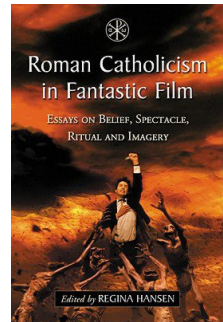


Roman Catholicism in Fantastic Film: Essays on Belief, Spectacle, Ritual and Imagery, edited by Regina Hansen

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Regina Hansen's collection of essays about Roman Catholicism and popular film is one of the latest in a long line of related offerings, such as: *Hollywood and the Catholic Church: The Image of Roman Catholicism in American Movies* (Lester and Barbara Keyser, 1984), *The Cross and the Cinema: The Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, 1933–1970* (James M. Skinner, 1993), *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Gregory D. Black, 1994), *The Word Made Flesh: Catholicism and Conflict in the Films of Martin Scorsese* (Michael Bliss, 1995), *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (Frank Walsh, 1996), *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940–1975* (Gregory D. Black, 1998), *Afterimage: The Indelible Catholic Imagination of Six American Filmmakers* (Richard A. Blake, 2000), *Through a Catholic Lens: Religious Perspectives of Nineteen Film Directors from Around the World* (Peter Malone, 2007), *Catholics in the Movies* (Colleen McDannell, 2008), *The Look of Catholics: Portrayals in Popular Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Anthony B. Smith, 2010), and *Hollywood and Catholic Women: Virgins, Whores, Mothers, and Other Images* (2nd ed., Kathryn Schleich, 2012).

Structure-wise, the collection consists of Hansen's introductory overview and twenty-one critical essays categorized under three main sections (with associated academic apparatus): *Section One: Marvelous Catholicism*: 1. "When the Saints Go Marching In': Saints, Money and the Global Marketplace in Danny Boyle's *Millions*" (John Regan), 2. "Blasphemy in the Name of Fantasy: The Films of Terry Gilliam in a Catholic Context" (Christopher McKittrick), 3. "Sacramentality Between Catholicism and the New Age in *The Lord of the Rings*" (Em McAvan), 4. "'The Devil Made Me Do It': Catholicism, Verisimilitude and the Reception of Horror Films" (Rick Pieto), 5. "'The Power of Christ Compels You': Moral Spectacle and *The Exorcist* Universe" (Alexandra Heller-Nicholas), 6. "Our Lady of Fátima and Marian Myth in Portuguese Cinema" (Paulo Cunha and Daniel Ribas); *Section Two: Uncanny Catholicism*: 7. "Music That Sucks and Bloody Liturgy: Catholicism in Vampire Movies" (Isabella van Elferen), 8. "'The Blood Is the Life': Roman Catholic Imagery in American Vampire Films of the 1930s" (Ann Kordas), 9. "House of Horrors: *Brideshead Revisited* at the Movies" (Kathleen E. Urda), 10. "Drying Blood: De-sexualization and Style in Paul Schrader's *Cat People*" (Marco Grosoli), 11. "Something in the Dark: Race, Faith, Horror and the Other" (Ralph Beliveau); *Section Three: Ridiculous and Monstrous Catholicism*: 12. "Reversing the Gospel of Jesus: How the Zombie Theme Satirizes the Resurrection of the Body and the Eucharist" (Jana Toppe), 13. "*Kin Dza Dza!*: Christianity and Its Transformations Across Space" (Margarita Georgieva), 14. "Murder Mystery Meets Sacred Mystery: The Catholic Sacramental in Hitchcock's *I Confess*" (Barry C. Knowlton and Eloise R. Knowlton), 15. "Catholic Moral Teaching as a Fantastic Element in *Gone Baby Gone*" (Brett Gaul), 16. "The 'Fantastic' Roman Catholic Church in Italian Cinema" (Victoria Surluga), 17. "The Satanic Saint in Maurice Pialat's *Sous le soleil de Satan*" (Christa Jones), 18. "Dark Imperative: Kant, Sade and Catholicism in Jess Franco's *Exorcism*" (David Annandale), 19. "Killer Priests: The Last Taboo?" (Shelley F. O'Brien), 20. "Mad Drunken Exorcists: The Decline of the Hero Priest" (Regina Hansen), 21. "Otherness in *The Others*: Haunting the Catholic Other, Humanizing the Self" (Anabel Altemir Giral and Ismael Ibáñez Rosales).

The volume's contribution to "the Catholic fantastic" (4) is unique but its title "*in Fantastic Film*" is misleading because in addition to "the 'fantastical' genres of horror, fantasy, science fiction and the supernatural" (1), it transverses the crime thriller (e.g., *Don't Torture a Duckling*, *The Bloodstained Shadow*), tragic-romantic drama (e.g., *Brideshead Revisited*), detective stories

(e.g., *Gone Baby Gone*, *Mystic River*), priest tales (e.g., *I Confess*, *The Boys of St. Vincent*, *Sous le soleil de Satan*) and hagiographies (e.g., *Fátima*, *The Call of Fátima*). Elsewhere Hansen muddies the issue by referring to *subgenres* within the nominated fantastic genres, and also non-fantastic genres with questionable hints of the fantastic, namely: “Contributors will explore the fantastic subgenres of horror, fantasy, ghost story, and science fiction as well as ... the fantastic element in otherwise realistic film” (11), “so-called realistic films” (2). Tzvetan Todorov’s categories of the “uncanny” and the “marvellous” fused with Sigmund Freud’s concept of “*unheimlich*” (3) are used to justify the film diversity and tripartite book structure. However, few authors actually refer to these categories and why a book title more reflective of the actual genre diversity was *not* chosen is puzzling.

Equally puzzling, many essays burst their own stated parameters. For example, Cunha and Ribas’s “Portuguese Cinema” explicated the 1952 “North American production of Warner Bros. Pictures” (86), *The Miracle of Our Lady of Fátima* (85–86). Kordas’s “American Vampire Films of the 1930s” explicated the 1943 *Son of Dracula* (120). Van Elferen’s “Catholicism in Vampire Movies” discussed Anne Rice’s novel *Interview with the Vampire* (100) rather than Neil Jordan’s film adaptation, whilst Heller-Nicholas’s “The Power of Christ Compels You” explored the Turkish film *Şeytan* (72–74). This was a trashy imitation of *The Exorcist* that de-Catholicised the original novel-cum-film by replacing the exorcising priests with a secular psychologist and a Muslim exorcist who repeatedly called upon the name of Allah to expel the possessing demon. Furthermore, a Jinn-headed paper knife replaced the Catholic crucifix in the original masturbating/raping scene, and at film’s end the saved girl, Gul, visited a mosque and met an Imam holding a book (Qur’an?), both of which she lovingly touched. Temporarily overlooking its non-Catholic nature, Turkish audiences understood the narrative trajectory against reception theory’s expectation that viewers from vastly different cultural and personal experiences will vary greatly in their reading of the film.

Some authors focused upon Protestant, but not Catholic, film directors, such as McKittrick who explored “Catholic views of sin, redemption, and free will” (29) in the films of Terry Gilliam who was “raised a Protestant” (40; see also 29, 30, 35–36) and who quoted from the “King James Bible” (35), thus turning him into a Claytons Catholic with “undeniably Catholic sensibilities” (40) although “it would be grossly inaccurate to label Terry Gilliam a ‘Catholic’ filmmaker” (39). Van Elferen’s “Catholicism in Vampire Movies” focused extensively upon Protestantism (99, 101–105,

109, 110, 111), whilst “Paul Schrader’s *Cat People*” by Grosoli acknowledged that “Schrader has been a Calvinist Protestant throughout his childhood and youth. So the rigid traits of his scriptwriting in *Cat People* should be regarded ... as the Protestant counterpart.” (151).

Despite Hansen’s claimed focus upon “Catholicism and the filmic art form” (14), particularly “Catholicism and fantastic film” (14), some authors devoted *more* space to novels rather than to their film adaptations. For example, McAvan’s *The Lord of the Rings* essay dwelt primarily upon J. R. R. Tolkien’s life and novels that itself “largely eschews explicit reference to Catholicism” (48), rather than upon Peter Jackson’s film trilogy, that itself was an imprecise “New Age series of films” (48). Urda’s “*Brideshead Revisited*” focused upon Evelyn Waugh’s book and the history of Gothic novels more than Julian Jarrold’s 2008 movie that itself was “quite literally, another story” (126). Kordas quoted Bram Stoker’s novel *Dracula* to justify a point not made in Tod Browning’s 1931 film *Dracula* (119); yet, both texts are sui generis and not necessarily interchangeable.

Pieto’s social-scientific study on “the relevance that Catholicism had on their [interviewees’] experience of possession films” (52) is an acceptable reception theory attempt to gauge viewer’s reaction to a genre of films, but it suffered methodologically from an insufficient and biased sample size (four females from six mixed gender interviewees [63]), and more worryingly, three quarters of the interviewees were *not* matched or were *weak/lapsed* Catholics! The religious status of Ashley was “none” (63), Karen was “other” and specified “pagan” although she was raised Catholic” (63), Audrey “was raised Catholic and is currently undecided” (63), and only Linda was “Catholic and ... still active in the Catholic Church” (63). Furthermore, Pieto confuses “horror films” (52), “possession films” (52), “satanic films” (55), “slasher films” (57), “other possession and religious subgenres of horror” (58), “the supernatural” (59), and “the monsters of the classic horror films” (61) as if unproblematic equivalents; yet, neither Norman Bates, Freddy Krueger nor Hannibal Lecter (60–61) from *Psycho*, *Halloween* and *The Silence of the Lambs* are possession films *per se*. Regrettably, Pieto did not specify exactly what possession films were utilised, apart from reporting that on several occasions the participants “had to leave the theater or stop watching the tape or DVD” (54); all of which seriously compromises the value of his study.

Production-wise, the book is marred by numerous and exasperating errors, such as: inconsistent, incomplete and incorrect film titles (e.g., “*Kin Dza Dza!*” [186] versus “*Kin-Dza-Dza!*” [186], “*Twelve Monkeys*” [40]

versus “12 Monkeys” [34], “Don’t Torture a Duckling” [257] versus “Don’t Torture the Duckling” [292], “The Bloodstained Shadow” [257] versus “The Blood Stained Shadow” [291], “13th Day” [294] instead of “The 13th Day” [92], “Dracula’s Son” [125] instead of “Son of Dracula” [120], “Boys’ Town” [196] instead of “Boys Town” [291]); printing and spelling errors (e.g., “S, eytan” [68] and “Seytan” [294] instead of “Şeytan” [73], “control is [sic; “his”] pedophilic urges” [271]); missing details (e.g., *Halloween* [64] in Works Cited omitted from the essay, “Geoffrey Cubitt” [236] and “McDannell” [269] in their essays are omitted from their Works Cited [and Notes]); misplaced references (e.g., “Reider,” “Denby,” “Walters” [3x, 27], “Tony Fawl,” “Ryan Ward” [2x, 194] within Notes but not Works Cited); incomplete information (e.g., “Horkheimer” [248] not “Horkheimer ... and ... Adorno” [254], absent performer details from *Exorcism* [254] and *The Sadist of Notre Dame* [255]).

Furthermore, the book contains conflicting release dates (e.g., *Zombie* “1978” [170] versus “1979” [182], *Dawn of the Dead* remake “2007” [173] versus “2004” [181], *House of Mortal Sin* “1975” [256] versus “1976” [266]); a wrong header (e.g., “Bibliography” [93] not Works Cited); missing author attributions in Works Cited (e.g., “Balbo, Lucas, et al.” [254]); an inconsistent reference format (e.g., “ed.” (40, 125) versus “(Ed.)” [151]); incomplete book titles (e.g., “*Hollywood and the Catholic Church*” [208] instead of “*Hollywood and the Catholic Church: The Image of Roman Catholicism in American Movies*” [79]); missing films from Works Cited (e.g., *Apocalypse Now* [19], *The Exorcist III* [68], *Pilgrimage to Fátima* [92], *Cat People* [140], *Rosemary’s Baby* [171]); missing Index items (e.g., book and film versions of *Interview with the Vampire* [100], *The Da Vinci Code* [137]), and phantom Index-nominated films (e.g., “*Song of Bernadette*” [294] supposedly on page 21 does not exist there). Disappointingly for a cinema textbook, there are no film stills to savor beyond the enticing cover image from the dramatic fantasy *Constantine*, which itself was *not* central to any essay therein and was only mentioned briefly in passing (270). Given multiple author favoring of *The Exorcist*, maybe a cover image from it would have been more relevant.

Overall, Hansen’s book is the proverbial diamond in the rough and despite the many annoying imperfections and boundary issues, there is still much more to admire than decry. The actual gamut of topics, the diversity of filmic exemplars, and the durability of the themes explored therein make it an interesting and thought-provoking addition to any celluloid religion or Catholic Studies collection, whether personal or professional, faith or film-

focused. Upon a close reading of the collection, readers will find many kinds of meanings and pleasures buried within that might inspire their own scholarly explorations into the emerging interdisciplinary field of religion and film. Hopefully, Hansen's future books will be just as exciting and eclectic but better proof-read.

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