The Lure of the Dark Side: Satan and Western Demonology in Popular Culture, edited by Christopher Partridge and Eric Christianson

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The study of the sinister side of religion in contemporary culture is frequently relegated to popularizing treatments that seldom take such religious expressions at face value. The current volume is a welcome corrective to this overly simplistic understanding of the dark side spawned by an unbalanced dualism as it developed in, particularly, Christianity. Partridge and Christianson, both known for their work on religion and culture, open this volume with an informative introduction that begins with a brief review of the belief in demons and the demonic in Western culture. Even this cursory treatment offers insight into how Christianity came to regard the resurrection of Christ as an essential aspect of the defeat of evil rather than simply the hope of new life. The early biblical origins of the satan and demons (*nephilim*) are traced, demonstrating that these stock figures simply did not appear in their most recognisable garb in the Hebrew Bible. Apocalyptic sensitivities and the literal demonization of feminine power, characteristic of the emerging Christian movement, led to the popular perception of demons and devil.

Each of the essays in the collection is then introduced. The essays are divided into three partially overlapping media: music, film, and literature.

The premiere essays, "Satanism and Popular Music" by Asbjørn Dyrendal, and "Between Hymn and Horror Film: How do we Listen to the Cradle of Filth?" by Peter Mercer-Taylor, confront the issue of the connection between black metal and Satanism. A sub-genre of death metal particularly popular in Norway, black metal projects a self-professed Satanic outlook. An unexpected irony appears as Dyrendal weighs this claim against the outlook and philosophy of Anton LeVey's Church of Satan. Satanic rhetoric and lyrics of bands such as Venom and Mayhem project an image of Satanism that turns out to be at odds with LeVey's "official" version of the religion. Inspired by horror-style demonology rather than a real-life Satanism, black metal bands construct a fictional realm of a literal personification of Satan that many Satanists do not accept.

This idea is confirmed by Mercer-Taylor's sympathetic consideration of the British black metal band, Cradle of Filth. Mercer-Taylor begins his musicological analysis by noting that musical affronts to social conventions are taken seriously in a way that cinematic ones are not. People understand that cinema conveys fiction while music is a tap into the raw emotion of the writer/performer's experience. Thus religious believers often find hymns to be strong expressions of their own belief systems; religious movies seldom display similar power. Focusing specifically on Cradle of Filth's satanic anthem "From the Cradle to Enslave," Mercer-Taylor demonstrates how both the lyrics and musical structure move from an anti-hymn to a more theatrical, quasi-cinematic portrayal of a world coming to its end. Interestingly, the outlook is not far removed from a typical Christian view. What Mercer-Taylor suggests, in a way that corresponds with Dyrendal's analysis, is that when black metal attempts to be the music of the horror genre it loses its credibility. Horror as a literary and cinematic genre requires suspense and lengthy development, something that is difficult to achieve in the medium of conventional albums and their length limitations.

Anthony B. Pinn's provocative essay, "When Demons Come Calling: Dealing with the Devil and Paradigms of Life in African American Music," takes the reader from spirituals to blues, rap and hip-hop. Pinn argues that belief in the reality of the struggle between good and evil, whether or not a literal Satan is accepted, defines much of African-American music. Focusing on the traditions of Robert Johnson as a test-case (and moving on to Scarface and Snoop Dogg) Pinn makes a strong case for social inequality being

at the heart of this perceived struggle. His conclusion is seconded by Charlie Blake's "Dark Theology: Dissident Commerce, Gothic Capitalism and the Spirit of Rock 'n' Roll." Blake approaches the subject principally through the work of Jacques Derrida and Georges Bataille. "Gothic capitalism" is Blake's conceptualization of post-industrial, or modern, capitalism, which, in its unparalleled ability to betray the realizations and hopes of many artists, rewards those who succeed, paradoxically, with capital. This divide between the desolation of reality (reminiscent of Peter Ackroyd's styling of British sensitivities in *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination*) and the functionalism of economics leads rock and roll into an ethos of demonic despair that may be glimpsed from Robert Johnson down through the relatively mainstream heavy metal groups into the more pointed expressions in death and black metal. It is the failure of capitalism to live up to its promises that creates the Gothic sensitivities of many rock artists.

The second set of essays shifts focus to cinema. "'Speak of the Devil': The Portrayal of Satan in the Christ Film," by biblical scholar William R. Telford, concentrates on the genre of Christ movies. "Christ movies" are essentially big-screen renditions of the Gospels, and, for Telford's purposes, films that also feature the Devil. To begin his analysis, which pays special attention to intertextuality, Telford sketches a brief history of how the Devil emerges and is portrayed in art and literature. Had the book been more expansive, a fuller treatment of this theme would have added to the overall utility of such a study. Telford narrows down the set of movies that show Satan interacting with Christ in Cecil B. DeMille's *The King of Kings* (1927), George Stevens' *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), and Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). Considering both cinematographic and intertextual issues, Telford notes that with the exception of *The Passion*, these films at least imply the diabolic as a psychological rather than a metaphysical struggle. This may not have been the intention of the directors or screenwriters, but the suggestion is clearly present. This tellingly fits the cultural Zeitgeist in which the films were produced. Telford also offers a filmography of other movies featuring the Devil. One omission I immediately noted was Alan Parker's 1987 *Angel Heart*, one of the more disturbing members of the genre. The Devil has such staying power in the movies, however, that a comprehensive filmography would require a book of its own.

Titus Hjelm's "Celluloid Vampires, Scientization, and the Decline of Religion" is a fascinating analysis of the changing standards of vampires in

movies. The classic Hollywood vampire of the early twentieth century was a manifestation of spiritual evil whereas more modern vampires are often explained scientifically by genetic mutations or viruses. Comparing classic Hammer Studio vampire movies with the Blade and Underworld series, Hjelm argues that the "migration of the vampire soul" (118) follows the decline in religious belief in society. The vital role of blood and the means of destroying vampires reflect this shift. If caught in a dark, Transylvanian street it is better to have a gun with ultraviolet bullets than to go armed with a crucifix. Recent developments further confirm Hjelm's thesis: Justin Cronin's new novel *The Passage* features viral vampires and word is out that Tim Burton is working on a *Dark Shadows* movie to be released next year. It will be worth observing how the conflicted soul of Barnabas Collins will fit into this mix of modern vampires.

The essay "A Man of Wealth and Taste: The Strange Career of Hannibal Lecter" by Brian Baker begins *in medias res* for neophyte Thomas Harris readers. Hannibal Lecter is, of course, a household name. Those who have not read the novels or seen the movies will need to accept uncritically what Baker propounds, although his thesis is intriguing. Building on the Romantic ideal, based on the analysis of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost* as a heroic rebel, Baker sees in Lecter an embodiment of this ideal. Lecter, a polished serial killer with style and taste, finds an analogue not only in Satan but also the Romantic portrayals of Prometheus. Baker suggests that through the series of Lecter novels Hannibal moves "from monstrous Other to Romantic satanic hero" (132). The essay focuses more on the novels than on the movies, but it offers an interesting path to the American Film Institute's number one movie villain.

In "Demons of the New Polytheism," George Aichele's contribution, the demonic is meant in its classical form as the proliferation of divine beings. Aichele, taking Jack Miles' *God: An Autobiography* as a starting point, demonstrates the fractious nature of the biblical God. This, he suggests, is symptomatic of the newly emerging polytheism. In a postmodern culture, the popular media offers a plethora of deities. This can be seen in the writings of William Gibson, Neil Gaiman, James Morrow, China Miéville, and even J. R. R. Tolkien. Taking *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as illustrative, Aichele supports his thesis with the heavily populated spiritual world of vampire slayers in both the movie and television series. The direction that this indicates is a society moving away from a theological paranoia to a schizophrenia, sympathetically explained, as old explanations simply do not fit modern constructs.

This new polytheism, filled with its own "demons" is a semiotic wonderland populated with a variety of gods. Aichele suggests that Christianity, with its ready-made Trinity, might find the first steps forward a little easier than might otherwise be anticipated.

Larry J. Kreitzer concludes the film section with "Scriptural Dimensions of Evil: Biblical Text as Timepiece, Talisman, and Tattoo." In this somewhat playful piece, Kreitzer analyzes five "Revelation" movies that employ eschatology (timepiece), protective defenses against evil (talisman), and some form of the mark of the beast (tattoo). The films he analyzes are Richard Donner's *The Omen* (1976), Carl Schultz's *The Seventh Sign* (1988), Gregory Widen's *The Prophecy* (1995), Peter Hyams's *End of Days* (1999), and Stuart Urban's *Revelation* (2001). Each film utilizes some or all of the three interpretive elements, but each does so in an idiosyncratic way. Overall, Kreitzer finds Revelation films to be more complex than usually credited, although they differ considerably in how they make use of the Bible.

The final two essays focus on literature. Beginning with the nineteenth-century work of James Hogg, Crawford Gribben ("James Hogg and the Demonology of Scottish Writing") explores how Calvinism and the demonic played into the imagination of writers in Scotland. Starting with Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), Gribben explores the use of demonic doppelgangers, the Devil himself, and the conventions of demons in Hogg's work. To solidify his observations, Gribben continues his study into the work of Robert Louis Stevenson (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (*The Hound of the Baskervilles*), and Iain Banks (*The Wasp Factory*). The progression shows a tendency toward internalizing evil rather than finding a demonic reality in the larger physical world. This internalizing of evil is related to the belief, demonstrated in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels, that evil is good gone bad. The final essay in the book, "Voldemort, Death Eaters, Dementors, and the Dark Arts: A Contemporary Theology of Spiritual Perversion in the Harry Potter Stories," by Colin Duriez, returns to the Scottish realm in a contemporary setting. J. K. Rowling spent many of her formative years in Scotland and some of the same sensitivities concerning the origin of evil cited by Gribben appear in the Harry Potter series. Duriez, in surveying the struggle of good-versus-evil in the Potter stories, notes that Rowling shows a Christian-Augustinian concept of evil as perverted good, rather than a Manichean, Gnostic concept of evil as an independent realm. Along the way Duriez considers Rowling's view of magic and compares it favourably with the views of C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien.

Like any collection of essays, this book offers multiple points of view and varying degrees of depth. It is, however, an excellent example of what might be garnered from biblical and other religious scholars maintaining dialogue with popular culture. Far too often academic scholars, no matter how secular, become cloistered in academe, only to miss what their fellow citizens are saying, in media with much wider circulation, about the demonic (or just plain religious) world. This is an important book that is unashamed to ask what musicians, movie-makers, and novelists are saying about the demonic and how their views affect religious outlooks. As a relatively new field of serious research, such studies should be welcomed by anyone interested in contemporary religious thought. The one resource that might have been useful in analyzing horror films, which is regrettably absent from the bibliography, is Douglas E. Cowan's *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen* (2008). This is a second example demonstrating the close connection of religion and horror. Taken together these two contemporary studies offer fascinating insights into the popular hunger for religiously oriented evils that continue to haunt society.

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