WITCHCRAFT IN FILM

David Nash

A chapter on Witchcraft in film that appears in a book primarily about the history of the phenomenon clearly has a different purpose than the numerous treatments of witchcraft that appear in film studies and popular culture volumes. Thus this chapter will consider several of the central themes thrown up by numerous depictions of witchcraft in film and will focus upon these in specific examples. Perhaps one overarching theme that cultural historians should perhaps most be interested in is how depictions of witchcraft in film have been a communicative and exploratory device. That is, they should be regarded as methods by which the public at large learn aspects of otherwise specialist or academic knowledge. As such, they have a crucial role in shaping popular perception of the particular phenomena depicted. This dis- plays illustrations of witchcraft practice, vivid re-creations of what particular periods of historiography have established as fact and interpretation and, lastly a variety of themes which seek to place witchcraft in a wider historical and cultural context. As such these have lasting influence upon popular perceptions of witchcraft and the occult. Indeed we might consider how far some of these depictions have become cultural archetypes in themselves further influencing cultural products and outputs about this particular subject.

One of the first themes we notice in witchcraft films is the theme of knowledge. This has many different dimensions and modes and witchcraft films regularly unpack this idea in various directions. Knowledge can be portrayed as the conscious and studious acquisition of ideas and concepts generally considered alien to conventional and normal life. This knowledge can be secret and hidden and only uncovered after considerable effort or scholarship or surrender of self and power. Once such knowledge is required it can be used for good or for evil. This propensity sometimes appears as a warning to those who have a disposition to mistakenly involve themselves in what is so often referred to as 'the black arts'. Excursions into these arts and the knowledge surrounding them can be portrayed variously as obsessive scholarly interest, the folly of youth, or as a pursuit liable to be undertaken by the decadent or the bored. Knowledge, and the power it conveys, are also frequently the battleground between good and evil. At various moments in witchcraft films the superior nature of knowledge, or its application by skilled practitioners can appear to have evil triumph over good or vice versa. The interface between ideas of knowledge and power also reminds us that there is a tension between different witchcraft films that portray the phenomenon as a fully-fledged system as opposed to the more random acquisition of occult powers, or the intention to acquire these. Elsewhere there are places where the fanatical application of knowledge makes the whole concept of knowledge itself acquire a sceptical and dangerous ambivalence. Knowledge can likewise become a source of related problems for protagonists within such films. Curiosity and the acquisition of knowledge can lead individuals into situations and circumstances that are dangerous and very frequently unforgiving. This preoccupation with power might make us think of Foucauldian analysis and its perspectives on historical change in the West. However the fit is less than exact. Whilst power seems to drive these plots and their resolution to a considerable degree, it is modernity that is generally seen as the innocent party. Witchcraft films so often show premodern authority as a

type of driven and righteous specialist knowledge wielded by the professionals of the period (of both sides) against the more innocent subjectivity of individuals. Far from being a problematic labyrinth of control and enslavement, modernity is often portrayed in witchcraft films as the simplistically innocent counterpart to the agenda driven darkness of the early modern period and its practices.

Related to the issue of knowledge is the issue of power and, quite often in these films, knowledge is power – quite literally. Elsewhere power is used to convert, dazzle, liberate, mislead and oppress in a variety of ways. Several early modern period pieces in particular focus upon the misuse of power, largely by those engaged in the pursuit of witch hunting. Very frequently this graphically creates the sustained portrayal of gendered oppression. This oppression takes many guises from the application of the law through subjugation of the will and even to acts of what we might term sexual terrorism. As such this visual playing out of the misuse of power has assisted in the cultural acceptance of the gender dimension of witchcraft as occasion for persecution. Authority to control errant behaviour, sexuality and identity is very often portrayed as male which has served to culturally underpin many gender explanations of witchcraft and its history. Likewise attempts to see the oppressive destruction of independent minded women merely pursuing activities that liberate them, or recapture older knowledge, produce studies in inequality of gender power and its distribution.

One further dimension of this is the appearance of anticlerical themes in some witchcraft films (or those about possession such as Ken Russell's The Devils) which also emphasise elements of single-mindedness which sometimes shades over into oppressive fanaticism that, almost always, results in the systematic abuse of power. Equally it is often significant how the dissolution of power, broadly defined, is generally the conclusion of such films. Thus the witchcraft film is broadly speaking a simple Manichaean universe and the action turns around the restoration of good over evil, albeit with some notable exceptions. A further theme, we might even call part of an anti-Foucauldian central trinity, is the action of knowledge and power upon the individual will. Very frequently there is action or circumstances which lead protagonists to either surrender their will, or have it twisted and shaped by circumstances, the action of others or their perception of the supernatural occult world and its nature. Another singularly common factor in most witchcraft films is the ambivalent nature of time, chronology and historical context. Although some films are simply early modern period pieces that re-enact actual, or skillfully invented, and plausible stories others use time and history as essential motifs that drive narrative or dramatic action. Several turn on the idea of an ancient curse which self-consciously brings the past into the present. Within such plots witchcraft, and the knowledge surrounding it, are portrayed as dramatically out of kilter with modernity. This juxtaposition is frequently used to problematise the supposedly secure nature of modernity, but also to induce fear about aspects of our past selves reaching out to unsettle us from the mists of time.

A further aspect of this reaching out from the mists of time is emphasised by the regular invocation of geographical remoteness as an important signifier within witch- craft films. This serves to distance such beliefs from the rational and modern world whilst allowing for, perhaps celebrating even, the ability of the past to envelop characters from the present who stray off course in various ways. The sense of stumbling into the persistent nature of anachronistic practices and beliefs – if one is foolish enough to stumble off the beaten track – is also a method of destabilising modernity and emphasising its very fragility as its writ does not run as far as audiences hope or are led to fear.

One film perhaps straddles the world of academic study and active entertainment is also arguably one of the first in the canon of twentieth century witchcraft films. Benjamin Christensen's 1922 film Häxan probably is the one most responsible for providing audiences with a self-conscious education about witchcraft and its history. This film engaged closely with The Malleus and consciously reflected several of its beliefs whilst carefully critiquing them. The film blends scholarly exposition with

dramatic reconstruction of plausible events. Throughout the film is modernist in tone, ascribing witchcraft beliefs to a failure of primitive man to have adequate tools with which to comprehend the universe. The film's first section is an unashamed history lesson with sequences which move towards an analysis of witchcraft and the witch- hunt which was academically prevalent until the end of the 1960s. Namely that these phenomena were the products of species of extreme and deranged thoughts and behaviour – as befitted a film which expounded its own close engagement with the Malleus. Thus both witches and witch-hunters were victims of their historical context that identified this as an unfortunate episode which would be recast by Trevor Roper as the 'Witch craze'.[1]

Further sections outline crucial aspects of the 'making of a witch' which again must have had a profound influence on twentieth century visualisation of the witch as an archetype. She is shown at work creating potions in her kitchen and then the action moves to the detailed portrayal of a witch trial. This takes the viewer through accusation of bewitchment and then the arrest and torture of the witch. During the course of the latter a description of attendance at the sabbat emerges, and under torture the witch implicates others allowing the film to depict the consequences of a witch-hunt and the dynamics which drove this. A later section strongly suggests witchcraft beliefs and the indulgence of them by practitioners and opponents were likely the product of hysterical reactions. The cause of such hysteria was likely to be forms of repression of the mind which again was an approach which took its place in the arsenal of pre 1960s explanations – but would re-emerge in the work of Norman Cohn in *Europe's Inner Demons*.

Examination of post *Häxan* films with a more obvious intent to entertain should begin with the 1960 film *City of the Dead* (John Moxey) which tells of the perils of researching the witchcraft of the past. The central character is killed by Devil worshippers after travelling to a sleepy New England town in search of insights into the history of witchcraft.[2] This is a film which sought to give American audiences a taste of their own indigenous witchcraft history. As with many of our films it pitches the rational against the irrational with both belief in witchcraft and scepticism which describes it as 'mumbo-jumbo' are both plainly evident within the first reel. The inhabitants of the 'City of the Dead' are still surviving undead from the seventeenth century – a period when one of their number was executed for the crime of witch- craft. This yokes together two long-running traditions in filmmaking about the occult. Firstly that it comes down to us from a remote past, more often than not systematically and deliberately unaltered. Likewise this village is remote and is, literally, untouched by the twentieth century. It can also only be reached by significant and dangerous detour re-emphasising for American audiences stepping off the main thoroughfare or highway is most times fraught with difficulty and danger. This motif became so central to American horror that it informed everything from *Psycho* right through to the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The ending has a strong motif which engulfs the coven members when they are touched by the shadow of a crucifix.

Success and power within the academy have even been the subject of witchcraft's flirtation with dialogues of power. In Sidney Hayer's 1962 film *Night of the Eagle* Peter Wyngarde's university career is nurtured and promoted by the spells and charms cast by his wife in conflict with the spells cast by other wives in the faculty. When Wyngarde's sceptical nature destroys these his own academic career falls apart leaving the film as an interesting discourse upon fate and superstition.[3]

Later mid 1960s films provide variations on these themes. Piers Haggard's 1970 film *Blood on Satan's Claw* contains some interesting variations on the theme of witch- craft whilst also critiquing and rendering ambivalent some elements of the sixties counter culture. In the film the youths of an early modern rural English village become entranced and follow a 'personification' of evil that leaves its mark upon them as the so called 'Devil's skin'. This leads to the exploration of their own burgeoning erotic power and similarly stands as a challenging motif ranged against the world of adults that this

manifestation of evil wishes them to throw aside. Although relatively low budget (and quite hammy) there are moments of menace, even if the ultimate confrontation with evil is something of a disappointment. Nonetheless there remain interesting things to note about this film. The action is deliberately, and self-consciously, set in the post Restoration period distancing itself from the 1640s – the central authority character offers a Jacobite toast in one scene. This idea is further developed by the suggestion that superstition and beliefs about witchcraft are a thing confined firmly to the past, even if it is recent. This sceptical line is firmly reinforced by the central authoritative character's forthright declaration of its obsolescence. Nonetheless when strange events occur he is forced to change his views. The youth of the village begin to spectacularly maltreat individuals echoing 1960s experiments in 'theatre of cruelty'. However all is not lost since the beliefs of the village are contrasted with more sophisticated urban knowledge and practices. The central authoritative character declares he must leave the village taking with him the one piece of evident print culture that seeks to explain the happenings in the village. His destination is the town where he hints he will consult with other learned authorities. His return is heralded with hope and confidence that the knowledge he brings with him from the town will enable him to combat the evil in the rural locality. However there are no incantations, no erudite discussions of demonology that we might expect from Hammer's finest. Instead the choice of weapon he has sought from his consultations is in fact (disappointingly) an over large sword which slays the personification of evilmaking for a considerably dull and anti-climactic finish.

Witchfinder General (Michael Reeves, 1968) is not so much a film addressing the act of witchcraft but rather a consideration of the consequences and possible motivations for witch-hunting. The most important evident motif within this film is of the breakdown of order, and this is stated in one the film's early scenes. The Civil War and its impact upon judicial systems is another important theme and elements of this persist in the pursuit of the film's villains into the very final scene. These villains are real historical individuals in the shape of the witchfinder general Matthew Hopkins (in this instance played by a, for once, not overly camp Vincent Price) and John Stearne. The latter, interestingly is portrayed as a plebeian rogue bent on moneymaking and debauchery. Vincent Price's Matthew Hopkins is slightly ambivalent and the film can almost not make up its mind about this. In several scenes the Hopkins character appears cynically intent upon moneymaking and the illicit exercise of power, the latter especially geared towards the seduction of vulnerable women. Nonetheless within other crucial scenes Hopkins declares himself to be quasi genuine in his desire to rid the Suffolk locality of witches. However the film does involve some nods to historical accuracy with a real enough depiction of walking a suspect and of swimming a witch. *Witchfinder General* also gave audiences their own visual encounter with pricking for the witches' mark and the ducking stool. Likewise the accusations involving individuals consorting with their familiars does lean on evidence from the Hopkins witch-hunt of the 1640s.

However it is also worth noting how this film has distinct parallels with the later (1976) Clint Eastwood epic *The Outlaw Josie Wales*. Both depict the consequences of lawlessness emanating from the breakdown of order as a result of civil war. The heroes of both films, Josie Wales and Cornet Marshall, are away fighting when forces that embody predatory disorder violate the virtue of their womenfolk. Whilst the Wild West was normally portrayed as terrorised by guns and routine violence, this British 'Western' incorporates witchcraft accusations as an analogous motif. Given such lawlessness the issue of revenge and exacting revenge on such figures drives the plot in some interesting ways. The film has been considered a flawed masterpiece, but critics also note the amorality (for this particular genre) of the films ending and the dizzying array of violence contained within. Alan Bennett was notably appalled by the violence in *Witchfinder General* which provoked a comment from Reeves that the viewer should rightly be appalled by the violence in the film rather

than led into accepting it through a casual or comic book treatment.4 As such the film is also part of a wider dialogue that saw gender relations as under strain around issues associated with witchcraft and how it is both a simultaneous challenge to authority and an attempt to assert newer kinds of this. In particular the construction of patriarchal society – which some gender historians of witchcraft have demonstrated – finds expression in films like *Witchfinder General*. Beyond its witchcraft subject matter it contains strongly demarcated and gendered spaces for the characters and is seen to deal with what Peter Hutchings has described as the '. . . maintenance of a male authority that is largely dependent on female submission in the face of an increased female resistance to this submissive role.'5

Gordon Hessler's (1970) *Cry of the Banshee* again featured Vincent Price as a witch hunting authority figure placed under a curse by a witch named Oona. Although generally dismissed as inferior to *Witchfinder General* this piece is intriguing as a study of an individual psychologically dealing with the real life consequences of a witches curse and the desperate attempts he utilises to retain rational explanations of the world in the face of misfortune.6 The apparent enduring nature of witches' curses is also a theme that ignites terror and death in Norman J Warren's *Terror* (1978). Again another entry in this plot line borrowed form cinema appeared in 1973s *Spell of Evil*, an episode in ATV's *Thriller* series directed by John Sichel from a story by *The Avenger's* writer Brian Clemens. In this the reincarnation of a witch comes to torment a widower from several hundred years previously to fulfil a curse. Such themes and treatments, once again, brought the ancient into the late twentieth century living room of both protagonists and audiences.7

The coven in witchcraft films also became a later focus of controlled and predatory menace. Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* is perhaps the ultimate in the objectification of women as receptacle of good and evil as well as sacrifice. Mia Farrow becomes powerless as a result of enforced domesticity as much as her unlucky circumstance to be merely the vessel containing the child of Satan 'most chillingly of all is the implied notion that she is merely fulfilling her destiny. She was built for such work.'8 1979's *Satan's Slave* (Norman J. Warren) revisits the theme of a contemporary coven conspiring to plot evil and harm against innocent characters in the name of a past legacy of witch belief – in this case reincarnation.9 Tipping over into the genre of pornography was 1970's *Virgin Witch* (Directed by Ray Austin) which played on the zeitgeist idea of aspiring young women lured by offers of modelling contracts, only for them to be ensnared by a lesbian coven. Though there is considerable voyeuristic content and soft-core porn, the twist in this feature is that one such woman defeats the coven's leader and supplants her.10 Nonetheless this was not a serious examination of female power and its struggles and was perhaps a culmination of a filmmaking trend which associated witchcraft with the aspirations of the male libido. This drew upon fantasy narratives of availability and licentiousness provided by filmmakers provoked by gradually relaxing of censorship regimes.

Although not directly about witchcraft, Hammer's adaptation of Dennis Wheat- ley's *The Devil Rides Out* (released as *The Devil's Bride* in the United States), was classily done for the period (1968) by the renowned Terence Fisher. This likewise contains elements that address popular understanding of many of the phenomena associated with witchcraft. Curses, the ability to command demons, supernatural power over humans and nature as well as necromancy, satanic worship and allusions to the power of the coven all appear in this work. The film also is quite forthright in its depiction of the Devil himself, exploring this at length in the opening title sequence and credits – complete with horns and red glowing eyes.

Although this is something of a classical fairy tale, with a slightly implausible happy ending, this is part of constructing an obviously Manichean universe where the forces of good regularly stumble

across pernicious evil that is liable to corrupt the innocent. As such the film rather dips into Wheatley's Duc de Richelieu series of books with only a sketchy concept of this central character (played by Christopher Lee) and the context he springs from. As a result quite how he has such a developed level of arcane knowledge is never properly explored or explained. The witchcraft systems adopted and used against each other by the hero de Richelieu and the villain Mocata are a blend of Egyptian and Judeo-Christian motifs by which spirits and the wills of individuals are secured and commanded. Nonetheless to update and enrich this knowledge, as in other films mentioned, De Richelieu disappears to the British Library to acquire further wisdom that he can use to combat and outflank the presence and activities of evil. Thus this element of stumbling upon elements of witchcraft and satanic belief in every corner of the world makes De Richelieu appear to the audience as though he is a latter day inquisitor or witchfinder – only this time portrayed as driven by the very purest of motives. As such this does display a sense of orthodox rational power systems lapsing and fading when the occult and matters of witchcraft swing into view. *The Devil Rides Out* is sometimes seen as a struggle between father/authority figures who both lay claim to superior skills and knowledge that the rest of the cast must acknowledge and obey, particularly the young and impressionable. Yet equally it is the female characters, of three generations, who through their own independent agency, conspire to bring about the demise of the villain Mocata.11

Other elements in the film cleverly associate the appearance of witchcraft within modernity with the imminent danger it somehow carries into the twentieth century. Debates over modernisation and its juxtaposition with witchcraft as a forgotten past that gets revived had earlier been rehearsed in the opening scenes of the 1964 Hammer production *Witchcraft* (directed by Don Sharp).12 In *The Devil Rides Out* the Devils horns on display in the titles are cleverly juxtaposed in the first scenes with an aircraft and an airport alongside the very important motif of the motor car which, from this first scene, conveys characters away from specific situations. The motor car itself also plays an ambivalent role throughout the film since it provides a means of transport for both good and evil and a means of rapid escape for both – styling itself as the broomstick of modernity. Likewise it enables good to pursue evil alongside the opportunity for evil to influence how the motor car itself is driven by individuals through the powerful use of interventionist mesmeric powers. The power of the motor car is further emphasised in one memorable scene in which the coven arrive for the meeting at the sabbat in a procession of opulent luxury cars rather than broomsticks. At this same meeting it is the latent power of the motor car and its accessories that enables the Duc to physically attack the embodiment of the Devil (billed by the Duc as the horrifying Goat of Mendes) within the midst of his followers in the context of a convened sabbat. The car's headlights answers De Richelieu's desperate imploring request 'oh if only there was some light.' Likewise other period features are turned to invoke other disturbing cultural resonances. Some of the central characters enticed into the orbit of devil worship are flappers – apparently emblematic of the damned 'between the wars' generation. Regular motifs of opulence, wealth and clandestine retreats at unnamed manor houses also evoke disturbing elements of country house fascism – however this adds another series of interesting dimensions to the discussion of evil and its discourses within the film.

These discourses, and their wider resonances boil down to seeing good and evil as two opposing 'systems' which again invites identification with the historical period. The leading characters personifying good (Christopher Lee as the Duc de Richelieu) and evil (Charles Gray as the sinister Mocata) are each given narratives of how each branch of 'system' works and has its place in the universe. In particular the resolution of this film emphasises that equilibria, in all its senses, must be restored.

In one scene Lee with his companion Rex (Leon Greene) confronts his suspicions about his friend's son Simon (Patrick Mower) and his involvement in something infinitely more sinister than an 'astonomical society'. When the tell-tale signs of Devil worship are discovered and ridiculed by the sceptic Greene the following exchange occurs:

De Richelieu (Lee):   Do you believe in evil?

Rex (Greene):   As an Idea.

De Richelieu: Do you believe in the power of Darkness?

Rex: As a superstition.

De Richelieu: Now there you are wrong! The power of Darkness is more than just a superstition. It is a living force which can be tapped at any given moment of the night.

Later a similar discussion from the opposite perspective occurs from the arch magus Mocata as he tries to control the mind of one of the central characters.

Mocata: I do not propose to discuss with you the rights and wrongs of practicing the magic art, I will confine myself to saying I am a practitioner of some experience. . . . In magic there is neither good nor evil it is merely a science. The science of causing change to occur by means of one's will. The sinister reputation attaching to it is entirely groundless and is based on superstition rather than objective observation. The power of the will is something people do not understand attributing to it mysterious qualities it does not possess.

Throughout the idea is that the occult exists as a series of tools that can be utilised for good and evil and are merely parts of an interlocking and intricate system. These are merely at the mercy of knowledge used by the virtuous or the corrupt and evil. As such the link here with modernity comes full circle and is completed.

Robert Hardy's 1974 *The Wicker Man* shows a clash between conflicting systems but this is rather played out in the sensibilities of the protagonists rather than a straight battle between good and evil.13

The Wicker Man has been a touchstone of modern western society's popular knowledge of Wicca and, as such, has been the source of many semi-myths. As historians we should regularly bear in mind how the mass of the population learns its view of specialist and arcane knowledge. *The Wicker Man*, through its cult status and fairly literate script (by Anthony Schaffer) put into the mainstream the idea of human sacrifice, connectedness with nature and an opulently permissive approach to sexuality and sexual licence.

Last of all it provoked, once again, a deeply enduring suspicion of geographically remote communities and the apparent limits of civilisation (another theme evident in the earlier *The Witches*) that can be seen as cultural constants that appear in sub- sequent generations of filmmaking. Forgotten and primitive rural society is a threat to civilisation that appears in cinematic and televisual works as diverse as *American Werewolf in London* and *League of Gentlemen*. One of the writers of the latter, Mark Gatiss, labelled *The Wicker Ma*n, *Witchfinder General* and *Blood on Satan's Claw* as a sub- genre he called 'Folk Horror'. Summerisle in *The Wicker Man* is again off the map and the central protagonist, Sergeant Howie, has to move from a place of modernity, where he is in control, to one alien and untouched by it where he is not.14 Elements of the central character's

attachment to evangelical Christianity and its morals are sharply contrasted with the licence and permissiveness of the Summerisle community's Wiccan paganism. As such the plot unfolds so the latter's ultimate morality and behaviour is questioned and ultimately sounds the same note of caution and censure against elements of the counter culture we saw on display in *Blood on Satan's Claw*.

Perhaps the new millennium's most obvious way of acquainting mass audiences with witchcraft, sorcery and its associated ideas has been the series of Harry Potter films. In many respects these represent something of a departure from previous representations, yet equally some aspects are similar – particularly in the obvious re-creation of a manichaean universe. Nonetheless it is the differences that are particularly striking. The first most striking difference is that the world which magic inhabits in *Harry Potter* is hidden from the rest of humanity – indeed regular instances of magic impinging upon the world are punished as transgressions. The world of magic within Harry Potter films is immensely organised regulated and eventually overly bureaucratic. The suggestion is that a hidden world can really exist with its own quirky and amusing practices (Quiddich, Platform Nine and Three Quarters, the Ministry of Magic, secret societies, brotherhoods and fellowships, magical recipes and ingredients). Witches and wizards are born with powers and thus there is arguably no choice but to accept a career in magic. This is very different from some of the other earlier films discussed which portray witchcraft and devil worship as a conscious lapse from the straight and narrow, more often than not as a result of a tragic flaw within the individual personality – or as a foolhardy pursuit of arcane knowledge.

In *Harry Potter* the skills of witches and wizards are developed through education – in large part the essence of the early *Harry Potter* books and films was an identification with adolescent schooling as a method of seeking the audience's empathy. Magic, within this schooling environment is divided into disciplines which pull together a considerable and multicultural range of magical subjects and practices. Many of these skills are focused on in turn and it is made quite plain that witches are supposed to be 'all rounders'. Magical creatures and practices are brought together from a vast range of anthropological and ethnographic data from throughout the world. Like- wise those enrolled on courses at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry are self-consciously reflective of the multicultural twenty-first-century world. Indeed this attempt to present an international fellowship of shared cultural values is one that might well have pleased Sir James Fraser, and most pertinently of all for historians of witchcraft studies, Margaret Murray. The films also have a slightly problematic relationship with modernity. Magic is used to enable individuals to undertake mundane tasks by persuading anachronistic inanimate objects do their bidding in the manner of modern household appliances- thus brooms and mops operate cleaning functions of their own volition – whilst magical Routemaster buses invisibly career around. Likewise lifts disguised as antiquated red London telephone boxes convey individuals from ground level to the darkest recesses of the Ministry of Magic. There are also elements of classical 'retrochic' in evidence; such as the individual carriaged steam train and the flying car appearing as a 1960s Ford Anglia. Although this time warp post-war Englishness was clearly intended to appeal to the American market it does also create a further element of nostalgic remoteness for pretty well every audience.

The stories conveyed in the films reflect some very classic adolescent, rite of passage themes and metaphors that echo much teenage fantasy writing stretching back to *Lord of the Rings* and beyond. Interestingly to reinforce this aspect so much about the portrayal of both good and evil within the Harry Potter films is very closely related to the idea of the development of the self. This is arguably extended by the fact that there is no conception of the devil within this world. Both good and evil, spring from the individual and are a consequence of the individual's character or circumstances of

their own particular personal development. This particular aspect is made plain in portrayals of the development of the central evil character Voldemort. This individual begins life as someone who's disturbed attitude and ambition is what leads him astray. He is not part of evil's opposition to good that has been in existence since time immemorial. Voldemort learns to pervert and twist many of the established symbols, rituals and tools of conventional magic to bring them into the service of his evil wishes. Intriguingly when the plot resolves itself at the end of the last film it is through a simple trial of strength. There is no inherent reason why the forces of good should triumph over the forces of evil. Perhaps it is this potential for amorality that has led the *Harry Potter* series of films to fall foul of species of American evangelicalism.

Thus witchcraft and its appearance in films as we have noted continues to discuss and sometimes problematise a number of recurrent themes. The golden age of their appearance in front of some of audiences -perhaps between 1950 and 1980 – potentially linked with the struggles for identity of numerous groups seeking greater recognition of their individuality within post-war society. Witchcraft films generally have some motif of illegitimate control which are often juxtaposed with countercultural tendencies that offer alternatives based on an assertion of youth, gender or some identity that can be considered a breakaway from the norm of a given social context. In the new millennium perhaps the witchcraft film's dissolution into a fable of children, which adults may wish to peek at, reflects a re-creation of the original power of Grimm fairytales. Perhaps it also suggests the powerful mix of gender and counter- cultural challenges to religious and social norms that are no longer as powerful an artistic inspiration as they once were. Moreover perhaps twenty-first century society is now more terrified by the real in the shape of bullets and bombs which, like spells and potions once were, are now seen in spectacularly incongruous, and therefore ultimately terrifying, contexts.

Notes

1. Hugh Trevor Roper, *The European Witch Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: Harper and Row, 1967).

2. Gary A. Smith, *Uneasy Dreams: The Golden Age of British Horror Films, 1956–76* (London: McFarland and Company, 2000), 50.

3. Ibid., 166.

4. Peter Hutchings, *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1993), 137.

5. Ibid., 144–151.

6. Harvey Fenton and David Flint, eds., *Ten Years of Terror* (Guildford: Fab Press, 2001), 24–26.

7. Ibid., 302 & 324.

8. David J. Hogan, *Dark Romance: Sex and Death in the Horror Film* (London: Equation, 1986), 80.

9. Smith, *Uneasy Dreams*, 190.

10. Ibid., 232.

11. Hutchings, Hammer and Beyond, 152–155.

12. Ibid., 130.

13. Hogan, Dark Romance, 84.

14. Tony Magistrale, Abject Terrors: Surveying the Modern and Postmodern Horror Film (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 175–176.

Selected bibliography

Fenton, Harvey and David Flint (eds.), *Ten Years of Terror*. Guildford: Fab Press, 2001. Hogan, David, *Dark Romance: Sex and Death in the Horror Film*. London: Equation, 1986.

Hutchings, Peter, *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993.

Magistrale, Tony, *Abject Terrors: Surveying the Modern and Postmodern Horror Film*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.

Smith, Gary A., *Uneasy Dreams: The Golden Age of British Horror Films, 1956–76*. London: McFarland and Company, 2000.