

*Penda's Fen* is a 1974 film about an English teen in the 1950s whose coming-of-age narrative is intertwined with surreal visions of religious terror and ancient mystery, as Stephen, the main character, is caught between nationalist fervor and the discovery of what simmers, unseen, beneath it. On each side are guides, opposed to each other, hoping to lead Stephen towards them: the Mother and Father of England, scouring the earth in the name of God, and the titular King Penda, the long-buried pagan king whom Stephen awakens. This triangular conflict is the heart of the film, but its relevance spreads beyond its immediate context through the character Arne's "technocratic angel of death"<sup>1</sup>: the film's secondary antagonist. Through a dual historical analysis of contemporary evangelical movements and medieval religion, an interpretation of Walter Benjamin's concept of aura, and modern internet critical theory, I will argue that it is this "angel" whose shadow has permeated modern times as the enemy of a free society. I will then place the film in this historical context and explore how its subversive use of dissonant, dichotomous imagery (between purity and dirtiness, light and darkness, and past and present) keeps it relevant in today's issues of technocracy and the digital panopticon.

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<sup>1</sup> *Penda's Fen*, 00:16:33