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Hellions

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Hellions

Abstract
This is a film review of Hellions (2015), directed by Bruce McDonald.

Author Notes
Jodi McDavid is an instructor in Folklore and Gender & Women's Studies at Cape Breton University. She earned her BA at St. Thomas University (New Brunswick) and her MA and PhD from Memorial University of Newfoundland. Her PhD dissertation was on anticlericalism in folk and popular culture. Her current research interests include vernacular religion, digital culture, the folklore and popular culture of children and adolescents, and gender and women's studies.

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In *Hellions* seventeen year old Dora finds out that she is pregnant on Halloween. The film has some familiar tropes of the horror genre; the setting is an isolated rural farmhouse, the boyfriend dies, it takes place on Halloween, and there is the recurrence of masked characters at the door (who begin their bombardment as common trick-or-treaters but escalate into a terrifying presence). Some of the demons dress in garb not dissimilar from traditional “mummers” costuming. The director does a good job of making the mundane appear frightening.

The main character, Dora (Chloe Rose), is an intrepid, clever heroine, which is a welcome departure from traditional horror films. Although several people attempt unsuccessfully to rescue her, she ultimately fights for her own soul and that of her child.
The “hellions” are small child-sized demons. The director manages to make them terrifying but portrays this with minimal special effects. We’re shown that the demons are humanoid but left to guess at their facial features. They live underground and seem to only make their presence known during Halloween every generation when they surface to claim an infant from a pregnant mother. The costuming further drives home the point that this is about a battle between good and evil. Dora dresses for Halloween in a white dress, angel wings, and a tiara, and this is what she wears throughout the film in her battle against the demons. There is imagery which draws upon pseudo-pagan traditions as well, with references to a “blood moon,” sacrifice, and a large focus on the harvest. Traditional beliefs creep into the film such as the idea that salt can be used against evil.

There’s juxtaposition in the film between the medicalization of birth and traditional practice, with a focus on the hospital and doctors as assisting, with success, in pregnancy, and with the rural homebirth being threatened by demons. To use a Freudian lens, one might say that Dora is not prepared to be a mother and her experience might be some sort of mental breakdown. The meaning of some parts of the film is oblique which makes it more compelling. Is the girl having hallucinations brought on by the trauma of finding out she is pregnant? Or have these demons come to snatch her baby? It’s open for interpretation.