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THE SCRIPT, THE SÉANCE AND THE CENSOR: WRITING NIGHT OF THE DEMON (1957)

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Abstract

In his memoirs, screenwriter Charles Bennett reflects upon writing the British horror film Night of the Demon (1957, Jacques Tourneur). He reveals his lack of *fondness for the film's executive producer, commenting 'Hal Chester, if he walked up my driveway right now, I'd shoot him dead'. Chester rewrote elements of Bennett's script to focus attention on the fire demon, and arranged additional* filming after Tourneur had completed directing duties. This much of Night of the *Demon's production history is well documented. However, drawing upon* extensive research at BFI Special Collections and the BBFC, this article offers an alternative reading of the film. Focusing on creative process, I utilize draft screenplays, reader reports and letters to piece together how the original writer envisaged Night of the Demon and how various institutional pressures impacted upon the final script. Crucially, by examining the séance - the act two midpoint - I provide a revisionist account of the film, one that draws away from the now-standard discussion of whether Bennett and Tourneur knew the fire demon would *be shown at the film's beginning and end. Instead, this a*rticle is a consideration of the power of storytelling to generate fear.

Keywords

Horror film, British cinema, screenwriting, censorship, spiritualism, script development

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Biographical Note

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In November 1958, British fan magazine The Picturegoer published a special Halloween issue on horror film. The genre was described as 'a mounting trend that Picturegoer hasn't been able to resist' and that 'Britain is enjoying or suffering… the biggest-ever box office bonanza in screen horror'.[1] In an interview with actor Christopher Lee, critic Sarah Stoddart explained that Dracula (1958, Terence Fisher) 'is staggering filmdom at the *world's* box office. Right now it's breaking the money-making records of every all-British film ever shown in America'.[2] Lee was enthusiastic proclaiming that horror is 'the best thing that's hit British film in years'. Yet in contrast, several pages later, 1930s star Boris Karloff disdainfully responded, 'we wanted to give them goosepimples. Nowadays the trend is to help picturegoers throw up their breakfasts'.[3] Elsewhere I have pointed out that in the 1930s, Gaumont-British aggressively marketed a clutch of British horror films to the US, including Karloff vehicles The Ghoul (1933, T. Hayes Hunter) and The Man Who Changed His Mind (1936, Robert Stevenson).[4] However, it wasn't until May 1957, with the release of Hammer Films' The Curse of Frankenstein (1957, Terence Fisher) that British horror cinema began to have genuine international appeal. Indeed from the end of the 1950s until the 1970s, British horror film came to be regard as 'one of the most commercially successful areas of British cinema'.[5] Box office takings did not correlate with critical response, however. Writing for the Observer in May 1957, C.A. Leujeune yelped 'without hesitation I should rank The Curse of Frankenstein among the half-dozen most repulsive films I have encountered', concluding 'I could not discern one moment of art or poetry'.[6] The following year, Derek Hill published his now-infamous article 'The Face of Horror' in Sight and Sound, where he complained about the 'new viciousness' in horror. Hill argued that such films are primarily interest in 'the flat presentation of revolting details' and 'an obsessive concentration on violence'.[7] Reviewers of Dracula variously commented that 'the film disgusts the mind and repels the senses,' it was 'a singularly repulsive piece of nonsense,' and 'a boring, tasteless horror film'.[8]

Due to the popularity of The Curse of Frankenstein and Dracula, most film historians mark the 1950s as the birth of the modern British horror film; yet Hammer's lurid re-imaginings of gothic novels, filled with violent excess and voluptuous female victims are the antithesis of X-certificate Night of the Demon, made by Sabre Productions for Columbia Pictures. Hill would probably approve of it: filmed in black and white, practically no on-screen violence and definitely no sex. When situated alongside its European contemporaries it is an anomaly, its various working titles of The Bewitched, and The Haunted revealing far more about its English ghost story origins than its chosen monster movie title. This article explores the distinctiveness of Night of the Demon, released at a time when 'the flat

presentation of revolting details' and on-screen violence were major preoccupations of filmmakers and critics. On one hand, the film is a story of haunting, insinuation and belief in the afterlife, loyal to its roots in the Edwardian ghost stories of M.R. James, yet on the other it offers moments of the outrageous 1950s 'creature feature' made with an eye for the American double-bill movie circuit.

Night of the Demon executive producer and credited co-writer Hal Chester substantially altered screenwriter Charles Bennett's script and arranged additional filming after Tourneur had completed his work. Both writer and director denounced the final picture and the film is not entirely cohesive. This much of Night of the Demon is well documented, particularly Bennett and Tourneur's disgust at the depiction of the fire demon. However, this article offers an alternative reading of the film. Given its development history, how does the film generate horror? What issues arise when the tone is the insinuation of the supernatural but the supernatural is then shown on screen? How is the horror created distinct from other films of the period? Does the success of grisly horror films during this period change how potential producers present the draft scripts to the censors? How do critics and the trade press respond to the finished film? Drawing on extensive research at the British Film Institute's (BFI) Special Collections and the archives of the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), this article utilizes draft screenplays, reader reports, memoirs, letters, critical responses and film analysis in order to understand how Night of the Demon was first envisaged by its original writer and how various institutional pressures impacted upon the final script. Ultimately, this article is an analysis of script development and screenwriting in the 1950s and the power of storytelling to generate fear.

'A loathsome and bestial thing…'

The film begins with the death of Professor Harrington (Maurice Denham). Harrington has been investigating Julian Karswell's (Niall McGinnis) devil cult, and Karswell has commanded him to stop. When Harrington refuses, Karswell casts a spell to summon a fire demon to kill Harrington. It is worth looking at this prologue in some detail. Using archival material, we can explore how the different contributors to the film (writer, director, producer) envisaged the sequence differently. This approach is influenced by Ian W. MacDonald's work on screenwriting poetics and specifically the 'screen idea', 'a label for the singular project that people are working on… the focus of the practice of screenwriting'.[9] It becomes clear here that the screen idea is very different for the various people involved in this production. The film begins as Harrington arrives at Lufford Hall (Karswell's mansion) late at night. He

begs Karswell for his life, but Karswell refuses to consider a reprieve and Harrington drives home through the woods, despondent and frightened. Pulling into his garage, he wearily turns off the car engine and begins to close the garage doors. Then he hears a strange and repetitive squeaking. Through Harrington's point of view, the audience stares deep into the darkness of the woods. A light emerges and a cloud surges towards the audience. Out of the cloud appears the demon: wings, horns, scales and claws.

Harrington screams and scrambles back into his car but his fate is secured in the following shot: as he reverses out of his garage, the camera focuses on two electricity poles in the foreground, marked by a sign 'DANGER – HIGH VOLTAGE' and 'DANGER – LIVE WIRES'. In his panic he reverses into the pole and the pylon collapses on him, darkness banished by a blazing arc of electricity. Harrington clambers out of the exploding car, onto the live wires, and is electrocuted. But his ordeal is not yet over yet: the demon has arrived. In a big close up, the demon stares intently into the camera lens. It leans forward, its mouth tipping open. Harrington goes limp and dies just as huge scaly leg and foot appears in shot. The demon then looks into the camera once more, grabs the lens, pulls the audience close and seemingly swallows the camera whole. Total blackness ensues. The sequence ends with a straight cut to Karswell at home. He stands at his mantelpiece calmly reading a newspaper. After the frenzy of close ups, quick cuts, explosions and unnatural death, this seventeen-second static shot is the antithesis of all that has occurred before. He somberly throws the paper on the fire. As it burns, it reveals a crucial headline: 'Karswell Devil Cult Expose Promised at Scientists' Convention'. The prologue is concluded with Harrington's death, while Karswell's next target – the scientist who intends to expose him at the conference – is made manifest.

The prologue has sharply contrasting moments of storytelling and visual style. The first half reveals Tourneur's trademark suggestive horror filmmaking, shown in Cat People (1942) and I Walked With a Zombie (1943) yet the second half concludes with big close ups of the monster literally devouring the audience. Other studies have focused on Tourneur's dissatisfaction with the finished film, but I want to examine the processes of writing and redrafting the prologue in order to better understand the development process of the project.[10] Bennett became established as a professional writer in the 1920s and 1930s through his collaborations with Alfred Hitchcock at Gaumont-British, including The 39 Steps (1935) and Sabotage (1936). He also penned Foreign Correspondent (1940), one of Hitchcock's first Hollywood films.[11] By the 1950s, Bennett acquired the rights to M.R. James' story 'Casting

the Runes' (1911) and adapted it as a screenplay, The Bewitched. However, he was unable to secure a production deal for it, until he met Hal Chester:

> I was over in England directing a series for television. The day before I was coming back from England, a guy by the name of Hal Chester turned up and said "would you sign this contract for Demon? Because I can set it up with Columbia – but I'll need your signature". So I was in a hurry to catch the goddamned plane, I said yes. When I got back to America, I learned to my surprise that Dick Powell's right-hand man had set it up for me to shoot the picture at RKO – with me as director. That was exactly what I wanted but, goddamit, I had signed this letter of intent before leaving England. So… this guy, Hal Chester, messed up the screenplay quite a bit. It was so good, that screenplay, that it couldn't be completely destroyed, only half destroyed… I think the job Jacques Tourneur did with what Hal Chester gave him was awfully good.[12]

Chester has also taken credit for the initial idea and the writing of the script, explaining he got the idea from 'Casting the Runes', and after 'I had already written, frankly, practically a whole script – a long treatment', he then 'ran into Charlie Bennett' and agreed Bennet could have first billing if Bennett could 'break it down into close-up, medium shot, long shot and all that'.[13] The final script is credited to Bennett and Chester, but to complicate things further, in 2002, writer and critic Tony Earnshaw interviewed the widow of blacklisted American writer and director Cy Endfield. She claimed that her husband was responsible for the rewrites.[14] This was confirmed in 2005 when Film Studies published an old Endfield interview where he revealed 'I did a substantial rewriting of Charles Bennett's script for Night of the Demon. I received no credit because of the blacklist'.[15] Brian Neve argues that The Bewitched (September 1956) is Bennett's original version and Endfield was brought in on the shooting script The Haunted (October 1956). However, the BFI holdings show Chester credited as co-writer on The Bewitched and, as we will discover throughout the article, this script is already much revised from Bennett's original idea.[16]

We begin to see that the idea of a badly treated writer, valiantly battling director, or even simply a troublesome producer, does not fully articulate the process of script development. No individual can be considered responsible for the decision making regarding storytelling. This is something we can explore this further with reference to MacDonald's theory of screenwriting poetics, which is concerned with 'understanding the actual practices of how [screenplays] are written, and the institutions, individuals and beliefs that lie behind them'.[17] In this spirit, I now turn to documents obtained from the archives of the BFI and the BBFC in order to examine the development process in more detail. In January 1955, prior to Chester becoming involved, a Romanian émigré producer Marcel Hellman was developing

Bennett' screenplay The Bewitched. He submitted a draft to the BBFC to ascertain its likely certificate. We do not have copies in either the BBFC or BFI archives of this version of the script, but we can ascertain some details from the script report. The censor Audrey Field is rather vague and confused about what the monster is, finally settling on a 'nebulous horrible dinosaur'.[18] The BBFC were clear: regardless of any amendments Hellman would make, the film would be given an X certificate. Hellman stopped developing the project and the following year Chester picked it up for Sabre Productions. The Bewitched shooting script is from September 1956, following Chester's input. If we look at the prologue, we can see how the demon is insinuated, not overtly depicted. On page thirteen, Harrington closes the garage door and looks into the woods:

> 44a HIS ANGLE
> The grove of trees bending, burning under the impact of the invisible thing from Hell, accompanied by the heavy sounds of a bestial, fiery breathing.
>
> 44b CLOSE ANGLE – (EFFECT) – THE GROUND
> As camera pulls back, huge cloven hoofed footprints churn the earth, leaving their mark in sulphurously smoking, burning imprints.[19]

Harrington screams and runs towards the main road, at the same time an electricity pole erupts into flames, leading to:

> 50 CLOSER SHOT. HARRINGTON.
> He runs from the figure… We see now the loathsome and bestial thing that moves upon its victim fleetingly, a figure coalesced of smoke and flame, not mindful that as it contacts the wires it is weathered in a halo of electrical discharge. The music mounts to a terrifying crescendo: then it stops with a crash as we
> FAST DISSOLVE.[20]

A revised shooting script entitled The Haunted was submitted to the BBFC the following month. The same section of the prologue concludes:

> 41. FULL SHOT HARRINGTON
> He is surrounded by the wires which continue to arc and crackle. We see now the loathsome and bestial thing that falls upon his victim – a figure coalesced of smoke and flame… we can only see it intermittently in the light of the arcing electrical charges.[21]

The fire demon materializes a little more, draft by draft. While it is merely 'nebulous' in January 1955, by September 1956 it is made of smoke and flame, a month later the vision is far clearer in the scene description: 'we now see the loathsome and bestial thing'. Having said this, the scene description remains written in fashion that suggests Harrington could be

imagining the monster, that the demon that we witness (predominantly through his point of view) is in fact the vision of a man driven out of his mind by fear, a terror generated by Karswell's curse. Regardless of how you read this scene, one thing is unequivocal: Harrington dies by electrocution, not a monster attack. Tonally, the question of the supernatural remains open to interpretation. Even with the explicit revelation of the fire demon in the October 1956 shooting script, the audience is able to ask: do we witness a man's madness made manifest, or does the devil really exist?

'Something's here, can't you feel it?'

Bennett has described himself as a 'first-class constructionist', that he does not consier himself the best dialogue writer, but 'the important thing – and Hitch always knew this – is construction':

> Construction is: a story starts at the beginning, it develops, it works itself out, and it works up to its finale. The great essence of construction is to know your end before you know your beginning; to know exactly what you are working up to; and then to work up to that end. To just start off and wander on the way isn't any good whatever… because you're wallowing.[22]

In his research on Bennett and Hitchcock, John Belton reveals that The 39 Steps is built around a three-act structure, relating to 'a classical odyssey', here 'the hero "dies", i.e. journeys to the underworld, and then returns home'.[23] Night of the Demon follows the same story pattern. After the Harrington prologue, Act One begins properly when protagonist John Holden, the American scientist who intends to expose Karswell, arrives in the UK. The inciting incident is when Karswell passes the runes to Holden in the British Library. We are then given a time lock – Holden reads the runes, which reveal he has 'two weeks' – he later discovers this means two weeks before he dies. Act One thus sets up the story: the death of Harrington, the arrival of Holden, the meeting of Holden and Harrington's niece Joanna, and Karswell passing the runes to Holden. Belief then becomes a key theme of the film. Throughout Act One, Holden remains an avowed skeptic, but Act Two challenges the preconceptions of not only Holden but the audience: it asks, has the supernatural truly entered the world of this film? The purpose of an Act Two midpoint is to provoke a major shift in the protagonist's knowledge or beliefs – everything s/he has thought before is changed. We will now analyse Night of the Demon's Act Two midpoint, Mrs Karswell's séance. Holden has started out as a firm disbeliever. However, when he stands on the doorstep of the small terraced house where the séance is to be held, he confesses to Joanna 'there are a few things I

don't know'. His seemingly limitless confidence finally begins to waver. The question is clear: will the séance make him a believer in the supernatural, or will he return to his former skeptical state?

Summoned by Joanna to 44 Harvard Terrace, Holden arrives by taxi and looks around, uncertain, the wealthy and successful American scientist lost in suburban London. Joanna beckons him over and they are forced to huddle together as they enter the narrow doorway of the house, welcomed in by their jolly host, Karswell's mother (Athene Seyler). They are shown through to the parlour, a busy room with densely patterned wallpaper and lace curtains. The shelves are crammed with statues and vases, the walls groan with pictures, and a large lamp hangs down from the ceiling, dispersing a little light. The rest of the room is in shadow, a darkness that deepens until the edges of the room disappear into a deep inky blackness. Everything about this room is late Victorian; stuffy, dusty and dark. The production design is faithful in spirit to The Bewitched, which describes the interior of 44 Harvard Terrace as:

> 200 INT. NARROW HALL AND FRONT LIVING ROOM – MOVING SHOT
> The hall, with its faded wallpaper and straight stairway, holds little except a hat rack and umbrella stand. The living room which leads off from the hall is unattractively Victorian – a round table, horsehair sofa, a potted aspidistra in the lace-curtained window, etc. An old-fashioned wind-up phonograph is on an ugly sideboard.[24]

The potted aspidistra is a clue here; as are the adjectives: dowdy, narrow, faded, unattractive, ugly. In Keep the Aspidistra Flying (1936), George Orwell tells the story of Gordon Camstock, a petty man who rebels against society, abandoning his job to write poetry and sliding inevitably into desperate poverty. In the second chapter, he walks home from his job in the bookshop to his 'bed-sitting-room' in Willowbed Road, North West London:

> Willowbed Road, NW, was not definitely slummy, only dingy and depressing. There were real slums hardly five minute's walk away… But Willowbed Road itself contrived to keep up a kind of dingy, lower-middle-class decency… In quite two-thirds of them, amid the lace curtains of the parlour window, there was a green card with 'Apartments' on it in silver lettering, above the peeping foliage of an aspidistra.[25]

The set dressing for Harvard Terrace mirrors Orwell's images, and demonstrates how both script and novel make a point about the relationship between class, space and money. The parlour is a world away Holden's modern (and expensive) Central London hotel suite and the scholarly space of the British Museum. Holden and Joanna look uneasy here, neither know

how or where to place themselves. Indeed, the relationship between money and space is a subtle theme throughout the text. On his first trip out to Lufford Hall, early in the film, Holden catches sight of the manor house in the country from his car. He asks Joanna, 'are you sure this is Karswell's place? I don't know what his racket is but it sure pays pretty well'. But Karswell and his mother never look comfortable there, as if they are playing at being landed gentry. It is not until Mrs Karwell welcomes Holden and Joanna into Harvard Terrace that she looks at home; her ease revealing her character's working class origins.

The medium Mr Meek arrives, smartly dressed in his suit, and sits at the séance table with Mrs Karswell and his wife. As he prepares to go into a trance, a shot rhythm is established: snappy, medium close up two-shots of Joanna and Holden watching, while Meek is framed in languorous, medium shots of around twenty seconds. The emphasis is clear: while we have the sceptic to contain the credulity of the séance, the focus is on the medium. It is unusual for a 1950s British film to feature a medium. Mediums do become more visible in British horror films in later decades, including Myra Savage (Kim Stanley) in Séance on a Wet Afternoon (1964, Bryan Forbes), Madame Orloff (Margaret Leighton) in From Beyond the Grave (1974, Kevin Connor) and Rosa Flood (Anna Wing) in Full Circle / The Haunting of Julia (1977, Richard Loncraine).[26] However in the 1950s, the only other example is the witch-like Nellie Lumsden in The 39 Steps (Ralph Thomas, 1959), a character based on Helen Duncan, who, in 1944, was the last medium to be imprisoned under the Witchcraft Act of 1735.[27] Furthermore, while British horror films over the decades have frequently included a medium, they have always been female: Mr Meek is the sole example in the history of British horror cinema. However, this tendency towards representations of women does not reflect the reality of mediums in British social history. Jenny Hazlegrove points out that the idea that in the nineteenth and twentieth century, mediums were more likely to be women is 'baldly stated…misleading', but more importantly notes that male mediumship was often associated with homosexuality, that 'male mediums were often viewed contemptuously as "cissies" or "jessies"', and that 'mediumship, whether an attribute of women or men, was signified as intrinsically "feminine" – the obverse of "masculinity"'.[28] The masculinity of Meek is certainly an intriguing one: he is married (his wife assists him sat the séance), yet he strikes a sharp contrast to Holden's alpha-male posturing. As his name suggests he is softly spoken, with a small frame and gentle demeanour. Here, Meek takes on the role that popular culture (if not social history) assigns to women: he lets the spirits in. Such scenes prefigure a tradition of possession in horror films from the 1970s onwards, such as The Exorcist (1973, William Friedkin), where spirits possess unfortunate women and girls, often with the most disastrous

consequences. Perhaps the choice of Meek as the medium says something about the gender roles performed throughout the film. The protagonist, Holden, is a strong and educated man with clear beliefs, his antagonist and dark opposite, Karswell, is equally well read and erudite, able to summon forces of black magic seemingly on a whim. In Night of the Demon, knowledge, power and access to the supernatural are coded as masculine.

The choice of male medium is just one example of the way this sequence defies audience expectations. The script constantly toys with the audience's potential belief in the supernatural, resulting in striking moments of horror. For example, the initial tone of the séance is comedic: Mrs Meek puts on a gramophone record, and with Mrs Karswell's accompaniment, she sings the traditional English song 'Cherry Ripe', a popular parlour ballad in mid- and late-Victorian England, which found renewed popularity during World War One.[29] The parlour ballad compounds the sense of time travel: the décor, song and séance leave behind the 1950s and occupy a liminal space, shifting between late Victorian England (the period described by Alex Owen as 'the golden age of English spiritualism') and the inter-war years.[30] And there is definite humour here; the scene feels ridiculous. As the September shooting script instructs, when the two women sing 'already the scene seems to be taking on a note of lunacy – the worn recording, the two women singing without expression… a scene out of bedlam'.[31]

The comedy ebbs as the singing concludes. Meek enters his trance, shaking and perspiring. In the silence that follows, Mrs Karswell turns and whispers to dubious Holden, 'something's here. Can't you feel it?'. The effect is an initial moment of wonder, but Meek's ridiculous outburst in the tongue of his Native American spirit guide 'Crimson Cage' quickly punctures the moment. Banality is compounded as 'Mr Macgregor' comes through and discusses the weather with Mrs Karswell. Everything is orchestrated; it's all a fake. But our disappointment does not last. There is a significant tonal shift halfway through the scene. In a high angle, medium close up, a new guest abruptly inhabits Meek: a lost, young girl cries for her mother. It isn't Meek's voice disguised, the pitch and intonation are completely wrong. The girl cries again, for her doll Frederica. The room is quiet. The horror has begun. This shift is precisely underscored in The Bewitched shooting script:

> 201 CONT
>
> MRS KARSWELL
>
> Of course you are – Mr Macgregor knows better than you do –
>
> But even as she speaks, Mr Meek is twitching again… and right now it is as if the room gets even darker. We are conscious that the coldly haunting little theme

melody is creeping in, hardly heard but definitely present. Suddenly Mr Meek's face is curiously blank, strangely young. A child's voice comes from his lips…

MR MEEK
Mummy! Oh mummy!...[32]

Then Harrington comes through, calling for Joanna. In this moment Joanna becomes a true believer. She stands up at the table, exclaiming 'it is my uncle! I know his voice!'. The audience attempts to catch up, remembers back to the prologue: is this how Harrington sounded? Is this his voice? Holden's disdain increases as Harrington begs him to stop pursuing Karswell; a sentiment heartily applauded by Karswell's mother. There is a solitary flicker of interest when Harrington tells Holden that Karswell has translated 'the book' (The True Discoveries of Witches and Demons – the book Holden searched for in the British Library). The engagement is also momentary though; our protagonist's interest is quickly lost as Harrington relives his final moments on earth. Meek screams 'it's in the trees! It's coming!' and wafts his hands in front of his face. Disgusted, Holden turns on the light and drags Joanna out of Harvard Terrace. In the play of belief, between characters and audience, the spell is broken.

This is a powerful sequence, oscillating between belief and denial, comedy and horror. It offers multiple moments when character (and audience) interpretation is key to understanding the message of the scene, oscillating between the supernatural and the mundane. It asks of the audience: what do you think? Is Meek a charlatan? Is Holden a fool to ignore Harrington? Is Joanna right to believe Meek? These all lead to the larger question permeating the film: is the demon real? Such is the power of the séance that it is one of the few scenes to remain virtually unchanged in endless script revisions. Whatever version of the story is consulted, the séance occurs in the middle of the film, and is only marginally altered throughout the production processes. In the transition from initial shooting script in September to revised and retitled shooting script in the October, the séance has only very minor alterations, which amount to a few less lines of sarcastic disbelief from Holden.

Having said this, the séance caused the censors – and relatedly, the producers - a major problem. By the 1950s, producers were encouraged to submit scripts of films prior to going into production; BBFC secretary John Nicholls explaining at the time that 'experience has shown that friendly discussion in advance of production has often saved the producer needless expenditure'.[33] Let us first move back to the pre-Chester era, to consider the problems arising from the script in its earlier form. When the Hellman version of The

Bewitched was submitted to the BBFC in 1955, the response, three days later was very clear: 'the only possible certificate for a film based on this script would be "X".[34] The accompanying reader's report provides a fascinating summary of the early version of the film: Joanna (here, Harrington's sister) is convinced that Holden is in trouble but he refuses to believe her, Holden attends the séance with Joanna and Mrs Karswell, 'where an insignificant business man called, appropriately, Mr Meek, is the medium through whom Henry gets in touch with Holden and screams in terror that he was killed by some terrible Thing which will get Holden too on the appointed day'.[35] The key difference is Holden is an excellent golf player, and is in England to compete in a Golf Championship. The appointed day of Holden's death is also the golf final, which the reader dryly notes 'which he, of course, being the American hero of this British film, has reached'.[36] The séance is a major concern:

> …Holden is not represented as the type to be driven to suicide by fear. Nor is the medium at the séance ever unmasked as a fake – indeed, the evidence is all the other way…I cannot suggest any way of making this story 'A'. Even for 'X', we do not want the picture (which hangs in Karswell's room) of the Black Mass, or any references to it. I am not sure whether we want the séance or not, but think we cannot object, provided the climax is not overdone (perhaps it is overdone in the present script).[37]

The things listed as most 'X' include the demon's pursuit of Harrington, the séance, the demon's pursuit of Holden after leaving Lufford Hall, and Karswell's death. The reader further comments 'but removal of these elements would still leave us with an "X" story' and crucially, 'if anyone is going to suspend disbelief, children will, the more so as it is not at all badly done'.[38]

The initial BBFC report on The Bewitched, written four years after the certificate was introduced, demonstrates the enduring concern over the impact of horror film upon children. Bennett convinces his audience to believe, and censors believed children were more susceptible to this enticement than adults. The film repeatedly evokes childhood fear: when Joanna and Holden visit Karswell for the first time he is dressed as 'Dr Bobo the Magnificent', hosting a children's party. When Holden displeases him, he conjures up a cyclone, terrifying the innocent children. Later, Joanna – a primary school teacher - points out to Holden, 'you could learn a lot from children. They believe in things in the dark, although we tell them it's not so. Maybe we've been fooling them'. Perhaps the Monthly Film Bulletin reviewer was more perceptive than s/he realized, when they commented that some of the film's sequences 'seem rather the product of a child's nightmare than an adult's

imagination'.[39] And it is no coincidence, that at the heart of the film, a lost and frightened young girl possesses Meek: it is a child that lets the horror in.

In 1951 the adults-only X certificate was introduced, its premise to allow those over the age of 16 'to enjoy more extreme elements of cinematic entertainment while protecting younger viewers from material for which they were not yet emotionally, or intellectually prepared'.[40] The child viewer was a constant in the mind of the censor: in 1957 Nicholls explained that adolescents 'often form a major part of the audience' and this fact 'governs the approach of the Board to censorship questions and justifies the system of the classification of films into categories'.[41] Throughout the 1950s there is also a broader public distaste for a relationship between children and horror. This is demonstrated in the aforementioned The Picturegoer special issue from 1958. The final item in the magazine reflects upon The Colossus of New York (1958, Eugène Lourié) and The Space Children (1958, Jack Arnold). These films are certified A and U respectively, but were marketed as horror films for children. The Picturegoer writer argues that 'making kids the go-between for ghouls is, frankly, a sickening idea… they leave a nasty taste in the mouth'.[42]

The problems with the séance did not end with the offer of an X certificate. The month after the BBFC's ruling, Hellman submitted the screenplay to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). The Production Code also had its concerns. MPAA's Geoffrey M. Shurlock wrote to Otto Klement (Hellman's associate) on 28th February 1955, to advise that the film was acceptable under the provisions of the Production Code. However, there were several instances of unacceptable dialogue and concerns over the Black Mass painting. What really troubled him though was as follows:

> We would like to direct your attention to the fact that you may very likely incur serious troubles with one portion of the script with other critical groups who will review your picture at the time of release. We refer to the scenes of the séance. While your leading man scoffs at the séance and will not accept it as credible, it seems to us that the manner in which the script is written leaves the credibility of the séance rather equivocal. If this impression should come through in the finished picture, certain religious groups will object most strenuously and you will have on your hands a considerable problem involving public acceptability.[43]

There are two issues here. First, while Holden does not believe, the scene is presented in such a fashion that the audience is able to believe, to choose the supernatural over artifice. Second, there is a strong concern that religious groups would take issue with scene. Ronald Pearsall points out that while spiritualism was not initially or primarily conceived of as a religion, its

opportunity to converse with the other side made this a possibility: 'astute clergymen recognized that spiritualism could offer something that nineteenth-century Christianity could not… If communication with the dead was possible, then surely those on earth would have access to sources which would give a full explanation of all mysteries?'.[44] Parallels are thus drawn between spiritualism and organized religion, both bound up in the belief of a world beyond our own. One suspects that if the séance was played as outright farce, the religious aspect would not be an issue: it is the possibility of its real power that makes it so dangerous.

Hellman took the MPAA comments and returned them to the BBFC with the hope of getting the British censors to reconsider The Bewitched's X certificate and grant it an 'A' instead. In the accompanying letter he comments 'I sincerely hope that you might be able to look at this subject differently now'.[45] However, the BBFC files then go quiet for eighteen months. In his extensive research on the film, Tony Earnshaw suggests that the BBFC's flat refusal to consider The Bewitched for an A was 'the kiss of death for Hellman', and the script then went round the Hollywood production houses for a long period.[46] A year later, Bennett signed the script over to Chester, and Sabre Films. Chester sent a much-revised shooting script to the BBFC in September 1956. The reader of the revised script is now weary: 'I have not the papers with me and forget how many times we have read this script, in one form or another', before noting 'mercifully, on this occasion, the makers are plainly aiming at an "X". The would-be funny bits… have disappeared and real black magic is unquestionably at the bottom of the all said goings-on'.[47] Here we can see a shift in the producer's intent. While Hellman wanted the more accessible A certificate, Chester was happy to increase the horror. Barry Forshaw describes Chester as a 'business orientated rather than creative' producer, close to 'the fairground huckster' Herman Cohen in Horrors of the Black Museum (1959, Arthur Crabtree).[48] Perhaps Chester saw the box office potential in the script, if it could be adapted to suit the American market. When Chester first began developing the project in 1956 he was arguably responding to the established successes of 1950s American monster movies such as Them! (1954, Gordon Douglas) and Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1955, Don Siegel). By 1957, he could perhaps finish the film with an eye to the international box office success of The Curse of Frankenstein.

The film was revised again, retitled The Haunting and the shooting script returned to the BBFC in late October for a final report. Reader Audrey Field was concerned about the increasing references to devil worship, and points out that 'the warning about horrific sequences should be strongly reiterated and reference made to the following in particular…the climax of the séance'.[49] Even with an X certificate, the séance remains problematic. If we

look at this page in the September script we can perhaps see why. Meek cries of fire, that 'everything is burning – No – Karswell – you promised' and the action description follows 'the voice ends in a wildly frenzied shriek – the shriek of death! Mr Meek is literally foaming at the mouth, his face covered in sweat. All are on their feet. Joanna shrieks in utter hysteria'.[50] Holden then shoulders hysterical Joanna out of the way, grabs Meek and yells in his face to stop. The characters are palpably out of control. According to the censor's wishes, Chester and Enfield must have then revised the scene for filming, as when Night of the Demon was submitted for certification in June 1957, the only reel cut was Hobart's examination at the conference.

As such, the final filmed version of the séance, while powerful, does not descend into an abject nightmare of sweat, foam and shrieking envisaged in earlier drafts of the script. What the censorship material initially reveals is Hellman's keenness to make the film an 'A' certificate. However, when it became apparent that the basic components of the film, in and of itself (which include the potential veracity of the supernatural, and the powerful séance) could not be sufficiently altered to reflect an 'A', he walked away from the project. The BBFC are clear on this, commenting on the original submission that 'the comic, batty mother and the time off for golf' do not reduce its potential to frighten, for it is a 'good horror story'.[51] The fate of Night of the Demon, and its eventual rewriting by Enfield and Chester then come out of the censors responses: clearly, Chester believed if the film was going to be X anyway, they might as well make it really X. And it is here in the film's final moments, that the fire demon fully materialises.

The shriek of the express train whistle

The conclusion of M.R. James' original short story and Bennett's original script are very similar. The protagonist and antagonist meet on the train, minutes before the deadline for the monster's victim being chosen, the runes are passed without the antagonist realizing, and the antagonist leaves the train. In James' story, Karswell gets off the Victoria – Dover train, unknowingly carrying the runes, boards the boat to France, and two days later dies in Abbeville. As noted earlier, the BFI and BBFC archives do not hold a version of Bennett's / Hellman-era script, only an early script report from 1955. However, in 2014, Bennett's son published his father's memoirs, inserting extracts of various scripts taken from the private family collection, including Bennett's original ending for The Bewitched. In this version, Karswell has been passed the runes and realizes his fate. He races down the corridors of the train, terrified, 'even as he passes the camera we get the weird impression that a HUGE AND

WREATHING SHADOW FOLLOWS HIM'.[52] Holden, Joanna and the police pursue him; he sweats and shrieks as he plunges towards the carriage door. Throwing it open, he tumbles out into the night, just as an express train appears travelling the other way. In an exterior shot, 'for a split second Karswell's body is falling… right into the path of the locomotive… then the express is racing past the camera…'.[53] The following interior shot returns to the train corridor, and Holden 'stops dead. The shriek of the express train whistle can still be heard, racing into the night… but the music has stopped'. Holden is in a dream; in close up he stares at Joanna. With a shaking voice, he states 'It's all over'.

With his keen sense of tension and action, Bennett reduces James' time frame considerably: the runes are passed and Karswell dies within two minutes, not two days. Bennett also reduces the location, remaining on the train for the climactic moment, making the horror more immediate and claustrophobic. Most importantly, he lets Karswell discover his fate, then visually depicts the man's blind terror through action. What Bennett really has taken to heart though is James' allusion. In her work on James, Fielding argues that he is a 'master of the unexplained supernatural', that 'his creatures are more difficult to categorize… often it is hard to say precisely of what the phobic materials consist, as they rarely take on material form'.[54] Accordingly, Bennett's ending is ambiguous: did Karswell throw himself in front of an oncoming train, or did the ethereal monster get him? Like Harrington in Night of the Demon, it is Karswell's own fear that destroys him.

While James and Bennett are in accord over this, the later versions of the script demonstrate a stark divergence in the screen idea; as the script leaves Bennett and is taken up by Chester, a different story emerges. In The Bewitched shooting script, Karswell jumps off the train and runs up the train tracks. At the same time the shadow of the beast appears and another train approaches:

> 343 MEDIUM SHOT. EXT. TRAIN TRACK (TRICK SHOT)
> […] The coalescing BEAST comes between the CAMERA and Karswell and starts after him. We can still see through it. As it goes away from the CAMERA we see its huge bulk getting more opaque and it starts to flame….
> […]
>
> 352 LOW ANGLE SHOT – THROUGH THE RACING WHEELS OF THE TRAIN
> … Karswell stumbles and falls as a flaming claw enters the shot and encloses his body.
>
> 353 LONGER ANGLE – THE TRAIN RACING BY IN THE FOREGROUND

> The flaming head of the monster raises above the train wreathed in smoke and sparks from the locomotive. In its extended claws is Karswell. The beast rears its head and lowers behind the train again. We hear a piercing cry of a soul in torment o.s. and on that note the music stops and all we hear is the train racing off into the night.[55]

The last two shots remain exactly the same in the revised shooting script from the following month. In Bennett's original script, the demon is never material. Night of the Demon's production designer Ken Adam claims he designed the monster but 'under protest' as he was in agreement with Tourneur 'we both felt it was completely wrong to show the monster because we felt the footprints – when you see steam coming from the imprints – were enough'.[56] Elsewhere I have talked about the idea of the screenplay as bricolage, suggesting that there is no single document that can be fairly described as the screenplay; rather it is ever-changing, flexible document composed of multiple drafts, voices and creative ideas.[57] We begin to get a sense of that here: the fragments from Bennett's personal archive reveal only a shadow, both the BFI first and revised shooting scripts depict a full monster, the production designer remember a script where steaming imprints signal the monster's presence. This illuminates not only the importance of understanding the development process as a powerful element of filmmaking, but also the problem of analysing the finished film as emblematic of the (credited) writers concerns and preoccupations. In the case of *Night of the* Demon, the material gathered here demonstrates how different the screen idea is for different creative personnel; how many drafts the screenplay must have gone through; and how, ultimately, executive producer Chester's decision was final. By the time the scripts are prepared to go into production, the demon has moved from ephemeral to corporeal, complete with piercing claws and a flaming head.

A number of critics have suggested that the revelation of the fire demon in the prologue undercuts potential audience pleasure in guessing whether Karswell really has dark powers.[58] However, I've argued that Harrington's death can still be read as an accident, and the point of view – reaction shots depict the demon as potentially emanating from Harrington's fevered mind. However, the end of the film is clear: the beast materializes, claws Karswell then picks him up and eats him – the lowering of the demonic head over the struggling body just as a train passes is the only nod to allusion. With such explicitness on show, it is little wonder that Bennett swore to shoot producer Chester if he ever saw him.

The veracity of the demon is then reinforced in Columbia Pictures' UK pressbook. In the 'Exploitation' section, there is a large photo suitable for foyer display. It is the fire demon

in close up, staring directly into the camera, accompanied by the slogan 'the horror of all mankind terrifies the screen!'.[59] The fire demon features prominently on all of the UK posters, with a small photo of Holden and Joanna beneath, fearfully clutching each other. Yet, if we look closer, in the end, perhaps the posters do hint at Bennett's original project. While the demon's face dominates, the tagline is always 'chosen…singled out to die…victim of his imagination or victim of a demon?'.[60] It is here that the heart of the film resides: despite Chester's alterations to Bennett's script, the first two moments analysed in this film - Harrington's death and the séance – is open to a reading sympathetic to ambiguity and allusion. Both shooting scripts comment on the way madness will allow a man to destroy himself, or, in the case of the medium, to fool themselves (and others) into believing in the afterlife. Yet in the film's final moments, when the demon captures Karswell, 'we hear a piercing cry of a soul in torment', and our final moment of horror comes from the revelation that black magic is real – in this fictional world, at least.

'First-rate British X certificate'

In the first issue of Journal of Popular British Cinema, Vincent Porter draws parallels between Night of the Demon and Curse of Frankenstein. He points out that they are both 'low budget productions substantially financed by major American film distributors (Columbia and Warner Bros respectively)', and they have similar running times and are directed by cineaste maudits, Tourneur and Fisher.[61] However, he then points to their distinct differences, referencing colour, style and theme. The point he makes here is that 'the horror genre was sufficiently flexible to facilitate the production of two films with significantly different messages about the use and abuse of science'.[62] However, Porter's idea needs some refinement. In 1957, the British horror genre is just beginning to establish itself, after a brief and unsuccessful attempt in the 1930s, and two 1940s films, Dead of Night (1945, Alberto Cavalcanti et al) and The Halfway House (1944, Basil Dearden). Therefore, it is less about British horror being flexible during this period, and more that the genre was embryonic. Indeed, as I will now demonstrate in the reception of Night of the Demon, what critics did understand as horror was very limited and entirely inflexible.

By 1958, the wider British establishment was intrigued by the earning potential of horror. Reviewing The Fly (1958, Kurt Neumann), David Robinson of the Financial Times points out that 'the current vogue in horror films would have little interest if it were not for their tremendous success at the box office', that their 'popularity is enormous… especially, it seems, among teenagers'.[63] This was confirmed in a business article in the same month, that

in a climate of declining cinema attendance due to the competition of television, 'a run of good box office films has helped – "horror" films, for example, consistently return large grosses, and in some cases record business, wherever they are shown'.[64] However, just a year earlier, the formulation of genre was not as established. Night of the Demon was first advertised in Kinematograph Weekly in October 1957, before being released in December. Positive reviews in this trade publication are crucial, as the reviews are 'for showmen'. Kinematograph Weekly embraced Night of the Demon, describing it as a 'supernatural melodrama', referencing 'occult and black magic' and summarising 'just the stuff to attract and chill the crowd. First-rate British X certificate'.[65] Here, Night of the Demon is not a horror film. Rather, one of its 'points of appeal' is the 'popularity of thrillers' (notably, it concludes that the 'séance scene and a phoney monster' are 'irrelevant'). This accords with the Columbia Pictures press release which variously describes the film as a 'supernatural mystery thriller and a 'macabre thriller'.[66] When Monthly Film Bulletin reviewed the film in January 1958, it was simply described as 'an essay in the occult', and reference made to Tourneur's Cat People.[67]. The demon sequences are considered weak, and the reviewer suggests the film is A certificate, rather than an X.

I have been unable to find Night of the Demon reviews in most of the major British newspapers, broadsheets and tabloid, including Guardian, Observer, The Times, the Financial Times or the Daily Mirror. In order to establish whether it was Night of the Demon that was ignored, or independent British horror films in general, I also conducted a reception survey of a further eleven independent British horror films released between 1957 – 1962.[68] All the films, bar Michael Powell's Peeping Tom (1960), suffered a similar fate to Night of the Demon.[69] The New York Times reviewed a handful, particularly those playing at the Rialto Theatre, but most lacked general press coverage. When horror films are reviewed during this period, they are usually by Hammer. Even the BFI special collections microfiche only holds one newspaper review for Night of the Demon, from the Sunday newspaper Reynolds News. The one paragraph review is enthusiastic, describing it as 'imaginative, original and convincing' but revealing confusion over generic categorization, listing it as a 'black magic horror thriller'.[70] The only broadsheet review is a devastating critique five months after initial release in the Irish Times, describing it as 'the lowest standard for horror films'.[71] Notably, only the Irish Times review - published some time after the rest of the responses - clearly categorises it as a horror film.

In February 1958 Variety previewed the film prior to its US release as Curse of the Demon. As was the case in the UK, it received an excellent trade press review. Variety hailed

it as a 'fine Hal E. Chester production flowing with eerie suspense' with 'fine possibilities' for box office exploitation. Notably, Variety distinguishes it from the other horror releases and the American 1950s B movie, 'in a day when most horror pix are grasping creatures from outer space', Night of the Demon, 'made in England', 'has the unique bonus of conjuring a mythical chimera-like creature from the past', lingering over the 'magic, hypnotism, séances, strange aberrations and profuse delving into the occult'.[72] Once more though, I have been unable to locate any other film reviews from the usual major newspaper resources including New York Times, Boston Globe or Chicago Tribune. Despite the lack of critical attention, throughout 1958 and 1959 Curse of the Demon toured across major American cities on a double bill with The Revenge of Frankenstein (1958, Terence Fisher). It premiered in New York City in July 1958 at Loew's Triboro Theatre. By August it reached the Maryland Theatre in Chicago, and by September, the Meadow Glen and Quintree Drive-Ins in the greater Boston area.[73] As in the UK, audiences are going to see the film, yet the critics are not writing about it.

Hutchings argues that British film critics' attitudes to the genre 'were to a large extent formulated in response to... horror films produced by Hammer in the last part of the 1950s', and this is played out in the reception data uncovered here.[74] Hammer's dominance was evident as early as 1958: in August of that year, a Financial Times critic noted 'a smallish production company, Hammer Films, has established something of a monopoly in horror'.[75] Hammer then impacts upon how horror is categorized. In the late 1950s, critics considered Hammer's approach 'a matter of sensation rather than artistry. The aim seems to be horrid rather than horrific images – monsters and corpses, and blood and loose eyeballs'.[76] Night of the Demon is not considered to be a horror film because Hammer's first horror cycle was explicitly gothic – Jonathan Olliver describes them as 'Gothic styled' - and Night of the Demon is not a gothic text.[77] Indeed, when reviewing Macabre (1958, William Castle) in August 1958, the Daily Mirror describes 'the recipe for horror film' as 'take a few freshly dug graves and plenty of coffins, season with swirling mist and simmer for ninety minutes', further adding 'spooky music, crunching footsteps… and hands sliding around tombstones' as 'standard horror procedure'.[78] British newspapers of the period thus acquaint horror with the showing of body parts and violence within a gothic context. This is confirmed in a 1959 review of Terence Fisher's The Mummy, where 'though there are enough thrills to keep you tense there's not enough horror to make the film unpleasant'.[79] In addition, critics are not yet making the connection between horror and the occult. Instead, the trade press and specialist publications explore the supernatural angle and focus on Tourneur as director. It might have a

suicide, a séance and a fire demon, but critics are far more interested in the film's pedigree as a Hal Chester or Tourneur production.

In conclusion, we can perhaps best understand Night of the Demon by returning to Karloff's disdainful statement given at the opening of this article: 'we wanted to give them goosepimples. Nowadays the trend is to help picturegoers throw up their breakfasts'. This film is on the cusp of a fundamental shift in the nature of British horror film. Tourneur and Bennett look backwards to Edwardian goosebumps and RKO chillers, and their supernatural insinuations reflect this; Chester looks forward to the (for Karloff), vomit-inducing American b-movies and the rise of the graphic British horror film, and his vision of the fire demon is a reflection of that. The analyses of shooting scripts and the finished film reveals this oscillation as a fundamental part of the development process, a continual changing in tone that arguably responded not only to the different production personnel but to the rapidly changing climate of filmmaking in Britain in the 1950s. I've explored how the film generates horror by examining Harrington's prologue, the séance, and Karswell's death, and have considered what these scenes can tell us about the nature of storytelling, filmmaking and horror. In particular, I've focussed on the power of spiritualism to generate fear, not only for the characters but also the audience, the censors and the critics.

Story development has been my primary strategy for providing a revisionist reading of this much-discussed film, and this article demonstrates the power of the development process. I've considered the screenplay as a form of bricolage, and explored how the meaning and nature of horror changes as revisions are demanded or enacted by numerous creative and institutional forces. It is worth acknowledging that development is a nearly always a difficult and painful process for all parties, but especially writers, and that as a collaborative medium, filmmaking will inevitably reflect the visions of multiple practitioners. While many may not approve of Chester's input, the film was successful on the American drive-in double bill circuit, and the finished product remains a fascinating and unnerving horror film. Finally, it is hoped that by focussing on scripts, this article can move away from the now-tired discussions of who-ruined-what in this remarkable and unusual film. Although, it has to be said, I have my doubts about this. Once a film is complete, it frequently appears hermeneutically sealed, often difficult to ascertain the specific input of an individual contributor, beyond reductive claims of auteurism. Perhaps one reason that the traditional readings of Night of the Demon remain so popular for historians and critics is because its multiple contributors and disparate influences remain evident within the surface of the text for all to see.

Acknowledgements

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