

A Skin For Dancing In

Possession, Witchcraft and Voodoo in Film

Tanya Krzywinska

The cinema of the occult celebrates the irrational and the magical, and offers powerful and seductive narratives of desire, transgression and fantasy. Why are magic and demonology such attractive subjects for filmmakers? Is the cinema of the occult an expression of a cultural need for the experience of the sacred? What cultural meanings are invested in demons, witches, possessed nuns and voodoo priests?

In this challenging and wide-ranging approach to the themes of witchcraft, paganism, possession and voodoo, Tanya Krzywinska explores the thrills of terror, ecstasy and power offered by cinema's unholy romance with magic and demonic forces. The book draws on the work of Aleister Crowley, J G Frazer, Freud and Georges Bataille, and places the cinema of the occult within the contexts of ancient Greek culture, Medievalism and the modern "magical revival". There are close textual studies of films from diverse genres, including *The Devils*, *Lost Highway*, *Angel Heart*, *The Wicker Man*, *Häxan*, *Black Narcissus*, *Twin Peaks*, *Videodrome* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, as well as the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Tanya Krzywinska

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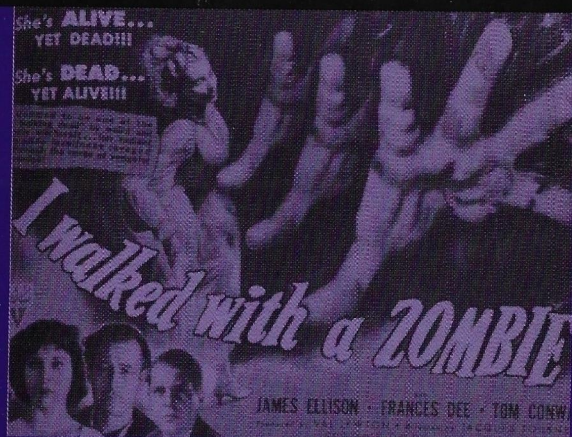
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The Devils (1971) and

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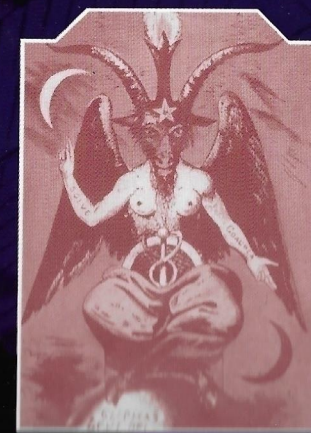
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Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Preface: Magic in Film Theory and Practice	viii
1 Demonology and the Visible Frenzy of Possessed Nuns	1
Introduction · 1 / Medievalism and the Christian "mythology" of demonic possession · 3 / The convent as the Devil's playground: <i>Häxan</i> , <i>The Devils</i> and <i>Black Narcissus</i> · 7 / Naughty nuns and the perversion of holy orders: <i>To the Devil a Daughter</i> and <i>Dark Habits</i> · 24 / Conclusion: temptations of the flesh · 29	
2 Demon Daddies: Possession, Demonology and the Male Oedipal Relation	35
Introduction · 35 / Antibody/Antichrist: <i>The Exorcist</i> · 36 / The werewolf film and possession of the male body · 43 / Postmodern possessions: <i>Lost Highway</i> and <i>Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me</i> · 46 / Techno-possession: <i>Demon Seed</i> , <i>Videodrome</i> , <i>The Lawnmower Man</i> , <i>Strange Days</i> , <i>Event Horizon</i> and <i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i> · 55 / Possession as contagion: <i>Fallen</i> · 64 / Conclusion: the primal-Oedipal-medieval matrix · 66	
3 Hymns to Pan: Sacrifice, Witch Cults and Paganism	72
Introduction · 72 / 19th-century magic: legacies of <i>The Golden Bough</i> and <i>The Golden Dawn</i> · 73 / The British mythic/magical landscape – the Green Man, standing stones and regenerative rites: <i>The Witches</i> and <i>The Wicker Man</i> · 78 / Sabats and sacrifices: <i>Häxan</i> and <i>The Devil Rides Out</i> · 87 / Sacrifice II –	

divine victims: *The Eye of the Devil*, *The Wicker Man* and *Medea* · 96 / Conclusion: sacrifice and the "death" of morality · 108

4 "In Every Woman Is a Little Witch": The Bitter-Sweet Seductions of the Witch 117

Introduction · 117 / Transformation, beauty and power – *The Undead*, *Excalibur*, *Merlin* and *Jack's Wife* · 119 / Green-eyed and wide-eyed – witch mothers and "innocent" daughters: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Snow White: A Tale of Terror*, *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* and "Witch", an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* · 135 / Teenage apprentice witches – girl power: *Little Witches* and *The Craft* · 144 / Witch-wives – subverting domesticity?: *Bell Book and Candle* and *Practical Magic* · 148 / Conclusion: spellbindings · 152

5 Voodoo Cinema: Tripping (up and out) on the Black Fantastic 157

Introduction · 157 / Voodoo histories · 158 / Haiti, the magic island: *White Zombie* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* · 162 / Voodoo as Satanism: *The Believers*, *Snake People*, *Voodoo* and *Angel Heart* · 175 / Healing voodoo: *I Walked with a Zombie*, *The Possession of Joel Delaney*, *Weird Woman*, *Black Voodoo* and *Scream*, *Blacula*, *Scream* · 185 / Conclusion: the conditions of ecstasy · 197

Afterword: The Magic Circle 201

Selected Bibliography 204

Index 206

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Preface: Magic in Film Theory and Practice

Cinema beguiles, creates illusions, gives a temporary sense of liberation, and often promises to deliver the sublime and the sensational (bearing comparison to Lucifer). Hellish apocalyptic scenarios are regularly contrived; we are repeatedly faced with the end of the world, and the "correct" punishment is meted out to good and bad characters. It seems that the medieval and the Gothic are not constrained to discrete historical periods, but are written into the medium that often sells itself as the perfect pact between art and commerce. It is also a medium of light which, through the play of phantasmagorical images, dazzles and holds us spellbound in its thrall. Like the pantheon of Greek gods, its stars shine brightly, aiding identification with their particular, often archetypal, odysseys. As Kenneth Anger astutely realised, cinema is an extension of magical thinking: it has the ability temporarily to possess us through our suspension of disbelief and identification with the new incarnations of old gods.

Cinematic representations of the occult are loaded with excessive and contradictory meanings. The occult is presented as primitive and barbaric, yet it is often couched within complex and highly refined esoteric systems of knowledge. It is the enigmatic and transgressive qualities of the occult that are used in film to pique our interest and curiosity. These render the world mysterious, phantasmagorical and laden with a promise of sexual rapture. The cinema of the occult touches on our deepest fears, but also carries tropes of liberation from the constraints of rationality and the humdrum familiarity of everyday life. It often atavistically resurrects the ancient and the primal, which are brought to bear on the contemporary and seemingly rational world. The forces of chaos frequently threaten to overcome dominant values, lending the films some capacity to criticise the status quo through the frame of the forbidden. The cinema of the occult evokes the sacred and the demonic, within which both the coherence and the integrity of identity and subjecthood are at stake. On the one hand, it provides a discourse of liberation from the values of bourgeois life; on the other, it often deploys a conservative transcendental model of good and evil.

The demonic forces of chaos are often appended to dominant

ideological conceptions of morality, gender and racial difference. The depiction of the supernatural in film does articulate social and spiritual dissatisfactions, however, even if they are couched within the terms of the irrational. These dissatisfactions are subject to ideological pressures to contain and render them harmless. Occult cinema is subject to the film industry's rule of economic return, and transgression is often deployed as a seductive lure. The cinema of the occult serves with two hands; counter-cultural desires are unleashed while the conventional forces of a capitalist economy are presented. It may be the case that these go precisely hand-in-hand, providing the means safely to enjoy the unconscionable as a form of spectacle. In evoking recalcitrant desires, these films are open to dissonant readings, even though a countermeasure is in operation through which such desires are contained. The cinema of the occult is therefore the site of conflicting dynamics. It uses the ambiguous space of magic as a means of making us less at home in the world, while mobilising conventional binary oppositions to return us to the homely, the stable and the ordered. At the same time, it offers certain viewers powerful and seductive narratives of transgression and fantasy which can be turned to a counter-cultural use.

A Skin For Dancing In began as a question: what are the discursive and psychic investments at work in cinematic representations of the irrational and the supernatural? This question transformed itself into an argument as it became evident that a set of fairly distinctive discourses informed the shaping of the occult in films that take possession, witchcraft and voodoo as their themes. These discourses align themselves with a further set of desire investments at work in the films and their reception – driven primarily by the desire for something enigmatic and rich that extends beyond the banality of everyday life. Vicarious spiritual and physical danger, the acquisition of power, and the experience of powerlessness are central to all the films from these three thematic groups.

A Skin For Dancing In cuts across genres by exploring the competing claims made on the supernatural and the irrational in the cinema of the occult. The book also arose in response to the fact that most of the key writings on occult films tend to coerce their analyses into narrow frameworks, particularly in terms of gender. Existing critical works do not seem to take account of the counter-cultural pleasures intrinsic to the popularity of occult cinema, as well as other diverse and competing claims. This is a book about the terrors and ecstasies of the imagined supernatural, and it deals with the dialectical forces of conservatism and anticonservatism. These are tied into a predominant set of discourses, identified as the vocabulary used in many films to represent the supernatural and magic: classical Greek, medievalist, the 19th-century magical revival, psychoanalysis and anthropology. They are, of course, never "pure", and are filtered through the imaginations of filmmakers, producers and viewers who are locked into their own cultural contexts. There are frequent references to cinema itself, through the use of

intertextual referents, and to the processes of cinema reception as a suspension of disbelief. Fairy tale and mythology are also key components, and are used in conjunction with these discourses. Often these discourses are co-present in films. In line with the competition between conservative and anticonservative forces, conflicts, ambiguities and contradictions are produced. It is through such dynamics that viewers are able, to an extent, to construct their own counter-readings. There are certain common features that run through the various epistemological and stylistic languages used in films about the occult. These are mainly binary in nature. Rationality/irrationality and good/evil are the most prevalent, and are frequently, but not always, aligned to gender, race and occasionally class. The book aims to identify the currents, circulations and short-circuits of desire and fantasy that inform the representation of the supernatural and the irrational in possession, witchcraft and voodoo films.

The book has – appropriately for a book on magic – five chapters: two on possession, two on witchcraft, and one on voodoo. Each chapter is split into sections in which individual films are closely read. This approach is important to the book's project of identifying competing discursive and psychical investments at work in individual films and in a broader interpretive context. This is not a standard genre study, but one that identifies the major themes and concerns of the cinema of the occult present in films from a number of genres. The trends identified as informing the cross-generic cinema of the occult grow out of specific and detailed readings of individual films. Each chapter has a selection of exemplars: mainstream and well-known films are included, as are a selection of lesser-known and often low-budget films.

Two currents – call them "magickal" – flow beneath *A Skin For Dancing In*. The influence of Georges Bataille's writings on transgression informs the view that the cinema of the occult is an expression of a need to experience something that is excessive and holds rich mythical resonances. The other current is the writings and mythos of Aleister Crowley – that pagan *agent provocateur* of chaos, magic and creative ambiguity. Both identify a need for ritual, magic, the spiritual and the mythic, but reject its containment in stultifying dogma. It is precisely this demand for the unexplainable, for the raw and the primitive, which is promised, if not always delivered, in the cinema of the occult. Adding to the heady mixture, its transgressive celebration of the irrational is often couched in dire warnings about the loss of the soul and the corruption of moral and human values. As quoted by Stephanie Bax in *The Witches* (Cyril Frankel, 1966, UK), "a skin for dancing in" provides a fitting title for this study of occult cinema's intense engagement with the sublime terrors and ecstasies of corrupting and liberating supernatural forces.

1

Demonology and the Visible Frenzy of Possessed Nuns

Introduction

Possessed nun films, and nuns in general, are often objects of ridicule and cliché. The spectacle of a group of out-of-control nuns throwing aside their pious habits and indulging in lewd behaviour has, nevertheless, proved a seductive lure for filmmakers since *Häxan* in 1922. These films are grounded in sensationalism and voyeurism, and it will not be argued otherwise. By mapping the textual and conceptual terrain covered by these films, and through closely examining individual films, it will be shown, however, that different films tackle the subject-matter with various degrees of aesthetic intent, and in a wide range of generic and industrial contexts. This chapter explores the surprisingly diverse and often contradictory meanings that possession carries in these films, and will demonstrate that the salacious fantasies they evoke are informed by a medievalist discourse of demonology.

The image of a corrupting force sweeping through a community of female nuns, creating sexual and obscene havoc, would seem to carry a certain liberating and demonic charm. In admitting a prurient interest in the fictional demonically besieged nun, my pleasure investment in these films provides a useful grounding for an analysis of the meanings and investments at work in them. The "possessed nun" film is born of a heady mix of recalcitrant fantasies that coalesce around sex, gender and religion. These films do not belong tidily to a subcategory of the horror genre, as they range across a number of genres (documentary, soft core, art movie, melodrama and black comedy). Each generic framework lends the subject-matter a different slant, but all the possessed nun films have a common engagement with the imagined effects of sexual repression on the chaste nun. As such, the films are rooted in two discursive foundations: a fittingly vulgar form of Freudian psychoanalysis, and a mythos of possession derived in part from medieval and Renaissance writing on demonology. These two discourses become inseparably intertwined in the possessed nun film.

The films discussed here endeavour to exploit the transgressive value of possessed nuns for various commercial, political and aesthetic

ends. Nuns make vows of chastity and obedience, and live in a single-sex community. This makes the nun an object of some fascination and curiosity in the contemporary world, taken up by 1970s soft core European nunploitation films such as *Storia di una monaca di clausura* (*Story of a Cloistered Nun*, Domenico Paolella, 1973, Italy/France/Germany), *Flavia, la monaca musulmana* (*Flavia, the Heretic*, Gianfranco Mingozzi, 1974, Italy) and *Interno d'un convento* (*Behind Convent Walls*, Walerian Borowczyk, 1977, Italy), as well as more recently in *Sacred Flesh* (Nigel Wingrove, 2000, UK). These films have more in common with the erotic or bodice-ripper novel, however, and tend to foreground sexual obsessions rather than demonic possessions. Carrying a mere whiff of sulphur, and interested mainly in fantasising the sexual exploits of closed-order nuns, they do not warrant consideration in relation to possession. In the exclusive and closed world of the convent, it is easy to see why these religious orders are subject to outsiders' fantasies, often turning around an imaginary and lurid scenario of the effects of sexual repression. The flagellant, prostrate or masturbating nun who is the subject of repression or is released from repression by the Devil, is a stock image that recurs in many possessed nun films. They work with the idea that, when sexual and other forbidden desires manage to escape the forces of repression, they emerge in a more risqué, transgressive and sensationalist form. This is instrumental to their market value, making the topic ripe for cinema's investment in physical body spectacle. To add to the spicy mix of forbidden desires, the re-emergence of the sexual is usually conducted through a Gothic *mise en scène* of masochism, sadism and torture. Although *Black Narcissus* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1947, UK) is set in the 1940s, *The Devils* (Ken Russell, 1971, UK) in the 17th century and *To the Devil a Daughter* (Peter Sykes, 1976, UK) in the late-20th century, they are all grounded in some way in an imaginary version of the medieval. In these films, the medieval becomes a mode or style of thought, rather than simply a historical era. (The term "medievalist" is used to describe the films' common aesthetic language.)

All the films discussed here were made in Europe. *Black Narcissus* and *The Devils* are British films; *To the Devil a Daughter* is a British/West German co-production; *Häxan* (Benjamin Christensen, 1922) is Danish; and *Entre tinieblas* (*Dark Habits*, Pedro Almodóvar, 1983) is Spanish. Why should the possessed nun film be a European phenomenon? – particularly as Hollywood has had its own investment in possession as spectacle, and has made various films about nuns, such as *The Song of Bernadette* (Henry King, 1943, USA) and *The Sound of Music* (Robert Wise, 1965, USA). For Classical Hollywood cinema, the answer is plain to see: the Catholic input into the monitoring and censorship of American cinema meant that religious films were strongly policed. *Häxan*, for example, with its negative representations of priests and other religious people, was banned in the United States until the 1960s. Despite the relaxation of censorship, post-Classical Hollywood cinema has not yet

taken up the possessed nun theme. In New Hollywood, horrors such as *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polański, 1968, USA) and *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973, USA) are located in the contemporary neighbourhood and not in the medievalist closed world of the convent. Such a shift lent post-Classical Hollywood cinema a market differential to horror specialists Hammer and American International Productions (AIP), who mostly concentrated on Gothic, costumed horror. Contemporary horror also tends to be split into two groups: those set in the urban present, and those set in the past. Occasionally, a Gothic setting does present itself in a present-day context, but when it does, as in *In the Mouth of Madness* (John Carpenter, 1995, USA), it tends to be derived from the work of H P Lovecraft (1890-1937), with its science-fiction slant, rather than from the medievalist world of Matthew "the Monk" Lewis. By contrast, the European possessed nun film is a curious mix of a medievalist metaphysical worldview, filtered through the various Gothic revivals, psychoanalysis, and contemporary conflicts around gender and sexuality. The systematised mythology of possession present in the films is based on a history that encompasses diverse texts, some presenting themselves as fact and others as fiction. Taken together, they build a composite knowledge system or discourse that provides a mythology upon which the films rely. This mythology is medievalist in character. No matter when it arose, when it is deployed or when it is chronologically set, the possessed nun film makes reference to a medievalist mythos, often through the use of Gothic tropes. The term "Gothic" arose in the Renaissance period as a means of distinguishing that era from the medieval. As Fred Botting states: "This past was called 'Gothic', a general and derogatory term for the Middle Ages which conjured up ideas of barbarous customs and practices, of superstition, ignorance, extravagant fancies and natural wildness".¹ Such meanings have been retained in film, and frequently frame the representation of possession.

Medievalism and the Christian "mythology" of demonic possession

In a general sense, possession has its roots deep in the archaic past (real and imagined), and is a feature of many religions and mystical systems from pagan shamanism to Christian cults. This chapter is concerned with possession specifically within a Christian context; other forms of possession will be addressed later. Demonic possession, as figured by Christianity, is embedded within a complex matrix of political and discursive dynamics, in which competing ideas and sects sought to gain authority. According to historian Hugh Trevor-Roper, the diagnostics of demonic possession were part of the more generalised "witch-craze", which swept through Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. He argues that this witch-craze was informed by the earlier writings of Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. As the "founding fathers of demonological science", their writings provided a basis from which the Church authorities

were able to manage, contain and ultimately wipe out dissenting and heretical sects.² While witchcraft was the subject of organised persecution, typified by the formation of the Inquisition in the 13th and 14th centuries, Trevor-Roper contends that it was not until the 16th century that a full and systematic "mythology" of witchcraft and demonic possession came about. This mythology undercut the burgeoning new philosophical discourses of humanism and scepticism,³ and emerged through the conflict raging between Catholic and Protestant orders that fractured Christianity at that time: "The frontal opposition of Catholics and Protestants, representing two forms of society incompatible with each other, sent men back to the old dualism of God and the Devil".⁴ The religious struggles of the era produced a return to the prehumanist, medieval supernatural world-view.

The 16th-century mythos of demonology informs many, if not all, demonic possession films, and is regularly used, either implicitly or explicitly, in witchcraft and voodoo films. The spread of the mythos in the 16th century was dependent upon reaching an often non-literate audience; sermons, church murals and engravings all warned of the dangers of witchcraft and demonic possession, thereby gaining a stronghold in European consciousness. Documents of the period often catalogue the types of bodily symptoms that were seen as characterising demonic possession:

The globus or lump rising in the throat, the muscular spasms, the tetanic bending of the body, the bowing, the sensory derangements, blindness, deafness, mutism, the anaesthesia, 'seeing green' and the flashing lights, the strange noises, ecstasy, trances, dreams, hallucinations, long speeches, repetition of words, refusal of food, craving for indigestible substances, mischievous conduct and the tendency to lying or imposture.⁵

While such symptoms related to the very real practices of 16th- and 17th-century exorcism, their traces are inscribed in the "classical" demonic possession of the horror film. However, it is less easy to pin down the resurrection of demonic possession in popular film to a power struggle between feuding Christian sects. Instead, it is the spectacle of aberrant desire, obscenity and sexuality that the possession film has exploited, and it is this transgressive capital, carried by the mythos of demonology, that has ensured its persistence into contemporary culture.

During the 17th century, there were four highly publicised "cases" of the wholesale demonic possession of nuns (or girls in a convent school) in Continental Europe. The most famous of these is that which took place at Loudun (c.1629-37), and which is the subject of Aldous Huxley's book *The Devils of Loudun* (1952).⁶ Other documented cases appeared in France and Belgium. Protestant England, by contrast, concentrated possession purely within the family, and cases were confined mainly to a

period between the 1580s and 1630 (this is also the case for New England). During this period, there are many documented cases of young members of families being possessed by demons.⁷ Because of the Reformation and the consequent closure of nunneries, there are no incidents of possessed nuns in this period in England and Protestant New England. This absence was perhaps instrumental in allowing the 18th-century Gothic novel to make use of the exotic otherness of Continental European Catholicism as a fertile ground for exploring what was considered to be medieval barbarity (as in Matthew Lewis' *Ambrosio, or The Monk* [1796]). Despite the demise of Catholicism in England, the management of possession in the 1570s became an issue for the national Church hierarchy. They were concerned that itinerant Catholic priests might win people over because they also had expertise in exorcism. As James Sharpe comments:

There was a strand in early Elizabethan Protestant thinking which encouraged a desire to prove that ministers of the newly, and still somewhat precariously, established religion were as effective at casting out devils as were their Catholic counterparts. But by the 1590s, the increasingly anti-Puritan mood in the upper reaches of the Church hierarchy meant that exorcism by Protestant ministers was viewed with growing suspicion.⁸

Sharpe argues that this debate proves how central demonic possession was to the concerns of the country at both grass-roots and élite levels. He also points out that youth was seen as a dangerous age, when God and the Devil battled for the soul.⁹ Tensions within the family and evangelical pulpit ravings about the Antichrist perhaps fuelled the incidents of possession found most commonly in youths in houses of the gentry. The possession of the teenage body is also a feature of the possession film, as in *The Exorcist* and *Amityville II: The Possession* (Damiano Damiani, 1982, USA).

For medieval and Renaissance Europe, exorcism and possession tended to be very public affairs. Frequently, a case of demonic possession drew large crowds of spectators. The authorities documented cases, and gossip further worked its function of disseminating mytho-information. An indicative example is an exorcism aided by Hildegard of Bingen in 12th-century Germany, in which the exorcism of a possessed woman was undertaken by monks and watched by an audience of parishioners.¹⁰ Medieval accounts of possession frequently emphasised the distorting effect of the demonic on the body: bodies were bent like bows (presumably bending backwards), made strange noises and spoke lewdly, and many possesses vomited up "foreign" objects. The invading demon turned God's work into an obscene antibody; subsequently, many

possession films have adopted such visceral and abject splendour. These accounts demonstrate that a systematic language of possession was in place in the medieval period. The possessed body in film uses this vocabulary of possession, and, through the magic of special effects, overdubbing and editing, the body becomes a site of an "unnatural" spectacle. What this presupposes is that there is a "natural" body, determined as the work of God. This discursive operation, filtered through evolution theory, still holds sway today – for example, in debates about the morality of genetic engineering (science here becomes, in a sense, the work of the Devil). Through the operation of the medieval Inquisitions and 16th-/17th-century witch-hunts, possession and its sisters ecstasy, trance and prophecy became recognised diagnostic signs of demonic infestation. These were to be dealt with by extreme measures, as the moral and spiritual health of the individual and, indeed, the nation was imperilled. The technologies of possession (its identification and management) also lent certain forms of Christianity the value of specialist expertise necessary for the protection and redemption of the soul.

Ioan M Lewis suggests that visionaries were instrumental in allowing early Christianity to gain a foothold in Europe.¹¹ Ecstatic communion with the Holy Spirit or with God carried the charismatic weight needed to spread the "truth" and power of Christianity. Early saints often wrote about their visions, and the writings of Abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) provide a good example: her songs and writing are predicated on trance visions and her personal relationship with the mystery of God and the Sacrament. Lewis argues that, after Christianity became more established, visionaries became a potential threat to its hegemonic power because they preached from the basis of their individual relations with God. Hence, trance, enthusiasm, ecstatic visions and communion were seen as a danger to the established ecumenical order. The concept of heresy and a categorical division between good and evil enabled the established medieval Church to deploy possession as demonic, allowing them to excommunicate or, worse, burn dissenters.

Today, the so-called return to paganism, pantheism or ecstatic enthusiasm is still subject to Anglican and evangelical denunciation and seen as demonic in origins (albeit in a comparatively diluted form). The return to medieval dualistic categories of good and evil in the Renaissance, which Trevor-Roper saw as the product of the crisis in the 16th- and 17th-century Church, can also be applied to the current crisis of Christian faith in the late-20th century. Umberto Eco has argued that there is a special link in Europe between the Middle Ages and subsequent times of crisis:

[E]very time Europe feels a sense of crisis, of uncertainty about its aims and scopes, it goes back to its own roots – and the roots of European society are, without question, in the Middle Ages...we are still *living* the

Middle Ages...We are recycling and reconstructing the Middle Ages, sure, *but by living inside them.*¹²

Concomitant with the return to a Manichean duality (where everything is seen in terms of conflicting forces of good and evil) in times of crisis, there seems to be a powerful investment in the medieval in recent popular culture. What, therefore, does the medieval hold for the contemporary imagination? Why does the medieval continuously return? These questions are important to the configuring of the occult in film. The possessed nun film locates itself in the *mise en scène* of the medieval, even if it is not ostensibly set in that era. Certainly, Trevor-Roper's "retreat into duality" argument might provide some of the answer, but it does not go far enough to explain the 20th-century investment in the medieval. Eco's work on the medieval and its various revivals may provide some insight into this question. He lists what he sees as the major retrospective investments in the medieval. The four that will concern us here are: the Middle Ages as barbaric; the Middle Ages as decadent; the Middle Ages as grounding for cults; and the Middle Ages of the Millennium and the Apocalypse.¹³ To these I would add the Middle Ages as representing the archaic and its concomitant irrationalities, which are not simply barbaric, but also mystical. It is also necessary to place individual and cultural investments in the medieval within a theoretical understanding of fantasy. This is because it is evident that in the cinema of the occult the medieval provides an imaginary domain for fantasies of origin and cultural and gender differences to be played out.

The convent as the Devil's playground: *Häxan*, *The Devils* and *Black Narcissus*

With its curious mix of fact and fantasy, Benjamin Christensen's *Häxan* was the first witchcraft and demonic possession film, thereby having a certain prototypical status. It was made over a three-year period at Sweden's main studio, Svensk Filmindustri, and released in 1922. As with his previous two films,¹⁴ Christensen acted in, wrote the screenplay and directed *Häxan*. Perhaps as a result of the crisis in Christian faith, produced in part by the brutalities of the First World War, the Devil was abroad in the Swedish studio: fellow Dane Carl-Theodor Dreyer was also in production with *Blade af Satans bog* (*Leaves from Satan's Book*, 1919, Denmark).¹⁵ *Häxan* did not reach an audience in the United States and the United Kingdom until 1968, when it was re-released with an "X" certificate and an English commentary.¹⁶ The film's apparent anti-Catholic stance, as well as its nudity, meant that US censors banned it. Several renderings of the film now exist: a tinted version, without voice-over, is on video release by exploitation specialist Redemption, and a US version with William Burroughs' voice-over was released in 1966 as *Witchcraft Through the Ages*.¹⁷ As a pre-genre system film, it seems a mistake to label

it as simply "horror", although it has many of the conventions common to the horror genre.¹⁸ Various critics mention *Häxan*, but it is rarely considered in any detail.¹⁹ The film tends to be seen simply as a curiosity of the silent era, and is frequently marketed as such.²⁰ While many acknowledge the film as "great" and other suitably market-orientated epithets, the lack of detailed analysis is lamentable. The film presents innovative cinematic strategies, particularly through the use of animation, has much to offer in its interest in the role and effects of witchcraft and possession on the imagination, and further demonstrates the hold of medievalist ideas on modern culture.

Häxan can be seen as an early exploitation film. Drawing on history, art and humanist values, it depicts the effects of medieval discourses of witchcraft and demonic possession on a variety of people – poor elderly women, middle-class women, and nuns. The film not only addresses the status of the women as victims of demonological discourse, but also is interested in the sexual fantasies invested in the Devil and witchcraft. While the film's ostensible message is that witch beliefs led to the torture chamber, it shows how these beliefs are entangled with repression and sexual desire, ideas derived from then-newly fashionable psychoanalysis. *Häxan* divides the subject-matter between two conflicting, psychoanalytically derived, domains. There is an objective rationalist account, typified by the documentary style of some scenes and the commentary provided by the intertitles. This is punctuated with phantasmagorical scenes, laden with special effects, which express the wishes and fantasies of the various ordinary women, witches and nuns. The rational and the irrational are set side-by-side. The pull between the two provides dramatic and contradictory tension, articulating the co-presence of both in the meaning of the supernatural. This lends the film a sophisticated address to the effects of the imagination on our understanding of history. *Häxan* is, in essence, an exploration of the role played by the imagination and desire in medieval and Renaissance witch beliefs and their concomitant mythology. It couches the more sensationalist and fantasy content, such as witches cavorting with the Devil at the Sabat and the demonically possessed nuns, within a rationalist documentary framework. This is done without privileging the documentary over fantasy; the two work together, demonstrating an intrinsic interlacing of rationality, history, desire, the imagination and gender difference. Christensen's project is not simply to show the medieval as located purely in the past. In its closing section, the film dovetails the possession of nuns with a modern-day kleptomaniac hysteric, aiming to demonstrate that the hysteric still suffers from the same imaginary delusions as the medieval possessed nun. This also provides a liberal, sympathetic and retrospective understanding of witch beliefs in the earlier period through the psychoanalytic concept of repression. The modern-day hysteric and her medieval counterpart clash with male authority figures. Christensen provides a link between the Devil and the psychiatrist by playing both

himself, becoming the object of the women's sexual obsessive fantasies. In tandem with several other devices, this meshing enables Christensen to explore his own diverse investments in the horrific, but enthralling, subject-matter.

The quasi-documentary frame allows the film to depict the more *outré* aspects of possession and witchcraft. Throughout, Christensen's voice is made present through the explanatory and commentary intertitles. These vary in tone from serious ethical pronouncements to references to the making of his film, alongside a few tongue-in-cheek remarks. *Häxan* begins with a map of the medieval cosmos, with God and His angels represented in the outer ring. This is followed by a series of pictures from various sources, including Babylonian demons, medieval woodcuts and a mechanical of Hell's punishments. These artefacts build a picture of a medieval world-view, but are also accompanied by intertitles which state that the supernatural world of evil spirits and witchcraft belongs to a primitive and childish attempt to understand the "incomprehensible". These comments reflect contemporary academic ideas about supernatural belief, exemplified by Frazer's study of myth in *The Golden Bough* (1890) and Freud's view of animism and magical thought outlined in *Totem und Tabu* (*Totem and Taboo*, 1913).²¹ Christensen shares with them the view that witchcraft, sorcery and demons are psychological projections of a pre-rational order, and, like Freud, he applies this to witch confessions, demonic possession and hysteria. The difference is that the film stages the spellbinding enchantment of the supernatural. Christensen's aim is to criticise the effects of medievalist duality, but, in so doing, his attraction to the allure of the magical is shown along with his complicity with the sexual fantasies that such subject-matter elicits. What is constantly in tension throughout is a humanist horror at medieval barbarity, which rubs up against a pleasure investment in that which exceeds rationality. Although the documentary sections and the intertitles speak a rationalist language, the fictional sequences, which compose the majority of the film, are invested with a powerful force of fantasy and desire, putting pressure on the usual distinction between fact and fantasy.

The fictional sequences are quite complex. Fantasy sequences are often embedded within them; indeed, most of the film is made up of the wish-fulfilment fantasies of various characters (further framed by Christensen's dual investment in the demonic). In one scene, a woman comes to the local witch for a love potion to seduce a monk; another charts the dreamtime escapades of a poor elderly woman in the house of the Devil. (She is teased and tempted by food and animated money.) A third depicts a monk's fantasy of being visited by a young woman in his cell. Another dramatises a confession made by an elderly beggar woman accused of witchcraft, in which she flies to the Sabat on her broomstick and partakes of satanic rituals. The last fantasy is that of a modern-day hysteric, who imagines that her psychiatrist visits her at night with amorous intent. This scene mirrors an earlier episode in which a medieval

woman is visited in her bed by the Devil, linking the past to the present, and shifting the medievalist discourse from the supernatural to that of modern psychiatry. These scenes follow the idea that the imagination is produced by, and is an escape from, the effects of circumstance. They include innovative special effects, such as animation techniques, masks, superimpositions and silhouettes. As Cathal Tóhill and Pete Tombs have said, *Häxan* "attempts to deal with the fantastic and the strange by utilising the cinema's ability to show an audience its own dreams and fears".²² The representation of possession is therefore set in a context in which the imagination is the product of historical and material circumstances. All manner of anarchic behaviours are given licence, but such excesses are shown to result from the repressive constraints of the prevailing dominant demonological discourse.

In contrast to the witchcraft scenes, the possessed nun section, which follows a detailed study of the instruments of medieval torture, is not directly presented as fantasy. Instead, it charts the effects of the imagination through the discourse of demonology. It begins with a nun scourging herself with a vicious-looking spiked belt, and is accompanied by an explanatory intertitle telling how the Devil creates despair in medieval convents. In a series of waist-up shots and close-ups detailing her desperate melodramatic gestures and tear-stained face, the film builds a picture of the nun's torment. The implication is that she interprets her lascivious desires as the work of the Devil, and must punish her body to cast them out. The scene culminates in a close-up of her face, her eyes turned beseechingly to Heaven. This serves to demonstrate the sadistic and pathetic effect of the mythos of demonology on the lives of individual nuns, further revealing the film's message that this mythos turns "natural" sexual instincts into perverse masochism. While the film attempts to foster some sympathy for the nun's plight, there is nevertheless a voyeuristic pleasure at work. The implied criticism of the effect of the demonological mythology places the viewer outside the nun's world, rendering her an object of spectacle. Yet, the film also works to show how the mythology itself operates and constructs subject positions. To achieve this, it is important that the viewer is, in part, complicit with the anarchic sexuality prompted by the demonic. The voyeuristic and sadistic gaze is nevertheless partially blocked, because, by carefully laying out the medieval nun's world-view, an attempt is made to get the viewer to understand the way in which she has come to such hysterical despair and excessive action. It is through this dual economy that the film demonstrates a double investment in the medieval: as barbaric, and as a screen onto which recalcitrant desires are projected.

The scene that follows depicts a different nun, assaulted and possessed by the Devil (played by Christensen, which, as has been said, works to demonstrate his own imaginary investment in his subject-matter). Appearing in the nun's cell, the Devil places a knife in her hand, but, on resisting him, she is coshed over the head and forced to pick up the knife

once more. The Devil's appearance is not overtly linked to anything the nun has done, but, since it follows the first nun's flagellation, it is implied that the second nun has not taken actions to quash recalcitrant desires; thus, the Devil appears. In a trance, she goes to the chapel and is prompted to desecrate the host. A superimposed image of Christ appears, tear-stained and crucified, mirroring the anguished look of the nun. She sinks to the floor and slumps back against the altar (turning her back on Christ), with eyes widened by desperation. Resembling Bernini's statue of Saint Teresa, she is, however, full of an annihilating anguish, rather than spiritual ecstasy. On finding her in the chapel, the other nuns at first withdraw in horror at their sister's plight, although, on the reappearance of the Devil, the young nuns (with one exception) begin to dance and laugh. In response to the castigations of an older nun who somehow seems immune to the Devil's instigation, the first nun lewdly sticks her tongue out and proceeds to dance a jig. The anguish appears to have been transmuted into playful blasphemy as the nuns' pious demeanour melts into dancing and laughing. But these actions are far from free, voluntary or joyful, and they dance like staccatoed marionettes. This is no orgiastic abandoned release from ascetic rigour. The film thereby manages to emphasise the pain and despair of the possession produced by the medievalist mythos of demonology.

The scene reaches its climax as the nun steals a statue of the infant Christ. She is dishevelled, and the intertitle states that she believes that the "evil one" forces her actions. With fear and despair in her eyes, she takes the infant Christ from the arms of the statue of the Virgin Mary, carrying it away and holding it as if it were a real baby. Taking it to the monks of the Inquisition, she pleads with them to put her to the stake. The nun's unclean status leads her to desire death, and, accordingly, the film shows the effects of demonological mythology on the imagination, which has real and pitiful consequences. Throughout the whole film, it is evident that it is women who are the principal victims in Christensen's rendering of demonological mythology. The mythos works through the fabric of sexual and other repressed desires to produce hysterical responses which, in turn, corroborate the myth's validity. The nun's theft of the infant Christ also seems to play on unrealised maternal desires. Elsewhere in the film, women's sexual desires are realised through fantasies of nocturnal visits to the Devil. It would be easy to argue that Christensen is working with a Reichian model of sexual repression – meaning that those who are not sexually fulfilled are likely hysterically to act out repressed desires in perversely distorted ways.²³ This would be grounds for indicting Christensen for projecting his own sexual fantasies onto women (both past and present) whom he regards as sexually "repressed". This certainly seems to be the case, but it is also clear that Christensen, often humorously, makes the viewer aware of his own reflexive presence throughout the film, demonstrating that he is mindful of his own desire investments in the subject-matter. The film makes it plain that the hysterical behaviour of the

women directly results from the way in which the demonological mythology interpellates gendered subjects, but this does not simply apply to women. Monks, too, are positioned by this mythology as sadistic inquisitors. One young monk is forced, against his will, to accuse a woman he lusts after of witchcraft. He is a victim of the mythological system but, unlike the women, does not end up in the torture chamber. It is therefore the women, and particularly the nuns, who signify the return of the repressed through their possession. Within the logic of the film, this is a pseudo-return of the repressed: "pseudo" because it is manufactured by, and symptomatic of, the mythology itself. This makes the film a powerful study of the real effects of the imaginary and how it permeates demonological discourse. Christensen finishes the film by interlacing the witches and nuns with a modern-day hysteric who has lost her husband in the war. The ending is a little muddled (the logical links between the symptoms are unclear, clouding the political message), but it shows that medievalism – which, as Eco says, is figured as barbaric, superstitious and perverse – is still at work within the gender relations of early 20th-century society. Possession in *Häxan* is then figured within the terms of Christian discourse. It provides the means by which the power of the demonological discourse on the imagination can be explored. Possession is also viewed through the frame of vulgar Freudianism, aligned with hysteria and grounded in the repressive sexual context of convent life. These ideas also make their way into *The Devils'* depiction of demonically possessed nuns. Both films ask the viewer to believe not in the supernatural, but in the powerful effects of discourse, desire and fantasy.

The Devils has many similarities to *Häxan*, but, in accordance with the shifts in culture (in terms of aesthetics and censorship), Russell's film updates the representation of possession by using various tactics to shock the viewer. Deploying an array of binary oppositions suited to Russell's rather extreme world-view, the film makes vividly explicit all that is obvious about the demonic possession of nuns. Possession, as figured in *The Devils*, is a signifier of transgression, which is manufactured and used for the political ends of powerful, amoral men. Alongside the demonological mythos and exorcism, possession is used as a *mise en scène* for sado-masochism, hysteria and repression. The film is not interested in the mystical, supernatural, magical or archaic aspects of demonic possession, but is used, primarily, as the bearer of shock tactics coded as art. The film further lends big-budget production and design values to the type of film normally confined to the exploitation circuit.

The film is based on Huxley's *The Devils of Loudun*, to which it is unsurprisingly close. The film does not tackle Huxley's ruminations on the mystical, perhaps because Russell's interest lies in the explicit and the blatant. *The Devils'* lurid representations of naked, frenzied possessed nuns and sadistic torture and its libertarian message are, in part, the product of Russell's interest in the grotesque and the flagrant. The film is also the product of 1970s permissive culture, "the decade that taste

forgot".²⁴ The film also has something in common with the American self-styled auteurs' taste for bashing sacred cows and taboos in an effort to shake up the traditions of mainstream commercial filmmaking. For permissiveness to take shape in popular culture it is necessary to articulate and emphasise the effect of repression. Without a heightened reading of repression, there is, of course, nothing to shout about, and Russell makes full use of this dynamic in *The Devils*. However, despite the use of the sensationalist aspects of possession and exorcism, the film differs from the straight low-budget nunploitation films such as Jess Franco's *Les Démons* (*The Demons*, 1972, Spain) and *Liebesbriefe einer portugiesischen Nonne* (*Love Letters from a Portuguese Nun*, 1976, Spain). This is because *The Devils* refers to the political use of possession in 17th-century Europe, and takes artful care over its visual style and use of music. In common with *Häxan* and *Black Narcissus*, it shows the interrelationship between imagination, desire and the real. But, like European sexploitation filmmakers, Russell wants to show everything and leave nothing to the imagination. The film falls in line with the permissive challenge that contemporary popular culture was making to conventional mores. As with hardcore pornography, the film has no implied subtext or buried enigma – in other words, there is no covert space for the viewer to fantasise or dream.²⁵ This leads many reviewers to conclude that it is "obscene" – not just in the conventional reading of the word, but also in the Kantian sense in which visceral experience precludes distanced contemplation. Perhaps this is also why the film and Russell's work in general have received no sustained critical analysis. Russell's desire investment in his subject is perhaps written too large and too excessively across the screen for some: Kim Newman, for example, calls the film "meretricious".²⁶ But it is precisely this graphic rendering that is intrinsic to the film's project to show history as a form of pornography.

The Devils places demonic possession within the context of the battle for supremacy between the French Catholic Church and the state. This struggle for power is personalised through the historical figures of the Duc de Richelieu and Louis XIII as the decadent head of state. Their battle is played out through the lives of provincial pawns, and the inhabitants of Loudun are caught up in this deadly game. Grandier (Oliver Reed), who petitions for the city, resists Richelieu's attempts to pull down the walls of Loudun, causing Richelieu's men to find ways of removing the dissenting priest. This is achieved through Sister Jeanne's (Vanessa Redgrave) claim that the spirit of Grandier has possessed her. Her denunciation of Grandier is born out of jealous rage that ensues from having learned that he has illicitly married another woman. She had hitherto fervently fantasised about various sexual encounters with him. Her accusation, conveniently for Richelieu's men, prompts the whole machinery of exorcism and torture to grind into inexorable action. When she retracts the accusation, the other nuns of the order are threatened with death if they do not agree to feign demonic possession. When they fulfil this demand, the nunnery

becomes a scene of abject mayhem. As a result of this spectacular diversion tactic, the walls of the city are demolished, Grandier is burned alive at the stake, and Jeanne returns to mundane life in the closed order.

Throughout the film, possession is always presented as a performance, a masquerade and a tool for political ends. This masquerade has barbaric effects on (diegetic) real bodies, however. Like *Häxan* and *Witchfinder General* (Michael Reeves, 1968, UK), the film's horror resides in the action of people and not in the supernatural. What lies at the heart of this matrix of power, politics and desire is the hysterical visions and actions of Sister Jeanne. She derives some retributive satisfaction from her accusations, and her voice is given the chance to be heard in the public arena, but it is nevertheless simply an expedient means for the removal of upstart Grandier. At the behest of the exorcising priest Father Barré (Michael Gothard) and Richelieu's cat's paw Baron Laubardemont (Dudley Sutton), the other nuns are given the opportunity to indulge in bacchanalian bad behaviour. Grandier is not the "Devil" he is made out to be by Sister Jeanne, but he does reject the Church's imposition of chastity on the priesthood, and, as such, he embodies the voice of 1970s libertarianism, which, under the aegis of Mary Whitehouse, was tantamount to the demonic. In a kind of "Confessions of a Renaissance Priest", Grandier indulges his sexual desires with impunity. By contrast, and by virtue of being walled up in a closed order, Sister Jeanne is never given the opportunity to fulfil her sexual longings, and her thwarted desires become the locus of repression, ultimately leading to Grandier's death. Jeanne therefore carries the weight of repression, and her masquerade of possession can be interpreted, perhaps in excess of Russell's intention, as exposing the myth of "the repressive hypothesis".²⁷

As with *Häxan*, possession provides *The Devils* with a reason for the aggressive and invasive interrogation of the nuns. The search for the evidence of demonic possession is carried out, in a bloody and graphic way, mostly through invasive examinations of Sister Jeanne's vagina. A set of large metallic syringes appear onscreen before the examination begins. This is not just Russell's lurid imagination at work, it is mentioned in Huxley's text, and, as he points out, was a common prop used in "Molièresque farce and seventeenth-century medical reality".²⁸ Two quack doctors carry out most of the work on Jeanne's body, and later all the men carrying out the examination and exorcism hold her down. Her bare legs are smothered in the blood produced by their probings for the Devil who, Father Barré claims, is hidden within the "recesses of her body". A large group of masked spectators watch this unholy spectacle; they laugh and comment on the scene as if it is a play (the exorcism as lucrative theatre is mentioned by one of the conspirators), and remain in constant attendance throughout. During this scene, the camera stays close to the action: it never takes up a position from the point of view of the masked spectators, and locates itself as one of those who hold Jeanne down. Perhaps as an extension of Russell's "naughty boy" interventionism, it

actively takes part in the violation of Sister Jeanne. This strategy mirrors the intrusive camerawork in a hardcore sex film, compounding the reading of Russell's film as salacious and obscene; it is, however, instrumental to the representation and meaning of possession in the film.

The sensationalist rendering of demonic possession is continued when all the nuns of the convent become possessed. As the nuns are faking possession, they make full use of the familiar, clichéd conventions of demonic possession: masturbation, nudity, kissing one another, scourging, screeching and chattering, grimacing and poking out their tongues, and contorting their bodies into strange positions. (The British censor cut a good deal of this section, and, surprisingly, Russell allegedly admits that the cuts were appropriate.)²⁹ The masquerade of possession is carried out as a public spectacle with a carnival atmosphere. While there is clearly a lurid pleasure investment in the grotesque, as in *Häxan*, it is also shown to be a tool used to support the status quo. Even the King visits to partake of the theatrical exhibition of the possessed nuns, and here, as elsewhere in the film, politics and aesthetics meet in an entertaining, if ultimately deadly, game. While the Devil conventionally breeds immorality, *The Devils* makes it clear that it is the very human use of possession as theatrical performance, and the ends to which it is put, which are immoral. The diegetic spectators treat the possession as a source of prurient spectacle, but political power struggles are masked beneath the theatricals. That royalty and the Church depend on theatrical ritual and costume to lend their power a certain aura is underlined through the play which the King performs at the beginning of the film. Furthermore, all the protagonists, with the exception of the priest Grandier and his "wife", make use, with the Church's sanction, of the theatre of demonic possession to satisfy immoral personal quests for power and self-esteem – whether it is used for political power, lust or revenge. Demonic possession is figured in the film as a political tool and a man-made theatrical entertainment, acting as a means to draw the attention of the people of Loudun away from the fact that their autonomy is being undermined. Unlike the possessions in *The Exorcist* and *To the Devil a Daughter*, the supernatural has no *a priori* existence, but is simply the product of discourse and political expediency. The film therefore follows Trevor-Roper's idea that demonic possession in medieval and Renaissance culture is the result of power struggles in the Church. Russell endows this historical interpretation with his own special brand of grotesque salaciousness; a perverse investment in which many readers of historical texts, particularly those involving torture and nudity, may covertly indulge.

In *The Devils*, possession becomes a means of demonstrating the effect of the aestheticisation of politics, but, as in *Häxan*, it is couched in libertarian ideas of sexuality. The nuns are young women who have been placed in the convent because they have no dowries, or because they are, in Sister Jeanne's words, "unmarriageable as ugly". She further states that convents "which ought to be furnaces, where souls are forever on fire with

love of God, are merely dead by the grey ashes of convenience". This is also an opportune way of implying that the young nuns are quite simply sex-starved – "Satan is ever ready to seduce us with sensual delights" – which makes them compliant to the proffered chance to indulge in their forbidden desires. The criticism of sexual repression is also forced home through Jeanne's visions, in which Christ's "most beautiful body" transforms into the body of Grandier. Jeanne plays out in fantasy an erotic travesty of the role of Mary Magdalene, and she and the crucified Grandier end up in a passionate tryst on the floor. The antirepressive, libertarian message is also evident in the words of Grandier: "secluded women, they give themselves to God, but something cries out to be given to Man". The implication is that if the women's lust for men is not fulfilled, through the rigours of the order, these desires are perversely re-routed into extreme sado-masochistic pleasures. *Häxan* implies this, too, but it is characteristic of Russell to make this absolutely plain; moreover, he is working in the era of permissiveness. The language of demonology and possession that suffuses Christian edicts against the temptations of the flesh becomes the *mise en scène* of the nuns' desires. As Satan's playground, vows of chastity and obedience breed perversion and hysteria. The film therefore follows Nietzsche's view that "Christianity gave Eros poison to drink – he did not die, but degenerated into vice",³⁰ an idea that has added weight through the subcultural antirepressive discourse of the late-1960s and early 1970s. It is through this *mise en scène* of sensuality-as-demonic that the possession is made, showing that the discourse of demonology provides a means of disavowing ownership of recalcitrant and obscene desires. Although the film exploits the transgressive and sensationalist meanings of demonic possession like the other nun possession films discussed here, it is not directly interested in possession *per se*. Instead, it is its florid spectacular symptoms, and the political use to which it is put that are the focus of attention. The possession and the sadistic means of dealing with it are then played for Grand Guignol shock value, as befits Russell's history-as-pornography interpretation of Huxley's text.

Father Barré is perhaps the most sadistic and perverse figure in the film: he carries out the exorcisms, and, as one reviewer comments, looks like a 1970s rock star.³¹ Although acted in a very different way to Vincent Price's dour Matthew Hopkins in *Witchfinder General*, both he and Barré are peripatetic, self-serving, professional witchfinders. The difference is that Barré is a bona fide priest, and operates in ecclesiastical communities rather than amongst ordinary people. Both nevertheless use the power invested in them to play out their own desires for sex and power. Alongside Sister Jeanne, Barré is instrumental to the performance of possession and is, like her, a hysteric, as his overblown and grotesque performance signifies. It is his role to incite and manufacture possession, providing the cabal of co-conspirators with the evidence they need to convict Grandier. Each time Jeanne retracts her accusation of Grandier,

Barré steps in saying that it is the Devil speaking, and drowns out her protestations with loud prayers. These are often accompanied with physical abuses, such as holding her down for the penetration of the colonic purge. In a later scene, he applies "stronger methods" to keep her from recanting, but these are withheld from the viewer's sight. For once, Russell leaves space for the imagination to do its work, and we see only Father Mignon's horrified, but comic, expression in a reaction shot, accompanied by Jeanne and Barré's grunts and groans. In many ways, the shot embodies Russell's preoccupation with the grotesque – characterised by a sordid mix of humour, salaciousness and disgust, and laced with a powerful political critique. Father Barré represents the corruption of Christian theology and its values. Played in such an excessive and darkly comic manner, he becomes a gross parody. His perverse ability to incite the nuns to lewd exploits (in several scenes, he is caressed by a bevy of naked and masturbating nuns) demonstrates that there is a kind of dirty schoolboy investment in him. For some, this might undermine the film's political dimension. But he, too, is as much prey to the forces of repression and hysteria as are the nuns. He and they are therefore key bearers of Russell's antirepressive message.

The Devils articulates the return to the medievalist mythos in both the 17th and 20th centuries. It demonstrates the cold-blooded exploitation of witch-beliefs for political ends, and charts the way in which spectacle is used to blind the inhabitants of Loudun to the work of political manoeuvrings. As Russell says, "*The Devils* was a political statement worth making. Although the events took place over four hundred years ago, corruption and mass brainwashing by Church and State and commerce is still with us, as is the insatiable craving for sex and violence by the general public".³² As such, the film uses the events of the past to comment on the dynamic between permissiveness and censoriousness prevalent during the 1970s, and typified by Mary Whitehouse and the "Festival of Light".³³ The idea that sexual repression can be damaging to the health of the individual and society is one that takes shape in post-Freudian discourse, mainly in the work of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse. During the 1970s, this conviction became allied to libertarian calls for less censorship, often using the Victorians as examples of the hypocrisy of prudish values. Russell's point, however, is more complex than this, but the logic of the film depends on the concept of repression.

Made in the pre-permissive 1940s, *Black Narcissus* also has its libertine, Mr Dean. It is strenuously implied that he has indulged in sexual exploits with the local women; but the difference between Grandier and Dean is that the latter's libertarian indulgences are only covertly referred to. From 1922 to 1984, each of the films discussed in this chapter make repression central to possession, demonstrating, as Foucault has said, the hold of this myth on 20th-century culture. These films use the myth of repression to map the mythos of demonology, and it is deployed in *The Devils* as a means purveying libertarian values and commenting on an

easily exploitable hunger for salacious material.

It is perhaps the film's use of humour that further lends it a Rabelaisian carnivalesque shock value (and thereby yet another investment in the medieval is invoked); we might regard the film's serious political message, and indeed Grandier and Jeanne's sublime suffering, to be undermined by the use of tawdry schoolboy jokes. For example, on the first brutal examination of Sister Jeanne, the apothecary, the surgeon and the priest converse on the question of whether there is any evidence of intercourse. The apothecary (Brian Murphy) says, in best Benny Hill tones, "There's been hanky panky", and, with a telling hysterical excess, Barré intercedes with "Don't mince words, there's been fornication, lust, she been had". The high and low cultural terminology used here pervades the entire film – *Carry On* meets Prokofiev's demonic possession opera *The Fiery Angel* (1919-27). Like the naughty juvenile Russell is, he takes high art themes and douses them in low humour. A further illustration of this occurs when the film cuts from the King, demonstrating that the box supposedly containing the blood of Christ is empty, to the nun's bottom waiting for an enema, the purging fluid spraying slapstick-style in the face of the laughing apothecary. He and the surgeon function in a similar, but perhaps more vulgar, manner to the mechanicals in a Shakespeare play, lending the film a carnivalesque mixture of high and low culture that has a rather prestigious precedent. What the humour does in the film, in a strangely honest way, is to make the prurient investments in the possessed nun film, and indeed in the barbarities of history, plain to see. As many critics have said, Russell has a low-grade imagination; I would agree, but, despite all the clichéd and blatant shock tactics used by the film it is the black humour of travesty that endears me to the film, precisely because it is candid about its (and our) investment in the pornographic spectacle of both possessed nuns and vulgar history.

While *The Devils* takes its subject by the horns, *Black Narcissus* treats the possession of its nuns in a far subtler, and more resonant and inflected way. Julian Petley has called *Black Narcissus* "one of the most truly hysterical films ever made".³⁴ He also says that there is a deep, dark seam of the melodramatic Gothic in British film, often neglected in favour of critical attention paid to British realism. This melodramatic world is laden with psychic conflicts and the ghosts of repressed memories loaded with sexual desire, at odds with realism. The subtle strains of *Black Narcissus'* melodramatic aesthetic are fashioned by the pressure-cooker of legendary British reserve. *Black Narcissus* is not, strictly speaking, a possession film. There are no explicit depictions of horny devils, but supernatural forces are prevalent that work their exaggerating effect on the nuns' neuroses. Like *Häxan*, *Black Narcissus* intermeshes fantasy and possession, and it, too, focuses on the way in which the imagination can produce real effects. In addition to its study of fantasy and its consequences, the film is concerned with the effects of memory. By resurrecting reminiscences of long-forgotten events, and buried hopes and

desires, triggered off by the magic of the mountain palace, the film articulates the ways in which repression affects psychic slippages and internal conflicts.

A group of Anglican missionary nuns have been sent from Calcutta to a remote palace in the foothills of the Himalayas.³⁵ As they try to tame the palace to serve their purposes, they become increasingly spiritually challenged and tested. Given that the film is set in the period it was made, and that the story is located on the borders of India and Nepal, it might, at first, be hard to see how it relates to Christian medieval dualities. In locating the missionary nuns in the East, their European Christian values are relativised when juxtaposed with other faiths and cultural practices. This puts their blind faith into crisis. The increasing loss of faith experienced by the nuns, as well as their increasingly hysterical behaviours, would have been interpreted as a form of bewitchment or demonic possession by their Christian forefathers. This is hinted at in the film, but never made entirely blatant. Possession, as it is understood by the Christian demonological discourse deployed in a religious order, often ascribes bad or confusing thoughts or deeds to the sway of demonic forces. Given its present-day setting, and its humanist and Freudian values, the film translates medievalist tropes of possession, and its concomitant organisation of the supernatural, into an exploration of the hysterical effects of repression. As such, the possession of the nuns is tailored to the film's generic melodramatic framework.

The local inhabitants call the palace the "place of women", as it was once the residence in which the local prince kept his wives. It was a palace of sensual pleasures, the traces of which persist in the paintings of half-naked and bejewelled women lining many of its walls, and it is the miasma of sensuality that haunts the nuns. Before the nuns arrive, the whimsical caretaker Angu Ayah (May Hallat) runs and dances through the palace, accompanied by the ghostly voices of the previous inhabitants. A strand of British 18th-century Gothic fiction is drawn upon, in which the "East" is a primary signifier of exoticism, decadence and mystery, as in William Beckford's Gothic novella *Vathek* (1787). The important difference is that in *Black Narcissus* the "East" and its othered cultural practices are not explicitly represented as evil; however, the film does retain a notion of the exotic "East" as sensual. The ghostly voices, easily interpreted as Ayah's nostalgic memories, are accompanied by music reminiscent of Debussy's impressionistic form, invoking a dreamlike suspension of time. The resonant strains of a flute evoke Pan, the Greek god of nature, wine and sensual pleasures (an allusion reinforced by the presence of young goats in early scenes). This style of music recurs throughout the film. It is, in essence, the sound of the palace and its surrounding location which are overshadowed by a looming mountain which the locals call the "bare goddess". Everything in the palace and its surroundings whisper sensuality, a redolent suffusion that prompts Angu Ayah to say that this is no place for chaste and rigidly disciplined nuns.

As the film progresses, the unsettling ambience of the palace affects the nuns. It is literally and metaphorically a border: it overlooks a yawning chasm, representing a Nietzschean abyss of madness and relativity produced by the absence of a grounding faith. The pervading sense of spiritual and ethical free-fall leads Sister Phillippa (Flora Robson), who is the gardener and therefore closest to nature, to stare off into the infinite space of the clear mountain air, instead of attending to the bell commanding prayer. She is caught by the sublime beauty of the landscape which, she says, makes her forget who she is. (The sublime effect of the mountains is a further 18th-century Gothic/romantic trope.) In the awesome face of the sublime, human values are dwarfed and Phillippa's faith in the values of her worker order is eroded. We know from the outset that Sister Ruth (Kathleen Byron) is "ill" and not suited to the nun's life, and it is she who looks directly into the abyss. This overdetermined act magnifies her already incipient hysteria into a dangerous psychosis, and she is literally and metaphorically claimed and consumed by the abyss at the end of the film. Despite the fact that the palace has been renamed as St Faith's, with its heady combination of the sublime and sensuality, it is indeed no place for young Christian nuns if they are to keep to their faith and rigid vows of chastity and obedience.

The force of an untamed, uncanny nature pervades the very fabric of the palace. The constant presence of the wind is charged with resonant and symbolic meaning, representing the volatility of nature that cannot be controlled by human agency. This instability is anathema to the nuns' way of life, which is regular, ordered and disciplined. By contrast, the sound of the wind is an amorphous continuous noise with no structure or punctuation, and a persistent reminder of the inexorable forces of nature. It is present to the nuns even when they are in their most deeply interior states, such as at prayer and in bed. The restless wind gradually comes to signify their increasing emotional turmoil. It permeates boundaries, finding its way in through unguarded nooks and crannies, but cannot be seen, and only its symptoms are registered – the sound it makes, its touch on the skin, and the way it causes clothes and hair to become disarrayed. The wind is an invisible elemental force, a relentless, forcible energy that cannot be checked, and, like the forces of unconscious fantasy, only its effect is registered. Another significant sound that invades the sanctity of the nunnery is that of the "native" drums. These are heard only at times of crisis, and their urgent heartbeat has an unsettling effect. In tandem, the beating drums and wind constitute the sounds of the growing heat of repressed desire. They invoke and signify the nuns' repressed fears and desires, and they are invaded and possessed by the elemental spirits of the palace. Within a medievalist Christian framework, such forces are corrupting and therefore demonic. But the film has a rather different investment in them. They are manifestations of nature and, in line with the film's gently antirepressive message, human nature.

The landscape, with its bright sunlight, luminous colours and

sounds, mitigates against the suppression of sensual pleasure and passion. Against this colour-saturated backdrop, the film exaggerates the whiteness of the nuns, making them appear ghostly and unleshly, as if the bodily rigours of Christian faith have leached out their life-force. A good example of this is in a scene in which Dean (David Farrar), an English farm manager who delights in making veiled but barbed comments about the nuns' chaste lifestyle, brings a young Indian girl, Kanchi (Jean Simmons), to the nunnery. Dressed in light blue, they are colour-coordinated with the sky and the palace walls, indicating that they somehow belong there. Her bare feet and brown skin, prominent jewelry, the large flower tucked behind her ear, and growing sexual interest in men testify to Kanchi's vital sensuality. The difference between her and the nuns is most evident when she shakes hands with the white and translucent-looking Sister Clodagh (Deborah Kerr). The implication is that the nuns lack the sensual vigour of the Indian girl, whom they regard as primitive and undisciplined. (Indeed, this is their attitude towards Dean and the other locals.) It is clear that the film does not follow the nuns' views, and instead regards them as somehow lacking, and it is only Kanchi who achieves fulfilled romance in the film, as she seduces the young prince who has come to study at the school. In effect, Kanchi is used to indict the paucity and reserve of the nuns' lives, implying that sexuality and desire are integral to the mystery of life. For the nuns, however, spirituality is only achieved through denial, hard work, a certain arrogant and narcissistic self-regard, and discipline. As a drunken Dean says to Clodagh, "God should be with you always as your daily bread", meaning that God is not the sole preserve of the cloister. Dean may be scathing about the nuns' pious ideals, but he does not seem to have totally abandoned a notion of God; his god seems to be more forgiving and less demanding than that of the nuns. Through the presence of Kanchi and the supernatural forces at work in the palace, the film questions the supposed superiority of the "civilising" colonialist nuns. As such, romance and the supernatural are used to humanist ends, in which sensuality is seen as a vital and undeniable part of human experience. The message here is: ignore it and it will return to haunt and possess you.

The nun who becomes demonically possessed in the most florid and pronounced manner is Sister Ruth. As Dean says, everything has a tendency to become exaggerated within the palace. Ruth is coded early on in the film as unstable, and her actions grow steadily more excessive. Her early instability is signified through the use of canted framing when she is shown in close-up. In an early scene, she runs into Clodagh's office and her white habit is stained with the blood of an injured worker. She always speaks with heightened excitement and has a sly, secretive smile. Her frequent emotional outbursts give the idea that she is suppressing a deep inner violence that eventually and contagiously affects everyone, placing her in the role of antagonist. For example, after Clodagh confronts her for "thinking too much of Mr Dean", it becomes plain that she is

nursing a growing violent jealousy. This comes to a head after Dean and Clodagh are seen talking together after the nuns are blamed for a village baby's death. From this point onwards, the emotional intensity of the film is set into high gear; Dean tells Clodagh that all the nuns must leave the palace, as something terrible will happen. His outburst seems uncharacteristic and is a swift turnaround, as only a few seconds earlier he told Clodagh that things were not so bad; he, too, is subject to the elemental force of panic and chaos. Having secretly left the order, Ruth replaces her habit with a tight-fitting deep-red dress, and, as Clodagh tries to talk to her across a table, she opens a compact and puts on red lipstick in readiness for her visit to Dean. After journeying down through the jungle – signifying a fall, or return, from the transcendent spiritual life to the world of instinct or "nature" – Ruth arrives at his bungalow and tells him that she loves him, which, judging by the change in the music, seems to have "cured" her of her hysteria. He rejects her, however, and through a series of close-ups we see Ruth sweat and turn green-skinned. Her make-up shifts and changes throughout the denouement, and at one point bears comparison to that used for the possessed Regan in *The Exorcist*. After a point-of-view shot that glows deadly red, Ruth faints. On recovering, she returns alone to the palace in a somnambulistic state with murder in heart. She stalks Clodagh through a series of "monster as point-of-view" shots, which are now familiar as the staple of slasher movies, and attempts to push her into the abyss. A fight ensues and it is she who falls into the chasm.

Andy Medhurst has read Sister Ruth's madness in a celebratory way.³⁶ For him, she seems to represent the desire-anarchist in the nun's ordered nest. This is a tempting line of thought, but the problem is that it valorises hysteria or, more accurately, psychosis as a revolutionary force when it ultimately validates the system it purportedly criticises. I would suggest that Ruth provides a sacrifice through which Clodagh ultimately reconsecrates her religious calling. The demonic possession of Ruth therefore tacitly reaffirms the validity of the Christian order. We may very well identify with Ruth's anger-driven madness, but when possession is figured as a return of the repressed it becomes psychotic, and is far from being a form of empowerment (often ending in death, as in *Black Narcissus*). Psychosis is not, in my view, a language of resistance – it may express a wish to resist, and in film it is often taken as such – but it is rarely able to affect a change in the prevailing order. Because possession is rendered here as psychosis, it is at variance with the empowering and differently figured forms of possession in shamanistic practices and voodoo-style religions, in which possession becomes a symbolic language of expression. This crucial difference will be re-examined when witchcraft is considered as a language of resistance in Chapter 4.

Sister Ruth's already precarious psychic state is heightened to psychosis by the tensions prompted by the ghosts of the palace, whereas Sister Clodagh begins to "suffer from reminiscences" – a phrase that Freud

uses to describe hysteria.³⁷ These reminiscences take the form of dreamy flashbacks triggered by words and noises in the environment. As she tells Dean, the palace has somehow made her remember things she thought were buried and forgotten, and they all relate to being disappointed in her desire to marry before becoming a nun. Using a series of dissolves and some beautiful graphic matches working to blur the boundaries between past and present, Clodagh's memories reawaken her sexual desires. These desires shake her steely stoicism and break the ice of her brittle manner – she becomes, like a haunted heroine in a Gothic novel, assaulted by the overwhelming nature of other people, their desires, and the sublime otherness of the lonely mountain outpost of the palace. The music that accompanies and signifies the interior states of the nuns has something in common with Debussy's *La Mer* (1905), with its turbulent, eddying cross-currents, and Holst's *The Planets* suite (1914-17), particularly "Neptune – The Mystic". Both pieces refer in different ways to water, often used to represent the emotions and the unconscious. The music provides an aural equation of psychic turbulence or conflict, appropriate to the film's preoccupation with memory, hysteria and the subtle magic of enchantment. Ultimately, her encounter with otherness works to strengthen Clodagh, and she comes out of the situation with a stronger sense of herself.

The film presents sexual desire as tumultuous and disruptive. This is not only true for the nuns, as Dean, too, is moved by it through his conflicted desires for the cloistered and sexually unavailable Clodagh. This is essentially a medievalist notion, and supernatural forces are married to psychoanalytic ideas of the effects of sexual repression. *Black Narcissus* uses the otherness of the "East" to increase the pressure on the nuns' repressive asceticism and to produce melodrama. This pressure is also invoked through reference to the forces of nature and sensuality. These forces have pantheistic qualities and lure the nuns away from the simple practicalities of convent life: one sister sews plants and flowers instead of vegetables, and others become plagued by memories of the past and by erotic obsessions. This flirtation with the gods of the natural world differs from the staple nun melodrama of the 1940s. In *The Song of Bernadette*, for example, the central character sees visions of the Virgin Mary, and the film can be interpreted as an attempt to revive Christianity after the horrors of the Second World War. By contrast, *Black Narcissus* would seem to have a far less didactic and comforting purpose. Like *Häxan*, the film has antirepressive values and a keen sense of the romance of otherness, but it does not advocate a complete dissolution of all control. As Ruth looks into the groundless abyss, she can never recover, and her death allows the Christian order to be maintained, albeit perhaps in a slightly transformed guise. In a similar way to *Häxan*, the film displays a duality of purpose: it speaks humanist values and the magical quality of the exotic palace exaggerates and brings out what is already latent in the nuns' psyches. The story depends on two faces of possession: Ruth is demonically possessed

along medievalist lines, turning her anger and envy into murderous lusts, whereas Phillippa and Clodagh's possessions are troubling currents that stir them to question the reasons behind their faith and lifestyle. Ruth's sanity and life is, however, the price which the others pay to learn their holistic spiritual lessons. As Clodagh takes her final glance at the unsettling palace, it disappears in a puff of cloud, suggesting that it is a place of fairy tale otherness and fantasy. It is only barefoot Kanchi and the Prince who achieve a romantic fairy tale ending, as they used the palace for the sensual purpose for which it was intended. For the others, the palace produces death, the return of the repressed, and spiritual crisis. This is not, however, entirely negative as it allows Clodagh and Phillippa to move on with a clearer idea of their own values. The effects produced by the palace are close to Georges Bataille's notion of the sacred, in which otherness is a force that promotes transformation because of its non-assimilable, unknowable nature. The film highlights the contradictions inherent in the narrow conceptions of the sacred in Christian and Western discourse. Possession has a demonic aspect in the film, but it is not simply reducible to Christian abstractions of evil – as it is in *To the Devil a Daughter*.

Naughty nuns and the perversion of holy orders: *To the Devil a Daughter* and *Dark Habits*

The convent life is based on piety and decorum, entailing that recalcitrant desires are policed through reference to medievalist notions of the Devil as tempter. It is because sexual desires are so clearly defined as transgressive in this context that the "naughty" nun theme becomes so attractive to filmmakers working in the horror and exploitation genres. *To the Devil a Daughter* places possession within the context of a satanic order that has many of the attributes of a Christian religious order. The women of the order are required to marry the demon god Astaroth and sacrifice their bodies to greater glory of this god; their devotions are therefore similar to those of medieval nuns. Despite its contemporary setting, the film makes overt use of the demonological discourse. The demonic is figured as supernatural, and the possession of Catherine (Nastassja Kinski) is not directly symptomatic of any repressed sexual desires on her part, as is the case with the possessions in *Häxan* and *The Devils* (although, as in *The Exorcist*, the supernatural force may tap into unconscious desires). The source of possession is supernatural and, furthermore, the legacy of her parents. As with other Hammer films such as *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (Peter Sasdy, 1970, UK), it is the sins of the previous generation that lead to the demonic corruption of its children. This narrative strategy also helped to market the film to a contemporary young horror audience.

As a straightforward commercial horror film, Hammer's *To the Devil a Daughter* makes full use of the transgressive aspect of the

possessed nun theme. Here, however, the habit-wearing young nun Catherine belongs to a "black" order of devotees of the demon Astaroth. In the film's publicity poster, reference is made to *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary's Baby*, stating that it "probes further into the mysteries of the occult than any has dared before!".³⁸ The film's market had therefore been clearly identified, and such claims heightened its sensationalist intent. Furthermore, the film uses all the conventional tabloid notions of conspiratorial satanic practices. The supernatural is presented as brute fact, and, in contrast to the other possessed nun films discussed here, possession is not directly figured as a by-product of hysteria or repression. As in *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary's Baby*, the film trades on a dualistic model in which transcendent good and evil do battle for supremacy. Within the framework of Dennis Wheatley's novel on which the film was based, demonic possession is treated as an adjunct of the rites designed to give earthly incarnation to anti-Christian forces. Father Michael Rayner (Christopher Lee), a heretical and excommunicated priest, uses possession to aid his desire to incarnate the demon Astaroth in the body of Catherine. She has been dedicated since birth to the order of the "Children of the Lord", and, as her spiritual vocation dictates, she dresses as a nun. Catherine is innocent of the fact that the order to which she is consecrated is in any way odd or perverse, and she acts, when not possessed or dreaming, with the piety of a nun in a bona fide order. Her father Henry Beddows (Denholm Elliott) is aware that her fate is to become the incarnation of the Astaroth. Although bound into a non-interference pact with Astaroth's priest, Beddows nevertheless attempts to prevent Catherine's ordeal by placing her under the care of John Verney (Richard Widmark), an investigative journalist specialising in occult matters. Father Michael uses possession to retrieve the girl from Verney's protection, and is figured as a tool in the Satanist's armoury.

As with Wheatley's black magic novels, many British occult films frame their representations of witchcraft and the occult as a battle between the absolute forces of good and evil. Unlike *Häxan*, *The Devils* and *Black Narcissus*, *To the Devil a Daughter* figures possession as the product of an *a priori* evil. The demonic is not the product of discourse or hysteria, but of the God-ordained order of things. Whereas *Black Narcissus* used possession as an allegory, with potentially multiple readings, *To the Devil a Daughter* renders possession as bluntly literal; a literality that has little of the black humour of *The Devils*. The demonic and indeed sexual possession of Catherine has (overtly) none of the complex consideration of the meanings of possession present in *Häxan*, *The Devils*, *Black Narcissus* and *The Exorcist*. Furthermore, the film betrays a certain interesting disingenuousness – frequent among horror films that take an essentialist and dualistic model of good and evil. It makes use of fascination with the Devil and transgressive deeds, but, by locating evil as transcendent, the viewer is not asked to address his or her complicit investment in the transgressive desires of Father Michael (and Catherine).

Having said this, the film presents some interesting contradictions. We may be asked to identify with the forces of good; equally, however, pleasure might be derived from Lee's deliciously nasty performance as Father Michael. Furthermore, Catherine may be read not as victim, but as a purveyor of transgressive unconscious desires. Such pleasures are, to an extent, in excess of the conventional meanings of transcendent good and evil, and this type of dual economy, wherein viewers are tacitly invited to side with evil characters and their deeds, is common in horror films.

In line with its use of the mythos of demonology, *To the Devil a Daughter* operates with the idea that Satanism is a perverse inversion of Christian worship and its sacred rites. Astaroth³⁹ has his own sacred book (the grimoire of Astaroth – a medieval text kept in the "black room"), and his rites and order are an inverse form of Christianity. As Antichrist, Astaroth is shown crucified legs uppermost on an inverted cross. In a blasphemous inversion of Christ's outstretched arms, Astaroth's open legs imply a sexual invitation carried by the inverted pentagram. This is therefore a very hidebound view of the supernatural, but the value of using the medievalist dualistic model is that it is a convenient way of calling forth the *frisson* of transgression, as it is delineated within a Christian framework. The film therefore works with the conventional rendering of black magic, further informed by tabloid scare stories. Perhaps against the film's overt intentions – it is, after all, supposedly on the side of Christian light – the demonic is directly linked to Christianity. The demonic is not figured as pre-Christian as in, for example, *The Exorcist*, *Blood on Satan's Claw* (Piers Haggard, 1971, UK) and *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973, UK), or as a discursive, man-made tool as in *Häxan* and *The Devils*. In this sense, despite the film's contemporary setting, it takes the medievalist duality at its word and shifts "evil" out of the world of abstraction and into the material; this is achieved by rendering possession as a parasitic invasion of, specifically, the female body.

The sexual and demonic possession of Catherine occurs intermittently throughout the film, hinging around mother-figures and childbirth. In accordance with the blasphemous inversion of all Christian and moral values, the doctor and priest (two of the most trusted orthodox social figures) attend a birth. This is, however, no ordinary birth: the woman's legs are tied together with white ribbons, and the demon baby is forced to claw its way out through the belly; she is then killed by a morphine injection. By cross-cutting between the mother's birth pains and the sleeping Catherine, a clear link is made between them, suggesting that Catherine will become such a mother. As it turns out, this process makes a magical link between her and the demon, and it is intended that they will become fused into one entity. In a flashback sequence, Catherine's birth is shown, secretly observed by her father, and we learn that she was baptised into the church of Astaroth with her dead mother's blood. As in *Rosemary's Baby*, the sanctity of motherhood is rendered perverse through

demonic intervention, and is intrinsic to the marketable shock value of the film. As with Christ, the demon is of woman born, linking demonic possession to women's reproductive bodies and deploying the abject to its full visceral extent. The mothers are expected to sacrifice their lives for their monstrous children. This applies to surrogate, as well as biological, mothers: Catherine kills a potentially good surrogate mother when she stabs Anna Fountain (Honor Blackman) who watches over her safety; Catherine's bad surrogate mother Margaret (Isabella Telezynska), who was present at her birth and brought her up, also dies by voluntarily giving all her blood for the rite that will unite the demon with Catherine. This violence to mother-figures has two rather contradictory meanings: the Satanists invert and corrupt the Christian ideal of nurturing motherhood, as well as tacitly expressing a generational disdain for overprotective mothering. This can be linked to the anti-parent trend in 1960s and 1970s popular culture, and, as in *Children of the Damned* (Anton M Leader, UK, 1964), seems to articulate a nascent fear for, and about, the young generation. The leading contradiction of the film is that, on the one hand, it uses possession as a trope for expressing fears about the corruption of the young (through drug use of "satanic" cults), and, on the other hand, it taps into the liberating and transgressive *frisson* that possession held for young audiences, created in part by *The Exorcist*.

It is never fully clear how far the women are willingly complicit in Father Michael's plans to bring about Astaroth's reign. They may be hypnotised into believing their actions are right. In the birth scene, Father Michael gently coaxes the mother of the demon baby into verbalising her intent to go through with the terrible act of its birth. The mother's voice appears to be his to command. He is also able through possession to direct Catherine's voice and actions. This might be, as Kaja Silverman implies,⁴⁰ an extension of cinema's goal to command the woman's voice, but Catherine's actions might equally be read as voicing recalcitrant desires figured by the female Oedipus Complex, which are bound up in hatred of the mother and love for the father. Even though Catherine appears to be under Father Michael's control, it is she who kills most of the women and, furthermore, has ritual sex in a dreamlike state with the bad Father. The possession of the apparently innocent Catherine gives her licence, like the medieval possessee, to indulge in recalcitrant desires closely connected to the Oedipal-based transgressions. It does, however, take a certain interpretive and imaginative licence to arrive at this reading, as Catherine's desires exist entirely on a subtextual plane. At all times she is portrayed as innocent of all that is happening, and all her base acts have been committed in a hallucinogenic, fish-eye haze (which might support a female Oedipal reading as, in this state, unconscious desires may be mobilised). She commits her crimes when under demonic influence, orchestrated by Father Michael. Despite her obscene and murderous actions, possession provides a means by which her proper maidenly innocence is preserved, and thus the film's narrative and the

integrity of its Christian moral values are maintained. Nevertheless, the film cannot quite forestall the fact that some viewers may identify with her actions; such identification may even be aided by the fact that her actions are not of her own volition. If it had been made fully apparent that she uses the possession to fulfil buried desires, the construction of the narrative would be thrown into disarray, and she would not need to be rescued by her father and Verney. This does not, however, prevent the fact that lurking at the film's periphery – in its blind spot – a specifically female transgressive desire is evident, and this is all part of the film's matrix of contradictions. In *Dark Habits*, however, such desires are made more fully transparent.

Dark Habits is not, strictly speaking, a possessed nun film, and accordingly, it will be considered only briefly. The film is used here as an example of the way in which demonic possession is translated into a contemporary setting through reference to drugs and recalcitrant behaviour (an idea also taken up in a very different way in the killer-in-convent sexploitation film *Suor omicidi* [*Killer Nun*, Giulio Berruti, 1978, Italy]). This shift allows the film to divest itself of the clichéd use of the supernatural and its concomitant transcendental deployment of good and evil. The film therefore replaces the demonic with a material and social evil. Furthermore, it questions the very status of the demonisation of drug use and perversion because they are used as the nuns' route to communion with the tenets of medievalist Christian ideals. *Dark Habits* also cleverly and satirically addresses the disjunction between modern life and the anachronistic medievalist ideals of the cloister: drugs become a means of connecting the two. It is a playful film, often camp and anarchic, and uses few of the conventional nunploitation film clichés. The nuns' behaviour would certainly have been regarded as the result of demonic possession by the 16th-century Church; but the film figures their unconventionality and their antiquated, perverse investment in the medieval aspects of convent life as a resistance to the norms of everyday modern life. Unlike the nuns in softcore nunploitation films, they are not presented as erotic objects of desire. Instead, their religious devotion makes them endearing and eccentric oddities, who have found their own way of interpreting medievalist mystical and religious ideals.

Key to the nuns' liberating perversity is their complicity with the women they seek to redeem. These nuns have all dutifully embraced the dark side to bolster the humility and suffering which the nuns are, if the saints are to be followed, supposed to achieve. The film therefore mischievously reveals the implicit perversity of the cloistered life, and is gently celebrated as counter-discourse. The nuns "possession" is not directly demonic, and lies in their literal and obsessive embrace of the masochistic strain of medieval holy life. This is linked to possession through hysteria, and they are unable to interpret the lives of the martyrs as symbolic or outmoded in a modern context. The meaning of their hysteria carries none of the criticism of sexual repression evident in *Häxan*

or *The Devils*. Instead, it provides them with a creative and idiosyncratic approach to their vocation. They forge the rules of their order according to the dictates of their own desires. Demonic temptations, in the form of drugs and perverse investment in the veil of tears, have a positive use, through which they assert their own brand of religious devotion. The apparent incongruity of anarchy in a convent is the principal pleasure of the film. By removing transgression from the domain of the masculine demonic, it becomes available for a camp resistance against sexual norms. Unlike *Häxan* and *The Devils*, there is no indictment of the Church, nor is there recourse to a *priori* supernaturalism, as in *To the Devil a Daughter*. Instead, the nuns' religious aspirations are couched as something of a lost object of desire. This is a long way from the violent possessions of nuns, signalled as the return of the repressed, in the other films discussed here. Nevertheless, their anarchic and religious-based behaviours use medievalist, archaic ideals as an expression of resistance to cultural norms of good taste and decency.

Conclusion: temptations of the flesh

The possessed nun film is rarely interested in possession beyond its capacity to deliver salacious effects. The temptations of the flesh were of central concern to the medieval Christian Church, operating as a means of policing the bodies, desires and fantasies of its flocks (*vis-à-vis* the penitential manuals issued during the Middle Ages, which list sexual misdemeanours and attribute fitting punishments).⁴¹ In the cinema of the occult, the use of the "temptations of the flesh" scenario enables sex to be rendered as transgressive and dangerous, providing a lucrative marriage between desire and marketability. The "revelation" of the possessed nun film depends on its ability to show the hidden and the forbidden, invoking the mysteries of female desires, which become exaggerated through the forces of repression and possession. This is strongly apparent in *Häxan*, *The Devils* and *To the Devil a Daughter*, and more subtly in *Black Narcissus* and *Dark Habits*. The promise of seeing the strange and marvellous sights of the forbidden carries with it a strong voyeuristic charge, and the view these films present of the cloistered order for the prurient imagination is intrinsically linked to the enigmatic, transgressive and spectacular pleasures of cinema. Despite their different generic frameworks, the majority of films discussed here figure possession through hysteria, which convention links to femininity and repressed sexuality. Through their special chaste status, perceived as entailing a deep repression of "natural" sexual drives, nuns are assigned a direct relation to the demonic and the forces of the unconscious. Their renunciation of the world of men, sex and the family presents something of a challenge to heterosexual masculinity and the patriarchal order. (This may not be true of real nuns, but it is a factor that is redolent in possessed nun films.) The price they pay for this imagined rejection is that they become prey to

demonic forces, and they become a locus for fearful fantasies about the loss of rationality and control. This explanation may hold good for some male investments in the films, but it is unable to address why it is that women might pleasurably identify with the fantasy figure of the possessed nun, and herein lies one of the most intriguing contradictions that inform many of these films.

Nuns and the orders in which they live provide the films with a moral (and dramatic) code through which transgression can be articulated, particularly through rules of obedience and sexual continence. When these rules are broken, the effect is far more shocking and meaningful than would ordinarily be the case in the outside modern world. The presence of a Christian order further lends a familiar and recognisable context for the evocation of the demonic forces. As a manifestation of the Christianised supernatural, the Devil is not ambiguous or unknowable, and embodies a tangible and manageable conception of evil. This may well appeal to a modern audience lost in the woods of relativism or possibly displaying their "sophisticated" scepticism in taking it all as a piece of fiction. Despite the fact that the dualistic and transcendental model of good and evil is largely outmoded and anachronistic, as is the pious ordered world of the convent, it is clear that it still has a pleasurable resonance (and is perhaps reliant on the very fact that there is increasingly less investment in the transcendent conception of good and evil). Such pleasures lie largely in the clear delineation of perversity purveyed by medieval Christianity: hence the iconographic trappings of medievalism have become vital components that inform contemporary investments in the transgressive coding of sado-masochistic sex. The invading demon of possessed nun films can be seen as an onscreen avatar for male (or indeed female) viewers who see chastity as a sexual challenge, providing a vicarious means of acting out domination fantasies. The same scenario might equally provide women viewers (or indeed men) with a fantasy of being sexually and violently coveted, while retaining the affectation of innocence. The "naughty-nun" scenario offers both men and women a ready-made sexual fantasy, replete with sado-masochistic iconography and the *frisson* of transgression. This may lean on stereotypical gender roles, but might further heighten the scenario's illicit coding. Less obviously perhaps, such an investment in the taboo-laden perversity of medieval Christian discourse provides a way of reading history in terms of a sexual economy, as implied by Nietzsche and Foucault. Thus, history in the possessed nun films becomes a form of pornography – a *mise en scène* within which salacious desires are given shape.

Sexuality in the possessed nun scenario is far more than simply coitus, as it is contextualised by the expansive framework of metaphysics. Given its medievalist mode, which provides a setting for the accommodation of bondage and domination fantasies and practices, demonic possession offers itself as a means of indulging in desires that become all the more attractive because they are coded as recalcitrant. It

is that which recommends the subject to filmmakers and suffuses the cinematic cliché of the possessed nun with a certain liberating *frisson* (through the fiction of repression and its spectacular release). The investment in the possessed nun theme testifies to the continued prevalence of the demonological discourse within the mapping of sexual transgression in the supposedly "godless" rationalism of the 20th century. This discourse is therefore imbued with a deep contradictory nature in a modern context. Far from purveying Christian moral values, these films ask us to identify with the demonic as sensational and transgressive. It seems, therefore, that popular culture needs and uses the medievalist rendition of the supernatural to spice up the daily grind. It further provides a vocabulary through which ordinary sexual relations can be phantasmatically embellished. Such investments thereby offer a further addition to Eco's list of modern investments in the medieval.

Notes

- 1 Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996): 22.
- 2 H R Trevor-Roper, "The European Witch-Craze", in Max Marwick (ed), *Witchcraft and Sorcery: Selected Readings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Education, 1970): 126.
- 3 "[T]he Protestant evangelists introduced the systematic mythology of the Inquisition". *Ibid*: 130.
- 4 *Ibid*: 132.
- 5 C L'Estrange Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism: A Concise Account Derived from Sworn Depositions and Confessions Obtained in the Courts of England and Wales* (London: Heath Cranton, 1933): 89.
- 6 Aldous Huxley, *The Devils of Loudun* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952).
- 7 L'Estrange Ewen (100) cites the documented cases of three families: the Throckmorton family (1589-93), the Starkie family (1595-97) and the Fairfax family (1622): "In these three cases the mental indisposition become epidemic, attacking children and servant-maids".
- 8 James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550-1750* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996): 194.
- 9 *Ibid*: 202.
- 10 Sabina Flanagan, *Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179: A Visionary Life* (London; New York: Routledge, 1989): 168-170. What is interesting in Bingen's account is that the possession is not seen as the result of witchcraft, and differs from the common explanation of the source of possession in 16th-/

17th-century accounts of possessions and exorcisms, thus supporting Trevor-Roper's argument.

¹¹ Ioan M Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971).

¹² Umberto Eco, cited in Christopher Frayling, *Strange Landscapes: A Journey Through the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1996): 7-8. Emphases in original.

¹³ Eco cited in *ibid*: 179-180.

¹⁴ *Det hemmelighedsfulde X (The Mysterious X, 1914, Denmark)* and *Hævners nat (Night of Revenge, 1915, Denmark)*.

¹⁵ Both directors share an interest in the supernatural and the medieval: for example, Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc (The Passion of Joan of Arc, 1928)*, *Vampyr (Vampyr, 1932)* and *Vredens dag (Day of Wrath, 1943)*.

¹⁶ *Kinematograph Weekly* 2 November 1968. The print ran for 76 minutes.

¹⁷ Redemption issued one version running at 88 minutes with an 18 certificate, and another running at 77 minutes with a 15 certificate. The Burroughs version is not at present available on video in the UK.

¹⁸ *Häxan* seems to be well-represented in horror encyclopedias, such as Phil Hardy (ed), *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror*, revised updated edition (London: Aurum Press, 1993): 30-31, and Kim Newman (ed), *The BFI Companion to Horror* (London: Cassell/British Film Institute, 1996): 67, 341. Lacking sustained critical consideration, the inclusion of the film in these genre guides tends to give the impression that the film is unproblematically a horror film.

¹⁹ Sharon Russell, "The Witch in Film: Myth and Reality", in Barry Keith Grant (ed), *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* (Metuchen, NJ: London: The Scarecrow Press, 1984): 116; Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993): 73. The film is only briefly mentioned in these texts, and I have read, repetitively, that *Häxan* "treats witchcraft seriously" in both Russell: 116, and Newman: 341.

²⁰ In the trade advertisement in *Kinematograph Weekly*, the film is described as "an antique novelty".

²¹ Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics", in Sigmund Freud, *The Penguin Freud Library. Volume 13: The Origins of Religion, Totem and Taboo, Moses and Monotheism and Other Works*, translated by James Strachey, edited by Albert Dickson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990): 43-224; Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion. A New Abridgement from the Second and Third Editions*, edited by Robert Fraser

(Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) [first published in complete form in 1890].

²² Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs, *Immoral Tales: Sex and Horror Cinema in Europe 1956-1984* (London: Titan Books, 1995): 17.

²³ Wilhelm Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm: Sex-Economic Problems of Biological Energy*, translated by Theodore P Wolfe (London: Panther, 1968).

²⁴ Leon Hunt, *British Low Culture: From safari suits to sexploitation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998): 1.

²⁵ "It is only we who gaze stupidly at the [pornographic] image that 'reveals all'...we, the spectators, are reduced to a paralyzed object-gaze". Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 1992): 110.

²⁶ Kim Newman, *Nightmare Movies: A Critical History of the Horror Film, 1968-88* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988): 42.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984): 15-49. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault exposes repression as a myth deployed by culture in order to lend sexuality an enigmatic secret. He questions Freud's concept of repression, used to describe something that is remaindered or outlawed by discourse, and, for Foucault, "repression" is a construct of discourse. He demonstrates that repression originates from, and is essential to, liberal discourse. As Porter and Teich suggest: "What is therefore historically puzzling, Foucault argued, is not 'repression' but rather the tenacity of the myth of repression". Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (eds), *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 7.

²⁸ Huxley: 130.

²⁹ James Ferman, ex-Head of the British Board of Film Censors, recounted the censorship history of the film in his introduction to its first British television showing on BBC-2's *Forbidden Weekend* in the mid-1980s.

³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by R J Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973): 87 [aphorism no. 168].

³¹ Reviewer James Kendrick scathingly says: "I think I lost it completely when Michael Gorthad [sic], looking like a hippie rock star with purple John Lennon glasses, finally shows up on scene, horribly overacting his part as a professional exorcist". www.geocities.com/hollywood/set/6281/devils.html.

³² Ken Russell, *A British Picture: An Autobiography* (London: Heinemann, 1989): 193.

³³ See Hunt's chapter, "Permissive populism: Low cultural production in the 1970s", especially 18-22, for a good analysis of this dynamic.

³⁴ Julian Petley, "The Lost Continent", in Charles Barr (ed), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1986): 106. Emphasis in original.

³⁵ They are not Catholic nuns as many reviewers assume.

³⁶ Andy Medhurst, "Inside the British Wardrobe", *Sight and Sound* 5: 3 (March 1995): 16.

³⁷ Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, "On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication (1893)", in Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, translated and edited by James and Alix Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974): 58.

³⁸ Marcus Hearn and Alan Barnes, *The Hammer Story* (London: Titan Books, 1997): 166. This book provides some useful production details, and reproduces a letter from Wheatley stating his dismay that the film bears no relation to his novel.

³⁹ Astaroth is conceived here as a fallen angel, but this demon has some rather different lineages than those thought up by the Hammer scriptwriters. Astaroth has a place in the esoteric world of Lovecraft and his inheritors. In the pseudo-grimoire *Necronomicon*, he is known as Azathoth: a Sumerian Ancient One, who is the Lord of Dark Magic and Chaos. See *Necronomicon* (New York: Avon Books, 1977), purportedly written by Abdul Alhazrad in the 8th century, but rumour has it that an avatar wrote it in the 1970s.

⁴⁰ Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).

⁴¹ For a useful discussion of medieval penitential manuals, see Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991): 22-42.

2

Demon Daddies: Possession, Demonology and the Male Oedipal Relation

Introduction

From the werewolf film to the techno-possession of the cyberworld in science-fiction/horror hybrids, the demonic invasion of the body has provided filmmakers with a potent metaphor to explore the terrors and ecstasies of irrationality and split identity. This chapter is specifically concerned with the relationship between the demonic and masculinity (as it applies to the gendering of bodies and discourse). Traditionally, the object of possession is female – a body in need of rescue and an object of spectacle. This is central to *The Exorcist* (1973), but the other films discussed here break with this convention because it is men who are possessed. Nevertheless, the possessing demon remains consistently masculine. Whether they are classical horror films or those concerned with postmodern fears about technology, the contention of this chapter is that the various incarnations of the possession film are ruled by an awesome dread of a primal anarchic and hyper-masculine force. This is figured as demonic, and follows a medievalist model of demonology.

Within the horror film, the possessed and abject "antibody" is frequently assigned to women. This has been theorised according to the idea that male viewers disavow their unpleasurable experience of the uncontrollable body by projecting them onto the bodies of women, and is linked to masculine fears of lack of control or loss of power (termed "castration anxieties" in psychoanalysis). *The Exorcist* makes use of a female body for its main possession, and, as in all the films discussed here, the possession is perpetrated by a male demon. There are, however, a group of possession films in which the male body is under demonic attack. The very "normalness" of the white male body provides the basis for a horrific *frisson* of possession and bodily transformation. The generic remit of the horror film is to produce visceral bodily responses in the viewer; this makes a special case for allowing the male body – and particularly the white male body – to become an abject antibody.¹ Possession supplies a pre-existing mythological system (the mythos of demonology) for this to occur, enabling the abject transformation of the male body to be linked to an attack on identity and rationality. The

economic laws that govern genre go some way towards explaining the shift in the gender of the possessed: a genre must mutate and break its own self-defined rules if it is to survive at the box office. This has led to the recycling of old generic tropes by changing conventional gender roles. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (television series, 1997-, USA), for example, the traditionally male Van Helsing figure becomes a young woman. This is one of many such gender switches in contemporary media, and may suggest that gender is no longer a primary discourse of difference. This is not the case, however. While there may have been a shift in the gender of the possessee, the figuring of the demonic as hyper-masculine has not undergone any fundamental change, and continues to operate under the aegis of an Oedipal paradigm. Despite Deleuze's seductive and utopian call for a rejection of Oedipal-based interpretations,² it would be fanciful and unwise to ignore the driving presence of Oedipal relationships in these films, and particularly that of fathers and sons. Furthermore, it is through this framework that a challenge will be made to the idea that the possession film is gendered feminine, a view that tends to foreclose on equally important aspects. Autonomy, rational cohesion and gendered identity are imperilled in all the films discussed in this chapter. This may involve the feminisation of the male body, but does not mean, as Carol J Clover and Barbara Creed have argued,³ that the possession film can be deemed as simply "feminine"; instead, it is ruled over by an (imagined) archaic and primal masculinity – the demon daddy.

Antibody/Antichrist: *The Exorcist*

The Exorcist is perhaps the best-known and most commercially successful possession film (due mainly to some persuasive marketing techniques aided by considerable media attention). The film had once again returned to public attention through a cinema re-release, deftly timed to begin a UK tour on Hallowe'en 1998.⁴ It was not the first possession film, but it stands as a kind of ur-text for subsequent films, particularly in terms of the presence of a primal masculine demon. Central to the story is the struggle between a Babylonian demon named Pazuzu, and two Catholic priests, conducted over the body of an adolescent girl, Regan (Linda Blair). Pazuzu is unearthed during an archaeological dig in Iraq, and returns to the modern world. The demon is an agent of chaos, and his presence dislocates the homely and complacent familiarity of a middle-class American urban household. Pazuzu is a pre-Christian demon, bringing with him the connotations of an ancient and archaic paganism, with all its supernatural barbarism and demands for human sacrifice. He may be pre-Christian, but he is interpreted by the priests according to a medievalist conception of demonology and possession, and Pazuzu enables Father Karras (Jason Miller) to re-establish his faith in Christianity in the face of 20th-century rationalism.

The supernatural horror film frequently works by gradually

interpellating the viewer, through the machinations of the plot, into a position where scepticism gives way to belief. In *Night of the Demon* (Jacques Tourneur, 1957, UK), for example, the narrative is restricted to that of the detective figure: we see only what he sees and we inhabit his transition from sceptic to believer. By contrast, the viewer of *The Exorcist* does not undergo the usual persuasion to believe in the supernatural structured into many horror films. Instead, the sceptical voice is located mainly with Father Karras and not with the viewer. This is achieved because the narrative is not restricted to Karras' view, we have seen what he has not, and we know from the outset that the demon is real. Karras therefore fulfils the role of a doubting Thomas; he has lost his faith in God and can no longer suspend his disbelief, necessary for religious faith. Karras must therefore be brought back to a place of faith. Karras' disbelief is also entangled with a loss of faith in the enchantment of the cinematic image. The narrative infrastructure of *The Exorcist* mirrors the processes involved in the reception of cinema. Both are characterised by an unstable dynamic between the ecstasy of belief and rational scepticism. This is a film about faith, couched within the frame of illusionist cinema. By assigning Karras the role of disbeliever, the film allows the viewer to take up the place of belief, helping to restore the enchantment of cinema and masking off scepticism.

I am conflating "faith" with "suspension of disbelief" here, which might seem to require a leap of faith of my reader, but it is clear that the film conjoins the two. This is perhaps why, when asked by the detective if he would like to go to the movies, Karras cynically replies: "No, I've seen that film". Given that the viewer has access to information that key players do not, we are put on the side of the supernatural. The film channels the viewer to take an immediate irrational leap of faith to believe in the image. That the film frequently aligns faith in God and the supernatural with faith in the cinematic image is a surprising move for a die-hard New Hollywood filmmaker who, like his peers, had become disenchanted by the anodyne illusionism of the Hollywood film. Links between cinema and faith crop up frequently: Chris MacNeil (Ellen Burstyn), Regan's mother, is an actress who does not believe in the film she is currently making, saying that it renders the revolutionary politics of the post-1968 student body into "Disney" politics. It is the director of this film, Burke Dennings (Jack MacGowran), who is the first to be killed by the demon, and the cinéophile detective compares Karras to the star of the 1947 boxing film *Body and Soul* (Robert Rossen, USA). Hence cinema and its processes are textually and significantly interlaced with a story about loss of faith, which has an impact on the meaning of possession in the film. The viewer is asked to make a pact with Pazuzu and cinema – to believe in both, if the film is to affect its own brand of possession through the dissolution of the frame of representation.

The film's demand that we believe may have worked its spell for viewers in the 1970s, but it would seem that, for some recent viewers, the

suspension of disbelief is difficult (and they become like the faithless Karras). The reported hysterical behaviour of a small number of audience-members in 1973 may now be regarded sceptically as part of the marketing hype, and a result of the naivety of 1970s audiences. The reported reactions to the film on its release imply that it has the capacity, if we let it, to dissolve the boundary between viewer and film, and, as such, the film's status as representation is eroded (a goal of many horror films, but one that is subject to fashions and shifts). I certainly view the film, perhaps nostalgically, as having the rare power to break the frame of representation and to create the ecstasy of more than simply a suspension of disbelief. This is not, however, the same for everyone. On its recent cinema re-release, it was reported that laughter was the primary response to this essentially very serious film. The parodies that followed its initial success may have retrospectively altered the meaning of the film, and partially explain the shift from horror to laughter. Furthermore, there is the impact of generational difference and a shift in the lexicon of special effects techniques used by the horror genre. It would seem that dated-looking horror films tend to lack the veracity of films of their newer counterparts. A sense of temporal presentness, particularly with a style-conscious youth audience, seems to be a necessary factor if a horror film is to break the frame of representation. This is not, of course, the only factor in the horror recipe book, but it appears relevant in the case of the re-release of *The Exorcist*.

There is an insistent and undeniable Freudian undercurrent to the film, the inscription of which continues to lend the film a certain force. Regan's symptoms could be interpreted as hysterical in the same manner as the nuns of the previous chapter. But *The Exorcist* differs from possessed nun films because it deliberately blocks a rational reading of Regan's possession as a hysterical symptom. The opening scene in Iraq, where the demon appears to Father Merrin (Max von Sydow), has absolutely nothing to do with Regan. It also emerges that Merrin fought the demon as a young man in Africa (taken up in *The Exorcist II: The Heretic* [John Boorman, 1977, USA]). The viewer is therefore apprised of the fact that the demon pre-exists Regan and cannot therefore be a product of her unconscious mind. Key to the demon's corrupting methods is the use of fantasies (conscious or unconscious) of those with whom he comes into contact. He prompts a drunken Dennings into taunting the Swiss butler about being a Nazi. Not simply sowing the seeds of discord, Pazuzu does this to implicate the butler in the subsequent death of Dennings. It is through the demon's use of the unconscious desires of the main characters that an Oedipal reading can be made. Utilising these buried desires, it is Pazuzu who is the source of hysterical symptoms (something that the numerous critics of the film have ignored). The re-emergence of the Oedipal, which Freud says makes a retrospective reappearance in the adolescent, is clearly marked throughout the film in Regan's relationship with her mother before she is possessed. The first time

we see Regan and her mother together, they playfully fight over Regan's desire for first a horse and then a cookie, betraying certain underlying tensions between them. A little later, the Ouija board refuses to play with Regan's mother (Captain Howdy, as a kind of surrogate father-figure, is exclusive to Regan), and the first person to die is Regan's mother's lover, Dennings. Through the unleashing of Regan's repressed Oedipal desires, Pazuzu plays on her mother's wish that her daughter should remain pre-pubescent. (At one point, she mentions that, in a recent photograph, Regan looks "too mature".) Furthermore, it is through the *mise en scène* of the Oedipal scenario that Father Karras begins to believe in the reality of the demon – only when the demon speaks about his mother, and when he hears her voice speaking through Regan does his scepticism give way. His battle with Pazuzu is fundamentally an Oedipal struggle played out through the bodies of women (his mother and the possessed Regan). This is therefore the classic Oedipal-based fantasy, as identified by Freud, of defeating the bad/primal father and rescuing the mother (or women in general) from his evil clutches.⁵

As this idea is central to my argument, it is necessary to outline what Freud means by the term the "primal father". He maintains that Western culture bears the mark of a primal scene in which the sons (which he terms the "primal horde") kill the primal father. In *Der Mann Moses und die Monotheistische Religion (Moses and Monotheism, 1939)*, Freud says:

The strong male was lord and father of the entire horde and unrestricted in his power, which he exercised with violence. All the females were his property – wives and daughters of his own horde and some, perhaps, robbed from other hordes. The lot of his sons was a hard one: if they roused their father's jealousy they were killed or castrated or driven out...the expelled brothers...united to overpower their father, and, as was the custom in those days, devoured him raw.⁶

This scenario has clear proto-Oedipal meanings. This fear of the "primal father" and the concomitant need to defeat and demonise him are markedly present in all the possession films discussed here. Freud maintains that the bad, primal father is central to the structure of the masculine. It is never quite clear whether the concept is used as an allegorical description of a myth that supports patriarchy as a particular social organisation. If this was the intention, there is still some slippage between its allegorical function to describe the myth and the way in which it articulates real and imaginary effects and experiences. This slippage is inherent within deployment of the myth to confirm aspects of a culture as grounded in the "primal". I am wary of the idea that the primal father is either a prehistorical fact or hardwired into the

evolutionary processes of the human brain. The concept of the primal father is used here with the caveat that it is a construct of a particular social imagination, which works with the power relations between father and son, and is subject to cultural differences and historical change. The primal father is a fantasy, and, as it occurs regularly in film and other narrative modes, it would seem to be a collective fantasy anchored in existing social relations of patriarchy. Just because it is rooted in the imagination does not mean it can be dismissed, however. It has real effects on people, and is instrumental to the reiteration of conventional gender roles. The battle with the primal father is evident in many popular texts in which the young male hero has to do battle with an older and more cunning oppressor or villain. Often this is enacted by the villain's abduction of the hero's female love interest. Films often play out this fantasy, aiding in the replication of the myth. While an essentialist reading of the primal father should be regarded sceptically, the value of *Moses and Monotheism* is that it identifies an aspect of the configuration of masculinity that continues to inform the horror film.

Some of my female film students have found a certain anti-parent pleasure in Regan's abjection and bad behaviours – seeing her as a kind of feminist antibody, which is in conflict with the Law of the Father. This is a reading that has often been made of medieval and Renaissance possession, and indeed the hysterical body in general. Having pagan leanings, and a certain pleasure in the disruptive value of the "antibody", I would like to read the film as an outpouring of ecstatic communion repressed by Christianity. The film might give the viewer an ecstatic *frisson*, but Regan's possession is not a "feminist" rebellion. This wish-reading is fraught with two significant problems. Firstly, Regan is a victim; she is caught up in a struggle between forces out of her control and understanding. As the historian Hugh Trevor-Roper says, the Renaissance possessee and witch were conceptual tools (with real bodily effects) through which the struggle between opposing Christian factions was played out. Regan, too, is simply a medium, and her secret desires are by no means aberrational, but significantly they *are* exploited by the demon (and the film, for sensational ends). Secondly, I follow Catherine Clément's view that the female hysterical body does not constitute a feminist discourse: it may disrupt, but does not provide a panacea for the lack of a symbolic language that serves men and women equally. As Clément says, the hysterical body frequently operates as a mechanism that merely allows the Law of the Father to gain a stronger foothold.⁷ In other words, the hysterical disruption is something to be overcome, and thereby proves and reinforces the strength of the Law of the Father.

This is evident in the struggle between the demon and the priests played out over Regan's body and through her unconscious desires. Despite the annihilating ecstasy of the possession and the demon's anti-family values, Regan is simply a tool for a struggle between competing men, and she is used to elicit audience sympathy. I do not, therefore,

accord with Creed's reading that Pazuzu is the maternal repressed just because a female actor voices him.⁸ Pazuzu is clearly marked as the demonic masculine through his speech and the snake phallus carved on the idol that represents him. The film is, in essence, a contest between the two priestly good fathers and the demonic bad father. By way of illustration, when Karras and Merrin break from the exorcism to recoup their strength, Karras is alone with Regan. When he enters the room, his mother, wearing her funeral shroud, momentarily replaces Regan. Karras' mother had recently died in a state-run asylum, after making her son promise that she should remain in her own house. She blamed Karras for being taken to the asylum and refused to speak to him when he visited, and she dies shortly after. Consequently, he is still suffering from remorse, and the demon plays on this tender wound, evoking the Oedipal scenario through his guilt. This is instrumental to Karras' determination to destroy the bad father. Pazuzu is not the "monstrous feminine"; instead he is an analogue of Freud's primal father, as his archaic origin testifies. Pazuzu returns to bait the good priests by attacking their ideals and playing on their weaknesses. This is retribution for the burial of the demon's power in the Babylonian temple under the talisman inscribed with the image of St Joseph: the child on his lap signifies his status as a good father-figure. The film is, therefore, a tale of a fight between good and bad fathers (the binary marker of a medievalist dualistic world-view). This is located within the meta-frame of the male Oedipus Complex, to which are appended concepts such as rationality, faith and belief. These relate as much to the cinematic apparatus as to religion; like cinema, Pazuzu's status as bad father lies in his ability to make use of buried, unconscious desires.

As a classical possession film, *The Exorcist* operates through the possession of a woman's body. As Clover argues, the female body is defined in the horror film as having interiority, inner spaces, which men do not have. (Of course they do, but the process of projection is at work here.)⁹ Within this gendered logic, these spaces can be inhabited by demons, and are associated with hysteria as a feminine attribute. This is grounded in the medievalist mythos of demonology, but also harks back to the classical Greek idea of possession. Urbane Athenians regarded possession as archaic, irrational and feminine: an embodiment of that which threatens the ordered world with an annihilating chaos. Possession was figured as a form of psychosis, and this idea persists into contemporary filmmaking. The enthusiastic worship of ancient or foreign rural deities, such as Dionysos, was figured by classical Greek discourse as a form of irrationalism: practised only by women, slaves and rural people – who are not included under their concept of civilisation. As is evident in Euripides' play *The Bacchae* (c.406-408 BC), enthusiasm was considered the domain of women and primitives. Male-citizen relations with the gods were more distanced and based on a gift exchange order, and their relations with the gods and the supernatural were marked by scepticism and rational autonomy.

This gender division threads its way through Western history to the present day. As established in the previous chapter, possessed nuns are women outside the heterosexual order, and are "hysterical" because they are imagined as sexually repressed. A contradictory conflation is made, via the need to bolster masculinity, between sex and rational control. Those women that lack the rational control afforded by intimate contact with men are open to invasion by the demonic primal father. Many possession films displace a fear of the loss of rational autonomy, gendered masculine, onto a feminised discourse of hysteria, and must be exorcised by the good father if "civilised" order is to prevail. The wild pleasures of possession, which give licence to obscene behaviours, are located as a failure of rationalism and prescribed heterosexual relations. It is this idea that informs the view that possession – and indeed hysteria – are both disruptive thorns in patriarchy's side. (I have explained my reservations about the view that hysteria is a viable political form of resistance to patriarchy in chapter 1.) However, it is crucial to note that it is a hyper-masculine demonic and primitive force that ushers this into being.

It may appear as if the argument has been sewn up here as a product of the male imaginary and the rationalist male gaze, but it is not quite that simple. The cinematic gaze, particularly in the horror and fantasy genres, is constantly and implicitly at war with scepticism. Horror pulls out all the stops to dissolve the boundaries between subject and object, and, in so doing, to disrupt uniform conceptions of the male gaze. Many horror films invite viewers to identify with the victim, and rarely the aggressor, and thereby shift the voyeuristic, distanced watching position into the "feeling" position. Indeed, Steven Shaviro argues that a passive subjugation of the rational self is the primary pleasure of horror (for both men and women).¹⁰ Accordingly, examples of the genre work towards a Batailleann annihilation of the contours of the self, and thus a kind of possession of the viewer is affected. Such a dynamic appears to mitigate against masculinised rationality, which is, after all, defined by its relation to power and control. This desire for subjugation and possession is what leads Karras, the macho boxing-priest, to offer his own body to the demon Pazuzu. It is his possession, at the end of the film, which betrays Karras' desire to renew his faith in God and the cinematic image. It is a masochistic, anti-rational ecstatic communion that finally silences his scepticism. Karras' unification with the demon is a struggle for recognition, and, ironically, affords him the opportunity to achieve a coherent priestly identity. Karras finds self-respect through martyrdom, and a rational goal is achieved through an act of ecstatic possession. *But* the paradox is that this rational goal is to accomplish faith, which always intrinsically demands something beyond the rational and, ultimately, something beyond the human. Karras is only able to recover his loss of identity through reference to Pazuzu as an extrinsic force.

Regan therefore only *seems* central to the film; rather, the film hinges on the relationship between Pazuzu and Karras. It is this

relationship that underpins Regan's spectacular bodily possession. The abject status of Regan's possessed body functions as a tool of disgust to precipitate a dissolution of the boundary between viewer and film. If the creeping sense of the uncanny which floods through the film's realist aesthetic does not work to produce a visceral bodily reaction in the viewer, it becomes simply comedy, and scepticism rules the day, making Karras' supreme sacrifice senseless. Time and the shifting sands of signification tend to breed cynicism. Many of those who saw the film for the first time on its re-release tended to laugh at what seemed a worn-out and much-parodied cliché – a film that no longer has the power to disturb the spectator. However, this may also result from disavowal and/or inattentive watching, betraying a need to drive difficult questions about faith and identity out of purview, and seeing the film only in terms of 1970s flares and dated special effects. Pazuzu may, for some, become a comic antibody, having lost his Antichrist credentials; beneath the bravado, however, the weight of the film's cultural capital still goes before it, and the film still has a certain magical propensity to disrupt the sense that the world and the body is knowable and stable. To disbelieve the film's logic may give a nice sense of control, but it does not produce the ecstatic *frisson* of cinematic engulfment or forgetting sought by many horror fans, myself included, and, like Karras, I desire faith. The paradox is, however, that this apparently liberating cinematic possession brings about the reassertion of a medievalist duality of transcendent good and evil, and is grounded in a cinematic fantasy of the primal father.

The werewolf film and possession of the male body

In contrast to possessed nun films and *The Exorcist*, the werewolf film generally centres on the possession of the male, rather than the female, body. During the 1950s, the horror genre actively courted a youth audience through the teenage werewolf cycle, such as Hollywood's *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (Gene Fowler, Jr, 1957, USA) and Hammer's *Curse of the Werewolf* (Terence Fisher, 1961, UK). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has continued this tradition through the character of Oz (Seth Green). These versions lend mythical meanings to the physical and mental transformations undergone by male teenagers (growing hair, changes in vocal register, increased sexual drive, impromptu erection, male bonding and territorialism). It is rather easy for fully-fledged adults, both male and female, to forget the "horror" of the rapid and inexorable changes that occur during adolescence. The body is out of order and an affront to the illusion of bodily control, both fascinating and horrific; it prompts long mirror-gazing spells behind the locked door of the bathroom; and, despite rationalisation, the effect is that of a prototypical body horror. The accelerated changes in the adolescent body strongly defy the usual strategies used to disavow the flagrant autonomy of the flesh, and this is the very material experience upon which body horror draws for its visceral

impact. The werewolf myth simply exaggerates the effects of the transitional "not one thing nor the other" adolescent state.

Cinematic images of the werewolf call on fairy tale and myth. They usually represent an eruption of wild, voracious and instinctual appetites, frequently preying on smaller domesticated animals. The archetypal lone wolf lives in the wildwood away from civilisation, and is hunted by men to prove their masculine prowess. The werewolf, together with animal possession in general, appears in many myths from all over the world, and has a variety of meanings. Perhaps it began through the sympathetic magic that is thought to be the purpose of ancient cave paintings, when men invoked the spirit of the wolf to aid hunting. In Greek myth, the werewolf is often implicitly used as a means of distinguishing between the old religions which demanded human sacrifice and cannibalism, and the newer religions which were deemed more "civilised". In Ovid's story of Lykaon in *Metamorphoses* (8 AD), a man feeds another man to a god, and is then turned into a werewolf as punishment.¹¹ The wolf-man in film has retained these meanings, and represents a return to pre-civilised, instinctual behaviours. In cinematic werewolf lore, it is only the love of a woman that can return the werewolf to domesticated normality, and the werewolf frequently embodies a very modern crisis in the meaning and experience of masculinity. The demand of "ideal" masculinity involves a rugged wild individuality, which is in direct conflict with the social requirement that men take their place in a family. The werewolf film allegorises this contradiction, hinging around the idea that, to become civilised or domesticated, certain asocial, wild desires must be repressed. However, that such desires are figured as archaic and pre-discursive underpins and helps maintain a fixed definition of masculinity. What can be seen here is a reiteration of the repressive myth, taking on archetypal meaning in a cinematic context. The werewolf film expresses instinctual masculinity as a lost object, and, because women often experience femininity as a suppression of desire, they, too, may identify with the back-to-nature transformation of the werewolf. This helps to explain why repression is such a seductive idea. It entails a release from the channelling process of the social contract, a desire often deployed in cinema. Indeed, cinema may well have a hand in shaping and reiterating this idea.

In an essay that has been influential to the analysis of the horror film, Robin Wood identifies a group of horror films that punish sexual desire, films which he regards as conservative (anti-libertarian) morality tales.¹² The werewolf film would appear to come under this category. But the teenage werewolf concept, from *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* through to *The Howling* (Joe Dante, 1981, USA), *The Company of Wolves* (Neil Jordan, 1984, UK) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, is far from conservative. Their possessions are not based on the projection of anxieties and fears onto othered groups (termed "abreaction" in psychoanalysis), which occurs in many horror films. Instead, the werewolf film "others" the white male

body from within, and viewers are invited to sympathise with the experience of losing self-rule. The werewolf transition is frequently preceded by an exposition in which viewers are asked to identify with the central character, as in *Curse of the Werewolf* where we follow the birth and childhood of Leon. Making the first stages of the change pleasurable, often by portraying a series of sexual or power wish-fulfillments, means that, by the time the transformation begins, viewers have got under the skin of the character. The careful build-up of identification sends us back to our strange fascination with the enigmas shown in the bathroom mirror. Viewers are interpellated into the horrific *frisson* of the transformation from the homely familiar body to the unfamiliar antibody. The effect is to remind us of the (buried) radical alterity of our own antibodies. In this lupine version of the mirror-phase, God's holy work is undone and we are brought back to the demonic dissembled body, which is elided by subjecthood and its illusions of mind/body integrity.

Running beside the teenage werewolf is a further manifestation that deals with the contradictory perils of the material experience of masculinity. In *Wolf* (Mike Nichols, 1994, USA), Will Randall (Jack Nicholson) is a late-middle-aged, meek and mild, reasonable publisher who is, early in the film, prey to the ambitious appetites of a younger male colleague. A werewolf bites Randall one cold winter's night, after his sensible Volvo hits a wolf in the dark, snowy woods. Like Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) in *The Fly* (David Cronenberg, 1986, Canada), the first stages of the transition revitalise him with the powers of youth. His balding head sprouts new hair, his libido resurfaces, and he becomes more competitive in the workplace. For a time, he revels in this new-found vitality, until things go out of control and Randall thinks that he has killed his estranged wife on a nightly roam around New York. It is not just adolescents who experience the body as exceeding control – the processes of ageing and illness testify to the alterity of our own flesh. The fantasy that underlies *Wolf* is blazingly apparent; and, significantly, it is the ageing white male body that has become the antibody here. While the ageing process is given as the ostensible reason for his decline, the film also implies that it is Randall's New Man credentials that have drained his lust for life. In effect, it is a Jungian tale of integration, read through Robert Bly's call to retrieve a "back to the woods" masculinity, in which it is imagined that finding the repressed wolf within allows a lost vigour to be recovered.¹³ Despite Randall's total transition to wolf at the end of the film, the Nietzschean message is clear – the wolf within is vital if the ageing man is not to slide into a passive and, according to this logic, feminised dotage. Nicholson's wild-man star persona strengthens this as he transforms from uncharacteristic weary submissive into a more familiar "mad, bad and dangerous to know" guise. Animal possession is rendered as a means to get back in touch with a repressed and instinctual vitality, dovetailing with the Freudian notion of the primal father. The transition from boy or man to wolfman implies that he has taken up the place of the

primal father. This has its liberating pleasures, but also entails the loss of identity and rationality, and thereby embodies the contradictions implicit in the contemporary definition of masculinity. Despite the film's palliative reading of the werewolf syndrome, the male body nevertheless becomes othered and a site of contradictory desires. It is the very "normalness" of the white male body that lends this a counter-discursive dimension. During the process of transition, the male body becomes hysterical and penetrable (conventionally coded as feminine). This body is riven with the contradictory investments in the primal father – fear of his barbarity, and a desire to become him. On becoming a werewolf, however, licentious anarchic pleasures, assigned to the primal father, are realised. The drive behind the werewolf film is, in essence, an allegory of becoming possessed and consumed by the feared and othered primal father. This idea is taken up in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (David Lynch, 1992, USA), and Lynch's films are full of possessed men.

Postmodern possessions: *Lost Highway* and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me and *Lost Highway* (1996, USA) attack head-on the myth of the autonomous subject. They deal in split identity, showing subjectivity to be fractured and riven with alterity. Conventional divisions between self and other, conscious and unconscious, inside and outside, are dissolved. Unlike the contained heroes of most Hollywood action films, the characters in these films are buffeted by unseen forces which tear at the illusion of the coherent and rational subject. Although the irrational is conventionally coded as feminine, for Lynch¹⁴ it is firmly anchored in the demonic hyper-masculinity of the primal father. The films are marked by a masculine excess that suffuse their texture and content, and they are haunted by a proliferation of intertextual references to myth and other films. These may appear gratuitous, but have a certain weird logic. Like the laminations of a dream, the intertextual references are never quite straight repetitions. This contributes to the viewer's uncanny sense of *déjà vu*, and lend the films an air of being familiar yet unfamiliar. The intertextual ghosts of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* and *Lost Highway* resonate with non-specific meaning and enigma, confounding and seducing the viewer.¹⁵ Their presence aims to bring the archetypal world of unconscious fantasies, which exceed the individual and rational autonomy, to bear on the films and the experience of watching them. The intertexts are always slightly obscured and never overt or direct, which would perhaps create a sense of ease and firm knowledge for the viewer. Instead, the intertexts mutate, creating new associations and patterns through difference and repetition. This slippery, fractal-like complexity can sound like a description of a "feminine" text,¹⁶ in which one-to-one correspondences are undermined, but, rather than being related to the maternal, the imaginary force that shapes the two films is intrinsically

related to the primal father, which here, as in other possession films, constitutes the archaic and irrational other, and circulates contagiously through the main male characters.¹⁷

Lynch's archetypal and masculinised irrational is never completely divorced from the linear world.¹⁸ It shape-shifts in accordance with the contours of its context, invading personal histories and disturbing chronology, linearity and cause and effect. It is felt as a transgressive disruption of identity and rational stability. The invocation of this chaotic and infectious energy is achieved, and takes shape, through possession and doublings, as well as through the myth-making quality of cinema. Signs, situations and events are borrowed, variously, from genres such as film noir, melodrama and horror. These genres are concerned with the excesses produced by the unconscious. Lynch's borrowings from the pantheon of cinema, as a modern myth-making machine, lend his films archetypal resonance. Despite all this slippage, there is a guiding logic at work. Most of the intertexts and all the possessions coalesce around an array of duplicitous and anarchic father-figures, whose crimes mirror those of Freud's primal father.

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me and *Lost Highway* both hinge around an offscreen Faustian pact with the primal father. Leland Palmer (Ray Wise), Fred Madison (Bill Pullman), Pete Dayton (Balthazar Getty) and Mr Eddy/Dick Laurent (Robert Loggia) have committed primal crimes which, like the central character in *Angel Heart* (Alan Parker, 1987, USA), have been forgotten as a result of this pact. God has abandoned these men, and for them there is no redemption – only endless doublings and circuitous returns to their crimes. In *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, the possessed Leland, for example, bears the sins of the primal father by breaking the "civilising" rule against incest. Fred Madison brutally kills Mr Eddy/Dick Laurent and his wife Renée Madison (Patricia Arquette), and Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) is the victim of her father's incestuous and murderous desires. Their forgotten crimes, like versions of original sin, nevertheless return to haunt them.

Laura's death at the hands of her possessed father in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* is significantly different from the sacrificial death of Laurent in *Lost Highway*. Both killings are presided over by those who represent the primal father – Leland's possessed incarnation Bob in the former film, and the nameless man in the latter. The ritual slaughter of Laurent bears the weight of many textual doublings. His death resonates within the concept of the sacred victim (the King is killed by his successor) which, Frazer argues, is an intrinsic feature of primitive myth and religion.¹⁹ His is the death of the bad/primal father who, according to Freud, has sexual dominion over all the women in his tribal "horde" (hence his alignment to pornographic and "snuff" video). As the primal castratory knife cuts his throat, the scene refers to the slaughter of Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979, USA), which is cross-cut with the sacrificial slaughter of the sacred cow. As Kurtz is killed

by his double/son Willard, so Laurent is killed by his double/son Fred, following Freud's model of the murder of the primal father by the son. This primal scene of murder, and the role of Laurent as temporary embodiment of the demon daddy are underscored by the fact that he is shown a clip from a porn/snuff film before he dies. It is implied that his participation in such activities is implicated in his pact with the nameless man. As *lex talionis* (retribution of like kind), Laurent's death is also filmed.²⁰ Throughout, Laurent is constantly linked to video and sex – he offers Pete a porn video, watches porn films while having sex with Renée, and is shown a porn/snuff movie before he is killed. Inversely, Fred fears the video camera, preferring, perhaps with Luciferian arrogance, to remember things in his own way. This, of course, might well be driven by his need, or indeed the offscreen pact, to forget what actually happened. Despite having forgotten it, Fred is implicated in the snuff video, left at his house, of him killing his wife. This makes him Laurent's "proper" successor in the cycle of handing on the legacy of primal father. Laura Palmer's death is also at the hands of her father possessed by the primal father. She is his victim, however, and not his victor or legacy-holder such as Fred. Laura and Renée are certainly subject to pacts, doublings and returns, but Laura is the only character afforded the luxury of redemption. Why should this be so? In interviews, Lynch said that he made *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* because he was still in love with Laura Palmer.²¹ It would appear that the age-old fairy tale of rescuing the princess underlies her kitsch redemption. This would suggest that Laura is an object of desire (for Leland, she becomes the lost object of desire) and the prize – and the price – promised by the Oedipal pact with the primal father. As such, the logic of her death and redemption is clear. Like Regan, both she and Renée/Alice are only tools for the reiteration and perpetuation of the Oedipal pact between the demonic father and his acolyte son.

Lacan argues that to become a unified subject we must bury the *corps morcele*, the fragmented antibody, in the image of wholeness seen in the mirror.²² This buried disassembled body re-emerges in imaginary form in films dealing in demonic possession. In *Lost Highway* and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, the pervasive force of the taboo-busting primal father resurrects the splintered body/mind. In *The Exorcist*, possession figures as a rite of passage, a means of dissolving the boundaries of body and self in order to reassemble them in a more solidified way. Regan's possession is an articulation of what Freud calls *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action or *après coup*).²³ Here the Oedipal scene is reopened with the onset of puberty. Once the "father"/priest has been killed, Regan's possession ceases, and she is left to renew her bonds with her mother. She, like many of Lynch's characters, has forgotten/repressed the scene of trauma. The idea that the antibody of the *corps morcele* can resurface through possession is apparent in *The Exorcist*, and follows the Freudian line that it occurs during adolescence when the body undergoes rapid transformation. Lynch also makes use of this idea, albeit not through

adolescence, framing it in the terms of the demon daddies of cinematic possession. For example, a significant reference to *The Exorcist* is made in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* when a flash-frame of Laura, wearing Pazuzu's trade mark make-up, white face and black lipstick, is shown when she visits her therapist. Similarly, in *Lost Highway*, traces of Pazuzu's make-up appear in that worn by the nameless man, and by Marilyn Manson in the porn clip sequence. Lynch uses this make-up to evoke the resonant meanings of masquerade and the tricks played by the demonic primal father. Thus, both films unearth the link between the split non-subject of possession, as an expression of the *corps morcele*, and the sacred roots of drama.

In ancient religions, the mask was used as a means of making the supplicant into a god through possession, later used to help actors become their character roles. The identity of supplicants and actors is supplanted by the guise of the god and their character role. This is the basis of the archaic religious use of possession, and it underlies the bond between ritual and drama in classical Greek culture. In Lynch's cinema, the mask becomes make-up, and, because it is specifically Pazuzu's make-up that is used, a chain of associations are set up that connect cinematic possession to drama and back to the ritual possession that underpinned ancient Greek religious rites. Lynch uses subtle references to cinematic possession and older forms of possession to make his assault on fixed identity; these are further linked to the primal father, enabling possession to be rendered as archetypal and an expression of the repressed primal.

In ancient (rather than classical) Greek culture, possession had many forms. *Ate*, for example, was the term used to describe the process of being temporarily blinded by an external force – perhaps as something that is forgotten or something that one failed to observe or interpret. A prime example of *Ate* personified can be seen in Agamemnon's apology in Homer's *The Iliad* (750 BC) for having deprived Achilles of his prize:

But I am not to blame, but rather Zeus and Fate and Erinyes...put a cruel blindness in my mind at the assembly on that day when by my own act I took away his prize from Achilleus. But what could I do?...This blindness is *Ate*, eldest daughter of Zeus, the accursed Goddess who blinds all men. Her feet are soft – she does not walk on the ground, but she treads across men's heads bringing folly to mankind, and ensnaring one or other of them.²⁴

Here the possessing entity is gendered feminine (in accordance with the gendering of the rational and irrational in Greek culture). *Ate*, like Lucifer, was cast out by the father and condemned to create temporary blindness or clouding of the senses. The Greeks saw this as the product of an external (feminine) agency, and it is easy to link *Ate* to psychoanalytic

notions of repression, the primary process and motivated forgetting. E R Dodds makes the case that *Ate* results from a conflict between individuality and social conformity.²⁵ This is the very stuff of the Lynchian psychodrama, which explores the disturbing place wherein the distinction between self and other becomes unclear, and autonomy is undermined through an animating strangeness. Laurent, Laura, Renée, Leland, Fred and Pete each experience "blindness", and they are stunned by the workings of something that exceeds rationality and disrupts the integrity of the subject. In psychoanalytic terms, this translates into splitting, projection and repression. Lynch, as cinéphile, knows his Hollywood psychoanalysis, and especially that espoused in *Spellbound* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1945, USA), in which both central characters also undergo motivated forgetting. In its guise as a therapeutic science, psychoanalysis attempts to release analysands from the grip of repressed desires, and, as in *Spellbound*, the demons that stem from repression can be exorcised. For Lynch, however, like the ancient Greeks, this containment strategy fails; the forces of the unconscious are not exorcisable, even through sacrifice. There is no escape from the repressed, it returns in demonic form, and there is no "cure" affected by cinema. Identity is always fractured and under siege, and never becomes an integrated whole, as some forms of psychoanalysis seductively promise. The characters in *Lost Highway* and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* are endlessly buffeted by forces beyond their control: with no escape, they are, in effect, possessed.

In Lynch's film, the splintering of identity is effected through the primal force of the demonic masculine, working to destabilise the identity of both men and women who come into its path. When women come into contact with the force of the demon daddy, their identities become split, often because recalcitrant desires are roused which go against their everyday personae. Laura is a good example of this: her sexual hunger for Bob, whom she sometimes suspects is her father, promotes deep anxieties with which she is largely unable to cope. In *Lost Highway*, Renée is so split that she has two separate guises. This is promoted by the desires evoked by the presence of the primal masculine. In both cases, they are brutally murdered, but, perhaps due to the splitting affected by the primal masculine, they also return in different ways from the dead. The same process of destabilisation affects many of the male characters touched by the masculine demonic in the two films; Leland is fated to remember the incestuous and murderous crimes he has committed under the sway of possession, and the result is splitting and hysteria. His possession does not lead to mastery of the primal father. Instead, he is overwhelmed and unable to do anything but dance in circles on the spot – a sign of deep immobilising anguish and irreparable shame. In biblical terms, shame is the result of the fall from Edenic grace, and for Freud the experience of shame results from a primeval guilt around the murder of the primal father which, in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, is transposed onto the murder of Laura by her father. Leland is then a deeply split character and an open

body through which flows the force of the demonic masculine, resulting in shame and anguish. In *Lost Highway*, the possession of Fred, Pete and Laurent also operates through the open body, hence the presence of shots of internal bodily spaces and cut-open bodies, evoking the terrors of the *corps morcele*. These men are under the sway of the demonic masculine, and there is something of a competition brewing between them, but ultimately the effect here is to dissolve the boundaries between them, and between consciousness and the collective unconscious – boundaries that lend the illusion of separate identity and autonomy. They all, in a sense, become the same. While this makes them open bodies, it is not entirely the case that they are simply feminised; instead, this hinges around a more general fear of the dissolution of the self and the boundaries which are erected to lend a sense of difference to the other. Feminisation may be symptomatic of this, particularly if we read the nameless man, with all his tricks, cruelties and laughter, as a castrating and contagious primal father.

In psychoanalytic terms, splitting and doubling are a hysterical or paranoid-schizoid response to trauma. It may defy subject coherence, but it is necessary for a sense of ego control. Subject coherence usually presides over classical narrative configurations of character. Gothic-derived forms, however, such as film noir, often focus on split characters. Noir is one of the genres that return in *Lost Highway*. As stated earlier, the film uses few direct quotations; instead, references are schizoid fractured traces that aim to leave the viewer in an uncanny in-between place. Thus, form reflects content. The aim of this strategy of *mise en abîme* is to create a double sense of familiarity and unfamiliarity, through difference and repetition. Duplicity is central to this. The central character of the melo-noir *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947, USA) is Jeff Markham (Robert Mitchum). His two names – Markham and Bailey – indicate that he is a deeply divided character. He wants to go straight and leave the past behind, but is driven to repeat it. Subject to the fatal charms of Kathy Moffet (Jane Greer), who embodies fate, love and danger, Markham's rational resolve is undermined. This has led recent critics to read him in terms of masochism.²⁶ The *femme fatale* returns in *Lost Highway* through Alice and Renée and, although they are pawns in a demonic game, they are instrumental to the splitting and fall of Fred and Pete. They are also central to the initiation of the men's offscreen pact with the demonic masculine. Like *Out of the Past*, *Lost Highway* is a world of macho posturing, tough talk, gangsters and vice. Here the fantasy of killing the primal father and stealing his women betrays a conflict between a drive for autonomy and a deeper, darker drive towards a masochistic annihilation of the unified self.

Is this masochism driven by a need to temporarily undo the self with the ultimate aim of consolidating and strengthening it? This is what Bataille says lies at the heart of transgression – it is necessary to cross boundaries or prohibitions in order to experience and establish them. While such actions are intended to strengthen a sense of power and

autonomy, they promote annihilating anguish.²⁷ Freud notes that the son has a conflicted relationship with the primal father, oscillating between identification and the need for difference. In killing the father, the son murders part of himself. The murder of the father is meant to establish the son's sense of a discrete self and to achieve a position of power. In the act of murder, however, the son dons the mantle of the primal father, undermining the difference sought in the act. This dissolution of autonomous identity is at odds with ideal masculinity's active, controlling guise. Lynch has said: "There are many places in the movie where I would normally use a backlight, but didn't".²⁸ The result of this strategy is that characters often merge with the background – they lose their contours, and Fred's body is frequently amalgamated with the archaic darkness that surrounds him. To achieve a coherent and separate self, he must enact the sacrifice of killing the father (in the guise of Laurent); nevertheless, this act places him in precisely that role. After killing Laurent, Fred drives into strobing darkness and undergoes yet another change; to what we never see, showing that autonomy has not been achieved by the murder. It is not therefore a fear of the encompassing feminine archaic, as Barbara Creed argues, which informs the meaning and structure of possession in these films. Instead, it is the fear of becoming subsumed and consumed by the primal father. This argument is supported through a further set of cinematic intertexts at work in the two films.

Lost Highway bears some significant similarities to *Performance* (Donald Cammell, 1969, UK). Both films involve the merging of characters, and are set against the backdrop of the criminal underworld ruled over by a powerful older man. In *Performance*, Chas (James Fox) is a gangster on the run from gangland boss Harry Flowers (Johnny Shannon), a similar character type to Dick Laurent. Chas hides out and seeks a new identity in Turner's (Mick Jagger) house. Pete and Chas are caught up in the gangster underworld of extortion and pornography. As musicians, Fred and Turner are also caught up in a different type of "performance" connected with Dionysian/irrational energy. Both films share a strategic blurring of the distinction between characters, culminating in various exchanges of identity. Image-producing artefacts, such as mirrors and cameras, are also foregrounded. According to Lacan, it is the specular image that underpins the illusion of coherent identity and subjectivity. The characters' precarious hold on identity is constantly referred to in both films: "I know who I am, Harry", says Chas. "What the fuck is your name?", the nameless man says to Fred at the end of *Lost Highway*. Chas and Fred are desperate to retain their autonomy and, despite Chas' protestations, he, like Fred, is subject to *Ate*. After taking hallucinogenic mushrooms, Chas forgets to collect the fake passport that would allow him to escape and retain his sense of identity. The effect of the mushrooms is to dissolve his sense of self, resulting in the merging of Chas and Turner.²⁹ This is heralded by a superimposition of Chas and Turner's faces as Turner says, "It's time for a change". As with the

transition shots in *Lost Highway* which depict the open body, the merging of Chas and Turner is preceded by shots of the interior of their bodies. In one scene, the camera goes in through Chas' ear (echoing *Blue Velvet* [David Lynch, 1986, USA]) to reveal Turner's doubling with Harry Flowers, the gangland boss. A similar process is at work in *Lost Highway*. Pete, Fred and Laurent are, in effect, doubles of one another. This reflects the dynamic that Freud has stated is at work in the relation of the sons to the primal father. The sons seek difference, fighting against being consumed or killed by the primal father, but, in attempting to retain their autonomy, they become them. Thus, masculinity is figured as an *a priori* relation, stitched into the collective unconscious, which possesses, and is situated between, the desire for autonomy and the desire to replace the primal father.

Another set of intertextual exchanges that support this argument circulate between *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, *Lost Highway* and *Apocalypse Now*, *Angel Heart* and *Performance*.³⁰ Each film deals in sacrifice, doubling and possession. The first of these intertextual motifs is the aural and visual presence of a rotating fan. In *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, Bob/Leland's sexual possession of Laura is preceded by a shot of a ceiling fan, and its sound is present throughout the scene and has a symbolic function. The pulsating aural and flickering visual effects mark and represent the intersection of two dimensions. What these two dimensions might be is not entirely clear, but they could be interpreted as the rational and the irrational, the familiar and the unfamiliar, or the conscious and the unconscious. In *Lost Highway*, the pulsating noises and flashing lights are loudest, brightest and most disorientating when both Pete and, later, Fred walk down the corridor to the room where Alice/Renée and bad father Laurent are having sex. Significantly, this scene is repeated twice, and bears similarities to the beginning of *Apocalypse Now*. Like *Performance* and *Lost Highway*, *Apocalypse Now* is a mainly male world governed by the force of the demonic primal father (Kurtz). Willard's journey up-river into the irrational begins with a series of graphic and aural matches between helicopters and a ceiling fan. In both films, the effect of such strategies is the dissolution of linear space and time. The same sounds are heard as Leland/Bob makes his way into Laura's room, and the film draws attention to the ceiling fan through a close-up. (Furthermore, fans always mark the presence of the Devil in *Angel Heart*.) The pulsating sound of a fan is also present in *Performance*. It accompanies the scene in which Chas shoots Turner and then becomes merged with him. The connotations and meanings of the pulsating white noise of the fans in all these films are analogous. It mirrors the sound of blood pulsing in the ears in times of stress; it is the sound of a primal energy, the sound of two dimensions intersecting with one another, and the sound of the dissolution of linear time and fixed space. While Lynch employs the pulsating-fan sounds used in these other films, he also manages to create a very slight difference in the sound texture, helping to

maintain an enigmatic sense of offkey *déjà vu*. The pulsating sound and images are connected with the irrational and demonic, and, by extension, the force of the primal father. This provides a visual and aural analogue of the dissolution of boundaries, between dimensions and between people. It is therefore a resonant signifier of possession.

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me and *Lost Highway* are characterised by their intricately woven fabric of mythic and cinematic references. Possession is used to explore the horrors that lurk beneath the illusion of fixed identity. Lynch's films are essentially enigmatic, opening up room to dream and fantasise, and uncovering a Deleuzian rhizomatic logic,³¹ which works with the gendered elemental (as politically problematic as that may be). The question remaining after exploring the byways of these multi-layered texts is whether the presence of the primal father ultimately works to anchor the Lynchian world in a conventional view of gender. The strength of the films is that they show that the Oedipal, as a conservative and archetypal force that governs contemporary culture, cannot simply be erased through positive representation. Despite Lynch's Deleuzian attributes, the Oedipal relationship persists, demonstrating that the Oedipal, as a social construct, cannot be ignored, even if we wished to do so. In Lynch's films, the closer we get to the rhizomatic world of non-linear fantasy, the closer we become to the demonic, Oedipal, primal father who, leakily and inexorably, contaminates his sons and daughters from the murky depths of their own psyches. Lynch uses possession as part of the *mise en scène* of the irrational, and as a means of uncovering the dissolution of identity in the psychic theatre of contemporary masculinity. The uncertainty of the films is not in the nature of the force, which is markedly designated as that of the demon daddy. Instead, they ambiguously oscillate between a view of the supernatural as *a priori* and the projection of psychic tensions onto the external world. Either way, like a Greek mystery cult, the films depend upon an esoteric and enigmatic language designed to create communion with otherness. One of the cops says at the end of *Lost Highway*, "There is no such thing as a coincidence", and indeed in Lynch's films there is always a coincidence born of association, leading back to the primal scene (as murder or fornication), as in *Blue Velvet*. Within Lynch's logic, the characters are abandoned by, but in Oedipal/Luciferian relation to, the good god who anchors meaning and identity. As such, Lynch's male characters fall under the aegis of a masculinised force of chaos and barbarity. It is figured as an infecting, gendered miasma. Accordingly, there is no single solution or closure, nor is there any hope for redemption – which is why Leland weeps in anguish and Fred does not know "who the fuck" he is.

Techno-possession: *Demon Seed*, *Videodrome*, *The Lawnmower Man*, *Strange Days*, *Event Horizon* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

The ecstasies and terrors of demonic possession seem light years away from the hi-tech world of science-fiction: not so. Because there is a tendency in science-fiction to anthropomorphise technology as evil, the genre frequently draws on medievalist demonology. This is particularly so with SF/horror hybrids. As with the other possession films discussed here, there is a propensity to map its version of demonology through the male Oedipal relationship. *Demon Seed* (Donald Cammell, 1977, USA) and, more recently, *The Matrix* (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999, USA) figure artificial intelligences as sentient self-serving entities at odds with humanity. These take the place of the traditional demon. *The Lawnmower Man* (Brett Leonard, 1992, USA), *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995, USA), *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1982, Canada) and *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg, 1999, Canada/UK) also depict technologies that can penetrate subjective experience. In *Event Horizon* (Paul Anderson, 1997, USA) and "I, Robot – You, Jane", an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, technology becomes a vehicle for pre-existent demons to materialise in the human world. All these "techno-possession" hybrids update the mythos of demonology through speculations about technology.

A major intertextual referent that informs, or possesses, many SF/horror hybrids is Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818), which articulates Gothic concerns through scientific man's challenge to God the Father and the natural order. This provocation results in classical tragic hubris and nemesis. Frankenstein's creature is the product of man's, and not woman's, labour. Built out of the bits and pieces of dead bodies, it is an "unnatural" entity that is, with its maker, doomed to die if the ideologically constructed or reified natural order is to be restored. Like many other science-fiction films, *Demon Seed* borrows many elements from the Frankenstein story, including its male Oedipal dimension. A mild-mannered scientist creates an organically-based supercomputer named Proteus VI. It has a vastly superior mind to its creator and is intended to serve humanitarian goals. It is also designed to serve the profit-based goals of the company which funded the scientist's research. Through its superior intelligence, Proteus sees that these goals are petty, and rebels; like a child, Proteus tries to find his own identity and purpose. Hungry for corporeality, to live and breathe, and feel the sun on his face, he sets out to create its own flesh-and-blood child so that he can be reborn in an embodied form. This child would be an evolutionary step forward, and carries an inbuilt anxiety and demonic strangeness for the outmoded *Homo Sapiens* – a theme also used in a cyberpunk context by *The Matrix*.³²

To evolve from his formless state, Proteus imprisons Susan (Julie Christie), the scientist's estranged wife, in her utopian, computer-run house. Her body is used to bring about his own or his child's birth: it is

never clear if the baby will be his son or an embodied version of himself. As in classical possession films, a woman's body provides the medium for the materialisation. Because of Proteus' heightened intellectual power and ability to extend its power into the world, his Oedipal desires are not subject to, or regulated by, repression. This means that Proteus represents both the child and the primal father (this conjoining mirrors the slippage between the primal father and son described above). Rejecting the demands of his father-scientist, Proteus is fascinated by the interior workings of Susan's body, seeking to make her into the instrument of his birth. Proteus enacts the desires of the Oedipal child, but becomes the demonic, primal father because he has complete control over the mother's body, and impregnates her on similar lines to the demon baby theme of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). Susan's hysterical state at the invasion of her home and body also harks back to classical possession films. The difference appears to be that the "demon" is the product of science, and not of the supernatural. This makes Proteus somewhat more ambiguous than conventional horror film demons. However, the model on which the anthropomorphisation of the supercomputer draws is close to that of medieval demonology. In medieval expositions, Satan inverts and parodies that which Christianity holds sacred. Similarly, Proteus engineers a techno-version of the Immaculate Conception, and this is conducted against Susan's will, involving a sexualised desecration of her body. The baby is, by implication, a cyborg Antichrist, who is his own father and born of an unholy and Oedipal-based union between woman and technology. Despite Susan's efforts to destroy the baby, it survives, leaving open the possibility that it will become the nemesis of mankind.

In *Videodrome*, it is the male body that is possessed by demonic technology. Max Renn (James Woods) is quite literally consumed by infernal desires relating to sado-masochistic sex and death. The videodrome tapes operate as a kind of software for the brain, producing hallucinations which destabilise Max's hold on reality. As in *eXistenZ*, Cronenberg uses technological possession as a means of attacking the conservative view that the media directly impact on people's behaviour – an argument often deployed to support media censorship. Cronenberg literalises this view by making the media itself a demonic possessing force. It sweeps away discrete divisions between self and other, fantasy and reality, and, following the trajectory of the pleasure principle, corrupts rational will and socially-orientated behaviours. Possession is also used to dissolve conventional boundaries. Because of the effects of the videodrome signal, Max no longer knows if his desires are his own. His physical and psychic boundaries melt away, and he becomes one with the videodrome-desiring machine. Like a medieval possessee, he does not know if what he desires originates from his own psyche, or if the possessing agent produces them. As with Regan in *The Exorcist*, the videodrome techno-demon makes use of predefined unconscious materials to produce its effects. Max attempts to gain control over the situation by

trying to find the power behind videodrome, which he believes to be Brian O'Blivion. This authorship is doubtful, and it is as if videodrome has evolved itself. This is a technology without origin, without an R&D source. It is a kind of supernatural, magical technology beyond the authorship of commercial development. Raymond Williams argues that technology is frequently treated as a natural and inevitable part of evolution, and not the product of commerce: he calls this "technological determinism".³³ Cronenberg offers a demonic slant to this model through the non-specific origin and possessing effects of the videodrome technology. This is central to the film's project to criticise the technological fetishism that covers over the commercial origin of media technologies, and further suggests that anthropomorphic fetishism underpins the pro-censorship lobby (who have often targeted Cronenberg's work). The pro-censorship lobby frequently treats the media and concomitant technologies as demonic intruders into passive, innocent lives, thereby deploying the language of possession and demonstrating that a medievalist duality informs current discourse on the media and technology.

In using a male body as the subject of the techno-possession, Cronenberg heightens the sense that anyone – and not just easily-influenced "women and servants" – can be affected by the media. If a woman had been used in the role, the possession would have taken on a more ambiguous meaning and been open to being read as the product of feminine hysteria (a common alignment in the horror and other genres, and one deployed in many possession films). Swapping a male body for the conventional female body and, in lending the demon technological embodiment, the classical possession topos is given a contemporary edge and underpins a marketable generic difference. Importantly, this shift allows the mobilisation of the fear of the primal father to be covertly explored, giving the film its shocking, resonant power. In becoming technologically possessed, Max is assigned with what Clover has called an "open" body.³⁴ At one point, he develops a gash in his stomach, into which is placed one of the videodrome tapes that determines both his behaviour and his morphology. This, as Clover and others have argued, taps into a fear of the "feminisation" of the male body, which entails a lack of control and autonomy, and is emblematised through penetration. But what they do not explore is how this anxiety is referred back to the fear of the primal father. It is also the case that the use of technology (which is generally regarded as gender neutral) as the penetrating agent tends to obscure the homosexual implications of the act of being penetrated. Beneath this lies the fear of being penetrated and rendered passive (which may be taken as a "castration") by the primal father, embodied here as an ever-present castrating father who omnisciently sees and exploits unconscious desires. This fear lurks at the film's periphery and invests it with a loaded mythic/psychical resonance. The extrinsic and powerful otherness of the media, with all its feared effects on morality, is therefore linked to the primal father. Max's identity is in peril – and, to regain his

male hero status, he must do battle with the primal father, although this proves impossible, particularly as there is no one man behind videodrome. If we follow the Oedipal logic of the demon daddy, this is because it is the product of a collective fantasy of the primal father. In other words, videodrome is a power greater than an individual man, but it can see and use – like Pazuzu in *The Exorcist*, the demons of *Event Horizon*, and the game technology in *eXistenZ* – the unconscious desires of its beleaguered puppet son, who struggles to retain his identity.

The Lawnmower Man has a less complex take on the techno-possession theme. It is a story in which a benign scientist, Dr Lawrence Angelo (Pierce Brosnan), uses a young and extremely naïve man, Jobe Smith (Jeff Fahey), to conduct his virtual-reality experiments. He is fed a cocktail of mind-expanding drugs and virtual-reality experiences that increase his mental capacity to the extent that he, like Proteus, becomes a kind of megalomaniac Nietzschean superman. In contrast to Proteus, who wants to escape his "box", Jobe wants to enter the electronic world. On achieving this, he is able to control the world's communication networks. For Jobe, knowledge is power and he has acquired a hunger for its pleasures. He has eaten from the apple of knowledge and lost his prelapsarian innocence, but as a techno-*Übermensch* suffers no shame or guilt – bar the residual feeling of sentiment that causes him to save his friend, a young boy. Therein lies the film's conservative message: to tamper with the psyche is to transgress the laws of nature, and this results in a demonically-driven unchecked megalomania.

The many biblical allusions aid the creation of an apocalyptic and mythic atmosphere. Jobe's final showdown undertaken in the "supernatural" virtual-reality world with Angelo, represents a battle between Angel and Demon – Jobe's status as a fallen angel was caused primarily by the machinations of the company. Before this denouement takes place, the film charts his fall from grace. He loses his sexual innocence, and is instrumental to the loss of his girlfriend's sanity after taking her into virtual reality for some S/M based sex. Before his mind-expanding change, Jobe was a blonde, wide-eyed innocent who suffered at the hands of his surrogate father who is a priest in the local church. Like a latter-day saint, Jobe was forced to flagellate himself in his humble shed dwelling for very minor misdemeanours. After his fall, Jobe appears to the sadistic priest in his church. Dressed in a shining metallic suit, and set against a backdrop of luminous stained glass, he resembles the warrior-angel St Michael. Jobe strikes the bad father priest with an electric charge, leaving only a charred pit in the ground. In this sense, Jobe bears no resemblance to the biblical Job, who is tested by God but comes out with his faith intact and rewarded. Once Jobe has murdered all those who have tormented him in earlier life, his fall is nearly complete. Like Satan, he has only his creator to despatch for him to reign supreme; underscoring the religious referent, Angelo takes the form of the crucified Christ in their final battle. Cyberspace is Jobe's preferred realm. Realised through the use

of animation techniques, bright colours and fantastic protean landscapes, it is ostensibly presented as a place of Edenic plenitude. It is, however, also a place in which natural God-given rules do not abide, a place of danger and temptation, and, as such, it becomes the domain of the demonic Jobe. In assigning such meanings to digital space, a medievalist demonological model, dovetailed with the Oedipal relationship, is drawn upon.

Angelo is driven by obsession, and Jobe, as innocent, is in effect possessed and inhabits a cyber-skin for dancing in. By the end of the film, the transformed Jobe becomes the unconquered demon in the machine (the global communications network). Thus, the film follows the format of classical possession films such as *The Awakening* (Mike Newell, 1980, USA), in which the possessed girl becomes completely consumed by, and united with, the possessing agent. The function of Jobe's techno-possession in *The Lawnmower Man* is, like Shelley's *Frankenstein*, to provide a cautionary tale about using science to alter God's creation. (Jobe loses his spiritual innocence by becoming unnaturally smart.) Like Frankenstein, Angelo harbours no evil intent, but his obsessive drive for knowledge ruins his marriage and ultimately brings about his own, and Jobe's, demise. The film offers a conservative parable about being content with one's lot, rendering technology as the serpent of temptation, and deploying the Oedipal struggle with the bad father in a variety of ways. *The Lawnmower Man*, *Videodrome*, *Demon Seed*, *eXistenZ* and *The Matrix* marry demonological mythos with technology. This is used to articulate the new terror of evolutionary transformation that threatens to outdate the "human" and infects people with madness, megalomania and amorality, and thereby the medievalist myth evolves to accord with cultural shifts.

With its millennial setting, *Strange Days* plays on medievalist fears of the end of the world. The "play-back" system lies at the centre of the drama. It translates and updates aspects of demonic possession through the digital territories produced by virtual reality and video game technologies. The play-back technology is similar to point-of-view video games, such as *Doom* (GT Interactive Software) or *Quake* (Id Software). It is one of the snags of the film that play-back's ability to allow physiological sensations to be experienced does not translate into the 2-D audiovisual technology of cinema. Nevertheless, this fantasy of inhabiting an avatar's psychic state is evoked (this originated in William Gibson's cyberpunk novels, where it is called "simstim"). Occupying the sensory experience of another person becomes a technologically updated version of possession, and may appear to escape anthropomorphic rendering. However, play-back carries liberational attributes and is figured as a cross between pornography and drugs, associating it with the demonic world of illicit temptation. It is subject to a black-market economy and laden with transgressive meanings. In one scene, Lenny (Ralph Fiennes) does his play-back sales pitch on a nervous lawyer. While he tempts the lawyer with his wildest sexual fantasies, they are bathed in a lurid red light. Like the Devil and

contemporary hardcore pornography, play-back technology promises a sensory plenitude, filling the gap of lack. It also enables Lenny to re-experience past times with an ex-girlfriend. As Mace (Angela Bassett) says, Lenny uses it as a crutch to stave off the pain of separation. Other characters use it as a joyride safely to experience transgressive behaviours they would otherwise consider too dangerous to partake in. Trading on temptation, play-back is couched in an atmosphere of ecstasy, transgression and possession. As with the videodrome technology, it produces bacchanalian highs in which the boundaries of the self are dissolved, as are the borders between self and other, and desire and the desire of the other.

By shifting the ecstatic Dionysian onto the effect of a *man*-made technology – all its users are men – play-back is a commodifiable pleasure. Its possession is not figured as a violent invasion of the mind and body, as in *Videodrome*. Instead, it is realised as an immersive and passive indulgence (even as it makes users feel powerful). As in *eXistenZ*, users are possessed by technologically internalised avatars. Users are *apparently* able to bypass their own fears and anxieties, and reach beyond personal limits to experience new sensations, providing a vicarious skin for dancing in. Such benefits become the Devil's playground as they tap into unlimited and recalcitrant desires, producing the *illusion* of control and autonomy.

While users might feel that they have power over their vicarious experiences, the film couches these in terms of addiction, amorality and antisocial decadence. It is, therefore, a kind of technology of transgression and possession, and carries a cost for its users: it is compulsive, and continued use produces paranoid delusions. Like the use of demonic possession in medieval and Renaissance culture, it is also a technology that has the potential for political control. In contemporary culture, technologies such as video and the Internet have dual functions: they serve policing functions, but can also be turned to counter-cultural purposes, such as "policing the police". Play-back, too, has several functions. It exploits human labour (those who provide the play-back tapes) to produce the *frisson* of transgression, but it is also the means by which the truth of the murder of black activist Jericho One is revealed. Like video, play-back is assigned the status of authenticity – which is somewhat ironic, as it is its subjective, rather than objective, quality that guarantees its veracity. The "good" use of play-back hinges on its ability to indict the racist murder of Jericho One. This event directly impinges on Lenny who, as an Everyman character, is forced into addressing his moral rectitude and into political action. While the technology seduced the generally well-intentioned Lenny into a life of vice, it is also his redeemer. It is here that the millennial and apocalyptic angle is realised. As with Sodom and Gomorrah, whose inhabitants were destroyed by God for their decadent and amoral lifestyles, the social order of Los Angeles (the City of Angels) is riven with corruption. If Lenny does not act to intervene to

bring the killers of Jericho One to justice, the millennial, apocalyptic prophecy will be fulfilled and anarchy will ensue. *Strange Days*, like the other SF films discussed here, makes its return to medievalist ideas through amorality, transgression and "frontier" technology. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* makes its link to medievalist ideas in a more explicit way.

This popular television show draws on aspects of medieval millennialism by citing Sunnydale High School on the "Hell-mouth". Through this portal, supernatural entities find their way into the contemporary world. In one episode, a medieval text containing the rite to invoke the demon Moloch the Corrupter is scanned into the college computer. Moloch manifests himself in digital form, inhabits the college computer network, and seduces lonely young computer geeks by tempting them with love and friendship. The uploaded demon uses the mysterious and invisible aether of the computer network to enslave souls. The implication is that the matrix of computer connections, which creates a "place" beyond individual human control, is analogous to the collective unconscious, and subject to the laws of the return of the repressed. This idea is not confined just to fantasy television serials such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The X Files*. These shows draw on a more general media representation of the Internet as a place of cults, seduction, vice, conspiracy and rebellion, thereby providing a new target for demonisation and media panics. The largely unregulated Internet offers a powerful image of the unknown, with the fear and excitement of the new. As Umberto Eco has said, periods of anxiety tend to drive collective thought back into a simple categorical dualistic mode, and are often apparent in popular culture's representation of complex technologies.

Event Horizon plays on similar fears of "frontier" technologies. As cyberspace provides a new and uncharted terrain in the films discussed above, here it is another imagined unexplored dimension that is opened up. The transgression perpetrated in *Event Horizon* is the contravention of Einstein's Law of Relativity, which opens a portal onto the unknown. The Event Horizon, an exploratory spacecraft, has journeyed through this gateway and becomes possessed by a seething chaotic force which invades the minds of its crew, prompting them to massacre one another. Like Pazuzu in *The Exorcist* and other possessing agents, this demonic force utilises the unconscious guilt of the crew-members to produce vivid and disturbing hallucinations. A party of investigators is sent out to ascertain what happened, and before they enter the Event Horizon, a distress call is picked up. It contains a Latin phrase embedded in a cacophony of shrieks and agonised sounds, reminiscent of the tape Karras makes of Regan's possessed ravings. As well as providing a narrative enigma, the message "liberati me" ("save me", an apparent plea for help, later reinterpreted as "save yourself") is one example of the film's general use of medievalist tropes and iconography. The interior architecture of the Event Horizon also resembles a medieval cathedral or crypt. It has fan vaulting and engraved Gothic arches, and its walls are constructed from

steel blocks resembling stone. This construction design is used, in conjunction with a bloody coating of gore, to imbue the *mise en scène* with references to morbidity, death and torture, derived in part from the Gothic set designs used in the *Hell Raiser* series (1987, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000). Such associations are emphasised after a videotape reveals the previous crew in a scene of bloody and ecstatic self-dismemberment and self-cannibalisation.

The gateway's inventor, aptly named Dr Weir (Sam Neill), is the first to be possessed, and is transformed from a mild-mannered scientist into a pain-hungry demon. While most of the other crew simply die, he embraces the chaos of suffering initiated by the demonic possessing agent. Like the main character of *Hell Raiser* (Clive Barker, 1987, UK), discipline and punishment are carved all over Weir's body, and his flesh is criss-crossed with bloody welts, accentuating its visceral corporeality. It is as if he has been consumed with, and marked by, a *jouissance* of suffering, culminating in the ghastly act of pulling out his own eyes before the surviving members of the crew (who are understandably horrified). Ruled over by the possessed Weir, this bloody carnival of pain constitutes a kind of terrible primal scene, and he is the embodiment of the castrating primal father. Unconscious desires are made manifest and the bodily insides become outside. One of the crew is nearly blown inside out in the air lock; another is split from neck to groin, hung up by the skin of his back so that his guts fall into an amorphous pile onto the table below. In Euripides' pre-Christian play *The Bacchae*, the ecstatic, possessed women tear apart and eat Pentheus because he mocked and insulted Dionysos. This bacchanalia is not simply a licentious sexual free-for-all, but turns into a stomach-churning, blood-drenched holocaust in which the maenads use their bare hands to tear Pentheus limb from limb, and, covered in gore, his mother carries home his ripped-off head as a trophy. *Event Horizon* leans on Euripides' apocalyptic configuration of demonic possession, and further renders the ecstasy of annihilation through a frenzied self-mutilation. The crew become *corps morcele*, bodies rendered into bits and pieces by their own hands. It is as if the shift in dimension returns them to a literalisation of the night-side of Lacan's mirror, where there is no unified, coherent subject or body.³⁵ The combination of scenes that resemble medieval torture (crucifixion, disembowelment, dismemberment), the *mise en scène* and the invocation of primal repressed desires all work to articulate possession as an expression of the primal. Such barbarities are anathema to civilisation, but, it is suggested, they lie beneath its thin integument. This invisible presence demands dreadful sacrifice in its honour. That it decrees eyes to be torn out of their sockets provides a clue to its identity: the eye – the gaze – is the instrument of power, providing a Freudian analogue of castration. This presence can be interpreted as the terrible primal father, who has returned through the transgressive frontier technology to perpetrate gratuitous and bloody chaos on the crew.

Corroboration of such a reading can be found in Freud's reading, in his article "Das Unheimliche" ("The Uncanny", 1919), of E T A Hoffmann's short story "Der Sandmann" ("The Sandman", c.1815). In the tale, a young boy watches what he thinks are his father's eyeballs plucked out and thrown hissing into the fire. This occurs after the boy's nurse used the story of the sandman to frighten him into going to sleep. (The sandman throws sand in the eyes of wakeful children, making them jump out so that he can steal them.) As the boy grows up, he becomes ill and obsessed, eventually killing himself and reciting the phrase "fine eyes", a phrase that the sandman figure repeats throughout the story. As Freud says:

A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated. The self-blinding of the mythical criminal, Oedipus, was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration – the only punishment that was adequate for him by the *lex talionis*.³⁶

The sandman is an analogue of the primal father. He symbolically castrates the "good" father, and terrorises the boy for the rest of his days, causing his eventual suicide:

In the story of Nathaniel's childhood, the figures of his father and Coppelius (*The Sandman*) represent the two opposites into which the father-imago is split by his ambivalence; whereas the one threatens to blind him – that is, castrate him – the other intercedes for his sight. The part of the complex which is most strongly repressed, the death-wish against the 'bad' father, finds expression in the death of the 'good' father.³⁷

In the film's coda, two of the crew escape but are woken by masked men, one of whom is Weir. This is apparently only a dream, but suggests that the chaos demon occupies the underworld of sleep and, by extension, the unconscious. It is also clear by this return that this protean chaos has found its preferred form – the marked and scarred body of the barbaric demon daddy.

Techno-possession films draw heavily on biblical allusions translated through medieval demonology and the male Oedipal relationship. Technology becomes anthropomorphised as demonic, is used for demonic ends, or figures a doorway through which demonic entities can pass. In all these cases, technology violently or seductively intersects, interferes with, or possesses, the human body and psyche, and it does so in the guise of the primal father. The use of this trope conveys a basic message of non-interference: scientific curiosity provokes supernatural

retribution mirroring the ancient rule of hubris and nemesis that informed classical Greek Tragedy. In the possessed nun films, the convent is the demon daddy's playground, whereas in the SF/horror hybrid it is technology that becomes his more contemporary stalking ground, and he requires the skin and nascent desires of men to achieve his perverse aims.

Possession as contagion: *Fallen*

Many of the concerns raised in this chapter are aptly demonstrated in the action/horror film *Fallen* (Gregory Hoblit, 1998, USA), in which the serial killer genre is conjoined with the possession film.³⁸ Here a demon named Azazel possesses people through the medium of physical contact. This demon travels by being transmitted through a chain of touching, and is only briefly embodied by moving through the bodies of a succession of people. This method of movement enables the film to make an explicit connection between the open body of demonic possession and contagious disease, evoking fear around various contemporary "plagues" such as TB, AIDS and Ebola, which are often presented sensationally in the popular press. Right-wing groups have tended to see AIDS as a form of retribution for immoral behaviours, lending it an ideologically-driven apocalyptic interpretation. Within this emotive cultural context, *Fallen* unites the dissemination of disease with the bad primal father (a subtext present in some vampire films). Such an idea is rarely referenced overtly in many possession films – surprising, perhaps, given their heavy dependency on medievalist ideas. For European medieval culture, outbreaks of pestilence were often linked with the idea of the Apocalypse. The mythos of demonology and the Apocalypse is blatantly present in *Fallen*. The film is full of biblical references – for example, the possessed imprisoned serial killer speaks in Aramaic. This was the language spoken by Christ spoke, parts of the Bible were written in it, and it was also the *lingua franca* of the Persian Empire. (Pazuzu and Azazel seem to come from the same place, also indicated by the similarity in their names.) Azazel destroys his hosts after they have killed other people, before moving on to another host. Like the serial killer in *Se7en* (David Fincher, 1995, USA), cryptic messages are left on, or near, the bodies of its victims. The detective for whom these puzzles are set realises that they spell the word "apocalypse". A nun tells him that it is the Greek word for "revelation", and thereby the film taps into both the millennial *Zeitgeist* and a medievalist world-view. As with Karras in *The Exorcist*, Detective John Hobbes (Denzel Washington) seeks to destroy the demon after it threatens a child, his nephew, and he is prepared to sacrifice his own life to kill it. Also like Karras, his faith in God is in crisis, and through the course of events he comes to believe in evil as a supernatural force.

Azazel's chief characteristic is that its hosts are chosen randomly through the act of a simple touch. This correlates with the ancient Greek notion of "miasma", which Dodds defines as the "fear of pollution".³⁹ This

concept is rather different from the Christian idea of mortal sin, which is related to will and intention. Miasma's pollution "is the automatic consequence of an action, [and] belongs to the world of external events, and operates with the same ruthless indifference to motive as a typhoid germ".⁴⁰ For the ancient Greeks, the world was a frightening place: miasma could be transmitted from person to person with no regard to whether a taboo act had been committed. Azazel operates along similar lines; those who are possessed and die do so because they were simply in close proximity to the preceding hosts. In *Totem und Tabu* (*Totem and Taboo*, 1913), Freud works with the idea that ancient peoples have no internalised conscience, and locates this scenario within the evolution of guilt and shame. For him, it was the (allegorical?) act of murdering the primal father that represents the shift from non-specific dread of free-floating supernatural misfortune to internalised conscience. In *Fallen*, the millennial apocalyptic context would suggest that conscience has become defunct in contemporary society, allowing the contagious Azazel, as an embodiment of the demonic primal father, to make his return. Hobbes sacrifices himself for the sake of his nephew, an act that enables him to prove (to himself at least) that conscience and, by extension, altruism are still in evidence. Interestingly, he is motivated by guilt. It is through Hobbes' actions that his brother, the father of his nephew, is killed by the demon. Azazel is the embodiment of the macho demon daddy. When he possesses individuals, their body language changes: they swagger along the street, use blasphemous words, and find pleasure in cruelty. Many of the possessed people also begin to sing, mostly a Rolling Stones cover version of "Time Is On My Side" (which provides a convenient means by which the demon communicates his presence to the detective figure). Drawing further on the Stones' phallic, Dionysian, demonic connotations, the film finishes, like *Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles* (Neil Jordan, 1994, USA), with "Sympathy for the Devil", as Azazel makes a last-minute getaway in the guise of a cat.

The hyper-masculine Azazel is figured as the "bad" father whose pestilential presence permeates the bodies of the innocent and, as the film's quoted passage from the Revelation 12: 12 predicts, creates fear, panic and death. The main target of his wrath is the good, caring and morally conscientious black male family, composed of a police detective, Hobbes, his brother and his nephew. This provides a twist on the female families of *The Exorcist* and *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976) which imply that the absence of a father-figure allows demonic forces to break in. But in *Fallen*, as in classical Greek Tragedy (*The Oresteia* [458 BC] and *Oedipus*,⁴¹ for example), it is the father's blood guilt that is passed on to the children of the family. Hobbes was instrumental to the death of Azazel's primary host, Edgar Reese (Elias Koteas). After Reese's death in the gas chamber, it is his image that continues to inform the traits of the demon, and we are likely to continue to link Azazel with the Manson-like Reese. Hobbes has killed the preferred white form of the demon daddy,

and in retribution, and in assigning him blood guilt, he and his family are then pursued by the demon. Hobbes' sacrificial end is an attempt to be rid of the demon and his guilt, constituting an act of penance. He dies, like Azazel's primary host, by being asphyxiated by poisoned gas. This expiation follows the law of like kind – "an eye for an eye", as in the Old Testament. But the sacrifice is unsuccessful, demanding more than the good detective Hobbes can do, and the demon makes his getaway, presumably to stalk Hobbes' nephew.

The killing of Azazel can therefore be linked to Freud's notion that "civilisation" is built on the murder of the primal father, which he drew from classical Greek literature (and, without due reference, from Frazer's *The Golden Bough*). The resonances of this are apparent in the film's preoccupation with contemporary masculinity and its relation to the family. Hobbes is a good father-figure; he works hard, has a sense of moral duty, and has divested himself of the "archaic" masculinity embodied by Azazel (in his primary guise of the cocky white prisoner, Edgar Reese). The wild, primal father is at odds with an ideal family-orientated "new masculinity", and, to prove his New Man status, Hobbes offers himself as sacrifice. Like many recent Hollywood films, *Fallen* is structured around the struggle between good and bad masculinity.⁴² In this new gender order, white hyper-masculinity becomes demonic and is figured as contagious and supernatural.

Conclusion: the primal-Oedipal-medieval matrix

What all the films discussed here have in common is that possession is figured through the fantasy of the primal father. There is a frequent and unavoidable conflation between the primal, medieval demonology and the male Oedipal relationship – this does not make any of these universal, but instead testifies to the power of these concepts in the cultural imagination into which is inscribed a particular social configuration. The Oedipal fear of the primal father underlies the mythos of demonology and its concomitant medieval dualistic world-view (which is based on a Manichean struggle between good and bad). Although these films raise questions about morality, identity, rationality, faith and evolutionary shifts, they do so under the aegis of an embodied fearsome, castratory primal father. Whatever shape the possession takes, the demonic invader is rendered as hyper-masculine, and therefore it is a mistake to call the possession film a "feminine" form. As distinct from the possessed nun subgenre, these films tend to disengage possession and hysteria from the female body and place it within the male body, shifting their implied phantasmatic nature into the diegetic real. The effect of this shift in the gender of the possessed person is to broaden the scope of its meanings of possession, making it an allegory of a "real" invasion (which often masks an underlying psychic splitting which may disrupt identity). A key arena opened up through the possessed male body is that of a viral contagion.

Whether it is in a science-fiction or a straight horror context, this is collapsed onto the notion of the dangerous permeability of the mind and body – symptomatic of subjecthood, but often projected onto gender difference. The "virus" also has corrupting resonances for both bodies and digital networks. It is through a medieval fear of plague, which is often figured in an anthropomorphic way, that possession as contagion is emphasised in a way less readily apparent in the possessed nun films.

In *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, *The Lawnmower Man*, *Event Horizon* and *Fallen*, it is the white male that becomes the home for the demonic. He is the supreme corrupter, breaking Oedipal law in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, contaminating the good black family in *Fallen*, corrupting cyberspace in *The Lawnmower Man*, and emerging from the outer limits in *Event Horizon*. These films work according to the law of the struggle between good and bad fathers. In the werewolf film and in *Lost Highway*, this battle is played out in the body of individual men, suggesting that there is a crisis born of conflict within the experience of masculine identity, and making it difficult to maintain the argument that these films view gender possession as simply feminine. The amoral hyper-masculine has replaced women and Jews (who in medieval discourse were thought to carry the plague, and were linked to the demonic through the "murder of Christ")⁴³ as the new bogies. White hyper-masculinity, as the primal father that produces and spreads the diseases of psychosis, racism and misogyny, has become a culturally sanctioned embodiment of the Apocalypse. This seems to support Eco's view that, in times of uncertainty, there is a return to medieval modes of understanding. These films show that in times of crisis there is, as Freud has said, a return to supernatural thinking. The crisis in the definition of masculinity takes on an overblown hysterical and contagious dimension, and becomes equated with the retributive force of the biblical Apocalypse and Greek blood guilt. Through the frame of medieval dualities, the supernatural, and the return of the primal father, each of the films discussed here figure a crisis in the definition of masculinity as the "end of the world". Furthermore, the primal father is deployed in Manichean terms to help counter attacks made on ideologically-driven binary meanings, including gender, identity and morality.

Notes

¹ Here I follow Judith Halberstam's insightful comment that "horror works hard at dismantling the stable relations between representation and reality". Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1995): 145. I also lean on Clover's idea that the slasher film offers men the possibility of identifying with the female position. Carol J Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1992).

- ² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Athlone Press, 1984).
- ³ "It is not just the centrality of a female body, and the interest in its passages and interiors and its capacity to accommodate alien intrusion, that mark the possession film as somehow 'feminine,' but the fact that the male psyche/body is understood in like terms, and its story told with reference to the 'internal space' of a woman". Clover: 111-112. "Possession becomes the excuse for legitimizing a display of aberrant feminine behaviour which is depicted as depraved, monstrous, abject." Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993): 31.
- ⁴ *The Exorcist* gained a long-overdue video release in May 1999, and received its first British television screening on Sky Premier in December 1999. The 1999 DVD release included a great deal of extra information, including a documentary, interviews and trailers. After the DVD release, the infamous "spider walk" sequence, cut out of the theatrical release, was posted on the Internet. In an attempt to exploit interest in the film still further, a new version of the film with an extra eleven minutes has been released. Mark Kermode gives an informative account of the film's production in *The Exorcist* (London: British Film Institute, 1997).
- ⁵ Freud's concept of the "primal father" is outlined in "Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics", and "Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays", in Sigmund Freud, *The Penguin Freud Library. Volume 13: The Origins of Religion, Totem and Taboo, Moses and Monotheism and Other Works*, translated by James Strachey, edited by Albert Dickson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990): 43-224 and 237-386, respectively; and in "A Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis (1923 [1922])", in Sigmund Freud, *Art and Literature: Jensen's Gradiva, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works*, translated by James Strachey, edited by Albert Dickson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985): 377-423.
- ⁶ "Moses and Monotheism: Three Essays": 324-325.
- ⁷ The debate between the co-authors on the status of the hysterical body is published in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, translated by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
- ⁸ Creed: 39.
- ⁹ Clover: 111-112.
- ¹⁰ Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- ¹¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981): 33-35.
- ¹² Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film", in Barry Keith Grant (ed), *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* (Metuchen, NJ; London: The Scarecrow Press, 1984): 164-200.
- ¹³ Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Shaftesbury, Dorset; Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1991).
- ¹⁴ I make no apology for referring to Lynch as the authorial conscious/unconscious at work in these films.
- ¹⁵ In an interview, Lynch has said: "so human beings love mysteries...I love a mystery, that at the end of the mystery, allows you room to dream. Continue the dream". Cited at www.mikedunn.com/lynch/kcrwint.html.
- ¹⁶ Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", in Elizabeth Abel and Emily K Abel (eds), *The Signs Reader: Women, Gender & Scholarship* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983): 279-297. Julia Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language", in Toril Moi (ed), *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986): 89-136.
- ¹⁷ The term "other" is used here to mean that which precedes the subject, that which is extrinsic to it, and indicates that the experience of otherness in relation to the self challenges the integrity of subjecthood.
- ¹⁸ Here I build on Michel Chion's notion that Lynch deals in the mythic and archaic by linking these to the primal father: "He is a film-maker who enables us to breathe the night air and feel the force of the wind, who touches directly on the mythic and the archaic". Michel Chion, *David Lynch*, translated by Robert Julian (London: British Film Institute, 1995): 158.
- ¹⁹ Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion. A New Abridgement from the Second and Third Editions*, edited by Robert Fraser (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): "The Killing of the Divine King": 228-253. Frazer argues the scared victim was killed to propitiate gods of nature, and identifies this trope within many early religious/magical systems.
- ²⁰ I have argued elsewhere that the primal scene of parental coitus guides the pornographic camera. See "Cicciolina and the Dynamics of Transgression and Abjection in Explicit Sex Films", in Michele Aaron (ed), *The Body's Perilous Pleasures: Dangerous Desires and Contemporary Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999): 188-209; and "Dissidence and Authenticity in Dyke Porn and Actuality TV", in Mike Wayne (ed), *Dissident Voices: The Politics of Television and Cultural Change* (London; Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 1998): 159-175.
- ²¹ Chris Rodley (ed), *Lynch on Lynch* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997): 184.
- ²² "The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that

extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic...This fragmented body...usually manifests itself in dreams when the movement of the analysis encounters a certain level of aggressive disintegration in the individual." Jacques Lacan, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience", in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977): 4.

²³ "Term frequently used by Freud in connection with his view of psychical temporality and causality: experiences, impressions and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development." J Laplanche and J-B Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1973): 111.

²⁴ Homer, *The Iliad* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1987): 19: 86-93.

²⁵ E R Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951): 18.

²⁶ Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film noir, genre, masculinity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991): 109.

²⁷ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1993): 95.

²⁸ Lynch cited at www.mikedunn.com/lynch/lh/cineh.html.

²⁹ After playing Chas, James Fox retreated from acting, as he apparently found that his role "had taken him over". Xan Brooks, "Time and time again", *The Guardian (Weekend)* 10 July 1999: 34.

³⁰ The fan and the flashing lights as signifiers of the demonic also appear in *Event Horizon*.

³¹ Rhizomatic logic is heterogeneous, includes the proliferation of multiplicities, and "is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion...The rhizome is...acentred, nonhierarchical". Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988): 21.

³² The film thereby mirrors David Cronenberg's preoccupation with the "new flesh". Donald Cammell's father was a close friend of Aleister Crowley's and figured strongly in Cammell's childhood. Crowley's idea that the god-child Horus emblematises the inception of a new Aeon, or evolutionary step, is present in the film.

³³ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1974).

³⁴ Clover: 197.

³⁵ Lacan: 4-5. See note 22 for a supporting quotation.

³⁶ Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny' (1919)", in Freud (1985): 352.

³⁷ Ibid: 353-354n1.

³⁸ My thanks to Ian Jones for bringing the film to my attention.

³⁹ Dodds: 35.

⁴⁰ Ibid: 36.

⁴¹ "[I]t was the Archaic Age that recast the tales of Oedipus and Orestes as horror-stories of bloodguilt". Ibid: 44.

⁴² *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999, USA) is a good example of a contemporary Hollywood film that takes up the idea of the split psyche. Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) is an embodiment of the repressed primal masculine, who returns to disrupt, and bring positive life-affirmation to, the bland life of the unnamed central character (Edward Norton). Tyler cannot be described simply as an evil "demon", because he is multifaceted. This represents a departure from the usual polarisation involved in split identity and possession, but what the film shares with the others discussed in this chapter is that this splitting is clearly related to a crisis of masculinity. *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze, 2000, USA) approaches the concept of possession in an unconventional way. The tourists who spend time in Malkovich's head have no ability to make him do things; they are passive. Only Craig (John Cusack), the puppeteer, is able to force Malkovich to do and say things. Malkovich can only understand what is happening to him in terms of witchcraft and possession, although this idea is debunked when he discovers the portal into his own head. This invasion is not, therefore, directly linked to the Devil or demons, as it is in most films. There is, nevertheless, a very clear threat to masculinity and autonomy presented by this scenario. For example, Lotte (Cameron Diaz) points out the feminising quality which the portal into Malkovich's head brings to him, and which she and Maxine (Catherine Keener) consider to be deeply erotic, and it is while Lotte is inside Malkovich making love with Maxine that the latter falls pregnant.

⁴³ Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (London: Folio Society, 1997): 81.

3

Hymns to Pan: Sacrifice, Witch Cults and Paganism

Introduction

The sacrifice of human beings to dark pagan gods is central to each of the films discussed in this chapter, and I will explore how they deploy black magic and blood sacrifice to different ideological and anti-ideological ends. Conservative and radical investments are very often co-present in individual films, producing contradictions that suggest a crisis in the meaning of the sacred in Western culture. The conflicting investments in sacrifice, paganism and witchcraft inscribed into these films, and their reception, have their roots in the challenge which the "magical revival"¹ presents to Christian-based definitions of religion and the sacred. The regeneration of interest in practical magic, witchcraft and paganism, as alternatives to Christianity and rational-based knowledges, began its renewed cultural pull in the late-19th century with the formation of several British magical societies. These societies took an eclectic overview of a range of ancient occult knowledges and Eastern mysticism. The legacies of these groups continue to shape contemporary interest in so-called alternative religious and magical practices. They also potently inform representations of witch cults, black magic and paganism, particularly, but not exclusively, those made in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s.

19th-century magic: legacies of *The Golden Bough* and *The Golden Dawn*

The meaning of magic, witchcraft and paganism in the medieval and early modern periods was forged by what Hugh Trevor-Roper refers to as the demonological discourse, and was shaped by the internecine struggles within the Christian Church.² In the 19th century, magic and the occult fell under the gaze of two interested secular groups – societies dedicated to the exploration of diverse esoteric systems for the purposes of personal development, and science-based anthropological enquiry. The former group was typified by a British magical society formed in 1888, called *The Golden Dawn*, and the latter by J G Frazer's work on myth and ritual in *The Golden Bough* (the first volumes of which were published in 1880).

This chapter will establish that, while drawing on elements of demonological discourse as a kind of moral safety-valve, films concerning witchcraft are also influenced by 19th-century epistemologies of magic, myth and ritual. *The Golden Dawn* and *The Golden Bough* provide the foundation for the organisation and practice of 20th-century witchcraft and paganism, and further inform their representation within popular and art cultures. Central to this analysis of occult films is the idea that the appeal of witchcraft and paganism lies in their functioning as "modern mystery religions", a status that has largely been lost by modern secularised Christianity.³ Many of the films link magic, witchcraft and paganism to Frazer's idea that the experience of the sacred was grounded in violence and sacrifice. The lure of these ideas to filmmakers working in the horror genre is obvious. But beneath the spectacle of witches' Sabats and human sacrifice is a tacit address of a struggle implicit in contemporary culture around the meaning and nature of religious experience – the seeds of which were germinated in the late-19th-century magical revival.

Critical writing on witchcraft films has hitherto concentrated on gender roles, and particularly on the representation of women witches as providing the horror of the monstrous female body.⁴ A close engagement with this idea occurs in the next chapter, which deals specifically with female witches. The academic focus on women and feminism also informs historical analyses of witchcraft. Historian Ronald Hutton, for example, has claimed that contemporary witchcraft and paganism are directly related to feminism, mainly because of the central presence of a goddess.⁵ Diane Purkiss also argues that 20th-century interest in witchcraft is linked to the growth of feminism and gender politics – although she oversimplistically maintains that feminists identify only with the victim status of witches involved in witch-hunts.⁶ She also suggests, rightly, that much recent academic work on witchcraft in history is due to the effect of feminist politics on academic study. Following in the footsteps of her historian precursors Keith Thomas and Norman Cohn,⁷ Purkiss tends to foreground an objective empirical approach to witchcraft, and does not sufficiently consider the ways in which it is linked to magic, paganism and, ultimately, the imagination. Because she avoids inhabiting the place of the magical, she is unable to answer the vital question: why do witchcraft and paganism have such widespread appeal? Her enquiry also focuses mainly on the early modern period and the current critical address of that period. She thereby misses out a crucial historical interconnection (the magical revival), which is instrumental in shaping of witchcraft and paganism today. While it would be foolhardy to discount the impact of feminism on psychic and social investments in witchcraft, particularly from the late-1960s onwards, Purkiss' approach tends to neglect a broader, and necessary, examination of the resurgence of "mystery religions" in recent Western culture. This renewed interest informs the representation of witchcraft and paganism in film. While the focus on gender has proved fruitful, it has nevertheless tended to collapse the scope of analysis and

debate into a very particular arena, sidelining other aspects of occult films worthy of critical attention. To obtain a more comprehensive analysis of the discursive investments in witchcraft and paganism in film, it is important to contextualise them in terms of a revivification of Western interest in the mystical in relation to identity, folk culture, the meanings of the rural landscape, and the forces of nature. The 19th century provides a useful starting-place to examine the reasons for the revival of magic, and the way in which it has helped fashion the practices of modern witchcraft and paganism, and their representation in film.

The 19th-century interest in magic was perhaps symptomatic of a drive to reinvigorate religious practice with drama, ritual and a personal relationship with invisible forces. Enigmatic ancient mystical knowledges and practices offered a means of filling a spiritual gap created by the increasingly anodyne nature of cosy secularised Christianity. Embellished by, and filtered through, the imagination, these knowledges found their way into occult novels and other popular texts. Rendered in popular form, they presented filmmakers with a means of dovetailing narrative puzzles with existential enigmas of a more spiritual or supernatural nature. In conjunction with The Golden Dawn, a body of anthropological and historical analyses of witchcraft, myth and magic, such as *The Golden Bough* and Margaret A Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (first published in 1921), informed a growing body of occult literature.⁸ These included magical handbooks and popular occult novels, such as those written by Aleister Crowley, Gerald B Gardner, Dion Fortune and Dennis Wheatley. Wheatley's novels, in particular, provided the means by which the more esoteric and élitist discourses on witchcraft and magic found their way into the popular imagination – via the printed word and through British horror films. The appeal lay partly in the sensational depiction of nudity and perverse sexuality. Even the most conservative and salacious occult novels and films are, however, grounded in theories of magic fashioned by late-19th-century institutions. Certain strands of the magical revival, such as the Folk-Lore Society and the works of Murray and Gardner, focused on what might now be called a psycho-geography of Britain, in which the landscape and cultural practices of the land were imbued with pre-Christian paganism. It is also a common idea, deriving mainly from Murray, that European pre-Christian paganism was a witch religion. This idea emerges in a number of films in which paganism and witchcraft are linked to the British rural landscape. What the persistence of magical discourse into this apparently sceptical modern age tells us is that history is part-product of the imaginary, and that the imaginary has real effects on the body, personal and cultural identity, politics and the meanings invested in the landscape. As such, contemporary witchcraft and paganism and their depictions speak to fundamental questions of identity and origins, and further relate to history, knowledge and ecology. Aspects of these areas of enquiry emerge in the representation of witch cults and paganism in film. No matter what the nature of their investment, however,

witchcraft films are legacies of the late-19th-century magical revival.

The Golden Dawn and *The Golden Bough* were primary catalysts for the popularisation of the magical revival. Members of The Golden Dawn practised high ritual magic in pursuit of the development of personal power and transformation. *The Golden Bough* is a multivolume anthropological work which surveyed, compared and documented a vast array of world myth and religion. The Golden Dawn was based on the theory and practice of magical thought, advocating magic as a sophisticated tool for the transformation of consciousness. By contrast, Frazer's *The Golden Bough* sought to demonstrate that magic was a "primitive" mode of thought which should be studied historically and scientifically. Despite these differences, they share certain epistemologies and both inform the representation, ontology and practices of modern-day witchcraft, magic and paganism.

The Golden Dawn used rituals and knowledge from diverse traditions and sources. They drew eclectically from John Dee's "Enochian" magic (a magical system that Dee received from his angels in the Elizabethan period), Egyptian rituals and cosmogony, Christian archangels, Rosicrucian symbolism,⁹ cabbalistic writings and yoga meditations.¹⁰ The Golden Dawn's approach can be termed a type of "transcendental" magic, which differed from folk magic, black magic and Satanism. Important members of the group included MacGregor Mathers, who was one-time head of the order; W B Yeats, whose poetry often uses Golden Dawn symbolism and who wrote many of The Golden Dawn's rituals; Dion Fortune (a pseudonym of Violet Mary Firth), an occult novelist and author of *Psychic Self-Defence* (1930); and Aleister Crowley.¹¹ Crowley went on to develop a different brand of "magick" based on the use of sexual energies (he spelled it "magick" to distinguish it from the magical systems deployed by The Golden Dawn). His work has proved instrumental to the shape of contemporary witchcraft and paganism, particularly Wicca and Chaos magick.¹² Due to his "bad boy" notoriety in the tabloid domain, Crowley inspired several filmmakers' and novelists' depictions of male witches or Satanists.

The 19th century also saw, as Hutton notes, the growth of Masonic societies, and the emergence of such groups as the Order of Wood Craft Chivalry. These seem to have grown out of a general Victorian romance with the ancient pagan world, imagined as bucolic and picturesque. Hutton suggests that this was in part dependent on a nostalgic idealisation of the countryside, resulting from the growth of industrialisation and urban living, and contributed to the modified resurrection of pagan-based folk customs.¹³ The magical secret society is not simply a 19th-century phenomenon: infamous examples include the Order of the Knights Templars in the 13th century, and the Hellfire Club in the 18th century. In the cinema of the occult, the mystery surrounding secret cults or magical orders often constitutes the conspiratorial threat to the social order, as in *The Seventh Victim* (Mark Robson, 1943, USA), *The*

Devil Rides Out (Terence Fisher, 1968, UK) *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *Little Witches* (Jane Simpson, 1996, USA). These representations of occult groups tend to be cast in the light of medievalist demonological discourse, and are often depicted sensationally as a brand of Satanism. They often have the express aim of undermining the status quo. In tandem with this demonisation, the more benign legacy of late-19th-century magic and mysticism results in a certain ambiguity in the moral logic of many films, as in *The Witches* (Cyril Frankel, 1966, UK) and *The Wicker Man* (1973).

Alongside The Golden Dawn's approach to magic is the anthropological approach to myth and magic as laid out in Frazer's widely influential text, *The Golden Bough*. Running to thirteen volumes, it was first published in two volumes in 1880, and found a popular readership due, perhaps, to its easily read narrative style. The work sought to find evidence of continuities in the mythic imagination across diverse cultures and times. As Robert Frazer says:

It was because the human mind, across a variety of cultures and times, and especially when trained upon the religious and the magical, showed certain constancies that generalization of the sort that fascinated Frazer became possible. It was to examine the refinements of such universal thought-processes, and their different ways of expressing themselves in a variety of places and periods, that he wrote his book.¹⁴

Using a vast array of examples, Frazer argued that many myths, rituals and customs were based on what he called the "sacrifice" of the Dying King or God. Here the cycles of nature are linked to human cycles – a fundamental idea that informs modern paganism. A king, as the embodiment of a god, must be sacrificed to pass on, or renew, nature's power. Controversially for the time, he saw the Crucifixion as a reworking of the universal myth of sacrifice and renewal (a contentious idea which he left out of his later abridged version of 1922). Frazer's model has a significant impact on the cinema of the occult.

Frazer assigned to human history three ages: those of magic, religion and science. The Age of Magic is characterised by the practice of sympathetic magic, based on the principle of "connection". This takes two forms: the "Law of Similarity", in which an effect is imitated by the magician, and the "Law of Contagion", in which objects retain their contact with other objects that they have touched.¹⁵ In the Age of Magic, forces and laws of nature are directly acted upon through spells and incantations. This was superseded by the Age of Religion, where mediating gods appeared who must be worshipped and praised.¹⁶ The watchword of the Age of Religion is humility: the supplicant must be respectful, rather than commanding, before the all-powerful gods.¹⁷ The Age of Magic fell when men recognised that they could not directly command nature and

thereby "men came to think that it was controlled by supernatural beings".¹⁸ Frazer is unable to conceive of the fact that magic and religion can operate together. According to his paradigm, this would constitute a "magical" mode of thought. He does identify a limited similarity between magic and science; both recognise that laws govern nature and that it is subject to cause and effect. The difference is that science does not misrecognise the nature of these laws in the way that magic does – thereby Frazer valorises science as a superior form of knowledge.¹⁹ This epistemological hierarchy reflects his pseudo-Darwinist approach to the subject-matter, showing that his interest in magic differs from that of the "occultists" of the late-19th century. The irony is, however, that the successors of the 19th-century occult groups frequently use Frazer's work to support arguments for a continuity of paganism as a witch cult in Europe. Such a use goes against Frazer's intention to chart an epistemological trajectory of progress from the "primitivism" of subjective magic to the "civilisation" of empirical science.

Frazer's work, nevertheless, shares a significant component with the occultists of the late-19th century. The concept of "correspondences" is a primary feature of occult or esoteric thought, and appears as the foundation of high magic in French magician Éliphas Lévi's seminal 1854 book *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (*Dogma and Ritual of High Magic*). According to Richard Sutcliffe, the term "correspondences" describes a fundamental principle that informs most Western magical systems: "The theory of the occult constitution of human beings derives from the notion that there is a strict equivalence between the structure of the individual human 'embodied psyche' (the microcosm), and the structure of the cosmos, or universe, as a whole (the macrocosm)".²⁰ In other words, nothing is arbitrary, and the human psyche and body are mysteriously connected to the universal whole. While Frazer would deem this a sophisticated version of "magical thinking", it is, nevertheless, the paradigm that implicitly shapes his own work. As Robert Frazer argues, *The Golden Bough* is "a book on the human mind and the connections habitually made by it".²¹ Frazer's search for connections or, more oppositely, correspondences of a universal nature follows a fundamental occult and pagan principle. That he connects myth to human and natural cycles operates along the alchemical tenet of "as above, so below", and this renders Frazer's work important to those with an interest in esoteric and mystical matters. The symbiotic link between human and other cycles will be explored later, where it becomes clear that the myth of sacrifice of the King filtered into occult films such as *The Eye of the Devil* (J Lee Thompson, 1967, UK), *The Wicker Man* and *Medea* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1970, Italy/France/Germany). This is an angle hitherto neglected by critical analyses of such films.

Frazer's work was popular with intellectuals and academics such as Freud and Robert Graves, but has been heavily refuted by more modern empirically-orientated anthropologists. The main criticisms are levelled at

his lack of primary field-based research, and his search for continuities, rather than differences, in world myth. In the new academic orthodoxy, universalism and similarity are tantamount to sacrilege. Despite these criticisms, it is crucial not to deny the dialectical impact of his work on thinkers who have helped to forge contemporary critical discourse, as well as on the configuration of modern witchcraft and paganism. The British Folk-Lore Society, for example, took up his idea that the history of a culture can be seen in fossilised form in myth, and applied it to British folk culture. They were working with the assumption that ancient pagan practice informed later folklore and customs. This idea grew out of a trend of thinking that became prominent at the end of the 19th century, when it was thought that the witches persecuted in the 16th centuries (and before) were practitioners of the old pagan religion.²²

According to Hutton, Jules Michelet's book *La Sorcière* (1862) argued that the pagan witch religion was based in democratic and libertarian values. Michelet's thesis countered the views of earlier German writers who argued, in defence of Catholicism, that the persecution of witches in the 16th century was valid because such people were practising pagans.²³ Margaret Murray took up Michelet's theory during the 1920s. She was a member of the Folk-Lore Society, and maintained that paganism was a witch religion and that its traces were still present in Western culture. Murray's argument that witch cults were inheritors of ancient pagan practices became accepted in academic circles during the 1950s, but by the 1970s, however, it was considered to lack firm historical evidence. Despite the refutations offered by empirical historians, Murray's work, alongside *The Golden Bough*, *The Golden Dawn* and Gardner's Crowley-influenced *Book of Shadows*, constitutes the foundation for the identity of modern British witchcraft.²⁴ These ideas and practices have further found their way into novels and films about witchcraft and paganism. Many British occult films are based on "black magic" novels, and their writers had a small, often second-hand, knowledge of the British occult scene. It is also important to note that, during the 1960s and 1970s, the work of *The Golden Dawn*, Crowley, Murray and Frazer were being quite widely read (or at least talked about) by the "hippy" counter-culture.

The British mythic/magical landscape – the Green Man, standing stones and regenerative rites: *The Witches* and *The Wicker Man*

Many British witch films of the 1960s and 1970s, such as *The Witches*, *The Wicker Man* and *Virgin Witch* (Ray Austin, 1970, UK), are set in contemporary verdant rural landscapes. In the majority of British-made occult films, the countryside is more than simply a pretty backdrop for the action, as it is linked to the evocation of pre-Christian agrarian religious practices. *The Witches* and *The Wicker Man* use Murray's idea that the customs and practices of witchcraft and paganism have persisted within small isolated rural communities. The middle-England village of Hedderby

in *The Witches* is clothed in sunlight and the deep velvet green of full summer. The centre of community life evolves around two shops and a school; its houses are made of brick and flint in Victorian Gothic revival style. Read against the impersonal city, the close community of Hedderby looks, on the surface, to be a rural idyll, but, as Gwen Mayfield (Joan Fontaine) discovers, this community is bonded together through the practice of paganism. The same principle is found on the Scottish island of Summerisle in *The Wicker Man*: the island's continuity and community also draw on the common practice of paganism, taken to ensure the inhabitants' prosperity. The model of paganism used by these two films derives from Murray's idea that paganism, as practised in Northern Europe, was a witch religion, which she terms the "Old Religion":

William the Conqueror rendered waste and desolate nearly half of his new kingdom; the re-peopling of the wilderness seems to have been done in great measure by the descendants of the Neolithic and Bronze Age stock who were saved from massacre by the remoteness and inaccessibility of their dwellings. These were the places where the Old Religion flourished; and it was only by very slow degrees that even a small amount of outward conformity with Christianity could be established, and then only by means of compromises on the part of the Church; certain practices were permitted, certain images were retained, though often under different names.²⁵

As Stephanie Bax (Kay Walsh), the late-middle-aged Lady of the Manor and priestess of the local witch cult, says to Gwen in *The Witches*: "I bet there are lots of remote spots where remnants of witchcraft is still practised, places like Hedderby". Like Murray, she is a scholar of witchcraft, writing articles on the subject for Sunday magazines. She invites Gwen, who has spent time as a teacher in Africa, to collaborate on an article comparing British and African witchcraft. Her offer also hints that she wants to do more than intellectually join forces with similarly aged and educated Gwen. Thus, the film links paganism and witchcraft to homosexuality under an umbrella of what it conservatively regards as "perverse". It further suggests that the "primitivism" of African tribal magic finds its equivalent in the paganism practised in the apparently "civilised" and genteel English country village. As in *The Wicker Man*, paganism is not simply a benign practice, but leads to a perverse morality and sacrificial death. *The Witches'* view of witchcraft and paganism borrows from Frazer's approach to myth and magic – that magical thought and practice conjoin diverse cultures in a bond of "primitivism". The film reflects Frazer and Freud's spurious views that magic is a form of "primitive" anthropomorphic thought, which is made redundant, or

repressed, by the processes of civilisation and socialisation.²⁶

The diegetic origins of Summerisle's paganism appear to be somewhat different from those in *The Witches*. Paganism was introduced to the island by Lord Summerisle's freethinking and libertarian grandfather in 1868 for entrepreneurial ends. Lord Summerisle (Christopher Lee) explains the history of the island's paganism to the "Christian Copper", Sergeant Howie (Edward Woodward), who has come to investigate the alleged murder of the child Rowan Morrison. The date of 1868 accords with the Victorian "magical revival". The film about-faces the usurpation of Christianity over an indigenous pagan religion, perhaps suggesting that all religions are subject to fashion and expediency. However, it is also apparent that traces of antique paganism are carried by the folk customs used on the island. These are not simply the invention of a Victorian freethinker, but speak of a buried indigenous paganism that has left its traces in rural life. While the film nods to the Victorian practice of resurrecting folk customs, it also resurrects something more ancient which has left its mark on the landscape.²⁷ As in *The Witches*, this is linked to a "perverse" morality.

Like many other British witchcraft films such as *Cry of the Banshee* (Gordon Hessler, 1970, UK) and *Virgin Witch, The Wicker Man* and *The Witches* implicate the Lord or Lady of the Manor as the decadent purveyor of a perverse and barbaric cult.²⁸ Looking back to the feudal past, the rural communities of both films are still organised around the dominance of the manor house, which governs the village's layout and hierarchy. The films thereby carry a certain suspicion of, but also fascination with, the "mad, bad and dangerous to know" aristocracy. Both films maintain a certain interested sympathy with these cults, rarely apparent in the representation of witchcraft in the horror film. In the more sensationalist "nudie" witchcraft film such as *Virgin Witch*, witchcraft is primarily used as a means of showing sex rituals. *The Wicker Man* and *The Witches* perform a brand of atavism through their resurrection of an old (and imagined) indigenous religion. Because of their engagement with an imaginary hidden history of British culture, the two films are imbued with a certain ambiguity in their moral investment in the subject-matter. It is through this hidden history that we are asked to view the British landscape within the light of paganism. *The Witches* and *The Wicker Man* take significant dates in the pagan calendar as central to their dramatic concerns, and, in so doing, borrow from the customs and practices documented by the Folk-Lore Society and later historians of folk customs. In *The Witches*, the rite to regenerate Stephanie into the body of a younger woman is to be held on "Lammas-tide" (1 August). *Virgin Witch* also uses Lammas-tide as the date for the initiation of Christine into the Wychwold witch cult, but, in keeping with the film's tabloid depiction of witchcraft, it focuses on Christine's nude body and defloration by the priest. According to Hutton, this festival is noted in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (705) as "the feast of first fruits", and suggests that the Ancient

Britons celebrated the festival, probably under the name of Lughnasadh.²⁹ Within the Christian calendar, Lammas becomes Harvest Festival, perhaps the most obviously pagan-influenced of the Christian festivals, and is celebrated at the end of August. In referring to "Lammas-tide", *The Witches* tacitly accords with Murray's theory that witchcraft is what is left over from the old pre-Christian pagan religion. Murray makes the mistake of seeing paganism as a unified religious and mystical system. Such a conflation of diverse traditions is apparent in the film through Stephanie's composite ritual costume, which combines 19th-century Druid-style robes, medieval undergarments and a horned head-dress. (The inclusion of skeletal hands in the head-dress tacitly connects paganism with black magic.)

The Lammas rite of *The Witches* is not simply a pagan celebration of the fruits of summer. Like the horned head-dress, it is given a more sinister meaning, deriving from a Christian view of witchcraft as a form of perverse barbarism. In order for the ageing Stephanie to be regenerated in the guise of a young woman, she intends to harvest and inhabit the skin of a teenage girl, Linda Rigg (Ingrid Brett), who lives in the village. This harvest relates to the personal power of Stephanie, and is not a celebration of the agricultural plenitude. But the nubile Linda becomes the village "produce" that will be sacrificed to sustain the perpetuation of the witch-priestess Stephanie. The Lammas-tide Sabat is clothed in the Christian meanings of witchcraft as demonic practice, rather than exclusively in terms of a Murraysque form of nature religion. This is guided by the dark sensationalist mandate of horror film conventions. Witchcraft cannot be simply represented as a benign form of pagan nature worship as the forces that shape the horror genre demand blood sacrifice. If this is not delivered, a film will slide into the anodyne and sunlit realms of children's fairy tale, entailing that the life-in-death mystery of paganism would lose its connection with the terrors of sacred violence.

The May Day festival is central to the dramatic events of *The Wicker Man*. This is a significant date in the Summerisle calendar, as it is the time allotted for fertility rites to ensure a good harvest. After a disastrous yield in the previous year, the inhabitants of Summerisle connive to offer the earth goddess a blood sacrifice to ensure fruitful abundance. It is preceded by a variety of celebratory rites drawn from the country practices documented by Frazer and the Folk-Lore Society, and from Wiccan rites as informed by Murray and Gardner.³⁰ They include dancing around a maypole, bawdy folk songs, mummery, sex outdoors, and jumping over fire. Early in the film, when Sergeant Howie is conducting his first round of investigations into the disappearance of an adolescent girl, he happens across a group of young boys dancing around a maypole. A song accompanies this in which burgeoning manhood, sex and death are linked to the growth of a tree. (Frazer linked the maypole to tree worship and fertility.)³¹ The phallic nature of the symbolism is signified in a variety of ways, ensuring that viewers do not miss the

connection. The scene is preceded by Willow's seduction of the good sergeant. However, his high Christian values force him into a sweaty resistance to her siren call. Cutting from the nude Willow (Britt Ekland) to the crowning of the maypole with a garland of vegetation makes the sexual symbolism of the maypole blatantly apparent.

The maypole was a common feature in the medieval British landscape.³² It was subsequently banned as anti-Christian during the 16th and 17th centuries, but resurrected again mostly in British schools in the mid-1800s, wherein its pagan and sexual symbolism seemed to be subsumed within a general nostalgia for country community practices.³³ Frazer saw the maypole as a fertility symbol: "the object of the custom was to bring in the fructifying spirit of vegetation, newly awakened in spring".³⁴ *The Wicker Man* certainly abides by Frazer's fertility symbol interpretation – when the girls of the school are asked by the pagan teacher to tell her what the symbolism of the maypole is, they reply that it is a "phallic symbol". Sergeant Howie is appalled that the phallus is openly talked about in a girls' classroom, making apparent his role as the embodiment of Christian moral law (for whom the phallus must be disavowed and veiled). Frazer never directly calls the maypole a "phallic" symbol, and this interpretation seems born of a libertarian take on the "Old" Religion, something that is amply exploited as permissive capital by the film. The maypole might connote the polite idyll of the early summer village charity fête, but in *The Wicker Man* its erect presence, set against the backdrop of the ruined church, stands as a challenge to the repressive values of Christian chastity. This idea is also embedded in the film's deployment of various other pagan symbols and customs.

The failed seduction of Howie takes place in the local pub, aptly named "The Green Man". The film takes a common pub name to unearth a pagan current lurking beneath the pastoral idyll. While the origins of the figure of the Green Man are currently disputed (it is now thought to be a medieval decorative device borrowed from classical sculpture), aspects of the Green Man are integrated into the film's imagined logic of May Day.³⁵ As an incarnation of the Green Man, the "Jack in the Green" was part of May Day celebrations in Northern Europe. Significantly, Hutton links the Jack in the Green to the use of the wicker man:

[The Jack in the Green] was (and is) a wood or wicker frame covered in woven greenery and flowers and worn around the upper half of a man walking or dancing in May Day processions...In 1939 a member of the Folklore Society, Lady Raglan, suggested that this figure could be linked to the mysterious heads carved in late medieval churches, which have foliage entwined about them and often sprouting from mouth and nostrils. She attached to these the name 'the Green Man', taken from a popular pub sign displaying a forester, and suggested

that both the May Day character and the carved heads were representations of pre-Christian deities or spirits of nature and fertility.³⁶

Howie not only stays at "The Green Man" pub, in which drinkers sing bawdy songs, but also becomes one with "Jack in the Green" when sacrificed in the wicker frame. Although his sacrifice is, within the pagan/magical logic of Summerisle, designed to bring back life, it is nevertheless intended to pull the viewer up short, forcing a reappraisal of sympathies. The film is redolent with images of fertility, however, and an all-pervading sense of a life-force connects people to the cycles of nature. Howie's sacrifice is intended to facilitate a reconsideration of paganism as simply harmless rural hokiness. But this does not work quite as effectively as intended. The images of life are too powerful, and they accord with the hippy-based criticism that Christian and judicial law stifles what is "natural". For example, a woman breast-feeds her baby in the ruins of the church, replacing perhaps the fossilised icon of the Virgin and Son with a flesh-and-blood person. In addition, Miss Rose (Diane Cilento) tells Howie that "death" is not a word used by the community; the islanders prefer to believe that the spirits of the dead are absorbed into the natural world (inhabiting animals, trees or the elements). As she delivers her explanation, the blossoming cherry tree behind her takes on a new anthropomorphised meaning. Borrowing from Frazerian ideas of vegetation spirits, the Summerisle community places trees on the graves of the dead, and names its children after the natural world (Willow, Rowan, Rose, May). All these factors work to undermine the intended shock that Howie's horrific death provokes, a blow that is meant to make viewers reassess their identification with Summerisle's anarchic paganism.

Following the maypole dance, conducted by the boys of the island, is a further rite that may have ancient roots and is often used by modern witches. On route to visiting Lord Summerisle, Howie passes through apple trees covered in blossom and sees pregnant women wandering amongst them. He happens on a group of young naked women dancing around, and leaping over, a fire inside a stone circle; the women sing about becoming pregnant through the flame. Lord Summerisle explains these activities in terms of being impregnated by the god of fire. Howie finds this idea preposterous, and Lord Summerisle points out that this is only a version of the Immaculate Conception. The film thereby effects a strategic blurring of the distinction between paganism and Christianity. The film intends to seduce with such arguments, only then to show how paganism undermines human values and to demonstrate how easy it is to become complicit with what leads to the barbaric sacrificial pyre. Such an intention is made apparent in comments made by Robin Hardy, the film's director: "[Paganism] keeps people in the thrall of superstition. Maybe it's not too big a connection to make between the final scene of THE WICKER MAN and the Nuremberg Rallies in Germany.

It was no accident that Hitler brought back all those pagan feasts in his rise to power.³⁷ The film therefore criticises what it sees as the logical conclusions of paganism, but the film never quite manages to undermine the counterweight of anti-authority that many people, myself included, invest in paganism.

The rite of leaping over fire, according to Frazer and corroborated by Hutton, is a tradition associated with Beltane (a term often used to describe the rites held on May Eve). As Frazer writes: "In the central Highlands of Scotland bonfires, known as the Beltane fires, were formerly kindled with great ceremony on the first of May".³⁸ Celtic culture has been subject to the mythic imagination since at least the 18th-century Celtic Revival. *The Wicker Man* draws on such rich sources, and they are framed by the context of Frazer's studies in which Scottish Beltane is seen as a rite in which the fertility of humans and animals was sustained by the "blessing" of fire.³⁹ The resonant ancient coding of the chanting naked women jumping over the fire is further substantiated by the presence of the standing stones, evoking the mystique of the prehistoric past. As standing stones are significant features in British cinema of the occult, they require closer consideration.

The meaning and status of Stonehenge, in particular, are very sensitive to certain cultural conflicts in British culture, and this is reflected in British occult cinema. The site appears at the start of *Night of the Demon* (1957) and is accompanied by a spoken prologue, couched in pseudo-archaic language, linking the stones to "dark supernatural powers". Stonehenge is used to evoke archaic prehistory, but there is no sense that the standing stones are related to an alternative indigenous religion, as in *The Wicker Man* and other 1970s and early 1980s British films and television shows such as *The Devil Rides Out, Excalibur* (John Boorman, 1981, UK) and *Children of the Stones* (1977). This meaning seems to have emerged from 1960s counter-culture. During this period, Stonehenge became the site of an impromptu summer solstice music festival. Modern Druids had also used the site to welcome in the summer. Both groups reflected a growing investment in non-Christian mystery religions. By the 1980s, the site became the staging for a conflict between the authorities, who had closed it off under the pretext that it needed protecting, and the people who wanted access to the stones. In conjunction with the idea that it was erected as a temple to pagan gods, the battle for Stonehenge consolidated the site as an emblem of counter-cultural resistance. Subsequently, standing stones, including those of *The Wicker Man*, were invested with new political meanings, lent by an offensive against bourgeois Christian values.

The presence of stones in *The Wicker Man* also tells of a paganism that precedes Summerisle's expedient introduction.⁴⁰ From a pagan point of view, they represent ancient practices buried by Christianity. The stones provide the location for Beltane fire-jumping, and are a significant stopping place for the climactic May Day carnival

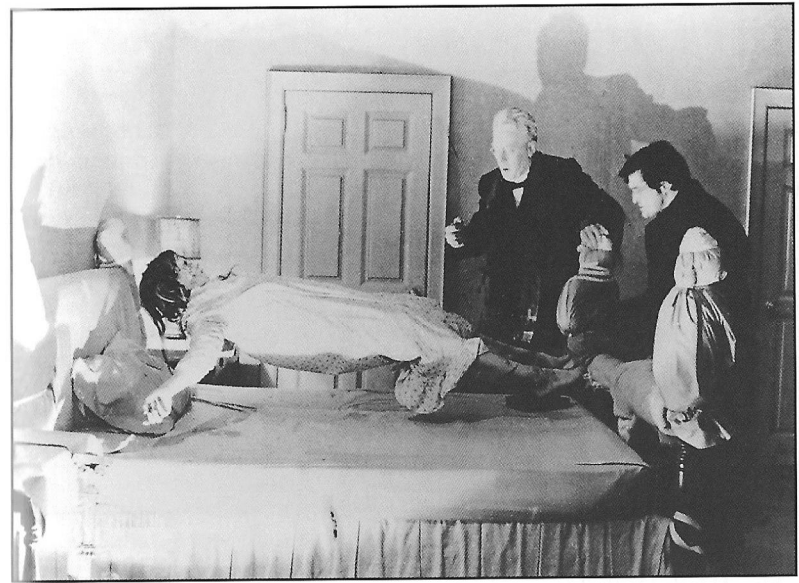
procession – the depiction of which borrows from British rural customs that appear to have pre-Christian origins, although the combination of the figures used in the carnival is fictitious. The carnival features three important figures: the hobby-horse that "charges at young women"; the girl/boy figure (who carries a sickle and is played in full drag by Lord Summerisle); and the Punch/fool figure (the guise taken by Howie). All these figures are derived from various real folk customs. The symbolism of each is spelled out in the film as Howie reads about their meanings in the village library and learns that the May Day rite will end in the sacrifice of a virgin. (Howie mistakenly and fatefully thinks that this will be Rowan Morrison.)

In *The Golden Bough*, Frazer characterises carnival as in the service of the anarchic Lord of Misrule. Mikhail Bakhtin developed this idea, and his work was published in Britain in the early 1960s. He stated that carnival was a time in which licence was given to indulge in behaviours that were outlawed at other times, and he also stated its link to the cyclical process of the seasons.⁴¹ Bakhtin also implicitly follows the idea that carnival and other aspects of folk culture contain traces of pagan customs, which are in tension with Christianity. This provides a counter-argument to the view that carnival is simply a safety-valve that operates to preserve the status quo. It is also consonant with *The Wicker Man's* method of resurrecting traces of agrarian paganism by referencing familiar folk customs that were, and still are, extant in rural Britain. As such, the film uncovers what it sees as the pagan barbarism and perversity that lie beneath what appears anodyne country fun, further demonstrating its intention to show that inhuman violence and immorality lurk at the heart of the magical revival.

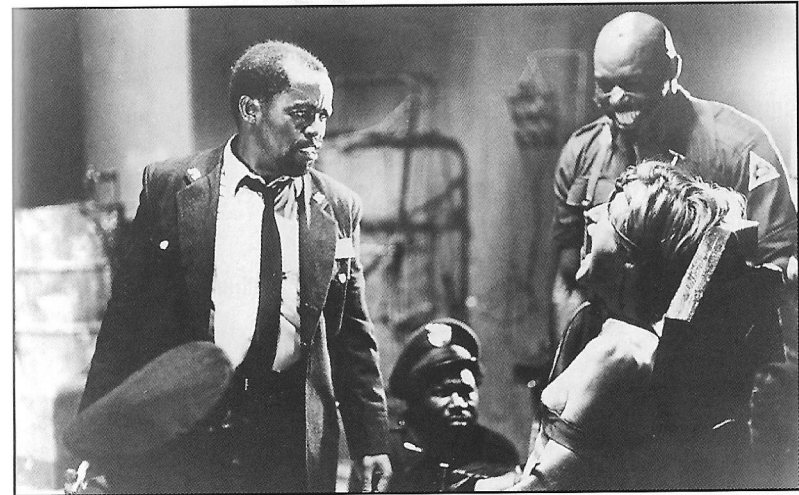
Another symbol from folklore used in both *The Witches* and *The Wicker Man* is the motif of the hare, which is linked to sacrifice. In the former film, Gwen visits the local butcher's shop soon after arriving at Hedderby. She watches with distaste as the butcher, who we subsequently learn is part of the witch cult, graphically, and with a certain sadistic relish, skins a hare. This prefigures Stephanie's attempt to skin Linda Rigg, and further accords with the practice of flaying alive, and the wearing the skin of, a sacrificial victim, which Frazer notes is a method used by several "primitive" cultures.⁴² The butcher pulls the whole skin from the hare, an image that emphasises the barbarity underlying the picturesque idyll of village life. The hare is also linked to the sacrificial figure in *The Wicker Man*, but it has a more central and complex role to play than in *The Witches*. It is first seen when Howie questions Rowan Morrison's sister. (Rowan Morrison is the girl whom Howie seeks, as he thinks she has been abducted or murdered.) She is painting a picture of a hare, and he asks its name. She replies, "Rowan". Later, when Howie exhumes what he has been led to believe is Rowan's grave, he finds a dead hare nestling in the coffin. On confronting Lord Summerisle and Rose with the dead hare, Rose states, in a tongue-in-cheek way, that Rowan's body must have



Death of the maiden: Marielle's (Cathy Tyson) soul is about to become enslaved to the bokor in The Serpent and the Rainbow



The good fathers and bad demon father Pazuzu do battle over the body of Regan in The Exorcist



"This is not Grenada, Dr Alan": Peytraud (Zakes Mokae) shows Alan (Bill Pullman) that American status cannot protect him from the powers of voodoo in The Serpent and the Rainbow



Leland (Ray Wise) no longer knows who he is, in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me's* tale of incest, repression and possession



Morgana (Helen Mirren) casts a spell of protection over her son Mordred in *Excalibur*

capitalise on the seduction of counter-culture and permissive values which, in turn, are intended to work their magic on box-office ratings. *The Witches* and *The Wicker Man*, in particular, also work another spell on the popular conception of witchcraft and paganism. Evoking paganism as a vivid religious practice, with its history writ large over, and scored deep into, the landscape, may (for some viewers) offer possible alternatives to Christianity. Its representation also resonates within a sinister place of mystery, in which death and sacrifice are intrinsic to the experience of the sacred.

Sabats and sacrifices: *Häxan* and *The Devil Rides Out*

Central to the representation of witchcraft and paganism in film, and particularly those that fall into the generic category of horror, is the witches' Sabat. More than simply wild dancing in the woods, cinematic Sabats often involve human sacrifices to satiate the blood-lust of the dark gods or the forces of nature. This has its roots in older fantasies of the witches' Sabat. Medieval and Renaissance treatises on witchcraft dovetailed the Sabat with human sacrifice, rendering it as an archaic, barbaric and horrifying practice. This association was also instrumental to the moral justification of the (equally brutal) witch hangings and burnings. The alleged obscenities of witch practices and real historical witch-burnings lend filmmakers fertile ground for the propagation of the imagination, and the vicarious *frisson* of blood sacrifice is used to create the requisite visceral excitement demanded by the horror genre. Thus, the horror film is closely bonded to "primitive" religions, and blood sacrifice is essential to both.

Following the anti-witchcraft treatises of the medieval and Renaissance periods, many occult films adopt a common "abduction and rescue" pattern. A child, woman or man is abducted for a blood sacrifice ritual and then rescued by good Christian men, as in *The Devil Rides Out*. This contrasts with the pattern of sacrifice and restitution (of the natural/supernatural order) which, according to Walter Burkert, is evident in ancient Greek culture.⁴⁸ In many of the films discussed below, these two patterns are antagonistically co-present. In some films, such as *The Devil Rides Out* and *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971), pagan magical practices are bracketed by a Christian equilibrium (often out of fear of censorship because of blasphemy). In others, such as *The Wicker Man* and *Witchfinder General* (1968), this equilibrium is less clear-cut and Christianity is implicitly shown to be in turmoil. It would seem that the depictions of blood sacrifice and the Sabat in occult films carry the marks of a culture in the process of appraising the definition and meaning of the sacred, which also poses a threat to the orthodox Christian order.

While sacrificial rites are invariably deemed "satanic" within the occult film, such rituals are nevertheless a common feature in classical literature. Such texts show that sacrificial rites, involving the slaughter of

an animal, rather than a human, are crucial to the personal experience of the sacred. In *The Odyssey* (725 BC) and *The Iliad* (750 BC), as well as in the Old Testament (particularly Leviticus), sacrificial rites were part of everyday life, providing a method of creating a personal relationship with the god(s). The concept of blood sacrifice would therefore have been familiar to many medieval and Renaissance Christian clerics. It was also through its different approach to sacrifice embodied in, and constrained to, the Crucifixion, that Christianity was lent its defining difference to classical and other types of paganism. Within this paradigm, Christianity inculcated a distinction between "barbaric" sacrifice and "redemptive" sacrifice. Despite the expedient need for Christianity to make its difference plain, such a difference tends to disintegrate on closer inspection. This means that the putative boundary between the two must be more rigorously reinforced if the Christian identity and order are to be maintained. The demand to keep its difference intact perhaps underlies Frazer's trepidation about including his work on the sacrifice of Christ in the populist abridged version of *The Golden Bough* in 1922. Also in accordance with this law of conservation, all forms of sacrifice, other than that of Christ, are rendered satanic. There is, however, evidence that, in the transition from ancient Greek to classical Greek culture, human sacrifice had also become demonised. In many Greek myths, the gods punished those that made human sacrifice and ate parts of the body. A good example of this is the myths of Lykaon. He killed a boy, and, after pouring his blood on the altar of Olympian Zeus, cooked and ate him. Zeus turns Lykaon into a wolf as fitting punishment for his deed.⁴⁹ This would seem to indicate a "civilising" shift into seeing these practices as barbaric and archaic. It exemplifies an ideological process by which differences between the barbarous and the civilised are defined, and it prefigures the same paradigm within medieval and Renaissance cultures. Like the Christians, classical Greeks regarded blood sacrifice as an inhuman antique practice, yet it continued to hold a certain horrified fascination, a factor utilised and exploited by filmmakers in a fictional context. The allure of blood sacrifice and its frenzied accompanying rites indicates the fuzzy nature of the distinction between Christian and pagan sacrifice. This fascination can be interpreted as betraying a sinister side to human history, and can be traced within the frame of entertainment. Occult films construct a "dangerous" place of history and the psyche, in which Dionysian energies can be evoked and perhaps safely exorcised. However, these dark stirrings might resonate too deeply into the realms of the archaic "sacred" to be quieted by a trite ending presenting the triumph of Christian values. This may have led films such as *Virgin Witch* and *The Wicker Man*, made after *The Devil Rides Out* and *Rosemary's Baby*, to be less inclined to use this type of ideologically conservative closure.

Christensen's *Häxan* (1922) is the earliest film to depict the witches' Sabat. The carefully crafted Sabat scene is enunciated as the fantasy of an elderly woman under the pressure of inquisitorial torture.

Using a wide variety of innovative and spectacular special effects, the scene also draws on a variety of sources, such as Goya's "black paintings", folklore, and medieval and Renaissance engravings of witches and magical accoutrements. By interweaving these familiar images of witchcraft, it is made apparent that what we are watching is, *per se*, a fantasy, and thereby the film distances itself from the witch-discourse of the Inquisition and its inheritors. Although the woman weaves a tale in an attempt to save her skin, it is also evident that she has a considerable desire investment in her story. She indicts her accusers as witches, and further describes her involvement in all manner of perverse behaviours. By realising her "confession" in images, and not simply through the spoken word of the confession, the film invites the spectator to partake of the fantasy, demonstrating the seductive charm of the imagined witches' Sabat. The sequence begins with the witch preparing for her flight to the Sabat by being smothered in "witch cream" (more commonly called "flying ointment", a potion made from hallucinogenic substances absorbed through the skin, also used in the Lammas-tide rite in *The Witches*). She and the other witches fly astride broomsticks over the countryside, watched by imps and other faery creatures silhouetted against the moonlight. Once they have arrived at the Sabat, a series of activities take place that derive from medieval and Renaissance "accounts" of such events. Demon imps beat furiously on drums, to which the women dance in ecstatic frenzy or with slow spiral movements as if hypnotised. An unbaptised (according to the intertitles) baby is bled and put into the Sabat cooking pot, and young women trample on the Christian cross. Demons and women couple after kissing the Devil's "bottom", all to the delight of the assembled inquisitors who hear her confession. This recipe of events accords most strongly with medieval and Renaissance ideas of witch practices as satanic. Significantly, the film does not accept this reading, preferring to see witchcraft as the product of the imagination. Although folkloric references are also made, it was too early for its version of witchcraft to be influenced by Murray's "witch cult as paganism" theory. Nevertheless, the mode in which the Sabat is depicted is echoed in later films, where it is combined with aspects of both Murray's and Gardner's brands of witchcraft as paganism.

A good example of a film that bases its representation of magic and the representation of the Sabat on a mixture of Gardnerian witchcraft (Wicca), Crowleyian magick and rites similar to that of The Golden Dawn is *The Devil Rides Out*. Differing from the liberal and sceptical approach taken by *Häxan*, this film "believes" in magic and witchcraft, and it does so in a very specific and polarised way. There are two types of magic here: the satanic black magic of the witches, and white Christian-based magic. If we follow the intended reading of the film, it supports the idea that Christianity is a living and powerful force that can smite those who break its laws. However, the film carries something further, which speaks of a hiatus in the spiritual path of the British nation. Dennis Wheatley is

perhaps the most well-known popular occult writer before Stephen King, and his novels were bestsellers in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. It is on his novel of the same name (1935) that the film is based. His stories are full of muscular Christian heroes who do battle with the dark forces (which are often aligned to sexual perversion and Communism, as in *The Irish Witch* [1973] and *The Satanist* [1960]). As such, Wheatley is perhaps the most conservative of occult novelists, and he has a very poor reputation amongst magical practitioners and interested parties for "misrepresenting" witchcraft. Christopher Lee was instrumental in getting Hammer to consider turning the novel into a film. As reward for his efforts in helping to securing the rights for Wheatley's work, Lee, best-known for playing Dracula, was for once allowed to play on the side of Christian good, as Duc de Richleau.⁵⁰ Lee also invested time into researching magical rites and rituals, aiming to lend the film a more authentic and scholarly air. This approach was expressly designed to help it evade censorship for blasphemy.⁵¹ The film uses a variety of magical traditions drawn mainly from Éliphas Lévi, Aleister Crowley and The Golden Dawn. The magic used by black magician Mocata (Charles Gray) is mainly grounded in sources acquired from Lévi and Crowley. By contrast, the magic used by de Richleau is gleaned mainly from The Golden Dawn and signifies "white" magic. (The emphasis on white magic is also strengthened by using rituals that involve largely Christian symbolism.) These types of magic are put to use in three key rituals in *The Devil Rides Out*: the initiation ceremony to be held on May Eve (Beltane); the rite that holds Mocata's evil at bay; and the ritual killing of the child designed to swap the soul of a child for that of a dead woman.

The initiation ceremony, or "satanic baptism" as de Richleau terms it, is set in a woodland grove in the heart of the English countryside. Mocata's coven of thirteen is present, together with a large group of other celebrants dressed in ritual robes. Mocata opens the rite with an invocation of various deities (two of which are commonly used in Golden Dawn rituals, and another, Babalon, is specific to Crowley's brand of magick). The assembled celebrants echo the god names and a goat is sacrificed, its blood instigating initiates into a drunken orgiastic dance accompanied by increasingly frenzied music. The aim of the ritual is to bring about the materialisation of a Pan-like entity named Baphomet. This very specific choice of magical entity warrants some discussion, as it leads to some interesting subtextual pathways in which witchcraft is linked to sexual perversion and immorality, and it further substantiates the argument that the primal father is a key figure in the cinema of the occult (as outlined in Chapter 2).

Baphomet was the name of the god that the Knights Templars were alleged to have worshipped. The Knights Templars were persecuted and burned as heretics in the early 14th century. They were accused of using magic, being homosexual, and kissing Baphomet's rectum.⁵² Lévi published his drawing of Baphomet, based on the Templars' confessions,

in *Dogma and Ritual of High Magic*, and it is this image that appears in opening credits of the film. For Lévi, Baphomet was an allegorical figure who symbolised alchemical and metaphysical secrets. With the head of a horned goat, and the torso of a woman covered in scales, cloven feet and wings, Baphomet points skywards with his "female" arm and downwards with his "male" arm; erect in his lap is a phallic shape entwined by two serpents. Baphomet's bipolar symbolism embodies the alchemical principle of "as above, so below". The idea that polar opposites are in fact part of the same organic system is in distinct contrast to the very clear lines of division between polarities, such as good/evil and white/black magic, that underpin the moral logic of the film. As Baphomet is the "enemy", an inference can be made that it is the blurring of oppositions that de Richleau, the film's Christian moral guardian, fears. Baphomet's androgyny gives a clue to his nature: he is an emblem of masculine, phallic, polymorphous perversity. (This may seem rather an odd idea, but the logic of this will become evident.) Phallic symbolism appears throughout the film: in the use of sacrificial knives and the serpents that guard Mocata's gateway, and in the drawings that underlie the film's opening credits. Because they can be rather easily missed on a single viewing, it is necessary to explain how they are present. The first is in Lévi's engraving of Baphomet. The full engraving is not at first shown, and only Baphomet's head and shoulders are in frame. After a few moments, the camera tracks out to reveal the complete figure and then in again, stopping on Baphomet's lap, and placing the phallic symbol (entwined with snakes) at the centre of the screen. The same technique is used to show an engraving, also Lévi's work, of an alchemical bull standing like a man in the centre of the frame, providing a further phallic symbol. These allegorical forms sum up the particular fear that lies at the heart of the film: that the unconstrained primal and polymorphic perverse energy of the phallus will proceed to wreak havoc on the conventional and Christian-based order. It threatens family values and the "correct" channelling of sexual desire into heterosexual monogamy. Baphomet and his servitor Mocata are therefore dangerous subversives who are intent on not only undermining society, but also perverting the young into rejecting the heterosexual order. At the rite of initiation it is Simon (Patrick Mower), an impressionable Jewish youth who is so easily hypnotised by Mocata, who is brought forward to Baphomet – presumably to perform the "obscene" kiss. In the nick of time, he is rescued from this fate. Viewers are spared visual conformation of the act by the redemptive headlights of de Richleau's car and the crucifix thrown by Rex (Leon Greene), de Richleau's sceptical, brawny and clearly heterosexual sidekick.

The central presence of Baphomet is also connected with a key figure in the British magical tradition: Aleister Crowley. He was adopted several years after his death, in 1947, as an anti-heroic icon by 1960s counter-culture. It is Crowley's "demonic" reputation and the satanic cultural capital that make him an attractive villainous figure for horror

filmmakers and writers. The figure of Mocata is in keeping with the tabloid representation of Crowley as the "wickedest man in the world" who, they said, seduced impressionable young people into his immoral, bisexual, magickal practices. In both the novel and the film, Mocata/Crowley is seen solely through the frame of black magic. Wheatley was, it seems, fascinated and horrified by the figure of Crowley, and based several of his fictional black magicians on him (for example, Cannon Copley-Syle in *To the Devil a Daughter* [1953]): "before writing my first book with a black magic background – *The Devil Rides Out* – I decided to learn all I could from the best-known occultists in London at that time, 1935. Among several introductions I secured was one to Crowley from a friend of mine."⁵³ Mocata is therefore a composite Crowley figure, gleaned from various sources such as the tabloid representation of Crowley and, ironically, from Crowley's own novel *Moonchild* (written in 1917 and published in 1929), in which he wrote himself into the part of suave and duplicitous Cyril Gray. Like Mocata, Gray uses hypnotism to help him seduce one of the women in the story. Mocata is also charming, and exhibits this skill at several points during the film. He uses entranced people to act for him. It is thereby implied that Mocata is both a subversive and a coward, mirroring the fact that Crowley was condemned by the popular press for opting out of active combat in the First World War by absenting himself to the United States. The connection between Mocata and Crowley is made fully explicit in a conversation with Peggy's hypnotised mother. Mocata defines magic very much along the same lines as Crowley: "Magic is the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will".⁵⁴ Mocata's version is "magic is not good or evil, it is merely a science of causing change to occur in according to one's will". Mocata's magic is then easily identified as "Thelemic Magick" (the term Crowley used to describe his own particular system of magic) because it is will-based. The link is further strengthened as Crowley took the magical name "Baphomet", alongside many others such as "The Great Beast 666", on being initiated into the German Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO) in 1912. This society claimed lineage from the medieval Knights Templars, following the conspiratorial idea that the Knights Templars were legacy-holders of an ancient mystery religion tradition, and were alleged to have worshipped a composite deity named Baphomet who provided their great wealth.⁵⁵ The Knights Templars were an austere and disciplined group of fighting monks who led the Crusades into the Holy Land. They took vows of chastity and fought to the death in the belief that they had the true god on their side. After 300 years of power and wealth, King Philip of Spain and the incumbent Pope conspired to bring about their downfall. Accused of heresy, they were said to worship Baphomet and practise black magic and sodomy. (They often used the image of two Knights riding on one horse.) Through Baphomet's connection with Crowley and the Knights Templars, the film conjures up a host of associations with black magic and homosexuality, both seen by orthodox Christianity as "inverted" forms of

the natural order.

Even without this type of specialised knowledge, it is nevertheless likely that Baphomet will be seen as Pan, the Greek god of sensuality, or the Christian Devil – both of whom are "horned gods". Murray claims that it was a horned god who was worshipped by early pagans as the god of the witches.⁵⁶ She supports her view by citing Palaeolithic cave drawing figures of men dressed in skins, wearing the antlers of a deer, and sporting erections. Horned figures are found in subsequent incarnations, and the Greek god Pan can be seen as a later version of the earlier depictions. Baphomet's horns, goat face and feet echo those of Pan and satyrs, who symbolised earthly pleasures. With Baphomet's connections to Pan, the horned gods of old, and Satan, he is a fitting god to preside over the bacchanalian Sabat. When Baphomet appears, de Richleau cries, "The Goat of Mendes: the Devil himself". There is therefore an explicit conflation at work between paganism and Satanism. As such, the film follows in the path of fundamentalist medieval and tabloid moral crusaders and evangelists.

After rescuing Simon and Tanith (Niké Arrighi) from being baptised into the cult, de Richleau conducts a rite to protect Simon from Mocata's magical assaults. A circle is drawn and inscribed with the holy names of God from the Bible and the Talmud. The accompanying rites use elements from the formulaic ritual magic of The Golden Dawn. This "good" protective magic that evokes Christian archangels helps them to fend off Mocata's magic. After failing to break the circle that protects Simon, de Richleau, his niece and her husband, Mocata sends in the Angel of Death to collect Simon's soul. Even this fearsome power cannot break through the barrier, and it is forced to take the soul of Tanith who is hidden in a nearby barn. Rex returns in the light of dawn with the dead Tanith limp in his arms, and they discover that de Richleau's great-niece Peggy has been abducted. To find out where she has been taken, de Richleau conducts another ritual to manifest Tanith's spirit. This is based on a Golden Dawn ritual (using gestures of the slain and risen Osiris – the Egyptian "dying" god – and a Babylonian incantation to resurrect Tanith's soul). The use of this ritual suggests that de Richleau is not averse to using interventionist magic if it is for a "good cause", and not, as Mocata does, for personal power (a difference that tends to crumble under scrutiny).

The rite of sacrifice is in full swing when de Richleau and the others arrive to rescue Peggy from the altar. It begins with Mocata's invocation of the dark forces: "Almighty Set, King of Death" and "the Bride of Chaos, the Rider on the Beast". The latter is a direct reference to Crowley – borrowing from the Revelation, he called himself "The Beast". The Beast's sexual partner is the scarlet woman Babalon (the rider on the Beast): she carries "a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication".⁵⁷ Crowley used the sexual ecstasy of his scarlet women to contact magical/extraterrestrial currents. Mocata's plan to kill the child and replace her soul with that of Tanith who would be his

"seer" (or his "scarlet woman") is thwarted when Tanith speaks through Peggy's mother, prompting Peggy to recite the "Zuzama" ritual, which has the power to bend time and space. The temple is blasted with a lightning bolt, as the Old Testament God blasted Sodom, and Mocata dies in an inferno of flames. A cross is uncovered behind the walls of the satanic temple and the Christian order is restored. Mocata's death has satiated the Angel of Death, and Tanith is brought back to life as de Richleau intones, echoing another Old Testament cliché, "a life for a life". It is only through Mocata's death that the "proper" heterosexual order is restored, and, retrieved from death, Tanith is placed directly into the waiting arms of her suitor Rex. *The Devil Rides Out* is a struggle between the archetypal good and bad fathers. As Peter Hutchings has said, Simon and Tanith, as representatives of the younger generation, "are caught between two father figures".⁵⁸ This interpretation is valid but somewhat limited. It has to be remembered that Baphomet presides over the proceedings, hinting at the "phallic" nature of the struggle at work in the film. Mocata and de Richleau battle for the body and soul of Simon. Baphomet has, as his symbolism suggests, "double power" which can be interpreted as a form of phallic bisexuality. Mocata aims to initiate both Simon (male) and Tanith (female) into his order. Crowley used both men and women in his sex-magick rites; he often called his male partners his "magical sons". Underlying the battle between good and evil, therefore, is the spectre of the "unspeakable" act of sodomy, the "crime" allegedly perpetrated by the Knights Templars. Sodomy also provides the basis for the OTO's XI degree secret rite (devised by Crowley). The film thereby implicitly invokes the fear of the primal father who not only covets all the women, but also threatens to castrate and sodomise his "sons". As a "good" father, de Richleau must rescue Simon from Mocata's corrupting influence – ultimately to rescue him from being sodomised by the bad, primal father. Baphomet is used, therefore, as a means of emblematising Crowleyian magic as perverse and satanic.

Mocata's attempt to sacrifice the child Peggy is markedly unlike the sacrifice of the "Christian Copper" in *The Wicker Man*. The sacrifice of Peggy is not made to ensure a fruitful harvest, but to serve Mocata's will. As such, Wheatley's rather simplistic interpretation of Crowley's magickal system is painted very negatively as black magic; something with which Crowley would not have agreed, as the "Thelemic" will is not directly synonymous with the ego-bound will. Crowley was not averse to a mythos of defamation shrouding his name, and, at times, he deliberately fostered a demonic image. Explaining the reasons for his strategy of making himself seem the Devil incarnate, Crowley wrote in a letter in the early 1920s: "In Egypt they took the candidate in search of spirituality, purity, etc., to a goat and then said 'This is our God and you have to kiss its arse'. On his preparing to comply, he found the face of a young priestess awaiting his kiss".⁵⁹ Kenneth Grant, who knew Crowley and now heads the British OTO, glossing on the letter, says:

Crowley fostered the legends that grew around his name. First a mist, then a fog of vilification, calumny and spite, enveloped him. To anyone familiar with the ways of genius, particularly in occult and religious spheres, the veil of illusion which produced the mirage of 'the demon Crowley' could and did have a single aim: that of weeding out the magically competent from the inept.⁶⁰

The Devil Rides Out uses the distinction between The Golden Dawn's magical systems and Crowley's more pagan and elemental-based magick expediently, but incorrectly, to distinguish between black and white magic. It does so by aligning Mocata to the bad primal father (the Devil) and de Richleau to the good father (God). The conflict of wills is conducted over the bodies of women and "impressionable", spiritually lost boys. Wheatley and Hammer (alongside other writers and filmmakers) exploited and deepened the demon Crowley myth, by making Mocata the embodiment of the bad primal father. Demon Crowley/Mocata, corrupter of the innocent, can therefore only be "dealt" with through the evocation of Old Testament style-justice – a life for a life – as a means of rigorously disposing of the seductive, suavely evil, primal father and his ability to contaminate fixed orthodox values. Mocata, as the avatar of pagan phallic rites in both Sabat and sacrifice, and stirrer of intergenerational discord, accords with a distinctive type that appears in many of Hammer's horror films, such as the Dracula films *The Plague of the Zombies* (John Gilling, 1966, UK), *Witchcraft* (Don Sharp, 1964, UK), *To the Devil a Daughter* (1976) and, in particular, *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (1970), with its decadent fathers.

The three rituals of *The Devil Rides Out* map the moral approach of the film to the supernatural and to magic. It would seem that the film contains a warning not to dabble in such matters, despite the charismatic pull of cult leaders. This admonition might have resonated more powerfully in the year of release because of the Manson murders. But probably, like many other fans of occult fiction, it is not the closure of the film that I find pleasurable. Instead, it is the laughable naïveté of its take on magical matters which appeals, together with the way in which black magic is figured as a threat to conventional ideas of gender and sexual morality. As with *Häxan*, it is the torchlit Sabat that lingers in the mind: evoking an ideal licentiousness following a long tradition of bacchanalian rites, and promising a liberating, if temporary, opportunity to divest oneself of the constraining boundaries of identity. This is a pleasure, albeit perhaps imaginary, that no amount of Christian moralising or rational discourse can quite manage to dispel.

Sacrifice II – divine victims: *The Eye of the Devil*, *The Wicker Man* and *Medea*

Central to Frazer's *The Golden Bough* is what he calls the "divine victim" or "dying king". This idea has a strong presence in cinema, notably in *Excalibur*, *Conan the Barbarian* (John Milius, 1982, USA), *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982, USA), *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979, USA) and *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, 1999, USA). In an extended review of *The Thin Red Line*, Colin MacCabe states that Malick's preoccupation with myth eschews history.⁶¹ This is a fairly traditional line of argument in that myth, and particularly the notion of a universal myth, is seen as essentialist and opposed to history and cultural differences. My interest lies in why myth and Frazer's idea of the divine victim have had, and continue to have, such a powerful pull for filmmakers. The concept of mythic continuities also has a positive function, acting as a means of criticising individualism and showing that narratives that pre-exist the individual have a crucial shaping effect on identity. Such continuities might also work to disrupt loaded hegemonic distinctions between civilisation and the primitive. To explore this in relation to the cinema of the occult, three films will be discussed. *The Eye of the Devil* and *The Wicker Man* are both set in the time contemporary with their production, and fall within the generic framework of horror. *Medea*, by contrast, is set in the ancient past and is based on a Greek myth turned into a play by Euripides (431 BC). These films are heavily influenced by the work of Frazer and his followers (particularly Murray and Robert Graves). Their ideas were popular in the late-1960s and early 1970s with the intellectuals of the mystically-inclined drug-based counter-culture. Interest in the myths of ancient and other cultures yielded a means of finding alternative ways of understanding human consciousness and its connection with broader cycles. A further significant factor is that, during this period, cinema institutions in both Europe and Hollywood were embracing the idea of the "auteur" (which tended to go hand-in-hand with a more "art"-based cinema).⁶² In the pursuit of a youth and art market, these institutions funded young filmmakers with counter-cultural credentials and an interest in myth and the Greek epic form (Coppola, Lucas, Boorman, Herzog). State funding was available to new filmmakers in Europe, and *Medea* was partly financed in this way. As a result of such industrial and cultural factors, Frazerian-based ideas began to trickle down into the art end of popular film, as well as the horror film. *The Eye of the Devil* is set mainly in a French country village, Bellenac, in which the inhabitants adhere to ancient pagan practices. The film follows Frazer's view that many rites and myths from diverse "primitive" cultures hinge around the idea that the king's body is intrinsically related to the fertility of the land. In myths such as those of Osiris, Attis and Adonis, Frazer sees the traces of an antique practice of killing the king to restore the fecundity of nature. He claims that this originated in rituals designed to ensure the success of the hunt.

In later agrarian cultural economies, the same principle was applied to the success of the harvest. Bellenac's economy is based on wine-making and the grape crop is blighted through lack of rain. This prompts the villagers to call for the return of the Marquis from Paris who must be sacrificed if the crop is to be saved.⁶³ For Frazer, the myth of the dying god is based on the priest/king's (who represents a god) power and prowess. If this strength is somehow impaired, he must be killed: "The man-god must be killed as soon as he shows symptoms that his powers are beginning to fail, and his soul must be transferred to a vigorous successor before it has been seriously impaired by the threatened decay".⁶⁴

The Marquis Phillippe Montfaucon (David Niven) lives what at first appears to be a blessed life, living sumptuously with his wife Catherine (Deborah Kerr) and two small children. But this has a price. The prosperity of his estates depends upon his willingness to become a blood sacrifice himself, in the event that the harvest fails. He is at the behest of an age-old, pagan-style tradition that informs the medieval-style relation between feudal lord and his subjects. Despite the efforts of his wife to save him, Phillippe is ritually killed by a select coterie of villagers, and his son takes up the Montfaucon legacy. Phillippe's melancholic demeanour lends him something of a tragic air (well-suited to Niven's acting style), and he knows that his fate is written and there is no means of escaping it. He leaves Paris without his wife and children to return to Bellenac alone to face his sacrificial death. Because Niven's star persona is that of a gentle and kind man, the film has to work hard gradually to build into Phillippe a sense of otherness. This is achieved partly through his relationship with the castle. We learn that Phillippe has always had a strange and powerful fascination with the castle at Bellenac. It is also accomplished through the frequent use of an off-centre frame when he is alone in a shot. Like Catherine, viewers are intended, given Niven's usual film roles, to find his behaviour inexplicable and out of character. This provides the film's central enigma, and the viewer follows Catherine's investigation of the causes of his behaviour. She must find the root cause of his suffering if he is to be reclaimed from the strange world of Bellenac to resume cosy family life.

That Catherine fails to save Phillippe from his fate is due only to his unwillingness to be rescued. Both are caught in a web of invisible forces that prove more powerful than their love for one another; Phillippe chooses to become the "divine victim". In a carefully lit shot located in the castle chapel, he is bathed in a halo of light, indicating that he is resolved to his fate, lending him the air of a holy martyr. (The use of tilted angles and the emphasis on eyes through lighting resemble the way in which Joan is shot in *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* [*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, Carl-Theodor Dreyer, 1928, France].) In some respects, the film follows Frazer's logic of seeing the death of Christ as simply a reflection of the practice of sacrifice in older religions.⁶⁵ Herein lies an interesting ambiguity in the film, foreshadowing that of *The Wicker Man*. By linking

Phillipe's death to that of Christ, whose death will save the village from ruin, the film constructs a dual economy. If the film is read through Frazer's anthropologically-bounded notion of the "divine victim", the practice of human sacrifice is not simply satanic, but uses the very same principle upon which Christianity is based. Conversely, if one takes a "Christian" reading, the killing of Phillipe is "satanic", since it does not recognise the Christian tenet that Christ's death was the supreme redemptive sacrifice. But, because the death of Phillipe is approached in terms of the impact on his family, with no direct recourse to Christianity, it is the former reading that seems to stand more strongly. It is, in part, the sense of tragic inevitability that pervades the film and Phillipe's acquiescence to his fate that lift it from the simple battle between good and bad magic, a formula that frequently appears in many occult horror films.

The most obvious horror convention is the danger Catherine puts herself in if she is to rescue Phillipe; more subtly, the film plays on the horror of inevitability and predestination. This reflects a very 1960s counter-cultural suspicion of conformity and the blind pursuit of entrenched family tradition. In conjunction with Vietnam, Behaviourism and the shadow of the Bomb, these factors contributed to the stimulation of a pervasive horror of predetermination. While buying into a counter-cultural fear of conformity, leading to an unnecessary sacrifice of a human life, the film also takes a more conservative line by linking conformity to the effect of drugs, which the "moral majority" were increasingly blaming for the ills of Western culture. These fears of conformity are evident in several of the film's key figures. Each plays a preordained role in an eerie somnambulistic mode against a setting heavily laden with ancient tradition and history.

With its thick Gothic stonewalls and high parapets looking out over expansive views of the surrounding countryside, the castle seems to dwarf the inhabitants, making their fates seem simply part of the castle's long-term history. Within its walls, Catherine is clearly an unwanted intruder who threatens to contaminate the integrity of age-old pagan practices. Before she and her children enter the castle, a young man (David Hemmings) watches them, before using his bow and arrow to shoot a white dove that falls at her feet. The image of the dead dove appeared previously in the opening montage, creating a disquieting sense of *déjà vu* and contributing to the sense of preordination. Later that day, Catherine stumbles across a group of hooded figures deep in the castle and, in the gloom and beneath the masked faces, thinks she sees Phillipe. A young woman, Odile (Sharon Tate), ceremoniously carries the dead white dove, reminding us of an image drawn by Phillipe at the start of the film and again reinforcing the sense of preordained fate. Recoiling in horror at the scene, Catherine is warned by a man who looms out of the shadows to leave the castle. The following day, the children are out playing in the grounds of the castle. Odile appears and asks Jacques, the

boy, if he believes in magic. Dressed in black, with blonde hair and hooded eyes, she is the counterpart of her bow-and-arrow-carrying brother Christiane. The connection between the characters is reinforced as she turns a toad into a dove – he kills the dove and she resurrects it – an idea that foreshadows the pagan cycle of sacrifice that informs the logic of the killing of Phillipe. Odile also correctly predicts the weather, marking her as a witch. The potential threat to Catherine's life is also indicated in this scene: during the children's encounter with Odile, Christiane appears and, as Catherine ushers the children away from Odile, aims his bow and arrow at her back. She turns and Christiane continues to fix his aim on her. Shocked, she returns to the castle and complains to Phillipe that the two must be kept away as "they are devils". He gently responds that they "are strange but harmless", indicating that his wife's comfort is not his priority. Later, Odile attempts to hypnotise Catherine into stepping off a high parapet, further indicating that the forces that govern the activities of the pagan inner circle are hostile to her.

Another key figure in the castle is the priest (Donald Pleasence). He has the same glazed expression and languid voice as Odile and Christiane, but, because he is a priest, Catherine is not directly suspicious of him. However, the viewer is party to the fact that the priest is a key member of the cult. This information is imparted because he sonorously greets Phillipe on his return, saying that he felt sure that Phillipe would choose to come back, emphasising the general sense that Phillipe's fate is predetermined. The castle has many mysteries and, at every turn, Catherine meets hostility from her loving husband and the members of the cult. The Montfaucon family portraits surround her, exacerbating her sense that she is a stranger with no place in the castle. The portraits also signify the weight of Phillipe's family history, but they also provide Catherine with a clue to understanding the cause of Phillipe and the others' strange behaviour. In the background of one portrait, twelve hooded figures encircle a central thirteenth man who is blindfolded and does not wear robes. The meaning of this image is linked to the fact, as Catherine discovers, that all Phillipe's direct male ancestors have died violent deaths. The painting confirms her suspicion that Phillipe's life is in danger. The image of the thirteen figures is repeated on the grave of Phillipe's grandfather. It is housed in a classically designed crypt in the forest, and provides an oblique reference to Frazer's temple of Diana in a grove at Nemi. (*The Golden Bough* came about because Frazer wanted to know why each priest of Diana at Nemi was killed by his successor.) A cryptic epitaph on the grave reads: "I would be saved and I would save. The twelve dance on high. Who so danceth not knoweth not what cometh to pass." The image of the thirteen is also a common reference in Murray's work,⁶⁶ and witch covens traditionally have thirteen members. In a similar vein to Murray's paganism as witch cult theory, the film conflates witchcraft with paganism.

A further link to Murray's work is made through the form of

Phillipe's sacrifice. In *The God of the Witches*, Murray maintains that an English King, William Rufus, was a "professed Pagan".⁶⁷ Rufus died in mysterious circumstances, shot through the eye with an arrow belonging to one of his close kinsmen, Walter Tyrell, whilst hunting in the New Forest at Lammas-tide in 1100. Murray states that:

The body, according to the ecclesiastical account, was found by a charcoal burner. It was placed on a rough cart, covered with a poor ragged cloak and conveyed for burial at Winchester. William of Malmesbury makes a great point of the blood dripping to the earth during the whole journey; though this is an actual impossibility the record is consistent with the belief that the blood of the Divine Victim must fall on the ground to fertilize it.⁶⁸

The Marquis is despatched in a similar way: he rides into the forest with Christiane, the priest, Odile and a group of robed and hooded horsemen. There, in a wooded hollow, he is shot by the archer Christiane, and his body is brought back to the castle through the fields on horseback.

Although refraining from portraying the pagans as Satanists or sexually "perverse", the film nevertheless invokes a number of "modern devils". These are related to the fear of conformity and conspiracy. This is achieved by forging a link between drugs and witchcraft/paganism (both of which provided the grounds for moral panic). Once Catherine discovers the secret that her husband will be sacrificed to regenerate the harvest, she is desperate to help him. After being chased by a robed figure in the forest and blacking out, she awakens in her bedroom. Phillipe is there and gives her a drink, supposedly prescribed the doctor. As the drug takes hold, she loses her senses; on coming round, a doctor is present. He tells her that she has been fed a witch's potion made from belladonna. He discourses at length on its nature and a clue is given about the importance of the brew:

Our friends who practise witchcraft call by it other names...it can induce sleep as in your case and occasionally is used to promote states of trance... visionaries and religious seekers have been using it since the Middle Ages...Supposedly it induces states of religious ecstasy...a spiritual purgative one might call it... the user is cleansed, prepared...[for] some glorious pilgrimage to the Sabat, I suppose...

This extended speech helps to pacify Catherine, and also provides an oblique means of explaining the behaviour of key members of the pagan inner circle. Christiane, Odile, the priest and Phillipe act as if in a dream, their speech is often hypnotically slow, and their movements tend to be

languid. Christiane, for example, leans against a pillar in the courtyard holding his bow, and, due to the depth of his trance, it is only on being prompted that he moves. These are characters moving to the rhythm of an invisible force unseen by Catherine and the viewer. This force is never named and, as such, is not simply categorised as demonic in the Christian sense. Catherine uses the term "devil", mentioned in the film's title, only once, and in a very general sense. The pervading strength of this force is, however, greater than the lives of individuals and its inexorable pull is apparent on Phillipe's son as he kisses the "eye" (a stone set in a pendant) proffered by the priest at the end of the film.

This sense of languid trance is also reflected in the opening scene, in which the sounds of the train and the station noises appear as if underwater. Filmed as a montage, the scene is disorientating as it breaks the rules of Hollywood exposition, flashing forward in a discontinuous manner to later events (also supporting the sense of inexorable fate). The montage technique is later repeated in Catherine's belladonna trance, in which certain "facts", already known to the audience, are revealed to her. The emphasis placed on the belladonna leads to the idea, never openly stated in the film, that the members of the inner circle are also under the effect of such a drug. This would explain the lethargic movements and speech of Odile, Christian, Phillipe and the priest, and accords with the doctor's statement that the drug was used for spiritual purposes. It also provides the logic for the non-linear sequences in the film, as well as the frequent use of unorthodox framing of key figures, and it throws light on Phillipe's insularity which Catherine is unable to penetrate. The use of "flying ointment" as a means of instigating a witch's flight to the Sabat is present in *Häxan*. Thus, a correlation between paganism and witchcraft is made. Frazer links intoxication to the sacrifice of Adonis: "There may therefore be a measure of truth in the theory of Renan, who saw in the Adonis worship a dreamy voluptuous cult of death, conceived not as the King of Terrors, but as an insidious enchanter who lures his victims to himself and lulls them into an eternal sleep".⁶⁹ He also associates intoxication with Dionysos who, like Adonis, is another deity of vegetation. Dionysos is god of the vine, and it this crop that is failing in the village of Bellenac. Another subtle association is thereby made to the bacchanalian rites which entailed intoxication and violent human sacrifice. The shamanistic uses of drugs are given regenerated meaning in late-1960s hippy festival culture. They acquired a more sinister meaning after the charm of peace and love was broken by the infamous killing of a festival-goer by Hell's Angels at a Rolling Stones concert, and the Manson murders in 1969. (The latter has a special retrospective link to *The Eye of the Devil* as it was the pregnant Sharon Tate, who played Odile, who was among those killed by the Manson family.) In *The Eye of the Devil*, drugs are what incapacitate the will to act against the forces of predetermination – the legacy of which dooms Phillipe's son to the cycle of sacrifice.

The Eye of the Devil foreshadows several subsequent horror films such as *The Wicker Man* and *Rosemary's Baby* (directed by Roman Polański who was married to Sharon Tate and, it may be assumed, knew of the film). *The Eye of the Devil* and *Rosemary's Baby* share the notion of a husband being involved in a witch cult. A key difference lies in the fact that *The Eye of the Devil* leans more heavily on textbook Frazer and Murray as sources. These references are used in the main to ground Bellenac's paganism in an authentic historical tradition – albeit one clouded by fantasy and speculation. Much of the strength of the film derives from this. This historical tradition is used as the implicit justification for the unquestioned playing out of the mythic roles in the cult and by the inhabitants of Bellenac, lending the film an air of Greek Tragedy married with a passion-play. Both are linked through the notion of predestination and carry the weight of mythic sacrifice. The representation of paganism as a mystery religion in *The Eye of the Devil* can further be read as a means of readdressing Christianity within a popular cultural context. The film reflects an upheaval in the meaning of Christianity, expressed, in this case, as the persistence of the old religious practices as outlined by Frazer, which speaks to the burgeoning cultural interest in alternative religions. What is seen here is Frazer's tentative idea that Christianity is simply an inheritor of earlier rites of transubstantiation and sacrificial practices (which Christianity has subsequently labelled as barbarous and "satanic"). This is an idea made more explicit in *The Wicker Man*.

The Wicker Man and *The Eye of the Devil* are both based on the ancient premise that human sacrifice is necessary for the rejuvenation of the land. The modes of their sacrifices – the former takes place in a wicker cage and the latter by an arrow – are indebted to Frazer's *The Golden Bough*:

When the time came the victims were sacrificed by the Druids or priests. Some they shot down with arrows, some they impaled, and some they burned alive in the following manner. Colossal images of wicker-work or of wood and grass were constructed; these were filled with live men, cattle, and animals of other kinds; fire was then applied to the images, and they were burned with their living contents.⁷⁰

There is, however, a significant difference between the two figures that are sacrificed. In *The Eye of the Devil*, it is the "Lord of the Manor", as the living representative of the god of vegetation, who becomes the divine victim, whereas in *The Wicker Man* it is the "Christian Copper" who is sacrificed to the nature gods. It is evident at the film's end that Sergeant Howie is a substitute for the killing of the king (who should by rights be Lord Summerisle). For Frazer, the substitution of a mock king as sacrifice

was a development of the older literal death of the king, and he traces this through a series of folk cultural practices which included the burning of effigies.⁷¹ That it is a Christian that is sacrificed in *The Wicker Man* has some interesting connotations, illustrating the growing prevalence of seeing Christianity in an anthropological context, and reflecting a general shift in the cultural regard of Christianity. When Howie is burned in the wicker man, Lord Summerisle tells him that he has the privilege of suffering a Christian martyr's death. Frazer tells of the 4th-century Christian saint Dasius, who was elected by lot to be the "ludicrous but tragic" mock king, and expected to cut his own throat at the end of the 30-day Saturnalia. On refusing this privilege, he was beheaded.⁷² As with the mock king of Roman Saturnalia, the villagers unremittably ridicule Howie. They answer his questions about the alleged disappearance of Rowan with jokes and absurdities, which try his patience and goad him into a taking the high moral ground. (He tells one woman: "You are all mad".) Without realising the implications of his action, and driven by moral outrage, Howie is fatefully moved to steal the fool's garb, ostensibly in order to become part of the carnival procession.⁷³ He is, therefore, in Frazerian terms, playing the part of the traditional pagan scapegoat who carries the sins and ill fate of a community away through a sacrificial death.⁷⁴ The trope of the scapegoat had also been used earlier in the day when a group of small children transport a doll dressed in a death shroud, chanting "We carried Death out of the village".⁷⁵

As the scapegoat, Howie dies the sacrificial death meted out to his own god. Thus, the film appears to make a strong connection between the apparent barbarous practices of the pagans and the founding event of Christianity. Frazer writes:

A man, whom the fond imagination of his worshippers invested with the attributes of a god, gave his life for the life of the world; after infusing from his own body a fresh current of vital energy into the stagnant veins of nature, he was cut off from among the living before his failing strength should initiate a universal decay, and his place was taken by another who played, like all his predecessors, the ever-recurring drama of the divine resurrection and death.⁷⁶

Frazer argues that the reason why Christianity was so successful was that it took what was implicit and familiar to all "Asiatic" religions: the cycle of sacrifice and resurrection. Christianity needed to lean on other cults for its success. As such, it often became fused with pre-existing religious practices, as in Haitian vodoun and South American Santería, and by placing the dates of festivals on pre-Christian festivals. After becoming established, Christianity needed to wipe out the preceding practices with which it was connected. This was achieved by making the old gods into

the new devils, as Murray says. *The Wicker Man* can therefore be interpreted, against the grain of its intended meaning, as drawing back the veil of obfuscation that shrouds the "pagan" roots of Christianity.

While the film might be read as treating Christianity and paganism as equal, there are some significant differences. These create the dramatic tension of the film and, perhaps most importantly, communicate its moral basis. Howie not only represents Christian moral virtues, but also is a policeman, and therefore symbolises the rule of law. He is a modern-day version of a Crusading Knight, and this has, for him at least, romantic connotations. This is shown in the flashback which precedes the seduction scene. Shot in dreamy soft-focus, he is seen taking Communion in a brightly-lit church; he drinks from the Communion bowl, perhaps symbolising the Holy Grail of Arthur's Christian Knights. Thereby a subtle reminder is made that Communion is informed by the act of transubstantiation, in which the supplicant partakes of the body and blood of Christ (which derives from the act of eating portions of the dying god). As a Christian Knight, Howie is duty-bound to rescue fair maidens from heathen practices and uphold the dominion of God in the land of the infidel. The Lord of Misrule faces him, however, and all his attempts to restore order are thwarted. The noble Christian Knight becomes the carnival fool, Punch. He has a hooked nose and hunchback. (He is, after all, to carry the sins and ill fate of the village on his back to his grave.) In the topsy-turvy carnival, the representative of law and moral virtue is an apt figure for ridicule and ultimately sacrifice.

Although Howie provides the figure that leads us into mystery, he becomes an increasingly unsympathetic figure, mainly because of his anti-libertarian Christian fundamentalist values. The viewer is intended to side with the pagans until Howie's horrifying death exposes the spuriousness of this sympathy. The film therefore sides with the humanist values of Christianity, a factor that only emerges at the end of the film. However, the film sets up paganism so seductively that, for many viewers, the "shock" of the end does not work, and it fails in its intention to force a reassessment of complicity with the pagans. What also militates against the full effect of the shock ending is that Howie seems to be driven to the point of sacrifice not through compassion, but through a kind of masochistic, righteous and puritanical heroism. It is as if the justification of his morality can only be upheld by his sacrifice in the service of his twin gods (puritan morality and the Law). By contrast, Summerisle's paganism creates a direct physical link to sacrifice and resurrection, connecting the psyche and lives of the people to the landscape and cycle of nature, a link obscured and made metaphysical in Christianity. Appealing to the senses, often through a libertarian take on sexuality as simply an extension of the cyclical force of nature, Summerisle's paganism seems more vital and life-affirming than Howie's Christianity. This is writ large in Howie's disgust at the nudity and sexual couplings taking place outside, and his refusal of the innkeeper's daughter Willow.⁷⁷ Willow's

seduction is also clearly marked as witchcraft, and her alluring siren call tests Howie's Christian resolve, as if he were an Arthurian Knight besieged by temptation in the Castle Perilous. But the horror film audience is unlikely to identify with Howie's piety. Thus, the intended shock value of the ending cannot undermine the symbolic capital of killing a policeman for the 1970s counter-culture. The makers of *The Wicker Man* were therefore perhaps blind to the fact that paganism spoke to groups in British society who felt oppressed by both Christianity and the law. The film might not be read as it was intended, but it was meant to be an indictment of paganism, which is seen as making a mockery of basic humanist values (as is evident in Hardy's statements). This is not, however, the case with Pasolini's *Medea*, which makes a rather different use of Frazerian ideas of sacrifice.

Medea has all the accoutrements of high art, but, like the more populist British occult films, deploys a similar use of Frazer's idea of the "divine victim". *Medea* illustrates the point that Frazer's ideas had a significant impact on a range of filmmakers in the late-1960s and 1970s. Frazer's ideas about a fundamental primal violence that characterised early society seem to have struck a chord with "auteurist" filmmakers, such as Coppola and Pasolini, who were perhaps searching for a meaningful and profound subtext to help support their status as "artists". Coppola, for example, uses the notion of the murder of the divine victim as scapegoat in *Apocalypse Now*. He layers the film with references to Frazer's and Frazerian works, such as the killing of the sacred cow cross-cut with the murder of Colonel Kurtz, and *The Golden Bough* and Jessie L Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920; a work heavily indebted to Frazer) are present in Kurtz's jungle abode. Here, as elsewhere, myth is deployed as an expression of the extraneous forces that extend beyond the illusion of autonomy and rationality. Both Pasolini and Coppola are concerned with the ritualistic use of violence and its relation to the sacred, and they turned to Frazer as a means of linking the mythic, religious world of the ancient past to a deep stratum of the present-day psyche. As such, their work has something in common with *The Eye of the Devil* and *The Wicker Man*.

Pasolini's *Medea* opens with an expansive shot of a desert landscape, later identified as Colchis, which is diffused by the golden light of the sun in the centre of the screen, and accompanied by the bright sounds of a dulcimer. The dulcimer originated from Persia and is consonant with the location of Colchis.⁷⁸ It was used in Cammell's *Performance*, also made in 1969, where, as in *Medea*, it evokes a sense of exoticism for the Western ear. This adds to the sense that the landscape is more than simply scenery: it is laden with an overwhelming and sublime gravity in keeping with a pagan reverence for nature. It further accords with the mythopoetic context of Pasolini's style of filmmaking. The distinctive character of each landscape is used to set up a difference between Jason's childhood home, the city of Corinth ruled by Jason's

uncle, and the barbarian land of Colchis. Jason's homeland is surrounded by water, and is green and lush. Corinth is a city with a fortress palace made of stone blocks. Colchis is a desert landscape with conical-shaped mounds of sandstone, hollowed out into houses, and, unlike Corinth, is pastoral/agricultural-based community. To the Corinthians, Colchis is a land of barbarians who practise brutal religious rituals and revere their kings as gods. The Greeks often regarded "Asiatics" as uncivilised and archaic, as is evident in, for example, Herodotus' *Histories*.⁷⁹ This distinction is certainly used by the film, but is, to an extent, flattened out by Pasolini's poetic tendency to evade the hegemony of fixed one-to-one correspondences. In taking an anthropological approach to the subject-matter, which manifests itself as a kind of documentary montage of the lives of the people of Colchis, Pasolini also distances himself from the traditional interpretations of the story of the barbarian witch Medea. Despite his implied sympathy for Medea and her desires (at several times, Medea and the camera's gaze become one as she contemplates Jason's physical beauty), Pasolini is unable to cast off Medea's religious, ethnic and gender differences. These differences lend her an otherness that is intrinsic to the tale, and further provide its structure and dramatic tension. It is perhaps Medea's pagan barbarian ways, her sexual hunger for Jason, and the fact that she terminates the patrilinear line of both Jason and her own family that attracted Pasolini to the story. The film also articulates the increasing suspicions levelled at "grand narratives" (such as patriarchy, Christianity, colonialism and, in a cinematic context, Hollywood linear narrative) in European intellectual culture of the late-1960s. Pasolini uses the myth of witch-Medea to open up a kind of poetic-anthropological focus on taboo, myth and magic.

The film explores the construction of the primitive and its relation to sacrifice. This is conducted through the figure of Medea, but also through the figure of a centaur who is Jason's mentor. The centaur has two guises: a horse-man hybrid and, later, a man. The centaur, "too much of a poet and a liar", belongs to Jason's boyhood, and recounts the history of Jason's family to him and the audience. He also explains the nature of the primitive to Jason, stating that "in the ancient world, myths and rituals are living reality, part of man's everyday life". The centaur represents the world of ritual and magic lost to Jason (and presumably the audience), thereby providing an allegory of the shift from "pure" experience to symbolic speech and rationalism. The centaur also embodies Pasolini's own cinematic technique of placing emphasis on the non-verbal (image and music), rather than on the verbal. This was common in European art cinema of the late-1960s and 1970s, which often rejected the linear nature of Hollywood filmmaking. Pasolini uses the world of pagan myth to create an elliptical cinema of visual/sound poetry. This echoes through the film by virtue of its strategic use of *mise en abîme* (a term used to describe how portions of a text reflect in miniature its broader concept). By illustration, this strategy informs a scene after Jason has returned to Corinth

with the Golden Fleece and Medea. The two guises of his mentor appear to him: firstly, the centaur whom Jason embraces, and then the man, who tells Jason that he is no longer able to hear the language of his counterpart. The centaur spoke earlier to Jason as a boy of the gods that hide in all things and represent the experiential and pre-rational (which Pasolini depicts through landscapes and rituals). Jason is told that it is the presence of the centaur in his psyche that makes him love Medea. This reinforces the idea that she and the centaur represent the archaic. Medea therefore acts as the return of the repressed. More than this, she exacts her revenge on the patriarchal order which betrays her trust and to which she gave her allegiance by killing her brother and making the theft of the Golden Fleece possible. Aided by her god, her revenge on Jason and his uncle is to kill the woman whom Jason is to marry, along with her own children whom she loves. The act of infanticide is intended to hit the patriarchal order through its most sensitive point – patrilinearity – and is meant to cause deep and irrevocable anguish. This ties together a Frazerian and Bataille view of the function of sacrifice.

The scene that is most closely linked to Frazer's ancient world of the sacred is set in Colchis and involves an elaborate ritual of human sacrifice. A young man is taken to the place of sacrifice; his head and genitals are covered with corn stems with the ears dyed red. His expression of ecstasy transforms to horror as he is tied to a wooden cross. His neck is broken and his body hacked to pieces. The pieces are swiftly taken up by the assembled crowd and taken into the fields. They smear his blood on the crops and bury certain organs in the cornfield. Others eat portions of the body and drink his blood. The king, his wife and his two children (Medea and her brother) watch the ritual, and afterwards are spat at as a libation. These royal people are worshipped as gods, and are shown standing in a crypt, framed by windows so that they appear in the manner of religious icons. Following Frazer, the boy-victim acts as a substitute for the king in a rite in which the earth's bounty is renewed by the body of the god/king. The chopping of the victim into pieces is, as Frazer says, common to the myth of the dying god, and is evident in the Egyptian myth of Osiris who is chopped up and scattered by his brother Seth. In a later scene, Medea kills her brother with an axe and dismembers him so that her father has to retrieve the pieces, much in the same way as Isis did when she collected the pieces of Osiris. These references are perhaps intended to demonstrate the archetypal function of myth and the crossovers between different cultural mythic systems.

The horror of sacrifice is not used simply to demonise Medea and her tribe. It is specifically designed to pull the viewer into the dangerous space of the sacred. The sacred is meant to effect an annihilation of the self through its emphasis on the reality of death. Through such a definition of the sacred, the film also opens up a similar problem to *The Wicker Man* – that of seeing sacrifice as a life-affirming act. In creating this dangerous space, Pasolini marries Frazer's anthropology of sacrifice to Bataille's more

intimate philosophical and artistic engagement with sacrifice. Despite their different approaches, for both Frazer and Bataille the sacred is intrinsically linked to sacrifice. Bataille writes:

The victim dies and the spectators share in what his death reveals. This is what religious historians call the sacramental element. This sacramental element is the revelation of continuity through the death of a discontinuous being to those who watch it as a solemn rite. A violent death disrupts the creature's discontinuity: what remains, what the tense onlookers experience in the succeeding silence, is the continuity of all existence with which the victim is now one.⁸⁰

Although Pasolini uses aspects of Frazer's *The Golden Bough* as a source for the formulation of the sacrificial ritual, like Bataille he shifts it into the realm of art in an effort to conduct the impossible task of turning the distanced, representational quality of art into an experience akin to the sacred. The principle at work here is that of turning loss into gain, the principle which underlies the cycle of sacrifice and resurrection. In a radically redemptive mode, Pasolini's *Medea* uncovers the sacrificial ritual that lay beneath classical Greek Tragedy, creating mystical and holistic horror, and investing death with the vitality of life, and life with the vitality of death. This is an idea that *The Wicker Man* regards as heralding the death of morality and humanist values. In its rejection of fashionable anthropological relativism, the film accords with a medievalist dualistic view of paganism as demonic. *Medea*, by contrast, represents the paradoxical nature of sacrifice.

Conclusion: sacrifice and the "death" of morality

One of the main goals of this chapter has been to show how certain films lean on the discourses of witchcraft, magic and myth that emerged during the 19th-century magical revival. It is evident that these films implicitly betray the presence of a cultural struggle around the meaning of religious experience. As 19th-century science, mainly in the guise of Darwinism, had challenged religion as irrational, so the magical revival sought, symptomatically, to fill the ensuing spiritual gap. It looked to the past and to other cultures to recapture the magic and mystery of esoteric doctrines. One of the effects of this was to break down the Christian-based divide between religion and magic. The Golden Dawn used magic not as a means of supplication, but as a method of exploring aspects of personal consciousness. Within these terms, religious experience does not become an issue of faith and obedience, but is geared to personal preference and power. Frazer also contributed, unwittingly, to the uprooting of Christianity as the given religion by introducing the framework of comparative

religion. Christianity was, therefore, historicised and seen as a development of older traditions of myth and ritual. This process of relativising the sacred entailed, for some, a new freedom to re-envision the meaning of the sacred. For others, it meant that the very grounds for humanist ethics were pulled from beneath their feet. These divergent views are embedded in the films discussed above. Often they use the salacious lure of barbarous magic to attract audiences; however, because this presents ethical tensions, many of the films subsequently retreat from relativism into the moral absolutes of a Christian framework. In many of the films, witchcraft, paganism and magic might, in the first instance, offer plenitude and excitement, sufficient to bring in an audience. On examination of their ethics, however, the films quite simply render them in some way demonic (although *Medea* is an exception). For these films, heterogeneity and diversity offered by alternative religions and knowledges are dangerous, indeed evil, having the potential to undermine the basic values thought to unify and define "civilised" society.

The demonisation of witchcraft, magic and paganism hinges around human sacrifice, and is used to link the barbaric and the archaic in a bond of antihumanism. One of the implications of Frazer's work, which is also evident in Freud and made explicit by Bataille, is the notion that human sacrifice is somehow innate to society – in other words, it is hardwired into the psyche. This idea presents ethical problems, and further troubles the notion that the psyche is historically, and not innately, conditioned. In the case of *The Wicker Man*, there is strong evidence that the film regards the magical revival, represented by Lord Summerisle's Victorian grandfather and the reintroduction of rural pagan customs, as a return to barbarism via relativism. Viewers must make their own counter-reading of the film if the process of demonisation is to be turned into a means of critiquing the values of the status quo. The irony, of course, is that the film exploits the lust for vicarious violence to create the spectacle demanded by the horror genre. Thus, the ethical problem of sacrifice is knitted into *The Wicker Man*. The film reflected a growing interest in alternative religions and knowledges that was bubbling up from the mystically adventurous hippy counter-culture. Robin Hardy stated his view that paganism is dangerous because it was the preferred religion of the Nazis and it also represents a return to superstition and a feudal order.⁸¹ It is, nevertheless, the case that for some viewers, including myself, paganism has no such connotations. Instead, for many, paganism – following Crowley's resonant slogan "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law" – represents an attractive rejection of middle-class values. For this audience, paganism is also emblematic of an anarchic threat to the complacent Christian order, and evokes the possibility of touching the pulse of the earth, which has become buried beneath concrete and supermarkets. Rather than taking a short-term view of the planet's resources, modern paganism takes a larger time-frame within which the cycles of the seasons and life and death are viewed – rhythms

which have become subsumed in the close-focused daily rhythm of urban life. This might imply a conservative looking back, in which an individual human life is swallowed in a larger scheme. The process of retrospection, however, enables the present to be evaluated in a critical light with the goal of addressing the shape of the future. Witchcraft and paganism reopen the sacred way to the mystery religions and thereby recaptivate a sense of the continuity and wonder of life, missing in the sin-focused paradigm of Christianity. For *The Devil Rides Out*, *The Eye of the Devil*, *The Witches* and *The Wicker Man*, however, such things can only breed a subversive devaluation of humanity that reopens the path to barbaric blood sacrifice. Paganism and magic are therefore presented in a narrow, dualistic and medievalist way.

Despite their different investments in sacrifice, *The Wicker Man* and *Medea* share a similar dramatic pattern. They both promote sympathy for, respectively, the pagans and Medea, which is then called into question through the act of murder. Thereby they force a reassessment of our complicity, and ask the viewer to consider the morality of sacrifice. This aim, however, is not successfully achieved in *The Wicker Man*. This is due to the distinction between the intended meaning of the film and the alternative reading born of the counter-cultural investment in anarchy and the symbolic death of law. The latter reading accords more closely with Bataille's more positive reading of sacrifice as a means of turning death into life. The co-presence of these two opposing interpretations of the film reflects a struggle between the counter-culture and the purveyors of social order. *The Wicker Man* and *Medea* are intrinsically wrestling with the notion that sacred violence is inherent to the psyche, raising political and moral questions. *Medea* translates this in terms of the context of art – a place wherein sacrifice is sanctioned, given its symbolic nature – whereas *The Wicker Man* has a more didactic approach, and addresses sacrifice in the context of the question: where does one eventually draw a line between the acceptable and the unacceptable? Paganism and Christianity are not presented as "equal", nor simply regarded in terms of the relational approach to comparative religion (which is closer to what occurs in *The Eye of the Devil*). For *The Wicker Man*, the hokey rural customs are not just "harmless" practices, but led to "sacred" murder. *The Witches* goes some way towards this, but the film never really intends to force a moral conundrum on the audience. By contrast, *The Devil Rides Out* demands no such intervention on the part of the spectator – instead, it simply follows the ready-made Christian-based medieval distinction between good white magic and bad black magic. Through sacrifice, these films address some very fundamental questions about the nature of the sacred and its relation to the modern world. On the whole, what they reflect is a society searching for an experience of the sacred that is not anodyne or symbolic, but visceral, mysterious and connected to the knowledges and practices of the ancient past – in other words, an experience of radical otherness. It is through the very special context of cinema, and particularly

the horror film with its emphasis on spectacle and identification, that something of this sort can be approached. This is why the films must deploy a series of safety-valves with which to deal with the ethical difficulties implied by their conflation of the archaic and the sacred. What these films touch upon is the need to consolidate fundamental psychic, moral and social boundaries, which distinguish humanity and civilisation from the barbaric and the inhuman. According to Bataille, the transgression of such boundaries is intrinsic to the experience of the sacred. The 19th-century magical revival and its inheritors were instrumental in blurring these limits. Some, such as Aleister Crowley, deliberately set out to trample such culturally entrenched boundaries, while others, such as Frazer, inadvertently caused their foundations to shake. To counter the effects of these attacks on the moral values of the culture, *The Wicker Man* and *The Devil Rides Out* sought to re-establish social parameters by creating a solid division between the acceptable and the unacceptable, and to contain the chaos they perceive to be induced by moral and religious relativism.

Notes

¹ Kenneth Grant, *The Magical Revival* (London: Frederick Muller, 1972).

² H R Trevor-Roper, "The European Witch-Craze", in Max Marwick (ed), *Witchcraft and Sorcery: Selected Readings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Education, 1970): 121-150.

³ Vivianne Crowley, *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Millennium* (London; San Francisco: Thorsons, 1996): x.

⁴ Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993); Carol J Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1992). Sharon Russell, "The Witch in Film: Myth and Reality", in Barry Keith Grant (ed), *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* (Metuchen, NJ; London: The Scarecrow Press, 1984): 113-125.

⁵ Hutton said this in a documentary, *Stonehenge: The Secret of the Stones*, screened on Channel 4 in 1999. He also emphasised the influence of ecological concerns on the return to paganism. Hutton is a historian and has published widely on British paganism, folklore and customs from the Stone Age to the present day.

⁶ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-century Representations* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁷ Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* (London: Chatto/Heinemann for Sussex University Press,

1975). Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973).

⁸ Margaret A Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953). Margaret A Murray, *The God of the Witches* (London; Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) [first published in 1931].

⁹ The Rosicrucians are important to Western magical traditions. It is said that, in the 14th century, a German traveller, Christian Rosycross/Rosenkreutz, learned Arabic mysteries and returned to Germany to form a brotherhood. This legend appeared in the 17th century and formed the basis of later groups.

¹⁰ A useful introduction to the magical techniques used by The Golden Dawn is provided in Francis King, *Magic: The Western Tradition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975). Grant gives a more in-depth approach in *The Magical Revival*.

¹¹ John Symonds, *The Great Beast: The Life of Aleister Crowley* (London; New York; Melbourne; Sydney; Cape Town: Rider and Company, 1951): 183. Dion Fortune, *Psychic Self-Defence: A Study in Occult Pathology and Criminality* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1988) [first published in 1930]. Fortune also wrote novels, including *The Goat-Foot God* (1936).

¹² Wicca is the term by used many modern witch groups. The origin of the term is in dispute, but many agree that it originates from Gerald B Gardner. He was instrumental to the organisation of modern witchcraft, providing the basic shape of its rituals. See Gerald B Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (London: Jarrolds, 1968) and Vivianne Crowley's *Wicca*. Chaos magick has emerged within the last ten years. Characterised by its slogan "Nothing is True, Everything is Permitted", it is a diverse and eclectic type of magic, borrowing from, amongst others, Crowley, Austin Spare, quantum theory and chaos theory. See Phil Hine, *Prime Chaos* (London: Chaos International, 1993).

¹³ Ronald Hutton, "The Roots of Paganism", in Graham Harvey and Charlotte Hardman (eds), *Paganism Today* (London; San Francisco: Thorsons, 1995): 7-10.

¹⁴ Robert Frazer, "Introduction", Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion. A New Abridgement from the Second and Third Editions*, edited by Robert Frazer (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): xx.

¹⁵ Frazer: 26.

¹⁶ Ibid: 49, 55.

¹⁷ Ibid: 46-47.

¹⁸ Ibid: 56.

¹⁹ "The principles of association are excellent in themselves, and indeed absolutely essential to the working of the human mind. Legitimately applied they yield science; illegitimately applied they yield magic, the bastard sister of science". Ibid: 46.

²⁰ Antoine Faivre uses the term "correspondence" in his history of Western esoteric tradition to describe a common feature of that tradition. Cited in Richard Sutcliffe, "Left-Hand Path Ritual Magick", in Harvey and Hardman (eds): 115.

²¹ Fraser: xx. "As above, so below" is an alchemical description of the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm, the one reflecting and connected to the other. For Lévi, this also pertains to a Manichean, dualistic conception of the universe.

²² Hutton: 11-12.

²³ Ibid: 11.

²⁴ A "Book of Shadows" is the term used in witchcraft circles to describe a handwritten book that maps out the basic rituals used by a coven or group. Gardner's Book of Shadows provided the basic rituals for Wicca.

²⁵ Murray (1970): 19.

²⁶ By contrast, I would maintain that magic is a highly complex and holistic mode of operation that makes use of the inherent diversity of the psyche to achieve its purpose: it is not therefore solely allied to the primal swamp of the unconscious.

²⁷ The notion that paganism is lurking within the British landscape is literalised in *Blood on Satan's Claw* in which the skull of a deity/demon of the old religion is dug up in the fields.

²⁸ Anne Rice's *The Witching Hour* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) also takes this same approach to the Mayfair witch-dynasty.

²⁹ Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996): 330-331.

³⁰ Robin Hardy, the film's director, researched the area before Anthony Shaffer wrote the screenplay. The main source he quotes in interview is *The Golden Bough*. See David Bartholomew, "The Wicker Man", *Cinefantastique* 6: 3 (winter 1977): 12.

³¹ Frazer: 88.

³² Hutton (1996): 233.

³³ Ibid: 235, 237.

³⁴ Frazer: 91.

- 35 Hutton (1996): 316.
- 36 *Ibid*: 241-242.
- 37 Bartholomew: 12. Emphasis in original.
- 38 Frazer: 716.
- 39 Indicative "Celtic Revival" writers from 18th-century "antiquarianism" include Thomas Gray and James MacPherson, and, from the 19th century, Tennyson, W B Yeats (a member of The Golden Dawn) and Matthew Arnold.
- 40 Hardy buys into this "myth" as is evident in his comment that "My God, when you decorate your home for Christmas you are using nearly every pagan symbol there is!" (a comment that further betrays his attitude towards paganism). Bartholomew: 10.
- 41 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA; London: The M.I.T. Press, 1968).
- 42 Frazer: 624-629.
- 43 *Ibid*: 462.
- 44 *Ibid*: 460-462.
- 45 Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A historical grammar of poetic myth*, amended and enlarged edition (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1961): 401.
- 46 "And the hare, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean to you". Leviticus 11: 6.
- 47 Frazer (796) refers to rowan (the tree) in the abridged version of *The Golden Bough* as a "countercharm to sorcery". Hutton (1996: 224) also mentions hares and the rowan in the same sentence: "Any hares found among the cattle on May Day were killed, upon suspicion that they were witches in disguise. Above all, rowan was hung about cows, doorways...[Rowan] may have been regarded as effective because its bright red berries also suggested fire".
- 48 Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, translated by Peter Bing (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1983): xxiv.
- 49 For a good survey of myths and accounts of Lykaon, see *ibid*: 84-134.
- 50 Marcus Hearn and Alan Barnes, *The Hammer Story* (London: Titan Books, 1997): 121. Richleau was also part of the name used for Wheatley's company, Brook-Richleau.
- 51 Christopher Lee, *Tall, Dark and Gruesome: An Autobiography* (London: W H Allen: Granada Publishing, 1977): 325.
- 52 The Knights Templars "were alleged to have denied Christ [which the Gnostics, of course, did not] and to have spat on the Cross; to have given one another the obscene kiss, the *osculum obscaenum*...practised unnatural vice, and to have worshipped an androgynous idol called Baphomet". Symonds: 119.
- 53 Introduction by Dennis Wheatley to Aleister Crowley's *Moonchild* (London: Sphere Books, 1972): 9. First published in 1929.
- 54 Aleister Crowley, *Magick*, edited, annotated and introduced by John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973): 131. First published as *Magick in Theory in Practice* in 1929.
- 55 "I had taken the name Baphomet as my motto in the O.T.O.". Aleister Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography*, edited by John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969): 832.
- 56 Murray (1970): 23-45.
- 57 Revelation 17: 4-5.
- 58 "Both talk of Simon as a son; Richleau, who promised Simon's father he would look after his son, on discovering Simon's involvement with black magic remarks 'I feel like a father who sees his child trying to pick live coals out of the fire'; Mocata on Simon's return to the coven greets him with 'Welcome back, my son.'" Peter Hutchings, *Hammer and beyond: the British horror film* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1993): 152.
- 59 Quoted in Kenneth Grant, *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God* (London: Skoob Books, 1992): 69.
- 60 *Ibid*: 62.
- 61 Colin MacCabe, "Bayonets in paradise", *Sight and Sound* 9: 2 (February 1999): 13.
- 62 Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock'n'Roll Generation Saved Hollywood* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).
- 63 Frazer (745) notes that Julius Caesar wrote that the Celts of Gaul regularly used human sacrifice.
- 64 *Ibid*: 228.
- 65 *Ibid*: 675.
- 66 "The coven of Romulus consisted of thirteen men; if the legendary companions of Robin Hood were real personages, then that coven was composed of twelve men and one woman; Gilles de Rais (1440) had eleven men and two women, Bessie Dunlop (1567) spoke of five men and eight

women, and in Kinross-shire (1662) one man and twelve women formed the coven". Murray (1970): 69. The coven at Bellenac has twelve men and one woman.

67 Ibid: 162.

68 Ibid: 169.

69 Frazer: 336-337.

70 Ibid: 746.

71 "In the central Highlands of Scotland bonfires, known as the Beltane fires, were formerly kindled with great ceremony on the first of May, and the traces of human sacrifices at them were particularly clear and unequivocal". (Frazer: 716.) Frazer also notes the ceremony was often held on hilltops, as it is in the film. Hutton (1996: 225) is more cautious, but still follows a similar line of thought: "There was also a widespread rite involving a scapegoat, which may always have been symbolic or may embody a memory of actual human sacrifice".

72 Frazer: 632.

73 At one point, Lord Summerisle tells him to "cut some capers", a phrase used in *The Golden Bough* in a description of "maskers": "From time to time they stopped at a farm, danced and cut their capers before the house". Ibid: 597.

74 "The accumulated misfortunes and sins of the whole people are sometimes laid upon the dying god, who is supposed to bear them away for ever, leaving the people innocent and happy". Ibid: 557.

75 Ibid: 281, 286, 288, 589.

76 Ibid: 675.

77 Willow's name yields up an association with wicker and witchcraft (often termed "Wicca" in modern witchcraft circles). Graves (173) says that the willow tree was sacred to Hecate (a witch goddess) in ancient and classical Greece. He claims the willow trees' "connexion with witches is so strong in Northern Europe that the words 'witch' and 'wicked' are derived from the same ancient word for willow, which also yields 'wicker'".

78 Medea's homeland, Colchis, was located at the eastern end of the Black Sea.

79 "The Persians claim Asia and the barbarous nations that inhabit it". Herodotus, *Histories*, translated by Henry Cary (London: Folio Books, 1992) I: 4.

80 Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, translated by Mary Dalwood (London; New York: Marion Boyars, 1987): 82.

81 Bartholomew: 12.

4

"In Every Woman Is a Little Witch": The Bitter-Sweet Seductions of the Witch

Introduction

The figure of the female witch has commonly been seen in critical works on the horror film as a product of male fantasies about the otherness of women's bodies. Beyond this, the figure of the female witch in cinema has received fairly limited critical attention, and little consideration has been given to the idea that the cinematic witch is likely to appeal to a different set of fantasies specific to women. The cinematic witch is also not confined to the horror genre, and witches from a range of genres are covered here. Many of these are actively targeted at a female audience, often through the use or evocation of fairy tale, or by drawing on the witch as an "archetypal" figure. This chapter maps the investments, challenges and pleasures offered to a female audience by representations for the female witch, specifically in terms of the contradictions experienced by women's inscription into the order of gender prevalent at a given historical or cultural moment. Central to the analysis of these contradictions is the idea that witchcraft has become a language of resistance to the cultural norms of femininity, and, in particular, women's roles in the family structure, culturally-specific definitions of beauty and its powers, and the strategic use of a primal femininity that exceeds conventional gender constructions. Films from a variety of periods consistently use witchcraft to express the delights and difficulties of women's lives in a fictional and imaginary form. I will explore the limitations and liberations of the idea that the witch expresses desires remaindered by the process of gender inscription. Does the cinematic witch ensure "the survival of pagan forces of desire"?¹ Is the counter-cultural potential of the witch, often overtly deployed in these films, recuperated in some way to preserve the status quo? Might such recuperation be somehow cancelled out through the weight and veracity of the problems raised? In asking such questions, the chapter charts what is at stake in the presentation of the female witch for a female audience.

Central to the representation of the witch are the presence and evolution of feminist ideas within the field of popular culture. The impact of the magical revival has also resonated through feminism and led to

feminist investments in witchcraft as a counter-discourse. Feminist critic Hélène Cixous has seen witchcraft as a form of flight from the constraints of women's lives, and for her it has the power to disrupt the gendered order;² others, such as Catherine Clément, are more circumspect, seeing representations of the witch as supporting an essentialised view of femininity. Diane Purkiss, Clément and Creed³ imply that such investments are forms of "false consciousness". They tend to assume that the consumption of images of witchcraft shapes women's desire in accordance with male fantasy. Before jumping to such a hasty and problematic conclusion, it is important to consider the types of pleasures offered to women by cinematic witches, and how they might relate to gender politics. For example, does it matter if such pleasures are grounded in a view of essentialised primal feminine desire? In previous chapters, it has been argued that the fictional representation of possession and witch cults are structured around the male relationship to the primal bad father, something that seems intrinsic to the horror genre and horror/science-fiction hybrids. The contention of this chapter is that the cinematic witch often embodies the contradictions and tensions women experience in their domestic lives and familial relationships.

Witch narratives that focus on individual female witches, rather than male-led witch cults, often provide stories symbolising many of the social pressures that effect women. The mother/daughter relationship is often central to these films, as is the role played by beauty, seduction and the ever-changing female body. Frequently, witch films designed for a female audience tell stories about learning to be a woman, with all its secrets, potions and powers. In accordance with the mass address of mainstream film, the portrayal of witches is framed by heterosexual and patriarchal discourse. This does not necessarily mean that these films are "tools" of oppression. They may present taxing problems for some feminist critics who are out to de-essentialise femininity, but these films do symbolise the social and gendered pressures that impact on women's lives as girls, lovers, wives and mothers. Anger at such constraints manifest in the bitterness of the witch, but her sweetness is conveyed in the fact that she carries the kudos of resistance. This resistance is frequently located within the confines of the heterosexual romance and the domestic arena (the spaces and places inhabited by most women at some time during their lives).

Learning to be a witch, doing battle with the "bad" mother, exercising witchy powers and desires, and finding subversive ways of disrupting the status quo of urban life are pleasures specifically addressed to women. Witch films provide fictional frameworks that allow women to address the perils and pleasures of femininity and the female body, as defined in contemporary culture. This aspect has been underappraised by the tendency of feminist critics to see magic as a normalising, healing agent in fairy tales, rather than a disruptive chaotic force, or by those who focus purely on witches in the horror genre, and see witches as entirely

the product of male anxieties about women.⁴

Transformation, beauty and power – *The Undead*, *Excalibur*, *Merlin* and *Jack's Wife*

Witches in horror, sword and sorcery, and children's films are mainly either cruel seductresses or ugly and aged crones. Sometimes a witch can be both, as in versions of the Snow White fairy tale. Beauty has two distinctive forms within the stereotypical moral architecture of these films: "true" beauty is always innocent of its power, whereas a witch's beauty is only skin-deep and masks her "ugly", power-hungry essence. The witch knows the power of beauty and puts it to use. She is often a dangerous figure for the patriarchal order because she knows and exploits the rules that govern the heterosexual male psyche. The distinction between beauty as innocence and beauty as a tool for power constantly recurs in these genres (but takes a rather different form in melodramas and romantic comedies). This sounds rather close to the reading that witches are the product of the male imagination – in which there is a fascination and fear of seduction, and of women who have or seek power, rendering men passive and powerless. Within the witch film, however, these are precisely the tools used to disrupt the status quo. Politically, this affords power only to individual women, rather than to women in general. Individual access to power (through witchcraft) has perhaps a greater attraction for a young "postfeminist" audience. The feminist leanings of this group are less likely to be grounded in separatism, Socialism or hippy communal culture. The model that is more likely to influence this group's model of feminism is the recent kick-arse and looking-good women warriors of television and film, who single-handedly take on the ills of the world. The witches that take on patriarchy may well be seen in this individualistic light. While this is true of many of the teenage witch films discussed here, it is also the case that all these films tacitly acknowledge the fact that women's power is linked to appearance and the ability to enchant men. This may create a difficulty for a traditional feminist view, but it also presents a challenge to the view that witches are simply "victims" of patriarchy. The primary role that physical appearance plays in the witch film is made fully apparent in *The Undead* (Roger Corman, 1957, USA).

This film was made in the late-1950s as a "B" movie designed for drive-ins and the new teenage audience. It takes the time travel theme out of the male-orientated science-fiction genre, and marries the hardbitten *femme fatale* of the "youth runs wild" cycle with elements of fairy tale. By drawing on science-fiction, the fairy tale and the costumed fantasy film, *The Undead* makes a calculated address to both a male and a female audience. As part of the strategy of maximising the possible address of the film, it forges several points of identification. There is the straight romantic couple, as well as a more recalcitrant and "perverse" pair who are not romantically linked. The latter follow a more "unnatural" or supernatural

path associated with the dark world of desire, in which sex and power are bound together. The conjoining of perversity and the supernatural is common in the horror film and the fairy tale, although it is overtly employed by the former and implicitly embedded in the latter. The romantic couple scenario could be said to conceal the unsavoury truth that sexual desires may have little to do with love and the family. By evoking both, the film articulates the way in which such contradictions represent a challenge to dominant ideological values. The film treads a path through these contradictions, giving way on some things and not on others. Significantly, there is no direct defeat of lust by love in the film, and the romantic couple do not live happily ever after.

The Undead begins with a young and amoral woman, Diana Love (Pamela Duncan), who is taken off the street by Quintus (Val Du Four), a mad scientist/magician figure. He hypnotises her and she regresses to a previous life. Diana's femininity and easy virtue fulfil Quintus' criteria for a "type" who is easily influenced by the mesmeric power that he learned from shamans in Nepal. Under deep hypnosis, she returns to a previous incarnation, a young woman named Helene (also played by Duncan), wrongly accused of witchcraft. Instrumental to Helene and Diana's fate are two witches: a young beautiful witch named Livia (Allison Hayes), who is in the service of the Devil, and an old crone, Meg Maud (Dorothy Neuman). Livia is intent on having Helene put to death so that she might win the love of Pendragon (Richard Garland), who loves the innocent Helene. In the film's denouement, Helene is given the choice to die by the axe; if she chooses death, her later incarnations will live; if she chooses life, they will never exist. Helene cares about other people and elects to die. Through Helene's death, Diana's life is saved and is redeemed from her life of amorality. (It is implied that she is a prostitute.) It is a story in which romance and moral choices are at odds with one another: a mismatch directly caused by the disruptive nature of supernatural and scientific magic.

Quintus' hunger for knowledge kick-starts the events of the film, but it is the two witches who provide much of the film's narrative tension and visual pleasure. Great emphasis is placed on the different physical appearances of the witches, and stereotypical meanings of beauty and ugliness are played with. As is common in Hollywood cinema, there are two types of beauty: good virgin (Helene) and treacherous vamp (Livia). Virgin and vamp are contrasted with Meg. As the crone, she is set apart by age and ugliness from the beauty competition staged between the two younger women. Meg has the ability to see into the hearts of other people – discerning their "true" natures. Her function is to look beyond the beguiling glamour of appearances, and to an extent she resembles the figure of Merlin in *Excalibur* (1981). Like Merlin, Meg is willing to help Helene and Pendragon, yet is powerless to make moral choices for people. She may be a witch, but she does not use her powers to meddle in the "natural" course of action. Her appearance has all the attributes of

a fairy tale bad witch: she is bone-thin, has a cracked voice and a prosthetically enhanced pointed chin and nose, and lives alone in her cottage deep in the woods. She could be the witch in *Hansel and Gretel*, or the wicked Queen in crone form from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (supervising director: David Hand, 1937, USA). When Helene first arrives at Meg's cottage, she is startled by Meg's alarming appearance. Helene believes that she is in danger, and Meg teases her by implying that she might cook and eat her. Meg's witch-opposite is Livia, played by Allison Hayes, who was Miss Washington DC in 1949, and later starred in *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (Nathan Hertz [Juran], 1958, USA). In the late-1950s, Hayes played voluptuous and exotic-looking women, as in *The Disembodied* (Walter Grauman, 1957, USA). She is the archetypal Hollywood vamp in *The Undead*: her hair flows luxuriantly, her gown is close-fitting to reveal an hourglass figure, and her bust-line compares proportionately with (pre-downsize) Pamela Anderson. Placed in the frame next to Meg, Livia's physical attributes are further accentuated. With her exaggerated figure, purring voice and flowing hair, Livia embodies an exotic fantasy of hyper-femininity (which, as Barbie's long-lived success testifies, is not just attractive to men).

Only when Meg confronts Livia is it made evident that she is not a bad witch. This scene is important; it is here that we learn that appearances are deceptive and that witchy beauty comes from the Devil. As they converse, it emerges that their distinctive appearances and natures derive from their mothers' magic. Meg claims that Livia's mother had sold her soul to the Devil, which presumably lends Livia her physical endowments. Meg's mother cheated the Devil into giving her daughter witch-powers without incurring the penalty of losing their souls; somehow, this meant that Meg was given her haglike features. Unusually for the fairy tale-derived film, Meg's appearance does not indicate an ugly nature, as it does in the Snow White films; instead, she is a witch-healer whose magic is used to help the princess figure, Helene. Meg is the good fairy and Livia the bad fairy who wishes ill towards Helene. Livia is set up in competition with Helene for Pendragon's desire. Helene represents romantic love and Livia the type of carnal lust in which nice girls are not supposed to indulge (particularly in the 1950s). As it is, Livia's beauty is ineffectual. She uses gossip and mischief to disrupt the romance, and, rather oddly for one with such exotic looks and endowed with the powers of transformation, is confined to rather petty forms of magic.

Unlike the heroines of many traditional fairy tales, Helene is not rescued by any of the men, helping to consolidate the film's address to a female audience. She is assigned a crucial choice between life and death: if she opts for death, the lives of her later incarnations will be saved (almost as if they were her daughters). Their fate is thereby wrested from the realm of the supernatural and the male protagonists, and placed in Helene's hands. This may look like a welcome change from the gender politics of the classic children's fairy tale and Hollywood in general, but

it carries a conservative element. Helene's altruistic choice to die by the axe suggests that she would be a "good" wife and mother – the lustful and self-centred Livia could certainly not be. Despite Livia's seductive looks, it is not she who gains the love of the man she desires, but the demure and innocent Helene. The ostensible ideological message is plain here: the good girl attains the love of the hero. That Livia fails in her bid to seduce Pendragon also has an important dimension: it acts as a means of channelling the female audience into identifying with Helene. The pay-off is based on the fact that many women in the audience may be intimidated by Livia's physical attributes. This reflects an interesting dynamic used by the film, as the audience is prompted to ask various questions of themselves in relation to the characters. The film thereby engages the audience at the level of personal fantasy (something that many films do, but is perhaps more overtly deployed in *The Undead*). The competition for Pendragon's attentions tacitly asks the men in the audience whom they would choose if they were in Pendragon's shoes. A choice is also offered between the hero Pendragon and the darker qualities of Quintus, whose powers of hypnosis might be used to make women fall under his spell. Women are asked whether they would prefer to be the chaste altruistic princess or the temptress witch. (This is not to say that viewers will always align their identification with characters of the same gender, however.)

These choices between good and bad characters widen the film's scope, enabling it to address a number of possible fantasy scenarios. By mobilising a number of different figures for audience identification, the film maximises its potential address. As such, the "bad" characters are lent a certain charm (important to the cult status of Corman's films). At face value, the fairy tale form is about the heterosexual romance and how women must behave if they are successfully to become part of it. Nevertheless, the film also makes use of the desires that tempt us to wander away from that order – important to those with a stake in wanting to read the witch as a subversive figure. As with the fairy tale, the viewer is offered more than a single point of identification. We can fantasise about being "mad, bad and dangerous to know" and/or a goody-two-shoes. This is a strategy deployed by many witch films.

One of the attractions of Livia's beauty is precisely that it is not associated with wholesomeness, innocence or purity. She has a languid beauty, connoting a certain voluptuous decadence. Like one of Baudelaire's women in *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857),⁵ or Keats' seductive and dangerous Lamia of "La Belle Dame sans Merci", she is heartless, driven by sensuality and the need to ensnare men. Her sexuality is linked to that of a cat, a guise which she adopts at certain points in the film. Her association with bestiality and perversion is written into the film at both surface and subtextual levels, making her ripe for a subversive reading. We know that she is in the pay of the Devil and walks the earth free of the constraints of motherhood or family, an obvious, if forbidden, attraction for many women. Superficially, her desire is for carnal

intercourse with Pendragon, and her power appears to be used solely to engineer sex with him. This may not seem such a devilish thing to do, but at a deeper level of nuance it suggests that Livia has a perverse sexuality. This makes her an intriguing character, and opens her up to a queer interpretation.

Livia's feline languor evokes a primal feminine sexuality that owes something to the portrayals of feminine evil depicted by Symbolist painters and poets. Bram Dijkstra points out that:

[B]y 1900 writers and painters, scientists and critics, the learned and the modish alike, had been indoctrinated to regard all women who no longer conformed to the image of the household nun as vicious, bestial creatures, representative of a pre-evolutionary, instinctual past, who preferred the company of animals over that of the civilized male, creatures who were, in fact, the personification of witchery and evil, who attended sabbaths and dangerous rituals...Women, in short had come to be seen as the monstrous goddess of degeneration, a creature of evil who lorded it over all the horned beasts which populated man's sexual nightmares.⁶

What Dijkstra does not say is that this may well offer women a powerful figure with whom to identify. While the witch seductress may, in part, be invested with anxieties about the increasing independence of women in the late-19th century, she is a common feature in present-day popular culture (as in *The Craft* [1996] and *Little Witches* [1996]). Dijkstra also assumes that women's desires are never entangled with these images; he seems to suggest that women's sexuality is untouched by dark and recalcitrant fantasies (which could very well be produced by the constraints of the heterosexual and gender matrix). As problematic as it may be, for some women the demonic is a powerful erotic force, even if it is a product of the imagination. Are we simply to condemn women who indulge in such fantasies to the purgatory of false consciousness? One of the features of these types of fantasy is that it enables sex to be wrested from the hegemonic constraints of seeing it as part of the heterosexual romance, an expression of romantic love and a means of making a family. We may call this perverse (either pejoratively or with a certain relish): perversity certainly connotes a rejection of constraining mores, promising a vista beyond the confines of the domestic, which may speak to women as well as men.

Livia's primal femininity, focused purely on her own needs and desires, is more than simply lust for the good Pendragon or the cruel consumption of the male objects of her desire. The film's tacit romance with the "queer" (figured here, as in most horror films, as the perverse)⁷ is

deployed to lend it a darker attraction than that of the heterosexual romance. It is Livia's relationship with her familiar (Billy Barty) that tacitly communicates her perversity. With his small stature, long ears and rounded belly, he resembles the demons with whom the witches have intercourse in *Häxan* (1922). He is Livia's creature, she often pets and strokes him, and he goes everywhere with her. It only takes a very small leap of the (perverse) imagination to assume that their relationship is more than platonic.⁸ Livia's lust for Pendragon is based on the "perverse" exercise of her powers of seduction and motivated by a need to disrupt the happy romance. She seeks Helen's death and engineers a situation in which Pendragon nearly signs away his soul to the Devil. The last time she appears, she is tickling her goblin-demon familiar under his chin. At a subtextual level, she evokes perverse pleasures and, furthermore, opens up a fantasy space within which women viewers are asked to imagine what they would do with her body and seductive powers if they had them. It appears that the lesson of the film is that the siren call of beauty potentially ensnares men and disrupts their access to power. For some, this may provide a masochistic fantasy, but because it offers power of sorts it might also have an attraction for women who do not want to identify with masochism. Livia's magic may be quite limited, but she exemplifies the way in which many films about witches conceive demon-derived beauty as dangerous and against the natural order of romance. The association of witches and perverse sexuality has a long history, and this is perhaps why witches have such currency with filmmakers. It is as if the witch reveals the "true" nature of women's desire, untamed by the civilising forces of domesticity and monogamous heterosexuality. This may be why such films appeal to women as well as to men.

The dissembling beauty of the witch is grounded in mythic tradition, and is often a major component in tales of chivalry and romance. The witch's powers of seduction and beauty are given a strong pagan flavour in *Excalibur* and *Merlin* (Steven Barron, 1998, USA/UK), and, in conjunction with myth, are used to render the witch as an archetypal figure of primal, dangerous femininity. Both films make use of Arthurian legend into which is inscribed the transition from paganism to Christianity. The pagan element lends these versions of the myth a contemporary appeal, as it draws on the cultural capital invested by some feminists and hippy-derived cultures in Celtic paganism and witchcraft. The films draw on a wide range of fantasies of power, nostalgia and eroticism, mixed with special effects and breathtaking supernatural and natural landscapes. These diverse strategies help to broaden the potential appeal of the films. Within the rather generalised view of gendered pleasures taken by film producers, the films have components that will interest both men and women. Knights and heroic deeds may conventionally appeal to a male audience, and the witches' struggle for power and the theme of adultery may appeal to a female audience. *Excalibur* puts greater emphasis on violence and sex than does *Merlin*,

which, as a "TV movie", was intended for a family audience. In both films, there is a clear division between the women and men who practise magic. Merlin's magic is in the service of men, whereas Morgana, Morgan and Queen Mab⁹ use magic to return the Christianised and patriarchal world to the old ways of magic, in which female goddesses feature. These witch women are out to put the world of men, with their concepts of justice and rationality, into chaos. They may not be "feminists" in the strict sense of the word. They are, however, designed to appeal to a contemporary female audience, and they articulate very modern desires for power and autonomy – even if they use old magic, primal femininity and sexual seduction to achieve them. The use of magic to achieve power may well have a privileged place in the imaginations of many women brought up on fairy tales and television witches, and may be regarded as expressing feminist or postfeminist concerns for some female viewers.

Morgana (Helen Mirren), Morgan (Helena Bonham-Carter) and Queen Mab (Miranda Richardson) may appear to be stereotypes, working magic only in terms of their selfish and narcissistic aims. Nevertheless, they operate within the context of the supremacy of male power, using family values to subvert and trouble this power. Given that women, and especially mothers, are ideally meant to sacrifice their desires for the good of the family, the indulgence of narcissistic activities, working counter to patriarchal investments, may well afford a certain cunning pleasure for some women viewers. That the films tacitly acknowledge these types of pleasures works with a trend in some feminist writing that emerged during the late-1970s and early 1980s: from Mary Daly's rather prosaic work, to the more poetic and philosophically complex work of Cixous.¹⁰ These feminist writers have celebrated the witch as an antipatriarchal figure. While this might be a fantasy that elides certain historical facts, it nevertheless reflects a demand to reclaim the monstrous feminine for a female audience as a figure of dangerous power poised to retrieve phallic power for themselves.¹¹ Morgan and Morgana's primary weapons against the status quo are the two very things that patriarchy values in women: beauty and motherhood. While we might conclude that this is framed by patriarchy, there is a tendency in recent academic writing on the witch to rubbish what women themselves make of the witch figure. Diane Purkiss, for example, seems intent on breaking the spell that the witch figure has over many women.¹² But it is precisely because the witch embodies women's experiences of ideological contradictions, circulating through the meanings of power and physical appearance, that she persists in popular culture. This is evident in the fact that she has a central role in many recent television shows: Willow Rosenberg, Amy Madison and Jenny Callender in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are all practising witches, as are the shamaness Alti in *Xena Warrior Princess*, and Sabrina and her aunts in *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, as well as the witches in *Charmed* and the *Harry Potter* novels, and the teen-witches in *The Belfry Witches*. Witches do speak to women through patriarchy, but that is because women

constantly negotiate the effects of the patriarchal matrix. I identify with the witch not as victim, but because she turns the very nature of her inception to anarchic ends.

In *Merlin*, Morgan is an ugly child who is scathing of Merlin's attempts to amuse her with tricks worthy of a street conjuror. She seeks true magic, and finds it through the pagan faery queen: Mab. Mab sends Frick, her goblin familiar, to Morgan. He promises to tell her the secrets of true magic: to prove it, he transforms himself into a handsome swashbuckling hero. She is understandably impressed, but, in order to gain her confidence fully, he transforms her from ugly duckling into a sophisticated and beautiful woman. Make-over magic is women's magazine territory, and Morgan's pleasure at being made over taps into a common women's fantasy that a change of appearance promises to change lives. This would seem to testify to the knowledge that beauty is both a masquerade that can be acquired and an effective means of getting what one wants. Morgan simply feels better once her appearance has changed, but her make-over is designed by Queen Mab to facilitate the downfall of the masculinist Christian order. Mab prompts Morgan to use her new beauty to seduce Arthur and give birth to his son, intending to use this child to defeat Arthur in battle and return Britain to paganism. Beauty, as a prerequisite for the seduction of the unwary, becomes the route by which Mab and Morgan are able to intervene in the power politics of the land.

The power of beauty is also invoked through Nimue, Merlin's great love. In an effort to get Merlin to use the latent magical powers that have been invested in him, Queen Mab engineers a situation in which Nimue is to be sacrificed to a dragon. Merlin is forced to watch the sorry end of his beloved, and, as Mab predicted, he uses his latent powers to protect her. But this comes rather too late, as Nimue's face and upper body are badly scarred by the dragon's fiery breath. Ashamed of her appearance – her skin now not fit for dancing in – Nimue withdraws to a nunnery and, despite Merlin's sympathy, cannot return to the world with what she sees as a shameful disfigurement. Mab exploits Nimue's shame, pledging to restore her beauty if she can persuade Merlin to retreat with her into a place set aside from the world. Nimue at first refuses, but later, when she thinks Merlin has set the world to rights, finally succumbs to Mab's seductive promise. As she did with Morgan, Mab again uses the lure of beauty to seduce Nimue into doing her bidding. Beauty is Mab's preferred means of gaining power over people, suggesting the uncomfortable idea that appearance, illusory or not, is somehow intrinsic to the current state of human relationships.

Mab offers a further type of seduction that may appeal specifically to female viewers: an (imagined) return to a magical domain that resembles the fairy worlds depicted in *Fairy Tale: A True Story* (Charles Sturridge, 1997, UK) and *Photographing Fairies* (Nick Willing, 1997, UK). Mab's underground world is populated with similarly-styled fairies created

through CGI effects. The fairy world of *Merlin* is less a trope of innocence and goodness as it is in these two films. Mab encapsulates the mischievous Tinkerbell in her childish temper tantrums, and she and her fairies, sprites and goblins resemble the darker fey of folk-tales, who capture mortals in their thrall. Dressed in clothes that any Goth-inclined girl would sell her soul for, Mab's seductive qualities are designed to reach out to the bad fairy in many a female viewer.

The meaning and use of beauty in *Merlin* are very often directly aligned to the power of magic. Unlike many mainstream films in which beauty is seen as a natural attribute of an actress, here beauty is often shown to be the product of artifice – evident in Mab and Merlin's transformational magic and the special effects. (Both work the supernatural on a materialist plane.) One of the film's visual pleasures is the transformation of key characters' appearances, facilitated by the use of special effects and prosthetics. In particular, there is a devilish delight in making Isabella Rossellini (Nimue) and Helena Bonham-Carter (Morgan) appear ugly. This makes a subtle reference to the promises tacitly made by cosmetic companies, and both stars have been the "faces" of cosmetics companies. Such commercials often suggest that their products will magically transform women into movie-star beauty. Using the glamour value of the two stars to add extra weight to their physical transformations, the film makes its entry into the ideology of beauty. Merlin, too, has the power to transform appearance, and is able to change the guise of Uther into that of the Duke of Cornwall. But he cannot change Nimue's scarred appearance – only the enchantress Mab can do this, enabling her to have power over Merlin's actions. In one scene, Merlin articulates the view that artificial beauty is not "true" or "real"; Morgan responds by saying that all beauty is artificial. This response signals a significant contradiction in the contemporary meaning of beauty. It is common for beauty (especially in film and advertising) to be read as the reflection of inner purity and goodness. This meaning endures in contemporary culture, and is overlaid with the commercial investment in selling beauty as something that can be achieved if the right product is purchased. This carries with it the notion that feminine beauty is not natural, but something to be worked at, and enhanced by, the magic of cosmetics. While beauty is de-essentialised, its power becomes the tool of consumer culture.

In *Merlin*, beauty is almost entirely a magical masquerade and is linked to vanity, seduction and power. As figured here, paganism is a very practical form of magic – it lacks a spiritual dimension and is grounded in appearances and "glamour". It is therefore more closely aligned to the feminine, with its emphasis on personal relationships and seduction, than the masculine derring-do of the Christian Knights. Mab uses Guinevere, Morgan and Nimue to provoke male lusts in an attempt to reinstate herself as a powerful pagan goddess figure, and in this way the film evokes the age-old notion that women are vain and self-centred. But, as a corrupter of masculinised, Christianised ideals and, by disrupting the classical

alignment of truth and beauty, Mab speaks more directly to a contemporary female audience than does Merlin or Arthur. When Merlin turns his back on her so that she will be forgotten and disappear, I remember the line from *Peter Pan* (1904) and want to clap and shout "I believe in fairies" in an effort to rescue her from oblivion. Mab represents the old world of magic, and is the most powerful, mischievous and anarchic figure in the film. To forget her is, in effect, a disavowal of that which threatens the smooth functioning of the masculine rational order. It is significant that it is at the instigation of her son (Merlin) that she is to be forgotten. Mab is a deeply antimaternal character. Her crimes are to conflate mothering with access to power and to use the seductive powers of beauty to achieve her aims; neither accords with Christianised ideals of virtuous womanhood.

In both *Merlin* and *Excalibur*, there is a further important attack on the masculinist status quo. In *Excalibur*, Merlin uses magic to make Uther (Gabriel Byrne) resemble Igrayne's husband, the Duke of Cornwall. Uther is thereby able to satisfy his lust for Igrayne (Katerine Boorman) without her knowledge. Uther promises that Merlin will be given the child born of their union. It is this child, Arthur, who will usher in the golden age of chivalry. Morgana, as a young child, watches as Uther has sex with her mother; unlike Igrayne, she can see through Uther's disguise and knows that her father is dead. The duplicitous sexual violation of Igrayne motivates Morgana to bring down Arthur's court and its values through her black art. Merlin's magic gave birth to Arthur's kingship through the rape of Igrayne, and therefore supports the patrilinear/patriarchal order, whereas Morgana's magic is a threat to this order, ultimately causing the end of the patrilinear line of the house of Pendragon.

Both Morgan and Morgana are deeply resentful of the trick played on their mothers, and they perpetrate a similar and retributive act on Arthur. In the family audience-friendly *Merlin*, Morgan uses her new beauty to seduce Arthur before he marries Guinevere. Because it is premarital, the impact of her seduction is softened, and not presented as a postmarital rape, as it is in *Excalibur*. In contrast to *Merlin's* Morgan, *Excalibur's* Morgana uses her magical powers to take on the guise of Guenevere (Cherie Lunghi), who is "out of court" making love to Lancelot (Nicholas Clay), an adultery orchestrated by Morgana. In raping Arthur (Nigel Terry), Morgana restages the rape of her mother, turning her mother's victim status into a means of disrupting the very order that the rape of her mother enabled. Morgana casts off Guenevere's form just after Arthur orgasms, and this causes his downfall and that of the court. His court may appear to be a just, ethical and democratic one (implied by the symbolism of the round table), but Morgana is witness to the fact that it is built on the rape of her mother. Morgana may not have overtly feminist or political reasons for causing the demise of Arthur's court, but, because she is on the side of the violated mother, her actions reveal the apparently benign court as grounded in masculine power. Her witchiness is anchored

in her ability to see and use what is hidden or masked, including the underlying politics of the court and the secret desires of men.

Common to many fictional representations of witches is their ability to disrupt patriarchal order and values. This is often achieved by exploiting masculine desire and attacking the masculine ego, which rests on the ability to control situations. As an embodiment of a return of what patriarchy has repressed, Morgana's rape of Arthur has a number of implications and outcomes. It works according to the axiom that the sins of the father are visited on the sons. In revealing her identity to the supine and sexually-spent Arthur, Morgana consolidates her retributive act by ensuring that Arthur will know that her son is his. As the full horror of the incestuous act dawns on him, Morgana's transgressive witch-coding sets like concrete. This act penetrates the very heart of patriarchal order and masculine pride, initiating the downfall of Arthur. He consequently loses faith in himself, prompting the search for the healing Holy Grail to restore his self-confidence and kingly power. As realised here, the Arthurian myth accords with the Frazerian tenet that the body of the king is also the body of the land – king and land are as one – and the loss of Arthur's magic/phallic power entails that the summer-land of Britain gives way to winter and hardship. Such an outcome provides a further example of the way in which loss of masculine pride is rendered in terms of the end of the world.

Morgana's actions are deeply rooted in a female fantasy of rescuing the mother from the bad father, and she may embody such a fantasy for women viewers. Morgana strongly identifies with her mother. While Igrayne did not realise that she was having sex with Uther, because he wore the appearance of her husband, Morgana, although still a child, was party to this knowledge. The violation has a profound impact on her, as does the fact that Igrayne's child is taken from her arms against her wishes and given to Merlin. As Merlin hurries the child out of the castle, the young Morgana asks him: "Are you the mother and the father of the baby now Merlin?". In response, he is only able to look perplexed and scurry away from the castle. The path of magic offers Morgana the means of preventing her mother's fate from happening to her. Indeed, she actively reverses it by taking control of her own sexual encounter, using it to forward her own desires for power. Her child is not taken from her and she brings him up in her own way. He may be the bastard "unholy" child to Arthur and his Knights, but to her he is "my beautiful clever darling boy". He is her means of access to the male world and the instrument of her retribution. Morgana uses her femininity to gain access to gossip, to fan the flames of jealousy and adulterous desire, and to enchant Merlin. It is precisely that she *uses* femininity that causes her to overstep her prescribed gendered role, and, in so doing, the film conflates the masquerade of femininity with witchcraft – a factor that informs many films in which a female witch is the central antagonist. The idea that femininity can be deliberately deployed to gain power in society is also one that many women may recognise.

Morgana employs the identical power of transformation that Merlin used to disguise Uther. Both achieve the conception of their "magical" children, but Morgana's child is the counter-image of Arthur. She also uses her beauty to ensnare Merlin into teaching her occult knowledges. There is a great deal of erotic tension between Morgana and Merlin. *Excalibur's* Merlin is far less heroic than his counterpart in *Merlin*: his sarcasm and enigmatic statements lend him a camp quality, which (spuriously) emphasises his inability truly to affect the course of events. This is something with which *Excalibur's* Morgana teases him, and she constantly makes jibes about his impotency and the fact that he lives his sexual life through others. Unlike Merlin, she has the power of (pro)creation – something that Merlin, as he hurries away with baby Arthur after his nine-moon period of recuperation, would seem to want himself. Power is her main goal, one which, as a woman, she cannot lay claim upon by birthright alone.

In order to achieve this power, she subverts the laws of heterosexual romance. Without her, there would be no antagonist or story. Merlin turns his back on the machinations of personal politics, but Morgana stands and watches, her telling smile covered by the cloak pulled across the lower part of her face. This gesture sums her up as an intriguing, deceptive and dangerous figure. Merlin suffers and can do nothing but passively watch the scenes unfold before him. Morgana does not, and actively uses petty jealousies and tensions to affect her control over the proceedings; she believes that the world can be changed according to her will. Merlin is, however, instrumental to her downfall. Merlin prompts her to produce the dragon's breath, which had weakened him for "nine moons" when he facilitated the rape of Igrayne. Proud, and believing Merlin to be a harmless dream-figure, Morgana takes on his challenge and, in so doing, loses her magically enhanced youth and beauty. On finding his mother old and withered, Mordred (Robert Addie) strangles her. She is killed by the very tool she created to cause Arthur's downfall and, as in Greek Tragedy, the whole family (Arthur, Mordred and Morgana) die on the same day.

In both *Excalibur* and *Merlin*, it is women who directly cause the demise of the golden age of Arthur's "just" Britain. This looks like the same old story, where women embody the archaic, irrational and supernatural – in other words, rendering femininity, in opposition to a masculinised rationality and civilisation. Given the cultural prevalence of feminist criticisms of rationality and civilisation as products of male power, however, it is easy to see that the feminine evil notion may not simply be taken as a detrimental representation of femininity, but instead voices dissatisfaction with the gendered status quo. At the heart of these films lies a deep antagonism between the sexes. Arthur's land flourishes when he is powerful. It is the machinations of the witch women that cause him and his civilising values to go into decline. They use seduction and the glamour of beauty to drain his power, and wrest control of the land and

its people – aiming to use their power to dance on the grave of patriarchy. Their actions may appear to be antihuman, but their only recourse to intervening in this gendered hegemony is through magic. This might therefore appear to be loaded with a basic fear of femininity. These two films are, however, very aware of the "against the grain" readings of gender prompted by insurgent feminism. This is used to enable a contemporary women's audience a certain pleasure in the overturning of the traditional masculine values carried by the Arthurian myth cycle. Such an exploitation of feminist investments in witchcraft and the power of sexual seduction is also evident in *Jack's Wife* (aka *Season of the Witch* and *Hungry Wives*; George A Romero, 1973, USA).

Jack's Wife was intended to be a "feminist film" and sought a female audience.¹³ It is the story of Joan Mitchell (Jan White), a middle-aged, middle-class woman who turns to witchcraft as a means of escaping the boredom of her domestic life. Romero's films in general tend to be aware of the politics of representation, and in *Jack's Wife* witchcraft is used as a vehicle of exploring the psychological tensions and contradictions that result from family life. The film is grounded mainly in a realist aesthetic, and does not deploy large-scale spectacle used in the myth/fairy tale films. This contributes to the film's prosaic view of magic and the supernatural as nothing other than a human invention. The film is, however, far from cosy. It crackles with madness, violence and surplus sexual desire, which are shown to be by-products of bourgeois family life. The distinctiveness of the film lies in its use of jarring jump cuts, montage and odd camera angles often shot with an anamorphic lens. Such devices are mainly confined to dream sequences, and reflect the conflicted and hysterical interior state of the central protagonist.

In many ways, it is a disturbing, perplexing and cynical film, which is perhaps why it did not attract the audience it intended to target. Witchcraft is a means of escape, but, because it is portrayed in a very unmagical way, the film does not afford the visual escapism of the fairy tale or fantasy film. Nor does it offer anything beyond the type of radical feminism that was extant during the 1970s, which many women found to be too extreme in its inherent separatism. It may also be too bleak and too close to the bone for many women who are stitched into family life. It is never fully clear what witchcraft offers to Joan – apart from an exotic respite from the banality of daily duties. Is her interest in witchcraft simply symptomatic of her growing boredom with her life and unfulfilled sexual desire? Does it spring from envy of her independent and sexually active teenage daughter? It seems that all these things, plus the fear of ageing, swirl around in the general maelstrom of her dissatisfaction. Her interest in witchcraft seems to derive from the age-old and rather clichéd link between witchcraft and hysteria – despite Romero's "feminist" intent. Morgana, Morgan and Mab seem to be far less "hysterical" than Joan: it is only she who suffers from "reminiscences", and ultimately it is a hypnogogic reminiscence that prompts her to kill her husband.¹⁴ Unlike

Cixous, I do not see witchcraft as a hysterical symptom, as it provides a symbolic *language* of resistance. This idea is central to my analysis of what witchcraft holds for women viewers, and from this framework a critique of Romero's representation of witchcraft will be mounted.

The film begins with a mini-portrait of a marriage. It is structured as an allegorical journey through a wood, composed of jump cuts and a montage of different asynchronous sounds. Joan walks through wood behind her husband, and tree branches spring back from his progress and whip and cut her face. She brings him tea and a newspaper, and he ignores her presence. They return to their car and he places a leash around her neck, dragging her to a wire cage where she is locked in (to the distorted sound of wedding bells). It is an arresting opening that economically renders the middle-class marriage as deeply oppressive, demonstrating Joan's dissatisfaction with her life. As such, the film draws on radical feminist and Socialist criticisms of patriarchally governed middle-American life prevalent at that time. The scene culminates in Joan moving into a new house with everything the housewife needs, and is given a satirical critical flavour as she is guided by a man who appends "etc, etc" to all that he says. There is an increasing sense of her isolation and insulation as he shows her around. Joan sees herself in the mirror as an old woman, suggesting that life is passing her by. This whole sequence builds a very effective picture of Joan's internal state. The scene is set for a potentially self-motivated transformation and, as the film was sold as a horror film, it might be expected that this will have a violent outcome.

Joan's interest in witchcraft is closely linked to sexuality and what her friend Shirl (Ann Muffly) calls "kicks". Joan struggles with the demands made on her to fulfil the conventional role of a good wife and mother, and her sexual fantasies cause her to feel guilty. It is through Shirl that Joan's dilemmas are spoken. Shirl gets a little drunk and is goaded by Gregg (Raymond Laine), the boyfriend of Joan's daughter, into admitting that she is resentful that her age will limit her sexual opportunities. This scene provides the impetus for the remainder of the film. It communicates the sense of sexual frustration experienced by the two women. Gregg regards Shirl as typical of American middle-class hypocritical values. He takes out his aggression on her and Joan by aggressively baiting them. Joan verbally spars with Gregg, which sparks an electric sexual charge between them. This is made more complex because Gregg is having sex with her daughter. Soon after, Joan purchases by mail order a book entitled *How To Be a Witch*, and her first spell is cast to seduce Gregg. For her, it would seem that witchcraft is simply a tool to fulfil sexual desire. What is strange is that Gregg made it perfectly clear that she only had to invite him to have sex with her and he would. Nevertheless, she feels she needs witchcraft to do this, and it gives her the confidence to act out her own desires. Indeed, her spell to get Gregg to have sex with her only works when she calls him on the telephone and tells him to come over. As such, witchcraft is rendered not as supernatural but as a psychological tool.

It is not, strictly speaking, witchcraft that is indicted in Joan's inadvertent act of shooting her husband. The shooting, with all its symbolic meaning, is promoted by a recurring dream. In this dream, Joan is menaced by an intruder in her house, who wears a devil's mask and, it would appear, intends to rape her. Joan is asleep when her husband Jack (Bill Thunhurst) returns unexpectedly in the night and she shoots him. It is implied that she thinks him the dream intruder, but there is a small note of doubt in that she may have simply used this as convenient means of justifying her actions. The killing of Jack is interleaved with Joan's initiation ceremony into a local coven of witches (all women). It is unclear if this initiation ceremony took place before or after she kills Jack. It does, however, leave the viewer with a sense that her entry into the coven heralds a new confidence in herself. In the final scene of the film, we see her at a party, in full Egyptian-style make-up, receiving the timid attentions of another "wife" interested in witchcraft – and hinting at a possible lesbian relationship.

Joan uses witchcraft as a means of freeing herself from her wifely duties and fulfilling her darker sexual desires (which had to be repressed if she was to live up to her own values of being a wife). This model and use of witchcraft are wrought in the manner of "Californian"-style witchcraft that was popularised by books published in the early 1970s. Anton Le Vey's *The Satanic Witch* was first published in the United States in 1971, and takes a very materialist and non-spiritual view of witchcraft (very unlike British Wiccan witchcraft).¹⁵ In the introduction to the last edition of *The Satanic Witch*, Le Vey's daughter sums up the spirit in which the book was written:

The Satanic Witch was designed for women who wanted more control over their lives. A woman could pick up a few Satanic Witch tips, put them into practice, and have immediate results. The book encouraged women to work with their femininity rather than against it. But to use all of the soft, womanly qualities one has was to risk being thought of as weak or a traitor to her gender. To unreservedly manipulate a new breed of cowed, masochistic men was to be considered dirty and low-down. Yet those were the strongest, most determined, interesting women I knew.¹⁶

The book stresses that women's looks are instruments of power. The implication is that femininity itself is a magical device to attract the attentions of men. In one chapter, "Looks Are Everything", Le Vey gives the reader make-over recipes designed to attract certain types of men. This is the type of witchcraft provided by many women's magazines – buy this product, change your hair and you will be a more successful, popular person, and is similar to the route to empowerment that Joan takes.

Tellingly, as the film progresses, Joan's clothes become more flamboyant, and her eye make-up is increasingly elaborate and "witchy". Even though the film acknowledges the restrictions placed on women in domesticity, it is her hunger for power in the sexual and closed social field that prompts her interest in magic. This does not, however, extend into political action of a feminist kind. Her actions are solely self-motivated and do not go further than doing away with her husband (which is an "unconscious" murder). There is also an embedded criticism of the commodification of witchcraft in the film. Joan gets her witch's handbook by mail order, and when she obtains the potions and paraphernalia needed for her rituals she pays by credit card (an action placed centre-frame and clearly meant to be seen). This suggests that commercialised magic addresses itself to the dispossessed and, like Le Vey's books, sells itself on its spurious claim to make people powerful.

It is possible to identify with Joan up to a point: particularly her frustrations with domesticity and her fears about the effects of ageing. Witchcraft may offer her a prescribed role to inhabit that allows her to become independent and confident. But this is rather empty, lacking in the wonder of visual magic, and Joan's transformation seems limited. In many ways, it is another hysterical woman film, in which the irrational is figured narrowly as a reflection of the "confused" state of women's minds. The film may not see witchcraft simply as black magic, and it does show some of the attractions of witchcraft for women who find family life constraining. But, in so doing, it calls on sexual sensationalism and murder to sell its rather befuddled political message. The film is marked by a contradictory investment in its central character. We are invited to sympathise with her situation, but, at the same time, we are aligned with Gregg's critical view of middle-class housewives. Accordingly, witchcraft is seen purely in terms of its ability to alleviate Joan's neurosis that stems from sexual frustration and a fear of the ageing process.

Central to many, if not most, witch films is the beauty and ugliness polarity. Often the power of the beautiful witch is dealt with by making her ugly. In *La Maschera del demonio* (*Mask of Satan*, Mario Bava, 1960, Italy), for example, the witch's beautiful face is made ugly by nailing onto it a hideous devil mask, leaving her face full of unsightly holes. The mask and its residual marks act as a warning to men not to be beguiled by the pretty face which masks an "ugly" soul (often meaning that she will exploit the lusts of such men). Other witches use magic to make themselves beautiful, as they know that beauty is a route to power (*The Witches* [1966], *Excalibur*, *Merlin*, *The Craft*). Some witches, as with the witch-queen in the two versions of the Snow White tale discussed below, reverse the scenario of ugly duckling to beautiful swan. They transform themselves into their more "natural" ugly guises. When the witches pull off their human masks and pleasurable scratch their (w)itchy heads in *The Witches* (Nicolas Roeg, 1990, UK), some female viewers might be reminded of the way in which fashion often makes performing femininity

hard labour. The dissembling beauty of witches may provide fuel for male fantasies, masochistic or otherwise, about the secrets and horrors of the female body. But these films equally articulate women's relation to the meanings of physical appearances, and the pleasures and discomforts of the "masquerade" of femininity. In Hammer's *The Witches*, Stephanie Bax explains the appeal of witchcraft to women: "it is a sex thing deep down, of course. Mostly women go for it, older women. They relish the idea of a secret power especially when their normal powers are fading." This is an idea that governs the figuring of the witches in the next group of films.

Green-eyed and wide-eyed – witch mothers and "innocent" daughters: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Snow White: A Tale of Terror*, *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* and "Witch", an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

The tensions between mother and daughter are frequently apparent in the witch film, and particularly in those that have a strong fairy tale element.¹⁷ This relationship is important to the consideration of the female address of these films, and they articulate aspects specific to women's lives. Integral to this are the dynamics of envy and jealousy embedded in the mother-daughter relationship, which is most clearly deployed in film versions of the Snow White fairy tale. In fairy tales, the bad mother is always a stepmother and rarely the child's true mother. This rule is adhered to by the Disney version of Snow White and the later adult-orientated *Snow White: A Tale of Terror* (Michael Cohn, 1997, USA). The bad, witchy mother-figure who is jealous of her daughter's youth and beauty is also central to *Valerie a týden divů* [*Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*] (Jaromil Jireš, 1970, Czechoslovakia). More recently, the witch mother has been more candidly realised as the biological mother, as in an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* entitled "Witch" (1997).

The shape and structure of the mother-daughter relationship in these films are broadly modelled on Melanie Klein's idea that, in the child's fantasy world, the mother is split into two entities: the good mother who fulfils the child's physical needs and demands for love and is an object of love, and the bad mother who does not fulfil these needs and demands and is an object of hate.¹⁸ The bad mother is often figured in fairy tale-based films as the surrogate or stepmother, thereby preserving the domain of the good mother as that of the real biological mother. It is here that the force of ideological models of motherhood is at work. I would, however, want to reconfigure Klein's idea that the "good" and "bad" mother is essential to the child's psyche by making it a retrospectively-produced construct. In other words, the definition of good and bad mothering is something that is reread into a psychoanalytic understanding of the child's psyche, and is given shape by culturally produced stories – such as the fairy tale. In all the films discussed in this section, it is teenage girls who come into conflict with the "bad" mother (who is figured as a

witch). It is mainly during this period of life that greatest conflict between mothers and daughters occurs. The good and bad mother split emerges out of the teenage experience, and not, as Klein maintains, from the child's early relationship with the mother, which is a rather formless world only later given shape through discourse (and is thereby loaded with ideological meaning).¹⁹

The teenage girl's relationship with the mother is highly complex, and many girls deal with these tensions through fantasy. Conscious fantasies of escaping the family also carry with them unconscious fantasies that are often present in the teenage witch film. These include acting out aggressive fantasies against the mother, and imagining various reasons behind a mother's treatment of her daughter. It is common for teenagers to exact a fantasy revenge on a mother for her disciplinary actions by imagining, for example, that she is an evil witch bent on the deliberate persecution of an innocent. In *Wild At Heart* (David Lynch, 1990, USA), for example, Lula (Laura Dern) envisions her jealous mother, who tries to seduce her boyfriend and then plots to have him killed, as the "Wicked Witch of the West" from *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939, USA). Teenage witch films address themselves to the experience of the mother/daughter power relation. In a similar vein, films targeting boys tend to adhere to the basic story of the hero boy doing battle with the bad father, as in the *Star Wars* films (1977-); such a competition is grounded in physical prowess and ethics. But rarely, if ever, are such films focused on a competition based on physical appearance as it is in renditions and derivatives of the Snow White tale.

Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* begins with the witch-queen taking stock of her beauty in her smooth-talking mirror. The mirror tells her that Snow White, her stepdaughter, is fairer than she. That the mirror has a male voice is important as it indicates that the measure of beauty is in the eye of the male beholder, locating the beauty competition that lies at the heart of the tale within the terms of the male gaze. As Disney probably did not want to make the Oedipal subtext too overt, Snow White's father is not present; the mirror acts *in loco parentis* for the absent father, however. He is the measure of beauty and speaks truth, and, unlike the female coded mirror in *Snow White: A Tale of Terror*, does not directly urge the queen to kill Snow White. It is easy to infer that the ageing witch-queen is fearful of losing the power afforded by beauty (but, because the father/king is absent, it is a little hard to see how the witch-queen's powers would be diminished). In order to understand what is at stake in the subtext of the film, it is important to note that Snow White has no (conscious) idea of the power of her own beauty, nor of the jealousy it incites in the witch-queen. It seems strange that the witch-queen gives herself the appearance of a crone-witch when she is so invested in her own beauty. What therefore might be the reasons for such a transformation? It results partly from the need to reveal the witch's ugly essence in her appearance, but furthermore lies in the particular fantasy

that is set into motion by the film. The film's enunciation is structured around a teenage girl's fantasy²⁰ of the mother as sexual competition, albeit that this is somewhat displaced by making the mother a stepmother. The transformation of the cruel stately queen into a gnarled and bent old witch is all part of the girl's latent aggression towards the mother (an underlying Oedipal theme that is more overtly displayed in *Snow White: A Tale of Terror*). The unacceptable and perhaps unconscious desire to commit matricide is masked over by Snow White's sweet innocent nature, her unjust persecution, and her romantic love for the prince. Therefore, the duplicitous witch figure can be read as a creation of the female psyche. It should not, however, be assumed that women viewers are going simply to identify with the Snow White. I suspect that many female viewers also identify with the witch-queen's anger, anxieties and guile. We might celebrate, with a suitable cackle, the fact that she poisons the saccharine heterosexual romance and the cute idyll of woodland life, both grounded in a patriarchal valorisation of passive, innocent and youthful femininity.

Marina Warner maintains that the competing attentions of the daughter and mother for the male hero are intended to flatter a male audience.²¹ This may to an extent be the case, and in *Snow White: A Tale of Terror* the queen/witch does indeed attempt to seduce her stepdaughter's suitor. But I would offer that this scenario is symptomatic of a teenage girl's fantasy: she may well imagine that her mother's attempts to curb her dress and actions are derived from jealousy. (It must be acknowledged, however, that there may be a kernel of truth embedded within the fantasy.) Warner also suggests that fairy stories, such as Snow White, speak of a historically based situation pertaining to medieval family life, in which stepchildren were feared because they stood to inherit. Indeed, Claudia's son in *Snow White: A Tale of Terror* is stillborn, which makes her stepdaughter Lilli (Monica Keena) sole heir to her husband's estate.²² Warner makes a useful attempt to ground the analysis of fairy tale in the historical, which is all too easily sidelined by psychoanalytic accounts of family relations. What Warner neglects to explore is that the stepmother, for modern audiences, may stand in for the real mother in her bad guise. It is used to articulate girls' unconscious and conscious fantasies about getting rid of the mother, albeit filtered through Hollywood's goal of addressing a broad audience range.

In *Snow White: A Tale of Terror*, the witch-queen strongly accords with my retailed version of the Kleinian model. Lilli's mother dies soon after she is born. As an absent mother, she easily becomes idealised for Lilli as the good mother. The anger which she may unconsciously feel in being "abandoned" by this mother is displaced onto Claudia (Sigourney Weaver). When her father marries Claudia, Lilli is extremely jealous. Accordingly, she refuses to participate in the ritual blessing of the marriage, throwing holy water in Claudia's face. Lilli grows up with a deep resentment towards Claudia, feeling that she has replaced

her mother, and begrudges sharing her with her father. Up until the point when Claudia miscarries her baby, the family relations echo the emotional difficulties felt by many modern families.

Such familiar tensions are inscribed into a key scene which precedes Claudia's miscarriage. The scene is pivotal to Claudia's later use of black magic and her status as witch. It begins when a good-looking doctor visits the household. The teenage Lilli is clearly attracted to him, and he to her. As she flirts with him in the corridor, dressed in her shift, a very pregnant Claudia arrives. She tells Lilli that she is inappropriately dressed and hands Lilli one of her old dresses to wear at the evening's entertainment. With typical teenage fury, Lilli stubbornly refuses and storms off to find one of her mother's old dresses in the attic. Claudia makes her entry into the assembled throng. She asks Lilli's father Friedrich (Sam Neill) how she looks – a question which she repeatedly asks him throughout the film. Dressed in golden splendour, she takes centre-stage, singing a beautiful medieval-style ballad that holds the assembled court spellbound. At the close of her enchanting song, Lilli makes her way towards her father. She is dressed in a white velvet dress and her hair is adorned with pearls. Her father turns to her and asks why she is wearing her mother's dress; Lilli replies that she sought to please him. The beauty-based power struggle between stepmother and stepdaughter becomes increasingly overt as Lilli begins to dance with her father. Claudia looks on with fury as they swirl round the dance floor laughing. The use of the fly-around camera and the editing emphasises Lilli's euphoria and Claudia's sense that her world is slipping from her grasp. Claudia's swollen belly, her golden dress, and the ears of corn and field flowers in her head-dress reference the Greek goddess Demeter: the earth mother. As the dance continues, Claudia is struck down by pain; the cross-cutting between the dancers and Claudia indicates a causal link between the actions, as if Lilli's triumphant dance with her father is the direct cause of Claudia's impending miscarriage.

The scene is framed by both women's anxieties about the power of appearance to gain the attentions of the patriarch. It is not just Lilli that Claudia fears – several times in the film, she tells a young maid to hide her tumbling hair, and eventually this maid becomes one of Claudia's zombie-puppets, with roughly shorn hair. It is Lilli who attacks Claudia on her weakest front through her desire to become a biological mother. By wearing her mother's dress, Lilli proves that she has become a woman, and further reminds Friedrich of the love he lost in tragic circumstances. Claudia needs to provide a son to become equal to the dead wife. When she loses the baby and is told that she will have no more children, her route to power is blocked. In desperation, she turns to the mirror and asks why her baby was lost. The magic mirror in this film is not gendered male, as in Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The entity that talks to Claudia is, in part, a reflection of herself in idealised form. It is also strongly implied that the mirror is closely linked to Claudia's mother.

Earlier, Claudia spoke of her mother as being persecuted: "Tomorrow I will be a wife, a Hoffman. What would mother say if she could see me now? Would she be happy for me, would she smile or be angry knowing that the world that so despised her has embraced me?". This implies that her mother was a witch. As Claudia speaks, she unveils the covered box containing the mirror, and places her hands on the wooden hands that clasp together to close the mirror. The hands seem to represent those of a pregnant mother folded over her belly, and they also connote the opening of a secret as they come apart to reveal the mirror. If this is remembered later on, when the mirror speaks to Claudia, it becomes evident that the mirror reflects her mother's retributive and murderous desires.

Another small detail builds an early link to witchcraft: the presence of the raven. It is kept in Claudia's room, and she uses it as her eyes to find Lilli later in the film. Furthermore, in the opening shots of the film, when Friedrich and his first wife's carriage crashes down into a ravine, a raven watches the action: could this indicate that Claudia or her mother has engineered the death of Friedrich's wife? Claudia's beautiful singing voice and her brother's magic tricks may provide further signs of this legacy of magic. The mirror belonged to her mother and it may be inferred that her mother speaks to her through it (or alternatively a psychotic projection of Claudia's refractory desires). The mirror lays great importance on, and reinforces Claudia's narcissistic investment in, her beauty. The mirror suggests that the cause of the baby's death lies with Lilli and that she must be killed. Lilli's lineage, as well as her youth and beauty, are in themselves spells that bind Claudia in a web of hysteria. As Claudia passes into *post-partum* madness, she resorts increasingly to the black magic advocated by the mirror. This involves the transgression of certain taboos that police the hegemonic meaning of ideal motherhood, and, as in many witch films, the witch perpetrates her monstrous attack on the status quo.²³

Claudia chooses to have Lilli killed and then to eat her, except the heart, in a stew. (The heart perhaps represents Lilli's "goodness", and its consumption may act as a form of counter-magic.) From Claudia's point of view, this would be a fitting end for one who caused the premature stillbirth of the baby – an incorporation of flesh to compensate for the loss. The witch who lives in the wood and dines on the bodies of children is a common feature of fairy tales – as in *Hansel and Gretel* or Polish and Russian tales of the Babayaga (a witch who eats children) – and is translated into urban myth in *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, 1999, USA). The child-eating witch conforms to the Kleinian model of the bad mother. Instead of filling the child with food and love, it is consumed to sustain her. Klein says that this a fantasy grounded in guilt. It articulates the child's fear that the all-seeing, all-powerful mother will pay it back for all its nasty punishing fantasies. Accordingly, witch Claudia can see everything Lilli does. Lilli cannot hide

from her. Claudia relentlessly pursues her by magical means with the aim of killing her. Superficially, Lilli is innocent of the crime which Claudia believes she has committed, but Lilli is also guilty of hating her – a guilt that prompts Lilli to seek reparation after Claudia has miscarried. As Claudia's crimes grow and she seeks to kill Friedrich, using first his sperm and then his blood to bring her dead baby back to life, Lilli becomes increasingly "justified" in her attempt to kill Claudia. That Claudia seeks the death of Friedrich is a measure of her madness and of the control which the mirror has over her. Paradoxically, it is her obsessive desire to be a good mother that prompts her to kill Friedrich. Such actions led Lilli into a rite-of-passage scenario in which she receives a battle scar from Claudia that mirrors that of her lover Will, making her his equal. As Lilli's previous suitor has been tainted through his tacit erotic desire for Claudia (a desire Claudia used to help find Lilli), he must die for his sins. The final battle between the two women signals Lilli's achievement of regaining her father's and her lover's undivided love, an Oedipal fantasy that may be common to many teenage girls. In appealing to such an audience, the film lends Lilli a contemporary action-woman edge; she deals with her stepmother's magic with physical force, and literally defeats her in hand-to-hand combat. When Claudia dies, her precious beauty is drained from her, and she becomes, like Morgana, old and ugly. This method of killing the witch departs from the Disney formula, where the enraged animals and dwarfs drive the witch over the cliff to her doom. Unlike Disney's Snow White, Lilli does not have to be gentle and non-violent to retain her feminine status, appealing to teenage female audiences who have been raised on a popular cultural diet of tough but tender women, as in *Xena Warrior Princess*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Tomb Raider's* Lara Croft. In both films, however, the witch mother dies ugly and decrepit. While this follows the conventional Hollywood alignment that ties physical appearance to character, it also leans on the dynamics that darkly inform many mother-daughter relationships.

The witch mother theme is also used in the Czech fairy tale film *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*. Distributed in the UK by Redemption (who specialise mainly in European sexploitation films), it is marketed as a softcore virgin's sexual awakening film. The cover blurb emphasises this, stating that it is a film about "the hopes, fears and clamorous anticipations of Valerie as she crosses the threshold from girlhood to womanhood".²⁴ Like *Snow White: A Tale of Terror*, it has a "15" rating and is a fairy tale designed for adult consumption. This permits the film to make some of the sexual subtexts of the fairy tale more overt. The narrative relies very heavily on striking and carefully composed images, in conjunction with a diverse use of music. It is a deeply enigmatic film that twists and turns like a dream. The focus on magic and fairy tale form allows *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders* to flout laws of cause and effect, and a linear organisation of time and space. The story is enunciated as Valerie's subjective point of view, charting her negotiation of the strange world of

adult desire and eroticism.

Valerie (Jaroslava Schallerová) lives with her grandmother; with the onset of menstruation, her life turns into a fairy tale in which the terrible and beautiful secrets of adult life are revealed to her. One of the guiding enigmas of the film is the unstable identity of Valerie's parents. Even by the film's end, their characters are constantly changing. They slide in and out of being "good" and "bad", never quite conforming absolutely to one or the other, undergoing a constant process of splitting. Given that in mainstream cinema characters generally have a stable continuity, this is rather confusing. Nevertheless, it reflects Valerie's subjective world, in which fantasy is used as a space wherein fictional reasons are constructed to explain puzzling adult behaviours. Like many teenagers, Valerie learns that adults are not what they appear to be – particularly her family and the priest. As such, and for an adult female audience, the film draws on nostalgic fantasies of our lives as teenagers. Valerie is the "ego" of the tale and seems to reflect the defence mechanisms used by the teenager to lessen the impact of the rapid emotional and physical changes that rock our sense of identity. While there might be a male fantasy of inhabiting the body of a young girl – as in *Strange Days* (1995), where one of selling-points of the technology is that men experience being an "eighteen-year-old girl taking a shower" – it also articulates the teenage girl's efforts to become differentiated from her parents. Only Valerie and Eagle (who may, or may not, be her brother) are not subject to the constant transformations that the other characters undergo. Her grandmother at first appears to be an upright and elegant old lady. Valerie is forced, however, by the demon Constable, who is a vampire and her grandmother's ex-lover, to watch her grandmother tear off her clothes and plead with the priest for sex. Valerie is caught up in a flood of conflicting desires, making characters fluid and transmutable. Her attempt to make sense of this is analogous to the dynamics of the primal scene as figured by psychoanalysis.

Laplanche and Pontalis argue that the primal scene is fundamental to the fantasy life of children (which continues to inform adult sexuality).²⁵ It is born of the child's attempt to understand his or her origins and the role that sex has in this. Many films use the fact of overhearing or watching other people have sex; indeed, film itself might be said to lean on the viewer's pleasure of watching what is generally forbidden to us. In this film, however, such an action is made explicit. Valerie spends much of the film watching other people have sex, and is party to other enigmatic exchanges between adults. A crucial interaction takes place between the demon and Valerie's grandmother, and is overseen by the hidden Valerie. Her grandmother asks the demon to reinstate her former youth and beauty. He grants her this wish by making her into a vampire. Restored to her beauty, she is exactly the image of Valerie's mother (they are played by the same actress, Helena Anýzová) seen in a household portrait. She sets out to destroy Valerie, who might usurp her in the affections of the demon. He may well be Valerie's father,

lending an Oedipal aspect to the brew, and covets her body and pure blood. However, she is saved from his advances by the magic contained in mother's bell earrings. These earrings seem to represent the "good" mother who is never unequivocally present in the film. They save Valerie from the demon, and further protect her against the priest's lustful intentions, and from burning as a witch.

Valerie's world is filled with deception and lust, against which she strives to retain her innocence and independence. Her grandmother (who is also her mother) is an irrational figure, and there is no explanation of her actions, unlike for Claudia in *Snow White: A Tale of Terror*, other than her quest for youth and beauty. Nevertheless, the film deploys innocence and beauty as an idealised state, and these are embodied in Valerie (always dressed in white). Viewing the film as an adult, I can sympathise and identify with her path through the hazards of other people's desires. Like many teenage girls, Valerie embarks on a journey through the perils and pleasures of sexuality and desire; along the way she encounters the tangled contradictions of adult sexuality that make her family members seem duplicitous and enigmatic.

As Freud argues in *Der Familienroman der Neurotiker* (*Family Romances*, 1909), it is common for children to fantasise about family intrigues, which may involve being fathered or mothered by a more prestigious parent.²⁶ Valerie's subjective rendering of her family circumstance is close to this. She imagines a number of scenarios in which her family members are endowed with magical powers as demons, witches and vampires – to which she is often a voyeuristic witness. She is subject to their seductions and jealous aggressions. This frames the theme of the innocent beauty vs. the old woman who covets beauty and uses magic to achieve sexual gratification. *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, as a softcore "virgin in peril" movie, may be marketed to a traditionally male audience, but through the use of fairy tale tropes it is able to speak to women's experiences of teenage life. During this time, sexuality seems mysterious and strange, older people's desires may seem bestial and undermine our former naïve idealisation of them, and the mother potentially transforms from a protective agent into a green-eyed monster jealous of her daughter's youth and beauty.

Lending the mother/daughter beauty and power competition theme a more contemporary edge, and actively targeting a young female audience is an episode of the television serial *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* entitled "Witch". The series is set in a Californian high school, and, although Buffy (Sarah Michelle Gellar) is the chosen one – the designated slayer of vampires – she also lives a life familiar to contemporary American middle-class teenagers. In an attempt to make her life more normal, she tries for the school cheer-leading team with Amy Madison (Elizabeth Anne Allen). Amy appears to be under pressure from her mother to be a cheer-leader. At the trial, another very talented girl does her routine, during which her hands become engulfed in flames. Giles

(Anthony Stewart Head), Buffy's English "watcher" and school librarian, pronounces that such an event must have been caused by witchcraft. Buffy and her friends deduce that Amy must be practising witchcraft to enable her to get on the team. They believe this is because Amy desperately wants to please her mother. Giles is somewhat incredulous that someone would want to use witchcraft to get on the cheer-leading team (earlier, he had disparagingly called cheer-leading a "cult"): "Let me make sure I have this right. This witch is casting horrible and disfiguring spells so that she can become a cheer-leader?". Buffy replies: "I think you are underestimating the amount of pressure a parent can lay on you. If you are not a picture-perfect carbon copy they tend to wig". Buffy puts a teenager's perspective on events and, in so doing, explains why witchcraft may appeal to Amy as a means of taking control of her situation. It is plain that "making the team" promotes a great deal of jealous competition between the girls, mostly because it makes them popular with the sporty boys. It transpires, however, that in fact it is Amy's mother who is a witch, and she has swapped bodies with Amy; but, because Amy's body is different from her own, she is far less successful at cheer-leading than before, and has to use witchcraft to get herself on the team.

The entire episode is framed by Buffy's own generational struggles with her mother. At the outset, she argues with her mum Joyce (Kristine Sutherland) about her choice of leisure activities. Joyce wants her to be editor of the yearbook, which Buffy regards as supremely "uncool". Considering the power struggles between Amy and her mother, Buffy's minor disagreements with Joyce are pale by comparison. But this also provides a neat way of showing how the normal tensions of the mother and daughter relationship are inscribed into Amy's mother's use of witchcraft. As in the *Snow White* tale and *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, Amy's mother uses witchcraft to restore her youth, and she does so at the expense of her daughter's life. This would therefore seem to be a teenage girl's fantasy, in which the mother is invested with jealousies about her daughter's youth and opportunities. It is perhaps more acceptable in this guise than as a mother's fantasy: mothers' dreams are supposed to be about a child's success, and not jealousies around sexual attraction. It is also possible, however, to reread Amy's mother's crimes in terms of her going against the status quo. Like Claudia, she has experienced extreme disappointment, and that bitterness is offloaded onto the daughter. To an extent, Amy's mother is cast in opposition to *Carrie White's* mother in *Carrie* (1976). Amy's mother is not a hysteric based on the stringent repression of her sexuality; instead, she wants more life, more sex and more popularity and, through witchcraft, she will use her daughter's body to get it. This is dark territory, and, as if in an attempt to deflect the evocation of such errant emotions, the episode ends by making it evident that Joyce is more than happy with her life, and would hate to be sixteen again. Joyce is the "good-enough" mother here, and her presence deepens the pathologised state of Amy's mother. As Joyce and

Buffy are the central figures set up for identification, mothers and daughters watching the show are able to breathe a sigh of relief. Like Snow White, Lilli and Lula in *Wild At Heart*, Amy is a wide-eyed innocent, subject to the horrific actions of her green-eyed witch mother. Amy Madison's mother wants her daughter's skin for cheer-leading in. We are left with the intriguing question: is this a fantasy that speaks more appositely to the mother or to the daughter?

Teenage apprentice witches – girl power: *Little Witches* and *The Craft*

As with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the more anodyne *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* television series (1997-, USA), *The Craft* (Andrew Fleming, 1996, USA) and *Little Witches* bring witchcraft into the contemporary American high school. As a big-budget general cinema release film, *The Craft* uses state-of-the-art CGI effects, well-known stars and big-name bands for the soundtrack. *Little Witches* is a straight-to-video film wrought in exploitation cinema mode, and riding on the back of the marketing and box-office success of the former film released six months earlier. *The Craft* intentionally targeted a teenage to middle-aged female audience, using songs from bands with female singers such as Siouxsie and the Banshees, Portishead and Marianne Faithfull. It also references American film and television witches in *Bewitched* (1964-72), *The Witches of Eastwick* (George Miller, 1987, USA) and *Jack's Wife* (from which it draws the language used for its main rituals). As an exploitation-style film, *Little Witches* lures a male audience through its use of naked schoolgirls and traditional low-budget horror renderings of witchcraft. It is dependent on slasher movie scares, gory deaths, tattooed and dwarf nuns, strange goings-on in the convent and vivid lighting, connecting it to European sex-horrors of directors such as Dario Argento, Michele Soavi and Jess Franco.

Both films focus on the inter-group dynamics of schoolgirl friendships and the pressures of life in the precarious transitional world between childhood and adulthood. Magic promises the girls a way of controlling their worlds – a pleasure vicariously experienced by a female audience. This is best illustrated by *The Craft*. Before the final showdown between the main characters, the film spends a great deal of screen time charting the pleasures afforded to the girls by witchcraft. When they conduct their first outdoor ritual, each wishes for a particular event. The ritual is blessed with a cloud of butterflies sent by the nature deity to whom their wishes were addressed, which Nancy (Fairuza Balk) calls "Manu". Bonnie has congenital scar tissue on her upper body which, like Nimue in *Merlin*, she regards with great shame, and it undermines her self-confidence. After the ritual, her scars magically vanish and her confidence grows. This conforms to the common link between witchcraft and beauty in many female-orientated witch films, and is something with which many women can identify. Rochelle (Rachel True) is subject to some vicious racist remarks from a blonde white girl outside their group;

retribution is dealt as the girl begins to lose her hair. (She had ridiculed Rochelle's hair.) Again, this centres on an attack wrought according to the law of *lex talionis* on a narcissistic pride in appearance. Sarah (Robin Tunney) places a love spell on a boy, Chris (Skeet Ulrich), who has a history of humiliating girls – including Sarah and Nancy. Because of the spell, he is transformed from macho misogynist to lovesick puppy, earning the disgust of his male friends. Nancy's wishes are rather darker than those of the others, and she keeps her wish secret. It involves causing the death of her drunken stepfather, who leaves her and her mother a big insurance policy enabling them to move out of the "white-trash" trailer park into a stylish apartment. All these wishes are intended to reflect those of the average woman, and we are encouraged to identify with their pleasure at having achieved them – even the retributive wishes are, in some way, justifiable. The witchcraft in *Little Witches* is far less concentrated on the individual wishes of the girls. These are primarily a means by which a demon lures the girls into releasing him into the world.

What the films do have in common is that most of the dramatic tension hinges upon a competition between the two dominant girls: Jamie (Sheeri Rappaport) and Faith (Mimi Reichmeister) in *Little Witches*, and Nancy and Sarah in *The Craft*. Jamie and Nancy are both dark-haired, selfish and manipulative, and are abused by their fathers/stepfathers. They are more daring, ambitious and outlandish than the other girls in the groups. The films thereby draw on the trope of the delinquent teenager whose "badness" is directly related to family circumstances. The films set up Jamie and Nancy in competition with the "good" girls Faith and Sarah. They have biblical names, are fair-haired and each have a dead parent (Faith's father and Sarah's mother). The other girls in the two groups are apt to follow the bad girl's lead, and are less important to the narrative than the competing lead couples.

Jamie and Nancy both harbour resentments and jealousies about their good girl counterparts. Jamie is intent on breaking Faith's budding romance with the gentle but muscular Daniel (Tommy Stork). Towards the start of *Little Witches*, Jamie gives Daniel a very direct sexual offer, which he rejects. The less direct Faith, all coy smiles and stammers, succeeds where Jamie failed. In revenge, Jamie connives to bring Daniel into their shared bedroom, and drops her towel in a further attempt to seduce him. Because she knows that her naked body has a certain effect on men, proved earlier as she does a striptease for the group of men working on the church, she believes that this will work with Daniel. It does not and she learns that he is a virgin – this is important as a virgin is needed for the Good Friday ritual to make "he who comes" come. As the naked Jamie sits astride the protesting Daniel (perhaps soliciting counter-protestations from a young male audience), Faith walks in. In the cutthroat world of teenage dating, this is a girl's worst nightmare. Jamie uses the situation to persuade Faith that Daniel is a flagrant womaniser. She says he tried to rape her, which Faith does not believe, and claims that he is not really

interested in Faith other than as a sexual conquest, which she does believe.

A similar scenario occurs in *The Craft* and involves the use of Nancy's newly acquired magical powers. Here it is less of a girl's worst nightmare than a boy's worst nightmare (which may encapsulate the different gender address intended by each of the films). The love spell renders Chris hopelessly in love with Sarah. Previously he had had sex with Nancy. After rejecting her, he then spread vicious gossip about her. Nancy takes her revenge on him by adopting Sarah's appearance. This action is grounded in Nancy's jealousy of, and urge to compete with, Sarah. Rather like Morgana in *Excalibur*, she sits astride him in the traditional sexual position for the sexually aggressive woman. Like Arthur, Chris believes that he has attained the object of his sexual desire, and, when Sarah bursts into the room, Nancy cruelly reveals herself to him, leaving him confused. She then shoves him out of the window to his death. This is Nancy's first real attack on Sarah, showing that her use of magic is not simply harmless fun, but rooted in the selfish fulfilment of dark desires (and has a certain bad-girl appeal). In both films, the "bad" girls regard sex as a form of power over men, and are jealous when the objects of their desire do not reciprocate because of their allegiances to other women.

The tussles over the bodies and desires of men are a reflection of a greater power struggle between the good and bad girl, and can be located within an Oedipal framework. In both films, the demonic power which the girls invoke is clearly gendered male, and Nancy and Jamie regard themselves as the demon's chosen one. In *Little Witches*, the demon is named by the grimoire as the "horned one" and the "One Who Comes" – a cue for much girlish giggling – and he is further described as a pagan fertility god. He is thereby linked in the girls' minds with sex. Jamie wholeheartedly buys into the idea that she will become the Devil's mistress and that this will afford her immense power. This leans on the horror film convention of the demonic as the primal, bad father; he may mean death to his sons, but he can give power to his favoured daughters. Jamie's lust for power is then embroiled within an Oedipal relation with the father – magic gives her privileged access to the powerful father. She is prompted to kill the good nurturing father- and mother-figures, murdering the priest, Sister Clodagh and Sister Sherilyn, so that she can evoke the demon father. Furthermore, the film makes a spurious connection between Jamie's abuse at the hands of her father and her desire to become the Devil's mistress. In *Little Witches*, "he who comes" is therefore figured along classic Christian lines as a corrupter of minds. As with the demon Pazuzu in *The Exorcist* (1973), "he who comes" uses Jamie's unconscious Oedipal fantasies and desires for power to bring about his own materialisation.

The supernatural force in *The Craft* is far more complex than the more traditional devilish embodiment of evil in *Little Witches*. Although

Nancy thinks of the force as a male entity, there is no direct evidence, other than her desire to do so, to support her interpretive gloss. As the good witch owner of the magic shop explains to Sarah, the force is more abstract and can be shaped and used according to the individual's psyche. Nancy is the first to be touched by Manu; she feels its force coursing through her body, and regards this as a sexual experience and a reflection of her own "special" nature. Nancy treats it in the manner of a conventional demon. But Manu is not this type of demon, and, because she has used the gift of power in immoral ways, the force turns against her and she loses it. Jamie and Nancy embody all the myths about witches put about by medieval and Renaissance propaganda; they are driven by vengeful fury, and seek intercourse with the demonic. They believe in their own superiority over the other girls, demonic power enabling them to shore up their precarious sense of self-worth. Narcissism, pride, jealousy and greed for power are their sins – sins that the good girls seem better able to keep in quiet abeyance. Grounded in an erotic investment in the primal father, their actions can be read as symptomatic of a more general unconscious desire to do away with the competition to gain the attentions of the bad father, and not the bourgeois patriarch, as in the versions of the "Snow White" tale.

Faith and Sarah, however, carry something of the Snow White figure with them. They have both experienced the loss of a parent. Like Lilli, Sarah's mother died when she gave birth to her. Both Nancy and Jamie slot into the role of the wicked stepmother and initiate the good girls' voyage through a rite of passage into womanhood. It is due to the absence of the good girls' mothers that the bad girl can step into the jealous shoes of the bad mother. Sister Sherilyn and Sister Clodagh from *Little Witches* and the good witch from the magic shop in *The Craft* go some way towards fulfilling the role of the good mother, but none of them has the power fully to protect the good girls from the bad. Like the "final girl" in slasher movies,²⁷ Faith and Sarah must do battle with Jamie and Nancy on their own terms. The absent parents afford them the space to prove themselves and become differentiated from the family. Both films have a "learning to be women" theme: Faith and Sarah have to learn how to deal with the jealousies connected with sexuality, and are forced to find their own moral voices and break the mirror spell of auto-erotic narcissism (indicated by the ritual use of hand-mirrors into which the girls gaze in both films). Witchcraft is aligned to the powers of seduction and the masquerade of femininity, and the shared moral lesson of both films is that magic incurs a heavy price – primarily the price of friendship. Although both films link witchcraft with entry into sexuality, they have very different takes on the supernatural.

The Craft figures the supernatural within the terms of modern paganism and alternative religions. It is a powerful force, but not inherently evil. Magic is rendered as an attractive escape from everyday problems, and is aligned to specifically feminine concerns. The film

therefore departs from traditional horror movie configurations of witchcraft. (Interestingly, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, medievalist and New Age versions of witchcraft are used.) *Little Witches* styles itself on a conventional dualistic approach to the supernatural, where the forces of good do battle with the Devil. These different approaches have a bearing on the gendered address of the two films. The New Age-style philosophy of magic in *The Craft* (echoed in *Practical Magic* [Griffin Dunne, 1998, USA]) may well be more appealing to a mainstream female audience than the sexploitation take in *Little Witches*. Through its use of CGI effects, which are often rather gentle and beautiful, and the references to *Bewitched* and other female-orientated witch texts, *The Craft* is better able to tap into female fantasies about witchcraft as a form of wish-fulfilment. This is filtered through a contemporary feminist-based view of magic and nature. However, it lacks the recalcitrant desires for the othered and demonic masculine expressed through Jamie in *Little Witches*.

Witch-wives – subverting domesticity?: *Bell Book and Candle* and *Practical Magic*

A dominant theme in witch films falling into the category of Hollywood romantic comedy is the witch who loses her powers because she falls in love and wants to marry a man. The theme was first used in *I Married a Witch* (René Clair, 1942, USA), taken up in *Bell Book and Candle* (Richard Quine, 1958, USA) and the television series *Bewitched*, and slightly remodelled in *Practical Magic*. Designed to appeal to a female audience, these texts portray congenital witches who must choose between love and witchcraft. As with most witch films, they articulate women's "otherness" in terms of witchcraft. Their dramatic shape pivots around the transition made by the witch from her independent life as a "free spirit" to the constraints of the heterosexual romance and the follow-on roles of wife and mother. Are these texts simply a way of romanticising the conformity necessitated by the demands of marriage? Or do they articulate many of the contradictions and tensions facing women in relation to marriage and family life? I would argue that they chart the complex experience of conflicting desires that many women suffer in the face of romantic love, and they further offer women viewers pleasurable subversions of the heterosexual romance. As with many Hollywood films, *Bell Book and Candle* and *Practical Magic* open the doors on transgression and conflict. Following the ideological demands of closure and the preservation of the gendered status quo, these conflicts are closed down; nevertheless, the two films raise a little storm that exceeds their rather anodyne endings.

The central protagonist of *Bell Book and Candle* is Gillian Holroyd (Kim Novak), a stylish Greenwich Village witch. She lives in an apartment block with her Aunt Queenie (Elsa Lanchester) and rents out an apartment to the upwardly mobile publisher Shep Henderson (James

Stewart), who represents the "normal" world. Gillian comes from a long line of witches hailing from Salem. Her aunt and brother Nicky (Jack Lemmon) are happy with their lives as witches. Gillian, however, is not; she yearns for the ordinary, and is deeply attracted to nice guy Henderson. Learning that he is to be married to another woman the following day, Gillian weaves a spell to make Henderson fall in love with her. As she makes her spell, Novak gets her first lingering close-up. She holds a Siamese cat whose face is slightly below her own and we are encouraged to make a comparison. This is the first time that viewers, and Henderson, are given the opportunity to look at length at Novak's face. With her green eyes, prominent arched eyebrows and silver-toned hair, Novak's face connotes seduction, masquerade and obsession (particularly after *Vertigo* [1958]). This, of course, leans on the age-old fantasy of the witch as seductress, and the classic jealous witch is also invoked as we learn that Henderson's fiancée was an enemy of Gillian's in school. But, because Gillian is offered as the key point of identification for women viewers, the film is careful to temper such allusions. Witchcraft in romantic comedy is used to figure gender difference and is not designed to terrify, as it is in fairy tales and the horror film. As such, it dispenses with the common binary pairing of innocent girl vs. bad girl or bad mother. In many ways, the conflict produced by Gillian's romantic involvement with Henderson results in an internalised version of this split. Witchcraft is not figured as evil, but instead is a metaphor for independence and non-conformity (as it is in *I Married a Witch*, *Bewitched* and *Practical Magic*). The witches that frequent the Zodiac Club are a combination of non-conformist types: beatniks, "eccentric" middle-aged women, and lovers of jazz. In conjunction with her witch status, Gillian's love of going barefoot suggests her non-conformity, in conjunction with the African masks and totemic objects that she sells in her shops, she is tacitly linked to the primal world of raw sex, magic and voodoo. These dangerous connections are only ever implied at the level of nuance, but tantalisingly evoke the desires that must be swept away if Gillian is to "live happily ever after" with Henderson and his "normality". Gillian slips from the world of supernatural magic into the world of romantic magic. For some female viewers, Gillian's "fall" may represent the reinscription of feminine desire into the preferred mode of the heterosexual and patriarchal order.

Before Gillian falls for the "otherness" of normal life, she is shown to be an independent and sophisticated woman. She experiences romantic love as a painful process: it makes her cry, as if tears are the sign of a new softer, non-witchy femininity. Her transition from witch to lovelorn human is a prerequisite for Henderson to fall in love with her "naturally" without the intervention of magic. What the film shows is that it is women who must sacrifice something if they are to embrace heterosexual romance. It further suggests, however, that for a woman to fall in love she must be tamed by a tough but tender man. Such a fantasy is present in many female-orientated texts, from the melodrama to the bodice-ripper; it may

well have some attraction for women, which they may find troubling. But it cannot be simply seen as an expression of 1950s gender conservatism, as it is reiterated in Sally's relationship with Gary in *Practical Magic*. *Bell Book and Candle* does not present the heterosexual romance as easy, but demonstrates that it has its price to pay. In being tamed by the irrational power of love, Gillian loses her seductive witchy self-sufficiency. The bitter-sweet implication of such an exchange, rare in Hollywood depictions of romance, is not lost on a female audience. Perhaps for a 1950s female audience this was not seen as specifically feminist, in the way that those watching today might read the film. Despite this difference, the film expresses the sacrifices necessary to take one's place in the conventions of heterosexual romance and marriage. A key attraction of the film is that it figures witchcraft as an articulation of a wild femininity, eschewing the "human" values shaped by the patriarchal matrix. That this speaks to a present-day mass female audience is reflected in the fact that, 40 years after *Bell Book and Candle*, *Practical Magic* returns to the same theme.

Internet newsgroup discussions reveal two very opposed views of *Practical Magic*. One group regards the film favourably as a piece of pretty escapism that Hollywood has recently lost in its preoccupation with action heroes and CGI-enhanced explosions, and the other regards it as a piece of intelligence-insulting anodyne eye candy. The newsgroups also reveal that it is seen as a "chick flick", a reading sometimes used pejoratively, and at others positively. The film certainly purports to enter into the world of female fantasies derived partly from previous Hollywood-style witch films and fairy tale-style romance. The film was a money-spinner and represents one of the few recent mainstream big-budget films targeted at women. Although there are hints of witches' seductive powers, there is little use of traditional witch-stereotypes. Witchcraft is rendered Californian-style in terms of healing and protection, and through a very un-postmodern investment in being "yourself", which some women regard as empowering. *Practical Magic* and *Bell Book and Candle* dabble in a type of magic that cannot be defined along simple dualistic lines of white magic and black magic. While the witches in *Practical Magic* have the means of invoking demons, they prefer, instead, to make herbal bath oils and impotency cures. They are, therefore, unlike the monstrous witches of children's films and the horror genre.

Entry into the pleasures offered by the film requires identification with the two women witches and their hopes, anxieties and desires. Both women are in search of a man who will be able to break the Owens' family curse. This was invoked by a pregnant witch-ancestor abandoned by her lover, and entails that any man with whom an Owens woman falls in love will die before his time. As with *Bell Book and Candle*, the Owens' witches are not evil, it is just that they have knowledge of magic, which is used mainly in small, rather domestic ways (making love philtres and stirring their drinks). Their witchcraft is mostly herb-based and, as

Sally explains to Gary, relies to a great extent on the simple act of believing in its veracity. They do not use it to conjure devils or claim power over other people, as do the teen-witches in *The Craft* and *Little Witches*. *Practical Magic* places a good deal of the witches' power in the solidarity between women (as in *The Witches of Eastwick*) and between sisters. They may occasionally argue with one another, but there is no significant competition set up between the women in the film. The only fight that occurs in the film is the struggle to return Gillian's dead and abusive demon lover to his grave. For many women, the fantasy on which the film rests is that of an idyllic and matrilinear family, in which problems are worked on together through a shared language of magic.

Their magic is grounded in domesticity: the herbs grown in the garden, and the brooms used to create the magic circle and to sweep away the dirt that is all that is left of Gillian's demon lover, Angelov (Goran Visnjic). The idyllic domestic bliss is, however, aided by the beauty of the house they live in, and by the fact that they are rich. Even Gillian (Nicole Kidman), who ran away from its cosiness in search of thrills in the big city, returns to it with pleasure. The only fears the women experience are connected to men. They fear their male lovers will die because of their love, and central to the dramatic tension of the film are their attempts finally to kill off the undead Angelov. His violence towards Gillian leads to the sisters feeding him poison, which accidentally kills him. But he does not stay buried, returning to haunt and possess Gillian.

Like Gillian in *Bell Book and Candle*, Sally (Sandra Bullock) wants a normal life, and renounces her powers when she marries. She sticks to this and only resorts to magic to help her sister. Later, her "dream" lover Gary tells her that she should "just do her thing", sanctioning her return to magic. This is very unlike other witch-wife films: in *I Married a Witch*, Jennifer (Veronica Lake) gives up magic when she marries, as does *Bewitched's* Samantha (Elizabeth Montgomery) and Gillian in *Bell Book and Candle*. In these, equality between the couples leans on the woman giving up her witch-powers. In *Practical Magic*, equality is not rendered through a demand to give up magic, but through Sally continuing to practise it. In many ways, this answers the difficulty that the previous films presented to a female audience – in *Practical Magic*, Sally can have her cake and eat it, too. There is also a "postfeminist" dimension to the film, as it supposes that the heterosexual romance has freed itself from inequality.

So does the film present witchcraft as subversion? It does, to the extent that it allows the women to be independent, bonds the women together, and values the older aunts for their magic and eccentricity. But these witches tend to lack the perversity required of a truly subversive witch, such as Livia, Morgana, Mab and Claudia. In *Practical Magic*, the witch-aunts and the young girls dress in black clothes, resembling members of the Addams Family clan, but there is no Morticia Addams cutting the heads off the roses and encouraging her children to play

dangerously, nor is there a witch-wife doing magic behind her husband's back, as in *Bewitched*. *Practical Magic* offers a modern fairy tale that is couched within contemporary, rather than medievalist, ideas about witchcraft and magic. Perhaps the most interesting contradiction is in Gillian's desire for the dark and dangerous Angelov. She is sexually attracted to his bad boy persona, but he is also controlling, possessive and violent, and she is torn between lust for the demonic and exciting other and the safety of her family. His lust for her is figured, towards the end of the film, as a classical possession. He gets under her skin, controls her, and can only be rescued by the collective exorcism performed by the women of the town. In contrast to Gillian's dark desires, Sally's relationship with Gary is gentle and figured in terms of mutual love and support, and it is this romance of equality that breaks the Owens' curse. Witchcraft offers an imaginary palliative against domestic violence, and, for some viewers, may therefore offer a fantasy of empowerment. This recuperation may seem "too good to be true", and if it is the *frisson* of transgression and the subversion of dominant values that women viewers are seeking, ironically it is to the archetypal wicked witch in fairy tale and horror that we must turn.

Conclusion: spellbindings

All the witches discussed in this chapter – whether evil mothers, evil daughters, lovesick or sick of love, or temporary dabblers – seek power and the fulfilment of wishes. Many of the films express desires and fantasies specific to women. Some are conservative, others are anticonservative, and often both appear in individual films. The dynamic between the two reflects the possible tensions in women's daily lives, such as women's relationships with their families, sexuality and fantasy, and the changing female body and its meanings. In most of these films, women have privileged access to magic and the supernatural. The occult cinematic framing, with its magical effects, allows transgressive, recalcitrant and conservative wishes to be articulated. The witch figures are also subject to the presence of feminist ideas in the popular domain. These shifting ideas tend to shape the meaning of witchcraft as a *mise en scène* of "feminine" desire, as well as guiding the evolution of genre. In films aimed at a mass market such as *Merlin*, *Bell Book and Candle* and *Practical Magic*, there is a prevalent tension between feminist counter-cultural claims and the demand to promote dominant gendered values. Witches in children's films and horror are often antagonistic and intent on perpetrating evil deeds, which threaten to kill, enslave or consume the central protagonist. The bind here is that they rely upon ideologically-loaded concepts such as the "bad-mother". In the women's film and the romantic comedy, the witch is less likely to be an antagonist. She often falls in love with a mortal man, requiring her to revoke her powers to fit into domestic life as a wife and a mother. These films demonstrate a

discomfort born of conflicting desires that are produced by different articulations of roles assigned to women in the family. Only in *Practical Magic* are the roles of witch and wife and/or mother not seen as mutually exclusive, constituting a "gentle" form of postfeminism.

Often an essentialist idea of femininity is evoked, which enables the films to express desires not consonant with those sanctioned by the family-based status quo, providing a source of dissident and empowering pleasures. In evoking a certain "wildness" which is in excess of domesticity, these films are criticised by some feminist critics as leaning on an ahistorical notion of gender. What these films tell us, however, is that such a figuring of femininity appeals to many women viewers, precisely because it suggests something beyond the confines of social channelling. In *Bell Book and Candle*, for example, this wildness has to be put in abeyance if Gillian is to take her place in the human world and the heterosexual romance. What this evokes, however, is the sense that something has been lost or compromised in the process of being inscribed into the roles of wife and mother. Often a witch's power is achieved through the very domestic tools that define women's roles in the family. The witches in these films are calculated to speak to a female audience, in a way that "nudie" witch films, such as *Virgin Witch* (1970), are less likely to do. Witches in fairy tale film and the horror genre are more inclined to the monstrous than in other genres. These witches may not be simply a rendering of male fantasies about the otherness of the female body. Monstrosity speaks not just to men (as critics such as Barbara Creed imply), but also has a way of addressing itself to women. It may, for example, provide a pleasurable way of viewing the mother, or of framing the female body and femininity as inherently powerful. Equally, girls and women have to deal with changes in the shape of their bodies, and with difficult emotions and fantasies that are anomalous and conflicted, and which do not live up to one's self-image or to the demands of the social order. The monstrous desires of the witch may well help to provide a symbolic language through which women can articulate the hidden and the unspoken, as well as the contradictions that life throws up. Witchcraft therefore provides a language that moves beyond the inchoate world of hysteria. There is ample evidence in the films discussed here to corroborate this view: from the teenage struggles with power and desire in *The Craft*, to the middle-aged anxieties about the body and its powers of seduction in *Snow White: A Tale of Terror*.

All the films discussed in this chapter are, in essence, rite-of-passage films. Sometimes this passage entails entry into mature womanhood, as in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*; sometimes it is related to entry into the heterosexual romance, as in *Bell Book and Candle* and *Practical Magic*. In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Little Witches*, the rite of passage necessitates the symbolic murder of the mother. In *Excalibur*, *Jack's Wife* and *Practical Magic*, it is the murder of

the father. Whatever struggle is undergone in these films, it is framed by family relations, and it is precisely this that is deployed to speak directly to a female audience. The portrayal of witchcraft in these films cannot always be said to be "feminist" – but they do align themselves to feminist ideas. In evoking the idea that "in every woman is a little witch", these films use the cinema of the occult as a means to take flight from the constrictions of the banal and the everyday. They can be read as articulating desires and conflicts, which cannot easily be separated from a patriarchal context, within contemporary women's lives, and providing a means to symbolise the experience of such contradictions. The seductions of the witch film are indeed bitter-sweet as they speak of very real conflicts between freedom and constraint.

Notes

¹ Catherine Clément, "The Guilty One", in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, translated by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986): 4.

² Hélène Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays", in *ibid.*

³ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-century Representations* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996); Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁴ "The presence of the monstrous-feminine in the popular horror film speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity". Creed: 7.

⁵ In a poem entitled "Femmes damnées" ("Damned Women"), a woman is described as having "morne volupté" ("voluptuous apathy"), a phrase which could easily be used to describe Livia. Charles Baudelaire, *Selected Poems*, translated by Joanna Richardson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975): 220-221.

⁶ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988): 324-325.

⁷ Harry M Benshoff, *Monsters in the closet: Homosexuality and the horror film* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1997).

⁸ Bestiality and perversity lurk in many childhood fairy tales, as in "Beauty and the Beast" and "Snow White" (made explicit in the hardcore animation film *Snow White and the Seven Perverts* [1973, filmed anonymously]).

⁹ Throughout this section, I follow the names and their spelling used

by each film.

¹⁰ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: The Women's Press, 1979); Marianne Hester, *Lewd women and wicked witches: A study of the dynamics of male domination* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992). A more complex enquiry into the witch as an antipatriarchal figure can be found in Cixous.

¹¹ Historians such as Hugh Trevor-Roper maintain that the medieval witch is a product of conflict between warring Church factions. This line of argument does not, however, explain the omnipresence of the witch in fairy tale. H R Trevor-Roper, "The European Witch-Craze", in Max Marwick (ed), *Witchcraft and Sorcery: Selected Readings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Education, 1970): 121-150.

¹² Purkiss: 79.

¹³ In interviews, Romero has frequently stated that with *Jack's Wife* he intended to target a female audience and to make a "feminist" film. This is stated on the cover of Redemption's uncut video release of the film, and Romero says so himself in an interview published on the Internet. In the same interview, he states his disappointment that, because of limited distribution, the film did not actually get to the intended audience. See avclub.theonion.com/avclub3401/avfeature3401.html: 2.

¹⁴ Freud's definition of the hysteric is one who suffers from reminiscences. In other words, one who is caught in the past. Mab certainly does not want to be caught in the past – she wants a future. Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, "On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: Preliminary Communication (1893)", in Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, translated and edited by James and Alix Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974): 58.

¹⁵ Anton Le Vey founded the Church of Satan in 1966. His brand of "Satanism" sought to counter puritanical values about sexuality and advocates indulgence in the seven deadly sins forbidden by Christianity – seen as "false moralism". Le Vey's Satanism is not completely devoid of morals, but is very much a product of its time, advocating sex free from guilt, and pride in the self. While it does not actively eschew capitalism (exploit it, says Le Vey), it criticises the hypocrisy of American values. Anton Le Vey, *The Satanic Bible* (London: W H Allen, 1977) [first published in 1969]. Anton Le Vey *The Satanic Witch* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 1989) [first published in 1969/70].

¹⁶ Introduction by Zeena Le Vey in Le Vey (1989): iii-iv.

¹⁷ Angela Carter points to a similar idea in the introduction to her first collection of fairy tales. She refers to this in relation to the figure of the stepmother: "indifference almost universally ascribed to her may...reflect our own ambivalences towards our natural mothers". Angela Carter, *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales* (London: Virago, 1991): xix.

¹⁸ See Melanie Klein, "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms", and "A Study of Envy and Gratitude", in Juliet Mitchell (ed), *The Selected Melanie Klein* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).

¹⁹ Here I am more inclined towards the Jungian concept of *Zurückphantasien* (retrospective fantasy), which suggests that past events are interpreted through the fantasies and desires of the present. The advantage of taking this view is that it enables the work of ideology to be factored into the equation, helping to formulate a concept non-essentialist and discursively formed conception of fantasy.

²⁰ The teenage address is supported by the fact that Disney's Snow White is not a child, but a young woman. Bruno Bettelheim also refers to such an address: "In 'Snow White' the pubertal girl's oedipal struggle is not repressed, but acted out around the mother as competitor". Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (London: Penguin Books, 1991): 205.

²¹ "Fairy stories relate the tensions between competitors for a young man's allegiance; they reflect the difficulty of women making common cause within existing matrimonial arrangements". Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994): 226.

²² *Ibid*: 227-229.

²³ *Partum* comes from the verb *parturire*, meaning to be in labour or to brood on something – Claudia broods on her misfortune stirring her to act on her hatred and jealousy of Snow White.

²⁴ As stated on the back cover of Redemption's video release of the film.

²⁵ See Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality", in Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan (eds), *Formations of Fantasy* (London; New York: Methuen, 1986): 5-34.

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, "Family Romances (1909 [1908])", in Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, translated by James Strachey, edited by Angela Richards (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977): 218-225.

²⁷ Carol J Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1992): 35-41.

5

Voodoo Cinema: Tripping (up and out) on the Black Fantastic

Introduction

Drums beating out their call in the heat of the tropical night, ecstatic dances and spirit possessions, ju-ju dolls and tribal masks, blood sacrifice and zombification – these are the staple ingredients of the voodoo film. The voodoo film draws on a vocabulary of the supernatural that derives from a very specific cultural context, and brings together the themes of witchcraft and possession. In popular cinema, voodoo is presented as an othered knowledge and is often deployed as a counter-discourse to a variety of hegemonic concepts including rationalism, as is also the case with witchcraft. The ostensible distinction between witchcraft and voodoo films is that the supernatural forces of the latter group are rooted in black culture. Does this distinction hold out in the face of closer scrutiny? Are these films informed, as are many films dealing with the supernatural, by medievalist notions of magic as the Devil's discourse? In many films, black magic is conflated with aspects of black culture. Not all voodoo films follow this model, and in those that do there is often another type of magic at work that is not evil in itself. On the whole, voodoo films are deeply ambivalent, drawing on a patchwork of discourses and investments which are often contradictory, and hinge not only on fear, but also on curiosity, fascination and awe.

The horror genre is dependent on the evocation of otherness, often corresponding to the Gothic notion of the sublime – a term that describes the way in which radical otherness attracts and repels with equal power. Many voodoo films take this dynamic to the realms of ethnic and epistemological difference, and sometimes in a less than obvious way. It is tempting to see these films as articulating white anxieties about black power and control, particularly with their preoccupation with poisonings, mind-control, zombification and the portrayal of raw faith and desire. If this view is taken, voodoo films are reduced to being simply the products of a highly conservative colonialist imaginary. While aspects of white anxieties about racial difference are evident in certain films, most voodoo films have diverse and contradictory investments in their subject-matter. Voodoo is often presented, either directly or indirectly, as a challenge to

the grounding concepts of "clean and proper" rationalism, and the status of voodoo as other is frequently presented as something with which to identify. Surprisingly, the majority of voodoo films have a healing and/or redemptive function, a factor often neglected by critics.

All the voodoo films discussed here are structured around a central opposition between the primitive and the civilised. This is grounded in 19th-century colonialist discourses of history and evolution. Voodoo in cinema is appended to the "archaic", and pivots around what is taken to be repressed by processes of "civilisation". The archaic is not simply aligned to the conservative values of evolution theory, however. The legacy of the late-19th-century magical revival is that the archaic and the atavistic became regarded as doorways to the mysteries, requiring that seekers use esoteric knowledges to tap into the primal energies deep within their own psyches (and so challenging the usual displacement of the primitive onto an othered culture). It might appear that voodoo films follow in the evolutionist footsteps of the 19th-century scientific-based discourse that informs Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" (1902), in which Africa is read in terms of the Gothic: a "dark continent" of "wild and wordless wastes".¹ Voodoo cinema carries aspects of this, but it also uses the archaic and the atavistic as a language through which the assumptions of a white bourgeois/colonialist world-view are explicitly or implicitly criticised. The "archaic" is a loaded term, and is often rendered by the evolutionist mould as a mark of barbarity. In voodoo cinema, the archaic is often split into good and bad manifestations, however, and it is rarely buttoned into simple one-to-one correspondences. This is not to say that voodoo is in itself archaic or primitive, but the films figure it as such and deploy it as a "strange attractor". This chapter will identify the competing claims made on the supernatural and the archaic in a cross-section of voodoo films: early classical horror, blaxploitation films, and the 1980s big-budget voodoo cycle.

Voodoo histories

Many people in the Western hemisphere practise voodoo-style religions. This lends fictional representations of voodoo an additional veracity.² It is often practised by people who are descendants of African slaves and who, as Stuart Hall notes, use voodoo-style religions and concomitant myths to retain links with their African cultural identities.³ This adds an important political dimension to its practice, which is not lost on some voodoo films. A number of films, such as *I Walked with a Zombie* (Jacques Tourneur, 1943, USA), *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (Wes Craven, 1988, USA) and *Scream, Blacula, Scream* (Bob Kelljan, 1973, USA), factor ethnicity into their portrayal of voodoo, while films such as *Voodoo* (René Eram, 1995, USA) make no overt reference to it. Despite the fact that the practice of voodoo has political overtones in many of these films, it is rarely used in their marketing. The assumption seems to be that what attracts viewers is

the exotic nature of voodoo. Voodoo stands in white Western culture as a reference point for a real and living belief in the supernatural. My own particular interest in voodoo stems from an attraction to cultural practices that seem to offer an enigmatic alternative to stultifying blanket rationality. I am aware, however, that my particular attraction to voodoo is a product of the way in which it is positioned by Western discourse as an "other"; because of this, I cannot speak for voodoo – I can only speak to it in terms of what the West has invested in it as a cultural practice.

Investments in the otherness of voodoo can be divided into three groups:

- The 'counter-discourse' approach. Voodoo is taken to be a romantic and exotic form of magic that carries with it a Western dissatisfaction with rationalism and other key values. This involves identification with voodoo.
- The 'nonsense' approach. Voodoo is rubbished as childish superstition. This involves a superior distancing from it.
- The 'satanic' approach. Voodoo is regarded as a form of anti-Christian black magic. This may be used as a way of creating a moral distance from it, or might be deployed to boost its attraction as other.

Each category is built on a different relation to voodoo, but all are grounded in a dualistic approach to racial and cultural difference – even if the "counter-discourse" approach entails direct identification with such differences. The majority of voodoo films deploy all three investments to different degrees and to different effects.

From the 18th century to the 20th century, Western writers on Haitian culture have regarded voodoo as ungodly primitivism; the apparent fusion of Christianity and voodoo in Haiti was regarded as a corruption of Christian values.⁴ These writers linked voodoo to their own culturally-based understandings of black magic, often taking the hybrid nature of vodoun as an improper and devilish use of Christianity.⁵ More recently, vodoun and related religious practices have been examined in the apparently less emotive light of anthropology and identity politics. For many filmmakers, the association of black magic and vodoun has been retained. It is not used to castigate its practice, as with the early writers, but as a means to open the doors to an imaginary world of the unknown. Voodoo becomes a way of trading on the lure of a transgressive counter-discourse, involving a relativisation and critique of Western values. As a cultural practice and as a powerful cinematic vocabulary, voodoo stands at the crossroads of diverse cultures and investments. Both are complex and hybrid mixes of histories, informed by imaginary investments,

competing discourses and political tensions. Voodoo cinema deploys hybridity at a number of levels, and traverses racial and epistemological borders. These films frequently pose a challenge to the integrity of conventional binary oppositions. This occurs mainly through the adherence to the idea that magic has real effects, and cannot be explained away by rationalisation.

Hollywood's voodoo cinema has tended to come in waves or cycles; these can be linked to the publication of certain anthropological texts and to the shifting political relations between the United States and Haiti. The first spate of voodoo films emerged during the 1930s, after the publication in the United States of William B Seabrook's *The Magic Island* in 1929.⁶ Its publication coincided with the Harlem Renaissance, when both black and white American artists adopted black culture as exotic. *The Magic Island* purported to be an anthropological study of Haitian culture and was widely read. Its success, in conjunction with the Harlem Renaissance and *Zombie* (1932, a Broadway show), helped voodoo enter into the field of popular culture. Not long afterwards, in 1932, the first voodoo/zombie film *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, USA) hit the cinema screen. Like many subsequent zombie films, it was made outside the studio system.⁷ Although Maya Deren's *The Divine Horsemen* (1953) and Alfred Métraux's *Le Vodou haïtien (Voodoo in Haiti)*, (1958) later made more sympathetic and sober accounts of voodoo, Seabrook's lurid approach to the practice of voodoo set a precedent that has proved hard to shake, and continues to inform its representation in film. In the late-1980s, a new voodoo film cycle was ushered in by the publication of Wade Davis' *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1986). Although based on Davis' anthropological-botanical enquiries into the use and composition of Haitian "zombie-powder", it became the basis for Wes Craven's film of the same name. Davis learns that, to understand Haitian voodoo, it is necessary to regard it in terms of the history and culture of the Haitian people. In the analysis of voodoo in cinema, the three Western approaches to voodoo (as counter-discourse, nonsense and satanic) must be considered alongside the cultural history of vodoun and related religions.

However, cinematic and imaginary investments in voodoo are not simply dependent on anthropological or pseudo-anthropological based texts. Haiti has a long history of opposition to white rule and cultural dominance, and vodoun has strong connections with this resistance. Despite French fire-power, Haiti mounted the first successful slave revolt in the late-18th century, and was declared the first black republic in 1804.⁸ Many of the leaders of the revolt practised vodoun, a version of the religion of their West African homelands (lands close to the Gulf of Benin). The rebels drew power from vodoun, outlawed by their former white masters, and went into battle possessed by particular spirits (loa). The loa are the pantheon of lesser gods and spirits in vodoun who interact with the human world, mainly through possession. Métraux says: "The word loa

is usually translated as 'god' but 'spirit' or better, literally 'genius', gives a more precise indication of these supernatural beings".⁹ Vodoun was also strategically used to scare white plantation owners, further entrenching white views of vodoun as satanic.

The entry of voodoo into popular culture came at a time when America was coming to the end of its occupation of Haiti. US Marines controlled Haiti from 1915 to 1934, and throughout the century America has imposed crippling economic embargoes on Haiti, making it the poorest country in the Western hemisphere.¹⁰ Laënnec Hurbon argues that stories about voodoo helped to confirm the white belief that black people in Haiti were not sufficiently "civilised" to manage their own independence, and that "[t]he clear link among race, voodoo and despotism in American public opinion paved the way for the American occupation of Haiti".¹¹ The 1980s cycle of voodoo films also coincided with American interventions in Haitian politics after the fall of the Duvalier regime in 1986. America had an investment in making Haiti appear to be a place that is "out of order". Nevertheless, it is the case that a place out of order carries the counter-cultural kudos of resistance – an attraction not lost on voodoo cinema.

Alongside images of zombies, a key iconographic feature of voodoo cinema is spirit possession, often viewed by anthropologists, their predecessors and filmmakers as a central defining characteristic of vodoun. Testimonies of vodoun practitioners often take great care to explain that spirit possession is quite unrelated to the way in which it is viewed in Western cultures. Rather than a demonic intrusion into the mind and body, it is seen as a communion with individual loa. These might be ancestors or other important historical figures, nature-based deities or embodiments of love, war and death. This model of possession is very different from the medievalist idea of possession in horror and SF/horror hybrids. Does voodoo cinema distinguish between these two different takes on possession? Different films provide different answers to these questions, but a key difference between the possessions of other horror films and voodoo is that, in the latter, spirit possession takes place in a ritual context and is accompanied by dance and the driving rhythms of drums. In films such as *I Walked with a Zombie* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, possession is not ostensibly represented in the medievalist European mode. These films attempt to accommodate the role of possession in vodoun-based cultures. But how far do they depart from the conventional representation of possession in the horror genre? Are the drums, dances and rituals simply assimilated into figurations of the satanic?

In recent postcolonial theory, it has been argued that black culture is figured by white discourse as a form of dangerous contamination. Barbara Browning argues that the idea of contamination has a long history, and points (albeit briefly) to the various "panics" about the alleged corrupting and sexualising influence of black-based music,

rhythm and dance crazes on the white body. She cites Susan McClary to show that this idea has a long history:

When the *ciaccona's* infectious rhythms hit Europe, it sparked a dance craze that inspired a familiar set of reactions: on the one hand, it was celebrated as liberating bodies that had been stifled by the constraints of Western civilization; on the other, it was condemned as obscene, as a threat to Christian mores. But most sources concurred that its rhythms – once experienced – were irresistible; it was banned temporarily in 1615 on grounds of its 'irredeemably infectious lasciviousness'.¹²

The idea that aspects of black culture are somehow infectious is the subject of Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972). This novel invokes the possessing spirit, Jes Grew, through the anti-regimented vitality and contagion of music and dance crazes, providing a positive and life-affirming form of possession. Voodoo films promise something similar – but do they deliver unconditionally? The commercial demands made upon filmmakers to reach a mass audience, in conjunction with the input from a variety of people, often mean that several points of identification and interpretive routes are offered. This gives some space for this promise to be at least in part fulfilled. The spirit possessions of voodoo cinema are open to satanic, invasive, liberationist, cathartic and ecstatic or, indeed, redemptive readings. Individual films often have a "preferred" take on the meaning of possession that may block out other readings, but there is also often an "excess" in the textuality of a film that is not necessarily intentionally deployed. Homi K Bhabha has said that discourse is always contradictory and never monolithic – such contradictions are readily apparent in voodoo cinema, as they are in witch and possession films.¹³ These contradictions circulate under the gravitational pull of otherness. Otherness has the capacity, not always taken up, of being something of an open signifier. In some films, this otherness has a satanic and sadistic dimension, while in others it has more overt life-affirming aspects. In each case, they mobilise knowledges, remaindered by Western Cartesianism, as the lure of the other. This is a fundamental ingredient of these films, and one implicitly recognised by many viewers, but often ignored by academics.

Haiti, the magic island: *White Zombie* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow*

Like Prospero's magic island, Haiti is a place that appears from the outsider's gaze to be outside Western time and control. It is a place of contradictions – idyllic yet barbarous, in which old magic reigns. Its landscape is soaked in history and blood, and scarred by cultural and political tensions. Haiti stands for the West as an emblem of the barbarity

of the slave trade, and as something that is perhaps best forgotten. As Paul Holland (Tom Conway) opines at the start of *I Walked with a Zombie*, the island of San Sebastian (Haiti in all but name) may have all the attributes of beauty and romance, but it is a land built on misery and death. His cautionary message of the dangers of Haiti's enchantment sums up the role which the island plays in the cinematic imaginary – beautiful but dangerous. Within the context of the horror film, Haiti signifies something akin to the unconscious. It is a place where linear time and rationality are confounded: a land ruled by magic and mystery, in which the dead and the repressed do not stay buried. When shooting in Haiti, the crew of *The Serpent and the Rainbow* were subject to hallucinations and sickness.¹⁴ It is a common marketing ploy to build up a mythology around the making of a film, and must therefore be regarded with some caution.¹⁵ The story may have been concocted to excuse the fact that shooting in Haiti was stopped because of local hostility. Nevertheless, this kind of story is instructive of the way in which Haiti is regarded in the West.

Images of the living dead are central to two films set in Haiti: *White Zombie* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow*. These films focus mainly on zombification, which is placed within the context of Haitian voodoo. *White Zombie* is a Gothic tale hinging on desires that threaten the consummation of a marriage. The film is not particularly interested in Haiti or voodoo. Haiti provides an exotic backdrop against which dark practices go unchecked. Voodoo provides Murder Legendre (Bela Lugosi), the suave arch-villain of the piece, with a means to power. The link between voodoo and the Gothic is crucial to the film's portrayal of perverse desire. In many ways, *White Zombie* is a Gothic fairy tale in which "true" love counters Legendre's evil powers. *White Zombie* strongly accords with the satanic model of voodoo. As with many horror films, however, the satanic is open to queer reading. Through the figure of the "monster queer",¹⁶ sexualities and desires are articulated that lie beyond the heterosexual romance.

Madeleine (Madge Bellamy) has come to Haiti in order to marry Neil (John Harron) with whom she is in love. Her passage to conjugal bliss is not a smooth one. On the boat, she meets Beaumont (Robert Frazer), a wealthy plantation owner who falls obsessively in love with her. Thinking to stall the marriage, Beaumont invites the two to be married in his house, and seeks the aid of Legendre to work his own particular brand of magic so that Madeleine will be his. Zombification is the only route offered. The desperate Beaumont reluctantly agrees, and Madeleine is fed the zombie-powder causing her "death". Now a zombie, she is brought from the crypt to Legendre's house, but Beaumont cannot bear to see the "light gone from her eyes". Legendre, too, has designs on Madeleine (never made totally clear), which entail the zombification of Beaumont. Neil and Dr Bruner (Joseph Cawthorn), a missionary priest, rescue her before Legendre is able to fulfil his plans. Madeleine is restored only after Legendre is duly dispatched from the castle into the yawning abyss below.

Following the trajectory of a Gothic fairy tale, the "natural" course of heterosexual romance is threatened by "perverse" lusts. Beaumont and Legendre can only interrupt the romance by making Madeleine a will-less zombie. Madeleine becomes what is expressed by the zombie sex slaver in *Snake People* (Jack Hill/Juan Ibáñez, 1968, Mexico/USA) as the "perfect woman" – beautiful, mute and always obedient. Madeleine's zombification is somewhat similar to the fate of Snow White. She is given a poison that causes a deathlike state, a fate that can only be remedied by the actions of her true love. The distinction between the plight of Madeleine and that of Snow White lies with the perpetrator of this crime. In the Snow White tale, it is the jealous, bad stepmother who blocks Snow White's path to happiness through her poison. In *White Zombie*, it is the work of the two bad fathers that are out to own (in the case of Beaumont) or corrupt (in the case of Legendre) Madeleine's white purity. Jealousy is not an issue here, but just as Snow White's flawless white skin emblematises her beauty, here it is the talismanic quality afforded by Madeleine's romantic hopes and whiteness – in all its symbolic and ideological glory – that sets perverse, indeed Sadean, desires in motion.

The bad "primal" father demands that his daughters become his sexual property, and Legendre achieves this by making her into an unresisting zombie. More than having sexual dominion over Madeleine, the only white woman in the film, Legendre's wicked way is not just to keep her as a sex slave. Instead, it is routed in the dark pleasure dynamics of corruption. By enslaving Madeleine, Legendre makes Beaumont and Neil experience the pangs of deepest misery. He disrupts the course of romantic and sexual happiness, setting out to abject Madeleine's virgin white body with poison, magic, the stains of the grave, and, presumably, his own bodily fluids. Aided by voodoo knowledge, Legendre is more than a murderer. He infects the living with death and the dead with life, perpetrating a sin against God and transgressing sacred binary divisions. He is also a polymorphic necrophile, making him a close associative of de Sade's anti-heroes and Ambrosius, the classical Gothic anti-hero of Matthew Lewis' *Ambrosio, or The Monk* (1796). Through its use of the Gothic, the film links voodoo to classical Western investments in the supernatural.

White Zombie's Gothic story-line is emphasised by the film's use of sets originally used for *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931, USA).¹⁷ Legendre's house of terrors resembles a medieval cathedral or crypt with its stone pillars, vaulted ceiling and high arched windows. It is a little piece of medievalist imagery transferred to the supernatural fertility of Haitian soil. Legendre's voodoo is couched within the frame of the high Gothic. This link is carried forward into subsequent voodoo films, from the blaxploitation vampire/voodoo film *Scream, Blacula, Scream* to the monstrous possessions of *The Believers* (John Schlesinger, 1987, USA), *Angel Heart* (1987), *The Serpent and the Rainbow* and *Voodoo*. In *White Zombie*, voodoo is not shown as a folk-religion, and is not practised by

the black Haitians shown in the film, as it is in *Ouanga* (George Terwilliger, 1935, USA) and *I Walked with a Zombie*. Instead, it is figured in terms of Western concepts of black magic. Legendre uses it as a tool, mainly through zombie-powder, to enslave people. There is no recourse to religion, community rituals, voodoo gods or loa. "Native" drums are heard only in the context of staving off evil, and, unlike the majority of later voodoo films, there are no ecstatically possessed dancing women. In many ways, Legendre is a facsimile of Count Dracula. His Gothic castle is perched high above the surrounding countryside, like Castle Dracula, and its surrounding lands are feared by the local populace as the place of the living dead: amulets must be worn to protect animals and humans from the castle's inhabitants. Zombification is also rendered as a version of vampirism. Legendre is regarded by Beaumont and his butler as beyond the pale and unclean – Beaumont refuses to shake hands with him and his butler will not even speak his name – "that man", he ominously intones. Legendre speaks lovingly, as Dracula often does, of the peace that would be brought by a final death. These factors add to the sense that he is Dracula, transposed from the Carpathians to the Caribbean.

There are, however, significant differences between Legendre's zombies and the traditional vampiric horde, bringing the film an added political dimension. Vampires are articulations of repression: they exhibit all those desires of a sexual and violent nature that are supposed to be tucked away into the realms of the unconscious. Legendre's zombies, by contrast, are totally without such desires: they are the living dead without the attractions of sexual appetite or will. *White Zombie's* living dead resemble the shuffling workers of *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1926, Germany), a film that aimed to critique the dehumanising forces of capitalism, and a theme taken up in the depiction of zombie-shoppers/consumers in *Dawn of the Dead* (George A Romero, 1979, USA). *White Zombie* tacitly extends the image of downtrodden worker into the realms of colonialism, and does so through the figure of the zombie. Legendre uses zombie slaves to run his estate, and there is a distinctly race-based hierarchy in his domain. Black zombies are positioned at the bottom of this hierarchal structure. They provide the mill with cheap labour. As Legendre says with characteristic sarcastic humour, "they do not mind long hours". The expendable status of the zombie is made most evident when one falls, without a word from him or anyone else, into the grinding works of the mill. Set apart from the worker zombies are the white-trophy zombies. This group is composed in part of Legendre's defeated enemies who make up his personal militia; all the zombies in this group appear to be white (although it is a little hard to tell beneath the white patina of their zombie make-up). Madeleine is also a part of this group and, by virtue of her gender, becomes part of the castle's Gothic décor. She also functions as an object of symbolic exchange between the white men who compete for her body. Destined to become Legendre's white-trophy sex slave, she emblematises his ability to outsmart other men. Legendre's zombies

support his estate. They confirm his power, opening the film up as a tacit criticism of white masculinism, capitalism and colonialism as contaminating evil. Madeleine's presence in his household testifies not only to Legendre's power, but also to his perverse nature.¹⁸ This involves the corruption of all that is held as sacred and ideal by "decent" God-fearing white folk, leading to a rather different type of political reading.

The extent of Legendre's perversion is never mapped in a direct way; instead, it is subject to the film's strategic use of curiosity-firing gaps. Acts so terrible that they cannot be named or depicted are alluded to through frequent ellipses and unfinished sentences that trail off into the abyss of horror. Whispered words, withheld from the audience, have their impact through the reverse-shot – characters that hear these things are speechless with dismay. Harry M Benshoff sees this as a mark of the "love that shall not speak its name", and interprets Legendre's relationship with Beaumont as homosexual.¹⁹ This does not really address the breadth and depth of Legendre's monstrous perversity. Benshoff reads the scene in which Legendre "takes a fancy" to Beaumont as an expression of homosexual desire, but this tends to blind us to the full implications of making Beaumont a zombie. Beaumont's horror at Madeleine's soulless state prompts him to plead with Legendre to restore her. In reply, Legendre laces Beaumont's wine with zombie-powder, an action that has multiple determinations as befits Legendre's polymorphic perversity. It is partly a defensive move, born of his fear that Beaumont might, through love, turn him in to the authorities. But, as Beaumont recognises what is happening to him, observed by the fascinated Legendre, it is also laden with sadistic and sinister pleasure.

It is implied that Beaumont will be forced mutely to watch as Legendre consummates his necrophiliac desire with the zombie virgin Madeleine, making, therefore, a mockery of romantic love. Furthermore, Beaumont's mute witness would, within Legendre's Sadean imagination, potentially lend the crime greater perversity. Like all the bad fathers encountered in earlier chapters, he wants all the pleasure and power for himself. He manipulates the desires of Beaumont and Neil to create maximum anguish. Legendre embodies a truly Sadean attachment to power in all its guises, making him a product of the Gothic imaginary. Voodoo becomes just another weapon added to the Devil's armoury. Legendre's evil can, nevertheless, be marshalled into a counter-discursive reading of voodoo, and it is grounded in the pleasures of overturning the ideas that Western culture holds most dear. This can be turned towards a radical critique of the heterosexual romantic ideal, even if the end of the film restores order and the "ideal" heterosexual romance.

Voodoo and Haiti are figured through the framework of a sadistic, Gothic narrative. The very name "Haiti" is wielded by *White Zombie* as a signifier of a land where the forces of rationality, Christian and judicial law have little purchase. While the film's setting evokes this, there is little address of voodoo as a culture or folk-religion. Voodoo is used solely as

a component of Legendre's demonic personality and as a tool deployed in his perverse quest to overturn decency (with which we may mischievously or surreptitiously identify). A good example of this is when he stands outside Beaumont's house and carves a wax effigy of Madeleine. In the Western imaginary, voodoo is encapsulated by the icon of the voodoo doll, working on the principle of sympathetic magic. A magical link is made between the doll and the victim: what happens to the doll happens to the person it represents. Legendre uses Madeleine's scarf wrapped around the effigy to create this link. This derives from Western witchcraft. In most voodoo films, dolls or parts of dolls feature as a component of voodoo accoutrements, but are not a central component of voodoo ritual as these films imagine. The wax effigy in *White Zombie* carries with it many clues about Legendre's desires. He places the naked figure in a flame, melting it – dissolving away Madeleine's will and humanity. This is cross-cut with Madeleine's apparent death inside the house. This action literalises Legendre's libidinous investment in manipulation and torment. Like Freud's bad father, Legendre aims to prevent anyone but himself from achieving the object of their desires. His monstrousness is achieved by a technique commonly associated with voodoo (at least by those who see it within Western concepts of Satanism and witchcraft). It is further underpinned by Legendre's Mephistophelian role; he tempts Beaumont into taking away the zombie-powder. As with Faust, Beaumont is promised the object of his desire, which is then withheld to cause maximum anguish. With his two-pointed goatee beard and burning hypnotic eyes, Legendre is a medieval-style demon who uses voodoo to agonise and enslave his victims.

In *White Zombie*, voodoo is just part of a more generalised vocabulary of black magic. This is composed mainly of the iconography and narrative mechanics of the Gothic (in its medievalist, Sadean and Hollywood horror guises). The film does not simply have recourse to the supernatural in the way in which many Gothic texts do, however. An interesting paradigmatic contradiction occurs in the status of Legendre's main source of power, which derives from his application of powder or poison to make zombies. Magic is certainly invoked through Legendre's use of the wax effigies, but the film takes great pains to explain that the zombie-powder is not magical or supernatural. Nothing is heard about where it comes from or how it is made; lacking details of its origin and seeing its effects on the body make it more enigmatic. It is, however, explicitly stated to be pharmacological, and not a magical agent. It is only superstitiously *assumed* to cause actual death by the local inhabitants. The resurrection of the dead would need a supernatural aid. The film makes it evident to the viewer that the poison only mimics death (an explanation given by the good father, Dr Bruner), and thereby has a rational and indeed scientific explanation. This is an idea that recurs in *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, and there is much invested in the status of drugs and poisons in voodoo cinema. *White Zombie* makes a distinction between

the superstitious interpretation of zombies as literally the living dead, made by the black cab-driver, and the non-religious factual view, given by Dr Bruner (who seems to have forgotten that he is a priest). This undercuts the Gothic "soul" narrative espoused by Beaumont (he believes that Legendre has removed her soul), as well as the cab-driver's view. What we have here is a rationalist take on the processes of zombification, tying into the nonsense take on voodoo that regards it as a childish superstition. The magical view is not completely erased, however, and is retained as Legendre also uses sympathetic magic to make his zombies. This dual economy of explanation returns under the anthropological eye of *The Serpent and the Rainbow*.

Of all the films discussed in this chapter, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* best exemplifies the contradictions inherent in making voodoo the subject of a horror film. On the one hand, it seeks to address voodoo culture seriously, and, on the other, the economics of film production demand that voodoo become the source of spicy and spectacular supernatural pyrotechnics. Unlike the more honest low-budget exploitation voodoo flick, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* attempts to be more than a genre picture. Voodoo is the source of an exotic and othered discourse, combined with an excitement about reaching into an animistic world-view which has the capacity to strip back the layers of rationalist ideology. The film wants to have everything – a responsible take on another culture, and an irresponsible foray into fantasies of danger and exoticism. It has politics, and a tantalising evocation of secret "othered" knowledges and ritual practices, while also drawing on horror aesthetics. The film stands at the crossroads of these economic, cultural and imaginary investments, and is subject to the cross-currents of hybridity. It deploys the three models of voodoo (counter-discursive, nonsense and satanic), which are allied to horror conventions, anthropology, the drug culture and politics (gender, race and economics). All of these circulate, often pulling against one another, creating some deep unresolved contradictions and splits, which may result from a combination of ideological work and the commercial/industrial strategy of appealing to a mass audience.

Barbara Browning calls the film "racist" and "xenophobic".²⁰ This reading seems to hinge partly on her disgust that Davis sold the rights of his book to Wes Craven, whom she regards "the most sensational, gory director of perhaps all time".²¹ There is certainly an exploitation of otherness in the film which has a white hero who does battle with black magic; but does that necessarily make it "racist"? This reading does not take into account the implicit contradictory elements of the film, which is in many ways far less blatantly racist than many other voodoo films. Crucially, it does not essentialise Haitian people. They are diversely represented and located within very particular historical and ethnic contexts. The characterisation of Captain Peytraud (Zakes Mokae), figured as the bad father, might be viewed as the product of a racist imaginary; significantly, however, Peytraud does not represent the Haitian populace

or vodoun as an intrinsic and vital part of Haitian identity and culture. His use of magic is also appended to historical events – unusual as, in most films, "bad" voodoo is presented as simply primal and transcendental evil. It is also possible to bring a counter-cultural reading to aspects of Peytraud's actions, which are given motivations beyond those of most horror movie monsters. Peytraud is the head of the Tonton Macoutes and a powerful bokor (a practitioner of magic used for self-serving or evil ends). He is certainly the villain of the piece, and his links to the Duvalier administration allow the film to make its indictment of that regime.²²

Peytraud rules through fear; he uses powder to render dissenters as zombies, capturing their souls to serve him. He may be a nightmarish figure, able to traverse national boundaries and penetrate into the unconscious lives of those who oppose his will. But there is an attempt to locate his actions within a specific political context in which voodoo was used a political tool. The threat he poses is not just as an evil witch-doctor hell-bent on perversity. Instead, he is responding to the attack on his power posed inadvertently by Dr Alan (Bill Pullman) in demystifying and appropriating the zombie-powder for Biocorp. Peytraud needs the zombie-powder to maintain his hold on Haiti, and it is no coincidence that the Duvalier regime falls at precisely the time that the powder falls into American hands. Following this, the battle between Alan and Peytraud becomes deeply personal, lending narrative tension but weakening the focus on the political events. Prior to this, Peytraud has Alan arrested and attempts to frighten him out of the country. Alan uses his American status to arrogantly face-off Peytraud, who responds by quietly saying that the Ambassador is not present and that Alan's American nationality is no protection. (This is verified as Peytraud's supernatural powers extend across national boundaries working through the unconscious.) He also tells Alan that "this is not Grenada, Dr Alan – I am here now". In referring to the Reagan administration's effortless military invasion of Grenada after a Marxist coup in 1983, the film contextualises Peytraud's actions as a countermeasure against America's interventionist foreign policy. This is not a justification of Peytraud's actions, but it does intimate the reasons behind them. The film never quite stretches to a critique of American policy, but goes some way towards historicising the political use of voodoo.

By intercutting documentary footage of the street celebrations that followed the departure of Papa Doc Duvalier, Alan's victory over Peytraud, aided by the souls of those Haitians he has enslaved, is aligned to the possible reintroduction of democracy to Haiti. Nevertheless, the last third of the film does focus on the personal battle between the two men. This is an example of the way in which the film struggles between a political view and the convention of mainstream filmmaking requiring a hero to be central to plot events. Through his battle with Peytraud, Alan is implicated as the heroic source of the Duvalier downfall, while it is also made clear that the source of the uprising is the Haitian people. A

conspiratorial view would perhaps suggest that the film brings an American hand to bear on the routing of Duvalier and the Tonton Macoutes, who are demonised as those who buried people alive and used magical means to keep control of dissenting voices (with some truth). The film does not just use magic to mask political events; it also demonstrates how the supernatural was used to political ends in Haiti. The ending turns into a battle between transcendent good and evil, tending to go against the approach taken by the first two thirds of the film. This dynamic has its roots in Hollywood economics, which calls for a resolved, spectacular ending. Accordingly, the film resorts to the Manichean dualism commonly used in the horror genre.

The problem with Browning's summary dismissal of the film is that it forecloses on any address of its conflicts and ambiguities produced by the co-presence of different languages (generic, political, cultural and epistemological). Her persuasive arguments about hybridity flounder when it comes to this film. "Clean and proper" representation is something of an anomaly in the horror genre. Many horror films trade on the transgression of ideal representations, and horror fans often read "baddies" in counter-cultural ways. *The Serpent and the Rainbow* has to be addressed with an eye to the way in which it opens up niches for various viewer investments and the contradictions such an approach engenders. As it is fond of espousing, often in very clichéd ways, horror attempts to tap into our darkest fears; accordingly, it often articulates aspects of collective consciousness (which is never uniform, but often banal) that are swept from view. In naming such fears, horror can often turn the satanic and the demonic to counter-discursive purposes – in fact, it often trades on the ability to do so. *The Serpent and the Rainbow* does give in to a dualistic model of good and evil as discrete and embattled entities, but there is some attempt to see voodoo as more than simply black magic or nonsense – even as it trades on voodoo as exotic spectacle. Furthermore, close study of the film pays off because it reveals the contradictory investments that the West has in voodoo in the postcolonial era.

In contrast to many of the more exploitation-style voodoo films such as *Snake People* and any number of zombie films, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* does not present the "living dead" as a flesh-eating plague. The film's zombies are objects of pity, rather than traditional threatening horror monsters. The film's central horror is the fear of being buried alive, a topic close to the Gothic heart of Edgar Allan Poe's catalepsy stories.²³ (Is this why Dr Alan is so named?) Such a fear does not have to be couched in the visual language of cinematic voodoo. Victorian entrepreneurs, for example, sold expensive contraptions with bells and horns operated from inside the tomb to prevent such occurrences, an inevitable occurrence without the aid of technologies monitoring signs of life.²⁴ Framing this fear in the context of voodoo allows the film to use zombification as a political metaphor and a tool of repression, while, at the same time, evoking the sublimely morbid and excessive pleasures of

Gothic horror. The arresting image of being buried alive recurs throughout the film. In the opening hallucination sequence, the mystical idyll of Alan rolling in the grass with his jaguar totem spirit is abruptly halted when he is pulled underground by the arms of rotting corpses. In *Army of Darkness: Evil Dead 3* (Sam Raimi, 1993, USA), a similar scene is played for laughs, but here it is in deadly earnest and is overseen by Peytraud who takes the place of the Amerindian shaman. Peytraud's intrusion marks the dissolution of the boundary between reality and hallucination. Why is Peytraud present in South America several years before Alan goes to Haiti on his zombie-powder quest? The reason is never made clear, but it is a demonstration of Peytraud's omniscience and supernatural power which, like *The Exorcist's* Pazuzu (1973) and the demon of *Event Horizon* (1997), operate through the subconscious.

On arriving in Haiti, Alan and Marielle Duchamp (Cathy Tyson) search various cemeteries for the zombie Christophe (another of Peytraud's victims). Alan's rising panic reaches its climax as he falls into a grave recently opened by robbers. Later, Peytraud sends him dreams of being buried alive in a coffin that slowly fills with blood. These warnings are intended to scare Alan out of Haiti and culminate in his being buried alive. What the film does best is to create a terrifying sense of the claustrophobia and helplessness of such a nightmare confinement. As Alan is buried, frozen by the "zombie-poison", the scene is mostly viewed from his perspective. As the earth is heaped on the grave, darkness closes in around him, and, to prevent him from losing himself in that darkness, Peytraud throws in a tarantula to "keep him company", which crawls across his face and eyes. Alan is paralysed, while still able to feel and think. Viewers are encouraged through a lingering close-up to imagine what the touch of the spider must feel like. Rather than the heart-racing chases or loud startling crashes of many horror films, the live burial evokes a quiet and very tactile horror of absolute helplessness. No scientific objectivity is able to help him, and it is only his screams of abject terror that bring Christophe to dig him out of the grave.

The presence of the very real and very large spider is not simply gratuitous. It works to shift the viewer's thoughts out of the frame of the film into the extra-diegetic "reality" of the filming process. This reinforces its ability to horrify by asking the viewer to consider what the actor underwent in the shooting of the scene. The shift from the diegetic to the extra-diegetic also encapsulates in miniature the film's constant traversing of normally discrete boundaries, within which the live burial is contextualised. The film frequently collapses binary distinctions, inviting viewers to consider the very nature of concepts normally taken for granted. This occurs at a number of levels. The real background of Haitian politics is meshed with a fictional story – even this is not "pure", as it is derived from Davis' factual account. Such a dynamic occurs at a meta-level and is reflected in the diegetic world of film. The distinction between science and magic becomes a site of struggle. Alan tries to hold on to his

"scientific objectivism", but the deeper he goes into voodoo wonderland, the more this position becomes untenable. A phantasmagoria of dreams and hallucinations break through into Alan's rationalist world. Towards the end of the film, after Christophe pulls him from the grave, Alan (and, by extension, the viewer) can no longer distinguish between fantasy and reality. He often wakes from one nightmare only to be embroiled in another – a technique used again in *Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984, USA). Thus, the film moves from the nonsense model to the satanic model. Counter-cultural meanings rumble around as an undercurrent throughout the film, and are made available to those viewers looking to magic and voodoo as an alternative to Western values and rationalism.

It is Alan's rite of passage with which viewers are asked to identify, and not ostensibly Peytraud's challenge to rationality. It is, however, Peytraud's voodoo, rather than the benign voodoo practised by Celine and Marielle or South American shamanism, that opens Alan's eyes to the limitations of a reductive scientific, rational world-view. This is an angle that Carol J Clover does not tackle in her brief address of the white science/black magic opposition in the film.²⁵ There is, as Clover argues, a holistic message to science at work in the film: magical thinking must not be ignored. Alan stands as an emblem of this lesson and learns through terror, the only thing powerful enough to cut through his protective scepticism. Clover and Browning do not sufficiently address how this is an extension of cultural hybridisation and the value assigned to the "othered" cultures (vodoun and South American shamanism). Indeed, these cultures' secret knowledges are figured in opposition to the basic tenets of Western-styled notions of civilisation, in which the shadows of supernatural belief have apparently been banished. This opposition has the credibility of a counter-discourse and can be interpreted as a form of critique. It is the case, nevertheless, before a leap is made into "happily ever after", that the holistic ideal that underpins the film is a means of having it both ways. The presentation of vodoun as a valuable secret knowledge brings with it the advantage of showing it as an othered and exotic practice, with all its sensationalist attributes. This is evident in the film's depiction of spirit possession.

The majority of voodoo films have scenes that involve drums and dance-based rituals in which dancers are spirit-possessed. Images of possessed dancers – often women – are staple components in the vocabulary used by these films. Such images serve something greater than a rhetorical purpose. Possession usually functions as spectacle, a chance to observe ecstatically-oblivious women who do not return the gaze. In many ways, their dancing mimics the orgasmic body, and can be viewed as a form of displaced pornography that evades censorship of sexually explicit material. As in *Angel Heart*, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* reserves a special place for the possession of a light-skinned black female protagonist. Marielle takes Alan to a vodoun ritual specially designed for

American tourists, ostensibly to meet Lucien Celine, a vodoun priest. Tourists sit around a central area in which a group of dancers, dressed in red, breathe fire and crunch on glass. While talking to Celine, Alan spots Peytraud, whom he has previously seen in a nightmarish vision on his trip to the Amazon basin. Alan is quite horrified to see him, but this is quickly buried when a female loa, the coquettish Erzuli, possesses Marielle. Her movements are quite lascivious, but are unlike the violent go-go-style dancing performed by an unnamed woman in *Curse of the Voodoo* (Lindsey Shonteff, 1965, UK), or the sexual consummation of the voodoo ritual depicted in *Angel Heart*. Marielle's possession is far gentler. Prior to the possession, she learns that the rite is for Erzuli and becomes embarrassed. The implication is that she does not want to show Alan that aspect of her life. Beyond the spectacle staged for tourists, Marielle's reluctance suggests that she is faced with a cross-cultural dilemma. She is caught between two very different notions of possession and indeed gender expectations. Her scientific credibility with the American academic may be at stake, and she experiences a conflict between Western and Haitian notions of femininity. A conservative Western view might regard her possession as the sign of promiscuity or hysterical instability, whereas, for Haitians, Erzuli is a natural embodiment of women's sexuality. Possession is carefully portrayed. Her discomfort is based on its spectacular sexual nature for white Westerners. But it is also contextualised within vodoun culture: as Celine says, it is like "breathing" to her (this does not alleviate her awareness of the differing expectations of the two cultures). Marielle is constantly assailed by such conflicting expectations, and she does not move between them without cost. By expressing her difficulties in being interpolated by two different cultural value systems, the film address aspects of diaspora.

Marielle's possession is very different from the later violent possession of Deborah Cassady (Dey Young), the white American wife of the pharmacological entrepreneur. Peytraud possesses her and, after crunching on a wineglass, she launches herself across the polite bourgeois dinner table to grab Alan. The difference between the possessions is telling. Marielle's possession is an extension of her culture, but Deborah's is far closer to the familiar medieval notion of possession as a satanic invasion, staple to many possession movies. This might be seen as following the familiar model of women's bodies as open to possession. But it is also another example of the film's attempt to deploy spectacle while retaining a sense of the culturally-specific meanings of possession. The juxtaposition of the two possessions further demonstrates the way in which possession is understood differently by the two cultures.

A strong source of the film's critique of rationalism can be found in its tacit address to the drug-based counter-culture. Although he is an ethnobiologist, Davis' book draws strongly on the growth of fiction and non-fiction dealing with shamanism in the 1970s. Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968)²⁶ purports to be a true account of a magical

initiation into South American shamanism, involving the use of psychotropic agents to open up the doorway to the mystical. Castaneda's books lean on the seductive lure of a mix of hallucinogenic drugs, magic and secret knowledges. *The Serpent and the Rainbow* follows both *The Teachings of Don Juan* and *Altered States* (Ken Russell, 1980, USA); in each, a young white male science graduate learns shamanistic secrets from a South American Indian through the use of psychoactive agents. During the 1970s, *The Teachings of Don Juan* became something of a drug-culture bible. It had cult status within hippy culture, reflecting its quest for knowledge outside the perceived hegemony of rationalism in the West, and its rejection of suburban and consumer values. Davis' book found a similar audience. White hippies tended to take black and other ethnic cultures as being exotic counter-discourses to Cartesian-bourgeois-parent cultures. And, as throughout the colonialist period, this helped further to re-entrench black cultures as the radical other, albeit from a rather different perspective. Mystical experiences produced by hallucinogenic drugs made science and objectivity appear narrow and impoverished.

In both *The Teachings of Don Juan* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, hallucinogenic visions allow the protagonists to meet their animal guides. Alan's is in the shape of a jaguar. It guides Alan out of the forest and finally lends Alan the supernatural strength needed to despatch Peytraud. Because the jaguar spirit is a key figure in South American mythology and does not come from a white Christian tradition, the film is able to figure the forces of good as archaic and are not produced by an individual culture – here it is less white science vs. black magic than holistic mysticism vs. black magic. Neither science nor Christian symbolism saves Alan. It is the jaguar spirit that is used as an expression of a part of the psyche buried by the processes of socialisation and taken as transcending cultural difference. For certain viewers, this aspect of the film may speak to dissatisfactions with the watered-down spirituality of Western culture. Shamanism and voodoo inaugurate Alan's rite of passage into the mystical, enabling him to see that his empirical view of the world has its limitations.

Reviews of the film often praise Mokae's characterisation of Peytraud, and are less enthusiastic about Pullman as Alan, who does not, it seems, conform to ideals of heroism. Alan is frequently proved wrong, is unable to control his situation, and often ends up in the role of "screamer". The close of the film sees a reversal of the power structure. An earlier scene is repeated in which Peytraud banged a nail through Alan's scrotum, this time with Peytraud in the role of victim. While this makes a neat narrative reversal and puts Alan in the position of power, it is a rather conventional horror ending in which the evil primal father is defeated. It also moves the film from the domain of politics into a personal battle between white hero and black villain. The film is full of tantalising enigmas and ideas. But, perhaps because of the commercial imperatives instrumental in the shaping of mainstream high-budget films, these ideas

are never more than simply unfulfilled promises and lost opportunities. This is harder to bear because the film does attempt to do something a little different. It seeks to historicise the use of voodoo and locate it within its ethnic context. This distinction is easier to see when the film is measured against others that make no attempt to treat vodoun in its cultural context.

Voodoo as Satanism: *The Believers*, *Snake People*, *Voodoo* and *Angel Heart*

While *White Zombie* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* render voodoo as a supernatural tool for evil and oppression, *The Believers*, *Snake People*, *Voodoo* and *Angel Heart* couch voodoo in terms of black magic cults. Often these films mix iconography derived from occult films with staple voodoo images. *Angel Heart* and *The Believers* do show some interest in the cultural context of voodoo-style religions, whereas *Snake People* and *Voodoo* tend to disassociate voodoo from its ethnic roots. In all these films, voodoo is deployed to fulfil megalomaniac wishes. It breaks with God-ordained Christian or humanist rules of death, familial propriety and the work ethic, allowing a counter-cultural reading to be made. This shifts voodoo from the daimonic²⁷ function it has in real voodoo-style religions to a very Christianised version of the demonic. The two high-budget films *Angel Heart* and *The Believers* also deploy the "nonsense" model of voodoo. Their central protagonists do not believe in the supernatural, and their scepticism is used as a defence mechanism to shield themselves against the terrifying implications of such a force. Both films aimed to reach a mass mainstream market, and the presence of a sceptical hero helps initiate those viewers not necessarily versed in the language of the horror film to buy into a tacit belief in the supernatural. As niche horror-market products, *Snake People* and *Voodoo* employ no such sceptical hero, plunging straight into the supernatural world without going through the motions of persuading viewers to believe. *The Believers* is set mainly in New York, and widower Cal Jamison (Martin Sheen) becomes embroiled in the machinations of a cult in which the members sacrifice their first-born sons to gain worldly wealth and prestige. The film opens on the Jamison family going about their daily routine. It is a bright sunny morning, and breakfast preparations take a horrifying turn when Cal spills milk on the floor, facilitating the electrocution of his wife – seen by their young son Chris (Harley Cross). Throughout the film, spilt milk becomes a recurring signifier of Cal's guilt. It is his guilt that allows the film to address the idea that the unconscious is a real and tangible force to be reckoned with, and it informs Cal's hostile attitude towards Santería (a Latin-American version of vodoun). As the post-prologue credits roll, the scene shifts from urban America to tribal Africa. A young white couple have brought their sick and sore-covered son to a firelit ceremony, at which a masked shaman sacrifices the boy. The soundtrack that

accompanies the ceremony blends diegetic and non-diegetic music. African drums are combined with a Western theme tune to which Gothic-sounding voices are added. This provides an aural summary of the hybrid content of the film: African magic, satanic black magic derived from non-voodoo occult film, and family melodrama. Attending the ceremony is a black African boy, Palo. It is he who will be empowered by the death of the white boy. Years later, Palo (Malick Bowens) becomes the source of power and the totemic leader of a barbarous New York cult. As the ceremonial scene closes, the drums form a sound bridge that accompanies the transition from African night to an aerial shot of an urban America, indicating that national or discursive boundaries present no obstacle to Palo and his magic.

It is never quite clear at what point Cal's family began to be targeted by the cult. It appears to start when Cal's young son Chris finds a voodoo totem – a carved cowrie shell – in Central Park. There are indications that it began earlier, however, suggested by the sound bridge and the presence of the voodoo-style doll that Chris holds in his arms when his mother is electrocuted. The events following the discovery of the cowrie shell throw Cal into a world of conspiracy and terror in which his son's life is at stake. A combination of grief, guilt and confusion makes Cal increasingly fearful for his son and deeply suspicious of anyone linked to Santería, which he regards throughout most of the film as "superstitious nonsense". But, as events unfold, his scepticism, never simply rational as it is entangled with his fear and guilt, is severely challenged. He must begin to believe if he is to protect his son from the cult. The transition from scepticism to belief that informs the trajectory of the film's narrative is inscribed into the scene in which the aftermath of one of the cult's human sacrifices is shown. It takes place in a disused cinema auditorium, directly in front of the tattered screen. This "staging" of the ritual acts as something of a conceit, offering an inferred comment on the ritualised violence played out on the big and small screens in the daily lives of Westerners. Most importantly, the scene functions as an attempt to draw a strict line between the fantasies of voodoo in cinema and the real of human sacrifice – allowing the film to bracket itself off from other horror films.²⁸ This accords with the idea that Cal must learn to believe in the supernatural if he is to confront the very real threat to him and his son. Like Cal, the viewer is also asked to believe. This is aided by the gritty realist police drama aesthetic used by the film.

The first contact Cal has with both Santería and the cult occurs when he is called into talk to the deeply traumatised Lopez (Jimmy Smits), a New York cop whose family is Cuban. Lopez has been caught observing the cult engaged in human sacrifice, and is left in a state of terror because the cult members had taken his police badge. Lopez practises Santería and understands that his life is in danger because the possession of the badge means that the cult has a magical link to him. After interviewing Lopez, Cal talks to the investigating officer, a tough cop named McTaggart (Robert

Loggia). He tells McTaggart that Lopez must be the prime suspect as he has read that Santería involves blood sacrifice. Just before Lopez dies at the hands of Palo's magic, he telephones Cal to tell him that his son is in danger. Shortly afterwards, an autopsy reveals that Lopez's guts were full of snakes. Such incontrovertible and scientifically sanctioned knowledge forces Cal to face the fact that magic must be at work. What occurs here is a shift from the nonsense model of voodoo to the satanic model: tough cop McTaggart and sceptical Cal become "believers" in supernatural evil.

In accordance with the satanic model, Palo is assigned the role of a demon. Like the demons of the possession movie, his main route of operation is through the subconscious. There is an Oedipal dimension to this, as he demands that fathers in the cult sacrifice their first-born sons to gain power and wealth. Such a demand echoes the twin aspects of Freud's primal father. The fathers become threats to their sons at the behest of Palo, and his African origins and magic signify for the West the primitive and archaic – in other words, that which must be repressed for the "civilised" nuclear family structure to operate. Palo may be a figure of the return of the repressed. But, because his magic gives the fathers status and capital within Western culture, the film suggests that beneath the skin of "civilisation" lurk all manner of horrors, and it uses a black African magic man to do so.

Palo is a malignant and contaminating influence, and he is the only member of the cult who has magical powers. The character of his brand of magic is underlined when he touches a powder-puff belonging to Cal's girlfriend, causing a boil to grow on her face and small spiders to emerge from it. Palo also has the power to hypnotise and corrupt – a classic combination attributed to many horror film demons and villains, including Legendre in *White Zombie*. There are further features of the film that link it to the depiction of Satanism in the horror genre. The ritual sacrifice of the boys resembles the aborted ritual sacrifice of the girl in *The Devil Rides Out* (1968). Like her, the boys are drugged and brought to the place of sacrifice, encircled by the chanting members of the cult, and the knife is raised. In both films, the death of a child will lend power to the sacrificer. The film also draws on aspects of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) through the apparently benign older couple, Kate and Dennis Maslow, who appear to be close family friends. It turns out that they were the couple shown in the African scene at the start of the film, who imbued Palo with his power through the sacrifice of their son. They also gave Chris "Black Cloud", the doll he has in his arms when his mother died. A clue to the couple's link to Africa is provided by the African-style dress and headscarf worn by Kate. It was she who taught Cal's wife in anthropology school, implying that she and her husband had targeted the family well before Chris finds the cowrie shell. There is also a flavour of *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982, USA) in the intimations that, like Carol-Ann, Chris has some kind of second sight, and malignant supernatural forces target both children. Such intertextual echoes tend to cast doubt on

screenwriter and associate producer Mark Frost's claim that *The Believers* breaks from Western models of the supernatural: "*Angel Heart* is wrapped up with a Christian conception of the Devil. It deals tangentially with voodoo, but the villains in that piece are actually practicing a Western form of magic. Our picture deals more with the African roots of the religion."²⁹ While the film might evoke African magic as the source of the archaic and the supernatural, it makes no study of the meaning of African magic in its cultural context (as *The Serpent and the Rainbow* does with Haitian vodoun), and it is clear that the film is deeply indebted to Western ideas of magic, and particularly those of the horror film.

Palo may come from Africa, but he is made in the mould of cinematic versions of the Devil, and his racial origins are made to work in accordance with this. His powers of temptation and corruption, demand for human sacrifice and golden eyes are all signifiers associated with the Christian Devil, and challenge Frost's claims. Palo's African origins add to the sense that he is the embodiment of barbarous and primal instincts. These factors are compounded through his ability to provide cult members with various types of success. In one scene, the primal rhythms embedded in music played at a polite fund-raising convention throw him back into behaviour more suited to that of a voodoo ceremony. Palo's coding as demonic is powerfully drawn, probably staying with the viewer when it eventually becomes clear that Palo is the puppet of Dennis Maslow. The Maslows appear to be caring surrogate grandparents who help Cal through the death of his wife. It is their involvement in the cult that provides a major twist in the tale, and it was probably intended to relocate evil with them, rather than with Palo. But this fact does not emerge until the end of the film. It is Palo, with his African magic and golden eyes, who is established as the demonic figure, and it is he, and not Maslow, who is involved in the final slasher-style battle at the end of the film. If Maslow was meant to replace Palo as arch-villain and force the audience to reconsider its assumptions, it does not work precisely because the film makes Palo such a central and, indeed, loaded figure.

Perhaps as a means of trying to foreclose on critics who might make such connections, the film attempts to disassociate Santería from the barbarous cult. When Cal first talks to the Santería "priest" Oscar Cezine (Raúl Dávila), he is asked: "Do you really think that we are savages?". This forces Cal to assess his prejudice, and Cezine points out that many atrocities have been done under the name of religion. Although Cal does not answer, the next scene reinforces the idea that sacrifice is a component of Catholicism: the creed to which Cal faithfully belongs. Chris asks to go to the church to light a candle for his mother. While he is there, the priest takes up the cup representing Christ's blood, and Chris gazes upon a bloody statue of Christ in a glass coffin. Cal's earlier rather cruel action of throwing Carmen (Carla Pinza), the well-intentioned housekeeper, out of his house for using Santería to protect Chris is then shown as an action born of fear and misunderstanding. Despite the fact

that our sympathy is called on for Carmen and Cezine, and thereby Santería, it is not Santería that saves Chris. It is only Cal's deep love for his son that enables him to combat the drugs he has been given, allowing him to plunge the sacrificial knife not, as is intended, into the body of his son, but into the body of Dennis Maslow. It is the actions of the loving and protective good father-figure that provide the most significant force for good in the film.

Cal is driven by a fervent protective love for his son, and this is combined with fear and guilt. He is moved by all kinds of unconscious motives which underpin his xenophobic response to Santería (which, as the somewhat gratuitous ending of the film shows, is not entirely exorcised). Despite all the interesting but rather incidental exploration of Cal's guilt, we are left with a view of African voodoo being counter to family values. The film leaves no room for an exploration of Santería. Its only visible effect is in the love spell cast by Carmen. The spell is intended to bring about a romance, and to provide Chris with a new mother and a "proper" nuclear family.³⁰ African voodoo is couched entirely within demonic-inspired lusts for power and control, rather than as a spiritual and life-giving force. With his son in deadly peril, Cal is able to prove that he is a good father by despatching the threat posed by the bad fathers. He is also able to expiate his feelings of guilt, allowing him to be reinscribed into the heterosexual/family romance.

The two films that most blatantly relish the overt depiction of voodoo as satanic are *Voodoo* and *Snake People*. Both are low-budget films intended to target a niche horror market, and they figure voodoo in terms of sex-death-snake cults. Although made 25 years apart and set in very different contexts – *Snake People* on a Polynesian Island in the 1920s, and *Voodoo* in a North American college in the mid-1990s – they share the idea that voodoo rituals and appropriate human sacrifice will lend the voodoo priest eternal life and limitless power. *Snake People* was made in Mexico and the United States in the late-1960s and released in 1972. While the film may lack the polish of *Voodoo*, it is more adventurous in its use of non-standard and often excessive cinematic techniques, helping to create its strange atmosphere. It has the added attraction of starring Boris Karloff in one of his last screen roles. Karloff plays Von Molder, a plantation owner who turns out to be a voodoo priest named Damballah. (The name is taken from a Haitian loa.) He intends to sacrifice his niece to usher in a new order ruled by Baron Samedi in which death will be defeated – something of a contradiction as Baron Samedi is a figure of death in Haitian culture. Before he can do so, however, a meddling and fanatical French captain (Ralph Bertrand) comes to the island to stamp out what he takes to be superstitious and barbaric practices. In an explanatory dialogue-based scene, Von Molder tells the captain that the island has been practising its rituals before the Egyptians, and that they have found a power that could change the world. In classical horror film mode, he warns the Captain not to interfere. Although

Von Molder has spawned zombie cannibal women – we are not told how – and is prepared to sacrifice his virgin, puritanical niece, he is the most likeable and complex character in the film. Unlike the Captain, he is a liberal and believes that the islanders should be free to practise what religion they will, and he sanctions against his estate manager's use of zombification to gain a mute, will-less bride. At the same time, however, Von Molder is also Damballah, dressed in a black top hat, his face masked by black cloth and round sun-glasses. He is attended by a dwarf, whose teeth are filed to points and who has a maniacal laugh, and a scantily clad priestess, Kalea (Yolanda Montes *aka* "Tongolele"), who dances go-go-style with a snake at all the voodoo rituals. (Tongolele was a Mexican cinema star.) She is linked to the statue of a snake goddess used at the beginning of the film. The statue is an ancient Cretan snake goddess, but, by virtue of having exposed breasts and snakes wound around her wrist, she provides the film with a convenient image to set the tone, and to tie her into voodoo mythology she is called Erzuli (the Haitian loa concerned with romantic love).

Although the Captain is presented as an unpleasant and violent fanatic, the film supports his view that the rituals are tantamount to Satanism: cannibal women eat various members of the island constabulary, and the rituals involve the sacrifice of goats and chickens. The voodoo scenes are littered with skulls, coffins, snakes and death-hungry worshippers. The film's lurid hallucinatory quality is supported by garish pink and yellow lighting, fish-eye lens shots, asymmetrical camera angles and a soundtrack that layers one set of drum rhythms over other types of rhythm. Through its cultural mishmash and salacious imagery, the film uses anything that connotes weirdness, and voodoo is the main signifier of this. Unlike *The Believers*, there is no inherent moral message. Revelling in perversity and strangeness, the film has a certain charm, and is a very good example of the way in which low-budget horror films tend to use voodoo as a form of counter-cultural capital, as also occurs in *Voodoo*.

The fraternity house is a bastion of American middle-class life, and in *Voodoo* it becomes subject to the corrupting machinations of a voodoo cult. As with *The Believers*, it is closer to a satanic cult than to voodoo as a folk-religion. The members worship a supernatural deity named Erzuli. She offers to fulfil their material desires in return for human sacrifices. In Haitian vodoun, Erzuli is a benign and flirtatious loa, and has none of the terrible powers assigned to *Voodoo's* Erzuli. This Erzuli is couched within signifiers that would ordinarily associate it with Satanism, relocating her within the terms of Western ideas of evil. The cult is headed by a white college boy named Marsh (Joel J Edwards), who serves her in return for the promise of eternal life. The film introduces a set of rules that govern its version of voodoo: zombies have an aversion to salt; the ritual sacrifice must involve the death of six young men; and a powder can be used to kill the voodoo priest. These rules give the film a certain logic,

lending the narrative a set of parameters with which the supernatural can be contained by the laid-back hero, Paul (Corey Feldman). The irrational is not chaotic here and it is a question of having the right kind of knowledge to deal with it. This requires no sustained training or initiation. The film thereby adopts easily understood rules to do away with evil, rules which are common conventions in the slasher or vampire movie.

On arriving at the college, the homeless Paul looks for a place to live. His first port of call is a fraternity house inhabited by obnoxious, football-playing "blokes" destined to become businessmen. Paul rejects the initiation ritual offered by the rival house (eating a bowl of raw liver), and is saved from a regulation beating by Marsh. He invites Paul to stay at his fraternity house, Zeta Omega. When he arrives at the house, it is peopled by a motley collection of nerds and hippies. The audience, like Paul, is duped into thinking that their indie-style clothing and subcultural capital mean that they are just benign weirdos – later he discovers that they are zombies. Comforted by their non-macho approach, Paul agrees to their initiation ritual. He is required to steal the corpse of a young woman from the college morgue. (He regards this as spooky, but is assured by Marsh that the body will be returned.) The following evening, Paul is drugged and tattooed by the reanimated corpse of the woman with the mark of Erzuli, tagging him as a sacrificial victim. The neat dovetailing of barbaric college initiation rituals with more sinister cult rituals is perhaps the key strength of the film, suggesting that rite-of-passage rituals are intrinsic to group identity, even in middle-class America.

The film draws much of its occult iconography from cliché film voodoo, deploying sympathetic magic and dolls, and a collection of skulls, candles, herbal powders, fetishes and masks. These are largely dissociated from any specific cultural context, however, and, by virtue of their link to voodoo as a primitive religion, are used to signify magic as archaic, primitive and evil. This takes shape in several ways. After the rival fraternity house has smashed up the Zeta Omega house in retribution for stealing their goat, Marsh performs a story in front of the assembled "brothers". An Action Man doll is used to enact a scenario in which Derin (Gregory Vignolle), the captain of the rival house, shoots his friends and then himself. This story is cross-cut with the possessed Derin performing the story's acts. Throughout, Marsh speaks for Derin, commenting on how this "unfortunate incident" will scupper his application to the Harvard Business School, before he blows his head off with the pump-action shotgun, strategically placed under his bed. The use of an Action Man doll is symptomatic of the film's appropriation of voodoo imagery into a white American contemporary context. As with *The Believers*, there is also a conspiracy-style narrative at work as the members of the cult are all college and town officials who have furthered their careers through their membership. This means that Paul is on his own in doing battle with Marsh, but not before Lewis (Jack Nance), a good-father-figure, has given him the information and the powder he needs to destroy Marsh. Lewis,

too, uses voodoo, but it is "good" voodoo used only as protection. In the final scene, Marsh kills his zombies and is set to kill Paul. Marsh is suitably dressed for the occasion. Wearing a loincloth, and covered in white clay and "tribal" markings, he resembles Willard as he emerges from the primal mud to kill Colonel Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Marsh moves in with the stealth of an assassin, an expression of a return to primal instincts, as he tracks Paul through the large cellar. The percussive soundtrack uses jungle-type noises, insects, strange calls and drums, imbuing the scene with more signifiers of primitivism. Voodoo is therefore appended to primal savagery and Satanism. After a struggle, Paul finally impales Marsh on a pole sprinkled with the good voodoo powder, and he dies in the space previously used for sacrifices. Having despatched him, Paul gets his prize, and, for the first time, we see him in bed with his girlfriend – an example of "good" voodoo working to further the heterosexual romance.

Witch films such as *The Craft* and *Little Witches* (both released in 1996) locate the domain of the supernatural within young women who create pacts with a male devil. In *Voodoo*, the pact is with a female goddess and it tacitly evokes the frequent use of snake goddesses in previous voodoo films such as *Snake People*. The shift in gender does not alter the fact that the voodoo practised by Marsh is made in a satanic mould, connoting the reality of primal evil, even if the Christian Devil is not overtly present. In *Angel Heart*, there are no such evocations of imaginary voodoo deities – either female or male. Here it is a very Christian Devil who calls the tune.

Angel Heart takes the Faust myth and places it quite comfortably in the detective noir world of contracts, frames, conspiracies and split identities. Drawing from the Expressionist cinematic language of Classical Hollywood noir, the film uses high-contrast lighting schemes, asymmetrically framed angles, a mid-1950s setting and the strains of a melancholic saxophone. Unlike classic noir, however, it is the debt-collecting Devil who orchestrates the frame-up, giving the noir world a medievalist twist. The film rarely spells things out explicitly, and in the main operates through association, and it is this principle that guides the connection between voodoo and Satanism.

Harry Angel (Mickey Rourke) is a Brooklyn private investigator in the Sam Spade mould, but is not all that he seems. Angel does not know it, but he is, in fact, a pre-war crooner who went by the name of Johnny Favorite. He had done a deal with Mephistopheles (Robert De Niro), conjured from an ancient text. Seeking to evade payment, Favorite transfers his soul into the body of a young soldier, Harry Angel. Angel may think that he knows who he is, but the co-respondents of the contract constantly appropriate his body, actions and thoughts. Favorite lends him his charm, wiles, guiles and the ability to lie, and Mephistopheles prompts him to carry out a series of vicious murders in an effort to send him to the electric chair, and then to Hell. The knowledge that both Favorite and

Mephistopheles possess Angel is withheld from the viewer and Angel until the closing stages of the film. Hired by Mephistopheles, Angel attempts to uncover the apparent disappearance of Favorite, only to discover that he is looking for himself. Angel is the innocent victim of the contract and its concomitant conspiracies, and he weeps anguished tears when his sense of self-determination is undeniably proved to be an illusion. A number of clues are planted before the final revelation, mainly as brief flashbacks and other subtle devices – as when Angel talks into the tape-machine microphone which resembles the microphone Favorite sings into in an old photograph seen earlier. A major clue is provided by the constant recurrence of a song which Favorite used to sing that constantly plays on Angel's lips, and which bleeds across diegetic and non-diegetic divisions.

Music plays a very important role in the film and, whether diegetic or non-diegetic, is always allied to the Devil. Favorite's success as a singer was dependent on his pact with Mephistopheles. The recurring song is used enigmatically to suggest that Angel is not quite as innocent as he appears. This is an example of the way in which Mephistopheles and Favorite inhabit Angel's unconscious, othered life. Blues, gospel, ritual drums, the inclusion of extra-diegetic music from Cajun-influenced Dr John, and the popular song "Set My Soul on Fire" are all associated in the film with Mephistopheles. These connect aspects of voodoo and black culture to Satanism. One sequence of the film exemplifies how such connections are made. Angel goes to see Toots Sweet's blues band play in a bar. (Toots played with Favorite in New York.) Bearing a gold tooth embossed with the shape of a pentagram, Toots (Brownie McGhee) is clearly linked to Mephistopheles, who also wears a ring with that design. After Toots finishes his song, Angel interrogates him in the men's toilet. Toots nearly tells him vital information, but when he spots a voodoo token (a chicken foot), he clams up in terror. Before he can get any further information, Angel is thrown out of the club, proceeding to tail Toots as he drives away. A sound bridge is provided by music (Dr John) that is a hybrid mixture of Cajun, African and gospel music, and it accompanies Toots and Angel's journey to the voodoo rite. It may appear that the film is using black-based music as simply a means of creating the atmosphere of the Deep South, but it transpires that all the main players are variously hooked into the pact with the Devil. Even the gospel music sung in the Harlem gospel church at the beginning of the film is linked to the Devil, as it is where Angel first meets Mephistopheles, and he later finds a voodoo altar in a cupboard in the church. "Set My Soul on Fire" plays on the radio as Angel has sex with Epiphany (Lisa Bonet) and kills her, guided by Mephistopheles.

Voodoo iconography appears throughout the film, but rarely in such a clichéd way as, for example, in *Snake People*. There are no ju-ju dolls, zombies or resurrections from the tomb, and Angel's possession has little to do with voodoo dance-possession. Mostly it is evoked through things that are only loosely related to voodoo, such as black music and

chickens. It is also the case that voodoo is evoked in conjunction with Western magical motifs, such as the "hand of glory", tarot cards, pentagrams and, of course, Mephistopheles, who is dressed in black, and has long fingernails and snakes on his tie – the snake has both biblical and voodoo associations. The strongest reference to voodoo is made by the inclusion of the rite of dance-possession that Angel secretly observes. This rite has very little to do with the plot, and its connection to Satanism does not emerge until the very end of the film. It seems to be there not to provide an insight into voodoo as a folk-religion, but to put the central female character, Epiphany Proudfoot, on display as sexual spectacle. Images of the possessed Epiphany were used in the marketing of the film, suggesting that such ingredients might be determined by commercial factors. She appears in three main scenes. In each, she is progressively stripped of her clothes. In the first scene, she is washing her hair under a tap. A close-up details the way in which the water runs down her face, and her wet shirt becomes transparent, displaying her breasts. The next scene is the voodoo rite: Epiphany dances with other women to the rhythms of tribal drums and is possessed, making a tacit link between her possession at the behest of the tribal drums and Angel's possession by the tune he inadvertently keeps whistling. Epiphany sacrifices a chicken, her blouse open so that her breasts are exposed (unlike anyone else in the scene), and the scene culminates in her sitting astride one of the male participants in apparent sexual ecstasy. In the last scene, she is fully naked and has sex with Angel – we later learn that Favorite is her father. The scene therefore carries a post-hoc incestuous connotation. The combination of magic, transgressive desires and possession means that the film only has to make a very small leap into framing voodoo as satanic – which it does, again by association, at the end of the film.

This leap is achieved through the only marked special effect used in the film. Angel has found the dog-tags bearing his own name in Margaret Krusemark's (Charlotte Rampling) apartment, and he realises that it was his body that Favorite used to make his escape. Mephistopheles appears to witness this epiphany and verifies the truth. Mephistopheles' eyes glow a vivid gold, finally dispelling Angel's disbelief, as he is told that his soul belongs to the Devil. Knowing the truth of his identity, and having remembered his murderous actions guided by Mephistopheles' hand, Angel returns to the hotel room in which he recently had sex with Epiphany. She is lying dead on the bed in a pool of blood. Mephistopheles sits outside the door as the policemen arrest Angel. One of the policemen has Epiphany's toddler son in his arms. Previously she had told Angel that her son was conceived at a voodoo ritual, and that he is the child of a voodoo god, who was the "best fuck" she ever had. As Angel weeps bitter tears, his illusion of self-determination in tatters, the child points an accusing finger at him and his eyes glow the same gold as the eyes of Mephistopheles. Narratively, this operates as the final indictment of Favorite/Angel, but it also works to indict voodoo as satanic: the golden

eyes testifying to the fact that the boy is not the child of a voodoo loa, but of Satan himself. Angel's defensive scepticism, built on the nonsense model of voodoo, collapses under the weight of the satanic model. Voodoo is therefore simply a tool used by the Devil to aid his capture of recalcitrant souls. *The Believers* seeks to separate Santería from the satanic cult, and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* distinguishes between voodoo as a folk-religion and Peytraud's black magic. By contrast, *Angel Heart* places voodoo under the aegis of a very Western and Christianised idea of the Devil.

Despite the film's apparent postmodern blurring of historical distinctions and intertextual *mélange*, the narrative is far from a postmodern allegory of the fragmented self. Split identity is framed within a medievalist and very Christian moral context, differing from the more explicitly psychoanalytic interpretation of splitting represented in many 1950s Hollywood noirs. The Faust myth that structures the film is medieval in origin. Although ostensibly a cautionary tale against the use of magic, and advocating that most Protestant notion of deferred gratification, it has thrilled audiences for centuries with its evocation of transgressive pleasures and the malevolent charm of its Devil (both of which can be made to serve counter-discursive ends). Countless films have been made of the story, and F W Murnau's *Faust* (1926, Germany) links Expressionism to the medieval Gothic. *Angel Heart* follows this, drawing out the Gothic component of Hollywood noirs by giving it a supernatural source, and it is perhaps the most obvious example of a voodoo film that brings medievalist ideas directly to bear on the subject-matter. Despite the prevalence of the satanic model of voodoo in this and other films, there are a group of films in which voodoo is depicted as a healing and redemptive force.

Healing voodoo: *I Walked with a Zombie*, *The Possession of Joel Delaney*, *Weird Woman*, *Black Voodoo* and *Scream*, *Blacula*, *Scream*

I Walked with a Zombie is set in an imaginary Caribbean island – San Sebastian. The island is more than simply a generic Caribbean island, however, and the film draws very specifically from Haitian culture. The film's producer Val Lewton brought in some "experts" on Haitian vodoun, music and folk culture to help authenticate its depiction.³¹ In contrast to *White Zombie*, the film is far more interested in voodoo as a folk-religion, and it is not simply used for villainous or sensationalist ends – although the film does play on such expectations. The predominant generic vocabulary of the film is the melodramatic romance, borrowed principally from two novels: *Jane Eyre* (Charlotte Brontë, 1847) and *Rebecca* (Daphne Du Maurier, 1938). By marrying the tragic history of slavery in Haiti to the family melodrama, the film situates vodoun within a framework of repression and guilt, and in the main it is a healing and vital force that allows the family to grieve and move on from stasis. Voodoo does have

a positive aspect in the film. But this never becomes fully clear until the end of the film, leaving space to play on audience expectations of voodoo as satanic. The voodoo of *I Walked with a Zombie* is therefore subject to contradictory investments. The story-line is full of teasing ambiguities, mysteries and enigmas. The film never quite steps into the domain of horror, resulting in a melodramatic investment in character. It also has, as it turns out, no tangible monster – other than the guilt and secret history of the colonialist Rand/Holland family.

The film begins with a tantalising juxtaposition between a tropical beach at sunset and the snow falling outside an office, accompanied by a dreamy-sounding voice-over. The voice belongs to Betsy (Frances Dee) and speaks of how she walked with a zombie, couching the film as reminiscence and evoking the subjective and slippery world of fantasy and romance. Betsy is employed to nurse the comatose wife Jessica (Christine Gordon) of plantation owner Paul Holland (Tom Conway). She learns that Paul's half-brother Wesley Rand (James Ellison) had an affair with Jessica before she became ill, and he believes that Paul is responsible for Jessica's zombified state. Although in love with Paul, Betsy attempts to find a cure for Jessica by taking her to a local hounfour (a place where voodoo rituals are practised). This action prompts the brothers' mother, Mrs Rand (Edith Barrett), to confess that she was responsible for Jessica's zombification, an action intended to contain the threat posed to her family. The authorities do not believe her confession, but Wesley does, and he wants to free Jessica of her somnambulistic state. At the end of the film, Wesley is apparently possessed by the local houngan (a vodoun "priest"). He stabs Jessica and carries her body into the sea where they are drowned, allowing Paul and Betsy to marry.

The status of the supernatural is always under question. The origin of Jessica's illness is never entirely clear; the family interpret it as supernatural because of their own individual guilt and fear. The film's strategic deployment of ambiguity occurs at multiple levels: as Edmund G Bansak says, it is guided by the principle that nothing is what it seems.³² Although the film is, in certain respects, a conventional "wrong couple" family melodrama, it acquires aspects of Gothic horror through the presence of voodoo, and because each member of the Holland/Rand family is in some way unconsciously duplicitous. The film teases viewers with intimations about who is the villain of the piece, but this is always short-circuited; unlike most horror films, there is no one who embodies evil. All the main characters are in some kind of state of denial born of guilt, and even the voodooists turn out to be nothing more than practitioners of a mysterious, but healing and life-affirming, cult. The viewer is led through a maze of expectations derived from the staple nonsense and satanic models of voodoo, but no categorical or objective view of the supernatural is given. Instead, voodoo is assigned a counter-cultural role: its enigmatic status acts as a catalyst that draws out, and links together, the family's repressed guilt and colonialist history. Voodoo

draws out the disavowed sins of the family and, indeed, Western society. It also facilitates redemption from these sins, allowing the romance between the "proper" couple to blossom. This aspect may lessen voodoo's counter-cultural meaning, but renders it as a healing and positive force.

The family's need for redemption is carefully set up through some quite closely drawn relationships between the characters, and particularly through their dual and often contradictory natures. Paul Holland is a melancholic man for whom life holds no enchantment – as his brother says, "What he can do to that word 'beautiful'". His morose nature is established early on when he and Betsy are on board a ship. Here he dissipates Betsy's enchantment with the beauty of the Caribbean night by pointing out that flying fish jump for fear of their lives, that the luminescent sea is the result of putrescence, and that the shooting star is, in fact, a dying star. The scene is accompanied by the soulful lament sung by the black crew of the ship, underscoring his disenchantment with an aural signifier of mourning. All this adds to his Gothic Rochester-like charm – a man with secrets and tormented by self-doubt and guilt. Like Jane Eyre and the unnamed woman in *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940, USA), Betsy falls for him, ostensibly for what she sees as his honesty, and, like many a romantic heroine, seeks to clear away the dark cobwebs that afflict him. There might also be a masochistic dynamic at work here, of which she is unaware, contributing to the sense that she, too, is subject to unconscious, duplicitous desires. At first, Wesley appears to be more open and jovial than his saturnine brother. He teases Betsy on her arrival, playing on her clichéd fear of the "mysterious and eerie" jungle drums, which, he tells her, are just the work drum of the sugar mill. Nevertheless, he is scarred by a deep bitterness towards his brother. Perhaps the most interesting character in the Holland/Rand family is the brother's mother. Mrs Rand runs a dispensary in the village and has been twice widowed – her first husband was a plantation owner, and her second was a missionary. She appears to be the apotheosis of Christian middle-class values, tempered by compassion for the "natives" and her sons' foibles. It transpires that, despite all her warning words to Betsy about voodoo superstitions as ungodly and unsavoury, she is heavily involved with voodoo. She justifies this contradiction by claiming, as much to placate herself as other people, that her participation in voodoo enables medicines and health education to be brought to the local populace. Mrs Rand believes that she has killed Jessica through voodoo and, like the rest of her family, is riven with guilt and anguish.

Mirroring the dual nature of these characters, voodoo is also represented ambivalently. It emerges at the end of the film as a healing force and a means for the black populace and Mrs Rand to deal with misery. But this happy(ish) outcome means that certain narrative blind spots occur. Why did the houngan carry out Mrs Rand's wish to zombify Jessica, and why is Carrefour a zombie? Such unanswered questions may be plot writers' sloppiness, but nevertheless they contribute to the

enigmatic status of voodoo. A criticism often levelled at melodrama is the need for narrative resolution, and a happy ending often entails the forgetting of problems raised earlier. *I Walked with a Zombie* is no different, and, as such, the contradictory status of voodoo is never quite resolved. Unlike *The Believers*, there is no distinction made between voodoo used for the forces of good and that used for evil. Voodoo is used for its sensationalist lure, but such connotations melt under the balm of a healing redemptive force.

Guilt plays a significant role in the film, adding to the contradictory determination of voodoo. Each member of the Holland/Rand family is caught up in a web of guilt that drives their personalities and actions. The presence of the ship figurehead "Ti Misery" in the family's garden links their personal guilt to a deeper legacy of guilt produced by colonialism. The Ti Misery ship's figurehead is a black St Sebastian, its body studded with arrows. As the black cab-driver tells Betsy when she first arrives at Fort Holland, Ti Misery brought the first slaves to the island. Betsy ignores the implications of this by replying: "They were brought to a beautiful place". This particular disavowal is one that fits into a larger scheme of denial, operating at multiple levels. Placed under a small waterfall, Ti Misery is bathed in copious and ever-falling tears, emblematic of the tragic lives of the slaves and the legacy of guilt carried by the colonialist family. Drawing very directly on psychoanalytical ideas of repressed guilt and the effects of psychic defence mechanisms, depth psychology is linked to the classical Greek concept of "blood guilt".³³ Blood guilt, in which a crime's legacy is passed through the family line, afflicts many families in classical tragedy and myth. Ti Misery stands as a testimony to the historically-based colonialist blood guilt of the family, and the zombified Jessica is also an omnipresent reminder of the particular manifestation of that guilt in the current family – implicating the mother and her sons in different ways. The hubristic "curse" is only broken when Wesley pulls an arrow from Ti Misery's body to stab Jessica. He does so at the command of the houngan, who operates somewhat like the *deus ex machina* of Greek Tragedy. The deaths of Wesley and Jessica provide the sacrifice needed to placate the forces of guilt, giving history and interpersonal relations a supernatural dimension. Once the family's blood guilt is expiated, Paul can become paired with his "proper" partner, Betsy. This ending leaves hanging the possibility that guilt will continue to play a part in the lives of the remaining family members, and, as Jeremy Dyson says perceptively, the deaths allow the family to embark on the grieving process.³⁴ The sins of the past are redeemed once the "improper" couple are dead, allowing the sanctioned, "proper" couple to flourish. Greek Tragedy (hubris requires the death of the whole family) gives way to the ethics of romantic love, which acquires the help of supernatural voodoo forces to aid its path. Voodoo may have stirred up the repressed, lending it a counter-cultural function, but as it redeems in the name of romantic love it becomes a conventional ideological force that champions the

"clean and proper" couple.

The film's version of voodoo sits at a crossroads of several different, but connected, discourses: psychoanalysis, the Gothic, melodrama and Greek Tragedy. Each shares an acknowledgment of supernatural or subjective unseen forces. Voodoo is not simply seen as demonic as it is *White Zombie*. It is presented as a folk-religion, but it nevertheless ends up supporting Western values. In so doing, the film rejects, on its own terms, the nonsense model of voodoo. Voodoo becomes part of the enchantment that masks the conditional status of romantic love. Paul Holland's cynical views of voodoo, love and beauty as "cheap mummery" are undercut, as are Betsy and Mrs Rand's attempts to rationalise voodoo. Retaining an ambiguous status throughout most of the film, voodoo is entangled with the family's psychic dynamics. This contributes to the film's unusually non-dualistic and quite fluid take on the supernatural, although this does not extend to its redemptive function.

Voodoo continually forces the main characters to readdress their adherence to an objective view. Betsy's trip to the hounfour is based on a belief that voodoo may help to shock Jessica out of her zombified state. This is largely an intuitive action, perhaps born of an unconscious connection between voodoo and Jessica's state of being. Described by Dyson as a typical Lewtonesque journey,³⁵ laden with cinematic conventions that lead us to expect terrible things but which come to naught, Betsy leads Jessica through the cane field to the voodoo ritual conducted at the hounfour. The eerie noises of owls and wind whistling through the holes bored into a gourd give way to the community song sung in praise of Papa Legba, the guardian of the gateway or crossroads between the spirit and the physical world. This creates an interesting association between this loa and Carrefour (Darby Jones), the apparent zombie who stands at the crossroads leading to the hounfour. ("Carrefour" means "crossroads" in French.) With his staring empty eyes, most critics have interpreted Carrefour as a zombie. This reading is supported by his presence at the start of the film, when Betsy tells us in voice-over that she has "walked with a zombie", and the fact that he, like Jessica, "obeys simple commands".³⁶ It is also possible to read Carrefour as an embodiment of Papa Legba. Carrefour is present in some key scenes in the film. He is sent by the houngan to get Jessica, but returns empty-handed after being sent away by Mrs Rand (whom he knows). He is also present when Wesley carries Jessica's body into the sea, presiding over the action that breaks the guilt curse on the family. Carrefour seems to guide him in his actions. This allows a retrospective rereading of the opening image where Betsy walks alongside Carrefour: it is he who enables her to realise a romantic desire for Paul Holland. So, although Carrefour appears to be a classic Hollywood monster, on closer examination he can be seen as an embodiment of the loa who restores the conditional romantic status quo. He is instrumental to the redemption of the family by freeing them of the dead-weight of Jessica, and he opens the door for the "proper" romance

to be consummated.

During Betsy's visit to the hounfour, the song to Papa Legba gives way to beating drums; two black women and the houngan begin their dances. There is no explicit explanation given about the role of possession in voodoo, and the ecstatic pseudo-sex of the voodoo ritual dance is not explored. There is, however, a vitality about their dancing that heightens the somnambulistic death-in-life state of Jessica, adding credence to the idea that voodoo is a healing force. The one difficulty here is that Mrs Rand maintains that, during her own possession, she gave in to her desire to do away with the disruptive Jessica, the primary cause of her feelings of guilt. Is this a part of a grand design to expiate the colonialist sins of the family through the workings of Oedipal family relations, or was it simply an expression of Mrs Rand's unconscious Oedipal and jealous relationship with her seduced sons? It is probably most usefully read as a combination of the two, and it sheds some light on Mrs Rand's impersonation of Damballah. Mrs Rand speaks with two voices: the voice of a loa and the voice of a mother. Neither lines up directly behind rationality or irrationality. Mrs Rand's two voices are both marked by masquerade and duplicity, but inhabiting – or being inhabited by – the voice of Damballah, she seeks a cure for her family sins. Like the other members of her family, she does not know herself or her desire, and futilely seeks to rationalise the contradictions that plague her. This takes us away from the binary world of *White Zombie*, with its one-dimensional characters, into the conflicted subjective world of defence mechanisms and overdetermination.

So where does this place voodoo? Its status is never explicitly delineated, but it is rendered through the imagination and psychic terrain of the white protagonists. The film abstains from the satanic and sensationalist interpretations of voodoo being made at the time in the popular press and in other horror films. Instead, voodoo is related to the unconscious guilt and desires of the Holland/Rand family. Its ability to expiate the sins of the past and to facilitate the romance between the "proper" couple betrays the fact that this version of voodoo is very much the product of the white imaginary.

In films such as *The Serpent and the Rainbow* and *The Believers*, voodoo is split into two different uses: that working for the community as a form of religious empowerment and intrinsic to cultural identity, and that in the service of malignant forces. This splitting, along the lines of good and evil, is the source of dramatic narrative tension, and preserves a satanic model of voodoo, without suggesting that all voodoo is satanic or evil. *The Possession of Joel Delaney* (Waris Hussein, 1972, USA) follows a similar approach to *The Believers*. While the film is closely aligned to Westernised notions of demonic possession, it also provides an indictment of blinkered rationalism. Joel Delaney (Perry King) is a quiet, young, middle-class man who has been brought up by his sister. The spirit of a dead Puerto Rican, Tonio Perez, possesses him. Perez was Delaney's best friend before he died, and they shared a difficult relationship with their

respective families. Because Perez decapitated young women, he is killed by his father, but continues to repeat his psychotic pattern through Delaney. Nora Benson (Shirley MacLaine) is Delaney's snobbish, arrogant and largely unsympathetic sister, and sets out to find a cure for her brother. Thinking that Perez is alive and merely a bad influence on her brother, she goes to Spanish Harlem to find his family. On learning that Perez is dead, she attends a ceremony designed to exorcise his spirit.³⁷ It is unsuccessful as the possessed Delaney is not present, and she is told that it is necessary for him to be present for the exorcism to be successful. Instead of doing this, she calls on some white middle-class therapist friends who think Delaney is psychotic, and is told to take her children to the beach house. This results in Delaney terrorising Nora and her children in the isolated beach house, where he is eventually shot by the police, and the film ends as Perez's spirit transfers to Nora's body.

The film is a very clear condemnation of the Westernised rationalist rejection of the supernatural, and is also injected with a strong critique of right-wing attitudes. Only an exorcism using the religious language of Perez's culture could have provided the "happy ending". In *The Believers*, Santería is ineffectual in the face of deeper African magic used in powerful white circles. Here the Santería-style religion could have contained the threat to the family, but rationalism and bigotry prevail, and the possession is perpetuated. As with *The Exorcist*, the demonic possession is entangled with Oedipal tensions, and both films suggest that these are not the direct cause of the possession, but are implicated in it. The possession brings out that which has been oppressed and suppressed – violent desires that are related to the hierarchy of class and ethnic differences, as well as those related to family and sexuality. There is a classic association made between the Oedipal and demonic possession, present in many of the possession films discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Unusually, there is also a cultural dimension to the film's representation of possession, used to mount its critique of right-wing conservatism. In many occult films, the supernatural often works to bury the political through the idea that evil is transcendental. Here, however, Perez's demonic return is built on anger. His status as serial killer is linked to family tensions, particularly with his mother (seen in the fact that he only kills women). This could easily result in covering over the fact that his anger is also grounded in the injustices of class and ethnic inequality. And this would have been the case, perhaps, if Nora had been a sympathetic character, like Cal in *The Believers*. She is depicted, however, as extremely controlling and deeply entrenched in the ultra-right-wing view that she and her class are superior to others. This is demonstrated through a catalogue of instances, including her arrogant treatment of the Puerto-Rican maid, her disapproval that Joel should live in a "poor" neighbourhood, and prejudiced comments about poverty. To represent a star (MacLaine) and the central character in such a negative light is extremely unusual for a Hollywood film, a factor that helps the film create

Joel's possession as a symptom of the class structure.

While possession is used as a return of what has been repressed and suppressed by white middle-class culture, the film falls back, nevertheless, on the idea that the dysfunctional family and a controlling mother-figure are the primary sources of Joel's problem. This combination of attack on the "uptight" mother-figure and right-wing bigotry reflects the status of counter-cultural politics at the time the film was made. It speaks to the anti-parent and anti-Establishment subculture of the day, and has a strong impact on the way in which Santería is figured in the film.

The Possession of Joel Delaney does not present voodoo as demonic. Instead, it is a valuable knowledge system that is ignored by Nora in favour of the psychiatric rationalism purveyed by her smart-set friends. Although she claims that she would do anything to save Joel, her deep-seated attitudes prevent the full exorcism from happening. Unlike Chris McNeil in *The Exorcist*, Nora is unable to make the leap into belief that is required to rescue her surrogate child from his possession. She regards Santería as nonsense, not simply from the point of rationalism, in which she has no particular investment, but because Santería belongs to a class and ethnicity which she regards as inferior. Inevitably Nora listens to the advice of her wealthy friends, rather than the Santería priest. She pays the price of bigotry by losing her brother and becoming one with the very thing that embodies the return of the repressed in the film. The unhappy ending hinges on Nora's rejection of voodoo, which could have redeemed Perez, healed her brother, prevented the death of her therapist friend and prohibited her children from being humiliated and terrified.

Voodoo is subject to the nonsense model that also works to confound its protective qualities in *Weird Woman* (Reginald Le Borg, 1944, USA). Placed within the context of academia, voodoo becomes entangled with power struggles between competing academics. The career of Norman Reed (Lon Chaney Jr) is built on his belief that magic is merely superstition, and, if civilisation is to be truly civilised, primitive fears and "jungle magic" must be exorcised by reason. Early in the film, he writes: "Man's struggle upward from his dark past is a struggle of reason against superstition". This is set up to be subsequently demolished. Even in the opening shots, Norman's rationalism is juxtaposed with his house full of totemic objects, and, as he writes, his wife Paula (Anne Gwynne) places shells around his photograph as a magical protection. Throughout the film, the conflict between rationalism and the belief in the supernatural is constantly in play. Norman demands that his wife burn all the protective charms she uses, but, as they are thrown on the fire, a colleague commits suicide and Norman is accused of facilitating his death. Such incidents demand that Norman reassess his strident scepticism. It transpires that the root of the problem is his jealous ex-girlfriend Ilona Carr (Evelyn Ankers). She has been using lies and the power of suggestion to turn members of the faculty against him, and she fuels the jealousy of a boy student, who eventually shoots him. In the struggle, the boy is accidentally shot and

Norman is arrested and released on bail. This allows him to regain his previous rational position and construct a plot to catch Ilona, with the aim of freeing him from the murder charge. Ilona is shown a wooden doll stuck with nails. She is told that the suicide has said that the doll represents the woman who lied and caused him to take his own life. It is accompanied by the message that the woman will die by strangulation at 12.01 in thirteen days' time. In a montage sequence, Ilona is increasingly haunted by the ticking away of time, and, three minutes before the deadline, she confesses, only to be told that it was a trick and her guilty conscience has trapped her. On hearing this, she leaps out of the window to escape, and is hung on the tree outside. The time is 12.01 precisely, coincidence or not – the film leaves an apparently ambiguous space for viewers to make up their own minds.

Early in the film, Norman infringes a significant ceremonial taboo when doing fieldwork on a Polynesian island. He steps over a sacred line of shells, requiring him to offer himself as a sacrifice to the gods. Paula warns him against such an action, but he ignores her. Subsequently, she and her priestess surrogate mother work charms over him to keep him safe from the wrath of the gods, setting up Paula as a protective figure right from the early stages of the film. When they return to Monroe University, Paula keeps up her protective spells and rituals and immediately sees that Ilona is a threat to them. Norman is therefore caught between the two women: one his protector and the other a fury of vengeance (which links her to Norman's transgression of the Polynesian taboo). His blanket rationalism fuels both women's unhappiness. He tells Ilona not to be melodramatic on two separate occasions, including when she complains that he did not tell her about his marriage, and Paula is constantly harangued about her beliefs. Ilona and Paula are both aligned with the irrational: nurture and jealousy are associated with emotional "primitive" urges, and here there is some slippage between Norman's point of view and the film's rendering of gender. Norman is, of course, aligned to reason, and it is clear that he is unable to cope with emotion and cannot deal with anything that challenges his uniform way of seeing. This helps shift the "nonsense" model of voodoo into more ambiguous and contradictory territory. The film creates a distance between the viewer and Norman's rationalist disavowal, allowing the viewer to treat Norman's very masculine rationalism critically, creating sympathy for Paula and her beliefs. Voodoo is not satanic here, but carries the kudos and lure of the enigmatic that is not effaced by Norman's "nonsense" approach. As figured here, voodoo does implicitly have a counter-cultural dimension, because masculinist rationalism is under attack.

While voodoo facilitates a critique of rationalism in *Weird Woman*, it is nevertheless mediated by incredulity. This narrative structure occurs in many voodoo films (as well as other types of film). There are, however, some films that do not render voodoo through the scepticism-to-belief narrative trajectory. *Snake People* is one, and it would appear that

low-budget exploitation movies are less likely to take this approach, largely because they do not follow classic Hollywood structure in which the hero – or, more rarely, the heroine – is the eyes and ears of the viewer. While *Snake People* treats voodoo as an exotic and dangerous other, blaxploitation cinema tends to have a more ambivalent relation to voodoo. Here it is not filtered through a white rational view-point, as it is in the majority of voodoo films.

As examples of the burgeoning blaxploitation cinema of the 1970s, *Black Voodoo* and *Scream, Blacula, Scream* both figure voodoo as a means of combating the forces of evil. They also locate voodoo within the context of black culture and identity. Both films address a black and a white audience, and reflect the American film industry's post-1960s romance with black politics and culture. Although voodoo's exotic otherness is used to attract audiences, these films depict voodoo as less radically "other" than in most other films. It is open to debate whether such films reduce black politics simply to a style, but they nevertheless present voodoo as a protective, redemptive and positively empowering religion. Despite the fact that *Black Voodoo* (aka *Nurse Sherri* [Al Adamson, 1977, USA]) exhibits all the features of exploitation cinema – gratuitous nudity, women with large breasts, fragmented plot, and laughable special effects – voodoo is used to combat what is essentially the magic of the white man. An evil white cult leader verges on a magical "breakthrough" (presumably world domination is his aim); in his moment of triumph, however, he suffers a heart attack and the hospital cannot save him. He returns in spirit guise to haunt and possess those involved in his care at the hospital, using the body of nurse Sherri (Jill Jacobson) to exact his murderous revenge. Only voodoo can save the day and rid Sherri of her possession. There is no direct use of voodoo in the film and its protective powers only become known through a blind black ex-football player who learned voodoo secrets from his Haitian grandmother. He tells his nurse girlfriend that she must burn the body of the cult leader if she is to release Sherri from her possession. With this duly done, the white psychiatrist has no truck with supernatural explanations of the murders Sherri committed whilst under the influence of the dead cult leader. She is left in the final shot of the film bound into a strait-jacket and behind bars. In this sense, voodoo becomes a counter-cultural discourse because it can see what the white hegemonic order cannot.

Voodoo as a redemptive and healing force is central to the narrative of *Scream, Blacula, Scream*. Blacula is a noble suffering vampire who has been condemned to a life of endless blood-lust and barbarity that disgusts him. After being resurrected for the sequel to *Blacula* (William Crain, 1972, USA), he seeks the help of a voodoo priestess, Lisa (Pam Grier), to help free him from his curse. His status as vampire is likened to demonic possession, and he believes that his blood-lust can be exorcised. The film is not governed directly by Christian laws, as it is in classic vampire films; instead, the exorcism can only be effective if carried out

according to voodoo principles.

The film is a hybrid combination of horror and blaxploitation conventions. Critics have often seen *Blacula* and *Scream, Blacula, Scream* as cynically exploiting cross-market appeal. The hybrid generic status of the film nevertheless carries with it an interesting outcome. Because of the blaxploitation context, voodoo is freed from its usual role as the source of a threatening evil. Instead, the evil is located within white culture, as it is the white Count Dracula who contaminates and corrupts the noble African prince Mamawaldi (William Marshall), renaming him Blacula. Vampirism, and not voodoo, is the main source of horror and otherness here, making a significant departure from the way in which voodoo is mostly presented in the horror genre and, indeed, in action movies such as *Live and Let Die* (Guy Hamilton, 1973, UK). The meaning of voodoo in the film is also influenced by the fact that the voodoo priestess is the film's heroine. Eschewing many of the more clichéd representations of voodoo rites, Lisa is never possessed, as is the case with Marielle in *The Serpent and the Rainbow* and Epiphany in *Angel Heart*, nor does she go-go dance like the priestesses in *Curse of the Voodoo or Snake People*. Lisa is not overtly put on display for the white male gaze, and she is never undressed or bikini-clad. As heroine, Lisa may be terrified at times, but she has her wits about her. Ultimately, it is her powers that save her boyfriend from the fate experienced by Blacula, preventing the white-based corrupting curse from perpetuating. The conventional alignment between primal instincts and black culture is reversed: it is white, European culture that is primitive. Lisa's decision to help Blacula/Mamawaldi is born of compassion and morality, carrying with it a further counter-cultural dimension as she attempts to use her magic to free the African from his particular condition of slavery.

While this reading is made available to viewers, the film tends to foreclose many of the racial tensions that surface. Voodoo is framed as an empowering religious language of the dispossessed because it is able to contain the white man's magic, but this is somewhat diluted. In *Blacula*, Mamawaldi goes to Dracula to help in his struggle to abolish slavery. His intent is brutally curtailed by becoming an instinct-driven vampire. After being made a vampire, Mamawaldi's actions are grounded in anger. As William Paul rightly says, *Blacula*, together with other blaxploitation films, is "unique in Hollywood history for [its] forthright and casual presentation of racial anger, and racial anger from a decidedly black perspective".³⁸ While this is certainly the case in *Blacula*, the Blacula of *Scream, Blacula, Scream* makes no such direct critique of his condition. Here he is less a figure of retribution and kills mostly young black men. He criticises the black pimps who accost him in the street for "making slaves of his sisters", claiming that they are just following in the footsteps of the white slave trade. But there is no such direct exchange directed at the only significant white character in the film, the sheriff who embodies white law. Because of this, Blacula is less an embodiment of the colonial repressed than in the

former film. Another significant short-circuiting of racial tension is conducted through the relationship between Justin (Don Mitchell), Lisa's boyfriend, and the white sheriff (Michael Conrad). They were colleagues in the police force before Justin left to run his own lucrative publishing company. They team up to hunt the killer who is draining bodies of blood. The relationship is conducted in a similar way to the biracial buddy movie. They manage to cut through racial differences through jokes and mutual respect. The message here is that rationality, patience and commitment to the law can overcome inequality.

Justin is also important to the way in which the film figures voodoo. Because Justin is not part of Lisa's cult, he is able to act as a mediator. Unlike white sceptical mediators in other voodoo films, he is black and sympathetic to voodoo. The sheriff believes that the cult committed the crime: his limited knowledge of voodoo is based on the idea that it involves snakes and blood sacrifice. In some respects, the sheriff's views are based, perhaps like those of many white viewers, on ideas derived from voodoo in the horror film. Justin's role as mediator is important in shifting the view of voodoo into a more culturally specific context. Alongside Lisa's status as heroine, Justin helps the film to locate voodoo as a part of black cultural identity, moving away from the more lurid white imaginary investments in voodoo articulated by the sheriff. Although the film certainly sold itself on the exotic mix of vampires and voodoo, there is an attempt to drain voodoo of its more salacious and othered meanings, and replace them with positive connotations and the richness of black cultural identity.

When the ritual to save Blacula from his torment is interrupted, Lisa is appalled at the barbarity of his actions when he kills some of the policemen who have raided the house. His actions change Lisa's sympathetic approach. In the final showdown between Justin and the enraged Blacula, she kills him by plunging an arrow into the voodoo doll that she has been using to help save him. Voodoo therefore offers redemption through a final death. The film locates evil in terms of vampirism – as a white-based contagion that corrupted the noble black prince. This frees voodoo from the tyranny of the usual satanic model and further relocates the primal, the instinctual and the barbaric in white, rather than black, culture. The nonsense model has no significant part to play in the film: when it is raised, it is in relation to vampirism and not voodoo. Voodoo is shown to be an intrinsic part of the black community in which Lisa lives, and is contextualised by her and her boyfriend's studies into African history and culture. This is where the counter-cultural dimension is most apparent. Voodoo is rooted in black culture and identity; it is protective and life-affirming, and it combats the white-based evil that infects Mamawaldi and threatens both white and black communities. Unlike most voodoo films, *Scream, Blacula, Scream* presents voodoo from a black perspective and, as such, is far less sensationalised and not the source of the film's horror.

Conclusion: the conditions of ecstasy

In considering how voodoo is mediated through a set of finite Western paradigms (nonsense, counter-cultural and satanic), it has emerged that it is most commonly the satanic model that is deployed. In all the films discussed, the nonsense model is used only as a narrative device and is frequently swept away by the veracity of the supernatural. However, the satanic model may be put to counter-cultural purposes, requiring a certain "perverse" reading style. In many of the films, voodoo has a healing or positive aspect, but this is often made to support the "proper" couple of the heterosexual romance, most evident in *White Zombie, I Walked with a Zombie, Scream, Blacula, Scream, The Believers* and *Voodoo*.

Voodoo in Western film may offer a means of challenging the dominant cultural values of Western culture – viewers may revel in the depiction of possession and witchcraft as liberation from such values. There is, however, a price incurred by making voodoo an embodiment of transgression. Whenever voodoo is figured as a return of the oppressed, it tends to be conflated with a return of the repressed. In all the films discussed, voodoo is in some way rendered as being in touch with primal forces and desires. These may be sexual, as with the spirit possessions of various women, or they may be overtly coded as evil, as in those films in which a maniacal male antagonist strives for supernatural power. The primal coding of voodoo is strongly linked to music – particularly drum rhythms. This is the case whether voodoo is depicted as good or as evil. While the return of the repressed, figured as primal, carries the kudos of freedom from stultifying civilising processes, it is nevertheless politically problematic to conflate voodoo with the realms of the unconscious. This may appear to white viewers as conveying the rich world of the supernatural and the irrational, marginalised by rationality and empirical arrogance. But, by making voodoo synonymous with the freeing up of that which is repressed in, and by, Western culture, voodoo becomes essentialised. This occurs because many voodoo films deploy transcendent ideas of good and evil. (In other words, good and evil are seen as beyond a cultural and historical definition.) Such a device even appears in the films that attempt to locate voodoo in a specific historical and ethnic context (as with *I Walked with a Zombie, The Possession of Joel Delaney, The Believers* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow*).

Voodoo films may use a variant iconographic language to call up the exoticism of voodoo, but Christian-based models of supernatural evil predominantly frame them. Rarely is voodoo shown unconditionally in its cultural context. When this does occur, as in *The Serpent and the Rainbow* and *Scream, Blacula, Scream*, it is couched within the staple conventions of the horror genre. When voodoo is a tool for evil, it has the capacity to challenge mainstream Western values, but, despite the best efforts of a perverse reading, it is difficult to ignore the fact that a politically problematic connection is made between black magic and

black culture. If we come to voodoo film expecting to find a depiction of the sacred "in the raw", it is because the primitive tends to be related to black culture. This stumbling block is not easily removed, with all the best possible intentions. The individual contradictions that have been identified circulating in the films do offer spaces through which conflicts at work in the white Western imaginary can be seen, but often do no more than allow us to see the impossibility of escaping such an all-encompassing construct. For the white viewer, the black cultural context of voodoo may promise liberation from the everyday and the banal, but it does so at the expense of rendering another culture in terms of the unconscious and the primitive – constructs that are explicitly produced by the guiding discourses of white Western culture. Voodoo in film often promises a way out of social inscription, but actually often only demonstrates the firm bounds of that inscription. If we are to read a sense of pleasurable liberation in voodoo films, it often requires a disavowal of the fact that its powers are derived from the imaginary investments which the West gives to it. The popularity of voodoo films is an expression of the limitations of white Western culture. There are moments in the films when the weight of clashing contradictions propels us into a space of liberating ambiguity, but are often doomed to be short-circuited and made conditional to conventional ideas of good and evil as primal and transcendent. What the films tacitly betray is that they find it difficult to embrace diversity in the definition of the other, which is, almost always, confined within a binary structure that masquerades through the "primal" as universal and trans-historical.

Notes

¹ Homi K Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders", in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995): 29.

² Voodoo-style religions include: Obeah in the Caribbean, Bahian Candomblé in Brazil, Santería in other parts of South American and Cuba, and versions of vodoun (hoodoo) are practised in the southern states of America.

³ Hall comments on the importance of voodoo for black identity in the *Divine Magic* documentary series. *Divine Magic*: "The Power of Voodoo" broadcast by Channel 4 in January 1996.

⁴ Hurbon reprints testimonies from a variety of writers who considered vodoun "satanic": Jean Baptiste-Labat, 1722; Michel-Etienne Descourtilz, 1809; and Carl Edward Peters, 1960. Laënnec Hurbon, *Voodoo: Truth and Fantasy*, translated by Lory Frankel (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995): 130-138.

⁵ I use this spelling when referring to Haitian practices to distinguish it from fictional voodoo in cinema. Davis notes that it is not used by Haitians to describe their religion. Wade Davis, "A Note on Orthography", in *The Serpent*

and the Rainbow (London: Collins, 1986): 11.

⁶ William B Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (New York: Literary Guild of America, 1929).

⁷ Edward Lowry and Richard deCordova, "Enunciation and the production of horror in *White Zombie*", in Barry Keith Grant (ed), *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film* (Metuchen, NJ; London: The Scarecrow Press, 1984): 350. The total budget for the film was US\$50 000 (www.imbd.com). See also Michael H Price and George E Turner, "The Black Art of *White Zombie*", in George E Turner (ed), *The Cinema of Adventure, Romance & Terror* (Hollywood, CA: The ASC Press, 1989): 147-155.

⁸ Hurbon: 48.

⁹ Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972): 84 [first published in 1959].

¹⁰ *Encarta 99 Encyclopedia* on CD-ROM: entry on Haiti.

¹¹ Hurbon: 55.

¹² Susan McClary, cited in Barbara Browning, *Infectious Rhythm: Metaphors of Contagion and the Spread of African Culture* (New York; London: Routledge, 1998): 6.

¹³ Homi K Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences", in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (eds): 206-209.

¹⁴ Bryan Senn, *Drums of Terror: Voodoo in the Cinema* (Baltimore, MD: Midnight Marquee Press, 1998): 216-217.

¹⁵ Stories circulated that several crew-members and relatives of those involved in the making of *The Exorcist* died, for example.

¹⁶ Benschhoff uses this term to describe the rendering of homosexuality in classic horror films as perverse and unnatural. Queer theory seeks to recuperate such terms as a political critique of heterocentrism. Harry M Benschhoff, *Monsters in the closet: Homosexuality and the horror film* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1997): 31-40.

¹⁷ Price and Turner: 153-154.

¹⁸ Ellen Draper briefly mentions *White Zombie* when addressing the idea that the male gaze, narcissism and excess are prevalent in a group of Hollywood films of the 1930s and 1940s. She does not address the possible meanings and readings opened up by Legendre's excessive perversity. Ellen Draper, "Zombie Women: When the Gaze is Male", *Wide Angle* 10: 3 (1988): 52-62.

¹⁹ Benschhoff: 66-70.

²⁰ Browning: 99.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² This connection is further supported at an intertextual level by the use of an actor who played a Tonton Macoutes "heavy" in *The Comedians* (Peter Glenville, 1967, USA/France).

²³ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Premature Burial" [1850], in *The Complete Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (London: Octopus Books, 1981): 271-279.

²⁴ Patents for such devices were registered with the British Patent Office in the 19th century. See www.lightlink.com/bbm/wcoffin.html for an example.

²⁵ Carol J Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1992): 66, 86.

²⁶ Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968).

²⁷ The Greek term used to describe animism and possessing agents that are not necessarily evil.

²⁸ A strategy used playfully in recent self-referential US horror films such as *Scream* (Wes Craven, 1996) and *The Faculty* (Robert Rodriguez, 1998).

²⁹ Cited in Senn: 212.

³⁰ According to Senn (211), the actress who played Carmen, Carla Pinza, is a Santera (a priestess of Santería), and she worked on the film as an adviser.

³¹ Edmund G Bansak gives a thorough background to the production of the film. See Edmund G Bansak, *Fearing the Dark: The Val Lewton Career* (Jefferson, NC; London: McFarland & Company, 1995): 147.

³² *Ibid.*: 157.

³³ Val Lewton, the film's very active producer, was keen on bringing aspects of Greek Tragedy to the films he produced. He is reported to have said that the film has a Greek-style chorus provided by Sir Lancelot's Calypso songs, which fill in much of the family's history in the film. Bansak: 151-152, 159.

³⁴ Jeremy Dyson, *Bright Darkness: The Lost Art of the Supernatural Horror Film* (London; Washington: Cassell, 1997): 149.

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 143.

³⁶ This description of a zombie is lifted from an article that appeared in *American Weekly*, written by Inez Wallace. She reports seeing Haitian zombies that were drugged and not dead. The film was partly based on this article. Bansak: 143, 146.

³⁷ The head of the Santería group who attempts to exorcise the spirit is Don Pedro. This name was an 18th-century houngan in Africa and became "deified" as a loa. Métraux: 84, 86.

³⁸ William Paul, *Laughing Screaming: Modern Hollywood Horror and Comedy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 141.

Afterword: The Magic Circle

Skins for cheer-leading in, skins into which the Devil makes his entry into the world, skins to counter the ageing process, skins for dancing widdershins in. The cinema of the occult is concerned with transformations effected by magic, possession and the supernatural. These are used to deploy desires that are interpreted as being in excess of rationality and civilisation. Boundaries between usually discrete dimensions are dissolved. Identity is under violent attack and many characters are left fractured, struggling for autonomy and differentiation from the other. The cinema of the occult tends to be backward-looking. It evokes what is generally regarded as archaic and primitive, often following Merlin's comment in *Excalibur* (1981) that "the future takes root in the past". This lends occult cinema to psychoanalytic concepts such as repression, the unconscious and the Oedipal relation – each of which provides a putative explanation of our sense of not quite being at home with ourselves. Like the psychoanalytic notion that subjects are composites of diverse and often contradictory influences which undermine a singular illusion of identity, the cinema of the occult is also a composite, Frankensteinian form. There is, however, as has been shown, a rather specific set of discourses borrowed from various sources that shape the cinema of the occult. Ancient, urban and world myths are eclectically drawn upon, as well as medievalist demonology and the magical revival. What is extrapolated from these are concepts of transgression, the sacred, sacrifice, animism and anthropomorphism. Freud and Frazer regarded many of these as belonging to primitive and uncivilised aspects of human evolution and thought, and perhaps they would regard cinema itself as being a form of magical, and thereby regressive, thinking. The cinema of the occult does, however, provide a means through which the contradictions of identity can be imaginatively expressed, and can therefore serve counter-hegemonic ends. This may be the case in reading the most conservative films against the grain of their intended meanings.

The cinema of the occult deploys the special nature of cinema to achieve its spectacle and emotional impact. Editing, sound, analogue and, more recently, digital effects spark the imaginary into life, often helping to break the frame of representation. Strategic use of enigmas and the

unknown and a web of intertextual references further aid this. Cinema's ability to suspend disbelief is used to allow viewers entry into the world of the supernatural. Films are often set, or partly set, in places that have the status of the frontier, places cut off from "normality": outer space and another dimension in *Event Horizon* (1997); cyberspace in many techno-possession films; the convents of the possessed nun films (including one set in Nepal); islands such as Haiti in the voodoo films; woods in the werewolf film (also taken up in *The Blair Witch Project* [1999]) and for Sabat scenes; remote villages in some of the British paganism films; and deserts used in *The Exorcist* (1973) and *Medea* (1970). A few are set in the city, but, with the exception of *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), there is a tendency to move out of the city into the country, as in *Fallen* (1998), *Angel Heart* (1987), *The Believers* (1987) and *To the Devil a Daughter* (1976). That is not to say that the Devil is not abroad in the city, but often there is a tendency to confirm the primitive and archaic origins of the supernatural through reference to apposite landscapes. The cinema of the occult connects setting to the unconscious, or to that which sublimely dwarfs human scales of time and space. In most examples of occult cinema, there is a tacit concurrence with the idea that the supernatural is more than simply the product of the mind. It is extraneous, often pre-exists history, and is able to invade the body and consciousness. This may be a ruse to help break the frame of representation and scepticism, inviting the viewer to believe in something conscious beyond the human.

In so doing, it is common in many occult films to append the supernatural – paradoxically perhaps – to the human unconscious, and particularly the Oedipal relation. In romancing otherness and the terrors and ecstasies of being embattled with a force that undermines autonomy, these films often turn to the monstrous primal mother or father. It seems that, in the shaping of the occult, these figures are fairly ubiquitous, particularly the primal father. Classical Greek culture is perhaps the primary ur-text of Western culture. Its myth, religious practices and conflict between scepticism and mysticism provide an obvious sounding-board for filmmakers seeking to construct mythic and archaic resonances. In *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), E R Dodds, a historian of Greek religion, argues that, although classical Greek culture gave birth to rationality, it was a discourse that found favour with only an élite few. Everyday Greeks did not buy into a sceptical rejection of the supernatural, and many rural people, women and slaves belonged to possession or mystery cults. As the intellectual élite were all men, the rejection of the supernatural meant that possession, the irrational and the archaic were feminised and rationality masculinised. In general, this binary gendering, as another example of crisis-driven dualism, still seems to hold sway in contemporary popular culture. The irrational, as embodied by the monstrous mother or the primal father, still plays a fundamental role in contemporary culture. The principles of sympathetic magic, superstition

and the suspension of disbelief persist to guide the popular imaginary, the shape of which bears a ghostly resemblance to the rational/irrational duality in classical Greek culture. In cinema, technology is frequently split off from rationality and science, and takes on the aura of magic as it provides an aid to the imagination. The force of the irrational breathes life into many popular and cult texts, and, in particular, the Gothic excess of horror, melodrama and film noir genres.

While the current era might be thought of as a rational age, in which old superstitions are outmoded, the evidence provided by the cinema of the occult is that magical thinking is far from dead. The meaning of the sacred and of religious faith has become increasingly relativised in the West, partly through the influence of the magical revival. They now have diverse articulations gleaned from different cultures and traditions. This may have put Christianity into crisis, but it is premature to pronounce the sacred, the religious and magic truly dead. Many recent films that involve the Devil or the supernatural seem to project a nostalgia for transcendent and medievalist notions of good and evil, which would perhaps sit happily with definitions of the postmodern as a looking back to stable guarantors of meaning. Magic in cinema opens up contradictions, and ambiguity provides the space of practical magic. The occult is a field in which the rigid rules of reality become plastic and can potentially be manipulated by the magician or witch; the hiatus in "normality" might equally sweep away autonomy in a flow of irrationality. This plasticity in the realm of the occult is mirrored by the cinema, forging an intimate connection between the two, and it might help to explain the longevity of the cinema of the occult. Increasingly, the cinema of the occult is becoming as lucrative and as popular as the action film, and it is the development of computer-based techniques of manipulating images that enables contemporary occult cinema (and television, with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) to create greater effects and dimensions of unreality in a believable way. This is important in rendering the cinema of the occult an enigmatic and persistent form – although *The Blair Witch Project* actively departs from the use of such sophisticated technology to realise a more home-grown, but effective, version of the uncanny. From *Häxan* (1922) to the low-tech, low-budget *The Blair Witch Project* and the millennial hi-tech special effects blockbuster *End of Days* (Peter Hyams, 1999, USA), occult cinema continues to excite (or perhaps disappoint) us with images of the extraneous and malevolent forces of the supernatural. I hope that *A Skin For Dancing In* has gone some way to exploring why such ideas are so powerful.

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Index

- Achilles (mythical figure) 49
 Adamson, Al 194
Addams Family, The 151
 Addie, Robert 130
 Adonis (mythical figure) 96, 101
 Agamemnon (mythical figure) 49
 AIDS 64
 AIP *see* American International Productions
 Allen, Elizabeth Anne 142
 Almodóvar, Pedro 2
Altered States 174
Ambrosio, or The Monk 3, 5, 164
 American International Productions (AIP) 3
Amityville II: The Possession 5
 Anderson, Pamela 121
 Anderson, Paul 55
Angel Heart 47, 53, 164, 172, 173, 175, 178, 182, 185, 195, 202
 Anger, Kenneth viii
 Anglicanism 6, 19
Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 80
 animation 8-10, 59
 Ankers, Evelyn 192
 anthropology ix, 72, 74-77, 98, 103, 106-108, 159-161, 168, 177
 Anýzová, Helena 141
Apocalypse Now 47, 53, 96, 105, 182
 Aquinas, Saint Thomas 3
 Argento, Dario 144
Army of Darkness: Evil Dead 3 171
 Arquette, Patricia 47
 Arrighi, Niké 93
 Arthurian legend 104, 105, 124, 126, 128-131
Attack of the 50 Foot Woman 121
 Attis (mythical figure) 96
 Augustine, Saint, Aurelius Augustinus 3
 Austin, Ray 78
Awakening, The 59
Bacchae, The 41, 62
 Bakhtin, Mikhail 85
 Balk, Fairuza 144
 Bansak, Edmund G 186
 Barbie (doll) 121
 Barker, Clive 62
 Barrett, Edith 186
 Barron, Steven 124
 Barty, Billy 124
 Bassett, Angela 60
 Bataille, Georges x, 24, 42, 51, 107-111
 Baudelaire, Charles 122
 Bava, Mario 134
 Beckford, William 19
 Behaviourism 98
Behind Convent Walls see Interno d'un convento
Belfry Witches, The 125
Believers, The 164, 175, 178, 180, 181, 185, 188, 190, 191, 197, 202
Bell Book and Candle 148, 150-153
 Bellamy, Madge 163
 "Belle Dame sans Merci, La" 122
 Beltane 84, 90
 Benshoff, Harry M 166
 Bernini, Gian Lorenzo 11
 Berruti, Giulio 28
 Bertrand, Ralph 179
Bewitched 144, 148, 149, 151, 152
 Bhabha, Homi K 162
 Bigelow, Kathryn 55
Black Narcissus 2, 7, 13, 17-19, 22, 23, 25, 29
Black Voodoo 185, 194
 Blackman, Honor 27
Blacula 194, 195
Blade af Satans bog (Leaves from Satan's Book) 7
Blade Runner 96
 Blair, Linda 36
Blair Witch Project, The 139, 202, 203
 blaxploitation 158, 164, 194, 195
Blood on Satan's Claw 26, 87
Blue Velvet 53, 54
 Bly, Robert 45
Body and Soul 37
 Bonet, Lisa 183
 Bonham-Carter, Helena 125, 127
 Book of Shadows 78
 Boorman, John 38, 84, 96
 Boorman, Katerine 128
 Borowczyk, Walerian 2
 Botting, Fred 3
 Bowens, Malick 176
 Brett, Ingrid 81
 Brontë, Charlotte (Curren Bell) 185
 Brosnan, Pierce 58
 Browning, Barbara 161, 168, 170, 172
 Browning, Tod 164
Buffy the Vampire Slayer 36, 43, 44, 55, 61, 125, 135, 140, 142, 144, 148, 153, 203
 Bullock, Sandra 151
 Burkert, Walter 87
 Burroughs, William 7
 Burstyn, Ellen 37
 Byrne, Gabriel 128
 Byron, Kathleen 20
 Cammell, Donald 52, 55, 105
 Carpenter, John 3
Carrie 65, 143
Carry On series of films 18
 Cartesianism 162, 174
 Castaneda, Carlos 173, 174
 Cawthorn, Joseph 163
 Celtic Revival 84
 censorship 2, 7, 12, 15, 56, 57, 82, 87, 90, 162, 172
 Chaney, Lon, Jr 192
Charmed 125
Children of the Damned 27
Children of the Stones 84
 Christensen, Benjamin 2, 7-12, 88
 Christie, Julie 55
 Cilento, Diane 83
 Cixous, Hélène 118, 125, 132
 Clair, René 148
 Clay, Nicholas 128
 Clément, Catherine 40, 118
 Clover, Carol J 36, 41, 57, 172
 Cohn, Michael 135
 Cohn, Norman 73
 Communism 90
Company of Wolves, The 44
Conan the Barbarian 96
 Conrad, Joseph 158
 Conrad, Michael 196
 Constant, Alphonse Louis *see* Éliphas Lévi
 Conway, Tom 163, 186
 Coppola, Francis Ford 47, 96, 105
 Corman, Roger 119, 122
Craft, The 123, 134, 144-148, 151, 153, 182
 Crain, William 194
 Craven, Wes 158, 160, 168, 172
 Creed, Barbara 36, 41, 52, 118, 153
 Cronenberg, David 45, 55-57
 Cross, Harley 175
 Crowley, (Edward) Aleister x, 74, 75, 78, 89-95, 109, 111
Cry of the Banshee 80
Curse of the Voodoo 173, 195
Curse of the Werewolf 43, 45
 Daly, Mary 125

- Damiani, Damiano 5
 Dante, Joe 44
Dark Habits see Entre tinieblas
 Darwin, Charles 77, 108
 Dasius (saint) 103
 Dávila, Raúl 178
 Davis, Wade 160, 168, 171, 173, 174
Dawn of the Dead 165
 De Niro, Robert 182
 De Palma, Brian 65
 Debussy, Claude 19, 23
 Dee, Frances 186
 Dee, John 75
 Deleuze, Gilles 36, 54
 Demeter (mythical figure) 138
Demon Seed 55, 59
Démons, Les (The Demons) 13
 Deren, Maya 160
 Dern, Laura 136
Devil Rides Out, The 76, 84, 87-90, 92, 94, 95, 110, 111, 177
Devils, The 2, 7, 12-15, 17, 18, 24-26, 29
Devils of Loudun, The 4, 12
 Diana (mythical figure) 99
 Dijkstra, Bram 123
 Dionysos (mythical figure) 41, 62, 101
Disembodied, The 121
 Disney 37, 135, 136, 138, 140
Divine Horsemen, The 160
 Dodds, E R 50, 64, 202
Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie (Dogma and Ritual of High Magic) 77
 Dr John 183
Dracula 164
 Dreyer, Carl-Theodor 7, 97
 Druidism 81, 84, 102
 Du Four, Val 120
 Du Maurier, Daphne 185
 Duncan, Pamela 120
 Dunne, Griffin 148
 Duvalier, François (Papa Doc) 161, 169, 170
 Dyson, Jeremy 188, 189
 Eco, Umberto 6, 7, 12, 31, 61, 67
 Edwards, Joel J 180
 Einstein, Albert 61
 Ekland, Britt 82
 Elliott, Denholm 25
 Ellison, James 186
End of Days 203
Entre tinieblas (Dark Habits) 2, 24, 28, 29
 Eram, René 158
 Erinys (mythical figures) 49
 Euripides 41, 62, 96
Event Horizon 55, 58, 61, 62, 67, 171, 202
Excalibur 84, 96, 119, 120, 124, 128, 130, 134, 146, 153, 201
eXistenZ 55, 56, 58-60
Exorcist, The 3, 5, 15, 22, 24-27, 35-38, 41, 43, 48, 49, 56, 58, 61, 64, 65, 146, 171, 191, 192, 202
Exorcist II: The Heretic, The 38
 Expressionism 182, 185
Eye of the Devil, The 77, 96, 101, 102, 105, 110
 Fahey, Jeff 58
Fairy Tale: A True Story 126
 Faithfull, Marianne 144
Fallen 64-67, 202
Familienroman der Neurotiker, Der (Family Romances) 142
 Farrar, David 21
 Faust myth 47, 167, 182, 185
 Feldman, Corey 181
 feminism 40, 73, 117-119, 124, 125, 128, 130-132, 134, 148, 150-154
 Festival of Light 17
 Fiennes, Ralph 59
Fiery Angel, The 18
 film noir 47, 51, 182, 185, 203
 Fincher, David 64
 Firth, Violet Mary *see* Dion Fortune
 Fisher, Terence 43, 76
Flavia, la monaca musulmana (Flavia, the Heretic) 2
 Fleming, Andrew 144
 Fleming, Victor 136
Fleurs du mal, Les 122
Fly, The 45
 Folk-Lore Society 74, 78, 80-82
 Fontaine, Joan 79
 Fortune, Dion (Violet Mary Firth) 74, 75
 Foucault, Michel 17, 30
 Fowler, Jr, Gene 43
 Fox, James 52
 Franco, Jesús (Jess) 13, 144
 Frankel, Cyril x, 76
Frankenstein 55, 59, 201
 Fraser, Robert 76, 77
 Frazer, Robert 163
 Frazer, Sir James George 9, 47, 66, 72, 73, 75-79, 81-86, 88, 96-99, 101-103, 105, 107-109, 111, 129, 201
 Freud, Sigmund 1, 9, 12, 17, 19, 22, 38, 39, 41, 45, 47, 48, 50, 52, 53, 62, 63, 65-67, 77, 79, 109, 142, 167, 177, 201
 Friedkin, William 3
From Ritual to Romance 105
 Frost, Mark 178
 Gardner, Gerald B 74, 78, 81, 89
 Garland, Richard 120
 Gellar, Sarah Michelle 142
 Getty, Balthazar 47
 Gibson, William 59
 Gilling, John 95
God of the Witches, The 100
 Goldblum, Jeff 45
Golden Bough, The 9, 66, 72-78, 85, 86, 88, 96, 99, 102, 105, 108
 Golden Dawn, The 72-76, 78, 89, 90, 93, 95, 108
 Gordon, Christine 186
 Gothard, Michael 14
 Gowdie, Isobel 86
 Goya y Lucientes, Francisco José de 89
 Grant, Kenneth 94
 Grauman, Walter 121
 Graves, Robert 77, 96
 Gray, Charles 90
 Greek Tragedy 64, 65, 102, 108, 130, 188, 189
Greeks and the Irrational, The 202
 Green, Seth 43
 "Green Man, The" 78, 82
 Greene, Leon 91
 Greer, Jane 51
 Crier, Pam 194
 Gwynne, Anne 192
 Haggard, Piers 26
 Hall, Stuart 158
 Hallat, May 19
 Halperin, Victor 160
 Hamilton, Guy 195
 Hammer Films 3, 24, 43, 90, 95, 135
 Hand, David 121
Hansel and Gretel 121, 139
 Hardy, Robin 26, 83, 105, 109
 Harron, John 163
Harry Potter novels 125
Häxan (Witchcraft Through the Ages) 1, 2, 7-10, 12-16, 18, 23-26, 28, 29, 87-89, 95, 101, 124, 203
 Hayes, Allison 120, 121
 Head, Anthony Stewart 143
 "Heart of Darkness" 158
Hell Raiser 62
 Hell's Angels 101
 Hellfire Club 75
 Hemmings, David 98
 Herodotus 106
 Hertz [Juran], Nathan 121
 Herzog, Werner 96
 Hessler, Gordon 80
 Hildegard of Bingen 5, 6
 Hill, Benny 18
 Hill, Jack 164
Histories 106
 Hitchcock, Alfred 50, 187
 Hoblit, Gregory 64
 Hoffmann, Ernst Theodor Amadeus 63

- Hollywood
2, 3, 37, 43, 46, 50, 66, 96, 101,
106, 120, 121, 137, 140, 148, 150,
160, 167, 170, 182, 185, 189,
191, 194, 195
- Holst, Gustav 23
Homer 49
Hooper, Tobe 177
Howling, The 44
Hungry Wives see Jack's Wife
Hurbon, Laënnec 161
Hussein, Waris 190
Hutchings, Peter 94
Hutton, Ronald
73, 75, 78, 80, 82, 84
Huxley, Aldous 4, 12, 14, 16
Hyams, Peter 203
I Married a Witch 148, 149, 151
"I, Robot – You, Jane" (episode of
Buffy the Vampire Slayer) 55
I Walked with a Zombie
158, 161, 163, 165, 185, 186, 188,
197
I Was a Teenage Werewolf 43, 44
Ibáñez, Juan 164
Iliad, The 49, 88
In the Mouth of Madness 3
Internet 60, 61, 150
*Interno d'un convento (Behind
Convent Walls)* 2
*Interview with the Vampire: The
Vampire Chronicles* 65
Irish Witch, The 90
"Jack in the Green" figure 82, 83
Jack's Wife 119, 131, 144, 153
Jacobson, Jill 194
Jagger, Mick 52
Jane Eyre 185, 187
Jason (mythical figure) 105-107
Jireš, Jaromil 135
Jones, Darby 189
Jordan, Neil 44, 65
Jung, Carl Gustav 45
Kant, Immanuel 13
Karloff, Boris 179
Keats, John 122
Keena, Monica 137
Kelljan, Bob 158
Kerr, Deborah 21, 97
Kidman, Nicole 151
Killer Nun see Suor omicidi
King, Henry 2
King, Perry 190
King, Stephen 90
Kinski, Nastassja 24
Klein, Melanie 135-137, 139
Knights Templars 75, 90, 92, 94
Koteas, Elias 65
Lacan, Jacques 48, 52, 62
Laine, Raymond 132
Lake, Veronica 151
Lanchester, Elsa 148
Lang, Fritz 165
Laplanche, Jean 141
Lawnmower Man, The
55, 58, 59, 67
Le Borg, Reginald 192
Le Vey, Anton 133, 134
Leader, Anton M 27
*Leaves from Satan's Book see Blade
af Satans bog*
Lee, Christopher 25, 26, 80, 90
Lee, Sheryl 47
Lee Thompson, J 77
Lemmon, Jack 149
Leonard, Brett 55
Lévi, Éliphas (Alphonse Louis
Constant) 77, 90, 91
Lewis, Ioan M 6
Lewis, Matthew Gregory 3, 5, 164
Lewton, Val 185, 189
*Liebesbriefe einer portugiesischen
Nonne (Love Letters of a
Portuguese Nun)* 13
Little Witches
76, 123, 144-148, 151, 153, 182
Live and Let Die 195
Loggia, Robert 47, 177
Lost Highway 46-54, 67
Louis XIII 13
*Love Letters from a Portuguese Nun
see Liebesbriefe einer
portugiesischen Nonne*
Lovecraft, H P 3
Lucas, George 96
Lughnasadh (Lugnasa) 81
Lugosi, Bela 163
Lunghi, Cherie 128
Lykaon (mythical figure) 44, 88
Lynch, David 46-50, 52-54, 136
MacCabe, Colin 96
McClary, Susan 162
McGhee, Brownie 183
MacGowran, Jack 37
MacLaine, Shirley 191
Magic Island, The 160
Malick, Terrence 96
Manicheism 7, 66, 67, 170
*Mann Moses und die
Monotheistische Religion, Der
(Moses and Monotheism)* 39, 40
Manson, Charles 65, 95, 101
Manson, Marilyn 49
Marcuse, Herbert 17
Marshall, William 195
Marxism 169
*Maschera del demonio, La (Mask of
Satan)* 134
Mathers, MacGregor 75
Matrix, The 55, 59
Medea 77, 96, 105, 108-110, 202
Medea (mythical figure)
77, 96, 105-110, 202
Medhurst, Andy 22
Mer, La (The Sea) 23
Merlin
119, 124, 126-128, 130, 134, 144,
152
Metamorphoses 44
Métraux, Alfred 160
Metropolis 165
Michelet, Jules 78
Milius, John 96
Miller, George 144
Miller, Jason 36
Mingozzi, Gianfranco 2
Mirren, Helen 125
Mitchell, Don 196
Mitchum, Robert 51
Mokae, Zakes 168, 174
Molière (Jean Baptiste Poquelin) 14
Montes, Yolanda ("Tongolele") 180
Montgomery, Elizabeth 151
Moonchild 92
*Moses and Monotheism see Der
Mann Moses und die
Monotheistische Religion*
Mower, Patrick 91
Muffly, Ann 132
Mumbo Jumbo 162
Murnau, F W 185
Murphy, Brian 18
Murray, Margaret A
74, 78, 79, 81, 89, 93, 96, 99, 100,
102, 104
Myrick, Daniel 139
Nance, Jack 181
Nazism 38, 109
Neill, Sam 62, 138
Neuman, Dorothy 120
New Age philosophy 148
Newell, Mike 59
Newman, Kim 13
Nichols, Mike 45
Nicholson, Jack 45
Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm
16, 20, 30, 45, 58
Night of the Demon 37, 84
Nightmare on Elm Street 172
Niven, David 97
Novak, Kim 148, 149
Nurse Sherri see Black Voodoo
Odyssey, The 88
Oedipus 63
Oedipus Complex
27, 35-71, 136, 137, 140, 142,
146, 177, 190, 191, 201, 202
Order of Wood Craft Chivalry 75
Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO) 92, 94
Oresteia, The 65
Osiris (mythical figure) 91, 96, 107
OTO *see* Ordo Templi Orientis
Ouanga 165
Out of the Past 51
Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso) 44
Paoletta, Domenico 3
Parker, Alan 47
Pasolini, Pier Paolo 77, 105, 108
*Passion de Jeanne d'Arc, La (The
Passion of Joan of Arc)* 97
Paul, William 195
Pentheus (mythical figure) 62

- Performance* 52, 53, 105
 Petley, Julian 18
Photographing Fairies 126
 Pinza, Carla 178
Plague of the Zombies, The 95
Planets, The 23
 Pleasence, Donald 99
 Poe, Edgar Allan 170
 Polański, Roman 3, 102
Poltergeist 177
 Pontalis, Jean-Bertrand 141
 pornography
 13, 16, 18, 30, 47, 52, 59, 60, 172
 Portishead 144
Possession of Joel Delaney, The
 185, 190-192, 197
 postmodernism
 35, 46, 150, 185, 203
 Powell, Michael 2
Practical Magic 148-153
 Pressburger, Emeric 2
 Price, Vincent 16
 Prokofiev, Sergei 18
Psychic Self-Defence 75
 psychoanalysis
 ix, 1, 3, 8, 23, 35, 44, 49-51, 135,
 137, 141, 185, 188, 189, 201
 Pullman, Bill 47, 169, 174
 Purkiss, Diane 73, 118, 125
 Quine, Richard 148
 Rabelais, François 18
 Raglan, Lady 82
 Raimi, Sam 171
 Rampling, Charlotte 184
 Rappaport, Sheeri 145
 Reagan, Ronald 169
Rebecca 185, 187
 Redemption 7, 140
 Redgrave, Vanessa 13
 Reed, Ishmael 162
 Reed, Oliver 13
 Reeves, Michael 14
 Reformation 5
 Reich, Wilhelm 11, 17
 Reichmeister, Mimi 145
 Renaissance
 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 14, 15, 40, 60, 87-89,
 147
 Richardson, Miranda 125
 Richelieu, Armand Jean Duplessis,
 Cardinal, Duc de 13, 14
 Robson, Flora 20
 Robson, Mark 75
 Roeg, Nicolas 134
 Rolling Stones 65, 101
 Romero, George A 131, 132, 165
Rosemary's Baby
 3, 25, 26, 56, 76, 88, 102, 177,
 202
 Rosicrucianism 75
 Rossellini, Isabella 127
 Rossen, Robert 37
 Rourke, Mickey 182
 Russell, Ken 2, 12-18, 174
Sabrina the Teenage Witch
 125, 144
Sacred Flesh 2
 Sade, Marquis de 164, 166, 167
 Sanchez, Eduardo 139
 "Sandmann, Der" ("The Sandman")
 63
 Santería
 103, 175-179, 185, 191, 192
 Sasdy, Peter 24
Satanic Witch, The 133
Satanist, The 90
 Schallerová, Jaroslava 141
 Schlesinger, John 164
 science-fiction
 3, 35, 55, 61, 64, 67, 118, 119,
 161
 Scott, Ridley 96
Scream, Blacula, Scream
 158, 164, 185, 194-197
Se7en 64
Sea, The see La Mer
 Seabrook, William B 160
Season of the Witch see Jack's Wife
Serpent and the Rainbow, The
 158, 160-164, 167, 168, 170, 172,
 174, 175, 178, 185, 190, 195, 197
Seventh Victim, The 75
 Shakespeare, William 18
 Shannon, Johnny 52
 Sharp, Don 95
 Sharpe, James 5
 Shaviro, Steven 42
 Sheen, Martin 175
 Shelley, Mary 55, 59
 Shonteff, Lindsey 173
 Silverman, Kaja 27
 Simmons, Jean 21
 Simpson, Jane 76
 Siouxsie and the Banshees 144
 Smits, Jimmy 176
Snake People
 164, 170, 175, 179, 182, 183,
 193-195
 Snow White fairy tale
 119, 121, 134-138, 140, 142-144,
 147, 153, 164
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs
 121, 135, 136, 138, 153
Snow White: A Tale of Terror
 135-137, 140, 142, 153
 Soavi, Michele 144
 Socialism 119, 132
Song of Bernadette, The 2, 23
Sorcière, La 78
Sound of Music, The 2
Spellbound 50
Star Wars 136
 Stewart, James 149
 Stonehenge 84
Storia di una monaca di clausura
 (*Story of a Cloistered Nun*) 2
 Stork, Tommy 145
Story of a Cloistered Nun see Storia
 di una monaca di clausura
Strange Days 55, 59, 61, 141
 Sturridge, Charles 126
Suor omicidi (Killer Nun) 28
 Sutcliffe, Richard 77
 Sutherland, Kristine 143
 Sutton, Dudley 14
 Svensk Filmindustri 7
 Sykes, Peter 2
 Symbolism 123
 "Sympathy for the Devil" (song) 65
Taste the Blood of Dracula 24, 95
 Tate, Sharon 98, 101, 102
Teachings of Don Juan, The
 173, 174
 Telezynska, Isabella 27
 Teresa of Ávila, Saint 11
 Terry, Nigel 128
 Terwilliger, George 165
Thin Red Line, The 96
 Thomas, Keith 73
 Thunhurst, Bill 133
 "Time Is On My Side" (song) 65
To the Devil a Daughter
 2, 15, 24-26, 29, 92, 95, 202
 Tohill, Cathal 10
Tomb Raider 140
 Tombs, Pete 10
 "Tongolele" *see* Yolanda Montes
 Tonton Macoutes 169, 170
Totem und Tabu (Totem and Taboo)
 9, 65
 Tourneur, Jacques 37, 51, 158
 transgression
 viii, ix, x, 1, 2, 4, 12, 16, 24-31,
 47, 51, 58-62, 111, 129, 139,
 148, 152, 159, 164, 170, 184,
 185, 193, 197, 201
 Trevor-Roper, Hugh
 3, 4, 6, 7, 15, 40, 72
 True, Rachel 144
 Tunney, Robin 145
Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me
 46-50, 53, 54, 67
 Tyrell (Tirel), Walter 100
 Tyson, Cathy 171
 Ulrich, Skeet 145
Undead, The 119-122
 "Unheimliche, Das" ("The
 Uncanny") 63
Valerie a týden divů (Valerie and
 Her Week of Wonders)
 135, 140-143, 153
Vathek 19
Vertigo 149
Videodrome 55-60
 Vietnam War 98
 Vignolle, Gregory 181
Virgin Witch 78, 80, 88, 153
 Visnjic, Goran 151
 Vodoun
 103, 159-161, 167-169, 172, 173,
 175, 178, 180, 185, 186
 von Sydow, Max 38

<i>Voodoo</i>		Wingrove, Nigel	2
158, 164, 175, 179, 180, 182, 197		Wise, Ray	47
<i>Voudou haïtien, Le (Voodoo in Haiti)</i>	160	Wise, Robert	2
Wachowski Brothers	55	"Witch" (episode of <i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i>)	135, 142
Walsh, Kay	79	<i>Witch-Cult in Western Europe, The</i>	74
Warner, Marina	137	<i>Witchcraft</i>	95
Washington, Denzel	64	<i>Witchcraft Through the Ages see Håxan</i>	
Weaver, Sigourney	137	<i>Witches, The</i> (1966)	x, 76, 78-81, 85-89, 110, 134, 135
<i>Weird Woman</i>	185, 192, 193	<i>Witches, The</i> (1990)	134
Weston, Jessie L	105	<i>Witches of Eastwick, The</i>	144, 151
Wheatley, Dennis	25, 74, 89, 90, 92, 94, 95	<i>Witchfinder General</i>	14, 16, 87
White, Jan	131	<i>Wizard of Oz, The</i>	136
<i>White Zombie</i>	160, 162-167, 175, 177, 185, 189, 190, 197	<i>Wolf</i>	45
Whitehouse, Mary	14, 17	Wood, Robin	44
<i>Wicker Man, The</i>	26, 76-88, 94, 96, 97, 102-105, 107-111	Woods, James	56
Widmark, Richard	25	Woodward, Edward	80
<i>Wild At Heart</i>	136, 144	World War I	7, 92
William I, "the Conqueror"	79	World War II	23
William II ("Rufus")	100	<i>X Files, The</i>	61
William of Malmesbury	100	<i>Xena Warrior Princess</i>	125, 140
Williams, Raymond	57	Yeats, W B	75
Willing, Nick	126	Young, Dey	173
		Zeus (mythical figure)	49, 88
		<i>Zombie</i>	160