

**Witches and Demons:
The Occult in Two Hammer Films from the 1960s¹**

Michael Wood

The occult loomed large in several British horror films of the latter part of the 20th century. *Night of the Demon* (Jacques Tourneur, 1957) is a typical case, where ancient folklore, arcane writings, séances, and a malevolent magician are subject to the skeptical inquiries of a team of international paranormal investigators. In several of Hammer's Dracula films, the vampire prince, having been killed off in the previous film, is brought back to life, or at least to something resembling life, by arcane rituals carried out by modern students of the occult; notable examples include *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (Peter Sasdy, 1970) and *Dracula AD 1972* (Alan Gibson, 1972). In Amicus Studio's *The Skull* (Freddie Francis, 1965), Peter Cushing plays a modern writer on occult subjects who stumbles upon a cursed skull, of the Marquis de Sade no less, with predictably bad results. This paper argues that the portrayal of the occult in British horror films reflected contemporary realities of gender, class, race, colonialism and modernity as post-war Britain dealt with the end of empire and profound social changes. Such films also reflect popular conceptions of, and reactions to, various aspects of the Western occult tradition, such as ceremonial magic and Wicca, the latter a set of neo-pagan beliefs that was becoming known to a wider public for the first time as these movies were first released.

I focus on two films released by Hammer during the 1960s. *The Witches* (Cyril Frankel, 1966) follows Gwendolyn Mayfield (Joan Fontaine), a school teacher recovering from a mental breakdown while working in Africa as she takes up a new post in a peaceful and rather conservative English village. She soon finds out that not all is what it seems as she encounters the evil forces

Michael Wood is currently a faculty member of the Humanities Department of Dawson College, Montreal and a graduate of the McGill Institute of Islamic Studies (Ph.D., 2004), with a focus on the history and politics of Indonesia. His publications include *Official History in Modern Indonesia: New Order Perceptions and Counterviews* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). He also has a background in archaeology, having been involved in excavations in Jordan, Israel and Belize.

and sinister rituals lurking below the surface of an otherwise tranquil rural setting. *The Devil Rides Out* (Terence Fisher, 1968), based on the novel by Denis Wheatley, offers a glimpse into the occult experiments of the 1920s British upper-class. *Devil's* world is one of ecstatic rituals, esoteric texts, demonic conjurations, and the figure of Mocata, a practitioner of the magical arts based on the infamous occultist Aleister Crowley. These two films follow a similar narrative arc, with the protagonist uncovering an occult conspiracy. Both films feature villains who try to use occult knowledge to accomplish ambitious aims, in *The Witches* to extend life, and in *Devil* with the obscure objective of “transference of the soul.” Both films put forward the proposition that the supernatural, and those who know how to manipulate it in order to advance their nefarious plans, are not mere legends from the past, or the features of less-developed areas of the globe, but are with us today, in the stately homes and picturesque villages of modern England. Importantly, both films are conscious of the British class structure. In *The Witches*, the upper class magician’s plans are foiled by a persistent member of the professional classes, while *In the Devil Rides Out*, the magical battle takes place almost entirely within an aristocratic landscape. In both cases, the larger society of commoners, whether they be villagers or servants, have little impact on the final resolution of events.

The Occult: Ancient Traditions, a Modern Phenomenon

By the early 20th century we can speak of a Western tradition of occult knowledge. Individual practitioners and organized groups can be found in London, Paris, Berlin and St. Petersburg. Elements such as astrology, numerology, divination, and spirit summoning can be traced back to Babylonian and Hellenistic times. This occult tradition drew on the traditions of Christianity (demonology and ceremony), Judaism (especially the Kabbalah) and to an increasing extent, European interpretations, or misinterpretations, of Asian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism (notably yogic techniques and the concept of enlightened, usually hidden masters). Much of its symbolism and organizational norms were taken, in some cases directly, from such esoteric groups as the Freemasons. Its direct ancestors would be the alchemists of the Late Middle Ages and the ceremonial magicians of the Renaissance.² Occultism was also tied to a new phenomenon from America—spiritualism, the idea that it was possible to contact the dead via séances—as well as early experiments in hypnotism.³ Occultism often had a different

character depending on the society in which it was practiced: that is, the occult traditions in France would be different from those that emerged in England.⁴ In its early 20th century incarnation, occultism should be distinguished from mystical, heretical or syncretic takes on religion such as Gnosticism, Sufism or Theosophy. James Frazer's (1961) division between religion and magic might be good to note, in that occult adepts aimed to manipulate, rather than ask the favor of supernatural forces, although in reality the line between magical incantations or religious entreaties was quite blurry.⁵ As the 20th century progressed, new religious movements and this occult tradition became in some ways indistinguishable. The claim was made that these religious movements were not occult practices at all, but the resurrection of older religious traditions. For example, Gerald Gardner, the retired British colonial administrator who claimed to have revived and went on to popularize ancient English pagan practices and who earned the title "The King of the Witches" in the 1950s should probably be seen as the founder of the new religion of Wicca, rather than an occult adept like Aleister Crowley.⁶

The public reaction to the occult and its followers veered from fashionable or sensationalist interest, to mockery, to downright hostility, although it was seldom actually persecuted, outside of areas under Nazi control during World War II. What is most notable in the public reaction to the occult is the degree of confusion and ignorance with which it was met. In some cases this reception is understandable, as the occult was a very diverse phenomenon, its practitioners operated away from the public eye, and media coverage was, when not openly hostile, at the very least unformed.⁷ Instead, what comes out of the public take on the occult is a series of tropes, which are easily understood by readers of a newspaper or magazine article, a popular novel, or the audience for a horror film. Common elements that are often included in horror films, that reflect the popular, usually inaccurate conception of what the occult involves, include:

- Symbols: Pentagrams, glyphs, numerals and mysterious lettering
- Specialized items: candles, skulls, curtains, robes, altars, idols, wands, ancient texts
- Rituals: chanting, invocations, possessions, animal and human sacrifice
- Ecstatic dances, drugs, dreams and hallucinations
- Esoteric groups and cults, some with a very old history
- Charismatic cult leaders or magicians often with a rather obscure plan

- The summoning of demons and spirits that are understood to be part of a larger “otherworld.”⁸

These tropes feature prominently in both of the films examined here, although the depiction of the occult in *The Witches* and *The Devil Rides Out* cannot be reduced to simple ornamentation. In both of these films, the occult, however imperfectly understood, is the basis of the plot.

Witchcraft and Empire

The Witches opens with a panic-stricken Gwendolyn Mayfield, played by Academy Award winner Joan Fontaine in her final role, hastily packing up her belongings in a rural school, somewhere in “Africa.” The school, featured here as an outpost of colonial benevolence, is under attack; ominous drums beat in the background. Her loyal African assistants flee as a terrifying masked figure enters the room waving a spear; Gwendolyn suffers an uncertain but no doubt horrifying fate. This “tribal uprising” is connected to strange rituals and sinister “others” who respond to supposed British assistance with primitive violence (the normally peaceful local population is described as being led astray by malevolent and cunning “witch-doctors”). The larger argument of the film, not an uncommon one at the time, is that despite its best efforts and best intentions, the British Empire is unable to control its subject peoples, who are easily manipulated by sinister leaders, whether tribal chiefs, practitioners of ancient religions or modern nationalists, like Kenya’s Jomo Kenyatta. Although empire has faded, encounters with an ancient evil will follow the protagonist back to England. There is little reflection in *The Witches* on why the local African population might be less than happy as subjects of the British Empire, no matter how many schools are built (this obliviousness to the mechanics of empire stands in contrast to another film of the era, *The Oblong Box* [Gordon Hessler, 1969], where a magical curse in 1865 England is shown as a just punishment for specific, and perhaps general, colonial crimes). The colonial setting is dropped rather quickly in *The Witches*, reduced to an explanation for the protagonist’s fragile state back in England. Instead, the ancient evil that *already exists* in an English village is seen as the real threat. Just as Gwendolyn discovered in Africa, ancient beliefs are here seen as threatening to the unsuspecting and the vulnerable, as well as to society as a whole. An equivocal understanding of Empire as both a powerful force for good in the world and as the source of malevolence remains in the background

throughout the film. Thus, on two occasions a map of the world, with the British Empire marked in red, is displayed prominently in Gwendolyn's classroom, significantly in the scene where the doomed boy Ronnie Dowsett writes the test that will potentially allow him to leave the village—perhaps a nostalgic reference to when a talented youth would write an exam before heading out to administer supposedly grateful colonial subjects. By 1966 Britain had lost most of its empire in Asia and Africa, most notably India, Nigeria and Kenya, and such red marks on this map as Australia and Canada had long been independent Dominions. Gwendolyn's employer Stephanie, who is later revealed as the villain of the movie, reduces the former's experiences overseas to an encounter with “African fetish men,” although she is perceptive enough to equate the beliefs and practices of these Africans to what is actually going on in their own, rural English village.

Old Religion, New Religion

Gwendolyn retires to England to recover from the breakdown she suffers as a result of her experience in Africa, and she is recruited to serve as headmistress of a small private school in the village of Heddaby. While she finds her job and her friendship with the sponsors of the school, brother Alan and sister Stephanie Bax, satisfying, she finds interactions with the local villagers unsettling. She is also haunted by memories of the rituals she encountered in Africa and she comes to expect that malevolent forces may have in fact followed her to the peaceful village. However, the supernatural menace was seemingly already there and it is in fact being used and manipulated by both traditional practitioners, Granny Riggs, and modern adepts, Gwendolyn's new friend, Stephanie. Two of Gwendolyn's pupils, Ronnie Dowsett and Linda Rigg, seem to be forming an attachment, much to the disapproval of many of the villagers; the reason, unknown to Gwendolyn, is that Linda must remain a virgin in order to act as a sacrifice. Ronnie Dowsett shows academic promise and is given the opportunity to leave the village. However, he opts to stay in the village and be tutored by Gwendolyn. This decision is problematic for Stephanie's plans and Granny Rigg's magic is used to remedy the situation; the boy gets sick and his mother makes a deal for his health and safety in return for leaving the village. On the way to confront Granny Rigg, Dowsett, the boy's father, drowns, and as a result of these traumas—and because her suspicions that there is a malevolence at work are met with disbelief by the villagers and the authorities—Gwendolyn suffers a

breakdown and is institutionalized. She later escapes and returns to the village, where she is at first treated with warmth and kindness by her supposed friend Stephanie. The latter eventually imprisons Gwendolyn and explains her plan, which involves sacrificing Linda in a particularly horrible manner in order to achieve the goal of extending her own life. (According to the instructions of a 14th century account, Stephanie will achieve her magical objective by wearing the skin of a virgin sacrificial victim to, in the chilling words of the script, “give me a skin for dancing in.”) Gwendolyn is a close listener though, and she detects a flaw in the ritual that she is able to exploit to destroy Stephanie and thwart the sacrifice. She continues on as headmistress in a village purged of its ancient evil.

Although it is not explicitly stated, *The Witches* equates this ancient evil with Britain’s “Old Religion,” which at the time of the film’s release was being reinvented as a legitimate form of religious expression: modern pagan witchcraft, otherwise known as Wicca. For much of the 20th century, a popular theory saw the persecution of witches in Europe during the “Burning Times” of the 15th to 17th centuries as an organized attempt by the Church and state to crush the remnants of organized paganism. Margaret Murray in *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921) and later in regular entries in *The Encyclopedia Britannica* spread this theory to a wide audience.⁹ Although later largely rejected by scholars, the theory was taken up by figures like Gerald Gardner, who claimed that the religion of Wicca, which he introduced to the British public in the early 1950s, was the rediscovery of this ancient set of beliefs. Gardner had worked as a British colonial official in Malaya and while there had become interested in archaeology and local folklore, in particular ritual and magic. After his service he retired to a conservative English town and moved in “naturist” and esoteric circles. He claimed to have then joined a “coven” of local witches who practiced a type of magic based on English “cunning folk” traditions and on Western ceremonial magic.¹⁰ He developed rituals to be used by practitioners of Wicca, outlining them in “A Book of Shadows,” daggers, wands and magic circles being common elements in these rites. He claimed that these rituals were part of an older tradition, but he was open to taking rituals from many different sources, including the writings of Aleister Crowley.¹¹ Crowley emphasized personal power and the dark aspects of the occult, whereas for Gardner witchcraft was something positive. Crowley’s philosophy venerated natural forces, and dictated that supernatural abilities were to be used to help the community. Gardner was very interested in introducing the British public to Wicca, but he encountered some obstacles. For one thing, The Witchcraft Act of 1735 technically made what Gardner

was doing illegal. This act, described by historian Ronald Hutton as “a heavy-handed piece of Enlightenment rationalism,” assumed that since witchcraft and magic did not exist, anyone who was claiming to practice it was guilty of defrauding a gullible public.¹² Gardner presented his new religion to the public via a work of fiction, *High Magic's Aid* (1949) and expanded on it after the Act was repealed in 1951 with *Witchcraft Today*.¹³ Gardner was a tireless promoter of the Craft from this point onward until his death in 1964.¹⁴

Modern pagan witchcraft has gained much more acceptance in recent years, but during the time of *The Witches* this new and poorly understood religion garnered little sympathy. *The Witches* clearly references this new religion linking it to the rural superstitions and rituals of Granny Briggs, who is able to affect cures and potentially fatal curses. Also reflecting the view that magic, as allegedly practiced in 20th century Britain, is simply the continuation of an ancient rural tradition, are the film's crude dolls poked with pins and the wild, perhaps drug-fueled dance that was to culminate in a human sacrifice. The former also seems to be a reference to Eurocentric stereotypes of the Afro-Caribbean religion of voodoo (Vodou), while the latter seems a call out to medieval descriptions, or fantasies, of witch's Sabbats.¹⁵ The planned sacrifice, with its malevolent spell, its ancient text and Aztec sacrificial dagger, probably leans more toward the ceremonial magic of an Aleister Crowley than towards any genuine insight into Wicca or English folklore. The witchcraft practiced by Stephanie and her followers is shown as something as powerful, as prevalent and as malevolent as any African tribal set of rituals. This hostility towards Wicca and other neo-paganist beliefs was widespread at the time, especially in the popular press. (It is notable that the villain is in fact an ambitious celebrity journalist who asks the protagonist to collaborate on an article for the Sunday papers). Wicca was just as likely to be met with mockery in the media as its equation with Satanism.

What was new at the time of the film's release was not hostility to something labeled as witchcraft, but that some members of the public would call themselves witches and openly practice magical rituals. It is no surprise that reactions to this new religion would be ambivalent, but *The Witches* makes no attempt to mitigate its hostility—there is no sense that what is encountered is in any way legitimate, and even Granny Rigg's use of herbal cures cannot be separated from the fact that she is in the end a rather sinister figure, who tasks her cat to spy on the protagonist. The film typically posits skeptics as a problem; as rural life succumbs to modern England, the locals refuse to admit that ancient evil exists and might in fact be revived by an unscrupulous individual. The heroine Gwendolyn is shown as mentally fragile and

unbalanced, but as the only individual who recognizes the threat despite the lack of any tangible scientific evidence. As will be seen in *The Devil Rides Out*, *The Witches* posits that it is only through the abandonment of rational skepticism that evil can be defeated; after all, the villain has already done so in discovering that magic is real and can be used to further one's personal ambitions. Rural England had been subjected to the hunts of the "Witch Finder General" Mathew Hopkins in the 17th century. But the phenomenon of witchcraft, practiced in secret in a rural setting, as portrayed in *The Witches*, more closely resembles what happened in New England than in England itself. The village can be seen as analogous with Salem, Massachusetts, and the witch trials of 1692-1693, except the witches really did exist and were indeed perceived as a clear and present danger to the community.¹⁶

Women and the Occult: Granny Briggs, Stephanie and Gwendolyn

Feminist interpretations of the events taking place in Salem have become increasingly popular in recent decades, and women feature prominently in *The Witches* as protagonists, both villains and victims.¹⁷ The film's male characters are clearly of secondary importance. Alan Bax, who is set up as the supposed hero, is depicted as indecisive and weak, and is of very little if any help in foiling the occult conspiracy uncovered by Gwendolyn.¹⁸ The young Ronnie Dowsett shows enough promise to leave the village, but not enough wisdom to actually do so. The doctor at the sanitarium, the film's key authority figure, has neither enough intelligence to stop Gwendolyn from escaping, nor enough authority to force her to come back. The villagers, whether the boy's well-meaning father, or the complicit members of the cult, seem largely ignorant of what is going on, and in the latter's case this ignorance allows them to, apparently willingly, participate in the planned murder of a child. By contrast, the female characters drive the film's narrative, heavily involved in both the execution of and the stopping of the occult plot.

While Mrs. Briggs represents the ancient tradition of witchcraft, as Margaret Murray would argue, passed down among women, presumably for generations, Stephanie represents the modern reinvention of occult traditions for selfish ends. She could be viewed as a cynical version of Gerald Gardner or perhaps as a female version of Aleister Crowley (although in contrast to the latter, she holds a respectable position in society and keeps her magical interests secret). Stephanie describes her plan as being motivated by the desire for an extended life, another fifty years that would in a sense allow her to live a

second life and take her into the 21st century. She posits the sacrifice of a child as being driven by altruism: it is only now when the end of her natural lifespan is near that she feels she is truly learning and can really contribute to the betterment of humanity. She has qualms about the sacrifice because she is squeamish, but Linda's death is necessary, and not of particular concern, because after all the child is of "no value at all" in the grand scheme of Stephanie's plans. Stephanie's contempt for the villagers, even for those helping her with the sacrifice, extends to how they understand and utilize magic. The villagers may have held a belief in magic and carried out rituals for centuries, but they have never realized its full potential.¹⁹ Only an educated, upper-class professional can do that after a lifetime of studying it like a science.²⁰ Stephanie dismisses the magical abilities of Granny Rigg as not being in the same league as her own, even though they seem to represent a genuine local tradition. The villagers, according to Stephanie, are only dabbling in the occult, perhaps attracted to the simple prospect of a drug-fueled orgy; their plans and passions exist on an almost animal level (as she notes, "they can't help themselves"). In contrast to these so-called primitives, Stephanie has come to realize that magic is actually a science, and that human sacrifice will work as a trigger for a larger process, just as one might set off an atomic explosion (perhaps a reference to the Cold War fears of the time). Thus an arcane and morally repugnant ritual will harm only a few in Stephanie's moral world, allowing Stephanie to live and go on to discover further innovations that will better society as a whole. Or at least that is how she explains it to Gwendolyn. Whatever gain she hopes to offer the human race, at the cost of one human life, it is Stephanie who will be alive into the 21st century, presumably living a prosperous and youthful existence. She even lets slip that witchcraft is "a sex thing, deep down," practiced by "older women," after their "normal womanly powers" have been diminished. But in explaining witchcraft as a science to Gwendolyn, she makes a fatal mistake, because if it is a science, it operates according to immutable rules that can be learned and manipulated by anyone, even the very vulnerable Gwendolyn.

Gwendolyn is an unusual choice for a protagonist, in that she is a middle-aged woman, although Hammer has a long tradition of middle aged men as heroes, most notably Van Helsing, played by Peter Cushing in a series of Dracula films, and also Sir James Forbes, played by Andre Morell, in *Plague of the Zombies* (1966), and of course Christopher Lee's Nicholas, Duc de Richleau in *The Devil Rides Out*.²¹ These are, however, professorial figures who confidentially draw on years of knowledge and considerable research skill to uncover and defeat ancient supernatural evils. If they exhibit any self-doubt, it

is in their ability, as mere humans, to defeat the monstrous evil they are about to confront. In contrast, Gwendolyn is portrayed as a fragile figure, prone to mental instability and susceptible to breakdowns as a result of an initial violent encounter with the supernatural in Africa. She suffers from the common problem of the protagonists in most horror films: the evil she has stumbled upon needs to be stopped, but no one will believe her. But in Gwendolyn's case, her personal history makes her an even less believable witness. Her lack of confidence in her mental state (she does after all have a real breakdown that results in her being institutionalized) prevents her from simply soldiering on and smashing the occult conspiracy herself. In fact, she is rather passive in discovering what this actually conspiracy is, until Stephanie helpfully explains it to her.²² In effect, she attracts what Mary Ann Doane (1985), writing of 1940s "woman's films," calls the "clinical" or "medicalized" gaze, in that her central position in the narrative is attended by mental and physical frailty and illness.²³ That being said, Gwendolyn exhibits dogged persistence in getting to the bottom of whatever it is that is threatening her new home, Heddaby. She also displays considerable ingenuity in escaping from the convalescence home and in the end is able to defeat Stephanie by latching on to one, fatal line of the ritual, spilling her *own* blood during the sacrifice and causing the magical effect to strike back at the magician. This outcome is similar to the Angel of Death returning to kill its summoner Mocata, in the film that will be discussed below, *The Devil Rides Out*, although in this case Gwendolyn is more resourceful than de Richleau, who basically defeats the supernatural menace by accident.

It is not clear why Gwendolyn ends up in Heddaby in the first place. She is interviewed and hired by Alan Bax, but Stephanie seems to make all of the decisions for the family and when the latter speaks of summoning her because she is a vulnerable individual, it is not clear if this refers to her joining the cult or to her becoming headmistress. The relationship between the two women is ambiguous to say the least. She is initially greeted as a potential friend and as someone who will interact as an educated equal, although she is in fact Stephanie's employee. She is assured that although Heddaby is a little rustic, she will enjoy living there, yet Gwendolyn's fellow teacher confesses that she finds the place backward and would never live there herself. Stephanie continues to present herself as a friend until almost the point where her nefarious plans are revealed—or, more accurately, explained. Thus, she cautions about going to the authorities with any suspicions about Dowsett's death and pays for Gwendolyn's confinement. As mentioned above, Stephanie also pitches to Gwendolyn the co-writing of an article on their common

experiences with the occult, perhaps intimating the start of an ongoing partnership. After the breakdown and Gwendolyn's return, Stephanie still suggests cooperating, but in this case in carrying out a magical ritual, not just studying it. It is uncertain how Gwendolyn would actually be of help in the performance of the ritual, but it may be that it is the approval of someone of the educated classes that is important. It is not enough to live a second lifetime, since the villagers are dismissed as idiots who really cannot comprehend what has been achieved, and one could hardly announce through the media that one has carried out a human sacrifice. For Stephanie to truly succeed at this plan, someone of intelligence would need to give Stephanie credit, even if that credit was mixed with revulsion. In the end Gwendolyn may have been chosen, even from the beginning, to act as a witness—one who would not be believed, but also one who would understand.

The Devil Rides Out

Similarly to the *Witches*, *The Devil Rides Out* is a story of magic—wielded in a cold-blooded, efficient and perhaps even modern manner—being defeated by a protagonist who accepts the reality of the supernatural and thus is able to overcome it. Whereas in *The Witches* the magician and her opponent are women, in *The Devil Rides Out* these roles are filled by very much male figures; yet the eventual victory of the forces of light over the forces of darkness once again hinges upon the actions of a woman. *The Devil Rides Out* revolves around the attempts of Duc de Richleau, an aristocratic former air ace and man of means, to save Simon, a family friend, from the clutches of the black magician and cult leader Mocata. In the course of aiding Simon, de Richleau and his friend and former comrade Rex enlist the help of his niece, Marie, her husband Richard, and also endeavor to save Marie's daughter Peggy, and Tanith, a young woman who has, herself, fallen under the magician's control. De Richleau and his allies ward off a series of powerful magical attacks before a final confrontation leads to the death of Mocata and many of his followers, and the resurrection of Tanith, who has been killed in a previous magical encounter. Class is, once again, a fairly visible element in *The Devil Rides Out*. Despite the fact that the events seem to be taking place in the plain sight of modern Britain in an upscale London flat, a series of lavish rural estates, and a forested parkland, as well as involving a high speed car chase, no note of these activities is made by the authorities or any bystanders. In *The Devil Rides Out*, magic exists and functions in the modern age. The opening

credit sequence features pentagrams and medieval images of the Devil. Occult symbols and paraphernalia, some historically accurate, occur throughout the film, not just as decorative features but as part of various encounters with the occult in the film. De Richleau and his friend Rex first realize that their young friend Simon has indeed gotten involved with the occult, when they find a magical inscription, a powerful grimoire, and a pair of cocks destined for sacrifice in the latter's new house. The two major ceremonies carried out by Mocata involve elaborate robes marked with mystical symbols, altars, goblets, candles and sacrificial knives. De Richleau draws out a magical circle in chalk in order to protect himself and his friends from a series of supernatural attacks. Like Mocata, he uses magical ritual, in de Richeleau's case a form of necromancy, in which he summons a spirit of the dead in order to learn the location of Simon and Peggy. This is all presented with an air of authenticity in that the various symbols, magic items, occult texts and incantations, can all be plausibly equated with real examples from medieval and modern occult practices. The same cannot be said of the ecstatic dance sequence and summoning of Baphomet, which, although it might be equated with the lurid accounts of a medieval witches' Sabbat, may be meant to invoke the "tribal rituals" of the African, Caribbean and Asian subject peoples of the British Empire. In the same way, Mocata's cult bears little resemblance to the genuine occult brotherhoods of the Western occult tradition; it more closely resembles the international conspiracies that appeared in the works of Denis Wheatley, whose 1935 novel inspired the film.

Wheatley was a very successful writer of thrillers, several of which contain occult elements. Wheatley turned to writing after his family's wine business went under, and during World War II he was involved in military intelligence work. His acquaintances included Ian Fleming, Montague Summers, Aleister Crowley and, later in life, Christopher Lee. Wheatley's reactionary world view was rather typical of someone of his class and era, and this is reflected in his writings. His protagonists, for example, are firm supporters of empire and the class system; women, non-Europeans, and members of the lower classes are to remain in a subservient role and are often the subject of ridicule or hostility. The political left, communist and anarchist, is seen as a threat both in England and abroad. Wheatley's attitude towards the occult was ambivalent. He portrayed it in his writings as a sinister force and cautioned against getting involved in it in his non-fiction work. But he moved in occult circles during WWII, apparently took part in magical rituals, and befriended Crowley (whom he later maligned in his writings).²⁴ The film came out some thirty years after the novel's publication, during a different era, but some of these reactionary

tropes are still quite visible. Mocata (Charles Gray) is the head of a sinister organization that is able to lure normally level-headed members of the British elite to join its far-ranging conspiracy, which has an international dimension. Mocata's disciples can be equated with the communists, anarchists and Nazis of Wheatley's non-occult thrillers (although these are opposing political ideologies, Wheatley reduces them to irrational and insidious forces bent on subverting society). This organization has vast, even supernatural powers, and is both unknown to and unstoppable by the authorities. (Coincidentally, or possibly the result of trans-textual casting, Mocata's Charles Gray would soon play Blofeld, the head of SPECTRE, another omnipotent organization in the James Bond film *Diamonds are Forever* [Guy Hamilton, 1971]).

By 1968, the British class system been challenged, although it had certainly not been overturned. But while the world represented in the recent UK series *Downton Abbey* (airing on ITV from 2010-2015) was no longer intact, it was certainly still visible. *The Devil Rides Out* is set in the 1920s, an era that would still be quite familiar to many of the film's viewers and might even be seen with nostalgia by some. *Devil* portrays the "big house" class structure as so normative that few members of the working or servant class even show up on the screen. It seemingly runs itself and is at the disposal of the protagonists. There are a handful of obedient, although not particularly bright, servants, but the heroes and all the members of the cult, even the non-English ones, seem to be of the upper classes. Mocata is clearly a member of the upper class, recruiting Simon and Tanith to help betray their own class. As such, he is a most dangerous threat to the class structure and perhaps to the British Empire itself. Mocata is quite willing to bring in harmful outside influences that might threaten the country houses of England. His diverse "astronomical society" engages in exotic ecstatic rites in order to summon the ultimate *other*, the demon Baphomet. As in *The Witches*, these rituals are similar to those carried out by the Empire's rebellious African and Asian subjects (the subject of sympathetic fascination on the part of Gerald Gardner when he was in Malaya). The protagonist, Nicholas Duc de Richleau is not English; he is of French and Russian extraction, but he is of course an aristocrat.

Victims, Heroes or Villains?: Tanith, Simon, Marie, de Richleau

Tanith and Simon, the young members of the upper-class naively drawn into Mocata's sinister plans, are weak victims, lacking the experience to understand what is happening to them and how they might escape. Although

both do in the end try to help—Tanith by staying away from the group so as to not function as Mocata’s medium and Simon by offering himself in exchange for Peggy—neither of these actions work, and it is left to the older and more experienced to save the situation (de Richleau even specifically mentions his age and experience while trying to persuade Simon to leave Mocata). Ironically, it is Peggy, a young child, who ultimately destroys Mocata by reading the forbidden lines of an ancient ritual, although she does so at the prompting of her mother, and it was de Richleau who first uncovered the significance of this incantation. Curiously, the motives as to why Tanith and Simon got involved with Mocata in the first place are never really explored. Tanith is quite underdeveloped as a character and Simon may be motivated simply by boredom. This theme of boredom leading to an unhealthy interest in the occult is not an unprecedented one; in fact, it is a major theme of two of Hammer’s *Dracula* films, the aforementioned *Dracula AD 1972* and *Taste the Blood of Dracula*. In the latter film, a group of respectable Victorian gentlemen, having failed to satisfy their appetite for novelty in the brothels of London, engage a dissolute aristocrat to provide them with the ultimate thrill, the summoning of Count Dracula from beyond the grave. In contemporary London, an intense young Johnny Alucard (*Dracula* spelled backward), lures a group of rootless young people into performing a ritual to again resurrect Dracula. Alucard’s disciples make no secret of their boredom with “swinging London” and he uses their desire to experience “the next big happening” to participate in a perilous exercise that they do not at first take very seriously. Alucard, himself wants to go further: after summoning Dracula, he begs the vampire to bestow upon him vampiric status—presumably it is more interesting to be among the undead than to be a bored (and boring) member of the counterculture. While the boredom of *Taste the Blood Dracula*’s bourgeoisie stems from the freedom and burden of their elevated social status, that of Johnny Alucard’s band results from their lack of status; they are young people with little but free time and really no idea how to use it. This is similar to the hippy commune in American International Pictures’ *Deathmaster* (Ray Danton, 1973), who spend their days squatting in a vast California mansion, desperate for anyone to bring them novelty and guidance—even if Korda (Robert Quarry), their potential guru, who offers the wisdom of the East and the secrets of Eternity, is really a bloodthirsty vampire. In *The Devil Rides Out*, it is possible that joining Mocata’s group is a similar act of rebellion—here, against de Richleau and Rex, Simon’s father’s friends who had agreed to look out for him—although on the surface this control seems a rather loose one

(the reunion with Simon and de Richleau that Rex flies in from the Continent for at the start of the film appears to be a rather infrequent affair).²⁵

Rex and Marie's husband Richard are not strong characters, carrying out relatively unquestioningly the directives of the stronger characters in the battle against Mocata. They can perhaps be equated with the actual servants, Max and Marie's butler. Both Rex and Richard are portrayed as skeptics: Rex is convinced not by de Richleau's words but by what he actually sees, and Richard's skepticism is shown to be largely irrelevant, as de Richleau was going to follow a particular course of action, regardless of Richard's objections. While these characters are neither strong nor deep, the same cannot be said of Richard's wife, Marie. She is not at all skeptical of de Richleau's story of occult occurrences, and, perhaps more importantly, that lack of skepticism seems to be based not on gullibility or lack of knowledge, but on trust. If her uncle, a man she respects, tells her that this is the case, then she takes him at his word. Having accepted that Mocata is a dangerous man, she treats him as a serious threat and is able to survive a confrontation with him. In a "battle of wills"—as Mocata explains, magic is simply about exercising one's will—she is able to foil his plans, at least temporarily. She is also instrumental in the final defeat of Mocata, where she is able to draw on a mother's selfless love of her child as a source of strength (all other motives for opposing Mocata—saving one's friends, stopping the cult from damaging the larger society—having failed). Thus, while Marie's power may be in her stereotypical trust of male authority figures, and her devotion to motherhood, her consistency and resolve make her as attractive a character as *The Witches'* Gwendolyn.

The figure of Le Duc de Richleau is ambiguous: is he a hero or is he is in some ways a villain? Is he merely an occult scholar, or is he a full-fledged occult practitioner? While a figure worthy of earning Marie's trust, he also seems to have connections to the film's more sinister elements and conspiracies. Monsieur Le Duc remarks that he has conducted an "extensive study of these matters." He is able to correctly identify various magical symbols and items and is able to get a clear assessment of Mocata's powers and perhaps how to defeat them. He returns to the British Museum to look at certain "volumes kept under constant lock and key." His "morning's research" leads to more methods on how to counter Mocata. In some ways, he can be seen as the standard movie scientist or "expert," using hypnosis, for example, and systematically researching the problem at hand. But is he himself an adept? He not only prepares magical protections but also conducts an actual ritual. De Richleau's relationship with Simon may mirror that which Simon is establishing with Mocata. Perhaps de Richleau needs disciples, too. He is

certainly a ruthless individual, committed to a course of action with a certainty that it is the correct one and that it will have the desired outcome. Peter Hutchings notes the parallels between de Richleau and Mocata:

Both are well-dressed, knowledgeable figures of authority. Both make extensive use of hypnosis, with each hypnotising Simon, Tanith and Marie during the film. Both talk of Simon as a son; de Richleau, who promised Simon's father he would look after his son, on discovering Simon's involvement in 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." What both de Richleau and Mocata represent is a clarity and force of vision, a certainty lacking in the younger characters.²⁶

De Richleau's only moments of doubt are that he and his allies might not have the strength to follow this course of action through. (He stresses that everyone needs to be well-rested and that even a skeptic like Richard is useful as he "comes fresh to the fight.") However, in the end the one action he rejects, reading the forbidden lines of a ritual, are what finally defeat Mocata. As this decisive action is instigated by Marie, there is the intriguing possibility that she, like her uncle and his nemesis, is also an adept of the occult, or at least one in waiting.

Mr. Crowley

The Devil Rides Out could be seen as a film about Aleister Crowley (1875-1947). Mocata seems modelled on the notorious occultist in terms of his involvement in magical rituals, his leadership of occult organizations, and even his philosophy on how magic is alleged to work. In fact, Wheatley made no secret that he had modelled the character in his novel on Crowley, whom he met while researching occult topics as source material for his novels.²⁷ Although Crowley was quite generous in the help he offered the fledgling writer, the portrayal in *Devil* is far from sympathetic.²⁸ This might be expected as at the time of the publication of the *Devil Rides Out* novel, as Crowley had a very bad reputation in the British press. He had in fact earned the sobriquet, "The Wickedest Man in the World," though in the totalitarian world of the 1930s, it would seem somewhat absurd to apply such a title to Crowley.²⁹ Although born into a wealthy, and very conservative, family, money was often

a problem for Crowley, as he lived a life of travel and occult study. Whether alone, with “magical partners,” or as a member of various esoteric groups, most notably the Order of the Golden Dawn, he had developed various magical rituals, often involving sex and drugs.³⁰ He labeled this system “Magick” and believed that through carrying out these rituals, and above all by asserting one’s will, various outcomes, such as personal gratification, wealth, control over others or the obtainment of knowledge, could be achieved. Magick was to be the basis of a new religion, dubbed “Thelema,” with its own sacred scripture, *The Book of the Law* (1909), which was alleged to have been dictated in trance by a supernatural entity to Crowley’s then wife, Rose Kelly, after a visit to the Egyptian museum in Cairo. At the core of the Law, according to Crowley, were two maxims: “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law” and “Love under Will.” The former phrase has been the subject of much debate, as it could be seen as either a license to any and all selfish or even malevolent behavior, or more positively as a charge to find one’s true calling and follow it without compromise. The second aphorism seems to stress the importance of every individual exercising their will, while being aware that other individuals have a right to do so also.³¹ While these ideas are rather radical in their libertarianism, they certainly do not account for Crowley’s sinister reputation (which will be expanded upon below), and in fact until well after his death they were generally ignored. Nor was involvement in ceremonial magic or an interest in the occult particularly controversial among members of his class (the Order of the Golden Dawn included such luminaries as W.B. Yeats).³²

In 1920 Crowley founded Abbey of Thelama in Cefalu, Sicily, as a place for him and some followers to live communally while practicing magical rituals and developing each member’s will. In this task the community was aided by a copious amount of drugs, including hashish, cocaine and opium. After three years, Crowley’s utopia came to an end with the expulsion from Italy of Crowley and his group after the accidental death of one of his followers (which a hostile British press alluded to as an act of human sacrifice). Crowley reveled in this attention, styling himself “The Great Beast 666,” although this publicity did not help him in the end, and he died in obscurity in 1947.³³ Beyond the particulars of Crowley’s occult career, he is in many ways a problematic figure. Like Wheatley, he was a creature of his time. His misogynistic, anti-Semitic and racist attitudes would be considered shocking today. He also mistreated many of those around him. A common pattern is apparent with those many who followed Crowley in his quest for occult wisdom, only to be abandoned by him, and often left emotionally and

financially spent, taking many years to recover from the experience, if they ever did. Nevertheless, in Wheatley, Crowley seemed to have met his match in someone who repays generosity with betrayal.³⁴

There are numerous similarities between Crowley and the presentation of Mocata in the film. Mocata, like Crowley, fancies himself an adept of the occult, and even identifies himself as being one of some magical ability. Both adepts head secretive organizations, who might be described as cults, Mocata disguising his as an astronomical society. The membership of Mocata's group, like those of Crowley's various orders, including those who followed him to Cefalu, seems to consist of members of the upper, or at least educated classes. Both Crowley and Mocata also seem to attract weak-willed individuals: Simon could be equated with the poet Victor Neuburg, with whom Crowley embarked on a "magical partnership." Over the course of their relationship, during which the two conducted various elaborate rituals meant to summon spirits, Crowley subjected Neuburg to a steady stream of psychological abuse. Despite this treatment, Neuburg stayed attached to Crowley, perhaps because of his attraction to the latter and his magnetic personality, or perhaps because he believed fully in Crowley's work.³⁵ Tanith can perhaps be seen as one of Crowley's "Scarlet Women," with whom he would conduct what he termed "sex magic," although neither the idea, nor the character herself, is fully developed.³⁶ Like Crowley's disciples, it is not clear why Simon and Tanith remain with Mocata, although Tanith clearly fears what will happen to her if she leaves him. Simon seems similarly afraid, although he does seem to exhibit enough independent judgement to hide his involvement in the group from his overwhelming mentor, de Richleau. He is admonished by the latter for his involvement in "the most dangerous game known to mankind ... Black Magic," although it is not at all clear why he was interested in it in the first place. It is also not at all clear why Mocata needs Tanith and Simon at all. Mention is made of a certain number of people being required for a ritual, but Mocata does not seem to have too much difficulty in attracting new converts (especially for an organization that has seems to have no public profile). Perhaps, like Karlsfed in the film *Night of the Demon*, and Crowley, Mocata's "Devil Cult" could simply be a source of personal and financial reinforcement.

Both adepts engage in similar rituals, although the film downgrades Crowley's use of orgiastic sex to some ecstatic dancing, and there are no overt references to drugs. Mocata's final ceremony, an attempted "transference of souls," seems modeled on Crowley's and those of other ceremonial magicians, as it includes an invocation of the Egyptian god Set. An earlier ceremony in the film involved animal sacrifice, an altar, a sacred goblet and multiple

individuals dressed in robes, all elements associated with some of the ritual work of Crowley. This scene culminates in a wild frenzied dance, similar to the climactic scene of *The Witches* and possibly meant to reference in a stereotyped manner the religious life of Britain's colonized subject peoples, in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. This seems less connected to Crowley's activities, although, as noted, the character of the dance—with women hurled into a mass of frenzied male worshipers (although all remain very much clothed)—might hint at the often sexual nature of his magical operations. The summoning of a terrifying being from beyond was the goal of several of Crowley's most famous and ambitious acts of ritual magic.³⁷

Most important to Crowley was not the accumulation of followers or of wealth—indeed he had a great deal of difficulty hanging on to the latter—but the quest to master the will and use it to unleash real magical forces. Crowley performed rituals alone, with magical partners, and with esoteric groups, as he thought he was ushering a new eon of “Crowleyanity,” where enlightened individuals would use the innate power of the will to manipulate to world around them. Reminding one of Stephanie's motives in *The Witches*, Crowley saw his message as a positive one that could only be of benefit to society. In actuality, it left most of those around him broken, while he himself died an isolated, obscure individual. Also, there is no evidence that any of the rituals Crowley conducted in any way can be seen to have worked. The hostility he encountered seemed to have sprung not from the idea that he was a powerful “black magician,” but that he was someone pretending to do so while engaged in activities mainstream society saw as far beyond the norm. It is as a figure of rebellion, as someone who questions what one is told to believe and what one is told to do, that accounts for his popularity with the sixties counter-culture, some of whose young members may have been in the audience to see *The Devil Rides Out*. Crowley's expressed political beliefs, although he certainly cannot be seen as an overtly political figure, would have been seen as extremely reactionary to those who were gravitating to him as a symbol. That being said, Crowley for his times was certainly a transgressive figure, who wanted nothing to do with the overall project of British colonialism, choosing for many years to live abroad and refusing a comfortable life serving empire that a person of his class might easily obtain. Little of this was understood by Crowley's detractors, and little remains in the portrayal of Mocata beyond one key scene, the confrontation with Marie. In that scene Mocata not only tries to use “Magick” to overcome Marie and bring Simon and Tanith back to his cult, but he goes as far as to explain, in terminology taken seemingly directly from Crowley, how it works. He describes it simply as a science, one of using the

will to exhibit control of mind over matter, or more commonly mind over mind. He also states that the sinister reputation it has acquired is an unfair one and that he is a practitioner of some note of this science. He recognizes Marie as a woman of some intelligence (or does he mean of some magical ability?). But he is ultimately forced to break his attempt at magical control by the sudden arrival of Marie's daughter Peggy. The implications of this scene are not further explored; the magic in the rest of the film, of séances, rituals, altars, knives, and the invocation of dark forces remains at the level of the common set of tropes often depicted in horror films. The aims behind Mocata's sinister plans remain obscure. Instead Mocata, like Crowley, is viewed as practicing black magic, the twist being that he is doing so in the contemporary world, and that it actually works.

Concluding Thoughts: The Science of Magic in the Twilight of Empire

Both *The Witches* and *The Devil Rides Out* depict the supposed reality of magic in the modern world. Not only do they see the occult as something that really operates, but they also frame it as something that is not, in the end, out of place in the 20th century. In fact it is identified as a new type of science, which offers potentially unlimited power to those who understand its workings, although at a terrible price. Mocata laments that magic is very much misunderstood and that the sinister reputation it has acquired is an unfair one. While trying to use this much-maligned art to further his goals, he feels the need to explain that it is in fact a science, to be respected, rather than feared. But this science is not to be placed at the service of humanity; rather, it is to be used by the strong-willed individual for the fulfillment of personal, if rather unclear objectives. It is not really understood what Mocata hopes to accomplish by bringing Simon back to his circle and by executing a "transference of souls," but Mocata's actions are clearly not altruistic in their motivations. In this Mocata is clearly following the path of Crowley, who felt that any free individual should be able to exercise their will in pursuit of personal realization. This attitude towards how the occult, or any other tool at one's disposal, should be used, can be summed up in Crowley's central maxim: "Do what thou wilt shalt be the whole of the Law." Neither Crowley's philosophy, nor even the actions of Mocata, necessarily imply a malevolent attitude towards society as a whole in their use of "the science of magic"—they merely reveal an indifference to it.

Stephanie, like Mocata, sees magic as a science, but she goes further in exploring the implications of such a statement. For Mocata, science might simply be a new label for an ancient art. For Stephanie, who seems to have become interested in the occult rather late in her career, it really is something new, with the potential to transform the world as thoroughly as the splitting of the atom. However malevolent the potential implied by her simile, Stephanie approaches the magical ritual, involving a bloody act of human sacrifice, with careful planning and meticulous attention to detail, almost as if she were preparing a NASA space launch. Stephanie turns up the proper ritual in an obscure medieval text, translates and interprets it, and makes sure that the appropriate material components, such as an Aztec dagger used in countless sacrifices, are at hand. She confirms from local records that the proposed object of sacrifice (for this is how Stephanie sees Linda, an innocent local girl) is of the proper age and manipulates events in the village to make sure the girl remains a virgin. Stephanie's team, including the experienced but lower-level magician Granny Rigg and a large number of rather ignorant villagers, follow her commands without question. After "suiting up," in elaborate robes, Stephanie is ready for the transformative event. She will achieve a second life, during which she can bring humanity forward through her discoveries, many of which will presumably involve this new science of magic. Compared to Mocata or Crowley, her ambitions seem boundless. Of course, in explaining her plan and describing it as a science, operating according to immutable rules, she plants the seeds of her own downfall. Gwendolyn exploits a weakness in the ritual; blood spilled before the sacrifice takes place causes the unleashed power to strike back at the magician. Stephanie's mission is aborted before she can enter her brave new magical world.

Significantly, in *The Witches* it is the female protagonists, villain and heroine, who fully understand magic as a science. In *The Devil Rides Out*, Mocata, while he does describe magic as a science, does not really understand the full implications of the concept in the same way that Stephanie does (although this may have something to do with the fact that *The Witches* is set in the 1960s rather than the 1920s). De Richleau does not seem to see it as a science at all, but in rather vague religious terms as something coming from "the Powers of Darkness." As such, although he extensively researches what he is up against, he is unable, or is unwilling to do what is needed to defeat Mocata and his malevolent plans. That is left to Marie, who apparently has innate, and untapped occult powers.

Though both films are largely set in England, the subject of Britain's diminished imperial fortunes is clearly in evidence. In *The Witches*, empire is,

on the surface at least, portrayed as a positive thing, a product of rationality. In this context, Britain brings peace and civilization to various parts of the globe such as an unnamed country in Africa through instruments like a modern educational system. Unfortunately, in the film's terms, because of ignorance and the sinister supernatural forces that hold sway over the local population, such help is rejected. However, in drawing a parallel between witchcraft in Africa, and a belief in witchcraft in a sleepy English village, the film might be arguing that such dark forces and the hold they can have over entire societies are in fact universal, and, perhaps even more profoundly, *internal*. Stephanie notes the connection without comment, perhaps with the sentiment that whether African or English, such local traditions are beneath an adept of her ability. Empire is not directly dealt with in *The Devil Rides Out*; no note is made of whether any of the wealth of de Richleau, Simon or even Mocata comes from exploiting colonial properties, whether they be Indian tea plantations or South African mines. Nor is any mention made of colonial service by any of the characters (de Richleau and Rex are described as fighter pilots in France during World War I). It is not even implied that Mocata, like his real life inspiration Crowley, had travelled extensively in Asia, Africa and the Americas. Yet the survival of empire, seen as a positive force in the world, is very much part of what is at stake in the struggle between de Richleau and Mocata. The latter attracts followers from a variety of backgrounds: Africans, Indians and Germans are shown attending Simon's "astronomical group" (a cover for Mocata's cult). A multiracial group takes part in the orgiastic ritual to summon Baphomet. Simon and Tanith are asked to betray their class, and by suggestion the empire, by joining with Mocata in spreading disorder and on a personal level to abandon the self-discipline and self-denial necessary for the empire to survive. *The Devil Rides Out*, based again on a 1935 novel, can be read as a call to stem the lack of resolve seen as gripping the youth of Britain. This weakness—along with an attendant "unhealthy" fascination with the customs of, and even an acknowledgment of the humanity of, the colonized peoples—would inevitably lead to the end of empire. Ironically, by the time of the film's release, the imperial project had almost entirely ended, though the troubling echoes of the exigencies of empire are what inform the anxieties of both *The Devil Rides Out* and *The Witches*.

Notes

¹ This essay is the result of research conducted for a course with the Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies-Montreal under the co-direction of Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare and Kristopher Woofter; the course was entitled “British Occult Horror” and was held over three lectures from October to November, 2015.

² For a study of the emergence of the Western occult tradition Richard Cavendish, *A History of Magic* (London: Arkana, 1987) and Francis King, *Modern Ritual Magic: The Rise of Western Occultism* (New York: Avery Publishing, 1989).

³ Colin Wilson, *The Occult* (London: Grafton Books, 1979), 364-369, 449, 601-621. See also Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁴ Wilson, 423-428.

⁵ James Frazer, *The New Golden Bough: A New Abridgement of the Classic Work*, ed. with new intro. By Theodor H. Gaster (New York: Anchor Books/ Doubleday, 1961), 5.

⁶ Gardner is not mentioned once in James Webb’s survey of twentieth century occultism, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1976). As shall be seen this did not stop his detractors from identifying him as a practitioner of black magic.

⁷ Ronald Hutton. *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 266-269.

⁸ For a description of the beliefs and practices that inspired this imagery see Richard Cavendish, *The Black Arts* (New York: Perigee Books, 1967).

⁹ *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921). Murray’s work is discussed in Hutton, 194-201, 362.

¹⁰ Ibid, 205-206.

¹¹ Ibid, 226-228.

¹² Ibid, 107, 206.

¹³ *Highb Magic’s Aid* (London: Aurinia, 2010), *Witchcraft Today* (London: Rider 1954), both works are noted in Hutton, 206.

¹⁴ Ibid, 248-252.

¹⁵ Lois Martin, *A Brief History of Witchcraft, Demons, Folklore and Superstition* (London: Constable and Robinson, 2010), 37-46, Wilson, 568-569. For more on Vodou see, Leslie G. Desmangles, *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

¹⁶ Wilson, 563-564. For more on how economic and social tensions within a village environment may have led to the accusations of witchcraft in Salem see James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle. “The Visible and Invisible Worlds of Salem: Studying Crisis at the Community Level,” in *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection*, Volume 1, 3rd

edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 1992) and Paul Boyer and Steven Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976). For how witchcraft and other supernatural beliefs might have actually functioned in a rural English setting see Hutton, 86-106 and Kate Ravilious. "Witches of Cornwall: Macabre evidence of age-old spells surfaces in an archaeologist's front yard," *Archaeology* Vol. 61, No. 6 (November/December 2008): 41-45

¹⁷ See Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998).

¹⁸ He is described by Leon Hunt as "an almost parodic embodiment of disempowered masculinity, a failed wood-be priest in a town which no longer has a church." Wearing a priests collar "for security" and listening to tapes of music from Salisbury Cathedral, "the symbols of male authority can only be simulated, the clerical equivalent of playing with model trains," "Necromancy in the UK: witchcraft and the occult in British horror," in *British Horror Cinema*, eds Steven Chibnall and Julian Petley (London: Routledge, 2002), 90.

¹⁹ It is implied that centuries ago, the villagers destroyed the local church in favor of the "Old Religion."

²⁰ Hunt describes her as using "her scholarly credentials to accumulate arcane knowledge," and as "quite simply, the best witch in British cinema," 91.

²¹ See *The Horror of Dracula*, directed by Terrence Fisher (London: Hammer/ Universal, 1958), *Dracula A.D. 1972*, *The Satanic Rites of Dracula*, directed by Alan Gibson (London: Hammer, 1973), *The Plague of the Zombies*, directed by John Gilling (London Hammer, 1966).

²² Contrast this to the actions of Van Helsing in any one of the Dracula films, or the protagonists of *The Omen*, who know that the threat they have discovered is so farfetched that there is no way they will be believed and that their enemy is the Devil himself, but they none the less try to stop Damien, the Anti-Christ, from taking over the world. See *The Omen*, directed by Richard Donner (Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 1976).

²³ See Mary Ann Doane, "The Clinical Eye: Medical Discourses in the 'Woman's Film' of the 1940s" in *Poetics Today*, 6, no. 1/2, (The Female Body in Western Culture: Semiotic Perspectives, 1985): 205-227.

²⁴ Hutton, 262-263. Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), 387-389. Dennis Wheatley, *The Devil and All His Works* (London, Peerage Books, 1971), 11-12.

²⁵ On the other hand de Richleau could be seen as a rather stern father figure, keeping his son from going astray. De Richleau not only acts as a father to Simon, but is the latest in a long line of Hammer protagonists exerting authority over the young: "Both good and bad father figures exhibit an absolute authority, the film implies, but in the right hands that power over the young, which on occasion takes the form of physical violence, is necessary. Needless to say, it is an equation which leaves youth incapable of self-determination, and in this film it is clearly supportive of a paternalistic ideology that is perfectly in keeping with both the age and gender of the filmmakers and the positive valuing of the social authority deriving from the male professional, which, as has been demonstrated, characterised

Hammer production in the late 1950's and 1960's," Peter Hutchings, *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 153.

²⁶ Ibid, 152-153.

²⁷ In addition to *A Devil Rides Out*, Wheatley wrote seven novels dealing with occult topics, one of which, *Too the Devil a Daughter* (1953) was turned by Hammer into a film of the same name (Peter Sykes, 1976). It should be noted that most of Wheatley's seventy-four works did not deal with the occult at all, Hutton, 262.

²⁸ Ibid, 261-262.

²⁹ His sinister reputation had begun with a 1905 climbing accident and his "treason" during World War I. In the latter case, he had written pro-German propaganda while based in New York, but he later argued that what he had written was so absurd it actually helped the British cause and no action was taken against him after his return to Britain. But he only became the "Wickedest Man in the World" as a result of his *Diary of a Drug Fiend* (London: Collins, 1922) and certain events that took place at his Abbey of Thelama in Cefalu, Sicily, Sutin, 157, 247, 299-301, 307.

³⁰ Ibid, 216-217, Francis King, *The Magical World of Aleister Crowley* (London: Arrow Books, 1977), 15-32.

³¹ Ibid, 33-40.

³² Ibid, 22-24.

³³ Sutin, 410-419.

³⁴ By the time of the publication of *The Devil Rides Out*, Crowley was not a prominent figure, but the notoriety he had earned after Cefalu often flared up as he was an easy figure for the tabloid press to demonize. He might have been forgotten if not for the counter-culture and one of the periodic revivals of interest in the occult. By the 1960's he was seen by many artists as a symbol of rebellion despite the fact that he was in many ways a rather Edwardian figure. Experimental filmmaker Kenneth Anger led the revival of interest in Crowley. The Beatles included him on the cover of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) as one of their favorite people. Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page pursued a serious interest in Crowley, collecting a great deal of Crowley memorabilia and eventually purchasing the Scottish estate where Crowley had performed the A ritual. By 1980, over 100 years after Crowley birth, he is a known figure to the fans of Ozzy Osborne via his song "Mr. Crowley," Sutin, 3.

³⁵ King, *The Magical World*, 42-50,

³⁶ Sutin, 130-132

³⁷ King, *The Magical World*, 51-60.

References

- Boyer, Paul and Steven Nissenbaum. *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976.
- Cavendish, Richard. *The Black Arts*. New York: Perigee Books, 1967.
- *A History of Magic*. London: Arkana, 1987.
- Crowley, Aleister. *Diary of a Drug Fiend*. London: Collins, 1922.
- Davidson, James West and Mark Hamilton Lytle. "The Visible and Invisible Worlds of Salem: Studying Crisis at the Community Level." In *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection*, Volume 1, 3rd edition. New York: McGraw Hill, 1992.
- The Deathmaster*. Directed by Ray Danton. Los Angeles. American International Pictures, 1972.
- Desmangles, Leslie G. *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- The Devil Rides Out*. Directed by Terrence Fisher. London: Hammer, 1968.
- Diamonds are Forever*. Directed by Guy Hamilton. London: EON Productions, 1971.
- Doane, Mary Ann. "The Clinical Eye: Medical Discourses in the 'Woman's Film' of the 1940s." *Poetics Today*, 6, no. 1/2, (The Female Body in Western Culture: Semiotic Perspectives, 1985): 205-227.
- Downton Abbey*. Created by Julian Fellowes. Manchester and London: ITV, 2010-2015.
- Dracula A.D. 1972*. Directed by Alan Gibson. London: Hammer, 1972.
- Frazer, James. *The New Golden Bough: A New Abridgement of the Classic Work*, edited by with new introduction by Theodor H. Gaster. New York: Anchor Books/ Doubleday, 1961.
- Gardner, Gerald. *High Magic's Aid*. London: Aurinia, 2010.
- *Witchcraft Today*. London: Rider 1954.
- Horror of Dracula*. Directed by Terrence Fisher. London: Hammer/ Universal, 1958.
- Hunt, Leon. "Necromancy in the UK: witchcraft and the occult in British horror." In *British Horror Cinema*, edited by Steven Chibnall and Julian Petley, 82-98. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Hutchings, Peter. *Hammer and Beyond: The British Horror Film*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993.
- Hutton, Ronald. *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

- Karlsen, Carol. *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998.
- King, Francis. *The Magical World of Aleister Crowley*. London: Arrow Books, 1977).
- *Modern Ritual Magic: The Rise of Western Occultism*. New York: Avery Publishing, 1989.
- Martin, Lois. *A Brief History of Witchcraft, Demons, Folklore and Superstition*. London: Constable and Robinson, 2010.
- Murray, Margaret. *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921.
- Night of the Demon*. Directed by Jacques Tourneur. London: Columbia, 1957.
- The Oblong Box*. Directed by Gordon Hessler. London: American International Pictures, 1969.
- The Omen*. Directed by Richard Donner. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 1976.
- Plague of the Zombies*. Directed by John Gilling. London: Hammer, 1966.
- Ravilious, Kate. "Witches of Cornwall: Macabre evidence of age-old spells surfaces in an archaeologist's front yard." *Archaeology* 61, no. 6 (November/December 2008): 41-45
- The Satanic Rites of Dracula*. Directed by Alan Gibson. London: Hammer, 1973.
- The Skull*. Directed by Freddie Francis. London: Amicus, 1965.
- Sutin, Lawrence. *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000.
- Taste the Blood of Dracula*. Directed by Peter Sasdy. London: Hammer, 1970.
- To the Devil a Daughter*. Directed by Peter Sykes. London: Hammer, 1976.
- Webb, James. *The Occult Establishment*. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1976.
- Wheatley, Dennis. *The Devil and All His Works*. London, Peerage Books, 1971.
- *The Devil Rides Out*. London: Hutchison, 1935.
- *To the Devil a Daughter*. London: Hutchinson, 1953.
- Wilson, Colin. *The Occult*. London: Grafton Books, 1979.
- The Witches*. Directed by Anthony Nelson Keys. London: Hammer, 1966.

- 2018 -

MONSTRUM is Published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society.

Intellectual rights are held by the individual author(s).



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).