

How does the hollywood industry portray witchcraft in film essay sample



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Witches are traditionally viewed as the evil, ugly crone and it's the image that's engraved into our culture as an association to the word " witch. "

Barbara Creed identifies this image as the `phallic mother, motif perfectly illustrated in the long fingers and nose of a witch. ' 1 Nowadays, film is like what folktales and fairytales were in the past, 2 playing on the fear and phobias of the audience at the time. Hollywood has examined the effects of change, responding to the newly determined narratives of social, cultural and philosophical thought and redefining the witch as the ' monster'.

I will discuss how Hollywood portray these witches, with reference to four films; ' The Witches', ' The Craft', ' Witchfinder General' and ' Blair Witch Project', stating to what extent they reflect my definition of witchcraft. My own views growing up were similar to the ones above. As a young child, I believed witches were old, evil and ugly. The reason is the traditional view being portrayed in literature and film. Teenage years, I began to believe people who wore black, and looked ' moody' were witches. As an adult, I know this is not true.

Here, we can see the difference from being a small child, to being a teenager and the changing view on witchcraft. Hollywood has adapted to these changes, portraying witchcraft differently in films, which is also affected by the audience they want to attract. The ' Witchfinder General' film plays on the history of witchcraft, how it was treated around the time of the English Revolution, playing on the ignorance and fear of normal people caused by revolution. I believe this movie is affected both by the date it was made, and the audience it wished to attract.

Made in 1968, it is in a different culture to the now, popular 'teenager' market. They attracted more of the older generations. I find it interesting this film, although it is suppose to be historical, Hollywood still 'glamorised' it up, with the typical soldier/ hero in it, with love interests and good versus evil. Witches are usually always over dramatised, but in this film they are more subtle, using almost ordinary women as witches, portraying the historical context of the English Revolution. This film does not portray witches in a bad light; just showing the history of England.

It portrays the injustices made by our ancestors, which I believe is good. The date this film was made meant it would not be so popular nowadays, as it is not a 'typical' Hollywood film, it does not play on the fears of the audience as most of the new Hollywood films do, such as 'Blair Witch'. I think it is one of the best made witchcraft films by Hollywood, as although it has got the typical soldier/hero plot to it, it still manages to portray a true historical belief and view of witches. Also, the Witch finder himself; Michael Hopkins is important to the film, not just witches.

I find it interesting the Witch finder is portrayed in a bad light; i. e. taking bribes. Maybe this was purposely done to show witchcraft in a better light, differing from more modern films, where the witches are portrayed as the evil. In regards to how it reflects my own views, I think it is very similar. Studying history, I know this was what happened at the time; cruel people, like Hopkins, played on the normal, countryside people's ignorance and fear caused by the English revolution. Like the beginning of the film shows, women, (as it mainly was back then), even with no evidence, were seen to be a witch and put to their deaths.

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As cultural and social thinking changed, so did Hollywood. A new 'teenage' market came about. Hollywood had to glamorise their movies more, playing on the fear of the audience, rather than informing them of history. This is especially seen in the 'Blair Witch Project'. The Blair Witch Project is more of a psychological horror, rather than physical gore. Based around a group of three students who hear of an old tale of a witch in the woods, they set out with a video camera, talking to people of the town and hearing stories of the Witch; she has 'thick, black hair on her arms and body covered like fur of a horse.

Already we see Hollywood taking the stereotypical view of the witch; grotesque woman, able to enchant man. The reason the film was popular was because Hollywood used the fear for the partially and socially constructed known of the witch, but never showed her. It plays on the audience's imagination; the pre-defined images in their head, one of a grotesque and evil witch. It still shows Hollywood portraying a stereotypical view; voodoo twigs being planted, fulfilling the supernatural elements modern audiences crave and confirming the typical old view society fears.

Seen with spells and tales of the witch killing children. Its success shows people still fear witchcraft, which I believe is because they do not see the witch, imagining her for themselves. Hollywood portrays witchcraft as fearful and wicked, similar to the majority of films with 'good versus bad'. An exception is in 'Practical Magic', which portrays some of the witches in a good light. The film does reflect some of my own interpretation of witchcraft which I heard through storybooks and growing up; witches are evil, killing children and enchanting men.

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Yet, this follows the stereotypical view and nowadays I believe witches are more natural and not evil. Another teenage marketed film is 'The Craft', where Hollywood adapted to include new views of witches; young, teenage, rebellious girls, dressing in black, going against the old, traditional views of grotesque old ladies. Witchcraft is portrayed in more detail than in other movies; with practice rituals in the wood, taking a more of a natural approach. This reflects more of the modern age thinking of witchcraft, one of nature.

However, it still portrays stereotypical views of witchcraft, like one of the girls, Sarah, performing a love potion spell. This was to attract the teenage market and help 'glam' up the movie, as Hollywood always does. Containing the stereotypical view; good versus evil, it portrays the witches, as in all the movies, as outcasts. The movie contains a story about three teenage girls who are bullied at school and want to rebel against their classmates, but they do not have enough 'magical' powers. However, a new girl, Sarah arrives and she has strong, magical powers. With her help, they create spells to get back at their tormentors.

Here, we see Hollywood taking witchcraft into a typical teenage story, with love and revenge. The ending of the film is predictable for Hollywood, overblown and evil girl dying. Interestingly, the only girl with real magical powers is Sarah, who is portrayed as a natural witch and the only one portrayed as good. I think this reflects more to my own views now, as an adult, than other movies, linking more to the 'wicker' witch, using nature for goodness. Also, the typical idea of witchcraft; you get back three times what you give out in regards to spells is demonstrated.

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Although some may say it is a stereotypical view, it does reflect my own, personal beliefs. Overall, I think Hollywood portrays witchcraft quite well in 'The Craft', in regards to the natural witch being shown as good. But, it still portrays stereotypical views of the witch, i. e. an outcast and all girls. It has adapted to the changing views on witchcraft, taking a different angle to other movies, such as 'The Witches'. Hollywood portrays witchcraft in other movies differently, taking the light-hearted approach, seen in 'The Witches'. They portray a comical side of witches, based on the book by Roald Dahl.

Its audience is different to the other films; being for younger children.

Hollywood uses the stereotypical view of witches; ugly, old women who are scary, making them bald with warts. They are portrayed in a bad light, but in a comically. Like the other movies, it has a good versus evil debate, with the 'good' boy, Bruno, winning. Hollywood portrays and plays on the stereotypical views of witchcraft young children have. They show witches using spells, hating young children (as seen in the Blair Witch project) and turning people into animals, when the Grandma was turned into a mouse.

Although I think Hollywood portrays witches in a bad light in this movie, they are only being very stereotypical as they are using the comical value, rather than fear to attract audiences. They realise the traditional views of witches and play on this point, exaggerating it to attract people. Although it does not reflect what I interpret witches are now, it does reflect what I believed when I was younger, the stereotypical view shared by nearly all young children; grotesque, evil ladies and use spells. These movies have one thing in common; they all portray women as the witches.

Witches are a female, horror paradigm⁴, with power over men, i. e. in the Blair Witch and The Craft. This does not reflect my own view, as I know there are male wicker witches. It shows Hollywood is once again taking the stereotypical view of witchcraft. The majority of movies show witches as evil, although not in the 'Witchcraft General' (in fact injustices against them are seen). Hollywood has adapted to the changing view of society, playing on the views of the audience they want to attract, by using fear to more light-heartedness.

While they do not reflect what I view witchcraft is now, they do reflect past beliefs I had. This is due to cultural changes, of more understanding of different religions and beliefs. Although I do not think we can blame Hollywood extremely for using the stereotypical views of witches as it only reflects what the audience believes at the time, I do believe they could make more movies in regards to witchcraft not being evil, showing a more natural side to witchcraft as they tried in 'The Craft'.

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