
SATANIC PANIC!

THE DEVIL ON THE SILVER SCREEN

Week 3: After all it was you and me...

The English Devil

Though we might come to associate celluloid images of the Devil with American or Hollywood style productions, particularly with movies like *Angel Heart* (1987), *The Devil's Advocate* (1997), *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) or John Carpenters underrated cult feature *Prince of Darkness* (1987), perhaps, in some ways, Old Nick feels more at home roaming the length and breadths of the British Isles.

Bedazzled (1967)

"I'm the horn-ed one, the Devil. Let me give you my card." - This is how Satan announces himself to the unfortunate Stanley Moon in Stanley Donen's witty comedy *Bedazzled* (1967). Though the film would be a vehicle for Peter Cook and Dudley Moore - who, at the time were two of television's hottest properties - and would be made and set during the heady days of the swinging 60s, what separates it from other productions of a similar nature is its inherent dowdy Britishness. A reworking of the Faust story, *Bedazzled* mires itself in the sights and sounds of the ordinary. Though its fantastical set-up provides its backbone, it's the mise-en-scene and everything which happens between the magic and madness which is most fascinating.

From the grease-smearred Wimpy café, where Moon spends his days carrying out his tedious day job, to the grotty confines of his damp and dreary bedsitter, it never fails to capture a true picture of the age. For every flower power party, someone else was at home trying to unplug a blocked lav.

Moon, wonderfully played by Dudley Moore becomes not just a typical 'little man' – so abundant in Brit cinema - but also comes to represent the flip side of the swinging sixties fantasy. His life is so bleak and boring - his job is pointless; and his dream girl barely acknowledges his existence – that he decides to end it all. But if all this is not tragic enough, he even fails to get that right when the pipe he was trying to hang himself from breaks, flooding his meagre lodging space and his scant possessions.

This is when the Devil appears. Played by the incomparable Peter Cook – an impossibly tall, twinkly-eyed stick insect with impeccable comic timing, he immediately offers Moon the means by which he might swap out his miserable existence for something more palatable. At first, Moon, believing his guest to be mad, threatens to call the police. To which Cook dryly points out - *"You realise that suicide's a criminal offence? In less enlightened times they'd have hung you for it."*

Though it's far from perfect, with some of the humour now falling flat, what it does best is to offer a visually on-point view of the latter stages of the infamous decade. For as much as it became a turning point for many and is now revered as being the 20th century's greatest moment, at least when it comes to art, music and expression, for many, it was still a life of drudgery and disappointment.

Roman Polanski

- Born in Paris, 1933 to Polish-Jewish parents
- Moved back to Poland (Krakow) in 1936
- Poland invaded by the Nazis in 1939
- Forced into a ghetto
- Spent the next six years trying to survive the Holocaust

“Movies were becoming an absolute obsession with me. I was enthralled by everything connected with the cinema—not just the movies themselves but the aura that surrounded them. I loved the luminous rectangle of the screen, the sight of the beam slicing through the darkness from the projection booth, the miraculous synchronization of sound and vision, even the dusty smell of the tip-up seats. More than anything else though, I was fascinated by the actual mechanics of the process.”

Roman Polanski

The Apartment Trilogy

- *Repulsion* (1965)
- *Rosemary's Baby* (1968)
- *The Tenant* (1976)

All featured apartments as closed, claustrophobic spaces. They look at the relationship between the individual and ‘the other’

- *Repulsion* (1965) – Members of the opposite sex
- *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) – Religious order
- *The Tenant* (1976) – Socio-cultural group

The apartment becomes a metaphysical barrier between the individual and the outside world. It's often ineffectual. The peephole motif undermines our sense of privacy.

Rosemary's Baby and the New Wave of Horror

- Dealt with new themes
- *Night of the Living Dead* – arguably dealt with (failing) race relations
- *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* – the ultimate dysfunctional family
- *Rosemary's Baby* – the fear of starting a family in a new location, the pressures of modern marriage

Rosemary, like Carol seems also unable to reconcile her own inner ‘warring factions’. The pressure she feels to conform – marry, move to an apartment, give up her job, get married, get pregnant etc.

Goes against her need to retain her personal freedoms. For the first-time Polanski was making a film based on another person's material (Ira Levin's novel). Most of ‘the horror’ of the situation takes place in the apartment.

- The apartment in *Rosemary's Baby* acts as a physical manifestation of Rosemary's womb

Like *Repulsion*, the film contains a rape scene. But there is also another ‘invasion of the body’ as Rosemary's actual womb is taken over by other hands. The ultimate invasion of privacy.

‘The movie—although it is unpleasant—doesn't seem to work on any of its dark or powerful terms. I think this is because it is almost too extremely plausible.’

The New York Times

'Polanski shows an increasing ability to evoke menace and sheer terror in familiar routines (cooking and telephoning, particularly) ...Polanski has shown "his transformation of a cleverly calculated thriller into a serious work of art.'

The Monthly Film Bulletin

Nicholas Roeg

- Scenes and images arranged in disarranged fashion
- Often not presented in chronological order
- Challenging the audience to 'work out' or 'comprehend' the storyline

" (His films seem) to shatter reality into a thousand pieces" (and are) ...unpredictable, fascinating, cryptic and liable to leave you wondering what the hell just happened..."

Steve Rose (The Guardian)

Performance (1970)

"In getting drawn into their world of drug taking and promiscuity, the gangster confronts his own sexual ambiguities; the rock star sees in his innate violence something feral that he himself has lost."

Mark Cousins

"...the film pulsates with a sinister undertow of violence 'legitimized' in some way by its veneer of high living and rock music. The class war and the political tensions of the era take lethal shape in this brilliantly controlled movie."

Peter Cowie (Revolution)