

TRIAGING THE ACADEMY: TORCH-BEARING FOR EUROHORROR IN A SPONTANEOUS GENERATION

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PREFACE

Outputs included in the appendix are all by prior publication and form a body of relevant work to this PhD from 1989 - 2008.

ABSTRACT

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This study gives attention to a timeline and the development of critical scrutiny applied to European horror films, especially as defined by the term, Eurohorror, and their symbiotic relationship with European art house cinema. In adopting the methodology of a cultural historian, as defined by James Chapman, together with elements of a vernacular scholar, as defined by Thomas McLaughlin, and establishing the previously limited range of critical coverage of such films, I reflect upon how my own published work in this area, primarily from 1993 - 2008. Examples of my influence on the scholarly discourse surrounding Eurohorror films, which helped bridge the gap between fan writing and scholarship, thus enabling academic researchers to embrace Eurohorror film study, underpins the thesis, together with my dual contribution in this field both as writer and publisher.

By discussing the spontaneous generation of film critics whose discourse revolved around not what films they had seen, but rather, what films they had been *denied*, I scrutinise the increasing availability of films on video, together with the growth in film fanzines, to highlight an unholy trinity of pivotal directors; Mario Bava, Jess Franco and Jean Rollin. In addition, I explore the correlation between Eurohorror and European arthouse films.

Taking Matt Hills (2002) discourse revolving around fan academics and academic fans, Jeffrey Sconce's concept of paracinema (1995) and its increasing status in academia, together with both David Sanjek's (2000) observations on fanzine culture and Joan Hawkins (2000) theories on Sleaze Mania, Euro-Trash, and High Art, I integrate my own earlier published work with those of my contemporaries and illustrate a legacy as to how my own work is repeatedly used to progress the narrative today.

I argue that by being in the vanguard of early English language writers, recognising the importance of these hitherto neglected films, this has actively informed and influenced subsequent writers and extended the scholarly discourse surrounding the European horror and European art house genres. Where once such films were marginalised, they are now placed firmly front and centre and afforded due critical consideration. That these films are now vaunted rather than vilified, and subjected to the highest academic scrutiny, reveals a comprehensive re-evaluation that indeed signifies a triaging of the academy.

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explain my own contribution in raising the profile and understanding of European horror cinema, by occupying a crucial position as both writer and publisher within the fanzine/prozine zeitgeist during the late 1980s to early 1990s. By writing and publishing in an area of fan culture which highlighted hitherto neglected films, I was a protagonist in a movement that formed part of the British cultural history of horror film writing. Of equal importance, I was also part of a movement which helped to instigate the transition, and bridge the gap, between fan writing and academic writing. As a fanzine editor, publisher and contributor, I will demonstrate how I helped to drive this discourse. I will detail throughout this thesis how my own contributions have advanced scholarship in this area of horror film studies, using close reference, together with direct influences. Using “A Methodology in the Madness” chapter to define the often contested and fluid terms used in horror film studies, including Eurohorror. Upon reflecting on my work, I detail how I have predominantly used the methodological approach of a cultural historian, aligned with elements drawn from that of a vernacular scholar, I then outline the context of such films in analysing the unique production and distribution framework such films inhabit within the film industry. In conclusion, I then explain the formative influences that sparked my passion for film, aligned to an independent, punk styled attitude. With my “Literature Review” I examine the development of Eurohorror film scholarship up to 1993, when the majority of my own writing began being published. I assess how such scholarship develops from a cultural historian approach, to a more nuanced, academic analysis, opening up the discourse on the psychoanalytical and sociological aspects of horror films, for instance. I duly note the paucity in discussion of Eurohorror films up to this period, and using my writing to shine a light on such films and illustrate my influence, underpins this thesis. The “Fanzines and Academic Discourse” chapter is used to discuss the growth and importance of fanzines such as my own *Necronomicon*, and detail how such publications helped to develop an increase in the academic scrutiny of Eurohorror films, especially by Hawkins, Hills, Sanjek and Sconce. I then discuss key Eurohorror filmmakers from Italy, Spain and France. Therefore, my Bava chapter notes the importance of the ancient and modern colliding in his films and how my writing has influenced others. My Franco chapter discusses how my writing on medical obsession/superficial beauty, Freudian themes and oneiric sequences in Franco’s films are extended by other writers. In my Rollin chapter I illustrate how my early writing on the painterly imagery, non-linear narratives and existential aspects of Rollin’s vampire and zombie characters are developed by other writers. In addition, I detail how my wide-ranging interview with Rollin in 1996 has been extensively referenced, and influenced, other scholars. I then discuss the symbiotic relationship between Eurohorror films and European arthouse film in the “Horror and Arthouse” chapter. I highlight the influence on other scholars of my psychoanalytical reading of *Profondo rosso* (*Deep Red*) (1975), my existential reading of *Dellamorte Dellamore* (*Cemetery Man*) (1994), and how spatial concerns and architecture affect zombie films, including *[REC]* (2007). I use the Conclusion to summarise my contribution to, and influence on, the developing discourse on Eurohorror today and how it is

now highly regarded by academics, in comparison to when I first began writing. I also evidence the legacy of my own writing as even now, new publications such as *Cin Sado Noir* (Melanie Dante, 2021) are emerging, inspired by my own *Necronomicon*.

1. Methodology to the Madness

There are a wide variety of often contested terms which fuel the discourse for horror film writing. To unpack this, and in order to identify the terms I will be using in this thesis, I offer the following definitions:-

Eurohorror/European Horror - the very subject that underpins this thesis. In Peter Hutchings' "Putting the Brit into Eurohorror: Exclusions and Exchanges in the History of European Horror Cinema" (2016), he quotes Steven Jay Schneider's definition from *100 European Horror Films* (2007) that, "Eurohorror is a term used by reviewers and fans and fans who are reviewers - to refer to post-1960 horror cinema from Italy, France and Spain and to a lesser extent, Belgium, Germany and other European nations" (Schneider 2007, p.xx). This is the closest definition I have seen and feel this applies most accurately to my own writing. Schneider's definition and Hutchings development of it, sees Eurohorror as a *concept* rather than being anchored to a geographical location for film in this category, sharing some nationally specific characteristics and tropes, and yet these same identifiers also transcending national boundaries. In *Schneider's* book, Hutchings notes how the "European Horror" films of the title are replaced with the term "Eurohorror" inside, so immediately it is apparent how fluid these terms are. Schneider offers his own additional definition of Eurohorror films as featuring "a greater degree of explicit violence, sexuality and transgressive, alternative imagery than earlier examples of their form" (Schneider 2007, p.xxi). Similarly, Ian Olney's *EuroHorror: Classic European Horror Cinema in Contemporary American Culture* (2013), conflates the term Euro Horror with European Horror. In *Perverse Titillation: The Exploitation Cinema of Italy, Spain and France, 1960-1980* (2011), Danny Shipka uses his own term, Eurocult films, for which Shipka excludes British and American films as for him, they are so intrinsically linked by history, language and themes, that they become interchangeable. With Shipka contending that British and American films rely on familiarity of themes to engage with their audiences, the opposite is true of Eurocult films which by nature, "skew[s] the audiences by bending traditional narrative models normally associated with horror" (Shipka 2011, p.10). Shipka also argues that Eurocult films deconstruct "sexual, racial, and gender identities that allow audiences to adopt multiple viewing positions" (Shipka 2011, p.10), as Olney also argues.

I would agree with Hutchings contention that Eurohorror as a concept and form of film criticism, is almost entirely generated by British and American critics and fans, as opposed to continental Europeans. Therefore, Eurohorror can be considered a British/American concept. The exotic nature of Eurohorror in comparison to the apparently more prosaic nature of domestic (by which I mean British and American), output, is discussed by Hutchings, who asserts that "the attractiveness of Eurohorror for these critics seems to be that it offers experiences not found in what are usually presented as conservative or predictable mainstream forms of entertainment that are often associated with Anglo-American product" (Hutchings 2016, p.6). In a similar vein, Hutchings contends that Eurohorror can be considered as a concept that is "predicated on there

being a distance between the films concerned and the home culture of critics interested in these films” (Hutchings 2016, p.7). Conversely, the reception of Eurohorror in its native countries is entirely different where these films are considered more prosaic, as opposed to exotic in nature. Hutchings cites the example of the Italian *Giallo* films - perceived as extravagant by Eurohorror critics and yet, regarded as part of a history of crime thrillers in Italy. Hutchings does however, acknowledge that the Eurohorror approach has been “productive and effective in bringing to critical attention a wide range of hitherto obscure films” (Hutchings 2016, p.7). This is why I have deliberately excluded any detailed discussion of British, (and American) horror films from this thesis, as I would argue that British horror films, especially Hammer Horror films, have already been extensively analysed by other critics, including Peter Hutchings’, *Hammer and Beyond* (1993: Manchester University Press), Denis Meikle’s *A History of Horrors: The Rise and Fall of the House of Hammer* (2008: Scarecrow Press), Victoria Grace Walden’s *Studying Hammer Horror* (2016: Liverpool University Press) and Howard Maxford’s *Hammer Complete: The Films, the Personnel, the Company, A-Z* (2019: McFarland & Co. Inc). Even though I consider myself a fan of Hammer Horror, particularly their gothic horror films, I would argue that it is not so much a case of familiarity breeding contempt, but rather a case of frequent television airings perhaps unfairly giving one a more jaundiced view of these films, in comparison to the more obscure Eurohorror films, which did indeed appear more exotic and interesting to me.

What does blur the lines however, as Hutchings notes, is the apparently symbiotic relationship between British horror and Eurohorror. The success and influence of Hammer Films gothic movies from *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) onwards, aided the international recognition of British actors such as Christopher Lee, together with others including Robert Flemyng and Barbara Steele, for example. In addition, were the Anglicised pseudonyms that directors of Eurohorror used - thus Mario Bava became John M. Old, Riccardo Freda became Robert Hampton and Antonio Margheriti became Anthony M. Dawson. British directors such as Terence Fisher, Freddie Francis and Michael Armstrong, all worked in Germany, whilst Michael Reeves short-lived career began with *Revenge of the Blood Beast (The She Beast)* (1966), made in Italy. Making the opposite journey and making films in the UK, were continental European directors including Jorge Grau with *No profanar el sueño de los muertos* (1974) and José Larraz with *Vampyres* (1974) and *Symptoms* (1974).

Given that most of Hammer’s gothic film cycle was set in Continental Europe, in effect, “anticipating the ways in which critics and fans subsequently responded to Eurohorror films in terms of distance, strangeness and mystery” (Hutchings 2016, p.14), serves to reinforce this symbiosis. It is also what Sue Harper alludes to in discussing Hammer Films using a foreign milieu “as a means of signifying an unknown geographical space where myths and archetypes might be made flesh” (Harper 2006, p.144), equally highlighting the idea that British horror included certain Eurohorror tendencies and vice versa. In the case of my own writing, my focus centred not on British horror for the reasons stated above, nor was it shaped by the Video Nasties furore during

the 1980s. Instead, the choice of films I wanted to write about and publish on, was fuelled by my own discourse, concentrating specifically on Eurohorror films as defined above.

Other key terms often referred to in any discourse on horror film criticism are “exploitation” and “cult”, whilst the term “art film” is discussed in Chapter 6: Horror and Arthouse. (p.112). Critics including Eric Schaefer observe that “exploitation as a recognised term and distinct category” (Schaefer 1999, p.3) dates back to the 1920s and details how a major studio film might be released to cinemas with up to 400 prints, whilst exploitation films would typically have only 15-20 prints available and would be moved from territory to territory. These low budget films with no major stars or conventional genre attached to them, therefore required “an extra edge” (Schaefer 2009, p.4) to entice audiences. After the post-war years, exploitation films expanded, with low budget films during the 1960s and 1970s modifying the term to include the subject being exploited - hence, “sexploitation” and “blaxploitation” for example. Schaefer identifies 5 criteria for exploitation films:-

- 1) A forbidden topic which could include, sex, prostitution, vice, drug use, nudity and any subject considered in bad taste or taboo at the time.
- 2) Low production values with no stars and poor quality sound recording - Schaefer notes that for example, *Robot Monster* (1953) and *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1959), as predominantly science-fiction films, were not considered as exploitation movies as they were not dealing with any controversial themes.
- 3) Independent as opposed to major studio distribution.
- 4) Shown in cinemas not associated with major studios.
- 5) The relatively low number of prints in circulation as opposed to those for major studio releases

Schaefer argues the need to study exploitation films in order to address past imbalances in recording film history, asserting that while Hollywood films were about things that “bound us together, geographically, socially, and politically, then exploitation films were about the difference” (Schaefer 2009, p.13). In other words, although exploitation films operate on the margins of society, they remain central in adding to our understanding of film history, both in social and cultural terms.

Regarding the term “cult” film, Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik observe that this term was first used during the 1970s with certain films gaining repeat audiences, indulging in ritualistic behaviours, aided by midnight screenings such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) with fans dressing up as characters from the film, and films where memorable lines are repeated verbatim, including from *Casablanca* (1942) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994). The growth of the home video industry in the 1980s led to a decline in cinema screenings, but video companies began to use the term “cult” in marketing their video, and later DVD/Blu Ray releases, also fuelled by the rise of

the internet as a marketing tool. This also led to a levelling up in terms of accessibility as non-urban, rural film devotees now had equal access to this material. As Mathijs and Mendik explain, “cult” cinema upsets traditional viewing strategies by accentuating “the phenomenal component of the viewing experience [and] are situated at the margins of the mainstream” (Mathijs & Mendik 2009, p.8). The authors extend their discussion to include their methodology surrounding the research of “cult” cinema, oscillating between an ontological, essentialist approach as in “what makes cult cinema a certain type of movie” (Mathijs & Mendik 2009, p.16), and a phenomenological approach that “shifts attention from the text to its appearance in the cultural contexts in which it is produced and received” (Mathijs & Mendik 2009, p.16). What becomes apparent from the definitions of all the terms discussed, is both the fluid nature of how they are used by critics, but also begs the question of where does the true value of a film lie - is it in the tropes and conventions utilised by the creators/directors, or is it in the “personal frisson” (Allan Havis 2008, p.2) experienced by the viewer. I would suggest neither in isolation, but rather in a combination of the two.

When I first began my film writing in 1987, my passion and interest in film was my overriding inspiration, rather than any thought of transforming my published work into a thesis worthy of a PhD award. A major part of this thesis involves my reflection on my role within what transpired to be a cultural movement, whereby fanzine editors and writers helped to shape the future academic discourse regarding the study of Eurohorror films. Writing from an informed, but non-academic background, the main methodological approach I adopted was that of a cultural historian, with two definitions provided below:

cultural historians study beliefs and ideas, much as intellectual historians do. In addition to the writings of intellectual elites, they consider the notions (sometimes unwritten) of the less privileged and less educated. These are reflected in the products of deliberately artistic culture, but also include the objects and experiences of everyday life, such as clothing or cuisine. “Culture” can also imply everyday attitudes, values, assumptions and prejudices, and the rituals and practices that express them, from magical beliefs to gender roles and racial hierarchies. In this sense, our instincts, thoughts, and acts have an ancestry which cultural history can illuminate and examine critically. (<https://history.yale.edu/undergraduate/current-students/regions-and-pathways/cultural-history>)

applying anthropological methods to the study of history. Analyzing the six dimensions of culture (Politics, Religion, Aesthetics, Intellectual Developments, Economics, and Social Relations) in a given place and time. (<https://culturalapproach.columbusstate.edu/>)

Taking my cue from James Chapman’s *Film and History* (2016), Chapman identifies an early methodological and ideological rift between those adopting the critical tradition of textual analysis, focused on the “reading” of film texts, typically classified in terms of the *auteur* theory -

the “view that the director of the film is the principal creative artist and that films reflect the world view of the director” (Chapman 2016, p.130), or alternatively, genre criticism including the western film, the gangster film and musicals, for example. This approach was evidenced in 1960s journals such as *MOVIE* (1962-2000, UK) and *Film Culture* (1955-1999, US). In being heavily influenced by an English Literature background, many of the same critical methods were used. This required an emphasis on the formal analysis of films and tracing repeated patterns and motifs through the *oeuvre* of a particular director, or across genres.

In offering an alternative, and emerging from a social and cultural historian perspective, which emphasised the institutional and cultural contexts of filmmaking and considered the relationship between films and the societies in which they were produced and consumed, journals such as *Film and History* (1971-current, US) and the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* (1981-current, UK) emerged. Chapman identified a historical turn in film studies, dating from the 1980s, in recognising that textual analysis alone was insufficient to enable an understanding of films as cultural artefacts and that *all* films, including mainstream and commercial releases, together with art cinema, documentaries, experimental and avant-garde - “all existed within their various ideological, political, social, economic and institutional contexts” (Chapman 2016, p.3). This is particularly highlighted in both my later Franco and Rollin chapters where I argue that the often non-linear narratives and specific visual style and techniques, are resistant to any formal textual analysis. Equally, while textual analysis allows for the examination of content, structure and function of formal characteristics, while also breaking a text down into its component parts, including sound, editing, lighting and camera style, in order to elicit how both texts and meanings are created, this still leaves gaps regarding the *informal* characteristics in a text. This is where the methodology of a cultural historian and indeed, vernacular scholar, can uncover hidden meanings. The major difference between a film historian as opposed to other historians, as Chapman observes, is in the nature of the primary sources available, namely that the main source is the *film* itself. Other traditional primary sources are available, including production records, scripts, trade journals, diaries and film reviews, and yet “films are complex cultural texts different from traditional sources such as diaries, novels and paintings. Therefore, analysis requires specialist methods and skills unique to film history. With this in mind, Chapman states that Siegfried Kracauer’s *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947), represented the first application of sociology to the history of film” (Chapman 2016, p.16), and that it was the “first scholarly book to apply scholarly principles of evidence and analysis to the study of film history” (Chapman 2016, p.16). Chapman continues that it “presented an important historical landmark in the field - even if its methods are now regarded as flawed and its conclusions highly questionable” (Chapman 2016, p.16). Central to these criticisms are Kracauer’s eschewal of German Expressionism films as being part of a stylistic movement. Rather, Kracauer saw them as reflecting the “social dislocation in Germany after the First World War, while the parade of madmen, murderers and insane master criminals who populated these films, he suggested, anticipated the rise to power of Hitler and the Nazis” (Chapman 2016, p.17).

Kracauer's methodology - effectively in seeing *all* the German population share the same outlook, a "collective mentality" if you will, also associates film characters such as Caligari and Mabuse with Nazi leaders and being "more of a rhetorical strategy than a persuasive historical argument" (Chapman 2016, p.18). In effect, Kracauer is not only suggesting that films reflect the psychological state of mind of the audience, but also makes a quantum leap in claiming that they also anticipate later real life developments. Another flaw noted relating to the quantitative data is that in over a thousand films released in Germany between 1918-1933 in the period that Kracauer covers, he only studies one hundred films, so only a tenth of the total number, and he also omits certain genres, including comedies and romantic dramas, which may have offered additional insight into the national psyche of the German population at this time. In addition, German films counted for only 40% of the German box office during this period, so for example, escapist Hollywood films were not included, while Kracauer also ignores the economic and cultural contexts of German cinema in his study. The opposite approach is taken by Thomas Elsaesser, for example, who argues that the "dislocating perspectives and stylized mise-en-scene of German films were less a reflection of a collective sense of paranoia than a deliberate and highly conscious strategy of cultural and economic differentiation" (quoted in Chapman 2016, p.19).

Just as Chapman considers that the rediscovery and critical re-evaluation of early cinema in the 1970s showed the biggest shift in critical thinking, partly as more films came to light, I would draw a parallel with the study of Eurohorror films in fanzines such as my own, during the early 1990s. Again, availability was a key issue with the advent of video, followed by DVD and Blu-ray, which increased the number of films now open to rediscovery - both in cinemas and especially, home viewing consumption.

In considering films as a historical source, Chapman argues that the non-fiction film was the prominent mode for documenting the historical veracity of both people and events, while the commercial feature film has been the "most problematic as a source of historical evidence" (Chapman 2016, p.84). Chapman credits Pierre Sorlin with "opening up the idea of the historical feature film as a historical source" (Chapman 2016, p.84), and seen as "a space where film-makers could address social and political issues that might otherwise have been proscribed" (Chapman 2016, p.85). In addition, Chapman also argues that Robert Rosenstone opened up feature films as history through contestation, interrogating mainstream films. I would also draw a parallel between this and the role of fanzines and the movement which I was a part of, which also interrogated and contested mainstream Hollywood films, as well as championing alternative, independent films which eschewed traditional values and norms. Chapman concludes that film studies has shifted away from textual analysis in order to facilitate a film history that "properly explores the larger picture of cinema's social agency in the twentieth century that theoretical approaches alone have failed to provide" (Chapman 2016, p.129).

In reflecting on my own writing I would also identify with certain tropes expounded by Thomas McLaughlin in *Street Smarts and Critical Theory: Listening to the Vernacular* (1996). The term

“vernacular theory” was first used by Houston Baker in his *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (1984), which as McLaughlin explained, stressed “two aspects of the term “vernacular”. It refers in Latin to the language of slaves, and particularly to the localness of those slaves. McLaughlin’s use of the term is more abstract and “more in line with a critical tradition of studies in vernacular architecture, design, language” (McLaughlin 1996, p.5). McLaughlin is not studying the use of language or analytical strategies of academic theory per se, but rather fanzine writers who “devise a language and strategy appropriate to their own concerns. And they arise out of intensely local issues that lead to fundamental theoretical questions” (McLaughlin 1996, p.6). For McLaughlin, cultural theory is not merely the province of academics, but is also practised by a diverse range of people in both their professional and their social activities. McLaughlin argues that certain individuals working outside of the framework of academic cultural theory do important theoretical work that questions dominant cultures. This is done through ordinary language that both challenges, and yet is absent of any ideological assumptions that such language creates. McLaughlin posits a difference between vernacular theory and academic theory mainly in terms of its “status and style”, and “scholarly rigour” rather than its “goals and practices” (McLaughlin 1996, p.6). In McLaughlin’s view, vernacular theory has clearly defined strategies appropriate to local concerns and positions and the importance of fanzine writers is that they come from “a perspective that academic cultural theory cannot adopt” (McLaughlin 1996, p.62). From this localised position, the work of zines is theoretical in that it “provides those who live exclusively in popular culture with an opportunity to reflect on the determinants of their experience” (McLaughlin 1996, p.63). From my own experience, I met and corresponded with fellow fanzine editors and writers, both individually and at film festivals and film fairs where a sense of community and fandom was fostered. My own *Necronomicon* fanzine included a letters page entitled “Evil Writes”, where fellow devotees, including academics and future contributors, would debate and air opinions, to reinforce this sense of community, and also reflect on how fan writing would drive the discourse forward, for it to be later studied and analysed by academics. My own writing was not led by ideology, but rather a passion for the material and a sense of discovery as more films became available to fans and collectors alike. As my writing evolved and my contact with academics increased, I began to adopt certain academic conventions such as the inclusion of references and endnotes, together with further exploring psychoanalytical themes, including Freudian analysis and discussion of similar sub-texts.

In gaining expertise from reading zine texts, fans, in McLaughlin’s view, “begin to *see through* the strategies to understand the operations of the popular culture system itself. They become vernacular theorists, subjects who take up the work of dismantling the ideology they encounter in pop culture (McLaughlin 1996, p.57). These defiant acts of questioning cultural assumptions for McLaughlin, clearly defines fanzine writers as also being theorists. What McLaughlin fails to address is the idea that we can adopt multiple viewing positions which are constantly being navigated within our daily lives. As zines constantly review and revise their approaches, for example, if vernacular theory is enacted via narrative, then just as there are many theories, there are multiple narratives which remain open-ended to allow for questioning what is constituted to

be natural or the norm. This is where Ian Olney, discussed in the “Literature Review”, theorises that we “play dead” and adopt multiple viewing positions in reading texts.

By being embedded within the culture they describe for McLaughlin “zines also have the urgency of personal engagement. Writers and editors of zines are not detached from the phenomena they describe” (McLaughlin 1996, p.54). McLaughlin argues that there is;

No pretence of anthropological detachment or interpretative distance. Zine writers and publishers *are* the fans on whom ideological effects are plotted. They *are* the social subjects that academic writers on popular culture theorize about. What we will find in zines is popular culture subjected to a popularly produced, resistant discourse of analysis and theory. (McLaughlin 1996, p.54)

The notion of fan writers having an attitude and a deliberate bias, rather than academic rigour and balanced argument, is central to the whole debate with the “give” from fans and the “take” from academics. It is what Henry Jenkins in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (2012) referred to when describing fans as being the titular “textual poachers”, and that fans are not merely replicating the original text but developing “an independent sense of the true spirit of the text” (McLaughlin 1996, p.55). For Jenkins, the definition of fandom constitutes;

an institution of theory and criticism, a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of mass media and their own relationship to it. (Jenkins 2012, p.86)

Contrary to the criticism that fans are irrational, obsessively devoted and lacking the critical resources to theorise, McLaughlin counters that the “elite fan” does offer theoretical reflection and McLaughlin aims to;

examine the explicit and implicit theoretical work done in the zines, work that makes a distinctive contribution to understanding popular culture because it comes from a perspective that academic cultural theory cannot adopt. Zine theory has the advantage of operating within the culture it describes, with an intimacy and specificity not possible for the academic observer, who may like me be a consumer of popular culture but whose institutional position makes the encounter with vernacular culture problematic. The zines are an example of a vast cultural practice that includes academic theory but also much more, the theoretical work that goes on in everyday life. (McLaughlin 1996, p.62)

While for a fan writer there may be little economic gain, just as with an academic scholar, the latter is generally regarded in higher esteem, and afforded a higher status, but “zine scholarship, like academic scholarship is motivated by a desire to master the details of a complex and valued phenomenon” (McLaughlin 1996, p.71). From my own experience, I would also record that the

majority of any financial profit generated from publishing and writing, was ploughed back into the business in terms of buying more film stills, more films and increasing production values by printing with more colour sections and allowing for larger print runs. McLaughlin summarises his discussion of the contribution made by fan writers, stating that “I believe that the theory practiced in zines has at least as much potential for real political impact as does academic theory. The zines have a large audience and amore immediate and intimate connection with those they address” (McLaughlin 1996, p.76).

Having discussed the terms which define this area of horror film studies, together with the methodological approaches I adopted, it is of equal importance to evaluate the unique mode of production and distribution of Eurohorror films within the film industry. Shipka, utilising his own Eurocult definition, highlights the cooperation between numerous countries, each with differing social, political and moral codes, arguing that “nowhere in recorded film history is the standard of production so varied and multinational” (Shipka 2011, p.310). Rather than operating like other film genres where a film may look to disseminate its influence and culture beyond national boundaries, Shipka asserts that Eurocult, (ditto Eurohorror films I would argue), adopt a completely opposite approach in aiming to appeal to as many different countries and cultures as possible in order to maximise their commercial success. Citing the turbulent political period in Europe during the 1960s-1980s, and the attendant social issues, the growth in Eurohorror films can be seen in part, as a rebellion against repressive regimes such as that of General Franco in Spain, and the political and religious conservatism in Italy, with this rebellion usually manifesting itself in the form of violence in these films. In Spain for example, *La campana del infierno (The Bell From Hell)* (1973) where traditional family life is effectively dismantled, in Italy where an errant priest kills children in *Non si sevizia un paperino (Don't Torture A Ducking)* (1972) and in France in *Les raisins de la mort (The Grapes of Death)* (1978), where the national drink, wine, transforms citizens into murderous zombies. The unique style and production of Eurohorror films and their impact, playing alongside exploitation films in American drive-in cinemas, adopting multiple cross-cultural approaches, “make[s] it increasingly difficult to distinguish exclusive national and socio-cultural parameters” (Shipka 2011, p.9). Shipka notes the experiences of actor Ian McCulloch, star of *Zombi 2* (1979), *Zombi Holocaust* (1980) and *Contamination* (1980), recounting how Eurohorror films would be pre-sold to multiple countries on the strength of the posters, storyboards, title and synopsis produced, effectively being in profit before a camera rolled. Actors from different countries would often record dialogue in their own language, before being later dubbed into English for overseas markets. Multiple versions of films would often circulate due to being cut and edited for different countries, either increasing or reducing the sex and/or violence quota, as per that country’s own requirements. This meant that any number of different running times, and indeed film titles, could be attached to just one production. Notable Eurohorror examples of this include Mario Bava’s *Lisa e il diavolo (Lisa and the Devil)* (1974) with a running time of 95 minutes, but later re-edited by screenwriter Alfredo Leone and released as *The House of Exorcism* (1975), with a running time of 92 minutes. In addition, Jess Franco’s *La comtesse noire (Female Vampire)* (1973), was also released in a number of different versions and running times, including, *Erotikill & The Loves of*

Irina (US video), *Les Avaleuses* (France, hardcore theatrical version), and *The Bare Breasted Countess* (UK, theatrical 'X' version).

David Church in "One on Top of the Other: Lucio Fulci, Transnational Film Industries, and the Retrospective Construction of the Italian Horror Canon" (2015), concentrates solely on the Italian film industry but makes similar observations to Shipka regarding the 'global economy' of film production designed to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. Church notes how some critics have questioned the "Italianness" of Italian horror films and how the term 'Italian horror' is often used by critics "in making sense of a historical film market marked by so many border-crossing generic and cyclical tangents" (Church 2015, p.2). Church argues that Italian filmmakers appropriated 'cultural memories' of British and American films for their own *filoni* - their own localised renderings only "propelled outside specific national borders through transnational exchange" (Church 2015, p.4), thereby meaning Bava's reputation owed more to US TV showings of his films, (albeit in re-edited, re-scored and retitled versions), while Argento and Fulci's reputations grew more via the growth of home video during the 1980s. Church concludes that "Italian horror's reliance on transnational film industries reveals they are perhaps not so fundamentally "Italian" after all" (Church, 2015, p.15).

The nature of this global economy and transnational film production seemed far removed in terms of my own formative film experiences, when as a child I remember growing up on a diet of horror double-bills courtesy of terrestrial television, mainly the BBC, which concentrated on the classic Universal, MGM and RKO films of the 1930s and 1940s, the science fiction paranoia/nature's revenge films of the 1950s, together with the 1960s and 1970s output courtesy of production companies such as Hammer Films, Amicus, Tigon and AIP. There were the occasional obscure/rare gems screened, including Harry Kumel's *Les lèvres rouges (Daughters of Darkness)* (1971) and Mario Bava's *La maschera del demonio (The Mask of Satan)*, detailed in my later Bava chapter. There was just *something* about these often lyrical, non-linear, European films which fascinated me. Visually arresting and supremely stylish - even down to Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu: Phantom Der Nacht (Nosferatu the Vampyre)* (1979), with barely a trace of the bloodletting or violence horror films were renowned for, yet with a mesmerising, poetic quality which left an indelible mark on me.

My love of music, (guitarist in Dan, a punk band based in Darlington and playing live in the clubs of Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland, Leeds, Middlesbrough and Newton Aycliffe), led to my first film writing, appropriately enough in the form of film soundtrack reviews for *Samhain* magazine, a horror film fanzine/prozine edited and published by John Gullidge in Topsham, Devon. It used the tagline of "Britain's Longest Running Horror Magazine" for some time with over seventy issues published, bi-monthly, before it ceased publication, dating from 1986-1997. My own contributions began in 1986 and *Samhain* was significant as one of the first UK DIY publications, covering Eurohorror directors such as Mario Bava, (a 3 part retrospective spanning issues 37/38/39, from March 1993-October 1993), in addition to major studio releases and set

reports, including *Hellbound* (1988) in *Samhain* (issue 8, March/April 1988). It also predated other UK publications - *Fear* (1988) and *The Dark Side* (1990), for example. The punk ethos of rejecting the mainstream and cultivating a more independent spirit, is a parallel I draw with my passion for the Eurohorror and arthouse films, in eschewing the Hollywood status quo. When John later asked if I had any interest in also covering the films themselves, the touch paper was lit and so began my journey in horror film criticism and publishing. This also neatly dovetailed with my formative film reading which was greatly inspired by Peter Nicholls' *Fantastic Cinema* (1984), Phil Hardy's *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror* (1984), Alan Frank's *The Horror Film Handbook* (1982) and Kim Newman's *Nightmare Movies - A Critical Guide to Contemporary Horror Films* (1984), together with the Video Nasties¹ furore during the early 1980s.

Amongst those European films unsuccessfully prosecuted as Video Nasties were Lucio Fulci's *E tu vivrai nel terrore! L'aldilà* (*The Beyond*) (1981), Dario Argento's *Inferno* (1980) and Jorge Grau's *No profanar el sueño de los muertos* (*Let Sleeping Corpses Lie*) (1974). Fulci was also one of the victims of another anomaly whereby certain films were banned, yet not classified as Video Nasties - his *Lo squartatore di New York* (*The New York Ripper*) (1982) being a case in point in being refused a certificate for theatrical distribution. This film is also included in publications such as *See No Evil: Banned Films and Video Controversy* (David Kerekes & Jay Slater, 2000), together with *The Original Video Nasties: From Absurd to Zombie Flesh Eaters* (Allan Bryce, 2004). (Another anomaly resulted in films which were seized by police but again not classified as Video Nasties - Fulci's *Paura nella città dei morti viventi* (*City of the Living Dead*) (1980), Lamberto Bava's *Macabro* (*Macabre*) (1980) and Amando de Ossorio's *La noche de las gaviotas* (*Night of the Seagulls*) (1975) among the European entries affected by such actions. Add to this films such as Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), which was effectively self-policed by the director - so afraid of copycat crimes of violence that he withdrew the film from circulation in the UK himself, which was also where he was living at this time. Despite this, the film was widely distributed in other territories and it was only in 2000, after Kubrick's death, that the film was released again in the UK. The film was originally awarded an X certificate by the BBFC on December 15th, 1971 and so could only be shown to ages eighteen and above in the UK. The Cinematograph Acts of 1909 and 1952 empowered local authorities to prohibit screenings of films considered to be "inflammatory" in nature. This, coupled with sensationalist stories of copycat violence from the film, emanating from newspapers including *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun*, led to some councils enforcing these Acts of Parliament. So, although not officially banned, the actions of some local authorities, effectively gave the same outcome. A bizarre consequence of this gave examples such as Hastings, Sussex

¹ It was during this period in the early 1980s that over the course of several years some 72 films were at any one time held on the official Director of Public Prosecutions list with 39 films being successfully prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act, with the remaining 33 films either not prosecuted or unsuccessfully prosecuted. Amongst the European films banned were Lucio Fulci's *Zombi 2* (*Zombie Flesh Eaters*) (1979) and *Quella villa accanto al cimitero* (*The House by the Cemetery*) (1981), Mario Bava's *Ecologia del delitto* (*A Bay of Blood*) (1971), Jess Franco's *Die Säge des Todes* (*Bloody Moon*) (1981) and *El canibal* (*The Devil Hunter*) (1980), Dario Argento's *Tenebre* (*Tenebrae*) (1982) and Ruggero Deodato's *La casa sperduta nel parco* (*The House at the Edge of the Park*) (1980).

where the film was banned and yet taking a ten minute train ride to nearby Bexhill, governed by a different local authority, enabled one to see the film at cinema screenings there.² This gives an idea of the confused and fragmented situation regarding censorship at the time. As I later explain, the Video Nasties furore during the 1980s did not fuel my interest in horror per se, but rather the *outré* Eurohorror genre did. Other writers offer a more detailed evaluation of the Video Nasties era with *The Video Nasties* (Martin Barker, 1999), *Trash or Treasure? Censorship and the Changing Meanings of Video Nasties* (Kate Egan, 2007), *Film and Video Censorship in Modern Britain* (Julian Petley, 2011) and *Rewind, Replay: Britain and the Video Boom, 1978-92* (Johnny Walker, 2022), all prominent examples.

As a teenager during this period, the idea of any forbidden fruit was instantly appealing and simply banning something, does not eradicate the “problem” - it merely serves to make it even more desirable and drive it underground. I discovered that a combination of reading about some of the more obscure European directors and their films made me actively want to seek out these seemingly exotic entries to add some variety to the regular diet of often sanitised television horror. For example, the idea of putting children in jeopardy would generally be considered anathema for a made for TV horror film, whilst on a technical level, the speed of camera set ups would outweigh any more creative ambitions. That is why I found *Salem’s Lot* (1979) to be a revelation as children were placed in palpable danger of vampirism, and the judicious use of crane and dolly shots allowed for a more elaborate, fluid style, and so elevated this film above the static camera shots and prosaic approach of many TV films. Similarly, the sense of jeopardy in *La maschera del demonio*, the decadence and artistry in *Les lèvres rouges* and the ethereal atmosphere in *Nosferatu: Phantom Der Nacht*, set these films apart from the mainstream for me.

I also discovered books such as David Pirie’s *The Vampire Cinema* (1977), featuring a wealth of rare stills, especially from the surrealist *oeuvre* of Jean Rollin, which piqued my interest further. It was also around this time that, perhaps as a response to the neglect and indifference of the mainstream film press, that a number of pro-zines and fanzines emerged specifically in order to dissect hitherto uncovered European horror films. Besides the aforementioned *Samhain*, and my own *Necronomicon*³ magazine, which I first published in 1993, a number of other zines appeared including; *Absurd*, *Delirium*, *Eyeball*, *Shock Xpress*, *Flesh and Blood*, and *Redeemer* in the UK along with *European Trash Cinema*, *Video Watchdog*, *Fangoria*, *Psychotronic Video*, *Sleazoid Express* and *Something Weird* in the USA. The name *Necronomicon*, inspired by the influential

² For further information:- <https://www.anthonymburgess.org/blog-posts/the-banning-of-a-clockwork-orange/>
Accessed 25-03-2023 13.46

³ First published in 1993 with seven issues until 1995, before then evolving into book format for five books to date and a special *Necronomicon Presents* edition - ranging from 1996-2007. The first fanzine/magazine had a print run of 500 copies before eventually increasing to 4,000 copies. Half of these were distributed in the US by Diamond Comics and Tower Records. UK copies included distribution to Forbidden Planet stores, The Cinema Store in London, Tower Records UK, together with mail order outlets such as Media Publications and Midnight Media. The average print run for the book editions was 3,000 copies so there are between 10-15,000 copies sold globally now.

American horror writer H. P. Lovecraft, attracted me with the intriguing combination of gothic trappings, ambience and arcane rituals which permeated his literature.

The growth and availability of this “forbidden fruit” on the burgeoning underground market, fed by the emergence of the Videotape Cassette Recorder (VCR), enabled one to seek out the most controversial and/or graphic horrors and see exactly what all the fuss was about. This availability in turn no doubt helped to stoke the fires of the plethora of zines as there were now finally films available to watch and critique. This was my introduction to such luminaries as Lucio Fulci, Jess Franco and Jean Rollin. Although the presence of this pirate video industry was vociferously criticised by the film industry, understandably, arguing copyright theft/infringement and loss of potential earning to actors, crew and studios, it did also beg the question as to why so many other films not on the banned list were not made available during the 1980s. The eventual growth in companies such as VIPCO (Video Instant Picture Company), Arrow Films, Redemption Films, Tartan Video, Synapse, Blue Underground, Criterion and Anchor Bay to name a select few, actually sourcing and mastering good quality, original prints, often with specially commissioned bonus features and collectors booklets, effectively rendered the pirate industry redundant and proved the value and demand in releasing these hitherto unseen gems, to a welcoming market of eager collectors and fans. This also helped to sound the death knell for the historically important Scala cinema, especially for audiences in London, with the availability of cult films and Eurohorror on video, negating the need to travel to see them on the cinema screen. From the late 1970s up to June 1993, the Scala had screened a combination of cult US films including *Eraserhead* (1977), *Pink Flamingos* (1972) and *Thundercrack!* (1975), together with Eurohorror films from Argento, Bava and Fulci. The Scala also played host to the *Shock Around the Clock* film festivals (1987-89), organised by *Shock Xpress* fanzine, whilst I recall seeing the UK premiere of Richard Stanley’s *Dust Devil* (1992) there in 1993 - the same year the cinema closed. It had previously survived near bankruptcy when sued by Warner Brothers on Stanley Kubrick’s insistence, for screening *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), during the period of the director’s aforementioned, self-imposed ban. The Scala club, as opposed to cinema, then reopened in 1999 featuring an equally eclectic mix of music, as it had previously with film, including Slaves, The Libertines, Deftness, Coldplay, Foo Fighters, The Chemical Brothers, Lacuna Coil and Wolf Alice. It has also inspired regular regional events such as “A Celebration of Cinema”, taking place every September across the UK, as well as a book, *Scala Cinema 1978-1993*, written by former manager and programmer, Jane Giles, and published by Fab Press in 2018,⁴ to indicate its continuing influence.

⁴ <https://scalarama.com/scala-cinema/> Accessed 25-03-2023 at 13.59
<https://scala.co.uk/> Accessed 25-03-2023 at 14.25

2.Literature Review

In this chapter I will discuss the earliest books on horror film criticism, namely by Carlos Clarens, Drake Douglas and Ivan Butler, published between 1967-1970, together with William K. Everson, and where Eurohorror films are largely absent. These writers do not adopt an academic writing style, but rather the position of being cultural historians. I then consider those writers who *most* influenced me; Peter Nicholls, David Pirie, Kim Newman and Phil Hardy, and who also adopt the role of being cultural historians, with works published between 1977-1984, only they do begin the introduction and discussion of Eurohorror films to a degree. This is evidenced by the discussion of Jean Rollin films in David Pirie's, *The Vampire Cinema* (1977), Italian, Spanish and French films in Kim Newman's *Nightmare Movies* (1984), together with Phil Hardy's *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror* (1984). As academic focus shifted to the horror film, the development of a psychological approach can be traced in James B. Twitchell's *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror* (1985); a psychoanalytical reading in Robin Wood's *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan* (1986); a sociological treatment in Andrew Tudor's *Monsters and Mad Scientists: Cultural History of the Horror Movie* (1989) and gender-based theory on the role of women in horror films evidenced in both Carol J. Clover's *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (1992) and Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine - Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993), yet all still betray a paucity of Eurohorror film coverage, with the vast majority of films studied being British and American releases. There are however, three texts I later discuss which offer a more nuanced, sociological and anthropological approach in analysing areas including national identity, gender, existential concerns and with some discussion of Eurohorror. These are Tim Corrigan's *The Film's of Werner Herzog: Between Mirage and History* (1986), Steffen Hantke's *Calgari's Heirs: The German Cinema of Fear After 1945* (2006) and Gregory A. Waller's *The Living and the Undead: From Stoker's Dracula to Romero's Dawn of the Dead* (1986). This is then expanded upon in Ian Olney's *EuroHorror: Classic European Horror Cinema in Contemporary American Culture* (2013).

In terms of the earliest canonical reference books for horror film criticism, there are three titles which first published within three years of each other; Carlos Clarens' *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* (1967), Drake Douglas' *Horrors!* (1967) and Ivan Butler's *Horror in the Cinema* (1970). Of these, Clarens has the widest scope in terms of the films discussed, including a number of European horror entries. Clarens and Butler also broadly share the same definition of horror films, namely films sharing the attributes of what the French would term *le fantastique*⁵. Douglas opts for a much narrower focus with no emphasis on European films, instead taking a lead from literature which he sees as the driving force behind screen horror.

Defining 'horror' does prove problematic and invariably becomes a result of each particular writers subjectivity. For example Peter Nicholls, (1984) defines horror cinema as embodying fantasy elements, so precludes the inclusion of slasher or psycho killer movies, save for *Halloween* (1978)

⁵ A French term for film and literature which includes horror, science fiction & elements.

as Nicholls sees the seemingly indestructible, masked killer as an almost supernatural entity. Just as the definition of 'horror' can be fluid, so too are the differing approaches used by critics.

The history of the horror film up to the late 1970s can be broken down into distinct periods. Therefore, we have the embryonic stirrings of fantasy credited to Georges Méliès with *Le voyage dans la lune (A Trip to the Moon)*, released in 1898, followed by the birth of German Expressionism⁶ with *Der Student von Prag (The Student of Prague)* (1913), before the reign of Universal Pictures through the 1930s-1940s starting with *Dracula* (1931) and *Frankenstein* (1931), Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) studios with *Freaks* (1932) and RKO Pictures with *King Kong* (1933). The post-World War Two period from 1945 through to the early 1960s then sees a rejection of real-life horror in favour of a more escapist, science fiction orientated approach. Here the threat is either from outer space - *It Came From Outer Space* (1953) and *Earth vs the Flying Saucers* (1956), or from oversized mutants from the natural world *Them!* (1954), *Tarantula* (1955) and *The Fly* (1958). The final period sees a change in emphasis back to more traditional horror, only given a decidedly graphic, visceral edge through Britain's own Hammer Films. Victorian era England and period costume horrors feature heavily with reimagining of classic monsters in *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) *Dracula* (1958) and *The Mummy* (1959). Imitators followed including Tigon British Film Productions with *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1970), Amicus Productions with *Dr. Terror's House of Horrors* (1965) and American International Pictures (AIP), with *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964).

By attempting to elevate the status of the horror film within the area of film criticism, Clarens also acknowledges that the often fluid style and imagination inherent in some of the most rewarding examples, also prove problematic, as they defy categorisation. He states that; "Most movies have their own voices, and none of them was created to support a single aesthetic or theory" (Clarens 1967, xxi). Clarens criticises F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens*, especially Count Orlok (Max Shreck) for casting both his shadow on the wall and his reflection in a mirror, thereby flouting the vampire lore contained in Bram Stoker's source novel, *Dracula* from 1897. This criticism is perplexing as these elements actually add to the effectiveness of the film and still resonate today as the vampire's shadow eerily ascends the staircase in the opening frames of *Crimson Peak* (2015). Also, Hammer Films original adaptation of *Dracula* (1958) uses dramatic licence as Van Helsing (Peter Cushing) races across a long refectory table in order to draw back the curtains and so condemn Dracula (Christopher Lee) to a sun-drenched demise as the rays pour through the adjacent window. Most symptomatic of the limitations in his approach however, is his "Horror Around the World" chapter which actually uses American films as its starting point with entries such as *The Tingler* (1959) and *I Was A Teenage Werewolf* (1957), before then discussing the rise of Hammer Films, with no inclusion of any other European films.

⁶ The German Expressionist movement began during the First World War with films, art and literature characterised by highly stylised, symbolic design, non-realist approach and an accent on inner emotions. The movement reached its peak in Berlin during the 1920s, but has left a lasting influence on film - especially the horror genre and film noir genre.

Clarens does, interestingly, discuss Georges Franju's little cited documentary from the charnel houses of Paris, *Le sang des Bêtes (Blood of the Beasts)* (1949), "coming up with an unflinching poetic commentary on conveyor belt death, a dark mirror held up to our eyes, a salutary shock for those kind of souls and sensitive spirits who never wonder where steaks and beef come from" (Clarens 1967,154). Clarens argues that this Guignol theme is merely the training ground for Franju's later *Les yeux sans visage (Eyes Without A Face)* (1960), which "grabbed medical ethics by the horns" (Clarens 1967,154). Being universally condemned by most critics save for the *cineastes* in Franju's homeland France, mainly for the surgical scene of facial skin grafting - shown in unnerving detail and with an absence of the customary horror film shock tactics to release the tension. Castigated as a "nauseating piece of sensationalism" (Clarens 1967,155), Clarens argues such moments are "indispensable to the film and not the least of Franju's talents is to convince us of their necessity" (Clarens 1967,155). For Clarens, "Franju's movie treads horror territory with elegant assurance. It might not be the intended denunciation but something much more unusual; the elusive alliance of poetry and terror" (Clarens 1967,155), hinting at a more enlightened critical approach.

In a chapter numbering some 23 pages, Clarens only manages to devote four and a half pages to the European horror film entries from Italy and Spain. Clarens considers there are "few" films from these countries to cover but an "honourable one" (Clarens 1967,155) is Riccardo Freda's *I Vampiri* (1957). Clarens rather denigrates Freda's films as being marked by a "denial of the fantastic" (Clarens 1967,156), instead seeing them as more prosaic melodramas rather than anything else. However, in terms of being damned by faint praise, Clarens writes that;

Freda is a master at making palatable the most lurid subject matter, be it necrophilia, sexual impotence, or sadism, by laying the action of his pictures within the safety of the Victorian era, in the claustrophobic manor houses and mouldy crypts that are deeded Gothic country, decorating the sets with so much taste and opulent texture that they smother the most unsavoury aspects of the plot. (Clarens 1967,157).

Moving onto Mario Bava and his pivotal *La maschera del demonio* (1960), Clarens eulogises that "the quality of the visual narrative narrative was superb - the best black and white photography to a horror movie in the past two decades" (Clarens 1967,158). His praise for Bava's *I tre volti della paura (Black Sabbath)* (1963) is less fulsome and then, according to Clarens, his promise "alas has not been fulfilled in subsequent works" (Clarens 1967,158), as he then;

turned out a series of sadistic films, among them *Blood and Black Lace* (1964) and *The Whip and the Body* (1964). The former, especially has minimal plot and consists of a string of brutal murders, each staged with relish and in the most redolent hues, attesting to the fact that Bava is simply trying to titillate a very

specialised segment of his audience that requires neither rhyme nor reason. (Clarens 1967,158).

Of *Terrore nello spazio (Planet of the Vampires)* (1965), Clarens argues that “there was a distinct feeling of a director uninvolved with his material” (Clarens 1967,158), and yet one could legitimately argue as to just how influential this film has been - not least for providing the basic cadre for the colossal success that was *Alien* (1979). However, Clarens suggests that “fantasy is woefully missing from the Bava film, his chanel house preciosity proves that if directors usually end up as photographers, the reverse of this axiom is just as valid and true” (Clarens 1967,158). One could argue that Clarens’ criticism of Bava here is partly explained by the greater value he places on horror films of the past.

In summary, Clarens book is certainly the first detailed study of the horror film. It supplies context and an appreciation of the horror genre sorely absent up until this point, firmly making his claim that the horror genre should be studied as seriously as other, more favoured film genres. Clarens does highlight neglected gems such as *Vampyr*, (1932), *Night of the Demon (Curse of the Demon)* (1957) and *Night of the Eagle (Burn Witch Burn)* (1962), as well as critiquing obscure entries such as *Red Planet Mars* (1952). He also signposts the validity of the burgeoning sci-fi genre, importantly highlighting the significance of the Cold War period which even begat a later book in Bill Warren’s *Keep Watching the Skies* (1982). However, this scope is stymied by his over reliance on traditional Hollywood movies, and yet in a book totalling some 180 pages, barely four and a half pages scratch the surface of the European horror genre.

Douglas adopts a different approach, providing a less detailed, less insightful study in comparison to Clarens and also a more limited scope in the range of films discussed. His chapters are broken down into discussing particular creatures/characters, as opposed to themes. The scope of this book is very much confined to traditional American horror films. Douglas’s reliance on literature often relegates the film elements to become merely supporting players to the main text, so film is not held in such high esteem as Clarens would, for instance. On the few occasions when European horror is discussed even this appears contradictory as Douglas refers to Mario Bava’s *La maschera del demonio* as a “minor black and white film” (Douglas 1967, 65) and yet also states that it is a “gem of a film” (Douglas 1967,65) and “the most original vampire tale since *Dracula*” (Douglas 1967,66), featuring “superb photography” (Douglas 1967,66). Given this emphasis on literature and the American horror industry, Douglas’s entry is only of limited value to scholars of the European horror film genre.

Butler adopts an approach that is closer to Clarens rather than Douglas - European horror films are marginalised with minimal discussion, but, just as Clarens explores Georges Franju’s oeuvre beyond the expected entries, so too does Butler explore Henri-Georges Clouzot’s obscure *Le Corbeau (The Crow)* (1943) as well as the anticipated *Les Diaboliques* (1955). Butler’s introduction bemoans the lack of English language books at this time discussing the horror film genre

seriously. Beyond UK magazines such as *Sight and Sound*⁷ and *Films and Filming*⁸, Butler sees the mantle being taken up instead by French publications such as *Le Fantastique au Cinema*⁹, *Le Surrealisme au Cinema*¹⁰ and genre journal, *Midi-Minuit Fantastique*¹¹. He also argues the need to evaluate films by the “conventions of their period” (Butler 1970,8) and the impact they had on audiences of their day” (Butler 1970,8). Butler also recognises the subjectivity of defining horror as being very personal to each individual, referring to critic Dilys Powell’s observation that “one man’s *frisson* is another man’s guffaw” (Butler 1970,8). He discusses the gestation of horror in art, theatre and literature, and asserts that “[f]or several reasons, film is a particularly suitable medium for the creation of horror” (Butler 1970,10), and identifies the hypnotic effect of a cinema audience seeing a film together in the dark.

Butler explores the theme of mental, psychological horror in his analysis of Roman Polanski’s *Repulsion* (1965), where monsters and creatures are eschewed so;

When the mind is the actual stuff of horror, when madness and collapse are presented from inside, rather than viewed from without, then the solid ground itself shifts and crumbles, and we do indeed find ourselves looking into the bottomless pit. This is the fearful theme of *Repulsion*. (Butler 1970,144).

Having essayed the disintegration of the mind, Butler then proceeds to delineate “the degeneration of a community” (Butler 1970,113), in discussing Henri-Georges Clouzot’s lesser known *Le Corbeau* (1943). He is keen to point out that Clouzot himself spent 5 years in a sanitarium due to illness, perhaps good experience to draw upon as a small French town is torn apart by a series of anonymous letters - all cryptically signed “Le Corbeau” - “The Crow”. The letters are insulting, defamatory, cruel, vulgar and essentially, all lies. However, instead, they find a ready market among the gossips, and the placid little community is shown up as a festering body of repression, guilt, malice and all uncharitableness” (Butler 1970,114). That there are multiple suspects, multiple victims and multiple deaths, together with an ambiguous denouement, creates a striking impact. “There is no evidence that the inhabitants have been purged of their vices, their hatred, meanness, petty or not so petty dishonesties” (Butler, 1970,115). The “diseased minds” here rival anything in *Psycho*, Poe or *Repulsion*” (Butler 1970,115), continuing that;

⁷ First published in 1932. Now published by the British Film Institute (BFI). Published quarterly until the early 1990s when it became monthly. Also incorporates the previous BFI journal, the *Monthly Film Bulletin*.

⁸ [https://www.academia.edu/2023952/ A sensible magazine for intelligent film-goers. Notes for a History of Films and Filming 1954-1990](https://www.academia.edu/2023952/A_sensible_magazine_for_intelligent_film-goers_Notes_for_a_History_of_Films_and_Filming_1954-1990) Accessed 19-06-2019 10:46

⁹ Early French cinema book written by Michel Laclos and published prior to 1923.

¹⁰ A French language book by Ado Kyrou, a filmmaker, critic and historian, published in 1953.

¹¹ A French language magazine covering horror, fantasy and science fiction. 24 issues published between 1962-1972. Featured an article on Gaston Leroux written by Jean Rollin.

It's view of humanity is unrelievedly low and bitter, its approach cruel and satirical, and, with not one really sympathetic character, shocks but fails to move. The omnipotent threat of horror, however, is brilliantly sustained. (Butler 1970,115-6).

By dissecting the French horror of *Le Corbeau*, just as Clarens dissects the work of Franju, Butler illustrates how at this period in time, the only serious discussion of non-British European horror was framed partly by the French language press and adapted by critics such as Clarens and Butler. These French films enjoyed a partly elevated status in comparison to their Italian or Spanish counterparts at this time. Indeed, even the fifty-page filmography with capsule reviews Butler ends with, features precious few European horror entries. Mario Bava's *6 donne per l'assassino (Blood and Black Lace)* (1964) is described as being "beautifully photographed with imaginative touches" and yet merely appears as a footnote to the main text. Butler's other main contribution here is in acknowledging the increasing influence of psychological horror in film as opposed to simply monsters and traditional creatures from folklore and literature. In this small way, he is to some extent, pre-empting the proliferation of European horror films where the human psyche and frailties would rise to the fore to an event greater extent, especially in the *giallo* film.

With *Classics of the Horror Film* (1975), William.K. Everson, in adopting the role of cultural historian and relying on an assortment of sumptuous film stills but with the absence of any index, reaffirms his avowedly personal, subjective approach to the horror film genre. Everson shows disdain for the majority of Hammer's output, being relegated to only minor discussion in the book where Everson bemoans the cockney accents and often low rent actors, (excluding Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee). As such, for Everson, Don Sharp's *Kiss of the Vampire* (1963) is by far their best film as "[i]t exploited the sensual aspects of vampirism far more than the same studios Dracula films had done" (Everson 1975, 207). Everson does somewhat allow his own prejudices and petty jealousies betray him at times. He discusses an "uncovered gem" *The Strangler in the Swamp* (1946) that has "Managed to escape the attentions of even such thorough chroniclers of the horror film as Carlos Clarens and Denis Gifford" (Everson 1975,177), whilst efficiencies in Edgar Ulmer's *The Black Cat* (1934), claims Everson, "have roused the *Cahier du cinema*¹² cultists to the height of rhapsodic ecstasy" (Everson 1975,123), whilst "*The Ghoul* suffers from errors perpetuated in "uninformed publications such as *Famous Monsters*"¹³ (Everson 1975,119).

Of Everson's few non-American film insights, he discusses how the aftermath of World War Two led to more serious supernatural films being produced - perhaps as a form of catharsis in an attempt to cope with the effects of death and the ensuing psychological fall out of this. Referring to the Japanese film *Kaidan (Kwaidan)* (1964) as being; "fascinating visually in its bold use of

¹² A French film magazine first published in 1951. Its writers included later avant garde/New Wave directors; Jean Luc Goddard, Claude Chabrol, Francois Truffaut & Jacques Rivette.

¹³ *Famous Monsters of Filmland* - an American horror genre magazine edited by Forrest J. Ackerman, published from 1958 to 1983.

colour and imaginative sets” (Everson 1975,164), but then claims that it “does virtually everything wrong in its attempts to create suspense and horror out of phantoms and apparitions” (Everson 1975,164). There is no real evidence to substantiate this claim by Everson and it is based on the assumption that Asian audiences are frightened by the same things as Western audiences.

As Everson begins discussing post 1960s films, he asserts that since this period; “the horror film has become a mass-produced, standardised *genre*” (Everson 1975,189), and denigrates many of the more recent remakes and new films for being inferior to their originals, as well as admitting the “arbitrary standards by which many films have been selected for appraisal in this volume” (Everson 1975,189) - a rather startling admission. In a book with over 200 pages, the brief paragraphs detailing European horror output are mainly in his “vampires” chapter as Mario Bava’s *La maschera del demonio* (1960) comes under the microscope - “a welcome and ultra-stylish return to black and white” (Everson 1975, 207), with Bava described as Italy’s “more flamboyant answer to James Whale” (Everson 1975, 207). Everson’s considered opinion however, is that “Italy’s horror films - which have proliferated in the past decade - have always had a rather unhealthy tendency towards the excesses of Grand Guignol, to dwelling on the detailed unpleasantness of death and torture” (Everson 1975, 207). He claims *La maschera del demonio* to be the best of “too many” Bava films and “excess, not only of design but also of technique and content, is its only major flaw” (Everson 1975, 209), with Everson also reserving high praise for Roger Vadim’s *Et mourir de plaisir (Blood and Roses)* (1961). Everson very much elevates the older Hollywood “classic” films here, holding them in high esteem, but at the expense of any detailed analysis or appreciation of European horror films, save for a separate chapter on *Vampyr*. As such, Everson appears to hold little regard for European horror, in just the same way he treats the contemporary Hollywood horror films with disdain, due to their sex and violence.

Returning with *More Classics of the Horror Film* (1987), Everson includes films overlooked originally, such as Hammer’s *The Devil Rides Out* (1967), now covered as space allows, but this indicates that this is a popular overview, perhaps constrained by lack of access to materials, rather than an academic study where the criteria for inclusion would be based on influence and importance, rather than space constraints, calling into question Everson’s selection process. Everson also claims to uncover rare and largely unseen European films in this volume. Everson’s aforementioned rediscoveries and purported new accent on European films, prove to be underwhelming. With a brief discussion, Everson praises Werner Herzog’s *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* (1979) as “Murnau’s *Nosferatu* identified the vampire with pestilence and plague, and Herzog is able to underline that, (with, for example), a greater use of hordes of real rats” (Everson, 1987,192). Everson then mentions Dario Argento - “a mildly interesting cult figure but no more” (Everson 1987, 218). He dismisses *Profondo rosso* (1975) and *Suspiria* (1976) as being “vague and meaningless” (Everson 1987, 218) because;

They lurch along from one bravura suspense or shock sequence to another, some of the themes individually quite brilliant, full of little surreal touches which

suggest that Buñuel may have been as much of an influence as Bava, but in the end, adding up to nothing but an exercise in style. (Everson 1987, 218).

Everson concludes with the prescient comment (considering the rise in quality and importance of TV drama series today, fuelled partially by online streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime), that the growth and popularity in TV horror series is starting to impact on the film industry. Despite his assertions to the contrary, Everson's *More Classics* is very much more of the same - his scope is still limited to mainly American film output and his rare forays into European horror tend to see its exponents damned with faint praise rather than receiving any more considered scrutiny.

Having reviewed the early texts above, mainly on the basis of them supplying a historical context for the horror film, but offering a limited scope in not specifically discussing European horror, I will now scrutinise the key texts which helped to inspire my own writing. Of these texts, Hardy (1984), Pirie (1977), Nicholls (1984) and Newman (1984) are of interest for the depth of analysis and wide scope of hitherto neglected European films they discuss.

Hardy's *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror* (1984) was one of the first international reference works to include Eurohorror directors with Jess Franco, Jean Rollin, Lucio Fulci and Pupi Avati, together with an eclectic range of obscure works such as *Esta Noite Encarnarei no Teu Cadaver* (*Tonight I Will Paint in Flesh Colour*) (1966) from Brazil, *Cien Gritos de Terror* (*One Hundred Cries of Terror*) (1964) from Mexico, *Lokis* (*The Bear*) (1970) from Poland, nestling alongside Hollywood thrillers *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Basic Instinct* (1992). (In the 1993 reprint edition covering films up to 1992 - an extra 90 pages were added to the original volume, with many of the new entries written by Kim Newman, though the majority were UK and US releases, rather than international films). As with any work of this magnitude, there are some controversial inclusions and omissions with John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982) not making the horror edition but instead, included in Hardy's companion volume, *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Science Fiction* (1984). As one of the first books to give foreign language titles for the films, and detailed cast and crew entries, this was one of, if not, *the* pivotal reference books of the period. With contributions from Tom Milne, Julian Petley, Tim Pulleine and Paul Willemen, insightful and opinionated reviews of each film were given, although review contributions were not individually signed. For example, of Pupi Avati's *La casa dalle finestre che ridono* (*The House of the Laughing Windows*) (1976) "the film itself achieves a hellishness in its examination of the neuroses that underpin the morbid fascination of filming/depicting 'death at work'", (Hardy, 1993, 310), whilst Mario Bava's *Operazione paura* (*Kill, Baby... Kill!*) (1966) is reviewed as being, "deliriously stylised, flamboyantly romantic imagery and enhanced by an eerily poetic soundtrack" (Hardy, 1993, 183). This level of detail and intelligent criticism devoted to the horror genre, was generally unheard of at the time.

David Pirie's *The Vampire Cinema* (1977), although concentrating specifically on the vampire film, actually exhibits a far reaching scope with the strain of films covered and was a formative

influence on my own writing for two reasons. Firstly, by concentrating not just on the expected American and Hammer Films offerings, but also extending the range to include many European films, especially in the case of his Jean Rollin coverage. Secondly, in Pirie's thematic approach by directly connecting the rise and fall of the vampire film with the influence of the sexploitation genre upon it. He also notes the irony that the very same freedoms which led to the proliferation of sex films, also appeared to sound the death knell for the vampire film. When explaining the literary origins of *Dracula*, Pirie declares that, to a degree "the character of the Count can be construed as the great submerged force of Victorian libido breaking out to punish the repressive society which had imprisoned it" (Pirie 1977, 26). As such, the sheer, explicit nature of the sex film denies any such repression, so rendering the impact of the vampire film as impotent. "There can be few cinematic forms that chart the passage of permissiveness quite as strikingly as the vampire movie" (Pirie 1977, 9), Pirie notes.

Pirie traces the bloodline of the filmic vampire from *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (*Nosferatu*) (1922), but where his approach differs from other writers is in his analysis of Hammer Films and his concentration on European horror films. Pirie observes Hammer's *Dracula* (1958) with its tranquil opening scenes, save for the absence of any birds singing. For Pirie, this encapsulates Hammer's approach to horror - "their speciality is the intrusion of the abnormal into the normal" (Pirie, 1977,74). He also identifies Hammer's attention to detail in recreating a cosy, Victorian milieu, which makes the violence of the vampire all the more effective. Pirie notes that in *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (1970) "[a]s a chronicle of Dracula's ability to replace the ordered sexual stability of society with a chaotic and dislocating eroticism, the film is disconcertingly consistent", (Pirie 1977, 91), in delineating the disintegration of the family structure.

Identifying the influence of the book and film version of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), Pirie sees the synergy between the sexual and the supernatural and offers an insight as to how the supernatural elements conjured up were able to effectively help bypass the grip of the censor - "[c]learly in the early 1970s the supernatural was still able to go further than the sex movie, especially in the suggestion of sadistic pleasure", (Pirie 1977,100). Thus, films such as Hammer's Karnstein trilogy prospered, utilising supernatural undertones as a backdrop to the graphic, erotic content.

Pirie then dissects the work of one such enthusiast, Jean Rollin, analysing his oeuvre and claiming that his first film, *Le viol du vampire* (*The Rape of the Vampire*) (1967) "reflects a preference for visual effects rather than narrative continuity, which has been a feature of all his subsequent work" (Pirie 1977,103). Admiring his "audacious imagery" (Pirie 1977,103), Pirie sees *Le frisson des vampires* (*The Shiver of the Vampires*) (1971) as Rollin's most commercial work and in a nod to the surreal, painterly images on show, asserts that;

All of Rollin's films are crammed with visual extravagance, he is not averse to duplicating the exact details of this or that Surrealist painting and Max Ernst seems to be a central visual influence on his later work (Pirie 1977,106).

Although praising Rollin's vivid imagination, use of S & M inflections and audacity, Pirie qualifies this, commenting that;

His use of colour manages to prevent this from becoming too repetitive, but by taking the vampire out of a narrative context and placing it in an essentially visual frame of reference, Rollin has deprived the form of much of its interest. (Pirie 1977,106).

Pirie also discusses Alain Jessua's *Traitement de Choc (Doctor in the Nude)* (1973), which emphasises the political dimension of the vampire genre, detailing how a French sanitarium utilises the blood from cheap, imported Portuguese labourers to rejuvenate its wealthy clients. No such political intrigue in Hammer's Karnstein trilogy which Pirie then analyses, asserting the "sexual drug" aspect in *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), and "an aura of potent, cloying sensuality" (Pirie 1977,121) in *Lust for a Vampire* (1971). In the final entry, *Twins of Evil* (1971), there is one symbolic moment where a lethal crucifix comes into contact with a vampire's exposed pubic hair¹⁴ "its vicious juxtaposition of sexual energy matches anything that Rollin for all his overt Surrealism, has yet achieved" (Pirie 1977,123).

Because it was influenced by Richard Matheson's novel, *I Am Legend* (1954), in his "New American Vampire" chapter, Pirie considers George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) as pivotal. For Pirie, Romero's film "broadened the whole genre's frame of reference, redirecting our attention to a more general and political reading of the vampire myth than anyone had thought possible" (Pirie 1977,145). In addition, it introduces the unhappy ending, as well as the psychological and social impacts of war and racism.

Pirie then introduces "The Latin Vampire", referencing back to 1931 and the celebrated Spanish film version of *Dracula*, as indicating an early Latin interest in the vampire film. Pirie also identifies the predominantly Catholic religion in these countries as rendering audiences "more likely to be receptive to the idea of spiritual evil and its associate manifestations" (Pirie 1977,148). Of all the Latin countries however, Pirie observes that Mexico produces the most vampire films but is different in that "[t]he Mexican cinema operates from an entirely different cultural market than its American or European counterparts and its approach to genre material is correspondingly different" (Pirie 1977,148).

Regarding the Spanish influence, Pirie discusses the series of *Blind Dead* films, the films of the prolific Spanish actor Paul Naschy, and director Jess Franco, whose *Gritos en la noche (The Awful Dr. Orloff)* (1962) proved a catalyst for the Spanish genre industry. Referencing Franco's *Vampyros Lesbos* (1971), *Necronomicon - Geträumte Sünden (Succubus)* (1968) and *Nachts, wenn Dracula erwacht (Bram Stoker's Count Dracula)* (1970), Pirie claims that Franco "reeled between standard softcore exploitation and more fantastic subjects" (Pirie 1977,153) and he often "gave his vampire

¹⁴ Predating a similar scene in *The Exorcist* (1973) by some 2 years.

movies a sexual orientation” (Pirie 1977,153). Pirie states that “[t]he only Latin country to develop a horror cinema with international critical recognition is Italy” (Pirie 1977,156). He references Riccardo Freda’s *I Vampiri* (1957), *L’orribile segreto del Dr. Hichcock* (*The Terror of Dr. Hitchcock*) (1962) and *Lo spettro* (*The Ghost*) (1963) as well as the rise of the iconic actress Barbara Steele, (born in Birkenhead), who elevated the status of the female vampire, just as Christopher Lee had done for the male counterpart. Discussing Mario Bava, Pirie claims “if ever a horror film was pure style, it is *Mask of the Demon*” (Pirie 1977,160), and offers an insightful discussion on *I tre volti della paura* (*Black Sabbath*) (1960), especially the final moments - “an agonising scene which looks forward to *Night of the Living Dead* where a child, now one of the undead, is beating on its mothers door, begging to be let in from the cold” (Pirie 1977,162). Regarding Bava’s style, Pirie comments that “he particularly seems to favour thematic constructions which blur the borderline between reality on the one hand and dreams or psychosis on the other” (Pirie 1977,162), in offering amore insightful approach to Bava than his contemporaries.

Pirie’s astute point, is that when the UK joined the (as then), Common Market in 1973 “it was becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish the product of one European country from another” (Pirie 1977,165). Pirie cites two examples of this in *Vampyres* (1974) and *No profanar el sueño de los muertos* (1974). Of the former “it takes the idea of sex vampirism about as far as it can go in terms of the satiated sexual exhaustion the film conveys” (Pirie 1977,165). Of the latter, by equating it with *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) “[l]ike the earlier film, it ultimately identifies the hero with the undead rather than the forces of law and order” (Pirie 1977,166 & 169). Pirie identifies films such as these to coin a new sub genre “[b]y fusing the theme of contemporary social breakdown with the more Freudian and individual terror of gothic fiction, they extend the horror field into a new and more viable area that could be loosely termed the cinema of Gothic anxiety. (Pirie 1977,169).

Pirie’s conclusion, citing well crafted works which ultimately died at the box office such as *Messiah of Evil* (1973), *Jonathan* (1970) and *Le nosferat ou les eaux glacées de calcul égoïste* (1974), indicated the decline of the vampire film “[j]ust as Stoker’s *Dracula* achieved its vogue in the declining years of Victorian England, the vampire cinema seems itself to have reflected a transitional period in Western culture, involving especially, the further weakening of traditional sexual morality” (Pirie 1977,173).

Pirie is one of the first authors to identify and acknowledge the scope of European horror cinema, treating it with due respect and reverence, yet still retaining a critical eye. For once, previously neglected and disparaged films and their directors are given proper consideration and elevated above the more anticipated and copiously covered American entries. Although vampire films are the main subject, Pirie offers a wide, inclusive definition which increases the scope of the book considerably, as well as identifying the links between the permissive society and the vampire film, together with a new sub genre, the cinema of Gothic anxiety.

Another formative book, Peter Nicholls' *Fantastic Cinema* (1984), defines "fantasy" as any non-realistic element, so for Nicholls, slasher/psycho films are excluded, save for the seemingly supernatural killer in *Halloween* (1978). In his introduction, Nicholls quotes statistics from the trade magazine *Variety*, that in 1971 5% of the US box office was made up of science fiction/fantasy films, but this had exploded to 50% by 1982. For Nicholls, and many other critics, 1968 is identified as a pivotal year for fantasy with *2001 - A Space Odyssey*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Rosemary's Baby* and *Night of the Living Dead*, all being released during this year. As such, the majority of the book's scope covers post 1968 entries, also including a filmography with over 700 films listed, including capsule reviews and Nicholls own quality and gore ratings. Nicholls states the Surrealism movement as being an important aspect regarding fantasy cinema. He offers four main criteria for this including bizarre, grotesque, absurd and arbitrary moments in a film as opposed to reality; films with dreams and the unconscious mind, subversive, radical and rejecting any forms of repression and films with a wide-eyed, single-minded, intensity, (Nicholls 1984, 19-20). All of these criteria are located in one film for Nicholls, with Luis Buñuel's *L'âge d'or* (*The Golden Age*) (1930).

In his second chapter, Nicholls reserves praise for Georges Franju's *Les yeux sans visage* (1960), but notes that "it is sad that, when the film has been imitated, its Grand Guignol horrors rather than its poetry and its psychological tenderness have been used as model" (Nicholls 1984, 45). Nicholls also discusses the rise of period costume horror across Europe and the birth of the Italian *giallo* film "[b]ut the Italian line of development has now become a distinct style of its own; highly episodic, visually startling, grotesque, surreal and sadistic. *Black Sunday* stands at the lead of this tradition" (Nicholls 1984, 52).

His third chapter is devoted to 1968 as "The Breakthrough Year". Nicholls astutely observes the significance of Stanley Kubrick's *2001 - A Space Odyssey* as "[i]t remains one of the most intellectually audacious science fiction films ever made, and a rare example of a film of considerable complexity and obscurity becoming a hit" (Nicholls 1984, 63). Kubrick's statement here, driven by imagery as opposed to narrative, perhaps prepared some of the ground for the more surrealistic European horrors to follow. Nicholls identifies *Witchfinder General* as a costume horror opening up the threshold of violence, (in a similar vein to Pirie's theme of supernatural horror extending censorship boundaries), as well as more realistic, contemporary films such as *Rosemary's Baby*. Nicholls concludes this chapter with what he terms the most inspirational horror film of 1968, Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, and sees this as building upon the inconclusive "ending" of *The Birds* (1963), only more graphic and nihilistic as the black hero is shot dead by the authorities.

Nicholls compiles a list of 13 influential directors in the fantasy genre since 1968, but disappointingly, this is made up almost entirely of American figures. He omits Bava, Buñuel, Bergman and Fisher on the grounds that most of their work was before this starting point, whilst Argento is rather arbitrarily omitted, simply due to lack of space, as Nicholls admits on p.68.

Departing from the approach of many of his contemporaries, Nicholls does at least analyse some of the more modern European horror films, covering *Suspiria* (1976) and *Inferno* (1980) - "Argento is not interested in linear narrative. For him, magic is arbitrary and inexplicable. The result is a fragmentation so extreme as to defy analysis of what it all might mean" (Nicholls 1984,152). When discussing Lucio Fulci's more fantastical entries, he gives kudos to *E tu vivrai nel terrore! L'aldilà* (1981), for its audacious ending stating "that the sheer nerve of this sequence is admirable" (Nicholls 1984,152), and praising the restraint shown in *Quella villa accanto al cimitero* (1981), as "[t]he treatment of children in the film is surprisingly tender" (Nicholls 1984,152). Nicholls slightly barbed coda to Fulci is that;

I am tempted to defend Fulci's bottom-of-the-barrel sado-exploitation films for their macabre jollity, all *papier mache* and sheep's guts, and the director's ill advised but admirable insistence on breaking every rule of coherent narrative in order to create the illogicality of nightmare. But upon mature consideration, I will not. (Nicholls 1984,152).

Nicholls then does at least attempt to discuss how this visceral horror approach and often non-linear narrative is combined with arthouse cinema to startling effect in Andrzej Zulawski's *Possession* (1981). Nicholls claims that;

This is a film about mental disintegration, so what could be more appropriate than encouraging one's actors to go so far over the top they soar out of sight? The intensity with which abnormality is shown, is theatrical, but it *is* intense. (Nicholls 1984,154).

Nicholls observes that *Possession* is "overloaded with symbolism" (Nicholls 1984,154); from the political tension of the protagonists' apartment being adjacent to the Berlin Wall, a local school teacher being Anna/Helen's (Isabelle Adjani) clone and a husband who is a spy-assassin for a Machiavellian political group. The final scene of a door opening out, apparently onto the start of World War Three, completes the unnerving quality of the film. For Nicholls;

The subtext, after all, is quite well achieved (sexual anguish and alienation breed monsters). It is a grotesquely overdone arthouse movie, made by an intellectual, and not a sado-exploitation picture at all. It has something to say. (Nicholls 1984,154).

Nicholls concludes by analysing the post 1968 fantasy films, together with the notion of surrealism as social criticism - "[s]urrealism thrives on the escalation of small, disturbing incidents into full-bodied chaos" (Nicholls 1984,174). Nicholls also looks at the convergence of horror and fantasy which can exist symbiotically, whether it be *Céline et Julie vont en bateau: Phantom*

Ladies Over Paris (Celine and Julie Go Boating) (1974), *The Evil Dead* (1982) or *La bête (The Beast)* (1975).

Ultimately, Nicholls identifies pivotal trends in the fantasy genre, especially from 1968 and beyond, covers a wide scope of entries with due reverence to surrealist inflections and non-linear approaches, and includes selected, but detailed discussion of significant European horror films, including those often simply disparaged as arthouse. Nicholls holds European horror in high esteem compared to many and the omissions he makes are generally on the grounds of being entries prior to his watershed year of 1968. Whilst such omissions arguably weaken some of the text, Nicholls does make many valid observations, providing more insight than most of his contemporaries and a springboard for further investigation.

Last of the formative texts I studied was Kim Newman's *Nightmare Movies* (1984, second edition, 1988). Newman observes that unlike the writers previously discussed, who saw the famous Karloff and Lugosi Universal films upon their original release, he was not born until 1959, also reading and agreeing with Pirie in arguing the importance of later films, post 1960s onwards. Newman defines horror as "the central thesis of horror in film and literature is that the world is a more frightening place than is generally assumed" (Newman 1988, xii). Like Nicholls, Newman notes the importance of 1968 and *Night of the Living Dead* especially, as a watershed moment for horror cinema, but also alludes to other films, not typically considered as horror, and yet betray certain characteristics and can be equally horrifying such as *Dirty Harry* (1971) and *The King of Comedy* (1982). Newman also writes how say *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Deliverance* (1972) contain very similar fears and yet the latter, with a larger budget, bigger names and star director, is treated very differently. As Newman states "[t]he out-of-genre horror film is currently producing more interesting work than the franchised and repetitive glut of teenage horror comedies" (Newman 1988, xii). The notion of city dwellers clashing with rural, isolated communities, in effect raping the landscape with their construction projects, is alluded to by Carol J. Clover in discussing *Deliverance* (1972), stating that "[t]he construction of the city as metaphoric rapist of the country is an increasingly common one in horror" (Clover 1992, 129) - the valedictory ending showing the church and cemetery being relocated in order to make way for the planned redevelopment.

Newman identifies the more graphic horrors such as *The Exorcist* (1973) as sounding the death knell for Hammer Films and their imitators, disrupting the cosy period settings and blurring the lines between the traditional Good versus Evil morality tales - "[w]hile the conventions were atrophying at Hammer, others were actively subverting them" (Newman 1988, 14). As with Pirie before him, Newman observes the changing face of classic Gothic cinema, singling out Harry Kumel's *Les lèvres rouges* (1971) and José Larraz's *Vampyres* (1974), before covering Jess Franco and Jean Rollin. Of Franco, he claims that "[h]is films are slipshod affairs, enlivened by a handful (a *small* handful) of arty/surreal moments and the pretty faces of his often-naked ingenues" (Newman 1988, 30). Newman sees Rollin just as culpable of making bad movies but he "is

actually a sort of artist” (Newman 1988, 30). Asserting *Lèvres de sang (Lips of Blood)* (1975) to be his “qualified masterpiece” with “astonishing imagery”, Newman then considers Werner Herzog’s *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* (1979). Described as “achingly beautiful, but arch” (Newman 1988, 31), Newman also claims that “Klaus Kinski’s ratty Dracula and Isabelle Adjani’s pre-Raphaelite heroine are impressive portraits, but as frozen as paint on a canvas” (Newman 1988, 31).

For his chapter on “Devil Movies”, Newman includes Mario Bava’s *Lisa e il diavolo (Lisa and the Devil)* (1973), which he regards as having “an incredibly complicated plot, continually disrupted by the director’s love of startling images” (Newman 1988, 63), although I would argue that the equally convoluted release history of this particular film, with numerous re-edits and retitling, also contributes greatly to this.

Devoting a chapter to “Auteurs”, Newman, like Nicholls, almost exclusively includes American directors, only marginally updated in his second edition in 1988, to include Dario Argento. For Newman “Argento has deconstructed the horror/thriller tradition of Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang, Robert Siodmak and the American hardboiled *noir* writers and created his own distinctive world” (Newman 1988,105). He continues that “Argento goes out of his way to identify himself with the psycho figures in his movies” (Newman 1988,106), referring to the director’s penchant for donning the *de rigueur* black gloves and wielding the knife of the killer himself. Newman also argues how works of art are turned on the protagonists and used as weapons in *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo (The Bird with the Crystal Plumage)* (1970) and *Tenebre* (1982), for example. The irony of this is not lost as for “Argento’s audience, the *haut bourgeoisie* should suffer for their privilege by dying in elaborate agony” (Newman, 1988,107). Newman also comments that Argento is not afraid to reinforce the sly humour of this theme - equally so in *Profondo rosso* (1975) where “a typically sinuous tracking shot comes to rest on the killer’s lost marbles” (Newman, 1988,107).

Continuing his propensity for delineating the collusion between horror and art, Newman’s chapter devoted to “Weirdo Horror” includes Zulawski’s *Possession* (1980), where according to Newman;

the director goes mad with his swooping camera, has everything in shot painted blue and encourages his stars to attack their roles with a kind of stylised hysteria, rare outside the Japanese theatre, but *Possession* is compulsive all the same. (Newman 1988,137).

Newman’s chapter on “Ghost Stories” goes beyond the expected subjects, poring over an eclectic mix of European horror as Jacques Rivette’s *Céline et Julie vont en bateau: Phantom Ladies Over Paris* (1974) is termed “an optimists human vision of the world of magic which Argento summons up in *Suspiria* (1976) and *Inferno* (1980)” (Newman 1988,163). Newman also includes lesser known works such as Catherine Binet’s *Les Jeux de la Comtesse Dolingen de Graz* (1981) and Eduardo de Gregorio’s *Serail* (1976), along with Harry Kumel’s *Malpertuis (The Legend of Doom House)* (1971).

One of Newman's most insightful chapters "Cannibal Zombie gut-crunchers - Italian style", is self-explanatory. Inspired by the success of George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), (released as *Zombi* in Italy), including its own Italian collaborators in Dario Argento and the music group Goblin, Italy carved its own name in the zombie genre as Lucio Fulci's *Zombi 2 (Zombie Flesh Eaters)* (1979), arrived in cinemas only 2 months after *Dawn* was released in Italy. As Newman noted "Rome has become the Taiwan of the international film industry" (Newman 1988,187), adding that "Italy may make rip-offs, but at least it can claim to make the best, most lively, most audacious rip-offs in the world" (Newman 1988,187). To prove the point, Fulci's *Zombie* features an underwater zombie, outrageously taking a bite out of a passing shark in an ironic inversion of *Jaws* (1975). By accurately stating Italy's place in the pantheon of world cinema production, Newman adds that "[h]istorically, the pattern of Italian commercial cinema has been an overlapping succession of genre cycles" (Newman 1988,187), triggered by a specific American film or Hollywood genre. The production of such films, often rushed out to market and with a short life-span, can lead to some fascinating hybrids. For example, the disco/giallo of Fulci's *Murderock - Uccide a passo di danza (Murder-Rock: Dancing Death)* (1984), or the horror/peplum of Mario Bava's *Ercole al centro della Terra (Hercules in the Haunted World)* (1961). As Newman comments, these are not just quick copies, but "the best examples of most cycles are surprisingly sophisticated mixes of imitation, pastiche, parody, deconstruction, reinterpretation and operatic inflation" (Newman 1988,188).

As Newman begins to dissect the Italian zombie film genre, he also highlights the socio-political dimension often present, yet generally overlooked in the 1980s, amongst the surfeit of viscera on show. Thus, of Bruno Mattei's *Virus (Zombie Creeping Flesh)* (1980), Newman observes that "the film also has a surprisingly apposite (if stupidly expressed) message that unless the developed world feeds the Third World, the latter will eat the former" (Newman 1988,189). As regards the films of Lucio Fulci, for Newman, *Zombi 2 (Zombie Flesh Eaters)* (1979) has pace, *E tu vivrai nel terrore! L'aldilà (The Beyond)* (1981) and *Paura nella città dei morti viventi (City of the Living Dead)* (1980) are both "stately gothic", with the former also boasting "disquieting, painterly images" (Newman 1988,190). In the case of *Quella villa accanto al cimitero (The House by the Cemetery)* (1981), Newman states that;

the horror murders are hung on a strong situation, with Freudstein's willingness to murder his wife and daughter to prolong his life, paralleling the hero's willingness to endanger his own wife and son to get to the bottom of the mystery. (Newman 1988,191).

Shifting his focus to the Italian cannibal film genre, Newman deftly observes that;

The Italian /cannibal movie cycle is almost unique in that, although it assimilates influences as diverse as *A Man Called Horse* (1970), *The Valley Obscured by Clouds* (1972), *Aguirre-*

Wrath of God (1972) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979), it is actually an indigenous form whose brief popularity owes little to the box office success of any of its foreign inspirations. (Newman 1988,193).

The ephemeral nature of this unique, though now largely dormant Italian sub-genre, differs from that other peculiarly Italian creation - the *giallo*, which for Newman is “a staple Italian genre rather than being linked to a cycle” (Newman 1988,197). Therefore, *these* films still exist, though sporadically, including both *Sotto il vestito niente (Nothing Underneath)* (1985) and *Deliria (Stagefright)* (1987), as Newman notes.

Newman’s discussion in the final chapter, “The Post-Modern Horror Film”, questions as to whether horror has gone as far as it can go. Newman asks if this is why the proliferation of horror comedies that surfaced such as *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985) and *Re-Animator* (1985) came about. Alternatively, he sees multi-themed, eclectic influences pointing to more ambitious horror films with a decidedly less traditional approach. Citing *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Newman delineates the cultivating of Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando), as the “monster”, located in a nightmarish jungle milieu, surrounded by mutilated corpses and severed native heads - all echoed in the Italian zombie and cannibal film cycle. “Brando monologises on the meaning of horror, and the conventional horror movie becomes obsolete. The physical and emotional overstatements of the genre have exploded into the mainstream. If Romero’s *Living Dead* movies depict the Beginning of the End, *Apocalypse Now* comes close to being the End of the End” (Newman 1988, 213).

Newman’s greatest insights are his acknowledgement of the importance of the Italian film industry, identifying the unique nature of the Cannibal genre as well as the original creation of the *giallo* film. His scope is far wider than many previous authors and holds the European horror film in high regard. He also correctly notes how his difference in age, separates him from the earlier horror historians, allowing him to place emphasis on post 1960s films and their importance.

I will now analyse a group of authors who expand the area of horror film criticism further, by utilising a more academic approach. Intriguingly, although they expand the vocabulary and methodology for studying the horror film, they all almost entirely neglect European horror *en masse*. Therefore Robin Wood (1986), James B. Twitchell (1985), Andrew Tudor (1989) and David J. Skal (1993) adopt differing approaches but share some common ground. There is much discourse on the psychoanalytical aspects of the horror film, including ideas concerning “the return of the repressed” and the “other”, together with an amplified discussion regarding the concept of “body horror”. The future importance of gender, especially the female in the horror film,

is also introduced, particularly by female scholars including Barbara Creed, Carol J Clover and Linda Williams.¹⁵

Robin Wood embraces psychoanalysis, especially given his credence to Freud's view that "civilisation is built on repression, which accounts for the fundamental dualism of all art; the urge to reaffirm and justify that repression, and the urge of rebellion, the desire to subvert, combat, overthrow. (Wood 1986, 47). Wood argues that horror texts have an effect on their audience and not always repressive, they can be radical. Wood claims the "monsters" in horror films represents "the return of the repressed", and a reassertion of groups he terms "other", ordered by forces of patriarchy and capitalism, who include women, other cultures, the proletariat, ethnic groups, alternative ideologies, deviations from sexual norms and children. For Wood, such films often elicit audience sympathy for the monster as opposed to a desire to repress or contain it. As Wood sees the horror film as part of a struggle to recognise what our civilisation attempts to repress, this is where he claims the horror film to be radical with the caveat that a "happy ending" with the monster defeated may simply restore the repression. It is an appealing argument but then on occasions, I would argue, that the monster *itself* is the repressive force rather than the repressed, for example in *The Keep* (1983)¹⁶.

As regards the "other", for Wood this represents what bourgeoisie society cannot recognise or accept and must deal with it either by rejecting it, or by rendering it safe. Wood concludes by contrasting Bergman's *Jungfrukällan (The Virgin Spring)* (1960) with Craven's *The Last House on the Left* (1972), which effectively replay the same plot, only in a much more visceral fashion in the latter. Wood observes that the former is seen as art, the latter as exploitation.

This theme of art and exploitation is also explored by Twitchell who asserts that "the horror film has achieved critical acclaim at the same time auteur criticism was gaining popularity" (Twitchell 1985,18). Evaluating horror films in terms of technique allows justification of their intellectual properties Twitchell claims, adding that "film artistry can be judged independently of narrative responsibility" (Twitchell 1985,19). Twitchell also makes an important distinction between "horror and "terror", stating that; "the etiology of horror is *always* in dreams, while the basis of terror is in actuality. Thus, while the images may be similar, the interpretation of terror will be contextual" (Twitchell 1985,19-20). According to Twitchell, this emphasis on the psychological aspects of horror is stymied by a lack of critical vocabulary and methodology by which to study it. For Twitchell there are three reasons for the psychological attraction of horror;

¹⁵ Linda Williams (1984) 'When the Woman Looks', in *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams (Frederick MD: University Publications of America), p.83-99.

Carol J. Clover (1987) 'Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film' in *Representations*, Autumn 1987, No. 20 Special Issue: Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy (University of California), p.187-228.

¹⁶ An ancient sentinel guarding the eponymous castle during World War Two is awakened. The Resistance movement imagine he will defeat the dominant Nazi occupation, but instead, the sentinel embodies a range of Nazi-like tropes and proves as much a threat to the world as the Nazis.

1. Counterphobia - satisfaction in overcoming objects of fear.
2. The “return of the repressed” - the compulsive projection of objects of sublimated desire with repressed urges escaping via the fantasy element of a film.
3. Part of a complicated rites of passage - from onanism, to reproduction and sexuality. Horror acts as the do’s and don’t’s for adolescent sexuality. (Twitchell 1985, 65).

Twitchell expands on the psychological theme of horror, especially in relation to the characters of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and studies on schizophrenia during the Victorian era. Of Hyde, Twitchell states that he is “part of us all - reminds us what we have repressed or grown out of, namely, early adolescence. Far more than the vampire or the Frankenstein monster, Hyde is the monster of latency” (Twitchell 1985, 233). Regarding its relation to European horror, Twitchell only makes passing reference to entries such as *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (1971), and Hammer Films are again Twitchell’s “go-to” position on European film coverage included in his chapters on *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, (which includes a brief reference to Kumei’s *Les lèvres rouges* (*Daughters of Darkness*)). When discussing the theme of the “beast within” in films such as *Martin* (1978), Twitchell expands the discussion to science fiction and *Alien* (1979), observing that it “is almost a remake of Mario Bava’s *Terrore nello spazio* (1965), but with new technological virtuosity” (Twitchell 1985, 271), (a connection previously made by Jeffrey Frentzen in 1979)¹⁷. Twitchell does also intriguingly note of American horror such as Universal’s film series, that the “look” is taken from German cinema (Expressionism), but that the stories are English.

Twitchell concludes his study discussing the gaze of horror as “Modern horror first enters through the eye: it is visual, the visceral. Little wonder it is so often pornographic” (Twitchell 1985, 291). For Twitchell, the camera is the phallus, (as made real in *Peeping Tom* (1960)), expanding on Susan Sontag’s theory that it is “a metaphor that everyone unconsciously employs, and it is named without subtlety whenever we talk about ‘loading’ and ‘aiming’ a camera, about ‘shooting’ a film” (Sontag 1973,13-14).

Tudor increases the coverage of European horror, adopting both a singular and plural approach as he sees on one hand, a single genre and history, but also several genres requiring evaluation from several vantage points - using a variety of terms. Tudor aims at “understanding the development of the horror movie as a historically specific social and cultural form” (Tudor 1989, 2). Tudor rejects a psychoanalytical approach as being crucial to studying the horror film, which sees the genre as a “kind of collective dreamworld, requiring analysis by methods derived from one or another tradition of psychoanalysis” (Tudor 1989, 2). In his opinion, this is overly reductive and instead, utilises a sociological framework which he sees as a more ‘balanced’ approach to genre and reduces the importance of theories regarding the unconscious. In emphasising the viewer’s conscious awareness of genre tropes and filmic language, Tudor negates the need for the

¹⁷ “It! The Terror from Beyond the Planet of the Vampires”, *Cinefantastique*, Volume 8, no.4.

unconscious theorising which is central to Wood's 'return of the repressed' argument. Tudor studies 990 films from 1931-1984 - of these, barely 16% are from Spain, Italy or France for example, the remainder predominantly from America (56.9%) and the UK (25.1%). He also identifies his own distinct phases to study, namely; the Classic period (1931-6), the War period (1941-6), the Fifties Boom (1956-60), the American Decline (1963-6), the Seventies Boom (1971-4) and Sustainable Growth (1978-83). Tudor makes two pivotal observations in the Fifties Boom in *Peeping Tom* (1960) and *Psycho* (1960), firstly, the "internalisation" of the psychological disorders "potentially present within any of us" (Tudor 1989, 45). Secondly, that the psychosis effecting both killers is "overtly and metaphorically, linked to sex" (Tudor 1989, 45). Therefore, this correlation between sexuality, repression and psychosis "lay the foundations for a new kind of movie monster" (Tudor 1989, 45-6).

In "the Seventies Boom", Tudor makes the connection between *The Exorcist's* (1973) more graphic horrors, along with the vampire sex films from Hammer and others. During the Sustained Growth period Tudor delineates the dehumanising disease threat spread in *Zombi 2* (1979) and *Virus* (1980) as an "apocalyptic vision of total social collapse" (Tudor 1989, 71), and when discussing Fulci's *E tu vivrai nel terrore! L'aldilà* (1981), *Paura nella città dei morti viventi* (1980) and *Quella villa accanto al cimitero* (1981), he considers these films to be "[n]o less detailed than *The Evil Dead* (1982) in their insistent exploration of decaying flesh and spilled organs, they are narratively almost incoherent - perhaps the price to be paid for the eighties taste in gross special effects" (Tudor 1989, 76), he claims.

Tudor concludes by discussing Science, the Supernatural and the Psyche. Of the former, he asserts the belief that science is dangerous, as being central to the horror film;

Behind it lurks a generalised fear that, powered by science and technology, the engine of change is out of control, that 'progress' may not be the unqualified force for good" (Tudor 1989,143). Tudor expands this, analysing the Supernatural, referring to both *Witchfinder General* (1968) and *The Wicker Man* (1973) as rare, reflective horror films. Neither film "commits' itself to the existence of the supernatural... (Tudor 1989,170)

But, in both cases, the protagonists are either defeated, or at least scarred for life, by societies "willingness to accept superstition and persecution" (Tudor 1989,171). Essentially, "a world which has lost all sense of security" (Tudor 1989,171). In the case of the Psyche, Tudor sees the threat of impulses from within almost replacing the mad scientist film - the scientific 'madness', although always dangerous, seemingly able to be controlled or stopped by us - unlike the unseen, paranoid fear potentially lurking in each of us.

While eschewing the more analytical approach of Tudor, Skal does also scrutinise the horror film from a sociological perspective, introducing the notion that images, both moving and still, encompassing film and art, potentially contain a rich, hidden culture of their own, as he sees

horror as an adjunct to surrealism and other artistic movements. In a literary leap just as audacious as Kubrick's celebrated jump cut of a Australopithecus hurling a bone skywards, segueing into a floating spaceship, Skal observes the importance of *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*) (1919) as being;

difficult to overstate the kind of revelation *Caligari* represented to much of its audience, which felt it was witnessing an evolutionary leap in the cinema, one comparable to the coming of sound, or, decades later, the overwhelming experience of *2001 - A Space Odyssey*, a film that similarly reconfigured the possibilities of cinematic space and form for the general public. (Skal 1993, 39).

Alluding to horror's symbiotic relationship at times with surrealism, Skal also states that "[h]orror has always had a certain affinity for modern art movements and has often quoted their mannerisms, possibly because, at a root level, they are inspired by similar cultural anxieties" (Skal 1993, 55), so observing a correlation between horror and art.

Skal then delineates the change during the 1960s with the birth of the sexual revolution, contraceptive pill and women's liberation movement, and consequently, with films such as *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) where "[s]uddenly in the sixties, the womb was the new graveyard from which the horror mavens would take their raw materials for the new put-together monsters" (Skal 1993, 294). Following on with films such as *The Exorcist* (1973), *It Lives* (1974), *Eraserhead* (1976) and *The Brood* (1979), the latter "considered a Rosetta Stone of modern reproductive anxieties" (Skal 1993, 298). It is David Cronenberg's *The Brood* which also expresses a "pent up rage being physically externalized" (Skal 1993, 298), as a mother's "murderous 'brood' of child-like homunculae, act out her unconscious impulses" (Skal 1993, 299). This theme reaches its apex with *Alien* (1979) and its ultimate in (male) chest-bursting reproductive excesses;

Alien was a validation of something already suspected: that reproduction was a kind of death, a devastating insult to the body and personal autonomy; that sex and technology had come together in a weird and ugly way" (Skal 1993, 301).

This leads into Skal's "Scar Wars" chapter which equates the rise in body modification and piercings as a reaction to the powerlessness people feel - unable to change the world or society for the better, the one thing they "do have power over: their own bodies. That shadowy zone between the physical and the psychic, is being probed for whatever freedoms may be reclaimed" (Skal 1993, 323). Skal also notes the growth in popularity on the back of this, of magazines such

as *Fangoria*¹⁸, and *Gorezone*¹⁹, revelling in copious pictures of gore and special effects, with the body and vulnerability of the flesh, being very much the battleground and focus.

Skal then refers to the notion of vampire films and literature being seen as the blood contagion fiction which denoted the real life AIDS panic in the mid 1980s, before citing a horror boom in the 1990s, partly resulting from a general pessimism regarding the Gulf War threat, the aforementioned AIDS virus, pollution and homelessness. Skal also identifies new literature characters inspiring horror films such as Dr. Hannibal Lecter²⁰. Confronting the idea of a more secular society, Skal quotes Camille Paglia that; “[h]orror films are rituals of pagan worship” (Paglia 1991, 268), used by Western society to “confront what Christianity has never been able to bury or explain away” (Paglia 1991, 268). Skal also acknowledges the argument that the horror film perhaps represents the only audience “opportunity to experience mystery and miracle” (Skal 1993, 386) in a now highly secularised society.

Leading on from this, as Mark Jancovich has observed, with not just a highly secularised but also highly *sexualised* society, horror’s “social unacceptability as a genre has meant that there has been, as with the study of pornography, little real investigation of its forms and effects” (Jancovich 1992, 8), also explaining how monstrous and horrifying elements are set up for the audience, only to be then dissipated either when these elements are finally contained or destroyed, and the original order reaffirmed. Jancovich sees post-structural critics as analysing the effects of this and audience members suppressing the psychological effects of this to give a sense of self. By so positioning the subject within the ideology “for most post-structural critics, horror is founded upon a patriarchal fear of female sexuality. They claim it is female sexuality, which is ultimately defined as monstrous, disturbing, and in need of repression” (Jancovich 1992,10). Hence, other critics such as Clare Hanson, Creed and Clover arguing that women are represented in the horror genre as “monstrous, all-devouring figures who threaten men” (Jancovich 1992,10). Clover identifies the ‘Final Girl’ trope, predominantly studying the slasher film, whereby the heroine is either rescued at the end, or kills the psycho killer herself as in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Halloween* (1978) for example. Audience empathy resides with the resourceful female character as opposed to the faceless male, and/or, characterless killer. Clover sees the assaultive gaze as represented by the male/camera point of view shot and the reactive gaze being represented in the feminine/ viewer’s point of view. For Clover, horror is such a transgressive genre because it “operates in an allegorical or expressionist or folkloric/mythic mode” (Clover 1992, 281). Just as Clover turns the idea of the horror film genre being a solely male-centred, male-driven vehicle upon its head, so too does Creed challenge the patriarchal notion that women are merely victims in the horror film,

¹⁸ US based horror magazine which began publication in 1979 with a brief hiatus during 2017 when no print editions were published, before resuming again during 2018.

¹⁹ A sister publication to *Fangoria* - began publishing in 1988, running for 27 issues before cancellation.

²⁰ The adapted film; *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) won Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Actress and Best Adapted Screenplay at the 1992 Academy Awards - unprecedented success and recognition for a horror film.

arguing that man fears woman as a would be *castrator* rather than *castrating* figure. “[i]t may be that the horror genre is more directly responsive to questions of sexual difference, more willing to explore male and female anxieties about the ‘other’ than film texts which belong to mainstream genres’ (Creed 1993, 152). Creed’s reading is still problematic however, in that it is still reliant on perpetuating a view of male anxiety and fear of dominant females, after all, it identifies women as either masochist or castrator. By being still reliant on the patriarchy of a Freudian psychoanalytical framework, this reduces a powerful or dominant woman to becoming either a “masculinised” woman, or, a closet lesbian. As Isobel Christina Pinedo has noted “[i]f a woman can not be aggressive and still be a woman, then female agency is a pipe dream. But if the surviving female can be aggressive and be really a woman, then she subverts this binary notion of gender that buttresses male dominance” (Pinedo 1997, 83). Just as with their male counterparts of this period from the 1980s to 1990s, the one drawback with the female scholars mentioned, is again, a reliance on American and British films to study, to the neglect of Eurohorror films. As Donato Totaro has observed, female sexuality and empowerment is celebrated in films such as *Nekromantik 2* (1991), albeit concerning the perverse area of necrophilia. Totaro also recognises that the gender dynamics are often different in the Eurohorror model than with American films. For example, often the killer/co-killers in Eurohorror are female (as in *6 donne per l’assassino* (1964) and *Profondo rosso* (1975), whilst many of the victims are male and are often attracted to the female killer rather than being repulsed, somewhat rejecting Creed’s ‘Monstrous Feminine’ theory. Although acknowledging that there are certainly some questionable and misogynistic, Eurohorror films, Totaro argues there are far more which feature sexually liberated female characters. Given that the “gender-political range is broader”, he asserts that “these films should be mined by feminist writers and theorists, rather than merely attempting ‘against the grain’ readings of familiar, over-analysed American models” (Totaro 2002, 10).

As one of a trio of texts adopting a sociological and anthropological approach, Waller analyses a number of complex themes, including the role of the female in the horror film. He identifies Lucy as being a pivotal figure in *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* (1979) - a self-sacrificing figure whose purity defeats the vampire and yet whose sacrifice goes unrecognised by the patriarchal bourgeois society. For Waller, both “[n]ina and Lucy are the antithesis of the defenceless female victims” (Waller 1986, 225) portrayed in earlier film versions of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, and protected by a wealth of older, male authority figures. Waller sees both these women as “the visionary heroines of *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922) and *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* - because of the depth of their love and fear - are as much aliens in bourgeois civilisation as is the vampire” (Waller 1986, 225). The fact that Lucy gains no benefit of recovery or integration back into society means that *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht*, forces us “to question the values of the restored order and to acknowledge that the “right order” is, in fact, a specific form of social and cultural order” (Waller 1986, 336), according to Waller. Providing added insight, Waller notes how both “Murnau and Herzog question the price that must be paid for the survival of the bourgeois city and question also the values and institutions upon which such cities are based” (Waller 1986, 225). In offering the nuanced observation that “Murnau’s Bremen and Herzog’s

Wismar could well be the nineteenth-century antecedents of the besieged, easily invaded, crumbling America that has become a primary subject of the contemporary horror story” (Waller 1986, 226), Waller links the existential concerns of the European horror films studied, with those of the American studio horror films. The physical and social threat posed by the undead to the living in such films, for Waller, requires the living to engage in bloody acts of violence to survive. Therefore, “*Dawn of the Dead* which depicts the end of American society, and provides an open ending that answers and even qualifies the closed ending of *Night of the Living Dead*, which concludes with the restoration of official order” (Waller 1986, 331). Waller’s description of the reader/viewers role is also highly original and anticipates Olney’s later discussion on such roles. By being “cast into the role of witnesses” (Waller 1986, 334), Waller identifies how the popular open ending within the horror film, often results in the viewer (rather than the protagonists) being party to the final, ironic image suggesting that the horror is *not* over.

In *The Films of Werner Herzog: Between Mirage and History* (first published in 1986/2016 edition quoted), Dana Bellini notes the director’s use of landscape to articulate “the human condition” and “their narratives of rebellious response to such an existential condition” (Bellini 2016, 90), in a parallel sociological approach to Waller. Bellini adds that “landscapes function to articulate a world view for Herzog’s films” (Bellini 2016, 94). As such “the individual is presented as a minuscule element of this whole, ever in danger of being engulfed and lost in the world’s vastness” (Bellini 2016, 92). In the same volume, Judith Mayne’s text on *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht*, notes the large amount of screen time devoted to “the voyage from one culture and one set of values to another” (Mayne 2016, 123). Mayne observes that in the film, Jonathan on his journey is seen as a “fragile, tiny figure” (Mayne 2016, 123) in a vast landscape with his transition denoting a “definite crossing-over of boundaries...[where] one leaves the “self” behind to embrace an identity founded on “otherness” (Mayne 2016, 123). Mayne concludes that for Herzog “this is a world where the lines between dream and waking, between passion and reason, between mysticism and materialism, are absolutely drawn” (Mayne 2016, 123).

Building upon the sociological approach of both Waller and Corrigan’s texts, and in also analysing more existential concerns including the role of national trauma and identity upon the viewer, *Calgari’s Heirs: The German Cinema of Fear After 1945* (2007), edited by Steffen Hantke, discusses Eurohorror films from *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht*, and *Die Zärtlichkeit der Wölfe* (*Tenderness of the Wolves*) (1973) to *Der Fan* (1982), *Funny Games* (2007) and Jörg Buttgerit’s oeuvre. Hantke discusses German national identity, gender politics and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the Nazi past), arguing that post-war German horror films are devalued by historians in analysing them using a generalised model derived from the American film industry and placing too great an emphasis on personal, auteurist filmmaking. Linda Badley’s chapter, “The Shadow and the Auteur: Herzog’s Kinski, Kinski’s *Nosferatu*, and the Myths of Authorship” makes the distinction that Herzog’s films are characterised by being shot on location where confronting the real-life dangers encountered by the cast and crew, becomes as dramatic and as much of an ordeal as the films themselves. In remaking Murnau’s film, (though

admittedly in his own unique fashion), Herzog is also following the path of a more commercial director where a safe bet and return are seen to be more financially viable, as opposed to the more oblique path of an auteur. That said, Herzog's vision was very much a new imagining for a new age and Kinski's role "perfectly expressed the existential predicament of being trapped in the body of the beast. Paradoxically, in the course of the discipline and suffering of "becoming" the vampire, Kinski embodied perhaps the most human role of his career" (Badley 2007, 65). In describing Kinski's character as having "the vulnerability of infancy, the pathos of extreme old age, and the bestiality of nature" (Badley 2007, 65-6), Badley echoes Waller's identification of the battle for survival between the living and the undead. This is reinforced by Baden's contention that Kinski embodies "the aggressive aspects of the human predicament of existing within the ongoing futility of nature while being conscious of and alienated from it" (Badley 2007, 66). For Badley, Herzog succeeds in creating "a dialogue between the German Expressionist avant-garde of the past, the contemporary art film, and the vampire genre film, whose increasingly sympathetic monsters begged for philosophically and aesthetically sophisticated and serious treatment" (Badley 2007, 66). In Patricia MacCormack's "Necrosexuality, Perversion and *Jouissance*: The Experimental Desires of Jörg Buttgerit's *NekRomantik* Films", and in adopting the "non-judgmental eye of the anthropologist" (Hantke 2007, xx), she discusses the collective rather than individual litany of cultural obsessions and taboos within Buttgerit's films - especially "his preoccupation with the body after death" (Hantke 2007, xx). MacCormack notes Buttgerit's "unique representations of gender" (MacCormack 2007, 213), especially the role of Monika M as I reference in Chapter 7 and are seen as "part of a group of European horror films of the 1980s and 1990s which presented alternatives to the horror cinema in America that had become somewhat sanitised through the clean blade of the slasher films knife" (MacCormack 2007, 213). The ambiguity of the images and character motivations for MacCormack, override the traditional cinema conventions and "rupture the spectator's own ambiguous but nonetheless fascinated relationship with the extreme images and desires, taking the films as our own abject objects of desire" (MacCormack 2007, 213-4).

Described by Will Dodson as being "one of the first sustained academic treatments on the subject of Eurohorror, all the more so for the respect and attention he gives to fan scholars, who have produced a wealth of historical and analytical work" (Dodson 2014, 195), Ian Olney's *EuroHorror* (2013) scrutinises the privileged status art films enjoy in comparison to European horror, reasoning that this is due to "certain lingering aesthetic, ideological, theoretical and cultural prejudices that continue to define which films are (deemed) worthy of serious study within academia" (Olney 2013, xii). Olney sees the uniquely post-modern qualities of European horror cinema affording viewers a "play" or "performance" experience where they can engage via multiple viewing positions. Olney looks at three case studies; 1) the *giallo* film, 2) European horror with S&M, 3) zombie/cannibal films (Olney 2013, xiii). Olney argues the *giallo* invites spectatorship as performance, mainly via its playing with gender identity. He terms it an "anti-detective" cinema "whose pleasures for viewers lie not in the solution of a central mystery, but rather in an embrace of the post-modern principles of disruption, transgression, undecidability, and uncertainty that it

celebrates” (Olney 2013, xiii). For Olney, the second study blends horror and porn elements with fluid representations of sexuality and gender, continually shifting and so it “interrogates the imperatives of patriarchal power and pleasure” (Olney 2013, xiii). In the third study Olney notes the aftermath of when “East eats West” (Olney 2013, xiii), when white interlopers intrude on the domain of the Other, effectively “deconstructing the power dynamics at the heart of the historical relationship between the coloniser and colonised” (Olney 2013, xiii). With a paucity of contemporary European horror filmmakers Olney argues that what he terms the “extreme” art film, “a taboo-shattering hybrid of “highbrow” and “lowbrow” cinema” (Olney 2013, xiii), is the closest now to rivalling European horror in its spectatorship and performance qualities, with exponents such as Claire Denis, Lars von Trier and Pedro Almodóvar. This synergy between European art cinema and European horror is explained by Olney thus;

Both tend to favour loosely structured plots and intense psychological subjectivity, and both push the envelope of what was then considered acceptable with regard to the onscreen depiction of sex and violence. Moreover, both share a tendency toward bold experimentation with design, colour, lighting, camerawork, editing and sound. In fact, the line between art cinema and European horror can be difficult to discern. (Olney 2013, 7-8).

Olney asserts that as yet there is “no scholarly monograph offering a holistic examination of European horror cinema” (Olney 2013,11), and instead, most critical attention on European horror has been from the “fan-scholars” as defined by Hills, “the fan who uses academic theorising within their fan writing and within the construction of a scholarly fan identity” (Hills 2002, 2). Olney continues that;

In addition to books, fan-scholars have also published academic style journals devoted to the study of European horror cinema. A prime example is Andy Black’s periodical, *Necronomicon*, which during its irregular run has featured dozens of articles on European horror. (Olney 2013,12).

Olney asks the question as to why European horror has been so neglected with historic obstacles such as lack of availability now largely negated by the prolific release schedule of hitherto obscure European horror titles onto Blu-ray and DVD, plus the growth in digital streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime. Olney argues a neglect in academia due to “certain entrenched disciplinary prejudices that have blinded scholars to it. Some of these disciplinary prejudices stem from lingering biases against popular cinema” (Olney 2013, 21). Olney asserts that an “adherence to old aesthetic and ideological criteria used to determine whether a film is suitable for academic study” (Olney 2013, 21), goes against European horror, whilst popular cinema with a (perceived) artistic merit and/or are also politically progressive are deemed worthy of study. However,

“conversely, tasteless or politically incorrect forms of popular cinema - like European horror, which also has a reputation for being not only aesthetically challenged, but also misogynistic, homophobic and racist - remains largely beyond the pale” (Olney 2013, 21). Olney argues that “as a type of European cinema European horror does not respond to the dominant interpretive paradigm used in the discipline to analyse European movies” (Olney 2013, 222). In academia, Olney argues, European cinema is seen as “art cinema” and diametrically opposed to popular cinema, and being made by Europeans for Europeans, with European horror included in this also. The perceived “tastelessness” of European horror, themes now considered outdated and sensationalist, scenes which deliberately disrupt the narrative, all account for its neglect. In using Christopher Wagstaff’s argument on this aspect that such excesses remain a major draw for the audiences but “hindered recognition in scholarly circles” (Wagstaff 1992, 253), Olney then adds that “[i] would argue that European horrors sensationalism, more than its cheapness and datedness, is the key reason for its exclusion from horror film studies on aesthetic grounds” (Olney 2013, 33).

As a further obstacle to European horror’s reputation, Olney cites Leon Hunt’s argument that European horror “seems to confirm everyone’s worst fears about the horror film as a sadistic and misogynistic treatment of violence rendered into ultra-chic spectacle” (Hunt 2000, 325). Hunt cites the essentially male on female violence characterising the *giallo* film, and the typical representations/stereotyping of gay, queer, non-white characters, together with similar tropes exhibited in the WIP²¹, nunsplotation²² and zombie/cannibal genres which for Hunt, stymie any attempts at any “progressive” reading of these films. Olney, also introduces Paul Wells argument that European horror has a “style that is clearly inflected by the whole tradition of European art cinema” (Wells 2000, 69), continuing that (for Wells) “it is the combination of abstract design principles - blocks of colour, impactful effects (mist and fog predominant), unusual framing - and bravura narrative elements, largely mixing the sordid with gothic “shock” tactics, that properly distinguishes these films, and...calls attention to the re-positioning and re-definition of art cinema motifs” (Wells 2000, 70).

For Olney, the opportunity for European horror viewers to “play dead” and approach film spectatorship as a form of performance, is pivotal, and the ability to adopt multiple viewing positions and experiment different subjectivities to those proscribed by mainstream cinema. Olney states that “[i]t is ultimately this unique characteristic of European horror cinema, in my view, that definitely sets it apart from British and American horror and makes it so worthy of scholarly attention” (Olney, p.43, 2013). Olney argues that European horror fosters performative spectatorship in two ways; firstly, due to how the original is made with necessity (and audiences)

²¹ Women in Prison (WIP) genre - generally exploitative films accentuating (often lesbian) sex and violence within the confines of a prison *milieu*.

²² Exploitative genre focusing on sex and violence within a convent setting - eg. *Suor Omicidi (Killer Nun)* (1979), *Interno di un convento (Behind Convent Walls)* (1978) and *Flavia, la monaca musulmana (Flavia the Heretic)* (1974).

being the mother of invention here with the directors effectively becoming “post-modern filmmakers”, be it through non-linear narratives and/or violence and eroticism. Olney agrees with Isobel Cristina Pinedo that these films operate on post-modern “principles of disruption, transgression, undecidability and uncertainty” (Pinedo 1997, 17). Thus European horror subverts traditional film codes, formal filmmaking techniques and traverses boundaries, questions rational thinking and rejects the expected narrative closure. Secondly, Olney sees European horror fostering performance spectatorship via the way it is watched, utilising digital technology as special edition film versions with bonus features enhance the camp qualities and supposed “flaws” and can now be viewed with ironic detachment. Scrutiny of stylistic techniques, and the European horror aesthetic politicises the act of watching these films with directors and fans only “playing dead”, so invested are they in this genre and its transgressive nature. This, for Olney, shows European horror’s “potentially radical politics of production as well as consuming horror” (Olney 2013, 44), more than any other horror cinema form.

In summary, all of the above writers do afford that the horror film is worthy of serious scholarly study, which indicates a growing academic interest in the genre during the 1980s, correctly identifying the lack of critical vocabulary and methodology with which to critique the horror film. The obstacles of analysing the psychological/psychoanalytical aspects which so inform the genre are also acknowledged. Namely, that it can be reductive and places an over reliance on the viewers *unconscious*, rather than *conscious*, understanding of the text. However, one would need to counter this argument with the caveat that the ‘reductiveness’ of a theory is dependant as much on the theorist as it is with the theory itself. Furthermore, it can be argued as being necessary to understand and evaluate *all* audience interpretations, be they conscious or unconscious, in order to give a more rounded view. As Creed has noted, structural psychoanalysis for instance, centres the unconscious as a “structuring element at work in all cinematic representation” (Creed 1990, 242). Creed also identifies “the desire *of* the text as well as desire *in* the text” (Creed 1990 242), which makes for a greater understanding of just how fear is constructed within horror texts, especially in relation to “filmic codes and *mise-en-scene*” (Creed 1990, 242). It can also be argued that as such, psychoanalytic theory is necessary to analyse the representation of women in the horror film. Twitchell and Wood especially, consider the psychology of the horror film, in addition to Wood’s “the return of the repressed” theory. Skal acknowledges the importance of “body horror” as a growing concept, while Creed, Clover and Waller also signpost the burgeoning interest in gender in the horror film.

Despite these scholarly advances however, it is still fascinating to note that apart from their brief references to such films, the only authors to devote any substantial commentary to the European horror film, are Corrigan, Hantke and Waller, before Olney’s later contribution begins to redress the balance. This is especially noticeable in the case of the *giallo* film, which can be argued, is highly psychologically motivated in the form of the killer. Also, although a more secular, permissive society is described with more overtly sexual and surreal films released, this is not used as an opportunity to discuss European horror directors such as Franco or Rollin in any detail. It is only

after this period, from 1993 onwards, when the bulk of writing, (including my own), discussing European horror, begins to emerge. Thus, specific books from Blumenstock on Franco (1993) and Rollin (1997), Kerekes on Buttgereit (1994), Tohill and Tombs (1994), on European horror and Palmerini and Mistretta (1997) on Italian horror, begin to shift the focus away from traditional American and British horror film narratives. Howarth (2002) and Lucas (2007) devote books to Bava, Koven (2006) publishes the first comprehensive discourse on the *giallo* film, whilst Thrower (2015 and 2018) devotes two books to Franco, also covered by Lázaro-Reboll and Olney in (2018). In addition, Hinds (2016) and Deighan (2017) specifically cover Rollin, whilst Olney (2013) and Rigby (2016) discuss European horror. Central to all of this increasing coverage of European horror are my own *Necronomicon* fanzine (1993-95), *Necronomicon* book series (1996-2007) and my zombie book, *The Dead Walk* (2000), with a revised and updated edition also published (2008). This emphasises the point that although a more serious academic scrutiny of the horror film had begun, it was still very much the fanzines of the late 1980s, early 1990s that would actually discuss Eurohorror films in detail. Hutchings' writing on Argento (2012) and Eurohorror (2016), together with David Church's "One on Top of the Other", (2014) also begin to critique the movement that I was a part of. I will discuss this further in the next chapter by outlining the growth in horror film fanzines, which was also central to my own contribution, and how academic scrutiny and focus began to identify this trend and acknowledge its impact, by re-evaluating Eurohorror, cult and exploitation films, recognising their importance, rather than dismissing as mere trash cinema.

3. Fanzines and Academic Discourse

I begin this chapter by discussing how fanzines sought to redress the balance in championing Eurohorror films, which mainstream cinema, media and magazines would be reluctant to do. I review scholars including Thomas McLaughlin, Kate Egan, together with my own experiences of bridging the gap between fans/readers and editors of fanzines and the spirit of collaboration that was fostered, and considering how this manifested itself with the exchange of published work between myself and Harvey Fenton from FAB Press. Having analysed the relationship between fans, editors and academia with reference to Matt Hills, Jeffrey Sconce, David Sanjek and Joan Hawkins, I then consider the impact felt by the growth of video film releases, especially by labels such as Redemption Films, in making the works of Mario Bava, Jess Franco, Jean Rollin and other Eurohorror directors, available for the first time in the UK in well-presented, good quality editions, rather than fans having to rely on poor quality, pirated video copies instead. The importance of the contribution made by fanzines to the Eurohorror discourse is then examined by highlighting scholars such as Simon Haynes, Ernest Mathijs, Jamie Sexton, Steven Jay Schneider and Oliver Carter, before then considering the reception by foreign language media of Eurohorror films, and how especially in France, these films were often more highly regarded than in other countries.

Given that it is only quite recently that Eurohorror has been discussed and afforded scholarly consideration, it is of no surprise that the even greater academic stretch of establishing a correlation between Eurohorror and European arthouse cinema, has been even slower to materialise. Academics such as Hawkins, Mathijs, Mendik, Olney and Sconce have discussed this from the early 1990s onwards, whereas previously the very notion of linking so called exploitation directors with arthouse directors would have been anathema. Aside from rare excursions such as Carol Jenk's Bava chapter in Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau's *Popular European Cinema*²³ (1992), the majority of contemporary texts have failed to acknowledge any such symbiosis. These texts included Mike Wayne's *Politics of Contemporary European Cinema - Histories, Borders, Diasporas* (2002), Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby and Philippe Meers *Cinema Audiences and Modernity - New Perspectives on European Cinema History* (2001), David Martin-Jones' *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts* (2006), András Bálint Kovács's *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema 1950 - 1980* (2008) and John White's *European Art Cinema* (2016).

Even a country such as Germany with its long established horror film credentials dating back to German Expressionism and its celebrated arthouse directors such as Fassbinder, Herzog and Wenders, barely scratches the surface, aside from Steffen Hantke's *Calgari's Heirs: The German Cinema of Fear After 1945* (2006), with Anton Kaes' *Shell Shock Cinema - Weimar Culture and the*

²³ Jenks, Carol, "The other face of death: Barbara Steele in *La maschera del demonio*". This article was also republished in my own *Necronomicon Book One*, (Noir Publishing: 1996).

Wounds of War (2011), having a solitary page on Herzog, and equal paucity with a solitary page on Herzog's *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* (*Nosferatu the Vampyre*) in Jennifer M. Kapczynski and Michael D. Richardson's *A New History of German Cinema* (2014), whilst Sabine Hake's *German National Cinema* (2014) manages a page on Buttgereit's *Nekromantik* and *Schramm*. Thomas Elsaesser's *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (2000), eschews even a page consideration for this theme. Given the paucity of mainstream (and academic) coverage of Eurohorror and arthouse cinema and a reluctance to establish any links between the two, it was predominantly left to fanzines to cultivate this ground.

According to Thomas McLaughlin in *Street Smarts and Critical Theory: Listening to the Vernacular* (1996), a fanzine can be defined as "amateur magazines written and edited and published by the fans themselves" (McLaughlin 1996, 52). He explains that zines will "focus on one particular fan obsession" (McLaughlin 1996, 52), giving exploitation films as one example. Crucially, he identifies that zines "give fans of specific pop culture texts the opportunity to speak out of their own expertise, often in ways that resist the dominant messages of mass culture" (McLaughlin 1996, 52). He states that zine writers tend to "approach texts with a skeptical and rebellious attitude, with an irony that allows them to enjoy a mainstream media text but still refashion it to their own ends". (McLaughlin 1996, 53). Indeed, McLaughlin asserts that even more importantly, in zines, we can find "fans seeing through the ideological operation itself, practising a vernacular cultural criticism" (McLaughlin 1996, 53). He also makes the distinction between a zine being a "magazine produced by amateurs on the fringe of journalism and the publishing industry" (McLaughlin 1996, 53), and related to, but different to "fan magazines" which are "produced by the entertainment business *for fans*" (McLaughlin 1996, 53). McLaughlin argues that "[s]ome zines think of themselves as part of a 'samizdat' movement, operating outside official culture, on the fringe of the law... and at an acute angle to popular culture" (McLaughlin 1996, 53). He continues that "[z]ines are high-attitude productions; each zine *takes an attitude* rather than passively consuming pop texts, and each attitude taken has the urgency of resistance" (McLaughlin 1996, 54). By identifying fanzine writers and editors as being assimilated into the phenomena they describe, there is no pretence at detachment as "they *are* the fans on whom ideological effects are plotted. They *are* the social subjects that academic writers on popular culture theorise about" (McLaughlin 1996, 54). For McLaughlin, zines scrutinise popular culture, which is "subjected to a popularly produced, resistant discourse and analysis and theory". (McLaughlin 1996, 54). The idea that fans are cultural scholars, compiling filmographies for instance of favourite directors, also appeals to the fan "as collector or as vernacular curator" (McLaughlin 1996, 70). It is what Lisa A. Lewis in "Fandom, Lived Experience and Textual Use" (1990), alludes to, arguing that "fans need inside information to distinguish themselves from casual listeners [viewers], and they 'appoint' themselves historians of the resulting textual accumulation" (Lewis 1990, 158). McLaughlin uses US zine *Psychotronic Video*²⁴ as an example in covering sleazy, obscure cult films, including

²⁴ This was a quarterly film magazine published by Michael J. Wheldon, based in New York City, and running from 1989 to 2006. Wheldon also wrote *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* (1983, Ballantine Books) and *The Psychotronic Video Guide to Film* (1996, St Martin's Griffin).

horror, and yet despite “its vigorous bad taste and offensive material, treats these films in a serious and scholarly way” (McLaughlin 1996 71). With filmographies, cast and crew details, the “layout is lurid and jokey, but the articles are serious and knowledgeable studies in genre history” (McLaughlin 1996, 71). Drawing comparisons between zines and academia, McLaughlin asserts that “[z]ine scholarship, like academic scholarship, is motivated by a desire to master the details of a complex and valued phenomenon” (McLaughlin 1996, 71).

Just as McLaughlin identified that fan communities would be nurtured by fanzines covering and advertising other fanzines within their pages, which I also did with my own *Necronomicon*), so too does Kate Egan identify how *The Dark Side*'s “Fanzine Focus” column would highlight other fanzines to its readers, and by publishing full addresses in the letters page, enable like-minded fans to connect with each other. Egan sees *The Dark Side* as “promoting an authentic, grassroots culture, where all are welcome as long as their interests are never commercial” (Egan 2007, 110). Crucially, Egan notes a “collapsing of hierarchies between reader and editor” (Egan 2007, 110), an important part of fan culture in eroding the barriers between producers, distributors, consumers and encouraging readers to get involved themselves in writing, artwork, publishing and in any other creative capacity. From my own experience as a fanzine writer and editor, I would agree with this assessment. Starting from issue 2 of my own *Necronomicon* fanzine, I incorporated a letters page, *Evil Writes*, and the letters published included correspondence from both fellow fanzine editors and academics. These included Eric McNaughton, editor of *We Belong Dead*, (1993 p.18), Craig Ledbetter, editor of *European Trash Cinema* (ETC), in issue 3 (1993 p.36), Xavier Mendik, (1994 p.30), Carol Jenks, (1994 p.30-1) and Tony Jones, (1994 p.32), all in issue 5, and Harvey Fenton, editor *Flesh and Blood*, (1995 p.40), in issue 7. I would also receive anecdotal accounts from readers of how they had bought *Necronomicon* from a variety of sources, including Tower Records in New York City and the main comic store in Milan, and how readers, in general, appreciated the eclectic mix of films covered. As well as contributing myself to a number of other fanzines including Harvey Fenton's *Flesh and Blood*²⁵, he also contributed to my own *Necronomicon*. Indeed, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, the printers I worked for, Ebenezer Baylis in Worcester, printed the first Troy Howarth edition of *The Haunted World of Mario Bava* (2002), and I also press-passed the sections of this book for Harvey. I would meet him regularly to discuss forthcoming publications and also printed the first *DVD Delirium The International Guide To Weird And Wonderful Films On Dvd: Vol.1* (2002) by Nathaniel Thompson, for FAB Press. Equally, collaborating with Xavier Mendik on *Necronomicon Presents: Shocking Cinema of the*

²⁵ I contributed *Plague of the Zombies* in (ed.) Fenton, Harvey. *Flesh & Blood*, Issue 2. FAB Press. pp. 6-7, (1993), *Frankenstein and the Monster From Hell* in (ed.) Fenton, Harvey. *Flesh & Blood*, Issue 3, FAB Press. pp. 32-4 (1995), *The Legacy and Dominique* in (eds.) Fenton, Harvey. and Flint, David. *Ten Years of Terror: British Horror Films of the 1970s*. FAB Press. pp. 284-5 and pp. 289-90, (2001). Harvey contributed *Les lèvres rouges (Daughters of Darkness)* in (ed.) Black, Andy. *Necronomicon* Issue 2. pp.33-4 (1993), *Contes immoraux (Immoral Tales)* in (ed.) Black, Andy. *Necronomicon* Issue 5. pp.53-6 (1994), and *La casa sperduta nel parco (House on the Edge of the Park)* in (ed.) Black, Andy. *Necronomicon* Issue 7. pp.15-19 (1995).

Seventies (2002), the printing costs were part-funded through the University of Northampton, where Xavier was then teaching.

The symbiotic nature of this fan and academic relationship and the resulting fandom discourse, is built upon by Matt Hills in identifying a distinction between fan academic and academic fan in *Fan Cultures* (2002);

the fan academic, that is, the fan who uses academic theorising within their fan writing and within the construction of a scholarly fan identity as opposed to the professional academic who draws on their fandom as a badge of distinction within the academy. (Hills 2002, 2).

Commenting on PhD studies, Hills notes that “[b]izarrely, the fanzine-as-dissertation has been entirely ignored in academic work on fandom. Zines have been examined as sources of ‘critical’ fan knowledge (McLaughlin, 1996; Duncombe, 1997; Niedzviecki 2000), but not as a site where academic knowledge may also be circulated outside the academy” (Hills 2002, 18), which is precisely part of the *raison d'être* behind this thesis.

In also highlighting how “trash” films had emerged to become a source of serious academic discourse, scholar Jeffrey Sconce’s term, “paracinema” - “an extremely elastic textual category”, (Sconce 1995, 372), encompasses a wide range of film styles and genres, “seemingly disparate sub genres” and “just about every other historical manifestation of exploitation cinema from juvenile delinquency documentaries to soft-core pornography” (Sconce 1995, 372). It should be noted however, that the term is used to define a reading protocol, a criteria for evaluating if a film is paracinematic, rather than referring to a specific group of films. For Sconce, the

explicit manifesto of paracinematic culture is to valorise all forms of cinematic ‘trash’, whether such films have been either explicitly rejected or simply ignored by legitimate film culture. (Sconce 1995, 372).

The fluidity of the social, political and “taste” mores are “more complex than a simple high-brow/low-brow split, and that the cultural politics of ‘trash culture’ are becoming ever more ambiguous as this ‘aesthetic’ grows in influence” (Sconce 1995, 372), is seen as a defining factor.

As “paracinematic culture celebrates excess as a product of cultural as well as aesthetic deviance” (Sconce 1995, 392), for Sconce, this transcends formal academic systems for coding films and aligns Sconce more closely with Hills’ fan academic. Therefore, “[t]he paracinematic viewer’s recognition of narrative’s artifice, however, is the first step in examining a field of structures within the culture as a whole, a passageway into engaging a larger field of contextual issues surrounding the film as a socially and historically specific document” (Sconce 1995, 392-3). Thus for Sconce,

The paracinematic audience promotes their tastes and textual proclivities in opposition to a loosely defined group of cultural and economic elites, those purveyors of the status quo who not only rule the world but who are also responsible for making the contemporary cinema, in the paracinematic mind, so completely boring. Nor does the paracinematic community care much for the activities of film scholars and critics. (Sconce 1995, 374).

However, I see this as not so much a case of storming and “Trashing the Academy” but rather “Triaging the Academy”, in deciding the order and course of textual treatments to follow in discussing how fanzines and foreign language sources have shaped the discourse around Eurohorror and arthouse films.

Being instrumental to this discussion, David Sanjek argues how fanzines use their form and content to differentiate themselves from more commercially orientated genre magazines such as *Cinefantastique*²⁶ and *Fangoria*, (an American horror film magazine noted for its in-depth set reports and special effects coverage). First published in 1979, the magazine was purchased by Dallas based entertainment group Cinestate, who published their first magazine edition in October 2018. Sanjek states that both these magazines are “widely distributed publication [who] focus almost exclusively on current films, previewing them before release in a sycophantic manner fanzine editors condemn as little more than paid publicity” (Sanjek 2000, 316). Sanjek notes that such magazines have incorporated retrospectives of pivotal figures and films but “for the most part their emphases are exclusively Anglo-American”, (Sanjek 2000, 316). Whilst Sanjek asserts that the commercial magazine editors sometimes compromise critical evaluation in pursuit of interviews, set access and generous publicity materials, fanzine editors by comparison, are diametrically opposed to this approach. Rather, that “fanzines seem most attracted to uniqueness of vision. Their editors have so immersed themselves in the genre about which they write that they have little interest in and no patience for the slavish devotion to accepted formulae and conventions of the mainstream Hollywood product”, (Sanjek 2000, 317). Sanjek adds how few fanzines offer praise (or column inches), to serialised film franchises such as the *Nightmare on Elm Street*²⁷ series or *Friday the 13th*²⁸, now exhausted of any originality or creativity.

Sanjek sees this uniqueness of vision as enabling fanzines to champion a world of “an uninhibited visionary sensibility, one which pushes the boundaries of social, sexual and aesthetic assumptions”, (Sanjek 2000, 317). Sanjek cites now mainstream directors such as George A. Romero, David Lynch, Wes Craven and David Cronenberg as all being examined by fanzines before more commercial outlets. As such, the fanzines exhaustive research often uncovers “the

²⁶ Quarterly American film magazine begun by publisher/editor Frederick S. Clarke and published from 1967 - 2006.

²⁷ Numbering some nine films to date from 1984 - 2010.

²⁸ Numbering some twelve films to date from 1980 - 2009.

sort of interesting, untested “discovery” movies that crop up whenever devotees of the genre unite”, (Newman 1988, 69). Discussing the proactive nature of *Samhain*, Sanjek also notes how the “British fanzines in particular regularly editorialise against the powers of the state” (Sanjek 2000, 317), citing the regular “Police 55: Banned” column detailing films (then) deemed illegal by UK law. With *Cold Sweat*²⁹ also analysing the effects of censorship laws upon the availability of films in European markets, Sanjek observes that “[i]n an environment where the censor’s hand has been so indiscriminate, even summarising a restricted film’s plot can be a subversive action” (Sanjek 2000, 317). Sanjek expands this argument citing those;

fanzines which have begun to market video tapes, including not only titles in the public domain but also others sometimes surreptitiously obtained from foreign sources, underscore their devotion to authenticity of expression by emphasising that their copies are uncut or recorded in the proper letter boxed, widescreen format. (Sanjek 2000, 317).

This almost forensic approach to prints, their condition and running times is expanded upon by Joan Hawkins. She notes how European arthouse and exploitation films, very much in the vein of Sconce’s “paracinema” theory, are lumped together by mail order video companies so that “[m]any catalogues simply list titles alphabetically, making no attempt to differentiate among genres or sub-genres, high or low art” (Hawkins 2002, 125). Citing US mail order catalogue companies such as Sinister Cinema³⁰, Hawkins observes how their comprehensive catalogue lists two versions of certain films;

a longer, foreign language version and a shorter version with English subtitles - marks the company’s economic stake in serious collectors and completionists...(and)...it also gives the catalogue a curiously academic or scholarly air, which links Sinister Cinema to more upscale “serious” video companies like Facets.³¹ (Hawkins 2002,126).

My own experience editing the *Necronomicon* fanzine, (edited and published from 1993-1995, seven issues), and later, the *Necronomicon* Book series³², together with other written contributions from 1989-2008, (Selected Published Outputs p. 157-311), informs much of what

²⁹ A UK horror fanzine edited by Trevor Barley and published from 1987-1995, numbering ten issues in total.

³⁰ An American horror film distributor based in Medford, Oregon founded in the late 1980s, still trading today at www.sinistercinema.com.

³¹ facetsmovies.com based in Chicago.

³² Edited and published from 1996-2007, five editions, plus one special *Necronomicon Presents: Shocking Cinema of the Seventies* edition (2002), edited by Xavier Mendik, published by me and with one written contribution by me, “False Gestures for a Demonic Public”.

Sanjek and Hawkins discuss. Set against the backdrop of the first generalised, global use of the internet, beginning in 1989-1990 and the first, full-text online search engine, Webcrawler in 1994, followed by Yahoo in 1994 and Google in 1998. During the late 1980s to early 1990s, mail order, word of mouth and bootleg videotape copies were the currency involved in obtaining and viewing Eurohorror in this time period. It was 1993 before video labels such as Redemption Films, Tartan Video and Arrow Video, began releasing VHS video output after its mass adoption by Europe and the US during the late 1980s/early 1990s, before DVD became common place in 1998 and Blu-ray in 2008. Redemption, between 1992-1999 were responsible for the first UK releases of Bava, Rollin and Franco films in the UK. The first two releases were Bava's *La maschera del demonio* (*Mask of Satan*) (1960) and *Lisa e il diavolo* (*Lisa and the Devil*) (1973), with Rollin's *Requiem pour un vampire* (*Requiem for a Vampire*) (1971) and Franco's *Necronomicon - Geträumte Sünden* (*Succubus*) (1968) also being the first UK releases for these directors. The stylish black and white photography commissioned for the all new video covers by Redemption head Nigel Wingrove, added an artistic, design-led element, not perhaps expected for such cult, underground films. I also interviewed Nigel Wingrove in *Necronomicon 2* magazine (1993) and *Necronomicon 7* magazine (1995). This emphasis on promotional detail was influential in elevating the appearance, and therefore the status, of these films into the realms of arthouse cinema, just by virtue of the covers alone. Wingrove followed the same principles in publishing *Redeemer* magazine, (3 issues beginning in 1992), which again, featured the same high quality production values, with new studio photoshoots and models used to promote Eurohorror and exploitation films.

Covering a similar period - from 1992-2003, Tartan Video, like Redemption, also realised the power of branding, creating distinct labels including Tartan Terror, Tartan Grindhouse and especially their Asia Extreme series.³³ The effect of this sudden (legal) availability of films, in good quality, often restored prints, original scores and subtitles where available, proved the catalyst for a "spontaneous generation", or *generazione spontanea*, as seemingly a movement of film fans from the ground up, took both an advantage of, and an interest in, such hitherto rare or unreleased films, with a large percentage of the European horror releases being Italian films. In contrast to a generation of older film critics, the inspiration being not so much what we had grown up on, but what we had been *denied*.

Sources for prints were confined to fanzine editors, contributors, collectors, together with mail order companies from the US and Europe. As such, the vast majority of prints I originally viewed were second generation, (at best), VHS tapes from the *Samhain* editor, John Gullidge. In addition, similar bootleg tapes from collectors such as Mark Ezra in Mold, Wales, together with film fairs such as those organised by Trevor Barley's *Media Publications*, generally held in Westminster, where retail stalls/shops and collectors would trade foreign language, often uncut films. The

³³ Asia Extreme included Japanese film releases such as *Ring* (1998) and *Battle Royale* (2000), South Korean entry *The Isle* (2000), *Hard Boiled* (1992) originating from Hong Kong, as well as Thai films such as *The Eye* (2002). For further information see <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc50.2008/TartanDist/text.html> (Accessed: 12th October 2020) and <https://www.benoakley.co.uk/tartan-video> (Accessed: 12th October 2020).

significance of this was the availability of rare Eurohorror films to view, which enabled fanzine film critics, like myself, to be able to write more authoritatively on the subject.

There were also a number of independent video shops springing up in major towns and cities across the UK in this period and there would generally be a select number that would charge an “under-the-counter” rental fee for illegal films. One such video shop in Exeter was where I first saw an uncut video of Fulci’s *Quella villa accanto al cimitero* (1981), which was in limbo status at the time - not officially banned but not available for viewing either. Other sources for prints would be culled mainly from the classified ads pages in fanzines - mail order outlets that included Paul Brown’s genre specialists *Midnight Media*, *Dark Carnival Distribution* in Scunthorpe, *Videomania* in Slough, to a lesser degree, *Forbidden Planet* stores across the UK, *Nostalgia Comics* and *Andromeda Bookstore* in Birmingham. Overseas sources included *Cult Video* in Amsterdam, *Video Search of Miami* and *Diabolik DVD* in the US.

In my very first editorial in *Necronomicon* magazine (1993), I outline the ethos of film coverage including “an eclectic gathering... [and] a column for *giallo/krimi* films... I hope that *Necronomicon* really can shed narrow, “pure” horror conceptions to extend its boundaries in favour of wider, equally engrossing frontiers” (Black 1993, 3). In addition “by aiming for a predominantly retrospective approach, *Necronomicon* will remain free of current genre pressures to include coverage of conveyor-belt titles such as *Critters 4* and *Friday the 13th, Part 9*, just by virtue of the fact that they are newly released” (Black 1993, 3). Instead, I continue that “surely more rewarding to delve into past treasures from the likes of Hammer, Bava, Franco *et al.*... with coverage of only the more innovative [new] genre releases” (Black 1993, 3). As such, a wide range of hitherto neglected Eurohorror and transgressive arthouse films were covered in both the *Necronomicon* magazine and book series. The fruits of this approach came in the form of positive reader feedback, including a letter from Tony Jones from The Robert Gordon University, published in *Necronomicon* issue 5, and who wrote that “I have had several fanzines sent to me now...yours is by far the best fanzine I’ve seen to date. It really has an incredibly wide range of information included.” (1994, 31). He continues that;

The good thing about this is the detail, your publication avoids most of the pitfalls that fanzines usually end up in. Namely: a lack of detail and complete lack of respect for what they are writing about. You have many interesting slants on old arguments included; Argento etc and more importantly tackle some subjects in ways I have never encountered before. This was indeed very rare for a fanzine as many only rehash other ideas.

I especially have complete admiration for your *Django* article, although I did not agree with everything included in the piece. I admire the way the subject matter was tackled. This article was obviously very well researched by someone very knowledgeable on the genre. This is the kind of material I believe would really

benefit film students, especially those undertaking research into specific film genres, comparisons are big business on the academic circuit. (1994, 32)

Jones letter continues with additional comments that;

You avoid the stuff that ends up in most horror magazines and become over used cliches. You seem to concentrate more on the important people from cinema's past, in issue 3 namely Buñuel. That was a great article, I do not recall Buñuel, one of the greatest directors of all time, getting any recognition in any genre based magazines... [a]lthough your publication descends into humour it still takes the subject seriously. This is another reason why such publications could be useful to film and media students." (1994, 32)

Adopting the criteria for defining Eurohorror used in Chapter One, the coverage of such films in the seven issues of *Necronomicon* fanzine, ranged from a high of 78.57% in issue 3 when set against British, American and more mainstream films featured, to a low of 50% in *Necronomicon* 7. The average figure for Eurohorror film coverage across the entire 7 issues was 64.92%, which reinforces the argument that fanzines, including my own, provided the most coverage of such films when compared to mainstream magazines and books.

Additional research into the role of fanzines includes Simon Haynes (1997), who examines horror films by applying a cultural analysis, claiming that a psychoanalytical reading of texts misses the textual meaning which lies within individuals rather than the society in which the texts were produced. Haynes abstract notes that "central to the analysis of horror is an understanding of its aficionados and the culture that they forge for themselves" (Haynes 1997). Haynes sees fanzines as seeking to "legitimate horror as a cultural mode of popular consumption through often complex reasoning, historical and political social argument, and deconstruction of culturally-defined boundaries of taste" (Haynes 1997,122). He continues that "[t]his complex reasoning is evident throughout fanzines: for example, *Necronomicon*... [and its] editorial proves aware of academic debate, if not itself acting to academic standards, seeking perhaps partly to legitimate the publication through connections with academia despite being mostly distant from it" (Haynes 1997,123). This claim by Haynes, echoes the heart of Hills' fan-academic/academic fan discourse. My own observation would be that this is very much a two-way street as included amongst the contributors to *Necronomicon* fanzine and book series are a number of current academics and film scholars, (these contributors included: Xavier Mendik, Leon Hunt, Julian Hoxter, Ian Conrich, Steven Jay Schneider, Anna Powell, Ray Guins, Omayra Cruz, Bev Zalcock, Adèle Olivia Gladwell, Matthew Coniam, Harvey Fenton, Jim Harper, Daniel Bird, Andrea Giorgi, Mikita Brottman, Tim Greaves and Kevin Collins),- all of which came to me rather than vice versa, implying that they saw an intrinsic academic value to the publications.

However, Haynes also acknowledges the more enlightened approach and inclusivity of *Necronomicon*, (borne out by the number of female contributors perhaps), commenting that;

Headpress and *Necronomicon*, British publications, deal in horror, 'alternative' society and erotica. Far less misogynistic, these fanzines attract an appreciative female readership, though remain orientated dominantly towards males, since erotic response is usually considered in masculine terms. These publications mix quasi-academic and popular analysis, and much relevant material can be gained from them. (Haynes 1997,154).

For Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton, (2011);

Fanzines, on the other hand, have become more radical in their cultism. In the 1990s they were represented by publications that were mostly one-man operations, such as Tim Lucas's *Video Watchdog*, Andy Black's *Necronomicon*, David Kerekes's *Headpress*, and Harvey Fenton's *Fab Press*. The niche appeal of these publications actually helped films sustain cult reputations: it reinforced Mario Bava's and Dario Argento's reputations, spear headed the praise for the films of Bigas Luna and Peter Jackson, and assisted in the rediscovery of the films of Radley Metzger, Harry Kumel, and Alain Robbe-Grillet. (Mathijs and Sexton 2011,54).

Also recognising the importance of fanzines, Mathijs and Sexton write that;

Prozines have developed less interest in cultist appreciation and moved into a more institutionalized kind of professional criticism, of which *Cinefantastique*, *Fangoria*, *Starlog*, *SFX*, and *Starfix* have become the representatives. (Mathijs and Sexton 2011,54).

Oliver Carter (2013) analyses the role of European cult cinema fandom and fan culture as an alternative economy of fan production. Expanding on Hills and coining the term "fancademia", an "academic work that is based on a cult text... targeted at an academic audience, but also a fan audience" (Carter 2013,11). Carter notes that;

Necronomicon, a fan publication in the spirit of *Eyeball* and *Flesh and Blood*, was first published as a book by Creation Press in 1996. Identifying itself as the "Journal of Horror and Erotic Cinema", *Necronomicon* is yet more evidence of fan-scholarship. Numerous articles draw on psychoanalysis, cite academic work and are fully referenced. A total of five *Necronomicon* books were published, the last in 2007. (Carter 2013,144).

Having outlined the importance of the role of fanzines in discussing the esoteric delights of Eurohorror and arthouse films and identifying their intrinsic connections, in the absence of any detailed discourse in the Anglo-American sources detailed in the Literature Review, I will now discuss the role of foreign language sources and their reception of these films.

Given the timeline of my written contributions, although I was aware of some foreign language magazines and journals during this period, the high cost of postage subscriptions and as importantly, not speaking the native languages of the French, Italian and Spanish periodicals, meant that I was writing in parallel but not influenced by these texts. One can identify that even with these sources, there has been a gradual, retrospective acknowledgement, (in most cases), as to the importance and influence of Bava, Franco and Rollin, with only the French sources offering any early critical praise. A case in point would be the reception of Bava's oeuvre - the French critics assessing uncut prints rather than the edited versions released to the American market. Regarding *La máscara del demonio* (1960), Lucas writes that "[t]he outspoken enthusiasm of the French critics of *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Positif* and *Midi-minuit fantastique* - who were almost unique in being able to review the films Bava meant them to see - is beginning to make sense" (Lucas 1997,46)³⁴, and I include details of this impact in the Bava chapter.

In terms of Spanish film journals, there was also a reticence as with Italian publications, in giving in-depth coverage to European horror and art house entries - especially understandable given the severe constraints imposed during the General Franco era, where an authoritarian regime was not likely to welcome any films perceived as transgressive in any way. The earliest journals were the weekly *Primer Plans* (1940-1963), *Objectives* (1953-1956), *Film Ideal* (1956-1970) and Spain's longest running film magazine, *Cinemanía* (1995-present). Spain's first specifically genre orientated magazine was *Terror Fantastic*, published from October 1971 until its last issue in November 1973, and abbreviated to just *Terror* from its twentieth issue. There was limited coverage of native genre films which was mainly confined to Paul Naschy³⁵ films, Amando de Ossorio's *Blind Dead*³⁶ series and Soledad Miranda³⁷, but the emphasis was squarely placed on international coverage with Hammer Films alone enjoying eight cover issues. As with Bava, it is more recent coverage which has afforded a more elevated reading of European horror films. *Cinemanía's* retrospective article, "[w]hen Spanish horror cinema conquered the world"³⁸, included a select number of six entries, one of which is Franco's *Vampyros Lesbos*. Choosing a single title from a "horror titan" such as Franco is considered an "almost impossible task" and *Vampyros* star

³⁴ Lucas, Tim, *Metro*, issue 110, (Victoria:1997). Founded in 1963 *Metro* is the oldest film and media periodical in Australia - www.metromagazine.com.au.

³⁵ Star of many Spanish horror films - real name Jacinta Morina Álvarez - (1934-2009).

³⁶ A Spanish fusion of the Knights Templars with *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) although de Ossorio disliked the zombie film sobriquet the series was christened with by critics. The films were; *La noche del terror ciego* (*Tombs of the Blind Dead*) (1970), *El ataque de los muertos sin ojos* (*Return of the Evil Dead*) (1973), *El buque maldito* (*Horror of the Zombies*) (1974) and *La noche de las gaviotas* (*Night of the Seagulls*) (1975).

³⁷ Christened Soledad Rendón Bueno, (1943-1970), an actress with screen names of Soledad Miranda and Susann Korda. Gained most attention for her enigmatic presence in Jess Franco films such as *Vampyros Lesbos* and *Sie tötete in Ekstase* (*She Killed in Ecstasy*), (both 1971), before her untimely demise in a car accident.

³⁸ Editorial in *Cinemanía*, 3rd March 2018, (Accessed: 10th April 2020: <https://cinemania.20minutos.es/noticias/cuando-cine-espanol-terror-conquistó-mundo/> Madrid:2018.)

Soledad Miranda “could have become the Andalusian version of Barbara Steele” until her sudden demise. Now *Vampyros Lesbos* is considered by *Cinemanía* to be “one of the jewels of European terror... although it is difficult to find in Spain, it can be obtained on Blu-ray in the United States” (*Cinemanía* 2018).

In summary, I support, (and embody through my own experiences), McLaughlin’s definition of fanzines and the contribution made by their editors and writers to the discourse surrounding Eurohorror and other marginalised films, Eagan’s identification of fanzines breaking down the barriers between editors and fans, and the observations of Sanjek regarding the unique role of fanzines.

Having outlined the reception of Eurohorror and arthouse films in both fanzines and foreign language journals, I will discuss Bava, Franco, Rollin and art horror films in more specific detail in the following chapters. I will also examine how they have been received by fan academics and academic fans, together with situating my own contributions as a central part of the discourse. I will also highlight how the reception of such films has changed with directors such as Bava, Franco and Rollin, being studied now with a respectability which I am sure they would have found deeply ironic, and how my own writing has helped to shape and contribute to this seismic change in their critical reception. Indeed, as if to reinforce this, Schneider (2003) wrote that “[c]ritical attention to and interest in Euro-horror continues to grow today, just as it does with respect to the horror film output in so many other countries” (Schneider 2003, 119), referencing both myself and *Necronomicon Book Two* (1998) in his accompanying footnote.

4. Mario Bava

In this chapter I will explain the profound influence the films of Mario Bava had on me since my introduction to his films, courtesy of a BBC TV screening of *La maschera del demonio* (*Black Sunday*) (1960), detail the reception of Bava's films in foreign language media and how early English language texts influenced me and appeared alongside my own contributions (starting from 1989 for Bava in my own case), including Tim Lucas (1985), Steve Guariento (1993), Troy Howarth (2002) and Roberto Curti (2015-2019). I then examine the reappraisal of Eurohorror and Bava as evidenced in Peter Bondanella and Federico Pacchioni, the study of vernacular cinema, including the *giallo* film and Bava's role in it, discussed by both Mikel Koven and Ian Olney. My own contributions to the discourse on Bava are then considered, with close reference to other scholars, covering Jonathan Rigby, Stacey Abbott, Reynold Humphries and Gary Needham.

"I've often thought that if Bava's films had been released in America in Italian, with English subtitles, he would have been recognised earlier as one of the world's great directors" - (Quentin Tarantino, (Lucas 2007,1039).

A BBC screening of *La maschera del demonio* (*Black Sunday*) (1960), probably around 1987, was my first introduction to a Mario Bava film and was undoubtedly *the spark* to ignite my real passion for European horror. Much as I enjoyed the visceral Hammer Horror period entries there was just something unique in style and tone that set Bava apart. As director Tim Burton has noted that "*Black Sunday* is one of those movies - and this happens to you mainly as a child - that leaves an impression on you, and you don't necessarily know why" (Salisbury 2006, 173). In a similar vein, critic Mark Kermode comments about his formative horror experiences that "[i]...sensed from the very beginning that there was something incomprehensibly significant about the action being played out on-screen, something which spoke to me in a language I didn't quite understand. ...I felt from the outset that beyond the gothic trappings these movies had something to say to me about my life. I just didn't have any idea what" (Kermode 1997, 57). I feel this perfectly captures the sense of an epoch-making moment in one's life which I also experienced - just not able to realise the extent of the impact this would have in later life.

Unusually for an Italian horror film at the time, (make that for any Eurohorror film, in fact), *La maschera del demonio* benefits from the luxury of numerous dolly shots that the budget afforded it, so Bava's ever prowling and fluid camera explores each and every pore of the atmospheric, isolated rural community it traverses. It equally benefits from the iconic figure of Barbara Steele - launching her into a (not always welcome) career in horror films - her doll like features, bulbous, penetrating eyes, all set against her flowing jet black hair - at once ushering in an ambiguity that was to serve her well, especially in this pivotal horror debut. Playing the dual, doppelgänger role of Asa, a 17th century vampire witch as well as that of the young and innocent ingenue, Katia. Steele plays Asa with an imposing degree of menace and passion, whilst also sensitively capturing the naive innocence of Katia - an embryonic beauty yet to blossom and flourish with the benefits that maturity will later bring. The combination of ancient superstitions, secretive rituals

and the sense of dread emanating from the forbidding landscape, all combine to feed off one another to create a Gothic masterpiece. Funereal flames, misty forests, hooded figures, gnarled trees twisting in and out of frame, chalk white fingers clawing their way from beyond the grave to rupture the soil - all the Gothic forces at Bava's disposal are assembled here. Voracious vampire bats, spiders scuttling from sunken eye sockets and cob webbed crypts all accentuate the stylistic devices on show. Non more effective than the most celebrated sequence as through the mist laden forest, a nightmarish vision of a black horse-drawn carriage materialises and crawls past us in slow motion, to render a truly ethereal and genuinely disturbing vision. Bava's masterful use of technique, style, Gothic trappings, ancient folklore and emotionally charged characters was certainly more than enough to convince me to embark on a journey of further discovery, of not just his other films but also those of his European counterparts.

As an example of the enlightened foreign language reception of Bava, Fereydoun Heveyda, reviewing *La maschera del demonio*, extols the virtues of Bava's film emphasising mise-en-scène over screenplay - a favoured *Cahiers du cinéma* ethos³⁹ stating that "Bava has given the fantastic back to the cinema" (Heveyda 1961, 53-57), continuing in highlighting Bava's visual style transcending the narrative as "[t]he camera is extremely mobile, moving around with a nostalgic grace that is perfectly fitted to the neo-romanticism of Gogol's story... discovering the mental space of the fantastic... It is evidently not a question of believing in vampires" (Heveyda 1961, 53-57). Heveyda concludes emphatically that "Bava has the soul of a painter... The breakdown of the coach in the forest, the discovery of the tomb, the sudden appearance of the ancestral descendant, bring to mind such masters of the uncanny landscape as Hercules Seghers, Altdorfer and Grünewald⁴⁰. Bava's film is the pictorial poetry of the irrational communicated by virtue of the mise-en-scène" (Heveyda 1961, 53-57). Such comments confirm Heveyda as being one of the first critics to note this artistry in Bava's work.

Equally enamoured with *La maschera del demonio* was fellow French magazine *Positif*, where for Jean-Paul Toruk, the visage of the reanimated vampiric Asa - her face betraying the open wounds via the spiked mask hammered onto it during her execution, resonates as she beckons a character before her to kiss and know "bliss beyond the reach of mortals". As the screen fades to black with Asa's lips in extreme close up, Toruk eulogises of the scene that;

When aesthetic admiration is absolutely fused with desire and
terror, it "blacks out"... Where are your vaunted intelligence and

³⁹ Emblazened by François Truffaut's influential essay, "A Certain Tendency in the French Cinema" (1954), the *Cahiers*' critics envisioned a new type of cinema to reset the world order. Regarding film to be a very personal medium, this new guard of writers valued the older guard of filmmakers such as Jean Renoir but also valued the more aesthetic nuances as seen in Vittorio De Sica's *The Bicycle Thieves* (1948), as part of the Italian Neorealists.

⁴⁰ Hercules Seghers (1589-1638) - a Dutch landscape painter and an experimental printmaker during the Dutch Golden Age. Albrecht Altdorfer (1480-1538) - a German painter, engraver and architect influenced by the Renaissance. Renowned as one of the first artists to treat landscape as an independent subject. Matthias Grünewald (1470-1528) - also a German Renaissance painter.

your cultivated taste when everything in you freezes and is fascinated before revelations of the utmost horror? Beneath the flowing robes of this young woman with so beautiful a countenance there appear distinctly the tatters of a skeleton. *Is she any less desirable?* (Toruk 1961, np).

There was also a wider debate (and rivalry), between the French magazines *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif* regarding Italian cinema - between the Rossellinists of the former and the modernists of the latter who favoured Antonioni's approach, and also comprised a number of Surrealist-inspired writers including Gérard Legrand and Robert Benayoun. To expand the burgeoning horror and fantasy coverage in *Positif*, two medical students, Michael Caen and Alain Le Bris started *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* - its sobriquet courtesy of the celebrated Boulevard Poissonnière cinema which specialised in offbeat and outlandish strands of film. Spanning twenty four issues from May 1962 until the end of 1970, cover stars included Barbara Steele (twice) and European film icon Delphine Seyrig. It effectively "applied unprecedented intellectual scrutiny to a genre that was still held at arms length by France's actual film industry" (Rigby 2016,112).

As *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* folded, so a new French fantasy and horror magazine rose phoenix like from its ashes as *L'Écran Fantastique* replaced it. The publishers produced a mimeographed booklet, *Mario Bava* in May 1971 which was the first concerted attempt to curate all of Bava's work into one reference point. In 1973 Jean-Marie Sabatier wrote the first significant text on Bava's work in *Les Classiques du Cinéma Fantastique* (1973). Sabatier considered Bava to be an even greater talent than directors such as Tod Browning and Terence Fisher "[w]ith its extreme complexity... the works of Bava confound analysis" (Sabatier 1973, 59), continuing that "[i]f Bava isn't the greatest he is unquestionably the most personal - and perhaps the only genius" (Sabatier 1973, 59). The first book on Bava was also published in France - *Mario Bava* by Pascal Martinet in 1984, while a French collection of scholarly essays also appeared in 1995 in *Mario Bava*, edited by Jean-Louis Leutrat, closely followed by the first Italian language book also entitled *Mario Bava* by Alberto Pezzetta (1995).

Luc Mullet's article on Bava, "La peur et stupeur" (Fear and Stupor) in *Cahiers du cinéma* (1994), coincided with the Mario Bava retrospective at the Cinémathèque. Mullet discusses how Bava's oeuvre is so fluid as to defy any easy labelling such as *fantastique*, as both *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* (*The Girl Who Knew Too Much*) (1963) and *Ecologia del delitto* (*Bay of Blood*) (1971) which he scrutinises, take place in "contemporary reality" with no supernatural elements, whilst equally horror as a label does not apply to numerous other Bava films such as *Diabolik* (*Danger: Diabolik*) (1968). Actions are often improbable and flimsy characters are often rendered nonentities in his films Mullet states. For Mullet however, *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* and *Ecologia del delitto* "provide an almost continuous anguish" (Mullet 1994, np). In the former, because "there is a protagonist followed constantly, situated in a realist setting, with whom we can identify and above all can because we don't know from where or how, nor why danger will suddenly arise" (Mullet

1994, np). For the latter film “because the amazing accumulation of fifteen murders spread across the whole of the film doesn’t only create momentary fear... but it creates also an impression of uneasiness and unremitting nausea” (Moulet 1994, np).

For Moulet, *Ecologia del delitto*;

appears to be Bava’s masterpiece. It imposes upon the spectator a dynamic from which there is no escape. It is built on murder, and it is a product of the purest cinema, in so far as it owes nothing, neither to scenario, nor actions scarcely comprehensible - nor to their meaning, nor to characters, nor to actors. A cinema, a logic, which function uniquely on their own, without supports, of which we find no equivalent in filmic art, and which plunge the audience into an admiring stupor. (Moulet 1994, np).

Moulet concludes dramatically by stating that “at the level of conservation and preservation, there is no task in the world more urgent than taking into consideration the work of Bava, where colour is essential, not which is at risk of insidiously disappearing from memory”. (Moulet 1994, np). Moulet’s view here distils the appreciation of Bava as being reliant/validated by visual style, technique and cinematic *elan* as opposed to merely formal cinematic readings of films based on a linear narrative. This is the approach I have also adopted in studying Eurohorror and arthouse in this thesis.

This acknowledgement of the fantastique in French texts, aided by the new wave thinking ushered in by *Cahiers du cinéma* and rival genre magazines, giving a wider appreciation of the director as the driving force or *auteur*, in control of all aspects of the filming process, was not replicated in the Italian film journals of the period. Rather, that the Italian consensus revolved around how politically aware films were, what statement were they making and what impact on society? With genre films, especially European horror, often actively eschewing realism in favour of the fantastique, such films were deemed as not worthy of or intelligent enough to warrant serious consideration. The main Italian language film magazines were *Cinema Nuovo* (1952-1996), *Ciak* (1985 - present) and *Bianco e Nero* (1937). As such, it is only in later, retrospective features that Bava and his ilk have received any significant recognition.

Take the editorial in *Ciak* by Massimo Lastrucci with its Bava retrospective;

As often, we have to thank the French. That is, if today Mario Bava appears to us indisputably as an Author/auteur, a figure of fundamental importance in the whole panorama of cinema, not only Italian, we owe it once again to those fanatics...cinephiles of the *Cahiers du cinéma* who noticed all the originality of the films considered in Italy to be commercial, by a great director of

photography, a craftsman with a thousand technical solutions. (Lastrucci 2014, np).

Lastrucci acknowledges that the *Cahiers'* writers "rightly" reviewed *La maschera del demonio* as a "horror masterpiece" despite the "indifference of his compatriots". Lastrucci also gives kudos to *6 donne per l'assassino* for having "the most striking features... the good art of Italian arrangement applied to the crime... the killer's acts concealed by a wide-brimmed hat and a raincoat, thus inaugurating a thriving catwalk of masked psychopathic killers" (Lastrucci 2014, np).

Thus, aside from a select band of French film critics and mainly UK & US based fanzines, Mario Bava was generally neglected by the mainstream. This chapter does not seek to elevate Bava to auteur status simply by virtue of his previous "neglect" and "rediscovery" - but discuss the importance of his style and technique, in addition to the influence he has had on some of the most prominent filmmakers today. With earlier critics such as Clarens and Everson, effectively ignoring Bava, later critics including Pirie, Hardy, Nicholls and Newman began to acknowledge Bava's influence and importance. My own publications bridge this gap by being in the vanguard of those critics anticipating and contributing to a new revisionist discourse upon Bava, writing after Tim Lucas and his earliest Bava features in *Fangoria* in 1985, and parallel with Craig Ledbetter and Steve Guariento - a fertile period beginning in the late 1980s, early 1990s, aided partially by the (legal) availability of quality prints to see, and the publication of fanzines such as those indicated below, which were my only resource for Bava coverage.

In terms of general Italian film history texts, coverage of Mario Bava's output was typically scarce or non-existent. For example, Pierre Sorlin's *Italian National Cinema* (1996) features no Bava reference - the nearest to the horror genre being two pages on Pupi Avati, whilst Marcia Landy's *Italian Film* (2010) treads similar ground with three pages on Dario Argento used as its token horror coverage. Instead, it was left to fanzines such as Ledbetter's *European Trash Cinema*⁴¹ and Andrew Featherstone's *Blood and Black Lace* fanzine, (including my own features on *Terrore nello spazio* in 1989 and *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga (Baron Blood)* in 1990), to provide the first in-depth coverage of Bava. Ledbetter notes that *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* (1963) was "considered the first true *giallo*⁴² film" (Ledbetter 1992,7), that in *6 donne per l'assassino*, "Argento can deny that Bava was a major influence all he wants, but one look at this film reminds one of

⁴¹ Ledbetter, Craig, *European Trash Cinema* (Kingwood, Texas. Horror magazine/fanzine published from 1988-1998.

⁴² Ledbetter's *European Trash Cinema*, vol.2, no.6 published in 1992, was an Italian film, *giallo* special issue and one of the first accurate uses of the term. Nicholls *Fantastic Cinema* (1984) uses the term incorrectly identifying it simply as a "horror film with moments sufficiently gross - usually images of mutilation" (p.51) and giving Argento's *Inferno* (1980), (erroneously), as an example. The term *giallo* ("yellow") itself derives from a series of crime-mystery pulp novels entitled *Il Giallo Mondadori (Mondadori Yellow)*, by the Mondadori publishing house from 1929 and taking its name from the trademark yellow cover background. Critics disagree over exact definitions but *giallo* tropes generally include; trench coat, black gloves, knife as the preferred modus operandi, a psychologically motivated killer, protagonist/would be victim acting as an amateur detective, beautiful women amongst the victims and motivations including lust, greed and blackmail.

what a huge debt he owes” (Ledbetter 1992, 7) and of that film’s milieu “fashion studios would continue to appear viable well into the eighties (*Obsession: A Taste of Fear, Nothing Underneath*”⁴³ (Ledbetter 1992, 7). Writing in parallel to myself, Ledbetter equally opted to focus specifically on Eurohorror films, in order to uncover directors such as Bava, Fulci, Argento, Lenzi, Franco and Rollin, rather than discussing more mainstream, American studio film releases.

The first comprehensive study of Mario Bava’s films arrived in 2002, courtesy of cultural historian Troy Howarth’s *The Haunted World of Mario Bava*. The scope covered included all of Bava’s official directorial credits with a concise plot synopsis for each entry, before then discussing the salient themes running throughout Bava’s work. Although a Bava devotee, Howarth maintains a balanced, scholarly consideration of his films and reaffirms the notion that there is a variable quality to Bava’s work - his vision often hampered by production issues.

With *All the Colours of the Dark*, published in 2007, Tim Lucas’ 1,128 page volume on Bava, not only is the most *exhaustive* book on Bava, but also of any one director. With an introduction by Martin Scorsese, this is a labour of love from *Video Watchdog* editor Lucas. Despite his all consuming passion for Bava, Lucas still does maintain a critical perspective and besides the wealth of detailed coverage of Bava across diverse genres besides horror, and also includes his “secret” filmography chapter on more obscure entries. One of the most important aspects of the book is how it also incorporates a history of the Italian film industry, given the vagaries of the production issues which Bava himself encountered and are covered in detail for added context. It includes the silent film era and works such as *Quo Vadis?* (1913) and *Cabiria* (1914) with Bava’s father, Eugenio, the cinematographer on both films, and also providing the special effects on the latter. The pivotal influence of Eugenio on his son is documented by Lucas, in the first in-depth treatment of Mario’s work in English language, in *Fangoria* Vol.1, issue no.42 (February 1985) and Vol 1, issue no.43 (March 1985). In the first part, Lucas details how Bava took over directing *I vampiri* (*The Devil’s Commandment*) (1957) from Riccardo Freda, including the transformation of an attractive vampire into a wizened old hag, all in camera without the use of cutaway shots. Lucas argues that “*The Evil Eye*⁴⁴ is a production of considerable historical importance to horror film history” (Lucas 1985, 23) in being the forerunner to what Italians term as the *giallo* film. That is “stylish murder mysteries which focus on the *murders*, as opposed to the *mystery*” (Lucas 1985, 23). In the second part of the feature, Lucas discusses *6 donne per l’assassino*, observing how the police investigation is prosaic in comparison to the murders which are “photographed to appear gorgeous and titillating, forcing the audience to feel an accomplice’s share of the assassin’s pleasure” (Lucas 1985, 30). He also identifies how Bava shows almost bloodless killings on screen, instead, “preferring to lace the visuals with blood-red drapes, telephones, dresses and fingernails” (Lucas 1985, 30). Given this level of insight, Lucas can certainly claim to be the pre-eminent biographer of Bava as regards English language publications.

⁴³ Original film titles being; *Pathos - Segreta inquietudine* and *Sotto il vestito niente*.

⁴⁴ *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* being the original title.

For my own texts on Bava, the first one for *Blood and Black Lace* (1989) magazine, focused on *Terrore nello spazio*, where I scrutinised Bava's stylistic techniques and influence on other filmmakers. As such, I evoke the atmospheric milieu created by Bava;

Once the ship's outer door is lowered however, we are instantly caught up in and mesmerised by, the gradual assimilation of the planet's own distinctive landscape and characteristics. The rocky craters therein are illuminated by the vibrant pastel shades and colours, as all around banks of incandescent mist effuse from bubbling lava pools and enshroud the desolate landscape. (Black 1989,13).

Continuing these stylistic elements I add;

Bava's oft quoted reliance on the zoom lens is never better served than here as, from a long shot, the camera rapidly homes in on the contorted, bloodied face of one of the Galliat's crew. Then, in typical Bava style, the ever prowling camera wrestles it self over the other bodies that lie nearby, strewn across the barren surface of the planet's many craters. (Black 1989,13).

As a final example of Bava's technique, I reference that the exemplary resurrection scene in *La maschera del demonio* is almost surpassed here as "metal coffin lids quiver, bursting open as their occupants arise, tearing off the plastic shrouds that so eerily encase them" (Black 1989,13). Regarding Bava's influence upon other directors here I note that "[t]he idea that anyone could indeed be one of the alien undead has more recently been demonstrated in *The Thing* (1982) and the scenes of the Argos crew discovering an ancient ship seem to have been the direct inspiration for Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979)" (Black 1989,13), and one could argue still prevail today in the dank, waterlogged remains of the Death Star base in *Star Wars: IX - The Rise of Skywalker* (2019). I conclude that;

Bava's rare excursion into science fiction proves to be ultimately successful, its compelling visuals and atmospheric *mise en scene* triumphing over a banal script and some primitive special effects. Considering its release date, three years before the seminal *2001 - A Space Odyssey* (1968), it is a thought-provoking foray into space, its subtext of a highly intelligent alien form being subtly disseminated through the human race, is a sobering one, almost playing as a prequel to *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers* (1956), in showing how the aliens first arrived on earth. (Black 1989,13).

In *Necronomicon 2* magazine (1993) I evaluate Bava's pivotal *giallo* entry, *6 donne per l'assassino*, where I contextualise the *giallo* in comparison to the slasher film "as unlike their American counterparts, the best of the *giallo* films combine atmosphere, mystery, suspense and an outlandish sense of style, assimilating themselves into a unique sub genre" (Black 1993a, 4). I also argue that another major difference is;

Where the sex "act" will uniformly equate with death in the American slasher model, it is the eroticism of beauty and its desires which provokes the murderous response in the *giallo* film. In the twisted mind of the killer, if you can't have beauty yourself then the compulsion is to destroy it. It is a perverse generalisation on Peter Lorre's obsessive behaviour in *Mad Love* (1935); 'you always hurt the one you love'. (Black 1993a, 4).

I note that of the male murderer, Max, his "refusal of style and beauty, along with his inability to control the emotions it arouses within him, is ultimately demonstrated in the white gauze mask which cloaks his face during the murders" (Black 1993a, 5). I argue that "he is quite literally a faceless individual, an interesting forerunner to the modern day, anonymous assassin - the serial killer. This "nameless" aspect is particularly disturbing as it poses the alarming theory that the killer could be *any one of us*" (Black 1993a, 5). I note that;

Just as the appearance of the faceless killer recalls the eerie, swathed lovers of Belgian surrealist Rene Magritte, so too does the presence of drugs and fashion accoutrements, draw attention to the fetishistic elements contained in the film. There is the paradox of having characters with a craving for illicit drugs, whilst the killer exhibits a craving for the illicit pleasures of the "fix" he gains from sexual arousal, followed by his own perverse orgasm/relief. (Black 1993a, 5).

I also note how despite the visceral nature of the killings, very little actual blood is actually seen, with Bava's restless camera instead opting to;

takes in an accumulation of strident red subjects ranging from crimson drapes, telephones and diary, to the elegant dresses and the model's finely manicured fingernails. Urbaldo Tersano's striking cinematography advances rhythmically over omnipresent fashion mannequins, a creaking sign buffeted outside by the wind, and a fluorescent water fountain silhouetted against the night sky, while all around shafts of incandescent light reveal furtive figures as the strobe-lit, neon netherworld of violent criminals and decadent beauties reminds us of the *krimis* influence at work here. (Black 1993a, 6).

Ultimately, I argue that the superficiality of both the characters and their rarified, *haute couture* world, are intertwined and exposed by Bava. Therefore;

The intimate, ornate interiors and art-deco designs of the salon echo the sumptuous costumed models within, though the china-doll ornaments and figurines, also indicate the delicate, fragile artistic temperaments of the girls - all too apparent as they bitch about each other, caring not for those who have died and only concerned if it will be them next. Like the mannequins which proliferate the house, they are almost statuesque objects, too easily pursued, too easily “broken” and condemned to perish at the crushing hands of the murderer(s). (Black 1993a, 6).

More recent texts discussing Bava include cultural historian Jonathan Rigby’s *Euro Gothic* (2016), who deems *6 donne per l’assassino* as “a murder thriller so dazzlingly stylish and bloody that the competition was blown out of the water” (Rigby 2016,136). Citing the influence on Bava of the Edgar Wallace *krimi*⁴⁵ films from (then) West Germany, Rigby states that “Bava crafted a film so lusciously savage that it simultaneously defined a genre whilst making many of the thrillers that followed it appear redundant” (Rigby 2016,137). Rigby’s comment that the “female beauties [are] so immaculate they’re barely distinguishable from the frozen mannequins lining the salon’s showrooms” (Rigby 2016,138), echoes my earlier observations above.

Reynold Humphries (2001) extends my earlier text on Bava’s *6 donne per l’assassino* by developing the sexual exploitation aspects he identifies in the film. Humphries argues that there is a difference in the representation of male and female characters - highlighted in the credits sequence involving mannequins as Humphries notes how the female actresses ie. “models” are framed to closely resemble the dummies, with the male actors being portrayed as being more obviously human - “[t]hus, the credit sequence closes the gap between humans and models in the case of women, while insisting on that gap in the case of men” (Humphries 2001, np). Developing this theme, Humphries argues that there are “moments when the women are so still that it is difficult to tell the ontological status of the model we have before us on the screen” (Humphries 2001, np). Observing the gender divide Humphries claims that “[t]he human models are merely bodies used to show the clothes off to the best advantage... [and that]...Bava shows that clothes are more important than women” (Humphries 2001,np). Stating that the women are merely adjuncts for their clothing, Humphries claims that “fashion deprives women of their identity, prior to their being deprived of their very existence” (Humphries 2001,np), in expanding

⁴⁵ Similar and a forerunner in some respects to the *giallo* film, over forty *krimi* films emanated from West Germany from 1959 - 1972. Drawing their name from a series of red paperbacks known as *Taschenkrimi*, a number of which were written by British Crime writers, Edgar Wallace and his son, Bryan Edgar. Sanjek’s “Foreign Detection: The West German Krimi and the Italian Giallo” article in *Spectator* (1994) is one of the earliest and most comprehensive English language studies of both the *krimi* and the *gialli* film series - <https://cinema.usc.edu/archivedassets/098/15813.pdf> .

upon my text that “the *haute couture* models provide the victims. In a perverse way, the *chic* models live for fashion but will ultimately die because of it” (Black 1993, 4).

Humphries sees the killer motivated by greed - killing for money, and although anticipating the Hollywood slasher films of the 1970s and 1980s, notes that this motivation differs from the archetypal psychotic killers of such films.⁴⁶ Given this motivation, for Humphries “the theme of sexuality based on profit and the exploitation of the female body for profit, whether by a ruthless male [Max] or his equally ruthless female partner [Cristina]... [involves] getting the most out of patriarchal capitalism” (Humphries 2001,np). Humphries, cites Cristina’s equally sadistic treatment of any woman who gets in her way, betraying “masculine” tropes herself, also noting how the first victim dies from wanting a share of the money and resorting to blackmail. Thus, “Bava shows that the economic dimension of sexuality is where true morbidity dies”. (Humphries 2001,np). I would argue that this is too reductive a reading to put all the motivation down to money alone and prefer a more nuanced approach. In my text I argue that “what is necessary is a pathological desire to *covet* something, or more importantly, *someone* and accelerate the “passion” until [this] momentum topples over” (Black 1993a, 4). In addition “[a]lthough undoubtedly attracted by the idea of inheriting [the] fashion salon and its financial wealth, the killer’s main impetus is remarked upon by another character, and that “[p]erhaps the sight of beauty makes him lose control of himself and kill.” (Black 1993a, 5). Thus, I read a complex variety of motivations involving what would later evolve as typical *giallo* tropes, including greed and human frailties, especially psychologically-inflected ones.

In this I am not alone, as I would refer to Gary Needham’s (2003) text which seeks to “understand the *giallo* film in a more ‘discursive’ fashion” (Needham 2003,135), rather than just relying on generic and historical terms. Similarly to Koven, Needham sees the *giallo* as rising from the post-war period of Italian cinema and reflecting a variety of “textual and industrial specific” (Needham 2003,138) factors. Although Needham identifies other *giallo* tropes such as the *testimone oculare* or eyewitness, the concept of the *flaneur* or foreigner abroad, and the Freudian concept of “nachtraglichkeit” (a constant recall of memory, also indicated in the *giallo* film by a compulsion for the protagonist to return to the scene of the crime), and it is this last aspect that he focuses on. For Needham “the *giallo* literally begs for psychoanalytical enquiry” (Needham 2003,138), generally featuring “a killer who just can't resist serial murder (the psychoanalytic “compulsion to repeat”) (Needham 2003, 138). Continuing that “[t]he *giallo* is a paradigm case in defence of psychoanalysis. It solicits psychoanalytic interpretation and stages every oedipal scenario literally and spectacularly” (Needham 2003,139). Just as I note of the killer in *6 donne per l'assassino* “the white gauze mask which cloaks his face during the murders - he is quite literally a faceless individual” (Black 1993a, 5) and that “the appearance of the faceless killer recalls the eerie, swathed lovers of Belgian surrealist Rene Magritte, so too does the presence of drugs and fashion accoutrements, draw attention to the fetishistic elements contained in the film” (Black 1993a, 5),

⁴⁶ Among such films *Halloween* (1978), *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Prom Night* (1980) and *My Bloody Valentine* (1981) would be typical entries.

Needham also concludes that the black Macintosh (a future *giallo* trope), partially a result of continental fashion trends in the 1960s, also allows for anonymity - a fashion aspect entirely appropriate for the *6 donne per l'assassino* milieu. "This "nameless" aspect is particularly disturbing as it poses the alarming theory that the killer could be *any* one of *us*" (Black 1993a, 5) - an equally alarming thought and concept, not to mention, legacy, for Bava to have visualised.

I analyse Bava's *La maschera del demonio* in *Necronomicon 3* magazine (1993), with style and technique again to the fore. From the opening scene as Bava's point of view shot sees the mask of Satan nailed onto the screaming Asa "the film sees Bava further bombarding the senses as the taut atmosphere and supernatural forces reign supreme, unaffected by logic, untouched by reason" (Black 1993b, 4). I argue that the resurrection of Javutich is even more impressive;

seen through the eyes of a little girl, already frightened by the branches which seem to reach out and grab her ...the camera prowls through the shed window to stare at the vampire's grave. At first nothing. All is still. Then, gradually, mist swirls around the cemetery and the earth begins to heave, eventually erupting as thunder crackles overhead and a bony hand claws at the soil, as the masked figure of Javutich finally emerges. The vampire stumbles through the graveyard, struggling to remove the mask, before finally succeeding and marching ominously forward. (Black 1993b, 5).

I note how Bava then conjures up the ghost of German Expressionism in his homage to the ethereal carriage ride to the Count's castle in *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922) as;

Having barely survived this encounter, the girl then witnesses one of the film's most celebrated scenes as as a jet-black coach and horses, floats eerily through the forest, gliding upon a carpet of mist in sepulchral slow motion before stopping abruptly. Javutich stands beside the coach beckoning Dr. Kruvajan to enter it as wave upon wave of surging mist rolls forward to engulf the doctor. (Black 1993b, 5).

Cultural historian Roberto Curti's three book series on *Italian Gothic Horror Films* (2015) has years 1957-69 covered in the first book, 1970-9 in the second (2017), and 1980-9 in the third (2019). In his first text Curti, like Koven (discussed later), emphasises the idea of the Italian term *filone*, being more appropriate as "the *filone* is more flexible than genre or sub-genre, taking in the idea of cycles, trends, currents and traditions" (Curti 2015, 3). For Curti, Italy's expansion after World War Two and increasing wealth, led to a desire for more transgressive films so, "[i]n a sense, the 1960s Gothic horror was a laboratory of sorts where all the elements that would characterise Italian exploitation cinema in the following decade were tested" (Curti 2015,15). Curti identifies

Bava's *La maschera del demonio* as a key film with the opening sequence defined by the sledgehammer blows to the spoked mask entombing the witch Asa (Barbara Steele) - "a quantum leap in violence... (and with) ... ferocity, the object of violence was the female body" (Curti 2015, 38). Having "attacked the viewer in the jugular" (Curti 2015,39), with such violent imagery, Curti argues that it was this film which paved the way for the subsequent violence which characterised the Italian horror films that followed, together with the Spaghetti Westerns⁴⁷ and *giallo* films. For Curti, Bava staged a;

horrific eroticism of the tortured body which paved the way for a new manner in which to conceive the horror movie.. It is no coincidence that among the admirers of *Black Sunday* there were filmmakers such as Jess Franco and Jean Rollin, who put the connection between horror and eroticism at the heart of their experience in the *fantastique*. (Curti 2015, 39).

Curti observes the importance of Bava portraying the two extremes of the female character in a male dominated society with the vengeful Asa and angelic Katia doppelgänger motif in *La maschera del demonio*, as I had earlier with "[t]he dual nature of the human soul, its capacity for good and for evil, is the central theme to prevail here" (Black 1993b, 4), continuing that "Steele's bravura performance in the dual roles of Asa And Katia, continually milking the inherent ambiguity of the situation for all its worth, enables the deception to be effectively perpetrated" (Black 1993b, 5). Curti identifies how Bava's universe often oscillates between illusion and reality to disorientate the viewer, his use of landscape and its relationship to characters, together with Bava's use of spatial effects in locations, links between characters, their emotions and the landscape. Curti also references a major Bava theme of the past encroaching on the present, as in my own earlier text "[Bava] unveil[s] the friction between the religious and the secular, often expounded by the collision of ancient myths with modern scepticism" (Black 1999a, 33). Curti acknowledges that religion is only a "tepid presence" (Curti 2015, 46) and that "[t]he most disturbing thing in *Black Sunday* is not so much the promise of hell and eternal damnation, as the idea of a seductress who returns from the grave, embodying the lure and the nightmare of a passion that never dies" (Curti 2015,46).

I argue that Bava's masterly assembly of gothic elements, genre conventions and stylistic *elan*, very much place *La maschera del demonio* at the zenith of both his, and the genre's achievements. As a precursor to my discussion of *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga* and *Lisa e il diavolo* in *Necronomicon* Book Three, my text on *Operazione paura* in *Necronomicon* 1 magazine (1993), explores the "intrusion of secular rationale into a hitherto closeted village community, riddled with superstition and ignorance" (Black 1993c, 4). Haunted by the ghostly

⁴⁷ Spaghetti Westerns - filmed in southern Spain & Italy with international casts. Stylish variants on the traditional American western film with the most celebrated examples being Sergio Leone's *C'era una volta il West* (*Once Upon A Time in the West*) (1968), together with his *Dollars* trilogy featuring Clint Eastwood.

apparition of a young girl, Melissa (Valerio Valeri), killed in a tragic accident, her presence acts as the precursor to each of the unexplained deaths plaguing the villagers. I reveal how Bava creates a highly charged, ominous atmosphere as;

The village itself is clearly established as an uninviting place during the opening scenes when coffin is carried through the narrow streets. Low angled shots of towering granite structures, together with a spartan landscape save for the twisted branches of decaying trees, paint a barren picture. (Black 1993c, 4).

I also note how the pivotal rational/superstition conflict is evinced dramatically by Bava as;

Symbolically, Eswai's initial scalpel incision during the autopsy heralds the first of Bava's hallucinatory dream images - a rapidly zooming camera spiralling around a graveyard, then revealed to be a point-of-view shot from a child - Melissa, playing on a swing. (Black 1993c, 4).

I observe how Bava heightens this irrational tone as;

An incandescent light then bathes the night landscape as the ghostly face of Melissa materialises at a window, all under the frightened gaze of the inn-keeper's daughter. The intensity in creases as we zoom into Melissa's face, before the entranced victim impales herself on a candelabra spike - all the while watched by Melissa's vengeful stare. (Black 1993c, 5-6).

By identifying Bava's expert use of colour, sound, lighting and evocative use of elemental forces such as wind and mist, aligned to the secular/non-secular tribulations of the protagonists, I note how Bava marries all these aspects to create not just a gothic masterclass, but also ambitiously delving into the existential, psychological foibles of the characters, especially Eswai, which was ground-breaking for the time. These elements all combine to great effect, thus;

the wind howls fiercely through the churchyard and into the funeral parlour - a child's ball bouncing over the body that is laid to rest there, only for child-like laughter to pierce the quiet as the funeral shroud ominously drops to the floor. Bells toll for no apparent reason, mysterious lights shine in the cemetery where Eswai also finds the body of the murdered Inspector Kruger, and ethereal mist cloaks the village, sweeping through the streets with swirling menace. (Black 1993c, 6).

Developing these themes further in “A Modern World with Ancient Evil” (1999a), I discuss;

one of Bava’s most overriding preoccupations concerned the profound irony of religious faith and secular belief being interwoven (albeit uncomfortably), into the diverse fabric of modern society. The notion that ancient myths and religious rituals could still prevail and influence in a seemingly agnostic, contemporary society, was one which captivated Bava throughout his career but most pointedly, in his duo of (Alfred) Leone collaborations. (Black 1999a, 41,).

It is not surprising then, that in *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga*, the “Baron is resurrected by ancient incantations and not modern medicine - reinforced as the Baron ironically seeks out a doctor to “cure” his hideous wounds but contemporary medicine does not prevail whilst the Baron’s sadistic force does, as he leaves the doctor lying bleeding to death” (Black1999a, 42). Equally;

the incongruous sight of the death-black car set amidst the Gothic mansion and medieval town in *Lisa and the Devil*, suggests that modern conveniences are perhaps not what they appear and it is noticeable that it is the modern car’s mechanical failure which draws the ill- fated protagonists into seeking help from the Countess’ deranged family (Black 1999a, 42).

Building on the physical contrast between ancient and modern, as well as the metaphysical inflections investigated in *Operazione paura*, in *Lisa e il diavolo*, Bava also “questions our belief in fundamental aspects of our society” (Black 1999a, 42). I note how “Bava’s continual use of distorted reflections in filthy mirrors implies a distortion of our perceived “reality” as glimpsed in these surfaces, along with the suggestion that there is a parallel metaphysical universe to our own” (Black 1999a, 42). Be it temptation “in the form of modern greed and avarice” (Black 1999a, 43), in *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga*, with the aspiration to transform the ancient castle into a modern hotel or the “neon-lit drinks machine garishly located against the arcane castle walls” (Black 1999a, 43), similarly “Eva’s own psychedelic wardrobe - mini-skirts and close-fitting sweaters, exhibit an equally jarring visage when set against the drab walls of the castle” (Black 1999a, 43). Such incongruous images and character traits are equally important in *Lisa* as “the regal, stately demeanour of the Countess appears at odds with the remaining participants who exude lust, greed and bewilderment in equal measures rather than civilised manners” (Black 1999a, 43).

Ultimately, the dichotomy between ancient and modern structures, strictures and beliefs, together with the extra dimension given to the protagonists via their angst-ridden foibles and pre-destined fate at the hands of a greater power, invest the film with a compelling undercurrent. The conflict

between ancient and modern is never resolved as an occultist sagely admonishes in *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga*, that “[o]nce you killed innocent witches. Now you bring murderers back to life... Instead, we are left to marvel at the way Bava manages to transcend the hackneyed, worm-eaten script he had to work with” (Black 1994a, 5).

Extending my text “A Modern World with Ancient Evil”, academic Stacey Abbott (2002) analyses the modernisation of the vampire legend in *I Vampiri* (1957), one of the first Italian horror films, directed by Riccardo Freda, with Bava both camera and special effects director. Thus for Abbott “Andy Black has suggested that Bava’s films evinces preoccupation with the “notion that ancient myths and religious rituals could still prevail and [possess] influence in a seemingly agnostic contemporary society” (Abbott 2002, np). Abbott states that “*I Vampiri* creates a much more dynamic juxtaposition of the gothic past with the modern present by challenging the boundaries that separate them” (Abbott 2002, np), just as I previously commented on Bava’s “preoccupations concerned with the profound irony of religious faith and secular belief being interwoven (albeit uncomfortably), into the diverse fabric of modern society” (Black 1999a, 41).

Abbott notes that the first half of *I Vampiri* “situates its narrative within a recognisably contemporary location as the police hunt for a killer and an unknown murderer hunts for a new victim on the streets and in the modern institutions of Paris” (Abbott 2002, np). Identifying two key themes “it is Bava’s cinematography that visually suggests the relationship between the gothic and the modern world and... his special effects that associate the vampire with the technology of cinematic trickery” (Abbott 2002, np), as Abbott extends my text. Abbott observes a montage of sensationalist newspaper headlines that are used as “in this opening sequence the notion of vampirism is introduced but stripped of its gothic attributes, deposited in a modern city and presented by modern science and the printing press” (Abbott 2002, np).

For Abbott, the use of space is transformed by Bava’s use of cinematography and *mise en scène* as “science labs become “gothicised” and a gothic castle becomes modernised” (Abbott 2002, np). Just as I note that “the Baron is resurrected by ancient incantations and not modern medicine [although]... the Baron [later] ironically seeks out a doctor to “cure” his hideous wounds” (Black 1999a, 42), Abbott equally notes the gothic castle space in *I Vampiri* being “infected with the modern as it is laden with test tubes, gurneys, electrical equipment, gauges, switches and flashing lights. The barriers that separate the gothic from the modern have clearly lapsed” (Abbott 2002, np). With “the actual drinking of blood [being] presented as a scientific process of transfusion” (Abbott 2002, np), for Abbott, “Bava’s *I Vampiri* marks a significant moment when European horror began to confront the terrors of modernisation” (Abbott 2002, np). Seeing science as both the “cause *and* the cure”, for Abbott, the “vampire mythology is reinvented to suggest that the vampiric qualities of modern science and cinema technologies can embody both the danger and the wonder of the modern age” (Abbott 2002, np), reinforcing the point I make in my earlier text.

In continuing the dichotomy between the ancient and modern, Roberto Curti's second volume recognises that "[t]he non-stop quest for excess on screen, either violent or erotic (or both), drained the Gothic of its primary function and meaning" (Curti 2017,4), as filmmakers, including Bava, placed more reliance on blood and gore. As such, Curti notes in Bava's *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga*, as in my earlier text, (Black 1999a, 33-50), the increased accent on violence and torture and the conflict between ancient and modern - "[i]n a sense, the Baron is also protecting the environment from the invasive shadow of modernity" (Curti 2017, 55), Curti also observing how the characters are dwarfed by the immense ancient castle walls, as I noted "an authentic medieval castle whose looming towers and shadowed battlements dominate the Austrian forest locale...It becomes almost a *character*" (Black 1999a, 35). Discussing *Lisa e il diavolo*, Curti notes how Bava explores the boundaries between this world and the afterlife permeate this flawed classic - an over reliance on zoom shots, in and out of focus shots, plus the continual blurring between animate and inanimate, for example. Curti argues that here "the real horror is that one's self is revealed as illusory" (Curti 2017, 88), in a film with no discernible moral compass and Bava's familiar mannequin motifs throughout, suggested the characters are mere puppets controlled by a higher authority. This I identified previously stating that from the very opening titles of *Lisa* "Leandro [is] the "puppet master" as we see (his) white-gloved hands playing tarot cards - life becomes a game, a game of chance or fate... the continual use of mannequins or "dummies" in *Lisa and the Devil* reaffirms the sense that the characters are mere playthings, pawns on a human chessboard." (Black 1999a, 44).

Academic Danny Shipka's *Perverse Titillation* (2011), echoes my discussion of *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga*, when I wrote that "Eva's own psychedelic wardrobe - mini-skirts and close-fitting sweaters exhibit an equally jarring visage when set against the drab walls of the castle" (Black 1999a, 43), whilst Shipka noted, "an attempt to throw a very modern mini-skirted Elke Sommer into the gloomy Gothic castle motif" (Shipka 2011, 51). My theme of Bava exploring "[t]emptation, albeit in the form of modern greed and avarice" (Black 1999a, 43), for Shipka was "the continuing division between the generations...[and the] traditional and modern" (Shipka 2011, 51). Shipka argues the film portrays "the widening gap between the corrupt, old culture... and the new, hip, selfish one" (Shipka 2011, 51), just as I had noted that "corporate raiders are seeking to transform the castle into a hotel... destroying the ancient structure" (Black 1999a, 43). When discussing *Lisa e il diavolo*, Shipka also noted as I had, how the film "surrealistically moved between the traditional aspects of the Gothic genre and the modern ones" (Shipka 2011, 51), as I wrote that *Lisa* "recalls surrealism guru Alain Resnais... with its fragmented narrative and its lack of a final interpretation" (Black 1999a, 47). In addition, Shipka referenced Bava's "adherence to a completely non-linear style of narrative" (Shipka 2011, 53), as did I with "the seemingly non-linear dream/flashback sequence Lisa experiences" (Black 1999a, 42).

In also analysing *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga*, Jonathan Rigby considers Peter returning to the haunted Europe of his ancestors as "a plot device perfectly attuned to the time-honoured Gothic theme of ancient, atavistic horrors reaching from the past to envelop the living" (Rigby

2016, 240), also describing the film, (like myself), “the collision of ancient myths with modern scepticism (Black 1999a, 33), as “this collision of ancient and modern” (Rigby 2016, 240). He echoes the point I make regarding the modern encroaching on the ancient as “Dortmund however, gets his just deserts, having slotted his money into the neon-lit drinks machine garishly located against the arcane castle walls and the Baron strikes - strangling his victim” (Black 1999a, 43). For Rigby “[t]he Baron’s contempt for the modernisation of his stronghold is symbolised by the businessman’s use of a newly installed Coca-Cola dispenser, moments before his demise” (Rigby 2016, 241). Of *Lisa e il diavolo*, Rigby asserts that Bava “sought to subject viewers to exactly the kind of disorientating limbo into which its heroine is plunged” (Rigby 2016, 276), which I referred to earlier as “Bava’s continual use of distorted reflections in filthy mirrors implies a distortion of our perceived “reality” as glimpsed in these surfaces, along with the suggestion that there is a parallel metaphysical universe to our own” (Black 1999a, 42). He also considers that “[a]s a sumptuously imagined ‘designer’ view of the afterlife, *Lisa* is unrivalled” (Rigby 2016, 276). Rigby sees the climax where the impotent boy goes berserk thus “Bava stages a stunning tableau in which he’s faced by a dinner table of lolling corpses, the skeleton lover at the centre and a maggot writhing wedding cake positioned in front of her. The subsequent apparition of his murdered mother - with the dead-eyed Valli floating implacably towards Max and us - is among the most coldly frightening things Bava ever filmed” (Rigby 2016, 278).

Academics Stefano Baschiera and Russ Hunter’s *Italian Horror Cinema* (2016) offers an in-depth, scholarly study of the genre, however, acknowledging that although Italian Horror has not been completely devoid of academic study, it “has lacked the kind of *sustained* dialogue that helps to transform understandings of any given field” (Baschiera and Hunter 2016, 8). The authors argue that Italian horror scholars have provided valuable but isolated interventions that “have not been part of a broader discursive community” (Baschiera and Hunter 2016, 8). The authors identify three characteristics of Italian horror to underpin their research; the ability to make films quickly and with low budgets; a fragmentary mode of production whereby small companies relied on distributor advances and bank loans to make low risk (investment) films for the second and third run Italian theatres; and finally, the use of international actors and locations to both broaden the appeal and disguise the Italian origins of the films. The authors also identify that “[t]he 1980s are thus mainly understood through the (limited) filmic production of the period by canonised ‘horror auteurs’ (mainly understood as Mario Bava, Dario Argento and Lucio Fulci), whose careers began in a previous decade” (Baschiera and Hunter 2016, 48). As part of this shift in focus the authors cite Bondanella’s *A History of Italian Cinema* (2017), which unlike his earlier, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (1999) “features a significant and sustained engagement with popular forms of Italian cinema, horror among them” (Baschiera and Hunter 2016, 8), and indeed expanded in the newly published 2017 edition I discuss below.

Cultural historians Peter Bondanella and Federico Pacchioni’s updated *A History of Italian Cinema* is a strident indicator of the critical arc which now recognises and even celebrates the importance of both the horror and *giallo* genres within Italian cinema and beyond. The authors offer a detailed

and comprehensive evaluation of Italian horror with Bava to the fore. Indeed, he is now considered as “one of the most inventive horror and thriller directors after setting a standard for innovative peplum epics” (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 363). The authors note a distinction between horror and the *giallo* film, with the former featuring supernatural elements and often otherworldly creatures, with the latter grounded in more overtly psycho-sexual tropes closer, although distinct from serial killer films. They argue that;

This crucial distinction between the horror film and the *giallo* in Italy is sometimes ignored by critics and film historians, primarily because the same directors - Bava, Argento, Fulci and others - work in both popular genres, and their film styles often represent a mixture of techniques used in each kind of film narrative. (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 364).

Of Bava specifically and *La maschera del demonio*, the authors write “a masterful stylistic revisitation of all the elements of the classic horror film” (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 367). Importantly, they note this film’s release in the same year as the much vaunted Italian auteurs; Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita*, Antonioni’s *L’Avventura* and Visconti’s *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (*Rocco and his Brothers*) - all released in 1960. As Bava worked in other popular genres critics never considered him to be an auteur “but on the strength of this single film along (*Black Sunday*), and judged on purely stylistic terms, Bava surely deserves to be compared favourably with the august trinity of Italy’s auteurs who dominated the 1960s scene” (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 368). The authors add that “[w]hat is most remarkable about his films is that their quality emerged from extremely low budgets and accelerated production schedules” (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 368).

Of *Operazione paura*, the authors assert that “[w]ith beautifully staged exterior settings bathed in fog and night lighting and interior scenes that exploit spiral staircases and pursuits through endless corridors of old castles in decay [and] shot in deep focus, the film palpably depicts the ascent into the abyss of the supernatural” (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 372). They continue that “Bava lights up his sets...with primary colours in extraordinarily beautiful ways” (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 372). More praise is lavished upon Bava’s *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga* as it “continues the Gothic atmosphere of *Black Sunday* and *Black Sabbath* but combines a Gothic castle setting with a contemporary time frame” (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 372). Of *Lisa*, they claim that “[l]ike *Black Sunday*, it must be rated as one of Bava’s finest films” (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 373), and that it “exploits a link between horror in the past and the present” (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 373), echoing my earlier text, where I noted that “[Bava] seeks to unveil the friction between the religious and the secular, often expounded by the collision of ancient myths with modern scepticism” (Black 1999a, 33). The authors even go as far as to validate the claims of Lucio Fulci’s gore-drenched Gothic films in claiming that “they are artfully constructed around visual images rather than traditional literary plots, and thus resemble

Dario Argento's horror and *giallo* cinema" (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 388), whilst also stating Soavi's *Dellamorte Dellamore* to be "a truly fine horror film" (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 391), emphasising their revisionist approach to Italian horror.

Continuing the elevated status they now confer on the Italian horror genre, the authors also include a separate chapter devoted solely to the *giallo* film. In identifying its singular tropes, they argue that "[b]asically, the world of the *giallo* is one of cynicism, greed, sexual depravity, and violence; everyone, not just the murderer, probably has something to hide" (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 434). They also observe that there is no affirmation of the moral or social order in the *giallo* film, in fact, quite the opposite, detailing the attention paid to the eyewitness of any crimes, (*testimone oculare* in Italian), so "ways of seeing or of not seeing become one of the genre's basic themes" (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 434). They also consider the reliance on the "set-piece" as this "guarantees the audience's attention by stressing suspense, sex, violence and then murder" (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 434). For *6 donne per l'assassino*, the authors commend it as a "stunning visual beauty" (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 437), and denote how the "murderer photographed with a black fedora; a black jumpsuit, and the obligatory pair of black leather gloves, the outfit that would become *de rigueur* in future *gialli*" (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017, 437). On balance, it is astonishing to see how much scrutiny the authors pay to both the Italian horror film and its *giallo* offspring compared to the first edition of their book, giving balanced criticism and recognising the continuing influence these films have on the wider cinema world.

In writing at a parallel time to me, cultural historian Steve Guariento's Bava retrospective in *Samhain*⁴⁸ spanned three issues (no's. 37: March/April 1993, 38: (May/June 1993) & 40: September/October 1993)), delineating three phases in Bava's career; "Part One - Style it Takes (1960-65)", "Part Two - Italian Gothic, Italian Camp, Italian Psychos (1966-1972)" and "Part Three - Metaphysical Experiences" (1972-1980)". Guariento states that Bava's films "hold an irresistible fascination for both the die hard spaghetti-shocker buffs and highbrow film historians alike" (Guariento March/April 1993, 22). On *6 donne per l'assassino*, Guariento claims that "Bava predates his disciple Argento by subtly allying his audience with the killer(s) via titillating, brutal murder sequences which lend the film a vaguely unpleasant, misogynist angle" (Guariento March/April 1993, 25). Guariento argues that *Operazione paura (Kill Baby Kill)* (1966) revels in "the sense of oneiric disorientation engendered by this spellbinding jewel in the Bava crown" (Guariento May/June 1993, 22). Of *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga (Baron Blood)* (1972), Guariento asserts that "supernatural forces intrude abruptly on everyday normality" (Guariento May/June 1993, 26), and that Bava also "allows his monster a few moments of flamboyant Sadean gratification" (Guariento May/June 1993, 26).

In his final part, Guariento argues that with *Lisa e il diavolo (Lisa and the Devil)* (1973), Bava was able to "elevate the metaphysical subtext, implicit in much of his sixties output to centre stage

⁴⁸ Gullidge, John, *Samhain* (Topsham, Devon). Horror magazine/fanzine published from 1986 - 1997.

with a plot that makes no sense at all on anything other than a semi-surrealistic level” (Guariento September/October 1993, 23). Guariento notes a sense of unreality in *Lisa* - recurring images of clocks and watches stopped (or with hands removed), suggesting a timeless twilight zone and precursor to the “metaphysical” experiences the characters encounter. Guariento observes that the protagonists in Bava are often confronted by such alternative realities - for example, evil spirits in *La maschera del demonio* (1960), *Operazione paura* (1966) and *Il rosso segno della follia* (*Hatchet for the Honeymoon*) (1970), *Lisa e il diavolo* and *Schock (Shock)* (1977), mythological underworlds in *Ercole al centro della Terra (Hercules in the Haunted World)* (1961), extraterrestrial life forms in *Terrore nello spazio*, or crazed minds in *6 donne per l'assassino* (1964). Guariento expands this to claim that “Intriguing parallels with the dreamlike “pittura metafisica” of artist Giorgio de Chirico⁴⁹, whose anthropomorphic mannequins in particular, bear striking similarities to this director’s recurrent images of tailors dummies” (Guariento September/October 1993, 24). For Guariento, Bava’s films “occupy a space somewhere in the middle ground between Chirico and his surrealist disciple Rene Magritte, (as I also noted in Black, 1993a) in whose discomfiting world the everyday becomes imbued with a sinister new significance, simply by virtue of its placement within an unfamiliar context” (Guariento September/October 1993, 24).

In offering a sociological, theoretical perspective, academic Ian Olney’s *EuroHorror* (2013), points out the irony of what he perceives as the invisibility of Eurohorror in film studies, in that these films often confront issues of race, gender and sexism rather than merely perpetuating such prejudices, as they are often accused of. He argues that the relative freedom afforded to the directors of Eurohorror films, enabled them to make interesting and unique films. Using what Olney terms as “performative spectatorship”, which he defines as the “freedom to adopt multiple viewing positions and experiment with different subjectivities in a fashion generally proscribed by mainstream cinema and the dominant social order” (Olney 2013, 43). Olney then offers in-depth case studies of distinct genres within Eurohorror, and one criticism which could be levelled is an over reliance on Italian films at the expense of other European countries. He discusses Bava in relation to the *giallo* film and speculates the *giallo* to be the bridge between traditional Hollywood horror and the European art cinema tradition. For Olney, the *giallo* amplifies the disruption, transgression and uncertainty inherent in the horror film, prompting a post-modern and “uniquely performative kind of spectatorship” (Olney 2013,107). Olney argues, as Mikel J. Koven has, that *6 donne per l'assassino* is not a traditional detective story. The audience cannot gather clues, victims become killers and vice versa. Our empathy is fluid as we are unable to identify with one specific character - “a free-floating mode of spectatorship that operates in between set viewing positions” (Olney 2013,108). In addition, there is no satisfying closure at the end as the dual male and female killers confound our gender expectations, and are never brought to justice as the case isn’t solved by the police. Contrary to Gary Needham’s contention that the *giallo* defies definition, Olney argues in a similar vein to Koven that instead, the *giallo* “is defined by its narrative debt to

⁴⁹ An Italian writer and artist born in Greece (1898-1978) whose scuola metafisica art movement greatly influenced the surrealists.

post-war Italian anti-detective fiction and by the characteristic way in which it uses formal devices to amplify the destabilising, post modern tendencies of this brand of fiction” (Olney 2013,115). Olney claims that the *giallo* is “an intensely interactive experience that involves potentially transgressive acts of performative spectatorship by viewers” (Olney 2013,115-6). With respect to the postmodern treatment of gender roles, Olney argues that the *giallo* allows viewers to experiment with “a more fluid and malleable range of social and sexual identities than they would in their everyday lives” (Bernstein 1994, 233).

Also adopting a sociologically inclined approach, together with that of a vernacular scholar, in taking into account the specific geography of particular countries, Mikel J. Koven’s *La Dolce Morte* (2006) was the first in-depth analysis of the *giallo* film sub-genre and as such scrutinises the influence of Bava amongst others. Koven does note Visconti’s *Obsessione* (1942) as the first *giallo* film and details how the *giallo* has generally been contextualised within the history of the Italian horror film, (including Bava), as opposed to the crime genre with which it also shares several tropes. Thus, for Koven “Mario Bava was unofficially credited with inventing the *giallo* as a cinematic genre” (Koven 2006,3). With the release of Argento’s *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (*The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*) (1970) that year, Koven asserts 1970 as being “the key threshold for *giallo* cinema” (Koven 2006,4). It’s success;

takes the innocent eye witness who becomes an amateur detective through a grisly series of murders from Bava’s *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (1963) and adds graphic violence and iconically dressed killer (black hat, gloves and raincoat) from *Blood and Black Lace*. It is this combination that really defines the *giallo* film as it is more commonly understood. (Koven 2006,4).

Koven places great emphasis on identifying that “[t]he *giallo* is not high art; it is *vernacular* cinema in its marketing, consumption and production” (Koven 2006,6). Koven especially identifies the specific cultures within Italy that the *giallo* was made for, predominantly the *terza visione* theatres of the late 1960s, with mainly working class audiences, and the accent as much on socialising as cinema, hence the need for the *giallo* to grab the audience’s attention with bravura set pieces. Koven notes the lack of coverage of the Italian horror film as it is not seen as being germane to Italian culture or expressing a national film voice, relying on fantasy rather than realism and politics. To reinforce this claim, Koven cites the *The Companion to Italian Cinema* (1996) as including over twenty-five significant director entries, of which only Bava, Argento and Freda are chosen as horror genre representatives. As Koven explains “[f]anzines and other forms of vernacular criticism tend to understand the intended audience for these films better than the BFI” (Koven 2006, 32), and with native publications including *Cinema Nuovo* and *Ciak*, giving greater retrospective coverage to Bava, as previously discussed earlier in this chapter. In reinforcing the importance of fanzines such as my own in offering a revisionist critique regarding the appreciation

and reception of such films in the UK and US, whilst modernist, high art cinema allows the audience to distance itself from the film and evaluate ideas, vernacular cinema cannot - instead, it “demands an immediate and personal relationship to the narrative” (Koven 2006,40), which explains the graphic and exploitation accoutrements of gore, sex and violence which characterise the *giallo*. It is precisely these elements which also fed into the interest in Eurohorror films and the appeal to UK and US audiences of a seemingly more exotic, distant and transgressive group of films.

Koven also identifies how the *giallo* differs from the more Americanised serial killer movie concept. Often serial killers are portrayed with no rational motives unlike the *giallo* where often convoluted plots and motives ape the crime novel as rational motives such as greed and jealousy dominate, along with emotional/psychological trauma. Eschewing more Freudian-based psychology, Koven asserts that the “recognition of past traumas on the contemporary Italian psyche is perhaps more fruitful to consider” (Koven 2006,18). Koven notes that many of the main protagonists in *giallo* films of the 1970s are thirty to forty years old, thus having experienced Mussolini’s fascist rule during World War Two and the cultural reaction to its aftermath. Thus, “[t]he real past trauma is a historical one; the defeat and emasculation of Italy in the war under fascism. And this trauma has been haunting Italians ever since” (Koven 2006,109). Koven offers the first detailed, scholarly analysis of the *giallo* film, rooting it not just in thematic concerns but also the cultural context specific to vernacular cinema. As such, it affords an elevated status to the *giallo* film, both within European horror as well as Italian national cinema, together with acknowledging the trailblazing impact of Bava’s own forays into this genre.

Therefore, scholars including Curti, Bondanella and Pacchioni, Rigby, and academics Shipka, and Abbott, have all alluded to the conflict between the ancient and the modern that I have highlighted in my earlier writing, and which pervades much of Bava’s work. In addition, Curti picks up on the doppelgänger motifs I noted in *La maschera del demonio*, Rigby the parallel universe aspects I identified in *Lisa e il diavolo*, Shipka the non-linear style I observed in the same film, whilst Humphries repeats the superficiality of the fashion world (and models) I identified in *6 donne per l’assassino*, just as Needham observes the psychoanalytical narratives in the same film (and *giallo* genre), as I had previously.

As these more recent texts have shown, there has been a substantial revision in scholarly opinion and reception of the films of Bava. With the examples of my work selected throughout this chapter, (beginning as early as 1989), and the influence of these contributions upon later writers given the new found respectability that Bava now enjoys, I feel this demonstrates how I have helped to bridge the critical gap between his prior neglect, to now being championed as amongst *the* most influential horror and *giallo* film directors in history.

In the next chapter, I discuss how another influential Eurohorror director, Jess Franco from Spain, has also seen his work undergo a similar re-evaluation to that which has characterised Bava’s canon.

5. Jess Franco

In this chapter, having noted the dearth of information on Franco, (as with Bava), I then discuss the first in-depth English language analysis of Franco, *Obsession - The Films of Jess Franco* by Lucas Balbo, Peter Blumenstock, and Christian Kessler 1993, featuring interviews with both the cast and director, to give a revealing insight, together with the influence on me of Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs *Immoral Tales* (1994), and Stephen Thrower's *Eyeball* (from 1989). I then examine the influence of my own contributions set against other scholars, involving Xavier Mendik, Glenn Ward and Niall Scott in particular, who develops an entirely different and abstract concept from my own writing on Franco.

As noted with other luminaries such as Bava and Rollin, Franco was neglected by his own country in terms of film texts with titles such as Rob Stone's *Spanish Cinema* (2001), Nuria Triana-Toribio's *Spanish National Cinema* (2002) and Sally Faulkner's *A History of Spanish Film* (2013), all equally culpable and only in recent years have any more general texts begun to include Franco with Santiago Fouz-Hernández's *Spanish Erotic Cinema* (2017) a case in point (although still with only a sparse 3 pages out of 250 pages). This includes a token chapter on the "Eroticism of the Spanish Horror Film 1969-75" where Antonio Lázaro-Reboll argues that several critics such as Gubern, (1974) and Vana Clocha (1974-5) claim that eroticism and sexuality in Spanish horror films were symptomatic of the repressive General Franco regime in Spain, but Lázaro-Reboll sees this reading as reductive. As such, he claims that "[t]he pleasures of horror, or even the pleasures of eroticism in horror, can be read differently if the exploitation and positioning of a film's erotic assets are considered as part of broader production and distribution strategies" (Lázaro-Reboll 2017,76). Thus, many horror films were sold, promoted and received "not only as horror films but also as commercial vehicles for the erotic appeal of the female leads" (Lázaro-Reboll 2017,76). Lázaro-Reboll considers that as a result "Franco (was) trapped into commercially successful European industrial and generic trends, blending genres, trafficking in the erotic and confronting domestic and international audiences with active female sexuality" (Lázaro-Reboll 2017,77). Lázaro-Reboll also saw *Vampyros Lesbos* as pivotal in that it "explored the transgressive sexuality of a female vampire embodied in the figure of Franco's muse Soledad Miranda" (Lázaro-Reboll 2017,77). Although the Franco coverage in this volume is slight, it is nonetheless a welcome addition, given that it appears in a more general overview of Spanish erotic cinema, so to some extent, marks a turning point in how Franco's importance was being recognised.

Thematically, texts on Franco, and writing parallel to myself, include those adopting the approach of cultural historians with primary sources such as interviews with Franco and his principal cast and producers. As the first in-depth analysis of Franco's work, Balbo, Blumenstock and Kessler's *Obsession - The Films of Jess Franco* (1993) featuring an introduction from Franco regular Howard Vernon, who admits of even Franco's poorer films that "there are always one or two scenes that can be considered the work of a genius" (Balbo, Blumenstock & Kessler 1993,11). For Vernon, working with Franco was "one of the most positive and pleasant memories of my career, both

artistically and on a human level. Without that experience, a very essential part of my life would have been missing” (Balbo, Blumenstock & Kessler 1993,11).

With an introduction to *Obsession* by Tim Lucas, who asserts that Franco is “more artist than hack, more satirist than clown, and more philosopher than philistine” (Lucas 1993,13), and credits him with creating the “third *frisson...horrotica*” (Lucas 1993,13).⁵⁰ He claims that “[i]n Franco’s universe, the viewer never encounters joyous sex; there is always some dark element of guilt or pain, or emotional dislocation involved, and most of the erotic acts he depicts are dramatised in concert with the spectre of Death” (Lucas 1993,13). Lucas also acknowledges how acclaimed director Fritz Lang found Franco’s *Necronomicon - Geträumte Sünden (Succubus)* (1968) to be “a beautiful piece of cinema” (Lucas, 1993,13). Lucas then charts a series (for him), of specific chapters in Franco’s career; The Classical Years - 1959-1965, the Pop Art Years - 1965-7, the Harry Alan Towers Years - 1968-1970, the Peak Years - 1970-3, the Porno Holocaust Years - 1973-9, the Homecoming Years - 1980-7, and finally, the Autumn Years - 1987 - present (1993). Lucas would subsequently revise these chapters several years later.

The author’s interviews give a fascinating insight into Franco’s personality and ethos. Howard Vernon eulogises that “[y]ou can’t imagine how talented he is. He knows everything there is to know about cinema, movie-making and camerawork” (Balbo, Blumenstock & Kessler 1993, 201). Vernon continues that “[m]aking movies is Franco’s passion. He lives for that, and I’m sure he would also die for it” (Balbo, Blumenstock & Kessler 1993, 203). Actress Monica Swinn elucidates that “[h]e’s mad about the cinema, about framing, lighting, camera movements (even though he tends to overdo the zooms); if he hasn’t got a camera in his paws, he feels quite ill...he has an absolute need to film” (Balbo, Blumenstock & Kessler 1993, 224). Producer Erwin C. Dietrich comments that “Jess is a real film buff who knows every film ever made and who could basically make any type of film” (Balbo, Blumenstock & Kessler 1993, 229). In a revealing interview with Franco himself, he comments on his return to Spain and feeling that not much had changed since the demise of General Franco⁵¹, thus “[t]he facade has been cleaned up, but what’s behind has stayed the same” (Balbo, Blumenstock & Kessler 1993, 240). Franco continues that “[i]t’s worse than Italy nowadays, only those with friends in high places get the money to make films” (Balbo, Blumenstock & Kessler 1993, 240). For Franco, the new socialist government had become the

⁵⁰ Where the term “horrotica” was first coined by Lucas.

⁵¹ Francisco Franco, (1st October 1936-20th November 1975) an authoritarian general and dictator of Spain. A Spanish military general who led the Nationalist forces in overthrowing the Second Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War (1936-9) and who ruled from 1939-1975. In defeating the left-wing Republicans, the Nationalists ruled on a platform of conservative, traditionalist policies. His reign was characterised by both brutal repression but also economic prosperity. Reputedly over 344,000 people died during the war with rape, torture and executions used by Franco’s soldiers to quell political opposition. In receiving foreign support from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany with troops and aircraft, and with foreign support for the Republicans from the Soviet Union, this was seen by some observers to be a precursor to the battle lines drawn up for World War Two (1939-1945). Still a contested figure today with his remains removed from Madrid to Mingorrubio Cemetery on 24th October 2019, as it is considered a less prestigious location and to prevent further glorification of him.

“new Francos” - “...guys who just want to get rich.”⁵² Expanding on this, Franco claims that “[e]verything here’s so small and petty that one’s creativity gets lost...The other depressing thing is that the mentality of the country has hardly changed in fifty years, except on the surface” (Balbo, Blumenstock & Kessler 1993, 241). Ultimately, *Obsession* is a detailed, comprehensive text which gives a real insight into the Franco ethos via direct interviews with both him and his cast/crew and begins the work of contextualising his own unique style and importance within cinema.

Also adopting the approach of cultural historians, and writing parallel to myself, Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs *Immoral Tales* (1994) studies Franco in detail. In distilling Franco’s *raison d’être*, the authors write that “[w]ith Franco there are no rules. It’s like being back at the birth of the motion picture industry, when some crazy guys grabbed a camera, hired a few actors, and accidentally turned out something raw and fabulous” (Tohill & Tombs 1994, 90). The authors also note how reluctant Franco was to ever talk about his own films, nearly always dissatisfied with them and they speculate that “[m]aybe this is why he keeps reworking the same ideas” (Tohill & Tombs 1994, 90). Identifying how Franco’s fast and frenetic filming style means forgetting about striving for perfection and how low-budget, guerrilla filmmaking is not conducive to maintaining the same intensity for 90 minutes, the authors claim that;

Franco’s films tend to oscillate...inspiring, fantastic sections, separated by long, plodding plot development. The realistic bits usually feature the hero. In Franco’s films the woman is always dynamic, the hub around which his crazy fantasies spin. The hero on the other hand, is ordinary, a dullard who merely bolsters up the status quo - he’s not passionate, obsessive or driven by high ignoble desires like the villain. He doesn’t have fire or conviction....he isn’t a crazy dreamer. (Tohill & Tombs 1994,106).

Denoting Franco as an old fashioned fetishist, the authors discuss his fondness for “dressing” his female characters, often the more interesting villains, thus in *Faceless* it is “full of these corset-clad women, even the cold-hearted, feline, surgically austere Brigitte Lahaie sports one on an off-duty romp. Uninfluenced by fashion, Franco’s predilections don’t change, he simply reworks and reinvents them, increases their intensity, revels in their gaudy delight” (Tohill & Tombs 1994,109). Continuing with Franco’s voyeurism, Franco himself stated that he was;

a pure voyeur...a voyeur, not just of fucking, but of everything...To be a director of cinema how could you not be a

⁵² In particular, a new law Ley Mirò, passed by the Spanish socialist government in 1983. This favoured high quality films based on historical and literary origins so went against the low budget, genre based filmmaking characterised by Franco. A governing committee would select films “eligible” for grants - but in effect 80% of the films receiving grants were made by committee members. For Franco, this was censorship reintroduced, only disguised as a “rating” committee.

voyeur? What happens is I recognise it and 90% of my colleagues don't. What I am trying to say is that the voyeur in cinema is something passionate and important, but in life they are idiots. (Tohill & Tombs 1994,119).

The authors conclude that “you have to admire his ability to do as he pleases - it's impossible not to envy someone who has managed to make a career out of his obsessions” (Tohill & Tombs 1994,122). They expand that;

He could have been a real contender. He had the potential to be the finest European filmmaker of his generation, instead of which he chose to work in the shadows and turn out marginal little films. He wilfully courted obscurity. Like Milton's Lucifer, he's an outcast, someone who'd rather create his own world than follow the dictates of others. (Tohill & Tombs 1994,122).

Finally, they maintain that “[a]t their best, his films inspired a sense of wonder, at their worst, a feeling of exasperation and despair” (Tohill & Tombs 1994, 122). In summary, Tohill and Tombs analyse the mercurial Franco's unique qualities and delineate how these were always at odds with the repressive Spanish film industry and they afford him critical acclaim for the deeply personal and individualistic films he made, contextualising our understanding of such a complex character.

With my own Franco texts, my view differs from Lucas, for example, who claims a requirement to view all (if possible), of Franco's near two hundred films - itself problematic as his rapidly financed and shot films leave a contested production/ownership legacy, rendering it virtually impossible to itemise a definitive Franco filmography. Similarly to Bondanella and Pacchioni conferring Bava auteur status on the basis of only one or two films, I would argue a similar criteria is relevant for Franco. I can think of no other auteur approaching anywhere near to two hundred completed films, as at some stage the clarity of vision will become compromised on the altar of expediency, and consequently relegated to *quantity over quality*. For example, luminaries such as Fellini, Truffaut, Herzog, Almodóvar, Scorsese and Tarantino all share a relatively low number of films in comparison to Franco, with Tarantino famously stating that he will stop after only ten films. With this in mind, my own contributions on Franco are distilled into a select coterie of films which I would argue exhibit the auteur qualities he possesses and which elevate these films through a combination of directorial flourishes, *elan* and vision, together with effective casting and higher/lengthier (by Franco standards) production values and schedules.

In *Nachts, wenn Dracula erwacht*, Franco aimed to return to Stoker's original novel, *Dracula* and produce a more accurate, reverential version. Although not a success in itself, it can be viewed as a fascinating failure, as I comment in *Necronomicon 2* magazine (1993), with Christopher Lee's Dracula at least closely resembling the “ageing, white-haired and moustached figure to ensure physical authenticity (with the novel)” (Black 1993d, 28). Initially, “Dracula's all important first

appearance on screen is well handled by Franco as Lee's suitably mysterious, shadowed coachman floats into view to pick up the frightened Harker... but not the austere stone rooms and cold castle walls whose spartan milieu is at odds with the warming fires which glow in Stoker's source novel" (Black 1993d, 28). In addition;

While the picture does successfully establish the Count's regal lineage, it singularly fails to portray the Count's inner misery - that he is condemned to live for eternity - a lonely, unloved "master" for whom not even death can provide a merciful release. The motivations for his actions are left undeveloped, unexplained. He is simply required by Franco to exist. (Black 1993d, 29).

Even after having assembled an excellent cast, Franco was unable to "sustain a more supernatural, dream-like atmosphere" (Black 1993d, 29), with only an infrequent "suspension of disbelief" on the audience's part and a paucity of pathos-inducing moments. Thus, "[o]nly isolated scenes carry any resonance; of Lucy's black-clad figure beckoning to a child before then leading her away from an ornate graveyard and off into the distant woods - to presumably meet her doom. Or, the stuffed animals who threaten to become *animate* and whose "screams" signal Dracula's dramatic appearance in one scene" (Black 1993d, 29). This film also featured Lee's demonic vampire's supposed seduction of Lucy, (Soledad Miranda), only being almost overturned by the actor's reaction to her - "I've played this scene many times, but this woman is giving me something no other actress has ever had", Lee memorably claimed. (Black 1993d, 29).

Miranda is an actress I explored further in my *Dark Passions* text (1999b), especially her relationship with Franco. Her career was tragically cut short by her death in a car accident on a Lisbon highway in 1971 as "[p]rophetically, only months before, her "dying" breath as the title dominatrix in Jess Franco's *Eugénie*, (released in 1973), rasped that "*Je suis morte*", only for her character to be deliciously "tickled" back to life. Unfortunately, life did not imitate art" (Black 1999b, 73). Although Miranda made over thirty films "it is for the mercurial Spanish director's work that she is best known and indeed, remembered" (Black 1999b, 75). As Franco himself commented of her "[w]hen she began working in my films, it was like watching her undergo a transformation...She told me it was the first time in her life (that) she felt so fulfilled" (Black 1999b, 76). Certainly, her mesmerising beauty made her the ideal muse for Franco's feverish, fetishised celluloid vision. Utilising Miranda to great effect in both *Vampyros Lesbos* and *Sie tötete in Ekstase* (1970), where "Miranda's smouldering sensuality is utilised to great effect as she literally embodies the persona of a cogent femme fatale - her nebulous, piercing pools for eyes and pouting lips merely the veneer to lure her "prey" before ensnaring them in her hedonistic web of perversion" (Black 1999b, 78). I continue that;

As if to reinforce this seduction theme we even see a butterfly symbolically snared inside one of the fishnets which adorns Miranda's coastal "fortress" in *Vampyros Lesbos*. As Princess

Nadine she makes a startling entrance - decorated in a translucent black negligee she caresses, then kisses a full-length mirror. (Black 1999b,78).

Utilising the same *Vampyros Lesbos* sets for *Sie tötete in Ekstase* “the familiar jutting coastline and imposing castle residence is the ideal backdrop for Miranda's character as she glides down the stone steps cut into the island, her raven hair flowing in the wind, along with her purple cape which (barely) conceals a tight black dress beneath” (Black 1999b,79). Franco adds a Freudian inflection here as “[a]ppearing very much as the “castrating feminine” figure...Mrs Johnson proceeds to graphically sow the seeds of her enemies destruction - first, by seducing her victims, then by stabbing them in a homicidal frenzy, her phallic knife-thrusts appropriately aimed at her victim's genitalia” (Black 1999b,79). I argue that Franco's treatment of Miranda, seemingly able to coax from her a heightened performance level to realise his own vision, together with the stylistic devices he uses to augment and subvert traditional genres be they the vampire film, Gothic horror or erotica, together with the psychological inflections underpinning their fluid narratives, elevates his work to a uniquely individualistic status.

In Ian Olney and Antonio Lázaro-Reboll's *The Films of Jess Franco* (2018), Xavier Mendik's chapter, “She Kills in Ecstasy and Drives at Dangerously High Speeds”, analyses the role of Soledad Miranda in Franco's films, continuing the theme of others relating especially to Franco's portrayal of women as “his frequent conflation of erotic and horrific imagery created a series of iconic and deadly heroines who covet their sexual power by wreaking havoc on the ineffectual men that populate these often transgressive films” (Mendik 2018, 293). Mendik adds that this results in “the traumatic reduction of male power embodied by a radical loss of visual control” (Mendik 2018, 295). Mendik expands on this female dominance and faltering male vision in Franco, quoting *Vampyros Lesbos*, “which repeatedly uses objects, obtuse angles, and even the actress' own hands thrust violently into the camera lens to connect the idea of sexually charged looking with impending punishment” (Mendik 2018, 295). Mendik then proceeds to identify three tropes between Franco and Miranda which “revolve around Miranda's associations with *death*, and her *manipulation of male-ordered systems* of vision, as well as the frequent strategies of *doubling* that accompany her image” (Mendik 2018, 296-7). Therefore, regarding *death*, Mendik observes Miranda's “peculiar sex appeal” and her “curiously alienating” erotic scenes and how in *Nachts, wenn Dracula erwacht* (*El Conde Dracula*) - it is only when she joins the ranks of the undead that she appears animated. As the vengeful wife castrating a male surgeon (Franco himself), at the point of orgasm in *Sie tötete in Ekstase* (*She Killed in Ecstasy*), Miranda embodies female sexuality as a symbol of death, ditto *Eugénie* as Miranda's character strangles one victim, emitting a, “piercing shrill of sexual pleasure” (Mendik 2018, 298), evoking the extremes of suffering/arousal which remain central to the performance style she developed for Franco. This develops my own *Dark Passions* (1999b) text discussed above where I identify Miranda's Freudian “castrating feminine” figure in *Sie tötete in Ekstase*. Regarding the *doubling* or split female identity, besides using pseudonyms in real life, in the opening scenes of *Vampyros Lesbos*, Miranda is

seen dancing in front of a full-length mirror. For Mendik, a “character whose reflection and indeed very essence is literally doubled” (Mendik 2018, 307), again augmenting my own *Dark Passions* (1999b) discussion regarding the alter-ego aspect of Miranda’s character. Thus, I write that “[i]n one telling scene we see one victim lured to his doom by admiring Mrs Johnson’s reflection in a mirror - a direct reference to her alter-ego/dual nature - seductress one minute, killer the next (Black 1999b, 81).

Adopting the approach of a cultural historian, Jonathan Rigby’s *Euro Gothic* (2016) discusses Soledad Miranda’s star turn in *Vampyros Lesbos* including, “[t]he alluring Mediterranean heat haze...induces a cloying sense of languid dislocation, the kind of spell-stopped living death usually represented by ice-cold castles and subterranean crypts” (Rigby 2016, 215). Extolling the virtue of Miranda’s work with Franco, Rigby offers that she “owes her posthumous fame to these ramshackle fever dreams” (Rigby 2016, 217), with her legacy being that “[i]ndeed, her hypnotically Gothic presence is second only to that of Barbara Steele” (Rigby 2016, 217), echoing my earlier sentiments that “Miranda’s smouldering sensuality is utilised to great effect as she literally embodies the persona of a cogent femme fatale - her nebulous, piercing pools for eyes and pouting lips merely the veneer to lure her “prey” before ensnaring them in her hedonistic web of perversion”, (Black 1999b, 78). Rigby acknowledges the importance of Franco within the European and Gothic horror canon, but writing from a cultural historian perspective, does not seek to evaluate Franco’s methods or technique in any greater detail.

In *Plastic Surgery Disasters* (1999c), I analyse how Franco takes a classic horror film in Franju’s *Les yeux sans visage* as his raw material, in order to create a compelling and contemporary treatment in *Faceless*, which strikes at the heart of superficiality in modern society. As such, I argue that “the creation of life is not the driving *raison d’être* behind the surgical experimentation which takes place, rather it is the restoration of superficial “beauty” or “normality” which provides the defining impetus” (Black 1999c,141-2). I argue that in both films the surgeons, Dr. Flamand (Helmut Berger) in *Faceless* and Dr. Génessier (Piere Brasseur) in *Les yeux sans visage*, are;

seen operating as much to satisfy their own medical egotism as the well-being of their patients, literally operating under the misguided belief that by restoring a patina of perfection to their patients, they can somehow bypass the moral bankruptcy of the soul they embody. The goal for each surgeon is is not the salvation of the spirit but the achievement in making beauty once again become (only) skin deep. (Black 1999c,142).

In both films, the unwilling donor victims are effectively butchered - their pristine facial skin grafted onto the respective surgeon’s disfigured daughter’s, to once again make her whole. That a succession of donors are required in this overzealous pursuit, only adds to the trauma and also poignantly begs the question as to how the recipients are also “victims” - their lives governed by the obsessive actions of the surgeons - their lives can only be made “whole” again by the deaths

of others. Franco also adds (for him), a rare political and moralistic statement as in *Faceless*, Dr. Moser comments that “[y]ou French are strange people. You are very sentimental over trivial things. On the one hand, you protect the baby seals and on the other, France, the country of human rights, has become the third largest arms dealer in the world behind Russian and the United States. This industry of death, earns your country, the land of refuge, four thousand billion dollars a year” (Black 1999c,148-150).

I also argue that *Faceless* proves two things;

One - that when given the time and budget, (this was his largest to date), he can produce a coherent, action-packed film. Two - ironically all these factors also serve to negate his own improvisational skills and visual imagination. Although *Faceless* fairly speeds along at a relentless pace, it leaves no room for Franco to imbue it with the oneiric qualities found in his finest work such as *Venus in Furs*. (Black 1999c,158).

In broadening my *Plastic Surgery Disasters* text, Niall Scott (2014) discusses the monstrous nature of medical tools via the lens of horror cinema and the Art of Damien Hirst.⁵³ Scott sees a shift from the concept of the monster/monstrous as organic to instead, the inorganic - medical objects and tools such as the scalpel and syringe. For Scott the metaphorical significance of the monster/monstrous is sustained in such tools where in effect, the monster is a product of human creativity and technological advancement. Scott does not use his concept as a vehicle to merely chart the careers of film auteurs, (save for David Cronenberg)⁵⁴, but to detail the shift to inorganic, metallic monsters including technology, medicine, cyborgs, robots, the machine fetishising the human⁵⁵, together with the returned gaze of Hirst’s work.

On the theme of superficial beauty Scott writes;

This obsessive pursuit of beauty is critiqued in the 1959 French horror film *Eyes Without a Face* (*Les Yeux sans Visage*), described by its director Georges Franju as “horror in homeopathic doses”. Andy Black points out that in this film we encounter the move from “the so called “civilised” nations ... not preoccupied with survival ...” in the face of global war, famine and disaster, “... but

⁵³ Artist whose medical device installations are designed to speculate on the viewer’s relationship to the objects inside. These include; *Still* (1994), *Stripteaser* (1996), *End Game* (2004), *Lap Dancer* (2006) and *Night of the Long Knives* (2008).

⁵⁴ Canadian director whose body horror oeuvre includes *Shivers* (1975), *Rabid* (1977), *The Brood* (1979), *Scanners* (1979) and *Dead Ringers* (1988).

⁵⁵ Examples would include David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* (1983) and *Crash* (1996).

with the misguided quest for the ultimate body in order to hide the ravages of natural ageing. (Scott 2014, 321).

For Scott, “[t]he monstrous metallic comes to the fore: the scalpel and the syringe as surgical tools at the hands of the medical profession are an extension of the agency of the monstrous doctor (Professor Génessier), opposed to imperfection” (Scott 2014, 321). Scott expands that in *Faceless*, the use of the scalpel as well as “a syringe provides one of the key moments of terror, when it is directly injected into a victim’s eye” (Scott, 2014, 321). Scott also notes the ironic inversion of a tool designed to both inoculate against disease and relieve pain, being instead used to propagate infection and administer pain, as well as the timing of *Faceless* (1987) feeding into the AIDS virus paranoia prevalent at the time. Extending my premise of the surgical pursuit of superficial beauty with the organic body being modified with inorganic, surgical precision, Scott claims that the “monstrous reflective metallic surface of the clean medical tool reflects human anxieties regarding medicine and death” (Scott 2014, 329). Scott concludes that “[t]he reflected metallic surface represents the eye looking back; the viewer becomes an object held in the gaze of the reflective surface, the technological artefact condemns the viewer” (Scott 2014, 328). Ultimately, Scott extends my work beyond the film studies arena and into a wider discourse centred in medical science.

I cover Franco’s *Paroxismus* (1969), in my *Venus in Furs* article in *Necronomicon* issue 1 (1993e1) and (republished with added footnotes in *Necronomicon* Book Four in 2001), which I argue is his crowning achievement as well as deserving of a prominent place in the pantheon of high quality horrotica. I note that;

It’s a lyrical tale which largely dispenses with the somewhat staid (at the time, daring) source novel, mixing art porno chic with S&M as supplied by Sacher-Masoch, in favour of a more atmospheric, dream like aura which envelops the characters and audience alike. Though furnished with one of those perfunctory, “penny dreadful” style scenarios, the film still manages to transcend these modest origins as we see a bewildered jazz musician, Jimmy (James Darren), becoming increasingly mesmerised under the hypnotic gaze of Wanda. (Black 1993e1, 29).

Influenced by the free-flowing, organic style of one of Franco’s favourite jazz musicians, Chet Baker, Franco’s fluid, hypnotic spell plays out as;

Wanda’s sudden reappearance, floating ghost-like in and out of various scenes much to Jimmy’s bemusement. Her initial appearance - washed up on the shore, lures Jimmy into the maelstrom - his run into the sea towards her, stunningly rendered in hallucinatory slow motion, as if time itself were standing still. (Black 1993e1, 29).

Franco then ups the ante in essaying Wanda's revenge on her decadent killers as "the catalyst for the circuitous chain of subsequent events as one by one, Wanda first enthralls those responsible for her death, materialising like some rapacious succubus to drain their life juices and leave them dead" (Black 1993e1, 29).

Of these set piece demises, Kapp's (Denis Price);

is rendered the most impressively - consumed by lust for her, he covets Wanda's tantalising image as she glides around his bedroom. Each glimpse of her fur coat, her silk stockings, her exposed flesh, serves to heighten the fetishistic eroticism inherent in the visuals, literally "climaxing" with a fatal heart attack/orgasm, as the tormented Kapp expires. (Black 1993e1, 29).

I also note how Wanda's predatory, yet enticing image predates the powerfully attractive female characters in mainstream entries such as *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Basic Instinct* (1992), and observe how Wanda is often "only partially glimpsed through mirrors - a self-revelatory vision as the culprits are asked to look upon themselves, their own souls, and each question their own complicity in Wanda's death" (Black 1993e1, 29). Franco's mastery of style and technique in *Paroxysmus* with "[a]n assortment of low angled shots stretching up skywards at ancient towers and religious temples" (Black 1993e1, 29), aligned to the predatory yet mesmerising Wanda, with the final image being of "the satiated Wanda spurning the human wreckage that she has left in her wake, casually trailing her trademark fur behind her" (Black 1993e1, 30), combine in "creating a genuinely eerie, dazzling work, a visual poem concerning infatuation and all-consuming sexuality, coupled with a simply stunning score" (Black 1993e1, 30). It is a film which shows Franco at the height of his powers, a compelling, immersive *experience*, which genuinely draws, in fact, *drags* the viewer into the seething maelstrom and offers a true *cinema* experience. As cinema is a visual medium, this is a truly visual treat aligned with a mastery of disorientating, dislocating techniques which prove Franco to be a truly gifted exponent of his profession.

My text on *Paroxysmus*, its oneiric qualities and fetishistic aspects are extended by Glenn Ward (2011). With specific reference to *Paroxysmus*, Ward "discusses femme fatale stereotypes and fantasy tropes... Mixing visual discourses of 'high' and 'low' culture" (Ward 2011, 3). In agreement with myself over "the absurd gauntlet-throwing declaration" (Ward 2011, 41) of Lucas that one needs to watch all of Franco's films to have a complete set of references, Ward highlights how for him Franco oscillates between feast and famine as even his superior films often include an element of commercial expediency over artistic vision. Ward also notes how lengthy passages without sound feature extensively in the same film - invention through necessity as this low budget, Italian, UK and West German production had few facilities, (or indeed budget), to dub dialogue into so many different languages. In terms of developing the fetishistic aspects of my text, Ward notes the male gaze in the film to be a "fruitless ultimately destructive search for knowledge about a mysterious *femme fatale*, frequently represented through a fetishising gaze at

the endless enigma of woman” (Ward, 2011,79). Specifically regarding Wanda “[t]o drive the fetishism home, she is adorned with archetypal *fatale* accessories: high-heeled shoes, stockings, fur coat, long fingernails and cigarette” (Ward 2011,79). He continues that “Wanda’s fetish function is reiterated throughout the film by shots which isolate fragments of her body... her legs and feet in particular constitute a motif” (Ward 2011, 79). Expanding upon my references to the eroticism in Kapp’s death scene and the self-revelatory use of mirrors, Ward adds that “Kapp holds Wanda’s ankle and we catch sight of it in one of the numerous mirrors before he dies” (Ward 2011,79). Ward also notes Wanda’s “fractured and fleeting appearance in the many mirrors that adorn his [Kapp’s] bedroom” (Ward 2011, 91-2). He also identifies that as a continual thread in gothic and fantastic fictions “mirror images figure an uncanny... liminality... by appearing to exist in a limbo that blurs the oppositions of reality/perception, corporeal/incorporeal, present/absent” (Ward 2011, 92). Extending his argument further Ward claims that “[a]s doubles of both Wanda and her mirror image, the shots of the paintings [in the film], imply that Wanda exists only in the imaginary, or as an image in the text” (Ward 2011, 92). This very much echoes the themes of visual poetry, infatuation, all-consuming sexuality and the immersive cinematic experience that my text alludes to.

Utilising a similar cultural historian approach, only adding a more abstract discussion as to the “art” of Franco, Stephen Thrower’s *Eyeball* (2003) acts as a primer to his later magnum opus on Franco - *Murderous Passions* (2015) and its sequel, *Flowers of Perversion* (2018). By discussing Franco’s technical capabilities and ethos in greater detail, Thrower dissects Franco’s technique and his oft-quoted reliance on the zoom lens, asserting that “the zoom is to Jess Franco what the barre chord was to punk rock - a quick and effective way of making an impact” (Thrower 2003, 230). He continues that “[c]learly we’re not talking Great Art here...But it would seem, at his best, he operates in a bizarre overlap between Art, Exploitation and Random Lunacy” (Thrower 2003, 230). Expanding further, Thrower claims of Franco that “[h]e invites us to enter a private world of sexual fantasy, a delirious and macabre erotic party - it scarcely makes sense but there’s a oneiric recognition nonetheless, as if we once dreamed this scenario and Franco has staged its revival for our pleasure” (Thrower 2003, 230). Of Franco’s films, Thrower reserves special attention, like myself, for *Paroxysmus*. I wrote that “[it] ranks as one of his, and the erotic horror genres most effective offerings... mixing art porno chic with S&M... in favour of a more atmospheric, dream like aura which envelops the characters and audience alike” (Black 1993e1, 29). For Thrower, *Paroxysmus* is “an icy, shimmering jewel of a film, in which photography, music, editing and art design repeatedly coalesce into breathtaking sequences of morbidly glacial beauty” (Thrower 2003, 354). He continues that “linear narrative is gone, replaced by a series of cycles and variations, as the three libertines responsible for the S&M murder of Wanda, fall prey to the haunting incarnation of their guilt, in the form of her reproachful return from the dead” (Thrower, 2003, 354). As Thrower acutely observes here “looking for a narrative actually *becomes* the narrative” (Thrower 2003, 356). For Thrower “it does contain sequences of incredible visual power, realised with an assured fluidity beyond most practitioners in the sex and horror genre” (Thrower 2003, 356). As I noted that “[a]n assortment of low angled shots stretching up skywards at ancient

towers and religious temples...[and]... a cloying, oneiric atmosphere as coloured filters saturate the screen in a bold, kaleidoscopic display of greens, reds and blues” (Black 1993e1, 30), Thrower described how various techniques such as slow motion, colour filters, rippling effects, low angle shots and close up’s with wide angled lens are utilised to “achieve visual and temporal dislocations” (Thrower 2003, 356). Thrower shows a deft understanding of Franco’s filmmaking, elevating him to auteur status when mastering his technique in some of his finer films such as *Paroxismus*.

Confirming just how far Franco’s star has risen, Thrower’s labours of love; *Murderous Passions* (2015) (with Julian Grainger), and its follow up volume, *Flowers of Perversion* (2018), weigh in with a total of 944 pages between them. These definitive works on Franco are very much a valentine to him as much as Lucas’ *All the Colours of the Dark* is to Mario Bava. As Thrower states in the first volume, “the pleasures to be found are so near to abstract that we must put aside conventional expectations” (Thrower 2015, 44). Thrower contends that aside from Hawkins (2000), few academic scholars noted Franco until much later in his career. Extensive reference details, locations and production schedules are given as well as insightful analysis of each film. Most importantly perhaps, highlighting lesser known entries in his canon such as *La mano de un hombre muerto (The Sadistic Baron von Klaus)* (1963) and how Franco’s early work shows his technical ability and competence. Arriving four years later, *Flowers of Perversion* picks up from the first volume, beginning with *Julietta 69 (Juliette 69)*(1975) and ending with Franco’s last finished work, *Revenge of the Alligator Ladies* (2013). This definitive study of the maverick Franco, includes all of his Erwin C. Dietrich collaborations and also Franco’s varied attempts to shoehorn himself into the (then) popular zombie/cannibal and slasher genres - he was ever the opportunist.

In Olney and Lázaro-Reboll’s *The Films of Jess Franco* (2018), Alberto Brodesco’s “Sade” investigates how Franco borrows and transforms Sadean figures and topics - an innocent female and victim of evil and misfortune (Justine), the vampish mistress of her own destiny (Juliette), the victim of incest (Eugenie), plus the exploration of sexual initiation, education and corruption, plus lesbian love. He expands that “Franco veers between naive symbolism and sophisticated surrealism, trivial illustrated and heightened lyricism, banal readings and illuminating interpretations that rework or amplify Sade’s themes, scenes and styles” (Brodesco 2018,187). Brodesco argues that Franco very much treats S&M as being intertwined. As Franco is attracted to *active* female role models, Juliette more than Justine appeals to him. Therefore, “[i]n Franco’s cinema, the danger associated with the female body demands a special gaze. For all their allure, female genitalia evoke the castrating Medusa described by Freud” (Brodesco 2018,194). To survive this sight Franco has us viewing discreetly via mirrors, masks, reflections, or barriers, hence “the viewer must become a voyeur and stare from a distance” (Brodesco 2018,195). This develops my contribution on *Paroxismus* where I write that; “Wanda’s predatory, yet enticing image...is often only partially glimpsed through mirrors - a self-revelatory vision” (Black 1993e1, 29).

With “Vampires, Sex and Transgression”, in Olney and Lázaro-Reboll’s *The Films of Jess Franco* (2018), Aurore Spiers chapter compares Franco with Rollin, noting that “[t]heir films share many of the same features, including taboo subject matter...graphic depictions of sex and violence, campy sets and costumes, low production values and overall “bad taste”. They have often alienated mainstream audiences and critics alike” (Spiers 2018,168). Spiers does highlight that, “until recently they have been excluded from most scholarly histories of France, Spain and European cinemas” (Spiers 2018,168). Spiers adds that;

In particular, Jess Franco and Jean Rollin’s lesbian vampire films are compelling examples of the director’s subversion of generic conventions, of traditional conceptions of femininity, and of what Barbara Creed has named the “monstrous feminine” in the horror text. (Spiers 2018,169).

Of these films such as *Vampyros Lesbos*, and Rollin’s *Le Viol du Vampire* and *Le frisson des vampires*, Spiers writes “that despite their problematic images of women, their representation of alternative sexualities and female independence allows for a feminist interpretation of the lesbian vampire” (Spiers 2018,170). Just as Lucas has coined a third *frisson*, *Horrotica*, so too does Spiers assert that “the eurotrash paradigm may constitute a “third-space” outside the official tradition of quality and modernist new waves - a space where sex, blood and violence have the power to challenge societal, cultural and political norms” (Spiers 2018,170). This notion of a “third space” widens my distillation of Rollin’s influence existing beyond the screen as “[a] Rollin film still isn’t simply that - it is also a still-life, a fragment of the auteur’s fevered imagination, captured, preserved and gloriously independent of its filmic lineage (Black 1999d,128). So Franco and Rollin are not simply seen as anomalies, out of step for the period with their own countries, but instead creating “alternative examples of the European counter cinema of the 1960s and 1970s” (Spiers 2018,171). Ultimately, Olney and Lázaro-Reboll’s text offers a detailed and wide-ranging discourse on Franco and certainly its depth and scope reveals how important the Franco canon is now deemed.

Offering a more academically focussed, textual and contextual treatment of Franco’s work with an overtly psychoanalytical approach. Ian Olney’s *EuroHorror* (2013), discusses Sadean concepts in Franco, especially *Eugénie (Eugenie de Sade)* (1973), where Franco offers a progressive treatment in telling the story from Eugenie’s perspective - she is the driving force so here “Franco effectively highlights the fluidity of power and the consequent instability of patriarchal authority in the sadomasochistic scenario” (Olney 2013,156). In also discussing Franco’s *De Sade 70 (Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion)* (1970), Olney note how Franco is transgressive and “does not merely reflect the sadistic imperatives of patriarchal power and pleasure” (Olney 2013,157). By enabling the viewer to identify with Eugenie and her empowerment, Olney argues that “[f]ar from reinforcing the notion that power relationships are fixed and immutable, *Eugenie... the Story of her Journey into Perversion*, reminds us how quickly they can shift, and even reverse

themselves in S&M” (Olney 2013,158). Continuing this theme, Olney argues that Franco’s films encourage “the viewers performative exploration of sex and gender identity, not only through their exploration of female sadism, but also through their exploration of male masochism” (Olney 2013, 64). With specific reference to *Paroxysmus*, Olney notes how musician Jimmy’s tormented, masochistic relationship with Wanda, hopelessly obsessed and pursuing a “masochistic desire to prolong the agony of his relationship with her” (Olney 2013,166), or a “forever doomed pursuit” (Black 1993e1, 29), as I had previously noted. Olney also observes the symbolism of the musician’s horn (phallus) being buried in the sand and how his relationship ebbs and flows like the Bosphorus tide as does his ability to perform music. Likewise, I previously commented on the “requisite shots of crashing waves, indicating the fast approaching tide (of Wanda’s vengeance) about to engulf the guilty” (Black 1993e1, 29). Franco’s shots of Wanda - low-angled and glamorous, indicate how fetishised/dominating she is to Jimmy (and us). Slow motion sequences and colour tints “highlights the fantastical nature of their relationship and atmosphere of sustained masochistic suspense in which it flourishes” (Olney 2013,166). Therefore, Franco invites us to share Jimmy’s desire as well as Wanda’s doom, so multiple spectatorial positions are adopted. Olney’s main contribution here is in analysing Franco’s use of Sadean concepts and how he offers a progressive treatment, aided by specific stylistic techniques and composition.

Finally, in Olney and Lázaro-Reboll’s *The Films of Jess Franco* (2018), the editors curate a comprehensive and scholarly evaluation of the Franco *oeuvre*. As they state;

His movies are different, not in the sense that they are abstruse or demanding - in fact, it is hard to imagine cinema more committed to visceral pleasure- but in the sense that they stubbornly refuse to submit to the discipline of film criticism and theory. Even the auteur theory, which might seem to offer a straightforward and obvious way of framing Franco’s *oeuvre*, fails to fully curb its perversity; his movies, (and his attitude towards them), challenges some of our most basic assumptions about film authorship. (Olney & Lázaro-Reboll 2018, 2).

Franco’s unique cinema is considered thus, “[t]hematically, his work circles around a cluster of distinctive concerns; sexual sadism, surgical horror, mind control, erotic obsession, uncanny femininity, staged performances, revenge murder, and erotic adventure, to name a few” (Olney & Lázaro-Reboll 2018, 9-10). The authors also note how Franco himself admitted that “his entire, sprawling filmography could probably be condensed to as few as eight recurring plots” (Lucas, quoted in Olney & Lázaro-Reboll, 2016,10). Identifying returning figures, names and character types as defined by Lucas; Tanner - heroes, Radek - villains, Morpho - henchmen, Lorna - demonic woman, the authors assert that “[n]arratively speaking then, there are good reasons to consider Franco an auteur” (Olney & Lázaro-Reboll, 2018,10). Also, on a formal level, Franco can be considered an auteur as despite low budgets, rushed schedules and micro production values,

he was still able to imbue his films with his own stylistic flourishes. With Franco often operating the camera himself and “developing a trademark aesthetic defined by painterly abstraction...His films favour cinematic expression over hard-edged realism, eschewing visual precision, clarity and coherence for fragmentation, ambiguity and changeability” (Olney & Lázaro-Reboll 2018,11). Regarding Franco’s reliance on the zoom lens, the authors write that “[l]ike the camera zoom, it serves a means of representing the circular, hermetic nature of obsessive desire. Moreover, it serves as a means of pushing the image towards abstraction - in this case, via deceleration” (Olney & Lázaro-Reboll 2018,13).

Olney and Lázaro-Reboll identify three obstacles in regarding Franco as an auteur; 1) the amorphousness of his filmography, 2) the contradictory nature of the films themselves and 3) Franco’s famously ambivalent attitude towards his own work, (Olney & Lázaro-Reboll 2018,19). For the first point, the authors cite the dispute over how many films Franco actually directed, with confusion over titles, re-titling for different edits and markets/countries, use of pseudonyms given that “an auteur must demonstrate a consistent style across a body of work that is both substantial and well defined” (Olney & Lázaro-Reboll 2018, 22). Secondly, Franco’s focus shifts across his work and although associated with “horror”, as much as 40% of his work could be termed as non-horror, Franco himself is quoted as explaining that “I don’t think I have a definitive film. Such a thing is not possible for me” (Olney & Lázaro-Reboll 2018, 24). For some, Franco’s inability to focus renders his films individually and collectively as uneven, possessing moments of greatness, but equally, of ennui, thus “his films have the same fractured quality individually that they do as a whole” (Olney & Lázaro-Reboll 2018, 25). Such critics see no unifying factor in his work required for auteur status, therefore “[t]he issue is not that he directs movies other than erotic horror films for which he is renowned, ultimately, but rather that there is no organising principle binding his diverse output into a harmonious whole” (Olney & Lázaro-Reboll 2018, 26). Thirdly, Franco was famously dismissive of his own films, claiming a dislike for some. The authors cite Tohill and Tombs claim that this was partly due to Franco’s own frustration over his own ability to realise the exact vision he craved, but also possibly emphasised by the acclaim given to his films which he intended to be low profile as he “wilfully courted obscurity” (Olney & Lázaro-Reboll 2018, 27). Also, Franco didn’t necessarily take the idea of film as being art seriously, claiming in an interview that “[i] think it’s a mistake to consider the movie director as if they were great artists...A film is a film. It’s something to entertain you for a couple of hours. Not to be considered if it were Shakespeare” (Sean O’Neal 2009, np). The authors also consider that Franco’s interest was in the filmmaking process rather than the film *per se*, as Franco attached meaning not to the films themselves but rather how they were made, (similar to his hero Orson Welles who was “in love with process, rather than product”), (Jonathan Rosenbaum 2007,74). Therefore, some critics maintain that the auteur theory only partially applies to Franco.

From an ideological approach there is, in a sense, the problem of Franco having his cake and eating it. From a feminist perspective, Franco does have strident, dominant female characters, formidable and prominent, often subverting genre conventions, but at the same time, it can be

argued that Franco objectified and fetishised the female body. His use of copious nudity, or sexualised clothing and overuse of the genital zoom, which as Lucas states, makes it “perhaps impossible for anyone to speak with perfect authority about the phenomenon of Jess Franco” (Lucas 1993,13), suggesting a dichotomy of views which define the enigma that is Franco. Olney scrutinises the idea of Franco as cinephile, a filmic magpie growing immersed in cinema from an early age and that “[h]is appetite for cinema was voracious” (Olney & Lázaro-Reboll 2018,69), adoring Lang, Murnau, Dreyer and Siodmak amongst others, but also writing for the Spanish cinema magazine *Film Ideal*⁵⁶, just as other cinephiles such as Godard and Truffaut had written for *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

I would argue that my main contribution to the study of Franco’s films is in writing parallel to contemporaries including Lucas, Thrower, Balbo, Blumenstock, Kessler, Tohill and Tombs, I did not merely evaluate these films on the basis of how much sex and violence, or exploitation aspects were present. Rather, I began the process of seriously considering my own curated selection of Franco films in order to highlight scholarly issues as opposed to sensationalist attributes. Therefore, I observed the Freudian, Sadean, and psychological themes running through *Paroxismus*, *Sie tötete in Ekstase* and *Vampyros Lesbos*, together with the recurring motif of duality/alter-go visualised by Franco’s use of mirrors, which was later discussed by academics including Brodesco, Mendik and Ward. In addition, I noted how the superficial beauty and medical obsession in *Faceless* I identified, is also extended by Scott. By concentrating on the weighty moral dilemma of surgeons playing God with their victims lives, not to mention the “rooting out of imperfection in favour of the egotistical pursuit of the vacuous concept that is vanity” (Black 1999c, 141), I again eschew any simple glorification of the graphic scenes on show. Finally, my suggestion that filmmakers such as Rollin and Franco, occupy a unique place with films that resonate beyond the screen, is extended in the “Third Space” Spiers refers to. With my Franco texts dated 1993 and 1999 predating scholars including Scott (2014), Olney and Lázaro-Reboll, Brodesco, Mendik and Spiers (all 2018), I was one of the first writers to argue the case for Franco to be considered an auteur, with the caveat that this refers to a select coterie of films rather than his entire canon, which differs from the view taken by my contemporaries Lucas and Thrower. I feel that my contributions as a fan, along with the role of other fanzines, played a pivotal role in paving the way for Franco to be taken more seriously and given more respectability, which in turn, led to greater (and continuing) scrutiny of his work by academics.

Given his ambivalent attitude towards his own films, it would be fascinating to have seen Franco’s reaction to the burgeoning scholarly interest in his work, and the irony of just how much the reception of his oeuvre has changed in more recent studies. In the next chapter, I will discuss how French director Jean Rollin’s work has also been subjected to a similarly revisionist scrutiny by academics.

⁵⁶ A biweekly Spanish film magazine based in Madrid and published between 1956-1970.

6. Jean Rollin

In this chapter I will discuss how David Pirie was influential in bringing Jean Rollin to my attention for the first time, later bolstered by Peter Blumenstock (1997), together with Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs in (1994). I later draw on my own contributions and how they have influenced the discourse concerning Rollin's films, comprising my own extensive interview with the director and then incorporating the work of other scholars, including Jonathan Rigby, Danny Shipka, David Hinds, Colin Odell, Michelle Le Blanc, Brigid Cherry and Samm Deighan's edited volume in 2017.

Considering that even horror genre based publications afforded little or no space to discussing European horror films, with neglect of Italian horror auteurs like Mario Bava also occurring in France, it is no surprise that general French film criticism titles also largely neglected Rollin's oeuvre. Thus Susan Hayward's *French National Cinema* (2005), Phil Powrie's *French Cinema Students Guide* (2003), Rémi Fournier Lanzoni's *French Cinema: From Its Beginnings to the Present* (2005) and Isabelle Vanderschelden's *Studying French Cinema* (2013), being typical of this, whilst neither Michael Temple and Michael Witts *The French Cinema Book* (2004) or its revised edition (2018), provide any coverage. In Patricia Allmer's, Emily Brick's and David Huxley's *European Nightmares* (2012), the authors allude to the dearth of Rollin coverage in reputedly comprehensive studies of French cinema such as Lanzoni's aforementioned *French Cinema: From Its Beginnings to the Present*.

David Pirie's book *The Vampire Cinema* (1977) was certainly the first time I encountered the films of Rollin, and like most writers of the time, was immediately drawn to the surrealist images and elaborate costumes. The task of tracking down these obscure films to view was then mainly accomplished through a combination of buying bootleg (pirated) VHS copies from collectors, where the poor image quality did nothing to accentuate the myriad of colours which so characterised Rollin's film palette. As with Bava and Franco, for most fans of the time, the first legal and high quality video releases of Rollin's films, were courtesy of Redemption Films. It should be noted that there was an earlier text on Rollin, a special issue of the film magazine, *Fusion Fantasy* no.3 (1990), in French language, with 116 pages dedicated entirely to Rollin, but this rare title is not referenced by any of the writers I have studied, including Pirie, Tohill, Tombs, Rigby, Cherry, Hinds, Odell, Le Blanc, the contributors to Deighan's Rollin book, Blumenstock and Shipka. This would suggest that its scholarly impact is limited, at least with regards to English language critics. In "Reveries of Blood and Sand: The Cinema of Jean Rollin" (2010), Gerard Dapena also finds Rollin absent from a number of studies including; Roy Armes, *French Cinema* (1985), Alan Williams, *A Republic of Images: A Century of French Filmmaking* (1992), Michael Weldon, *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* (1983), Paul Wells, *The Horror Genre* (2000), Peter Hutchings, *The Horror Film* (2004) and Dennis Fischer, *Horror film Directors* (1991). Dapena also records Rollin's omission from French language horror studies, including *Le cinéma d'horreur et ses figures* by Eric Dufour, (2006). (All noted by Dapena 2010, 193).

Early texts on Rollin approached from a cultural historian perspective, with Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs *Immoral Tales* (1994) being published parallel to my own writings on Rollin, (starting from 1993) and building upon Pirie's earlier discussion of Rollin. Writing from an academic fan position - (Tohill was editor of *Ungawa* fanzine, publishing 4 issues from 1989-1992), the authors prime audience were knowledgeable horror film fans and consumers of just such fanzines. Most germane is the authors identifying and basing their criticism of Rollin, (as I also did), on films underpinned by imagery rather than linear narrative - surrealism over substance. As such, they identify Rollin's first film *Le viol du vampire* (*The Rape of the Vampire*) (1968) as embracing "[a]ll the themes and obsessions that he would work on and elaborate over the next twenty five years were already there, in embryo" (Tohill and Tombs 1994,169). The authors argue that Rollin does use "imagery and narrative to create an atmosphere of mystery" (Tohill and Tombs 1994,170), but that this in itself is problematic for some viewers with Rollin utilising a narrative style based on old serial style cliffhangers, with an often unresolved ending as a result. As Rollin himself admitted on his films, "[t]hey don't really resolve, they just fade out." (Tohill and Tombs 1994,170). Symbolising this confusion, the authors highlight how David J. Hogan's *Dark Romance* (1986), completely fails to comprehend the deliberate accent on imagery over narrative, "[Rollin's] images are as provocative as those in a glossy men's magazine, and about as thoughtful" (Hogan 1986,159), being all the insight that he can offer.

For Tohill and Tombs, viewers are always trying to work out what the images symbolise in Rollin's films, together with who or what the characters really are, but the point is "[a]ctually they don't symbolise anything" (Tohill and Tombs 1994,170). The authors distill Rollin's ethos thus;

His films are based around images and sequences of images,
not around the logical, point-by-point exposition of a screenplay.
The genesis of many of his films is a particular place that catches
his attention or a specific image. (Tohill and Tombs 1994,143).

Therefore, Rollin's "ideal is to find images that are strong enough in themselves to need no final rational explanation. To him, the need to explain takes away from the power of the images." (Tohill and Tombs 1994,143). As well as highlighting the use of recurring locations and characters, together with "not the curse of the undead, but the curse of memory regained" (Tohill and Tombs 1994,171), the authors also discuss the recurring role of dual female vampires as being "less like twins and more like two halves of the same personality - like Sade's Justine and Juliette"⁵⁷ (Tohill and Tombs 1994,171). Ultimately, Tohill and Tombs's main contribution is in providing the context for Rollin's canon within the wider European horror genre, identifying his defining and unique qualities and providing a coherent, critical framework with which to scrutinise his films.

⁵⁷ *Justine*, published in 1791 & *Juliette* published in 1797 - both written by the Marquis de Sade. Justine is a virtuous woman who only encounters abuse and despair whilst her sister Juliette, conversely is a murderous nymphomaniac who leads a successful and happy life.

Peter Blumenstock's *Virgins and Vampires - Jean Rollin* (1997) was the seminal text devoted entirely to Rollin's work, also adopting a cultural historian approach. As Blumenstock explained "[w]hile refined eroticism and fetish-imagery are a steady companion to his oeuvre, it is his unique world view that shines through between the frames of pulp-inspired vampire and horror fables" (Blumenstock 1997, 4). Blumenstock acknowledges the influence directors such as Franju, Murnau and Lang had on Rollin's films, the use of the term "*Rollinade*", coined by French critics during the 1970s to delineate Rollin's unique style. First used after the scandal surrounding the release of Rollin's first film, *Le viol du vampire*, in May 1968 as mainstream French critics saw Rollin's exposure of the female body especially, as indicative of his predilection for horror and porn imagery. The critical opinion that these films were amateurish with no redeeming values also harked back to the French expression, *Bérézinade* - the name of the river where Napoleon's troops were humiliated by the Russian army in 1812, and became synonymous with also meaning catastrophe. *Rollinade* also highlights the aesthetics Rollin loved, including the contrived, cliffhanger mentality of US pop culture, the serials of the 1920s - all damsels in distress and evil super villains such as Fu Manchu. As Blumenstock notes, Rollin is "blending the profound and ethereal tradition of the French *fantastique* with an almost avant-garde like visual style that has no comparison" (Blumenstock 1997, 5), reaffirming Rollin's rejection of formal film techniques. By devoting an entire book solely to Rollin, including extensive quotes from the director and copious visual material, this text signified the increasing awareness and recognition of Rollin and how his oeuvre was being discussed in more serious terms.

I also conducted a very wide ranging interview with Rollin, (arranged by Michael Donovan, the Press Officer for Redemption Films), which is published in *Necronomicon Book One* (1996). During this, Rollin explained his fascination with the surrealists, filmmakers such as Buñuel and Franju, his ethos of imagery over narrative, his preference for strong female leads, recurring themes of regained memory and lost innocence, and how he joked with one journalist that *La rose de fer* (*The Iron Rose*) (1973) was his own "Romeo and Juliet", which was then taken seriously. Rollin also elucidated how his zombie films such as *Raisins* and *La morte vivante* (*The Living Dead Girl*) (1982) differed from those of Romero for example, with a greater emphasis placed on the characters still retaining a semblance of some human conscience. Rollin also explained how the famous abattoir wine drinking episode in *Fascination* (1979) was inspired by a Lorrain⁵⁸ story, plus the importance of having his ensemble film crew to work with in that "[w]ithout my crew it's impossible to make such low budget films" (Black 1996a,188). Rollin's closing mantra to illustrate his ethos being that "[t]here are many beautiful images hidden inside the head of each human being. The idea is to take them and show them outside" (Black 1996a,188).

Also studying Rollin's work as an abstract discussion of art is Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik's *Alternative Europe* (2004). In Colin Odell and Michelle Le Blanc's chapter, Rollin's ethos is considered as a "crucial blurring of art and artifice" (Odell and Le Blanc 2004,160) which is more

⁵⁸ Jean Lorrain, a French poet and novelist of the Symbolist school.

“painterly” than populist. This, together with a critical analysis of the stylistic devices such as long takes and static shots, allowing the viewer to scrutinise all the features fully in the frame, allows Rollin to balance “the pulp aesthetic and art aesthetic with striking results” (Odell and Le Blanc 2004,164). The authors also argue that the use of material objects, interiors and locations represent as great a screen significance as that of the actors themselves, and therefore, as Mathijs and Mendik point out in their Introduction that “the placement of both people and props in created or positioned stages points towards a self-reflexive policy of filmmaking tradition associated with art cinema” (Mathijs and Mendik 2004,12). The significance of this analysis is that it regards Rollin as both an auteur, elevating his films beyond horror and exploitation, and an exponent of arthouse film, mirroring my earlier texts on Rollin.⁵⁹ The authors also highlight the use of monologues within Rollin’s films for plot exposition, with the effect of extending the mystery inherent in his narrative. “The mystery lies in the lack of explanation, and the meaning within the lack of meaning” (Odell and Le Blanc 2004,170). This extends the argument in my Rollin texts - including *Lèvres de sang*, *Le frisson des vampires*, *La vampire nue*, Rollin’s zombie/living dead films *Le lac des morts vivants (Zombie Lake)* (1981), *Raisins de la mort* and *La morte vivante* in *The Dead Walk*, together with my most referenced work to date on Rollin - a far ranging interview with the director “Clocks, Seagulls, Romeo and Juliet - Surrealism Rollin Style” in *Necronomicon Book One*, (1996). (Odell and Le Blanc reference this interview on page 163, regarding Rollin’s use of favoured locations, utilisation of dominant/alluring female leads, recalling the artist, Trouille).⁶⁰

With my interview in particular, Rollin expands the themes of detachment, existential angst and fetishistic attachment, only accentuating both the sadism and surrealism. Many of Rollin’s female leads mirror the Sadean characteristics of Juliette and Justine, with personalities alternating between good and evil. Rollin, inspired by the surrealists, German Expressionism and the television serials he devoured, renders his film stock as the canvas to enable his images to live a life beyond the screen - as the director himself stated to me “[t]he imagery in my films is certainly more important than the story itself” (Black 1996a,178). This encapsulates the Rollin ethos to the very core - his enduring legacy partly due to the poetic imagery from his films, developing an almost doppelgänger quality of their own as if to mirror his Sadean characters. The striking film stills which decorate both the printed page and the screen, removed from the films themselves, embrace an abstract, artistic merit all of their own - almost an inversion of the Dorian Gray⁶¹ myth, although here whilst the films themselves are now being viewed and celebrated, the still portraits are not rotting away in an attic but revelling in their new found acclaim. Odell and Le Blanc also

⁵⁹ In Odell and Le Blanc’s chapter on Rollin there are only five footnotes, of which two cite my Rollin interview.

⁶⁰ Clovis Trouille (24th October 1889 - 24th September 1975) - a French born restorer and painter of department store mannequins, but also known for his paintings, often depicting women entwined in erotic embraces. Especially noticeable in Rollin’s *Requiem pour un vampire* with twin leads played by Marie Pierre Castel and Mireille d’Argent.

⁶¹ Oscar Wilde’s 1890 novel, *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* - a Faustian style pact whereby Gray’s portrait rots away in the attic, recording his sins whilst his human form retains its beauty and libertine lifestyle.

reject the claims that Rollin's films are inherently sexist - arguing that they are no more pornographic than a painting by Delvaux for example and that Rollin's female protagonists, in part, achieve their dominance because of this strident sexuality, in stark contrast to the typically timid, two-dimensional male characters who populate Rollin's films. One can glean here how Odell and Le Blanc develop my arguments on the importance of the painterly elements in Rollin's *mise-en-scène*. For example, they state that;

Belgian artist Paul Delvaux appears to be an influence. His tableau of sensual women in *Sleeping Venus* (1944), some clothed, some naked and some skeletal (!), reflects Rollin's penchant for the surreal within his *mise-en-scène*. In *Requiem pour un vampire* wannabe vampire Erica performs an organ solo to a group of robed skeletons. (Odell and Le Blanc 2004,169).

The Delvaux connection is one I previously identified writing on *La vampire nue* in 1994 with "[t]he night-lit streets and darkened alleys are Rollin's homage to the paintings of surrealist's such as Delvaux and Max Ernst, as carefully composed lighting and back-lighting fills each frame for maximum effect" (Black 1994b, 57-8). My early text on *Lèvres de sang* in *Necronomicon One* magazine (1993) argued as to how Rollin's critical reception has led towards conferring on him auteur status. By referencing the influence on Rollin of poet Corbiere, his artist friends Druillet and Gaza, together with surrealist Ernst, I highlight the "painterly images and visual bravura" (Black 1993e, 21) symbolising his films. For *Le frisson des vampires*, in *Necronomicon Two* magazine (1993), I identify Rollin's artistic and technical qualities - from the "eerie architecture" and the "Low-angled shots (which) show the castle towering skywards" (Black 1993f, 35) as the ghost of German Expressionism is evoked. Similarly, Odell and Le Blanc write of the same film that;

Isolde...provide[s] the film with some of its most arresting imagery as she emerges from a grandfather clock at the stroke of midnight or suddenly reveals herself in all her naked splendour at the head of Isa's bed. These work like an eroticised version of Max Schreck's emergence from the coffin in *Nosferatu: eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922). (Odell and Le Blanc 2004, 164).

Continuing this exploration of *Le frisson des vampires* in *Necronomicon Book Three* (1999), I note Rollin's use of organic, inanimate objects being brought back to life - "the twisting, cavorting branches from a gnarled tree which snake around a master bedroom" (Black 1999d,126), noting a Hoffman-like atmosphere, together with the human characteristics ascribed to the library as for one character "claustrophobic bookshelves seemingly encircle him, the books taking on a life of their own as they begin to hurl themselves off the shelves and engulf him" (Black 1999d,129). As such, for me, Rollin's "canvas is awash with a myriad of colours, eccentric characters and exceptional locations - all adding a decidedly artistic grist to his most painterly mill, as his visual elan shines through as his true *metier*" (Black 1999d,126). I argue that "[a] Rollin film still isn't

simply that - it is also a still life, a fragment of the auteur's fevered imagination, captured, preserved and gloriously independent of its filmic lineage" (Black 1999d,128).

Likewise, for Odell and Le Blanc, Rollin's films are "more painterly or poetic" (Odell and Le Blanc, 2004,161), and *Le frisson des vampires* "excels with its astonishing use of colour gels" (Odell and Le Blanc, 2004,167). The authors cite the painterly images beginning the film thus;

The opening cemetery shot features light streaming through the gravestones towards the camera to give a sense of motion in an otherwise static frame. Locations are clearly defined by their colour divisions. Inside the blue walls of the chateau the servant twins climb a red spiral staircase leading to a room, inside which lurks a staked vampire. (Odell and Le Blanc, 2004,167).

Odell and Le Blanc also extend the painterly connections with Rollin I have introduced, by referencing the influence on *Fascination* (1979) of Magritte's *La grand guerre*⁶² (1964), in terms of the decadence, motivations and attire of the main protagonists. This influence is also extended in Gerard Dapena (2010), who also studies Rollin's work as an abstract discussion of art. For Dapena, Rollin's cinema includes "[a] striking reliance on a visual mode of storytelling and its intense painterly quality" (Dapena 2010,184), quoting from my Rollin interview that "[i] have tried to find that atmosphere of dream, poetry and madness in many of my films", (Black 1996,179). Dapena notes that,

Rollin's work stands out for the multiple ways in which photographic realism... is undermined by a *mise-en-scène* that evokes pictorial references (Romantic and symbolist painters, Clovis Trouille, or surrealists such as Max Ernst, Paul Delvaux and René Magritte), and by the use of coloured spotlights and filters that envelop many scenes in a dreamy lyricism or imbue them with a lurid intensity. (Dapena 2010,184).

Dapena quotes from my interview that "Clovis Trouille paints, I think, as I film. When I see some of his paintings, it seems to me that they could be photos from one of my films... if you look at a painting like *Mon Tombeau (My Grave)*, it can recall many images from *Le Viol*, *Le Frisson* or *Requiem*" (Black 1996a,178). He continues that Rollin betrays an "almost fetishistic attachment to certain props... [and] adds a surrealist flavour to the proceedings: naked dolls, skulls, skeletons, crosses" (Dapena 2010,184). Dapena also states how the dialogue in Rollin films often adopts a "poetic tone and trade[s] in oblique allusions" (Dapena 2010,184). Ultimately, Dapena builds upon

⁶² René Magritte - Belgian surrealist artist - (21st November 1898 - 15th August 1967). Translated as *The Great War*, this painting features a well dressed woman in a white dress, only for her face to be obscured - it begs the question as to what might she be hiding as well as introducing the notion of a mask - a theme which features in several Rollin films including *La vampire nue* and *Requiem pour un vampire*.

the painterly and surreal references of my texts and he concludes that Rollin's films "constitute an alternative horror cinema marked by absolute freedom" (Dapena 2010,192).

Of my own Rollin outputs, besides references to the imagery of Rollin, I also highlight the existential aspects, including the vampire Dominique in *Le frisson des vampires*, who is "reduced to drinking blood from her own veins in an act of self-perpetuation, which also serves to expose the pernicious and ultimately, futile nature of her vampirism" (Black 1999d,129). The correlation between blood drinking, vampirism and oral sex is also noted, together with the characters of Delahaye and Robiolles ravishing Isolde "only for their ecstasy to be supplanted by agony as the rapidly rising rays of the sun begins to sear their flesh, resulting in their abrupt demise" (Black 1999d,130).

Continuing Rollin's ethos of style over substance in *Necronomicon Four* magazine (1994), my feature on *La vampire nue* discusses the sumptuous visuals as "Rollin stretches even these malleable boundaries to breaking point with his decidedly non-linear plot contrivances" (Black 1994b, 57). Paying due attention to the influence of the pre-First World War serials which so informed Rollin, including Feuillade, together with writers such as Gautier, Rollin's "imaginative mise-en-scène" proves this to be Rollin's "most intensely fetishistic horror hymn" (Black 1994b, 57). Rollin also aims his sights at religion as "the subtextual theme of Catholic guilt is evinced as an artist's spying eyes stay riveted to a coloured model, whose pendulous breasts and garish gold-polished talons compel him to stare - the confessional gaze of one helplessly wallowing in (and totally consumed by), sin and perversion." (Black 1994b, 57). I also note how "[g]hosts of the past haunt Rollin's uniquely personal vision however, as towering castle walls and eerie, elongated shadows register the spirit of German Expressionism, whilst the denouement featuring the torch-wielding religious acolytes, evokes the memory of Universal's monochrome epics" (Black 1994b, 57). Rollin's flouting of genre conventions is also highlighted as "in one sequence the vampire suckles at the severed breast of one girl, in an inversion of Dracula lacerating his own chest for a would-be vampire to drink from in Bram Stoker's novel" (Black 1994b, 58).

In terms of extending my own texts above discussing the correlation between blood drinking and vampirism, together with the subverting of vampire lore be it by being reduced to drinking one's own blood or the male vampire suckling from a dominant female vampire's breast, Brigid Cherry (2002) cites my own Rollin interview and builds upon these themes in scrutinising how Rollin's abstracted art equally subverts the vampire myth and confuses the misogynist /feminist debate surrounding Rollin's use of eroticism in his films. Cherry states that *Fascination* (1979) is "recognised by fans and critics alike as the most accessible film of Jean Rollin's sex-vampire cycle" (Cherry 2002, np). Cherry notes the slow-pacing of Rollin's films can be off-putting to more general horror film fans and that the intertextual nature of the films, together with the surreal imagery and composition, actually appeals as much to arthouse fans more accustomed to this approach. However, Cherry also observes that Rollin's eroticism is deemed as misogynistic by such arthouse fans, therefore, it is "unlikely that Rollin's films will ever achieve widespread

popularity, remaining instead a cult taste restricted by and large to fans and followers of European horror or the fantastique, (as Rollin himself on a number of occasions has labelled his own productions" (Cherry 2002, np) - this is where Cherry references my own Rollin interview where she expands upon his filmic style and influences. Cherry asserts that the mix of horror and art is "problematical both for audiences and for critical recognition of an artist's work" (Cherry 2002, np), and also that the "issues of genre are crucial to an understanding of Rollin's films" (Cherry 2002, np). Cherry states that *Fascination* replaces the traditional supernatural elements of the sex vampire film with the "perversity of the blood fetish" (Cherry 2002, np). Therefore, the "morbid dread" of the undead is replaced with a "perverse and aberrant sexuality" (Cherry 2002, np), symbolised in the drinking of human blood. For Cherry, the absence of the supernatural but the presence of the *fin-de-siècle* setting evokes an even more transgressively, dreamy and decadent morbidity. Extending her argument to the fetishised, feminine aspects of *Fascination*, Cherry see the character of Eva as a "feminine appropriation of the grim reaper" (Cherry 2002, np), complete with deadly scythe. As a 'medieval figure of death, the film does not just elide the vampire, but the supernatural aspects of the genre" (Cherry 2002, np). Rather than a pallid, ghostly figure, Eva represents a "picture of extreme health, with rosy lips, flushed cheeks and plump flesh" (Cherry 2002, np). As such, Cherry sees the film as both evoking the imagery of soft-porn and exploitation, whilst also including the horror staples of male characters eager for sex and female characters "willing to use this desire to lure men to their deaths" (Cherry 2002, np). The *mise-en-scène* of the chateau locale and the aristocratic dress of the women, together with the "baroque decor", all emphasise the film's decadent themes. The inter-woven art-horror, soft-porn and transgression, may be peripheral, but "its poetic address to both art-horror and sexual taboo raises other issues" (Cherry 2002, np). Exhibiting the cult film trope of often trading upon the power of transgression, *Fascination* "does so without recourse to the usual romanticised conventions of the vampire film" (Cherry 2002, np). For Cherry, *Fascination* stands in the crosshairs where the art of elite culture meets trash cinema - thus enhancing the transgressive nature of the film.

Studying Rollin from the more geographical approach of a vernacular scholar, Danny Shipka's *Perverse Titillation* (2011) identifies a national trait in French cinema focusing on imagery and the physical body over dialogue, therefore arguing that from Franju's *Les yeux sans visage* (1960) through to Rollin's work "French exploitation's focus was on the body and everything one can do in order to exploit it" (Shipka 2011, 261). Shipka claims that French cinema differed from its Italian and Spanish counterparts with its readiness far earlier to explore subjects that were more adult in nature. Also, unlike Italy and Spain who were relaxing censorship from the mid 1970s onwards, France was enforcing it more - not for moral or religious concerns but for the "protection of art". Thus, "[f]or the French, exploitation wasn't dangerous for political reasons but aesthetic ones", (Shipka 2011, 262). Shipka also notes how *Les yeux sans visage* was hated by French critics upon its release and although it failed to usher in a surge of French horror and exploitation films, its legacy was still two-fold in firstly, the "enormous and lasting effect on other European filmmakers like Jess Franco and Antonio Margheriti" (Shipka 2011, 269) and secondly, the lasting impression

it made on Rollin. Quoting from my own Rollin interview (1996a) with Rollin deeming *Les yeux sans visage* to be “the greatest film in the genre” (Shipka 2011, 272). Shipka argues that “*Les yeux* mined the subjects of dreams, nightmares, poetry and madness, subjects that Rollin gravitated to over and over again through his works” (Shipka 2011, 273). Shipka uses my Rollin interview to detail the scandal caused with the release of Rollin’s first film, *Le viol du vampire* in 1968 (p.274). Likewise, my interview is used to explain Rollin’s ethos behind *La vampire nue* (1971) (p.277), and for *Requiem pour un vampire* (1971) (p.279). Using an extensive quote regarding *Les raisins de la mort* (1978) to elucidate Rollin’s differing approach to the zombie film, in contrast to Romero’s in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) (p.286), as I noted in the first edition of my zombie film book, *The Dead Walk* (2000) that “Romero’s claustrophobic farmhouse scenes are replaced with Rollin’s agoraphobic use of wide open spaces” (Black 2000, 87). I also continue with Rollin’s ironic use of wine in this film that “his concept of France’s national drink turning people into zombies [is] an audacious one” (Black 2000, 87). Likewise, Shipka comments that “[t]he idea that Rollin uses French wine as the catalyst for madness is delicious” (Shipka 2011, 286), echoing my earlier text.

Jonathan Rigby’s *Euro Gothic* (2016), also offers a cultural historian approach with a detailed critique of Rollin’s work, reflecting on the increasingly serious and high regard for his films now. Rigby acknowledges that although under 30 years of age when *Le viol du vampire* was released, Rollin’s debut encompasses what would become his trademarks “poetic imagery...impish humour, and luscious eroticism” (Rigby 2016,179). Thus, Rigby reveals of *Le frisson des vampires* (*The Shiver of the Vampire*) (1971) that “[p]arts of the film explicitly recall the Belgian surrealist Paul Delvaux⁶³, famous for his crepuscular yet lily-white nudes, invariably surrounded by classical architecture and attended, in some instances, by skeletons” (Rigby 2016, 221). This is an influence I also referenced in my feature on *La vampire nue* (*The Nude Vampire*) (1971) in that “[t]he night-lit streets and darkened alleys are Rollin’s homage to the paintings of surrealist’s such as Delvaux and Max Ernst” (Black 1994b, 57). Rigby also argues that *Raisins de la mort* was important “in redefining zombies as living people corrupted by a ghastly infection, Rollin anticipated such twenty first century films as *28 Days Later*” (Rigby 2016, 358). This aspect was previously highlighted in my own *The Dead Walk* (2000) where I discuss Rollin’s “zombie[s] with ‘feelings’ and emotions” (Black 2000, 88).

David Hinds’ *Fascination* (2016) offers a comprehensive study of Rollin, discussing his oeuvre more as an abstracted discussion of the filmmaker’s “art”, reaffirming the increasingly elevated status afforded Rollin in recent years. Hinds introduction to *Fascination* notes the embryonic

⁶³ A Belgian painter (23rd September 1897 - 20th July 1994) whose work was characterised by his use of dream-like scenes featuring silent women, dressed in ornate or historical costume. They are often surrounded by classical architecture and there is typically a balance of clothed and nude figures, often with a solitary male amongst a group of women. The women walk with purpose but disguise their intentions and are often chaste, with their sexual desires hidden. These elements especially appear in Rollin’s films, along with Delvaux’s use of skeletons and his own childhood influences adding to the poetic feel to the paintings, (and Rollin’s films). Rollin does subvert the female sexuality theme in making it more overt and dominant and also replaces Delvaux’s love of trains and train stations for his own love of ruined castles and favoured Dieppe coastline.

stirrings of Rollin coverage, (including my own contribution) - partly inspired by Redemption Video's gradual release of titles in the UK and the US from the mid 1990s, together with noting that "[a] small number of writers and publications spring to mind as English language champions of Rollin, including the excellent *Immoral Tales* by Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs, *Necronomicon* fanzine, some excellent essays by Tim Lucas and favourable comments in Nathaniel Thompson's *DVD Delirium*" (Hinds 2016, 2). With *Necronomicon* being the only fanzine highlighted by Hinds, this emphasises that my writing at this time was very much in the vanguard of Rollin coverage.

For Hinds "Rollin is a true auteur. His films inhabit their own unique genre, one in which the filmmaker explores his personal obsessions, dreams and ideas" (Hinds 2016, 9). Hinds offers a reasoned appraisal of Rollin's stylistic techniques, his use of slow zooms and pans - to draw attention to something or emphasise the unreal, but also for more practical considerations such as cost - the zoom shot cheaper than a steadicam or tracking/dolly shot, plus, has the impact of filling up the running time. He also discusses the use of colour in Rollin's films with red symbolising danger, white - innocence and black - death, plus the importance of locations to Rollin as "it's the location for me that conditions the rest" (Hinds 2016, 41). Hinds also highlights the gender differences in Rollin's work "the horrors perpetrated by Rollin's female characters are almost exclusively down to survival. With the male, violence is drawn from ignorance and plain brutality" (Hinds 2016, 50). Hinds concludes that "[t]he one thing the two sexes share, however, is doomed fate. Indeed, everyone in Rollin's films is doomed, victims as well as aggressors, human and the non-human" (Hinds 2016, 50-51). In Chapter Seven of my study of the zombie film in, *The Dead Walk* (2000), I discuss *La morte vivante* and how "[t]he film is interesting in its creation of a zombie with "feelings" and emotions, no mindless automation here" (Black 2000, 88). Despite this however, "the living dead character of Blanchard is still left a slave to her own suffering, she may maintain the appearance of life but it is death she longs for" (Black 2000, 88). I conclude that for Blanchard "death is an appealing release from the torment of a painful past life remembered and of a conscience that is of no consolation to her now. The surreal images of the billowing gases effusing from the earth are like the life-spirit that is now being sucked out once again from a rueful Blanchard" (Black 2000, 88). Hinds also discusses the film in detail and similarly to my text, adds that Blanchard's character is "not presented as an emotionless monster but rather a catatonic and seemingly innocent girl, which enhances the subtle atmosphere of dread and fear" (Hinds 2016, 145). Ultimately, Hinds presents a detailed study of Rollin's films, analysing thematic concerns and filmic techniques, bringing Rollin's output up to date with the inclusion of his final film, *Le masque de la Méduse (The Mask of Medusa: A Drama in Two Acts)* (2010), finished three months before he died.

Adding to the influence of my own texts and helping to establish a legacy, I would also reference the recent in-depth text on Rollin, Samm Deighan's *Lost Girls* (2017). Of the sixteen chapters, ten reference my Rollin interview. This wide ranging study, all by women scholars and academics, is intriguing as it adopts a psychoanalytical approach to Rollin's abstracted art from a female, but not necessarily feminist viewpoint. As Kier-La Janisse states in the Afterword in considering the

mainly male-dominated discourse on Rollin's films "the notion that female cinephiles do not respond to films coded as "horror", or that are lazily described as objectifying women , is a persistent, if woefully incorrect one" (Janisse 2017,413). Janisse notes that female viewers readings of Rollin's films will come from a different place to male viewers in that a major aspect in them - female nudity - will perhaps have a "sexually diminished" effect on them. However, "female viewers can look straight past that quality into the onscreen relationships that form so much of [Rollin's] ethos and imagery" (Janisse 2017,413).

Gianna D'Emilio's chapter on Rollin's first feature, *Le viol du vampire* comments that "[p]rints were distributed throughout the provinces, where - according to film scholar Andy Black - at least one local priest forbade the parishioners from seeing the film, citing an allegiance between the director and the Devil" (D'Emilio 2017,19), which D'Emilio uses to give context and background to the scandal which engulfed this initial release.

A number of scholars reference my earlier Rollin interview from 1996, including Alexandra Heller-Nicholas' writing on *Les Démoniaques (The Demoniacs)* (1974) as the director states that "the imagery in my films is certainly more important than the story itself" (quoted in Heller-Nicholas 2017,134), to reinforce her argument as to the importance of non-linear narrative in Rollin's oeuvre. To emphasise this, Heller-Nicholas also quotes from the my interview that "his images are surrealist visions" (quoted in Heller-Nicholas 2017,138). She concludes of *Les Démoniaques* that "the saving of the girl-clown, the spirit of joy, the embodiment of Rollin's very faith in supremacy of his visual poetry" (Heller-Nicholas 2017,143), also reinforces the view of Rollin as an artist rather than prosaic narrator, so extending my own texts.

Marcelline Block's chapter, "Poète, Maudit and Cinéaste Paria: Tristan Corbière as Inspiration for Jean Rollin's *Les amours jaunes (The Yellow Lovers)* (1958) and *La rose de fer*", also discusses the painterly aspects of Rollin's work my texts have alluded to, writing that "[i]n an interview with Andy Black, Rollin noted the influence of Corbière upon *Les amours jaunes* and his later films shot as Dieppe" (Block 2017,150), before then reproducing the following interview extract:

Corbière was a poet of the sea. And the sea is most important to me. My first short film was an evocation of Corbière on a beach near Dieppe. I was young, no money, no material etc. But I was there, on that strange beach covered in stones, deserted, with just the *falaise* and the seagulls. And in my mind, I said: "One day I'll come back here with all the possibilities for a real shoot. For me, now, after six or seven films shot on that beach, it is mixed with the remembrance of Corbière. (Black 1996a, 177-8 - quoted in Block, 2017,150)

Block concludes that the "imagery, words and themes of Corbière's poems, in particular, *Le Poete contumace* are hauntingly brought to life onscreen in *Les amours jaunes* and *La rose de fer* as only Rollin could" (Block 2017,162).

Regarding Rollin's use of landscape, architecture and props, Alison Nastasi's chapter, "Love Among the Iron Roses: The Cemetery as a Romantic Nexus in the Films of Jean Rollin", Nastasi comments how the characters shivers and moans mix with the natural, ambient sounds of the graveyard. "Rollin told interviewer Andy Black that he "tried to find that atmosphere of dream, poetry and madness in many of [his] films" (quoted in Nastasi 2017, 84).

In Kat Ellinger's chapter on *La vampire nue* and *Fascination*, she observes the connection between Rollin and the *fin de siècle* art and imagery over narrative - referring to my Rollin interview where the director states that "[w]hat I do emphasise is an approach to presenting my subject matter that is slightly surrealistic" (Ellinger 2017, 35). Intriguingly, Ellinger also draws parallels with Milton's Satan, thus;

Rollin embraces Milton's spirit to depict the vampire as a rebellious anti-hero, a crusader for freedom and evolution, which in turn holds some kinship to the idea of Nietzsche and Darwin; two minds that informed a generation in the post-enlightenment period of *fin de siècle* Decadence. Finally, there is much to be said of Rollin's affinity to the Marquis de Sade, as one of the founding fathers of French Decadence and an inspiration for the way in which the director portrayed female sexual cruelty as a liberating force. (Ellinger 2017, 36).

Referencing my Rollin interview again, Ellinger identifies both *La Vampire Nue* and *Fascination* as Rollin's most prominent examples of acts of rebellion and decadence. Ellinger notes vampire tropes of enlightenment and transcendence rather than the (then) Hammer vampire staples of animalistic bloodsuckers. Therefore, Ellinger sees "ritual as an artistic statement" (Ellinger 2017, 47) in *La vampire nue*, whilst *Requiem pour un vampire* has a "[s]adean cult of vampires which initiates young virgins into its fold through sadomasochistic graveyard ritual" (Ellinger 2017, 47). So Ellinger, effectively builds upon my own texts where existential themes and imagery are placed firmly over narrative in terms of importance. For Ellinger, the portrayal of Rollin's female vampires in accentuating their power, cruelty and indeed, occasional sexual gratification from this, reinforces the Nietzschean notion of the all powerful "Übermensch"⁶⁴ as well as Darwin's "survival of the fittest" mantra. Concluding with the Sadean characteristics inherent in *Fascination* - a powerful embodiment of Juliette, in re-ordering the gender hierarchy and flouting patriarchal dominance. For Ellinger, "Rollin reinvented the cinematic gothic, drawing from French symbolism to present the vampire as a metaphor for rebellion, freedom and female sexual power" (Ellinger 2017, 73).

In her chapter "Female Intimacy", Samm Deighan studies the notion of Rollin's female Sadean twin leads - rejecting the genre staple of female characters generally being with "prey, predator or final girl" (Deighan 2017, 166). Building upon my text defining Rollin's trope of dominant, oscillating twins that, "[t]he vamp[ires], with their dual personalities alternating effortlessly

⁶⁴ Concept relating to German philosopher Nietzsche - a superman goal humanity sets itself.

between good and evil, mirror the equally diverse nature of those Sadean characters Justine and Juliette” (Black 1996a,177), Deighan states that by diverging from genre tropes, the roles of Marie and Michele in *Requiem pour un vampire* are observed as the “theme of two girls united against the rest of the world, who go off into an uncertain future, [and] is one of the defining features of Rollin’s depictions of female friendship” (Deighan 2017,179). For Deighan, Rollin’s later *Les deux orphelines vampires* ties together these themes “whilst also giving the fullest expression to the concept of feminine sexuality as monstrosity” (Deighan 2017, 204).

In her chapter “Castles of Subversion” Virginie Sélavy offers a variant on the Sadean, dual female characters of Rollin, by including a material dimension to this in the form of the numerous castles Rollin utilises in his films. The connection between the English Gothic novel of the eighteenth century and these castles, termed the *roman noir* by French commentators, meant that Sade and the surrealists “had seized as the space of freedom and imagination - once more stood disobedience to authority at a time of turbulent questioning” (Sélavy 2017, 259).

For Sélavy, the ruined castles which permeate Rollin’s films are a reminder of “mankind’s vain fight against time. In *Le frisson des vampires*, the camera intently focuses on the bright green patches eating away at the rugged stones of Septmonts” (Sélavy 2017, 267). So Sélavy timeless motif mirrors my own of “angst ridden vampires, content to philosophise at length about [their] existential nature” (Black 1999,127), whilst with Rollin’s anthropomorphic tones here that Sélavy also alludes to in that “[Rollin’s] drowning castle walls with blood as he literally does draw blood from stone during the film’s climax, and his correlation drawn between human characteristics and inanimate structures also fuels much of his vision” (Black 1999,129).

Michelle Alexander’s chapter on Rollin’s zombie films highlights how in *Les raisins de la mort*, Rollin’s subverts the expected genre conventions - the strong, resourceful female lead, Elisabeth battling a man-made contagion, only to be ultimately destroyed by the ruling patriarchal order. Intriguingly, given Rollin’s emphasis on imagery over narrative, Alexander observes that “Rollin’s infusion of particular international hot topics of the 1970s (toxic chemical disasters, government cover-ups, feminism), into a number of his productions from the conclusion of that decade into the early 1980s, adds a fascinating dimension to these films” (Alexander 2017, 252). Alexander also echoes my text on *La morte vivante*, in detailing that the female protagonists have “considerably more conventional character and depth to them than in previous Rollin films” (Alexander 2017, 251). Alexander also extends my text on *Les raisins de la mort* in adding that the pesticide spraying of the wine grapes by the authorities “can be seen as an allegory for the dissatisfaction with the powers that be” (Alexander 2017, 238), to add a political dimension to the argument. Essentially, Rollin aping Jorge Grau’s engaging zombie film *No profanar el sueño de los muertos* (1974), where a government owned ultrasonic sound wave machine, designed to kill pests, begins to kill “human” pests. “The political aspect is well handled as throughout the film, (the main protagonist) faces more danger from the police than the zombies” (Black 2000,81).

Marcelle Perks "Final Girl Strategies" builds upon Clover's (2000) notion of the "Final Girl" - that the last girl alive in a horror film is typically virginal, feminine enough to satisfy the male gaze and yet not so feminine as to threaten male dominance and sexuality. As Perk's notes, Rollin's "Final Girl" deviates from this in that they *retain* their femininity and are not required to demonstrate masculine qualities to survive. Rollin treads a precarious gender tightrope in that his "Final Girl(s)" are exploited to a degree in order to titillate the male gaze and yet are also transgressive/ progressive enough as to retain control of their own sexuality, unlike their counterparts in Hollywood genre films. Referencing Donato Totaro (2002) that Clover's reading of the "Final Girl" is based on American films and that "American horror, like its popular culture in general, is generally too prudish and too deeply entrenched in a Puritan past to really engage in sexuality, which is so important to the horror film" (Totaro 2002, np). Perks also states that "[i]n contrast to other films that feature zombies, Rollin humanises these figures, forcing the audience to empathise with them, despite their horrible acts" (Perks 2017, 316-7). This builds on my own text for *La morte vivante* as I note audience empathy for Blanchard's character as "[s]he finds her memory, and more importantly, her conscience, returning to her, including an awareness now of her "death" and "rebirth"" (Black 2000, 88), continuing that the film is "interesting in its creation of a zombie with "feelings" and emotions, no mindless automaton here" (Black 2000, 88). Perks asserts that "Rollin sensitively allocates the same weight to emotional disintegration as physical violence... in contrast to a loosely similar horror film..., *Shivers* (1975), which features infected characters losing their humanity, but focuses more on gore" (Perks 2017, 317). Perks concludes that Rollin's "Final Girl(s)" offer a transgressive alternative to those posited by American horror movies" (Perks 2017, 323). She adds that "[t]hey also challenge a virgin/whore dichotomy in the sense that Rollin's protagonists both do and don't have sex" (Perks 2017, 323).

As a final coda to explain the Rollin ethos and how the reception of his films has thus changed, Kier-La Janisse's Afterword includes Redemption Films owner Nigel Wingrove's testimony that "[i]n the early 90s the internet was in its infancy, so there was no real horror fan community online, with nearly all of the discussion of films and directors being done through fanzines⁶⁵ - so it was a very underground scene!" (Janisse 2017, 414). Given that the handling and importing of films not classified by the BBFC was a criminal offence, it was extremely difficult for films companies such as Redemption to operate. Wingrove continues that "accessing or seeing films by exploitation directors such as Franco and Rollin was really difficult, even if you knew where to find copies, which most people didn't" (Janisse 2017, 415). As Lucas has noted regarding Rollin "[t]he less culturally isolated the viewer, the more opportunities they may have to come to terms with it" (Janisse 2017, 417).

In summary, I have revealed how my wide ranging interview with Rollin in 1996 has been extensively referenced and used as a construct for wider discussion on the salient themes in his *oeuvre*. As such, scholars including; Shipka, Rigby, Dapena, Cherry, Perks, Ellinger, Alexander and

⁶⁵ I interviewed Nigel Wingrove in *Necronomicon 2 magazine*, 1993, p.7-9 & *Necronomicon 7 magazine*, 1995, p.30-34.

Sélavy have utilised this text, whilst the painterly imagery and influence of artists such as Delvaux I previously noted in 1993, are extended by Odell and Le Blanc in 2004, Rigby and Block. The existential aspects of Rollin's zombie characters in *Les raisins de la mort* and *The Living Dead Girl* I identified in 2000, are also referenced in Hinds (2016), Shipka (2011), Alexander (2017), Rigby (2016) and Sélavy (2017), whilst the theme of Sadean twins that permeates Rollin's films that I identified, is also detailed by Deighan (2017) and Sélavy (2017). The anthropomorphism that I discuss in *Le frisson des vampires* in my 1999 article is extended by Sélavy in 2017, while the religious irony I refer to in *La vampire nue* in 1994 is one of the earliest mentions of this aspect by critics. As previously with Franco, my contributions have not simply concentrated on the sensationalist, exploitation aspects of Rollin's films, but sought to identify more serious, artistic and surrealist elements in his work, together with a highly personal and individual style marking him out as an auteur, and being one of the first writers to state this with my texts dating from 1993. With my contributions predating academic texts of Cherry, Odell, Le Blanc, Dapena and Shipka, by several years in some cases, I feel marks out my influence in paving the way for a more serious consideration of Rollin to be later taken up by academics.

One can glean from these texts focused on Rollin just how the reception of his films and the increased academic study of his oeuvre elucidate a more mature scrutiny and appreciation of his outputs. Although undoubtedly there are nuances to differentiate them, like Mario Bava and Jess Franco, Rollin's canon affords a visual transition between pure horror and surrealist, art film inspired visions and eroticism. As critical opinion begins to shift emphasis away from the non-linear narratives and analyse instead, the importance of imagery and *mise-en-scène*; the use of locations; the deliberate stylistic techniques invoked; the importance of recurring themes; his painterly use of colour and the Sadean characteristics of his dominant female characters, then a far more complex and compelling canon emerges. The examples I give referencing my own work on Rollin, (dating from 1993), indicate how I have identified these motifs and how other scholars have cited and adapted these observations to further develop Eurohorror film criticism. In the next chapter, I make the not so great leap from the surrealism and artistry of Rollin to the collusion between horror and arthouse styles in Horror and Arthouse.

7. Horror & Arthouse

In this chapter I define the term arthouse used by film scholars, referencing David Bordwell and Andy Willis, and analyse the symbiotic relationship that exists between Eurohorror, exploitation and arthouse films. I then consider the influence of the Marquis de Sade on these genres as highlighted in Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs *Immoral Tales* (1994). Further to this, I then examine the work in this area of other scholars, including David Kerekes, Danny Shipka, Stephen Thrower, Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik, before evidencing how my own contributions have helped fuel the discourse with close reference to *Nekromantik 2* (1991), *Possession* (1981), *Dellamorte Dellamore* (1994), *[REC]* (2007), *Dèmoni 2... l'incubo ritorna (Demons 2)* (1986), *L'anticristo (The Antichrist)* (1974), and *Profondo Rosso (Deep Red)* (1975).

Although, as was noted in my Introduction, there is often a fluid categorisation used by writers in discussing Eurohorror, exploitation and arthouse films, the intrinsic links in terms of production, marketing, directorial approach and audience reception, mean that the boundaries between what are considered horror and arthouse films are often blurred. Certainly my own discourse founded on the study of Eurohorror films rather than British and American horror or Video Nasties is what inspired me to scrutinise this particular genre. In defining the term arthouse, David Bordwell in "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Practice" (1979), considers that an art film is characterised by three important elements; realism, authorship and ambiguity, and especially with regards to adopting a different approach to narrative as "the art film defines itself explicitly against the classical narrative mode" (Bordwell 1979, 57). Immediately, one can see a synergy between the art or arthouse film and the Eurohorror genre as displayed by the non-linear narratives of Rollin, Franco and Fulci, to name just three examples. The use of real locations in arthouse films as opposed to studio sets lends an air of realism claims Bordwell and real problems are expounded using psychologically rounded and complex characters. I would point to David Hemmings' character in *Profondo rosso* (1975) - a musician with creative impulses who witnesses a murder and becomes embroiled in both a deadly whodunnit and as a potential victim of the murderer. That the same actor had previously starred as a photographer who thinks he may have inadvertently captured a murder on his camera in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up* (1966), serves to reinforce the link between Eurohorror and the arthouse film. For Bordwell, arthouse films often lack clearly defined goals and can appear vague, lacking any distinctive choices for the characters with "a certain drifting episodic quality to the art film's narrative" (Bordwell 1979, 58). This certainly relates to Rollin's work where defined goals often prove elusive with the accent on striking visuals and colour composition as opposed to narrative drive and coherence. On authorship, Bordwell sees the director as having the central vision and "the overriding intelligence organizing the film for our comprehension" (Bordwell 1979, 59). This being so the director is the unifying figure for the text while the position of the critic is crucial in analysing each film as a different chapter in that director's work. It "privileges the position of critics who may present themselves as the only people who can place each film into this context and hence interpret it 'correctly'" (Bordwell 1979,

59). This is borne out by the fanzine culture I was a part of in that key figures including Bava, Franco, Rollin and Argento, would be discussed in terms of their whole output inflecting their work, even when reviewing just one particular film.

Andy Willis extends Bordwell's argument in "Italian Horror Cinema: Between Art and Exploitation" (2005). Willis notes the impact on the film industry with the birth of video during the 1980s and the resulting decline in cinema audiences and film budgets. To negate this, Willis argues that filmmakers turned to more extreme and violent content and "have attempted to circumvent financial limitations with a [more] visceral approach" (Willis 2005, 17). Also scrutinising the Italian film industry in "One of Top of the Other" (2015), David Church discusses the problems of the "international capitalist economy" (Church 2015, 2-3), where promoting national cinema to the rest of the world is often reliant on delineating a cultural difference from Hollywood product. The issue here is that any perceived "cultural diversity" can be gained from imported films which could even be American/Hollywood films, or from homegrown films copying Hollywood films. Willis contests that horror films "exist in a number of critical discourses" (Willis 2005, 110), and that "certain film-makers may be championed as auteurs, directors who are able to create film that might be considered works of art since they transcend their generic origins" (Willis 2005, 110). This could certainly be claimed of figures such as Argento, (as Willis does), where any low-rent horror film labels are replaced by him being valorised as "an artist at the juncture of art and horror" (Willis 2005, 114). Leon Hunt in "A Sadistic Night at the Opera: Notes on the Italian Horror Film" (1992), credits Argento's working relationship with his father Salvatore, and his brother, Claudio, (as producers), for the autonomy and creative freedom he displays, claiming he is "virtually unique as an "art" horror director who has transcended the cyclic production line, spin-off genre system" (Hunt 1992, 69). There is also the question of the critical re-evaluation of films where any horror genre tropes are sublimated by writers, emphasising instead, the more formal and stylistic innovations. Examples of this would include *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922) and *Vampyr* (1932), in the process "transcending their generic origins rather than celebrating them" (Willis 2005, 112), whilst many Eurohorror directors such as Bava, Franco, Rollin and Fulci have similarly benefited from such reappraisal. The rise of film studies in the academy, in the wake of the fanzine coverage of Eurohorror films beginning in the late 1980s, early 1990s, has developed this process, together with "the expansion of film analysis, which has offered as broad range of more sophisticated methods of approaching popular films" (Willis 2005, 113), as such films are regarded as being more culturally important.

In terms of key studies in this area which have informed me, one of the most significant works, and adopting the position of cultural historians, Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs *Immoral Tales* (1994) is one of the first texts to discuss and acknowledge a link between arthouse and exploitation

cinema, devoting individual chapters to Franco and Rollin, as well as Larraz⁶⁶ and Borowczyk⁶⁷. Most importantly however, the authors include less expected directors such as Benazéraf⁶⁸ and Robbe-Grillet⁶⁹, who would hitherto have firmly been regarded as exponents of arthouse cinema, with no connection to horror/exploitation cinema. The authors note the growth in low budget, European horror film production from the 1960s and how these filmmakers were inspired by both surrealist artists such as Dalí and surrealist directors such as Buñuel. Consequently, films by luminaries such as Franco and Rollin defy simple pigeonholing. “[t]hey’re too low brow to be considered arty, but too intelligent and personal to be described simply as Euro-trash” (Tohill and Tombs 1994, 5). The authors elaborate that these films were “a curious hybrid, milking the dynamism of popular literature and comic books, combining it with the perverse romanticism of real art” (Tohill and Tombs 1994, 5). The writers observe the influence of Sade in this, arguing that his work “forged the first link between the doomed heroines and fatal heroes of the romantic period” (Tohill and Tombs 1994,10). They claim that Sade expressed a “philosophy that turned the moral order of the day on its head. Quite simply, he showed that not only is vice rewarded and virtue punished, but more - this is an expression of the real nature of the world” (Tohill and Tombs 1994,10). The authors argue that in Sade’s⁷⁰ *Justine*, *Juliette* and *The 120 Days of Sodom*, he “catalogues all the perversions and cruelties that a fertile imagination and long periods of enforced idleness allowed him to come up with” (Tohill and Tombs 1994,10).

By highlighting the blurred boundaries between horror and art cinema, the importance of both the Surrealists and Sade, the authors also acknowledge the latter’s influence on Robbe-Grillet - who distances himself somewhat, claiming his films are neither erotic or pornographic - not intending to excite the viewer but instead, intending to “deprive these images of excitement and hope to reveal their banality” (Tohill and Tombs 1994, 232), as his films “always invoke the concepts of game and distance” (Tohill and Tombs 1994, 232). This also correlates with sadomasochism where these are considered equally important concepts. Partially, due to the intellectual aspects

⁶⁶ José Larraz - Spanish director of erotic horror films such as *Vampyres (Daughters of Darkness)* (1974), *Symptoms* (1974) and *Los ritos sexuales del diablo (Black Candles)* (1982).

⁶⁷ Polish director Walerian Borowczyk crossing the divide between horror and erotica, arthouse and exploitation, in films such as *Contes immoraux (Immoral Tales)* (1973), *La bête (The Beast)* (1975), *Interno di un convento (Behind Convent Walls)* (1978) and *Docteur Jekyll et les femmes (The Blood of Dr. Jekyll)* (1981).

⁶⁸ French director of erotic films including; *Bacchanalia 73* (1973), *Bordel SS (The Red Devils)* (1978) and *Sex Resort* (1986).

⁶⁹ Alain Robbe-Grillet - French director whose films were characterised by being both cerebral and sexually provocative, with recurring themes such as voyeurism and body-doubling. His films include; *L’immortelle* (1963), *Glissements progressifs du plaisir (Trans-Europ-Express)* (1964) and *Successive Slidings of Pleasure* (1974).

⁷⁰ Marquis de Sade - (Born 2nd June 1740 - Died 2nd December 1814) - infamous French nobleman with revolutionary ideas regarding sexual freedom and libertine views. With both the words sadism and sadist deriving from his name, his sexual fantasies were often acted out in real life acts, resulting in his imprisonment for over 30 years - where much of his published work was actually written. These include; *Justine* (1791), *Juliette* (1797) and *The 120 Days of Sodom* (1785).

inherent in his work, Robbe-Grillet has been treated more favourably than say an exploitation director would, with films such as *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year in Marienbad*) (1961), (which he wrote), gaining an enhanced reputation as it is “as tantalising as it is inexplicable” (Tohill and Tombs 1994, 235). Just as with say Franco and Rollin, Robbe-Grillet’s experimentation with narrative wouldn’t be indulged on a big budget film. Unlike the improvised style of, say Franco, Robbe-Grillet knows exactly what he is going to shoot. His films may have an elevated intellectual level but are not so far removed from Franco and Rollin and other European horror directors. He, like Franco, Rollin and Benazéraf, makes films to please himself and Robbe-Grillet’s belief is that “the political and social significance of art operates over the long term, and that sort of engagement must in a sense, be unaware of itself” (Tohill and Tombs 1994, 243).

Continuing Tohill and Tomb’s conflation of art with horror cinema from a narrative history approach, David Kerekes’ *Sex, Murder, Art* (1994) sees the author publish the first detailed examination of German filmmaker Jörg Buttgereit, who, expanding the ethos behind his *Nekromantik* (1987) explains that “contemplating the relationship between love, sex and death... orgasm and the moment of death - emotionally both have a lot in common” (Kerekes 1994, 30). Buttgereit’s *Der Todesking* (*The Death King*) (1990) is also discussed and “[i]t could be argued that *Der Todesking* is an exploitation art movie. The suicide victims are nothing more than that - “victims”. They have no names, no background. They are only interesting as objects” (Kerekes 1994, 60). The “Tuesday” episode of the film is highlighted where a man watches violent death camp footage, eventually shooting his own nagging wife and blood splatters on the wall - only for the camera to abruptly withdraw to reveal this episode is a movie itself. This film within a film conceit is compared to Godard’s *Weekend* (1967) for toying with (and confounding), audience expectations - again emphasising the symbiotic nature between French New Wave art cinema in this instance and exploitation and European horror.

Kerekes also highlights/refutes another criticism of horror in general regarding the perceived exploitation of women. Interviewing the female lead, Monika M from *Nekromantik 2* (1991), the actress alludes to the popularity of the film with female audiences thus;

Women tended to like the movie because they had the possibility to identify with the main character: a woman who is an aggressor. Which is fine - I regard myself as liberated, but I don’t care to enter the feminism discussion - you know, always seeing yourself as *the victims*. (Kerekes 1994,101).

This echoed my own interview with Monika M, referring to her roles in *Nekromantik 2* and *Schramm* that;

It is true however, that the female characters in both films have a dominant personality, not at all like the ‘scream queens’ in the traditional sense. I think that the realistic portrayals of the characters, as opposed to the cliché-ridden role

models one normally sees, have become a trademark for Jörg's films, and it is certainly much more thrilling to present a character that will occupy some viewers interest and curiosity, even after the film is over. (Black 1994d, 10).

Continuing this progressive theme, Kerekes also references German academic, Dr. Hickethier's robust defence of *Nekromantik 2* against censorship - "who rules that the movie is indeed of artistic merit - analogous to the decaying East German society" (Kerekes 1994,100). Dr. Hickethier's 15 page report was deemed largely responsible for German courts overturning a ban on the film.⁷¹ Kerekes main contribution here is in recognising the importance of scrutinising the merging of European horror tropes with art film techniques and themes, together with analysing how traditional genre character identities are subverted, especially with regard to gender.

Much like my own *Necronomicon*, Stephen Thrower's *Eyeball* (1989 - 2003) evolved from magazine into book format with *Eyeball* (2003) and Thrower's introduction explicitly stating the case for merging an appreciation of both art and exploitation cinema together. Thematically approaching the subject from the perspective of a cultural historian, he argues that;

The art lover usually sneers at the "crudities" of exploitation, and likewise the gorehound usually scoffs at the "pretensions" of so-called art cinema. To me, there's no need for this, when the real enemy is the mainstream of commercial cinema. (Thrower 2003, 6).

For Thrower, *Eyeball's* ethos is to be "wide-ranging in both its content and style" (Thrower, 2003, 7), offering a more complex, in depth approach to reviewing, but he criticises some of the burgeoning academic interest beginning to stir for being too "dry" as opposed to the "style, readability and focus" (Thrower 2003, 7) he seeks from *Eyeball*. As Thrower succinctly observes, "[i]f you've written a piece about Andrea Bianchi and Michel Foucault is mentioned more often than Mariangela Giordano, I'd say there's a problem" (Thrower 2003, 7). The real contribution from *Eyeball* is in the serious critique of both art and exploitation cinema, without one being elevated over the other, therefore Franco and Rollin are treated with the same reverence as Fellini and Resnais for example, just as I did with Bava and Buñuel in *Necronomicon* issue 3 (1993), Freda and Almodóvar in *Necronomicon* issue 4 (1994), another example of how fanzines led the way in providing a serious discussion of both Eurohorror and arthouse films.

Arguing from a sociological viewpoint, Danny Shipka's *Perverse Titillation* (2011) uses the generic "Eurocult" term for the films discussed, defining such entries as "any film that typically sacrifices the notions of artistic merit for a more sensationalistic display, often featuring excessive sex, violence and gore" (Shipka 2011,10). Shipka notes that such films often rely on advertising rather

⁷¹ Hickethier's main argument was that the film was fictional and clearly cultivates a genre orientated world from the start. Using a realist depiction of horror such as films like *Salò* (1974), *Nekromantik 2* uses extreme material but carrying symbolic and allegorical overtones in order to highlight political themes and critique standard cinematic practices.

than content to attract viewers and that even films with large budgets and/or literary sources can still be included, such as *Histoire d'O (Story of O)* (1975), as “the violence portrayed in the film is on an equitable level with other exploitation films” (Shipka 2011,10).

Shipka differentiates between arthouse and Eurocult films however, citing Truffaut from France and Fellini from Italy for example, as making films that “resonated strongly with that country while acting outside its boundaries as an educational opportunity for understanding the country of origin” (Shipka, p.310, 2011). By contrast “Eurocult operates differently. Its production is designed from the beginning to appeal to as many different populations and cultures as possible in order to ensure its success” (Shipka 2011, 310). As Shipka notes, it would be hard to imagine auteurs such as Antonioni being forced to re-edit their films for different countries and markets. Shipka argues that this divergence of influences creates patchwork productions which deny the “cultural imperialism that is found in each country’s film industry and settles for a broad, overarching identity that is European” (Shipka 2011, 311). He also asserts that each country’s film output reflects the social and political climate within their nation, often manifesting itself as a rebellion against government, denoted by violence. Shipka claims that “[m]any of the auteurs of the genre were shaped by events in their own countries and most rebelled against what they viewed as dictatorial governments and conservative social pressure” (Shipka 2011, 311). He adds that these filmmakers, having “withstood the initial critical lambasting and are now experiencing a positive revision that looks at these films as (being) important to history and culture” (Shipka 2011, 312). Shipka’s main contribution is in scrutinising the effects of national boundaries and cooperation within the film industry and how this has impacted on the intrinsic links between arthouse and Eurocult cinema. Although Shipka does highlight Italy, Spain and France as the pivotal countries to study (in his view), he does also acknowledge that there are other European nations, (Germany especially), which also deserve serious study.

Utilising a partially sociological approach regarding the impact of class and society, coupled with an abstract discussion as to the art within art house films and especially the horror genre, Joan Hawkins (2002) pivotal text “highlight[s] an aspect of art cinema generally overlooked or repressed in cultural analysis, namely, the degree to which high culture trades on the same images, tropes and themes that characterise low culture” (Hawkins 2002,125). Hawkins adds that there is “a very fine line between the reading strategies demanded by trash and the reading strategies demanded by high culture” (Hawkins 2002, 127). She cites films such as *Freaks*⁷² (1932) which began as a horror/exploitation film before being later considered an art film, *Carne per Frankenstein (Flesh for Frankenstein)* (1973) and *Sangue per Dracula (Blood for Dracula)* (1974) which belong to both avant-garde culture as well as horror and experimental films such as *Un Chien andalou (An Andalusian Dog)* (1929), which;

⁷² One drive-in showing of *Freaks* in North Carolina, famously caused a near riot as it was retitled *Forbidden Love* but did not satiate the audience’s lurid expectations. 30 years later *Freaks* was revived as an art film and received favourable reviews from noted critics such as Raymond Durnat and indeed, by 1967, the film was included in the Museum of Modern Art.

contain sequences as shocking as those in any contemporary splatter film. These are films which promise *both* affect and “something different”; films which defy the traditional genre labels by which we try to make sense of cinematic history and cultures, films which seem to have a stake in both high and low art. (Hawkins 2002,128).

For Hawkins, genre overlap, the fluid nature of genre definitions and differing artistic categories adds to the ambivalence. For example, the US release, *Carnival of Souls* (1962) might have been considered an art film if made in Europe rather than the drive-in classic it became. Alternatively, *Les yeux sans visage* (1960) might have been considered a low budget horror film if made in the US, rather than the art horror reputation it now has. To a wider extent, it can be argued that *all* film has to strive to be considered art at all and distinctions we all make between “good” and “bad” films, “artistic” films and merely “entertainment” films, are partly driven by our own definitions of “taste”, which in itself is governed by questions of class. So, while, it is not the only genre to flirt with high-art aspirations at times, for Hawkins “horror is perhaps the best vantage point from which to study the cracks that seem to exist everywhere in late twentieth-century “sacralised” film culture. Precisely because it plays so relentlessly on the body, horror’s “low” elements are easy to see” (Hawkins 2002,131), be they exposed flesh or gore-driven body counts, whilst likewise “prestigious films, too, can play relentlessly on the public’s desire - or at least willingness - to be physically affronted. Like the lowest of low horror, European art films can “leave audiences gagging” (Hawkins 2002,131), as the correlation between art and horror films is emphasised.

Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik’s *Alternative Europe* (2004) adopts a more psychoanalytical approach in their art horror discourses, as the authors identify two extreme corners of exploitation and underground cinema to form the titular “Alternative Europe”. One corner, accepted as European cinema, celebrated and yet still seemingly out of place with Cocteau, Marker and Herzog cited as examples, being “heavily canonised, aesthetically challenging and representative of certain sensibilities but still too edgy or fanatic to be placed amongst the bulk of films” (Mathijs and Mendik 2004, 3). The other corner, “a part of European cinema many film scholars do not know exists (or consciously ignore), because it escapes scrutiny or because it is an unworthy object of study, often because it does not even set itself up as legitimate film at all” (Mathijs and Mendik 2004, 3). The authors cite Italian police films, German serial porn, and “video nasty” productions here. The authors note “Sconce’s concept of Paracinema, Hawkins theory of the artistic horrific and Betz’s analysis of unusual reception practices, all point to the same thing: they try to explain why some films are considered to be more (or less) alternative than others” (Mathijs and Mendik 2004, 4). Mathijs and Mendik see a combination of factors, including textual, status, controversial nature and reception, contributing to a film’s reputation. They also identify recurring issues of guilt, confession and testimony as a consequence of major upheavals such as World War Two, the collapse of communism, the rise of terrorism, political scandals and serial killers in local countries. Mathijs and Mendik’s *Alternative Europe* holds European horror in high

esteem, and its wide ranging discussion debates the very heart of what constitutes art, horror, cult and exploitation film. I would emphasise the fact that my contributions from 1993 onwards, those of Thrower from 1989, Kerekes, Tohill and Tombs, all from 1994, begin the discourse on the close correlation between arthouse and horror, given that the academic texts of Sconce (1995), Hawkins (2002), Mendik and Mathijs (2004), together with Shipka (2011), all follow later.

My own texts on, and interviews with, German auteur Jörg Buttgerreit, seek to reinforce the horror and arthouse synergy. In *Necronomicon Two* magazine (1993) I comment that;

Grotesque scenes of gore and violence are often merely sporadic intrusions into a more prosaic, mundane view of “routine” life and are rendered all the more disturbing for that. These films cannot merely be dismissed as “kitchen sink” dramas however, instead they actively challenge the viewer to sympathise with the characters, to understand their actions no matter how violent or extreme they may be and then asking each of us to question our own morality. (Black 1993g, 50).

Buttgerreit presents formulaic images as “bizarre and confrontational, rather than merely stilted compositions” (Black 1993g, 51). I cite the opening masturbation sequence in *Nekromantik 2* as an example - promising the “elicit sensual excitement of a porn film, only for the grotesquely rhythmical knife-thrusts here (to) provide a far more unnerving aspect to the whole scene” (Black 1993g, 51). I also cite the image of Monika M;

in a slinky dress, stockings and high heels, wearing garish red nail polish, conjures up visions of a *femme fatale* - a fantasy which soon evaporates with the thud of shovel on earth, soil on timber, as she unearths her lover’s corpse in an act of grisly defilement. (Black 1993g, 51).

I also highlight the existential, psychological aspects in *Nekromantik 2* which again align it with the arthouse genre, as Monika M visits a zoo, “where life, if not ended, is certainly held captive. It is as if the quality of life, for animals and humans, is in some way diluted” (Black 1993g, 51). I relate this aspect to Monika’s fragmented mental state which oscillates between the euphoria she experiences of a fairground ride and the nightmarish visions of her lover’s corpse, which permeates her thoughts. I also note how Buttgerreit’s radical approach does still betray influences from his own nation’s rich horror history - in *Nekromantik 2* for example an;

early sequence where a slow camera pan over an imposing whitewashed house evokes the spirit of the silent classic *Nosferatu* (1922) and ditto, the slowly prowling camera which peers through the shackled cemetery gates, the under cranking,

hand-held camera similarly conjuring up a feeling of timelessness and the stylish *chiaroscuro* images of German Expressionism. (Black 1993g, 51).

Contrast this with my own interview with Buttgereit in *Necronomicon Three* magazine (1993) where he asserts that his films “don’t fit into the horror genre” (Black 1993h,11) as they are “too silent sometimes, there’s not the build up of tension and exciting things” (Black 1993h,11). Buttgereit continues that “[i]’m not very interested in these ordinary storytelling techniques...what I’m going for is a more realistic, documentary approach to my movies” (Black 1993h,12). Another way that Buttgereit crosses the horror/art divide is with the perceived feminist tract in *Nekromantik 2*. As Buttgereit explained to me “normally in so-called horror films, women are there to be raped and killed and this time it’s the opposite way” (Black 1993h,12). This idea is expanded further in *Schramm*, where Buttgereit develops the idea of a serial killer “who is able to deal with the effect that he has killed some people in a very ordinary way...having to live with that fact and deal with it” (Black 1993h,12). Buttgereit subverts the norm by having his serial killer, Schramm, actually show signs of affection towards Marianne (Monika M). The trope that;

women are mostly killed by male serial killers” [is challenged and] “...you are uneasy because I hope you start to care about this woman and then you have this main serial killer character, who you also hopefully care about and you have this uneasy feeling when both of them are together in one room. (Black 1993h,12).

In *Necronomicon Six* magazine (1994), by combining one of “Buttgereit’s pivotal themes concerning the very prosaic nature of serial killing - the drab “normality” of the act of killing, with Schramm barely blinking an eye as he wavers between everyday life and everyday murder” (Black 1994c, 26). Schramm’s subsequent, accidental demise allows Buttgereit to play his trump card as Marianne attends a clandestine sex club. Namely, the “most disturbing image of all - as we see a frightened Marianne, dressed in schoolgirl uniform, gagged and tied to a chair, now without Schramm’s “protection”. It’s a disquieting thought that Marianne would have potentially been safer in the hands of a serial killer, than in the mischievous clutches of the coterie of aged deviants (whose company), she has been courting” (Black 1994c, 28).

Germany, Berlin, to be precise, also provides the setting in Zulawski’s *Possession* (1981), which also provides a pivotal bridge between horror and arthouse, together with a strong female lead. In a *Shivers* magazine (1999) feature I wrote that it is “the story of a dysfunctional marriage splintering Anna (Isabella Adjani) from her husband Marc (Sam Neill), set against the (then), prevailing political tension of the Berlin Wall divide, and with Anna’s “beast within’ manifesting itself literally, as a tentacled monster from the id” (Black 1999e, 30). The *outré* premise and events in the film are unsurprising perhaps “given Zulawski’s harsh introduction to life, barely surviving the German occupation of Poland during the Second World War, with his extended family and over forty members being reduced to three, and watching his little sister die of hunger”(Black

1999e, 30). I argue that to “expunge his memories of fascism, Zulawski’s film career has emphasised liberalism not repression, emotion not reserve and philosophy not doctrine” (Black 1999e, 30). Anna’s (Isabella Adjani) subsequent seizure and miscarriage in a dank, deserted subway, before the monstrous climax as she straddles an “ungodly, tentacled creature in a scene of hideously surreal intensity” (Black 1999e, 31). I state that “[i]t is these acts of explicit sexuality and savagery - mixing art house with grind house - which led to *Possession* being briefly placed on the list of “Video Nasties” in the early 1980s” (Black 1999e, 31). Zulawski himself has admitted that part of the inspiration behind his surrealism stems from arthouse auteurs such as Ingmar Bergman and his *Scener ur ett äktenskap* (*Scenes from a Marriage*) (1974) - only for Zulawski, his desire was to add “an impossible element, and for me that is the essence of cinema” (Black 1999e, 31), in order to elevate *Possession* from an interesting to a fantastical level. Zulawski refers to Adjani’s compelling performance as the result of art imitating life - she had severe personal relationship problems of her own during filming and reportedly tried to commit suicide after seeing the film. Zulawski claimed she admonished him thus, “[l]ook, you don’t have the right with your camera to plunge into an actor’s soul that way” (Black 1999e, 32), but Zulawski counters with “[i] think that the camera does have this incredible eye to see the truth of people and their behaviour and she saw that because she is a bright and intelligent person” (Black 1999e, 32).

My feature on Marco Ferreri in *Necronomicon Book One* (1996) was credited by the UK distributors as one of the first major examinations of his work in the UK and Ferreri, like Zulawski, blurs the boundaries between horror and arthouse which I scrutinise. I note that “Ferreri selects his targets with consummate zeal, be they age, sexual relationships, masculinity, (or) new femininity of family life” (Black 1996b, 55). As such “[f]rom modern day puritan to latter day pornographer, we may take the Marquis de Sade’s words (spoken through Saint Fond in *Juliette*), “who cares about the poverty of the people if it is the means to satisfy one’s perversions”, as a starting point to discuss Ferreri’s varied body of work” (Black 1996b, 55). I argue that;

Ferreri is concerned with human nature, why we behave how we do. Like Sade, he does spotlight the evils of human nature, but unlike him, he also searches for the good in society, albeit with a bizarre cadre from which his venomous humour arises, to add such germane observations on life, lust, living, society and sexual (im)morality. (Black 1996b, 56).

Given this “many of his films adopt a typically 1970s approach of post-Fordist, post-modernist delineation of the collapse of the family against a background of a rigid society which is simply too inflexible to accommodate the eccentric characters within Ferreri’s diverse universe” (Black 1996b, 56). I note how Ferreri’s *Storie di ordinaria follia* (*Tales of Ordinary Madness*) (1981) evokes Ben Gazzara’s character’s “gradual descent into madness and detachment” (Black 1996b, 57), his emotional angst laid bare against a dysfunctional society and pouring scorn upon the idealised notion of the “American wet dream”. Ghosts of horror past are conjured up in *Ciao maschio* (*Bye*

Bye Monkey (1978) as a plague of rats engulfing New York City evokes Herzog's *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* (1979) and the discovery on the banks of the Hudson River of a forty feet ape cradling a baby chimpanzee, recalls another giant ape in *King Kong* (1933). Ferreri juggles numerous themes ranging from aggressive feminism, to questioning if animals are more *humane* than us, whilst the pivotal Waxworks Museum represents "a symbol of an unfeeling android-like society, devoid of compassion, proliferated by cold and unappealing concrete towers" (Black 1996b, 58). With *La grande bouffe* (1973), Ferreri's most infamous work, the "all consuming greed of society, (and) our general lack of altruism" (Black 1996b, 58), are held to account. As "greed, sloth, lust, selfishness" and many other human foibles are dissected here, the four main protagonists also go unnamed to reinforce the impersonal nature of society. Having acted for Pasolini and been production manager for Fellini, "[h]is working relationships with such exalted figures seem appropriate given the accolades bestowed by numerous critics on his films - "Ferreri is the equal of Antonioni" (*Time Out*) and "Ferreri is fit to be compared to Buñuel" (*The Times*) - this latter eulogy perhaps the most meaningful as far as Ferreri is concerned, for it anyone can match the social vitriol, voracious sexuality - if not quite the religious satire of Buñuel, then it is Ferreri for sure" (Black 1996b, 61).

Whilst Zulawski and Ferreri play with art and horror conventions to create organic, sinuous films with a fluid, symbiotic relationship with different genres, Michele Soavi's *Dellamorte Dellamore* (*Cemetery Man*) (1994) concentrates on horror, but inverts it - specifically the zombie genre here and elevates it onto a more existential realm, more aligned to that of an arthouse film. In *Necronomicon Book Two* (1998) Soavi himself stated that "[t]he main character is not scared of zombies because killing them is a normal job to him. What is more scary, is living. Instead of being a horror film about being scared of death, it's more a film about being scared of life" (Black 1998a, 75). Soavi reinforces this in a bravura finale as Dellamorte and his assistant Gnaghi are framed, poised upon an isolated precipice. "As they survey the dramatic but desolate scene before them, Dellamorte comments; "I should've known. The rest of the world doesn't exist" as snowflakes begin to fall, obliterating their increasingly distant figures as the snowflakes layer the landscape" (Black 1998a, 75).

The now microscopic figures suggesting the insignificance of the human race within the wider universe, and;

is very much a case of *Cemetery Man* capturing the pessimistic mood of its own decade, reflecting the somewhat nihilistic forces of our own times. Perhaps because of this, that master of realism and drama, Martin Scorsese, declared *Cemetery Man* to be the best film of its year and a fitting testimony to the potency of the zombie film through the years. (Black 1998a, 75).

My identification here of “[d]ominant, forceful, liberated characters... seen as breaking new ground, offering imagination and originality, coupled with no small measure of sexuality” (Black 1998a, 69) and that “the single overriding influence [is] temptation” (Black 1998a, 71), is then extended as Douglas Keeseey (2011) cites my text. Just as I scrutinise “a symmetry with Soavi’s portrayal of “death” and of “love”... [as] the term “love” becomes combined with life” (Black 1998a, 73), so too does Keeseey “study the subtle relations between death and desire, the carnal and the charnel” (Keeseey 2011, 3). Keeseey also ‘explores the psychological, sexual and religious aspects of love and death” (Keeseey 2011, 3), as filtered through the minds of the film’s male and female protagonists. Close reading of both texts reveals a similarity in the pivotal scene between She (Anna Falchi) and Francesco (Rupert Everett) as “the elegiac tone [is] accentuated as... Falchi’s morbid fascination with the cemetery ossuary knows no bounds; “I have never seen anything so exciting” she drools, surrounded by walls of skulls” (Black 1998a, 71). For Keeseey, “Francesco ... invites her to visit the cemetery's ossuary. Exclaiming that she has 'never seen anything so exciting', the Widow gazes at skulls, sniffs cerements and then kisses Francesco, insisting that the kiss occur only through the black veil she is wearing and through the red veil she has him don” (Keeseey 2011, 4). I note the “dramatic tracking shot - past Dellamorte and beyond the door and leading into rows of graves in the cemetery outside...” (Black 1998a, 75), as proof that “Dellamorte lives in a world of “death”; even his aforementioned sexual sparring with She takes place either in the ossuary or on a gravestone” (Black 1998a, 75) and highlight the enigmatic coda which reveals the futility of our existence. By contrast, Keeseey explores the emotional aspects arguing that “Francesco believes that [She] is not a woman wanting love, but a femme fatale threatening death” (Keeseey 2011, 7).

For Keeseey, “Francesco's belief in eternal love is gradually hollowed out by grave anxiety, his desire for a restored beloved gives way to paranoid fear of her as a femme fatale” (Keeseey 2011, 16). Instead, Keeseey argues that “all he has succeeded in doing is to hasten the collapse of love into loss, the living into the dead. Francesco's mortal dread results in a cynical indifference to life (Keeseey 2011,17). Keeseey concludes that for Francesco, “feelings of impotence and his gradual contamination by cynicism and indifference to life as he loses his faith in love and immortality” (Keeseey 2011,1), and predicates the valedictory conclusion.

In identifying the use of architecture and physical space in Balagueró and Plaza’s *[REC]* (2007), I explore how this subverts typical zombie film tropes. In *The Dead Walk* (2008) I argue that the genius in the central conceit;

lies in its deliberate confinement of the zombie outbreak to one, quickly isolated, urban tower block. It’s not depicting global domination, it’s diametrically opposed to such an approach. It is just this insular rather than expansive aesthetic which propels *[REC]* into playing out as a real *tour de force*. (Black 2008, 249).

This audacious concept subverts Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) - in *[REC]* the zombies aren't outside attacking to get in - the zombies are already *inside* the building and the resulting lockdown is enforced to keep them *in*. I argue that the tension inside the building is increased considerably as residents and emergency services inside continually battle with the realisation that anyone of them could be the next to become infected - "it's a cerebral counterpoint to the "physical" blood test that the survivors in *The Thing* (1982) undergo" (Black 2008, 250).

I note how the apartment block itself is used to elevate the tension and claustrophobia, being rendered in effect, a tomb to its inhabitants;

its labyrinth passageways and shadowed recesses signify an architectural motif which manifests itself as a parallel creation to Dante's *Inferno* - as we spiral ever upwards from the bowels of the basement, in ever decreasing circles to the impenetrable reaches of the attic eyrie, which ultimately harbours an even greater horror. (Black 2008, 251).

Stacey Abbott (2016) extends my text by alluding to the "historical trauma" of 9/11⁷³ which preceded the film, the use of the found (film) footage format and "the capturing and communication of the 'truth' through the media" (Abbott 2016, 79), as the Spanish TV film crew shadow a group of firefighters. This "fusion of the documentary aesthetic and the zombie genre" (Abbott 2016, 73) utilises a first person POV to evoke a "visceral experience of a zombie outbreak" (Abbott 2016, 73). Abbott notes that;

In the twenty-first century, the dead will always outnumber the living. Similarly *[REC]* concludes with the camera operator dead, the camera having fallen to the ground and the journalist being pulled back into the darkness, everyone is dead or infected and the outbreak is not contained. (Abbott 2016, 90).

Thus for Abbott, spatial concerns are secondary to the role of the media in the film and the underpinning aesthetic of the found footage format.

Spatial concerns are front and foremost however for Phil Smith (2012), who broadens my argument and applies it to Lamberto Bava's *Dèmoni 2... l'incubo ritorna* (*Demons 2*) (1986), where a similarly residential block of flats to *[REC]*, informs "a zombie movie feeding on the space it portrays. The demons make the familial place of the flats strange, disrupted, questionable, possessed of ambience and unconventional possibility" (Smith 2012, 139). For Smith, the historical "text" and colonial "supernatural" of other zombie films are jettisoned as "[t]he European

⁷³ The four coordinated terror attacks on the USA by Islamist terrorist group al-Qaeda, on September 11th, 2001, resulted in 2,977 deaths and over 25,000 people injured. It remains the single deadliest terrorist attack in history.

zombie film becomes geographical. This sensibility [is] spatial and subversive” (Smith 2012, 139). Stating that “[i]n the early twenty-first century the fracture between these tendencies is now definable far less by continent or country of production and more by international cultural politics and imagination” (Smith 2012, 139). To reinforce this point, my earlier text, “False Gestures for a Demonic Public” (2002), also offers a cross-cultural analysis of horror films;

While many of the articles... seek to analyse genre representations from one specific filmmaking culture, Andy Black offers a cross-cultural analysis of horror in the article “False Gestures for a Demonic Public” with *The Sentinel* and *The Antichrist*. Here, the author discusses both American and Italian representations of the supernatural that followed on from the success of the 1973 film *The Exorcist*, as well as identifying some of the controversies surrounding these works. (Mendik 2002,150).

Scrutinising the differing depiction of good and evil and demonic possession, in Italian production, *L'anticristo (The Antichrist)* (1974), I note how evil occupation manifests itself as a physical and sexual affliction, which transforms a wheelchair bound heroine into a heretical vixen - “[i] feel so marvellous, as if I’ve been reborn” as the religious resurrection motif is inverted and the now possessed Ippolita is able to walk again. “All manner of demonic trickery is unleashed from levitation, to crockery smashing, to glass breaking, to projectile vomiting” (Black 2002, 218), explained away as being the product of “sexual frustration that brings on hysterical phenomena”. Ippolita also betrays evidence of what Clover (1992) termed the “colonised body” with “the currency that the female body and the female sex organ has within the possession films of the 1970s... narratives [where] supernatural domination is evidence through aggressive sexual displays” (Black 2002, 212). Thus, established exploitation tropes are utilised to accentuate the sexual aspects of possession, together with, and over reliance on, spectacle and special effects to reinforce this. Alternatively, Michael Winner’s US produced, *The Sentinel* (1977) uses a supernatural underpinning to explore wider contradictions in both the class and consumerism aspects of 1970s America. Most overtly delineated in the main protagonist’s role as a model and also the blind priest as symbols of superficiality and lost/deluded faith. As such, I argue that both films are “drinking from the same trough and yet offering a diverse, hybrid approach to the same subject, an approach particularly styled and inflected [with] the unique decade both films were born into” (Black 2002, 220), in addition to the cross-cultural influences they include. This paranoia of the monster within rather than externalised monsters and deviation from the more illustrious model, *The Exorcist*, in *L'anticristo*, is expanded by Peter Hutchings (2014) who describes a “collapse of social authority” (Hutchings 2014, 293), characterised in such films. Noting the definitions of pre 1960s horror and post 1960s horror which are “classical” and “post-modern” for Pinedo (1997) and “Fordist” and “post-Fordist” for Jancovich,(1992), Hutchings gleans “an underlying sense that by the time that horror cinema reaches the 1970s, it has become more anxiety-ridden and less inclined to assuage those anxieties” (Hutchings 2014, 293).

Hutchings agrees that *L'anticristo* is exploitative; featuring a deep, demonic voice spouting obscenities for Ippolita like the possessed Regan in *The Exorcist*, and similarly featuring levitation and furniture throwing scenes and “[y]et even these familial elements are presented... differently from their presentation in the original” (Hutchings 2014, 306) he argues. Hutchings cites the final exorcism scene in the Colosseum rather than the Georgetown bedroom in the original; also an adult rather than child being possessed and Ippolita representing the theme of reincarnation as she is possessed by an ancestral, heretical nun. In addition, the absent father in the original is replaced by an absent mother and weak father unable to protect his daughter in *L'anticristo*. So, “the presentation of troubled patriarchy thus becomes... literal and therefore limited” (Hutchings 2014, 307), offering “gloomy worlds that have fallen and are probably beyond redemption” (Hutchings 2014, 307). Hutchings argues that one cannot simply lump these possession films together as their differences are “in some ways with national distinctions and in other ways with the creative sensibilities” (Hutchings 2014, 307), in developing my cross-cultural approach. For example, Hutchings notes how Canadian horror was “generally subsumed into American horror cinema” (Hutchings 2014, 304), as seen in the work of David Cronenberg. Hutchings adds that “[t]his sense of national horror cinemas possessing their own distinctiveness but also existing in relation to other nations is arguably a widespread feature of 1970s horror” (Hutchings 2014, 305). Hutchings identifies how national borders are permeable and that “mapping the movements of particular horror films and horror formats through different contexts arguably provides the best way of capturing the simultaneously national and international qualities of 1970s horror” (Hutchings 2014, 305), just as I discussed “hybrid approaches” and the “unique decade” of the 1970s.

Continuing the 1970s theme, in my 1993 text on Dario Argento's *Profondo rosso (Deep Red)* (1975), I analyse the film from a Freudian perspective, combined with scrutinising how the art house influences shape the film. Thus;

Deep Red's basic premise revolves around the “Goddardian concern with the nature of illusion” which intrinsically proves to be of great value to the films sub Agatha Christie style murder/mystery plotting. Argento leans heavily on Michelangelo Antonioni's art house classic *Blow Up* (1966), for inspiration, utilising both that film's star - David Hemmings, and its bewildering comment on a “faceless” society. (Black 1993i,15).

I continue that “[i]n Antonioni's film, photographs prove deceptive, lacking substance which itself is used as a damning indictment on a colourless society. *Blow Up's* prophetic closing images are of people playing an imaginary game of tennis - life is just an illusion, an imaginary conceit. These *avant-garde* trappings which captivate Argento so much are reinforced in *Deep Red*” (Black 1993i,15). To accentuate the illusory nature of the film;

Argento fills his film with framing devices, precognition motifs and most literally of all - mirrors, to emphasise the importance of illusion here. The fact that the central plot conceit is that we can see the murderer for a split second, playing as an almost subliminal image and which also involves a mirror, is of material importance here. (Black 1993i,15).

i

Marcus (David Hemmings) discovers that “he had indeed glimpsed Marta in the apartment, immediately after Helga’s death - her grizzled features shown in reflection on one of the psychic’s baroque hall mirrors, augmented by an equally gnarled array of expressionist paintings evoking the likes of Goya, Callot and Rosa” (Black 1993i,16). This mirroring theme and,

doppelgänger imagery is most poignantly and disturbingly shown in *Deep Red*’s final shot as Marcus stares into a crimson background that is Marta’s pool of blood - do we now conclude that Marcus is similarly tainted by all this homicidal violence? The fact that it is his reflection we see is the perfect metaphor for an illusory world being turned upside down.

Likewise, Marcus’ piano bashing prefigures the death of Professor Giordani (Glauro Mauri), whose teeth are crushed against a marble mantelpiece, and [Marcus’] severing of a gate chain, Marta’s eventual decapitation. Contrast this precognition theme with *Deep Red*’s other salient plot device - that of the concealed, the secret and the disguised, all being gradually eroded like a cliff-edge by the lashing waves of the sea. (Black 1993i,17).

My scrutiny of Freudian, Oedipal themes, together with primal and childhood fears, augmented by the art film inflections, concludes by evaluating that “*Deep Red* is a genuinely engaging, not to mention disturbing thriller, complete with ingenious plot conceits and a powerful self-reflexive gaze” (Black, 1993i,19). This aspect especially, informs Ray Guins (1996) own text on *Profondo rosso*, extending my analysis to include a Lacanian theme. Guins looks at the “relationship of subjectivity ‘fetishisation’ and the gaze” (Guins 1996,141) and notes that “[p]unishment is dealt by torturing the spectating eye of [the] characters in the film and audiences watching the film” (Guins 1996,141). Citing Freud’s (1997) belief that “fetishised objects act as a substitute for the male “penis” which the castrated woman wishes to possess” (Guins 1996,141-2) and identifies how it differs to Lacan’s view of seeing the phallus as a symbolic structure and not penis = phallus. Guins argues that “Argento stresses the phallus by visually dwelling on fetishised objects” (Guins 1996,142), such as the “camera track[ing] slowly over marbles, bits of thread and toy dolls before stopping at a switchblade” (Guins 1996,142). Whilst my text stresses the psychological;

Argento’s rapacious camera sweeps over a veritable treasure trove of objects, which reveals a deranged mind as dolls, rope,

drawings and knives are strewn haphazardly across a floor, not to mention the loose marbles scattered asunder - a glaring comment on the killer's diseased mental state. (Black 1993i,18),

Guins stresses the phallic. Thus, for Guins, the camera;

erotically inspect[s] the switchblade, exploring its slender shaft ending at the tip of the blade. Such emphasis on [a] phallic significance highlights [the] purpose ie. to penetrate. (Guins 1996,142).

Guins notes how Marta uses one such phallic signifier (a knife), to free herself from her husband, by stabbing him and then handing the blade to her startled young son, Carlo, in the flashback sequence. Guins observes how Argento's camera exhibits a phallic quality as it twists and weaves up stairs, into tunnels and "penetrates mutilated bodies" (Guins 1996,144). Discussing the role of Illusion and Mirror Stage, Guins offers that;

Marcus' dilemma is having to remember the vital clue that he saw the night of Helga's murder. Marcus searching for the eerie illusion of his subconscious reveals itself to be a reflection in a mirror. (Guins 1996,150).

Guins observes how the "[m]irror stage in Lacanian psychoanalysis marks the point when the child attempts to identify with its reflection in the mirror" (Guins 1996,150). Guins continues by referencing my text and stating that "Black argues that the use of mirrors in *Profondo Rosso* is to emphasise the criticalness of illusion" (Guins 1996,150). Guins identifies that the;

spectator sees Marc's reflection placed in the same painting as was Marta's ghostly reflection Marc stares at his reflection identifying with the image, he sees himself cast as the murderer. Marc sees himself in the murderous other. Guins 1996,150).

When Marc stares into the pool of blood at the end of the film Guins questions;

Has Marc chosen his identity by assimilating the image of the other as his own? The reflective pool and Marc's narcissistic gaze may very well transform the image of otherness into a reflection of what Marc has now accepted as the self. (Guins 1996,150).

Guins ponders the mirror image drawing parallels between Marta, Marc and Carlo's characters as I do in my text;

Perhaps in Carlo, Marcus can see the flip-side of himself, a hitherto repressed part of his personality which he now confronts, albeit vicariously, through his friendship with Carlo. It is

like the story of Narcissus, staring at his own reflection in a pool and loving it as though it were another. (Black 1993i,17).

For Guins, Argento's film technique informs a;

sadistic gaze [which] operates to position the spectator within the madness. Numerous uses of point of view shots and emphasis on mirror images allows the spectator not only the opportunity to witness brutality, but to actually lose and define themselves while adopting a role. (Guins 1996,152).

Ultimately for Guins "[t]he overvaluation of eyes, knives and various other objects including the female body, fetishises the way spectatorship is constructed as part of the cinematic apparatus" (Guins 1996,152). In essence, the psychoanalytical traits, aligned with the artistry of the illusory motif, offer a compelling and disturbing gaze of self-reflection for the spectator to ruminate over.

During this chapter I have outlined the developing discourse surrounding Eurohorror and arthouse cinema and discussed how the international nature of film production has influenced this. I have also analysed how relevant directors such as Buttgereit, Zulawski, Ferreri, Soavi and Argento, have continually stretched these fluid boundaries between genres with specific examples of my work. In addition, I have indicated how my ideas have been added to by other scholars. As such, I detail through close reading how Keeseey augments my existential arguments surrounding *Dellamorte Dellamore*; how Abbott develops my ideas on the importance of architecture and physical space in *[REC]*; how Smith broadens my arguments surrounding spacial concerns and introduces an international, cross-cultural dimension, also extended by Hutchings when discussing *L'anticristo*, as I had previously. In addition, how Guins augments my Freudian reading with Lacanian theory in discussing the psychoanalytical aspects of *Profound rosso*. The core, central to all of my contributions here is the unerring relationship between Eurohorror and arthouse films, feeding off one another in a seemingly symbiotic fashion. Similarly, in identifying how both Eurohorror and arthouse films are now keenly studied, valorised and given due scholarly attention, signifying a seismic shift from when I began writing. Therefore emphasising, through my own contributions highlighted throughout this thesis, how I have played a part in helping to shape and alter the discourse surrounding such films.

8. Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, my aim has been to demonstrate the seismic shift in study, reception and opinion relating to the importance and impact of the European horror film, especially as defined by the term Eurohorror, its links with European arthouse cinema and how my own formative texts at the *zeitgeist* have contributed to the discussion and acted, in part, as torch-bearer for these films, with my texts still being cited today. For example, in Dvorak Ink and Mike White's *Sin Sado Noir* (2021), the editors note that "[t]his collection was inspired by Andy Black, editor of *"Necronomicon UK"* - a thought-provoking exploration of transgressive cinema begun by the much-respected and acclaimed magazine of the same name" (Ink & White 2021, 237). Ink and White explain that "[t]his time capsule tribute to sadomasochistic, *femme fatale* and Neo noir romances was originally organised by Melanie Dante for Andy Black of *Necronomicon: The Journal of Horror [and] Erotic Cinema*" (Ink & White 2021, 7).⁷⁴ As well as providing a Foreword to this volume, the editors refer to my email correspondence with Dante when I was asked for the *raison d'être* behind my publishing from 1993, being to "redress the balance as the majority of film writing at the time was based exclusively on U.S. films and the majority of European coverage was mainly just UK films... there [being] so much more to explore in other European output which was being neglected. The works of Bava, Franco, Rollin for instance" (Ink & White 2021, 8). In addition, the articles within *Sin Sado Noir* were to be published specifically for discussion during Philadelphia NoirCon 2021.⁷⁵

In summary, I have used my Introduction to explain the formative reasons behind my interest in Eurohorror and subsequent writing and publishing. In "A Method to the Madness" I have detailed the definitions and methodology I used for this thesis and my writing. For the "Literature Review" I have outlined the landscape up to and including 1993, before the main body of my own contributions began, where I detail the relative paucity of Eurohorror coverage before scholars such as Skal, Jancovich, Tudor and Wood offered a more theoretically-based approach, rather than the cultural historian approach used by Clarens, Butler and Douglas, for example. In "Fanzines and Academic Discourse" I reveal the importance of fanzines in covering Eurohorror by contrast to more conservative, mainstream publications, as well as the beginnings of academic scrutiny in this area provided by scholars including Sconce, Sanjek, Hills and Hawkins. The reception of fanzines such as my own is also discussed here. My contribution in offering a publishing platform to career academics including Xavier Mendik and Steven Jay Schneider, added to my own voice, and in the process, aiding both the legitimisation and development of the Eurohorror discourse within film studies. In each specific chapter on Bava, Franco, Rollin and Art Horror I have detailed the influence of my own writing, be it by direct reference and citation or

⁷⁴ This was originally due to be published by my own Noir Publishing as *Sin Cinema* in 2010, with Melanie Dante as editor.

⁷⁵ A biennial literary conference devoted to the dark, elusive, and seductive areas of art and life that we have come to call "noir." <https://noircon.com/>

alternatively, more nuanced, discreet influences which I identify in other scholars. As such, in the Bava chapter, the importance I place upon the conflict between the ancient and the modern in Bava's *oeuvre* is referenced directly by Abbott and also alluded to by Curti, Shipka, Rigby, Bondanella and Pacchioni. My observations on the doppelgänger motif in *La maschera del demonio* are echoed in Curti, whilst both Shipka and Rigby pick up on the non-linear, distorted reality themes I noted in *Lisa e il diavolo*. My ideas regarding the castle becoming a living character in *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga* and the notion of Leandro being the puppet master in *Lisa e il diavolo* are also echoed by Curti. My theories on the superficiality of the fashion world *milieu* and the models within it, in *6 donne per l'assassino*, reverberate throughout Humphries, whilst the psychoanalytical observations I make on the same film are paralleled by Needham.

In the Franco chapter, Scott directly references my "Plastic Surgery Disasters" feature on *Faceless* and augments my ideas on modern superficiality and medical obsessions, with an abstract discussion as to how the notion of "monstrous" changes from organic to inorganic, via the use of medical instruments. Ward references my *Paroxysmus* feature and parallels my observations on the oneiric quality and fetishistic set-pieces in the film, together with the alter-ego/doubling motif which pervades it. This same theme is also alluded to by Brodesco and Mendik - the latter also picking up on the Freudian connotations I identify in *Sie tötete in Ekstase*. Both Mendik and Rigby echo the observations I make about Soledad Miranda's effusive screen presence, whilst Spiers highlights the "Third Space" that figures such as Franco and Rollin occupy, and that I previously identified in stating that Rollin's work extends beyond its screen existence.

In the Rollin chapter, my interview with the director in 1996 is extensively referenced and quoted from by other scholars. For example, Ellinger and Heller-Nicholas in 2017, refer to Rollin's surrealist and non-linear narratives which I first identified in my initial features on Rollin in 1993-1994 in *Necronomicon* fanzine. Block, Cherry, Dapena, Odell and Le Blanc also reference my interview directly and identify the importance of the painterly imagery which defines Rollin's films. Odell and Le Blanc, together with Rigby, also pick up on the influence of Delvaux I identified, with Odell and Le Blanc in 2004, also discussing the underlying presence of Ernst, Trouille and Magritte in Rollin's films, as I had in 1993-1994. In addition, references to me are made as Sélavy discusses the existential elements of Rollin as I had previously, Deighan the dual Sadean twins which dominate Rollin's *oeuvre* and D'Emilio, the historical narrative and context I provided for *Le viol du vampire*. My discourse on the original nature of Rollin's zombie films in *The Dead Walk* (2000), and the human character and emotional angst exhibited by his zombies, (not to mention the irony of French wine as the vessel for the contagion), is also referenced in Shipka (2011) and Alexander (2017), and also discussed by Rigby (2016) and Hinds (2016).

In the Horror and Arthouse chapter, Guins (1996) references and broadens my psychoanalytic reading of *Profondo rosso* from 1993, Keeseey (2011) develops my existentialist reading of *Dellamorte Dellamore* in 1998, Smith (2012) includes reference to *The Dead Walk* (2000) when

discussing architecture and spatial concerns in zombie films, whilst Abbott (2016) does not directly reference me, but develops similar arguments surrounding *[REC]* which I had outlined in the revised edition of *The Dead Walk* (2008). In addition, Hutchings (2014), expands upon the cross cultural, international nature of horror in discussing *L'anticristo*, as I had previously in 2002.

On reflection, as a fanzine writer from 1989, as a fanzine editor from 1993 and as a later book editor from 1996, the advantage of effectively being your own boss was to be able to indulge in your own personal passions and interests. As such, I can reflect that although Eurohorror as a term didn't really exist until much later (my definition from Schneider is from 2007), many of the Italian, Spanish, French and German films in particular that fascinated me, ultimately embodied the tropes of Eurohorror, not to mention the arthouse traits which also appealed to me. This is borne out in the *Evil Writes* letters page (included from p.315) from my own *Necronomicon* fanzine - the main source of my direct contact with readers, other than occasional film fair and film festival visits. The mainly positive comments revolve around the detailed discussion of Eurohorror films, although some readers were not so impressed with my eclectic mix of films covered, including personal favourites such as Hammer films (not Eurohorror, given the definition I use in this thesis), my love of Sherlock Holmes films, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E* and American zombie films, especially those by George A. Romero.

In summary, I have sought to utilise Eurohorror as the prism through which to view the influence of my fanzine and book contributions. Writing in the first wave of fan culture studying such films, often parallel with, (and at times before), such contemporaries as Howarth, Ledbetter, Lucas, Thrower, Tohill and Tombs, my contribution was twofold - firstly, with my own writing and secondly, in providing a publishing platform in *Necronomicon* fanzine and book form, for other scholars to add to a developing discourse surrounding Eurohorror and arthouse films. As part of the *generazione spontanea*, where the availability of key films on video coincided with the growth in fanzines exploring the Eurohorror and arthouse genres, my ambition is for my published work, together with the context provided by later academics such as Hawkins, Hills, Sanjek and Sconce, to provide both a contribution and a narrative, a thread of influence running through the rising importance of Eurohorror within the academy.

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Spaced Out

Mario Bava's Planet of the Vampires.

Planet of the Vampires (1965), Mario Bava's rare excursion into space and science fiction, remains the pinnacle of achievement that all other Italian science fiction films strive to emulate. In all honesty, the spaghetti space films have seldom reached warp factor overdrive, no matter how much they may have aspired to. The volatile, artistic temperament that most typifies the Italians, has lent itself more effectively to the emotional blend of gothic horror and psychological terror best embodied in the *giallo* genre and the films of Dario Argento and Bava himself. Successful Italian space "epics" have been as blips on the horizon, so rarely sighted as to make Halley's Comet appear as almost prolific! The early visual promise contained in Antonio Margheriti's films such as *Battle of the Worlds* (1961), *The Wild, Wild Planet* (1966) and *War of the Planets* (1965), have shone through like an icon in an otherwise nebulous galaxy, epitomised by the more recent shooting stars, *Starcrash* (1979) and *Alien Contamination* (1981). The former is a jokey romp, noticeable only for the decorous *Hammer* starlet, Caroline Munro, the indecorous Joe Spinell from *Maniac* (1980) "fame" and the reliable Christopher Plummer, who must have needed the money! The latter is merely an excuse to update the vampiric *Nosferatu* (1922) into an *Alien* (1979) setting, utilising the irrepressible Ian McCulloch, star of many an Italian zombie gut-cruncher, from *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (1979) to *Zombie Holocaust* (1980).

No such qualms invade the planet of Mario Bava's space vampires however. Instead, we are treated to a truly atmospheric picture that combines tension and visual elegance in equal amounts, to deliver a film brimming with kaleidoscopic colour, acting as the perfect synthesis of science fiction and horror. The film's premise, that has the spaceship *Argos* enticed into an isolated planet named *Aura*, by a mysterious SOS call, borrows liberally from Ed Cahn's *It! The Terror From Beyond Space* (1958), with both films providing inspiration for the much vaunted *Alien* (1979).

Barry Sullivan plays Mark, the ship's captain and main reasoning voice, who responds to the distress call from the exploratory probe *Galliat*. The juddery landing of the *Argos* on the planet *Aura* is rather unconvincing, along with the remainder of the film's special effects, but it does give the film a kind of primitive charm, also exemplified by the space jargon that is prevalent. "Synchronise the meteor rejector on the electro magnetic control device, apply neuro vascular tension, suppress cortical areas xyz"! Being loner example. Once the ship's outer door is lowered however, we are instantly caught up in and mesmerised by, the gradual assimilation of the planet's own distinctive landscape and characteristics. The rocky craters therein are illuminated by the vibrant pastel shades and colours, as all around banks of incandescent mist effuse from bubbling lava pools and enshroud the desolate landscape.

After a short but frenzied bout of madness that sweeps across the *Argos* crew like a deadly contagion, it comes as no surprise when the ship's reconnaissance party sight what will be the first of any "dead" bodies. Bava's oft quoted reliance on the zoom lens is never better served than here as, from a long shot, the camera rapidly home in on the contorted, bloodied face of one of the *Galliat*'s crew. Then, in typical Bava style, the ever prowling camera wrestles itself over the other bodies that lie nearby, strewn across the barren surface of the planet's many craters.

The swirling wind that punctuates the film's soundtrack proves later to be the perfect backdrop to compliment the film's most stunning sequence. Bava's exemplary resurrection scene in *Black Sunday* (1960) is almost surpassed here as metal coffin lids quiver, bursting open as their occupants arise, tearing off the plastic shrouds that so eerily encase them. The film then careers into a "cat and mouse" scenario between the *Argos* crew and the undead members of the *Galliat* - the situation aptly summed up by the *Argos* captain; "If there are any intelligent creatures on this planet, they are our enemies." The idea that *anyone* could indeed be one of the alien undead has more recently been demonstrated in *The Thing* (1982) and the scenes of the *Argos* crew discovering an ancient ship seem to have been the direct inspiration for Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979). The ship's interior houses labyrinth passageways, spiralling corridors and the skeletal remains of some other life form that; "probably belonged to an ancient civilisation."

The denouement, which reveals that the Galliat's crew have indeed been "taken over" by aliens, allows Bava the opportunity to induce some more shocks as one crew member opens his jacket to reveal a literally "rotting soul" beneath it, and another appears menacingly from behind a locker-cupboard door.

The alien's inability to survive on their own is their *raison d'être* for occupying human bodies, also making a valid point on the human race's eternal clamour for self-destruction; "You humans have fought and killed down through the centuries. Do you expect us to be any different?" The crew's brave riposte is that "We'll never submit to a breed of parasites", but proves ultimately futile in the all too familiar "trick" ending as both the ship's captain and his fellow survivor Sanya (Norma Bengell), are exposed as aliens, now gloating over their next potential victims - a "small planet" with a "puny civilisation", who high-rise apartment blocks unmistakably reveal it to be earth.

Bava's rare excursion into science fiction proves to be ultimately successful, its compelling visuals and atmospheric *mise en scene* triumphing over a banal script and some primitive special effects. Considering its release date, three years before the seminal *2001 - A Space Odyssey* (1968), it is a thought-provoking foray into space, its subtext of a highly intelligent alien form being subtly disseminated through the human race, is a sobering one, almost playing as a prequel to *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers* (1956), in showing how the aliens first arrived on earth.

In *Planet of the Vampires*, to use the captain's words, we do indeed have "something tangible" whose quality "doesn't disappear when (we) look straight at it." It is not something that we can say today about many of the dire films that proliferate the genre, and who are so constantly outshone by Bava's films and their own unique cinematic qualities.

Black, Andy, 1989, *Planet of the Vampires*, pp.12-13, *Blood and Black Lace Magazine*, Andrew Featherstone.

“Save The Last Drop For Me” - Dancing with Death in Mario Bava’s *Baron Blood*.

To be brutally honest, *Baron Blood* (1972) does not represent the apex of Mario Bava’s work, nor is it riding on the slippery slope to oblivion. Instead, it sees Bava returning to the *Gothique* regalia and legends that permeate his best work, the sumptuous *Black Sunday* (1960).

Having previously dealt with literally faceless killers in *Blood and Black Lace* (1964) and the ingenious methods of murder in *Twitch of the Death Nerve* (1971), Bava now turns his attention to Otto von Kleist, the sanguinary Baron of the film’s title. It transpires that this nefarious warlock had previously burnt an “innocent” witch at the stake over 300 years ago, only for her to put a curse on him before her death. The Baron himself perishes, burnt in his “own” flames as fire engulfs his castle. Early on in the film Peter jokes to his uncle, “Between us we might even conjure up an ancestral ghost or two”. All he succeeds in doing is resuscitating the once dead Baron, aided by a decorative, mini-skirted Elke Sommer as Eva.

Bava’s skill really begins to show as he manipulates the mechanics of terror, both within the ancient walls of the castle and the hidden horrors without. The Baron’s abode, the “Castle of the Devils”, is an authentic Austrian medieval castle. Its looming towers and shadowed battlements dominate the film as Bava’s prowling camera breathes life into every pore of the fortress. It becomes almost a character, in much the same way as the unconquerable “Egdon Heath” in Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*.

The castle appears fully in control as Peter and Eva read out the incantation to revive the Baron - all at the dead of night. Bava turns the screw as doors creak and shadows fall around the castle. The nearby church bells chime for midnight but ominously only two peals are heard as Eva remembers that the Baron was rumoured to have died at two o’clock. Their looks of horror are inter-cut with a superb shot of the empty churchyard, shrouded in fog and cloaked in deathly silence, save for the tolling bells. Back inside the castle, a door handle turns, the camera zooming in, quickly Peter recants the verse and the handle remains still as the camera draws back. Even the advent of morning is unsettling as the camera pans out over the glorious sunlit views afforded by the castle itself. The castle walls may be decaying but its malevolent ‘power’ remains intact.

Brushing aside his uncle’s protestations, Peter reads the incantation again the next night, in the castle room where the Baron was thought to have actually died. This time there is no going back as we see a body stir and then writhe in the darkness. A sudden gust of wind forces the incantation to fly into the room’s raging fireplace and then the first of many POV shots indicate that the Baron is indeed alive. The cobwebbed interiors and gothic trappings of the castle then give way as Bava races into the film’s most impressive sequence.

Eva, having rushed home, now finds herself a target for the Baron. She escapes him, only to be chased by the Baron through the deserted town. His grotesque, glue-covered features are barely disguised by his long cloak and wide-rimmed hat. The sight of him pursuing Eva - a dark silhouette amongst the luminous mist, very much recalls Vincent Price’s *House of Wax* (1953), only here, Bava makes the scene all his own as the pacing and lighting are uniformly excellent. Eva runs from the Baron as a myriad of blue, orange and yellow shafts of incandescent light, decorates the night. All the while, Bava’s restless camera explores the narrow, claustrophobic alleys and the wide agoraphobic spaces of the town. Eva shelters in an archway as the Baron searches for her, walking right by her as she comes agonisingly close to discovery, before running off to the nearest house. As she hammers frantically on the door to be let in, the camera closes in on the rapidly advancing Baron. The last drops of tension are wrung out as she is finally accepted into the house, marginally escaping the clamouring caresses of the Baron.

The castle’s new owner - a wheelchair-bound Alfred Becker (Joseph Cotten, no less), is then unsurprisingly revealed to be the Baron during the film’s climax. His own sadistic fantasies surface as, with great zeal, he conducts a tour of the castle’s notorious torture chamber, complete with tape-recorded screams. Then, Peter and Eva are shown the pièce de résistance as they stare up at the castle turrets only to see human-like figures impaled there in an eerie tableau, in the Baron’s

finest masochistic traditions. (Obviously a close friend of Vlad the Impaler - if it's only your drinks he spikes then you're lucky!).

It is Eva who saves them from the Baron's clutches when she drops an amulet (previously owned by the witch who was killed by the Baron), onto the body of Fritz (Lucio Pigozzi) - a servant dispatched ungraciously by the Baron. As the trinket fumes and sizzles into his skin, he revives, and along with an army of the Baron's previous victims, put the evil Kleist to death in his own dungeon, leaving Eva to escape with Peter and Karl.

Beyond the atmospheric and gossamer strands incumbent in the film's style, Bava invests great gusto into the various murders that proliferate the place.

A doctor who treats the newly-revived Baron, is stabbed in the chest for his "pains", the ambulance he is telephoning for, ending up to be his own. Also, there is the death of the would-be property developer Herr Dortmund (Dieter Tressler), who is knocked unconscious before being thrown from the staircase landing - a "comforting" noose around his neck to break the fall! The tilted camera angle, staring unblinkingly upwards at the revolving body hanging there, seems the obvious inspiration behind similar deaths in both Lucio Fulci's *City of the Living Dead* (1980) and Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1976). Dortmund's lifeless corpse also brings about the demise of the aforementioned Fritz, who, when stealing a ring from the body, is unceremoniously dumped down several flights of stairs into the Baron's torture chamber, before being thrust into an iron maiden. The POV shot of the spikes shattering Fritz's face, recall Bava's own *Black Sunday*. When the lid comes off we are "treated" to a lingering look at the spikes, now dripping blood.

A small girl drops an apple which rolls dangerously close to the castle grounds. Bava instantly closes in on the gnarled hand that is wrapped around a tree nearby. Branches rustle as the Baron chases the girl - she escapes, but not before some tense moments have elapsed.

Besides these stylistic elements, there is also an attempt to show the conflict between a modern, secular Austria and the "old" legends. It is a recurring theme throughout the film. Early on, Eva makes her stand against the property mogul, and possible misogynist, Dortmund, offering that; "If Herr Dortmund had his way he would stick all of womanhood up there" (referring to the Baron's propensity for impaling - Dortmund is later killed whilst obtaining a coke from a drinks machine installed in the castle - obviously commercialism does not pay. The gold chest secreted away by the Baron, may also have encouraged Dortmund's keen "interest" in the castle.

An accurate summation of the new/old conflict and a germane warning is sounded by Karl; "We live in an enlightened age, where science not only reveals the old mysteries as mere superstitions, but little by little, discovers the true mysteries of the universe. I would not play with the occult if I were you. One's obsession with it can be a real danger."

It is a message Peter fails to heed. He even ignores the voice of an occultist who denounces modern man with a powerful invective; "Once you killed innocent witches. Now you bring murderers back to life." It is a simple logic that is difficult to disagree with here, though the conflict between ancient and modern is never resolved. Instead, we are left to marvel at the way Bava manages to transcend the hackneyed, worm-eaten script he was given. In lesser hands, *Baron Blood* would have been an unmitigated disaster. As it is, the film is a testament to Bava's own visual style that the utmost tension and creativity are gleaned from an otherwise mediocre script. It would have been interesting to see what he could have done given a truly original, intelligent plot to work from. *Baron Blood* may not come bathed in glory, but there is enough blood flowing through the veins to resurrect some life. In the words of the revenged witch, you can; "Save the last drop for me".

Black, Andy, 1990, "Save The Last Drop For Me", pp.26-7, *Blood & Black Lace 2* magazine, Andrew Featherstone

Blood and Black Lace

Is it a crime to be beautiful? Well, yes, if you're a fashion model in a krimis style thriller and there's a faceless killer on the loose. Rules are made to be broken and fashion isn't a statement but an invitation to death in the weird and wonderful world of the giallo film. Appropriately enough, the granddaddy of them all kicks off the first in our regular series on that peculiarly Italian creation.

"Inspector. Look at his face, he hates women." Taken in any context this is a disturbing, sweeping statement, but if anything, succinctly explains the prime motivation behind the vast majority of Italian *giallo* films. The word itself is derived from the garish yellow colours adorning the covers of a particularly lurid series of paperback thrillers - a spaghetti version if you will, of the old Edgar Wallace inspired crime thrillers which inform the German *krimis* films. Basically, these films consist almost entirely of masked/gloved maniacs slashing their way through an assortment of victims, male and female, but often comprising of beautiful women among their victims.

To dismiss the series as stagnant "stalk and slash" mediocrity would be ill-judged however, as unlike their American counterparts, the best of the *giallo* films combine atmosphere, mystery, suspense and an outlandish sense of style, assimilating themselves into a unique sub genre.

Where the sex "act" will uniformly equate with death in the American slasher model, it is the eroticism of beauty and its desires which provokes the murderous response in the giallo film. In the twisted mind of the killer, if you can't have beauty yourself then the compulsion is to destroy it. It is a perverse generalisation on Peter Lorre's obsessive behaviour in *Mad Love* (1935) - "... you always hurt the one you love."

In *giallo* films, love is no longer necessary, what is necessary is a pathological desire to *covet* something, or more importantly, *someone* and accelerate the "passion" until its momentum topples over into the "most extreme act of annihilation", to quote Dario Argento's *Tenebrae* (1982).

With these pre-requisites of the *giallo* film firmly in mind, it is clear to see that Mario Bava's *Blood and Black Lace* (1964), forms the seminal role model for this particular genre. In Bava's films, numerous killings are perpetrated, but it is the motivation behind these murders that is more character revealing than the violence itself. The victims are guilty of only one salient crime - being voluptuous, attractive women and thereby providing the catalyst for the most hideous display of male paranoia and frustration, encapsulated in the misogynistic killer.

The Christian Fashion Salon in Rome, is the setting for the murders with its *haute couture* models providing the victims. In a perverse irony, the *chic* models live for fashion but will ultimately die here because of it. Hell yes - the murders are hung around one of those convoluted, "penny dreadful" type scenarios which so often haunted Bava throughout his career. But if anything, the illegal drug taking and petty jealousies amongst the girls only serves to complicate the plot, interrupting Bava's lyrical *mise en scene* with intrusive, police procedural sequences. As the body count piles up and the complexities inherent in the film unfold, the killer is revealed to be Max (Cameron Mitchell), who self-hatred at the desire provoked in him by the coterie of exquisite girls who dominate his every day, and whose very presence compels him to kill - so eliminating his "weakness".

Upon this discovery, his lover, fashion house supremo Christiana (Eva Bartok), conspires to help him cover his tracks, only to find that she too is to be one of his victims; "You loved everything, everything but me." Although undoubtedly attracted by the idea of inheriting Christiana's fashion salon and its financial wealth, the killer's main impetus is remarked upon by another character; "Perhaps the sight of beauty makes him lose control of himself and kill."

Max and Christiana's joint deaths, entwined together proves fitting as murder has now turned full circle - the desire which fuels Max's homicidal rage, conversely motivates Christiana, if she cannot have her own "love", Max, then he too will die.

Max's refusal of style and beauty, along with his inability to control the emotions it arouses within him, is ultimately demonstrated in the white gauze mask which cloaks his face during the murders

- he is quite literally a faceless (characterless?) individual, an interesting forerunner to the modern day, anonymous assassin - the serial killer. This "nameless" aspect is particularly disturbing as it poses the alarming theory that the killer could be *any* one of *us*, as no real attempt is made to rationalise Max's actions or to diffuse his motives - he is simply left to represent the sharp end of male phobia and sexual frustration. He is, in effect, one step away from the Buffalo Bill serial killer from *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), who craves not simply the destruction of female beauty, but to actively replace it by creating his "own" by immersing himself in their skin - the ultimate corruption of feminine radiance.

Just as the appearance of the faceless killer recalls the eerie, swathed lovers of Belgian surrealist Rene Magritte, so too does the presence of drugs and fashion accoutrements, draw attention to the fetishistic elements contained in the film. There is the paradox of having characters with a craving for illicit drugs, whilst the killer exhibits a craving for the illicit pleasures of "fix" he gains from sexual arousal, followed by his own perverse orgasm/relief. This is a fascinating parable for modern times where both sex and drugs are viewed as forbidden, and where sex can prove as addictive as a drug - and where, ironically, both can be viewed as the height of fashionable behaviour in the trendy, image-conscious 90s.

Bava's "ultimate fever dream" as Tim Lucas has dubbed the film, is at its most disturbing when detailing the killer's gruesome actions. His orgy of violence displays a disquieting amount of sadistic zeal as one girl's face is pressed into a red hot stove, another has her head bashed repeatedly against a tree trunk, whilst a blade-lined mask is slammed onto the face of another victim, (shades of the maestro's own *Black Sunday* perhaps). In other moments of delirium one girl is strangled whilst another is found drowned in her own bath.

Bava's restless camera also serves to highlight the visceral nature of the killer, (although very little actual blood is glimpsed during the killings). Instead, the roving camera lens takes in an accumulation of strident red subjects ranging from crimson drapes, telephones and diary, to the elegant dresses and the model's finely manicured fingernails. Urbaldo Tersano's striking cinematography advances rhythmically over omnipresent fashion mannequins, a creaking sign buffeted outside by the wind, and a fluorescent water fountain silhouetted against the night sky, while all around shafts of incandescent light reveal furtive figures as the strobe-lit, neon netherworld of violent criminals and decadent beauties reminds us of the *krimis* influence at work here.

The intimate, ornate interiors and art-deco designs of the salon echo the sumptuous costumed models within, though the china-doll ornaments and figurines, also indicate the delicate, fragile artistic temperaments of the girls - all too apparent as they bitch about each other, caring not for those who have died and only concerned if it will be them next. Like the mannequins which proliferate the house, they are almost statuesque objects, too easily pursued, too easily "broken" and condemned to perish at the crushing hands of the murderer.

Although almost universally acclaimed and acknowledged as the prime exponent of the *giallo* film, *Blood and Black Lace* has also ruffled the feathers of others - as Carlos Clarens following polemic will testify to, describing the film thus; "(It) has minimal plot and consists of a string of brutal murders, each staged with relish and in the most redolent hues, attesting to the fact that Bava is simply trying to titillate a very special segment of his audience that requires neither rhyme nor reason."

Whether you agree or not, Bava's work here has undoubtedly influenced a whole generation of filmmakers, from the more obvious names such as Dario Argento, to the more obscure such as Piccio Raffanini's *Obsession - A Taste For Fear* (1988), and Carlo Vanzina's *Nothing Underneath* (1985), which both inhabit the fashion world milieu of Bava's picture, whilst Michele Soavi's superlative *Stagefright* (1987) and Lamberto Bava's own above average *Le Photo di Gioia* (1987), both feature scenes with grisly, still-life tableau's of dead bodies a la *Blood and Black Lace*.

If anything, this was *the* film to launch Bava's career, but despite its success, he remained "too much of a homebody" and spurned the lucrative advances of US distributors who beat a hurried path to his door.

The longevity of the film's themes and stylistic devices have proved the most poignant comment on its undeniable quality, it's ironic to think that "six women for an assassin", should have become *one* blueprint for a generation of future *giallo* films.

Black, Andy, 1993, Blood and Black Lace, pp.4-6, *Necronomicon 2 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

Black Sunday

Not only is it his best, but also one of the genre's most triumphant gothic classics as Mario Bava's masterly vampire film etches itself upon your memory. Read on...

"A strange type was needed for the part and we chose Steele from the pictures."

The words are Mario Bava's, but the face most definitely belongs to Barbara Steele, whose appearance in *Black Sunday* (1960), launched her into a successful horror film career, so elevating her to icon status and in the process, symbolising a particular strain of gothic horror pictures which permeated the 1960s and 1970s. Her giant baby doll eyes and nebulous, flowing locks contain just the right degree of alluring ambiguity, crossing the line between good and evil and at once, epitomising both vastly divergent callings.

It is this mystique, this veiled nature which Bava so adroitly exploits in casting Steele as both sorceress in Asa, a 17th century witch/vampire, and an angel, in Katia, an innocent young woman poised to blossom with the flourishing beauty which maturity will bring. The dual nature of the human soul, its capacity for good and for evil, is the central theme to prevail here. A horrific opening, as Asa is burned as a witch at the stake, to join her warlock accomplice, Javutich (Arturo Dominici), is the catalyst for unleashing the amassed forces of evil as the heretics are later resurrected to wreak their vengeance on Katia, her brother Constantine (Enrico Olivieri), and her father, Prince Vajda (Ivo Garrani). Two visiting physicians, Dr. Kruvajan (Andrea Checchi) and Andrej (John Richardson), also become embroiled in the subsequent terror as good fights evil to the bitter end.

Though loosely adapted from Gogol's *The Vj*, the film remains undoubtedly Bava's, betraying his stylistic flair and painterly *mise en scene*, coupled with moments of finely-realised, atmospheric terror. Dancing flames, misty forests and hooded figures in robes introduce a highly charged, quasi-religious ambivalence as the Inquisition of Moldavia contemplates the nefarious Asa, now condemned to death. "But before death, human justice anticipated divine judgement by burning into the flesh of those damned ones, the brand of Satan", the narrator informs us.

The Inquisitor's fatal command, "Cover her face with the Mask of Satan. Nail it down. May the cleansing flames reduce her would body to ashes so that the wind will obliterate all trace of her existence", is accompanied by a POV shot as Asa stares at the dark mask with its jagged interior spikes looming ever closer to impale her. Her screams, juxtaposed with a shot of her spurting blood, evokes a powerful invective from Asa, as she spits out a venomous curse; "Unchained elements of the powers of darkness are lying in ambush, *beware*." This curse proves to be prophetic as the remainder of the film sees Bava further bombarding the senses as the taut atmosphere and supernatural forces reign supreme, unaffected by logic, untouched by reason.

Natural landscapes and elements assimilate a mystical aura as wailing winds groan through the forest, a lugubrious menace held in each gnarled and twisted tree which bursts into view - these stylistic devices most effective when delineating the resurrection of the two vampires.

Asa's crypt features banging doors buffeted by the omnipresent wind, jangling the nearby pipes and swirling through the gossamer-coated archways which yield an unnerving religious subtext to the scene. A ferocious bat screeches through the crypt, cutting Dr. Kruvajan - his blood trickling onto Asa's inanimate corpse - spiders scuttle away as the mask is removed to reveal her pock-marked features, her dark, eyeless sockets filling up as the orbs open to reveal a malevolent stare as thunder and lightning rage outside.

Javutich's resurrection is even more impressive - seen through the eyes of a little girl, already frightened by the branches which seem to reach out and grab her as she reaches the apparent sanctuary of a cowshed opposite the cemetery. As Asa implores Javutich "to rise" the camera prowls through the shed window to stare at the vampire's grave. At first nothing. All is still. Then, gradually, mist swirls around the cemetery and the earth begins to heave, eventually erupting as thunder crackles overhead and a bony hand claws at the soil, as the masked figure of Javutich

finally emerges. The vampire stumbles through the graveyard, struggling to remove the mask, before finally succeeding and marching ominously forward.

Having barely survived this encounter, the girl then witnesses one of the film's most celebrated scenes as a jet-black coach and horses, floats eerily through the forest, gliding upon a carpet of mist in sepulchral slow motion before stopping abruptly. Javutich stands beside the coach beckoning Dr. Kruvajan to enter it as wave upon wave of surging mist rolls forward to engulf the doctor.

Bava's artful handling of suspense/supernatural scenes is also to the fore as Javutich materialises from out of a dark passage like a ghostly spirit, to terrorise the startled Constantine. The ultimate dilemma is then posed during the film's final stages as Andrej finds himself back in the crypt with both Asa and Katia, but which one is which? The beguiling "charms" of Asa; "Lose yourself deep into my eyes. Don't you feel the joy and the beauty of hating, look!", add to the ambiguity. Fortunately, Andrej manages to save Katia and send Asa to her deserved fate on the flame-lapped stake again as the film's circular conclusion unfurls.

Steele's bravura performance in the dual roles of Asa And Katia, continually milking the inherent ambiguity of the situation for all its worth, enables the deception to be effectively perpetrated throughout the film's entirety. Even Katia's initial appearance - clad in black and silhouetted alongside a giant black dog is imposing - at once intimating her "affinity" with Asa, a disturbing thought. Katia's own melancholy character, often content to play plaintive piano pieces, suggests her rather morbid disposition.

In complete contrast, the "undead" Asa appears passionate, emotional and most paradoxically of all - full of life! She implores Kruvajan to come to her as his blood rejuvenates her, offering the promise of eternal life. "You will be dead to man, but you will be alive in death."

Much has been made of the psychosexual subtext prevalent here - that male insecurity produces a scenario that claims a woman's sexuality cannot be eliminated, it will always appear in a myriad of different guises if necessary. I would rather suggest however, that Bava's true intentions are indicated by the salient themes combining all manner of gothic regalia, with heightened tension and by the presence of folklore and superstition, which informs both this film and others in his *oeuvre* - *Curse of the Dead* (1966) and *Baron Blood* (1972) to name but two.

True, women's sexuality is called into question, whilst the express ecclesiastical belief that only the cross, (which repeatedly repels the vampires and burns their flesh), can defeat the demons, is apparently given credence here - the idea of dual sexuality is simply too superficial. There is no middle ground in this world. Asa is inherently evil, Katia is an almost ethereal figure. The real truth, as in many areas of life, lies somewhere between the two.

Of more importance than this, the tone, the look, the atmosphere of Bava's picture, launched a thousand (almost entirely) poorer imitations, giving inspiration to the likes of Freda, Margheriti, Argento and Avati, whilst the presence of Steele, equally influenced the casting of countless other period costume horror films.

By deriving inspiration from Gogol's source novel, the idea of ancient folklore and superstitions - as mentioned, a recurring theme in Bava's earlier work, the director was able to set his assorted horrors and tensions against a background of insular, remote communities, at once loyal to one another, but also highly susceptible to any outside influences, especially of an avowedly supernatural kind.

There is, in fact, a lot of dynamism here from the heroic struggle between the forces of good and evil and tales of vampirism, to the extensive use of gothic accoutrements and the symbolic "damsel in distress" motif. The day of Asa's resurrection - St. George's Day or "Black Sunday", also marks the feast of St. George - 200 years after the witch's death. It is the frail, elderly Prince Vajda, weak from terror, who fears the supernatural as much as anyone. "I'm not tired, my spirit is", he laments as one can almost feel the malevolent presence of Asa - "How cold it is. A chill seems to come out the fireplace that penetrates my bones" he complains.

The labyrinth passageways which sprawl beneath the Prince's house are a mirror of the confused dreams and "realities" which punctuate his frightened mind - afraid not of the natural, but the supernatural and seemingly racked by superstition.

Black Sunday drew fulsome praise from critics; "chilling moments of both beauty and terror" eulogised one; "macabre and strikingly atmospheric" commented another, whilst Bava himself has given an insight into both the success and behind the scenes humour of the film itself. His comment on Steele that; "she was somewhat irrational, afraid of Italians" is illuminating, continuing jovially that; "One day she refused to come to the set because somebody told her I was using a special film stock that made people appear naked! I assured her that, if I had this kind of film, I'd have made millions long ago!"

On the reason for the films sumptuous look he ventured; "It was the only one of my films which was really well done, filmed entirely with a dolly which, because of the time and money involved, is seldom used (in Italian productions) anymore. I did the photography myself, I was very fast. The photography in a horror film is seventy per cent of its effectiveness, it creates all the atmosphere."

Well, it certainly is hard to deny, *Black Sunday* has atmosphere in spades, as well as a lush, vibrant texture to it which as yet, remains unequalled in the long history of the Italian gothic cinema.

Black, Andy, 1993, Mask of Satan, pp.4-6, *Necronomicon 3 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

Curse of the Dead

It's time to unearth one of Mario Bava's most neglected gothic classics, as the secular world collides with ancient superstition and ignorance.

I will start with a confession. I am a huge Mario Bava fan. For me no one can quite equal his skill for overcoming dilatory plots by imbruing each individual film with a unique sense of *style* and *mood*. His camera will fix upon the most prosaic of images and yet through lighting and dramatic movement, produce a masterpiece of cinema. To Bava, the camera is most definitely a tool, to be wielded as extravagantly or as delicately as an artist would a brush, only *his* canvas is the celluloid world of magic, mystery and suspense. His colours, the diverse nuances and emotions within the human soul.

His influence upon the whole of the Italian horror giallo cinema, from the exuberant bedazzlement of Argento to the subtle *frisson* produced by Avati, is undeniable, even extending across the water to such bewilderingly popular fodder as *Friday the 13th* (1980) - remember the "speared" lovers were also around in Bava's *Bay of Blood* (1972).

Well now that I've nailed my colours to the mast so to speak, one thing I can guarantee is that you will see plenty of the man in future issues of *Necronomicon*! Anyway, enough of the eulogising and on with the film. Bava's little-discussed *Curse of the Dead* represents him at his most deliciously gothic best. Like the later *Baron Blood* (1976), *Curse* charts the intrusion of secular rationale into a hitherto closeted village community, riddled with "superstition and ignorance".

The film starts with the disquieting image of a woman falling from a window, to become impaled on the spiked railings below, accompanied by a child's cry/laugh. The voice of reason as embodied in Dr. Eswai (Giacomo Rossi-Stuart), is then summoned to perform an autopsy on the victim by a police Inspector Kruger (Piero Lulli), drafted in on the case from a neighbouring town.

For some unaccountable reason, Eswai then discovers a coin placed on the victim's heart and delves deeper into the mysterious villa Graps - "when a pace is as bad as this it's been cursed" he is warned. It transpires that a number of violent deaths have plagued the village recently. Eswai also finds a note from the dead woman indicating she had believed there to be a "ring of murder" operating in the community and that she feared she would be next.

Armed with this cautionary information, Eswai, with the help of Marcia - (giallo favourite Erica Blanc), then discovers that the ghostly apparition of a young girl, Melissa (Valerio Valeri), is the precursor to each victim's death. Further investigations reveal Melissa to have been the victim of some local village revelry years before when she was trampled by horses, whilst running after a ball - the inebriated locals oblivious to the tragedy until her eventual death - signalled from the bell tower whose admonishing peals reverberated as if playing a requiem for the moribund child lying prone there.

Eswai also learns that Melissa is the offspring of the arcane Baroness Graps (Gianna Vivaldi), mistress of the "cursed" villa Graps, and who has been using her own spiritualist powers through the body of Melissa, as a conduit to gain her own vicarious revenge upon those she deems responsible for her daughter's death.

It is the continual deceit and suspicion of the isolated populace which Eswai discovers most difficult to surmount. Even the doctor's first appearance, as he enters the local public house, is indicative of the later indifference he will face as he is met by uniform silence and hostile stares by the regulars. The villagers are also appalled by his plans to perform an autopsy, regarding it as heresy and "against nature", later attacking him in the street for "profaning dead bodies".

Besides the hindrance from the villagers, Eswai also has to challenge the resident witch, Ruth (Fabienne Dali), whose own incantations and medieval potions are taken in preference to the modern cures offered by the doctor. As such, he finds the inn-keeper's ailing daughter being drained of blood by the witch's supposedly remedial leech-line.

Permeating these intransigent feelings of mistrust and superstition are Bava's vast array of stylistic devices which lend a considerable atmospheric charge to the proceedings. The village itself is clearly established as an uninviting place during the opening scenes when coffin is carried through the narrow streets. Low angled shots of towering granite structures, together with a spartan landscape save for the twisted branches of decaying trees, paint a barren picture with Eswai's horse-drawn carriage speedily vacating the area as if in sympathy with the frightened coachman from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

Symbolically, Eswai's initial scalpel incision during the autopsy heralds the first of Bava's hallucinatory dream images - a rapidly zooming camera spiralling around a graveyard, then revealed to be a point-of-view shot from a child - Melissa, playing on a swing.

An incandescent light then bathes the night landscape as there ghostly face of Melissa materialises at a window, all under the frightened gaze of the inn-keeper's daughter. The intensity increases as we zoom into Melissa's face before the entranced victim impales herself on a candelabra spike - all the while watched by Melissa's vengeful stare.

Bava later heightens the tension as the wind howls fiercely through the churchyard and into the funeral parlour - a child's ball bouncing over the body that is laid to rest there, only for child-like laughter to pierce the quiet as the funeral shroud ominously drops to the floor. Bells toll for no apparent reason, mysterious lights shine in the cemetery where Eswai also finds the body of the murdered Inspector Kruger, and ethereal mist cloaks the village, sweeping through the streets with swirling menace.

It is the villa Graps however, that Bava really begins to adeptly turn the screw, throwing in further confusion with which to confound Eswai and the petrified Monica. There are repeated shots of the villa's spiral staircase, its twisting, mazy contortions mirroring the labyrinth-like mystery, which is gradually unfolding before our eyes, whilst our glimpses of the ubiquitous Baroness are only from behind ornamented baroque panelling and the profusion of cobwebbed interiors that dominate.

A close-up of a painting in a secret room establishes the maternal relationship between the Baroness and Melissa, whilst shots of Eswai chasing after Monica are gradually revealed to be continually "looping" sequences until Eswai finally catches the figure in front only for it to be uncovered as himself.

The denouement sees Monica flee - in horror at learning that she too is also the daughter of the Baroness, while Melissa's features fade into the Baroness staring at a mirror - a judicious shot to provide ample comment on the Baroness and her vile use of Melissa as an instrument of retribution. As the embryonic stirrings of childhood, together with oedipal angst, are evoked by a weird collection of dolls cascading to the floor, Monica discovers her "own" grave. Almost simultaneously, Ruth vents her own homicidal rage upon the Baroness, who she kills in order to avenge the earlier death of her lover, Karl - another to die previously at the hands of Melissa, but by the mind and wishes of the Baroness.

Whilst the ending does rather peter out after the accelerating tension of the film's mystery is gradually unraveled. Bava does succeed in infusing the film with enough visual flair to counter any lack of narrative cohesion, which is never one of his, or Italian cinema's most celebrated attributes, in the final analysis.

Curse of the Dead has been described as Bava's "last great gothic", which is probably a fair assessment, although there are flourishes of his undoubted talent in the later films, *Hatchet for the Honeymoon* (1970), *Bay of Blood* (1971) and *Baron Blood* (1972). Bava's work after this has often been criticised for a lazy reliance on the zoom lens a la a certain Mr. Jess Franco, but fortunately not enough to detract from the excellent visual *frissons* he demonstrates here, along with his enviable ability to merge gothic regalia successfully with authentic scenes of enhanced tension.

Interestingly enough, critic Ernest Harris sought to compare Bava's film with Carl Dreyer's seminal *Vampyr* (1932) - it does encapsulate a similar dream-like quality, whilst also noting Bava's use of an evil little girl which prefigures by 2 years, that of "Toby Dammit" as part of Federico Fellini's

anthology piece for *Spirits of the Dead* (1968), alongside contributions from Roger Vadim and Louis Malle

It appears that maestro Bava can inspire the very best of them!

Black, Andy, 1993, *Curse of the Dead*, pp.4-6, *Necronomicon 3 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

El Conde Drácula

“Now for the first time, we retell Bram Stoker’s Dracula exactly as he wrote it.”

An impressive claim, but when the film in question is Jess Franco’s, you know what to expect from the Spanish maestro!

The mercurial Spanish director has repeatedly delved into the Dracula mythology to supplement his diverse oeuvre with titles such as *Dracula - Prisoner of Frankenstein* (1972) and *Daughter of Dracula* (1972), springing most readily to mind, but *El Conde Drácula* (1970), marked his avowed intent to finally furnish Christopher Lee with the definitive Dracula role, in physical appearance, characterisation and script.

This admirable purpose however, flounders with the zoom-inducing financial constraints of a shoestring budget and an array of no less than five writers, each of whose creative input is considerably diluted as a result. Claims of literary accuracy prove spurious as one of Stoker’s main protagonists, Arthur Holmwood, is omitted from the film entirely, whilst Franco’s occasional stylistic flourishes are tarnished by repeated shots of Renfield (Klaus Kinski), gazing from his asylum cell window towards the Count’s lair opposite.

It’s not all doom and gloom though, because Franco’s film does follow the source novel quite closely in other respects, and, true to his word, does at least portray the Count as an ageing, white-haired and moustached figure to ensure physical authenticity. Where *El Conde Drácula* does sometimes fail is in its stilted dialogue and plodding pacing - there are few dynamic sequences in the film, giving Lee’s arch vampire little to do, a disappointing waste of his authoritative demeanour and commanding screen presence.

It is Lee, ably supported by his egregious servant, Renfield, who give the film’s best performances. True to the spirit of the novel, Lee does begin the film as an archaic figure, only to appear progressively younger with each victim’s blood providing him with the necessary “elixir of youth.”

Dracula’s all important first appearance on screen is well handled by Franco as Lee’s suitable mysterious, shadowed coachman floats into view to pick up the frightened Harker (Frederick Williams). This then the cue for the “children of the night” to get carried away slightly as the wolves howl, voices groan, birds shriek and the audience cringe! Upon entering Castle Dracula, Harker is cordially welcomed by the Count, but not the austere stone rooms and cold castle walls whose spartan milieu is at odds with the warming fires which glow in Stoker’s source novel.

Franco’s annoying habit of instantly zooming into faces whenever the words “Count Dracula” are uttered, is rather more effectively employed here as a close-up of Lee ushers in the Count’s most memorable speech. “The shadows of my past remain here. We are the second Magyars, we have a right to remain proud, for in us flows the blood of many brave races, the blood of Attila is in these veins. To us was entrusted for centuries, the guardian of our lands. The Lombard, the Bulgar, the Turk poured their thousands against our frontiers - we drove them back. The Dracula’s have ever been the hearts blood, the brains, the sword of our people. One of our race crossed the Danube and destroyed the Turkish host. Though sometimes beaten back, he came again and again against the enemy until at the end, he came alone from the bloody field for he alone could triumph. This was a Dracula indeed. But now the wind blows coldly through the broken battlements. But although this is my home I must move on.”

Having thus powerfully established Dracula’s heroic ancestry, the action then switches to Van Helsing’s (Herbert Lom), clinic in London, where a now vampirised Harker awakes. Even within the convalescent environment here, the Count’s insidious influence penetrates as the tortured soul of Renfield awaits his master’s arrival with anticipation and revulsion - a truly tormented figure who appears reconciled to his unholy fate.

In a moment of rare horror, Mina (Maria Rohm) then enters Lucy's (Soledad Miranda) bedroom, only to find the Count engorging himself on his victim, his blood smeared face seemingly mocking the sanctity of the life which he proves so adept at stealing.

Dracula's final confrontation with Van Helsing eschews this visceral approach in favour of a momentarily ideological battle as the scientist explains that; "All my life I've studied the Black Arts. It's strange to finally confront the Prince of Darkness himself", with Dracula countering with; "You've learn't much. You can do *nothing*." Brandishing a cross saves Van Helsing from his doom, but equally, enables the Count to escape, whereupon he is chased back to his ancestral lair where Gregorian chants herald the appearance of a torch-lit procession of locals who ambush the vampire's entourage - his coffin now engulfed in flames and tipped over the castle battlements to perish below.

"Whilst the Count lives, time and space have little meaning", besides being Van Helsing's profound comment here, also indicates to us the real failure of Franco's film. While the picture does successfully establish the Count's regal lineage, it singularly fails to portray the Count's inner misery - that he is condemned to live for eternity - a lonely, unloved "master" for whom not even death can provide a merciful release. The motivations for his actions are left undeveloped, unexplained. He is simply required by Franco to exist, with the unenviable result of being forced almost to act as if in a vacuum, receiving little backing from the supporting cast.

Perhaps if Franco had been able to sustain a more supernatural, dream-like atmosphere then the film would have succeeded. Instead, there is only an infrequent "suspension of disbelief" on the audiences part and precious little in the way of any pathos-inducing moments to ponder over. Only isolated scenes carry any resonance; of Lucy's black-clad figure beckoning to a child before then leading her away from an ornate graveyard and off into the distant woods - to presumably meet her doom. Or, the stuffed animals who threaten to become *animate* and who "screams" signal Dracula's dramatic appearance in one scene. These moments aside, *El Conde Drácula* simply cannot overcome the paucity of its script and budget; "radiating cheapness" as one critic commented upon the film's initial release, which is a major disappointment given the potential quality of the cast that Franco succeeded in assembling here.

Who knows? If Franco *had* been allowed more time and more money, then maybe *El Conde Drácula* could have lived up to its ambitious claims as being *the* authentic Dracula film - as it stands, the film remains the perfect example of Franco's enigmatic filmmaking.

Black, Andy, 1993, *El Conde Drácula*, pp.28-29, *Necronomicon 2 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

Lèvres De Sang

With the inspiration of poet Corbière, artists Druillet and Gaza, together with the work of surrealist painter Max Ernst, Jean Rollin - founder of the sex vampire film, trail blazes his own particular brand of horror art across the screen...

If our own Ken Russell is considered the 'wild child' amongst British filmmakers, then France's Jean Rollin is very much the *enfant terrible* as far as his own contemporaries are concerned. Regarded with disdain in his own country, Rollin is paradoxically, much revered across Europe, his films held in high esteem and the man himself is often elevated to the rank of *auteur*.

Rollin's own initiation into the horror genre could hardly have been more unexpected, having been first influenced by the the relatively melancholic writings of 19th century poet Tristan Corbière, and later by artist friends, Druillet and Gaza, (who have also supplied Rollin with some of the stunning posters for his films).

Often duplicating entire surrealist paintings in his work, and citing Max Ernst as a foremost visual influence in his films, Rollin has very much made the unique sub genre - the sex vampire film, his own *Lèvres De Sang*, quite literally, *Lips of Blood*, continues Rollin's preoccupation with the more erotic nuances inherent within the sanguinary vampire motif.

The perfunctory plot features a young man (Jean-Loup Philippe) - who also co-authored the script, experiencing a succession of visions/memories - the ambiguity is deliberate, dominated by an old castle and ethereal woman, clad in white, (Annie Belle credited as Annie Briand). His total fascination with her becomes apparent as she leads him out from a cinema to the Montmartre cemetery where he releases a cluster of female vampires from their coffins.

Eventually, he finds his way back to a dark dungeon where his family are encircling a coffin. His mother orders him to destroy the formerly beautiful girl buried within, but his perverse love rears its head and he chooses instead to join with Briand - who, it transpires, is his sister - entombed by their mother for vampirising their father.

Rollin, as is indicative of his style, relegates basic plot mechanics to a purely negligible level, instead, favouring the painterly images and visual bravura that so symbolises his films. Thus, we hear a child's ghostly voice, the howling wind before glimpsing a rugged mountainside in one of Philippe's early visions. Seemingly unconnected images float in and out of the film before Rollin's surrealist *mise en scene* shimmers into view. Most impressive of all is the flash of lightning which accompanies the vampires awakening from their tombs, momentarily silhouetted, moving in captivating slow motion towards their prey.

Light and shadows collide as Rollin pursues his expressionist night photography - in one instance a girl lays strewn across a waterfall, whilst elsewhere, beaming flashlights suffuse the night air, the signal for a vast array of water fountains to gush forth spirals of cascading liquid. Even the obligatory vampire staking at the climax is performed against the inventive backdrop of ancient ruins and monoliths - the final image being that of a coffin washed away to sea.

This rather enigmatic finale was mirrored by *Lèvres* disappointing box office performance. Considered *too* restrained by both the horror and hardcore audiences that Rollin hoped to attract, the film has been termed a "macabre poem" with Briand's virginal gown symbolic of Freudian references, though these remain only fleeting, never being fully explored.

With its striking locations and washed out colours, *Lèvres* remains an elegiac period piece, not quite able to achieve David Pirie's claims of Rollin's work being "crammed with visual extravagance", and certainly failing to capture the lyrical beauty, not forgetting the strident soundtrack to his earlier *Frisson*.

If anything, Rollin's delicate, artistic approach towards making horror films is to be applauded but it often leaves him open to the accusation that he is foregoing any attempts at cultivating tangible

excitement and audience empathy for the characters by favouring such a unique brand of filmmaking.

To be fair, Rollin has attempted to provide a more powerful, visceral charge to his films with *Les Raisins de la Mort* (1978) and *La Morte Vivante* (1982), though both are only partially successful, eschewing many of his more visionary ideals in favour of blood and gore.

After a brief hiatus, the word is that Rollin is once again ready to return to the horror genre which is encouraging, as like them or loathe them, his films are always entirely individual and unique, exhibiting their own distinctive flair - qualities not always readily prevalent in horror cinema today.

Black, Andy, 1993, *Lèvres De Sang*, pp.21, *Necronomicon 1 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

Le Frisson Des Vampires

Saturated colours, midnight rituals and nubile vampire girls baring their fangs and everything else, can only mean one thing - yes, Jean Rollin is back again!

Shades of Don Sharp's *Kiss off the Vampire* (1962), as a couple on their honeymoon, (Sandra Julien) and Jean-Marie Durand) visit a relative's medieval castle to be informed that the hosts are now dead. This revelation is followed by the appearance of a pair of voluptuous female vampires, who seemingly adorn the castle like baroque ornaments, and a couple of pontificating, kaftan-wearing hippie vampires - Michael Delahaye and Jacques Robiolles, (who later went on to become a filmmaker too).

After much profound comment and lengthy nocturnal graveyard ceremonies, Durand fails in his attempts at saving his wife from the mark of vampirism as she expires during a "sun-kissed" finale. Though last issues *Lèvres De Sang* is probably Rollins most critically acclaimed picture, *Frisson* is his best known, thanks to its unusually wide (for Rollin!) European and US distribution, and is in many respects, his most accessible vampire film.

Rollin's usual preoccupation with saturated colour schemes, lengthy dolly shots, eerie architecture and lush, sandy beaches are all present, but are also helped along with some stunning imagery and a breathtaking guitar score as notes scream and wail before giving way to chugging chords and an infuriatingly infectious riff!

Genre critic David Pirie has termed Rollin the "Claude Lelouch" of the vampire cinema - a director overdoing on image over content and *Frisson* is no exception. A suitable imposing graveyard dominates the picture, headstones jutting through the mist-enshrouded atmosphere, with smoke billowing across the illuminated night sky. If you've ever watched Alice Cooper's *Welcome to my Nightmare* concert video, you" know where the "gore-rocker" got his ideas from!

Low angled shots show the castle towering skywards whilst female vampires cradle giant candelabras - the light shimmering through the gloom as weird, bird-like whoops punctuate the night air. Towards the end of the film, the graveyard plays host to a succession of other painterly images, as a pigeon bleeds to death on a gravestone, before the final blood ceremony takes place in the churchyard as red and blue lights provide an eerie glow.

Rollin's roving camera also caresses the interior settings of the castle, its bizarre embellishments, including a skull-head ornament on the mantelpiece, skull candleholders adorning the walls and to complete the skeletal influence - a "decorative" skull lies submerged in a fish tank!

Elsewhere, contorting branches twist around the master bedroom, books throw themselves off library shelves, whilst vampire girls indulge in lesbian foreplay, ravishing each other atop a fur-lined bed. Besides these diversely dislocating images, where else but in a Rollin film would a grandfather clock's midnight chimes, herald the dramatic entrance from within it, of a gorgeous vampire (Dominique), or her equally startling appearance later on - signalled by a crack of thunder as she oozes forth from behind some gigantic drapes - complete with black cloak and silver spikes protruding from her nipples!

As if to reinforce the theatricality of the proceedings, she then pounces on a victim, draining their blood in a choreographed attack, resembling a perverse blood ballet.

The final scenes show Julien vampirised on a bleak beach locale, despite the attempts of Durand to save her. Instead, he has to watch helplessly as Julien becomes the "filling" in a deadly vampire sandwich - one bite is enough, but the frenzied attack, accompanied by a soaring guitar, sees all three perish in a dual death/orgasm - their twitching bodies disintegrating in the rapidly rising sun.

Rollin's eye for a picturesque scene is sometimes hampered by his ear for a purportedly "profound" comment or two from his "enlightened", bloodsuckers who continually debate the existential predicament of the vampire. Thus; "The dead are present with us, and that is not

fanaticism. Those who don't know us accuse us of sacrilege and blasphemy. Our time is devoted to pursuing the memory of eternal darkness."

Although they "despise their situation", these angst-ridden vampires explain that; "It is a great honour. A very important privilege. You couldn't escape your destiny. Cultured people often come to us. You can't elude your destiny." So we don't just have vampires here, but bourgeois vampires - even worse!

With much of Rollin's work, it is better to feast your eyes upon the sumptuous visuals rather than stop to ponder the finer intricacies of vampire life. Instead, it is sufficient to heed the warning from one female character that; "This malediction which is ours, must not be passed onto others", concluding her poignant statement on vampirism by explaining the creature's "everlasting eternity, and pursued for ever, their fatal destiny." For Rollin's vampires here, the real horror is that their lives will never end, instead condemned to scratching out a miserable existence as they continue their living "death".

Black, Andy, 1993, *Le Frisson Des Vampires*, pp.35-36, *Necronomicon 2 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

Nekromantik 2

Horror art or horror porn? Original and visionary or sick and demented? Whatever your view, German director Jörg Buttgereit has certainly produced a thought-provoking ode to death with Nekromantik 2.

The precocious filmmaking talent of young German director Jörg Buttgereit is no ordinary one, and his most recent feature film, *Nekromantik 2* (1991) is no ordinary film. His previous works such as the original *Nekromantik* (1987) and *Der Todesking: The Death King* (1990), illustrate a deeply personal approach to living and even more so, to dying. Grotesque scenes of gore and violence are often merely sporadic intrusions into a more prosaic, mundane view of “routine” life and are rendered all the more disturbing for that. These films cannot merely be dismissed as “kitchen sink” dramas however, instead they actively challenge the viewer to sympathise with the characters, to understand their actions no matter how violent or extreme they may be and then asking each of us to question our own morality.

Buttgereit’s willingness to tackle taboo subjects such as necrophilia stems not from a simplistic desire to nauseate, but rather to attempt to unravel such unwholesome pursuits, as one critic observed of the films, they are; “insinuating, almost subtle films, not the silly bloodbaths of p[opular imagination.” If anything, the ultimate goal of *Nekromantik 2* is glimpsed in the film’s opening quotation from serial killer Theodore R. Bundy who proclaimed; “i wanted to master life and death.”

Society’s continual fascination with life and death, birth and rebirth, is startlingly evoked in the opening black and white sequence (replayed from *Nekromantik*), where a man simultaneously stabs himself in the stomach whilst also in the act of masturbating. His eventual ejaculation is of blood - a macabre metaphor alluding to the close proximity of sex with death, that is the act of procreation producing life and automatically to follow later, death.

Death is only the beginning for Monika (Monika M) here as she exhumes her dead lover from the grave to resume their “relationship”, the physical aspect helped if anything, by the corpses state of *rigor mortis* (!), but not by the petrifying mess he eventually becomes. Without blinking an eye, Monika calmly dismembers the body and throws it out with the rubbish in plastic bags, saving only the head and that *most* personal part, which ends up wrapped in clingfilm in her fridge - frozen meat indeed!

With tongue firmly in (rotting) cheek, Buttgereit then has Monika replace her lost love with a new man - his profession involving doing voice-overs for porn films... Once he finally realises that Monika’s lift doesn’t quite reach the top floor, it’s all too late as she strings him up, before later punctuating their lovemaking with the ultimate “coitus interruptus” as she saws off his head and replaces it with the coveted head from her dead lover to continue the sex act.

Buttgereit’s self-confessed eschewal of filmic etiquette - “I show what I feel is necessary” makes for a disturbing journey into the dark obsessions of the human psyche. Whilst the body in the bag scene betrays one of his main influences, the work of Abel Ferrera (whose *Angel of Vengeance* (1981) includes a similar scene), the primary drive behind *Nekromantik 2* is Buttgereit’s own highly individual style.

Time and again formulaic images are presented as bizarre and confrontational, rather than merely stilted compositions. The opening masturbation sequence may elicit sensual excitement in a porn film, but the grotesquely rhythmical knife-thrusts here provide a far more unnerving aspect to the whole scene.

Likewise, the sight of Monika in a slinky dress, stockings and high heels, wearing garish red nail polish, conjures up visions of a *femme fatale* - a fantasy which soon evaporates with the thud of shovel on earth, soil on timber, as she unearths her lover’s corpse in an act of grisly defilement.

When she’s not busy pondering over her own existential deliberations, the incongruity of Monika’s all-conquering “love” for her boyfriend, is readily to the fore. Thus, she plants a smouldering kiss

on the corpse's decaying head, jovial music accompanies her one-sided "lovemaking" bouts, whilst wilting flowers indicate the all-too petrifying presence of the corpse, now laid out as if in state, on a table in her flat.

The grim ritual of dismembering the body, becomes almost routine as Monika sets systematically about her work - complete with rubber gloves, as if all in a day's work. It is as if everything has become bland and regularised in a drab and dreary society. Everything we fantasise over, sensualise over, fetishise over, is reduced to a prosaic, everyday level, no better exemplified than in Monika's new boyfriend, whose lifeless attempts at sexual relations are a legacy of his own voyeuristic, passive "voiceover" work on the porn films he watches and seemingly drain him of genuine emotions. He is as remote and distanced from Monika as he is from the girls on the screen he gazes at during his working day. Intimacy and love are out - he is more a spectator than a participant in the now mechanised act of "love".

Buttgereit's penchant for abstract symbolism also rears its head as a lizard crawls free from under the grave Monika is busy unearthing, only to be later attacked by an insect as it rolls over in slow motion. Monika also watches an art film with her new boyfriend where naked men are shown eating row upon row of hard boiled eggs - the ending of life perhaps?

Later, they go to the zoo where life, if not ended, is certainly held captive. It is as if the quality of life, for animals and humans, is in some way diluted. Fragmented like Monika's fragile mental state, which fluctuates from the happiness she experiences on a fairground ride to the visions of her lover's decaying features which continually permeate her thoughts.

In a similar way, lurid fantasies/nightmares pervade the film as a faintly Freudian image appears of Monika singing, a pianist pounding the keys with venom whilst a skull floats and a corpse revolves against a nebulous background. Monika's boyfriend then dreams of being buried up to his neck in grass as a virginal white Monika kisses him, before placing a cardboard box over his head and burying her stiletto heels into it.

However gratuitous, however gruesome all of this may be, nothing compares with the sight of a group of female "necrophiles" engorging themselves on a diet of chocolates and obscene TV sensationalism, as they watch an explicit documentary on seal culling which features real-life atrocities as seals are eviscerated on camera. The sight of seals happily swimming and playing in the sea beforehand, makes the whole "spectacle" even more jolting and abhorrent. What we are seeing, in effect, is the hidden cruelty of "civilised" society being exposed, a veneer of respectability being peeled back as surely as the lacerated skin from the in this shockumentary.

Elsewhere, Buttgereit invests his own inimitable style upon the film by way of the historical signposts he imbues it with. Take the early sequence where a slow camera pan over an imposing whitewashed house evokes the spirit of the silent classic *Nosferatu* (1922) and ditto, the slowly prowling camera which peers through the shackled cemetery gates, the under cranking, hand-held camera similarly conjuring up a feeling of timelessness and the stylish *chiaroscuro* images of German Expressionism.

Although *Nekromantik 2* showcases a more professional gloss than the first film, it lacks that film's raw, visceral punch, whilst the slower, deliberate camera style, though an intended rebellion against the kinetic pop video, MTV style filming so much in vogue, it does also render some scenes as being rather too lengthy, with some plodding "pacing" to overcome.

On the plus side however, is most certainly a welcome departure from genre (and mainstream) constraints by attempting to provide a story told solely from a female's viewpoint. After all, it is Monika who is the film's main protagonist and although we appear to be witnessing her gradual descent into complete madness, it is still her who we feel the most affinity for - despite her decidedly homicidal, not to mention necrophiliac tendencies. Not content with mastering life and death, Monika also wants to conquer immortal love and who is to say that she won't succeed if a third film ever appears?

Black, Andy, 1993, *Nekromantik 2*, pp.50-52, *Necronomicon 2 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

Jörg Buttgerreit

Bloodied but unbowed by controversy and court cases, the seminal master of the horror art film (and that's official!), Jörg Buttgerreit dishes the dirt on his latest opus Schramm, which details the troubled mind of a serial killer. If you want an insight into the unique universe of sex and death, or, if you just want to know why he is the unlikely champion of the feminist movement, then read on...

Although your films such as Der Todesking: The Death King (1990) with its fatality and Corpse Fucking Art (1987) with its honesty have brought attention to you, your Nekromantik films seem to have brought you notoriety personally and a cause célèbre status for the films?

You mean no one watched the other two films! It's simply that it's a combination of sex and death I guess. That's the two main things you can get attention with. My kind of dealing with death is not very popular, but sex *is* very popular, so it's not big secret.

Your films concentrate on sex and death - it seems that the ethos of once you're born you're beginning to die is a central influence for you?

I can hardly think about doing a film without sex or death because it's such a main theme in your life and everyone is harping around about the kind of sex drive he has and he's buying mars bars because there's a good looking girl on the cover of an advertisement and stuff like that, so it's very obvious for me to deal with sex things because it's already in people's heads. And with the death theme, it's just my kind of thing I suppose! (laughing).

Nekromantik 2 opens with Ted Bundy's "I want to master life and death" quote - is this your filmic goal, to show the correlation between the two?

I think one explanation for dealing with the subject of death in a different way than others do, is that I can assume it's some kind of need to control something that you really can't control. You have this experience that if you deal with something that you're afraid of in the first place, then you're getting used to it, or a hold of it a bit more. You know it really doesn't work with the death theme but I think that's the drive behind it, going further and further and exploring what's going on there. That's the feeling I have with my kind of themes. It's a way of exploring things, to check out what's going on in all these fields and not just looking at these kind of supernatural, death-like themes which don't get you much further.

So it's real life horror and emotions reaching more of the audience?

For me it never was a question of I'm doing a horror movie or not, I just did it and I would say that they don't fit into the horror genre but it's okay by me because I like to watch horror films so it's no problem, but if I'm at film festivals and my work is playing together with horror films, then you can really see that it doesn't fit in. My films are too silent sometimes, there's not the build up of tension and exciting things. It's not built like that because I'm not very interested in these ordinary storytelling techniques, so that's why some people feel uneasy about the movies, because they see them in a different surrounding and then they really don't know what to do with them because sometimes it's not very entertaining anymore!

It's more in real time - you don't keep cutting to advance the action as per a "normal" film?

That depends what kind of effect you going for. In *Nekromantik 2* I really did that. In *Nekromantik* there's some parts which are nearly in real time - the time it would take to cut a corpse into pieces (not really!), but it's far too long to have a so called "entertaining" movie. In the new film we are going in the opposite way because that one is just happening in the head of the main actor and we were trying to put the way of thinking in the way we did the movie. So you're hopping from one thought to another and it's not logical storytelling anymore because sometimes you have an idea or your thinking about something and then your hopping to the next thing because that's reminding you of something and it's not very logical. It's logical in a way but only for your head because you have all the experience, so I'm curious to see if anyone will understand the new movie at all!

Some of the early scenes in Nekromantik 2 - hand-cranked shots and so forth, remind me of the German Expressionist period with the likes of Nosferatu and The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari. Abel Ferrera is usually cited as your main influence but did the earlier gothic films also strike a chord with you?

No, I don't think so. I have seen these films maybe ten years ago and I liked them but that was it. What I'm going for is a more realistic, documentary approach to my movies, that's a totally different angle. I think that the *Caligari* guys were going for a real artistic look and that's not what I'm looking for. I'm after a realistic look. Sometimes you know, I'm not aware of everything that I'm doing. I'm just doing it because I have a feeling that's it the right way to do it. Sometimes I'm finding out things when people are telling me about my movies because it's very difficult for me to watch the movies because I'm kind of blind to them. I only see very strange things, I don't see the very obvious things. I see things people don't see. I see behind the camera but not what's going on in the film on screen as I've seen all these parts a hundred times and then it's no big secret anymore for me, so I don't believe my films!

You seem to find another layer in your films as although you've been vilified for the film's you've made, there's a certain refreshing strain in them. In Nekromantik 2 you expose the hidden cruelty in society in the gruesome seal killing documentary, the exploitation in society via the prosaic "voice-over" sequence on the porn film set and also have a woman (Monika M) as the focal point for telling the story?

It's just the opposite way I guess. The main idea behind *Nekromantik 2* was this interview with a necrophile woman called Carol Greenly I read in a book called *Apocalypse Culture* and the idea was to have this different kind of angle, because as you've already said, normally in so-called horror films, women are there to be raped or killed and this time it's the opposite way. My experience is that mostly women like the second movie more than men do. Men always prefer the first one and I also think that the ending of the second part is not very easy for some male people who think they know how to deal with women, who has to lie on top (!) etc - everything that's said in the movie, so the male audience is feeling uneasy that a woman is getting control and especially in the situation where the male character is letting himself go for the first time, so it's a very strange thing. I didn't really realise that aspect when we wrote it and then shot it. A journalist from Hamburg used to tell me that it was a very strange thing to do it that way and I was thinking about it later and thought maybe you're right! I got this invitation for the film in Austria where it was shown at a women's film festival - only women were allowed to attend, and it went down really well. My conclusion was maybe this guy was right, maybe it is a feminist movie!

Are these themes present in your new film, Schramm? What's the film about and what are you trying to achieve?

It's hard to say what it's actually about! The idea of getting the way you think into the movie because the main actor, who is a kind of serial killer - you don't see much in the movie but you know that he is a serial killer. He is dying after the first five minutes from a stupid accident he has and then you have the whole cliché of when you are dying you see your whole life flashing before your eyes. You see these important things to him from a period of time he has in his head and if you puzzle everything together you might have the story of someone who is a serial killer, who is able to deal with the effect that he has killed some people in a very ordinary way - that's a theme I always have in my movies, having to live with that fact and deal with it - that's what's always interesting to me. There's a woman next door, a prostitute played by Monika M and she is often asking him to do her favours like driving her to customers she may be afraid of and he's very obviously in love with her and so for him, it's very strange and for the audience how he deals with her because the audience knows what he has done to other men and women, but the women part is more important in the movie because that's the most ordinary thing that happens in the world - that women are mostly getting killed by male serial killers. So, you are uneasy because I hope you start to care about this woman and then you have this main serial killer character who you also hopefully care about and you have this uneasy feeling when both of them are together in one room. She's very drunk and then she's sleeping and he's sitting next to her, then you see what happens!

So you're trying to probe and introduce some characterisation which isn't always the case in movies?

Yeah. Maybe, but I really don't know what's happened with *Schramm* as we only did two or three kinds of test screenings, though only on video in rough cut without sound and those people were reacting the opposite way. One guy like a film businessman said it was impossible to do such a movie because nobody will understand it and we're not doing ourselves any good. With this kind of movie, because we can't earn money with it (laughing). Then we had these guys who were doing the music for the film and they were saying it was obvious what was going on, it's very easy, it's the right way with the right amount of violence and cruelty, but not too much. The guy doing the music said for the first time it has the right amount of gore in it, not so overdone which was kind of funny, so I'm really not sure what is going to happen because I showed it to a few people and everybody was telling me totally different things so I didn't change anything! But that's the normal way with my movies. People react in totally different ways, they are telling me that the movie is wonderful and they are telling me that the movie is crap, but you don't have much in the middle, but that's ok!

*Serial killer films are very much in vogue these days with titles such as *Silence of the Lambs* and *Man Bites Dog* - is *Schramm* a conscious attempt to reach a more mainstream audience without compromising your principles?*

We will see! For the mainstream audience it is too gross I guess because there are some scenes in it which can't be done in a normal movie and the whole approach is different and the whole feeling of watching the movie is different. *Silence of the Lambs* after all, is an entertainment movie with tension built up. It's a good movie, it's very well done and it's for entertainment. With *Schramm*, it's not the same - you can't get as many people interested in it.

**Schramm* is a more thought-provoking film for the audience to ponder their own reactions and emotional responses to the actions then?*

Yes, like I always do. I could imagine that many people will compare it to *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986), so we were aware of that fact when we wrote the story and not to have anything in it that is like *Henry* because I really liked it but it's also a very ordinary storytelling of all these things so there was no need for us to do that again and I think that's the reason why we did this kind of strange storytelling - actually inspired by some French movies and not *Henry*! That's always the funny thing I guess because I'm always getting inspiration from totally different movies - they don't have to be ones from the field I'm working in.

One of our own "quality" newspapers referred to your oeuvre as being "insinuating, almost subtle." It's not something that people tend to associate you with?

Yeah. That article was quite big and I was kind of happy with it, but sometimes you don't know the newspaper well and you don't quite get the importance of it. Everybody was telling me that's someone from *The Guardian*, but *The Guardian* was nothing special to me (laughing), so I'm happy with it and I think this guy is right! (laughing). I would prefer articles in smaller magazine however, who go deeper into the films. I prefer longer articles.

I thought the best aspect was that someone managed to get over the normal "knee-jerk" reaction to the gore?

That's happened in Germany too because recently we had a Fantasy Film Festival in Berlin where *Schramm* was invited but we didn't make it in time so they just did a newspaper portrait of me that was also going a bit further than anything else because that newspaper also did a portrait of me when *Nekromantik 2* came out, so they're going deeper into it because people know about it. It's certainly getting better now but sometimes I see these very bad articles which say he is a horror film maker and he likes to put blood in his movies and that's it.

Do you find it disturbing that Nekromantik 2 should have been seized by the German authorities?

Some of the censors think they are doing the right thing because they want to protect the children, so sometimes I feel very sorry for them because they try to do it the wrong way and they really do nothing. You have other people who want to become more famous from banning movies and get lots of votes from housewives concerned that their children shouldn't be able to see these horrible movies. Sometimes I think that these people who cry for more censorship have the right ideas but don't know how to deal with it and then they start to ban movies which is the most stupid thing to do. So, sometimes I feel kind of sorry for them and I'm not really angry about them.

Does the release of Neo-violence films such as Reservoir Dogs (1992), Bad Lieutenant (1992) and Man Bites Dog (1992) inspire you - do you think the boundaries of censorship are receding and so helping independent filmmakers such as yourself?

I think so but these kind of films are carefully filled with violence, they have reasons which is totally different to say a Fulci zombie movie. It's very easy to ban these kind of films in Germany because there isn't much behind it, but it's more dangerous to ban a film like *Reservoir Dogs* or *Nekromantik 2*, because it looks like we will get the movie released next year. They tried everything but we were always fighting back and we've already won one trial in Munich where a woman projectionist who used to screen the movie to people - she got the same treatment as me - accused of glorifying violence by showing it. But she is now free because of a twenty page testimony/thesis from a professor which argues that the film is art and not trash and explained the movie is about the decaying East German area. So, the censorship people are losing face as they've tried to ban a movie and then someone who is a professor in film is telling them well you don't know what this movie is about as you would tell off a little child. These censorship guys aren't used to this normally - a 20 page thesis stressing that this is an art movie - how dare you try to ban it! But it's taken two years now, so it's a long time with money lost and even if we get the film freed next year, then the whole censorship movement may have lost face but they can say well, the film wasn't on the market for two years and that really hurts the producers, so people have the fear of not getting movies released. In the end they will succeed even if we do get *Nekromantik 2* freed - but it's still a step in the right direction.

What future projects are you going to be working on?

Well, I'm not really sure because I've not really finished with *Schramm*, but I've just done a kind of cross-over storyline for a comic of *Nekromantik* and *Nekromantik 2*. A Finnish artist from Helsinki is painting the pages for it and sending me them at the moment, whilst someone from England is doing the text bubbles as the comic will be in English, to ensure maximum distribution. With my own films, I'm not sure what to do because we have ideas but we can't afford them with our kind of moviemaking. After a while you're not satisfied, that's the problem. I have a feeling that after *Schramm* we're really on the edge of what we can do with the kind of money that Jelinski is giving us, so I'm not sure what's going to be the next project. I have two or three. Different ideas, including one for *Nekromantik 3*. I have talked to a Canadian director at a Spanish film festival recently and he was telling me that the idea for the third part is very good and worth developing, but the problem is that we couldn't find anyone to put up the money, so we have to do it the same again and that's really eating me up. In a way it's satisfying because you have total control, but you have these stressing times during the shooting which is absolutely embarrassing if you don't have any money and only a certain amount of time. That's the thing I want to change. If not, I may just rest for a year, then do the same kind of film again.

Black, Andy, 1993, Jörg Buttgerreit, pp.11-14, *Necronomicon 3 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

Deep Red

At last, after a lengthy hiatus, Dario Argento's superior giallo, Deep Red, bursts back onto our screens courtesy of the enterprising Redemption Video label. If your palate is jaded from watching too many poor imitations, then why not watch the authentic frissons and stylised thrills of Argento's finest hour...

I start with an apology! What, yet another appraisal of the unique cinematic world of Dario Argento - well, yes! Definitive treatments of the maestro's oeuvre have already appeared in a variety of publications, from Todd French's *Deep Red* magazine piece and John Martin's authoritative feature in *Samhain*, to Maitland McDonagh's, *Broken Mirrors/Broken Minds: The Dark Dreams of Dario Argento*, plus David Prothero's detailed *Bloody Hell* feature, but what the heck - I think there's still certain nuances in Argento's work which deserve further exploration, so bear with me...

As the man himself has observed; "All the critics see is the surface of the water which we call the technique, the style... but he he doesn't go under the water's surface to discover what lies there... and there's a lot! It's deep...there's politics, there are symbols."

Hopefully, you're ready to embark upon this vast subterranean journey with me. I can only promise to offer some ideas and thoughts. With luck, we'll discover forgotten themes and uncover a multitude of mysteries in much the same way that the pivotal childhood frescos are revealed in *Deep Red* (1975) itself.

Deep Red's basic premise revolves around the "Godardian concern with the nature of illusion" which intrinsically proves to be of great value to the films sub Agatha Christie style murder/mystery plotting. Argento leans heavily on Michelangelo Antonioni's art house classic *Blow Up* (1966), for inspiration, utilising both that film's star - David Hemmings, and its bewildering comment on a "faceless" society.

In Antonioni's film, photographs prove deceptive, lacking substance which itself is used as a damning indictment on a colourless society. *Blow Up's* prophetic closing images are of people playing an imaginary game of tennis - life is just an illusion, an imaginary conceit could be the final message here. These *avant-garde* trappings which captivate Argento so much are reinforced in *Deep Red*, with the presence of scriptwriter Bernardino Zapponi whose previous credits included *Satyricon* (1970) and *Roma* (1972) for that veritable icon of Italian cinema, Federico Fellini.

Argento fills his film with framing devices, precognition motifs and most literally of all - mirrors, to emphasise the importance of illusion here. The fact that the central plot conceit is that we can see the murderer for a split second, playing as an almost subliminal image and which also involves a mirror, is of material importance here. To compliment this almost magical theme, Argento also provides us with an unlikely hero in Hemming's thoughtful and introspective, rather than suave and dashing character - his artistic temperament a deliberate attempt to identify him with the film's killer.

Whilst in *Blow Up*, Hemmings portrays a trendy fashion photographer, in *Deep Red* he is Marcus Daly, a minor league pianist with seemingly major league hang-up's. Whilst on a midnight stroll he looks up to see the gruesome murder of a noted psychic, Helga Ulmann (Macha Meril) - stabbed repeatedly and then pushed through the window of her high rise apartment, by a black-gloved assailant in a macintosh - a *de rigueur* look as far as the giallo film goes. Rushing to Helga's apartment, Marcus is left with the overriding feeling that he has seen something important, (he has), but can't quite place the elusive but vital clue.

A series of further grisly murders, also including repeated attempts on his own life, plague Marcus as he realises his importance to the case, striving to find the murderer before the murderer reaches him. A taut conclusion reveal the killer to be Marta (Clara Calamai), with her bisexual son Carlo (Gabriele Lavia), attempting to cover his mother's tracks.

After Carlo's grisly demise - dragged behind a garbage truck and bounced along the streets before his head is squashed by an oncoming car, Marcus, (labouring under the misapprehension that Carlo was the killer), returns to Helga's apartment to puzzle out the murders - later realising that Carlo was actually with him as they had *both* witnessed Helga being butchered. Enter Marta, complete with her *giallo* accoutrements and hatchet - ready to avenge her son's death by *burying* it in Marcus. The fearful pianist now grasps the fact that he had indeed glimpsed Marta in the apartment, immediately after Helga's death - her grizzled features shown in reflection on one of the psychic's baroque hall mirrors, augmented by an equally gnarled array of expressionist paintings evoking the likes of Goya, Callot and Rosa. As Carlo prophetically remarks to Marcus earlier in the film; "Maybe that painting was made to disappear because it represented something important, something so important you don't even realise it. It is then the endangered Marcus fights with Marta, whose necklace becomes entangled between the elevator doors, taking Marta's chain and her decapitated head plummeting to the basement floor below.

Whilst Argento's bravura set pieces and stylish embellishments have been discussed at great length by critics, it is the psycho-sexual elements inherent here and the wayward emotional drive of the characters which offer the most illuminating insight into Argento's fascinating fever opus.

As previously indicated, Hemmings' artistic character is an untypical hero as far as traditional films go, but is in many respects, a *typical* Argento hero. His hero aren't the macho Schwarzenegger idols of popular imagination with muscle-bound strengths, but intellectual, sensitive figures exercising brain rather than brawn.

You only have to think back to Tony Musante's investigative writer in *Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970) or Leigh McCloskey's rather wimpish character in *Inferno* (1980), to see where Hemmings role fits into the Argento scheme of things. An Argento hero isn't a sexual demon ready to "win over the ladies", instead, he is more likely for his pent up, repressed sexual energy to be unleashed in avowedly artistic pursuits. As such, his heroes are ultimately as flawed as the miscreants they pursue - as Argento himself acknowledges; "What I like to deal with is the collapse between individuals... the universal fear."

Well, this is one communication breakdown which has drastic consequences for the diverse characters in the film. Delusory images and conversations, rhythmical scenes and premonitions inform the film throughout to devastating effect. One disturbing consequence of this unrestrained ambiguity is the inference that Marcus is not dissimilar to his would be killers, as mixed up emotions envelop all in *Deep Red*, from peripheral figures to leading players, from evil to good, everyone is effected.

So, just as Marcus is a pianist, so too is Carlo. As Carlo expands his philosophy thus "For me the piano is a beautiful woman and I like to tickle her fanny" (!), adding that; "The difference between you and me is purely political. I'm the proletariat of the keyboard and you're the bourgeoisie. You play for art and I play for survival - it's not the same thing." Later, when Marcus' "love interest" Gianna (Daria Nicolodi), asks him why he chose to be a pianist, he replies; "My psychiatrist would say that it's because I hated my father" as he pounds his keyboard with venom in Freudian irony.

These prime motivations behind both Carlo and Marcus are integral to the mirror theme of the film as both profess their differences to each other, yet in equally Freudian terms, leaving us to conclude that they are not so far apart after all. Indeed, in a scene usually excised from prints but included in the full length Italian version, both Marcus and Carlo are shown playing a piano duet - one's phrasing being the exact echo of the other's play, so emphasising their apparent character bonding. Perhaps in Carlo, Marcus can see the flip-side of himself, a hitherto repressed part of his personality which he now confront, albeit vicariously, through his friendship with Carlo. It is like the story of Narcissus, staring at his own reflection in a pool and loving it as though it were another.

The Greek adage to "know thyself" is all part of Marcus' self-revelatory journey, even down to his own artistic attributes also being ascribed to Marta who dreams she was once a famous movie star, but is in effect, as nutty as the proverbial fruit cake. This doppelgänger imagery is most poignantly and disturbingly shown in *Deep Red's* final shot as Marcus stares into a crimson background that is Marta's pool of blood - do we now conclude that Marcus is similarly tainted by

all this homicidal violence? The fact that it is his reflection we see is the perfect metaphor for an illusory world being turned upside down. These reverse, doubling devices permeate the entire film as Helga's opening psychic conference display enables her to unwittingly foretell her own death as she taps into "cruel, twisted thoughts, yet childish at the same time."

Likewise, Marcus' piano bashing prefigures the death of Professor Giordani (Glauro Mauri), whose teeth are crushed against a marble mantelpiece, his hand burn't on a coffee machine, the scalding demise of Amanda Righetti (Giuliana Mauri), and his severing of a gate chain from a "haunted house", Marta's eventual decapitation. Contrast this precognition theme with *Deep Red's* other salient plot device - that of the concealed, the secret and the disguised, all being gradually eroded like a cliff-edge by the lashing waves of the sea.

The murder of Amanda Righetti - the author of *Modern Ghosts and Black Legends of Today*, we are informed, includes a scene where she manages to scrawl a vital clue onto a bathroom mirror, only for it to be later obscured until it is uncovered by the steam from a hot water tap, to form an enlightening film of condensation, (a plot conceit previously used by one of Argento's mentors in Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* (1938)). It is clue which leads Marcus to the "house of the screaming child" whereby he uncovers a grotesque childhood fresco depicting a violent stabbing. This imagery, together with the trademark nursery rhyme music the killer uses as a calling card, are the emotional complexities behind the killer's cumulative atrocities.

In a flashback, it transpires that Marta, cajoled by her husband to register with a psychiatric hospital, takes her revenge by stabbing him in a bloodied frenzy, all under the attentive gaze of a young Carlo, who is left holding the blood drenched knife as the music continues playing to provide a dislocating, aural assault to the macabre scene.

As Giordani succinctly observes; "this little song may very well be the leitmotif of the crimes", continuing that; "The murderer is a schizophrenic paranoid. Anyone who kills with such frenzy surely does it in a state of temporary madness. In everyday life this person could appear quite normal. And when he kills he must recreate the specific conditions which will trigger the release of all his pent up madness." It is this primal childhood trauma which Argento seeks to explore, not only in *Deep Red*, but in his other films too.

The Freudian masturbatory fantasy of teeth being knocked out isn't solely confined to this film - witness the transsexual Eva Robbins placing her red stiletto heel into the mouth of a young boy in a *Tenebrae* (1982) flashback or the feverish dreams of the maniac in *Opera* (1987), for example.

The oedipal theory of children being traumatised having witnessed sex and confusing the audible sighs of pleasure for the repulsive groans of pain which some furtive, sadistic coupling would evince, is one of the central themes in *Deep Red*.

Although Carlo is undoubtedly the emotional victim here - the disturbing scene he witnesses the catalyst for his own sexual ambivalence in later life, Marcus appears to be similarly haunted by sexual relationships - elucidated in his reaction to Gianna's playful teasing of him when she cheats to beat him at arm wrestling, causing the utmost consternation on Marcus' part as his male ego is challenged.

When a little girl warns him about entering the haunted house, "Be careful, there are ghosts in there", it is more a case of "skeletons in the closet" (literally, he finds), as primal fears are exposed as surely as the all-too prevalent character frailties. Such weaknesses and the lunatic capacities of the murderer are visibly glimpsed as Argento's rapacious camera sweeps over a veritable treasure trove of objects, which reveals a deranged mind as dolls, rope, drawings and knives are strewn haphazardly across a floor, not to mention the loose marbles scattered asunder - a glaring comment on the killer's diseased mental state. Even the shot of the killer's blood-shot eye being painted with mascara, divulges the child-like mind at work as the black colour is daubed on as an infant would when playing with cosmetics.

To compliment this complex psychological delirium, we have Argento's customary stylistic *elan* displayed, though here his bold blood opera's take on a decidedly theatrical element - even in the

opening scenes red drapes are swept aside to act as the curtain call for Helga's psychic conference - itself a convincing "performance".

Each inventive death is similarly a violent set piece where the audience are actively involved by the imaginative staging of the murders - all previously signposted as mentioned earlier. The *objet d'art* in Helga's apartment - all weird furniture and pentagram shapes, is a reminder of Argento's earlier *Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, whilst unusual architectural sculptures also inform *Suspiria* (1976), *Tenebrae* and even more dramatically, *Inferno*.

However, it is with Amanda Righetti's death that these bravura flourishes begin to increase as rolling marbles and an extreme close up of the killer's eye completing a 360 degree spiral, illustrate the consuming madness about to increase its presence. Like a voodoo talisman, a doll hangs ominously from Righetti's ceiling, the cue for doors to bang and lights to dim as the killer take her victim by surprise, clubbing Righetti's head against the tiled bathroom wall, before then drowning her in scalding water, to leave her face a disintegrating mass of sores and bubbling blisters. The deranged voice of the killer, whispering his name, accelerates Giordani's death as the surreal sight of a clockwork doll in a tuxedo, spluttering towards him - and twitching in time to Goblin's rampaging score, ushers in the professor's demise as he is hurled onto the mantelpiece by his assassin.

Similarly, Carlo's gruesome death - at the hands of ill fate rather than a murderous assailant, is highly original as, swept along by a garbage truck and buffeted by the concrete streets, he breaks free only to land in front of a speeding car which squashes his head like a water melon with a resounding "splat" - all in close up!

Besides moulding his dazzling camera movements into a veritable *tour de force* here, Argento also invests the film with a variety of global influences, from the works of Cornell Woolrich, Edgar Wallace and Frederic Brown, to the filmic references of Hitchcock and Mario Bava, in order to formulate the perfect *giallo*.

As Helga explains before her demise; "My faculties have nothing to do with magic, the esoteric or foretelling the future" - she is almost a cipher for the Argento ethos, which emphasises mystery and psychology over the ritualistic constraints of the supernatural and satanism. In his films characters namecheck the works of Agatha Christie and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, as if his goal is to combine their mystery and suspense with his own operatic violence and directorial flair. If this is the case then *Deep Red* is indeed one of his most triumphant works.

It may well have been a transitional work, enabling him to transcend his more prosaic, "formularised" thrillers (if there is such a term when discussing Argento's *oeuvre!*), such as *Cat O'Nine Tails* (1971) and *Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, to assimilate the more flamboyant, Grand Guignol accoutrements which propel his later films such as *Inferno* and *Tenebrae*, but *Deep Red* is a genuinely engaging, not to mention disturbing thriller, complete with ingenious plot conceits and a powerful self-reflexive gaze as we may choose to ask ourselves probing questions and perhaps surprise ourselves with our responses.

Aligned to these prevailing themes we also have a fabulous Goblin score which decorates the action in the most vigorous fashion. Throbbing bass lines, tinkling melodies and rapid percussion provide the perfect backdrop to the deranged mind at work here, as well as faintly recalling the disturbing ambience of Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* theme which score *The Exorcist* (1973), so effectively. Strident organ chords and pulsating riffs belt out on the soundtrack in total contrast to the nagging nursery rhyme motif, but the rock score remains just as incessant, just as *vital* to the spiralling plot.

If ever any director aspired to seek the perfect marriage between visuals and music, then Argento's *Deep Red* must come perilously close to achieving just that - especially in the lascivious close-up's which traverse the music notes on Marcus' song-sheet in perfect harmony with the time he plays them, and in the intricate workings of the looping tape machine which reverberates to the sound of the murderer's musical motif, unspooling as readily as the killer's own rapidly degenerating mind.

I'd have to admit that personally, I consider *Deep Red* to be Argento's most successful work, certainly unsurpassed by his recent efforts such as *Opera* and *The Black Cat* (1990), which have been disappointing, with worse in the shape of *Trauma* (1993) to come if advanced press is anything to go by.

Let's hope the maestro can dust off the raincoat and black gloves in order to assemble another memorable *giallo* sometime soon, to help obliterate the memory of his recent disasters and recall the halcyon days of the *giallo* film at its very best - *Deep Red*.

Black, Andy, 1993, *Deep Red*, pp.15-20, *Necronomicon 3 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

The Rebirth of Vipco - No More Mr. Nasty?

Something is stirring in the recently bloodless video industry. Read on... The success of The Lovers Guide and other explicit material has also helped to loosen the constraints regarding the release of hitherto banned horror classics, as Vipco supremo Mike Lee explains.

Can you explain Vipco's demise after the "video nasty" era and your subsequent re-emergence?

The reason at that time was that shops were very frightened to carry the sort of product that Vipco distributed, so there wasn't really anyone to sell to because they were rather concerned about it, and in fairness, what we had to do was wait to find out what would happen with the classification system and what might happen to these movies. It has taken quite a long time before we feel we've been able to resubmit the films that were causing the problems at that time.

Is your policy of releasing hitherto banned films such as *Zombie Flesh Eaters* and *Death Trap* a concerted attempt at reducing censorship?

I wouldn't say it's an attack at censorship per se. I would turn round and say that I have strong feelings about certain movies that I think should be seen and have a right to be seen, and if I'm the only voice for these movies then so be it. I'm not saying that I'm attacking censorship at all but I am saying that I would like to have these films passed and available for the public to see. I think that they come from a particular period of time, are representative of certain directors work, who have since gone on to do other things. Even Abel Ferrara who starred in and directed *The Driller Killer* (1979), has gone on to do other movies now, so I'd like to eventually have that one passed - whether or not they do remains to be seen, but *Driller Killer* is an important work, as indeed is *Death Trap* (1976) for Tobe Hooper.

Have you found a new "enlightened" approach towards your product from the BBFC, given the proposed lowering of trade barriers heralded by 1992?

I think there's things to be taken into account here for 1992, with the trade barriers for the EEC coming down and I think that tastes are changing in the wake of that.

So you think that it's going to be an ongoing process with Vipco, hopefully releasing more output with less censorship even?

I'm hopeful but we can't be sure and needless to say, should we get the problems we experienced before, we would have to shut up shop and cease from distributing product yet again, but I'm hopeful that won't happen.

I understand you plan to submit both *The Driller Killer* and *House On The Edge Of The Park* to the BBFC - how do you think these notorious films will fair?

Well, *House On The Edge Of The Park* (1980) I'm not proposing to do at this time, but I'm hopeful that within the first six months of next year, we will be able to submit *Driller Killer*. This is a sensitive film based on the campaign it had around it years ago. It's about the degeneration of a man's psyche and if it were sensitively handled, would justify a position in the market place.

Vipco have shown a commendable policy of releasing cult films such as *Shogun Assassin*. Is this a deliberate move, and if so, what other cult films are scheduled for release?

Well, we have quite a number of these films to go - I cannot say which order they will be coming in because a lot depends upon the sensitivity of the BBFC. It is Vipco's intention to release as many of these cult classic movies as is possible, and of course, *Shogun Assassin* (1980) is a wonderful film, having got through unscathed on its release this time.

Are there plans to release foreign films much sought after by horror fans. I'm thinking of Dario Argento's *Deep Red*, *Tenebre* and *Inferno* for example, together with the likes of Mario Bava and Jess Franco?

We don't own the rights to the movies that you've mentioned just now, but we are negotiating all the time trying to buy rights to films like these for issue, so yes, you're bang in the right ball park. There is a prospect, and anybody who would like to mention names to us that they would like to see released that we're not aware of or haven't been up for a while. We're only a small company but we are trying our best to get out what we can and are open to feedback from our customers.

Do you think there is scope to release such rarities in widescreen versions, specifically aimed at collectors with "making of the film" booklets and other such additional material included?

Yes, that's something we're going to redress the balance on with the release of *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (1979) in widescreen, which will be the first previously banned movie to be issued in such a format and I will say now, that it makes a tremendous difference to the movie. The difficulty remains however, that with not being a major studio, we don't control everything when it's being made and those thoughts are not often put together at the time of the films production, and of course, we could be talking about movies which are over 25 years old. It is something that we've looked at, to create an informative leaflet, but we don't really want to rush off half-cocked. Unless the information is exact we don't want to publish anything, so yes, that may well come about next year at some point, but I can't guarantee any dates at the moment.

What about future releases - the Fulci and Warhol films for example?

City of the Living Dead (1980) and *The Beyond* (1981) are released at the moment and we're hopeful for *The New York Ripper* (1982).

***The New York Ripper*? How do you think that's going to get through - presumably with a lot of cuts?**

Well, we're hopeful. I don't think it's been allowed through before. It's been banned previously but it would be one that as it's part of Lucio Fulci's work, I think we'd like to see it available. *The House by the Cemetery* (1981) is released in October with plans for all three of his films to be released in widescreen format next year, with Warhol's *Blood for Dracula* (1974) and *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1973) hopeful for the first quarter of next year.

Do you think that people like Warhol with their "artistic" connotations have more chance of their films being released uncut?

Well, *Blood for Dracula* I'm hopeful will cause no problem. *Flesh for Frankenstein* still might cause a problem bearing in mind the background that you're mentioning, but I think we have a strong case, especially with his recent death, but *Flesh for Frankenstein* is an excellent film, although some people may consider the contents to be offensive, we're not of the same mind, but we'll tread carefully in dealing with that one.

Can you tell me something about Lord Buckethead?

He was the leading character in a movie called *Gremloids* (1984) (!), and indeed, for a bit of fun at the General Election, he decided to stand against John Major, as I'm sure you're aware. I think he got something like 107 votes this time!

So you were narrowly defeated?!

Yes indeed. There was some cause for consternation up there of course, but it all settled down in the end and John Major eventually got through, but it was a bit of a fight for him!

With Vipco though, you appear to be on the winning side as it were?

The important thing is that small though we are, I really want to try and keep it going. I do not want to find that they come down on us and say these movies mustn't be allowed yet again, so I want to try and make sure there's a presence in the shops. Sales are going well, not enormous because there's still a resistance out there, but the public want to buy them - that's good news. As long as they are aware that the films are there, they'll buy them and of course, the more support we get the more films we can buy in that they wouldn't otherwise have. So long as we're financially sound we can keep buying the rights to movies that we would like to release, that are not (currently) available and I think that we will probably be the only voice for these films.

Black, Andy, *Necronomicon* magazine 1, p.16-17, (Noir Publishing: 1993).

Redemption Video - Visions of Ecstasy?

Nigel Wingrove, supremo at the emerging Redemption Video level has, in a varied career, published a punk fanzine, worked as a designer in Paris, seen his own film Visions of Ecstasy banned for blasphemy in the UK and has cracked the whip over such diverse magazines as Skin Two and The Nursing Times - (I think there is a tenuous link there somewhere!).

Now, like a breath of fetid air, his company are releasing a plethora of perverse titles including cult classics, "fetishistic vampires, gestapo sluts and killer nuns" - our kind of films, you bet!

Not content with presiding over this explosion of exploitation, our Nigel also designs the video sleeves and supervises the photography of the distinctive black and white covers which adorn the films, as well as publishing his own magazine, the glossy gore and fashion hybrid, Redeemer.

Intrigued? Then read on...

Your launching a double assault at the moment with Redeemer magazine and Redemption Video. What are your ambitions for both of these?

Quite a number of things but the main reason is that I'm thirty-five now and grew up right through the 1980s and I've always been libertarian politically but quite right wing, so I grew up with the punk philosophy that if you don't like what somebody else is doing then you produce something better yourself. I love those sort of films myself anyway, they're a lot of the films I grew up with and like very much and you couldn't buy them. On the underground there's obviously a huge market for these films which is growing all the time. So I could go to potential video label financiers and say, look, these are the magazines like yours and *The Dark Side* right the way through. These are the magazines on the market. You can't have all these magazines, all this enthusiasm without some interest. I haven't encountered anything like this myself since the days of punk. It really surprised me how much was going on. So I go to the financiers and say, look these are the films which people like, I can package them, you can buy the rights to these films for "x" amount and still make a profit, so that's how the label came about. When I saw the magazines which were out I got quite nostalgic and with my contacts in the film industry and fashion world, that's how *Redeemer* came about.

You seem to specialise in gothic flavoured and art house type films. What do you think is the appeal of these kind of films?

I'm quite closely involved now with some of the main magazines like *Divinity* and *The Dark Side*. There's a certain amount of hero worship of people like Dario Argento and Mario Bava and people ring up and say are you going to put out these sort of films - the answer is yes if they're going to sell. We're going to put out all the Jean Rollin films. I've got the rights to eight Mario Bava films and we've got the rights to *Deep Red* (1975) which we're putting out in September and I'm trying to get *Tenebrae* (1982) but can't get the rights to *Inferno* (1980) yet from CBS Fox. The crux of it again money - are the titles going to sell sufficiently to put them out.

I think that these will be popular releases but how do you think they'll fair at the hands of the censors?

They've actually never classified *Deep Red* before, but the censors say it will get through with an "18" certificate, but there might be the odd cut. It's one of those things where you can throw your arms up in horror, but you can always discuss things with the board. For instance, I've just put Dallamano's *Venus in Furs* (1969) through - most people I know who have got copies have got it from German TV, which for some reason has got about forty minutes of this stupid dialogue going on, whereas the version I've got is letterboxed and is virtually sex all the way through. It's actually quite a good film! They wanted a tiny cut where there is a rape sequence and the woman begins to look as if she's enjoying the rape, which only amounts to about forty-five seconds of cuts. In *Killer Nun* (1979), the cuts were thirteen seconds and haven't really altered the film except for those with a kind of "train spotter" mentality. I'm not saying there won't be future cases though

where we might encounter problems. Recently for instance, I was offered the rights to *Flavia - Rebel Nun* (1974) which I haven't seen yet.

Yes, I've seen it, only titled *Flavia - Priestess of Violence*.

Most people seem to think I might have a lot of trouble with getting that one passed.

Yes - from what I remember!

I've got *Mark of the Devil* (1970) which is also coming out, in September - they said they would pass that with a few cuts. We've got the rights to *Cannibal Man* (1972) which was on the "nasties" list but they'll pass that with virtually no cuts probably, and we've also got the rights to *Blood and Black Lace* (1964) and *Baron Blood* (1972), which will also be passed. We may have trouble with *The Story of O* (1975). I don't know what the fuss is about. I think it's just the s&m thing. If they want to cut that's not so bad, it's when they can't decide on a particular cut but rather that the tone of the whole film is offensive and they want to ban it. I'm playing it by ear at the moment, but I want the label to work. By this time next year, we'll have released thirty to forty films, all this type which no one else is doing except for Vipco who are more gore-orientated.

You seem to be in the right market given the jaded state of mainstream cinema at the moment?

We've actually outlaid a lot of cash acquiring the rights to quite a number of films, with over one hundred on our "hit list" already, but the fans sometimes forget that it costs a large amount of money to obtain the rights and submit the films to the censor.

I can't resist the question any longer - have you any Franco films lined up for release?

Succubus (1968) is out now - it's the only one we've actually signed for. I haven't seen it yet but I'm interested in *Sadist Erotica* (1969), just because it was made around the same time as *Succubus*. We've been offered the rights from Germany for things like *Sadomania* (1981) which sounds a bit dodgy. One of the advantages of doing what we do is that we get to see loads of viewing tapes, often uncut and I've seen a lot of Franco stuff recently and I must admit that a lot of it I've been disappointed with. I saw *The Bare Breasted Countess* (1973) and I loved the title, but often the titles are better than the film and I would more than happily have put that out but when I saw the film it was rubbish and didn't want to release it. I just want to introduce a lot of people who don't know these films to the genre and I think when you spend £13 and take it home, put on the video and then say "fuck it" - I'm not going to buy any more of their films again, then nothing's gained.

I always think of Franco as being similar to Rollin in that some of their films are momentarily fascinating, but many are simply boring.

Yes, with Rollin some of his stuff I quite like. We're putting *Frisson* (1971), *Requiem pour un vampire* (1971) and *La vampire nue* (1970) out first, without subtitles as there's little or no dialogue. If they sell reasonably well then I'll use the money to pay for the subtitling of other films such as *Lèvres de sang* (1975). These are the films people eulogies about in half the magazines and I'm sure that half the people have never seen them - they're really difficult to get hold of. My brother lives in Marseille and I used to live in Paris, but even then, living in France, they're not easy to track down.

Have you got plans to release Franco's *Venus in Furs* as well as Dallamano's?

It's on my original list. Basically, we've got a major list of films, not just horror but the continental type movie as well, like Dallamano's *Venus in Furs*, a lot of the late 1960s, early 1970s erotic films as well, and Franco's films are definitely on that list. I don't want the label to be just horror, but a mixture of erotica, very much more the gothic than the gore stuff, or "nasty" serial killer end of the market.

I imagine that this approach will give you an advantage with the censors because your concentrating on gothic, stylish features as opposed to realistic violence?

I don't know yet. I'm hoping that might be the case as I'd like to release other films like *Flavia* or even Pasolini's *Salo* (1975), which I've talked to the censors about already. One of them felt it was a masterpiece and the other one felt it was a flawed masterpiece, but they both agreed that to cut the end sequence would ruin the film. To be fair to them, they actually said have you seen today's *Daily Mail* which had an article saying that Dennis Potter's *Lipstick on my Collar* was a video nasty and the censor's attitude was "God save us from the *Daily Mail*", so basically they have to respond to public opinion and to the law.

Have you experienced similar moral panics in other countries?

Well, we are exporting these titles to Germany, Holland, Sweden and America, so what we're probably going to do is set up a parent company in Holland and we'll also acquire the rights simultaneously for Europe - because I always thought that the label had potential worldwide and I know it has as we're exporting so much, but we'll just sell the same titles. For instance, with *Salo*, if that was refused a certificate over here, it's not just the BBFC's fault. It's *never* had much luck even in the cinema, but if I acquire the rights for that in say Holland, then I could package it in the same Redemption style and then export it from Holland to other countries and let people know in England that the film is available that way. We've also got some quite interesting, very old 1920s pictures, *Haxan* (1922) and *Seven Footprints to Satan* (1929) which we've tracked down, and they are being video processed, which is a new technique to take out all the surface scratches the film and improves the sound when there is sound, and also the blacks and whites.

So you're keen to release old films as well?

I'd love to try and build up the definitive collection of erotic horror from the beginning of cinema, right from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) through to *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and beyond, right up to the present day.

It seems that things are turning almost full circle with films as people are looking back to these stylish films?

I don't know. I think the 1980s and the 1990s were dreadful for film with titles like *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Basic Instinct* (1992). I remember when I was fifteen or sixteen, the main films like *Soldier Blue* (1970), *Straw Dogs* (1971) and *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), whether they were violent or sexual, were actually powerful in their own right, they were good films. Then all the independent's went bust in the 1980s and closed down and you had all the major studios producing very superficial, very shallow product and even things where they boast about an emotional aspect such as *Fatal Attraction*, were rubbish as well, I think the newer stuff, which is being tagged with this "new violence" label - forget the "violence" bit, but I think *Bad Lieutenant* (1992), *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and even *Man Bites Dog* (1992), which I find quite disturbing, but nonetheless they were all powerful films. There are some good signs now, with films such as *Boxing Helena* (1993) and *Falling Down* (1993), and I'm hoping that there won't just be violence but also some good human relationship type films. It's looking interesting the way it's going.

(It certainly is, not least with the presence now of both Redemption and Vipco to hopefully ignite an increasingly stagnant film industry with some memorable raves from the graves - Ed).

Black, Andy, *Necronomicon 2* magazine, p.7-9, (Noir Publishing: 1993)

The Church

*The gradual decline of the once great Italian horror film industry has accelerated in recent years, with only a handful of exceptions - one being the highly skilled Michele Soavi, whose *The Church* finally sees a release on these shores.*

The fact that *The Church* (1989) is one of the more interesting horror films to be released recently, says far more about the jaded output of present times than of any greater artistic merits to Soavi's film. As with all his *oeuvre*, it is undoubtedly good to watch, filled with stylish camera movements and imaginative settings, but it lacks the suspenseful flair of his glorious *Stagefright* (1987), or the brooding performances and dark recesses which characterise his underrated *The Sect* (1991), and as for plot - well, looks as if old Lucio (Fulci) helped out on the "scriptwriting" chores, given the distinct lack of narrative cohesion here.

That gradual decline of the Italian horror film industry I referred to earlier, can also be applied in isolation to this film which begins promisingly, but ultimately sinks beneath a welter of ineptly executed special effects and confused plotting.

Witchcraft and heresy are immediately introduced as a prologue sequence - set in the 16th century, sees an army of medieval Teutonic knights raise a satanist-worshipping village to the ground, before burying the dead in a mass grave - their decaying corpses providing the bare foundation bones for the titular church to be built upon later. All that remains is for the obligatory wise soothsayer to offer some rudimentary pearls of wisdom; "Bless this site and build a church on it. A holy shrine to imprison the demons in this pit forever", as the flickering flames of burning crosses (and martyrs?), dominates the background.

Once transported to the present day, we find the church now in the throes of renovation work and archaeological investigation as Barbara *Stagefright* Cupisti uncovers a series of ancient frescos under the watchful gaze of the furtive yuppie archivist, (Tomas Arana). Having preferred his scholarly pursuits of ancient inscriptions and medieval studies to the instantly more attractive advances of Ms. Cupisti, all is set for Arana's headlong charge into madness after he is doused by some centuries-old effluence emanating from the bowels of the church. His "possession" by dark forces becomes all too clear as in one (melo)dramatic scene he reaches into his own chest before removing his still beating heart, now raised up to the sky - a perverse satanic offering to his "master".

Having attacked Asia Argento's willowy teenager and bashed out 666 a few hundred times on the typewriter in true Jack *The Shining* Nicholson fashion, he, along with an assortment of peripheral characters, including two bikers, a school party and a bridal fashion ensemble (!), all remain trapped in the gothic confines of the church as all manner of demons appear in the closing scenes.

It may well have been Soavi's intention to turn "what was conceived as schlock pizza cinema into a strong essay on karma and ambiguous inner conflicts", but these aspects are not readily gleaned from the finished article. Instead, one's lasting impression is of some abysmal effects - a rubber fish which leaps out of a font to attack one victim, and a "cop out" ending where Cupisti is seen being impregnated by the devil as the building collapses around her ears.

Arana as the leading man, is simply not convincing. Wide-eyed stares and trying to look sinister are not the traits of someone struggling with inner conflicts and obsessions - merely the all too obvious spectacle of Arana's frantic overacting. It's almost as if the necessary *depth* of character, required here has been transplanted into the buildings as architecture is a dominant force in the film and Soavi's roaming camera invests more "feeling" into the granite structures and deep recesses of the archaic church than it ever does into the "leading" actors.

One glorious travelling shot, in a matter of moments, transports us from the medieval age to modern day as each nook and crevice of the cathedral is explored in exquisite detail by the lens, before exiting out into a group of monks, some tourists and then a priest as his chiming watch alarm clearly indicates the present day setting. Soavi certainly appears adept at such imaginative,

camera reconnaissance moves, having almost eclipsed Argento's oft-quoted travelling shot over an apartment block in *Tenebrae* (1982). Soavi extends his craft with his later film *The Sect*, which features many more intricate shots of a labyrinth house and its menacing basement.

Having thus aimed his sights at being literally an "architect of fear", Soavi's camera continually presents us with low angle shots of looming structures and towering cathedrals, in much the same way that the high ceilings and imposing buildings informed the Expressionist landscape of Universal's *Frankenstein* series in the 1930s.

Following on this theme, Soavi's explanation for the demonic occurrences also revolves around the architecture of the building, aligned to the ancient art of alchemy. So, in the same way that Varelli's mystical buildings inform Argento's *Inferno* (1980) - even culminating with the casting of that film's Fedor Chaliapin in an ecclesiastical role here, in *The Church*, it is Fulcanelli's controversial theories that medieval cathedrals are symbolic portrayals of the arcane processes of alchemy, which enlightens the proceedings.

As it is, a mass of wheels and cogs pre-empt the final demonic manifestations as is remarked during the film - "You are an alchemist and alchemy is a demonic science. You serve the devil." The hidden powers within the church destined to stay hidden, later surface but; "It was intended that the secret should remain buried in oblivion for thousands of years."

Ultimately, Soavi overreaches in his attempts to portray the influence of the devil in society and in peoples minds. The end conflagration mixes too many characters as the biking duo escape the church only to perish beneath a tube train, a schoolteacher is impaled on iron railings, whilst the bridal fashion model's, (Antonella Vitale) face erupts into a putrefying mess as she too becomes possessed.

Ironically, it is the more subtle flourishes which eventually hold a greater resonance - from Goblin's swirling organ fugue and cryptic phrasing, to an awesome POV shot from inside one knight's helmet - at once betraying a very narrow, cross-shaped view of the world - a criticism frequently levelled at over zealous religious dogma and its compelled disciples.

Unfortunately, Soavi seems to have been similarly hindered by the inherent claustrophobia of the church locale and its religious, and indeed, satanic presence within. *The Church* is no classic, but it remains far superior to many of the titles currently available - with the promise of *The Sect*, let's hope that some enterprising company will see fit to re-release *Stagefright* in the near future as it too deserves a prominent place on any self-respecting film enthusiasts shelf.

Black, Andy, 1993 *The Church*, pp.26-27, *Necronomicon 3 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

Inferno

Arcane rituals in art deco surroundings, classical music and classic themes, bravura murders and a glimpse of Mother Death herself - it must be Argento!

A poet, Rose (Irene Miracle), discovers an ancient tome written by an architect named Varelli, elucidating the legend of *The Three Mothers*, who, from specially constructed houses from around the world in Rome, Freiburg and New York, resolve to wreak all manner of misery and menace upon the secular world. So begins the second in Argento's announced *Mothers* trilogy, kick-started by the raucous witchcraft of *Suspiria* (1976) and refined in the non-linear, baroque excesses of *Inferno* (1980).

Whilst from the likes of Lucio Fulci, narrative cohesion is expected to be largely absent, from Argento we anticipate some unique mystery, a semblance of logic, a primary, often psychologically-rooted motive to counter balance, nay compliment, the array of *outré* visuals. *Inferno* denies this and *how*.

The ethereal notion of the *Mothers*, that Rose reveals her brownstone, New York apartment to be one of the said houses, and that her listless brother, Mark (Leigh McCloskey), is inveigled into the mystery to halt a succession of violent murders (which he palpably fails to do), is basically the meagre story here.

Into this breezy premise, Argento weaves his intricate spell of dazzling set pieces and off beat thinking, like in no other of his films. From the moment Rose swims down and opens the subterranean door (in the celebrated underwater sequence), in order to retrieve her keys, as a pool in the apartment basement yields a sunken ballroom and a hideous corpse floats out, we realise that Rose has in fact, awakened a malevolent force whose fury will result in many deaths. Rose's literal descent into the maelstrom here, uncovering a painting of Mater Tenebrarum - "Death" as she plumbs the Stygian depths, and her bare foot touches "death" itself, via the corpses skull, indicates that whilst "magic is all around us", there's also the small matter of infinite evil and its fatal presence to contend with.

After the brutal murder of his classmate, Sara (Eleonara Giorgi), her companion Carlo (Gabriele Lavia) and later, Rose herself, Mark picks up the baton as he too attempts to decipher the infernal rituals and malignant influence that the *Mothers* still spread across the world like a deadly contagion. His eventual discovery of Mater Tenebrarum's sepulchral lair - by sliding beneath the floorboards of the apartment - "The third key can be found under the soles of your shoes" we are informed, to unmask a secret chasm, itself parallels his sister's voyage into the water chamber earlier.

To heighten the comparison, both meet supernatural entities - Rose, the floating corpse, Mark, the face of *Death* itself in the guise of Mater Tenebrarum. Much has been made of these sequences and their allusion to both Jung's archetypal iconographic model, symbolised here by water, and Freud's notion of tunnels, passageways and corridors delineating the womb/female figure, but these are not the salient themes here - indeed Varelli rebukes such ideas thus: "This building has become my body. It's bricks my cells, it's passageways my veins, it's heart my very heart."

Of more intrinsic importance here is the idea of the protagonists marking upon a great journey, hopefully of self-revelation and self-discovery, more attuned with Homers *Odyssey* and of course, Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (of which it shares the same *Inferno* name). This notion, as expressed in Chris Barber's intriguing *Eyeball* article, quotes from Roland Barthes, "The creativity of narrative (at least under it's mythical appearance of "life"), is thus situated between two codes, the linguistic and the trans-linguistic. That is why it can be said paradoxically that art... is a matter of statements of detail, where as imagination is mastery of the code." With this in mind, Argento succeeds in mastering the limitless possibilities of the imagination, without leaving too many signposts (read statements of detail), along the way.

Likewise, we know nothing of Mark's life at the beginning of the film and precious little more by its end. He has survived his encounter with death and therefore we can assume that he is more

knowledgeable for the experience, but where to now? Argento, as cryptic as ever will not inform us, instead, it is left for the audience to fathom such concepts out using our own imagination.

In effect, Argento has gathered an eclectic range of influences ranging from early English writer Thomas De Quincey's opium dreams (a frequent source for Argento), the water imagery of Jean Cocteau and the fragmented "structure" of Alain Resnais' over-elaborate art house classic, *Last Year in Marienbad* (1962) - even casting that film's Sacha Pitoëff in a pivotal role here as the bad-tempered Kazanian, a book store owner who introduces Rose to the Mother's legend in the first place, so consigning her subsequently to a bloody demise.

Argento also derives inspiration from the Odin myth that ventures "blindness in exchange for wisdom" as a maxim, so requiring his characters to look further and beyond the superficiality of the film's art decor (and perhaps deeper into the very soul) - a recurring theme in his work from *Cat O'Nine Tails* (1971), to *Suspiria* (1976), and more recently, *Opera* (1987).

In *Inferno*, a Countess's servant is mentally "blinded" by his coveting (and subsequent stealing), of his mistress' jewels and by misappropriating her wealth, so too does he forfeit his right to sight - as we later see him slumped in a chair, his bloodied orbs hung acutely from his now eyeless sockets. By way of contrast, Rose, Sara and Mark alike, all fail to see the evil menace which is permeating their lives - they lack the imagination and perception to look further than only the obvious in front of them.

It often appears as if the characters (and by association, we, the audience), are similarly blinded by Argento's deliberately ornate settings and visual excesses, unable to venture into the more avowedly esoteric musings of the maestro.

Keith Emerson's varied rock/classical score remains the perfect motif to usher forth a succession of riotous set pieces and calmer moments as melancholy piano phrasing and pulsating, operatic incantations burst asunder at felicitous moments. Verdi's *Nabucco* plays to the university music class, only to then segue into a masterful vignette as Sara takes a taxi ride across Rome - a purely expository scene in the hands of any other director, but a supreme display of theatrics in Argento's. Raindrops pirouette against a background of luminous headlights, silhouetted as if in some magical water fountain display - all set to Emerson's wildly revisionist, up-tempo *Nabucco* theme. Again, this aspect serves to accentuate the contention that sound can be just as important as sight - also prevalent as we discover that the unique acoustics of the building, allow voices to echo around the apartment, as if by magic.

Verdi again provides the backdrop to Sara's sanguinary demise, stabbed in the back, but not before the similarly dispatched Carlo claws his way up her body in a macabre ballet of death - their writhing bodies the image of childhood insecurity caused by a mistaken correlation of sex with sadism, a motif which informs numerous other films in Argento's canon. Whilst Rose is decapitated in guillotine-like fashion by a falling window pane, Kazanian's death results in the most imaginative audience "pay-off", as besieged by rats in the lugubrious waters of Central Park at midnight, his cries for help are answered as a cleaver-wielding chef races towards him - only to thrust the blade into the helpless man's neck. This scene is certainly an improvement on Daria Nicolodi's death - savaged by a pack of snarling cats (all too obviously thrown at her from off-screen!).

Argento's camera scuttles off in some trademark flashes of brilliance - whether traversing the Bava-esque, kaleidoscopic colours of the apartment and its gossamer-laden basement; adventurously capturing the towering perspective, and in one moment, panning from a book illustration of the *Mother's* house, across onto a painting of the New York apartment which enables Mark to identify the importance of the building he is staying in.

Fortunately, the screen swamped with colour and artistry serves to distract the viewer from the narrative shortcomings and the rather vapid figure of Mark (his previous role in US TV soap *Dallas*, a precursor to this deliberately mannequin performance here perhaps?). Like David Hemmings before him in *Deep Red* (1975), Argento strives to make his protagonist human, with very noticeable frailties and in no way a heroic figure. Mark even feints whilst investigating the

basement, but instead of being killed, a shadowy figure merely drags him to safety where he is resuscitated. A glass of water, waves lapping the shore and his awakening the next morning, being one of the few coherent scenes in *Inferno*, and paradoxically, doubly confusing for just that reason given its juxtaposition between typically non-linear Argento scenes.

The final confrontation, where again the enfeebled Mark, only just manages to defeat the wheelchair bound Varelli, is ultimately disappointing given the elaborate build up as Mater Tenebrarum appears - "Your journey has come to an end. Everything around you will become dark and someone will take your hand. You'll be pleased, not unhappy. You'll enjoy moments of incredible brightness" continuing; "You think it's magic. No. I'm not a magician" she announces. As she then advances towards him, she calls out; "But men call us by a single name, a name which strikes fear into everyone's heart. They call us *Death, Death*", as her black-clad figure crashes through a portal and materialises in front of Mark as a skeletal, apocalyptic vision of death, as the enflamed building becomes an infernal funeral pyre, from which Mark narrowly escapes.

The true nature of horror in *Inferno* however, is that although Mark has survived, so too has Mater Tenebrarum - we see her dancing in the flames, arms aloft and revelling in the very destruction she has brought. She relishes her role as Grim Reaper, indeed the *Mother of Death*, as Kazanian observes; "The true mystery is that our lives are ruled by those who are already dead."

Black, Andy, 1993, *Inferno*, pp.51-54, *Necronomicon 3 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

The Torture Chamber of Dr. Sadism

Visual excesses and a oneiric atmosphere swamp any attempt at narrative cohesion in this fascinating sixties shocker!

German director Harald Reinl, having cut his teeth on *krimis* style Edgar Wallace potboilers such as *The Strangler of Blackmoor Castle* (1963) and *The Sinister Monk* (1965), found inspiration in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum*, to make the decidedly gothic *The Torture Chamber of Dr. Sadism* (1967) aka *The Blood Demon*.

My own introduction to the film was somewhat by accident when reviewing one of the egregious "shadow Theatre" horror compilation tapes. Fortunately, the customary selection of uninspiring clips from horror "greats" was rendered bearable by the inclusion of one of this film's most celebrated scenes - a moonlit coach ride through a corpse-laden forest.

The Poe influence is entirely appropriate here as Reinl conjures up an atmospheric brew of gossamer-coated castles, creaking doors and skull-infested dungeons, which betrays his grounding in *krimis* pictures, whilst also visualising some macabre tableau's in order to further embroider his rich gothic tapestry with.

Only Reinl's rather listless direction at times and the relative paucity of the script, conspire to impair the chills on show here, but it's still a title worth investigating for the curious viewer. There's also Christopher Lee as Count Regula - a sanguinary figure summarily executed during the 13th century for seeking the blood of 13 virgins in order to provide him with the elixir of eternal life.

Having only run up 12 on the victim score thus far, his dismembered corpse is then revived with the blood of his faithful acolyte, (Carl Lange), as he plans to wreak his revenge on the surviving descendants of his executors - a lawyer, Roger Montelle (Lex Barker) and a young lady, Lilian (Karin Dor - Reinl's real-life spouse), together with Lilian's servant, Babette.

Having escaped from an incisive pendulum *a la* Poe, Roger then saves Lilian from becoming victim 13 by brandishing his crucifix at Regula, as the sands of time, quite literally, are shown to be running out, thus reducing the Count to a pile of skeletal dust as the castle crumbles all around.

As previously mentioned, the basic premise and uninspiring script are unlikely to hold down any "Oscar" nominations but it is Reinl's affinity with the material and his ability to invoke an altogether ethereal atmosphere, which provides some compelling viewing. His image-conscious direction is in evidence throughout the film with the startling appearance of an imposing executioner - resplendent in crimson hood and thrusting a spiked mask onto Regula's face.

As the Count is sentenced to be "hung, drawn and quartered" he venomously replies that; "I shall destroy you and all your family" before a snazzy sixties soundtrack accompanies his "death march" from the castle catacombs meet his fate in the village square. Crowds amass and bells toll as Regula is spread-eagled before stampeding horses pull at his restraining ropes - Reinl's judicious cutting sparing us the grisly detail as the execution is instead delineated on a painting, now being paraded in the square.

Reinl's considerable style provides us with a succession of genuinely disturbing images and perverse compositions. He exhibits a penchant for obtuse framing as glimpsed in his frequent shots of a hooded executioner, dominating the frame, gargoyles, architecture and all manner of religious icons proving to be the physical embodiment of the emotional/mental vortex which drive the forces of good (as represented by Roger), and the forces of evil (as represented by Regula), throughout the film.

Religious symbolism especially prevails here as crucifixes are wielded and a giant cross is carried through the village to the accompaniment of ominously tolling bells and Gregorian chants. Even Regula's subsequent resurrection and then death at the hands of the cross, indicate the spiritual influences which pervade the film. The procession through the village itself is also enacted in

order to drive out the “man-eating monster in the valley”, so religion is revered as being the peoples saviour in the face of evil - the barren trees and crucifixion shrine which signpost the way to Regula’s castle, proving to be symbolic in their suggestion of the evil and infertile land which lies ahead.

Having finally inveigled its location from the frightened villagers, Roger and his companions journey to “The Bloody Castle”, (the sobriquet given to Regula’s residence by the locals), whereupon Reinl accentuates the gothic flavour of the piece as mist rolls in to cloak the twisted bodies and contorted limbs which populate the nightmarish forest they encounter. Weird birds cry and wolves howl as corpses hang from trees in eerie silence, before the shimmering blue hues of the night sky.

A fogbound graveyard with creaking gates contains Regula’s grave as beyond, the screech of the castle drawbridge juddering open, proves to be an irresistible temptation for the travellers to investigate further.

All manner of similarly sepulchral regalia confronts them once inside the castle as skull-lined corridors, perverse paintings depicting satanic orgies and a wind storm which disgorges an army of spiders into one passageway, inform the film. Despite being dead for 35 years, the egregious servant informs the guests that his master will return, leering that; “For you, he will rise from the dead.”

Whether they will be around to see him is another question however, as Roger has to survive his encounter with the pendulum. Babette recovers from a torture device slowly lowering her onto a bed of sharpened spikes below, whilst Lilian has to be rescued from a retracting plank which threatens to send her plummeting into a sprawling snake-pit below.

Besides these fearful devices, we are also treated to expressionist glimpses of the Count rising - depicted as a shadow on the wall, the *outré* sight of Lange resuscitating his master with his own *green* blood and the macabre display of virginal bodies which lay strewn across the Count’s torture chamber, before later crumbling to dust.

If anything, it is the rather arbitrary conclusion which dissipates Reinl’s otherwise tense atmosphere as Regula’s resurrection is accomplished rather too easily without bravado and, similarly his enfeebled demise which is heralded by Roger’s crucifix-wielding pose, is *too* abrupt a note to end on.

Having viewed Reinl’s film one is left with the overwhelming impression of witnessing a minor masterpiece, a triumph of style over content, visual panache over elucidatory details, so creating an image-conscious model of gothic cinema.

Black, Andy, 1993, The Torture Chamber of Dr. Sadism, pp.7-10, *Necronomicon 3 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

Baron Blood

Descending into the Gothic lair of a centuries old Baron whose Lazarus-like resurrection leaves him looking for blood.

To be brutally honest, *Baron Blood* (1972) does not represent the apex of Mario Bava's work, nor is it riding on the slippery slope to oblivion. Instead, it sees Bava returning to the gothic regalia and legends that permeate his best work, the sumptuous *Black Sunday* (1960).

Having previously dealt with a literally, faceless killer, in *Blood and Black Lace* (1964) and ingenious murder methods in *Bay of Blood* (1971), Bava then turned his attentions to Otto Von Kleist, the sanguinary Baron of the title. It transpires that this nefarious warlock had previously burnt an "innocent" witch at the stake over 300 years ago, only for her to put a curse on him before her death. The Baron himself perishes, burnt in his own flames as fire engulfs his castle.

Early on in the film, one of the Baron's descendants, Peter (Antonio Cantafora), jokes to his uncle when making a pilgrimage to the castle; "Between us we might even conjure up an ancestral ghost or two." All he succeeds in doing is resuscitating the long dead Baron, aided by a decoratively mini-skirted Eva (Elke Sommer).

Bava's skill really begins to show as he manipulates the mechanics of terror, both within the ancient walls of the castle and the hidden horrors without. The Baron's abode - the "Castle of Devils", is an authentic Austrian medieval castle - its looming towers and shadowy battlements dominate the film as Bava's prowling camera breathes life into every pore of the fortress. It becomes almost a *character*, in much the same way as the unconquerable "Egdon Heath" in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*.

The castle appears fully in control as Peter and Eva read out the incantation to revive the Baron - all at the dead of night. Bava turns the screw as doors creak and shadows fall around the castle. The nearby church bells chime for midnight but ominously only two peals are heard as Eva remembers that the Baron was rumoured to have died at two o'clock. Their looks of horror are inter-cut with a superb shot of the empty churchyard, shrouded in fog and cloaked in deathly silence, save for the ominously tolling bells.

Back inside the castle, a door handle turns, the camera zooming in, quickly Peter recants the verse and the handle remains still as the camera draws back. Even the advent of morning is unsettling as the camera pans out over the glorious sunlit views afforded by the castle, only for its decaying walls to cast a malevolent shadow.

Brushing aside his uncle's protestations, Peter reads the incantation again the next night, in the castle room where the Baron was reputed to have died. This time there is no going back as we see a body stir and then writhe in the darkness. A sudden gust of wind forces the incantation to fly into the room's raging fireplace and then the first of many POV shots indicate that the Baron is indeed alive. The cobwebbed interiors and gothic trappings of the castle then give way as Bava races into the film's most impressive sequence.

Eva, having rushed home, now finds herself a target for the Baron. She escapes him, only to be chased by the Baron through the deserted village. His grotesque, glue-covered features are barely disguised by his long cloak and wide-rimmed hat. The sight of him pursuing Eva - a dark silhouette amongst the luminous mist, very much recalls Vincent Price's *House of Wax* (1953), only here, Bava makes the scene all his own as the pacing and lighting are uniformly excellent. Eva runs from the Baron as a myriad of blue, orange and yellow shafts of incandescent light, decorates the night. All the while, Bava's restless camera explores the narrow, claustrophobic alleys and the wide agoraphobic spaces of the village.

Eva shelters in an archway as the Baron searches for her, walking right by her as she comes agonisingly close to discovery, before running off to the nearest house. As she hammers frantically on the door to be let in, the camera closes in on the rapidly advancing Baron. The last

drops of tension are wrung out as she is finally accepted into the house, marginally escaping the clutches of the Baron.

The castle's new owner - a wheelchair-bound Alfred Becker (Joseph Cotton, no less), is then unsurprisingly revealed to be the Baron during the film's climax. His own sadistic fantasies surface as, with great zeal, he conducts a tour of the castle's notorious torture chamber, complete with tape-recorded screams. Then, Peter and Eva are shown the *piece de resistance* as they stare up at the castle turrets only to see human-like figures impaled there in an eerie tableau, in the Baron's finest masochistic traditions - (obviously a close friend of Vlad the Impaler - if it's only your drinks he spikes then you're lucky!).

It is Eva who saves them from the Baron's clutches when she drops an amulet (previously owned by the witch who was killed by the Baron), onto the body of Fritz (Lucio Pigozzi) - a servant dispatched ungraciously by the Baron. As the trinket fumes and sizzles into his skin, he revives, and along with an army of the Baron's previous victims, out the evil Kleist to death in his own dungeon, leaving Eva and Peter to escape.

Beyond the atmospheric and gossamer strands incumbent in the film's style, Bava invests great gusto into the various murders that proliferate the place. A doctor who treats the newly-revived Baron, is stabbed in the chest for his pains, the ambulance he telephones for his patient, ending up to be his own. Also, there is the death of the would-be property developer Herr Dortmund (Dieter Tresler), who is knocked unconscious before being thrown from the staircase landing - a "comforting" noose around his neck to break the fall!

The tilted camera angle, staring unblinkingly upwards at the revolving body hanging there, seems the obvious inspiration behind similar deaths in both Lucio Fulci's *City of the Living Dead* (1980) and Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1976). Dortmund's lifeless corpse also brings about the demise of the aforementioned Fritz, who, when stealing a ring from the body, is unceremoniously dumped down several flights of stairs into the Baron's torture chamber, before being thrust into an iron maiden. The POV shot of the spikes shattering Fritz's face, recall Bava's own *Black Sunday*. When the lid comes off we are "treated" to a lingering look at the spikes, now dripping blood.

A small girl drops an apple which rolls dangerously close to the castle grounds. Bava instantly closes in on the gnarled hand that is wrapped around a tree nearby. Branches rustle as the Baron chases the girl - she escapes, but not before some tense moments have elapsed.

Besides these stylistic elements, there is also an attempt to show the conflict between a modern, secular Austria and the "old" legends. It is a recurring theme throughout the film. Early on, Eva makes her stand against the property mogul, and possibly misogynist, Dortmund, offering that; "If Herr Dortmund had his way he would stick all of womanhood up there" (referring to the Baron's propensity for impaling his victims up on his castle turrets). Dortmund is later killed whilst obtaining a coke from a drinks machine incongruously situated within the castle - so commercialism does not pay. The gold chest secreted away by the Baron, may also have encouraged Dortmund's "interest" in the castle.

An accurate summation of the new/old conflict and a germane warning is sounded by one character; "We live in an enlightened age, where science not only reveals the old mysteries as mere superstitions, but little by little, discovers the true mysteries of the universe. I would not play with the occult if I were you. One's obsession with it can be a real danger."

It is a message Peter fails to heed. He even ignores the voice of an occultist who denounces modern man with a powerful invective; "Once you killed innocent witches. Now you bring murderers back to life." It is a simple logic that is difficult to disagree with, though the conflict here between ancient and modern is never resolved. Instead, we are left to marvel at the way Bava manages to transcend the hackneyed, worm-eaten script he had to work with - unfortunately so often the case for the maestro.

(This article appeared in a different form in *Blood & Black Lace*, issue.2) Black, Andy, 1994a, *Baron Blood*, pp.4-5, *Necronomicon 4 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

La Vampire Nue

Space age mutants and immortal vampires dance their way through yet another of Jean Rollin's bizarre visual excesses...

Given even his checkered and unique history, French director Jean Rollin surpassed himself with *La Vampire Nue* (1969) - his second vampire picture to be shot in colour as horror mixes with science fiction in an outrageous (even for Rollin!), plot conceit. Although the majority of Rollin's *oeuvre* could be described as concentrating on visual style at the expense of narrative structure, with *La Vampire Nue*, Rollin stretches even these malleable boundaries to breaking point with his decidedly non-linear plot contrivances. The main protagonist, Pierre (Oliver Martin), finds himself embroiled in a fierce battle over immortality, between a weird quasi-religious sect and a group of decadent bourgeois, intent on performing their own bizarre suicide rituals - both forces eager to claim a voluptuous, jacinth-clad "vampire" as their own goddess - "She is gifted with a power which surpasses the imagination - that of immortality."

In the ensuing conflict, the religious sect defeats the suicide cult, and in the process, audaciously reveals the "vampire" to be a new form of "mutated human", a breed who will one day inherit the earth. This outlandish notion is expanded upon by the sect's leader; "We are the prototypes of future man. We are undergoing the first mutation of the race. There were never any vampires but there are mutants. You will disappear. You are helpless against us. You are helpless against evolution" he eulogises to the defeated cult's leader. He continues that "Tomorrow, or the next day, or at any moment, may bring the new era of the mutants" as the wind howls and waves lash the shore - yes, this is the obligatory coastline conclusion for a Rollin film!

If anything, this convoluted premise betrays the influence of the pre-First World War serials which so impressed Rollin, including such entries as Louis Feuillade's *The Vampires* and *Fantomas*, as well as the oneiric sexual excesses of French decadent writers such as Theophile Gautier.

As ever, it is Rollin's imaginative *mise en scene* which captures the attention as nubile in metal dresses, fishnet bodystockings, complete with spikes protruding from their nipples, perform exotic dances and somnambulistic walks, as this proves to be Rollin's *most* "intensely fetishistic" horror hymn. In addition, members of the suicide cult attend clandestine meetings attired in velvet hoods and animal-head masks, young ingenues glide along in diaphanous robes, whilst the subtextual theme of Catholic guilt is evinced as an artist's spying eyes stay riveted to a coloured model, whose pendulous breasts and garish gold-polished talons compel him to stare - the confessional gaze of one helplessly wallowing in (and totally consumed by), sin and perversion.

Ghosts of the past haunt Rollin's uniquely personal vision however, as towering castle walls and eerie, elongated shadows register the spirit of German Expressionism, whilst the denouement featuring the torch-wielding religious acolytes, evokes the memory of Universal's monochrome epics and in particular, the oft-repeated storming of Baron Frankenstein's castle - just as the Baron tampered with nature, so too does Rollin's threadbare narrative.

The night-lit streets and darkened alleys are Rollin's homage to the paintings of surrealist's such as Delvaux and Max Ernst, as carefully composed lighting and back-lighting fills each frame for maximum effect.

The rather one-dimensional characters and stilted dialogue - "You are the one for whom the girl is destined", only serve to reinforce the almost comic-strip/serial feel to the proceedings - hell, with a more energetic final shootout and special effects, the ending could have even strayed into sub *Flash Gordon* territory!

And this, it must be said, appears to have been the "height" of Rollin's ambitions here, as only once, (and in an almost throwaway scene at that), does he aspire to adding any extra nuances to the vampire/fantasy genre, as in one sequence the "vampire" suckles at the severed breast of one girl, in an inversion of *Dracula* lacerating his own chest for a would-be vampire to drink from in Bram Stoker's novel.

Besides this lingering image, the lasting impression is of Rollin's highly stylised piece of erotica - best illustrated by the languorous exotic dancer who writhes upon the floor before indulging in a rhythmical, delirious dance in front of a transfixed group of decadent onlookers - an appropriate merging of horror, art, sex and kitsch as it's accelerating bongo beat culminates in a suitably orgasmic climax.

Black, Andy, 1994b, La Vampire Nue, pp.57-58, *Necronomicon 4 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

Schramm

Religion, sexuality and social disintegration - all fall under the menacing gaze of a serial killer in Jörg Buttgereit's salutary opus...

"Today I am dirty, but tomorrow I'll be just dirt." A simple but effective opening to German *wunderkid* Jörg Buttgereit's follow up to the deranged and dreadful pleasures of *Nekromantik 2* (1991), *Schramm: Into the Mind of a Serial Killer* (1993). The egregious necrophile aspect still permeates here, lingering like the smell of stale urine, but this is a much more thoughtful, almost introspective work, considered, calculated and yet daring enough to be original and creative - rare commodities in these days of mundane films proliferating.

Buttgereit immediately eschews any pretence at sub-thriller style plots and "suspense" - careering off in a totally unique direction as we are introduced not only to Lothar Schramm (Florian Koerner von Gustorf). The compulsive serial killer, now ironically left dying on his apartment floor after a ridiculous accident whilst decorating. Well, I say "decorating", but his attempts to paint over the blood splattered walls of his abode - a literal "white-washing" of his crimes, renders the task one of necessary concealment rather than aesthetic ambition.

The remainder of the film captures the diseased mind of the dying Schramm as he puzzles over his life, childhood flashbacks collide with a montage of violent murders, (imagined) romantic encounters and quasi-religious musings as existential philosophies jostle for our attention. It's an audacious concept and that is just about carried off thanks to some deliberately understated performances, subtle music and inventive camerawork - all elements which serve to reinforce the oneiric aura evoked here.

As we enter the dark, deviant world of the despairing Schramm, we witness his bloody bursts of violence, his acts of vile self-mutilation, his compassion and affection for his prostitute neighbour, Marianne (the obligatory Monika M role). - all encircled by one of Buttgereit's pivotal themes concerning the very prosaic nature of serial killing - the drab "normality" of the act of killing, with Schramm barely blinking an eye-lid as he wavers between everyday life and everyday murder.

Immediately Buttgereit's film opens, we are forced into this nebulous world as the fast frame, flickering stone-like shots form the opening credits montage - blurred images repeated as a plaintive orchestral melody pierces the visuals.

Newspaper headlines crave attention, screaming out the "lonesome death of the lipstick killer" epitaph, before the spiralling camera forms ever decreasing circles, finally ending up on the prone figure of Schramm. It is at this moment that the full extent of Schramm's nefarious activities is realised as, via flashbacks, we see him opening his door to a duo of *sad*-looking Jehova's Witnesses - "Have you ever really thought about God... we would like to talk to you about Jesus Christ and how he died for *your* sins too." The sermon continues; "Have you ever realised that man is a creature of wonderful perfection?" Well - these guys are about to realise that Schramm is a creature of wonderful *imperfection*, as he proceeds to garrote one man, slashing his jugular whilst his female companion screams, though physically unmoved, being in a transfixed state.

Some well aimed hammer blows to the cranium soon curtails her noise as her bloodied head falls back, only to be framed against a colourful array of flowers - a surreal image, soon to be matched by scenes of Schramm liberally applying lipstick to the female corpse, before then arranging both religious disciples in a macabre tableau of sex positions - their bloodied, naked bodies brazenly on show as the final indignity. Their earlier words to him reverberate now in Schramm's head as a final ironic touch.

Schramm's total immersion into a world of perverted desires and lugubrious obsessions, sees further flashbacks of his necrophile tendencies - a drawer full of lipsticks forming only part of his deviant behaviour as he fetishises the female corpse with stockings before summarily sodomising the cold corpse.

His sadistic behaviour here also gives rise to masochistic behaviour later as we see Schramm's crude and painful penchant for self-mutilation - applying lipstick to his manhood before hammering home a cluster of nails into the flaccid member - the cringe-inducing sight bloodily rendered by Buttgerit in extreme close-up, cue much leg crossing by male viewers of the film!

If this ritualistic punishment isn't horrific enough, he also suffers nightmare visions of a trip to the dentists - far worse than the dental tortures in *Little Shoppe of Horrors* (1960 & 1986). Here we see Schramm the patient having his front molars extracted painfully by an overzealous dentist, before then having his eye cut out and teased away by a pair of surgical pincers - more cringe-inducing moments to suffer.

Having now established Schramm is to be rather more (or less) than your average, well-adjusted citizen, we do glimpse a more humane, though ultimately frustrated and unfulfilled side to his character, via his sepia-tinted flashbacks of childhood - flowers dancing in the breeze with his mum taking holiday snaps and children playing happily. Schramm's perhaps overly romantic memories here are developed further in his unrequited love for his neighbour, Marianne. That he is also reading a book entitled *Tortured Love*, is no coincidence, as he desires Marianne without a trace of that sexual attraction being in any way reciprocated.

His ultimate frustration at this "rejection" manifests itself in his avowedly *singular* masturbation sessions - craning to hear Marianne "satisfying" her customers upstairs - the orgasmic grunts and groans echoing through the elaborate pipework in Schramm's apartment. His lonely, miserable response to this being to masturbate into a pair of dummy breasts before *cuming* into the "hole" beneath them, the routinely rinsing out the apparatus in his bath. For "bath", you can almost read "kitchen sink" as this impersonal, decidedly un-erotic ritual represents the nadir of Schramm's non-existent sexual relationships. His inability to "get it together" with someone *living* has reduced him to this pathetic caricature of a man - literally relieving his frustrations through the plastic hole in a sex aid - for him, sex has purely been reduced to a mechanical function as opposed to a loving, emotional union. His one-sided "relationship" with inanimate objects, a far cry from his romantic dreams of dancing cheek to cheek with Marianne, through wisps of dry ice - a notion as far removed from reality as any that Schramm has.

Even when Schramm does get to take Marianne to dinner, it is an austere restaurant - their "meal", a revolting, anaemic-looking concoction of drab salad and unexciting pulses and grains - and Marianne gets to pay! When Schramm finally inveigles Marianne back to his apartment later that night, it is far from the romantic interlude he has planned. She is already too tired for love, but Schramm plies her with drink before then drugging her glass in order that he may contemplate her beauty - covet her body later undisturbed. It is an eerie sequence as having "undressed" her with his eyes, he gingerly peels off her brassier and skirt before taking polaroids of Marianne's prone body, (the ideal still-life perhaps), finally climaxing with him masturbating over her. When Schramm awakes the next morning, he imagines a tiny monster is between his legs - an ironic comment on his libido which seemingly rules over his brain and consequently, his life.

Schramm's one vestige of good taste is his protection of Marianne when she rather reluctantly agrees to attend a special "party" at a private address. Schramm escorts her to the address and waits for her to return safely - the "orgy" itself proves to be well paid as well as suitably kinky as Marianne also gets to dress up as a schoolgirl!

As this insane, nightmarish world of Schramm's draws to a close, we see him walking through billowing mist as a christ-like figure materialises before him - cue Schramm's expiring - perhaps he has finally found God, but too late?, or perhaps just some form of bad karma? The most disturbing image of all however, remains until last as we see a frightened Marianne, attired in schoolgirl uniform, gagged and tied to a chair, now *without* Schramm's "protection". It's a disquieting thought that Marianne would have been safer in the hands of a serial killer than perhaps the mischievous clutches of the coterie of aged deviants she has been courting.

The central performances are expertly realised here - Gustorf utterly convincing as the urbane, yet frenzied killer, calmness personified, whilst the alluring Monika M - decked out in negligee, thigh boots and stockings for her clients, cuts a sufficiently enticing figure - certainly attractive enough to understand Schramm's obsession with her. The sublime tones of Max Muller and Gundula

Schmitz's melancholy score, also provide appropriate light and shade to Buttgerit's unique vision - faintly recalling *Nekromantik 2*'s music, but also the oneiric rumblings of Florian Fricke and Popol Vuh's hypnotic score for Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979).

Given its diverse themes and myriad of stylistic approaches and bravura camerawork, Buttgerit's rapidly evolving talent is more salient than ever here.

Black, Andy, 1994c, Schramm, pp.26-28, *Necronomicon 6 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

Monika M

She's been a necrophile, and a prostitute, but most of all, the ultimate femme fatale, c'mon down Monika M!

Can you tell me how you came to be involved with Jörg Buttgereit and his films?

I have answered this question so many times that I sometimes don't even believe the story myself. So here it is once again - it was actually Franz Rodenkirchen, who has co-written and directed with Jörg since *Nekromantik* (1987), who is responsible for getting me involved with their films. I was on my way home after watching a movie, when someone came up from behind and started talking to me. This person was Franz. He apologised for 'stalking' me, and, out of the blue, he asked me if I could imagine myself acting in a film. At first I was surprised, because after all, it isn't every day someone comes up to you and asks you that. I asked about what kind of film he had in mind and he mentioned Jörg. It just so happened that I had heard of him because I had seen *Der Todesking* (1990) only a short time before that, a film that had impressed me very much. After a short conversation we exchanged telephone numbers, and I promised him that I would give it some thought. After a few days we had arranged to meet with Jörg. I received a script, (for *Nekromantik 2*) and a video of *Nekromantik*, so that I could get a picture of the project in my mind and make a decision about whether I wanted to do it or not. Until then I had no acting experience, so the entire thing seemed risky; but since Jörg and Franz didn't seem to have a problem with that, and I saw it as a great opportunity to do something new and interesting, I decided to go ahead with it. The good experience and fun that we had working together, and the great response from abroad led up to me acting in their new movie *Schramm* (1993).

Your roles are quite rare in horror/cult films as they portray the female as the pivotal character in each film. Is it this approach which attracted you to starring in these films?

This question pertains more to *Nekromantik 2* (1991), because *Schramm* is clearly more concerned with the male character. It is true however, that the female characters in both films have a dominant personality, not at all like the 'scream queens' in the traditional sense. I think that the realistic portrayals of the characters, as opposed to the cliché-ridden role models one normally sees, have become a trademark for Jörg's films, and it is certainly much more thrilling to present a character that will occupy some viewers interest and curiosity, even after the film is over. For that reason, I had a great desire to identify with both roles, which is why it was easy for me to embody these women.

The subject matter is very controversial in these films, as your characters are a necrophile and a prostitute - what do you think about this?

To play a whore in a film is not unconventional. Although they are not always the central figures as in *Belle de Jour* (1967) or *Crimes of Passion* (1984), you are almost certain to find them in almost any third-rate crime show, if it is necessary to produce a murder victim or portray a "seedy" gangster world. As far as necrophilia is concerned, Jörg's films *Nekromantik* and *Nekromantik 2* have dealt with something in a realistic manner, which, in an exaggerated metaphysical form, is the basis for all vampire films: the relationship between sex and death. Both of these core problems to the human existence are generally not seen as being connected with each other, though both are preconditions for life to reproduce itself. We have banished death as an occurrence as far away from our daily existence as possible. Should we be confronted by it someday, through the loss of a friend or relative, then the administrative machinery we have come to rely upon formalises the rites of disposal for us. In other words, death has become totally abstract for us. Should somebody dare to destroy this abstract relationship, our reaction would be to pathologise this person. I think that it is this kind of reaction that Jörg questions with the themes of his films. That is why they are so controversial, because they attack our innermost thought processes. This may be somewhat disconcerting, but it does have a certain allure.

Is it an ambition of yours to star in more lavish studio type films or do you prefer being at the cutting edge of Jörg's style of films?

This question isn't so easy to answer. To produce films in the way Jörg does is much more interesting for all participants because everyone is involved in the actual creative process. Even the script leaves room enough for one's own ideas and changes. The finished film is therefore also a product of chance, which wasn't planned at the time the shooting began. This kind of freedom is rare in film productions with a large budget: the workers are separate in their fields, and therefore easy to replace should this be necessary. The advantage on the other hand, is that large productions pay, but for that the actors are required to maintain a certain amount of professionalism that I do not possess. To keep it short, if I had the possibility to work on a larger production, provided of course that the conditions weren't unacceptable, I would take the chance and do it. This doesn't mean however, that I wouldn't find it satisfying or interesting to work on smaller productions, such as the Buttgereit-Jelinski-Rodenkirchen productions, who work with a small team and produce films with unusual themes, for I am always interested in such a project.

Your films have been well received by the women's movement - what do you think of women's roles in Hollywood features compared to your own roles?

Yet another question that I find difficult to answer, because I find it impossible to compare Hollywood pictures with low or no budget productions. Jörg doesn't produce for a large audience, therefore he isn't under the same kind of pressures to make a successful film the way that Hollywood directors are. This in turn affects the roles, the way they are written and casted, and mainstream movies are more apt to go with cliches. *Nekromantik 2* was shown at a women's film festival in Vienna, and I think that the enthusiasm among the feminists was based upon the fact that the female protagonist couldn't relate to living men. However, strong female characters, who act upon their own initiative, sometimes even violently, can be seen in Hollywood made movies (*The Alien* series, *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Blue Steel* (1990), to name a few). Women in film haven't had to be just "sexy, dumb and passive" for a long time now, and they never exclusively were.

What are your future acting plans?

If you have a good offer let me know!

(I would like to extend my thanks to Jörg Buttgereit for arranging this interview, Monika M for her time and Tobias for his translation! - Ed).

Black, Andy, 1994d, Monika M, *Necronomicon* magazine 5, p.10-11, Noir Publishing.

Censorship & Sensibility

Explore the guardians of the nation's morals as Guy Phelps of the BBFC expands the Board's philosophy on sex, censorship, horror and other contentious matters...

After a period of relative calm the censorship scissors appear to have been sharpened recently over the delayed video releases of *Bad Lieutenant* and *Reservoir Dogs*. Why is this?

With videos, we know that far too many children are seeing adult material and this is one of the difficulties with that medium, and in the end there's not much of an answer except for more publicity and education to try and get people to take the categories more seriously, which far too many people don't. They'll lock up their medicines and their whisky and so on, but leave their videos lying around and let little kids watch things which are quite unsuitable. One of the things we've been doing this year is taking part in yet more research into what both teenagers and teenage spenders are watching on video, partly to see if there's any difference in the sort of material they watch and how they watch them. The early results suggest there probably isn't. When we've got this research in and provided it doesn't throw up any alarming conclusions, then it's quite likely we'll classify these titles. One of the things we didn't want was them all coming out at the same time in the same way as happened unfortunately on film. I think that had all those titles come out over a period of six months instead of about two months, they wouldn't have made the same impact. We saw them here spread over a period of about a year (laughing), as it happened they all got released very much at the same time and the press then grouped into the "new violence" or whatever, and partly that was just an unfortunate coincidence. It did also reflect the fact that the public are worried about violence more than they used to be and less worried about sex, and I think to some extent, horror.

What do you think about the idea of having a new category of "21" for film?

Not legally allowed to in fact. The Video Recordings Act specifically states that the highest age category is 18, so that's not a legal option at all. The Act would have to be amended and I don't think that's at all likely.

There's a lot of support in some quarters for an American classification rather than censoring system. Do you think this could be introduced effectively over here?

We think it's a disaster actually. The trouble with a voluntary system is that it encourages companies to want the highest unrestricted category, so in America to some extent, it's killed off the unrestricted G and PG categories. Everyone making films now wants a PG13 because that doesn't restrict anyone at all, but suggests there's all sorts of things in that kids will want to see because kids want to watch the highest rated films they can get. The trouble with the American system all the way up is that it is voluntary, even R films can be seen by kids of any age as long as they're accompanied, so it does force the American censors to cut sex out of the films, so a lot of films like *Basic Instinct* (1992) for instance, are cut in America, but not cut here because we at least know on film anyway, that 18 more or less means 18, and that kids aren't going to be seeing it and therefore we can be happy about passing things for adults. The argument becomes less clear when one talks about video when in the home as anyone can see them and that is one of our problems. But at least with the film classifications, we're on fairly certain ground that the audiences are more or less the sort of age that we're classifying them for. Oddly, the Americans, although they cut quite a lot of sex out of films for R ratings, don't seem to mind kids watching violence at all. To date they've always been much more worried about kids seeing sex than violence, which seems slightly odd to us, but then maybe things in America are going to change.

Certain titles lauded as horror classics seem to be stuck in censorial limbo. I'm think of *The Exorcist* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. What is happening with them?

The Exorcist (1973) is a unique case really. When it was first shown in cinemas some twenty years ago, there were a lot of cases of adults seeing the film who believe in demonic possession, who were very seriously, psychologically disturbed by the film. We have letters in our files here even, of people writing about relatives who've been quite seriously traumatised by the film. As you know,

it's been available on film, it still shows on film here quite regularly. We do still worry about video where we know that teenagers are going to see it, particularly by now such a famous title. If adults were affected in that way, we're a bit concerned that teenagers, who are much more susceptible to that sort of belief, might suffer in the same way. I think sooner or later, probably *The Exorcist* will be passed. I mean these things are all time related to some extent. As time passes it looks more of a period piece. It's nothing to do with the horror in the film at all, it's purely this unique impact it's had on a tiny number of viewers, but still the impact is so big that one would be hesitant about exposing people to it. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) - the problem is not so much horror as sexual violence and threat which is one area we've always had a very strong policy on and although the links between violence on screen and violence in society have never really been established, except in a very loose and not totally convincing way, there is quite a lot of research that establishes that sexual violence and aggression towards women does actually change men's attitudes and maybe even their behaviour as well, so we've always been very careful in that area, and it's that aspect of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* that caused it to be rejected on film in the first place and why it's never been passed on video. It hasn't been seen for a number of years now. I haven't seen it for quite a long time, maybe now it might look a bit different, but it's the sexual violence, threat and menace to women angle - particularly the sequences where she is being bashed around by the old bloke where we worried about the sadism of that, and there are unfortunately in our society, a lot of men who are turned on by violence to women. It doesn't have to be sexual violence necessarily, just any violence to women is exciting to them and that's something we do worry about.

What do you think is film's role in society? Are we not guilty of taking certain visceral films too seriously and lending them a cause célèbre status - for instance many of the films on the DPP "banned" list?

There's obviously always that danger. I think the danger that anyone applying standards faces, that you can attract publicity to things by any action you take and that's obviously always a tricky one. A lot of the titles which caused problems in the early 1980s were cheaply made material of the sort that's actually not made much anymore. We don't see that sort of thing, it may to some extent be because distributors know not to submit that type of material to us, but I think that Italian horrors were the most spectacularly unpleasant of them - it was a sort of genre that rose and fell very rapidly and I can't think of any recent examples of that sort of thing. Dario Argento is linked tenuously to that but he's a much better film maker than the cannibal makers and their ilk! There's violence and quite an element of misogyny I think in Argento's films, but they're mostly films of some interest and certainly huge technical skill. I don't think most of them work as films as well as they might, because he's good at scenes and sequences but can't ever quite put them together into a good film somehow. He can't direct actors and the stories are never quite as strong as they ought to be.

There is often an inconsistency in censoring film - I'm thinking of what's allowed in big budget releases such as *Rambo* and *Die Hard*, against what's allowed in low budget entries such as *Henry-Portrait of a Serial Killer*. Can you explain this?

Interestingly, most of the titles you mention were cut to some extent. We're not influenced by cost but there is a difference in the way films are made. A cheap, low budget film in a way is more single-minded and if its mind is on violence, then on the whole, there's going to be less things distracting from that than there are in a big budget film where for all sorts of reasons, you've got to have something in to please everybody, so even a film like *Rambo* (1982) has a little boy in to keep young children happy. They've got to appeal to a lot of children in a wide way whereas a cheap film is probably targeting a very small, specific audience and in that sort of way, if it is dealing in a difficult area, there are perhaps fewer distractions. The two types of film are totally different so it's difficult to answer your question, but consciously we wouldn't treat the two differently, unconsciously I couldn't say!

I remember reading John Trevelyan explaining how difficult he found it to cut Michael Reeves' *Witchfinder General* as the violence was so intrinsic to the film. Have you any such experiences and do any particular directors pose problems to you?

Well, we often have real problems (laughing). *Witchfinder General* (1968) is a sad case because I think now we wouldn't make anywhere near the sort of cuts that John Trevelyan made and it's one of the great sorrows of this board that there doesn't seem to be an uncut version around. That, and *Peeping Tom* (1960), the two films we we'd love to see full versions of to see what could pass now. I doubt if we would make cuts in either now, though one can't be sure without seeing them, but they both seem not to exist any more in full versions. We get a lot of films which cause us great headaches. I mean something like *Henry* (1986), another unique film. I can't think of anything else like that. In some ways a brilliantly made film and quite a serious film, and a terribly, terribly disturbing film, but what could we do about it. It really did present enormous headaches and quite a few problems which we'd never really had to face before. Most films are genre, they fall into a pattern and one knows what one's done with similar films in the past and although every film is unique to some extent, obviously there are lots of parallels and patterns and it's fairly easy to deal with. It's the things like *Witchfinder General*, perhaps in its day it was unique and certainly *Henry* now would be and they're the ones which can be particularly difficult I think, especially where you do have respect for the work itself.

***Henry* is an interesting case as the American censors refused the film a certificate due to the film's "overall tone" - a unique reason?**

I find that quite understandable. There's no reason why censorship and classification just has to hit on particular moments or shots - in the end it's the overall impact that one is concerned with and one makes tiny changes because one thinks that does affect the whole. Interestingly, with *Henry*, there was a shot very early on of a very mutilated, naked woman which was actually taken out before the film was even sent to us, and the removal of that one quite short shot, did make a huge difference to the whole impact of the film. The Americans presumably saw it with that shot and maybe that's why we reacted rather differently to the Americans. A small change can sometimes have a very big effect on everything that surrounds it.

How are the BBFC affected by public opinion, media and political pressure?

Well, we can't ignore public opinion, it's one of our jobs to be aware of it and react to it. I suppose the easy answer is to say we react to intelligent public opinion, which raises more questions than answers (!), but is the honest answer in a way. Yes, I mean we try and listen to the public but we know that most of what we hear is very partial and comes from a tiny number of people and you have to try and evaluate it within those terms. I think one of the difficulties with horror films is that there are two such different publics- there's the horror public who are aware of nuances that others aren't and probably read horror films in a quite different way to someone who's not conversant with horror films. So at the same time to some extent, we've got to bear in mind both the reactions of that group who are looking at a film in one way and a more general public who might come across some of the more popular horror films and who would read the film in a very different way, and it's very difficult to square the circle between these two groups.

One of the problems with video is that you're having to act as parents and perhaps doing a job which is really down to parental responsibility?

It is a very difficult problem to balance - on the one hand the rights of adults to see adult material and on the other, the need to protect children from what we know some of them will see but shouldn't, and in many ways it's an unanswerable dilemma.

Have you any particular personal favourites from the horror genre?

I enjoy some sorts of horror films. I think the trouble with horror now is or was, that it's got hung up on gore and special effects to the detriment of stories, suspense and real fear and I think that was a pity. That period is perhaps dying a bit, in fact the whole horror genre seems to have died somewhat and lost its way lately, so the films I tend to think of are all rather old. There's been so few good horror films recently. I thought *Hellraiser* (1987) was very effective and each of the succeeding ones less so, although part 3 was better than 2. I enjoy watching Argento's films - I just wish they were better overall, rather than relying on the odd, very well made sequences.

I would imagine that the older material which is being released at present - gothic horrors from the 1960s and 1970s can't pose too many problems for you?

They sometimes do, largely because they quite often have sexual violence, or sexual threat, which is something as I've said, we do still worry about. Having been brought up in the period I'm a great fan of the 1960s - I won't have any of this nonsense which claims the period to be the beginning of the end of civilisation, but the sort of freedom of the 60s did allow freedom of certain ideas which now look a little strange, and I think that the way women were used in the 60s, both in society and in films - and I think feminists would now agree - was probably not altogether a good thing. It went too far to some extent and that is reflected in some of the films.

What do you think the public's view is of the BBFC?

I think that a lot of people think we're a bunch of old people, which well, we are to some extent, relative to the age of cinema-goers, but we cover a fairly wide age range and a lot of us quite enjoy, or very much enjoy horror films. We're certainly not sitting here pouncing on every horror film in order to see what dreadful things we can do to it, but it's much fun to believe the opposite really isn't it, so print the legend (laughing)!

Black, Andy, 1994, *Necronomicon 4* magazine, p.11-13, Noir Publishing.

Matador

The close correlation between bullfighting, killing and the sexual act forms the basis for this original serial killer film.

Loosely inspired by the Hollywood melodrama *Duel in the Sun* (1946), this compelling work from the unique oeuvre of Spanish *enfant terrible*, Pedro Almodóvar, focuses on an ex-bullfighter Diego Montes (Nacho Martínez), who instructs pupils at his Madrid school in the *corrida* - "the art of the kill". Amongst his charge is the sexually repressed, mother-fixated Angel (Antonio Banderas).

Having attempted to prove his masculinity by raping Montes girlfriend Eva (Eva Cobo), Angel fails miserably and after being consumed with catholic guilt, turns himself in to the police, confessing not only to the rape but to a series of murders currently striking fear into the city.

Where Almodóvar diverges from the standard Hollywood thriller is in his early revelation that the killer is in fact the dominating lawyer, Maria Cardenal (Assumpta Serna), whilst the police labour under the misapprehension that it is Angel. The intention here is not to produce some kind of sub-Agatha Christie style whodunnit, more an insight into the passion that loving and killing can arouse, together with the veiled theme of unrequited love eventually being fulfilled.

That Almodóvar chooses one of Spain's national institutions as his target/theme is appropriate given his predilection for perverse characters, weird situations and controversial subject matter. So, we find that the art of bullfighting is continually juxtaposed with the "art" of killing, and the act of sex. Hence we are told; "A good thrust is the result of a good job" and that; "The sword... must be sunk behind the nape, well directed, to sink in the heart and lungs. To kill properly we must use the sword and the heart".

That these words are intercut with Cardenal's frenzied coupling with one muscle-bound victim - her fatal thrust with a hat-pin into his neck simultaneously arriving with her orgasm, drives the point home, (so to speak!), whilst her continued rhythmical body thrusts hint at the dubious "delights" of possible necrophiliac tendencies.

The circular ending finds Cardenal finally united with the object of her desire - Montes, and their long-awaited consumption of a hitherto platonic relationship, doubled with a total eclipse of the moon as their combined point of orgasm signals their dual deaths.

As the onrushing Inspector Del Valle observes; "I've never seen anyone so happy", as both Montes and Cardenal experience the ultimate in sex and death, thereby realising their shared dream of the Freudian Death drive - Thanatos. As Monteo had earlier observed; "You and I are alike. We both feel obsessed by death".

What occurs in between these moments of high drama is decidedly more low key as Almodóvar seeks to illuminate the emotional complexities of the characters on show. Whilst the usual gamut of (his) garish players are missing from this film, and with it some of Almodóvar's typical local colour, this is one of his most involving and convincing works, benefiting from its realistic characters and more subtle motivations.

Angel is the prime mover in the piece - too introverted to be a classic hero, yet too gentle to be considered a brutish murderer - his early contemplative gaze at a cloudy sky, a portentous sign of the problems to come. His failed attempt to assert his masculinity upon Eva - "I'm sorry" he feebly replies afterwards, is followed by his mother's refusal to acknowledge him after learning of the episode. "If you do not take the right path I prefer not to see you" she retorts - blood may be thicker than water but not thicker than one's religious fervour and reputation it seems.

When Angel begins to question his own sanity, his mother still seeks to assert religious rather than secular answers - "You don't need a psychiatrist, you need a spiritual director" she claims. Even when Angel is interrogated over his attempted rape, it is sympathy rather than anger which he elicits from the viewer, cutting a solitary, pathetic figure as Eva's mother observes knowingly; "Your poor mother. She who is pious".

The imposing sight of Cardenal as his lawyer does nothing to quell Angel's emotional state - she knows he is innocent but he claims that, "I'm more guilty than you think, just ask my mother". Cardenal's subsequent meeting with Angel's mother proves to be highly charged as the sorrowful mater maintains that; "I must be alone with my grief", continuing "My son must accept God's punishment" with "God won't be in court" being Cardenal's acidic reply. The tirade continues unabated however as she claims that; "Such a monster cannot be my son. As a child he had dreadful visions, evil was nestling inside him".

If anything, Almodóvar lays the blame for Angel's introspective personality firmly at the door of Spanish traditionalists who insist on a high moral code and equate church attendance with christian-like behaviour.

Angel, in serious danger of being convicted for the serial murders is only saved accidentally by his mother's almost incidental claim that, "He can't stand the sight of blood" - quite a convincing defence argument for a supposed murderer?

Eventually, Angel's special telekinetic powers enable him to lead the police to the real culprits, but even this skill is not recognised by his mother, who sees it as being more aligned to being a mark of the devil, (as well as a nod in the direction of Almodóvar's previous 1985 opus, *What Have I Done To Deserve This?*, where a bravura finale sees an entire kitchen wallpapered by telekinesis).

Almodóvar is also careful to name check other inspirational exponents of the *giallo* genre, of which *Matador* shares so many generic elements. Thus, the opening scenes of a bullfighter masturbating over graphic moments of sexual violence on a film on TV are culled from Mario Bava's *Blood and Black Lace* (1964) and Jess Franco's *Bloody Moon* (1980) - even down to Almodóvar's recreation of Bava's Haute couture dressing room with bitching models on illicit drug binges, whilst the sight of Serna lying in the bath recalls the prone body of Claude Dantes from Bava's film.

Elsewhere, Angel's vivid visions/dreams conjure up black-coated assassins and art deco settings which evoke Dario Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970) amongst others, whilst Almodóvar's predilection here for muscular young men in fetishistic bullfighting regalia, similarly parallels typical *giallo* film accoutrements with killers disguised by trench coats and black gloves.

That Cardenal portrays the most powerful figure in the film is no mistake - merely a conscious indication of Almodóvar's own politically correct approach as Angel is emasculated by his mother and Montes is immolated by Cardenal's intoxicating presence.

As Cardenal observes; "Men see killing as a crime - we women don't see it so. Every murderer has a feminine aspect and every murderess a masculine aspect". The final overriding image however, remains the two star-crossed lovers entwined in a welcomed death - "I love you more than my own death" Cardenal purrs in the mortifying climax.

Black, Andy, 1994, *Matador Necronomicon* magazine 4, p.31-32, Noir Publishing.

The Terror of Dr. Hitchcock

A macabre strain of necrophilia, drug-taking and sexual perversion punctuates Riccardo Freda's gothic flair in this feverish 60s shocker...

Though not quite living up to its sensationalist as lines; "Dr. Hitchcock's shocking secret was a coffin named desire!" And "The candle of his lust burns brightest in the shadow of the grave" - (let's face it, what film could?!), Freda's poetic "hymn to necrophilia" is still a spirited period offering - it's perverse energy in complete contrast to the funereal atmosphere it blatantly evokes.

Robert Filming plays the eponymous Doctor Bernard Hitchcock - a deviant of the highest degree as the opening scenes show him clubbing a gravedigger unconscious, before opening the oak coffin lying within the freshly dug grave and fondling the bleached-white body inside. An abrupt cut to the good doctor going through his surgeon's paces establishes that his medical knowledge and interest runs the whole gamut from the living to the dead.

Going home to his wife Margaret (Maria Teresa Vianello), Hitchcock pays only a cursory glance to her piano recital party, his shadow yawning against the wall as he ascends the staircase - a nod in the direction of earlier German Expressionist cinema, as well as an indication of his Owen, lugubrious and solitary character.

As the party dissipates, straining orchestration pierces the soundtrack as, in a scene of delirious perversion, Margaret ;lies expectantly, surrounded by a myriad of candles in the doctor's cellar lair, before he injects her, then kisses her prone body - all to the accompaniment of Roman Vlad's rousing though melancholy score. The feverish intensity of this scene is paralleled later as the doctor continues to indulge his sex and anaesthetic games games, only on this occasion, Margaret overdoses (literally), flailing and gasping for breath before eventually expiring. A rapid close-up zooms into Hitchcock's face as he covers his eyes and screams, conveying his own distress, but also providing the catalyst for his perversions to continue, as, 12 years later, he returns to his sombre residence with a new wife Cynthia (Barbara Steele).

"I can be happy anywhere as long as I'm with you" Cynthia glowingly confesses to Hitchcock, but the doctor's obsession continues unabated, fuelled if anything by Steele's unique features, and soon he indulging in the same bizarre fantasies, culminating with his frenzied attempts to drain Cynthia's blood and so revive his first wife Margaret - all this a full 25 years before Clare Higgins attempted the same feat in *Hellraiser* (1987).

Besides the prevalent images from beyond the grave and the tangible evidence of Hitchcock's necrophilia, what is most startling is Freda's ambiguous (and audacious) stance concerning the deviant doctor. Despite his crimes and unhealthy fascination with the flesh of the dead, Hitchcock is portrayed as an almost sympathetic, even pitiable figure as opposed to an evil monster. Instead, Freda attempts to highlight the doctor's medical altruism and expand his philosophies on life thus; "So much time has been wasted in attempts to analyse the soul, while the material, mechanical side of our beings remains an unknown universe" as Hitchcock elucidates his preference for Darwinian theories over purely spiritual and therefore inferred, religious musings.

As Hitchcock's mental state deteriorates, so too does his physical condition as he begins to bungle operations - "Going back to hospital after all these years has put my nerves on edge" he admits after refusing to use his "special" anaesthetic on a patient who subsequently dies. We then see the doctor sitting quietly at home, morose, his conscience agonising over his mistakes. It's a thematic tendril all too neglected by Freda as he eschews any Frankenstein-style traits of medical explorer/advancer. The question "Is Bernard *normal*?" is met with the intriguing reply; "As much as any man of genius."

Eventually, any such deliberations - "I'm worried my hands are not as capable as they used to be" are supplanted by Hitchcock's overriding zeal to carry on his covert pursuits as we see him fondling a cadaver in the morgue before being interrupted - "I wanted to check the state of coagulation in this case" his only partially convincing response. Hitchcock is also culpable in the way he is continually prepared to place Margaret in danger as he relentlessly pursues his dreadful pleasures. "You've changed Bernard. I don't seem to mean anything to you anymore" Cynthia

claims whilst the doctor's willingness to place her in jeopardy is accompanied by the mental cruelty he shows towards her; "I'm afraid my dear that your nerves have given way again" and "You're imagination is much too vivid" - the final nail he drives into her emotional coffin being; "Drink this, it will make you sleep" as he attempts to poison her. As a physician later remarks when taking a sample of Cynthia's drink - "The milk you brought me contained sleeping tablets - enough to give eternal sleep."

Considering Cynthia's fragile state - still reeling from her father's recent death, the doctor's expected medical sensitivity doesn't extend to healing his wife's mental scars, merely erupting them with his morbid fascination for his first wife. He keeps Margaret's bedroom locked in shrine-like reverence, whilst Cynthia complains that: "I know you adored her, but wherever I go her eyes seem to be watching me." As the doctor's assistant concludes, "Cynthia feels like a rival, and in her subconscious is this question of doubt."

Freda's adeptness at conjuring up these diverse mental traumas, are enhanced by his ability to evoke a powerful gothic atmosphere, where such nightmarish visions and thoughts can survive. The portentous chimes of Big Ben, the fog shrouded graveyards, the cobweb-coated crypt and skull-topped tomb where Margaret is interned - all heighten the tension and increase the rarified atmosphere.

The doctor's palatial residence also takes on a character of its own. He arrives there at midnight with Cynthia after his hiatus abroad - it's neglected state described thus; "Nature's very prolific, it's only taken a few years to turn this place into a wilderness." In effect, the barren wastes of the house form the sub-textual parallel with Hitchcock's barren soul and infertile emotions.

Continual scenes of ethereal quality suggest the ghost-like presence of Margaret, compounded by the gloomy nature of the house. Screams in the night, Margaret's eerie portrait, stormy nights, wind rattling the windows, culminating in the luminous appearance of a white-shrouded Margaret out in the garden - all add credence to the notion that somehow Margaret's spirit, if not body, survives. Shots of Cynthia seemingly imprisoned behind glass windows and iron bars reach their peak during the macabre conclusion as she awakes inside a coffin - a glass window panel her only contact with the outside world, (shades of Dreyer's *Vampyr* here). Her subsequent escape, only leading her to be confronted with a decaying skeleton - the cause of her eventual fainting episode.

As green and blue lights suffuse the funereal cellar and its cavernous underground passage ways, we see Hitchcock eerily lit by a candelabra flame, his face distorted by the blood-red glow of the flickering flames, before then suspending Cynthia upside down as he attempts his nefarious blood transfusions. "Yes, kill her, then there will only be me" he hears Margaret's spirit-like voice plead, only for his assistant Kurt to appear - pushing the doctor back into the blazing inferno that now rages within, and to his death, whilst Kurt escapes and saves Cynthia.

Although the kaleidoscopic lighting and melodramatic, gothic flavour may be borrowed from alumni such as Mario Bava, Freda imbues the film with a very rare dynamism, sometimes overspilling the cup of reality as subtlety is devoured by naked passion and garish compositions.

The Hitchcock reference isn't entirely spurious but Freda, well, he's more your master of the macabre (as opposed to suspense), allowing his burgeoning sensationalism to burgeon a mite *too far*, overshadowing his more atmospheric passages - a common failing in many of his films - ditto *Murder Obsession's* (1981) graphic chainsaw death.

Black, Andy, 1994, *The Terror of Dr. Hitchcock*, pp.6-8, *Necronomicon 4 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

The Long Hair of Death

Heresy, ghosts, revenge, infidelity and murder - a passionate potpourri brought to boiling point by Italian director Antonio Margheriti.

"I will haunt you to your grave. A pestilence shall befall you, evil will stalk you by night and men shall mourn their stillborn sons..."

The maleficent ravings of a mad woman and witch perhaps? An empty threat, the product of a diseased mind? Or, a prophetic decree uttered from the mouth of a condemned victim of injustice?

Well, I'll take the latter thank you as Adel Karnstein, spouse to Count Humbolt (Giuliano Rafielli), is burned at the stake as a heretic and sorceress, falsely accused of the murder of her husband's brother Franz - the culprit, in fact, being the Count's own son Kurt (Giorgio Ardisson).

Not content with forcing Adel's daughter, Helen (Barbara Steele) and Lisabeth (Halina Zalewska) to watch the macabre spectacle, Humbolt then proceeds to send Helen to a watery grave after she confides in him that she knows the killer - "There my dear, your secret is safe" being Humbolt's callous epitaph for her. Rounds one and two to Humbolt perhaps, but not for long as Adel instigates her vicarious revenge by resurrecting Steele, only now in the guise of Mary - who proceeds to drive a wedge between the newly-weds Lisabeth and Kurt, not too difficult considering Kurt's brutish behaviour and burgeoning libido!

Revenge is indeed sweet as Mary's alarming initial entrance triggers a fatal coronary for Humbolt, before an ironic conclusion which sees Kurt tricked by Mary, and then trapped within a totem structure, then summarily torched by the unknowing locals as celebrations abound for the abrupt end to the hitherto rampant plague.

Now there is a strain of thought which considers this rather "penny dreadful" scenario to be somewhat pedantic and melodramatic but I have to admit here to harbouring a sneaking admiration for Margheriti, who too often is simply dismissed as a mere hack. Personally, I find his *Blood for Dracula* (1973) to be highly enjoyable - much more so than his vastly overrated companion piece, *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1973), whilst also admiring the sub-Vietnam thrills and (blood) spills in his urban flesh eater epic, *Cannibal Apocalypse* (1980).

The Long Hair of Death (1965), or *I Lunghi Capelli della Morte*, to give its native title, is a handsomely mounted, ably acted, gothic horror which holds up considerably well to its other Italian peers of the period. That said, Margheriti isn't averse to a spot of impromptu plagiarism and the opening execution scene with its attendant curse, the casting of the inimitable Ms. Steele in dual roles and the all pervasive, brooding atmosphere, all pay homage to Mario Bava's seminal gothic drama, *Black Sunday* (1960). Margheriti even utilises some musical out-takes from Bava's *Blood and Black Lace* (1964), as if to reinforce the influence.

However, if you're going to plagiarise, you may as well plagiarise the best, which is what Margheriti has done, together with imbruing the picture with some of his own visual style and directorial flourishes. Although Margheriti masterfully heightens the various emotional tensions and complexities throughout the film - not least the "romantic" trysts between Kurt and Mary, Kurt and Lisabeth, he also presents us with some powerful set pieces combining visceral terror with stylised framing.

The film's intense opening has Helen pleading with Humbolt to save her mother's life, judiciously intercut with Adel being frog-marched to her funeral pyre by armed guards. The executioner's sanctimonious declaration being that; "Judgement will be rendered by means of justice that is supreme. If you are really innocent, God will protect you and restore you to us untouched, but if not, you'll burn Adel, burn to death. Human judgement is fallible, but that of the Supreme will tell."

As the flames engulf her, leaping up as if to touch the night sky, Adel, clutching a cross to her like some Joan of Arc iron, spits out her ominous invective: "I curse you Humbolt and I curse your

descendants. Your bodies will be tortured like mine has been tortured today. I will haunt you to your grave. A pestilence shall befall you, evil will stalk you by night and men shall mourn their stillborn sons. Humbolt listen. I say now my last curse will be on you and your family. Murder and death shall pervade you all and you Kurt, yes you, will suffer this death of mine!" As the boring embers snuff out Adel's last ounce of life, the words linger - a testimony to their latent poignancy.

When we next see Helen, she is picking over the ashes of her dead mother, only for an ethereal voice to float upon the wind to her' "Helen, remember that your mother died innocent. You must avenge me for my soul will never rest. Do not be swayed by the nimble tongues of those hypocrites. Let not their wealth and power prevent you from taking the path I ask you to follow - remember Helen, avenge me, you must avenge me..." as her voice disappears into the night air.

All the while this spiritual soliloquy sounds, we see Helen kneeling over the burning embers of Adel's funeral pyre, wisps of smoke swirling, the wind blowing Helen's long hair as she trawls the dust and ashes through her hands - the obligatory cross stretching out at an acute angle, before Helen looks up to the stars above as if to seek divine intervention, before then running away into the distance.

Perhaps Margheriti's *piece de resistance* here however, is in his resurrection of Steele's character, only now under the name of Mary. As the villagers pray to God for salvation from the plague's infestation in the local church, we see the figure of Christ start to bleed in true stigmata fashion, whilst thunder and lightning whip up a ferocious storm outside. A fearsome thunderbolt strikes Helen's grave, whereupon the now exposed skull buried inside, becomes flesh again as eyes pop back into their sockets - "And on the day of judgement, the dead shall return to life", the priest proclaims inside the church.

The now revived Mary, crashes open the large church doors, head bowed in true Fulci-like zombie stance - silhouetted in the doorway, before she then collapses to the floor in a state of sheer exhaustion - cue also, the equally dramatic coronary which strikes fatally at Humbolt. The only real problem with this show-stopping scene is its appearance at roughly halfway through the film - a case of piquing too soon perhaps?

Only the predictably ironic finale, as Kurt does indeed undergo the fatal torture meted out to Adel, raises the pulse again. Here, the claustrophobic POV shots of Kurt, trapped within the wicker structure as flames and smoke begin to billow around him, is accompanied with the bitter rebuke from the scored Lisabeth; "The fire of vengeance, burn as my mother did" - the final lingering shot of the enflamed effigy, a curious precursor to the similarly emphatic ending in Robin Hardy's superior *The Wicker Man* (1973).

Amidst all this horrific splendour we find the *de rigueur* trappings of the gothic film genre, ranging from the secret passageways and cobwebbed corridors which punctuate the castle abode, to the eerie spectacle of Humbolt crying over his brother Franz's skeletal remains in the crypt - only for it to appear to move - Humbolt's hurried exit revealing the cause of the movement to be some particularly active rats beneath the bones.

Whilst Margheriti eschews any tangible form of supernatural elements, his use of Adel's disembodied voice, the appearance of Helen "lookalike" Mary, together with Lisabeth's apparent resuscitation from death during the finale, all suggest a supernatural aura which is never really fully developed, perhaps prudently so as part of the film's appeal is its deliberately ambiguous approach to the subject of secular and occult worlds.

There's a powerful and influential emotional vortex swirling around here too, given the fact that Helen/Mary are used as Adel's instrument of revenge, visited from the spiritual world onto the physical world. It's also a strong emotional nucleus with which to work from, given the Count's willingness to slaughter his own wife, then Helen - his callousness mirrored by Kurt who own mercenary character has led him to murder Franz, in order that Humbolt can inherit the family fortune. It begs the question as to how long Humbolt would have been safe from the monetary foibles of Kurt.

Kurt, like Humbolt, also suffers from a severe lack of compassion - his heart ruled by his libido as his licentious desires seek to claim new victims. As Lisabeth says to him; "You've had my body, but not my soul" as Kurt isn't interested in esoteric, intellectual pursuits, only in satiating his own hedonistic impulses.

Although enticed to some extent by Mary, it's fitting that Kurt's willingness to poison his wife Lisabeth - effectively casting her aside like some discarded plaything, should lead to his eventual demise. Given Adel's precursory outburst, there is a continual strain of Greek Tragedy running through the film as the pivotal characters seem doomed to their pre-destined fates - a cloying atmosphere of menace cloaking many of the castle scenes in amongst its gloomy interior.

As for the aforementioned similarities with the work of Bava, Barbara Steele succinctly remarked; "Bava was like a ghost, a man in silent shoes, you could barely feel his presence. Margheriti was exactly the opposite - very assertive, emotional and aggressive."

Black, Andy, 1994, *The Long Hair of Death*, pp.4-6, *Necronomicon 6 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

Genre Loves Jezebel

A little over a year ago Redemption Video burst onto an unsuspecting horror scene offering cult classics and obscure gems. Now it's the turn of eroticism in the shapely form of Jezebel, Redemption's wicked sister. To expose the cleavage on this wanton stablemate, I spoke to Nigel Wingove...

Since we last spoke Redemption has really taken off hasn't it?

With Redemption, the sales are good but they're not massive - our stuff tends to sell in fairly equal amounts across the range of titles we've got out, but we've never had a big hit. The catalogue sells steadily which is good but, in money terms, we're still very small and the money is put back into buying more titles, so any profit we do make is used to finance other films. Launching abroad is what I'm most excited about now for Redemption, in Australia first in April 1995 and New Zealand. Now we're also launching in Holland, all the Scandinavian countries, France - that'll probably be April as well. The real biggie for us is launching in the states, which is probably going to be around June/July and we're launching in America on laserdisc as well as on video - but we're really being pirated out there in a big way now.

What can you do to combat this?

Well, very little. We don't actually have the US rights and therefore it's up to the producer that we buy them from to take action against them and they're trying - but for instance, Jean Rollin, who really is broke and is trying to stop Video Search of Miami who are ripping him off. For someone like him, he's just an independent director who lives in a tiny flat and hasn't got much money. Video Search are really hurting him as they're getting money which really ought to go to him. What we've done is approach the MPAA who take it really seriously, but don't seem to be able to actually do anything and they passed us on to the FBI (!), but they're obviously more concerned with dealing with cocaine smugglers than a small English horror label being pirated out there. There's not much we can do until we get out there ourselves which is what we're going to have to do. We're talking to three big distributors out there and we're certainly going to take action - the name Redemption being registered worldwide and the logo, though on the plus side it at least proves there's a market over there for our product! So that's all very exciting, to be starting from a tiny video label and because of the way we've done it, that we're able to expand around the world, that's exciting and launching on laserdisc is good too.

I imagine that some of your releases will be in, shall we say, rather more complete form than in the UK?!

Oh yes, they'll be completely uncut - *Bare Behind Bars* (1975) and *Sadomania* (1981) are two of the first we're putting out on disc (*both currently banned in the "libertarian" UK!* - Ed). *Demoniac* (1975), I've never been entirely happy with the master we were originally given, mainly because the film's been chopped around so many times, the grading's been different, so we're going back to Eurocine so hopefully we'll have a new master created.

I think Demoniac is culled from two or three Franco films including The Sadist of Notre Dame?

That's right - they've all been messed around, so I want to go back to the original source material and get that done properly. I mean the best aspect of all this is that we spent quite a lot of money on *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1972), getting the best possible master we could and I hate having films cut, ditto laserdiscs and we launched on CD video in England in January this year. Again, things like *The Living Dead Girl* (1982) which cost us a fortune to create from the negative, but was cut by two or three minutes by the BBFC, but we'll be delighted to put that out uncut on disc. As far as all our releases go, Franco has probably been the most successful - one of our main sellers and in Australia they want a kind of "Franco Collection". I'm after *The Perverse Countess* (1974), *Demons* (1973) and *Eugenie de Sade* (1973) at the moment - we're getting that from the negative. There's a lot of rare Franco stuff we'd like, but a lot won't be released in the UK I'm afraid because of the problems with the BBFC and Franco's films, so a lot of the titles we're

putting out in 1995 are Italian *giallo* films like *What Have They Done To Solange?* (1972), and *In The Folds Of The Flesh* (1970), and classic, sleazy Italian films which I'm quite a fan of I must admit. *The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave* (1971) - I'm actually having a huge argument with the company at the moment because they claim the only master of the film they is a full screen one and I'm not having it, as I had the same problems with this company over *Deep Red* (1975), and I'm not going through that again. *Evelyn's* one of my favourite all-time films and that's the kind of stuff we'll be releasing in the UK, but obviously the rest of the world now gives us the opportunity to expand what we're doing, so I can put out *The Portrait of Annie* (1976) on the Jezebel label and a whole lot more.

You have a refreshing approach to releasing extended/subtitled versions of films such as *Deep Red*, *Tombs of the Blinds Dead* and *Baron Blood* with its original score?

The bottom line is it's mainly films I do like myself. The way it works is we track down the appropriate company for titles and only agree to transfer money to them when we get the kind of quality and complete master we want. For instance, the original master for *Tombs* was only 79 minutes long (!), panned and scanned and cut for US TV, and when I complained they told me it was the most complete version, (which I knew was crap), so you have to keep arguing with them! The same thing happened with *Martin* (1976) - I wanted a new version but it didn't appear.

***Tombs* is a gorgeous print...**

Yeah, that was an absolute find - they didn't know they had that. The same company are hopefully going to allow us to source their original material on *Sadist Erotica* (1969) and *Succubus* (1968), so we may secure better prints as the company now understand exactly what we want and couldn't be more helpful, unlike some of the Italian companies who don't understand us or pretend not to!

Have you had any one film release yet you'd consider to be really successful?

Salon Kitty (1976) and *Killer Nun* (1979) have been consistently good, as well as Dallamano's *Venus in Furs* (1969), *Succubus*, *Requiem for a Vampire* (1971) and *Virgin Witch* (1972) - that's been incredibly good. Also *Deep Red* as you'd expect, *Fascination* (1979) and *Female Vampire* (1973). *Tombs* has done quite well but *Martin* has been disappointing despite being passed uncut. Jezebel is selling very, very well too.

You unearthed an obscure classic in *Valerie And Her Week Of Wonders*, do you have any similar gems to come?

That's one of my favourites - I came across it some years ago in an old copy of *Film Review* and just on the evidence of the stills it seemed impressive. It's been a real disappointment - not the film which is wonderful and all the reviews were favourable except for *Time Out* which called it "soft pornography" (!), but it just hasn't sold in any real numbers. What I need though is for the bigger films to subsidise the less well known ones. Another which sells poorly unfortunately is Mario Bava, which is disappointing as all the fans go on about him, (*hang on a minute - do you mean me?! - Ed*), but we've got *Hatchet for the Honeymoon* (1970) lined up this year as we've got the rights. It's Franco and Rollin really who've been our main business and then *Bare Behind Bars* (1975) and *Sadomania* (1981) would have been big sellers if they'd come out in the UK.

I think perhaps the apathy with Bava is waiting for his rarer works to be released such as *Black Sabbath* (1963) and *Curse of the Dead* (1966) ?

Danger Diabolik (1968) is one I'm trying to track down because it's quite rare. I'd like to get his work in their full versions as well, but at least Jezebel is proving to be really popular. I've just bought a package of Radley Metzger films - *The Lickerish Quartet* (1970), *Score* (1974), *Curious Female* (1970) and *Carmen Baby* (1967), so we've got some nice stuff coming out on Jezebel. I reckon it'll take me a while to get Jezebel into its swing and evolve but they are selling well which is good. Elsewhere there is one little gem, *Black Candles* (1982) by José Larraz, which I hope is

pretty rare and big ones for us, (I hope!), are Clive Barker's first two films, *Salome* (1973) and *The Forbidden* (1978) - the latter, half an hour long and it's what he shot as a precursor to the first *Hellraiser* (1987) - that's edited under his own instructions. He shot it and it was never finished, so that's quite a coup for us. There is also one film which has its moments, called *Egon Schiele* (1980), based on the artist of the same name, with music by Brian Eno - it's got some quite nice scenes in it and is worth seeing. I'd also recommend *The Other Hell* (1981), *Stagefright* (1987), *House of Whipcord* (1974) and the full version of *Night of the Doomed* (1965) with Barbara Steele, plus *Witchfinder General* (1968) and *The Hellfire Club* (1961). For abroad, we have *Night Train Murders* (1976), *Tokyo Decadence* (1992), Tinto Brass' *Paprika* 1991), Borowczyk's *Blood of Dr. Jekyll* (1981) and *The Story of Sin* (1975). The only one I'm after but haven't secured yet is *The Magic Donkey* (1970) with Catherine Deneuve, a French adult fairy tale about where she has to put on the skin of a donkey to go through a forest - it's got a *Beauty and the Beast* feel to it - from all its descriptions and stills, (it) might have an element of *Valerie* in it.

As we've previously mentioned, you've run foul of the censors with your own *Visions of Ecstasy* and *Redemption's Demoniac*, *Bare Behind Bars* and *Sadomania* - what is the current situation?

With *Visions*, because the European Commission ruled in my favour, there was an opportunity to find some sort of friendly settlement which didn't work out and now it's going to the full European Court of Strasberg, which should happen by mid 1995 and they've said I should win, but it is a court and nobody can say for sure. If I lose though, *Visions* will be banned throughout Europe which is fairly extraordinary. If I win then the English government will be forced to let me release it. Our lawyers have looked at *Demoniac* and *Sadomania* and feel we haven't got any hope of winning, but *Bare Behind Bars* we might have. Because of the new criminal justice legislation, if I do win it will place the BBFC in a very awkward position, so they'll do everything in their power to win. I am opposed to censorship for adults, however, and felt that we had to put our money where our mouth was and make a stand.

In as previous interview you mentioned the possibility of releasing both *The Story of O* and *Salò* - is this going to happen?

In the UK no, but these and *Leather Dreams* (1992) which would have had half an hour cut out of it for the UK release, but it is ok for disc release abroad.

Despite these problems you do seem to have had more success with the BBFC than others. Is this down to artistic packaging and your arthouse crossover appeal?

I think the only thing with the BBFC is that they know we will fight them and they know we will go to our lawyers and we will take them on. So, if they ban one of our films, they know damn well that we're going to fight them and they'll be a lot of press and they'll have to justify their decision in court in front of the media, which no other company will do. If they did then the BBFC would probably be a lot more careful and not as draconian, or just hold films up. We haven't had much trouble with *Jezebel* so far, that's been relatively easy.

Can you expand on the philosophy behind *Jezebel* and the kind of films we'll be seeing?

It is the same as *Redemption* in a sense. I want to build up a definitive and interesting miso-mash of erotica from the 1960s, 70s and through to the 80s. It's actually proving to be more difficult finding the material than for *Redemption*, because these films seem even more obscure in terms of who owns them and so on. But tracking down these Radley Metzger films in New York was quite a coup for us and we actually got hold of Metzger and he's still got the negatives thank goodness, so that's a beginning and I'm pleased because I think he's an important erotic film director. Things like *I Am A Nymphomaniac* (1999) we got from France and we got *Danish Dentist on the Job* (1972) (laughing), but it was a really popular film over here in the 1970s so it's one I wanted to get. There's also a lot of European films I'd like to pick up and that's going to take me longer, perhaps a year to a year and a half, to get *Jezebel* really into shape. But it is selling well

which is great as it gives me more money too buy other titles whilst Redemption's always been a bit tight.

So what does the future hold for you?

Well, until now it's only been me working but I'm taking on more staff so we'll be launching a Jezebel magazine similar to us doing *Redeemer* magazine for Redemption. We've also been approached by another company about doing CD ROM's - now we're buying the rights to a lot of these Redemption books like *Countess Dracula*, which I'm filming moving sequences to cut into on the CD, so I'm excited about that as it means I'm able to get back behind a camera, which I've been unable to do recently except for shooting stills. I'm also commissioning some books on Fulci, Franco, Rollin, people like that so we can do printed book and also a CD ROM where you can click in on moving clips as we own the clip rights, so that's quite exciting for us, and also to do an interactive magazine, as the first CD ROM we're doing is putting *Redeemer 1 & 2* on an interactive CD, but obviously when we do a Jezebel magazine and the next *Redeemer* then we can start putting clips on there as well. The aim is that in two years, if the whole thing hasn't collapsed (!), I'd intend to make another film again and we're looking seriously at funding a future Rollin project. I'm also publishing two of Rollin's vampire books and our plans are to get Rollin over here to film sequences for what will also be interactive CD's of Rollin's first vampire books and moving sequences. The CD's in a way came out of the blue as we could never have afforded to do them as they're so expensive, but this particular company are doing a special deal with us to enable it to be cost effective. It's giving us the beginnings of a way of moving back into film work and the potential of CD is opening up a lot of doors and by the end of 1995, early 1996, we can look at raising the funds for a film project of say £250,000. It should be possible as we've had a successful start and each project becomes easier to fund.

You've also managed to acquire some good press coverage which helps?

We had a fair bit of good press but it's tricky with horror because we want to keep it upmarket to get people interested who wouldn't normally watch these films - I do get very pissed off when people dismiss these films as rubbish because they just don't know the genre - especially the Italian ones. Only the other day I watched *The Girl in Room 2A* (1974) and *Short Night of the Glass Dolls* (1971) - I'd like to pick up the rights to most of that type, but again, it's difficult tracking them down, like *The Iguana with the Tongue of Fire* (1971), *The Sweet Body of Deborah* (1968) and *The Killer Reserved Nine Seats* (1974). I like these and the idea of being able to pick up all of these films means that in a few years time we might be short of material, so we can concentrate perhaps more on CD, disc and film production.

Are there any particularly important lessons you've learn't from all of this?

We're still vulnerable as far as money goes, but also if you leave things to other people in the video industry, you lose out so we try and do things ourselves as opposed to wasting money and being ripped off. The main people we work with are the actual film fans who are more knowledgeable and also helped put us here in the first place.

Black, Andy, 1995, *Necronomicon* magazine 7, p.30-34, Noir Publishing.

(Extracts from this interview were also used in a feature for *Marquis* magazine, "Visions of Ecstasy", p.108-113, no.5, 1996).

Horror Express

Ever seen sword-wielding zombie cossacks or neanderthal creatures cutting a swathe through a speeding train? No? Then climb aboard...

Well, I guess it's true confessions time again - perhaps this is pandering to some kind of personal catharsis programme, but having already covered two thirds of the triumvirate of terrors which may not have shook the world, but certainly shook (and scared) yours truly! - (*Salem's Lot* & *Carry on Screaming*), it's high time to investigate the final, fearful epic, namely *Horror Express* (1972) or *El Pánico En El Transiberiano*, to furnish it with its native title.

Having first glimpsed this Anglo/Spanish production at a tender age - well, my early teens anyway, I found myself hiding behind the sofa and later checking under the bed for the bloodstained zombie cossacks with fried-egg eyes! A fanciful notion no doubt, and, although the seemingly risible plot of a neanderthal creature (the missing link?), escaping its specimen crate to cause havoc amongst a Transiberian Express train and transmogrifying its victims into zombies, appears to require only flippant treatment. Eugenio Martin's film though is an audacious triumph as well as being very entertaining. There is quite literally a whole host of diverse and intriguing ideas at play here, all set amidst some *de rigueur* horror trappings, enforced *atmosphere*, and played out to the full by an accomplished cast.

Although a bizarre hybrid of his fellow countryman Amanda de Ossario's *Tombs of the Blind Dead* (1972), juxtaposed with the rather more mainstream Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974), in many ways Martin's film acts as a precursor to the plethora of later films - "who's the host for the monster" you might say - the likes of John Carpenter's superb paranoia epic *The Thing* (1982) and Sam Raimi's outrageous *The Evil Dead* (1981).

Whilst the zombies who run amok amongst the train provide a visible, visceral and tangible terror, this cannot disguise the ingenious central dilemma posed as the creature transfers its being from victim to victim, via some concerted "eye-frying" - his mesmeric gaze being too powerful for his new "recruits". This is where the real tension breaks out during the film's final third as to all intents and purpose, the creature lies dead - shot by Inspector Mirov (Julio Pena), only for his malevolent presence to transfer into the mind and body of the Inspector - now the unwitting host. This revelation eventually leads an amazing episode whereby Sir Alexander Saxton (Christopher Lee) - the scientist who originally discovered the fossilised creature and is bringing his specimen back to civilisation, and Dr. Wells (Peter Cushing), who team up to embark on an impromptu testing of the train passengers eyes in order to ascertain who now has become the creature. Unfortunately, they later learn that this experiment must be conducted in darkness, rather *too* late for some of the victims...

Martin keeps this ambiguous, transferal theme running as Saxton confronts the creature - ready to gun it down only for it to plant a seed of doubt in Saxton's mind - "The history of your planet is part of me. Pull the trigger and you will end it. I will teach you to end disease, pain, hunger", finally swaying hypnotically and so reanimating Captain Kazan's (Telly Savalas in fine form), army of now slain cossacks, whose original intent to destroy the creature is now reversed as they set about attacking the survivors.

This rather ingenious global theme of reconciliation and power sits well within the confines of the cosmopolitan characters on the train. Dr. Wells' own examinations of the victims prove enlightening as we learn that in effect, by claiming each new victim, the creature also absorbs their intelligence - so it represents not only a physical threat but a cerebral, psychological threat also - the ultimate paranoid fear to fuel a host of *Invasion of the Bodysnatchers* (1956) style scenarios.

One victim's eye fluid is revealed to contain images of earth taken from space, as well as various images of dinosaurs, so the intriguing suggestion here is that perhaps this creature is a superior intelligence after all, or in some way a "missing link" of Darwinian significance. As Wells comments when performing an autopsy on one of the victims; "Learning and memory has been removed like chalk erased from a blackboard." This is all too readily demonstrated during the

early stages of the film when, having mesmerised and killed a thief at the train station, the creature is able to escape from its crate using the “lock-picking” skills it has now newly acquired.

That Saxton hesitates and so misses his opportunity to destroy the creature, casts light upon his own somewhat egotistical persona. He guards *his* creature initially like a proud father would his child, as he seeks to ingratiate himself with his peers in the scientific world, and so establish his own reputation.

Whilst the creature is, in effect, massaging his ego, Saxton is oblivious to the death and destruction of his fellow passengers. He readily admits to not caring enough about the deaths of the thief and the porter - preferring to deal exclusively (and callously), in scientific facts. As he indicates to Countess Irina Petrovski (Silvia Tortosa) - “It’s a fact and there’s no morality in a fact” and, by inference, no morality in Saxton. His arrogant behaviour and professional rivalry/jealousy with Dr. Wells festers and endangers not only his own life but those of his fellow passengers. It is only when they begin to pool resources that they gain the upper hand and manage to derail their own carriage from the rest of the train (holding the creature and the zombie inside), and so consigning them to an abrupt end as the locomotive crashes over a cliff - smashing into pieces on the jagged rocks below.

In fact, the most united display during the film from Messrs Saxton and Wells is when each unjustly accused of being the creature - “We’re British!” being the indignant reply. As if global conflicts and scientific advancement weren’t enough, the diverse characters within the train provide a bounteous array of further twists to an already burgeoning plot.

Whilst the creature is seen as “evil”, religion within the context of the film is represented fairly ineffectually by a “crazed” preacher/monk, Pujardov (Alberto de Mendoza), whose manic gaze and lurid pronouncements lead one to suspect he is already infected by the creature/devil! Performing his best Rasputin impersonation, he studies one victim and announces ominously; “the work of the devil... whatever you have here is unholy and must be destroyed.” He continues this tirade later with; “There is the stink of hell on this train, even the dog knows it.”

Despite these protestations however, when Pujardov finally confronts the creature, now dying and in the body of Inspector Mirov, his “faith” flies to the corners of the earth as the monk begs the creature to “enter him” and despite Mirov’s withering rebuke; “Fool, there’s nothing in your head”, the creature does indeed “possess” this religious body.

Martin obviously had some fun here poking an ironic, accusing finger at religion itself as the church’s representative here is basically labelled as “empty-headed” - as vacuous as religion itself?

In the final analysis, we, the viewer, would place *our* faith in the scientific actions and remedies of Saxon and Wells rather than in the flagrant outpourings of a religious fanatic. Here, as in many instances, the answer to the problem is not to be found in religion it seems.

Amongst this veritable potpourri of conflicting interests, enter one Natasha (Helga *Horror Rises from the Tomb* (1972) Line), as a glamorous spy - searching for Count Petrovski’s (Jorgue Rigaud), secret formula for manufacturing “steel, harder than a diamond”, the Count’s own vivacious and flirtatious wife, Countess Irina, Well’s spinsterish colleague Miss Jones (Alice Reinhart) and Telly Savalas’ womanising, chest-beating, larger than life cossack, Captain Kazan.

Whilst Martin does direct with a certain flair and with a kinetic pace, the is merely mirroring the momentum of the speeding train as the action fairly rattles along in unison with the locomotive (the ornate carriage interiors being “relics” left from *Nicholas and Alexandra* (1971)).

The intrinsic claustrophobia of the setting also works well, heightening the tension, especially as the now zombified cossack army shuffles towards its prey - there is no escape, there is nowhere to run - that is the harsh reality and futility of the situation. There is also a subtle patina suggesting the transportation of evil from East to West (the creature was discovered in Peking and is now being sent West via Moscow).

Given that Saxton and Wells represent that quintessentially British “imperialist” type character, perhaps this is the “uncivilised” world’s revenge on the “civilised” world for all the historical atrocities perpetuated in the name of the “civilisation” process.

This xenophobic strain, together with the turn of the century setting (1906 to be precise!), befits the theme of global “enlightenment” which pervades the action - it is a time when science is making advances perhaps at the expense of the ecumenical world, and when the “rape” of other countries by foreign powers should be declining (though this was not the case as history bears testimony to).

The contention in the trade paper *Variety*, that despite “some nice horrific moments and build up of tension... the transfer of evil powers by a glowing eye is too childish for sophisticated audiences” is ultimately proved correct, but the “eye-frying” moments lend a certain capricious charm to this eminently watchable film.

Martin’s other genre entries such as *Hypnosis* (1962) and *A Candle for the Devil* (1973) - the latter with a smouldering subtext of sexual mores in a typically isolated Spanish village, are altogether more prosaic than this minor masterpiece, which has been criminally undervalued by critics and fans over the years, in the face of competition from the over-praised work of his compatriots such as Paul Naschy.

As Saxon remarks to one passenger during the film; “People on long journeys crave excitement” - well, *Horror Express* certainly delivers on that score.

Black, Andy, 1995, *Horror Express*, p.42-45, *Necronomicon 7 Magazine*, Newton Abbot: Noir Publishing.

Clocks, Seagulls, Romero & Juliet

Surrealism Rollin Style

“A grandfather clock is of no interest - a vampire woman getting out of this clock at midnight - that’s me!” - Jean Rollin

“Dreams, life - they’re the same. Else life’s not worth living.” - From Marcel Carne’s *Les Enfants Du Paradis* (1945)

As any viewer who is acquainted with *Le Frisson Des Vampires* (1971) in the former case, or any of Rollin’s surrealist fantasies, (and that’s basically his whole oeuvre!), in the latter case will testify, the above quotations encapsulate Rollin’s filmic *raison d’être*, symbolised in his kaleidoscopic costumes, decadent characters and nebulous romanticism.

Whilst the Frenchman’s early career focused on his now trademark vampire sex “epics” such as *Le Viol Du Vampire* (1968), *La Vampire Nue* (1970) and *Requiem Pour Un Vampire* (1971), and encompassed moulding corpses in *Zombie Lake* (1981), masturbatory couplings in *Hard Penetration* (1977) and grotesque gore (and infected wine), in *Les Raisins De La Mort* (1978), recent years have been somewhat less than vintage for the mercurial Rollin.

However, times they are a changing’ as the man said and perhaps the halcyon days are due to return with the release of *Les Deux Orphelines Vampires* (*Two Little Orphan Vampires*) in 1996 - Rollin’s first vampire film for some ten years.

The master’s well documented love of the old French magazine serials or *Feuilletons* shines through with the film being the first to be adapted from his long line of successful *romans de gare* (station novels) - a unique brand of French “pulp fiction”, which also includes *Anissa*, *Les Voyageuses*, *Le Pillardes* and *Les Incendiaires*, in this particular vampire novel series.

With *Les Deux Orphelines Vampires*, Rollin revisits his obligatory two female vampire leads - Louise and Henriette here - and favoured gothic graveyard milieu as the duo of blind vampires, (“clack, clack, clack, clack went the two white sticks”), await nightfall when their sight (and more importantly, their appetite for blood), returns and they seek out new victims.

The vamps, with their dual personalities alternating effortlessly between good and evil, mirror the equally diverse nature of those Sadean characters Justine and Juliette, an irony not lost on Rollin to be sure.

Having tracked down the ubiquitous Rollin recently, here follows our lengthy dialogue:

You have stated that the poet Corbière and the artists Druillet and Trouille are among those who have inspired your work - in what way?

Corbière was a poet of the sea. And the sea is most important to me. My first short film was an evocation of Corbière on a beach near Dieppe. I was young, no money, no material etc. But I was there, on that strange beach covered in stones, deserted, with just the *falaise* and the seagulls. And in my mind, I said: “One day I’ll come back here with all the possibilities for a real shoot. For me, now, after six or seven films shot on that beach, it is mixed with the remembrance of Corbière. Druillet has nothing to do with my work, he is just a friend. After the shooting of *Le Viol Du Vampire* I ask all my friends who can take a pencil to do an image for the poster. Druillet brought (an image) which immediately became the film’s poster. Clovis Trouille paints, I think, as I film. When I see some of his paintings, it seems to me that they could be photos from one of my films. The same strange arrangements of the elements, romantic-expressionist protagonists, expression of the imagination. As for Magritte, Trouille paints people and objects in a realistic, ultra-realistic manner. It’s the arrangement between the elements which forms the surrealist way. Paintings like *Stigma Diabolo*, *La Violée Du Vaisseau Fantome* (*The Raped One From The Haunted*

Ship - could be the title from a Rollin film!), *L'Heure Du Sortilege* and so on could absolutely be images from my mind and my films. They are part of the "mystery of the imagination" I like so much. If you look at a painting like *Mon Tombeau (My Grave)*, it can recall many images from *Le Viol*, *Le Frisson* or *Requiem*.

What influence did the likes of Georges Franju and Luis Buñuel have on your career?

It's the same kind. Buñuel shot visions like Trouille did paintings, or Magritte. We can take some images off for film, those images speak for themselves. They are independent of the story, they are the voice of Buñuel himself. So, in a film so banal in appearance like *Susana* (1951) or even *EI* (1953), everything is shown by the vision of the artist. Personally, I am jealous of an extraordinary vision I saw in one of Buñuel's last French films, I don't remember which one but: a man closes a coffin, and some gold hairs from the dead girl inside are visible. Such imagery leaves me full of exaltation. There are many such images in Buñuel films. Franju is the author of the greatest film of the genre, *Les Yeux Sans Visage (Eyes Without A Face)* (1960). Perfection of the script, of the actors, of the light, of everything. I was haunted during many, many years by the end, Edith Scob walking in the park with her face covered by the white mask, and the white birds and that music... I have tried to find that atmosphere of dream, poetry and madness in many of my films. Same reflections about *Judex* (1963). It's a serial, like a serial. For me, when the cinema is near the surrealist poetry, near the primitive mind of childhood, it is the serial. My remembrance as a child is of the serials I saw after school every Wednesday - *Zorro Fighting Legion*, *Mysterious Doctor Satan*, *G-Men Versus The Black Dragon*, etc. I think I personally have shot two serials: *Le Viol Du Vampire* and *Les Trottoirs De Bangkok*. Here a critic said, "Rollin has done with *Bangkok*, the same film as his first one, *Le Viol*, twenty-five years after." And it's true! *Bangkok* is a kind of *Fu Manchu* and the film was improvised to a great degree like *Le Viol*. When I was shooting it, I was in the same mind that I was for *Le Viol*. I was twenty years old again!

Your first fantasy film Le Viol Du Vampire was considered daring for the time and released during a turbulent period in French history - in what way did this film and the critical reaction to it, shape your future career?

Le Viol was a terrible scandal here in Paris. People were really mad when they saw it. In Pigalle, they threw things at the screen. The principal reason was that nobody could understand the story. But there is a story, I swear it! Now, after such a long time, I think the principal reason is that the film was supposed to be a vampire story. The audience knew only Hammer's vampires and my film disturbed their classical idea of what such a film had to be. And outside it was the revolution, so people were able to exteriorise themselves. The scandal was a terrible surprise for me. I didn't know that I had made such a "bizarre" picture. For me, it was so simple! In all the country, throughout France, the film was a scandal. In my area, a little village, the priest said to his audience in church that they must not see the film on release at their local cinema... I was the devil. And even the fans of such films were disillusioned and the critics wrote horrors about me. A great newspaper, *Le Figaro*, wrote: "... this film is certainly made by a group of drunk people, probably medical students. It's a joke." I thought that my career was finished. But many people came to see *that* scandalous film and the producers asked me to do a second one. *La Vampire Nue* was not so delirious. But it kept one element from *Le Viol*, the mystery, like in the old serials.

Vampires burst from grandfather clocks, lovers are speared on the same stake - you are noted for your imagery not your narratives - is this fair comment?

The answer is this. The imagery in my films is certainly more important than the story itself. But the stories are done to provoke such images. In a certain way, the stories are "mad love" stories and the images are surrealist visions. The mixture of both makes my films.

In some ways your films break gender stereotypes - often two females are the lead players - is this a conscious attempt at "sexual equality" or a male reaction in showing seductive figures, often engaged in lesbian activities, or something else?!!

Why the girls? I really don't know. Maybe a psychoanalyst can tell! Even in my books, *Les Demoiselles De L'Etrange* (there are) are two. The *Vampire Orphans* of course and many more. About the love scenes, I must confess that, for me, I prefer to see (and show) two girls naked rather than a girl and a man. For me, a naked girl is more interesting, for sensuality and for poetry (a naked girl is *always* poetry), to put her in a clock or in a chimney, or anywhere except a bed. Using things for unexpected uses is the base of all surrealist painting. See Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp. When Duchamp painted *Nude Walking Down A Stair*, it's no more a simple stair. It became *the* stair with a nude on it. Understand? My clock is no more a simple clock, it's a clock with the vampire in it (*Le Frisson*), then the girl hides in it, (*Killing Car*). It's become Rollin's clock!!

Regained memory and lost innocence also appear to be central themes in your work - why?

Every man is, consciously or not, researching, remembering his childhood. When I was a child, there was no TV, only movies. I saw so many films... with the innocent eyes of a child. Maybe I am trying to recapture these moments and make films with the same eyes I had to see *Mysterious Doctor Satan* or *Jungle Jim*...

How have you enjoyed working with such actresses as Brigitte Lahaie, Marina Pierro and Françoise Pascal?

Brigitte is a pleasure to work with. She is quiet, she really likes to act, to play, and she does what is required of her role. When I took her for *La Nuit Des Traquées (The Night of the Hunted)* (1980) I was sure she would be great in the scene where she becomes insane slowly. And that sequence was the most important in all of the film for me. And I was right. Brigitte in that part was *émouvante*. Marina Pierro is Italian. Her temperament is fiery. It was good for such a character in the film. Françoise Pascal is very professional. Working with her was interesting because, to the contrary of most girls I'd directed before, she really was into the story, trying to bring ideas, to discuss what I had in mind. Her performance in the film is great. If she can find such roles to play she can go far, but what became of her?

Lèvres De Sang (Lips of Blood) (1975) is widely regarded as your best film - which is your own favourite and why?

I have no favourite. Maybe the next one! *Lèvres De Sang* is certainly my best script. The story was really good, based on the childhood memories that the hero had forgotten. Every person is sensitive to such a story. Everybody has had a childhood love at some time, and in the film the childhood love came true! Of course I like *Le Viol* because it was so attacked! But I have a little love for *Requiem* and for *Bangkok*. But the best one is *The Orphan Vampires*, probably.

La Rose De Fer has been described as a horror version of Romeo and Juliet - do you agree with this description?

One day, a stupid journalist, who understood nothing of my films in general and *La Rose* in particular, asked me "But at the end, what is that film about? What did it mean?" and I answered: "What! You don't see it's my version of *Romeo and Juliet*?" You have the boy and the girl and the cemetery and the family trying to separate them! But maybe it's true as you can see the film like that - but for me it was just a joke.

La Vampire Nue is a personal favourite of mine for its dramatic use of colour, costumes and fetishistic imagery - it was also your first film in colour - how much of a difference did the use of colour make in your approach to the film?

After *Le Viol* I had to make a more classical film. So in place of the delirious images of *Le Viol* I tried to put some mystery into *La Vampire Nue*. Mystery of the strange people, the strange girl who is not really a vampire, and mystery with the locations in Paris I found. Places had great importance for me in that film. For example, I like the strange meeting in the beginning between the girl and the boy (my brother Olivier), under the pale light. Nothing special, only elements of

everyday, except the girl with her strange costume, but the bizarre atmosphere is there. Why? Which? What? I don't know but the mystery is there.

You have been roundly condemned by critics for your excursions into pornographic/hardcore films - what is your response to such criticism?

I shoot X-rated films to have sufficient money to be able to live. I don't like the films but to make them can be amusing. I remember that period with pleasure. I liked the people I was working with, it was always one or two day shoots, very funny, a good friendly atmosphere. But no interesting films. That's all I can say.

*You worked on *Zombie Lake* - segments of which appeared in Jess Franco's *Virgin Among The Living Dead* - how did you get involved in this project?*

I technically shot *Zombie Lake* because Jess Franco, who was supposed to do it, had disappeared! The producers phoned me one Sunday when I was asleep and asked; "Can you shoot a zombie film tomorrow morning for two weeks?" And I said "Yes". I haven't seen the sequence in *Virgin* as I haven't seen that film, so I don't know if it's my sequence. But it's true I shot a sequence of zombies running after a girl for the same producer separately, and I don't know what was done with that footage, so maybe that's in *Virgin*.

*Your later living dead/zombie films such as *Les Raisins De La Mort* and *The Living Dead Girl* are very different in their approaches, the former with almost USA-style gore scenes, the latter more psychological as well as sanguinary. What were your intentions in each of these films?*

Raisins is probably my greatest commercial success. It sold everywhere (except in England!). Because it's more like what is expected by the audience. The idea was to do a "living dead" film with the same horrors you would find in a Romero film, but with a different story. Romero's style is "claustrophobic", the people are holed-up in a house surrounded by the zombies. I try the contrary approach; people are running in a vast countryside area, and, most importantly, my zombies are part living, with consciences, they know what they are doing but can't stop themselves. So the sequence where the actor becomes mad and cuts the head off his girlfriend, telling her at the same time that he loves her, is very dramatic! And such a dramatic construction was not possible with the unconscious zombies in Romero's film and many others.

For *The Living Dead Girl* it's also the memories that interest me. The girl came back to life and now inhabits her former château, in her own room, and finds her childhood toys and other souvenirs come back one by one. It's very emotional, very dramatic. And that for me, was the most interesting part of the film. The memories of the two little girls, the music box. And the end before one girl kills and eats the other one, she reminds her of when they were little girls. The massacre is a kind of love scene, like the killing with the axe in *Les Raisins*. The two sequences are from the same idea.

*How did you get involved with *Emanuelle 6* and was it an enjoyable/rewarding experience?*

In *Emanuelle 6*, I like the character of the little savage girl. I was thinking of Yoko, the girl in *Bangkok* for that, but she had disappeared at that moment. I directed a part of the film in France. It was a job with no problems. I like to shoot "erotic softcore films", it's a rest for me.

Fascination is another highly regarded film of yours - there's a startling opening contrast of upper class, costumed ladies drinking blood from wine glasses in an abattoir. What was the thinking behind this and how do you explain your own fascination with vampires?

My idea at the beginning was to give Brigitte Lahaie a costume from the beginning of this century! And to make a film practically entirely in a château. The first image of the script was the girls drinking in the slaughterhouse. That was inspired by a short story called *The Glass of Blood* by Jean Lorrain, an author of that period. The rest is my idea, from that: all the film shot in the chateau and just three people in most of the scenes. And Brigitte in a chateau dressed in 1900 costume period!

Can you tell me about three of your films which have never been available within the UK - Les Trottoirs De Bangkok, La Femme Dangereuse (1993) and Perdues Dans New York (1989)?

I have spoken of *Bangkok* before. *Femme Dangereuse* (*Killing Car* is the real title), is a kind of strange thriller. There is a mysterious Asian girl, really so beautiful you should see her, killing people, nobody knows why. In a moment, she jumps from inside a clock to shoot! It's a minor film, but I like it, it's real B-movie style as in the good old times! *Lost in New York* is a one hour film for TV. It's a kind of resume of everything personal I've put in my other films. It's really shot in New York for the greatest part, and, of course, on the beach near Dieppe.

Your latest film Little Orphan Vampires sees you reunited with one of your earlier collaborators - Lionel Wallman - how do you rate the film compared with your previous works and what are the key elements?

Lionel Wallman is an old friend and he knows me very well. So, it's always a pleasure to collaborate with him. This latest film is a little different. For the first time, I had a little money and time to work with the actors before shooting. The construction is the real construction of a film, and not an improvisation. It was easy, because the script is based upon the book. Maybe for the first time, I think it's a real movie and not a strange patchwork of eroticism, violence, blood and Rollin's obsessions like before.

With elaborate figures such as Batgirl, we seem assured of more of your trademark outre costumes and images though?

The *Batgirl* is an idea which was not in the book. It's one of the very rare supernatural moments in the film. The film is realist.

Your novels in this series run run to five now - are there plans to produce film versions of these and have you a UK distributor for Little Orphan Vampires yet?

If this film is a success, of course the idea is to make a sequel with the five books. Having just finished the film recently the first thing we did was to mail a video to Redemption Films... every county is free...

Little Orphan Vampires marks your return to the vampire genre after a ten year hiatus - why return to it now?

It's not really exact. There is a vampire sequence in *Lost in New York* and the girl in *Killing Car* is a kind of vampire... but real vampires? Because of the five books. The idea was to put on screen the first one and then the others. Now I have in my mind a little vampire film totally set in the ruins of a medieval chateau... very low budget but a classical vampire story with beautiful locations.

You acted in Trepanator as a mad doctor - how did this come about and did you enjoy the experience on the other side of the camera?

As this was directed by Norbert Moutier and he is an old friend and writes many articles in France about my films, to act for him was very funny, and I also appear in his last film, *Dinosaurs From The Deep*.

You have a regular team of actors and technicians who are your friends - how important are they to the unique style and spirit of your films?

They know me and I know them. They trust me and that is great. Without my crew it's impossible to make such low budget films.

"Dreams, life - they're the same. Else life's not worth living." - quoted from Marcel Carne's Les Enfants du Paradis. Your own philosophy?

There are many beautiful images hidden inside the head of each human being. The idea is to take them and show them outside.

Black, Andy, 1996a, Clocks, Seagulls, Romeo & Juliet: Surrealism Rollin Style, pp.177-188, *Necronomicon* Book One, London: Creation Books.

Extracts from this interview were also used for a feature in *SFX* magazine, "Rollin back the fears".

Marco Ferreri - Sadean Cinema of Excess

"To do a dangerous thing with style is what I call art." - Ben Gazzara's character Charles Serking in *Tales of Ordinary Madness*.

Antonioni, Bertolucci, Fellini. All celebrated, much vaunted, greatly revered figures in the annals of Italian cinema history and rightly so. To a lesser degree, albeit because of a lesser numerical audience, we also have such luminaries as Mario Bava, Riccardo Freda, Antonio Margheriti, whose gothic horror ancestry has now been assimilated into contemporary cinema on the shoulders of those such as Dario Argento, Lamberto Bava and Michele Soavi.

But the name Marco Ferreri? Relatively unknown in the UK, America and Europe, Ferreri is only accorded the acclaim his unique oeuvre deserves in his native Italy, whilst in France he barely cuts the mustard as a cult figure.

Born in Milan in 1928, Ferreri first came to any kind of critical attention with *The Wheelchair* (1959) - a wicked black comedy in which a vindictive old man murders his caring family because they refuse to buy him an electric wheelchair (!), despite the fact that the "invalid" is perfectly capable of walking unaided.

Since then, Ferreri has courted controversy with great frequency with his fiercely individual brand of salutary satirical comedy - not the style of humour to earn huge guffaws, more of a cerebral experience, aligned with an outrageous visual style - which is equally flirtatious with sexuality and social mores, and being all the more enticing to the awe-struck viewer because of it. One by one, Ferreri selects his targets with consummate zeal, be they age, sexual relationships, masculinity, new femininity or family life.

As befits any genius, the customary "accusation" that he is "ahead of his time" should in reality be seen as complimentary to his undoubted vision and ideas. Unfortunately, the narrow confines of the UK's "moral guardians", objected to such vision with the that arguably Ferreri's finest work, *La Grande Bouffe* (*Blow Out*) (1973), was originally banned in Britain from general release during the 1970s. It's limited exposure to London audiences was in fact prefaced with the cautionary notice, that the film is "A black comedy about four world-weary pleasure seekers, who decide to eat themselves to death in an orgy of high cuisine and sexual indulgence."

Despite such a clear warning some spectators felt the need to walk out of screenings, either in protest or sickness - one such walk out engineered by the "crusading" Mary Whitehouse, reputedly condemning the film thus; "It is totally disgusting... the most revolting film I have ever seen."

From modern day puritan to latter day pornographer, we may take the Marquis de Sade's words (spoken through Saint Fond in *Juliette*), "... who cares about the poverty of the people if it is the means to satisfy one's perversions", as a starting point to discuss Ferreri's varied body of work.

Not for him the elitist, decadent perversions of the Marquis, even when his films such as *La Grande Bouffe* betray such hedonistic pursuits as food and sex orgies - "Why do you eat if you're not hungry. Disgusting", one character questions in the same film, at once pinpointing the "sin of gluttony" in rather less graphic terms than the recent *Seven* (1995).

Ferreri is concerned with human nature, why we behave how we do. Like the Marquis, he does spotlight the evils of human nature, but unlike him, he also searches for the good in society, albeit with a bizarre cadre from which his venomous humour arises, to add such germane observations on life, lust, living, society and sexual (im)morality.

To this end, many of his films adopt a typically 1970s approach of post-Fordist, post-modernist delineation of the collapse of the family against a background of a rigid society which is simply too inflexible to accommodate the eccentric characters within Ferreri's diverse universe.

To compliment the aforementioned bizarre characters, we have a divergent range of films to absorb, from the almost “normal” (for Ferreri) western *La Cagna* (1971); human deformity in *La Donna Scimmia (The Ape Woman)* (1963), the oneiric *Dillinger Is Dead* (1968), the gastronomic pornography of *La Grande Bouffe* (1973); the modern day western *Touche Pas La Femme Blanche! (Don't Touch the White Woman)* (1973); a man's atavistic regression to ape-like characteristics in *Ciao Maschio (Bye Bye Monkey)* (1977); a theme continued in *Chiedo Asilo* (1979); emotional detachment in *Tales of Ordinary Madness* (1981); fetishistic attachment to musical key-rings in *I Love You* (1986); self-mutilation and sexual conflict in *La Derniere Femme* (1976); infidelity in *Il Futuro E Donna* (1984) and explicit sex comedy in *La Carne (The Flesh)* (1991).

An equally impressive range of actors have populated Ferreri's films, including Fellini star Marcello Mastroianni, the sultry Catherine Deneuve, Ben Gazzara, Gerard Depardieu, Anita Pallenberg, Carroll Baker and *Highlander* star Christopher Lambert.

Investigating the deep-rooted societal explorations in Ferreri's work, one need look no further than the appropriately-named *Tales of Ordinary Madness*, with Ben Gazzara's character of Charles Seeking, being a compelling study into one man's gradual descent into madness and detachment, mirrored by that of his new love, a prostitute named Cass (Ornella Muti).

Gazzara's perpetual downwards spiral, stumbling from one vacuous sexual encounter to another, finally ends in his acquaintance with Muti - herself, an alter-ego, combining sophisticated sensuality with a child-like innocence, her propensity for self-mutilation a physical expression of her emotional angst.

Gazzara's violent, rapturous erotic encounters - cavorting on the floor, pressed up against the wall, encapsulated in his throwaway one-liner, “She was that rare kind who gives you an instant hard-on”, describing one of his conquests, “Vera”, although “I wasn't about to embrace the American wet dream... I'd rather get drunk”, more incisively expounds his personal philosophy as well as pouring scorn (and semen!), upon the American “ideal”.

Whilst Cass's character is busy piercing first her cheeks with wire in a wince-inducing scene, and later moving down to her genitalia, we are left to reflect upon her physical scars and Gazzara's mental ones. Despite this intense chaos the film's message seems to be relatively uplifting, in that even the lowest of low-life's can still believe in the value of love. (Gazzara's character was actually based upon 1960s sub-culture, writer-poet, Charles Bukowski, whom Ferreri considered as a kindred spirit, and the film is based on Bukowski's book, *Erections, Ejaculations and Other Tales of Ordinary Madness*).

Not content with championing (?) the underprivileged of L.A. here, Ferreri turned his attentions to racial injustice and discrimination in the surreal *Touche Pas La Femme Blanche!* Reuniting his cast from *La Grande Bouffe*, this satirical slant on the western finds the (ill) treatment of the native American Indians, put under the microscope, together with the (over) idolisation of Wild West Heroes.

As such, we see General Custer (Marcello Mastroianni no less), portrayed as a weak and vain coward, attempting to fight off the advances of both Sitting Bull (Alain Cuny) and Marie-Helene (Catherine Deneuve), whilst Buffalo Bill (Michel Piccoli) preens himself prior to a bloody re-staging of the Battle of Little Big Horn. The incongruous sight of Custer riding on horseback through modern Paris and of the Indians owning modern clothes boutiques, lends a bizarre edge to the proceedings to say the least.

The rotting underbelly of a dysfunctional society again forms the basis for *Bye Bye Monkey*, where a plague of rats symbolically engulfs New York City (akin to the albino rats who proliferate in Werner Herzog's oneiric *Nosferatu* (1922) remake, *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979)).

Lafayette (Gerard Depardieu), lives in the city working at the New York Wax Museum and with an aggressive feminist theatre group. Lafayette and his friends (mainly outcasts themselves), makes

a strange discovery on the banks of the Hudson River - namely, the body of a forty foot ape, cradling a new-born chimpanzee in its arms.

Lafayette adopts the monkey and gradually becomes less human as his attachment to the ape increases. This apocalyptic dissection of society and human relationships poses many thought provoking questions. Have Lafayette's "new women" friends alienated him so much that he prefers the company of a monkey? Are animals indeed more humane than humans? Is the Waxworks Museum a symbol of an unfeeling android-like society, devoid of compassion, proliferated by cold and unappealing concrete towers? (The image of the giant ape lying prone in front of the New York city skyline also recalls a certain other giant ape, scaling the Empire State Building in *King Kong* (1933) and indeed, the ape model is actually the same as was used in Dino de Laurentiis's ill-judged *King Kong* (1976) remake with Jessica Lange).

The all-consuming greed of society, our general lack of altruism and show of fraternal feelings to one another, also informs Ferreri's most infamous work, *La Grande Bouffe*. "Do you know how to cook?" One character in the film asks - "No, I'd rather eat" is the ironic reply. So greed, sloth, lust, selfishness, many foibles of the human psyche are exhibited here. Even the main protagonists - a quartet of middle-aged men, (Marcello Mastroianni, Philippe Noiret, Ugo Tognazzi and Michel Piccoli), are unnamed, mainly referred to by numbers as if to reinforce the feeling that numbers, not people, matter most in modern society.

All four are sick of their dull lives, bored and in need of one last fling - an orgy of food, wine and women in a millionaire's mansion. As expected, the *Daily Mail's* critical reaction, that the film; "Makes *Last Tango in Paris* look like kindergarten stuff", is somewhat ill-judged and overreactive, but it became a viewpoint of many others too.

Crude imagery and crude manners abound - we see the chef packing a case with an obscene number of carving knives in it, or Michel cradling a cow's head in his hands and shouting "To be or not to be" in literary sacrilege.

From one piece of "meat" to another, as a duo of ingenues arrive to provide the men with their sexual sustenance - resplendent in tiny g-strings and leather boots. Unfortunately for them, Mastroianni has a severe car fetish and is usually to be found lying under four wheels rather than two legs, even to the extent of "pumping" a phallic manifold into one girl's groin! Noiret's character isn't much of an improvement, his oedipal/oral stage fixation leaving him gasping for air between the cavernous cleavage of a schoolteacher (Andrea Ferreol).

The gastronomic orgy then moves into overdrive in *Python*-esque style, ("Another wafer sir?!"), as Piccoli unsurprisingly falls ill with flatulence - "... you don't chew enough!" he is rebuked, one girl vomits (a heinous crime here as she doesn't love food), Mastroianni has an accident in the toilet only to be engulfed in a tidal wave of faeces (a comment on what his character is indeed wallowing in), culminating with Tognazzi being fellated by Ferreol as Noiret feeds him a grotesque pate binge - leaving Tognazzi to expire on the dual point of orgasm/full stomach! Noiret himself then dies after gorging on breast-shaped desserts. The moral appears to be that you most certainly can have too much of a good thing - be it food or sex or both. Over-indulgence, lust, greed - all lead to untimely ends here.

The continual sexual innuendo, banqueting and feasting certainly appear to have informed the likes of *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife And Her Lover* (1989), presenting us with an orgy of gastronomy and sexuality upon the screen.

The obsession of the characters in *La Grande Bouffe* is mirrored, though admittedly to a lesser degree in *I Love You* - a most unorthodox love story as Michel (Christopher Lambert), finds all his numerous female companions lacking in one area - unfaltering devotion and loyalty. His search for such a sincere companion leads him too... an electronic keyring (!), which answers his whistle with the three magic titular words. Even now however, Michel is not contented as his "new love" also answers to other people's whistles in the same manner - so, complete devotion is unobtainable, especially if you betray such obsessive, fetishistic character traits.

Similarly, obsessive behaviour rears its ugly head in Ferreri's *La Carne* also. Here it afflicts Paolo - a divorcee struggling to make ends meet. His night time stints as a cabaret pianist in a local bar, bring him into contact with Francesca Dellera - so, voluptuous siren meets pot-bellied pianist, united in one common goal - love. Or so we think, until Paolo's obsessive behaviour spirals dangerously - "I want to stay inside you. I'll die if I'm not always there" he pants as they make love.

As always with Ferreri however, the intensity of the eroticism is paralleled with the intrinsic comedy of human sexual relations - hence Paolo's love for his dog (Giovanni), is satirised as he penetrates Francesca "doggy-style", whilst her pendulous breasts have other uses besides mesmerising Paolo, as she helps a young mother breastfeed her baby, near the beach house.

"I'll be the lascivious virgin" gushes Francesca at one stage during the film - a more perfect microcosm of Ferreri's contradictory universe would be hard to find.

Ferreri's film work for others has been equally contradictory in a way, ranging from an acting role in Pasolini's *Il Porcile* (1970), to being production manager for Federico Fellini's affectionate comedy, *Il Voce Della Luna* (*The Voice of the Moon*) (1990).

His working relationships with such exalted figures seem appropriate given the accolades bestowed by numerous critics upon his films - "Ferreri is the equal of Antonioni" (*Time Out*) and "Ferreri is fit to be compared to Buñuel" (*The Times*) - this latter eulogy perhaps the most meaningful as far as Ferreri is concerned, for if anyone can match the social vitriol, voracious sexuality - if not quite the religious satire - of Buñuel, then it is Ferreri for sure. High praise indeed.

Black, Andy, 1996b, Marco Ferreri - Sadean Cinema of Excess, pp.55-61, *Necronomicon Book One*, London: Creation Books.

Comic Karma

From Baba Yaga to Cemetery Man

"*Dellamorte Dellamore* is not a horror film... horror is just an excuse for opening the doors of fantasy, at least for me." - Michele Soavi, director of *Dellamorte Dellamore* (aka *Cemetery Man*).

"There's something different about *Baba Yaga*. It's as if she came from another world." - Valentina, character in *Baba Yaga*.

Whenever that peculiar hybrid, the comic-book/horror sub genre is mentioned, critical gaze usually confines itself to such well documented entries as the William Gaines EC Comics-inspired films such as Freddie Francis's *Tales From The Crypt* (1972) and *Vault of Horror* (1973), or George A. Romero's *Creepshow* series; or to characters morphed from the printed page such as Wes Craven's *Swamp Thing* (1982), and more high profile entries like the *Batman* and *Spiderman* series, together with *The Crow* (1994) and *Judge Dredd* (1995).

Whilst this strain of purely American comic-book horror and fantasy is generally full of one-dimensional characters and juvenile situations - admittedly with some stylish locations/sets and well-realised milieu - the Europeans have tended to produce decidedly more erotic and challenging films derived from graphic material.

Perhaps the seminal comic character in all of this is Jean-Claude Forest's *Barbarella* (first appearing in 1962) - memorably portrayed by Jane Fonda in her (then) husband, director Roger Vadim's 1968 film adaptation, which did full justice to the aesthetic importance and intellectual strands prevalent in the form, so deservedly elevating it to the vertiginous heights bestowed upon it by the critical debates which raged upon its release.

Dominant, forceful, liberated characters such as Forest's *Barbarella*, were seen as breaking new ground, offering imagination and originality, coupled with no small measure of sexuality. This formed a potent cocktail, epitomised by other equally alluring sirens such as Guido Crepax's raven-haired *Belinda*, first published in 1960.

Crepax also ventured further into this territory with the highly successful *Valentina* - transformed into a TV film series in Italy during the 1980s - whilst other luminaries such as Philippe Druillet and Paul Curelier continued to push back the boundaries of taste and style.

And just as the Germans had their *krimi* series of detective novels and the Italians, the *giallo*, so too was the term *fumetti* coined for this particular brand of comic capers - or *fumetti per adulti*, for the more risqué titles! Of these, the first was the *Diabolik* series, which was to have a profound influence on both *Baba Yaga* director Corrado Farina and *Cemetery Man*'s guiding hand, Michele Soavi - partly through the printed page, and more overtly via the camera lens of Mario Bava's 1967 film visualisation.

Other comic incarnations such as Magnus and Bunker's *Kriminal* series materialised, as did the *fumetti neri* (black) style, whilst the publication of the sexually-orientated *Isabella* in 1966, (filmed by Bruno Corbucci in 1969), proved the catalyst for an explosion during the 1970s and 1980s of more graphic and sexually explicit material.

The filmic mantle was more willingly taken up by Jess Franco with his *Lucky the Inscrutable* (1967), acting as a homage to the comic-book form, whilst the ghost of Crepax's *Valentina* pervades the mesmerising *Necronomicon* (aka *Succubus*), (1967).

Farina's version of *Baba Yaga* (1973) (aka *Devil's Witch*), is culled from the sado-fetishistic comic strips of Guido Crepax - there's a scene where Valentina (Isabella De Funes) and Arno (Luigi Montefiori, of *Absurd* (1981), Joe D'Amato fame), flick through some comic-book erotica before then performing their own live action interpretation! And although some of the fashions and dialogue have obviously dated - the S&M imagery - thigh high boots, mini-skirts and so forth -

has, if anything, reached pre-eminence today as fetish fashions have become assimilated into the mainstream. As evidence, we have the current trend for stiletto's as a must-have fashion accessory, sexy advertising and the explosion of high quality, fetish publications such as *Secret*, *Skin 2* and *Marquis*. The film's best asset for such attire is found in the alluring form of the usually dour Ely Galleani as Annette - resplendent in her stunning S&M outfit.

Soavi's *Cemetery Man* (1994) on the other hand eschews some (but not all) of the sexual imagery of *Baba Yaga*, in favour of a more fantastical, horror setting, itself inspired by the popular Italian *fumetti* character of Dylan Dog, created by Tiziano Sclavi.

If you want to encapsulate the single, overriding influence in both of these films however, the word "temptation" would appear to be the most appropriate. Soavi's main character, cemetery caretaker Francesco Dellamorte (Rupert Everett), volunteers upon seeing the voluptuous She (Anna Falchi), that she is "the most beautiful woman I have ever seen", whilst in Farina's film the nubile Valentina is the object of the mysterious Baba Yaga's (Carrol Baker) affections, with Baba Yaga being "madly in love with her", as one character observes. Likewise, and perversely, Valentina is drawn to her elder admirer as if drawn by some mystical force, unable to resist temptation.

Both Dellamorte and Valentina are intoxicated by the black-clad figures of She - a grieving widow - and the beguiling Baba Yaga respectively, which reinforces the witch-like spell by which both characters hold their "victims" captive. Baba Yaga even takes some lipstick from Valentina, explaining that she "needs a personal object" of hers, continuing even more mysteriously that "there are forces which control our actions and our feelings."

The prevalent themes of witchcraft, sorcery and mysticism inform both films to a high degree; in Soavi's, witness the zombies or "returners" who are resurrected from Dellamorte's cemetery, (including She), the elegiac tone accentuated as the former *Playboy* centrefold, Falchi's morbid fascination with the cemetery ossuary knows no bounds; "I have never seen anything so exciting" she drools. Surrounded by walls of skulls, she gushes that "I couldn't ask for anything more, it's like a dream." The atmosphere of necrophilia concludes with She kissing Dellamorte passionately - though only having wrapped his head in a red shroud first - climaxing (literally) in their lovemaking upon her late husband's grave- and yes, the earth does move. Unfortunately, it is the irate husband "returning" as he witnesses the carnal chaos before him, ravenously biting a chunk out of his wife, (to compensate for not eating something else perhaps!).

Of Baba Yaga, well her complexion is bone-white, with deep black eyes and pale lips - very much a "returner" herself in appearance - her marble-like face mirroring that of the malevolent doll in bondage attire which Baba Yaga keep as a plaything, (or familiar?). Her sorcery is further glimpsed as we see the developed film from a camera she has touched - the fashion model in the shots now transformed into an S&M icon with spikes bursting through her body.

There's also an intriguing parallel to be drawn between Soavi's love of secret passageways and labyrinth tunnels - as seen in the esoteric construction of the cathedral in *The Church* (1989) and the hidden chambers of the woodland cabin in *The Sect* (1991) - and Baba Yaga's surreal mansion house, which bizarrely features a large, foreboding pit set into the lounge!

"I have an old house... you might find it interesting, Valentina", Baba Yaga ventures enticingly. Upon its subsequent appearance, we can glean that it is certainly arcane, and very dark as Valentina finds out to her cost - dropping a roll of film down into the pit. Baba Yaga dismisses the intriguing "feature" as just being "an old part of the house - don't worry."

Valentina conjectures on the hole that "it doesn't just lead down to her basement - there's no end to it." But Valentina's companion Arno rejects the importance she places on the abyss; "Soon you'll be telling me that it's the pearly gates of Hell and you're Baba Yaga's custodian witch of it... witches don't exist." He continues unabated that; "If it's anything, it's the world we're living in."

Although not particularly sympathetic, Arno does possess a certain potency in cutting straight to the chase; "You meet an old lesbian and a friend of yours gets a headache, and suddenly it's witches and sorcery." The finale, as lightning flashes coarse through the creepy, dimly lit house,

serves as a reminder to the echoes of German Expressionism which stalk the frames - including the appearance of *The Golem* (1920), playing on a TV set in the background - whilst the image of the nebulous Baba Yaga, silhouetted against an all-white photo screen, instantly recalls Crepax's own line-drawn graphic pages.

With Baba Yaga quite clearly representing death or the Grim Reaper, and the sultry Valentina, very much, "love", there is a symmetry with Soavi's portrayal of "death" and of "love" in *Cemetery Man* - as stated in the film's Italian title of *Dellamorte Dellamore*.

There's a startling materialisation from Soavi when a burning phone book reassembles into a Grim Reaper spectre. "Stop killing the dead - they're mine!" He admonishes the zombie-killing Dellamorte, then offers his own advice; "If you want to stop the dead returning to life then start killing the living." Only for Soavi, the term "love" becomes combined with "life" as we see the returning She appear as an "angel" - complete with white shroud dress and wild foliage hair - her passion for Dellamorte rather too all-consuming as she bites a chunk from his shoulder. Here, She encapsulates the full cycle of life, love, death and rebirth. It is left to the often forlorn figure of Dellamorte to signify the existence of life and love - chiding that "Life goes on" at the very beginning of the film, after he has just shot down another "returner".

The ensuing dramatic tracking shot - past Dellamorte and beyond the door and leading into the rows of graves in the cemetery outside - immediately establishes that Dellamorte lives in a world of "death", even his aforementioned sexual sparring with She takes place either in the ossuary or on a gravestone. As Dellamorte knowingly remarks later; "Hell, at a certain point in life you realise that you know more dead people than are living."

As Soavi himself has commented, the whole remit of the zombie genre he flirts with here has been deliberately subverted: "The main character is not scared of zombies because killing them is a normal job to him. What is more scary, is living. Instead of being a horror film about being scared of death, it's more a film about being scared of life."

To this (literal) end, Soavi concludes the film fittingly with Dellamorte and his loyal assistant, Gnaghi (Francois Hadj-Lazaro), existentially poised upon an isolated precipice. As they survey the dramatic but desolate scene before them, Dellamorte comments: "I should've known. The rest of the world doesn't exist." "Could you take me home please?", the previously mute Gnaghi asks, as snow begins to fall, obliterating their figures as the snowflakes layer the landscape.

It is very much a case of *Cemetery Man* capturing the pessimistic mood of its own decade, reflecting the somewhat nihilistic forces of our own times. Perhaps because of this, that master of realistic, prosaic dramas, Martin Scorsese, declared *Cemetery Man* to be the best film of its year.

It is as if all the events played out within *Cemetery Man*, now have no significance to the two characters, their own lives will carry on, unchanged by time and almost oblivious to external forces, or so it seems.

There's a rather more circular denouement to Farina's *Baba Yaga*, as Valentina and Arno return to the old house, where the previous night Arno had destroyed the eerie doll - and seemingly Baba Yaga as well - only to now find the house deserted, and apparently so for many years previous.

This merely confirms the oneiric, timeless quality of the film, reaffirmed in Baba Yaga's comment as she caresses Valentina's camera lens, which is shooting a model: "That's the eye - the eye that freezes reality" she purrs profoundly.

The "reality" is momentarily blurred however, in the bizarre dream sequences which punctuate the film - the erotic charge as Valentina, draped only in bra and panties, parades in front of a German officer in a night time wasteland, before being summarily frog-marched away by stormtroopers under a glaring spotlight, or, the *outré* sight of Baba Yaga relaxing in a chair perched on a cliff edge and enjoying the "fantasy" of Valentina dressed only in a peaked cap and sporting a rifle, as she slowly walks into the foaming sea.

Of all the images in both films, this is perhaps the most apt to conclude with, as we have become immersed in the fantasy of the events being realised upon the screen, compelled by the poetry of the compositions - be they gothic cemeteries or arcane dwellings - and forever compelled by the diverse and often mysterious characters on show, captivated by their emotional and psychological motivations.

DC or EC Comics these ain't - but animated and provocative they are. We may not discover all of Baba Yaga's beloved cosmic secrets, or comprehend all of the complexities of Dellamorte's life's quest - but then surely to reveal all would dissipate the intrinsic mystery and fantasy of these striking, enigmatic films.

Black, Andy, 1998a, *Comic-Book Karma - From Baba Yaga to Cemetery Man*, pp.69-78, *Necronomicon Book Two*, London: Creation Books.

PROGRESSIVE HORROR

Transcending Genre Boundaries: *Nightwatch* and *Mute Witness*

"I don't know why the hell they put a key in here". (Nightwatch)

"It makes you sick to watch it... and you never forget the look of sheer terror and panic in the victims' eyes as they are about to die". (Mute Witness)

Bob Rusk (Barry Foster) is the infamous necktie murderer who is terrorising London. He puts the body of his latest victim in a sack and dumps it in the back of a potato truck, but later realises that his monogrammed tie pin is missing. He returns to the truck where he discovers that the pin is grasped in the victim's fingers. Due to the effects of rigour mortis, he has to break the victim's fingers to free the pin, causing a nauseous crack. (Frenzy, Alfred Hitchcock)

In the morgue Jens (Kim Bosnia) hacks off his thumb in order to escape the handcuffs restraining him and save his friends from a serial killer. (Nightwatch, Ole Bornedal)

The terrified actress Alicia (Barbara Cupisti), stares across from behind the shower curtain at her adjacent friend Laurel (Mary Sellers), as the killer stabs her repeatedly - the victim momentarily mouthing to her friend for help before her body slumps to the cubicle floor and the killer departs. (Stagefright, Michele Soavi)

The mute Billy (Marina Sudan), watches in helpless horror as the girl is stabbed to death on a bed - her mouth forming an "o" to scream, but is silent as her life ebbs away - staring in sheer terror at Billy, who remains in her hiding place. (Mute Witness, Anthony Waller)

Forlorn, exposed, vulnerable, impotent - helplessness. Call it what you will but it's that basic, primal feeling of desperately trying to cope with outside influences seemingly beyond your control. It's that struggle for survival, to reach *terra firma* whilst the enveloping quicksands of deceit and subterfuge are tearing at your ankles in order to suck you into the maelstrom of despair. These are authentic feelings all too readily trampled upon and later discarded in that most problematic of sub-genres, the modern horror thriller. The majority of trashy and insipid offerings either mistake gore for authentic *frissons*, prefer violence to tension, or substitute special effects for genuine thrills. Fortunately, within the last four years, there have been isolated, audacious attempts to evoke the cogent atmosphere of what could be termed the "persecution" or "victim" thriller, embodying the above-mentioned feelings of helplessness so successfully realised in Alfred Hitchcock's canon.

With Danish director Ole Bornedal's *Nightwatch* (1994) and British director Anthony Waller's *Mute Witness* (1995), we see a welcome reprise of the tension, imaginative plot and character-driven development which Hitchcock made his own, together with a natural sense of affinity for the characters - the situations they find themselves in may be somewhat bizarre, but they are all the more captivating for that, and their subsequent flirtation with death makes the scenarios all the more believable. For Bornedal, the main location is that most unnerving and remote of places, the morgue - and yet it taps into a subconscious fear in all of us, not just the fear of dying but the realisation that this solitary place is one we are all pre-destined to visit in our final journey. We also see a likeable young law student, Martin (Nikolaj Coster Waldau), inexorably drawn into a web of murder and intrigue as his nightwatchman duties in the morgue, link him into an extraordinary chain of serial killings.

In *Mute Witness*, there is a similarly original and taut premise revolving around a mute American make-up artist, Billy (Marina Sudina), who is working on a low budget horror film in Russia and who finds herself the silent witness to a real life snuff movie in which an unknown girl is brutally killed by two of her male colleagues on the set. Immediately both films create an all-pervasive feeling of disquiet and genuine despair, as Martin is faced with mounting circumstantial evidence to implicate him in the heinous crimes and must somehow prove his innocence, whilst Billy must make her other colleagues and police aware that there are two murderers in their midst- and one

dead body. There's an incredible amount of tension and atmosphere created in both films by their respective directors attention to detail, mounting a brace of forceful thrillers filled with escalating suspense.

In *Nightwatch*, we see Martin given an ironic greeting to his macabre night job by the wily old stager he replaces; "Welcome to Mars" the curt pronouncement. With great relish the octogenarian gives Martin the "tour", explaining how he needs to visit every key-point hourly, located in the various chamber in order to reset the alarm system. Martin is instantly perplexed by the ritual - I mean, it's not as if the corpses can get up and leave, is it? During his first night alone on duty he gets increasingly spooked as he listens intently for any strange noises, watches the alarm on the wall and alternates between this "silent" study and the raucous rock music which belts out of his ghetto blaster - only forced to turn it off again so he can listen for any slight noise. The ultimate dilemma!

There are also priceless moments from Børnedal as we see Martin totally phased by his timer clock alarm sounding - signalling the start of his 'key' rounds and culminating with his careful navigation between the rows of corpses either side to reach the key point. His trepidation is perfectly captured here with the "screw" being further tightened after his audible sigh of relief in leaving the corpses - only then forced to return to the morgue in order to turn out the light he has forgotten about. Each subsequent night on duty becomes a test of nerve for Martin - the morgue alarm sounding, (unheard of), only for his investigations to reveal a toe-tag on one corpse reading "hey Martin", the white shroud rising slowly to reveal... Jens (Kim Bodnia), his practical-joking friend. The next night, Martin discovers a gruesome trail of blood leading through the clinical, white corridors to a mutilated cadaver - only for it to have then disappeared by the time he coerces the duty doctor to come and see it. The *pièce de résistance* however, occurs when having mined the "death" seam, Børnedal then goes for the "sex" accompaniment as Martin and his girlfriend Kalinka (Sofie Gråbøel) make love against the morgue wall - an act Martin lives to regret during the next night when a female cadaver is found violated, legs apart and with traces of Martin's semen lying nearby.

In *Mute Witness*, Waller goes straight for the jugular with an (apparently) tense scene as a stocking-masked killer stabs his "victim" before her convoluted, theatrical "death" is revealed to be a film-within-a-film, being made by Andy (Evan Richards) as a brat American director, aided by Billy's sister Karen (Fay Ripley). "This is not Chekhov - you're not the star, you're just another victim", being the frustrated director's riposte. Waller increases the tension considerably as the day's shooting wraps and as everyone is leaving. Billy has to return alone to retrieve a mask which is required for the next day. Unfortunately, this proves to be a conscientious but unwise move as Billy finds herself locked in the old warehouse building that is the film's set. The creepy, deserted set's long, expansive corridors echo with noises as doors bang in the distance, before Billy then hears voices. Having secreted herself onto the set, Billy then witnesses the snuff film - the victim's bulbous eyes piercing Billy's gaze with sheer terror, blood spraying from the numerous knife wounds inflicted and the victim's mouth forming a "scream" and yet unable to shout it, a mirror of Billy's own helplessness at being unable to fully articulate the horror she has witnessed via words. As Billy attempts to escape she is heard by the two murderers who then pursue her in an almost unbearable cat and mouse "game" which lasts for over twenty minutes of screen time. So, we see the killers pouncing on a shoe protruding from beneath a curtain, only it's a set prop and not Billy. Then we see Billy hanging precariously on a ledge over the warehouse store, before finally falling into the rubbish bags and murky waters below to try and retrieve the key to open the locked set door.

At one stage, Billy comes face to face with the bloodied victim who has been thrown into the store - Billy's silent scream counterpointing the victim's similar reaction upon her grisly death. There's also a moment when Waller phases in three rapidly advancing close-ups on Billy's eyes - mirroring an identical camera move which hones in on the victim's wildly terrorised eyes, at the point of death. As Karen and Andy then arrive to save her, they immediately, (and unknowingly), leave Billy alone with one of the murderers and although she survives, her frustrations only increase when the police arrive and she tries to implicate the killers. Firstly, the bloodied knife she points to isn't the real murder weapon but a substituted stage knife and then, having identified the roll of snuff film, it is replayed by the police, only to be the day's normal rushes, (the killers having also switched rolls).

Mute Witness doesn't have a monopoly on frustration in the face of murder however, as Martin in *Nightwatch* finds himself implicated in the serial killings, partly the eccentric games of his best friend, Jens. Their "challenge" game involves the loser forfeiting his freedom by getting married and settling down, but this "innocent" game is corrupted when it is subsequently linked to the sexually-motivated murders. "So we'll play with destiny" is Jens' flippant, but later prophetic remark. Jens then screws around with a local prostitute Joyce (Rikke Louise Andersson) - only he tells her his name is Martin! With friends like that... When Joyce causes a scene with Kalinka, her eventual murder implicates the innocent Martin. This whole murder scene is agonisingly played out as - unknown to the killer - Kalinka witnesses the graphic slaying. The killer's white attire and gloves are soon bathed in red as he lifts Joyce's body into the air using his knife, before writing Martin's name in blood to further implicate the beleaguered student. This is a pivotal moment in the film as we, the audience, discover the killer's identity - the investigating detective on the case, Inspector Wormer (Ulf Pilgaard) - but Kalinka, (who doesn't see his face), and Martin remain unaware. All of which sets up a taut *denouement* as searching in the morgue records, Martin stumbles across details of Wormer's psychiatric treatment, resulting from his perviously documented acts of necrophilia. When Wormer and Kalinka then enter the morgue, Wormer convinces Kalinka of her boyfriend's "guilt", only to later give himself away by whistling the song played on the radio when he murdered Joyce.

Having been tied up by Wormer, Kalinka tries to escape and get help by crawling over the morgue floor - now littered with broken glass - managing to set off the alarm and alert Jens, whose entrance is curtailed by Wormer's baseball bat blow to the head - Jens awakens later only to find himself handcuffed. The squirm-inducing moment as Jens hacks off his thumb with a saw in order to escape, is highly effective for the viewer, and even more so for his friends as he appears just in time to shoot Wormer - now hovering menacingly over Martin and Kalinka with a bone saw revving for action. It's a highly charged climax to a gripping film with suspense generated by the audience knowing the killer's identity, unlike Martin and Kalinka, until it is almost too late. Indeed, Kalinka's realisation of the killer's identity at the precise moment that she is locked in a room with him, is superbly handled and milked for maximum shock value. There's also the perplexing question of identity/mistaken identity as Jens plays his name games with Joyce with disastrous results, and Wormer's own calculated attempts to conceal his crimes by using Martin as a decoy/scapegoat, enable him to finish his killings and yet satisfy the public demand for a killer to be brought to "justice". Boredal even concludes *Nightwatch* with some ironic identity humour as Martin and Kalinka, Jens and Lotte (Lotte Andersen), take part in a joint wedding ceremony, only for the vicar to mix up the identities of the couples marrying! (It will be interesting to see how this year's British remake, starring Ewan McGregor of *Trainspotting* notoriety is received).

There is no such black humour residing in *Mute Witness* as Billy is forced to shoulder her terrible burden and literally, suffer in silence, although the tension is in some way dissipated by the sub-plot, which although adding intrigue, detracts from Billy's personal trauma as Alec Guinness' "Reaper" figure appears from the shadows to add an organised crime, KGB and police corruption involvement to the proceedings. Guinness as the Russian gang lord, is revealed to be the master behind an international trade in snuff and porn films, with illegal immigrants providing the unfortunate victims. The climactic chase scenes involve the police executing the two killers to conceal their crimes, whilst an undercover policeman, Larsen (Oleg Jankowskij), materialises to help Billy to escape the Reaper's clutches. In a fraught sequence, Billy is "gunned" down, only to later reveal the bullet-proof jacket and blood squabs, as she escapes unharmed - unlike the unfortunate Larsen who, whilst forcing a gagged criminal into his car, fails to notice Billy's concern at the terror in the man's eyes - all too appropriate as seconds later an incendiary device blows Larsen and the car to smithereens. It's an explosive finale for sure and it contrasts with the almost "restrained" tone which has preceded it - all silent suffering and subterfuge, an intriguing variant on 1967's *Wait Until Dark*, where on that occasion, a blind Audrey Hepburn is terrorised in her apartment by a killer gang, searching for a doll containing heroin.

In the case of both *Nightwatch* and *Mute Witness*, it is the convincing communication of helplessness, of being unable to control one's destiny, which captures the raw emotion and shredded nerves which constitute the authentic horror thriller.

Black, Andy, 1998b, *Progressive Horror: Transcending Genre Boundaries: Nightwatch and Mute Witness* pp.159-166, *Necronomicon* Book Two, London: Creation Books.

A MODERN WORLD WITH ANCIENT EVIL

There is a valedictory moment in Mario Bava's *Baron Blood* where a psychic, Christina Hoffman (Rada Rassimov) admonishes the protagonists thus; "Mortals are such fools. Once you killed witches, now you bring murderers back to life."

It is a defining moment on one of the key perplexities which prevail Bava's oeuvre - that somehow we in the so-called "civilised" world are steadily perpetrating the misconception that we are eradicating evil when all that we are really doing is fanning the flames in one area and positively stoking them in another.

Take that twentieth century phenomenon the serial killer for instance. Yes, we may pursue such miscreants until they are behind bars and positioned on death row in certain cases. Yet we only succeed in fanning the flames by allowing them the maximum oxygen of publicity available through all media be it books, films, television, radio or the internet and so, effectively rebirthing them and stoking the fire for future generations to be drip-fed this diet of Warhol fame and serial fortune.

This insidious media influence is observed to varying degrees in contemporary Hollywood productions such as Gus Van Sant's *To Die For* (1995)⁷⁶, Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994) and Jon Amiel's *Copycat* (1995), with the added nihilism in David Fincher's stark *Se7en* (1995) and with revisionist originality in *Scream* (1996).

⁷⁶ Media manipulation in *To Die For* centres around Nicole Kidman's small town girl Suzanne Stone, with a big time dream - to become a famous television personality. This dream in reality, becomes an obsession as well as a salutary observation on modern society as events are only deemed to be of "importance" if bestowed with the oxygen of tv exposure. The reality here is that if it's not on tv it doesn't exist.

Stone's *Natural Born Killers* caused an almost inevitable furore upon its' release with its' duo of deranged psychos lining up and (sporadically) hitting a multitude of targets in contemporary American society and especially the media, though the film is instantly burdened with the "condoning what it purports to condemn" tag.

Amiel's inveigling *Copycat* explores a serial killer at large who is literally replaying infamous serial murderer's including John Gacy, Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer and using their individual modus operandi as the "inspiration" for his crimes, aided by the global media attention given to these miscreants. The show trial mentality of increasing media coverage is alluded to by Sigourney Weaver's protagonist who declares pointedly; "We spent 8 million dollars on executing Ted Bundy. Wouldn't it have been better to spend the money on studying him scientifically." As writer Poppy Z Brite has also observed; "...violent films and publicity given to serial killers can provide a blueprint for nascent killers."

In Fincher's unremittingly bleak *Seven* the sadistic killer John Doe (Kevin Spacey), has read too many newspapers and watched too much television as he puts his own distorted interpretation on the "diseased" society he inhabits, leading to his eventual atrocities which are carried out with religious conviction.

Wes Craven's knowing *Scream* manages to segue a number of horror movie cliches with media exploitation as portrayed in Courtenay Cox's news reporter who hounds the potential victims almost as much as the Munchian-masked killer.

For such a supreme stylist as Bava, these conflicts are presented with rather more subtlety if not sensitivity as he seeks to unveil the friction between the religious and the secular, often expounded by the collision of ancient myths with modern scepticism, human frailty be it greed or malice contrasting with childhood innocence (and sometimes guilt), and finally, the almost greek tragedy of his leading actors, their lot seemingly shaped as much by fate and destiny as by their own actions.

In many respects, two of Bava's films; *Baron Blood* and *Lisa and the Devil* offer the most salient appraisal of these central themes and as such, can be viewed as companion pieces, sharing a number of key similarities.

Baron Blood was filmed in 1972 under Bava's direction and marked the first feature in a two picture deal with producer Alfred Leone (of which *Lisa and the Devil* formed the second). Partially derived from literary sources including Raymond McNally and Radu Florescu's account of Vlad the Impaler and his atrocities entitled "In Search of Dracula" and filmic sources, most noticeably Andre De Toth's Vincent Price starrer, *House of Wax* (1953)⁷⁷.

Bava turns our attentions here to the titular figure of Baron Otto von Kleist, a sanguinary "Vlad"-styled warlock, previously responsible for an innocent woman being burnt at the stake as a witch over 300 years previously, only for her to put a curse on him before her death.

The Baron himself perishes soon after, burnt in his own flames as fire engulfs his castle. Early on during the film, one of the Baron's descendants, Peter (Antonio Cantafora) jokes to his uncle whilst making a pilgrimage to the castle for the first time that; "Between us we might conjure up an ancestral ghost or two." All he succeeds in doing though is to resurrect the now long dead Baron aided by Elke Sommer's mini-skirted National Trust worker, Eva.

The Baron's abode, "The Castle of Devils" being its chilling sobriquet, is an authentic medieval castle whose looming towers and shadowed battlements dominate the Austrian forest locale as Bava's prowling camera breathes life into every pore of the fortress. It becomes almost a character in much the same way that the unconquerable Egdon Heath permeates Thomas Hardy's classic novel, *The Return of the Native*.⁷⁸

It is the castle itself which appears fully in control as Peter and Eva read out the witch's incantation to revive the Baron - all at the dead of night appropriately.

Bava turns the screw and heightens the tension as doors creak, the wind howls and shadows form around the castle. The nearby church bells chime for midnight but ominously only two peals are heard as Eva recalls that the Baron's own death was rumoured to have occurred at 2 am. Their looks of horror are intercut with a superb shot of the deserted churchyard, shrouded in fog and cloaked by a deathly silence save for the tolling bells.

⁷⁷ Price stars as a mad sculptor who turns human corpses into wax exhibits and his pursuit of Phyllis Kirk through gaslit streets is the film's most effective scene and a clear inspiration for Bava.

⁷⁸ The omnipresent Egdon Heath represents a sprawling landscape which dominates Hardy's novel, its' natural beauty and its' hidden danger continually guides the plot development to a greater degree than the protagonists do. The Heath's enigmatic qualities are encapsulated in one line of Hardy's prose; "In the heath's barrenness to the farmer lay its' fertility to the historian."

Returning inside the castle, a door handle turns, the camera rapidly zooming in and Peter hurriedly recants the verse and the handle now remains still as the camera draws back. Even the advent of morning however is unsettling as the camera pans out over the glorious sunlit views afforded by the castle, only for its' decaying walls to cast a malevolent shadow.

Foolishly brushing aside his uncle's protestations, Peter reads out the incantation again the next night in the castle room where the Baron was reputed to have died. This time there is no going back as we see a body stir and then writhe in the darkness. A sudden gust of wind forces the incantation scroll to fly into the room's raging fireplace and then the first of many POV shots indicate that the Baron is indeed alive. The cobwebbed interiors and gothic trappings of the castle then ebb away as Bava races into the film's most impressive sequence.

Eva, having rushed home to her apartment, now finds the Baron invading her room. She escapes him, only to be chased through the deserted village by the pursuing Baron. His grotesque, grue-covered features being only barely disguised by his long cloak and fedora-style hat. The image of him chasing Eva - a dark silhouette amongst the luminous mist ⁷⁹, instantly recalls Vincent Price's figure in *House of Wax* (1953), only here, Bava makes the scene all his own as the pacing and lighting are uniformly excellent.

Eva runs from the Baron as a myriad of blue, orange and yellow shafts of incandescent light glimmers through the night. All the while, Bava's restless camera explores the claustrophobic alleys and wide agoraphobic spaces of the village. Eva shelters in an archway as the Baron continues searching for her, walking right by her as she comes agonisingly close to being discovered, before running off to the nearest house for shelter. As she hammers frantically on the door for access, the camera closes in on the rapidly advancing Baron. The last drops of tension are rung out as she is finally admitted into the house, marginally escaping the clamouring clutches of the Baron.

The castle's new owner, via a property auction, a wheelchair bound Alfred Decker (Joseph Cotten), is then unsurprisingly revealed to be none other than the Baron during the film's climax.

His own sadistic fantasies surface, as, with relish, he conducts a macabre tour of the castle's notorious torture chamber which he has now lovingly restored, complete with tape-recorded screams to complete the morbid ambience. Then, Peter and Eva are shown the piece de resistance as they stare up at the castle turrets only to see human-like figures impaled there in an eerie tableau, in the Baron's finest sadistic tradition.

It is Eva who saves them from the Baron's clutches when she drops an amulet (previously owned by the witch unjustly burned by the Baron), onto the body of Fritz (Luciano Pigozzi) - a servant dispatched abruptly by the Baron. As the trinket fumes and sizzles into his skin, he revives, and, along with a cadaverous army formed from the tyrant's other victims, puts the evil von Kleist to death on his own instruments of torture, leaving Eva and Peter to escape.

In order to fully determine Bava's thematic assimilation here of ancient evil into a contemporary setting, it is necessary to outline the genesis of his companion film for Leone, *Lisa and the Devil* and its' own plot dynamics.

⁷⁹ The cloaked Baron shambling through the eerie night mist is affectionately parodied by Bava fans Joe Dante and Allan Arkush in their debut feature *Hollywood Boulevard*.

For Bava, *Lisa and the Devil* was very much his “wish” film as he had never previously had a producer willing to grant him the complete artistic licence to film exactly what he wanted to. When Leone offered him virtually “carte blanche” - “He told me the story of *Lisa and the Devil* and I told him to go ahead with it. I gave him all the freedom he wanted”, Leone reveals.

Having finally secured a guarantee of no interference and the cast and budget to make his “dream” film, Bava wasted no opportunities in his development of the project, meticulously scouting for locations and incorporating some acutely personal tenets into the film. These included the proliferation of mannequins in *Lisa and the Devil* - something which Bava had grown used to from his formative years which were often spent in his father’s sculpture studio, the choice of Elena for a central character - the name of his own sister and his daughter, and augmented by the use of dialogue and music from his own favourites, so elements of Dostoevsky’s “The Devils” can be traced along with extracts from Joaquin Rodrigo’s stirring orchestral score.

As with *Baron Blood*, it is Elke Sommer who plays a pivotal role as Lisa - “a displaced tourist on a voyage of self-discovery” and also as Elena in a dual/alter-ego performance which recalls Barbara Steele’s finest role(s) in *Mask of Satan*.

Having studied a fresco depicting the devil, Lisa then confronts a real-life replica in the eccentric figure of Leandro (Telly Savalas)⁸⁰. The all pervasive use of mirroring and distorted viewpoints during the film continues as Leandro is seen holding a mannequin, only for Lisa again to confront the “real-life” materialisation in the guise of Carlos (Espartaco Santoni) who inexplicably “mistakes” her for an as yet unknown Elena.

Lisa’s subsequent flight from the imposing, claustrophobic village locale leads her to flagging down a chauffeur-driven car where she is given refuge. Unfortunately, for all the occupants, mechanical problems necessitate their stopping at a nearby mansion for assistance. The bickering couple of Francis Lehar (Eduardo Fajardo) and his predatory wife Sophie (Sylva Koscina), the chauffeur George (Gabrielle Tinti), along with Lisa, are introduced to their impromptu hosts - the Countess (Alida Valli), her son Maximillian (Alessio Orano) and their butler.... Leandro.

What, with the all-encompassing azure-tinted fog and the sprawling estate enveloped by menacing woods, it is no surprise when Lisa, jolted upon discovering that the watch worn by Carlos on their initial encounter is now in her room, is then mortified at seeing his haunting face appear from the night mist at a landing window⁸¹.

The nebulous mood is accentuated as at dinner, Sophie confesses to the Countess that; “The entire setting is so right for a tall tale of gloom and perdition. We could make one up as we go along. We have all the right ingredients. The dark night, this house, it’s all so spooky. I prefer ghosts to vampires though, they’re so much more human. They have a tradition to live up to. somehow they managed to keep all the horror in without spilling any blood.” Cue - a sudden

⁸⁰ Savalas also starred alongside Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee to good effect as a zombified cossack in Eugene Martin’s energetic *Horror Express* (1972), before going on to fame as the lollipop-sucking detective in the *Kojak* TV series - his sweet-sucking habit formed during his Leandro characterisation in *Lisa and the Devil*.

⁸¹ The haunting image of a face looming from out of the darkness to peer in at a window was pioneered by Bava in “The Wurdalak” episode of *Black Sabbath* (1963) and later in his *Curse of the Dead* (1966).

crash upstairs, floorboards creaking and the sound of someone falling ? This provides a suitably tense and dramatic coda to Sophie's acutely-observed speech.

It is at this point that the surrealistic, often sedate tempo is radically altered as the bloodletting begins and we start to uncover an increasingly macabre web of deceit, betrayal, unrequited love, insanity, perversion and ultimately, death.

Having juxtaposed the guests' discovery that the Countess is actually blind (and yet apparently still all seeing, all knowing), with Lisa's first "flashback" which sees her as Elena courting Carlos in the estate grounds, Bava uses these revelations as the catalyst for further extremes of human behaviour. These involve the murder of the chauffeur outside as his throat is cut. The felicitous Sophie who, when distraught at the death of her clandestine lover then wreaks her own revenge by driving the car into her husband before running him over repeatedly - his body buffeted under the wheels like a discarded rag doll.

With the adrenalin still flowing we then glimpse Lisa with Carlos in a room full of mannequins only for Carlos to be struck by a gold staff. Sophie is a short-lived witness to this assault as, pursued through the house, she too is eventually clubbed to death - the camera pulling back to reveal the red-cloaked and now patently unhinged Maximilian/Max as the attacker.

The dark, deadly family secret is then unravelled as a sordid case of illicit affairs - of the mysterious Elena spurning Max's advances in favour of his own stepfather, Carlos. With Elena's apparent "rebirth" in the guise of Lisa, Max is unable to control his emotions and seeks to this time consummate their relationship by destroying all who endanger his plans.

Max's final thread of sanity is eroded however, with the discovery of his bedroom shrine to Elena - her atrophying remains adorning the bed, complete with grinning skull. That Max's ravishing of Lisa and his subsequent orgasm can only be achieved under the "watchful" gaze of Elena's decomposing corpse merely serves to confirm his descent into insanity.

The Countess' perceptive comment regarding Lisa; "That girl will be the end of us" proves to be prophetic, especially for her, as she finds herself impaled on a sword wielded by Max before the final grisly tableaux as all the assorted victims are seated at a wedding reception - complete with nuptial cake and Elena in black veil, whereupon the wounded Countess moves menacingly towards Max causing him to fall to his death from the high-level window. We then cut to Lisa awakening on a foliage-strewn bed before emerging from the mansion grounds and entering the village again, only this time seeing Leandro with another mannequin - her own.

Her speedy departure aboard a charter plane provides a fittingly surrealistic finale to the film - suddenly finding the plane deserted she hears a familiar voice imparting the passenger information over the intercom. Her worst nightmare is confirmed as she discovers all the victims now sat aboard the plane and her investigation of the cockpit reveals the pilot to be... Leandro, who cries out "Elena" whereupon she feints to the floor.

This then completes Bava's "fever-dream" vision and yet even this remained unseen in its' entirety until recent years due to the film's artistic and critical success but resounding commercial failure.

As Leone himself explained to Tim Lucas regarding the film's premiere at Cannes in 1973; "There was a tremendous turnout and no one left the theatre during the screening. We even held additional screenings to packed houses but there were no buyers. I couldn't give the film away."

Like the similar problems encountered at the same time by the previously prolific (and hugely successful) Hammer Films, *Lisa and the Devil* was ironically, given its “timeless” quality, considered too subtle, too sophisticated in the wake of the astounding commercial success of *The Exorcist* (1973)⁸² with its’ graphic, special-effects driven portrayal of demonic possession.

So, having been consigned to virtual limbo and gathering dust in the studio vaults, Leone set about recutting the film and resurrecting its’ commercial appeal and *House of Exorcism* was born in 1975. This hybrid version contained both *Lisa* footage and additional footage of Summer doing her best Linda Blair performance from *The Exorcist*, being strapped to a hospital bed, spewing forth toads, pea soup, profanities and impromptu levitations.

As Leone revealed; “There was a combination of scenes involving Elke that Mario refused to film. Mario’s sister was a nun and he was a very superstitious man. At certain points during filming he would refuse to go any further. He would take Elke aside and tell her not to say those words, the profanity and what not. At such points I had to take over and he would go out and wait in the corridor. We had a falling out over this, eventually, so I had to complete the picture myself. Bava had nothing to do with the editing or the final assembling of the film.”

As Bava himself later commented on the making of *House of Exorcism*; “It’s not a movie of mine, although there’s my name on it. It’s the same situation, too long to explain, of a cuckold father with a son, who is not his own, but has his name and he can’t do anything about it.”

Subsequently, Leone and Bava reconciled their differences and Bava’s name was indeed restored to Italian prints of the film, *La Case dell’exorcismo* in place of Leone’s pseudonymous director credit of Mickey Lion.

Given this torturous route to finally unveiling Bava’s delirious original edited version, the fact that *Lisa and the Devil* is now generally considered by critics to be one of his most diverse and fascinating works provides a fitting (if posthumous) coda to Bava’s unique vision.

So what of Bava’s personal obsessions and thematic components then and how do they synthesise within the cadre of both *Baron Blood* and *Lisa and the Devil* ?

As Leone’s comments bear out, one of Bava’s most overriding preoccupations concerned the profound irony of religious faith and secular belief being interwoven (albeit uncomfortably), into the diverse fabric of modern society. The notion that ancient myths and religious rituals could still prevail and influence in a seemingly agnostic contemporary society was one which captivated Bava throughout his career but most pointedly, in his duo of Leone collaborations.

As Peter’s uncle, Karl (Massimo Girotti) succinctly observes in *Baron Blood* - “We live in an enlightened age, where science not only reveals the old mysteries as mere superstitions, but little by little discovers the true mysteries of the universe.” He then sounds a germane warning that; “I would not play with the occult if I were you. One’s obsession with it can be the real danger.”

⁸² Linda Blair’s tour de force as a 12 years old girl Regan possessed by a demon included urinating on the carpet, vomiting green bile over a priest and masturbating violently with a crucifix, all aiding the confrontational film to become the (then), most commercially successful horror film of all time. The use of such graphic special effects and make-up heralded the onset of the special-effects driven film as opposed to the period gothic of Bava, Hammer et al.

Given that this followed on barely three years after the notorious Charles Manson⁸³ murders and the subsequent growth in popularity of alternative religions, new age theories and homeopathic medicines, I'm sure that Bava would have allowed himself a wry smile if still alive today, at the prophetic nature of Karl's comments.

The fact that the Baron is resurrected by ancient incantations and not modern medicine - reinforced as the Baron ironically seeks out a doctor to "cure" his hideous wounds but contemporary medicine does not prevail whilst the Baron's sadistic force does, as he leaves the doctor lying bleeding to death and the on-rushing ambulance the doctor has alerted with a futile trip.

In a similar way, the incongruous sight of the death-black car set amidst the gothic mansion and medieval town in *Lisa and the Devil* suggests that modern conveniences are perhaps not what they appear and it is noticeable that it is the modern car's mechanical failure which draws the ill-fated protagonists into seeking help from the Countess' deranged family.

On a tangential thematic level, *Lisa and the Devil* also questions our belief in fundamental aspects of our society. Bava's continual use of distorted reflections in filthy mirrors implies a distortion of our perceived "reality" as glimpsed in these surfaces, along with the suggestion that there is a parallel metaphysical universe to our own. Ditto, watches stop and we have a timeless limbo or twilight zone suggested to us, emphasised in the seemingly non-linear dream flashback sequence Lisa experiences.

Lisa herself awakens during the final scenes in a verdant setting, her bed draped in fauna and shot through soft-focus filters which indicates a regression to the beginning, the genesis of the human race. It is also noticeable that in *Baron Blood* the childhood innocence of Gretchen (Nicoletta Elmi) is tempted by a fallen apple - only her "garden of Eden" contains the snake in the grass that is the Baron - his gnarled hand revealing his presence in the bushes, followed by his extended but fruitless pursuit of the frightened little girl.

Temptation, albeit in the form of modern greed and avarice are none better illustrated than in the death of Her Dortmund (Dieter Treder) in *Baron Blood*. His company's corporate raiders are seeking to transform the castle into a hotel and at one point, Eva goes to investigate "what your workers are destroying" within the ancient structure.

Dortmund however, gets his just deserts, having slotted his money into the neon-lit drinks machine garishly located against the arcane castle walls and the Baron strikes - strangling his victim. The presence of a treasure chest full of gold previously secreted away by the Baron no doubt has also fuelled Dortmund's "interest" in the castle.

Eva's own psychedelic wardrobe - mini-skirts and close-fitting sweaters exhibit an equally jarring visage when set against the drab walls of the castle, whilst in *Lisa and the Devil*, the regal, stately demeanour of the Countess appears at odds with the remaining participants who exude lust, greed and bewilderment in equal measures rather than civilised manners.

⁸³ Charles Manson, the notorious American cult leader of the drop-out group known as the "Family" and the mastermind of the graphic murders on the 8th August 1969 of actress Sharon Tate (and her unborn baby), along with companions Jay Sebring, Voytek Crykowski, Abigail Folger and Steven Parent, at the house in Cielo Drive, LA owned by Tate's husband, the film director Roman Polanski.

Given the strong sense of pre-ordained fates which seemingly envelop the doomed characters, it is interesting to note the influence of one of Bava's contemporaries, the Belgian director Harry Kumel. Kumel only made two full length features during the early 1970s - the sapphic *Daughters of Darkness* (1971) and the *outré Malpertuis* (1972)⁸⁴, before then bizarrely consigning himself to the relative backwaters of working in Flemish television.

It is the latter entry which most interests us here in relation to Bava. *Malpertuis* revolves around an eccentric collection of guests gathering in an old dark house, who are revealed to be greek gods, sewn into human skin for the amusement of explorer/taxidermist Cosavius (Orson Welles) for his own delectation.

As Steve Guariento⁸⁵ has noted, Cosavius bears a striking resemblance to the role of Telly Savalas' Leandro in *Lisa and the Devil*. Both figures are seen as toying with the mortals fate has earmarked for their collection, in the same way that Bava is toying with his characters in order to create his (and our ?) playthings.

The numerous life-like mannequins which we see Leandro carrying in *Lisa and the Devil* are literally his toys - his collection of "souls" if you will as in repeated scenes, the distinction between human and mannequin is deliberately blurred by Bava.

The very opening titles of *Lisa and the Devil* also indicate Leandro as the "puppet master" as we see (his) white-gloved hands playing tarot cards - life becomes a game, a game of chance or fate. Take your pick. Bava then cuts immediately to the figure of Leandro in an antique shop - his face a replica of the fresco-depicted devil glimpsed only moments earlier by Lisa.

The continual use of mannequins or "dummies" in *Lisa and the Devil* reaffirms the sense that the characters are mere playthings, pawns on a human chessboard. In the same way, just as Leandro is associated with the devil, so too is the Baron the personification of evil in *Baron Blood* as he gradually decimates the cast list.

Again, as with *Lisa and the Devil* there is an overwhelming feeling from the beginning that the Baron will re-emerge, only Bava provides the characters with both his means of resurrection and the amulet to herald his destruction.

Both films also lend credence to the notion that the sins of the father will be visited upon their children.

From the very opening scenes of *Baron Blood* we can glean that Peter has an unhealthy interest with his infamous ancestor - "I'm particularly fascinated by the ghoulish Baron on my father's side" he confesses and his later barely concealed glee at acquainting himself with the Baron's macabre torture chamber leads him to conjecture; "I wonder how many victims the Baron tortured with these trinkets".

⁸⁴ Kumel's *Daughters of Darkness* is a heady cocktail of surrealism, camp and lesbian chic courtesy of Delphine Seyrig's compelling performance as the infamous Countess Bathory via Marlene Dietrich ! *Malpertuis* adopts an approach of flamboyant fantasy which somewhat dilutes Jean Ray's original source novel which fuses the idea of Greek gods with the perverse world of the tawdry characters within the film and so loses the horror generated by the juxtaposition of the two seemingly incompatible worlds.

⁸⁵ A three issue feature in *Samhain* magazine, issues 37,38 & 40.

As soon as he is familiar with the legend of the curse placed upon the Baron, Peter is seemingly hell-bent on reciting the incantation in order that his nefarious ancestor will materialise. Common sense and rationale fly out of the window and the fact that Peter has just gained his degree at university emphasises that modern “intelligence” can still be hamstrung by ancient beliefs.

Likewise in *Lisa and the Devil* we see the haunted family skeletons of the Countess’ lineage displayed eventually for all to see - any hereditary status and breeding sacrificed on the heady altar of human weakness and perversity.

The sins of the stepfather Carlos’ indiscretions with Elena not only infects the Countess with feelings of guilt, but transfers them to her son, Max, who out of some misplaced sense of loyalty to Elena, maintains her grisly shrine and attempts to recapture her image as embodied in the flesh by Lisa.

Such instances of family rifts, dysfunctional behaviour and their perverse actions not only inform much of Bava’s output but also epitomise some of the most salient motifs throughout the Italian horror tradition.

Bava also exhibits his own zeal for the anti-hero, the miscreants in both *Baron Blood* and *Lisa and the Devil* at the expense of the (by comparison) vapid “heroic” leads. Thus, in *Baron Blood* Bava enjoys building up the Baron’s history and reputation in classic horror movie style before the mangled one’s dramatic entrance serves to increase the tension.

Leandro’s wicked sense of humour is a constant theme running through *Lisa and the Devil*, whether he is breaking the legs of a corpse to cram it into a coffin and joking “Say it with flowers” and nonchalantly rearranging the numerous mannequins/corpses as is his want, to the oneiric denouement where he assumes the role of aircraft pilot on the charter flight which belongs in the realms of nightmares.

Ultimately, the charge generally levelled at Bava (and many other directors working specifically within the horror and sci-fi fantasy genres) is that his films betray a sense of style over substance.

Whilst there is certainly an argument to consider that style can be of pre-eminence, this is not the time to argue such polemics as I believe that Bava demonstrates sufficient substance, even with the often penny-dreadful scripts he frequently worked from, to refute such claims in any case.

One can certainly see from the prevalent themes outlined above that there is plenty of sub-textural work going on in Bava’s films if you are prepared to dig deeply enough to locate it.

That said, both *Baron Blood* and *Lisa and the Devil* illustrate Bava’s acute understanding of the mechanics of horror and the dynamics of terror and also demonstrate just what can be achieved when a director maintains his distinctive style whilst simultaneously attempting to delineate lapsing moral standards and expanding “ethical” boundaries.

With this in mind, Bava’s camera is ever zooming, rapidly arrowing in on characters as if to identify them as “victims” in direct violation of the more considered framing of the classical close-up shot. When Bava uses a close-up it is often to gain maximum impact from the latest pool of blood to encompass the screen as we are awash with murder, mayhem and bloodshed.

Wipe away the gossamer strands of the gothic milieu and you will see the utilisation of almost de rigueur horror motifs in energising fashion by a master at work.

So, the ancient castle looms large in *Baron Blood* whilst in *Lisa and the Devil* it is a sprawling, remote mansion. In the former film we are informed of the locals' fearful suspicion of the Baron and his legend in a thinly-veiled correlation with those two bastions of the gothic genre; Baron Frankenstein and Count Dracula (via Vlad the Impaler), whilst in the latter, the sheer isolation of the nebulous family estate suggests a haunted past if nothing else.

Eva and Peter's invocation of the malevolent Baron - is a triumph of the classic horror tradition transcending common sense as is also so expertly satirised in Wes Craven's *Scream*⁸⁶. So, the couple blindly recant the script knowing full well that if the curse prevails, then the Baron will return in all his bloody glory. It is demons of a different kind which are invoked from ancient tomes in Sam Raimi's kinetic *Evil Dead* series⁸⁷.

In *Lisa and the Devil* it is a classic combination of "don't run into the foreboding woods at night" and "don't flee aimlessly down corridors in expansive houses" which spell danger for Lisa in the first instance and death for Sophie in the second.

Bava's love of German Expressionism also punctuates both of these films to a high degree as both feature snaking, narrow alleyways, full of menace and towering ancient buildings which soar skywards, especially given Bava's low-angle camera shots to accentuate the intimidating, claustrophobic confines of the locales. That the same arcane streets in both films stretch away into the distance, unnervingly recreates the style of surrealist artists such as Giorgio de Chirico and the use of mannequins in *Lisa and the Devil*, besides recalling Bava's father, also evokes the spirit of Chirico again and Rene Magritte⁸⁸.

That a permanent incandescent fog swirls around both locales also heightens the gothic atmosphere, as does the cogent scene in *Baron Blood* where the psychic is introduced, partially to explain the gaping holes in the plot (!), but also to provide the characters with the *modus operandi* (an amulet) for destroying the Baron, but mainly to recapture the vertiginous gothic heights of his earlier films. Bava even has one character, Fritz (Luciano Pigozzi) impaled in an iron maiden in *Baron Blood* in homage to Barbara Steele's spiked face mask demise in *Mask of Satan* and the aforementioned "face at the window" in *Lisa and the Devil* conjures up poetic moments from both *Black Sabbath* and *Curse of the Dead*.

⁸⁶ Craven's phenomenally successful revisionist *Scream* includes elongated scenes of characters stepping out of relatively safe, well-lit houses and into dark, foreboding areas immediately outside, in outhouses and in garages with predictably fatal consequences.

⁸⁷ Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981), *Evil Dead 2 - Dead By Dawn* (1987) and *Army of Darkness* (1992) feature possessed characters returning as demons following incantations and tape recordings read/played out aloud from (in this case) the ancient tome "The Necronomicon" or "Book of the Dead".

⁸⁸ Such surrealist artists as Chirico and Magritte influenced numerous continental directors such as Jean Rollin and Alain Robbe-Grillet whose *La Belle Captive* (1983) (*The Beautiful Prisoner*) was based on Magritte's painting of the same name.

Bava also adds a decidedly surrealistic edge to the proceedings in both films - a style he is not readily noted for. This is mainly evinced in *Baron Blood* during the Baron's pursuit of Eva at night - the ominously silent streets and kaleidoscopic use of colour lending the scenes an ethereal quality.

The even more enigmatic *Lisa and the Devil* recalls surrealism-guru Alain Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad* (1960)⁸⁹ in parts with its' fragmented narrative and its' lack of a final interpretation - an insoluble enigma in effect. The "wedding reception" scenes here also recall the supreme surrealist of them all - Bunuel with their "Last Supper" connotations. Staple horror film accoutrements including grisly killings and death by sharp implements are capably realised in each film for the cognoscenti to revel at.

After the careful cultivation of the reborn Baron in *Baron Blood* his anticipated killing spree is probably rather more rapid than one would expect but then Bava was always willing to pre-empt the "slasher" films phenomenon of the late 1970s and early 1980s. His groundbreaking double-impalement of victims in *Bay of Blood* later reappeared to more commercially viable effect in *Friday the Thirteenth* (1980).

So, the dramatic hanging of Dortmund in *Baron Blood* was to later inform Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1976) - only this time with a double death, and Lucio Fulci's *City of the Living Dead* (1980) as a priest swings limply in his own cemetery, a rope around his neck.

Echoes of such violence resound in *Lisa and the Devil* where the sight of an up-raised arm with murder weapon poised to strike spells doom for more than one victim and the macabre "wedding" tableaux resurfaces to chilling effect in Michel Soavi's ably-crafted *Stage Fright* (1987).

Crimes of passion coupled with the dead returning to life have always skirted the uneasy taboo of necrophilia and with this brace of films, Bava confronts the thorny subject to varying degrees. In *Baron Blood* there is no overt mention of such evil deeds but the climactic confrontation inside the torture chamber - with an alternative outcome - the Baron triumphing, wouldn't stretch the imagination too much to see the Baron make advances on the nubile figure of Eva before, during and after torturing her!

With the case of *Lisa and the Devil*, partly "inspired" by an unrealised project about necrophile Viktor Ardisson, the references are far more overt - especially during Max's molestation of the drugged Lisa, lying adjacent to the rotting remains of Max's beloved Eleanor. Although Max's obsession is convincingly portrayed, the seminal work in this disquieting area remains Riccardo Freda's macabre hymn *The Terror of Dr. Hitchcock* (1962)⁹⁰.

So, enough of these undoubted Bava successes in merging ancient evil with the modern world but who can we now hold up as his most fitting successor. His own son Lamberto flickered

⁸⁹ Alain Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad* was one of the quintessential art films of the 1960s - a suffocating melodrama where even the minutest of details appears crammed with significance.

⁹⁰ *The Terror of Doctor Hitchcock* is probably Freda's greatest horror film - a confrontational period melodrama concerning a necrophile, the titular doctor (Robert Flemyng), haunted by his dead wife (Maria Teresa Vianello), when he returns to the family home with his new bride (Barbara Steele) as a highly fetishistic mix of sex and paralysis ensues amidst a supremely gothic atmosphere.

brightly with his debut feature *Macabre* (1980) before then being sucked into the artistic quicksand of Italian television.

Of Argento, the giallo remains more of a driving force than the gothic and Soavi still produces inconsistent and erratic work concerning both his choice of projects and the differing style he assumes for each one.

What price then someone who can take the memory of Bava's gothic flair whilst still inaugurating modern, fantastical thematics to propel the Italian gothic cinema forward into the next millennium and beyond. Step forward one special effects supremo and now fledgling director, Sergio Stivaletti. His debut feature *Wax Mask* (1996), due to be helmed by Lucio Fulci before his untimely demise, captures both the authentic period costume and attention to detail Bava exhibited, competent actors and an audacious climax which recalls James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984) in order to give a thoroughly modern interpretation to what in lesser hands would have been only average and uninspiring material.

Wax Mask may not be authentic Bava and Sergio Stivaletti may only be a pretender to the throne but the spirit which epitomised the master still survives, living on in the imaginative works of those who seek to restore former glories to the contemporary gothic horror film.

Black, Andy, 1999a, A Modern World with Ancient Evil, pp.33-50, *Necronomicon* Book Three, Hereford: Noir Publishing.

DARK PASSIONS

Just like such famous icons before her as Jane Mansfield and Marc Bolan, Soledad Miranda met her premature death by speeding to her appointment with destiny from behind the wheel of a car on a Lisbon highway during the final months of 1971.

Prophetically, only months before, her “dying” breath as the title dominatrix in Jess Franco's *Eugenie De Sade* (1970) rasped that “Je suis morte”, only for her character to be deliciously “tickled” back to life ! Unfortunately, life did not imitate art as no such resuscitation was possible in reality.

Born to Portuguese parents on July 9 1943 in Seville, Spain, Miranda was actually christened Soledad Redon Bueno or “good solitude” and spent the formative years of her life performing song and dance routines in San Fernando talent contests. As Franco once commented on Miranda; “She had a rather unfortunate and difficult life, which began with flamenco dancing and lead to small roles in films.” As one of her fellow countrymen Franco's insight into the marginality of Spanish cinema and its paucity of opportunities is revealing, especially when considering Miranda's own neglected talent - “It is very difficult for actors in Spain to achieve any kind of recognition”, Franco observed.

Miranda's film debut, aged 16, reflected her prowess on the stage as she portrayed a ballerina in José Maria Elorrieta's *La Bella Mimi* (*The Beautiful Mimi*) in 1960. Her film career blossomed as she then appeared in Franco Giraldi's spaghetti western *Sugar Colt* (1966), before starring in a brace of international productions, *Cannons for Cordoba* (1967) and *100 Rifles* (1968).

More universal recognition however, followed her work for US producer Sidney Pink in Javier Seto's *The Castilian* (1963) and Julio Coll's *Pyro* (1963). In the former, Miranda appears briefly, but to noticeable (!!) effect as one of a dozen young nubile, who strip off their clothing and bathe in a public stream in order to distract a unit of invading soldiers ! Her role in the latter, as a sensitive, caring innocent, the daughter of a carnival worker who has a love for dogs, induces a certain degree of pathos in the audience in Coll's somewhat underrated Spanish horror.

This exposure to the prolific fear genre undoubtedly acted as the catalyst for her eventual partnership with horror auteur Jess Franco. Although she made a total of 31 films (perhaps even more), it is for the mercurial Spanish director's work that she is best known and indeed, fondly remembered.

After a brief hiatus when she gave up films and started a family with a Portuguese racing driver, Miranda then returned to life in the cinematic fast lane via her role as Mina in Franco's *El Conde Drácula* (*Count Dracula*) in 1969. Although much-touted (mainly by Franco !) as being the most accurate and reverential adaptation from Bram Stoker's seminal vampire novel, *El Conde Drácula* is certainly light years away from being the definitive version of the source work.

All this, despite the appearance of Christopher Lee in his favoured role as the Count, with the eccentric Klaus Kinski as a manic Renfield and with Herbert Lom as Professor Van Helsing. In fact, the only real authenticity that Franco recreates from Stoker is in accurately portraying the arch vampire as a silver-haired and moustached figure who, upon suckling the elixir of blood from each successive victim, becomes progressively more youthful in appearance. Miranda certainly made her mark on this picture in more ways than one - her supposed seduction by Lee's demonic

vampire being almost overturned by the actor's reaction to her - "I've played this scene many times, but this woman is giving me something no other actress has ever had" - praise indeed ! Lee's initiation into Miranda's mesmerising aura is part-explained by Franco's appraisal of her; "When she began working in my films, it was like watching her undergo a transformation." He continues; "She told me it was the first time in her life (that) she felt so fulfilled."

As if to echo this physical transformation, Miranda also took to utilising a pseudonym when appearing in Franco's productions, as a cross-fertilisation of the producer of *The Thief of Baghdad* and the author of *Valley of the Dolls* gave birth to Susann Korda !!

Then came a trio of Miranda (or Korda!) appearances in the films Franco directed for Liechtenstein productions; *Sex Charade* (1970), as yet unreleased with Miranda as a woman held captive by a sadistic maniac who has escaped from hospital. She is forced to tell him a story (!) in order to keep the fugitive awake which she does, but it is a self-revelatory, allegorical premise which mirrors her present situation - quite a departure from Franco's requisite flesh and fear *oeuvre*.

Next came *Les Cauchemars Naissent la Nuit* (1970), only marginally better known than *Sex Charade* as it did receive a solitary film release in Belgium (!) and which saw Franco return to one of his earlier film plots - *Miss Muerte* (1966) as a nightclub dancer unconsciously commits murders for somebody else who is controlling her, and, enjoying her actions vicariously.

The last of this triumvirate *Eugenie De Sade* (1970) is at least more widely seen which is appropriate as it showcases perhaps Miranda's definitive work as the titular and truly modern sadist. As Eugenie, the daughter of Albert de Franval (Paul Muller), an acclaimed psychologist and who under the name of "Radeck" is researching into sexual perversion - good work if you can get it ! Given that Eugenie's favourite book is the story of Saint Theresa you could be forgiven for thinking that she is a shy and retiring violet - not so ! She is incestuously attracted to her father and provokes his desire by strangling to death a nude model they have hired for a kinky S&M photo session (played by another Franco regular, Alice Arno). Along with the sadean perversions on show, *Eugenie De Sade* is also noticeable for the *outré* costumes which include go-go boots, cape and floppy hat (all red), and white framed, blue-lensed and oversized shades ! Psychedelic or what ?!

Of Miranda's final trio of Franco films, *The Devil Came From Akasawa* (1970) is the least well-known - a real potboiler of a story based on a Bryan Edgar Wallace krimi and liberally borrowing from mystery/crime writer Mickey Spillane's *Kiss Me Deadly* - filmed so memorably by director Robert Aldrich in 1955. As Jane Morgan, captain of the British Secret Service no less, Miranda poses as a prostitute in London and is recruited as an exotic dancer in Akasawa with a mission of getting closer to the thieves suspected of stealing a lethal "philosophers" stone - a glowing mineral which turns metal into gold but burns men to cinders. Draped in crimson scarves and flamboyant costumes Miranda cuts a stunning figure - aided and abetted by Scotland Yard detective Walter Forrester (Fred Williams). For Franco, Miranda's performance obviously had a lasting impression as her role was virtually reprised in Lina Romay's character of Countess Irina in the later *Female Vampire* (1973).

Rather more well known, thanks to Redemption Video's release of the two titles, are *Vampyros Lesbos* and *She Killed in Ecstasy* (both 1970). In both films, Miranda's smouldering sensuality is utilised to great effect as she literally embodies the persona of a cogent femme fatale - her

nebulous, piercing pools for eyes and pouting lips merely the veneer to lure her “prey” before ensnaring them in her hedonistic web of perversion.

As if to reinforce this seduction theme we even see a butterfly symbolically snared inside one of the fishnets which adorns Miranda's coastal “fortress” in *Vampyros Lesbos*. As Princess Nadine she makes a startling entrance - decorated in a translucent black negligee she caresses then kisses a full-length mirror to the accompaniment of an almost funereal sounding Hammond keyboard, before then turning her attentions to the naked figure of Lucy (Ewa Stroemberg) as the two cavort on the floor, writhing in orgasmic ecstasy ! Given that this graphic display takes place within a darkened night-club, some of the intimacy is lost in favour of an avowedly exhibitionist atmosphere created by the “performance”.

Princess Nadine's fortified retreat eschews the trappings of the gothic in preference to similarly extravagant displays imitating the Princess' own exotic nature - so fishnets rather than cobwebs ensnare unwary visitors, kites rather than bats fly overhead and luxurious poses on sandy beaches or aboard a sun-kissed boat replaces the traditional vampire pose rising from a coffin and such like - no such obvious images permeate the Franco imagination for his own unique sanguinary predator.

Princess Nadine's taloned fingers beckon the camera closer in one memorable scene as, outstretched on the floor, her (blood) red scarf unfurls in front on the lens, flowing in an imaginary breeze, at once capturing the erotic, cloying actions of the Princess. Having succumbed to and then overcome “death” the Princess is quick to turn her amoral desires towards the blonde beauty of Lucy again - eventually supplying her with an authentic “love-bite” after Lucy's long blonde tresses have fallen dramatically in front of Nadine's equally long stockinged legs.

The triumphant finale relocates Nadine and Lucy to the familiar nightclub dance floor as the Princess masquerades briefly in a latex peek-a-boo bra, matching panties and thigh length boots, before turning her attentions to the statuesque Lucy - draping her own discarded lingerie onto the prone blonde to create the ultimate erotic frisson.

As a very “loose” interpretation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula's Guest*, *Vampyros Lesbos* doesn't really cut the mustard but as a highly-charged, kinky and kitsch curio the film excels, especially with the bravura dance/striptease sessions and psychedelic jazz score which rates almost as highly as the visuals.

For *She Killed in Ecstasy/ Sie Totete in Ektase* (aka *Mrs. Hyde*), Franco returned again to his earlier epic *Miss Muerte*, but if anything, *She Killed in Ecstasy* is a far more explicit work with Miranda as the avenging widow Mrs Johnson - reaping punishment upon those she believes drove her scientist husband to death - his revolutionary ideas meeting with almost the same kind of hostility reserved for Baron Frankenstein !

Utilising the *Vampyros Lesbos* sets the familiar jutting coastline and imposing castle residence is the ideal backdrop for Miranda's character as she glides down the stone steps cut into the island, her raven hair flowing in the wind, along with her purple cape which (barely) conceals a tight black dress beneath. Appearing very much as the “castrating feminine” figure that the psychologists would have us believe, Mrs Johnson proceeds to graphically sow the seeds of her enemies destruction - first, by seducing her victims, then by stabbing them in a homicidal frenzy, her phallic knife-thrusts appropriately aimed at her victim's genitalia. Her final victim fittingly is Franco

himself (as Dr Donen) - tied to a chair and left helpless as his wide-eyed tormentor traces first her lips, then the knife-blade over his bare body before his bloody demise ensues.

In one telling scene we see one victim lured to his doom by admiring Mrs Johnson's reflection in a mirror - a direct reference to her alter-ego/dual nature - seductress one minute, killer the next.

Her own demise - at the wheel of a car which careers over a cliff, unfortunately proved prophetic in the extreme. As Franco himself lamented after Miranda's tragic death - "The day before she died, she received the greatest news of her life. I visited her apartment in Lisbon with a German producer, who came out to offer her a two year contract with CCC, which would assure her of at least two starring roles per year in big budget films. She was going to become a major star in Germany". And all this, a mere two weeks after *Vampyros Lesbos* had opened to rave reviews in cinemas in West Berlin.

Miranda's death was also seemingly the catalyst for Franco's obsessive, workaholic approach to film-making - literally throwing himself into projects as if to expunge her from his memory. As Franco noted in a final tribute; "She left behind an incredible legacy. All of the women who acted in my films after her were deeply affected by her legend. Lina Romay, for example, has had moments in which she was completely possessed by Soledad. She became Soledad Miranda !"

That being so, there really was only one Soledad, and at least now some of her finest works are becoming available to view again for new audiences to share in the mystique that was Miranda.

Black, Andy, 1999b, *Dark Passions: The Seductive Charm of Soledad Miranda*, pp.73-81, *Necronomicon* Book Three, Hereford: Noir Publishing.

Plastic Surgery Disasters

Body Horror in *Eyes Without A Face* and *Faceless*

"It's an anguish film. It's a quieter mood than horror, more internal, more penetrating. It's horror in homeopathic doses." - Georges Franju, director of *Eyes Without A Face*.

It's a horror film but with human beings instead of bizarre monsters. It's not a gore film." - Jess Franco, director of *Faceless*.

"Doctor said you need surgery now,
You're feeling good until the side-effects fuck up something else..."
"The magazine says your face don't look quite right,
Until you wear our brand new wonder cream tonight..."
(Dead Kennedys - *Plastic Surgery Disasters* - Alternative Tentacles CD Release)

Whilst Andy Warhol famously commented that members of contemporary society each demand their own fifteen minutes of fame, the populace in the western world require much greater longevity when it comes to the thorny issue of preserving their "beauty" in order to massage their vanity.

As civil wars, natural devastation and global conflict tears apart the fabric of the remote, (and not so remote) world, many in the so-called "civilised" nations find themselves not preoccupied with survival but with the misguided quest for the ultimate body in order to hide the ravages of natural ageing. So, out goes wrinkles and in comes skin grafts, out goes excess fat and comes tummy tucks, out goes atrophying flesh and in comes donor flesh - ultimately, out goes the natural and in comes the plastic, the artifice that plastic surgery provides. It may not be rooting out the blonde-haired and blue-eyed as special, but it is the rooting out of imperfection in favour of the egotistical pursuit of the vacuous concept that is vanity.

It is just these cosmetic concerns that informs both Georges Franju's masterly *Eyes Without A Face/Les Yeux Sans Visage* (1959) and Jess Franco's thinly-veiled homage, *Faceless/Les Prédateurs de la Nuit* (1988) - though not a remake per se.

Where as the traditional strain of mad doctors and even crazier experiments has mined a rich seam in numerous horror and sci-fi genre films over the years, essentially borrowing much of their inspiration from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) with its' core theme of creating new life from a mosaic of donor body parts, both Franju and Franco's work strikes more at the heart of contemporary society.

In both films, the creation of life is not the driving *raison d'être* behind the surgical experimentation which takes place, rather it is the restoration of superficial "beauty" or "normality" which provides the defining impetus.

The surgeons in each film - Professor Genessier (Pierre Brasseur) in *Eyes* and Dr. Flamand (Helmut Berger) and Dr. Moser (Anton Diffring) in *Faceless*, as seen operating as much to satisfy their own medical egotism as the well-being of their patients, literally operating under the misguided belief that by restoring a patina of perfection to their patients, they can somehow bypass the moral bankruptcy of the soul they embody. The goal for each surgeon is is not the salvation of the spirit but the achievement in making beauty once again become (only) skin deep.

In both films it is (dysfunctional) family relationships which serve to instigate the nefarious activities of the respective surgeons as they spiral into the detritus of the human psyche with ever increasing urgency with each successive operating failure.

In *Eyes* it is Genessier's daughter Catherine (Edith Scob) who is the unwilling recipient of numerous facial skin grafts following her hideous disfigurement in a car accident, (itself the result

of her father's driving) - "He always has to dominate, even on the road he drove like a demon" she remarks, and so reveals her father's deep-rooted guilt complex for her condition - a burden he seeks to remove by restoring her former beauty.

Likewise in *Faceless*, Flamand's doomed surgery is the result of his beloved sister Ingrid (Christiane Jean), being disfigured with acid thrown into her face by one dissatisfied client of Flamand's expensive plastic surgery clinic and which was intended to hit the doctor instead. Unlike Catherine however, Ingrid proves a more enthusiastic recipient of the numerous attempted face grafts, perhaps a sign of the increasingly cosmetic-obsessed 1980s - she must have her "beauty" returned at any (human) cost.

Although the acquisition of unwilling donor victims - all chosen for their facial attractiveness and pristine skin is instigated upon the instructions of Genessier in *Eyes* and Flamand in *Faceless*, it is the doctors' willing accomplices who carry out the subsequent kidnappings, and as such, become equally guilty for their complicity in these crimes.

Whilst Genessier's loyal assistant Louise (Alida Valli), is content to trawl the streets looking for intended victims and later to callously dispose of their dissected bodies, Flamand's vivacious confidant Nathalie (Brigitte Lahaie), adds an extra dimension in her hedonistic pursuit of sexual pleasure with male and female partners, coupled with a sadistic zeal for inflicting pain upon her victims - "I believe in reincarnation, don't you?" mocks the syringe-wielding Nathalie as she prepares one patient for her abrupt demise.

The most horrific aspect in all of this is the single-minded determination to pursue the surgical experimentation until "success" is achieved - no matter how many innocent victims are butchered in the process.

This paucity of respect for human life is most harrowingly revealed in *Eyes* as Genessier cruelly and incorrectly identifies a disfigured corpse as that of his daughter, (it is in reality, a donor victim for Catherine), whereupon he meets the real victim's father, Tessot (Rene Genin), on his departure from the morgue. As the anguished Tessot pleads with Genessier as to his certainty that the body is Catherine's, Genessier coldly lies; "All too certain, unfortunately" as he maintains it is his daughter's body which has been found. He compounds the deceit by continuing to Tessot disingenuously that it is "Strange that I should have to comfort you, for whom some hope yet remains.

When we later see Genessier continuing the deception at his daughter's "funeral", calmly laying a wreath on the grave, Louise threatens to crack urging, "Let's go. I simply can't take any more" only for Genessier to continue the deceit, replying simply that "I like things done properly."

Genessier continues this calculating, dispassionate approach, coolly chloroforming a new victim, Edna (Juliette Maywel) whom Louise has inveigled back to their spacious, isolated residence. When the ensuing operation on Edna ends in failure, Genessier sighs to Louise, "Look after her, feed her; I'll let you know later" regarding her fate, whilst treating the unfortunate victim like one of the many barking dogs he has caged up adjacent to his operating theatre.

In one moment of emotional outpouring, Catherine opines the fact that her father treats her "like" a dog, in effect, the numerous operations she undergoes condemning her to be no more than "A human guinea pig, what a godsend to him."

In a similar vein in *Faceless*, we see Flamand's soulless streak unmasked as having kidnapped the voluptuous model, Barbara (Caroline Munro), Flamand observes that "She's very beautiful, don't you think?", suggesting that this will soon change in his hands. His cynical comments to one elderly patient who genuinely feels that his clinic "is like a paradise on earth", reveals his contempt for others as he chides; "The capsules I gave you contain hormones, glands and bone marrow from virgins sacrificed by me when the moon is full." He finishes with great insincerity; "Don't forget, your body is a temple" - only for Flamand it becomes more a bloodied altar of vivisection.

When Flamand's oafish, salivating servant, Gordon (Gerald Zalcberg), later attempts to rape the captive Barbara, her resulting injuries provoke not compassion in Flamand, only the selfish response that "The worst thing is that her skin is damaged."

With Flamand then confessing that he cannot operate on his own sister, he enlists the help of an exiled Nazi war surgeon, the aforementioned Dr. Moser - "If you offer him a lot of money and a new passport allowing him to return to Austria and last but not least, the possibility to experiment on human beings again, why not?", Flamand is informed as he sounds out the opportunity of hiring Moser.

Having met Ingrid, Moser reassures his new employer; "Don't be too sad my friend. I'll get her back all of her beauty" having also complimented Flamand on his taste in artists - "Greco, Degas, Hals. Very nice", suggesting the doctor's conscious attempts to surround himself with beauty, be it great works of art or the feminine beauty supplied so readily by Nathalie's vibrant form.

It is later during dinner when Moser perceptively cuts through the pretence and hypocrisy here, observing the irony that; "You French are strange people. You are very sentimental over trivial things. On the one hand, you protect the baby seals and on the other, France, the country of human rights, has become the third largest arms dealer in the world behind Russia and the United States. This industry of death, earns your country, the land of refuge, four thousand billion dollars a year."

Having continually referred to the "victims" of the surgery in both *Eyes* and *Faceless*, it is also pertinent to understand the emotional as well as physical victims in both films, namely Catherine and Ingrid themselves. Neither asked or deserved their disfigurements and shattered lives but both remain the victims of the surgeons' scalpel as surely as the innocent girls plucked from the obscurity of the street - though here, it is interesting to note Franco's ironic social satire in *Faceless* with Munro's cocaine-snorting model and glitzy, read superficial, actress, Florence Guerin (starring as herself), numbering amongst the victims here.

If the "eye is the window of the soul", then truly Edith Scob's pathos-inducing performance as Catherine in *Eyes* proves the point. She is truly a tortured soul, her eyes staring out from behind the white death mask which enshrouds her face, a listless, heart-broken figure. When she is not wearing a mask, she is lying face down on a bed or sofa crying, with all mirrors/reflective surfaces removed from her reach so she is spared the sight of her own reflection. "My face brightens me, my mask terrifies me even more" are the heart-felt words to her father, at once distancing herself from his imperious "professionalism". For Catherine, her own disfigurement at least provides a natural, honest aspect, preferable to the artificial "beauty" her father seeks to create.

The vivid contrast between the smooth, doll-like mask and the dark, staring eyes within is further enhanced by her slow, studied movements as she navigates the labyrinth corridors and stairways of the house like an animated mannequin, an image reinforced by the carnival, circus themed musical score.

Her baleful, emotive gaze at the vibrant painting of her mother which adorns one wall, whilst holding a white dove in her hands - a symbol of freedom and a precursor to the emancipating finale is memorable in the extreme, as her agonisingly silent phone calls to her fiancé Jacques (François Guerin) - frightened to speak to him for fear of revealing to him that she is still alive and has inadvertently and cruelly deceived him, and yet longing to hear her loved one's voice again.

Her complicity in her father's deceit and murderous deeds is ultimately too much of a cross for Catherine to bear as she confides to Louise; "I know the dead should be silent, then let me really die.", continuing despairingly that; "I can't bear it any more...afraid to look at one's face for fear of feeling the cracks and furrows."

Catherine's final flight of freedom sees her release the latest intended victim, Paulette (Beatrice Altariba) - her use of a scalpel to untie the girl's bonds, eliciting a frightened reaction which serves to reinforce Catherine's belief that she is dangerously close to embracing her father's characteristics and (im)morality.

Her subsequently fatal scalpel wound to Louise's disfigured neck, (a skin wound previously operated on by Genessier), allows Catherine to affect her escape, stopping only to let loose the baying hounds which then summarily tear her father to pieces, blood symbolically splashing his surgical gown and atoning for the years of mistreatment the dogs have suffered at his hands.

The final, poetic image is one of liberation as Catherine frees a dove from its cage, walking into the woods in the distance, cradling the bird in her hand as its companions fly overhead into the freedom of the night sky.

As Franju himself eulogised regarding Scob's qualities; "Fever, yearning, fear, hope... I found all this in the beautiful eyes of Edith Scob. But I was always troubled by them. Troubled in the presence of this young, sweet girl. Because sweetness was an emotion which her face never expressed."

Christiane Jean's Ingrid doesn't do "sweetness" either in *Faceless*, somewhat lacking the innocence of Catherine in *Eyes*, being an equally forlorn but much more worldly-wise figure who elicits far less sympathy from the audience because of it. Whilst Catherine's every act is seen as selfless and caring, Ingrid is instantly portrayed as self-serving and selfish.

When Flamand's brutish assistant Gordon misbehaves he is sent to Ingrid for "punishment" - Flamand and Nathalie watching on CCTV screens as Gordon stoops to kiss the stocking-tops of Ingrid's fishnet-clad legs, before both parties simultaneously disrobe. "Does Ingrid know we're watching?" asks Flamand as he stares intently at the monitor with Nathalie replying; "Of course, that's what she gets off on."

Later we see Ingrid all alone in the dark, gazing at her TV screen, full of beautiful girls - "I'm so alone...I need love... to be loved, to be touched?" she laments, so for her, physical beauty represents the only road to personal happiness as opposed to Catherine's refusal of such superficiality in favour of keeping true to her honest emotions.

Ingrid's search for happiness through sexual fulfilment also turns sour, even when Nathalie brings her back a male prostitute to "enjoy". As Ingrid luxuriates on her bed in exquisite lingerie and a metallic face mask, (notably much more brazen than Catherine's porcelain-like face mask), the sexual coupling commences, only for coitus interruptus to strike big time when her inquisitive "suitor" suddenly removes her mask - screaming at the horror beneath, only to be silenced when Ingrid stabs him in the throat with a pair of scissors. Her night of passion now lies in ruins, surrounded by bloodied sheets instead of carnal pleasure.

More blood flows during the climactic operation scenes as Guerin's face is successfully transplanted onto Ingrid's and we later see her, resplendent in her new face, happily toasting in the New Year with Flamand, Nathalie and Moser - only for the ambiguous ending to suggest Flamand's scheming is about to be, ahem, unmasked (!) By the authorities.

Ultimately, both *Eyes* and *Faceless* are each successful films to varying degrees, but in different ways, mainly thanks to the individual interpretation of the salient themes here by the respective directors.

Franju's work is undoubtedly the more poetic and overtly haunting. Cruel and tender. Sadean and surrealistic in almost equal measures. Franju manages to complete the fine balancing act between delineating graphic horror; as evidenced in the truly harrowing surgery scene where Genessier's perspiring face presides over the skin graft procedure - scalpel incisions and then scissors used to clamp all around the facial section, before the bloodied face mask is then levered off the victim's face - and lyrical passages as evidenced in the stunning Cocteau-like images of Genessier's house - all elongated corridors and stained glass windows, lending an eerie, phantasmagorical atmosphere to it.

The stark, unflinching documentary style shooting of this scene, has its antecedent in Franju's early career as a documentarist, witness *La Sang des Bêtes* (1949), which focuses on an abattoir; *Hotel du Invalides* (1951), his subversive film on a French military museum - "Legend has its

heroes, war its victims” and *Cathédrale de Paris* (1957), where the familiar, Notre Dame, is shown from a seldom-seen rear aspect, “decorated” with the rubble of broken stone gargoyles.

Franju’s unique style stems from his ability to initiate feelings of dysfunction and perversity, and yet present them within a natural framework, in other words, fantasies emerge not from real life as such but are instead, simply uncovering the hidden qualities of life. As Franju confesses; “For me, the fantastic is above all realism. I detest fiction... I love what is realistic because I think it is more poetic. Life is much more poetic than anything you can imagine.”

He continues his personal ethos thus; “... any screen image has an immediate presence. Whatever you do, a film is always in the present tense. The past is spontaneously reactualised by the spectator. That’s why anything artificial ages quickly and badly. Dreams, poetry, the fantastic must emerge from reality itself. Every film is a documentary, even the most poetic.”

Though some have picked fault with Franju for his cursory coverage of the police investigations into the murders and disappearances in *Eyes*, and for the lengthy takes which sometimes serve no purpose except for inviting cries of ennui, Franju is far more concerned with investigating diverse characters here, their motives, their foibles and their ambitions and how they interact with one another, together with the complexities of the surgical/moralistic can of worms which propels the film and underpins its considerable dynamics.

He himself is inspired by masters, witness; “I was asked which was the most intensely poetic film and I quoted Buñuel; which was the most beautiful horror film and I quoted Murnau; which was the most intensely graphic film and I quoted Lang.” If you learn and are inspired by masters of this quality, then perhaps Franju’s skill and vision should come as no surprise.

For the mercurial Franco, *Faceless* proves two things. One - that when given the time and budget, (this was his largest to date), he can produce a coherent, action-packed film. Two - ironically all these factors also serve to negate his own improvisational skills and visual imagination. Although *Faceless* fairly speeds along at a relentless pace, it leaves no room for Franco to imbue it with the oneiric qualities found in his finest work such as *Venus in Furs* (1969) and *Succubus* (1969).

Instead, it allowed Franco to return to some of his earlier screen motifs, namely the ubiquitous Dr. Orlof from *The Awful Dr. Orlof* (1961) (and *The Secret Dr. Orlof* (1964), with Orlof himself (played by Howard Vernon), making a cameo appearance in *Faceless* as one of Franco’s in-jokes, as well as Anton Diffring’s final screen appearance (almost reprising a similar role he essayed in 1967’s *Circus of Horrors*).

Whilst Franco aims for the jugular with some startlingly graphic scenes as we see hands lopped off, heads punctured by power drill, cut-off by chainsaw and some incredibly sanguinary surgical scenes - in close up we see surgical pliers tease away the skin from a victim’s face as their bloody facial mask is then held aloft in a restating of Franju’s scene from *Eyes* - only here, we see the dissected tissue that remains beneath as white eyeballs stare up in anguish and white teeth gleam unnervingly at us. As Moser helpfully informs us; “The donor’s fear and panic are the best muscular stimulants. The face remains stretched tight which is an additional guarantee of success.”

Franco also invests his film with the voyeuristic and fetishistic motifs he enjoys so much - filming Flamand’s clinic with banks of TV monitors a la *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (1960), where he can observe all manner of sexual couplings if he wishes, whilst the ample displays of lingerie and hose adorning Lahaie, Guerin and Jean are influenced more by Franco’s own predilection for such imagery rather than any particular fashions.

Given that Lahaie was the (then) “squeeze” of *Faceless* producer Rene Chateau and who then curtailed Berger’s sex scenes with her in the film (!) - “It was such a difficult movie for everyone involved” confessed Lahaie afterwards, and that Franco quarrelled with the special effects man Jacques Castinau and Chateau himself, as the proposed low budget film transmogrified into a high budget affair with an all star cast, Franco does surprisingly well to hold things together. As he confided; “It was a compromise - it’s not a real horror film, it’s a thriller.”

Whatever the case, it's certainly true to say that both *Eyes* and *Faceless* cover similar ground, with very different results and conclusions, providing much thought-provoking material along the way.

It is fitting to leave the last words to Franju however, who in expressing his embryonic yearnings for the surreal, provides a suitably stimulating insight into how the mind of a genuine creator actually works; "I remember one day when I was tiny, I found myself before a wardrobe with a mirror... I opened it and because the wardrobe was damp, the side was infested with mushrooms... The sight startled me and has probably established a certain mechanism in my sense of the bizarre."

Black, Andy, 1999c, *Plastic Surgery Disasters: Body Horror in Eyes with a Face & Faceless*, pp.140-160, *Necronomicon* Book Three, Hereford: Noir Publishing.

Le Frisson Des Vampires

Vibrant colours and dazzling surrealism, plus a heady infusion of sex inform Jean Rollin's sanguinary vampires.

"The dead are present with us and that is not fanaticism. Those who don't know us accuse us of sacrilege and blasphemy. Our time is devoted to pursuing the memory of eternal darkness." - (Vampire philosophy from Le Frisson Des Vampires).

Amongst the litany of ephemeral images French surrealist Jean Rollin elevates to the screen in *Le Frisson des Vampires/Shiver of the Vampire* (1970), both the twisting, contorting branches from a gnarled tree which snake around a master bedroom and the startling appearance of a beautiful vampire Isolde (Dominique), bursting out from within the confines of a grandfather clock, serve to illustrate the unfettered imagination and Hoffman-like atmosphere which the filmic *artiste* Rollin includes within his palette.

Not for him the mundane mechanics of the slasher film, the prosaic images of *cine-verite* or the artifice intrinsic within the "art" film. Instead, his canvas is awash with a myriad of colours, eccentric characters and exceptional locations - all adding a decidedly artistic grist to his most painterly mill, as his visual *elan* shines through as his true *metier*.

Indeed, Rollin confesses that, "It was a great pleasure constructing the images" for *Frisson*, in this, his third film. His seminal feature *Le Viol du Vampire* (1968), began his process of imbruing his particular *oeuvre* with dazzling imagery, only mediated somewhat by the monochrome stock the film is shot on, with his follow up work, *La Vampire Nue* (1969), becoming his first colour feature and the kaleidoscopic splash of colour continues with ferocity in *Frisson*. As Rollin reveals of his cameraman Jean-Jacques Renon, (his) "... co-operation was essential, he was entirely in tune with me, splashing colour in the castle tower as if it were a candy cane."

As is his want, Rollin quickly dispenses with such mundane niceties as "plot" - quickly introducing us to a honeymooning couple Ise (Sandra Julien) and Antoine (Jean-Marie Durand), arriving at a seemingly deserted castle, save for the two voluptuous servants, (Marie-Pierre Castel and Kuelan Herce).

The couples search for their cousins sees Ice gradually becoming initiated into the vampiric realm of Castel and Herce, together with the mesmerising Isolde, before being reunited with the effete duo of Michel Delahaye and Jacques Robiolles, who it transpires, are the long lost cousins as well as angst ridden vampires, content to philosophise at length about the existential nature of the vampire.

Antoine's anxious attempts to affect a speedy escape from the castle and the clutches of its vampiric occupants, ultimately flounders on the "forbidden fruit" that Ise enjoys in her sapphic encounters with the female vampires and upon the cerebral fertilisation which Delahaye and Robiolles use to engage Ise's mind. Thus, the staking of an "innocent" female victim is explained thus: "There was no other way. This malediction which is ours must not be passed onto others." Delahaye continues; "Because she would have been allowed to live like the dead, she would have shared our everlasting eternity and pursued forever our fatal destiny", he concludes.

Around the relative paucity of this threadbare framework, Rollin embellishes events with his customary flair and in doing so, transcends the deliberately cliched horror genre elements - arcane castle; fog-shrouded cemetery complete with creaking gates; flaming torches; vampires and virgins.

His real skill however, is in utilising these visual accoutrements in the manner of his own favoured artists such as Trouille and Magritte in order to transcend the mere medium of film and breathe new life into them beyond. It is no surprise to see the wealth of Rollin-related features appearing in numerous film publications in recent years, given the unique nature of Rollin's illustrative materials. A Rollin film still isn't simply that - it is also a still-life, a fragment of the auteur's fevered imagination, captured, preserved and gloriously independent of its filmic lineage.

In many respects Rollin's love of utilising horror genre conventions in his images and then bombarding them with a collision of colours, echoes the style of Mario Bava, although any further similarity is dissipated with Rollin's favouring of more abrupt cutting and editing techniques, which allows for none of the celebrated tracking shots which became a trademark for Bava's ever prowling camera.

When Rollin is not drowning his interiors with incandescent red and blue hues, he's drowning castle walls with blood as he literally does draw blood from stone during the film's climax, and his correlation drawn between human characteristics and inanimate structures also fuels much of his vision.

As such, the castle also has an almost living and breathing library - when Antoine is trapped in the library, it's claustrophobic bookshelves seemingly encircle him, the books taking on a life of their own as they begin to hurl themselves off the shelves and engulf him. This is juxtaposed with the sight elsewhere of vampires dying, so the library too bleeds like the castle walls which contain it, as the truly organic nature of the structure is revealed.

Likewise Dominique's aforementioned entry from within a grandfather clock, delineates that it too is alive. "I don't know where it came from, it's kind of a surrealist vision" as Rollin appropriately describes the image, also stating his own filmic philosophy thus; "A grandfather clock is of no interest - a vampire woman getting out of this clock at midnight, that's me."

A bizarre concoction of eccentric, singular characters is also pure Rollin one could say when discussing his work and *Frisson* certainly doesn't disappoint on this score. Whether it's Dominique's sexual predator, Delahaye and Robiolles "hippie", kaftan-wearing vampires, the sexually provocative duo of Castel and Herce (the latter replacing Castel's twin sister Catherine, who was pregnant at the time of the shoot!), or Julien's naive virgin - "... beautiful.. and not too clever. She was a model", being Rollin's description of her. There's certainly no shortage of outrageous characters here to compliment the eye-catching scenes.

It's Dominique however, who has the pivotal role here when, in the fatalistic denouement, she is reduced into drinking blood from her own veins in an act of self-perpetuation, which also serves to expose the pernicious and ultimately futile nature of her vampirism.

The inherent symbolism here which correlates blood drinking/vampirism with oral sex, draining the bodies life fluids as it were, reaches its logical conclusion on Rollin's favoured location, Dieppe beach, as Delahaye and Robiolles ravish Ise with wanton abandon as the sea crashes against the shore - only for their ecstasy to be supplanted by agony as the rapidly rising rays of the sun begins to sear their flesh, resulting in their abrupt demise. Their *petit mort* or dual "death orgasm" becoming their external death here - the figures vanishing from the screen, with the ensuing silence then crudely broken by the raucous seagull cries overhead.

Supremely aided by the crashing, flailing chords of the short-lived college rock band Acanthus, (evoking the vibrant, theatrical music and images of Alice Cooper's *Welcome To My Nightmare* concert), *Frisson* remains a classic triumph of style over substance.

By concentrating solely on the vampires visual aspects, Rollin does jettison any opportunity to dissect or come to any real sense of understanding of the vampires condition, merely relying on (in this case), Delahaye and Robiolles pretentious, improvised philosophical ramblings in order to put any flesh on the vampire bones.

As these self-appointed barometers of taste so acutely observe of vampirism; "It is a great honour. A very important privilege. You couldn't escape your destiny, cultured people often come to us. You can't elude your destiny."

In Rollin's case, his "destiny" is very much making vampire films for the more discerning, cultured cognoscenti and amen to that in a film world dominated by commercialism before imagination and expediency before principles.

Black, Andy, 1999d, *Le Frisson Des Vampires*, pp.126-130, *Necronomicon* Book Three, Hereford: Noir Publishing.

A Man Possessed

Andrzej Zulawski and his film Possession

We look back at the giddy surrealism of Possession and meet the director Andrzej Zulawski.

“The lunatic, the lover and the poet are of imagination all compact.” - William Shakespeare - A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

The bard may not have had the benefit of viewing Polish auteur Andrzej Zulawski’s recently released film *Possession* (1981), but his words encapsulate perfectly the emotional angst and vivid imagination of this audacious work.

A brief synopsis of *Possession* - the story of a dysfunctional marriage splintering Anna (Isabella Adjani) from her husband Marc (Sam Neill), set against the (then), prevailing political tension of the Berlin Wall divide, and with Anna’s “beast within” manifesting itself literally, as a tentacled monster from the id - simply suggests lunacy, rather than “exciting, indelible cinema” which was the description critic David Thompson gave it. But the *outré* premise of the film is perhaps understandably, given Zulawski’s harsh introduction to life, barely surviving the German occupation of Poland during the Second World War, with his extended family and over forty members being reduced to three, and watching his little sister die of hunger.

As if to expunge his memories of fascism, Zulawski’s film career has emphasised liberalism not repression, emotion not reserve and philosophy not doctrine. As Adjani commented; “Zulawski’s got no inhibitions. He doesn’t obey any rules in terms of society, in terms of sin and God. He’s got his own opinions of the Devil. And it makes sense, even if it’s crazy.”

But enough of the cod-philosophy and on to the cod-psychology of the film itself. One of the most remarkable achievements is Zulawski’s impressive rendering of Anna and Marc’s decaying relationship within ten minutes of the film’s beginning. Having returned to their Berlin home after a lengthy absence, Marc immediately discovers that his wife has almost completely changed character, being barely able to cope with their young son Bob, while also having taken on a lover, Heinrich (Heinz Bennet). Her later revelation of her slimy non-human lover, simply adds insult to Marc’s mental injury. That their son, the only “normal” character within the film, drowns himself during the finale, seems no surprise.

Along the way, we also get to see Anna endure a horrific seizure and miscarriage in a dank in a dank and deserted subway. We meet Anna’s angelic alter ego, the beguiling, enticing schoolteacher Helen, (also Adjani), whose striking physical similarity to Anna, fascinates Marc. Events culminate in Zulawski’s monstrous climax as Anna is seen straddling the ungodly, tentacled creature in a scene of hideously surreal intensity.

It is these acts of explicit sexuality and savagery - mixing art house with grind house - which led to *Possession* being briefly placed on the list of “Video Nasties” in the early 1980s. Before, (we hope), someone pointed out the fact that there was little chance of life imitating art, as there was something of a lack of horny, tentacled id-creatures roaming the Home Counties.

So, just how does one invent such a surreal piece? Zulawski explains that” “Oh, God, I think that there were two sources. The first one was my own very private, personal experience of separation. Some people who split up really don’t really know why the hell they had to split. In the film you therefore have a thick layer of *cinema verite*, which you could say are actual scenes which happened to these people. I remember seeing an Ingmar Bergman film called *Scenes from a Marriage* (1974), which I thought was very intelligent, moving and accurate film about couples. But there was a dimension missing for me at the end. I went out of the cinema and said, “Yes, this is the absolute truth but why wasn’t it more interesting? Why isn’t it *movies*? Why isn’t it *cinema*? The stories that we tell our children have an impossible element, and for me that is the essence of cinema. So, I thought to myself that if I could add an extra element - an “attic” to the house - my “attic” would be the impossible, this ingrained element of fantasy in what we’re doing and thinking, then we just crawl and I hate crawling films.”

With the various fantastical elements established, Zulawski gets unexpectedly dramatic and emotive performances from his cast. If anything, the performances evoke the stylised vision of the Japanese cinema. Was this perhaps influenced by the style of acting Zulawski encountered in his theatrical work?

“The division between theatre and film is totally false” says Zulawski. “It all stems from the same ground, the same humour. It’s rather helpful, it’s rather childish, it’s rather religious and it’s rather fun, but we are pretending to do the so-called ‘professional’ thing with it. When it becomes ‘professional’, it falls into the hands of people who are imposing their standards and money in order to conform to their vision of the work. But acting is very free, is very savage, is very powerful. If you so it right.

I don’t see the difference between acting in film, in theatre, in opera and so on. It’s a question of calibrating your needs. In the theatre you have to yell, whereas in cinema you can whisper because the camera is so close. This is the only difference and it is purely technical. It doesn’t touch the essence or soul of the work.”

Given the presence of a tentacled monster in a ‘realistic’ domestic milieu, Zulawski’s casting of the two leads was important in order that they not become overshadowed by the more sensationalist, non-human elements, as the director explains.

“Sam Neill was an unknown quantity then” Zulawski admits. “I saw him in a film, *My Brilliant Career* (1979) by the gifted Australian director Gillian Armstrong and I thought this guy has almost a reluctant quality. Not passive but reflective. He’s not handsome; he’s intelligent. He thinks; he’s a good actor. He reminds me very much of how James Mason was, and he has something of the same voice. We brought him over from New Zealand for the film and he was unknown and therefore it was very cheap for the producers as he cost nothing.”

“So Sam became a friend. I deplore the things I’ve seen from him in Hollywood recently because he’s starting to become a ham. I can say this because I suffer from it. But he was so good, so intense, so fresh. As a matter of fact he also used to make his own documentary films about painting. He was really a partner and he had the most difficult part to play. Not so much in the scenes, but he was the ‘glue’ glueing together the entire film. Adjani appears from time to time, throws a tantrum and then disappears, so Sam had to glue all the pieces together to keep it human, simple and intelligible. I thought he was brilliant.”

“Isabella’s not really a trained actress, she’s an extremely intuitive, sensitive and delicate figure, rather like a child in her ways. Even now, when she destroys her beauty by becoming a client of these Swiss clinics, she still has it. This thing came out of her to the camera, so we just filmed. The subway sequence in the film was only about a fifth of the footage we shot of her, which in itself is quite impressive. I think she went into a real trance which is something I’m very interested in - it’s good, it’s cathartic, it’s salvation.”

“She was acting on screen what was happening to her in real life - to a point of course - and therefore it became like a huge psychodrama, as all these things were happening to us in our own lives as a parallel. At that time, Donald Sutherland lent her an apartment in Paris as she had no money, and at that time nobody wanted her anymore, so it was really one of the crises of her career. I think it was mostly her personal situation which was bad, so she did the film and she was very soldierly. She was there at 5am in the morning, she was struggling. She never saw the dailies throughout the entire film. I understand that after she saw the final film she tried committing suicide but I don’t know if that was to do with the film or not. She came out with this memorable phrase; ‘Look, you don’t have the right with your camera to plunge into an actor’s soul that way.’”

“I think that the camera does have this incredible eye to see the truth of people and their behaviour and she saw that because she is a bright and intelligent person.”

Black, Andy, 1999, *A Man Possessed - Andrzej Zulawski and his film Possession*, pp. 30-32, *Shivers*, London: Visual Imagination Ltd.

Wax Mask

A Neo-gothic Italian Model?

“Very soon we’ll open our doors to the public and my work will be revealed to the world.” - Volkoff (Robert Hossein), the curator of the Wax Museum in *Wax Mask*.

Whilst the hysterical cries of “frying tonight” from Kenneth Williams’s Dr. Watt in *Carry on Screaming* (1966) reverberate around my head whilst writing this, Sergio Stivaletti’s directorial debut, *Wax Mask* (1997), jettisons the “mad doctor”, mixing molten wax caricature in favour of a more reverential and yet rejuvenating approach, with its considered blend of gothic elements and futuristic conceits, as the audacious climax reveals.

In fact, it is these gothic trappings which led Stivaletti to these shores, not to plunder the inspired lunacy of the *Carry On* team, but to recreate the halcyon days of our most famous horror studio, as he admits that he “... wanted the film to have a Hammer look about it.”

Borrowing liberally from Michael Curtiz’s *The Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933), André de Toth’s remake *House of Wax* (1953), together with Gaston Leroux’s famous novel, *The Phantom of the Opera*, Stivaletti composes a real hybrid of ancient beliefs and alchemy, fermenting with far more contemporary motifs.

Given this veritable potpourri of influences, plus the initial collaboration between both Dario Argento and Lucio Fulci, it is no surprise that *Wax Mask* endeavours to cover so many disparate bases.

The untimely death of Fulci, (who was slated to direct the film), only two months before filming was due to commence, deprived the maestro of his intended opportunity to rekindle the long-ailing Italian horror film industry, especially as he was working alongside an equally vaunted luminary in Argento.

Fulci’s death, together with the absence of first choice Robert England for the role of museum curator Volkoff, on the negative side, deprived the film of a star name and visceral impetus, but on the positive side, allowed Stivaletti to eschew his “SFX only” mantle, (memorably showcased in the likes of *Demons*, *Creepers* and *Cemetery Man*, to name but three), by also enabling him to handle the directorial reigns for the first time.

Stivaletti explained his evolution into director and six maestro - combining prosthetic make-up effects with modern CGI techniques in *Wax Mask* thus; “What I want to do is to put all these different types of effect into my new film and my next projects. *Wax Mask* is a project which was born for another director, so I cannot put everything I would like into it.” Continuing to outline his own ambitions for the film, Stivaletti reveals that; “My personal goal for *Wax Mask* was to design the very best special effects and also direct the movie. For me, it was an ideal opportunity to control both artistic elements.”

And it is most certainly these artistic elements which Stivaletti does concentrate on, unsurprisingly, considering the somewhat heterogenous script provided by Argento, Fulci and Daniele Stroppa.

Their handiwork begins in Paris circa 1900 on New Years Eve as cascading fireworks illuminate the night sky, silhouetting the Eiffel Tower, only to cut to a grisly murder scene as we see police officers pouring over two bloodied corpses - their hearts ripped out by a masked assailant, using a metal claw, as recounted by the sole survivor and witness to the heinous act - the victim’s frightened young daughter, Sonia (Romina Mondello).

As the action then advances twelve years to Rome, we see Sonia, now an attractive young woman, gaining employment as a costume designer for a newly opened waxworks museum, curated by Volkoff (Robert Hossein).

That the main “attractions” in the museum are the life-like recreations of gruesome murder scenes, appears to not unduly phase our Sonia, but the spate of violent and suspicious deaths which ensue, raise her fears and those of an investigative journalist/photographer, (yes, that old cliché!), Andrea (Riccardo Serventi Longhi), especially given the close correlation between the murders and the new exhibits that Volkoff proudly displays in his museum.

What’s most refreshing here, is to see Stivaletti’s concerted attempts at evoking a cogent, gothic atmosphere, given the period milieu the film occupies - a welcome change from the usual gamut of teen-fodder gore films where creativity is measured, not in the artistry of the work but in the length of time the *de rigueur* knife-blade spends embedded in the skin of the cherub-faced victims.

As such, we have the Bava-esque image of Volkoff entering the museum - a personification of mystery clad in a black fedora and billowing cape; the disquieting wax figures - lifeless in appearance and yet silently watching or so our minds tell us, and Volkoff’s underground laboratory come torture chamber, where bubbling, smoking vials, coloured liquids and sparking instruments suggest a *Frankenstein* aura.

Most bravura of all however, proves to be Sonia’s ill-fated, night time journey - walking the (almost) deserted Rome streets as the rain lashes down, thunder crackles overhead and the wind rustles the trees and bushes - all under the eerie silhouette provided by the gas-lit street lamps, before an ominous black hansom cab careers towards her and she is kidnapped by the unseen assailant.

The almost playful, naive charm of the local brothel also reinforces the period setting here, as we see lingerie-clad sirens seducing the all too willing clients in an atmosphere of unrestrained hedonism. The presence of the prostitutes here is also non-judgemental as we see Andrea visiting when he is not cultivating his burgeoning romance with Sonia, as well as Alex (Umberto Balli), Volkoff’s (sorcerers) apprentice, whose lively S&M sessions in the brothel are greedily devoured, vicariously, by his voyeuristic employer, who watches undetected via a bedroom peephole.

Just as Alex may be searching for his own sexual “perfection”, so too is Volkoff searching for his own artistic “perfection”, as in the wax figures he so lovingly covets and whose lifelike qualities represent not so much Volkoff’s artistic skills, but his embalming ones - comprised of his victim’s blood and flesh, we later learn in a shocking revelation as Sonia discovers fluid pipes draining from the wax bodies and fake eye sockets concealing the ravaged flesh beneath.

In time-honoured tradition, the demented Volkoff does indeed see himself as an “artist” - creating new life and “perfection” from each new victim he kills, (Sonia’s own parents numbering amongst them it is revealed). To further this pursuit we see Volkoff lure the vivacious Georgina (Valery Valmond), with a “false” note into a secret rendezvous/trap. Having been abruptly knocked unconscious by Volkoff’s well-aimed syringe to the neck, Georgina later awakens, only to find herself half-naked and strapped to a mechanical chair in Volkoff’s laboratory. As the imposing image of the now masked Volkoff advances towards her, we then see Georgina drained of blood and her beauty, morphing into a hideously wrinkled old hag - her life taken in order to sustain Volkoff’s waxen effigies above.

The denouement sees Andrea frantically descending into the bowels of the museum, using a lantern to pierce the enveloping gloom, as he seeks the now similarly imprisoned Sonia. As we see the now helpless and naked Sonia, strapped to the same mechanical chair, Volkoff reveals the extent of his misguided fantasies; “... even then my art was touched by genius, but now it has a new dimension. The world refused to recognise me then, now it will be forced to do so. My gentle sensitivity was mocked, despised as if a true weakness. People wanted only violence and terror. Alright. I could give them that. No one has expressed pain and sorrow as I have done because I carried a vast store inside me. And sorrow, I bestow on the wax figures and so in their moment of death, I grant immortality. I honour those who like me were cast out by society, reviled by it.”

The depth of Volkoff’s hatred for society is now revealed, his attempts to play god are summarily ended as Andrea aims to send Volkoff to meet his maker by blasting him with acidic vapours whereupon, Volkoff’s face liquifies into a hideous, putrid mess, allowing the duo to escape. As the

curator's embittered assistant Alex then throws a lantern at him, shouting the epitaph "Burn in hell", we see the shrieking Volkoff engulfed in flames, his life now appropriately ending as simultaneously, his wax creations melt down to reveal the true identities of their human hosts.

The horrific skeletal figure with erubescant eyes that reaches out menacingly, only to be arbitrarily decapitated by a swift sword strike, instantly evokes the similar endoskeleton image from *The Terminator* (1984) - a germane reference considering the extraordinary climax as we glimpse Alex, peeling off his face mask to reveal similar skeletal features beneath, before utilising his metal hand to pick up a Volkoff face mask from an array of masks in front of him.

The alarming sight of the "reborn" Volkoff attired in requisite top hat and suit, walking calmly into the night crowd and away from the burning museum, suggests not only Volkoff's embodiment of Freud's "self-preservative drive", but also a deliberate ambiguity and blurring of identities. Just as a certain physical appearance and characteristics can be stripped away like an artificial veneer, so too can we re-examine the mind and soul, teasing away the pretences and aura of mystery which surrounds our inner most recesses.

Though as regards the stated aim of re-igniting the stagnant Italian horror genre *Wax Mask* may ultimately fail, it at least offers a more deserving case for support than say Argento's most recent, lacklustre works; *Trauma* (1993) and *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996), with his *The Phantom of the Opera* (1999), also running low on imagination and ingenuity.

The compelling atmosphere he creates, his effective use of both colour and shadows, coupled with some bravura camera moves, all suggest Stivaletti, the director, has a future - not least for his much criticised stand against merely producing another blood-filled platter - "I'd like to think that the splatter scenes are quite elegant, since I approached the film with a classic touch. I really didn't want to have that much gore."

The characters may not all be fleshed-out to the extent one would wish, but the energy and craftsmanship are there, together with a highly audacious, climactic *frisson* which suggests that although Stivaletti may not have instantly revived the corpse that is the Italian horror genre, he has at least restored the vital signs to it by ensuring that the crimson liquid is once again coursing through the veins - a feat which has proved to be beyond many of his more lauded contemporaries.

Black, Andy, 1999, *Wax Mask: A neo-gothic Italian Model?*, pp.131-139, *Necronomicon Book Three*, Hereford: Noir Publishing.

Danger Diabolik

"It's got lots of gadgets, a lot of minimal furnishings, with Carnaby Street and Italian designs. Terry Thomas is in it. For most Americans, there are two types of British accents, Terry Thomas or Davy Jones." (Mike Myers (Austin Powers) discussing the influence that Mario Bava's *Danger Diabolik* had on his own *Austin Powers* films.

Very much a departure from the dark and tangled web weaved by Bava's classic gothic films such as *Black Sunday* (1960) and *Curse of the Dead* (1966), and his prominent giallo hymns such as *Blood and Black Lace* (1964), *Danger Diabolik* (1967), nevertheless represents a veritable feast of eye candy and psychedelic excess as well as being one of the maestro's least meaningful and yet most entertaining creations.

Given the mega success of the *Diabolik* influenced *Austin Powers - International Man of Mystery* (1997) and *Austin Powers - The Spy Who Shagged Me* (1999), then what better time to re-asses this rarely glimpsed gem, which also acts as a reminder than James Bond doesn't have a monopoly on suave, stylish and sexy spy capers - with Bava's denouement also proffering a sly nod in the 007 direction.

Originally envisaged by producer Dino De Laurentiis as a big budget follow up to the previously successful *Barbarella* (1967), the ever frugal Bava only managed to spend a fraction of the \$3 million budget - surely some sort of record as far as De Laurentiis is concerned? Remember, this is the same guy who bankrolled such box office fodder as the risible remake of *King Kong* (1976).

With a less than *Magnificent Seven* attributed with co-writing, or rather cobbling together the screenplay, *Danger Diabolik* sees John Phillip Law essaying there titular anti-hero culled from the pages of the Italian *fumetti per adulti*⁹¹ (comix for adults), created by sisters Angela and Luciana Giussani and first published in Milan in 1962, (the Giussani's were also among the many scriptwriters for the film).

Diabolik, an amoral criminal anti-hero and a master of disguise to boot, is forever doomed to be pursued by his nemesis, the hapless Inspector Ginko (Michel Piccoli) - "The whole world worries me less than a single man... Diabolik", the Inspector records for posterity.

The purely perfunctory cadre for these sparring protagonists to navigate consists of Diabolik audaciously hijacking a \$10 million gold shipment, stealing some priceless jewels, blowing up the tax records to "emancipate" the nation and murdering innocent people, whilst Ginko colludes with a narcotics baron Valmont (Adolfo Celi), in order to catch Diabolik and uses the now melted-down (but radioactive) 20 ton gold ingot as bait to lure Diabolik. Having stolen the ingot and successfully negotiated its passage into his underground lair, Diabolik is then imprisoned when the gold explodes, turning him into a living statue.

Whilst much of Bava's output can be heralded as a triumph of style over shoddy scripts, with *Diabolik*, it's a triumph of style over substance as the deliberately slight characters are mere window dressing, especially in the case of Diabolik's dazzling girlfriend Eva (Marisa Mell), for the vibrant collision of action scenes, kitch sets and psychedelic music which makes for a heady brew of pop-art flourishes and flagrant plasticity.

So, the futuristic architecture of Diabolik's cave, complete with silver staircase, jutting, jagged, angled metallic beams, usher forth an expansive tunnel gangway with pod-style apartments snaking off it. If you can resist the urge to look for Alfred popping up to beckon Bruce Wayne from out of the Batcave, (there's even a concealed trapdoor beneath the main road above which

⁹¹ The first of the *fumetti per adult* (comix for adults) or *Il giallo a fumetti*. Like French noir, *giallo* derived from the yellow covers of crime/thriller potboilers in Italy in the late 1940s and 1950s. Imitations include the German variant the *kriminal*. Diabolik himself is a fusion of Marvel comics Spiderman and fantomas - the diabolical super-criminal of French pulp fiction fame and adored by surrealists such as Rene Magritte, who appropriated a fantomas cover design for his 1943 painting, *The Backfire*.

provides a direct entry into Diabolik's cavernous lair a la the caped crusader), then there are a myriad of incidental delights to view courtesy of Bava's unfettered imagination and pursuit of humour.

The bravura pre-credits sequence - multi-coloured smoke effusing as Diabolik hijacks the gold shipment, with rapid arpeggio guitar riff echoing, before atmospheric chords ring and wild sax lines reverberate⁹² - the sequence ending on a close up of Diabolik's masked face, provides a suitably pulsating opening to the film.

With Diabolik moving swiftly from speed boat to fast car before being pursued and menaced by helicopter gunfire, it deliberately reinforces the whole spy/Bond genre inflections present, right down to the far fetched plot, the eccentric characters, (especially Terry Thomas's Minister of the Interior), and the glamorous girls, namely Diabolik's squeeze, played by Mell.

Even the finale appears to be poking a gilded digit of fun at 007 as the "imprisoned" Diabolik indeed becomes a "golden boy" rather than *Goldfinger* (1964) or *The Man With The Golden Gun* (1974). In fact, the only real departure that Diabolik makes from the Bond mould is in his decidedly monogamous relationship with Eva - no Bond-style infidelity for him, only a completely faithful relationship.

Eva's first appearance, flowing silver hair, vivid tangerine dress and jet black boots as she emerges from the recesses of a tunnel, is startling, her large inviting eyes and pronounced lips as lovingly caressed by the camera as by Diabolik. As one of Valmont's jealous floozy's remarks of Eva - "The way she was decked out in red, she looked like a mini-cardinal" to reinforce the idea of "religious" like fervour Eva provokes.

When Inspector Ginko and Thomas's Minister of the Interior discuss how Diabolik will attempt to transport his gold booty out of the country, Ginko suggests Diabolik will deal with the dollars in; "quite some different way... a way that only a mind like his could imagine" - cut to Diabolik's cave and a rotating, circular bed immersed in the said money, only for Diabolik and Eva to emerge from beneath a deluge of dollars in a display of pure hedonism. It is also significant that despite being surrounded by a sea of money, Diabolik is more enraptured by his embrace with Eva.

With actions speaking louder than words, Diabolik is also prepared to make a further grand gesture to complete Eva's forthcoming birthday celebrations, as he audaciously snatches a priceless necklace from one Lady Clark (Caterina Boratto), which contains eleven emeralds - a perfect present for Eva.

Diabolik's superhuman approach as ever, (with nary a box of Milk Tray in sight), involves swimming underwater, before then scaling the large and imposing tower, nestled into the coastline where Lady Clark resides. Diabolik's use of special suction pads in order to scale the structure, also reinforces the comic book theme by recalling Spiderman's *modus operandi* amongst others. By taking a picture of the room inside and positioning it in front of the CCTV cameras, Diabolik can cheekily carry out his heist undetected, before the very eyes of the unsuspecting security guards.

Having successfully made his escape here, Diabolik's subsequent capture is only the result of his unstinting loyalty to Eva, when Valmont succeeds in taking the now injured Eva captive, to use as the bait to ensnare Diabolik, aided by Ginko and the police.

Dispatching Valmont with eleven (symbolic) bullets - one for each diamond, Diabolik eventually manages to extricate himself and Eva from Ginko's clutches by feigning "death" by suicide pill - "He's become a part of my life" Ginko laments, looking at Diabolik's body stretched out motionless on the morgue slab - "I can't believe he's really dead."

⁹² Ennio Morricone is the Italian composer famous for scoring Sergio Leone's spaghetti western *Dollars* trilogy as well as numerous Italian horrors, including Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1971), *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996) and John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982).

Disguised⁹³ as Valmont's father (!), Diabolik effects his escape along with his urn of diamond "ashes" - jump cut to Diabolik lovingly placing the diamonds around Eva's neck and gushing "Happy Birthday" to her before they both dive into their subterranean pool - a case of *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971) perhaps?!

During the climactic cave scenes when the gold ingot explodes and encases Diabolik - a surreal image as Eva gazes longingly at his now frozen features - Diabolik's careful wink of recognition indicates that there's is a love which will not die and which will not be corrupted by gold or money.

Diabolik's unwavering devotion to Eva, coupled with his apparent altruism, makes for an atypical and compelling anti-hero. When Thomas's bungling minister offers a one million dollars reward for Diabolik's capture, Diabolik responds by guaranteeing to take the money out of circulation owing to the "improper" use of the bounty.

By deliberately blowing up the central tax office, Diabolik also makes himself a hero overnight as all the (unspecified) country's tax records are erased, leading to facial appeals by Thomas for taxpayers to voluntarily contribute the sums of money they owe to the government - cue much laughter from the assorted media present.

Set against Diabolik's capricious charm and individual anarchy is the satirical view of the authorities which Bava presents to us as the police, government and medical profession are all ridiculed throughout the film.

The inept police are generally outwitted by Diabolik and very much portrayed as bumbling, flat-footed figures of fun, whose only recourse to capturing Diabolik is by instigating an "unholy alliance" with the drug baron Valmont. As Valmont boasts to the Inspector - "You'll be more warmly dressed and your women *less*" with "It takes a thief to catch a thief" being the Inspector's lame response to having struck their corrupt bargain-less narcotics busts and arrests, in return for Valmont catching Diabolik.

Equally inept are the government as represented by Thomas and his facial press briefings, littered with fatuous statements. Ditto; "Diabolik, I assure you that this very individual, whose very name reveals his antagonism towards the established values of our society, will soon be brought to justice. This criminal paranoid seems to have dedicated himself to a one man fight against our society." Having restored the death penalty for Diabolik (!), the rant continues; "This black mask, this manifestation of exaggerated delinquency has exceeded the boundaries of rational behaviour, within and without the legal structure that is the very basis of our freedom and way of life."

Most risible of all, Thomas concludes; "He also seems to derive a great deal of pleasure from me. Making fun of our entire police force. He's certainly not going to make a fool of me" as laughter echoes all around!

To conclude a triumvirate of oafish officialdom , we also have the weak and discredited Dr. Vernier (Giulio Donnini), who is effectively used as a "plant" by Valmont in order to identify and trap Eva - "They've crossed your name off the medical register, but if you're lying I'll cross your name of the *human* register", Valmont threatens him.

Entertaining, with tongue in cheek humour, *outré* sets, stylish costumes, rapacious photography and with Ennio Morricone's memorably psychedelic score, *Danger Diabolik* is very much Bava's hymn to the vibrancy, colour and eccentricity of the 1960s and as such, provides an equally appropriate starting point for the *Austin Powers* series where Mike Myers cryogenically frozen spy (Austin Powers), is thawed out to do battle with the megalomaniac Dr. Evil (Myers again), in the 1990s.

⁹³ Diabolik, like the fantomas, adopts disguises and features cloth masks as also recalled in Mario Bava's seminal *giallo* *Blood and Black Lace* (1964), together with Rene Magritte's paintings such as *The Lovers* and *The Heart of the Matter*.

If De Laurentiis had his way there would certainly have been more diabolical deeds on the way via a sequel, but his strict insistence on a “no gore” approach proved at odds with Bava, who favoured a rather more visceral interpretation of the character for a second outing, leaving Diabolik’s influence to be sustained instead via the Austin Powers route into the millennium.

Black, Andy, 2001, *Danger Diabolik*, pp.147-160, *Necronomicon* Book Four, Hereford: Noir Publishing.

Venus in Furs

“Wanda Reed, a young beautiful stranger, washed on to our friendly shores with only death as a companion. May she find peace in her final resting place.” (Inscription on Wanda’s grave in *Venus in Furs*).

*“For those who showed no mercy, no mercy will be shown,
For those who got their pleasures from the strangled cries and groans,
The grins that filled their evil faces will be wiped for sure,
Sometime, someone, somewhere will come knocking, knocking on your door,
Venus in Furs will be smiling, when that moment arrives.”* (Title song from *Venus in Furs*).

Divine or heavenly retribution may well serve as a subtitle for this particular epic from prolific Spanish director, Jess Franco. The reason? The startling appearance throughout of the voluptuous Maria Rohm as the predatory, all consuming Wanda Reed; the undisputed, shimmering *Venus in Furs* of the title. Although the much vilified Franco and his profuse *oeuvre* don’t often elicit much in the way of fulsome praise, *Venus in Furs* (1969) ranks as one of his, and the erotic horror genres most effective offerings.⁹⁴

It’s a lyrical tale which largely dispenses with the somewhat staid (at the time, daring) source novel, mixing art porno chic with S&M as supplied by Sasher Masoch⁹⁵, in favour of a more atmospheric, dream like aura which envelops the characters and audience alike. Though furnished with one of those perfunctory, “penny dreadful” style scenarios, the film still manages to transcend these modest origins as we see a bewildered jazz musician, Jimmy (James Darren), becoming increasingly mesmerised under the hypnotic gaze of Wanda. All the more perplexing as Jimmy can remember seeing her accidentally killed during a torrid orgy he witnessed at a party in Istanbul, by a fashion photographer, Olga (Margaret Lee) and her two decadent playmates; Kapp and Ahmed played by horror alumni Dennis Price and Klaus Kinski.

All of this does little to explain Wanda’s sudden reappearance, floating ghost-like in and out of various scenes much to Jimmy’s bemusement. Her initial appearance - washed up on the shore, lures Jimmy into the maelstrom - his run into the sea towards her, stunningly rendered in hallucinatory slow motion, as if time itself were standing still. Indeed, when he gazes upon Wanda’s sunken features, her beauty ebbing away as if caught by the tide, he remembers and time does momentarily stop. He then reveals the “depths” of his own profundity; “When you don’t know where you’re at, time is like the ocean - you can’t hold onto it.”

Thus begins his forever-doomed pursuit of the “truth”, given in often rather jarring, first-person narrative which seems at odds with the more ethereal images on view. As such, we are treated to such anachronistic gems as; “Man, it was a wild scene” and the prescient “How can you run from a dead person unless you’re dead yourself.” The answer, it seems, is to escape Istanbul and ingratiate yourself with the carnival atmosphere of Rio and the carnal allure of nightclub singer Rita (Barbara McNair).⁹⁶

Although Rita helps the beleaguered musician “find” his music again, (cue some sporadic snippets of fabulous Manfred Mann jazz rock numbers), Jimmy remains “haunted” by the continuing appearance of Wanda - the jovial, highly-charged festivity of the Rio celebrations doing little to dispel his doubts or melancholic mood.

⁹⁴ “A film both experimental and commercial... *Venus in Furs* is a veritable gem of a movie, an underrated masterwork which sooner or later will find its place in all motion picture film libraries.” Alain Petit - *Cine-Zone* no. 120.

⁹⁵ Franco’s preferred title of *Black Angel*, together with the non-linear, experimental plot, indicated *his* films non-adherence to the source novel, save for Kinski’s transition from sadist to masochist during the film.

⁹⁶ In real life, the singer McNeil, was found near the top of the R n’ B charts during this period.

Conversely, it seems to Jimmy that Wanda can be his *only* catharsis, even though he feels “trapped in a whirlpool, which keeps sucking (him) in deeper and deeper.” Still more unfathomable, his existence becomes as again, slow motion sequences herald his pursuit of Wanda, down a garden terrace, her fur-coated outline momentarily obscured by the shadows from the tree edged path which also serve to (symbolically) cloud his mind.

Jimmy’s “soft focus” consummation of his “relationship” with Wanda, is inter-cut with arty shots as Franco’s beloved use of the zoom lens makes an appearance, raking across a gallery of adjacent paintings as the bedroom ardour intensifies. This acts as the catalyst for the circuitous chain of subsequent events as one by one, Wanda first enthralls those responsible for her death, materialising like some rapacious succubus to drain their life juices and leave them dead.

Of these, Price’s death is rendered the most impressively - consumed by lust for her, he covets Wanda’s tantalising image as she glides around his bedroom. Each glimpse of her fur coat, her silk stockings, her exposed flesh, serves to heighten the fetishistic eroticism inherent in the visuals, literally “climaxing” with a fatal heart attack/orgasm, as the tormented Kapp expires.

Wanda’s predatory, yet enticing image, (long pre-dating the powerfully attractive female characters in the likes of *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Basic Instinct* (1992), is often only partially glimpsed through mirrors - a self-revelatory vision as the culprits are asked to look upon themselves, their own souls and each question their own complicity in Wanda’s death.

Next victim is Olga, whom Wanda seduces during a private photo-session, leaving the dazed sufferer to slash her own wrists whilst prone in the bath - the crimson water an echo of Wanda’s own washed up body appearing on the shore. The circular theme is reinforced as following each killing, the requisite shots of crashing waves, indicating the fast approaching tide (of Wanda’s revenge), about to engulf the guilty, then segue into Rita’s heartfelt refrain that “*Venus in Furs will be smiling, when that moment arrives*” - the perfect coda.

An assortment of low angled shots stretching up skywards at ancient towers and religious temples, signals the reappearance of another icon as Wanda emerges back in Istanbul with Jimmy, where in a delirious sequence of increasing sexual tension, it is Kinski’s⁹⁷ turn to meet his maker - denied the licentious union with Wanda that he so covets. Once again, the final image is of the satiated Wanda spurning the human wreckage that she has left in her wake, casually trailing her trademark fur behind her.

The singular absence of any police authorities thus far is remedied as a mortified Jimmy, is then informed by the local police inspector that Wanda has actually been dead for two years now, according to their records. Unable to reconcile this with the “very real” flesh and blood Wanda that he has just left sleeping upstairs, he escapes with her, only for Wanda to break away in the direction of a nearby cemetery. With masterly precision, Franco is once again able to conjure up a cloying, oneiric atmosphere as coloured filters saturate the screen in a bold, kaleidoscopic display of greens, reds and blues, before Jimmy stumbles upon her discarded fur, and then... her grave.

Understandably traumatised by this discovery, he reacts to the, by now, familiar stretch of coastline and, in a supreme moment of *deja vu*, sees a body lying in the water. The languid, stop-motion photography enhances the timeless feel again as Jimmy now turns the body over, only to discover that he is staring at *himself*. “Oh my god, it’s me. I’m dead. I’ve been dead all the time” being the rather enfeebled response.

Given the relative paucity of the basic premise, this is probably the only “logical” conclusion to avail itself - however, disappointing and inadequate it may at first appear. In the final analysis, Franco has succeeded in creating a genuinely eerie, dazzling work, a visual poem concerning

⁹⁷ Franco’s musings on Kinski include memorably that; “He’s mad, *really* mad. But he’s very clever. You’ve got to draw a line to have a good relationship with him.” Franco expands that Kinski is “... a very intelligent guy, very cultured, who knows what he’s doing and does it well. Kinski’s peculiarity is his personality.. you’re watching an ordinary film. Suddenly Kinski enters the frame and everybody jumps. He has that power.”

infatuation and all-consuming sexuality, coupled with a simply stunning score⁹⁸ that not only compliments the visuals, but embellishes them with subtle, and non too subtle flourishes to further stretch the imagination.

Franco shows that he too is capable of creating a classic when given the necessary time and consequently, energy, to devote to one picture. It's certainly fascinating to note the comments of Franco regular Howard Vernon, who maintains that the ubiquitous Spaniard was held in high regard by Orson Welles, and that the equally celebrated Fritz Lang, was also fulsome in his praise for Franco's next best film, *Necronomicon*, aka *Succubus* (1967) - which Lang also regarded as a "sex film" - a genre he personally hated!

It's fair comment that the mercurial Franco has never again scaled these vertiginous heights, though his later *Faceless* (1987) did threaten some kind of renaissance - a renaissance since crushed with the underwhelming experiences that are *Killer Baby's* (1996), *Tender Flesh* (1997), *Mari-Cookie and the Killer Tarantula* (1998) and *Lust for Frankenstein* (1998). That said, at least his ability has enabled him a momentary flirtation with greatness. For many other much vaunted *auteurs*, even that has proved too formidable an achievement.

Black, Andy, 2001, *Venus in Furs*, pp.131-139, *Necronomicon* Book Four, Hereford: Noir Publishing.

⁹⁸ Beside the source novel, the idea for the film came from a discussion between Franco and legendary jazz musician Chet Baker, and the film's free-flowing, organic style is very much in keeping with this musical influence.

False Gestures for a Demonic Public in *The Sentinel* and *The Antichrist*

“We were banished because of our beliefs and the methods we have used to rid the earth of the disciples of the devil. Excommunication has been a small price to pay for the fulfilment of our destiny” - minister from the Brotherhood of the Protectors in *The Sentinel*.

“I find New Yorkers have no sense for anything but sex and money” - Miss Logan (Eva Gardner) to Alison (Christina Raines) in *The Sentinel*.

“If god performs a miracle for you he’s good, he exists, he’s your protector, if not, it’s supposed to mean he’s abandoned you but it’s not quite like that, it’s not so simple” - The bishop (Arthur Kennedy) in *The Antichrist*.

“Sects of devil worshippers are springing up everywhere... it’s a symptom of the spiritual crisis of our time” - The bishop (Arthur Kennedy) in *The Antichrist*.

The Supernatural Seventies

Given the spectacular success of *The Exorcist* in 1973, regaling a captivated cinema-going public with the spiritual battle between good and evil, god and the devil as physically manifested upon the pre-pubescent body of a helpless teenage, Regan (Linda Blair), via such flagrant means as levitation, stigmata and projectile vomiting, the success of *The Exorcist* appears almost inexorably linked to the traumas of seventies America.

For instance, Wood⁹⁹ has linked the film’s conflict between good and evil as an apocalyptic comment on the structure of American ideals during the era. He notes that this nihilistic vision produced not only in the profound questioning of the American family as a structure of normality and stability, but also recast childhood innocence via the figure of the “Terrible Child” (Wood 1986, 83). The monstrous nature of the possessed child is clearly signalled by the hideous transformation of Regan in the film, and her more excessive physical and sexual displays motivated much of the visceral excess of the imitations and sequels that followed Friedkin’s film. Indeed, it is fascinating to see how this age-old struggle for spiritual utopia is handled in the contrasting styles of British director Michael Winner’s *The Sentinel* (1976) and Italian director Alberto De Martino’s *The Antichrist* (1974).

For a while the demonology in *The Sentinel* is avowedly implicit and material - delineating a Brownstone building which happens to be built over the gateway to hell, the demonology in *The Antichrist* is assuredly explicit and emotional with Carla Gravina as Ippolita, a crippled young woman who becomes possessed by the devil.

As a result of her afflictions, the normally virginal heroine becomes increasingly aggressive and sexually deviant, much to the disgust of her close companions. While the protagonist’s exaggerated gestures are clearly modelled on *The Exorcist*’s most shocking scenes, their impact goes beyond their use in Italian exploitation productions. Rather, the figure of Ippolita like Regan before her, indicates the currency that the female body and the female sex organ has within the possession film of the 1970s. As Clover¹⁰⁰ has noted, in these narratives supernatural domination is evidenced through aggressive sexual displays, pointing to long held cultural myths that connect the vagina as the entry point to demonic possession. Through these beliefs, the female openings of the possession film;

“... stand in a long line of female portals, from the equally gullible Eve through the professional portals-sibyls and prophetesses- of classical and medieval times to the majority of psychic and New Age channellers of our own day. Certainly the portals of occult horror are almost invariably women” (Clover 1992, 70-71)

⁹⁹ Wood, Robin, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan*, (Columbia University Press:1986)

¹⁰⁰ Clover, Carol. J, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, (BFI Publishing:1992).

The Antichrist continues the theme of the “colonised body” that Clover finds in many of the narratives of this type, situating a theme of female possession alongside that of dysfunctional patriarchal attempts to restore the order that excessive female sexuality threatens.

Whilst Winner chooses to explore the tangential effects of spiritualism via the extra-dimensional portal which leads beyond the physical world, De Martino firmly roots his battleground for spiritualism inside the human body - that of Ippolita to be precise.

By jettisoning the graphic displays of possession which inform *The Exorcist* and *The Antichrist* and a legion of other similar films, Winner creates a more cerebral canvas upon which he adds splashes of mental anguish. Alongside issues of sexual repression, the director situates the pivotal religious/secular conflict through a powerful condemnation of the political and social injustice of seventies American society.

Winner’s choice of his central character Alison (Christina Raines) in *The Sentinel*, a fashion model, serves to emphasise the superficial nature of modern society with its accent on materialism and artificiality as opposed to spirituality and strength of character/depth of purpose. The most glaring example of this occurs during one of Alison’s photoshoots for a wine commercial where repeated takes prove necessary due to her failure to leave the wine bottle and its brand label facing the camera.

Blind Faith?

Contrast this obsession with the importance of all things visual, all things seen with the figure of Halloran (John Carradine) - a blind priest who inhabits the top floor of Alison’s house, blankly staring out of the window. “Blind, well then what does he look at?” Alison enquires of her unusual neighbour. Casting aside any flippant comments regarding ‘blind faith’, the question is not so much *what* he can see, but that he can see *more* than a sighted person. Perhaps he can see more than the immediate horizon which Alison sees all too easily, perhaps he can see beyond and deeper into the very soul?

No such existential debate or soul-searching in De Martino’s avowedly more visceral *The Antichrist* as the tormented Ippolita ponders far more prosaic concerns - enviously eyeing her father Marino’s (Mel Ferrer) blonde girlfriend Gretel (Anita Strindberg) from the confines of her wheelchair - “She’s pretty and young and intelligent. She should be loved, she’s a woman” Ippolita opines.

Having then discarded a tarot card into an open fire, whereupon wind and demonic voices howl around the spacious family home, Ippolita explains to her uncle, a bishop (Arthur Kennedy) - “The blasphemous image of christ was an image of the devil, uncle.”

She then utters her plaintive philosophy; “Then why doesn’t god make himself understood. The devil does and clearly too. He has been very clear to me. Has god forgotten you? Has your father forsaken you? Are you alone, unhappy, desperate? Here I am. All you have to do is call me and I will be with you. I’ll give you everything you have been denied”, concludes her rhetorical question to the devil. “God is testing you” her uncle replies, continuing that; “You’re too possessive with your affection for your father. You must learn to know yourself honestly. Your jealousy is absurd.”

Whilst Ippolita’s ‘possession’ is subsequently revealed to be the external manifestation of her own inner demons and ancestral bloodline. Alison’s battle with the forces of evil is not so much the result of any emotional baggage she carries with her, but rather the unfortunate consequence of fate as she discovers that she is predestined to become one of the guardians (or sentinels) to the entrance to Hell, over which her house is built.

“To thee, thy course, thy lot, is given, change in strict watch to this happy place, no evil thing approach or enter it” from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* prove to be the most prophetic words which guide Alison’s destiny.

When her boyfriend Michael (Chris Sarandon) does some investigating of his own amongst the secret records of the mysterious Brotherhood of the Protectors sect, he discovers the apocalyptic

truth that; "If these files are right, Father Francis Matthew Halloran dies, the same day that Alison Parker disappears and becomes Sentinel Theresa... tomorrow."

During the film's conclusion when estate agent Miss Logan (Ava Gardner) is seen showing some prospective tenants around the now familiar Brooklyn house, she is asked if "the neighbours are quiet", to which she replies that one woman is a recluse, "She's a nun", whereby the camera pans away to reveal a now blank-eyed Alison silently staring out over the river as the Brotherhood's earlier prediction is proved to be true.

It is not prophecy but regression which provides the self-revelatory undercurrent in De Martino's film as we see a "practising psychologist" Dr. Sinibaldi (Umberto Orsini) persuade Ippolita to undergo regressive hypnosis in order to contextualise her inner demons in the hope of providing her with some form of emotional (if not physical) catharsis.

During the hypnosis Ippolita is transported back in time to the personal trauma of her mother's death in a car crash - Ippolita escaping the flaming wreckage only to discover that her legs are now paralysed - "My legs are dead" she screams. The surreal image of her now writhing on the psychiatrist's couch, engulfed by flames like a witch being burnt at the stake, becomes highly symbolic as Orsini tells her to meet her past - "Who are you" he asks. In a dream/flashback sequence we see Ippolita transformed, now sporting long blonde hair and held captive in a circular cage as white-robed monks encircle her. It transpires that she is on trial as a heretic and is later sentenced to death at the stake before the therapy session abruptly ends.

Her father and uncle subsequently inform her that one of her ancestors was a nun forced into the path of religion and who later revolted by escaping to join a devil-worshipping sect. "So much family history, it can be a burden" she is told.

It is then the sight of Massimo and Gretel making love which acts as the catalyst in awakening Ippolita's angst, frustration and jealousy as she is shown writhing on her bed, apparently floating skywards. Transformed again in to the blonde devil figure, we are transported into the ethereal setting of a fairytale wood - incantations, tribal drums, a masked figure - "You are about to become a daughter of Satan" the announcement as fog swirls around. An eerie azure filter colours the scene as we see a toad's head torn off and fed to Ippolita, whereupon she lasciviously licks the blood up from the floor, before then being penetrated by the masked figure - all cross-cut with Ippolita on her bed as the mattress ripples, curtains billow and the sky casts a shimmering aura.

As her regression therapy sessions advance, they culminate with the now shaven-headed Ippolita on trial, still imprisoned in her cage before Orsini asks her to try and walk - to his astonishment, she does! "I feel so marvellous, as if I've been reborn" she gushes. We then see her ravenously tear into her meat at dinner and consume copious amounts of wine before then writhing and speaking in a Latin tongue; "Look at my arse you whore, how many men have you had?" She spits forth at Greta. Continuing unabated, in suitably demonic tones, with foaming white mouth, lights flickering, doors banging and wind raging outside, she utters; "I have been waiting 400 years for today but I piss on that time."

During the graphic conflagration between Ippolita and the exorcising priest, Father Mittner (George Coulouris), all manner of demonic trickery is unleashed from levitation, to crockery smashing, to glass breaking, to projectile vomiting, explained by Orsini as being the product of; "... sexual frustration that brings on [a] hysterical phenomena" - go figure eh, ever the psychiatrist.

Even the family's reaction is totally unreal - their response to Ippolita's behaviour being an intellectual debate on the mores of demonic possession rather than a shocked rebuttal of her behaviour.

She later confronts her sickened uncle - "Here is the devil" she shouts at him as she opens her legs up before him, later claiming that; "You with your doubts priest and you're fragile faith - stop reading that idiocy" she demands as she makes the bible he is grasping burst into flames. "You will not prevail", the bishop repeats as he brandishes his cross and places it upon Ippolita. As Father Mittner begins reading his incantations her powers begin to ebb away as the triumphant priest claims; "Behold the cross of God, Satan be gone... I exorcise you."

This battle of moral and gender wills reiterates Clover's view that for the woman, the possession film is a "body story with a vengeance", which forces women to reveal the inner most sexuality to male inquisitors. As Clover states;

"Film after film interrogates... the "physical presence" of a woman: forces it to externalise its most inner workings, to speak its secrets, to give a material account of itself- in short, to give literal and visible evidence. It is remarkable how many of these films in fact put the female body to some sort of formal trial" (Clover 1992, 82-3).

As the raging storm and demonic voices begin to calm down, we can hear church bells toll all around us as a new day begins to dawn - so good has prevailed over evil.

Freaks and the Normal

Unlike the overtly fantastical special effects and over the top exploitative approach of De Martino's film to its demonic possession subject matter, Winner's more prosaic, earthy approach lends an entirely more realistic tone to its supernatural subject matter. This was all the more problematic given his use of genuinely deformed and handicapped people, who help make up the "legions of hell" - the ghastly apparitions who populate Alison's house and simultaneously haunt and terrorise her.

For some critics, this was all simply too distasteful - "A thoroughly execrable enterprise" according to *The Aurum Book of Horror* and lacking the sympathy and dignity afforded to the similarly real-life disabled who appeared in Todd Browning's controversial *Freaks* (1932).

Robin Wood went much further in his condemnation of the film. He concluded that while it is normality which has the power to define the marginal nature of the freakish and 'abnormal', Michael Winner's use of real 'freaks' in *The Sentinel* made this; "... the worst - most offensive and repressive - horror film of the seventies" (Wood 1986,153).

Interestingly though, Winner gave a different insight into such prejudices when I interviewed him on the subject; "These people we found all came with their carers, were so happy. I got reviews and letters saying "I didn't know there was anyone else in the world like me, I thought I was the only one." They all enjoyed themselves. But so you know what happened? I suddenly sensed that something was happening on the set. I called over the first assistant director and said "Are they union representatives that have arrived" and he replied "Yes". So I said what the hell do they want. Anyway, it turned out that the crew did not want to sit at the same lunch table as the disabled actors. The union representative told me that the crew wanted a screen put up, they didn't want to see these people having lunch. So they put this screen up and I went furious and told them that if they didn't take it down I would come out and sit and eat with these so-called 'freaks'. And the union fella replied, "We don't care what you do Mr. Winner, you won't even eat with the crew!" Perhaps just as faith can be blind, so too can prejudice, ironic given the subtext within *The Sentinel*.

In conclusion, whether you prefer the explicit, graphic approach of De Martino, or the implicit, mind-games of Winner, *The Antichrist* and *The Sentinel* remain thematically similar films, both drinking from the same trough and yet offering a diverse, hybrid approach to the same subject, an approach particularly styled and inflected by the unique decade both films were born (nay, spawned) into.

Black, Andy, 2002, "False Gestures for a Demonic Public in The Sentinel and The Antichrist", pp.211-220, (ed) Mendik, Xavier, *Necronomicon Presents: Shocking Cinema of the Seventies*, (Noir Publishing:2002).

Brave New Zombies - Cemetery Man

In the sincere hope that he is not alone in exploring this undoubted potential, the mantle for imagination and creativity has been (partially) at least, grasped by the hands of Argento protegee, Michele Soavi, with his audacious zombie hymn *Cemetery Man/Dellamorte Dellamore* (1994).

Having cut his teeth aiding Argento on *Creepers* and playing bit parts in the likes of *Demons*, Soavi's directorial debut was the hyper-charged *Stagefright* (1987) - a stylish psycho-slasher with more than enough directorial flourishes to indict a bright future. This initial promise hasn't quite flourished as yet but Soavi's gradually evolving oeuvre - *The Church* (1989) and *The Sect* (1991) are eclipsed by the finery and maturity shown within *Cemetery Man*.

Soavi's main character here, cemetery caretaker Francesco Dellamorte (Rupert Everett), is captivated by the nubile temptress yet grieving widow, She (Anna Falchi), confiding that she is "the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

The witch-like spell that She casts over Dellamorte perfectly compliments the prevailing air of sorcery and mysticism that permeates the nebulous confines of the cemetery. This is reinforced by the sight of the zombies or "returners" who are resurrected from Dellamorte's cemetery (including She), the elegiac tone accentuated as former Playboy centrefold Falchi's morbid fascination with the cemetery ossuary knows no bounds; "I have never seen anything so exciting" she drools, surrounded by walls of skulls, gushing that "I couldn't ask for anything more, it's like a dream."

The necrophilia laced atmosphere concludes with She kissing Dellamorte passionately - though only after having first wrapped his head in a red shroud - climaxing (literally) in their lovemaking upon her late husband's grave. Although the earth does indeed "move" it proves to be the corpse of her late husband "returning" as he witnesses the carnal chaos before him, ravenously biting a chunk out of his wife.

The zombie dead also take on an altogether more symbolic meaning following the startling materialisation of "death" when a burning phone book reassembles into the spectre of the Grim Reaper - "Stop killing the dead - they're mine!" he admonishes the zombie-killing Dellamorte, before offering his own advice that; "If you want to stop the dead returning to life then start killing the living."

Only for Soavi, the term "love" becomes combined with "life" as we see the returning She appear as an "angel" - complete with ivory shroud dress and wild foliage hair - her passion for Dellamorte rather too all-consuming as she bites a chunk from his shoulder. Here, She encapsulates the full cycle of life, love, death and rebirth.

It is left to the forlorn figure of Dellamorte to signify the existence of life and love - chiding that "Life goes on" at the very beginning of the film, after he has just shot down another "returner".

The ensuing dramatic tracking shot - past Dellamorte and beyond the door and leading into the rows of graves in the cemetery outside - immediately establishes that Dellamorte lives in a world of "death"; even his aforementioned sexual sparring with She takes place either in the ossuary or on a gravestone. As Dellamorte knowingly remarks later; "Hell, at a certain point in life you realise that you know more dead people than are living."

As Soavi himself has commented, the whole remit of the zombie genre he flirts with here, has been deliberately inverted. "The main character is not scared of zombies because killing them is a normal job to him. What is more scary, is living. Instead of being a horror film about being scared of death, it's more a film about being scared of life."

To this (literal) end, Soavi concludes the film fittingly, with Dellamorte and his loyal assistant Gnaghi (Francois Hadj-Lazaro) existentially poised upon an isolated precipice.

As they survey the dramatic but desolate scene before them, Dellamorte comments; “I should’ve known. The rest of the world doesn’t exist” as snow flakes begin to fall, obliterating their increasingly distant figures as the snowflakes layer the landscape.

It is very much a case of *Cemetery Man* capturing the pessimistic mood of its own decade, reflecting the somewhat nihilistic forces of our own times. Perhaps because of this, that master of realism and drama, Martin Scorsese, declared *Cemetery Man* to be the best film of its year and a fitting testimony to the potency of the zombie film through the years.

Given his affinity for the genre and burgeoning talent, Soavi’s subsequent career has proved to be a major disappointment for horror and fantasy fans, with his confinement to the sanitised creative vacuum of TV work. His series of drama’s only recently enlivened by a return to film with *The Goodbye Kiss* (2006) and the recently complete *Il Sangue dei Vinti* (2008).

However, instead of acting as an inspiration to revitalise the zombie genre, what ultimately followed was as disappointing as Soavi’s own career curve, with *Cemetery Man* effectively signalling a coda rather than a catalyst to herald any new zombie film boom.

This apparently lifeless genre body, in fact, lay dormant until two factors were to revive it in the new millennium. At first glance the words “computer” and “virus” would appear to be intrinsically related and yet, ironically, it was to be “computer” in the form of the video game/PC, digital era and a physical “virus” whether in animal or human shape, which would usher in a newly resurgent zombie film renaissance.

Black, Andy, 2008, Chapter Eleven: Brave New Zombies, *Cemetery Man*, pp.219-221, *The Dead Walk*, Hereford: Noir Publishing.

Into The Beyond - The Enigma That Was Lucio Fulci

It is quite appropriate considering the converging links between voodoo and the Roman Catholic religion that the Italian director, Lucio Fulci, should have become as closely identified with zombie films as his illustrious American counterpart George A. Romero. Like him or loathe him, Fulci has managed to acquire a large group of admirers and has enjoyed international recognition and success in the world of horror. This popularity however, conceals a long and relatively unsuccessful career in the cinema that has spanned practically every genre.

After studying at the Experimental Film Centre in Rome under such celebrated directors as Michelangelo Antonioni (*Blow Up* 1966) and Luchino Visconti (*Death in Venice* 1971), Fulci embarked on a varied career which included work on comedies, television pop music shows, rock and roll films, westerns and a spell as assistant to Marcel L'Herbier and Paolo Moffa on the *Sins of Pompeii* (1950) and to Stefano Steno on *Times Are Hard For Vampires* (1959).

In the 1970s he turned to psycho thrillers such as *Don't Torture A Duckling* (1972) and *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin* (1971). By 1979 Fulci had directed over 30 films but it was the release that year of *Zombie Flesh Eaters* that proved to be the commercial breakthrough he had been striving for.

One of the prevailing themes running through Fulci's zombie films stems from his own religion, as his work contains a kind of perverted catholicism with the resurrection of the flesh carried to its utmost extremes, epitomised in the horrific walking dead who dominate his films. This, coupled with Fulci's own unique style of filming, refusing to follow traditional narratives and pacing in favour of a more personal approach involving his much maligned reliance on the zoom lens to create intensity and claustrophobia, and his atmospheric rendering of "Lovecraftian" underground caverns, caves and gloomy cellars.

In this respect *Zombie Flesh Eaters*, despite being Fulci's most successful film financially, is also his least satisfying aesthetically, containing little of the atmosphere and style that *City of the Living Dead* (1980), *The Beyond* (1981) and *The House By The Cemetery* (1981) all offer in abundance.

The main reason for this is that *Zombie Flesh Eaters* was primarily conceived as a "cash-in" on the overwhelming success of Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* before it. The American title for Fulci's film, *Zombie 2*, was even a blatant nod in the direction of the American title for Romero's film which was *Zombi*. The film, in fact, sets itself up as a prequel to *Dawn of the Dead*, showing how the zombies came to infect America.

Zombie Flesh Eaters is set in the voodoo heartland of the Caribbean, as Fulci himself comments; "I wanted to recapture the moody atmosphere of witchcraft and paganism that must have been prevalent when the Europeans first settled in the Caribbean during the 1700s." "That's when the concept of zombies, human slaves brought back from the dead - first became popularly known to western civilisation."

The film's pre-credit sequence, set in New York harbour, gives the film an intriguing start as a police launch vessel investigates a mysteriously drifting, apparently deserted boat. From the moment that the two cops board the boat we know that something is very wrong and the alarming appearance of an overweight and ravenous zombie from the ship's hold, confirms our worst suspicions. He proceeds to make a quick lunch of one of the cops before being shot and the horror has very firmly begun.

The appearance of the boat, concealing impending doom on the calm water is similar in tone to the early vampire classic *Nosferatu* (1922), later remade by Werner Herzog in 1979 with Klaus Kinski as the titular vampire. The plague of rats and that film's scourge of vampirism are here replaced by the threat of a zombie epidemic causing ripples in the calm waters of civilisation.

Then we are rapidly transported to the tropical island of Matoul where Dr. Menard (Richard Johnson) is busy experimenting and as a result, unwittingly raising the dead. An intrepid reporter played by Ian McCulloch, and Menard's daughter (Tisa Farrow) spearhead an investigation into the evil events occurring on Matoul. Along the way the decorative Aurette Gay finds herself

sandwiched between an amphibious zombie and a marauding shark in an electrifying underwater sequence. She escapes only because the zombie chooses to lunch on a quick shark steak, obviously no respecter of the synonymous villain of *Jaws* (1975).

Having survived this, the quartet, including Gay's boyfriend (Al Cliver - Pier Luigi Conti), head for the dry land of Matoul only to find that even worse horrors lie in wait. They encounter a village riddled with disease and rife with voodoo superstition. In the film's most infamous scene, the very unwilling Mrs. Menard (Stefania d'Amario) is slowly impaled, eyeball first, by a zombie with a penchant for sticking wooden stakes where he shouldn't. The non-too special effects of Gianetto de Rossi here are improved upon later as the search party, in an impromptu "picnic", are besieged by zombies rising from their graves. Unfortunately Gay, having learned nothing from her previous underwater battle, "gets it in the neck" as the remainder of the party escape.

The climactic scenes take place in the village hospital as the survivors, along with Dr. Menard, barricade themselves in, a la *Night of the Living Dead* style, as the zombies converge on them from outside. In the ensuing melee zombies are shot and "torched" with molotov bombs as they try to break into the hospital, and Dr. Menard himself receives some of his own medicine as he is bitten by a zombie and condemned to walk the ranks of the living dead.

As McCulloch and Farrow escape the burning hospital they see Cliver, now confronted with the sight of his zombified girlfriend Gay. As he debates the finer points of past love and future survival, she gives him a rather over-zealous love bite to remember. He is eventually rescued by the others, and after swiftly dispatching Gay, they are next seen sailing back to America, Cliver locked in the hold and betraying signs of zombie-hood.

The real irony is that they are, in fact, sailing back to the same horror, as the final, puerile radio announcer, screams of zombies now attacking suburbia. The final image of zombies streaming over the Brooklyn Bridge shows that the "Big Apple" is now rotten to the core.

Whereas the film lacks the up front social satire inherent in *Dawn of the Dead*, it does contain an underlying statement on the western world's willingness to "meddle" in the third world and under-developed countries' affairs. This is exemplified in the film by the forlorn figure of Dr. Menard, infected by his own living dead creations. Also the bizarre appearance of grotesquely decomposing zombies set against the vibrant tropical sunshine looks unnervingly like the horrific news reports that are beamed back to the "civilised" world from starvation-torn nations such as Ethiopia.

In its entirety, *Zombie Flesh Eaters* is probably the most visceral of all Fulci's films. Like most of his work it features exceptional make-up but very unexceptional special effects. Also, because it is the least personal of Fulci's zombie films, it lacks any real style or visual identity. The long camera takes echo the wide-open exteriors in which the story is predominantly filmed, as Fulci eschews any attempt at real directorial identity. For this reason, *Zombie Flesh Eaters*, despite its high graphic content, is probably the most accessible and watchable of Fulci's films.

For the same reasons however, it is also the least satisfying artistically, lacking the stylised Fulci trademarks that his later films contain. Of these, the most identifiable is his absolute willingness to interrupt any semblance of logical thought and so turn his films over into the realms of nightmares. Often his gore scenes are agonisingly slow-paced, and yet it is the very illogicality of such scenes that helps us to suspend our disbelief and reinforce the nightmarish atmosphere he has so lovingly created.

His next zombie film, *City of the Living Dead* (1980), incorporates many of these elements. Fulci has called it; "a visual rendering of the metaphysical side of bad dreams." Certainly the nightmare begins immediately as Father Thomas, the priest of Dunwich, a town built on the site of the Salem Witch Trials, hangs himself in the town's cemetery in renunciation of his religion. The sight of the rope being lashed around the tree is a throwback to the numerous crop of spaghetti westerns that left such a strong impression on Fulci. The image of the pale priest swinging amidst the autumnal colours of the graveyard is not easily forgotten. This acts as the signal for various decaying zombie heads to erupt from out of their earthen graves.

It is left to a reporter (Christopher George) and a medium (Catriona MacColl), jokingly called Mary Woodhouse (sic), to lay the restless priest's spirit before All Saints Day, when all the dead will rise. The most intriguing twist here is that before this can happen, MacColl must first be rescued, having been buried alive. This is a knowing reference to Edgar Allan Poe who is one of Fulci's main inspirations as shown in his filming of the Poe tale *The Black Cat* .

This one scene is probably the most memorable and expertly realised of all in Fulci's work, as George lingers in the cemetery, half-thinking that he can hear a voice screaming from within MacColl's coffin. It's a moment that perfectly captures that murky grey area in between knowing and not knowing if something feels right.

This is similarly alluded to in *Night of the Living Dead* as Barbara's brother taunts her in the graveyard. George's indecision is intercut with shots of MacColl trapped in her tomb, gasping frantically for air and clawing desperately at the coffin lid. Fulci, although not famed for his subtlety, shows a deft touch here, betraying his gothic flair by showing the flower clasped in MacColl's hand wilt symbolically as her life is being gradually snuffed out. It is like the fly that puts out the flame from Eustacia's candle in Thomas Hardy's novel, *The Return of the Native*.

After what seems an agonisingly long time, George finally realises that MacColl has indeed been buried alive and rushes to her coffin. He commandeers a handily-placed pick-axe and then proceeds to rain blow after blow upon the coffin lid.

Simultaneously, as the axe cuts breathing holes in the lid, it also cuts perilously close to the poor girl's face. Her life is saved, but only by her life being further endangered in the process. The two protagonists then join forces with a Freudian psychiatrist (Carlo de Mejo) and his patient Sandra (Janet Agren), to defeat the priest and his undead disciples.

The endlessly repeated tracking shots down darkened streets and enclosed alleys, creates a feeling of tension, along with the swirling wind that skirts the outer reaches of the town. Despite this creation of atmosphere and suspense, there are still some extremely gruesome scenes offered up, such as the girl who vomits up her intestines under the menacing gaze of the priest and various other victims have their brains ripped out by clawing zombie hands that lurch into the frame.

There is also a knowing reminder to the horror audience as in one scene the priest literally rubs a victim's face into some gore, and Fulci's own "mugging" of a scene from Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1976), as the four would-be zombie fighters are bombarded by a non- too convincing "maggot-storm".

There is also some on-shore drilling as the local village idiot is given a crash course in the intricacies of a Black & Decker lobotomy by one irate girl's father. This scene echoes Fulci's own criticisms of middle class intolerance, it is "a cry he wanted to launch against a certain type of fascism." The film's closing sequences take place in an underground vault, full of genuinely eerie, cobwebbed caves and labyrinth tunnels that come the closest yet in the cinema to evoking a "Lovecraftian" other world.

It is here that George meets his end, and Agren, now returned as a zombie has to be unceremoniously run through with a cross by de Mejo, along with the still-glaring priest, just as the zombie hordes are about to close in for the kill. The two remaining survivors flee the now enflamed zombies where they see a child run towards them - only to be freeze-framed into a piercing scream. It is an unsatisfactory conclusion but then here the narrative is more an incidental than a primary concern. The ghostly sight of the pallid priest, appearing and disappearing irregularly, creates a real sense of fear and expectancy, adding to the hauntingly macabre ambience that permeates the film's entirety.

This is Fulci's "mood" picture, with tension totally supplanting any attempts at characterisation which here, even for Fulci, are purely perfunctory. Given that the creation of atmosphere is the film's main goal, it has to be judged as a success as Fulci accomplishes this admirably, including some powerful images along the way.

The themes and ideas put forward here are even further explored in *The Beyond* (1981), the most overtly surreal and image-conscious film in all Fulci's oeuvre.

It is, according to him, "an absolute film, with all the horrors of our world. It's a plotless film, people and dead men coming from "The Beyond". There's no logic, just a succession of images." This is certainly the case as the "plot", or what exists of it, concerns a woman, Lisa (Catriona MacColl), who inherits the "Seven Stars Hotel" in modern day New Orleans. Unfortunately for her, it has in fact been built upon one of the Seven Gates of Hell (a similar premise to *The Sentinel* - 1977). Its' previous owner Schyke, an artist, is the hotel's own sentinel who is gruesomely dispatched in the film's opening sequence (set in 1927), as a local lynch mob give the unfortunate painter an acid wash down. His malevolent presence haunts the hotel whose guardianship is also shared by a blind girl, Emily.

It is interesting here to note Fulci's pre-occupation with the human eye - the "window of the soul". In *Zombie Flesh Eaters* it is skewered, in *Manhattan Baby* (1982) it is removed by birds and in *The Beyond*, it is pushed out by nails or filmed over, Fulci's reasoning here being that "sight has no *raison d'être* any more in this lifeless world."

The irony here is that the film boasts some of Fulci's most memorable images, the numerous picturesque scenes on show are drawn from the artistry of the devil-worshipping Schyke, whose own canvassed vision of Hell provides the film with the most imaginative and satisfactory ending in all the Fulci series.

The most remarkable *mise-en-scene* is the moment when Fulci jump-cuts to the solitary figure of Emily, standing silhouetted against an isolated causeway that is set amidst an expansive lake. The timeless theme created here can also be glimpsed in another scene when Emily runs through an open doorway, only for the same action to be repeated in slow motion. The apparently meaningless and arbitrary inclusion of this is typical of Fulci, who at least is prepared to step out of the ordinary in his attempts to conjure up another world, a Beyond where the edges between reality and dreams are blurred. A similar technique can be seen in Harry Kumel's interesting but barely fathomable *Malpertuis* (1972).

The Fulci trademark of sluggishly-paced gore scenes is also present here. Most effective is the morgue sequence where a young girl watches her mother fall and become smothered in acid. The garish red pool of blood that results, moves gradually towards the girl who runs from door to door amongst the plastic-shrouded corpses, only to find each exit blocked. The last door she opens is guarded by a zombie. The next time we see the girl is at her mother's funeral, the blank, motionless eyes signalling her transcendence into the ranks of *The Beyond*.

The secret to the hotel is discovered by the town librarian as he reaches onto his shelves and picks out the "Book of Eibon", an ancient tome which explains the hotel is, in fact, one of the seven gateways leading to Hell. His find is short lived as, falling from a ladder, he lies dazed on the ground only half-seeing the supernatural spiders that have emerged and now set about slowly biting him to death.

The denouement sees Lisa and a hospital doctor McCabe (David Warbeck) escape a zombie-besieged hospital via some underground steps that by chance, connect to the hotel cellar. The geometry may be similar to *City of the Living Dead*, but here Fulci creates a more original finish, as, after various tussles with the zombies, the duo walk into *The Beyond*, which is the landscape depicted in Schyke's painting of the desert of Hell where they will "face the sea of Darkness and all therein that may be explored." The two survivors turn to face the camera whereupon we see the now familiar blank eyes etched onto their features.

The ending here is as welcome as it is unexpected. The importance of Schyke, or his ghost, haunts the characters throughout the film and is followed through to the film's conclusion as his painterly image of Hell does indeed become a passageway into another world. It is vintage Fulci in the way that it combines both the supernatural and the fantastic with unsettling scenes of outre violence.

The only disappointment here is that Fulci, who has shown that he has the talent and vision for creating a unique world of horror, still finds it necessary to constantly crib from other sources. *The Beyond's* murderous dog can also be found in Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1976), and the film's random plotting reminds one of both *The Sentinel* (1977) and *The Shining* (1980). The mysteriously ringing bells from the hotel rooms, supposedly unoccupied, again recall *The Shining*.

In comparing the two however, Fulci's film ranks as no mean achievement as his flair for atmospheric and highly original visual compositions surpasses the master craftsmanship of Stanley Kubrick on this occasion. His arbitrary plotting works against *The Shining* whereas the absolute plotting found in *The Beyond* is intrinsic to fashioning that film's identity.

The one sustained highlight of Kubrick's film, its beautifully photographed chase through the snow-covered maze, cannot compensate for the "emptiness" that has gone before. The somewhat "empty" characters who populate *The Beyond* are unimportant, surpassed by the ingenious ideas and phantasmagorical images that pervade the film, both being integral to the film's success. *The Beyond* is a blinding flash of light. We may lose our sight but not our humanity or soul which remain unaffected. It is a film that deals with man coming to terms with his own corruption. In Fulci's language "every man chooses his own inner Hell, corresponding to his hidden vices." The wasteland of Hell portrayed in Schyke's painting is something that we must all face eventually.

The continuing evolution of Fulci's film personality and style can be further charted in *House By The Cemetery* (1981). Whereas his previous zombie films earned him notoriety as opposed to critical approval, *House By The Cemetery* came the nearest to garnering both. In fact, that most "English" of newspapers, The Sunday Times even praised the film for its "style and restraint." Part of the reason for this becomes apparent when studying Fulci's treatment of children in his films. They are continually placed in danger, witness *City of the Living Dead* as well as *House By The Cemetery* for examples, but on each occasion the children escape unhurt, however narrow the margin for error may be.

In *House By The Cemetery* children are of primary importance as opposed to adults. All the occurrences revolve around children, especially young Bob (Giovanni Frezza). The film begins with a brief history of the title house, charting a young girl's abrupt demise at the end of a knife, wielded by the insane Dr. Freudstein (Giovanni de Nava).

After a briefing by a city professor (Lucio Fulci in a cameo role), academic Norman Boyle (Paolo Malco) and his wife Lucy (Catriona MacColl) together with their son Bob, take up residence in the house. They learn that its previous owner, Dr. Peterson, killed himself and his mistress, not exactly the stuff house-warming parties are made of !

Here, any resemblance with the inhabitants of the very one-dimensional *The Amityville Horror* (1979) ends. The unsavoury experiments being conducted by Dr. Freudstein in the murky cellar of the house are never far from the mind, but it is the actions of young Bob that are of the most interest.

Throughout the film he switches from the adult world to a child's world where he communicates with the ghostly figure of a young girl called May. She warns Bob of the dangers in the house and he in turn sees for himself the danger as a shop window mannequin "comes to life" and is decapitated before his disbelieving eyes. This, in reality, is a premonition of babysitter Anna Pieroni's death later in the film at the hands of the murderous Freudstein. The fantasy of this children's world is emphasised by the two young charges who "speak" almost silently to each other as if through some form of telepathy, though hundreds of yards apart.

Fulci however, is unwilling to relax the tension for long and most of the film's action takes place within the claustrophobic confines of the house. Even Fulci's exterior shots of the house add to the "enclosed" feel, his raking camera filling the screen with shots of the adjoining cemetery. After a torrid conflagration with some tenacious vampire bats from the cellar, it is time for Norman and family to confront Freudstein in person. The cellar, a charnel house of butchered corpses, acts as

Freudstein's life-blood as he constantly grafts new body parts onto his own rotting frame, a process that has kept him alive for 150 years.

The gruesome appearance of this "mosaic of corpses" is as electrifying as anything that Fulci has produced. Freudstein also possesses super-human strength, being stabbed by Norman and yet still being fit enough to tear out the helpless man's throat. Mother and son make for the ladders that lead above to a cracked tombstone in the graveyard, their only hope of escape.

Lucy is dragged back down below to her death whilst Bob struggles to squeeze through the cracked opening. As Freudstein's hands reach for his legs, Bob, in a final surge of strength, leaps up to freedom (of a sort).

Instead, he finds himself in limbo occupying the childhood world of Mrs. Freudstein and her daughter, May. The film's final quotation taken from Henry James; "Are children monsters or would monsters be children", perfectly encapsulates the idea that anything can happen in a child's world.

Taken to its logical conclusion the events in the film may have purely been the result of Bob's imagination. Although the ending does provide a great deal of suspense, it is also a reprise of the Jorge Grau's earlier sanguinary masterpiece, *The Living Dead At The Manchester Morgue* (1974).

This aside, there is still much to commend the film. It is interesting to note the parallel between Boyle and his predecessor Peterson, in that he is also prepared to endanger his own wife and son to solve the mystery attached to the house, in much the same way that Peterson had jeopardised his own loved ones. Someone in the town even insists that he has seen Boyle before he has arrived at the house, suggesting another link between Boyle and Peterson.

The character of Freudstein himself is an embodiment literally, of Frankenstein's ideal of creating life from dead bodies and of Freud's theories on personal development. The murderous doctor's will to survive encompasses much of the "self-preservative desire" that Freud alluded to. This, together with the film's dual child/adult world and the tombstone/rebirth finish suggests more than a passing reference to Freud.

Fulci could have expanded on these influences but it is questionable as to whether any further elaboration would have added anything extra to the film. The real horror in *House By The Cemetery* is that nothing is resolved by the film's conclusion; the house still stands ready and waiting to receive more victims. The nightmare world of Fulci remains intact, with no glimmer of respite or release.

The rich vein of inspiration that Fulci exploited in making these zombie films through the early eighties appears to have dried up soon after. He had been less than prolific in recent years (partly due to illness), making less imaginative films such as *Manhattan Baby* (1982) and the non-supernatural, psycho-slasher gore exercise *The New York Ripper* (1982). The former is a pale shadow of what Fulci is really capable of producing, whilst the latter dwells uncomfortably on sado-masochistic thrills as a substitute for atmosphere and suspense.

Lurching between Italian, made for TV, films and other alternatively insipid/gore-drenched offerings, Fulci made the gore disco *Murder Rock* (1984) *Demonia* (1990), *Voices From Beyond* (1990) and *Door To Silence* (1991).

Voices From Beyond is not quite a return to those halcyon days of a decade ago for Fulci, but ample proof that there was still some inspiration, however stilted, remaining at this stage of his career. Fulci's obligatory cursory plot involves a finance magnate, Giorgio Mainardi, whose unexpected death proves to be no accident as he contacts his beautiful daughter Rose (Huff) from beyond the grave to expose his murderer. Some authentic frissons can be found amidst the longuets as a mist-enshrouded forest evokes the "return" of the magnate, from his limbo state, whilst elsewhere suitably cadaverous zombies engulf one character in an eerie crypt. Certainly no classic but, together with *Nightmare Concert* (1990) - an extraordinary, semi-autobiographical romp, as Fulci stars as a horror director Fulvio, orchestrating scenes of graphic carnage, surreal humour and nazi orgies, goes to prove the resonance of the late maestro's unique oeuvre.

As something of a departure, Fulci turned his attentions to utilising the same cadre as his zombie films, only replacing zombies with pasty-faced, blackened-eyed nuns with *Demonia*.

The film centres on Professor Evans (Brett Halsey) and Liza (Meg Register), heading up an archaeological team investigating the ruins of a Sicilian monastery. With the time-honoured genre staple of “digging up more than they bargained for”, they succeed only in awakening the dead - much to the chagrin of the locals, who it transpires, are fiercely guarding a guilty secret.

With shades of *The Beyond* resonating through the film, we discover that angry villagers had crucified the nuns some five hundred years previously, deep within the catacombs of the monastery.

The nun’s revenge is suitably gruesome, ranging from beheadings, to a tongue nailing and with the obligatory eyeball gouging all thrown into the mix. The *piece de resistance* however, is reserved for one unfortunate victim who is tied between two trees and wish-boned in half a la Ruggero Deodato’s *Cut and Run* (1984).

Despite some atmospheric Sicilian surroundings, the lacklustre performances, uninspired photography and perfunctory music score all conspire to render *Demonia* merely average at best.

Fulci also started but failed to finish *Zombie 3* (1988) which was eventually completed by Bruno Mattei and Claudio Fragasso, before the maestro finally shuffled off this mortal coil on the 13th March 1996, aged 69 and having just spent the last three years of his life trying to get *Wax Mask* (1997) - as it was eventually called, off the ground.

His untimely death left the horror genre a decidedly more prosaic place, but the rich legacy of his imaginative *oeuvre* has assured Fulci his rightful place at the vanguard of fantastic cinema.

Black, Andy, 2008, Chapter Five: Into the Beyond - The Enigma That Was Lucio Fulci, pp. 89-104, *The Dead Walk*, Hereford: Noir Publishing.

[REC]

The lineage of the Spanish zombie film may not exactly be long and illustrious, but for directors Juame Balaguero and Paco Plaza, it proved mightily fertile ground for their superior *[REC]* (2007) - a taut, stylish foray into a contemporary world of urban nightmares, with zombies lurking from seemingly every shadow. As Philip French memorably noted in *The Observer*, “The film comes at you with the ferocity of a Spanish Inquisitor with a branding iron and holds you there to the bitter end.”

An intriguing premise sees an intrepid TV reporter, Angela (Manuela Velasco) and her tenacious cameraman Marcos (Pablo Rosso), on location recording the nocturnal work of the Barcelona Fire Service, whilst filming for a late night TV news programme *While You Sleep*. The duo shadow the fire crew as they are called out to attend a disturbance in an apartment block, where an old lady is found screaming.

When they arrive, they find her covered in blood and she attempts to bite one of the firemen. In the ensuing chaos, the residents, firemen and TV crew are all effectively quarantined inside as the exits are closed and the entire building sealed off. The inherent tension and claustrophobia arising from this, together with the increasing hysteria of the confused tenants, immeasurably heightens the impact of the macabre discovery that the dead are now walking...

Balaguero and Plaza betray a masterful guiding hand here – the natural, unhurried build up establishing the relaxed approach and camaraderie of the firemen at the station, before scrambling to a seemingly banal incident involving an old woman, then, careers into overdrive as the confined milieu and palpable air of paranoia, conspire to create an escalating atmosphere of malevolence.

The genius of this central conceit lies in its deliberate confinement of the zombie outbreak to one, quickly isolated, urban tower block. It's not depicting global domination, it's diametrically opposed to such an approach. It is just this insular rather than expansive aesthetic which propels *[REC]* into playing out as a real tour de force for the directorial team.

Their most audacious deviation from zombie film convention is that the zombies aren't outside the building trying to get in, because here, they are already inside. The natural performances from the residents and their descent into hysteria – arguing and seeking to apportion blame rather than joining forces to boost their survival chances, evokes the spectral influence of Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). The tension is ratcheted up considerably with the realisation that any of them could be the next to die, with suspense emanating from trying to second guess who will be next – (it's a cerebral counterpoint to the “physical” blood test the survivors in *The Thing* (1982) undergo, in order to try and discover who the next infected victim is).

As with the aforementioned *The Zombie Diaries* (2006), one could be churlish and argue over whether such endangered figures would really still have the presence of mind to continue filming the resulting carnage and yet it's a concept which sits far more easily here as it reinforces Angela and Marcos' professional commitment and integrity in keeping the camera rolling under any circumstances – Angela's virtual epitaph proving to be; “We have to tape everything Marcos for fuck's sake!”

Given this journalistic bravura – similar to the “film at all costs' mantra which war reporters espouse when in the battle arena, the jolting, hand held camera is more integral to the plot here than its slightly forced use in the likes of *Cloverfield* (2008) or *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), and considerable tension is derived from it.

As we join Angela and the ever present (but entirely unseen) Marcos, there's a voyeuristic intimacy to the proceedings – long, unbroken takes adding to the suspense as the roving camera prowls through empty corridors, records ethereal sounds, culminating in one extraordinary shot as the lens spirals down the central stairwell, only to uncover zombies emerging from almost every recess, before a heart-stopping moment as one ghoul's face bursts into view in ultra close-up.

With no weapons to defend themselves, the sheer scale and hopelessness of the situation becomes ever more apparent, with the fast spreading contagion and economical glimpses of the zombies adding to the effect – the camera continually cutting out, jerking away or even dropping to the floor to disorientate us.

Angela anchors the whole piece, being virtually ever present on screen. She is attractive, yet believable, professional and practical – in one scene she stems the flow of blood from a fireman's neck wound by compressing her jacket against it.

The hellish nightmare which unfolds is experienced through her eyes and the camera lens becoming as one and the sense of paranoia is almost unbearable as the authorities (shown in silhouette outside), proceed to vacuum pack the entire building with "biohazard plastic". Frantic, tantalising last glimpses of the outside world, of "normality", show only the flashing blue lights and neon street lamps beyond – authority figures cast only as vague shadows as the final rays of light ebb away to render the building a virtual coffin.

This theme of events beyond our control and left to watch as "outsiders" looking in, is accentuated as Angela and Marcos secretly film the newly arrived health inspector- himself a monstrous apparition, clad in gas mask, lurid yellow suit and carrying a black medical case, trying to administer a serum to the infected in a locked room he commandeers. The inevitable happens, as an injured policeman, handcuffed to a table, proceeds to bite the inspector – not before he has explained that they believe the virus has emanated from an infected dog and is carried on its saliva. Not one to neglect her journalistic duties, her immediate response is to shout to Marcos; "Get this on tape", when one girl, Jennifer (Claudia Font), is infected and handcuffed to the bottom of the stairwell.

Adding greatly to the tension in *[REC]* is the "characterisation" of the apartment block where all the action unfolds. Besides being rendered a literal "tomb" with its very own incumbent zombie residents, its labyrinth passageways and shadowed recesses signify an architectural motif which manifests itself as a parallel creation to Dante's *Inferno* - as we spiral ever upwards from the bowels of the basement, in ever decreasing circles to the impenetrable reaches of the attic eerie, which ultimately harbours an even greater horror.

With only Angela and Marcos left as "survivors" now, their plans to escape via the basement and into the sewers, are thwarted by a veritable army of zombies now inhabiting the stairwell. Having momentarily lost Marcos, adrenaline supplants fear as, now reunited, the duo embark on a frantic bid to reach the attic – struggling to find the right keys to enter the locked room with the chasing zombies now in rapid pursuit.

Once "safely" inside, we reach the truly harrowing conclusion as they discover newspaper cuttings everywhere, delineating the story of the demonic possession of a Portuguese girl Nina Medeiros, as well as a rather risible tape recorded message they listen, to explaining the origins of the virus, in a similar plot device to *The Evil Dead* (1982).

Discovering a trap door leading up into the attic space. Marcos climbs up and swings it open to investigate with the camera – his 360 degree pan abruptly halted as he fixes upon the grotesque features of Medeiros' (Javier Botet) snarling, demonic face – who, hits out wildly at the camera and breaks the light. Switching to "night vision" mode on the camera, the room is bathed in a spectral, incandescent green hue, (akin to a similarly suspenseful climax in *The Silence of the Lambs*, 1991). Almost unbearable tension is created here as whilst we, the viewer, and Marcos, can see the emaciated, skeletal figure of Medeiros now in the room with them via the night vision lens, Angela cannot. Armed with a hammer, the ghoul repeatedly attacks Marcos, raining blows upon him before proceeding to devour his near lifeless body. With the camera now grounded, our final images are of Angela screaming and being dragged by her feet away from us, before the screen reduces to black – an unremittingly nihilistic coda.

Whether the actual device of somewhat "clumsily" attempting to explain the origins of the virus actually works is open to debate – perhaps leaving things unexplained would have added a further aura of mystique and menace here?

Whatever your viewpoint, with a US remake *Quarantine* (2008) due later this year and the idea of a sequel directed by Balaguero and Plaza again also being muted, their edgy, vibrant reinterpretation of the zombie mythos looks certain to continue – with the same compelling terror, energised *élan* and authentic scares, we hope.

Black, Andy, 2008, REC, pp.249-252, *The Dead Walk*, Hereford: Noir Publishing.

The Continental Cousin

Due to the reluctance of financial backers to subsidise the British film industry, the British horror film has become something of a rarity in recent years. This is surprising when considering the quality of films that have been made here, such as John Landis' humorously inventive *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), Neil Jordan's Freudian fairytale *A Company of Wolves* (1984) and Clive Barker's auspicious debut *Hellraiser* (1987).

From a country that once led the world in horror during the heyday of Hammer, it has been a sad fall from prominence. The worsening economic and employment situation led to a growth of British films that can loosely be termed "realist" in their portrayal of these factors and the accompanying social problems.

Of these films, *A Letter to Brezhnev* (1985) and *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) stand out, before the economic resurgence in the mid-nineties produced the comedy of *Four Weddings And A Funeral* (1994), hip-gangsters in *Lock Stock And Two Smoking Barrels* (1998) and the multi-cultural satire of *East is East* (1999).

Of the British films that have dealt with the living dead in one form or another, the James Bond adventure *Live and Let Die* (1973) reached the widest audience. Roger Moore, in his first Bond outing, is thrown against Yaphet Kotto's black villain who is intent on single-handedly turning America into a nation of drug zombies (he already appears to have had some success!), by flooding the "land of the free" with heroin to create a land of the enslaved.

It is a form of black retribution against the white race for their past colonialism. This revenge motif is effectively set against the backdrop of a Caribbean island immersed in superstition and voodoo regalia, all culminating in the well-staged voodoo ceremony where the suitably menacing Baron Samedi (Geoffrey Holder), rises up from the grave to instruct his obedient masses. Scare sequences such as these are interwoven with typical Bond fare such as Jane Seymour's beautiful tarot reading "Solitaire", who unfortunately, cannot see far enough into the future to realise the fate that she will suffer at the mercy of Bond's libido. An even worse fate befalls Kotto whose undignified exit has him filling up with air to balloon size before exploding, a feat emulated more humorously in the Monty Python team's *The Meaning of Life* (1983).

The interesting cast featuring J. W. Pepper's country clown sheriff, Dave Heddison's CIA agent (he had previously starred in the cult TV serial *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*) and Madeline Smith's vamp (she was a star in Hammer's 1971 entry *Twins of Evil*), inject the film with added vitality. *Live and Let Die* also boasts one of the finest Bond scores, the music here provided by Paul McCartney's "Wings". The half comic, half horror character of Baron Samedi holds the key to the film's success as Bond's gadgetry and innuendo take a back seat to the supernatural aura that pervades the film, embodied in the end sequence as a seemingly dead Samedi returns, sat atop the cow-catcher on Bond's fast moving train, and laughing creepily.

The part British, part Spanish production *Horror Express* (1972) is also set aboard a rapidly moving train, the Transiberian Express. The action is set in 1906 in China, as Christopher Lee's arrogant Professor Saxon discovers the fossilised remains of a neanderthal monster frozen in ice.

Saxon boards the train with a crate containing the animal, but not before the early demise of one inquisitive Chinese victim. Once on board the express the pace never falters, under the capable direction of Eugenio Martin. The neanderthal, who has a keen eye for a potential victim and a useful skill for picking up keys, escapes and begins to turn the majority of the train's passengers into zombies. This, he accomplishes by staring at the unwilling humans with his glowing red eyes that boil the brains and absorb the intelligence of his chosen victim.

The train's passengers include Peter Cushing as Dr. Wells - Saxon's professional rival, a spy, a Countess and a raving demonic priest (Albert de Mendoza) whose character owes more to Rasputin than Holy Orders.

Eventually, the creature is trapped and shot by police inspector Mirov, but not before one last, lingering stare from the creature, who transfers his “personality” and power to the now-infected inspector. It is then left to Wells and Saxon to defeat him, only after Telly Savalas’ army of Cossacks have boarded the train to be arbitrarily reduced to zombies en masse. The final scenes, as the scarlet-coated, erubescence-orbed cossacks march to kill the remaining survivors, still trapped within the confines of the train, are classically frightening in a claustrophobic way. The Express speeds relentlessly towards its inevitable demise with the uncoupled carriage-full of zombies careering off a cliff edge, with the survivors carriage halting just in time before the looming precipice.

The most notable features of the film are its breakneck direction, emulating the momentum of the locomotive, and its outrageous, though ingenious, science fiction explanation for the creature’s existence. This has Saxon and Wells discovering that the neanderthal’s eye retina contains images of earth from outer space and a history of the world as dinosaurs can also be glimpsed through the eye’s image.

The central theme of an alien who can transfer from one body to another, taking over that form, is also the basis for Howard Hawk’s *The Thing From Another World* (1951), and its special effects dominated remake, *The Thing*, by John Carpenter in 1982. The idea that the creature could be anyone, could even be standing next to you, works well within the cramped interiors of the train in *Horror Express*. The film plays as a supernatural “Murder on the Orient Express”, only here substitute a mysterious creature for a mystery killer(s). Tom Gries’ *Breakheart Pass* (1975) and the tense, *The Cassandra Crossing* (1976) create the same nervy tension by confining their action to on board a fast-paced train.

Martin also manages to suffuse his film with some nicely judged humour, as when Saxon and Wells themselves are accused of playing host to the creature they reply in unison; “But we are British !” For them the dilemma they face is the age-old horror conflict of scientific breakthrough set against endangering their fellow human beings. Saxon, who brought the creature back to civilisation and so does endanger his fellow men, but in pursuit of a greater goal, as the creature remarks; “Let me live and I will give you the power to end disease, war, famine.” It’s a trick but an attractive one. The time-honoured tempting by the Devil in “Faust” and more humorously *Party Animal* (1984) has been taken from a religious plane to a scientific one. It is the same temptation that Baron Frankenstein succumbs to in *Frankenstein* (1931 & 1957). Whereas the lure of say the vampire is immortality, the lure of this creature is world peace, an inviting trap to lay.

No such wider theorising in Hammer’s bizarre mixture of the vampire and martial arts genre’s, *The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires* (1973), which owes more to the zombie than the vampire for its’ thrills. The powdery faced Dracula (John Forbes- Robertson), complete with gaudy lipstick, is more camp than Count, lacking Christopher Lee’s commanding stature and presence. Dracula returns to China to resurrect his vampire forces (the 7 Golden Vampires), who seek to terrorise the nearby village of Ping Kuei and it is these scenes of heaving earth that steal the show as all around the darkened graveyard, arms and heads burst up into view.

The slow motion scenes of the army of the dead charging towards the isolated village, and of the apocalyptic horse-riding vampires inject the film with its only real frissons. It’s very much a case of Hammer robbing their own grave (*Plague of the Zombies*), but these sequences are still more effective than the rest of the film. It is left to Peter Cushing, reprising his Van Helsing role, and his young protege (David Chiang) to defeat the vampires.

Despite some well-staged martial arts battles, the action never really excites and the Chinese scenery is of more interest than the cast which includes the decorative Julie Edge. The film’s one inventive moment sees Chiang impale both himself and Edge on the same stake for a unique double death. Dracula’s expected demise, as Cushing plunges a metal spike into him, is also a reflection of the film’s lack of ideas.

Director Roy Ward Baker fared rather better with his earlier Hammer entries; *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), and *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (1971). *The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires* is very much a case of a missed opportunity by Hammer. The idea of merging the western gothic with

oriental, martial arts/action was a good one but both elements needed to be more fully developed into a stylised formula and hung around a more original premise.

Director Amando de Ossorio has almost single-handedly been responsible for the creation of the Spanish zombie with his series of films based around the Knights Templar. He created horror films that, while deficient in many respects, particularly in their treatment of women (vile and unnecessary-as all such scenes are- I actually prefer the cut versions of the films with such foul misogyny removed- a rare example of positive censorship), they are noteworthy for the creation of the Blind Dead themselves, undead, sightless, Knights Templar, who hunt their prey by sound, their creepy movement not entirely part of our reality, enhanced by a fine score by Anton Garcia Abril.

The first of these films, *Tombs Of The Blind Dead* (1971), begins in a very boring fashion, the film only coming alive when a young woman, Virginia, leaves a train following a disagreement with her friends, Betty and Roger, and spends the night in a derelict monastery (as you did back in the 70s!). During the night, corpses arise from their graves and kill her. In the meantime her friends have become concerned. They start out for the monastery and begin to learn of the legends of the Knights Templar connected with the graveyard.

They are told by the police that their friend's body has been found. Virginia's body, while in the morgue, reanimates and kills the creepy mortuary attendant. Roger and Betty visit a medieval expert, Professor Cantal, who explains the Templars returned from the Crusades practising Satanism, they were executed for this, their bodies hung from trees so the birds could devour their eyes.

Betty's assistant Nina is attacked by Virginia, who is destroyed by fire. Roger and Betty meet Pedro, the Professor's son, who is a bandit leader whom the police believe is responsible for the killing. Pedro brutally attacks Betty. The Templars arise again and Pedro deservedly is killed, as is everyone except Betty. She makes her way to the train, as do The Blind Dead, who kill all the passengers save for Betty. When the train arrives, the Templars find fresh victims, and the film ends on an almost apocalyptic note. To say the film is poorly acted and badly plotted is an understatement. Loathsome in its treatment of women, the film is in fact very dull, save for the Blind Dead themselves. When they are on screen, the film comes alive, and one can only mourn that the entire film isn't of that quality. The Blind Dead, with their mummified faces, blank empty eye- sockets, and rotting monks cowls, are an awesome concept. A true *medieval* dead! Fast forward to the Templars and ignore the rest.

The next film *Return Of The Evil Dead* (1973) is the best of the four. Opening with a flashback to the Templars sacrificing a young girl, from the village of Berzano, in the medieval period. The local villagers however, have had enough of these evil priests, and rise up against them. (This gives this film a great resonance, symbolic of the power of the medieval church, which lived off the people it purported to serve, indeed, it demanded both money, servitude and blood during the Crusades, the Templars in particular, were hated and feared.

The theme of powerful overlords exploiting the peasants, is of course a strong theme in the Hammer Horror cycle, such as *Plague of the Zombies*. The villagers storm the monastery and put out the Templars eyes, so they can't find their way back from hell (a strongly symbolic desecration, the eyes being the windows of the soul in many cultures and times, and of course, an act of vengeance against an oppressive and wealthy church).

The action shifts to the present day. The citizens of Berzano prepare to celebrate the anniversary of the destruction of the Templars by burning them in effigy. A man named Jack arrives to set up fireworks for the celebration. He meets an old flame, Vivian, and they walk together to the ruined Templar monastery. They are met by a crippled man, Murdo, who tells them the Templars will arise this very night.

As the celebrations begin, the Templars do, as promised, arise! (though how they managed to have bodies to re-animate, or even be buried with, since they were incinerated (in-sin-erated?) at the stake, is never explained). On their undead steeds they ride into town (again, the question of where the horses came from is not explained either). All attempts by the villagers to escape or get

help fail. The Templars slaughter the townsfolk, the people who laughed and mocked at what they thought was a myth are no longer laughing but screaming. The beautiful people are not beautiful anymore.

Jack leads a spirited defence, allowing his companions to barricade themselves in the church. They find Murdo already inside, he used a tunnel to enter the church. But when he and another survivor use it to escape, they are both killed. Everyone eventually dies save for Jack, Vivian and a little girl.

After the night of the blind dead has passed, the Templars are still standing sentinel in the morning. They attempt to leave quietly, but the threat has passed, the Blind Dead have lost their power as the sun rises, and they crumple to the ground. Easily the best of all four films. Far more Templars, far less exploitation of women. Taut direction and a strong plot really make this a memorable film that still stands up well today. It owes a lot to *Night Of The Living Dead* but then the majority of post-1968 zombie films do.

The villager's cruel treatment of Murdo is particularly affecting, and certainly de Ossorio is making subtle points about the corruption and disregard shown for ordinary people by the authorities, the Mayor being more like a feudal overlord. General Franco still ruled Spain at the time, so de Ossorio had a deep well to draw inspiration from and the film is all the better for it. The medieval flashback is a fine notion, and really adds to the atmosphere of creeping death across the centuries. And of course, the Templars are an awesome creation indeed, de Ossorio was a fine artist, and his conceptual paintings of the Templars have an incredible, otherworldly vitality.

It is a shame that technological and other considerations held him back from fully realising his vision. (When you think of the huge budgets wasted on dull films, remakes and the like, it makes the conditions de Ossorio struggled under particularly poignant, indeed it serves to remind one that whatever his films shortcomings, even making them was a great achievement, that he would create the Blind Dead is even more impressive.)

The third film in the series, *Horror of the Zombies* (1974), alas, showed a steep decline in quality, and, in the interests of honesty, much as one would wish it otherwise, is utterly dire. The plot, such as it is, concerns a pair of glamour models at sea (much like the viewer!), as part of a publicity stunt (the mind can only boggle, still it was the 70s so perhaps it felt like a good idea at the time!). Their boat is struck by a ghost ship. They radio for help and then enter the ghost ship. A group of people leave to search for them. They find the ghost galleon with the aid of a professor who has been investigating reports of ghost ship sightings in the area.

The professor believes they have entered another dimension (that's one way of putting it). The rescue party go aboard the ghost galleon, and one of their number is killed. The professor finds a logbook that says the galleon was captained by a Dutchman, bringing back Templars excommunicated for devil worship, and apparently, the now undead Templars are guarding a horde of treasure on the ship. They find a hidden room with the said treasure, and a horned human skull, which the Templars apparently worship as an idol, and not a stage prop from *Slayer* as you might expect.

The Blind Dead, as is the way with the Blind Dead, arise once again, and attack their rather stupid visitors, who hold the Templars back with a burning wooden cross, driving them back to their coffins. They try to hail a passing ship but they are invisible due to being in 'another dimension'. They throw the coffins overboard, and swim for shore. The professor stays onboard as he cannot swim. The sockets of the horned skull glow red and the ship combusts. Only two survivors make it to the shore, where the Templars emerge from the water and kill them, (A grimly effective scene, would that there had been more like this).

Once again, de Ossorio's fabulous vision is hampered by his frugal budget. Once again, the treatment of women is loathsome. Even the Templars, removed from their horses, and hampered by the confines of the ship, lack the effectiveness and atmosphere they show at the end of the film. The sole positive outcome of *Horror of the Zombies* would be its influences on John Carpenter's Lovecraftian *The Fog*. Thankfully, the final film in the series, *Night Of The Seagulls* (1975), would be a fitting swan song to de Ossorio's creations.

The film begins with another medieval flashback. A couple are travelling by cart on a foggy night. The woman grows nervous and the man seeks shelter in a nearby house. He is surrounded by white-robed warrior monks who kill him, then abduct the woman, whom they bring to nearby castle where she is sacrificed to a hideous idol.

Moving to the present day. A couple, Doctor Henry Stein and his wife Joan, travel to a Lovecraftian village to take over from its retiring doctor. When they reach the cottage, they find the doctor cannot get away fast enough, curious, Henry joins the old fellow for part of his journey. Whilst Henry is away, Joan tends to the wounds of a misfortunate cripple (what did de Ossorio have against the handicapped, it's positively medieval, in those days people vilely believed that people's physical form was an indicator of their 'good' or 'evil', mind you, they also believed the earth was flat and that women were the spawn of the devil) named Teddy who was beaten by the sadistic (and doubtlessly inbred) villagers. Later, Joan and Henry see a young girl being led to the beach, what they don't see is her being left for the Templars

Joan finds the villagers hostile, the local shopkeeper is reluctant to serve her (I almost expect her to tell her "this is a local shop, for local people, when did you last sacrifice a comely maiden to a group of undead optically challenged religious fanatics?"). Joan meets a young woman named Lucy, who offers to do some housework for Joan.

That night a girl named Tilda runs to the doctor's house, but she is taken away by the villagers and sacrificed. Following Teddy's directions, Henry tries to discover Tilda's fate, but receives only lies as answers. Teddy is pushed from a cliff by the evil villagers and badly hurt. That evening, the villagers come to the doctor's house for Lucy, who leaves with them. Henry wants Joan to leave, as the seagulls howl overhead. Teddy makes his way to the house, returning to the only place he was ever shown kindness, to die. He tells Joan and Henry that for seven nights each year, seven young girls are sacrificed to prevent the Templars from destroying the village.

After death, the souls of the girls come back as seagulls. Henry goes to save Lucy. The villagers run as the Templars turn on the village to seek revenge. Henry, Lucy, and Joan fortify their house from the Blind Dead that besiege them. The Templars break in and kill Teddy. Henry and the girls escape through the attic window. They take the Templars horses and the undead steeds carry them back to the castle. They destroy the idol the Blind Dead worship and the zombie Templars disintegrate, leaving only bones. Once again, there is a different background story, but the film is quite good, the characters more sympathetic, and a strong hint of H.P. Lovecraft. The locals are a foul bestial bunch, next to them the Templars seem almost likeable, they are the true villains of the piece!

A good film for the series to end on. Looking on the positive side, making horror films in Franco's Spain was no easy task, and factoring in problems with infrastructure, budget, and the technology and expertise required to realise de Ossorio's vision, it's a remarkable achievement indeed. We can only feel for such an artist, full of visions he could never realise fully, his unrealised conceptual paintings are ample proof of this. I sincerely hope that with the renewed interest in both the Knights Templars and de Ossorio's work, that some enterprising filmmaker (Guillermo Del Toro would be perfect!) will one day realise fully, this man's unique creation and put the Blind Dead in a film his vision deserves.

"That is not dead Which can eternal lie Yet with strange aeons Even death may die."

(H.P. Lovecraft)

Appropriately enough in Franco's Spain(!), the prolific Spanish filmmaker Jesus Franco has made frequent forays into the zombie genre, some completely unmemorable such as *Virgin Among The Living Dead* (1982), but others such as the *Secret of Dr Orloff* (1962) are almost credible. This, the sequel to *The Awful Dr. Orloff* of the same year, bears little resemblance to the first film, save for the appearance of Marcelo Arroita Jauregui again, this time as a disciple of the evil, titular doctor.

He develops a technique for controlling people's minds through the signal from a radio beam, a theme graphically revised and expanded to modern television in David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*

(1982). Angered by his wife (Pirla Cristal) and her relationship with his brother (Hugo Blanco) he kills and transforms Blanco into a woman-killing zombie, Cristal numbering amongst his victims.

It is the zombie's daughter (Agnes Spaak), who alerts the police to the situation, whereupon the doctor orders his creation to kill Spaak, the zombie's own daughter. For Blanco, however, paternal instinct is still intact and he refuses, turning instead on his master before then vanishing into the woods.

He is finally lured back to the village by the authorities who use his daughter as bait. He is shot as he returns to see her, as she is held captive in the village square. It is a film refreshingly free from glib endings as Franco does try to explore the relationship between the zombie and his daughter, though admittedly, not to its furthest extent. It is still one of Franco's better films although his oneiric *Venus in Furs* (1969), featuring a suitably psychotic Klaus Kinski in the title role, remains the best in his prolific oeuvre.

The most memorable zombie film to originate from Spain (in title especially) is Jorge Grau's *The Living Dead At The Manchester Morgue* (1974), shot in England's scenic Lake District with a Spanish film crew. It remains one of the most assured films made in the "image" of *Night of the Living Dead*.

Here, the political emphasis is even further to the fore in the shape of Ray Lovelock's left-wing biker, Trendy George (the name says it all), and in Arthur Kennedy's ultra right-wing policeman, Sergeant McCormick. Filmed in colour, the exterior scenes are exploited to the full as the screen is awash with red splashes of blood that contrast vividly against the lush green, countryside surroundings. The graphic scenes that are on view here are made all the more so by the painterly backgrounds that they are set against.

The film's political tone is set early on as we learn that a Ministry of Agriculture machine that uses ultra-sonic sound waves to kill pests (the question of insect or human is raised), is in fact making the bugs eat each other, symptoms that are soon prevalent in the human population. The opening shots of a busy city show the "zombified" commuters travelling uncaringly to work, set against a backdrop of billowing pollution clouds. A tramp inhabits a shop doorway and a naked girl runs through the streets unnoticed, as a radio announcer warns of "hysteria when confronted with ecological problems."

The action soon cuts to the picturesque Lake District where a holidaying George meets up with a young woman (Christine Galbo). As George leaves to ask for directions, so Galbo is left alone in her car as a recently reanimated tramp stumbles menacingly towards her. Narrowly escaping him, she takes George to her brother's house only to find that he has been viciously murdered. The two now face an uphill battle with both the zombies and the police who suspect them of being responsible for the murder. As McCormick tells George; "You're all the same. Drugs, sex, every sort of filth." George doesn't exactly ingratiate himself by replying glibly that "Christ and the Saints are out of fashion" and that "Satan's very popular these days."

Free from the questioning they search the local cemetery for the grave of the tramp that attacked them. As they descend into the crypt the film's previously expansive outdoor scenes and open spaces are replaced by an overwhelming sense of claustrophobia, as corpses then begin to rise and attack George and Galbo. Only a climactic escape through an opening in the crypt roof saves them, a sequence imitated in Lucio Fulci's *House By The Cemetery* (1981). An investigating police constable isn't so fortunate and soon becomes a victim of the cannibalistic cadavers, the gaping wounds and viscera courtesy of Fulci's own make-up man, Gianetto de Rossi.

George and Galbo's continuing struggle for survival is once more overshadowed by the actions of the police who, despite hearing reports of new-born babies biting staff in the local hospital, send the helpless Galbo there to "convalesce". She is finally killed there by hordes of zombies, with George left stranded in a police cell. His eventual escape is too late to save her, but he does succeed in killing off the rest of the zombies by setting fire to the hospital.

The film's final irony however, has the hero George, shot "dead" by McCormick amidst the now blazing inferno - the cop's parting message to him being; "I wish the dead would come back to

life you bastard because then I could kill you again !” McCormick does indeed get his “wish” as a revived “zombie” George returns to gain his revenge on the policeman.

For all its similarities to *Night of the Living Dead*, the film still offers enough originality to be considered a worthwhile addition to the zombie cycle. The political aspect is well handled, as throughout the film, George faces more danger from the police than he does from the zombies, as the authorities, with their own “plodding” misconceptions, thwart George in his attempts to save Galbo.

The film continued the movement of the horror film away from the almost “cosy” period horrors of Hammer, to a more modern day setting, reflected by the anxiety felt at the use of radiation to control nature. In this respect the film anticipated later nuclear danger films such as *The China Syndrome* (1979) and *Threads* (1985). The explicit violence - a policeman’s chest is ripped open and his eyes gouged out, a woman has her breast torn off, was to be a major feature in later offerings in the horror cinema.

Grau’s other forays into horror such as *Ceremonia Sangrienta* (1972) have lacked the visceral impact and *mise en scene* that are contained and so expertly deployed in *The Living Dead At The Manchester Morgue*, a film which still stands as the final word in Spanish zombie films.

One country that seemed to have been only marginally influenced by *Night of the Living Dead* was Italy, but it has since more than made up for lost time, especially so by exploiting the success in that country of Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*.

Part of the reason for the popularity of that film in Italy was due to the involvement of Italian director Dario Argento as the co-producer, and the use of his music maestro’s “Goblin” to score the film. Argento’s films such as *Tenebrae* (1982), *Suspiria* (1977) and *Deep Red* (1975) owe more to Hitchcock and Mario Bava than any Romero films, but nevertheless *Dawn of the Dead* was to prove the catalyst for a host of other would-be zombie films made by countless Italian directors.

Of these, some can roughly be termed as exploitation films with barely a minimal undercurrent of wider societal observations, the accent here is firmly placed on action and gore. *City of the Walking Dead* (1980) is one such example, directed by Umberto Lenzi whose other “restrained” films include a duo of cannibal “gut-munchers”, *Eaten Alive* (1980) and the notorious *Cannibal Ferox* (1981).

This film, however, is more of a *Dawn of the Dead* meets *The China Syndrome* hybrid. It stars Hugo Stiglitz as a news reporter who, in the film’s opening, is waiting at an airport to welcome an incoming professor. The plane lands, but as it does it disgorges a seething mass of zombies who proceed to take over the airport and surrounding area. It is revealed that the zombies have been created by a radiation leak that infected the professor, who in turn transmitted the disease to his fellow passengers, infecting all, with the need for fresh blood to survive.

The remainder of the film charts the progress of Stiglitz and his girlfriend (Laura Trotter), who attempt to escape the rampaging zombies. She is finally killed, falling from a helicopter rope ladder into the teeming ranks of zombies below. It is then that Stiglitz “awakens” from what has all apparently been a “nightmare”. The circular conclusion however, sees him going to the airport to meet a plane.....

It’s all a rather tame ending to a film that, besides featuring blood-lusting zombies, also attempts some cursory narrative structure as Stiglitz’s tenacious reporter has his work censored by an authoritarian army General (Mel Ferrer). The ineffectual military “help” that is given to the reporter is as adequate as the unoriginal “it’s all a dream, no it isn’t” conclusion to the film.

Bruno Mattei’s *Zombie Creeping Flesh* (1979) is marginally different in tone to Lenzi’s film as it approaches the problems of Third World starvation in an almost “documentary” style at times. Shots of zombies are liberally inter-cut with realistic footage of natives in their villages, mixing food and performing other daily chores.

The action is set in Papua, at the ironically-named HOPE research station where a team of scientists are experimenting with synthetic food substances. After a laboratory accident, the workforce are transformed into flesh-eating zombies. A force of commandos, led by Franco Giraldi, are sent into the area to rescue a group of journalists trapped there, including Margit Evelyn Newton amongst their number. Gradually, the real purpose behind the research station's experiments becomes clear, as we learn that they have in fact been trying to eliminate overpopulation in the world by reviving dormant cannibalistic instincts in the natives via this newly developed synthetic food.

The zombie scenes owe much to *Dawn of the Dead* - even down to using the same Goblin soundtrack! The perverse logic implied in the Third World/Western conflict - the Third World biting back literally here, isn't enough to bolster the ponderous "action" scenes, a sagging script and any attempts to "out-gross" Romero fall embarrassingly flat.

Marino Girolami's (as Frank Martin in the credits), *Zombie Holocaust* (1980) takes plagiarism even further being a copy of a copy, borrowing not from Romero's film but from Fulci's *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (although Fulci's film does stand up to analysis in its own right as previously discussed).

Zombie Holocaust even "boasts" the same star (Ian McCulloch), somewhat of an Italian horror film veteran having also appeared in Luigi Cozzi's *Alien Contamination* (1981). He plays a scientist who travels with a doctor (Alexandra Delli Colli), to the native island of Kito in the Pacific to investigate the suspected origins of some gruesome happenings in New York, where hearts have been ripped out of cadavers in a hospital morgue.

Once on the island they meet the depraved doctor of the alternative title (*Doctor Butcher M.D.*) - a Dr. Albrera who is practising Dr. Moreau type experiments on human victims and creating zombies whose alarming appearance contrasts vividly with the sight of Colli, who is eventually captured by the natives, stripped, painted and worshipped as an ancient goddess! Yes, they know a thing or two these natives !

She escapes as the cannibal natives capture and then kill the demented doctor, a novel twist, leaving McCulloch to flee the now burning laboratory. The film's *raison d'être* is mainly to show numerous shots of Colli's semi-draped body, coupled with some grisly scenes such as when one helpless victim runs into a jungle trap and is impaled on a row of spikes, his writhing body greedily devoured by the natives.

In another scene, a maggot- infested skull adorns a bed along with the arbitrary inclusion of a half-clad female form in the frame, which sums up the film's exploitative attitude. The film's spirited advertising campaign - speaking of the doctor, ran "He is a depraved, homicidal killer and he makes house calls", along with a picture of a Salvador Dali-posed figure, only with a knife replacing the walking cane, unfortunately, being more inventive than anything contained in the actual film. This is one case of the cooking pot boiling dry and leaving us *Zombie Holocaust* as a burnt offering!

There are no native zombies in *Cannibal Apocalypse* (1980), as the zombies shown here are all the product of the western world. The film is one of director Antonio Margheriti's few excursions into the zombie genre, his other films ranging from the science fiction orientated *Planet of the Lifeless Men* (1961) to the gothic horror of *The Long Hair of Death* (1964).

Cannibal Apocalypse has John Saxon from *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1985) fame playing a Vietnam veteran returning home to America. The opening scenes show the war at its height as Saxon discovers two American soldiers imprisoned in a bamboo covered pit, tucking into a Vietcong. As he offers them a helping hand, one of the G.I. cannibals sees it only as lunch and bites a chunk out of the horrified Saxon's arm.

Later, the three men meet up again in Atlanta, Georgia, where one of the survivors (John Morghen), goes on a killing spree after his release from a mental hospital. He bites a girl in a porn cinema and then "holes up" in a nearby shopping mall. He is saved from the police by a calm-talking Saxon.

This only paves the way for future bloodshed though as the zombies, led by the infected Saxon and Morghen, proceed to chomp their way through the remaining members of the cast, culminating in a final showdown with the authorities by the city sewers. Now it is the G.I.'s who are hunted down and "torched" by soldiers wielding flamethrowers, a reference to earlier in the film to the fate that is meted out by the G.I.'s to the Vietnamese. Now we have turned full circle, the hunters have become the hunted. Only Saxon survives the encounter, to die with somewhat greater dignity later in a suicide pact with his wife. His "disease" lives on though, now in the shape of the young girl next door who Saxon had previously bitten, the victim's fridge now chock-full of human meat as man has now become the ultimate in packaged consumer goods.

Margheriti does little to show the affects of war on its survivors and on society as a whole; he is content to merely pile on one gory excess after another, lacking the style so freely exhibited in his earlier films. His one moment of inspiration here is the camera shot that is taken through the gaping hole in one man's chest, the closest the lens comes to actually breathing life into a character itself. This, and the humorously named G.I. Charles Bukowski (aka Charles Bronson) are the film's only imaginative elements.

An Italian zombie film that does succeed despite its lack of characterisation is Lamberto Bava's *Demons* (1986), a kinetic offering, high on style, low on plot, but fascinatingly escapist for all that. Bava's pedigree certainly goes unchallenged, being the son of the late and great Mario Bava, who was the director of such stylish gothic horrors as *Mask of Satan* (1960), *Planet of the Vampires* (1965) and *Curse of the Dead* (1965), as well as giallo films such as *Blood and Black Lace* (1964) and *Bay of Blood* (1971).

Lamberto garnered his first experience of directing on one of his father's final films *Shock* (1977), before his own creations; *A Blade in the Dark* (1981) and *Macabre* (1981). *Demons* atmospheric start has the two glowing eyes of a train peering out of the darkness at us, accompanied by Claudio Simonetti's synthesised variations on Prokofiev's music. Two girls, Sharel (Natasha Hovey) and Kathy (Fiore Argento), are given free tickets to a horror film preview at the ominously shadowed Metropol cinema in Berlin. At the screening, a black prostitute cuts herself on a promotional mask in the foyer, a neat echo of Mario Bava's *Mask of Satan*, which also features a spiked, satanic mask.

Inside the darkened theatre the action then cuts to a film within a film style narrative as the diverse audience watch a film about the discovery of the tomb of Nostradamus. Gradually, the scenes on the cinema screen of demonic possession are duplicated in the cinema itself as the prostitute metamorphoses into a razor-teethed, gooey-eyed demon with taloned fingernails. As the cinema exits become mysteriously blocked, she bites her way through the others in the cinema who in turn become zombies. The remainder of the film is taken up with breathtaking action scenes inside the cinema; there is an indoor motor bike chase and a helicopter which crashes through the cinema roof at one stage.

Eventually the girls and their dates, George (Urban Barberini) and Ken (Karl Zinny), find their number infected by the demons, leaving only two survivors who escape using the helicopter winch cable to haul themselves up onto the cinema roof.

Despite the almost consistent lack of characterisation there is still plenty to admire in Bava's film. He certainly knows how to create tension in an original manner. An opening sequence sees one of the girls chased by a mysterious figure wearing a mask, in the menacing underground station, only to find him catch up with her, and merely give her free tickets to the Metropol.

The figure surfaces again during the film's climax as the survivors scramble on top of the cinema. His efforts to push them back down to the zombies below are thwarted as he is finally impaled, face down, on a metal spike. Bava makes good use of his locations, his camera ever prowling the gloomy corridors and corners of the eerily deserted cinema, with shafts of fluorescent light warning of the impending appearance of the demons.

The exteriors, shot in Berlin, also manage to capture some of the ambivalence and tension inherent in the all-pervasive East/West divide that then clouded the city. Bava infuses the film with bravura action sequences, with samurai sword wielding bikers slicing up legions of zombies in

bloody fashion and manages to integrate the potentially troublesome film-within-a-film technique into the picture, which has thus been called *The Evil Dead meets the Purple Rose of Cairo*, (the latter, Woody Allen's cinematic screen comedy).

Bava's cinematic style betrays his father's influence, and he also shows admiring glances in the direction of various genre films. The cinema lobby in *Demons* sports a poster of Herzog's *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979) and the scenes where one of the heroes transforms into a fiery zombie, pleading for his friends to kill him, recalls Roger's agonised demise in *Dawn of the Dead*. The diverse cross-section of characters in the film's cinema audience which include a prostitute, a pimp, a blind man and a vampish usherette, are the type of people that we would expect to find in a Dario Argento film such as *Cat O' Nine Tails* (1971), not altogether surprising as he did in fact produce *Demons*. The film makes for compelling viewing as a tour de force for Bava's own fluid camera style, matched by his affinity for highly-paced, frenzied action sequences. The film's climax, as the demons can be seen sprawling over other parts of the city leaves us in no doubt as to the dangers to be faced in the sequel, *Demons 2* (1987).

The zombie may have crossed many continents and reached many oceans but New Zealand has certainly not been his favourite port of call. David Blyth's 1985 film *Death Warmed Up* goes some of the way to redressing the balance, being a cautionary tale of hospital brain operations that turn patients into zombies.

The film's numerous action scenes carry the narrative weaknesses in much the same way as the aforementioned *Demons*. Here we see a surgeon (Gary Day) programming a young man (Michael Hurst) to be mean to his parents, this he carries out with zeal as he proceeds to slaughter them to death. On his release from an insane asylum the blonde-haired zombie encounters the surgeon again and discovers that he is still carrying out his experiments on a remote island. It is left to the now reformed Hurst, to defeat the army of homicidal zombies that Day has created.

The graphic scenes on display here - heads explode a la Cronenberg's *Scanners* (1980) and an underground bike chase ensues, ride uneasily with the film's otherwise conservative viewpoint and ideal, in itself a by-product the less than prolific New Zealand film industry has nurtured. Its genre films have been few and far between with *Scarecrow* starring John Carradine being an interesting example from 1983. In more recent times of course interest has exploded with the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy offering a spectacular opportunity to boost both the Kiwi film industry and the numbers of tourists. Their close relations across the sea have fared better with *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), *The Last Wave* (1977), *Patrick* (1978) and *Undead* (2003) all emanating from Australian shores.

The French have also been reluctant to delve into the explicit images of the zombie film, preferring instead a preoccupation with realism, surrealism and eroticism, elements which do not lend themselves easily to the zombie genre!

As a result, the French cinema has produced pictures such as Jean Luc Goddard's *Weekend* (1967) and Alain Resnais' *J'taime, Je T'Aime* (1967), coupled with his *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) and Roger Vadim's *Barbarella* (1968) that all stress such qualities.

The French zombie film has been left almost exclusively in the hands of one Jean Rollin, whose previous horrors such as *Les Frissons des Vampires* (1970), *Requiem Pour un Vampire* (1971) and *Levres de Sang* (1975) had concentrated more on the implicit eroticism of the female form than on the fatal charms of the vampire. His *Pesticide* (1978), translated to *The Grapes of Death*, is the most commercially accessible of his films, owing to its American origins as opposed to Rollin's own unique brand of horror. The film's plotting recalls *Night of the Living Dead*, but its characters are based more upon the "cross-section of society" stereotypes found in innumerable American "disaster" movies, as in *The Poseidon Adventure* and *The Towering Inferno* from 1974.

Only here the "normal" world of the disaster film is jettisoned in favour of Rollin's own "fantasy" world as surely as Romero's claustrophobic farmhouse scenes are replaced with Rollin's agoraphobic use of wide open spaces. The film has Elisabeth (Marie Georges Pascal) travelling to

Southern France to join her lover, when she is assaulted on a deserted train by what looks to be a corpse, (Romero's *Martin* also has the synonymous vampire praying on a lone girl train passenger in its opening sequence).

After escaping from other such corpses, Elisabeth teams up with two apparently "normal" Frenchmen and they shelter in an overgrown vineyard after leaving the train. She then learns that the vines here have been infected with pesticide and are responsible for the zombie contagion that is spreading across the country.

The film's conclusion sees her realising with horror, that she too, will eventually succumb to the infection as she gradually begins to lose her sanity, accelerated by the gruesome sight of her former lover and friends being killed, their heads cut off and their torsos' impaled on pitchforks and crucified.

The sight of faces crumbling and disintegrating is indicative of Rollin's skill and style at manipulating the horror audience, and film, with his concept of France's national drink turning people into zombies, being an audacious one.

Rollin's *Zombie Lake* (1980) may not be as successful as it could have been but then this is mainly due to the late appointment of Rollin to direct the film, having taken over from the original choice, Jess Franco. The film features German soldiers returning as zombies to haunt the inhabitants of the village that had previously killed Nazi soldiers and dumped them all into the village lake. The opening scenes recall *Jaws* (1975), as a young woman swimming in the lake is caught by a zombie rising from the depths below. A battle between the zombies and the villagers ensues, culminating with the elimination of the German "dead" by a youngster who sets fire to the mill that has become the soldier's headquarters.

The boy has symbolically been the product of an affair between a local woman and a German soldier. Considering the short amount of time he was given to work on the film Rollin does a creditable job in reviving the zombie soldiers who look suitably repulsive with their green and petrifying faces and dishevelled uniforms. The film has been wrongly credited on occasions to director Alain Lesoeur who in fact made *L'abime des Morts Vivants* (1981) whereas Jess Franco went on to direct a similar piece to Rollin's, *El Lago de las Virgenes* (1981).

The Living Dead Girl (1982), one of Rollin's best films, has a plot faintly reminiscent of Georges Le Franju's *Eyes Without A Face* (1959), as a woman (Marina Pierro), seeks out potential victims for her friend (Francois Blanchard) as did Alida Valli in Franju's film. Blanchard, as the dead girl, is revived by earthquake gasses and then proceeds to consume more and more blood, haunting a castle in the volcanic area of the Arvenge where she had once lived. Gradually, she finds her memory, and more importantly, her conscience, returning to her, including an awareness now of her "death" and "rebirth".

Pierro, as the devoted childhood friend, provides the victims with which Blanchard now satiates her bloodlust. Eventually, it is this all-consuming appetite that overcomes both love and death, culminating with her killing Pierro. The film is interesting in its creation of a zombie with "feelings" and emotions, no mindless automaton here. Despite this inner intensity however, the living dead character of Blanchard is still left a slave to her own suffering, she may maintain the appearance of life but it is death she longs for.

Her devoted friend, who teaches her to talk and to "live" again, is still cast unceremoniously aside in the end by an inconsolable Blanchard. Her revived memories of her old house and of childhood toys are simply icons of a past life that she can never reclaim. For her, death is an appealing release from the torment of a painful past life remembered and of a conscience that is of no consolation to her now. The surreal images of the billowing gases effusing from the earth are like the life-spirit that is now being sucked out once again from a rueful Blanchard.

Like the French, the Chinese cinema, and oriental films in general, have rarely diversified into the zombie genre, preferring instead "monster on the loose" pictures such as *Godzilla - King of the Monsters* (1954) and *Rodan* (1956), featuring atomically created mutations, a lingering influence from the atom bomb destruction that so devastated Japan. This range has extended to cover

other horror genres such as the vampire film, with 1971's *Lake of Dracula*, but nowhere have the age old fixations of Chinese cinema been more inventively and excitingly remoulded than in Ching Sju Tung's *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987). Despite the title the film manages to utilise a phenomenal range of influences, from the stylised martial arts sequences, (a relic from Kurosawa's samurai epics such as *The Seven Samurai* - 1954), to the images of rapidly decaying zombies the like of which have populated Romero's films and *Ghost Story* (1981) amongst others.

The film itself has a very contemporary appearance, evoked through the graphic action scenes, loud pop music and fluid camera movements, all topped with some dazzling special effects. A collection of Ming dynasty, supernatural tales, forms the basis for the film's premise which follows a young tax collector who encounters a beautiful ghost whilst looking one night for a place to sleep. At first, he resists her subtle charms but is gradually lured to her by the romantic sounding music with which she serenades him from her lakeside abode.

Little does he realise that she is, in fact, held in thrall by an androgynous tree demon, Lord Black. Despite warnings from the local people, he elects to stay the night at the haunted Lan Ro temple. This acts as the catalyst for the dead zombies inside the temple to revive and begin to converge on the unsuspecting traveller.

The breathtakingly paced denouement has the tax collector, aided by the ghost and a swordsman priest, Yen, conspire to defeat the evil tree demon, resulting in a final battle in a ghostly-shrouded world of Hell. The tax collector and Yen escape, returning the ghost's ashes to her family estate in the nearby graveyard, to affect her spiritual release from the tree demon.

A Chinese Ghost Story is sumptuously filmed in an invigorating style. Old fashioned, creaking gothic images are revitalised here, especially so in the mist-laden forest that is densely filled with grotesquely twisted trees and an ever-moaning wind.

Howling dogs roam the wood, silhouetted against the night sky, their eyes burning as brightly as the glowing lantern that lights up the tax collector's way. The fog-shrouded graveyard he visits has verdant green plant life sprawling amidst the dull grey tombstones, as bells toll ominously and skulls sit silently atop the headstones, a symbol of the gothic regalia that pervades the film.

The prowling camera that rushes through the forest in the opening scenes is clearly inspired by the electrifying *The Evil Dead* (1982), but takes the formula even further as the all-seeing lens circumnavigates the lake house before then exploding into the interior, where the ghost is making love to an unwilling victim, her "love" sapping his life. This action is all surrounded by the type of kaleidoscopic lighting that recalls early Mario Bava films. The ghost's next victim fares even worse - being reduced to a shrivelled zombie shell, that nevertheless has to be stabbed in the forehead and set on fire to kill it.

The film's numerous action scenes owe much to the director, a former martial arts sequence adviser, as lurid red blood splashes across the screen in the opening scenes where the bemused tax collector witnesses a samurai battle and is himself tainted with the blood of its participants. The blood continues to flow in the climactic confrontation with the tree demon. All around, foliage comes alive and soon the haunted temple is surrounded by spiralling tree branches and leafy tentacles which coil around the awe-struck characters inside. Tree stems burst through trap doors and walls encircling the temple like the giant octopus straight out of *Warlords of Atlantis* (1978), rippling underneath the floor in much the same fashion as the creature from *The Thing* (1982).

The slimy tentacles pummel the collector about the face, submerging him under a sea of mucus as crocodile jaws emerge simultaneously with sinuous roots which further entrap the helpless victim. The film's puppet zombies are drawn from Ray Harryhausen's seminal skeletal creations in *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), and it is around them that much of the film's charmingly innocent humour revolves.

In one sequence, the collector explores the temple cellar, completely oblivious to the zombies behind him that crumble instantaneously to dust as he pulls open some window shutters, so flooding the room with sunlight. He narrowly escapes the zombies clawing hands later on when

he is dropped and then raised in yo-yo fashion by Yen over an open trapdoor as zombie fingers clutch at him from out of the darkness below.

The rich vein of humour that continues throughout the film is also well illustrated when the hapless collector is once again found bobbing up and down - only this time when concealing himself from Lord Black's female sirens by hiding in a bathing barrel full of water. He times his surfacing for air to perfection - grabbing an eyeful of the de-robed ghost who stand before him on each occasion.

This is typical of the film's approach and we know that despite the graphic deaths that pervade the piece, the innocent humour and fantastical fairytale atmosphere continually remind us of the fact that the main characters will remain free from harm if not danger. Although the film does draw heavily from a vast range of influences it has enough style and wit of its own, coupled with its unique *joi de vivre*, to elevate it above the purely imitative status that so many other films fall into.

A Chinese Ghost Story, together with its eventual sequels, emerges as a promising product from the "new wave" Chinese cinema which has spawned other films such as *In The Wild Mountains* (1986) and draws on such diverse entries as *Zoo Warriors From The Magic Mountain* (1983). The priest, played by Woo Mar is himself no stranger to the horror genre having directed horror comedies such as *The Dead and the Deadly* (1982).

In terms of China's oriental cousin, Japan, one of the main obstacles to having any meaningful zombie film entries lies in the cultural/religious issue of the majority of the dead being cremated, leaving little to resurrect!

This seemingly insurmountable problem is circumvented by the old "let's infect the living with radiation from a stray asteroid" ploy which is how Kazuo Komizu's seminal *Battle Girl* (1991) begins. Although the by-product of this is to turn the citizens of Tokyo into the walking dead, (the film is also known as *The Living Dead in Tokyo Bay*), Komizu's camera lens appears just as interested in the shapely charms of female wrestler Cutey Suzuki as the heroine Keiko.

Suzuki spends the majority of the film squeezed into a tight black PVC outfit and leading the survivors charge against the Self-Defence Forces who have turned against the civilians. Featuring probably the only scenes to date of zombies being wrestled to defeat (courtesy of Keiko's pro-wrestling skills), *Battle Girl* is also noticeable for the maniacal army general who tries to create his own zombie-human hybrid. This intended "super race" is characterised by their badly applied face paint and spiky shoulder-pads in true post-apocalyptic film fashion!

Tetsuro Takeuchi's *Wild Zero* (1999) also features an extra-terrestrial theme with aliens from outer space landing on earth and turning the populace into zombies. Takeuchi's opus plays an entirely different riff (literally) with its teenage punk hero, Ace (Masashi Endo) joining forces with Guitar Wolf, his favourite rockabilly band, in order to save the earth and find true love, though not necessarily in that order!

Ultra-violent, *Wild Zero* plays with a *Night of the Living Dead* meets *Spinal Tap* vibe with gun-shooting motorcycles and guitars, together with some incidental delights, including the bickering couple who actually become more likable once transformed into zombies and the object of Ace's desires revealed to be not quite what "she" seems?

Following hot on the heels of Takeuchi's entry is Atsushi Muroga's *Junk* (2000), only this time using gaijin or "foreigner" soldiers instead. Inspired by *The Return of the Living Dead* and the *Resident Evil* video games, the film revolves around US Army chemical weapons being accidentally uncovered and unleashed by some amateur bank robbers. That the thieves spend as much time squabbling with gangsters to keep hold of their loot as they do avoiding the newly created living dead, adds to the humour here, though the requisite lashings of gore are still spilled to reinforce *Junk*'s horror status.

Continuing with this almost spoof-like tone is Naoyuki Tomomatsu's *Stacy* (2001). Eschewing the need for any alien intervention it is the "alien" world of the teenager which is highlighted here as a number of girls aged between 15-17 years old are, after a brief period of ecstasy known as "Near

Death Happiness”, transformed into zombies or “stacies”. With dismemberment by chainsaw the preferred option and the remains left for the refuse collectors to dispose of, it is as well that the Japanese local authorities appear more conscientious in their waste collection than the UK’s, with the current clamouring for fortnightly or even monthly collections!

Borrowing liberally from Romero’s *Day of the Dead*, (the zombie cleansing operation is headed by “The Romero Troops”) the film has a group of scientists who have captured some of the “stacies” in order to search for a cure for the teenage epidemic.

Based on a novel by former rock star turned writer Kenji Otsuki, (who appears in the film peddling “Bruce Campbell’s Right Hand 2” device for dismembering your daughter), Tomomatsu film is a diverse mixture of ambitious, over the top carnage, uneasily married with some surprisingly sentimental scenes which, whilst quite effective (and affecting), in no way compensate for the leaden pace and scatter-gun approach.

With the release of Ryuhei Kitamura’s *Versus* in 2001, the Japanese zombie film genre reached its apex. A volatile hybrid of gore, martial arts and samurai influences, the frenetic pace and outre violence manfully disguise the obvious budgetary limitations. The intriguing premise sees Prisoner KSC2-303 (Tak Sakaguchi) on the run following his recent escape from prison. His “escape” appears short-lived however, as he encounters a gang of yakuza and their female hostage in the nearby woods.

As KSC2-303 continues his flight, now accompanied by The Girl (Chieko Misaka), their pursuers are joined by The Man (Hideo Sakaki) and his clique of smartly-dressed assassins. As if all this wasn’t enough for audiences to chew on, Kitamura throws in the little matter of the woods being the Forest of Resurrection, conveniently positioned over the 444th gate into the world of the dead, with anyone dying in the forest doomed to return to (after) life.

In a final act of audacious revelation, we discover that the main protagonists are continually being reincarnated to fight a war that has in effect been raging for thousands of years - think *The Evil Dead* meets *Groundhog Day*!

Just like Raimi, the camera here is restless - all tilted angles and relentless pacing, supremely stylish amongst the broad stroke violence. Every scene counts here as a spirited cast combine to infuse the film with a wildly imaginative and entertaining foray into zombiedom. The gaping chest wound of one victim which provides the unlikely framing for one particularly nauseous camera shot, may recall the excesses of exploitation fayre such as *Cannibal Apocalypse*, but with shades of Raimi and Peter Jackson exhibited by Kitamura’s work here, perhaps his eventual aim is far higher.

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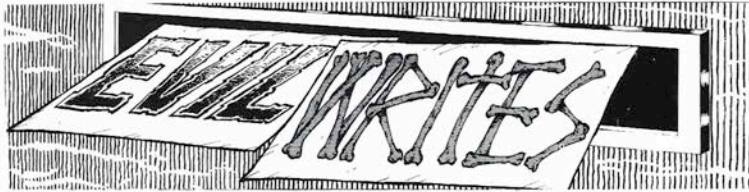
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Whatever your views on NECRONOMICON I'd like to hear them whether they be good, bad or just plain ugly! Or, if you want to air your views on wider aspects of the horror/fantasy genre then let's hear from you - all letters to the following address:

Evil Writes
15 Jubilee Road
NEWTON ABBOT
Devon
TQ12 1LB

Dear Mr Black,

Thanks for issue 1 of "Necronomicon", which seems to be well up to "Samhain/Film Extremes/Giallo Pages standard. I look forward to issue 2.

I don't know whether the comments of a new reader are of interest, but here goes:

PLUS POINTS:-
 1. Quality of illustrations - excellent. I was particularly impressed by the clarity and size of reproduced stills - a point on which too many fanzines fall down.

2. Editorial policy - I heartily agree with the decision to concentrate on older material. Many magazines don't seem to realise that the audience for 80's style "splatter" and older horror are substantially different. I know I'm not alone in seeing a declining standard after the early 80's as special effects take over from the creation of atmosphere and films appear to be aimed more and more explicitly at a teenage audience.

3. Film reviews - a good selection and intelligently handled (further below for a quibble).

4. Vipco Interview - excellent. Nice to see as well that you were prepared to give a Vipco distributed film (Lenzi's *Eaten Alive*) an indifferent review.

5. *Living Dead At The Manchester Morgue* - good to see this excellent film given more than the faint praise it usually receives. It is not simply an inferior copy of Romero's overpraised *Night of the Living Dead*.

MINUS POINTS:-
 1. I think that the coverage of TV-based material (eg. *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*) and mainstream fantasy (*Fu Manchu* and *Sherlock Holmes*) belongs elsewhere. I appreciate your editorial calls for diversity but other magazines specialise in this material to a

degree which will not be possible in "Necronomicon", and to my mind it rather disrupts the "feel" of the magazine to come across an article on this material alongside reviews of *Bava, Aranda* etc.

2. Presentation of film reviews could be improved. The ideal is the "Sight and Sound" format of full technical and cast listings followed by a plot synopsis and separate comment. If this can't be achieved could you at least list; title as originally released (eg. *La Novia Ensangrentada*), country of origin, alternative titles, director and cinematographer, screenwriter and principal cast members? Also the timing of the review copy?

Paul Bowes
Swinton
Manchester

Phew! Thanks for the comments Paul. I'd particularly like to hear from readers if they find the diversity here too jarring. I don't plan to start listing full credits etc. as this simply takes up too much space but I'd certainly consider incorporating brief title details and credits if there's enough feedback on this.

Dear Andy,

Many thanks for my copy of "Necronomicon". What you have here is a wonderfully written, nicely produced and well balanced magazine.

I know we share a common love of zombie movies and it was your book "Zombies" (a most excellent read by the way) - (yes, the *cheques in the post!* ed), that moved me to send for "Necro".

The only print of *The Living Dead* I've seen is the European Creative Films print that's available at the moment so it was great to see some stills of the missing scenes.

As for the other articles:-
 Hammer's *Brides of Dracula* - the more Hammer the better!!

The Rollin article, all I can say is I'd like to hear more about his work and where I may possibly get my hands on some. (*Redemption Video have the rights to all Rollin's vampire films which are due for release during the next year* - ed.)

I read the Sherlock Holmes article with

relish as this particular film is one of the best Holmes treatments I have seen. I await articles on *Rathbone* with bated breath.

The U.N.C.L.E. page I could do without but this is a minor gripe in an otherwise perfect publication.

Please, please, please more *Bava*, more *Fulci*, some *Soavi* and if you must cover *Argento* (the absolute master film-maker) lets have a refreshing new approach to his work, though topping John Martin's "Magic all around us" in "Samhain" will be a very hard task indeed.

I am also very glad to see that "Necro" will be a Jason & Freddy free zone. The two film series of these two characters I feel have diminished the horror genre to mere parody.

PS. Any plans for an article on "Godzilla" as I've got this real soft spot for the ugly great lizard.

Andy Jones
Stoke-on-Trent

No plans for any Godzilla yet unless you fans out there want to persuade me otherwise!

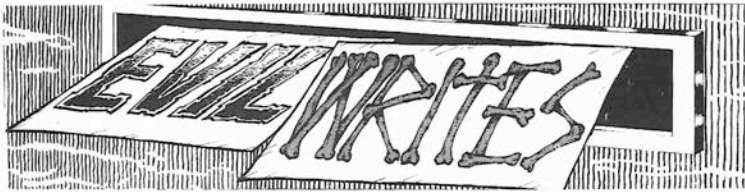
Dear Andy,

Thanks very much for the copy of "Necronomicon" which I thoroughly enjoyed. The *Living Dead* is one of my favourites and in fact, we will be looking at it in "We Belong Dead" '5.

There was a really interesting mixture of articles and reviews. Nice to see the underrated *Brides of Dracula* there, definitely one of Hammer's best vampire films. Another favourite of mine is *Murder By Decree* so it was good to see a lengthy article on that. Although Stephen Knight's case for the identity of the Ripper is full of holes, it makes an interesting story. As Ripperologist Robin Odell has said, when we are all standing in heaven and the identity of the Ripper is at last revealed, we'll all go "who"?! I also have to admit I enjoyed the *Love Bites* review!

Eric McNaughton
Nottingham

As most of you are no doubt aware, Eric edits the excellent Hammer zine "WED" and will, I hope, be contributing Hammer articles to future editions of "Necronomicon".



Whatever your views on **NECRONOMICON** I'd like to hear them whether they be good, bad or just plain ugly! Or, if you want to air your views on wider aspects of the horror/fantasy genre then let's hear from you - all letters to the following address:

Evil Writes
 15 Jubilee Road
 NEWTON ABBOT
 Devon
 TQ12 1LB

Hello Andy,

Thanks for issue 1 of "Necronomicon". I've since read issue 2 and have a few notes of correction.

In *The Vampire Lovers* Ingrid Pitt is actually the vampire Mircalla Karnstein. That's what it actually says on her crypt. She uses the names Marcilla when visiting Peter Cushing's home, and Carmilla in Madeline Smith's. It's interesting that this is the only film which uses the lore that the vampire must return to his/her grave each night to rest, and can not rest without his/her shroud.

In *Lust for a Vampire*, Yutte Stensgard's character is identified as really Carmilla Karnstein, and uses the name Mircalla. Was this a mistake, or did the filmmakers intend for this to be a different vampire? Yutte's character doesn't seem to share Ingrid's disdain of men; could this have been intentional. It would explain the fact that Yutte's corpse doesn't have a disconnected head.

For *Twins of Evil* (look out for a piece on this by Tim Greaves in a future issue - Ed), the guest appearance of a female vampire is by Mircalla - which is the name on her crypt. Oddly, she then disappears from the film, never figuring into the following events, and she is never shown being re - destroyed.

Regarding your review of *Dracula* (U.S. *Horror of Dracula*); Lucy is not the daughter of the Holmwood's, she is Arthur's sister. ("Dear brother, let me kiss you."). The little girl is not Lucy's sister, but the daughter of the housekeeper. ("I saw Aunt Lucy."). Interestingly, the quote from Van Helsing that you used points out that Lucy is Arthur's sister and not his daughter.

Few people mention one of my favourite moments in the Terence Fisher *Dracula*; when the vampire unceremoniously drops

Mina into the hole he's dug, and her horror when she realises that he intends to bury her alive.

Bill Connolly
 Los Angeles

Yikes! I think I can consider myself well and truly reprimanded now. All I can plead in my defence is that enthusiasm outweighed critical faculties and attention to detail, coupled with a few too many visits to the local cider bar which have degenerated the brain cells considerably! For those in search of such encyclopedic knowledge and minutiae, check out Bill's essential "Spaghetti Cinema" zine.

Dear Andy,

Thanks for the copy of "Necronomicon" 2. I'm more and more surprised by the high quality of the new British fanzines, long gone are the badly copied zines as "Macabre" or "Sheer Filth" and your "Necronomicon" is for sure, really well made.

The problem is that I'm 99% interested in Asiatic movies. *Godzilla* (I'm a mega-fanatic of the Big G!), Japanese super heroes and B movies from the 1950's - 70's. So the arguments covered in "Necronomicon" aren't exactly what I like to read about. Never liked Hammer movies, have had enough of Buttgerit and his mega over-rated *Nekromantik 2* (even if I very much liked the first *Nekromantik* and *Der Todeskin* is pretty interesting), and about Italian movies I don't know what to say. I like some of them, but I think that all that could be said about them has been said already.

The Men Behind The Sun could have been more interesting if the author of the review didn't reduce the examination to a commentary of the gore scenes. *Men Behind The Sun* aka *Maruta* aka *Black Sun 731* (its original Chinese title), is certainly something more than a gore movie.

It's based on real facts. Also, it's not a Japanese movie (it will never be released there apparently as it's strongly anti-Japanese) but from Hong Kong. A sequel has been made, *Laboratory of the Devil* aka *Maruta 2* but it isn't as strong as part one, it

just uses the same idea in a much more exploitative way.

Good to see Traci Lords! Are you a fan of her? My sex-goddess is the Brit Sarah Young, pity she's now retired to conduct a wife's life! Sigh-sob!

Well, I hope my comments aren't too hard, but again, "Necronomicon" is really well made and you'll probably be surprised to know that it's available here in Milano in the biggest comic shop! I saw issue 1 and I think it is now sold out!

Max Della Mora
 Milan

First me, and now Mr Stroud taken to task! Thanks for the info Max and yes, you can look forward to seeing more of Traci in future issues (ho, hum!) and possibly Mrs Young who is certainly a better ambassador for Britain than any of our politicians could ever hope to be!

Dear Andy,

I was reasonably impressed (take it from me, that is really a compliment as I'm notoriously loathed to praise anything - I usually go out of my way to deliberately not enjoy or appreciate things!) with the first issue of "Necronomicon."

I was going to berate you for the lack of an original title - but then, what is the ideal title for a horror-type fanzine? The answer sure has me stumped. I did feel that *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* rested uneasily a little bit amongst the rest of the contents though. Never mind, I'm sure you won't let a minor quibble of mine worry you in the slightest.

Nice to see a feature on *The Blood Splattered Bride*, as I hadn't seen any mention of it for ages, almost forgotten such a film ever existed. Sounds interesting, but even more distressingly I've never seen the film itself - and would dearly love to, not least because of Alexandra Bastedo, who in the guise of Sharon MacReady (Champton!), was one of my childhood heart-throbs. How sweet eh? *Living Dead At The Manchester Morgue* also seems to have been enjoying a resurgence just lately - and why not?

Anyway, just send me issue 2 pronto and

If you're really unlucky, I may even write back and tell you what I thought of it - or I may just go back to sleep until issue 3!

**John Worley
Northampton**

I guess I should feel honoured that John awoke from his slumbers long enough to write to me! Anyway, as you've mentioned, some features have proved more popular than others so Napoleon Solo and the boys will be taking a rest for the time being - Close Channel D!

Dear Andy,

Hi again and many thanks for "Necro" 2. I'm glad to see the high standards of issue 1 have been maintained.

Well, a vampire special, hey, nothing unique or new there but what I was pleased to see was the variety of bloodsucking movies under scrutiny.

Suffice to say, it all made for enlightening reading and also persuaded me to part with my hard earned cash for a copy of *Daughters of Darkness* which I thoroughly enjoyed (if only I could purchase *The Vampire Lovers*!! Please could someone tell me if it's available on sell thru as my efforts to locate it have been anything but fruitful.

Now onto *Cannibal Holocaust*, as the article said, "love it or hate it", I think I'm definitely a "love it" man.

In the words of Chas Balun it is probably "the last cannibal film anyone will ever need to see" mainly because compared to other so called third world classics, it is head and shoulders above the rest.

I found it to be a cleverly put together film running its audience through a whole range of emotions. It sets its pace perfectly and builds to a crescendo that leaves the viewer mentally exhausted and battered senseless.

I felt numb after watching. The film never loses its impact on repeated viewings. The BBFC be damned - an obscenity my ass, a definite must see.

Another fine choice of movie in the Holmes section, Peter Cushing is one of my all time favourite actors, and a childhood hero, so many thanks for a fine review.

I'm not sure that Spaghetti Westerns fit the magazine but if it suits other readers it's something I can live with.

All in all, another great read yet again but where were the cheap subscriptions? (Yes, that is a hint!).

**Andy Jones
Stoke-on-Trent**

Yes, it's Andy Jones again - will he make issue 4 too!! I did endeavour to include some neglected films in the vampire section which most people seem to have enjoyed. *The Vampire Lovers* was due for a sell thru release a year or two ago but nothing happened. It still appears on ITV stations from time to time as a late night film so that's

probably your best bet, unless any readers can advise otherwise?

Daughters of Darkness is one of my own personal favourites - great locations, good music and some ravishingly erotic vampires to boot!

As far as the Spaghetti's go, I plan to include many more as so many have a huge cult following and are so much more interesting than their American counterparts - save for a certain Mr Eastwood of course!

Dear Andy,

Thanks for issue 2 of "Necronomicon" - a vast improvement!! Please bear with me while I lend a critical eye to it! (Oh no! - Ed).

Vampires, vampires, vampires - excellent features on all the films. I'm still in two minds about Coppola's *Dracula* though. Great imagery, crap acting. Keanu Reeves should retire now, as nothing he did after "Bill & Ted" will ever be taken seriously, ever. Even the reliable Ms. Fylder tripped up on this one. I think Drac' should have sucked her dry first, then turned his eternal attentions to the infinitely more lustful Ms. Frost. Do you think it ever occurred to Coppola to set the film in England with an English cast?

I know this is probably crying over spilt milk but couldn't you have covered *Martin and Near Dark* as well - two major classics I'm sure you'll agree.

Redemption - It's good to see a massive surge of life pumped back into the market. They seem to have the right idea in packaging as well, classy covers that improve even the average stuff. A definite alternative to a lot of the mainstream cinema tosh that gets churned out under the title "psychological thriller" mention no names, *Basic Instinct* - I hate that crap!

Nice to see that you don't just stick to one genre - *Once Upon A Time In The West* is an epic amongst epics. How about *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* if you haven't considered it yet.

Finally, I may be hugely interested in everything demented, sick and perverse, but I haven't seen half the films connected with those words which is why I rely on stuff like "Necro" to inform me and guide me into deeper depths. I mean, I only saw *The Exorcist* for the first time last year! - (that French and Saunders sketch kept flashing in my mind). More obscure articles, keep them rolling!!!

Before I leave, here's the Jones' selection of books to read, investigate or generally ignore:

"The Big Nowhere" by James Ellroy, "Beat Your Relative to a Bloody Pulp" by Max Decharne, "A Wolverine is Eating My Leg" by Tim Cahill (a travel book - but not a boring one, features a first report on Jonestown), and "Wiseblood" by Flannery O'Connor.

**Martin Jones
Paignton**

Well, I'm going to have to tell the truth here

and admit that although I like Martin I don't think it's one of Romero's better films and *Near Dark* just leaves me cold I'm afraid!

Also against my better judgement I have to confess a sneaking regard for *Basic Instinct* - yes, I know it's pure mainstream manipulation/exploitation but it's better than the crap which apes it - yes, I do mean Silver!

Dear Andy,

Thanks for issue 2 of "Necro". At £3.00 it was expensive, but I'd rather pay that for a quality zine than pay £2.00 for a badly printed one with only a few pages (do you mean issue 1! - Ed).

As for issue 2, the vampire special part was most welcome with my favourite movie, *Dracula* being reviewed and a rare good review given to a very underrated film, *Salem's Lot*.

As you also review films away from horror, I was wondering if there are any plans for a feature on the martial arts films, in particular those of the great Bruce Lee.

I look forward to issue 3 hoping that it will match even better what's gone before.

**Gareth John
Rhonda**

There may well be some more oriental film coverage in future issues - remember Shogun Assassin graced issue 1. One of my own favourites has got to be A Chinese Ghost Story which may well find its way between these pages and I'd welcome suggestions from readers as to what other films of this ilk you'd like to see covered.

Dear Andy,

Thanks for the issue of "Necronomicon", it was very enjoyable. *The Living Dead At The Manchester Morgue* is a film I haven't seen for years, one of the first video shops in my area stocked it back in the early 1980's but it's long gone now.

The *Fu Manchu* article was nice (if short) too, I remember watching 'ne Christopher Lee/Hammer movies on BBC 2 a few years ago. For all their faults I've never been bored watching a Hammer film. Watching the *Quatermass* films on ITV and Channel 4 recently has been a lot of fun.

The *Love Bites* review was fun too. I've seen a few of Traci Lords' films (both porn and legit) but this is one I haven't come across yet (yes I know!) You might be interested to know that she appeared in ABC TV's adaptation of Stephen King's *The Tommyknockers* which aired during May. She plays the part of "nympho postmistress Nancy" (I think we can see this as a mixture of mainstream acceptance AND typecasting).

I don't know how close the adaptation is as the *Variety* review is very brief and I didn't like the book much anyway, so I don't really remember too many details.

Look for it on video in the next few months and in the meantime I look forward

to the next issue.

**Steven Bray
Greavesend**

Dear Mr Black,

I am very impressed with all aspects of your magazine, from the lovely cover to the range and quality of the articles. Glad to see many photos used and also Spaghetti Westerns featured. You are doing a top class job, keep it up.

From my experience of magazines and from talking to fans I would suggest the following :

Detailed profile of life, films etc of some of the great European cult stars, people like; Mark Damon, Richard Harrison, Brett Halsey, Luciana Paluzzi, Suzy Kendall, John Garko, Peter Lee Lawrence, E Martinelli, Eva Renzi etc.

There is too much coverage of films but hardly any career info/profile of the stars who appear in so many classic movies. Can you maybe lead the way ?

**L Malik
Tottenham**

I take the point about star profiles but what do other readers think ? Over to you !

Dear Andy,

The first issue of "Necronomicon" was an impressive debut, however, the leap in quality of issue 2 is incredible ! Congratulations Andy on a top-flight magazine. The colour covers (Both inside and out) add a wealth of class. Reproduction of stills inside this time were sharper and clearer too.

Your subject matter coverage was a hell of a variety and I found all of it to be of interest. I really salute your decision to cover Spaghetti Westerns (I look forward to the article on Django Films).

Highlight for me was the interview with the head of Redemption Video. I wish the company all the success. Too bad a label like that would never make it over here due to the stranglehold the major studios and the Blockbuster Video chain has over distribution.

I'll be sending you the ETC vol 1 reprint that we just published soon. It takes all 12 issues of ETC's cheesy newsletter and binds them together into one 90 page zine. I look forward to Necro 3 !

ETC 8 will be out in October I hope !

**Craig Ledbetter
Texas**

True to his word, ETC Vol 1 did pop through the door and excellent it is. Craig's own Euro masterpiece is going from strength to strength though personally I think it will be difficult to surpass the superb giallo edition. Part 2 soon please Craig !

REMEMBER !

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to the Imperial Cancer
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helping a very good cause !*



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NECRONOMICON
Evil Writes
 15 Jubilee Road
 NEWTON ABBOT
 Devon
 TQ12 1LB

Hello Andy,

Thanks for the copy of Necronomicon - the features on Hammer horror were enjoyable. I like the erotica of the seventies.

Unlike most of your readers yours is the first horror magazine I've ever bought! Modern horror is too violent for my tastes and not atmospheric; except for *Lair of the White Worm* (I think it was called) directed by Ken Russell and starring Amanda Donohoe, Hugh Grant and Catherine Oxenberg. Perhaps this film could be featured in a forthcoming issue.

But anyway, I enjoyed the magazine because it gave reference to some of my favourite films and intrigued me with its new territory (new to me that is), the Italian exploitation genre which I'm going to investigate now.

A Moran
Enfield

Mr Moran, your prayers are answered! Lair of the White Worm will be featured extensively in Issue 5 - do you really think I'd miss the opportunity to scrutinise Ms. Donohoe and Ms. Oxenberg cavorting around dressed as air hostesses - really!!

There will also be plenty of other erotic treats in store as far as the next issue goes and I wish you well with your quest for "Pasta Horror" - you will see some great films but also a fair amount of crap!

Dear Andy,

Thank you very much for sending me the Necronomicon magazine - it's a fantastic effort and I'm enjoying it very much, especially the part dealing with vampire films

which is really interesting.

I am very grateful to you all at Necro for offering us such a thorough and most detailed journey through some of the most important vampire movies ever made.

I have to admit that John Badham's *Dracula* is one of my all-time faves but unfortunately only a brief mention of it in the Francis Ford Coppola review could be found.

Any chance of reviews about about Stephen King and Peter Straub novels in the future? Also if possible I'd like a list of the best Traci Lords films if you can, man, I adore her!!!

Max Littrizza
Malta

Badham's Dracula missed out due to a shortage of space I'm afraid - though the locations and photography are good Langella's overtly sensual Count falls in the same way as Oldman's more recent incarnation of the role - they simply don't terrify like Stoker's creation, becoming overly-romanticised perhaps.

As far as Stephen King goes, the nearest you'll get to him within these pages will be articles concerning films adapted from his work - though at the present time quantity is far outweighing quality!

Dear Andy

Thanks for Necronomicon 1 - loved it!

It would probably be quicker to say what I didn't like, but I don't want to be negative so here goes :- Vipco interview - good, it's nice to know there are people out there trying to get the more "difficult" films available, general design and presentation are excellent - not too fussy and easy to read.

Articles - well written and informative without being too "fanzine-y" or too overly intellectual (*Something there's no danger of me being accused of!* - Ed).

Best of all though, is the eclectic nature of the articles - a nice mix with Bava, Franco and Rollin rubbing shoulders with Sherlock Holmes, Traci Lords and those men from U.N.C.L.E. - a great selection.

Only one thing I thought of as an improvement - some indication of the likely availability of the films mentioned on video

(although I realise this could be tricky...), Anyway keep up the good work.

P.S. In case you wondered (I did! - Ed), I'm a Minister of the Universal Life Church (the same as John Walters) and not any dodgy Christian moralist type religion!

Reverend Adam Clark
Manchester

Always good to hear from someone nearer to "God" than me - not difficult in my case! The idea regarding video availability is a fair one but too frequently companies change release dates and delete titles already in the shops so for now I'll leave such exhaustive information to the likes of Video Watchdog!

Dear Andy,

Thanks for the Necronomicon, not a bad little issue!

Nice to see Ciccolina but there should have been a full colour centre page spread!

In one of the letters there was mention of *Lust For A Vampire* etc. We were wondering what this Carmilla/Mircalla thing is. I noticed Mircalla in *Twins of Evil* and thought hang on a minute, wasn't that the name of the vamp from *Lust For A Vampire*? Are we missing out on some excellent vampire lore or what?

We are pretty bogged down with college work but we are working on our magazine and will send you a copy of our films as soon as we get round to it.

Our film *Papel Flores* went down quite well at the Cheltenham Festival and we are hoping to enter the London Co-operative Super 8 Festival which is on in December, should be quite interesting.

Anyway, we think the mag is great!

Emma Williams
Portsmouth

Emma and her boyfriend are enthusiastic amateur film-makers whose work should find its way into a future issue - if anyone is interested in finding out more about Emma's films then write to me and I'll pass all letters on.

As far as the vampire anagrams go, you

have no doubt had a deprived childhood , missing out on the seminal sensual vampire novel by Sheridan Le Fanu !

Dear Andy

Well, Necro 3 has arrived and what can I say, it just keeps getting better. You're now officially numero uno on my fanzine list, no mean feat considering that Samhain has been top since its first issue. (I'll take that as high praise - Ed).

It's taken me 3 issues to decide that I do like the covers. I feel that they give the magazine a distinctive and unique look that Samhain had in its early days with Pam Richards excellent illustrations.

So Argento fever has hit town yet again and in two very passable essays (considering how much has been written in the past).

Inferno I've seen, Deep Red I have not (Go buy it immediately! -Ed) - so I'm looking forward to the Redemption release with great anticipation.

Nekromantik is one of the more, how can I put it, repulsively interesting films I've seen over the past couple of years. Though not as hard to watch as say Faces of Death, I find it very hard to come back to it or even admit to being a fan of the film, but on the other hand I could read an interview the size of "War and Peace" with its director - Jorg Buttgeriet is a fascinating man with some interesting things to say. I hope we get the chance to read more.

At last someone has something good to say about Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2, hoo bloody ray!

To anybody who hasn't seen it or refuses to see it, give it a chance. "Texas 1" it ain't but it doesn't try to be as what's the point of attempting to better one of the best. It just goes ahead and forges its own identity in its own way.

Besides, you could do worse, you could be watching "Texas 3" which makes even Night of the Bloody Apes look good - (Mr Stroud, how could you call that a classic).

Anyway, I'm off now so until number 4, cheers for another great read.

Andy Jones
Stoke

Just when you thought it was an Andy Jones-free zone!

Favourite Necronomicon quotes of 1993!

Are you writing about graves again. - Kind-hearted but intellectually-challenged neighbour!

Congratulations. They are getting better and better although I've got to admit some of it is beyond my comprehension!! - My mother-in-law - affectionately known as The Dragon!!

I still think you need a crossword in it! - My darling wife who is presenting me with a little "Necrobaby" in August!

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Thanks to those fine fellows at Redemption Video we've got 5 copies of this Mario Bava classic to give away. To win a copy just answer the following question ;
Name 5 other Bava films ?
Entries on a postcard marked Bava by 25th May 1994

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COMPETITION

Those cool cats at Redemption have kindly donated 5 copies of one of Jean Rollin's most erotic chillers. To win a copy just answer the following question;
Which Rollin film sees wine turn people into zombies ?
Entries on a postcard marked Rollin by 25th May 1994



Whatever your views on **NECRONOMICON** I'd like to hear them whether they be good, bad or just plain ugly ! Or, if you want to air your views on wider aspects of the horror/fantasy genre then let's hear from you - all letters to the following address:

NECRONOMICON
 Evil Waite's
 15 Jubilee Road
 NEWTON ABBOT
 Devon
 TQ12 LLB

these then get in touch !

Dear Andy

Just a short letter to thank you for the copy of *Necro* 4 which I received a few days before the Dario Argento conference I organised took place at Kent University.

I must say that I found the content of this edition to be of particular interest. As you may recall, the conference evolved out of my own M.A. thesis on Argento and the European cinema, as well as the Fantastic Film course I am helping to teach at Kent University.

As a review of *Tenebrae* featured in issue 4, you may be interested to know that I concentrated on this film in my lecture at the event, which looked at the construction of male masochism in the film. I highlighted the use of transexuality in the text, and linked it to psychoanalytical case studies where male patients have attempted to disfigure their own bodies in order to achieve a "female" status.

I am pleased to be able to inform you that the conference was very successful, to the extent that the board have provisionally asked me to prepare a similar event for next year. I felt the event made real steps towards a more reflexive understanding of the complexity of such cinematic cycles, and everyone that I spoke to after the event expressed the view that it was both informative and entertaining. I have included some details from the event which I thought may be of interest to you.

Please do keep me updated with your magazine's activities, as I am particularly interested in the European sphere of production.

Xavier Mendik
 Lecturer in Film & Media
 Cornwallis South
 University of Kent
 Canterbury
 Kent
 CT2 7NF

Xavier's Argento conference took place on March 19th this year and included lectures from such noted genre luminaries as Alan Jones and Martin Coxhead and sound just

the sort of event any self-respecting Necro reader should want to attend which is why I've also included Xavier's full address so you can contact him about next years event !

Hi Andy

Thanks for *Necro* 4, an excellent read. I'm proud to have my work in there (stop it Leighton, I'm blushing !! - Ed). The article on censorship was interesting, as was the piece on *The Little Picture Show*. Actually, I had forgotten all about that programme as it comes on at about 4.30 in the morning where I live.

I've started taping it now though and it's a cool show, what with Mariella "sexy voice" Frostrup presenting it!

I particularly enjoyed the *Man Bites Dog* review/analysis too, and the *Telefono Rosso* and *Hands of the Ripper* pieces were great too. I've seen a couple of Ciccilina's masterpieces and I have to say it's quite strange to think of her as an MP while watching some bloke thrust a banana up her hairy part! (Makes a change from an orange I suppose - Ed - making an extremely topical but poor taste political joke !!).

I see from the bottom of the letters page in *Necro* 4 that congratulations are in order as you're soon to become a father. If you thought your mag was a responsibility, wait until August!

Leighton Phillips
 Abertillery
 Gwent

Well Leighton, I reckon sitting through any number of appalling US teen horror flicks and an equal number of lame Villa performances (Coca Cola Cup excepted !) has more than prepared me for the joys of fatherhood !! Sleepless nights and dirty nappies will simply pale in comparison !!

Alert readers will also discover that Leighton forced himself to review a Ciccilina film for this issue - such dedication to the cause, it's a hard life etc, etc !!

Dear Mr Black

It was very good of you to take the trouble

Dear Andy,

Can you pass my letter on to Emma Williams like you said you would in *Necro* 4? Have you seen her films yet? Are they any good?!

Well, *Necronomicon* is definitely about the best horror magazine yet. It beats *Samhain* on its sheer size and the articles are generally better. I think that a contacts address page would be a great help. You could list film company addresses and tape trade ads as not everywhere has a shop nearby that sells these films. The wide range of films is good to see.

Have you ever thought of covering Lydia Lunch, Richard Kern and Nick Zedd's films. They are some of the best shorts I have ever seen. Any chance of a Lydia Lunch article? - that would be brilliant!

Well thanks for your help and passing the letter on. Looking forward to *Necro* 5.

Jeremy Herron
 Armagh
 Northern Ireland

Having duly passed your letter on - no, I haven't seen any of Emma's films yet (are you reading this Emma ?!)

I do try and feature useful ads with books, films, and ephemera of interest to readers but if there are other shops out there wanting to advertise then just contact me for the ad rate card ! I'm looking into the possibility of printing film company addresses, though to be honest its distributors addresses which will probably be of more use.

I will confess to complete ignorance regarding the films of Lunch, Kern and Zedd, although I have heard Lydia's music (!), so if anyone wants to contribute something on

to answer my letter regarding future Redemption releases - yes, I think it would be a shame if Bava-wise, *The Whip and the Body* didn't see the light of day.

After thirty years it couldn't have caused trouble - or could it? Me, I'd prefer less Franco (though *Succubus* was a truly amazing surprise - it took my breath away), and more Barbara Steele. I'd settle for the second Dr. Hitchcock movie - you don't happen to know if there are any plans in that direction do you?

Carol Jenks
Sheffield
Yorkshire

Redemption have certainly made great inroads into releasing some long overdue classic gothic horrors and the likes of Bava's *The Whip and the Body*, *Curse of the Dead* and *Hatchet for a Honeymoon* would certainly be welcomed by many so, over to you *Redemption* I think!!

Dear Andy

Many thanks for Necro 3 and many congrats - great stuff.

Yes, despite its innumerable flaws and my belief that even the 104 minute English dubbed version is too talky, the wonderfully surreal and macabre *Deep Red* is probably my favourite Argento too (visually and narratively anyway), though I'm not sure about this rampaging Goblin score as even more so than the atrocious dubbing, it almost ruined the film for me.

Alright, it's different, yes, I'll give them that, and frequently witty, but it's also mostly inappropriate. It's their sound and volume rather than their music. It is too loud and contemporary (now dated - ditto some of Keith Emerson's score for *Inferno*), for my taste and doesn't suit the gothic mood and atmosphere created by the director's visuals at all.

It may sound great blaring out of a hi-fi system cranked up to volume 11! I know it does because I have the soundtrack, and it may have worked if the film itself had been a straightforward thriller, but it doesn't belong in a hybrid like *Deep Red*. The electronic-rock they play during the murder sequences especially, almost drove me up the living room wall! During the murder of the authress, I could just picture one of them saying partway through the scene, "Yeah, groovy man!" and then the entire group continuing to follow the same style and tempo totally oblivious to what was happening on the screen.

Worse, on a couple of occasions (eg. when Marcus Daley calls out to Gianna at the school just as the shadow of the killer appears on the wall), the music comes in a fraction too early, pre-empting the shock, and, worst of all, the plodding guitar riff (quite apt in its way, admittedly, with its hints of danger at the fringes of the track, as our accident-prone Johannesque hero is a bit of a lumbering dunderhead, though I still say they should

have saved this piece for the zombies in *Dawn of the Dead*), that accompanies David Hemmings' exploration of the "abandoned" old house and his later investigation of the school just doesn't gel with the serpentine camerawork and elegant visuals in my opinion.

I'm not even sure if these sequences really require music but surely something more subtle, more stylish, and more seductive would have been more appropriate. Something along the lines of the first movement from Bartok's "Music for strings, percussion and celeste" (which to me immediately conjures up an image of a snake winding up a tree to reach its prey), would have complemented Argento's menacing camera to a far more satisfying degree, and added that extra bit of class and eeriness and haunting power which Goblin's contributions to the film generally lack.

At least it doesn't sound like Bernard Herrmann or Morricone or Gaslini or Pino Donaggio, some might say, but frankly I wish they did!

Still, it's only a surface detail I suppose, albeit an important one (and one which I believe has hindered Argento's critical acceptance more than some might think), and Goblin did more than redeem themselves with *Suspina* and (with the exception of the razor-murders, when again they affect and hurt the film in some of its key and most suspenseful moments), *Tenebrae* - didn't they? - so perhaps I should try to forgive and forget...

Right, better go - I could ramble on about music in Argento's films and many of the articles in Necro 3 all night (that's enough *Mark* - I haven't got enough pages left!! - Ed), so I'd best leave it there and just add that I hope the mag is the success it deserves to be and I look forward to future issues.

I know I've gone on a bit here, but then perhaps you could start a readers "Second Opinion" feature - what do you think?

Mark Ezra
Mold
Clwyd

Phew!! - "War & Peace" or what *Mark*! The very reason I have printed this letter in full is because it does cover an important but often neglected area of films, namely their music scores.

I've seen many a poor film almost saved by a vigorous score and conversely many a potentially tense scene ruined by a garish musical flourish.

I'll have to confess to being a big Goblin fan here, and I think that the pulsating, admittedly overblown rock score razors through the live action perfectly, capturing the diseased minds of the killers and the darker recesses of their disturbed psyche. I think that Goblin are also to be commended for rendering Luigi Cozzi's lamentable *Contamination* almost watchable!

I've got to admit though - I quite fancy the idea of a reader's "Second Opinion" after a Necro feature, so get writing!!

Dear Andy,

Well, I think it's about time I sent off for issue 4 of Necro - £3.50 dutifully enclosed, therefore.

It's certainly gone from strength to strength since issue 1 - all those extra pages and colour bits too, most impressive! Actually, it's the best new fanzine I've seen for ages - but I'm not going to tell you that, lest the flattery goes to your head and causes excessive brain damage (don't worry John - I had excessive brain damage to start, just ask my wife!! - Ed).

At least Necro features a healthy mix of films I haven't seen and those I actually have seen - whereas some fanzines can become too esoteric at times.

Just keep on featuring vampire movies; *Rollin' movies*; *Bunuel (Diary of a Chambermaid)* - which I've only seen once - didn't really make that much of an impression on me. My faves are the more obvious ones, *Belle De Jour* and *That Obscure Object of Desire*; anything on Buttgeret will always go down well (the guy's a genius - I really love the *Nekromantik* films; a bit of Franco here and there, et cetera... and I'll be happy, (little things please little minds as they say!). Looks like Sherlock Holmes is here to stay... not really my scene, but I mustn't quibble... neither are westerns but don't let that worry you!

I'd like to see a feature on *Possession* sometime - I've only seen the film once, and I confess I was very confused by it all - but Isabelle Adjani made the whole thing worthwhile! (I wish someone somewhere would start a fanzine devoted to French actresses - just another personal passion of mine). I wasn't at all impressed by her performance in *Nosferatu* though.

Final question - will you ever get a proper subscription service going or are we doomed to write in every quarter just to get hold of each successive copy? Cheers.

John Worley
Northampton

Glad you like the mix of films on offer John and this is something which is definitely here to stay. As far as *Possession* goes - yes, it may be a minority view but it's an interesting film if not a good one (!), so expect to see it amongst these pages eventually.

As regards subs - turn to page 58 now! - future publishing times may be prone to vary but the sub is designed to cover 3 issues - either 1 year perhaps 18 months ok!

Dear Andy

Many thanks for the copy of Necro, I had seen it advertised before but had never read it. I have had several fanzines sent to me now, generally the research is going very well.

To be honest, yours is by far the best fanzine I've seen to date. It really has an incredibly wide range of information included.

The good thing about this is the detail, your publication avoids most of the pitfalls that fanzines usually end up in. Namely: a lack of detail and complete lack of respect for what they are writing about. You have many very interesting stunts on old arguments included; Argento etc and more importantly tackle some subjects in ways I have never encountered before. This was indeed very rare for a fanzine as many only rehash other ideas.

I especially have complete admiration for your *Django* article, although I did not agree with everything included in the piece, I admire the way the subject matter was tackled. I have been a spaghetti western fan for many years and I can't recall anyone really comparing the Corbucci film to the other *Django* film Nero appeared in.

This article was obviously very well researched by someone very knowledgeable on the genre (Tony is obviously no judge of character! -Ed). This is the kind of material I believe would really benefit film students, especially those undertaking research into specific film genres, comparisons are big business on the academic circuit.

In this case your magazine would receive the highest rating possible, as it obviously contains information that can be regarded as new, or at the very least provides a new perspective.

On a more personal level, I believe that this article glossed over a couple of really important westerns, firstly *Django Kill*, an incredibly strange western with Tomas Milan, an actor who should never be ignored and also *Django the Bastard* which is also pretty good. I also felt Corbucci's best film was *The Grande Silence* known in the UK as *The Big Silence* starring Klaus Kinski in his best ever performance, should at least have got a mention as it is quite literally miles ahead of *A Fistful of Dollars* for instance. It is the commercial audience that had made the latter a classic.

On a more general level, I love the way you avoid the stuff that ends up in most horror magazines and become over used cliches. You seem to concentrate more on the important people from cinema's past, in issue 3 namely Bunuel. That was a great article, I do not recall Bunuel, one of the greatest directors of all time, getting any recognition in any genre based magazines. In my opinion this is fairly ridiculous as some of his stuff has been downright frightening. I only have to think back to one of the segments in *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* to shudder. I only hope that some of your readers check him out.

Your magazine had a great balance. The interviews were informative as well as clearly structured. Your letters page was obviously serious as contained a wealth of information on its own, again too many people do not take underground genres seriously, this is why they will never be commercially acceptable. If the fans are not serious, the critics certainly will not be. Although your publication descends into humour it still takes the subject seriously. This is another reason why such publications could be useful to film

and media students.

Maybe you could give what I'm doing a word in a future issue, to spread the word. Anyway, I've enclosed a cheque for your next issue because I'm so impressed. I love *Man Bites Dog* second only on the serial killer stakes to *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*.

Tony Jones
The Robert Gordon University
Faculty of Management
Hilton Place
Aberdeen
AB9 1FP

Shucks - what can I say Tony, except expect more Bunuel and more spaghetti's over future issues!

Admittedly I could have mentioned more watershed films during the *Django* article but was conscious of confining the main thrust of the piece to Nero's *Django* films - the definitive work, hence my reluctance to delve into other *Django* incarnations - maybe in a future article. As far as *The Big Silence* goes, I'd love to cover this so let's hope some enterprising video label will do the business on this - how about it Aktiv?!

Incidentally - I've included Tony's full address as he is currently compiling a directory of fanzines to be circulated amongst libraries, universities and media centres throughout the country, so interested fanzine editors should send Tony a copy of their publications now!

Personally speaking, I find the growth in media studies courses on cult/horror films as vital to the survival of our beloved genre which is continually blamed for all societies ills - ditto the horrific Jamie Bulger case and even more horrific David Alton-inspired legislation, although there's nothing "inspiring" about it!

Many of the greatest, most interesting, confrontational and challenging films ever to be made have sprung from the genre so shouldn't we be shouting about it and educating people as to the merits of such films?

Dear Andy,

Picked up issue 3 in a Tower Records on Third Avenue here in New York City. I was almost felled by an episode of ague as I handed over the \$5.75 cover price, but I did recover.

I feel compelled to offer my jaundiced Yankee take on both *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* and *Day of the Dead*. Maybe they gained something in the trip across the Atlantic, but in this country, both wound up disappointing because each sequel seemed to force issues and themes already presented more subtly in the previous film.

The original *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, in addition to being a horrific and unnerving film, was also a startling (albeit crude) satire on consumer society. To hire Kit Carson twelve years later to expound upon those themes, ad nauseam, with *Leatherface* and friends playing winkingly along, seemed

abjectly redundant. Like Tom Savini's recent remake of *Night of the Living Dead*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* unnecessarily recalled bits from the original such as Slim's aping of *Leatherface's* victory dance, Granpa etc., when it should have been striking out for new territory.

Likewise, *Dawn of the Dead* lampooned the American bunker (or bomb shelter) mentality by transposing an apocalyptic scenario into a suburban shopping mall. To have Romero come out seven years down the line and put his protagonists and antagonists into an actual bunker seemed, well, to spout one of this country's less inspired interjections... *duh!*

Both sequels are certainly watchable, and perhaps because each is far less complex, less demanding. But there is a wide gap between watchable and acceptable.

I was grateful for your observations on such curios as *Requiem for a Vampire* and *Vampyros Lesbos* (two films whose poster art and stills mesmerised me as a teenager when they appeared in horror and vampire literature). I also appreciated your piece on *The Torture Chamber of Dr. Sadism* available on tape in this country as *Creature of the Walking Dead*.

I liked Soavi's *The Church* better than you did; at least it had the resolve to tell the story straight, without the smartassed prejudice that taints too many American horror movies, the entire *Nightmare on Elm Street* canon in particular.

Horror cinema got along for nearly a hundred years without wisecracking monsters, yet suddenly every film in the accursed genre has to have one. There's just something attractive about unstoppable, mute evil, and something infinitely preferable about a straight ahead horror feature that doesn't wallow in nostalgia, celebrity cameos and in-jokes, as does anything by John Landis or the woefully overpraised Joe Dante (I seem to be the only one in the colonies who thought *Matinee* was terrible).

I enjoyed *Necronomicon* very much and look forward to reading it again. Just retain better proofreaders, please; you are *English*, after all. Hail Britannia!

Richard Harland Smith
New York
USA

Some fascinating comments there Richard from across the sea. On the subject of sequels - yes, by and large they are crap but although I'd agree that Tom Savini's remake was utterly pointless I do confess to rating both *Texas Chainsaw 2* and *Day of the Dead* high above their much vaunted originals. I can't recall seeing such a wide-ranging spread of social satire punctuating Hooper's first film and whilst some elements such as Grandpa's torture of Stretch at the dinner table (!) are simply replays of the original, I think the sequel benefits from its surreal fairground locale, atmospheric lighting and rampaging performances.

As far as Romero goes, I've always

found the original to be as slow moving as its zombies and Dawn of the Dead rather too dogmatic in its consumer satire approach. I think where Day scores is with its development of the "intelligent" zombie theme, whilst the conflict between military muscle, scientific inhumanity, raw fear and just plain pacifism means the film is hung around a strong emotional situation.

It's also one film where gross special effects actually work and Romero's unusually fluid camera drives the story along, whilst also milking as much suspense from the film as is possible - ditto the zombies gradual emergence from hiding in the eerily deserted Florida streets.

I reckon you're spot on though with criticism of the now tiresome "wisecracking monster" syndrome. For me, the mute killing machine in the Alien series is far more horrifying than some failed comedian, would-be psycho killer. Humour and horror can be similar yet difficult emotions to portray, so intended lampoons such as Mel Brooks' superb Young Frankenstein tend to work best.

Dear Andy,

More than the usual amount of gratitude to you for what was an excellent edition of Necro. Surely we've missed the ubiquitous "Happy Birthday" greetings that you are well due to? One full year on and many to go. From strength to strength you will flourish, let there be no mistaking. Absolute congratulations.

Where else are we updated on the Jean Rollin philosophy of film production, or the deep problems that the one and only Vippo are experiencing? Who else would cover Spaghetti Westerns with the same enthusiasm that Man Bites Dog was tackled? No where else and no-one else does or would cover the vast arena that you allow us to sample.

Here's to your diversity, Andy. We are all on your side and with my money where my mouth is, please find a cheque to pay for a year's sub, regardless of whether such a thing exists as yet!

"I crave the ethereal, the remote, the shadowy and the doubtful". Not half!!

Ronnie Smart
Crossmichael
Castle Douglas

Kind words indeed and yes, such a thing does exist now if you turn to page 58!!

Remember
All postage stamps from Necro correspondence go to the Imperial Cancer Research Fund

M.I.A. - An Apology

I would like to retract certain errors which appeared in Helen Swift's "open letter" to Necronomicon 4 regarding remarks erroneously attributed to MIA's Vanessa Mellors on The Little Picture Show.

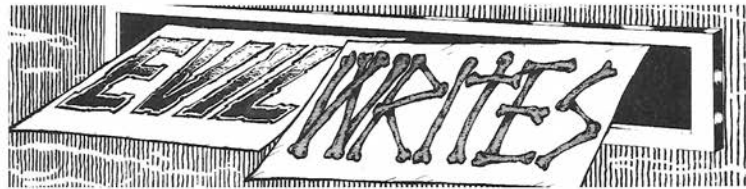
Namely, that Vanessa did not appear on the show to discuss the inconsistencies of censorship, nor was she subsequently penalised by the BBFC for any remarks concerning censorship as the BBFC do not operate on this basis.

Finally, that MIA have never been granted an 18R certificate and do not hold a licence for any product in this category.

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Whatever your views on NECRONOMICON I'd like to hear them whether they be good, bad or just plain ugly! Or, if you want to air your views on wider aspects of the horror/fantasy genre then let's hear from you - all letters to the following address:

NECROMICON
 Evil Writes
 15 Jubilee Road
 NEWTON ABBOT
 Devon
 TQ12 1LB

Dear Andy,

Ten years ago to the day (26/6/94) Wisconsin handyman and reformed necrophiliac Ed Gein left this veil of tears, his spirit rising up through the ether, na't to seen again. Between the escalation of gang and domestic violence, large scale riots, terrorism on the homefront, and the increase in the suicide rate, we've scarcely had occasion to miss him.

All this nostalgia is just an excuse to congratulate you on another fine issue. No.5 hit the stands this week in the midst of a prolonged heat wave; a fresh copy of Necronomicon, a chaser of blue Kool Aid, and a frosty, not-too-well-lighted place in which to read have proved the perfect tonic to the merciless dog days of summer. And I'm not just going on like this because you printed my letter (*psychic eh - Ed*); still, leave it to the English to run it in its entirety and then offer a reply nearly two-thirds as long (*perceptive too! - Ed*).

Thanks a heap for the Barbara Shelley interview. Although you're the fourth publication this year to grant her space (right behind Dark Terrors, Scarlet Street and a 1982 interview reprinted in the latest issue of Little Shoppe of Horrors), I'm still grateful and haven't heard enough from this underrated and woefully neglected actress.

It was good to hear some kind words in regard to Ken Russell's much (and unfairly) maligned *Lair of the White Worm*. With so little quality material in the genre these days, it confounds me how much ill will this film earned upon its original release.

Likewise, your comments regarding *The Wicker Man* were especially valuable, particularly in light of William K. Everson's dismissal of it in his fine book *More Classics*

of the Horror Film. I find myself in partial agreement with Tim Greaves' ambivalence about the work of Mario Bava; while I readily admit the man's a cinematographic genius, I've always found his *Mask of Satan* just a touch soporific.

On a more contentious note (and here we are back on the subject of sequels), I hated every frame of Brian Yuzna's *Return of the Living Dead III*, particularly its unabashedly racist undercurrent: unintelligible Korean grocers, oily, hot-tempered Latin cholos, a decidedly non-American (ie. British) villainess, and most offensive of all, the nauseating Uncle Tom-like Riverman, who, living or dead, just can't do enough for his white *chil'uns*.

Selfless to a fault, even when possessed of the undead brain-hunger, even when this state was caused by the very people he was protecting, Riverman just keeps rolling along to the point of virtual disintegration by shotgun blast.

(One dreads the possibility of a director's cut restoring footage depicting shrieking, mincing homosexual lab technicians and a miserly Jewish military physician).

There is a big difference between the horrific and the merely unpleasant, and Brian Yuzna has consistently failed to live up to the promise of his debut effort, *Society*.

But let's not allow this petty quarrelling to detract from your promethean efforts. You run a fine ship. Long may she sail.

Richard Harland Smith
 New York
 USA

Hoy - listen Richard, "promethean efforts" - I like the sound of that! I Could be a future ad line methinks!!

As you'll no doubt have gathered from the tone of The Wicker Man article, I feel it has some unique merits which perhaps have not received the oxygen of praise they deserve. Personally, I find William K. Everson to be a knowledgeable writer, only blinkered by his somewhat "rose-tinted glasses" dogma that preaches the old films are the best.

The thought of you finding Bava "soporific" however is rather worrying to me (!), whilst I'd also have to differ with you over Yuzna's

Society which I found to be vastly overrated, being too reliant on rather unconvincing special effects to crudely emphasise its hedonistic, not to mention hegemonic themes.

Oh, and by the way, at least I've partially limited my reply here!!

Dear Andy,

I have just finished reading Necronomicon 5 and I must say it was another excellent issue.

I particularly think the balance of articles is just right and the choice of films to cover is also excellent. You obviously have a bias to *Redemption* (as I would have to any other similarly enterprising video companies - *Ed*), which I think is good as they appear to be the only label at present releasing the more obscure films.

Please do not revert to reviewing mainstream films as there are already magazines covering these and in general you only read the same old thing.

It's refreshing to read a magazine with well thoughtout opinions and I hope you continue down this road. I do not know whether you read *The Darkside* or not but I find Allan Bryce has gone for a more commercialised magazine that basically has become very boring.

The articles are too lightweight and lacking in substance. I believe his reputation is taking a bit of a battering since he has spent more time on *Video World* than *The Darkside*. I have also noted that many articles are just relished after a year or so. Is he selling out?

The point of the above is that often something good starts out but can often loose its way. I would rather pay extra money to read a quality magazine such as *Necronomicon* than a sub-standard magazine which I believe *The Darkside* has become.

Any decision yet as to whether you will reprint issue 2 as this is the only issue I am missing?

Craig O'Brien
 West Hunsbury
 Northampton

Hopefully the increase in price, and more importantly, quality with this issue will indicate just how seriously I take views such as yours Craig which I feel are shared by many other genre fans.

As far as *The Darkside* goes, I'll leave it to readers to draw their own conclusions, suffice to say, the last issue I received advertised free posters, *Fanzine Focus* and *Prints of Darkness* on the cover - none of which appeared in the issue!

Issue 2? - This is fast becoming a legend as it is the most requested issue to date. It is sold out and I may reprint it at a later stage but I'd prefer to concentrate on future issues at the moment!

Dear Andy,

Thanks for issue 5 of *Necro*, another excellent issue. Consistently one of the best fanzines out there and all in the space of 5 issues - big pat on the back!

Each issue seems very Redemption heavy, not that I'm complaining as at least most of what you feature can be easily obtained in the high street.

Can we expect a *Blind Dead* special soon, what with the release of *Tombs of the Blind Dead* and *Return of the Evil Dead*. Please!!

Umberto Lenzi seems a very bitter man. Everybody seems to owe him for their success, Argento, Omella Muti and his knocks at Mattia and Massaccesi and Deodato.

Anyway, I enclose a cheque for a subscription and look forward to the next issue.

Ian Ward
Ashford
Kent

Well Ian - unless someone out there would like to pen the definitive *Blind Dead* article I don't plan to cover the films as I reckon they've already been exhaustively covered in numerous fanzines, although *Redemption's* credit "Tombs" is scheduled for release in the hitherto unseen director's cut - with 20 minutes extra footage.

I agree with your comments on Lenzi - having seen a number of his films I've yet to notice any particularly original or stylistic flair unlike the works of his so-called "plagiarists".

Dear Andy,

Thanks a lot for issue 5 of *Necronomicon* that arrived a few days ago. Glad to see my interview published!

Good stuff inside your mag as usual. I enjoyed the interview with *Nekromantik's* fascinating Monika M (Have you seen *Schramm*? A wonderful nightmare I think), and the portrait of sleazy maestro Jean Rollin. His films are released in the UK by *Redemption* but I believe they are cut. Do you know something about it.

I found particular interest in the review of *Cicciolina World Cup 90* (released some

days before the football championship played in Italy), but your contributor Leighton Phillips has made some amusing mistakes.

The correct name of the porno queen mentioned is Moana Pozzi. It's fun because in the slang language of North East Italy, Moana means pussy...!

Anyway, *Cicciolina* is not as famous here as she was some time ago (she's not considered a sexual icon anymore as Leighton writes). Now there are a lot of sleazy stars: the Italian porno business (in home video), is one of the biggest in Europe with many titles released every month so people tend to have forgotten the blonde Ilona.

Andrea Giorgi
Milan
Italy

Thanks for the info Andrea - I don't know about you but I just can't figure what's so funny about the word pussy....

Dear Andy,

I had no thoughts that you would publish my last letter but maybe *Redemption* in the form of Nigel Wingrove will take notice of your comments.

While we're on the subject why doesn't he put out *Franju's Eyes Without A Face* and *Vadim's Blood and Roses*? They strike me as incredibly obvious choices but I don't think he's very interested in the obvious.

I wonder where your eager beaver correspondent from Northern Ireland actually saw the *Kern/Lydia Lunch* films - there are three of them, *Submit To Me*, *The Right Side of My Brain* and *Fingered* and the latter was banned in Britain the last time I read anything about the matter.

Only one of her films, a performance monologue, *The Gun*, is available here on *Visionary Video*, an obscure label which puts out material by Derek Jarman, Kenneth Anger etc, now Anger should make an appearance in *Necronomicon*!

I love the cover of number 5 - *Lair of the White Worm* is one of my favourite films. As it was a huge, if culty, hit in America, I'm sure Sharon Stone's appearance - all-white got up and leg uncrossing act in *Basic Instinct* were ripped off from amanda's first scene with the helpless Ernest. Has the similarity ever struck you? Except of course that the *Basic Instinct* scene is only unintentionally funny!

Carol Jenks
Sheffield

Your film choices do appear to be splendid suggestions for *Redemption* - usually the major problems are securing the appropriate film rights for affordable sums of money!

The *Kern/Lydia Lunch* films are available through *Essa Distribution* - see ad elsewhere on this page - I find them somewhat of an acquired taste but some of the music from the likes of *Sonic Youth*, *Dream Syndicate*

and *Wiseblood* is suitably effective.

I've got to admit to never noticing any connection between *Basic Instinct* and *Lair of the White Worm* but you could be right. Personally I'd like to see both Amanda and Sharon star in *Lair of the White Worm 2* - a sure-fire hit wouldn't you say?!!!!

Dear Andy,

Many thanks for *Necro* 5. What a month June's been, *Necro*, *Giallo Pagos* and *Little Shoppe of Horrors* all at once - I'm in heaven!

Of Umberto Lenzi, all I can say is that I can only remember ever seeing two of his films - the infamous *Carnibal Ferox* I personally found to be graphic and sadistic just for the sheer hell of it. A terrible film living of its undeserving reputation.

The other was *Nightmare City* which I found hilarious, its pasty, lumpy-faced zombies running and jumping around like monkeys on speed brings tears to my eyes still.

I wasn't too impressed with Martin Jones *Phenomena* article so thank heavens for Tim Greaves and his wonderful *Twins of Evil* piece.

Along with his 1-Shot publications and his articles for your own magazine, Tim's fast becoming one of my favourite contributors.

Andy Jones
Stoke on Trent
Staffordshire

Well, I've got to disagree here Andy regarding Martin Jones - I thought the *Phenomena* piece was excellent, offering some hitherto unexplored ideas pertinent to the maestro's work. What I will say is when are you going to send me your piece on *Trauma Martin*??!



Whatever your views on NECRONOMICON I'd like to hear them whether they be good, bad or just plain ugly ! Or, if you want to air your views on wider aspects of the horror/fantasy genre then let's hear from you - all letters to the following address:

NECRONOMICON
 'Evil' Writes
 15 Jubilee Road
 NEWTON ABBOT
 Devon
 TQ12 1LB

Dear Andy,

Before the ravaging hoards of eagle-eyed Euro-trash film-fiends deluge you with complaints about factual inaccuracies within the pages of your esteemed publication, I would just like to say I KNOW. I have just been informed by eagle-eyed Euro-trash film-fiend Adrian Smith, (editor of the perfectionists guide to Italian exploitation known as DELIRIUM - buy it, it's bloody marvellous !), that I am guilty of the unforgivable sin of spelling Borowczyk's name wrong. That is, I spell Borowczyk's name wrong. Borowczyk is spelled Borowczyk. Though in the course of my studies I have also seen it spell Borowcyk.

Borowczyk. Happy, Adrian ?
 However, I would like to claim diminished responsibility for my crime due to the following unusual circumstances :

- temporary insanity due to the impossible deadlines imposed on myself by the late arrival of review tape leading to two all-night vigils of intensive writing.

- In addition, failure of the editor to act accordingly in order to correct the blatantly misspelled name under discussion.

I would also like to make it clear that at no point did I claim that myself, or anyone else for that matter, found Borowczyk's film "noir".

Yours sin-cerely

Harevy Fentonck

Hey ! - I can't even pronounce that Polish guys name never mind spell it !!!

Dear Andy,

The latest issue of Necronomicon visualised

here in the colonies in the last weeks of November, as Autumn yielded quietly to Winter. For a moment at the newsstand, I thought I had inadvertently picked up a copy of Hustler, but when I couldn't locate even a single "Chester the Molester" cartoon, I realised what was what.

Just can't get enough of them Vampyres. I only recently saw the film, although publicity shots and stills from it had captivated me for twenty years. The shower shot of Marianne Morris on page 26 is what we on this side of the pond like to call a keeper, yes, that'll be one to show the grandson. Wouldn't mind getting her into my loo for a fitting.

As usual, your views and insights leave your American contemporaries choking in your dust. Splendid insights all around, and the addition of colour just makes a good thing better.

I feel I should clarify a point regarding my remarks (and your response) about Mario Bava's *Mask of Satan*. Keep in mind, I've only seen (as have most Yanks), the American International Pictures cut of the film, (*Black Sunday*, as it was called here), with the Les Baxter score. At the October Chiller Theatre Convention in New Jersey, I finally procured a tape of the European cut, with its original score, from Tim Lucas, publisher of the estimable Video Watchdog. (Tim and his wife Donna had accompanied Barbara Steele, a guest of Chiller Theatre), I'm certain it will make all the difference, although I'm not entirely sold on Bava as a storyteller. By the way, Chiller Theatre recently brought out their own eponymous fanzine, and if you're not able to get your hands on a copy, let me know. Once again, congratulations all around. Keep this up and you're sure to be bigger than Jesus Christ.

Demons all around me,

Richard Harland Smith
 New York
 USA

Richard, your praise gets better and better as I've heard this JC figure is quite a guy - don't really know much about him myself except he was in *A Fish Called Wanda*! Let's hope that *Necronomicon* - the book, will build upon these expectations !

Dear Andy,

Regarding your correspondent Carol Jenks letter in issue 5. The second Barbara Steele Dr. Hitchcock movie is available on tape from Sinister Cinema in the USA, in NSTC format as *The Ghost*, and Bava's *The Whip And The Flesh* was around in Holland in a dutch subtitled English language video.

I have enjoyed the two issues (5 & 6) that I have seen of *Necro*, particularly appreciated the amount of space devoted to *The Long Hair Of Death*.

Good luck and keep up the sterling work.

Clive Bennett
 Ruislip
 Middlesex

I'm sure all *Necro*-hounds will be pleased on the film into Clive - *The Long Hair Of Death* is one of my own favourites and yet another of the neglected Italian horrors around.

Dear Andy,

So at last two of my wildest dreams (which just goes to show how limited my imagination is !) have come true - firstly, we get credits for the sometimes baffling cover pictures, and secondly, the arrival of a proper subscription service. It's a little disconcerting to find that *Necronomicon* is not a quarterly anymore - it's an approx six-monthly publication from now on then is it ? - (well, er, sort of annual now John - Ed !). Mustn't grumble, as it works out cheaper that way, and the quality is more important than the quantity... and no doubt you'll have enough on your metaphorical plate coping with a "necrobaby" - (good title for a film anyone ?). Commiserations are in order ! No, I don't really mean that - I'm not a genuine cynic, just a pseudo one. But anyway, I'll stop waffling and please, no more glaring errors like in issue 5 - trying to pass off Beatrice M. as Monika M. just won't do ! (Are these two actresses, by any chance related - or is M a common German surname ??).

Whilst we're on the subject of Monika M. (and she's a most worthy subject to turn one's attention to, in my humble opinion), where do the two photos of her on page 10

come from ? Is this another one of her films I (shock I horror I), know nothing about ? Are they just publicity shots or what ? Well, I'm pretty damn sure they're not from Schramm, speaking as a fully-fledged Buttgerit fan I have to confess that, after one viewing, I'm very disappointed with Schramm. Perhaps it'll grow on me. Some films take time. Meanwhile, I still toy with the quaint idea of Jorg making a Nekromantik 3D one day... and perhaps in aroma-vision (or whatever the damn thing was called way back when) too - that should really be interesting !

The rest of issue 5 was another fine mix of films, speaking as a non-worshipper of Argento's work, I have to say I regard Phenomena as one of his most enjoyable efforts, storyline absurdities aside. Nice also to see a piece on Dallamano's Venus In Furs - makes a lot more sense than Franco's film of the same title - I'd never even heard of it until Redemption brought it to my attention. What a grand job they're doing ! As indeed is a certain Tim Greaves... not only has he produced an impressive series of One-Shot publications, but he also seems to be infiltrating the pages of Necro with ever-increasing regularity these days. Not that I'm complaining as he seems to take an interest in precisely the same kind of films as I do. Can't wait to see Valerie And Her Week Of Wonders (financial restrictions do not permit it as yet - or is it because I'm secretly hoping to win another of your competitions ?) - the title does leave a lot to be desired however ? But what's in a name and all that.

I used to think Ken Russell was a "serious" film-maker, so when I first saw *Lair of the White Worm*, I was understandably shocked, but instantly relegated it to the "so bad it's good" category. I think I appreciated it a bit more fully on subsequent viewings. On the subject of Ken's films, I really enjoyed *Salome's Last Feast*. Any idea what happened to it ? Has it ever been released on video ? If not, it damn well should be !

Long for the day when we can see a fully restored print of *The Wicker Man*. BBC's longer-than-usual version of a few years ago certainly whetted the appetite. I was always led to believe that the missing footage contained more of Ingrid Pitt. Strange then that at the recent Festival of Fantastic Films, Ingrid herself should say that the shorter version is better, the extra footage apparently consisting of mainly superfluous dialogue. Ho hum. The music in the film is magnificent also - not the kind of thing I'd listen to usually - but fits perfectly within the context. Was there ever a soundtrack album available ? (Is anyone interested in the fact that The Mock Turtles recorded a version of The Willow Song as part of their *Wicker Man* single - the title track itself having nothing to do with the film, although the sleeve featured an image from the film).

Okay, that's enough of my ramblings for now so I'll leave you in peace until next time.

John Worley
Northampton

Whoops! - no sooner do you get a subscription service than it closes - sorry John but circumstances do change and hopefully when you see the Necro book I'll be forgiven !

The Monika M photos are from her own personal file and have nothing to do with any of her films as you noticed - maybe I'll get some more if she's tempted by Nekromantik 3D !!!

Can't say I know much about of Ken's *Salome* except that I think Linzi Drew's got a brief cameo (shows the level my mind works at eh !?!), and as for *The Wicker Man*, well, Christopher Lee rarely eulogises about his old horror work with the notable exception of Hardy's film so obviously he rates it too.

Dear Andy,

First of all I hope you're ok. How can it be otherwise with Villa eliminating my fave team - Inter Milan - from the UEFA Cup ? (I realise this is all terribly dated now but any Villa victory is worth savouring this season - especially this one ! - Ed),

Anyway, what's most important is that Necro keeps on getting better and better. I loved issue 5 and I've ordered *The Wicker Man* through a local video shop. I'd like to order some Jorg Buttgerit films too, but there would be no way of them getting through our censorship (sounds like Britain - Ed).

I'm also enclosing a photocopy of a Collinson twins photo from a local magazine. (Unfortunately, the quality is too poor to reproduce here or I would have - Ed). You wouldn't believe what a hit they were back then over here, in a time when Malta was still literally ruled by the church. My dad, who passed away three years ago, used to buy

magazines such as the one the photo appeared in and you wouldn't believe your eyes reading the film titles which were banned during this time. Only to mention three - Brando's *The Wild One*, Betty Grable's *Meet Me After The Show* and Liz Taylor's *Butterfield 8*.

That's the state our country was in during the 1950's and 1960's and believe me, I wouldn't risk ordering any Jorg Buttgerit films on video because they would be banned. Last year I ordered Iggy Pop's "Kiss My Blood" tape and it was banned due to him stripping stark naked 5 songs from the end!

I only managed to get it through a friend of mine who went on holiday to London, just to give you an idea what goes on here - (this is the first time I've heard of people visiting these shores for banned material to export !! - Ed).

By the way, has *Reservoir Dogs* been released over there yet and how about A Moana Pozzi tribute please !

Max Littriza
Figura
Malta

It's always interesting to hear about censorship experiences in other countries don't you think although perhaps the most comprehensive survey is to be found in the fascinating seminal issue of the anti-censorship magazine *Scapegoat*.

Reservoir has yet to be granted a video certificate at the time of writing but following the release of both *Beyond Bedlam* and *Bad Lieutenant* on video here, I'm sure it will only be a matter of time. Moana Pozzi tribute - why over to you Andrea ?!!

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