
Review of Christopher Partridge and Eric Christianson, eds., *The Lure of the Dark Side: Satan and Western Demonology in Popular Culture*. London: Equinox, 2009.

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This collection of eleven essays—arranged into sections on music, film, and literature—stems from a 2006 conference on demonology hosted by the Research Centre for Religion and Popular Culture at the University of Chester and St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, North Wales. The editors' historical introduction traces popular demonology back to the Christian systematization of late Jewish apocalyptic demonology. While one might expect modern rationalism and empiricism to have corroded such belief, demonology remains alive and well in popular culture. The editors claim that this resilience depends both on continuing unease about the "dark side" and on the cultural usefulness of the monstrous other.

The first essay in the music section is Asbjørn Dyrendal's "Satanism and Popular Music". Despite the anti-Christian reputation of Norwegian black metal, Dyrendal argues that the music proceeds from more Christian standards than something like the popular "My Way", which more clearly represents the worship of life and self found in something like Anton LaVey's Satanism.

In "Between Hymn and Horror Film", Peter Mercer-Taylor traces Cradle of Filth's move from black metal's cosmic sense of despair to cinematic spectacle in the song "From the Cradle to Enslave". Postulating that (fictional) horror films are inherently less transgressive than hymns, Mercer-Taylor illustrates that while "From the Cradle to Enslave" begins with the conventions of hymnody (like those in Charles Wesley's "Lo, he comes, with clouds descending"), it soon moves toward the socially sanctioned sphere of fictional role playing. While the song is not scary, which is seemingly a distinctive characteristic of cinematic horror, Mercer-Taylor postulates that the song belongs to a type of horror cinema that privileges spectacles of cruelty.

In "When Demons Come Calling", Anthony B. Pinn finds the blues more willing to deal with the devil than Christian spirituals, which declare war on such evil. Using the iconic Robert Johnson as an example, Pinn also asserts that some musicians create Faustian personae in order to market their music. Working with the music of rap artists like Scarface and Snoop Dogg, Pinn finds a continuing acceptance of the dark aspect of life in recent African American music and a sense that the "bad man" may be best equipped to deal with such a world.

Charlie Blake's more theoretically oriented "Dark Theology" relies on Derrida and Bataille to situate the transgressive posturing of rock and roll in late or Gothic capitalism. Late capitalism makes a space for such music in order to market deviant and defiant identity to adolescents. But, Blake argues, such music also displays the rotten heart of late capitalism. In America, in particular, such music incarnates the betrayal one feels when the American birthright and promise fails. To do so, such music employs the imagery of expenditure, transgression, decay, and eroticism.

The first essay in the film section is William Telford's "Speak of the Devil". After making broad comments about film's portrayal of Satan (and including an appendix on such "roles"), he hones in on the portrayal of Satan in four Jesus films: *The King of Kings*, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and *The Passion of the Christ*. In each film, Satan tempts Christ, but the specific temptations vary widely from world sovereignty to sex. The first three films move increasingly toward psychological portrayals of evil, but Gibson's film returns an external, monstrous Satan and creates a metaphysical (or apocalyptic) conflict between good and evil.

In “Celluloid Vampires, Scientization, and the Decline of Religion”, Titus Hjelm charts a different progression to attack the prominent idea that vampires are mystical anti-heroes in an age saturated with science. For Hjelm, recent vampire films, like the *Blade* and *Underworld* series, testify instead to religion’s decline and to science’s increasing importance. In this new paradigm, the vampire’s origin is genetic, not demonic. The vampire drinks blood to survive, not out of some malevolent desire. The vampire’s nemesis is technology, not religious faith. While Hjelm admits that this transformation may stem partly from the move of vampires from horror to action films, he argues that the change also indicates the eclipse of Christianity.

In “A Man of Wealth and Taste”, Brian Baker finds yet another progression in the novels about Hannibal Lecter. Hannibal begins as the monstrous other but gradually becomes an image of the self. The serial killer as evil monster delineates both the acceptable cultural limits of the self and the fragmented, rather than monolithic, self most moderns are. For Baker, this imagery still belongs to Christian discourse about evil, although now in the vein of Romantic readings of the Satan of *Paradise Lost*, which see Satan as heroically resisting the monotheistic sovereign (God/self?).

While discussing a variety of popular fictions, George Aichele looks innovatively at the Christian systematizing of gods and demons in “Demons of the New Polytheism”. Using Jack Miles’ *God: A Biography* and Satan’s frequent role as a second deity in Christianity, Aichele argues that monotheism is an unhealthy interpretation of what might better be seen as a polytheistic Bible. In addition, he demonstrates that the popular fictions that he considers all display the fragmented realities/selves and plural discourses of postmodernism. He concludes, then, that polytheism (and the schizophrenia of Deleuze and Guattari) “fit” that world better than the paranoia of monotheism and modern notions of identity. For Aichele, the new postmodern polytheism, which includes simulacra of the Christian God, offers far more tolerant possibilities than imperialistic monotheism.

Larry Kreitzer’s “Scriptural Dimensions of Evil” examines five different films with some relationship to the book of Revelation: *The Omen*, *The Seventh Sign*, *The Prophecy*, *End of Days*, and *Revelation*. For Kreitzer, such films differ from other horror films because they employ three motifs from Revelation: timepiece, talisman, and tattoo. Timepiece refers to calculations of the end. Talisman refers to something, possibly an interpretation of Revelation, which provides believers with protection from evil. Tattoo refers to some visible mark discriminating between the forces of good and evil. These three motifs not only distinguish Revelation films from horror films generally, but they have also become self-generating cinematic motifs in that subgenre. In short, Revelation films are more closely related to other Revelation films than they are to the book of Revelation.

The final two essays comprise the book’s literature section. In “James Hogg and the Demonology of Scottish Writing”, Crawford Gribben argues that Hogg’s 1824 novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, which satirizes an extreme form of Scottish Calvinism, belongs to a larger fascination with demons in Scottish literature. Hogg’s protagonist meets his satanic *Doppelgänger* and moves into a violent antinomian life that leads to his suicide. For Gribben, such demonic themes are already present in Scottish “books of wonder” and continue in more internalized and secular forms in various works of Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Iain Banks.

Finally, Colin Duriez argues that the conception of evil in the Harry Potter novels is essentially Augustinian. The evil Voldemort was once, like Harry, an exceptional student at Hogwarts. Seeking immortality, Voldemort turned to evil. Evil, then, is a parasitic perversion of the good.

The question lurking in or behind all these essays, as the editors themselves suggest, is how Christian popular demonology is (see Aichele). Do demons and evil itself, as the last essay says, depend for their very “life” upon Christian discourse, whether that discourse is acknowledged or not? Similarly, is popular demonology simply something that one performs in order to market oneself in a world where Christian discourse remains a dominant force (see Dyrendal, Pinn, and

Blake) or in order to resist Christian imperializing, as the Romantic impulse (Baker) and certain essayists' quotations from Derrida (Blake) and Deleuze (Aichele) suggest? Or, as the editors suggest in their final introductory lines, do popular conceptions of evil now stand alone in a world that is all too familiar with evil (see Mercer-Taylor, Pinn, Hjelm, and Gribben)?

Regardless of the answers, popular demons remain, as they are in Christian discourse, something to be "outed" or to be desired. This ambiguous connection of abhorrence and desire brings one hauntingly close to Bataille's notion of the sacred (see Blake). Here, it becomes difficult to separate demons or evil from deities, whether popular or Christian. Perhaps, the real question, then, is not how Christian popular demonology is. Perhaps, to use the editors' own language, the real question is how iconic popular evil is.