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Irish Horror Cinema

Kim Newman

Even setting aside the myriad film versions of *Dracula*, which range from purportedly faithful versions of Bram Stoker's novel to wild tangents like *Billy the Kid Versus Dracula* (1966) and *Dracula Sucks* (1979), Irish creative talents have had a significant role in the history of the horror film. *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, Stoker's other major horror novel, has been officially filmed several times (*Blood From the Mummy's Tomb*, 1971, *The Awakening*, 1980, *Legend of the Mummy*, 1997), unofficially several times more (*La Cabeza Viviente/The Living Head*, 1963) and is a source for almost all 'mummy' movies. J. Sheridan LeFanu's vampire tale 'Carmilla' and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and 'The Canterville Ghost' have inspired multiple film and television adaptations. Like Dorothy Macardle's novel *Uneasy Freehold*, filmed as *The Uninvited* (1944), these oft-told stories are notably not set in Ireland, though Stoker and LeFanu frequently wrote about their native land, drawing on Irish legends and folk-tales for their ghost stories. We still await a film of the greatest of all horror novels to use an Irish location, William Hope Hodgson's *The House on the Borderland*.

Away from the homeland, Irish ex-patriates have done important work in horror: directors Rex Ingram (*The Magician*, 1926), Roy William Neill (*Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, 1943) and Neil Jordan (*Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*, 1992) and actors Arthur Shields (a werewolf in *Daughter of Dr Jekyll*, 1957), Jack MacGowran (*Dance of the Vampires*, 1967), Gabriel Byrne (a Nazi in *The Keep*, 1983, the Devil in *End of Days*, 1999), Stuart Townsend (the Vampire Lestat in *Queen of the Damned*, 2002, Dorian Gray in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, 2003), Michael Gambon (a werewolf in *The Beast Must Die*, 1974), Liam Cunningham (a werewolf in *Dog Soldiers*, 2002), Brendan Gleeson (*Lake Placid*, 1999, *28 days later …*, 2002), Stephen Rea (*The Doctor and the Devils*, 1985, *FeardotCom*, 2002, *The I Inside*, 2003) and Patrick Bergin (who has played Frankenstein, Dracula and the Devil). Patrick Magee, famed on stage as a great interpreter of the works of Samuel Beckett even counts as a minor horror star: with eye-rolling, beetle-browed, dialogue-savouring performances in the likes of Roger Corman's *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964), Freddie Francis's *The Skull* (1965), *Die, Monster, Die!* (1965), *Marat/Sade* (as DeSade, 1967),*The Fiend* (1971), Roy Ward Baker's *Asylum* (1972), Peter Sykes's *Demons of the Mind* (1972), *… And Now the Screaming Starts!* (1973), *The Monster Club* (1980), Lucio Fulci's *Gatto Nero/The Black Cat* (1981) and Walerian Borowczyk's *Docteur Jekyll et les Femmes* (1981). Yet, for all this suitable talent, there's a distinct shortage of Irish horror films, and little which might be counted as an Irish horror – or even fantastical – tradition in the cinema.

Most treatments of Irish folklore in the cinema have been benign enough to overdose a sugar addict, usually buried under Hollywood's idea of 'Oirishness'. Walt Disney's production of *Darby O'Gill and the Little People* (1959) has (like most Disney fantasies) one genuinely nightmarish sequence, in

which the young hero is pursued by the Great Banshee. Otherwise, precious few chills can be found in the likes of *Finian's Rainbow* (1968), *Leapin' Leprechauns* (1995), *Spellbreaker: Secret of the Leprechauns* (1996), *The Last Leprechaun* (1998) and *The Magical Legend of the Leprechauns* (1999). Screen leprechauns tend to be cute, horribly-accented little fellows. Perversely, the minor Leprechaun horror franchise puts a nasty spin on this image rather than mining the many more sinister stories of the Little People. With Warwick Davis – who plays it cute in *A Very Unlucky Leprechaun* (1998) – under the snarling make-up and dressed like a demented Lucky Charms mascot with buckled shoes and big hat, *Leprechaun* (1993) has the title character loose in Los Angeles, inflicting horrible fates and worse wisecracks upon those ill-advised enough to steal his pot o' gold. Despite featuring a young Jennifer Aniston, it's a totally undistinguished effort – which didn't stop Trimark pictures from making a slew of sequels: *Leprechaun 2*(1994, aka *One Wedding and Lots of Funerals*), *Leprechaun 3* (1995), *Leprechaun: In Space* (1997), *Leprechaun in the Hood* (2000) and *Leprechaun: Back 2 tha Hood*(2003). In desperation, the films come up with their own rules, similar to the lore which affects screen vampires, so Davis's cackling fiend is repelled by a four-leaf clover as Dracula would be by garlic. Outside of the *Leprechaun* series, which reached its nadir in a brace of films set in 'tha Hood' with Davis as a rapping monster taking on tas like Ice-T, Irish myth has figured in few horror films. *Cry of the Banshee* (1970) is misleadingly-titled: it's set in England, and its howling monster is a male werewolf type rather than the Irish wailing woman. *Banshee* (2006) is a contemporary American action film about a figurative banshee – a vengeful, whining woman. Occasional television episodes have been more to the point, though rarely with distinction: 'Banshee' (*Ray Bradbury Theater*, 1986) offers Peter O'Toole spoofing John Huston in an elementary terror-by-spook episode, while the occasional historical flashbacks which explored the title character's Dublin origins on *Angel* (1999-2004) mostly to expose cruelly David Boreanaz's inability to do an accent. John Sayles's *The Secret of Roan Inish* (1994) is delicately touched with fantasy, though not in the explicit *Darby O'Gill* manner and deals with a selkie, either a human raised by seals or a shapeshifter. Roan Inish is ambiguous about its selkie, but John Gray's TV movie *The Seventh Stream* (2001), with fisherman Scott Glenn netting wereseal Saffron Burrows, is more explicit. *Roan Inish* and *The Seventh Stream*, essentially American productions, but use Irish locations and mostly Irish supporting casts. This pattern turns up over and over in the few pre-2000 works that might count as Irish horror.

In 1963, Francis Ford Coppola persuaded Roger Corman – for whom he was working as a minion on a European-shot film called *The Young Racers* – to finance a quickie horror film that he might direct using some of the leftover *Young Racers* cast and crew. Always eager to squeeze an extra film out of a budget, Corman let the junior auteur have his head and the result was the Irish-shot *Dementia 13* (aka *The Haunted and the Hunted*) – a Psycho knock-off about axe murders on the estate of the Haloran Family, one of whom is a homicidal maniac. Coppola, who would return to the genre with a vastly bigger budget on *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), works fast and creative in *Dementia 13*, making shocking little sequences out of the killings and the implied haunting, using his locations well and highlighting unexpected eeriness like a transistor radio burbling distorted pop music as it sinks into a lake along with a just-murdered corpse. It takes place in Ireland for convenience – if Corman

had been shooting a Western instead of a European race track film, Coppola would have set the film in Texas – but Coppola uses the location well, and was among the first to discover the horror potential of Patrick Magee (who would work for Corman on other projects). Cast as the red herring local doctor, Magee is nicely self-deprecating, even delivering a speech about how his 'one-sided smile' makes him seem too sinister to be confided in. Ireland was and is occasionally used by British films to play other countries: Hammer never shot a horror film in Ireland, but did use its green, wet fields – less blighted, apparently by electricity pylons and passing lorries than their English equivalents - for a couple of their pocket-sized swashbucklers (*Sword of Sherwood Forest*, 1960, *The Viking Queen*, 1967). Cyril Frankel's *The Very Edge* (1962), a little-known, interesting early entry in the psycho/stalker cycle, has maniacal Jeremy Brett persecuting ex-model/housewife Anne Heywood (with Magee down in the cast list); it unusually uses a nondescript modern Dublin suburb to represent a housing development in a non-specific English 'New Town'. Don Sharp's *The Face of Fu Manchu* (1965) effectively uses locations in Dublin and the surrounding countryside to represent London in the 1930s and the wilds of Tibet and China. Robert Altman's psycho-charade *Images* (1972) and John Boorman's science fiction film *Zardoz* (1974) get a great deal of value out of misty widescreen vistas of the countryside, without confirming (or denying) that their stories are set in Ireland. This tradition is continued in *Reign of Fire* (2002), in which Ireland plays a post-end-of-the-world England ruled by fire-breathing dragons, and the slasher film *Wilderness* (2006), set on an offshore island but shot in Northern Ireland.

Until the mid-1990s, homegrown (or even transplanted) Irish horror cinema consisted mostly of footnotes. Hilton Edwards, the Dublin stage director, made a short film *Return to Glennascaul* (1951) with Orson Welles, playing himself, being told an elementary ghost story (the one about the disappearing inn). It's an interesting footnote to Welles's career, and – were it not for the mildness of its scary elements - might count as Ireland's first horror film. The Swedish director Calvin Floyd made two interesting Irish-Swedish gothic horrors: *Victor Frankenstein* (1977), a low-key relatively faithful version of the Mary Shelley novel (the chapters which involve the near-creation of the Monster's Mate are set in Ireland), and *The Sleep of Death* (1981), based on LeFanu's 'The Room at the Dragon Volant' (which had already been done on television as 'The Inn of the Flying Dragon', 1960, and 'The Flying Dragon', 1966, episodes of the American Dow Hour of Great Mysteries and the British Mystery and Imagination series). Though set in France, *Sleep of Death* is a unique Irish-based adaptation of a story by one of Ireland's major horror writers, and furthermore features and Patrick Magee as a sinister Marquis. Floyd's films are seriously-intended, though they incline towards Merchant-Ivory respectability in adapting their sources rather than taking off on cinematic flights of fancy.

Interesting rather than frightening, Floyd's films are still a cut above *The Fantasist* (1986), a Dublin-set serial killer mystery which was Robin Hardy's disappointing, tardy follow-up to *The Wicker Man* (1973), and George Pavlou's below-average monster romp *Rawhead Rex* (1986). Based on a Clive Barker story which is set in rural England, *Rawhead* was relocated to Ireland for budget reasons -- though the plot revolves around an Anglican church and awkward lines had to be tipped in

when someone remembered there were no Roman ruins in Ireland. The novelist and director Neil Jordan usually brings a fantastical touch to his films, and gets closer to genre horror in his adaptations of Angela Carter (*The Company of Wolves*, 1983), Anne Rice and Bari Wood (*In Dreams*, 1999). However, the comical ghost romp *High Spirits (*1988), which is set in Ireland, is among his least-satisfying films, an effects-heavy pudding which ought to be a breezy comic fantasy but devolves into failed farce. *The Butcher Boy* (1997), based on Pat McCabe's novel, is closer to horror, entering the mind of a junior psychopath (Eamonn Owens) who has visions of the Virgin Mary (Sinead O'Connor) and takes great delight in murdering a neighbour (Fiona Shaw) he holds responsible for all the troubles visited upon his family. Like *The Fantasist*, *The Butcher Boy* plays up the specific Irish milieu, addressing the not-always-benign influence of the Church on all things: Hardy works on the rural Catholic upbringing of his imperilled, resilient heroine (Moira Harris), but Jordan and McCabe fill out the 1960s world of young Francie, influenced by American popular culture but also his father's repeated yarns and invented myths.

Three decades on from *Dementia 13*, Roger Corman set up his own unit in Ireland and backed a clutch of genre movies to feed the hungry maw of his *Roger Corman Presents* series of made-for-cable movies, with an eye on ancillary video (later, DVD) rental and sales business. In rapid succession, Corman produced Scott P. Levy's *House of the Damned* (aka *Escape to Nowhere*, 1996), starring Alexandra Paul and Greg Evigan; Howard McCain's *The Unspeakable* (1996), scripted by Christopher Wood (who once wrote the 'Confessions' books and films as Timothy Lea and a few Roger Moore Bond movies), starring Athena Massey, David Chokachi, Timothy Busfield and Cyril O'Reilly; Mitch Marcus's *The Haunting of Hell House* (1999), starring Michael York and Claudia Christian, and purportedly based on a story by Henry James; Marcus's*Knocking on Death's Door* (1999), starring Brian Bloom, Kimberly Rowe, John Doe and David Carradine; Michael B. Druxman's *The Doorway*(2000), starring Roy Scheider, Lauren Woodland and Christian Harmony; and Marcus's *Wolfhound* (2002), which the director signed with the pseudonym 'Donovan Kelly', from a script by novelist Scott Bradfield, with Allen Scotti, Jennifer Courtney and Playboy Playmate Julie Cialini. Corman also backed a couple of anonymous action-thrillers in Ireland (*Bloodfist VIII*: *Trained to Kill*, 1996, *Dangerous Curves*, 2000) using the same set-up.

These films rely on lower-case American writers, directors and lead actors, but use Irish supporting players – frequently dubbed in an attempt to pass off Ireland as Maine or Massachusetts. Recurring presences include Brendan Murray, Mike O'Nolan, John McHugh, Colm O'Maonlai, Brian Glanney and a surprising number of veterans of the Irish language TV soap *Ros na Run*. Only *House of the Damned* and *Wolfhound* are set in Ireland: both are about American (or Irish-American) couples who unwisely settle in hostile communities, to be pestered by spooks in one case and a pack of shapeshifters in the other. *Wolfhound*, despite silly lesbian werebabe scenes, is probably the pick of the litter, thanks to a few good lines from Bradfield and local actor Brian Monahan's imposing performance as an alpha male werewolf. Not one of these films, but easy to lump in with them (a few actors recur) is John Hough's *Bad Karma* aka *Hell's Gate* (2002), from a novel by Douglas Clegg, starring Patsy Kensit, Patrick Muldon and Amy Locane. This also passes off Irish locations

as New England, but it's a little nastier than the television-backed Corman movies, involving sado-masochist murders and the reincarnation of Jack the Ripper.

The American Michael Almereyda first tackled Bram Stoker in the unusual, low-budget, black and white New York vampire movie *Nadja* (1994), in which he cast Irish actor Karl Geary as Renfield, the fly-eating minion of Dracula. Almereyda's slightly more conventional second horror film is *Eternal* (1998) aka *Trance* or *The Eternal: Kiss of the Mummy*. This uniquely connects Stoker with his homeland, trotting out yet another variant on Bram Stoker's oft-filmed *Jewel of Seven Stars* but with the novel's Egyptology background stripped away in favour of more unusual Irish Drudiry. It works on atmosphere and character, developing its plot in surprising lurches, and gets away with its old-hat story of a heroine under threat of possession by a distant or recent ancestor by dint of oblique storytelling, unusually convincing performances, a whole-hearted embrace of gothic blarney and sheer mystic vagueness. Nora (Alison Elliott) and Jim (Jared Harris), an alcoholic New York couple with a young son (Jeffrey Goldschrafe), return to Nora's childhood home in Ireland, where her blind academic uncle (Christopher Walken) and bedridden grandmother (Lois Smith), assisted by a little girl (Rachel O'Rourke) who shares narrating chores with Jim Jr, preside over a house haunted by the spirit of a two-thousand-year-old Druid priestess, whose bog-preserved corpse is kept in the cellar and who manifests herself looking either like Nora's mother (Sinead Dolan) or Nora herself. The uncle is killed at the half-way point by the revived mummy and the old lady calls in Nora's ex-boyfriend (Geary) and some semi-terrorist gunmen to deal with the revenant, which is worming its way into Nora's family almost by accident.

In the end, mother love and a bottle of Irish whiskey get through and the priestess recreates her original drowning, leaving the smashed family to reform. Elliott and Harris are an unusual hero and heroine for a horror film, troubled by booze and simmering family resentments and yet still credibly a couple, and the actors imbue the roles with unusual but unshowy depth -- Harris, while lampooning the resident mad professor, even does a credible impersonation of Walken, whose Irish accent is wobbly but livens up the exposition. Almereyda is rare among modern horror directors in neglecting straight action, though a confrontation between the dazed, resilient mummy and the gunmen is interesting, but works hard on an air of disorienting (here, slightly boozy or druggy) menace. Like *Nadja*, *Eternal* uses home movie-like snippets to fill in the never-quite-defined idylls and horrors of the protagonist's childhood. Far more than the Corman implants, Almereyda uses the Irish setting and locations in an interesting way, with the bog-tanned princess an intriguing, culture-specific alternative to the usual wrapped Egyptian mummy.

Meanwhile, Irish filmmakers began to make their own horror films – mostly outside the mainstream of the small Irish film industry, whose tentative approach to genre yielded only odd, arty, whimsical items like Steve Barron's *Rat* (2000), Robert Quinn's *Dead Bodies* (2003) and John Simpson's *Freeze Frame (*2004). In Northern Ireland, Enda Hughes directed, wrote, edited and photographed *The Eliminator* (1996), a hand-to-mouth movie in the spirit of Peter Jackson's *Bad Taste* (1987), similarly put together over a lengthy shoot by enthusiastic and irreverent young film-makers. While

Jackson's movie has a pace and confidence which bely its origins, *The Eliminator* capitalises on its ramshackle feel, sometimes staging stunt or action sequences with a deliberate clumsiness that dovetails seamlessly in with budget-enforced choppiness (£8,000). It opens portentously with a quotation from an ancient Irish necromantic text that suggests this, like seemingly every other film ever made in Northern Ireland, will be a serious film about 'the troubles'. 'The Organisation' - presumably the IRA - is concerned because the British security services have kidnapped O'Brien (Michael Hughes), a student rebel who has on disc the plans to a super-vehicle 'the Viper'. The eye-patched, claw-handed, limping, geek-bearded, overacting Hawk (Mik Duffy) sends his one-time friend Stone (Barry Wallace), a supercool superspy in a snappy hat, to rescue O'Brien and bring back the plans. However, because of bad blood between Hawk and Stone, Stone is set up to fail in his mission, having been given a map of Vietnam rather than Cornwall.

O'Brien is tortured in a disused cardboard box factory by cackling Brits who have built the Viper - a tank-like effort resembling a carnival float version of the Spectrum Pursuit Vehicle from *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons* - and need the codeword to make the on-board computer work. Stone frees O'Brien and the Brits get wiped out in a knockabout battle, during which O'Brien commandeers the Viper and drives it around a factory site, ploughing through strategically placed piles of cardboard boxes. After some gore, Stone defeats the Brits - the chief nasty, Scorpio, is burned up in a *Mad Max*-ish car smash - but is killed by Hawk when he complains about being sent into action without back-up. Then the spy/s-f/action plot winds down and the horror movie kicks in, as Stone returns from the dead with a white curly wig and a *Darkman* hat-and-mask arrangement, picking up some firepower from an arms dump and heading off to 'the Irish Rebel Warrior Graveyard' to invoke a curse from the Celtic Book of the Dead and raise the zombified remains of Ireland's heroes to see off the Organisation's balaclava-helmeted goons. There's 'a bitching zombie fight' in the graveyard, complete with sneezed-out eyeballs, Fulci-like facial maggots, plenty of stumbling around, and a lot of amiably silly gore. In the finale, O'Brien tries to settle things by summoning up disappointing Irish heroes - Cuchullain, who turns out to be a spotty youth, and the giant Finn MacCool, who has shrunk into a prancing leprechaun - and then St Patrick himself to sort out the squabble. St Pat delivers a speech about how Irishmen should turn to the ways of peace and everyone seems cowed, but the zombie Stone condemns everyone present as 'hypocritical bastards' and pulls the pin out of a grenade. The last line has St Patrick muttering 'oh shit'; then it's a rousing chorus of 'Alternative Ulster' over the (long) end credits.

One-man band Hughes may not have been able to get audible dialogue recordings - much of Hawk's manic yattering is white noise - but he still manages something distinctive. The most Jackson-like aspect (cf: *Meet The Feebles*, 1989) is the jokey Vietnam flashback - set up by a hilariously a-historical speech that gets all the dates wrong - with yellow-tinted frolics and gore in the jungle. The two major set-pieces are the Viper/car chase and the zombie battle, both of which are packed with gags but go on too long. It's very rough-hewn, but Hughes cannily gets laughs from things like mistimed punches or obvious stunt dummies. The cast mostly mug outrageously - Duffy is probably too broad even for this - but Wallace and Michael Hughes deliver surprisingly decent work. It may

be obscure, and its North-of-the-Border origins marginalize it even within a marginalized filmography – when the producers of *Dead Meat* (2004) and *Boy Eats Girl* (2005) were arguing over who could claim the title of 'Ireland's first zombie movie', they either didn't remember or didn't count *The Eliminator*, which undeniably got there first.

Though obviously a low-budget effort, writer-director Conor McMahon's *Dead Meat* feels far more like a 'proper film' than *The Eliminator*, with funding from the Irish Film Board. It has a rural setting (including an impressive ruined castle location) and makes vague topical references to the mad cow disease and foot and mouth outbreaks, and characters who don't try to disguise their accents, but still feels like a run-of-the-mill zombie film, a simple imitation of George Romero's work which dwells on disembowelling extras and staging zombie chase sequences without tackling the sub-textural material which makes Romero's films more than just bloody exploitation. It opens eerily with a farmer attacked by a mad zombie cow on a near-derelict farm (a setting which recurs in the slender Irish horror filmography) and the living dead disease jumps the species barrier from cattle to people, which turns loose the usual bloodthirsty, gut-munching ghouls on the countryside. Helena (Marian Araujo) and Martin (David Ryan) knock down a shambling derelict (Ned Dennehy) on a rural road, and assume they've killed him – only for Martin to sustain a bite and turn into a mindless, hungry zombie. Helena becomes the heroine-survivor, seeing off her dead boyfriend with a vacuum cleaner, and joining up with spade-wielding gravedigger Desmond (David Muyllaert) to struggle across country towards the supposed safety of a rescue centre, picking up a few more stragglers (dead meat, in plot terms) to get bitten, transformed or killed. Eoin Whelan, veteran of McMahon's hurling-themed horror short *The Braineater* (2001), plays the liveliest character: Cathal, an obnoxious local with a tweed cap, a thick accent and a tendency to rambling non sequitur. The finale is cynical and downbeat, as Helena makes it through but is instantly penned in trucks with other civilians, but it seems more like a straight lift from Romero's *The Crazies* (1974) than anything felt. Stephen Bradley's *Boy Eats Girl*, scripted by Derek Landy, is an even more derivative zombie comedy (essentially a remake of Bob Balaban's *My Boyfriend's Back*, 1993). A lengthy series of contrivances to do with nervous schoolboy hero Nathan (David Leon) and his attempt to tell a longtime friend (Samantha Mumba) he is in love with her lead to the teenager semi-accidentally hanging himself, whereupon his devoted mother (Deirdre O'Kane) uses a forbidden book of voodoo spells which happens to be stashed in the basement of the local church to bring him back to life. Thanks to a missing page, a crucial ingredient is left out of the spell, and Nathan revives as a potential cannibal. Without a pulse or blood pressure (this is perhaps the first film to deal with the problem of erectile dysfunction among the undead), Nathan attends the school disco, where he is overcome by zombie instincts and bites the rugby-playing bully (Mark Huberman), who proceeds to spread the usual plague of flesh-eating zombiedom among the locals. It contrasts poorly with Edgar Wright's *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) which wholly embraces its Britishness for contrast with the American conventions of the zombie genre. A stumbling imitation of lesser films, to the extent of casting thirtyish teenagers and presenting a view of school life which is a cartoon idea of American teendom not remotely credible as Irish, *Boy Eats Girl* loses the cultural specificity (it was even mostly shot on the Isle of Man) that even *Dead Meat* takes pride in. It gets gruesome in the home

stretch, with a combine harvester massacre rather like the one in Jake West's *Evil Aliens* (2005) and gore all over the floor – but a handy snake, whose presence in famously snake-free Ireland is never explained, provides the final ingredient and restores the hero to normal life.

Picking up on elements hinted at in *Dead Meat*, two films finally advanced the cause of a specifically Irish mode of horror movie, albeit within familiar sub-genres. Director-writer Patrick Kenny's *Winter's End* (2005) is an entry in the 'captivity' cycle of psycho-thriller (cf: *The Collector*, 1965, *Misery*, 1990, *Calvaire*, 2003). Slacker photographer Jack Davis (Adam Goodwin) attends an open-air concert the film can't afford to depict, gets completely drunk, has a brief argument with his more responsible married best friend Ben (Donie Ryan) and returns to the field to find his car has been stolen. Farmer Henry Rose (Michael Crowley) lures him down a country road so he can use the phone and knocks him out, then chains him up in the barn. Gradually, it emerges that the cracked villain's plan is to have the victim impregnate Amy (Jillian Bradbury), his half-sister, so that his family's 150 year-long tenancy of the failing farm can continue. Henry says he'll let the lad go with a cash pay-out, but Jack is smart enough to realise from the outset that the farmer has to kill him to have a hope of getting away with it. The set-up at the farm is interesting, with Henry given a bit of range and depth in his crazy schemes, and an uneasy balance between the meek, dependant girl and her other brother Sean (Paul Whyte), a simpleton Henry keeps threatening to have put in an institution. Jack has to tell the girl, who has been cut off from TV and newspapers, that Ireland doesn't have 'institutions' in that sense any more, and hasn't for years. All stories like this follow a similar pattern – with the victim going from disbelief to pleading to desperate trying to escape via bogus cooperation and the captor trying to hold together a scheme which keeps stumbling over the human element – but *Winter's End* is well-enough written and acted to get past familiarity. There's a clever surprise late in the day, as the captive cannily gets the farmer to send out for an especially poncey Italian meal as a last supper – which turns out to be a signal to his best friend, the chef in the restaurant. The climax is protracted, with running about and hiding behind hedges plus shotgun-waving and an obvious casualty – but the coda, which finds captive and 'wife' together four years later, with a young daughter, is surprisingly affecting with a minor undertone of creepin.

Writer-director Billy O'Brien's *Isolation* (2006) offers another desperate, lonely farmer out to preserve his doomed business, but segues from rural misery and suspense to monster attacks. The strength of O'Brien's something-nasty-on-the-farm film is that it has enough confidence in the effectiveness of its special effects to avoid the knockabout slapstick found in *The Eliminator* or *Dead Meat* (and UK-shot efforts like *The Revenge of Billy the Kid*, 1991, or *Evil Aliens*) and treats its potentially ridiculous, *Alien*-variant story with the utmost seriousness. In grimly-realistic, Irish rural mode, farmer Dan (John Lynch) is clearly close to cracking up and troubled by the difficulty his pregnant cows are having in coming to term. Dan tries to shoo off a traveller (Sean Harris, of *Creep*, 2004) and his runaway girlfriend (Ruth Negga, of *Breakfast on Pluto*, 2005), but in a crisis calls the kids in to help him haul a calf out of its mother with a winch and rope. The local vet (Essie Davis) and a lone scientist (Marcel Iures) are also around the farm, and it turns out that the cows are being used in fringe unethical experiments that have a nasty side-effect. The calves are born pregnant with

inside-out little freak foetuses which get loose after an autopsy and grow rapidly into voracious monsters. The film offers a long, atmospheric build-up, full of pregnant pauses, withheld explanations and desperate characters who never quite explain their awful situations – but the last half-hour is a high quality monster runabout, with the well-realised creatures darting out of the shadows to inflict horrible damage on the dwindling human cast.

O'Brien follows examples like *28 days later ...* and *Wild Country* (2005), telling a familiar story in an unusual manner, with a lot of work on the nuanced but unfussy performances (Lynch, in particular, does something with almost no scripted material to go on) and a sense of real characters in a crisis to ground the basic monster movie business in mucky credibility. The effects by veteran Bob Keen are fine, and sparingly-used – with one nice moment as the biggest of the monsters has a sudden full reveal, and stays on screen a few seconds longer than expected without losing its shock value. Without overstressing its origins, *Isolation* also offers a specific Irish take on its story – the motor of the plot, as in *Winter's End*, is the economic plight of traditional farm folk left behind by the 'Celtic Tiger' boom and clinging to the land with all the tenacity of Richard Harris in *The Field* (1990); and there's uncomfortable truth in the treatment of the traveller couple, jovially advised with menaces to move on by the Garda and instantly suspected of any crime or horror.

There are still too-few Irish horror films to perceive a tradition, though theof rural agricultural miserablism as opposed to, say, Dublin-set urban ghost stories, is striking. Pegarty Long's *The Irish Vampire Goes West* (2006), the first Irish vampire film, is forthcoming, and may take another direction. And there are still a great many Irish or Irish-set horror stories, and a wealth of sinister folklore, which could profitably be brought to the screen. Finally, this survey would not be complete without mention of the most purely frightening ten minutes in Irish cinema, writer-director Brendan Muldowney's *The Ten Steps* (2004) – which combines ancient (a house where the Devil was once seen) and modern (a mobile phone-call) with psychology (fear of the dark, sibling tensions) and the supernatural (a hell-dimension in the basement). Here, at last, is the true Celtic Chiller.**Irish**

Irish Gothic: A Theoretical Introduction

Jarlath Killeen

Any list of important Irish writers includes a goodly number of Gothicists and horror aficionados, and their apparent over-representation has seemed to some critics to require an explanation. Since the critical turn to the Gothic in the 1970s, after which a torrent of theoretical and historical material on various versions of non-realism poured from the academic presses, a number of important cultural historians with an interest in Irish Studies have attempted to provide this explanation. In this article I will try to map the theoretical terrain covered by a number of these critics, and put forward a few hypotheses of my own which try to build on the insights already achieved.

While the critical literature on Irish Gothic is, as yet, relatively small (though growing every year), what has been produced is of a high standard. Interestingly, the very existence of the Irish Gothic as a literary tradition has been one of the points of controversy. As a brilliant biographer of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and a formidable cultural historian, W. J. McCormack is, perhaps, the major theorist of the Irish Gothic. In his seminal 'Irish Gothic and After' he examined the field in some detail, tracing its beginnings in a number of now obscure novels from the late eighteenth century, such as Regina Maria Roche's Children of the Abbey (1796), Mrs. Kelly's Ruins of Avondale Priory (1796), Mrs. F. C. Patrick's The Irish Heiress (1797), Most Ghosts (1798) by 'the Wife of an Officer', and Mrs. Colpoys' The Irish Excursion (1801), and following its trajectory through the writings of Charles Robert Maturin, Lady Morgan, Lady Clarke, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, William Carleton, Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker, W. B. Yeats, John Millington Synge and Elizabeth Bowen. This list of writers looked, to some, to be a ready-made Irish canon, an interpretation bolstered by McCormack's argument that 'if the Irish tradition of gothic fiction turns out, on examination, to be a slender one, there are other ways in which such material is of literary significance'.(1) Indeed, McCormack's article fell foul of the more general reaction to The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing in which it appeared. Although the editor Seamus Deane explicitly stated that the anthology was not meant to amount to a 'canon' of Irish writing, and was through its very inclusiveness designed to undermine and problematise all such pretensions to canonicity, critics of the project claimed that through its selection of editors and its exclusion or under-representation of some Irish writers it effectively amounted to a politicised anthology rather than a catholic representation of the richness of a vaguely defined 'Irish' literature. 'Irish Gothic and After' was taken by some as indicative of a canon of Irish Gothic, and McCormack later returned to the issue to complicate a simplistically linear reading of his choices.

In his important study Dissolute Characters, McCormack argued that the Irish writers of Gothic literature did not produce a definitive 'tradition' but merely mobilised the conventions found in English Gothic.(2) The terms 'tradition' and 'canon' conjure up too strongly the image of a direct and chronological line of great writers influencing one another. The danger with such constructions is that they effectively close themselves off to external forces and pressures, make Irish culture into an

inward looking and self-generating force, and suggest a coherence and formal and ideological similarity that simply does not exist between the texts and authors themselves. In relation to Irish Gothic McCormack posed a chronological problem: there is a large gap of twenty-five years between the publication of Charles Robert Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer (1820) and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's first novel The Cock and the Anchor (1845) (which was not a Gothic novel), and a further nineteen before Uncle Silas (1864) arrived. Such a gapped and discontinuous line could be called a 'tradition' in only the most dubious sense. McCormack wanted to complicate this idea of a tradition by examining what he called 'interventions' into literary history; he pointed out that Balzac's Melmoth réconcilié (1836), rather than any Irish text, is the crucial connection between Maturin and Le Fanu.(3) The appeal to 'tradition' masks historical processes, elides questions of origin and naturalises complex literary and cultural relations, and does this for ideological reasons. McCormack urges the 'unmasking of tradition as cousin-german to ideology'.(4) As Terence Brown pointed out in a review of *Dissolute Characters*:

> it is none of McCormack's purpose … to suggest the kinds of continuities, influences, rewritings, and critical engagements that are the stuff of less forensically sceptical literary history. Literary history in McCormack's quizzically interrogative mind is by contrast, a contested, troublingly uncertain activity which can only be awarded respect when it respects the weird contingencies of the human variable and the negotiations that occur in all writing between the world as text and the world as social and political construction. His version of a literary history is really a kind of anti-history which is arranged in terms of fissures and discontinuities.(5)

While accepting the force of McCormack's critique of putative 'traditions' as all-too-easy constructions of the ideological imagination, I would suggest that the kind of Irish Gothic line left after his deconstruction resembles actually Gothic edifice, full of suggestive gaps, obscure corners, imposing promontories (the 'great' works), fractures, fragments. In other words, despite the effects of historical process and 'external' interventions, a list of writers which includes figures as substantial as Maturin, Le Fanu, Wilde, Stoker, Yeats, Synge, and Bowen, all of whom have a connection to the same political and geographical space, all of whom have recourse to the same broadly defined conventions of Gothic, all of whom have some thematic associations, may still amount to a (much complicated) version of a tradition, indeed, a Gothic tradition in the full sense of the word. A literary tradition survives in the face of McCormack's justifiable worries that ideology rather than history lies behind the positing of an Irish Gothic. To assert a Gothic tradition in Ireland we need not be making a disguised claim to Irish self-sufficiency or even to a thematic coherence linking very different texts and authors, but merely suggesting that certain Irish writers pursued certain similar questions that were historically specific to the Irish situation, and in doing so they utilised the Gothic mode. The 'Irishness' of the tradition comes from the fact that the writers had some important Irish connection, dealt with Irish issues, and were partially influenced by (or at least vaguely aware of) an Irish line of precursors.

According to many critics, one of the connecting tissues between many of the writers of the Irish Gothic is their link to the colonial powers in Ireland (see especially Bakus for this): most of them were part of what used to be termed the 'Anglo-Irish', though we need to acknowledge that this term elides much in the way of class, theological and political difference. McCormack has, however, objected to a reading of the Irish Gothic as a legacy of a colonial psychology. In a short entry in The Handbook of Gothic Literature he argued that Maturin, Le Fanu and Stoker would not have felt the burden of colonial history and identity on their shoulders since none of them 'came from landowning families … two were of foreign (Huguenot) background, and one of these (LeFanu) could also boast a Gaelic ancestry (through the Sheridans)'.(6) However, psychological burdens do not always fall where they should. For example, the Huguenot community in Ireland, though putatively 'foreign', was fully implicated in the colonial project as it was central to the campaign of William of Orange. William's army contained a number of Huguenot generals, hundreds of Huguenot officers and four Huguenot regiments.(7) In the 1690 campaign, 'the youngest and strongest of the French refugees were ready to lay down their lives in defence of the Protestant religion and against the enemies of England'.(8) Securing the Williamite settlement was thus at least partially the work of the Huguenots. Moreover, a major extension of the Penal Laws took pace while the Huguenot Lord Galway was governor, and much subsequent historical analysis from Irish Catholics claimed that Galway was out for revenge against the Catholic Church which had mistreated the Huguenot community in France under Louis XIV.(9) Although in 1970 J. G. Simms demonstrated that Galway was not, in fact, behind the extension of the Penal Laws, the interdependence of the state and the Huguenot community was widely believed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.(10) Such historical details indicate that the burden of colonial history is wider than we initially expect, and we should not be surprised to find that this burden is one of the main issues Irish Gothic revolves around.

What remains for cultural historians is to expand on and explain the cultural significance of such connections between the Irish writers of Gothic fiction, and also to explain why Ireland should have produced a remarkably large number of writers who were so attracted to Gothic conventions. In perhaps the first substantial article on these matters, Roy Foster's study of Irish 'Protestant Magic' usefully linked the writing of Gothic fiction, an interest in the occult and spiritualism, a general superstitiousness, membership of the Freemasons and other arcane societies, as all aspects of what is really the same Irish phenomenon, a phenomenon he identified as peculiarly Protestant in provenance. In a response to a reading of W. B. Yeats as having 'remembered' his Protestantism only in the 1920s when he tried to implicate himself in a liberal Irish Protestant tradition of Edmund Burke, Jonathan Swift, George Berkley and Henry Grattan, Foster argued, persuasively, that Irish Protestantism had been an aspect of Yeats' identity from the very beginning. Foster reminded the reader that, although Irish Protestantism has a proud tradition of rational philosophising and healthy scepticism, another, darker, side to the Protestant character has always existed and found expression in an obsession with the occult and the Gothic. He linked this attraction to occult process and marginal states of being to a realisation by Irish Protestants of their increasing marginalisation in the new Ireland that was emerging throughout the nineteenth century. As the Catholic middle class grew and began to occupy traditionally Protestant positions in municipal government and local structures

of power, Protestants compensated for their loss of power in the real world by re-investing their energies in another, more obscure, and yet more powerful domain. He argued that all the major Irish Gothicists were marginalised figures 'whose occult preoccupations surely mirror a sense of displacement, a loss of social and psychological integration, and an escapism motivated by the threat of a takeover by the Catholic middle classes'.(11) Foster traced a connection between the neo-classical castellation of Ascendancy houses in the eighteenth century and the Gothicising of Protestant fiction in the nineteenth century. In both cases the cultural fashion was protective: by investing in the neo-classical Protestant Ireland laid claim to a superior intellect beyond the vicissitudes of political reality; the Gothic enclosed the Ascendancy in a highly codified and stratified world requiring rites of initiation, secret knowledge, and a sense of esoteric entitlement. Moreover, both modes stretched into the distant past and thus pre-empted the emergence of Catholicism, thus rooting Irish Protestants in a history longer than their political rivals.(12)

Roy Foster's explanation of the Irish Gothic persuasively links politics, religion and culture, and his depiction of the Protestant Irish as a cultural group obsessed with their own impending extermination and determined to find methodologies by which to circumvent such an annihilation by escape into other realms of power is certainly convincing. Yet, we should not push this explanation too far as, in certain phraseology, it can appear to absolve Irish Protestants of any involvement in nineteenth-century history itself. This is more clearly the case in Julian Moynahan's articulation of this position:

> The Gothic seems to flourish in disrupted, oppressed, or underdeveloped societies, to give a voice to the powerless and unenfranchised, and even, at times, to subvert the official best intentions of its creators.(13)

This, I think, is a rather forced version of Foster's argument. England, the locus of the Gothic tradition in this period, could hardly be considered a particularly 'underdeveloped' country, and we must remember that the Protestant writers of Gothic in Ireland formed a part of the (relatively) powerful rather than the powerless, and it doesn't really make sense to view them as marginalized in anything other than purely psychological terms. The very broadly defined Protestant population was still in social and political control; this was, though, a control that was under constant threat, and which always seemed on the verge of slipping away. Gothic, in truth, may not belong to the dispossessed but to the paranoid possessors, the out-of-control controllers, the descending Ascendancy. I think we need to be careful in rushing too quickly to an argument that would somehow render Irish Protestants so marginal to power in nineteenth-century Ireland that the realm of the Gothic and the occult substituted for real influence in the real world. Such a view is in danger of distorting the picture of Protestant power in Ireland which may have been on the wane through the nineteenth century, but whose demise was long in gestation and longer in arrival.

Moreover, Irish Gothic has a longer history than the nineteenth century, longer, in other words, than the actual marginalisation of Protestant interest in Ireland. McCormack has traced it back to the last

decade of the eighteenth century, but in my own work, I have located the 'origin' of Irish Gothic in the mid-seventeenth century. If we take into account the tropes and themes that preoccupy Gothic literature in general, then an Irish tradition can be followed at least back to the historian Sir John Temple's response to the 1641 rebellion.(14) In his The Irish Rebellion (1646), Temple codified many of the images and arguments that would reappear again and again in poetic and fictional texts that would later be termed Gothic. The 1641 rebellion was certainly configured by its major historian as a moment when extermination appeared to be on the cards for the Protestant 'race' in Ireland, but paranoia does not marginalisation make. It is not legitimate, in other words, to trace feelings of fear and terror on the part of the Protestant community in Ireland and come to the conclusion that this fear was therefore indicative of a genuine diminution in real power. Proto-Gothic literature flourished during the period of the Penal Laws when Protestant power was consolidated, and traces of a heightened fear of extermination can be found in the work of some of the most powerful men in eighteenth-century Ireland, such as Archbishop William King, who was constantly seeing Catholic ghosts and monsters lurking in the outer darkness.

Thus, a 'colonial' history, Protestantism, and the fear of marginalisation – rather than marginalisation itself – are central features of the Irish Gothic tradition. The demonisation of both Catholics in general, and Catholicism as a theological and social system, is also central to the Irish Gothic: its monsters are invariably Catholic or crypto-Catholic, the clearest example of which is the anti-Catholic manual that is Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer in which the Catholic Church is depicted as a cornucopia of perverts, control freaks, Satanists, and power-hungry sadists. Most Protestant Gothic is an articulation of what Tzvetan Todorov has termed fantasy of the 'not-I'.(15) The themes of 'not-I' fantasy deal with the relation of the Self to the world through the mediation of the Other. Danger to the Self emanates from without, externally; the Self suffers, or believes it suffers, an attack against its integrity by some outside force. Within Irish Protestant Gothic Catholicism functions as this external threat, partly for obvious reasons – overwhelming demographics, agitation, difference. Yet, the Gothic analysis of Catholic monstrosity incorporates not only a disgust with Catholicism, but also an intense obsession with the Catholic, an obsession which often spills over into desire. The association of Catholics with bizarre sexual practises and sadistic and masochistic rites of passage (seen, for example, in Temple's argument that Catholics performed almost unbelievably perverse acts on Protestant corpses), a trope central to the Gothic, is indicative of a widespread though terrified attraction for that which is denied. The combination of Catholophobia with Catholophila illuminates other aspects of the Gothic, including the interest in the occult and the cabbalistic. In writing Gothic fiction, Irish Protestants were partly trying to explore the Catholic Other that had been rhetorically eliminated by the Penal system. The Irish Protestant fascination with antiquarianism, folkloric studies and Irish 'superstitions' is, at least to some extent, emblematic of an ethnographic encounter with a native population, and expressive of a means by which the Protestant Self can safely explore (and perhaps absorb) aspects of that forbidden culture. If Gothic often violates the 'official best intentions' of its authors,(16) this often involves a disintegration of the intentional anti-Catholic rhetoric of the narrative in a point of aporia.

To illustrate such disintegration it is useful to take the example of perhaps the most stridently anti-Catholic writer of Irish Gothic material, Charles Robert Maturin, and consider the Gothic fiction Maturin told of his own origins.(17) Maturin always claimed that he was descended from an abandoned child found (like Jesus) wrapped in swaddling clothes on the streets of Paris in the mid-seventeenth century. The aristocratic lady who found the boy-child raised him a Catholic, but he later converted to Protestantism and became a minister. This was enough to get him sent to the Bastille after the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685, and there he remained for twenty-six years. Once released he fled to Ireland to his wife and child, and established the line from which Maturin would descend. The Mosaic and Christological implications of the story are obvious, the baby raised in one faith only to become a liberator of another. Here French/Continental Catholicism functions as the old repressive dispensation prepared to crucify the one sent to purge it and bring the new Gospel of joy: Protestantism. The insignia of the past is not so easy to erase however, and Maturin also believed that his surname could be traced to a French Catholic religious community - Les Maturins.(18) If Catholicism is that which has been escaped from it is also that which continues to define the limits of identity. Inscribed into Maturin's very identity is a theological dualism; to deny one religious gravitation is to leave a void in which identity itself begins to crumble. In his genealogical fantasy Maturin subverts the closed intentions of his original Oedipal fiction.

This theological and genealogical uncertainty (19) is also present in Maturin's most famous work, Melmoth the Wanderer, written as the Catholic Emancipation campaign began to warm up. Although the action of the novel takes place in the nineteenth century, many of the stories recounted in its pages relate back to the late seventeenth century, that period when the Huguenot community to which Maturin belonged played such an important role in the Williamite campaign. The theme of dispossession which runs through the novel reflects the circular return to the Cromwellian past which has dogged Irish history – that primal scene when Irish Catholics were banished to 'hell or Connaught' to make way for their ethnic and religious superiors. Of course, Melmoth himself has been dispossessed by his Cromwellian brother, and is thus in an equivalent position to that Irish Catholics found themselves. The central anxiety of the novel is the reappearance of the dispossessed Melmoth, a figure who might stand for all those demonic figures now also complaining of dispossession: Irish Catholics. Melmoth is, after all, only a threat and a wanderer because he has been denied access to the Big House which is rightly his.

Maturin's Five Sermons on the Errors of Catholicism (1824) released his vitriolic outpourings of hatred on the Catholic Church, and as a nationalist his greatest fear must have been a union between the religion he despised, the people he distrusted (native Irish), and the cause he espoused. Yet, Maturin uses the figure of Melmoth, a symbolic Irishman, to make the most malicious attack on Roman Catholicism in the novel. In Volume III Part XIV, Melmoth explains to Immalee, his island lover, what religion is, and shows her all the religions of the world. His discourse is, of course, not an objective account, and he claims that Judaism, Hinduism and Catholicism are religions typified by their dedication to sadism and masochism, while Protestantism is presented as the religion of benign truth. Thus, violent anti-Catholicism lies at the centre of the novel, yet, as Chris Baldick points out,

Protestant truth is proclaimed by the most reviled figure of the narrative, the Wanderer himself.(20) It is Maturin's villain who is the most consistent Protestant in the whole novel (while simultaneously representing all banished and exiled figures, including Irish Catholics), which surely tells against his claims that it is Protestantism which is the means to salvation.

Paranoia, Protestantism, anti-Catholicism, desire for the Other – these are all fairly typical of Gothic. There is nothing particularly 'Irish' about any of these aspects of the Gothic oeuvre as a whole, although in Melmoth the Wanderer Ireland did produce what is perhaps the most heightened example of traditional Gothic fiction imaginable, a novel which works itself into such a pitch of Gothic excitement that the reader gets lost in the twists and turns of its spectacularly labyrinthine structure – so elaborate indeed, that only Varney the Vampyre rivals it for formal complexity. What is peculiarly 'Irish' about the Gothic tradition is that it emerged from a geographical zone which was defined as weird and bizarre. Indeed, Ireland as a whole was identified as a Gothic space. In The Milesian Chief (1812), Maturin articulates this commonly held view of Ireland cogently:

> [Ireland is] the only country on earth, where, from the strange existing opposition of religion, politics, and manners, the extremes of refinement and barbarism are united, and the most wild and incredible situations of romantic story are hourly passing before modern eyes.(21)

In this passage, Maturin references the reading of Ireland which was dominant: seen through the eyes of the English reading public for whom the Gothic authors were writing, Ireland was a spatial and temporal anomaly. The view of regional space as a classic site of Gothic energies and horrific creatures has been central to Gothic convention. Traditionally, horror and the Gothic takes place in what has been called the 'outlandish' (22): obscure places of the country, in the Scottish highlands, in the mists of Ireland, in the valleys of Wales, in Cornwall (!), or – where the Gothic locates itself in an urban environment – monstrosity emerges from under the stairs, from the attic, out of the cellar, spaces on the edge rather than the centre. For English eyes, the Celtic fringes were such 'outlandish' spaces, Ireland peculiarly so given the link between the geographical term 'outlandish' and the Catholicism dominant there.(23) Much Gothic fiction is concerned with the outlandish and the regionally strange, and where the plot does not take place on the Catholic Continent, it usually locates itself in those geographical areas deemed marginal to England. Darryl Jones has termed fictions which concern themselves with identities and areas 'marginal' (a word he rightly objects to) to England (and also to cosmopolitan America) 'regional Gothic', and claims that 'in the ideological rhetoric of horror, Catholics, Welshmen, hillbillies and cannibals are all pretty much the same'.(24) He points out that the construction of the Celt as a kind of counter-Enlightenment figure, and of Celtic lands as zones of the weird, went hand in hand with the emergence of the Gothic novel and the materialization of a modern English identity. As English identity was configured as normative, those areas which surrounded it – the 'Celtic fringe' – were simply constructed as abnormal.

Moreover, as Christopher Morash has outlined, the Celtic fringes were not only configured as repositories of all that which England wished to deny and banish (the irrational, the superstitious, the

perverse, the Catholic, the cannibal), they also became a kind of zone of atemporality, a place of the primitive and the atavistic which the modern world had not yet touched. If the Gothic is often seen as the return of the repressed, the past that will not stay past, Ireland was usually read as a place where the past had never in fact disappeared, a place where the past was the present. Morash points out that nineteenth-century philologists such as James Cowles Prichard, Franz Bopp, and J. Kasper Zeuss, argued that in Celtic languages was preserved the remains of a European ur-language and that 'in a slide which was common in nineteenth-century ethnography and beyond, this was taken to indicate that the Celtic peoples of the present day were an instance of a cultural anachrony, a race out of time'.(25) In such Celtic regions as Ireland time and space took on different meanings and history itself was not so easy to account. According to Declan Kiberd, Ireland operated as 'England's unconscious'; hence the large number of English Gothic narratives which use Ireland as a shorthand indicator of the depraved past rather than the technological future.(26)

However, Ireland's important position as a Gothic space in the English mind does not really explain why Irish Protestant writers were so attracted to the Gothic form. While it makes sense for an English writer to Gothicise the Irish landscape, for the Irish Protestants that Gothic space was home: to Gothicise it was to risk making a monster of themselves. It is clear that by the end of the eighteenth century the English had rejected the claims of the Protestants of Ireland to English ethnicity and included them in the general stereotyping of the Irish as weird backward perverts; in response the Protestants of Ireland had accepted Irish ethnicity and nationality and attempted to reconfigure this identification as a positive rather than a negative marker of identity – which largely required denying Irish Catholics the right to the same nationality.(27) It would seem perversely counter-productive, after such a long and painful process of identification with Ireland, for Irish Protestants to contribute to a genre which could serve to justify English views of the Irish and Ireland as congenitally primitive and out-of-step with the modern world. Christopher Morash has provided one possible answer as to why Irish Protestants did write Gothic fiction in his claim that Irish Gothic is not a celebration of the weird and the occult so much as an attempt to exorcise these elements from Irish society. Rather than accept the version of Ireland as Gothic, the traditional narratives of Irish Protestants attempt to find ways of destroying this image: the Irish Gothic

> is a riposte to a Celticist project which almost invariably celebrated the survival of the past in the present (often in racial terms), a narratologically produced demand for a stake to be driven in the heart of all that confounds the project of modernity, particularly when that agent of resistance is the blood of an ancient race unaccountably flowing through the veins of the present.(28)

Just as Count Dracula must be staked at the end of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, so too the version of Ireland as atavistic must be banished (and, the suggestion goes, its Catholic representatives as well), and Protestant modernity ushered in. This is a fascinating reading of the entire Irish Gothic tradition as one aspect of the wider project of Protestantising and modernising Ireland. Rather than an indulgence in a form of political escapism from the realities of power loss, as Roy Foster argued,

Morash believes that the Gothic is an attempt to re-assert the kind of cultural realism deemed necessary for a nation to enter the modern world and be accorded the full privileges of nation status.

I would like to suggest another possible reason for the attraction of Irish Protestants to the Gothic, one that slightly complicates both Foster's and Morash's arguments. For this explanation we need to return to that seminal text so central to understanding this genre: Tzvetan Todorov's The Fantastic. His definition of the 'fantastic' is crucial:

> In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us … The fantastic occupies the duration of uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous.(29)

This mode of hesitation, this psychological ambivalence, which Todorov believes central to the fantastic, is precisely what defines the Irish Protestant mentality. There were no greater cultural hesitators in the British Isles than the 'Anglo-Irish'; so deep was their sense of cultural ambiguity that Julian Moynahan has rightly called them a 'hyphenated culture'. As hybrid figures the Anglo-Irish were in a perfect position to develop an important tradition in a literature that emphasises hesitancy over certainty, and which refuses to dissolve binaries such as living/dead, inside/outside, friend/enemy, desire/disgust. W. J. McCormack has identified the 'verbal intricacy … represented by complicated oaths of loyalty, arcane or antique documents, and compromising last wills and testaments' as central to the Irish Gothic,(30) and this is only fitting given the ethnic and national complexities involved in the construction of an Irish Protestant identity in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Given their eighteenth and nineteenth century attempt to renegotiate their identity, the tortuous verbal and plot convolutions of the typical Gothic novel were perfect representations of the existential gymnastics forced upon the Anglo-Irish by history. The Gothic ambivalence highlighted by Todorov was irresistible for such pathological prevaricators and perfectly represented the hesitancy of the Anglo-Irish between an 'English' realist embracing of the technological, the future, the rational, and an 'Irish' Catholic superstitiousness, anachrony, atavism. For, if most Irish Gothic novels do, as Morash insists, end with the expulsion of the primitive past, that expulsion is never really complete because the Gothic writers, like the people they represent, were not fully convinced of the desirability of the rational. Dracula, for example, does not conclude with the death of the Count but rather the birth of Jonathan and Mina Harker's baby. This baby is burdened with the 'bundle of names' of the men of the Band of Light as if to guarantee his role as a symbol of a bright future in which the atavistic has been fully laid to rest.(31) However, in a text which revolves so importantly around the circulation of blood, one name has been conspicuously left out of this new baby's title. After all, Dracula has bitten Mina, and she has partaken of his blood in a

perverse parody of the Eucharist. Van Helsing himself hints that such a sharing of blood is tantamount to sexual consummation, and if Dracula's blood courses through Mina's veins it must surely have been transferred to her new son. This possible survival of the primitive in the new is part of a wider attraction to Dracula throughout the novel, an attraction felt by Mina herself – the moral exemplar of the plot – who tells us that when confronted by Dracula in her bedroom she did not want to 'hinder' his bloodsucking,(32) unsurprising perhaps when Dracula operates at times as an ultra-masculine embodiment of all that her now white-haired and presumably impotent husband Jonathan cannot provide. In fact, a refusal to completely exorcise the atavistic is a recurring feature of Irish Gothic, from the entirely ambiguous ending of Melmoth the Wanderer, where it is unclear if the Wanderer has actually disappeared for the last time, to the final line of Le Fanu's 'Carmilla' in which the now dead narrator Laura writes that she sometimes thinks she hears 'the light steps of Carmilla at the drawing-room door'(33) – an ending which suggests that perhaps Laura is dead because Carmilla has finally come to claim her.

This sense of cultural hesitancy between the future and the past, the real and the supernatural, the Anglo and the Irish, runs through much of the literature of the Protestant Irish and helps to explain why the realist tradition was never very successful here. This has been a much debated point in recent theoretical discussion of the development of the Irish novel, with many reasons put forward to explain the relative failure of a realist tradition. Terry Eagleton famously put it down to the fact that Ireland in the nineteenth century was a place of division and disruption rather than security, and since 'the realist novel is the form par excellence of settlement and stability' it could not gain any hold.(34) Luke Gibbons echoed this view when he argued that the Gothic works of Maturin et al may be the best place to look for a historically accurate 'story of Ireland' since the 'inchoate structures' of the Gothic were a more telling representation of an Ireland characterised by violence and terror in a colonial context than any putatively factual history book could be.(35) David Lloyd posited that there were too many elements within Ireland that were could not be assimilated by a realist form. He argues that the paradigm of the realist novel is the bildungsroman, the novel of education and growth, and it thus relies on notions of development and maturation, expressive of a society growing teleologically into a nation state. Ireland was, however, composed of elements which were uninterested in such statist narratives, and these 'non-modern' elements could not be properly accounted for by the standard realist conventions, and thus the realist novel never really had a chance in Ireland.(36)

These explanations are all persuasive. However, the cultural hesitancy of the Protestant Irish, and the correlation between that hesitancy and the Gothic mode, does offer a good reason why even novels which offer putatively realist accounts of Ireland are continuously disrupted by the Gothic mode, and why these novels seem unable to achieve closure, remaining lost in the interstices of the Anglo-Irish binary. A good example of the inability of the realist mode to dominate and overcome its Gothic counterpart is a novel like Maria Edgeworth's Ennui (1804). On the face of it this is a clear example of Christopher Morash's view that the main aim of Protestant Ireland was the expulsion of the Gothic, anachronistic elements in Irish society and so that modernity could be brought fully to bear

on the island. The plot is initially straightforward enough: the bored English Lord Glenthorn travels to his Irish estate in order to make his life more meaningful. On the way he encounters the standard stereotypes that were believed to populate Ireland: inveterately lazy bumpkins who speak in rather silly accents. Glenthorn is presented with two alternative views of Ireland's future. One Mr. McLeod urges the slow but steady modernisation of the country through the introduction of English methods of agricultural organisation, education of the Catholic peasantry in non-denominational schools, and encouragement of industry; one Mr. Hardcastle insists that the Irish are un-reformable and are lazy and improvident by nature as opposed to culture, and advocates coercion and a firm colonial hand in keeping them down. The choice lies between allowing the Irish to remain characters in a Gothic story, or gently translating them into a national bildungsroman. The ideological weight of the novel appears to come down on Mr. McLeod's side, and suggests that the spectre of the Gothic can be banished given enough reforms and patient application of reason and technology. However, the main problem with this easy reading of the novel is that it ignores the energies of the text: Lord Glenthorn is completely bored while in 'rational' England and is only awakened to life's possibilities when he meets Ellinor, his Irish former wet-nurse and a banshee-like figure straight out of a Gothic melodrama. His excitement continues once he arrives in Ireland and confronts its Gothic scenery and meets its Gothic cast list, and almost becomes involved in the 1798 Rebellion, organised by a secret society meeting near some sublime cliffs. There is a sense, in other words, that recreating Ireland into a miniature version of England may well be industrially desirable and economically necessary, but that it will be disastrous from a psychological view and that cultural decadence and ennui will follow such a recreation. The plot of the novel certainly seems to opt for a reformable and possibly realist Ireland of the future; the energy of the novel lies completely with the Gothic melodrama Glenthorn finds being enacted when he migrates there. Ennui is a clear example of Gothic energy refusing to allow realist closure. Edgeworth may be intellectually on the side of English reform, but psychologically her novel is more attracted to Irish Gothic irreality.

With the rise of the Catholic middle class, the rationalisation of Catholicism through the Devotional Revolution, and the gaining of independence in 1921, power passed out of the hands of the Anglo-Irish to the Catholics who had for so long been the representatives of the Other found in Protestant Gothic fiction. Cultural hesitancy passed to them too, a hesitancy between what came to be called 'traditional Ireland', the Ireland of the countryside, the Church, the hearth (or some stereotyped version of this Ireland), and 'modern Ireland' defined by full engagement with the technological future. Irish Catholics also took to writing fiction characterised by an uneasiness about cultural identity, and this psychological hesitancy has facilitated the proliferation of Catholic Gothic narratives in which the cottage, the castle and the church merged as spaces attempting to block the nation's progress towards the rational, cosmopolitan future. In recent years Gothic imagery has been used to characterise the 1940s and 1950s, and its industrial schools and Magdalen laundries have all been imbued with an aura more common to the horror film than the history book. The figures of the past, like Eamonn DeValera and Archbishop McQuaid, have also been transmuted into stock villains, with all the sexual perversions and unmerciful authoritarianism which was associated with the Catholic authorities of Maturin's novels. However, despite this Gothicisation of the traditional, there

remained a sense of attachment to this recent past, and a fear that in rejecting it something of the sublime might be lost and Ireland could find itself in a cosmopolitan banality. This hesitancy has kept the Irish Gothic alive and well in the twentieth century.

However, the Irish Gothic, understood as a form of perpetual hesitancy, may not be altogether possible in Celtic Tiger Ireland since it appears that the Irish have finally made a choice and rejected the hyphenated mind of the past. Gothic Ireland now exists only as a tourist virtual reality. Perhaps the last great Irish figure who could be considered a Gothic 'hero' was Charles J. Haughey, a monumental cultural hesitator in the best sense of the term. A political and social modernizer and innovator (seen in his judicial reforms, especially the Succession Act, his development of Temple Bar, his handling of the presidency of the EC in 1990), he was nonetheless reviled by his fellow cosmopolitans because he spoke in the language of what they considered atavistic tribal nationalism (despite his importance to the Peace Process), and, in the eyes of the high priests of modernity he was seen as a monster needing a stake through his heart. Ireland of the 1970s and 1980s often appeared to resemble the plot of a Gothic novel, Garret (Fitzgerald) the Good chasing down Charlie the Bad across an increasingly improbable plot, a battle won when Brian Lenihan – closely associated with the Haughey element in Irish politics – lost the Presidential election to the liberal Mary Robinson, a woman associated with the 'right' side of recent ideological battles between stereotyped traditionalists and modernisers. The truth was, as usual, more complex. Haughey, like the Anglo-Irish writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had his feet firmly in two camps, and pointed in two directions: towards an unreal and weird landscape he called (in a now notorious Channel Four documentary) 'Charles Haughey's Ireland', and towards the virtual reality future of the Irish Financial Services Centre. Perpetually hesitating between these two modes, Haughey effectively instantiated a schizophrenic Ireland unable to decide whether its future lay in the past or the present. In the end, as Ivana Bacik has put it, Ireland was dragged 'kicking and screaming' into postmodernity through three abortion referenda, two divorce referenda, and a host of other, bitterly divisive, changes. When Haughey died in June 2006, the Gothic Ireland recognised by Maturin, a place where all manner of things were possible, a GUBU land of the imagination, also passed on. While some popped unseemly corks of celebration at Haughey's death – the death, so it seemed to them, of an Ireland they despised, an dark Ireland of the deep past – others reflected, like Lord Glenthorn in Edgeworth's Ennui, that perhaps with the coming about of this new modern Ireland something frightening, fractious, dangerous, but exciting and stimulating had been lost. However, as Declan Kiberd has reminded us, Irish traditions are at their most vital when they have been proclaimed about to die, (37) so perhaps the ghosts of Maturin, Le Fanu, Stoker, and Haughey are ready for a dramatic and truly terrifying revival.

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JESS FRANCO, or THE MISFORTUNES OF VIRTUE

John Exshaw

El sueño de la razon produce monstruos
(The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters)
Francisco Goya y Lucientes, Los Caprichos, plate 43, (1797-1798)

In his book, Jess Franco: El sexo del horror, the Spanish film historian Carlos Aguilar closes a chapter with the following remark: "It is really true that, in his own way, Jesus Franco represents a damn peculiar case . . ." (1) That Jess Franco can produce such a perplexed (and exasperated) response in a compatriot who was, after all, engaged in writing a book-length biographical and critical overview goes some way to illustrate the difficulties encountered in trying to come to grips with Jesús Franco Manera, a director whose staggering output of something like 180 films in forty-five years contrives to make words like 'maverick', 'obsessive', 'enigma', or even 'deranged', seem sadly inadequate.

Some might question whether it is worth "coming to grips" with Franco at all. His detractors are legion, and, despite the publication of three serious studies (2) and a veritable host of admiring magazine articles, it is fair to say that Franco and his films still fly well below the radar of respectable critical attention; considered, when considered at all, to be beneath both notice and contempt.

In part, of course, this attitude is simply a hangover from what might be termed 'La Plus longue nuit des auteurs', the Cahiers du Cinéma-inspired revolution which, having done sterling work in elevating the importance of the Seventh Art, then proceeded, like an earlier French Revolution, to overstay its welcome, descending into a kind of intellectual Terror in which certain directors of genre films were elevated to the Pantheon (particularly if they laboured in the more obscure depths of the Hollywood system) while others (mainly European) were simply ignored. It is only relatively recently, after all, that mainstream critics on both sides of the Atlantic have been forced to concede, albeit grudgingly and with reservations, the importance of such genre directors as Sergio Leone, Mario Bava, and Dario Argento, despite the fact that their films are often self-evidently as much about cinema itself – what Leone called "cinema cinema" – as any homage-laden chef d'œuvre of the nouvelle vague.

To a substantial degree, however – and there is no way of riding around this – Franco's reputation and critical neglect also stem from the fact, freely admitted by both his admirers and the man himself, that many of his films are simply awful. And yet even the most stringent and fastidious proponent of the auteur theory would find it difficult to deny that Franco meets all the requirements of authorship: in addition to directing, he also writes, edits, and acts; he is frequently his own cameraman, and often composes or co-composes the scores. Franco's universe is distinctly his own, to put it mildly – an

oneiric witches' brew of eroticism, fetishism, voyeurism, and Sadean impulses, all stirred together with recurring motifsof vampires, mind control, morbidity and decay, before being presented for consumption with a true jazz aficionado's disregard for the niceties of linear development and narrative convention. Some might reply that much the same could be said of Edward D. Wood, Jr., whose mastery of mise-en-scène in Plan 9 from Outer Space is certainly unique to him and unlikely to be confused with that of, say, Ingmar Bergman in The Seventh Seal. And while this may be true, it perhaps says more about the shortcomings of the auteur theory than it does about the validity of any claims to authorship made on Franco's behalf.

For anyone raised to regard Universal and Hammer films (by-and-large shot in a classical style, with well-defined heroes, villains, and monsters) as the horror film norm, Franco's movies can prove quite a shock to the system, and it cannot be over-emphasised how necessary it is to adjust one's expectations if one is derive any enjoyment or meaning from his work. Many reviewers, over the years and up to today, have proved either incapable or unwilling to make this adjustment. Franco has been derided as talentless and unimaginative, his films as lurid, incoherent potboilers distinguished only by a combination of shoddiness and salaciousness. The director's over-fondness for zoom shots during the international phase of his career has resulted in more brickbats than even Michael Winner has had to sustain on that account. Not all of this criticism is unjust, at least where the films themselves are concerned, but at the same time it is clear that Franco is a film-maker possessed of many virtues, of which independence, tenacity, loyalty, consistency of vision, a love of cinema, and a stubborn anti-authoritarianism are not the least admirable. These virtues have not always stood to Franco's advantage – his marginality in terms of European genre film-making is a direct consequence of his own desire for independence – but they suggest that, at his best, he deserves to be considered as a serious voice in the tradition of European horror and the fantastique.

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Franco's film career proper may be said to have begun with his fifth feature film, Gritos en la noche ('Screams in the Night', henceforward referred to by its best-known title, The Awful Doctor Orlof, itself derived from the French title, L' horrible Dr. Orlof), made in 1961. Not only was it Franco's first horror film, it was also Spain's first horror film; and in making it Franco paved the way for future directors such as Amando de Ossorio, José Larraz, Jorge Grau, and Eloy de la Iglesia, in much the same way as Riccardo Freda did in Italy for Bava, Argento, et al., when he made that country's first horror film, I vampiri (The Devil's Commandment) in 1956.

Shot in black-and-white and set in France in 1912, The Awful Doctor Orlof tells the story of the eponymous surgeon's quest to restore his daughter's beauty with skin drafts taken from the faces of various unwilling members of the demi-monde. In this he is assisted by his blind and mute servant, Morpho. Opposed to him is one of the thickest policemen on celluloid, whose fiancée, fortunately, is very bright and brings about the doctor's undoing. (N.B. All the nominal heroes, policemen or otherwise, in Franco's films are irredeemably stupid and virtually peripheral to events.)

The film, a co-production with France, was also Franco's first to receive widespread distribution, and it is worth considering the reaction it provoked abroad. The British Film Institute's Monthly Film Bulletin reported that, "This film is at once appalling and unique, so bad as to be almost enjoyable for its ludicrous qualities, so singular that curiosity hunters are likely to look at it agog. An occasional shot or two is worthy of James Whale or Epstein, but it is the soundtrack which provides the film's most bewildering aspect, containing as it does the weirdest collection of quasi-musical noises. The ramshackle plot is Les Yeux Sans Visage, plus a blend of Frankenstein and Dracula, represented by the demon doctor and his monster slave respectively; the brave heroine is worthy of the utmost admiration. A singular film . . . really most extraordinary." (3)

The sense of bafflement expressed by the reviewer would remain a constant in critical reactions to Franco's films (and finds a later echo in Aguilar's "damned peculiar case" phrase), as would Franco's employment of unusual soundtrack devices and frequent referencing of earlier works in the horror genre. The assumption that Franco helped himself to the plot of Georges Franju's 1959 classic, Les yeux sans visage (Eyes Without a Face/The Horror Chamber of Dr. Faustus) is widespread, though interestingly, Franco himself denies he had seen it before making his film.

Franco's veracity generally has been called into question, most notably by Aguilar (who also cites the Franju film as a source) and who writes bluntly that Franco, "from his earliest interviews has loved to lie and contradict himself, to invent and misinterpret." (4) This may well be true, but it seems worth noting that in the interviews included on the U.S. DVD releases of Franco's films, the director comes across as both honest and self-critical. Perhaps in the past, Franco tended to follow the example of his hero, Orson Welles (whom, it will be recalled, liked to tell people he knew Bram Stoker, despite being born three years after the author's death), but, with regard to Franju's film, one feels obliged to take his word, not least because, apart from the basic plotline common to both, the handling of the material could hardly be more different.

Where Franju's film is a Gothic parable for modern times, cold and detached in its depiction of Dr. Génessier, lyrical in its treatment of his daughter's plight, Franco's is a riotous mélange of over-ripe clichés in which the director is clearly having a whale of a time riffing on his favourite themes from earlier works. The doctor's name is taken from the 1939 British adaptation of Edgar Wallace's Dark Eyes of London in which Bela Lugosi played the sinister Dr. Orloff, complete with blind henchman. Franco uses tilted camera angles both for aesthetic reasons and as a reference, via the character of Morpho, to Robert Wiene's The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1919) and other Expressionist classics, while the "mad doctor" storyline recalls any number of Hollywood horror movies. To all this, Franco adds his own visual motifs: nightclub scenes, women in chains, nudity, and cats and owls (which tend to crop up quite a bit in his early films). There are some beautifully filmed night scenes on a river, and a memorable long shot of Orlof and Morpho in silhouette, carrying a coffin. And, as the Monthly Film Bulletin noted, Franco's unusual choice of soundtrack only adds to the unsettling effect of many of the visuals.

The use of nudity may well be a first in the horror genre as well as one of the earliest examples in post-war European film. Although topless scenes seem to have been included in export versions of certain Italian films in the 1950s, the real significance of Franco's inclusion of nudity is not the nudity per se, but how he utilises it. According to Tohill and Tombs (5), as Orlof prepares to begin operating on an unconscious chanteuse, he allows himself a brief moment of what would now be termed "inappropriate contact" with his victim's breasts. The scene, with all its unhealthy, necrophiliac overtones, must have caused apoplexy throughout the censorship offices of the world, and it seems safe to assume it was not included in the domestic Spanish print. In the context of Franco's career, however, it is absolutely central, a demonstration from the outset of Franco's determination to place the sex urge, in all its forms, at the very heart of his cinema. Not only was this a daring step for a young director to take, but his use of nudity, not as cheap titillation, but as an illustration of Orlof's psychological make-up, undercuts the charge, so often leveled against him later, of being merely a purveyor of "smut". At his best, Jess Franco was always much more than that.

Franco's handling of his actors is (and would continue to be) wildly erratic. On the one hand, Howard Vernon is outstanding as Orlof, his gaunt features and aloof, sinister mien perfectly suited to the role, and Diana Lorys is fine as the intrepid Wanda; on the other, Conrado San Martín, an otherwise accomplished actor, deals with the thankless part of the policeman as best he can, while the background cast can most accurately be described as enthusiastic.

The Awful Doctor Orlof is still considered by some to be Franco's best film, but while it is certainly entertaining and often impressively staged, it is perhaps too derivative to be considered a genuine classic. Franco may have been having fun when he made it, but there are not enough original twists on the old themes and conventions to mark it out as a decisively original or revolutionary work, in the sense that Sergio Leone's Fistful of Dollars (1964) may be said to have redefined the Western. Its importance, however – apart from launching the Spanish horror film, and the international careers of Vernon and Franco himself – lies in it being one of the first genre films to consciously cite earlier works, a post-modernist trend which up till 1961 had largely been the preserve of the enfants terribles of the nouvelle vague. And, consciously or not, Franco was also placing himself at the heart of the European tradition of horror and the fantastique, a lineage stretching back, in cinematic terms, to Georges Méliès and on through Wiene, Paul Wegener, F.W. Murnau, Fritz Lang, Benjamin Christensen, Paul Leni, Rex Ingram, G.W. Pabst, Carl Theodor Dreyer, and Terence Fisher. (6)

Franco's next excursion into the horror realm was The Sadistic Baron Von Klaus (La mano de un hombre muerto/Le sadique Baron Von Klaus, 1962), another Spanish-French co-production shot in black-and-white. After a spate of killings in a small German town, suspicion falls on the present Baron von Klaus (played by Howard Vernon), whose progenitor had apparently been rather partial to a spot of recreational butchery. The story appropriated many of the elements of the then hugely popular German series of Edgar Wallace adaptations known as krimi – black-garbed and hatted

killers silhouetted in windows, characters isolated and stalked in empty spaces, crazy plot twists and improbable dénouements – which would, two years later, in Mario Bava's Blood and Black Lace (Sei donne per l'assassino), give rise to the Italian giallo thriller. Indeed, while it is impossible to know whether or not Bava saw Franco's film, it is worth noting that the Germanic town setting and the torture chamber both prefigure Bava's own Baron Blood (Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga), made in 1972.

Surprisingly leisurely paced, The Sadistic Baron von Klaus is an effective chiller, shot in a classical style. Franco's decision not to focus on any one particular character makes the Gothic potboiler plot seem more interesting than it really is, even though the characters are strictly stock. The most original scene, perhaps unsurprisingly, occurs in the torture chamber. Having overpowered a girl, the villain places her on a bed before heating up an assortment of sharp implements in a brazier. He then begins to kiss and undress his still-unconscious victim. When she wakes, they exchange a few words before he begins to perform an act still not legal in certain American states. Then, without warning, he gets up, grabs a whip and begins to flog her. When she has passed out, he suspends her from the ceiling and begins applying the red-hot treatment. The sex act aside, there would seem to be nothing too remarkable going on here, but it is only when the villain begins whipping the girl that we realize that Franco has cut all sound from the scene, bar the music. We are left to imagine the sound of the whip on skin, the girl's screams, the clanking chains, and the hiss of burning flesh. It's a remarkably original and effective device, one which adds an uncomfortable intensity and nightmarish quality to a scene which would otherwise be merely gruesome or even unintentionally funny.

Franco's next horror project, Dr. Jekyll's Mistresses (El secreto del Dr. Orloff/Les maîtresses du Dr. Jekyll, 1964), had nothing to do with Robert Louis Stevenson and not much more to do with Dr. Orlof, who (not played by Howard Vernon) expires in the first few minutes, leaving the responsibility to be fiendish in the hands of an inadequate substitute named Fisherman. It's another story of mind control and murder, with Hugo Blanco giving his best Conrad Veidt impression, but the film is hampered by numerous plot deficiencies. As these may be due to cuts (the current DVD runs for 85 minutes but Aguilar lists the original running time as 99 minutes), it would perhaps be best to refrain from further comment until a fuller print becomes available.

The Diabolical Dr. Z (Miss Muerte/Dans les griffes du maniaque), made in 1965, marks the end of what can be called the first horror phase in Franco's career. With a larger budget than his previous features and a first-rate cameraman in Alejandro Ulloa, the film looks wonderful, and is, on the whole, an entertaining variant on the mind control theme. When the title character dies after having his scientific experiments on personality change denounced in public by the medical council, his daughter plots her revenge on those responsible. After faking her own death, she uses her father's 'personality machine' to gain control over a slinky nightclub performer, who, her long nails dipped in poison, is sent to eliminate the offending members. Although most of Franco's fixations are on view, there is something pedestrian in his handling of the story, which plods along its generic course to its expected conclusion. Even his handling of Estella Blain's exotic nightclub routine with a mannequin

lacks the voyeuristic intensity Franco would later achieve in Vampyros Lesbos, and the revenge plot, borrowed from Cornell Woolrich's 1940 novel, The Bride Wore Black, would also find more powerful expression in his later She Killed in Ecstasy.

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In 1967, Franco embarked on a three-film deal with the German company, Aquila, which resulted in one of his most personal and unusual films, Succubus, as well as two supposedly light-hearted but relentlessly heavy-handed spy capers, which, despite the appearance of a vaguely wolfman-like creature in one of them (Rote Lippen – Sadisterotica/El caso de las dos bellezas) need not detain us here. Succubus (Necronomicon – Geträumte Sünden) focuses on a nightclub entertainer named Lorna (Janine Reynaud) whose act involves sado-masochism and feigned death. Haunted by memories of a possible previous existence as well as visions of a future one, she appears to be controlled by a demonic figure. In what we assume is a dream, but may not be, Lorna meets a character called 'the Admiral' (Howard Vernon) in a club. They play a word association game which turns out not to be a game (or is it?) when Lorna stabs the Admiral in the eye with a hatpin. On returning to 'real life', she sees a funeral cortège; in the coffin is the Admiral. Later she attends a party where tabs of acid are passed out as if they were communion wafers. In a fantasy castle (which may be real), mannequins come to life and threaten Lorna's female lover, whom Lorna then stabs to death. As Lorna slips between one level of fantasy (or reality?) and another, she apparently kills her nightclub partners during a rehearsal. After killing her male lover (Jack Taylor), who appears to have been in league with the demonic figure, she is united with the latter, who brings her to the castle where he will watch over her while she sleeps. A voice-over reference identifying Lorna with Faustine suggests some unspecified pact with the devilish stranger.

Succubus is an astonishing piece of work. Whether one finds it convincing, pretentious, or ridiculous is entirely beside the point (it is quite possibly all three), but there is no denying the skill with which Franco handles his material, blending the fantasy/reality threads of his narrative in a way that is both utterly confusing, yet strangely satisfying. More importantly, it marked the complete abandonment of traditional genre film-making in favour of an oneiric, jazz-inspired, improvisational approach that would come to characterise his best work. At the same time, however, Franco managed to retain and incorporate, and even expand, the visual and thematic motifs which were already his trademark And yet, for all its apparent aspirations to an art-house style, it seems quite clear that Franco is also having a sly dig at the likes of Antonioni, Fellini, and Godard – it's not every film that includes references to alienation and La dolce vita together with images of Dracula, the Phantom of the Opera, Godzilla, and the Frankenstein monster – as if he's saying, "You people at the Cahiers du Cinéma want narrative experimentation? I'll show you narrative experimentation!"

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There would, however, be precious little room for experimentation in the next phase of Franco's career, which saw him join forces with the ex-patriate British producer, Harry Alan Towers, in a disastrous partnership from which Franco's reputation never recovered. Their first was The Blood of Fu Manchu (Fu-Manchu y el beso de la muerte/Der Todesküss des Dr. Fu Manchu/Kiss & Kill/Against All Odds, 1968), which, on the face of it, should have suited Franco down to the ground. An avid reader of lurid fiction, he was already a fan of Sax Rohmer's books, and the opportunity to film the original Devil Doctor, an arch-fiend much given to mind control and the employment of slinky female killers, must have seemed like a dream come true. Towers had begun his series of Fu Manchu films in 1965, with the excellent The Face of Fu Manchu, directed by Don Sharp and starring Christopher Lee and Nigel Green as Fu Manchu and Sir Denis Nayland Smith respectively, but after Green's (in particular) and then Sharp's departures, it had declined appreciably.

All in all, The Blood of Fu Manchu proved an acceptable effort which, despite a certain crudity of style, is still reasonably entertaining (in, it must be noted, its complete form; it was originally released in Britain minus a full thirty minutes of its 91-minute running time). Lee and Tsai Chin (as Fu Manchu's daughter, Lin Tang) give it their best, and there is a robust comic performance by Ricardo Palacios as the bandit chief, Sancho López, which somewhat offsets the miscasting of the visibly creaking and portly Richard Greene as Nayland Smith. The same cannot be said for The Castle of Fu Manchu (El castillo de Fu-Manchu/Die Folterkammer des Dr. Fu Manchu/Il castello di Fu Manchu, also 1968), which is an unmitigated disaster from start to finish. Franco himself is not immune to criticism in this instance, as we shall see, but the real problem with this and other films of the partnership is Towers himself, or rather his work methods. As far as can be determined, his (Faustian?) pact with Franco went something like this – "I will give you exotic casts and locations, plus worldwide distribution, and you can film the works of some of your favourite authors. But, you have to do it all on a budget of twenty-five pounds. Just sign here; in blood, if you please."

Towers' penny-pinching approach meant that while Franco's movies were indeed widely distributed, they were usually received with howls of derision. The principal responsibility of a producer is to produce an adequate budget, but Towers' penchant for complex co-production deals (which involved basing his company in Liechtenstein for tax purposes) resulted in erratic cash flow and the need for Franco to make do as best as he could. It is no coincidence that Franco's reputation as an incorrigible zoom-hound can be traced back to the Towers partnership; if one doesn't have the time or money for basic camera set-ups, then zooming is a cheap (in both senses of the word) way of cutting costs.

Towers' shortcomings as a producer are not intended as an excuse for the poor quality of Franco's work in their films, merely as a reason for it. For instance, it is hard to imagine that it was Franco's bright idea to insert stock footage (from Roy Ward Baker's A Night to Remember and what appears to be Ralph Thomas' Campbell's Kingdom) into The Castle of Fu Manchu in order to pad out its running time, to say nothing of saving money. Even allowing for the budgetary limitations, however, this is still a shoddily-constructed film, for which Towers, as scriptwriter 'Peter Welbeck', is also to blame. Continuity and logic are frequently absent; for example, in one scene Dr. Petrie (Howard

Marion Crawford) announces that the missing Dr. Herakles is in Turkey, then in his next scene both he and Nayland Smith are amazed to hear from another character that Dr. Herakles is . . . in Turkey! And then there is the scene in which the Turkish gangster, Omar Pasha, is surprised to learn that Fu Manchu is in the governor's castle, when earlier he and his men had helped him capture it. But the worst thing about The Castle of Fu Manchu is that, with even a smaller degree of professionalism (and someone other than Greene as Nayland Smith), it could at least have been a perfectly acceptable entry in the series, rather than sounding its death knell.

As for Franco's direction, it frequently appears amateurish. Fu Manchu's attack on the castle is a prime example: guns are fired but none of the other guards seem to hear them, despite the fact that Franco's spatial direction gives us every reason to suppose they are within earshot. He seems to have no grasp of how to shoot action scenes involving more than three people, let alone a band of Turkish extras dressed up as dacoits. And there appears to be a 'civilian' wandering through the back of the reverse-angle shot down the staircase. Even if these infelicities might be excused by budgetary shortcomings and the resultant need for speed, his own entrance scene (he plays a Turkish copper), is particularly ineptly composed and shot. By placing the camera behind himself, he gives a mysterious import to his character that is totally unjustified by his entirely peripheral and expository contribution to the narrative.

This seems as good a place as any to deal, briefly, with Franco's own appearances in his films, of which the most polite thing that can be said is that they are frequent. It's hard to know whether his predilection for playing grotesques is simply a case of amusing himself or a desire to save a few hundred pesetas on a supporting actor's fee; quite possibly both. But whatever the reason, it is hard to escape the feeling that Franco's films would have been better served, especially given his restrictive budgets, if he had busied himself more behind the camera than in front of it. On the other hand, of course, this would have deprived Franco and world cinema of what one can state with some confidence must be another 'first' (and hopefully, 'last'): the spectacle of the director himself being buggered by a large black man in his 1981 women-in-prison opus, Sadomania.

As alluded to previously, The Castle of Fu Manchu marked the end of Towers' Devil Doctor series (it should also be noted that Franco and Towers managed to terminate, with extreme prejudice, Sax Rohmer's other creation, the female mastermind, Sumuru, with the execrable The Girl from Rio/La ciudad sin hombres/Die sieben Männer der Sumuru, also 1968). Bearing in mind Towers' greater responsibility for these disasters, as outlined above, one can only marvel at the following anecdote from the producer himself: "I hate to put it this way but the project deteriorated with the remakes, and when we made the fifth one, that was the last one. And I think I said to Jesús when I'd viewed the print, I said, oh, you've done something that was impossible: you've successfully killed Fu Manchu." (7) If Towers really had the nerve to say that, one can only assume that Franco's presumably poor grasp of English at the time saved Towers from a richly deserved death of Fu Manchu-like fiendishness.

One of the happier outcomes of the Franco-Towers partnership was the opportunity for the director to finally bring to the screen the writings of the Marquis de Sade, an author whose presence can be said to lurk in most of Franco's films, if sometimes only in the iconography of chained and whipped women that abounds from The Awful Doctor Orlof onwards. Whereas the Sadean references in earlier works often seemed imposed and artificial (there because Franco wanted them there rather than to forward the narrative in any meaningful way), in the Marquis de Sade's "Justine"/Justine and Juliet/Justine, ovvero "Le disavventure della virtù" (1968, again), one really gets a sense of a meshing of director and subject. Given the fact that de Sade, as written, is virtually unfilmable (some would say unreadable as well), Franco can be said to have captured more or less the right tone in his adaptation (for which Towers, as scriptwriter, also deserves credit): that slightly kitsch, fetid atmosphere with provocative underpinnings that one gets from even the most nominal attempt to read de Sade.

Indeed, Franco and de Sade are very obviously kindred spirits: both push the boundaries of acceptability to the breaking point and beyond, for which they can and should be admired, while both, due to the sheer relentlessness and chaos of their narratives, are often difficult to approach. Franco's thoughts on the Marquis are both instructive and revealing: "The fact is that De Sade [sic] fascinates and grips me. I keep going back to him, although it would be more correct to say that he never leaves me. He is an excellent source of inspiration. He was probably a raving madman, but he got over his madness by writing these stories, solving difficult situations, exaggerating, provoking and digressing in the most unusual manner. I love his morality plays, very moral may I say. [. . .] His way of being lubricious and evil was simply fantastic." (8)

Alas, however, such identification does not mean that Marquis de Sade's "Justine" is a good film. Despite having a large budget for once (by Towers' standards, at any rate), Franco had to contend with the imposition of Romina Power (daughter of Tyrone, Jr.) as Justine; when it became clear that the reluctant actress was not capable of playing the role as he intended, Franco was forced to adapt it. In a bizarre way, though, Power's non-performance works quite well, in that the audience is forced to impose its own interpretation on the blank canvas of her personality. The outstanding performance in the film (in a positive sense) is that of Klaus Kinski as the Marquis – one fevered genius playing another – who is absolutely riveting in his few silent scenes as the imprisoned author. The other guest stars are quite a different matter: Mercedes McCambridge, while less obviously under the influence than in her previous Franco-Towers appearance (as the power-crazed prison warden in 99 Women/99 mujeres, also, would you believe, 1968) still turns in another scenery-chewing turn, while Akim Tamiroff seems just plain drunk. But the outstanding performance in the film (in a negative sense) is that of Jack Palance as Brother Antonin, a display so jaw-droppingly deranged – Palance doesn't just deliver his lines, he howls them – so far beyond the power of any mere intoxicant, as to be worth the price of admission by itself. Apt to be lost in the background of such epic gurning is the film's only other positive aspect, the beautiful score by Bruno Nicolai.

Undeterred, Franco and Towers returned to de Sade the following year with Marquis de Sade's "Philosophy in the Boudoir"/Die Jungfrau und die Peitsche, better known as Eugénie…the Story of Her Journey Into Perversion and De Sade '70. While Franco acknowledges that de Sade's story could not be filmed as written even today (or perhaps that should read, in these politically correct times, "especially today"), let alone in 1969, that does not alter the fact that Towers took rather too many liberties in his adaptation. The point of de Sade's story is that, through her suffering, Eugénie is liberated from the conventions of her matriarchal upbringing – not, as in Towers' version, merely abused to no end and turned into a "monster". The satirical element - indeed the whole point of the original, is entirely absent from the film. Marie Liljedahl, as the put-upon heroine, displays a rather weak screen presence, while Christopher Lee, drafted in for box-office purposes, may be said to have rather too much, in what is essentially a minor role as on-screen narrator. In the other parts, Maria Röhm is effective as Mme. de Saint-Ange, while Jack Taylor, as Mirval, is his usual creepy and effete self. Nonetheless, despite its shortcomings, the film does capture much of the nightmarish and repetitive nature of de Sade's writing, and may be considered a more successful attempt at conveying the spirit of his work than its predecessor.

Venus in Furs (Venus im Pelz/Paroxismus, 1969) was perhaps the most satisfying result of the Franco-Towers partnership, an oneiric journey of discovery by a young jazz musician who finds the body of a woman he believes to have been murdered in Río de Janeiro washed up on a beach in Turkey. Is he being haunted by his past? Is he, in fact, dying? Has the woman, Wanda, returned from the dead to wreak vengeance on her killers? Or is it all just a dream or metaphorical nightmare? While Franco likes to recall a conversation he had with the jazz trumpeter, Chet Baker, as the inspiration for this story, its original title, Black Angel, reveals it to have been an unofficial adaptation of Cornell Woolrich's 1943 novel, The Black Angel, in which a very-much-alive woman hunts down those responsible for framing her husband for murder. Interference from the American distributors led to the title change (despite Franco's protests that his story had nothing to do with the 1870 novel of that name by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch), as well as the casting of baby-faced James Darren as the protagonist. While nobody's idea of a tortured artist, Darren was an accomplished trumpeter, and his blandness can be said to work in much the same way as that of Romina Power, mentioned previously. Maria Röhm is unconvincingly cast as the angel of death, while Klaus Kinski as an Arab is different – but not a success. The glossy, lurid look of the film is a distraction, as are some of the more gimmicky optical effects, and Franco's composition occasionally leaves a lot to be desired. Overall, though, the film remains the most personal of Franco's pictures for Towers, and for that reason the most interesting.

The Bloody Judge (El proceso de las brujas/Der Hexentöter von Blackmoor/Il trono di fuoco, 1969), on the other hand, was a blatant attempt to cash in on the success of Michael Reeves' Witchfinder General (1968), and as such is of only passing interest. The main strength of the film, and also its weakness, is the casting of Christopher Lee as Judge Jeffreys, the seventeenth-century British judge notorious for his brutal condemnation of prisoners in the aftermath of the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685. On the one hand, Lee is in fine form, dominating every scene; on the other, he is left to act in a

vacuum. Unlike Reeves' film, in which Vincent Price's Matthew Hopkins is balanced out by his henchman, John Stearne (Robert Russell), Lee has no one to oppose him, except perhaps Leo Genn, but the latter's character is too vaguely drawn to be effective in this regard. Maria Schell appears, for no discernable good reason, as a benevolent witch, but Howard Vernon has fun as the chief executioner, his costume designed to evoke memories of Boris Karloff in Rowland V. Lee's Tower of London (1939). The battle scene (a double charge of cavalry through trees towards an artillery position) is competent, but nothing more (the suggestion in the U.S. DVD's liner notes that this scene proves that Franco was responsible for the glorious mud-and-blood battle in Orson Welles' Chimes at Midnight/Campanadas a medianoche,1965, on which the Spaniard was second-unit director, seems unfeasible, as any comparison will quickly demonstrate).

"Over fifty years ago Bram Stoker wrote the greatest of all horror stories. Now, for the first time, we retell, exactly as he wrote, one of the first – and still the best – tales of the macabre." (Prologue to Count Dracula, 1969) And so we come to Count Dracula (El conde Drácula/Nachts, wenn Dracula erwacht/Il conte Dracula, also known as Bram Stoker's Count Dracula), the film which probably did more harm to Franco's reputation than any other, being the most widely publicised and widely seen. Whatever the intentions of faithfully adapting Stoker prior to shooting, it staggers belief that, once the film was completed, Franco and Towers would choose to pretend that they had, "for the first time, [retold the story], exactly as he wrote . . ." (the claim appears, if anything, even stronger in the Spanish print – "con absoluta fidelidad"). Indeed, it is impossible to believe any such intentions ever existed, given the wholesale mangling to which Stoker's book is subjected. In many ways, then, this is possibly the worst of the Franco-Towers efforts because the disappointment occasioned by the end result is all the greater when taking into account not only that preposterous claim but also the fact that, as with the Fu Manchu movies, all the elements were in place to make a much better film. The top-line cast is perfect (Christopher Lee as Dracula, Herbert Lom as Van Helsing, and Klaus Kinski as Renfield), the locations, if not authentic, were potentially interesting, and Bruno Nicolai's score, though perhaps more appropriate for an Italian Western, could have effectively counterpointed the unusual atmosphere. All the elements, it seems, except an adequate budget and a sense of professionalism.

As it stands, the final result is an insult not only to the source material and the cast, but to the intelligence of the audience as well. Is anyone meant to be convinced by Dr. Seward and Co. being menaced by a roomful of stuffed animals? Towers must take most of the blame, both for his adaptation and for putting the production together in such a way as to give Franco neither the time nor the money to do anything good with it. As for Franco himself, even if he was forced to cheat on reaction shots (and one can often gets the sense that the actors are mouthing their dialogue solely to the camera), that does not explain or excuse his inept handling of Herbert Lom's frankly laughable exposition scenes. And it is presumably his fault that Lom seems so uncomfortable in a role for which, even if he was not the first choice, he should have been well-suited (mind you, the idea of flabby Dennis Price as Van Helsing is even worse than the reality of Lom's discomfort). Lee, of course, does his best, but it's clear after the opening scenes that he's fighting a losing battle. Yet

again in a Franco film, the best performance comes from Klaus Kinski in a virtually non-speaking role. The movie is also a curiously bloodless affair, with even the stakings appearing slapdash and absurd. And whose bright idea was it to kill Dracula by setting him on fire and shoving him over a wall . . . ?

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The only positive outcome from Count Dracula was the reunion between Franco and actress Soledad Miranda, who had played an uncredited role in the director's third film, La reina del Tabarín/Mariquita, la belle de Tabarin, made in 1960. Her part as Lucy in Count Dracula required her to do little other than look wan and blood-drained, which she did perfectly adequately and without giving the slightest indication of the transcendental effect she was about to have on Franco's cinema. Up till this point, it would be hard to single out any great performances in Franco's films, with the exception of Howard Vernon's career-defining Dr. Orlof. Christopher Lee came close on a couple of occasions but was undermined by extraneous factors, while Klaus Kinski's own genius, rather than anything likely to have been inherent in either script or direction, probably explains the manic intensity and depth he was able to convey in his essentially silent roles as de Sade and Renfield. But with Soledad Miranda everything was to change, if only briefly.

Not the least remarkable fact of the Franco-Miranda collaboration is how Miranda appears to have arrived fully formed in Franco's films, the ultimate embodiment of his erotic and morbid obsessions. To describe their relationship in standard terms of "artist and muse" would be a mistake; theirs was a symbiotic relationship in which the creative and interpretive roles were mutually rewarding, the benefits to each self-evident. There seems to have been no obvious period of adjustment for either actor or director; the camera rolled and Miranda breathed life into parts that could not be accused of being overwritten, that on paper must have seemed no different from Franco's earlier fusions of desire and death in such characters as Estella Blain's Nadia in The Diabolical Dr. Z or Janine Reynaud's Lorna in Succubus. But where those parts were largely emblematic – remote, even robotic, icons controlled by others – Miranda was able, through a combination of intelligence, intensity, and sheer belief in what she was doing, to invest very similar characters with an emotional depth that previously had been absent from Franco's work. Such happy alchemy cannot be explained, nor perhaps should it, though a pertinent parallel may be drawn with the example of G.W. Pabst and Louise Brooks in Pandora's Box (Die Büchse der Pandora, 1929) and, to a lesser extent, Diary of a Lost Girl (Das Tagebuch einer Verlorenen, also 1929), in which the director's vision was stunningly realised by an actress who, up till then, had largely been seen as romantic decoration.

Franco's filmography has proved a well-known source of despair to anyone trying to unravel it (different titles and different versions being only the most obvious difficulty), and there seems to be no agreement among those who might know as to the order, either of production or release, of Franco's seven films with Miranda, all of which, Count Dracula excepted, are dated 1970. That being so, we shall consider them mainly in order of their achievement.

Sex Charade is, according to Tohill and Tombs, a portmanteau film of erotic episodes "pieced together using left-overs from other projects" (9), presumably similar in type to those so popular in Italy, but which, according to Aguilar, " is practically impossible to find" (10). Nightmares Come at Night (Les Cauchemars naissent la nuit) tells the story of Anna, a stripper in "a sleazy Zagreb nightclub" who falls under the control of a woman called Cynthia. Installed in the latter's villa, she starts to suffer nightmares in which she kills people. Is she really a murderess or is it all a highly improbable plot by Cynthia, in cahoots with a Dr. Lucas (Paul Müller), to divert attention away from their own crimes? A rather dreary effort, with shades of Henri-Georges Clouzot's Les Diaboliques (1954), the film provided a starring role for Diana Lorys, whose last significant work for Franco had been in The Awful Dr. Orlof. Lorys emotes well enough, but there is just too much of it, and far too much use of voice-overs; it's all very French, and not in a good way. The plot, such as it is, is poorly executed, and Müller's volte-face at the end is only one of many implausibilities. Miranda shines briefly as the girlfriend of one of the co-conspirators, a remarkably well-nuanced performance, achieved largely through attitude and gesture, in what is essentially a "nothing part" (and a small "nothing part" at that). And indeed, her character gets to deliver the verdict on the film when she observes, "This is boring."

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Eugénie (Eugénie de Sade/De Sade 2000) saw Franco return to the Marquis de Sade, this time without the distractions of unnecessary or drunken guest stars, and it proved to be his most satisfying adaptation, or rather interpretation, of the author's works. The film opens with a writer, the splendidly named Attila Tanner (played by Franco himself in what must be considered, in his terms, a normal role), watching a home movie of what appears to be standard soft-core frolics between two young women but which abruptly turns into a vicious murder. Tanner then visits the seriously-injured Eugénie in hospital. She agrees to tell him her story on condition that he will kill her when it is told. Tanner agrees.

Brought up in a large, lakeside house outside Berlin by Albert Radeck (Paul Müller), a man she has believed to be her father but who is actually her stepfather, Eugénie has developed what she calls "an almost obsessive admiration" for Radeck, an author who supports himself by writing book reviews, etc., but whose real interest is "focused mainly on eroticism." Left to her own devices for much of the time, Eugénie discovers a work of erotica in Radeck's library. When he notices it has been moved, he tells her it is time she read such books. She agrees, telling him that she enjoyed it, "More than anything I've read in my whole life." The intimacy between them grows, and Eugénie attempts to seduce her stepfather. While he rejects the invitation, he leaves her a copy of de Sade's Eugénie de Franval in which she reads of that Eugénie's incestuous relationship with her father; later on, they take to acting out the scene, though only verbally. Radeck then announces that he is going to a conference in Paris, during which he and Eugénie will take the opportunity to commit "the perfect crime".

They fly to Paris, unaware that they are being followed by Tanner. That night they attend a rather tame show at The Taboo club, but leave unobserved and board a flight to Brussels, after first changing into the most conspicuous clothing imaginable (red leather stocking-boots, matching hat, red cape and outsize white-framed shades for her; red jumper, tartan cap and scarf, black gloves and red shades for him). Having hired a photo-model, Albert agrees to pay extra for "some sadistic twists". The model duly brings out the requisite props and paints fake blood on herself. Eugénie chains her up and then proceeds to throttle her to death with a large pair of pincers while Albert takes photographs. After taking the last flight back to Paris, they return to The Taboo in time to catch an unfunny comic, their absence unnoticed.

The next day, they attend a cocktail party at the offices of Albert's French publishers. Eugénie finds herself jealous of the female attention Albert is receiving, but when Tanner introduces himself and asks her to arrange an interview, she gladly obliges. At his apartment, Tanner expresses his admiration for Radeck's writing on eroticism and questions him about his philosophy, which proves to be a disagreeable blend of Sadean and sub-Nietzschian elements. Tanner voices his impression that "father and daughter" are lovers, which they do not deny. The tension between Radeck and Tanner is aggravated by the latter's stated determination to "keep a close watch on you and what you do. I'm very much interested in your progress." On their drive back to Germany, Radeck dismisses Tanner but Eugénie is worried by his curiosity. Needless to say, the Belgian police are making no progress in their search for a sartorially-challenged couple. But Eugénie is haunted by the face of their victim; when she cannot sleep, she cuddles up naked with Albert.

One day, Eugénie, whose mother died shortly after her birth, asks Albert how her mother died. Albert tells her that, after waiting for her to give birth to Eugénie, he had killed her, and asks Eugénie, "Does that horrify you?" Faced with that almost impossible line, Miranda shows a maturity beyond her years in her playing of the response, replying after a perfectly timed pause, "I just wanted to know. Had I known her it might have been different." Albert explains that she had been unfaithful to him and that he "can't bear treason." Eugénie asks him, "If I was unfaithful to you, would you kill me?" "I would do worse. But then I would kill myself because nothing would matter to me anymore." Sensing the conversation has become a tad sombre, Albert starts to talk about their next escapade. "Let's do something different this time, and have fun doing it," he suggests brightly.

They pick up a hitch-hiker named Kitty ("She was Austrian, a student and very stupid.") and bring her to the house. Eugénie creates a bond with the girl by lending her clothes for dinner, after which Albert proposes a drinking game. When that has run its course, he suggests "playing dead". Eugénie demonstrates, lying still while the others try to make her laugh, and then paying the penalty, suggested by Kitty, of a striptease when she loses. Next, it is the inebriated student's turn. Albert and Eugénie start to caress and undress her, then Albert places a handkerchief over her face and pours whiskey over it. Eugénie holds her down while she suffocates. Afterwards, still aroused by the

murder, Eugénie falls into Albert's arms and they kiss, before going to her bedroom where she fellates him before they make love.

In voice-over, we are told that the hapless Kitty was dumped into the lake, followed by eight others, five girls and three boys. On a rare trip to Berlin, Eugénie and Albert are approached by Tanner, who says he knows they are responsible for two murders, and warns Albert that one day he will outwit himself. Naturally, the couple admit nothing, but later Eugénie reflects that, "Tanner's words had made an impact on me. Had we gone too far? How was it all going to end?" Albert, who clearly doesn't consider eleven murders to be "going too far", tells her not to worry; they will try "a brand new game", which he will film while Eugénie acts as bait.

Albert proceeds to target Paul (André Montchall), "a mediocre musician who plays the trumpet in a trendy club band", because he appears to be unattached and naïve. He will be, "Our masterpiece. He lives as a fool and will die a fool." Albert is becoming more fascistic with every murder while Eugénie is beginning to have her doubts. But she will continue to do as he asks. The pair go to the club where they make sure that Paul sees Eugénie. The next night, she allows him to pick her up, and then seduces him. As they continue seeing each other, Eugénie comes to realise that, behind his "tough guy attitudes", Paul is "highly sensitive". He begins to fall in love with Eugénie, who is also changing. Nonetheless, she keeps to Albert's plan and engineers a break-up with Paul. Albert intends her to keep away from Paul for a few weeks but Eugénie misses him, and realises that she is in love with him. One night, she sneaks out to meet Paul – "For the first time, I went against my father's wishes. The first time I felt I was betraying him."

But the next day, Albert happens to see them. Eugénie tells Paul how she was meant to keep away from him but not why. She tells him she loves him and asks for his help. Later, after making love, she tells Paul, "I lived in a void, all because of him. But now I feel free and liberated." They make plans to go away, unaware that Albert has come into the flat. He hears her tell Paul that she loves him. After she has left, Albert approaches the dozing Paul and slashes his throat with a penknife. As he hurries back to his car, he is once again accosted and taunted by Tanner. Eugénie is understandably nervous about telling Albert of her decision to leave. She goes home, followed shortly by Albert. He throws her onto the bed, tries to rape her, then stabs and slashes her with a scissors (the final blow, we can assume, being thrust into her vagina). He then dons evening dress and commits hara-kiri, as he had earlier said he would do. Having finished her story, Eugénie reminds Tanner of his promise. He tells her she is dying anyway, and shortly thereafter she passes away.

Eugénie is one of Franco's best films, with outstanding performances from both Miranda and Müller, and a groovy score by Bruno Nicolai. Under no obvious budgetary constraints, Franco is able to let the story unfold at its natural pace; presumably the small cast and intimate nature of the story helped in this regard. The bleak, wintry setting of the exteriors is an effective visual counterpoint to the increasingly unhealthy, hothouse atmosphere of the Radeck household, and even Franco's use of zooms are acceptable, being employed with restraint both normally and in reverse. Miranda's playing

is both subtle and intense, and one need only compare it to that of the unfortunate Romina Power to see that this is an actress who fully understands, and is in tune with, both the spirit of de Sade and that of his cinematic adaptor and equivalent, Jess Franco. Müller, too, gives an impressively understated performance, only gradually allowing the fascist underpinnings of Radeck's "philosophy" to become apparent; indeed, it is by some way his finest performance for the director.

Perhaps the most important things to consider when looking at Franco's adaptations of de Sade is, firstly, the context and, second, the intent. De Sade had become something of a cinematic flavour-of-the-month in the late 1960s, with one attempted biopic and two adaptations following on from Peter Brook's adaptation of Peter Weiss's play, Marat/Sade in 1966 (11). But Franco's interest in, and admiration for, the works of de Sade was long-standing and sincere, not some passing fancy dictated by fashion. If the Towers' adaptations were less than successful, it was inevitable that Franco would return to the Marquis as soon as circumstances permitted (which, as it happened, was within a year of the end of his partnership with Towers). When one watches Eugénie today it is important to ask who else was making films like this in 1970? What other films were dealing openly with subjects such as sadism, incest (practical if not biological) and thrill-killing? The nearest equivalent might be Leonard Kastle's independently-made The Honeymoon Killers in 1970, although the real-life murderers in that film were killing for profit rather than pleasure. There may be other examples before John McNaughton's Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer in 1990 (in which the killers film their crimes) or Oliver Stone's Natural Born Killers in 1994 (which features thrill-killing as public spectacle rather than private pleasure), but none that immediately come to mind. (The Italian gialli, though liberally infused with sex and violence, never pretended to be saying anything significant about the darker aspects of the human condition.)

As to intent, if one accepts, as one must, that Franco is sincere in his interest in de Sade, and that, as suggested earlier, the centrality of the sex urge is essential for any understanding of Franco's cinema, then it becomes clear that Franco can, to a significant extent and in his best work, be absolved of the charge of prurience or salaciousness that is often levelled against him. If one intends to make a film centred on the sex urge then it follows that said film will contain nudity and sex. This self-evident fact never seems to have bothered Franco (quite the opposite, in fact), but it has certainly bothered his critics, whose reactions to his films have often betrayed a puritanical objection to the whole idea of making sex the mainspring of a film. In this regard, it may be said that whereas Hollywood has often rightly been accused of selling sex in a blatantly dishonest (and prurient) fashion, Franco's attitude has been refreshingly honest and, paradoxically (given his interest in the more outré aspects of human sexuality), healthy. His sincerity is on display in a film like Eugénie which, for all its fevered eroticism derived from its source material, is not shot in an exploitative way. Indeed, Franco rarely includes nude or sex scenes gratuitously; they nearly always make a point about the characters' psychology (as in the above-mentioned example from The Awful Dr. Orlof) or serve to advance the narrative (as in Eugénie), unlike the too-many-to-mention Hollywood films of relatively recent times in which a heavy-breathing scene, with perhaps a soupcon of nipple or a dash of pubic hair, is

included for no good reason other than to reinforce the masculinity of a lead actor or to market (i.e., exploit) the desirability of a female one.

Present-day viewers of Franco's films, particularly those of a feminist bent, may well look at a film like Eugénie or others in the Franco-Miranda canon, and see only that Miranda spends a large amount of screen time wearing very little. This is undeniable, and it would be wrong to suppose that Franco does not intend us to find her desirable (being Franco, he would expect both men and women to do so), but that it not to say that she is being exploited, unless one follows the hard-line feminist approach which decrees that any display of female nudity is tantamount to exploitation, and little short of rape. Indeed, in Miranda's case, where her entire being may be said to inhabit the character she is playing, it is quite clear, both from the internal evidence of the films, and from one's own responses to them, that Miranda's nakedness and what it embodies is not just there, as the joke has it, because it is "essential to the plot" – it is the plot, the very core of Franco's best films, and what makes them distinct from, say, the lamentable work he produced in collaboration with Erwin C. Dietrich in the mid-1970s. In fact, it is possible to make the case that Franco himself, though doubtless knowingly, has been exploited by producers and distributors who market his films solely on the sex content (as an illustration of this, it is instructive to watch Eugénie and then compare it to the trailer included on the DVD). In any event, and whatever one's views on the matter, one still returns to the question, how does one make a film about sex without sex?

* *

She Killed in Ecstasy (Sie tötete in Ekstase/Mrs. Hyde) opens with several shots of Mrs. Johnson (Soledad Miranda) running down steps from a large, multi-level modern house to the seafront. She is wearing a black dress and a flowing, purple woolen wrap. At the water's edge, she stops and, in voice-over, laments the death of her husband and the short time (two years) which they had together. In flashback we see their wedding and hear her say: "How can I ever forget you? Your love, your caresses. You are inside me, my darling. In me, you live on. Nothing will destroy your memory." Then we see Dr. Johnson (Fred Williams) telling his wife about the expected decision of the Medical Council, due in a week, which, he fondly believes, will endorse the validity of his research. He then takes her on a tour of his laboratory, well-stocked with feti in jars of formaldehyde: "At first, I used animals but in the final phase, I used human embryos. Human and animal hormones are injected, resulting in revolutionary changes. You get viable organisms. The hormones make them more resistant to cancer, heart failure and physical and mental decline." We then see them making love (not, one hastens to add, in the laboratory).

Dr. Johnson is attending a preliminary hearing of the Medical Council. He is aghast to hear his research condemned as "inhuman" and himself denounced as a "charlatan". Donen (Jess Franco) tells him, "Your plan to alter the human organism with the aid of hormones is, in our view, a crime." Professor Walker (Howard Vernon) adds that his research is a violation of the Hippocratic oath and that the Council will be recommended to stop him practicing medicine. "Don't you understand? It's

not about the Hippocratic oath. It's about mankind, a better existence," Johnson protests. The female member of the board, named Crawford (Ewa Strömberg), then says, "Dr. Johnson, I have here reports about your embryo experiments. You have denied human embryos the possibility of life. I would call that a criminal act, and a blasphemy." "Blasphemy? What kind of a world do you live in? Only one thing counts: to help people, regardless of morals." The last member of the Council, Dr. Huston, tells him that he is ordered to discontinue his experiments, and finally, Donen tells him to burn his research papers.

Johnson returns to his laboratory to find it destroyed, and his wife huddled in a daze on the floor. She tells him an angry mob broke in, threatening to kill him. Johnson stares round at his destroyed life's work and breaks down. After that, he begins to lose his grip on his sanity, ranting and raving in the night. His wife calls Dr. Huston, but he refuses to come to Johnson's aid. Mrs. Johnson, in voice-over, then tells us how she took him from the city to their house on an isolated island. "The house [the same one as seen in the opening shots] was like a dream. A labyrinth where the steps echo, where words rebound and return, again and again." But Johnson's condition does not improve, and he alternates between lying in a stupor or rambling on about the Council's decision.

Mrs. Johnson attends an open meeting of the Medical Council, where Prof. Walker is haranguing the audience on the need for the medical profession to protect itself from "dreamers", "charlatans", and "unscrupulous criminals". The chairman thanks Walker and refers to the "damnable actions" of Dr. Johnson. "At our request, the Medical Council has struck him off the register." (Note: it is never entirely clear which body actually constitutes the Medical Council.) Mrs. Johnson gets up and leaves, watched by Dr. Huston. Outside, she runs into a police inspector (Horst Tappert), whom she met after the destruction of the laboratory. When she suggests angrily that he finds the men who destroyed her husband's life, the inspector is unaccountably jaunty: "Who knows? I might just do that." He goes into the meeting, where now Donen is busily denouncing Johnson, and exchanges pleasantries with Huston, who is surprised he knows him.

Johnson, now out of his mind, is oblivious to his wife's words and her attempt to arouse him. Later, when she is asleep, he wakes, still haunted by the Council's words. He goes into the bathroom and cuts his wrists with a razor. When his wife finds him, he is dead.
We then see her on the seafront, as at the beginning. She says she cannot live without him nor without avenging him. "My revenge will be cruel. The price for our destroyed lives can only be death."

Mrs. Johnson waits for Prof. Walker in a bar, where he is busy propounding his disagreeable views on "the young" to an interviewer. ("They have their reservations and don't want to carry out orders.") When he has finished, he comes over and starts to chat her up. She lets him believe she is a prostitute and suggests they go to his hotel. In his room, Walker reveals himself to be even more unpleasant than he is in public. He stops Mrs. Johnson kissing him, saying he cannot stand that kind of thing, which makes him nervous. In bed, he pauses for a brief prayer (presumably along the lines of St.

Augustine's "Give me chastity and continency – but not yet!") before telling her to degrade and abuse him: "I need that." "Yes, because you are impotent," observes Mrs. Johnson, before obliging him with a few slaps in the face. She then pulls out a knife, slashes his throat and stabs him in the groin. Across the hall, Donen, hearing a noise, wakes up and opens his door. He sees Mrs. Johnson outside Walker's room. She hurries away. Donen goes into to Walker's room. There is an abrupt cut to:

Dr. Huston waiting by a coin-operated telescope on the seafront. He is joined by Crawford; both have them have received letters from Donen. When he arrives, he tells them about Walker, whose throat had been cut and his penis severed, and about seeing (though not recognising) Mrs. Johnson. He then hands them a note which he had removed from Walker's room before the police arrive. It reads: "This was the first. There'll be three more. J."

Crawford is at a coastal resort complex. In the bar is Mrs. Johnson, disguised with a short blonde wig. Crawford initiates conversation and Mrs. Johnson offers to lend her some books. They go to her apartment, where Mrs. Johnson gives her to understand that she is a painter. Crawford begins to seduce Mrs. Johnson on the floor. There is a brief cut to the Dr. and Mrs. Johnson embracing on a sofa. Then Mrs. Johnson leads Crawford into the bedroom. They undress each other and embrace for some presumed Sapphic frolics, which are rudely terminated when Mrs. Johnson presses an inflatable black-and-white cushion over Crawford's face and smothers her. She then pins a note on her chest which reads: "You are the second pig. J."

Mrs. Johnson approaches the corpse of her husband, laid out on the bed in their island house, saying that she has killed two of his murderers.

Mrs. Johnson is in a church (the one where she and Johnson were married), wearing widow's weeds and a different wig. She is watched by Dr. Huston, who follows her outside when she leaves. When he approaches her, she tearfully tells him that her husband is terminally ill. Huston offers to help, but when he mentions his name she runs away.

Huston is telling Donen of the incident in a restaurant: "When I said my name, she was as scared as if I was the devil." He says he is certain it was Johnson's wife, but Donen tells him to stop talking nonsense. Mrs. Johnson appears, sans disguise, and sits at the next table. Donen says that she looks familiar and goes to ask the waiter who she is, but when he turns to point her out, she has gone.

Dr. Huston visits the inspector and, having outlined his fears of being a revenge target, demands police protection. The inspector is polite but firm – not until he is in serious danger.

Huston walks into Donen's hotel and tries to relax in the lobby. Mrs. Johnson appears, again without disguise, and Huston becomes agitated, finally getting up to confront her. She asks for a light. He tells her to leave him alone, and walks out. She follows him into a bar – "Do you have a light now?"

With shaking hands, he lights her cigarette. When she asks, “Don’t you want to talk to me?” he says no and again tells her to leave him alone before rushing out of the bar. As Huston walks up the flights of stairs to his apartment, he realises he is being followed by Mrs. Johnson. He starts to run, and she gives chase.

Inside his darkened apartment, the light is suddenly switched on to reveal Mrs. Johnson lying on the bed, wearing a black bra, suspenders and tights, blue fishnet knickers, and the blonde wig she wore for Crawford. She tries to allay Huston’s fears, and kisses him. There is a brief cut to the Johnsons kissing, then back to her and Huston, then another cut to the Johnsons and back. As Huston slavers over her, Mrs. Johnson stares glassily at the ceiling. This is paralleled with a shot of the dead Dr. Johnson’s eyes staring upwards. Then Mrs. Johnson stabs Huston in the base of his neck, before opening his trousers and cutting off his penis.

Mrs. Johnson is sitting in the dark on a sofa, naked except for her purple wrap, staring at her husband’s body on the bed, remembering when they were together. Drawing the wrap around her, she approaches the bed, lets the wrap fall, and embraces her dead husband, saying that it is all over now, and that they will go away together. Then she bites his chest.

Donen leaves his hotel and gets into a taxi. Much later, back in his apartment, he finds his wife lying in the hallway, her throat cut. As he passes out, Mrs. Johnson descends the stairs, crosses over to him and lifts his head up.

In a hospital room, the inspector pulls back a sheet from Crawford’s body. A medic tells him that she was suffocated and her body scratched. Then an orderly announces that the professor’s body has been brought in – “He has multiple stab wounds. The body’s a mess.” The inspector remarks, “Now only Dr. Huston survives. We’ll have to watch him closely.”

Donen is tied to a chair in the apartment in which Crawford was killed, his pink shirt torn open. Mrs. Johnson watches him from the bed. As he regains consciousness, she gets up, and approaches him. “You will have to suffer.” She caresses him and then starts slicing his chest with a knife. She drops her wrap, slides up his body, then slaps him, saying, “My husband will rest easier after your death.” She then kills him with a thrust to the groin.

Mrs. Johnson gets into a car, her husband’s body in the passenger seat. She tells him they will be reunited, and then drives the car over a precipice. The inspector arrives and solemnly intones, “A dead man was held responsible for these crimes. I believe it to be the truth. Mrs. Johnson was a normal woman. If it wasn’t for her husband’s death she wouldn’t have committed these crimes.”

Despite good photography, a great score, and another standout performance by Miranda, She Killed in Ecstasy, another reworking of The Bride Wore Black, proves a disappointment in comparison with either Eugénie or Vampyros Lesbos, though still much better than the ridiculous The Devil Came

from Akasava. As can be seen from the above synopsis, there are far too many holes in the plot and it seems clear that the script was put together hurriedly and with little concern for logic. How, one wonders, does Mrs. Johnson get into Huston's apartment, and when did she effect her disguise? And why did she run away from him at the church if her purpose (deduced from her disguise) was to get close to him? The scene with the inspector in the hospital makes absolutely no sense; when Huston visited him he was told that the policeman was working on the Walker and Crawford cases, yet in this scene he's acting as if the murders had only just happened. And why does the orderly come in and pronounce on the state of the professor's body? It's two murders ago since Donen called the police, and even if the inspector does not yet know of Huston's demise, this hardly qualifies as news. And why does the inspector assume that only Huston is still alive? Surely he must know of Donen, who initially contacted the police and who has not, in fact and as far as the inspector is aware, been killed at that point.

All of this might be less of a problem if Franco was experimenting with narrative structure again, or constructing an oneiric revenge story like Venus in Furs, but there is nothing in the film to suggest that the events are unfolding in anything but a straightforward manner and in 'real time'. Indeed, She Killed in Ecstasy may be said to perfectly demonstrate two of Franco's shortcomings: the tendency to rush into production before a script is finalised, and his reported enthusiasm for completely rewriting scenes overnight or improvising on set (12). The jazz-inspired, improvisational approach alluded to earlier is not best suited to genre subjects such as the revenge thriller, which of course, insists on rules and internal logic for much of its effect. In fact, She Killed in Ecstasy would have been much more effective if Franco had adopted the oneiric or supernatural approach; perhaps having the inspector reveal at the end that Mrs. Johnson, on discovering her husband's death, had also committed suicide, and that, as far as he was concerned, the murders must be the work of an unknown maniac.

Furthermore, and in contrast to Eugénie, the characters are all too sketchily-drawn, the only paradoxical advantage of this being the illustration it provides of Miranda's ability to yet again convincingly create a character from next to nothing. Dr. Johnson, whatever sympathy one feels for his plight, quickly loses it once he begins to crack up. Why doesn't he just move to a country where work on a forerunner of stem-cell research is welcomed? Prof. Walker is splendidly unpleasant, though one regrets Franco's habit, previously seen in The Diabolical Dr. Z and Succubus, of killing off Vernon too early in proceedings. Dr. Huston provides Müller with little to do beyond looking nervous, and the role of Crawford is so under-developed that Ewa Strömberg can make nothing of it. The most preposterous character of all, though, is the inspector, a curiously repellent characterisation by Horst Tappert who seems to spend his time either smiling like a lunatic or mouthing incomprehensible platitudes.

Franco's direction seems rushed and often unsure; he may be amusing himself showing Mrs. Johnson and Crawford distorted through a glass of sherry, but why is there a sequence of erotic paintings shown at the start of Prof. Walker's scene in the bar? Are we supposed to believe that they are

hanging in what otherwise seems a perfectly run-of-the-mill establishment? And if not that, then what? Franco's use of the zoom lens is also particularly ham-fisted in this film. In the scene where Dr. Huston approaches Mrs. Johnson outside the church, Franco begins with a beautiful, classically composed shot of the pair framed by an archway; he then performs a horrible double-zoom movement which not only destroys the composition but breaks the mood and makes one aware of the camera. Nor can it be excused on the grounds that Franco was saving time on another set-up because towards the end of the scene he moves the camera closer to the actors anyway.

For all its faults, however, She Killed in Ecstasy remains one of Franco's most popular films, and is certainly more entertaining than François Truffaut's conspicuously flaccid version of Woolrich's novel, La Mariée était en noir, made in 1968. The spaced-out soundtrack by the German composers, Manfred Hübler and Siegfried Schwab, is a great asset, and Franco displays some nice touches in handling the murder scenes, in particular the smothering of Crawford, whose contorted face can be seen through the plastic cushion. Miranda not only brings style and substance to the film, but manages to infuse even her most bloodthirsty scenes with an eroticism that is not easily forgotten.

* *

Vampyros Lesbos (Las vampiras) begins with the titles playing over an image of the sun with a ship in the foreground, accompanied by what sounds like a radio broadcast being played backwards. This is intercut with shots of a beautiful dark-haired woman, her hands reaching out to the camera, a long red scarf fluttering from her neck. After some brief shots of Istanbul in daylight, the film begins in a Turkish nightclub, where the same woman is performing. On the stage is a female mannequin, a silver candalabra, and a full-length mirror. The woman, who is wearing a black negligee over black bra and panties, black fishnet stockings and suspender, offset by a long red scarf and red garters, begins by caressing her own image in the mirror. After discreetly stripping, the woman approaches the mannequin and begins to caress it. The "mannequin" comes to life, and at the act's finale is vampirised by the woman. The performance is being watched by Linda Westinghouse (Ewa Strömberg) and her boyfriend, Omar (André Montchall). Linda is fascinated, aroused, and disturbed by the act, and totally oblivious to Omar's presence.

Linda is woken by the woman apparently calling to her; a kite jinks and twists across the sky; Linda is taking a boat to an island. In a succession of cuts, we see a modern, single-level house with red pyramid-shaped roofing, a fishing net, and a wicker chair. The woman from the nightclub, bare-breasted now but still wearing the long red scarf, looks to camera. We see blood on a windowpane, a butterfly in a fishing net, a scorpion, the blood drops on the window merging into a stream, the woman again as before. Next, we see a different shot of her reclining. Suddenly, Linda's head enters the frame in front of the woman's legs. She is wearing a heavy, ornate necklace.

Linda is recounting her dream to a psychiatrist, Dr. Steiner (Paul Müller), who is more interested in his doodles than his patient. Linda tells him she has this recurrent dream featuring the woman from

the nightclub, but that she did not know who the woman in the dream was until she saw her performing in the club the night before. Dr. Steiner, eager to end the consultation, tells her she is sexually frustrated and should find a better lover.

Linda is at work in the offices of Simpson & Simpson. She is told that her boss wants to raise the company's profile in Turkey. Linda announces that she is going to Anatolia, "to see Countess Carody about an inheritance."

Linda returns to Omar at the Istanbul Hilton. She does not tell him what Steiner said, but admits she is scared. As they look out over the swimming pool, she suggests they spend a few days together.

We see the kite, and the same boat as in Linda's dream. Linda is now on a ferry to Anatolia. She is wearing a rust-red leather coat, an orange patterned hair tie, and carrying a bright red leather handbag. She seems nervous. We see the kite again, and the woman from the nightclub calling her name. Linda walks up a deserted street to the Plaj hotel, where she announces herself and asks to be taken to the Kadidados Islands. She is told she is too late and has missed the boat. When she asks where she can stay, she is informed that the Countess Carody has reserved her a room at the Plaj. In the background, the hotel janitor, Memmet, sits, counting off a rosary. He takes Linda up the faded, red-painted stairway to her room.

Linda, wearing a short brown dress, wakes up suddenly after a nightmare. She finds there is no water in the room and goes downstairs, where she is startled by Memmet grabbing her elbow. He tells her not to go to the island because, "Death lives there. Madness and death rule the island." He says she should come to the wine-cellar later, then he is called away.

Linda looks down into the wine-cellar and sees Memmet standing over a woman's corpse, trussed up, bloody, and with a noose around its neck. She runs away. Memmet makes a half-hearted effort to follow her before returning to his gruesome business.

Linda arrives by boat on the island. We see the kite, and hear the woman calling Linda's name. We see the woman's mute servant, Morpho, watching Linda through the fishing nets. We see Linda walking, from through the nets. We see the scorpion. The camera zooms from in-focus on Linda to out-of-focus and then into focus again. Inside the house, Linda 'sees' blood running down the windowpane. She panics and runs but is halted by the woman calling her name. The woman is reclining in the wicker chair, wearing a white bikini and large shades. She is the Countess Nadine Carody. Linda approaches, announcing she is from Simpson & Simpson. The Countess watches her appraisingly. Linda confesses she feels she has been here before. The Countess says that is quite common, then invites her for a swim.

The Countess encourages Linda to swim au naturel, assuring her no one can see them. Except Morpho, who is watching. Afterwards, the Countess also strips off, creating a sense of intimacy and relaxation between them.

The Countess is sitting at an outside table decorated with red candles on a salmon-pink cloth. Behind the table hang the fishing nets. Linda joins her, now in a white trouser suit and wearing the ornate necklace seen in her dream. She remarks on the unusual will and asks about Count Dracula. The Countess says he was, like her, from Hungary. He left everything "to the woman who made his life worth living," adding that "It is wonderful how much he had to give me." When Linda remarks that not everyone is so generous, the Countess, touching her wedding ring, says, "One day, I will pass it on to somebody who deserves it." Linda admits to a headache. The Countess, after remarking that "I love this red wine", tells her to rest. Linda, obviously drugged, passes out, watched calmly but intently by the Countess, who then caresses her neck, her nostrils dilating. She calls for Morpho.

Morpho puts Linda to bed. We see a black dog in the sea, the butterfly, the scorpion, and hear the distorted voice that played over the opening credits. The Countess pulls aside a curtain leading into Linda's room. She is wearing the long red scarf, and there is blood on her lower lip. Linda awakes, and walks hesitantly towards her. We see the scorpion, as the Countess approaches. Linda looks apprehensive as the Countess caresses then kisses her. The Countess then tilts her head back briefly, establishing her power before sitting Linda on the bed and removing her top. She kisses her again. Dissolve to the Countess lying Linda on the floor and removing her trousers. Dissolve to the scorpion. Dissolve to the Countess standing over the now naked Linda and starting to remove her dress. Dissolve to the kite. Dissolve to the Countess, still wearing her scarf, caressing Linda's neck with her lips. Dissolve to the butterfly in the fishing net. Dissolve to the Countess biting Linda's neck. Cut to blood running down windowpane. Cut to the Countess biting, then raising her head, a gobbet of blood hanging from her mouth, before biting again as Linda moans.

The camera zooms back from an open window, gauze curtains billowing in the breeze. Linda lies naked on the floor, She wakes with a start, calls for "Nadine", then finds her brown dress. She goes downstairs, through a room with red and black furniture and a heavy, red-tasselled ceiling drape, then outside. In the swimming pool, she sees Nadine, floating in a crucifixion pose. The camera pans the length of the red scarf to Nadine's face, her eyes staring wide as in a trance, blood on her chin. Linda passes out beside the pool.

In the private clinic of Dr. Aldon Seward, a female patient called Agra is having a fit. After being slapped back to reality by Melnik, Dr. Seward's assistant, she babbles on about the Countess returning to her: "She will take hold of me again. I'm so happy." Downstairs, Dr. Seward (Dennis Price) is reading – "The moon will be red as blood, and the undead will step from the dark, looking for victims, ruthless and cruel." Melnik comes in and reports Agra's latest fit. After ordering that she be given an injection, Dr. Seward visits her. Agra tells him about her latest visitation: "I lost myself

completely in her. She was me, and I was her." When Seward asks who she means, she replies, "My friend is the Queen of the Night."

Linda wakes up in Seward's clinic. She is unable to remember who she is, and has been there for a number of days. Omar arrives, in response to a notice run by Seward. We see Linda and Omar on a boat, then walking around Istanbul while, Linda, in voice-over, tells him that, apart from being on a boat at sea, and the Countess in the pool ("All I can see is a woman, a naked woman lying dead in a pool."), she can remember nothing. She wonders if it is all a dream. Cut to a shot of the Countess staring out a window. Cut back to Linda and Omar, reflected and distorted in a window. Omar suggests they go on holiday. The camera pulls back to reveal an airline company's window display.

A slow reverse zoom from the sun and the ship seen in the title sequence is followed by a fast zoom to a big house on a mountain. Inside the Countess is lying on a black combination seat, watched by Morpho. She is recounting how, a hundred or was it two hundred years ago, she was raped by a soldier before being rescued by Count Dracula, who killed the soldier. Dracula then took her blood before sharing with her "the secrets of the vampires." "Why did he do it?" she wonders. "Men still disgust me. I hate them all! Many were captivated by me. Many women. I bewitched them. They lost their identity. I became them. But then I met Linda. Now I'm under her spell. I have to initiate her into our circle."

Cut to Linda and Omar in bed (the same as earlier, so presumably they did not go on holiday), the sea reflected in the window. We see the Countess, with Morpho behind her, "watching" them. Linda and Omar start to make love. The camera zooms into Nadine's face as, in voice-over, she calls Linda's name. Cut to waves breaking. Cut to Linda and Omar, now asleep. Cut to a close-up of Nadine's eyes as she calls Linda a third time. Linda wakes, then gets up and fetches a long, black dress. Nadine appears on the balcony outside their room, apparently closing in on Omar. Linda walks down the hallway, and is next seen walking up the steps to the house on the mountain.

Cut to Linda walking up a spiral staircase bathed in red light, then along a corridor, the shot ending in a close-up of Nadine's face. Nadine sits on the combination seat, also dressed in black, waiting for Linda and appearing somewhat nervous. When Linda comes in, Nadine welcomes her, then drinks from a crystal chalice filled with blood, which she then offers to Linda, who also drinks from it. Nadine tells her that she is now "one of us" and that "The Queen of the Night will bear you up on her black wings. Kovec nihe trekatsch." Linda repeats the incantation, then kisses Nadine hungrily. Nadine lies down, "Save me," she says to Linda, giving herself to her. Now it is Linda who is the aggressor. Cut to Agra having an erotic dream and fondling a phallic-shaped children's toy. Cut back to Nadine now vampirising Linda, then back to Agra screaming for Nadine.

Omar is sitting listlessly in a chair in Dr. Seward's consulting room. The doctor tells Linda, who is now dressed in a shorter black dress with a red patterned neck scarf and black boots, that Omar has lost a lot of blood but that it is not serious. When Linda suggests it may have been her fault, Seward

replies patronisingly that she is a charming girl but understands nothing about occultism, adding that, "You can't influence the supernatural." Melnik announces that Agra is having another attack. "I've spent a lot of time studying vampires," Seward informs Linda before inviting her to visit Agra with him. They pass through Seward's study, which is decorated with a rug with blood-red patterning. Seward then says that while Omar is in no danger, Linda is. Linda explains how she finds herself doing inexplicable things. Seward tells her she can protect herself from "the Spirits of the Night," while admitting he is frightened of them: "It depends on the desire to live and to free yourself." He then advises her on how to kill a vampire with a deadly blow to the brain, either by splitting the skull with an axe or piercing it with a bar (both of which items he happens to have handy), adding that, "If you succeed in killing a vampire, the body will vanish into nothing."

When Seward (but not Linda) enters Agra's room she is writhing on the floor: "She was inside me. And now she's gone! Nobody can save me!" When Seward tries to get more information, she suddenly says that Nadine will be coming back, because she wants to meet Seward.

Omar expresses his concerns that Linda is getting weaker and will not survive another attack, but Seward reassures him that he has told her what to do and that she will be all right providing she has the strength to do it. As Omar leaves, he is approached by Agra, who tells him must go to the Countess's house ("The old house of Uskalan, up on the mountain.") to get Nadine to help her. They are interrupted by Seward and Melnik, the latter having spotted Agra from an open window. Seward tells Omar to leave in no uncertain terms.

Omar returns to the hotel, looking for Linda. When he cannot find her, he asks at the reception and is told that she checked out the day before.

Linda is apprehensively climbing an outside staircase. A green door at the top opens to reveal Memmet. Linda screams but he overpowers her and she loses consciousness.

Omar arrives at the nightclub, where Nadine is beginning her performance. He leaves before the end, unaware that Morpho has seen him. As Nadine reaches the climax of her routine, we hear the distorted voice on the soundtrack as she starts to vampirise her "mannequin", this time killing her in the process.

After a quick cut to the image of the sun and the ship (from the opening titles), we cut to Dr. Seward's clinic. In his consulting room, the doctor confides in his diary: "The more I study the phenomenon of the vampires the more I'm drawn to their world. Its powers stem from unknown depths, powers that are inaccessible to most of us. I can barely resist the temptation to cross over into the dark world of the supernatural." Melnik comes in to report that Agra is asleep and to ask if he is needed. Seward dismisses him before crossing to the stairs and starting up them, pausing as the hall clock strikes midnight. Half-way up, Seward turns and looks down. The Countess is in the hall. "Who are you?" he asks. "You know, so why ask?" Nadine replies. Seward tells her he wants to enter

her world, “Only with your help can I enter this world and contact the supernatural.” But Nadine refuses, “You want to take Linda from me. That’s why I won’t aid you.” Seward again asks for her help, before uttering the “Kovec nihe trekatsch” incantation. “Shut up!” Nadine tells him, “Our words have no power when you say them. He who is our enemy will lose the battle and will never join our empire.” Seward asks why she has come. “Because this is the hour of your death.” Seward makes the sign of the cross, intoning “Sanctus spiritus benedictus aberatio aberni mandati nolet.” Nadine backs away, shielding her face, then calls Morpho who grabs Steward and strangles him to death. The Countess approaches his body before exchanging a glance with Morpho.

As Agra writhes bare-breasted on the floor, Nadine materializes through the door. Agra reaches up to her. “I’ve come to say goodbye. I have to leave you forever,” Nadine tells her. She dematerialises, leaving Agra clutching at thin air.

Dr. Steiner arrives at his practice and reads in the paper that, “The famous scientist Aldon Seward was killed last night. Two people dressed in black were seen leaving the scene.” Omar comes in and asks if he’s seen the paper. Steiner, as sympathetic as ever, answers, “Yes. They killed the old charlatan who studied vampires. What’s it to you?” Omar says that Linda has disappeared and must be in the hands of the killers. Steiner tells him his imagination is running wild and that she is probably with another man. Then Omar tells him of the death in the nightclub and that he believes the dancer will lead him to Linda. He has managed to find out that the dancer lives, “In an old house in Uskalan.” Steiner tells him he should not go on his own, and that he will accompany him.

Linda is trussed up in the wine-cellar. “You are here to meet Dracula’s heirs. You will be mine in this night of darkness,” mutters Memmet, threatening her with a saw. It transpires that he is Agra’s husband and that she went out to the Countess’s island. She came back deranged and was locked up by Seward. He babbles on about blood, saying he will untie Linda so she will be free to enjoy her pain. He again shows her the woman he killed by hanging. Linda plays along with him. He unties her and then she kills him by smashing the saw blade into his neck.

Omar and Steiner arrive at the house in Uskalan. Nadine, dressed in a white fur-lined coat and matching Cossack hat, hears them coming upstairs. She calls Morpho, who fires off a shot at the two men as he and the Countess make their escape.

Nadine leaves Istanbul by boat. She looks tired and ill.

We see Nadine’s pool, in which the scorpion is drowning. Cut to Linda running along the beach, calling for Nadine. The house appears to be locked up, but Linda forces open the French window. She finds Nadine draped over the combination seat, obviously dying. Cut to the scorpion. Linda asks what has happened. “The end has come . . . for me,” replies Nadine, weakly. Linda asks if there is anything she can do. “Yes. Only you can help me. Only through your blood will my strength return.” But Linda refuses, saying, “No, I don’t want to belong to you.” “You . . . you want to leave me?” asks

Nadine in disbelief. Linda strokes her gently as she turns over. “This is the end. It has to be the end,” she says before biting Nadine’s neck. Cut to Morpho outside. Cut to Nadine, as she dies. Cut to Agra. Cut to Linda pulling out a steel hatpin. “No,” she says, “I don’t want to be like you. That’s why I have to do it.” She then stabs Nadine in her left eye. A spurt of blood hits Linda in the face. Cut to Agra collapsing, now freed from Nadine’s influence. Cut to scorpion. Cut to Morpho, running. He hauls Linda off Nadine’s body and hurls her to the floor. He kisses Nadine tenderly, then removes the pin from her eye and stabs himself in the heart. Omar and Steiner arrive by boat. They see the drowned scorpion in the pool. Inside, the find Linda hunched up against the wall. There is no sign of Nadine’s body or that of Morpho. But beside her is the Countess’s long red scarf.

As they travel back from the island by boat, Omar, in voice-over, tells her, “It was a bad dream, Linda. Nothing more.” She replies, “No, it wasn’t a dream, unbelievable as it may seem. Even if there is no explanation. The pain will fade in time but the memory will remain for as long as I live.” The final shot shows the kite falling to earth.

* *

There can be little doubt that Vampyros Lesbos (13) is the best film of Franco’s long and erratic career. For once, nearly all the elements that have fascinated him – sex, eroticism, fetishism, voyeurism, mind control, the shifting boundary between dreams and reality, the conjunction of death and desire, the rejection of logic, non-linear story-telling – came together to create a pulsating acid trip of a movie, an outrageous, psychedelic blend of pop-art, poetry, and pulp which audaciously inverts the conventions of the traditional vampire film while at the same time respecting and reinforcing them. Indeed, with Vampyros Lesbos Franco may be said to have successfully redefined the genre in the Leone-esque sense of the term (alluded to previously), even if the film had no obvious impact or influence on contemporary or future trends.

Critical analysis of Vampyros Lesbos, as with Franco himself, has been pretty minimal. It is not mentioned in any of the early, pictorial studies of the horror genre (by Denis Gifford, and Alan Frank); the first references to it would appear to be in Donald F. Glut’s The Dracula Book and Barrie Pattison’s The Seal of Dracula (both 1975). The former described it as being, ‘reputedly based on “Dracula’s Guest,” by Stoker. The film is about a girl dreaming that she is being menaced by a lesbian vampire’ (14), while the latter notes only that it concerns “a young American [sic] girl ... confronted by a Countess, whose face has appeared in her hallucinations and who is discovered to be a descendant of Dracula.” (15) David Pirie’s otherwise excellent The Vampire Cinema (1977) basically repeats Pattison’s summation (16). The first intelligent assessment of the film in a book not specifically about Franco would appear to be that of Alain Silver and James Ursini in the second (but not the first) edition of The Vampire Film, published in 1993. (17) As recently as the late 1990s, however, even specialist horror publications could be found to be inaccurate in describing the film, or ignoring it altogether (while confidently stating that Jess Franco is Italian!) The fact that Vampyros

Lesbos was not released in Britain (nor Ireland, presumably) of course explains its absence from the early works while, as can be seen, the first authors to mention it had clearly not seen it.

Nonetheless, it is fair to say that Vampyros Lesbos is not universally loved or admired (one on-line review facetiously suggests it is about a girl being menaced by a kite), though it will be shown that such views betray a lack of understanding of the film (and of Franco) and the context in which it was made. And Vampyros Lesbos is, perhaps, not an easy film to appreciate on a first viewing, especially if one has been brought up on the Universal and Hammer models. Franco's film is a visual and aural assault on the senses which can quite easily leave a viewer saying, "Jesus! (or even Jesús!) What the hell was that?" It can seem like a crazy-quilt film of weird shots, crazy sounds, and far-out music (courtesy, once again of Manfred Hübler and Siegfried Schwab). And, oh yes, two hot babes doing the wild thing on the floor . . .

Franco's Countess Nadine Carody was one of the earliest cinematic female vampires, and arguably the first one who is not only central to the story, but from whom the story stems. The first female vampire, to all intents and purposes, was the old hag in Carl Theodor Dreyer's Vampyr (1931). It may be considered heretical to mention Franco in the same sentence as the sainted Dreyer, but there is much in common between their two films. Both were shot in impecunious conditions; both claimed an entirely spurious derivation from Anglo-Irish sources: Bram Stoker's Dracula's Guest and J. Sheridan Le Fanu's Carmilla, respectively; both films are highly distinctive, aurally as well as visually; both seek to establish a poetic, other-worldly atmosphere; and both may be said, to similar degrees, to fall short of perfection in an artistic sense. The following quote is from the Aurum Horror Encyclopedia: ". . . the entire film is riddled with disjunctive editing, impossible point-of-view shots and seemingly incoherent events . . . which make it impossible for the viewer to settle on any particular 'view' with any certainty. . . . the repeated use of a voice off and an eerie soundtrack . . . and the spatial dislocations provoked by the editing style combine to make an abstract movie proceed with the movement of dream logic. Many images remain engraved on the mind . . ." (18) Were it not for the reference to point-of-view shots (not employed by Franco) it would be hard to tell that this is, in fact, a review of Dreyer's film.

In The Vampire Cinema, David Pirie convincingly suggests that early Hollywood never felt entirely at ease with the vampire in general, the female vampire in particular, and the supernatural as a whole. Dracula itself (1931) was considerably toned down, among its other shortcomings, while Dracula's Daughter (1936) actively backed away from the sexual implications of its story. Hammer's Dracula had his 'Brides', of course, but they were secondary characters. Jean Rollin was the first director to actively engage with what would be termed "the sex-vampire" (always female, pointedly enough). His stiflingly obscure, surrealist dreamscapes have their admirers, though many regret that his films are never as interesting as the posters promoting them. Rollin's female vampires tend to be remote, totemic figures rather than active protagonists. Hammer's later female vampires, derived mainly from Carmilla, though central to the plot, are not necessarily the focus of it, while the films themselves betray an unease with notions of female sexuality and transgression that is often embarrassing.

Franco, on the other hand, took Nadine Carody and made her both the source and focus of his film in a way that had not been attempted before. It is yet another example of his inclination (or obsession) to place women at the very centre of his cinema, for reasons already examined, not all of which might necessarily lead him to be retrospectively hailed as an icon of feminism. Nonetheless, Franco may be said to have acted both sooner and with considerably more honesty and conviction in this regard than others in the same field.

In stark contrast to She Killed in Ecstasy, Vampyros Lesbos gives every indication of having been properly thought out. Structurally, it is assembled with a deftness and precision all too often lacking in Franco's films, while visually it is extremely rich and complex. Events and images are foreshadowed and paralleled with extraordinary skill, and Franco's control of space and his camerawork are extremely disciplined while at the same time quite recognisably his own. His use of décor, design, and costume, not always his strong suit, is wonderfully consistent and greatly enhances the impact of the film.

One of the things evidently missed by those unimpressed by Vampyros Lesbos is the fact that it is such a fascinating – and amusing – inversion of the Dracula story. Following the basic storyline of Stoker's novel, Franco allows himself some new riffs on the familiar theme. Linda Westinghouse is a feminised version of Jonathan Harker, travelling to Nadine's island to conduct some business on behalf of a mysterious client, just as Harker travels to Dracula's castle in the novel. The Countess Nadine Carody is a vampire unlike any we have seen before: the first part of her act takes place in front of a mirror in which she caresses her own reflection; she sun-bathes and swims (perhaps not in "running water", but if Count Dracula had a penchant for skinny-dipping, Stoker kept it to himself); and she loves wine. Her "castle", instead of being shrouded in gloom is wide open to the bright Mediterranean light; spiders' webs are 'replaced' by draped fishing nets; and the mysterious kite stands in for the traditional bat. The character of Renfield is split in two, feminised as the raving Agra in Dr. Seward's clinic, and ranting on about blood in the character of Memmet, who also stands in for the peasants and coach-driver who utter dire warnings to Harker on his journey. And Dr. Seward himself, in this case an amalgamation of the original and Professor Van Helsing, far from being the voice of reason as would be expected, wants nothing more than to become a vampire himself! (He also has his own take on vampire killing, involving neither garlic nor heart-staking.)

Neither Seward, Omar (who himself shares some of Harker's characteristics in the latter part of the film), nor the egregious Dr. Steiner play any useful part in rescuing Linda from Nadine's control; indeed, the latter two are reduced to the Franco norm for male protagonists, secondary buffoons forever one or more steps behind the action, useful only for mumbling platitudes at the close of the film. Linda, in fact, does not require rescuing; she disposes of the murderous Memmet through her own wits, and delivers the requisite deadly blow to the brain herself. Indeed, her character is the complete antithesis of the usual whey-faced virgin or blushing bride common to the vampire tradition; she is presented instead as a grown-up, sexually active adult.

The Countess, too, is not, in the final analysis, a true monster; her relationship with Linda is neither parasitic nor defined in terms of personal antagonism, as is the case with Dracula and Harker, fighting for control of Mina's soul. She admits to being under Linda's spell, and her sudden decline, never explicitly explained, seems if anything due to a realisation that she and Linda cannot be together than for any concrete cause. Their final words sound more like the ending of a human love relationship than a vengeful release, and Linda only stabs her once she is dead.

A possible explanation for Nadine's decline may be found in the German lobby cards for the film, one of which shows Nadine on the hotel bed with Omar, stroking his hair and presumably about to vampirise him. This scene must have followed that of Linda waking, after making love with Omar, and the Countess approaching their room from the balcony. The fact that Linda returned to Omar after her experience with Nadine on the island may have caused the Countess to see Omar as more of a rival for Linda's affections than is apparent in the final cut, hence her intention to remove him, or more likely, reduce his potency, by vampirising him. Later, when Omar is being examined at Seward's clinic, Linda suggests it may have been her fault, and we assume she means this in the sense of having become involved with the Countess in the first place, thus leading her to Omar. However, by removing the scene of Nadine vampirising Omar, Franco may have intended us to suppose that Linda believes herself responsible for vampirising him after her return from the initiation ceremony in Uskalan. If this speculation is correct, then Franco would have needed a scene demonstrating a deeper bond between Linda and Omar than is apparent, in order to explain the Countess's fear of losing Linda and her subsequent decline – in a literal sense, dying for love. Such a strong fear of losing Linda to Omar would also explain Nadine's otherwise uncharacteristic anxiety as she waits for Linda prior to the ceremony in Uskalan.

Franco achieves an unsettling atmosphere from the very beginning, with the distorted voice playing over the image of what one assumes is a setting, rather than a rising, sun, intercut with the disorientating posture of Nadine as she reaches towards the camera. He then inserts a couple of brief shots of Istanbul, not at night, as we might expect, but in the full glare of day, before cutting to the nightclub and the beginning of the Countess's performance, which (obviously) is taking place at night. Her interaction with the "mannequin" clearly prefigures her seduction of Linda, while also playing on the life-death theme of traditional vampire storytelling (Nadine can bring the "mannequin" to life, but her attempt to give Linda immortal life will lead to her death).

The images we see in what turns out to be Linda's dream will make more sense later when Linda actually visits the island, though the scorpion and the butterfly already convey their metaphorical message of predator and prey. The combination of these images in the editing, combined with the soundtrack, achieve an hallucinatory effect that reawakens the sense of unease felt during the credit sequence, which is then increased by the disturbing image of Linda's head lurching into the frame.

When Linda returns after seeing Dr. Steiner, she and Omar lean on the balcony. Franco includes a quick view of the hotel swimming pool below, foreshadowing the pool scene on the island. Linda's

predominately red outfit, worn on her trip to Anatolia, contrasts with those of the Countess, which are predominantly black, while perhaps also suggesting her future role as blood victim. Her hair tie, fluttering in the breeze, specifically links her with the butterfly.

Franco isolates Linda in long shot as she walks to the hotel, underlining her vulnerability. This is reinforced by a quick hand-held shot from on top of a building, suggesting she is being observed. The faded red paint on the hotel stairs prefigures the décor in the Countess's house, while Linda's brown dress may be intended as visual metaphor for her current state, halfway between life (represented by red) and death (black). Her first encounter with Memmet leads us to suppose he is simply a grotesque and amusing harbinger of doom, familiar from so many vampire films, but when Franco then cuts immediately, with no time lapse, to Linda entering the wine-cellar and seeing the body, our shock is as great as hers.

In a traditional film, we might now expect a scene where Linda reports her discovery to the authorities, either to be disbelieved or to return with them to find there is no longer a body in the cellar. Franco, however, has never been impressed by authority and it seems Linda isn't either, because the next we see of her is her arrival on the island. This unexpected transition is unsettling in retrospect, though we have no time to dwell on it at the time.

Franco's repetition of the imagery we saw in Linda's dream now carries a definite threat, increased by our first, unexpected view of the sinister Morpho. When Linda sees the blood on the windowpane we believe she is only imagining or remembering it, but we cannot be sure. Our grim forebodings are then undercut, if only momentarily, by our first sight of the Countess in her own environment, reclining gracefully in her wicker chair like an elegant model on a photo-shoot. We, along with Linda, are then invited to relax during the swimming and sunbathing scene, but this too is undermined by the Countess's lie that nobody can see them, while we can see Morpho watching them.

The scene at the dining table may be the best individual scene of Franco's career. The setting is both intimate and ominous, the refined simplicity of the table contrasting with the threat of ensnarement represented by the draped fishing nets in the background. The two women have established a bond but we know that it is the Countess who is controlling every aspect of the situation. The dialogue is largely unimportant, but the emotional undercurrent, conveyed by gesture and eye-contact, is remarkably powerful and seductive. This is great screen acting, and Franco's subtle camerawork and editing perfectly captures and enhances the understated, yet intense, eroticism flowing beneath the surface.

Such is the strength of the scene, in fact, that it rather undercuts the effectiveness of the actual seduction and vampirising of Linda that follows. When Morpho places Linda on the bed, Franco, perhaps unwisely, cuts to a shot of a black dog in the sea, a rather unnecessary metaphor for Morpho's doglike devotion (and one which also recalls the traditional vampire's control over "the

children of the night" as well as their shape-shifting abilities), or at any rate, one that could have been included at a different point. Similarly, the intercutting of the scorpion and the butterfly in the net (not in themselves a model of metaphorical subtlety) with the vampirising of Linda, while perhaps adding to the delirium of the scene, also fractures it and reduces its power. Such reservations, however, are quickly forgotten by the shock of seeing the Countess lying in the pool, apparently in a catatonic state. In the traditional vampire film, if we see the vampire at all once he has drunk his fill, he is lying sated in his coffin. This is exactly what Franco replicates here, but in such a simple yet starkly original way as to make us unaware of the parallel until later.

While much of the original appeal of Bram Stoker's novel came from switching the action from Transylvania (where, it being foreign, anything could happen) to contemporary Victorian England (where such things definitely didn't happen), for most modern-day readers the passages that remain etched in the mind are those set in Transylvania; after that, the Count rather fades into the background and we are introduced to a lot of secondary characters we don't really care about. Much the same problem affects Vampyros Lesbos at this point. Agra does not engage our sympathy, Omar is a dullard, and Dr. Seward, though we initially suppose him to be just the man to restore Reason to her throne, later proves to be several garlic cloves short of a bulb.

Still, while Franco does his best to keep us intrigued, one can almost sense his interest starting to wander. There is a most peculiar and unnecessary zoom into Dr. Seward as he is about to go up to see Agra. He stops at the foot of the stairs and suddenly throws out his arm dramatically, like Moses about to part the Red Sea. The camera zooms in, and Dr. Seward says, "We'd better give her an injection" – a perfectly commonplace utterance for a doctor to make, one would have thought, warranting neither the gesture nor the exclamatory zoom.

The Countess's soliloquy regains our attention. It is also noticeable from this point on that Linda is dressed in black, having, as it were, crossed over to the dark side. Her arrival at the house in Uskalan ends with a wonderful close-up of Nadine's face, followed by a rather pointless zoom into a naked light. The ceremony scene is rather uneven, as is the lighting. The Countess becomes rather less fascinating the more she is required to utter lines about black wings and the Queen of the Night. However, the scene ends strongly, with Linda, for the first time, the aggressor, and Nadine allowing herself to be vampirised. In the final shot, the Countess has reversed their positions and reclaimed her dominance.

After Dr. Seward has shown Linda his weaponry, she mysteriously disappears. He has invited her to visit Agra, but when we see him with the latter, Linda is not with him. After Omar has been ordered off the premises, he returns to the hotel where he is told that Linda checked out the previous day. As Linda accompanied him to Seward's clinic, and as there was no bridging scene indicating a passage of time between his leaving the clinic and then learning of Linda's departure, nor anything to indicate that Omar's visit is at a later date than when he was accompanied by Linda, we are entitled to wonder what is going on. Is this just another example of Franco fracturing the narrative, as when Linda ran

away from Memmet, or is he losing the plot? It's difficult to tell, but having gone along with him this far, and got used to his narrative leaps, one is inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Even harder to fathom is Linda's return to what we assume is the hotel and the grim embrace of Memmet. What on earth is she doing there? Possibly to stop us worrying about such things, Franco cuts to Omar arriving at the nightclub and the beginning of Nadine's final performance. Omar may leave before the end, but Franco has no intention of letting us do so, or of doing so himself. We are treated to a spellbinding display of Nadine's sinuous and erotically-charged talents, fully five minutes in length, at the end of which we are not remotely concerned about Linda's predicament or Omar's, nor for that matter Dr. Seward's demise, which follows on from it. (The Countess's reaction in the latter scene is disappointingly 'traditional'; one would imagine that a reflecting, all-dancing, all-swimming, all-sunbathing, wine-imbibing vampire would be thoroughly unmoved by such ecclesiastical mumbo-jumbo). Nadine's materialisation through Agra's door is a surprise, largely because Franco has not before resorted to such trickery. In the same puckish mood, he frames a shot of Agra through the loose, black lace sleeve of Nadine's dress as she approaches the demented woman, a little nod to similar shots of Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee obscuring their victims with their cloaks.

Nadine's death, or rather the manner of it, is also a surprise. As has been suggested before, the scene is played very tenderly, with none of the 'death before sundown' dramatics of Dracula's demise, and one feels a sympathy for Nadine which, combined with Linda's reluctance to deliver the final blow, bestows a poignancy and sense of loss on what, after all, and no matter how it is played, is the traditional and expected end of a vampire film.

Despite the inconsistencies of tone and treatment which are apparent in the latter part of Vampyros Lesbos, they prove less problematical when actually viewing the film than in reading about it. The strength of the two female characters, and our involvement with them, so skillfully built up in the first part of the film, carries us through to the end, past the occasional absurdity and lapse in logic (intentional or otherwise). Soledad Miranda, it goes without saying, is simply sensational as the Countess, but she is equally matched by Ewa Strömberg as Linda, making one wish Franco had made better use of her cool voluptuousness in their previous collaboration. The other members of the cast do not fare so well. There is something off-kilter about Dennis Price's playing of Dr. Seward, as if the actor's thoughts were not in synch with the dubbed dialogue we hear from his lips. André Montchall is his usual charmless self, while Paul Müller, though quite amusing, has not enough screen time to be really effective. The actress playing Agra can scream and writhe with the best of them, and the chap playing Morpho, looking like a grim-faced refugee from the Manfred Mann Band, makes a welcome change from the other Morphos in Franco's films, in which the character is usually depicted as a gibbering wreck with eyes like fried eggs. As for Franco himself, well, what can one say?

Vampyros Lesbos is not a perfect film, but neither is Dreyer's Vampyr. Some of its faults can be said to be inherent in its unacknowledged source, some from the circumstances of its production (it was completed in one month); and some from Franco himself. And yet its qualities far outweigh its defects. It is bold, original, crazy, erotic, disturbing and highly entertaining all at the same time, while also containing an emotional truth and intensity that mark it out as a unique contribution to the horror genre. Within the narrow boundaries of the vampire film, it proposed something new, both in theme and technique, and, by and large, delivered it successfully, and for this it deserves far greater recognition than it has hitherto received.

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Soledad Miranda died from injuries sustained in a car crash on the 18th of August, 1970. Many pieces written about her, while lamenting her tragic death, also observe that cinema was robbed of a potentially great actress. That is true, but only up to a point. She was already a great screen actress, in the films of Jess Franco, and happily, the evidence is still before us.

Jess Franco, of course, went on to make more, if not better, horror films (19), and is still doing so today. It's unlikely that he will ever be asked to sit at the high table of High Culture, but even more unlikely that he would want to do so. By concentrating on his best work up till 1970 (while not ignoring or excusing his worst), it can hopefully be seen that with Franco it is always worth taking the rough with the smooth. His career path has been unique, to say the least, making comparisons with his contemporaries either difficult or redundant, but it should be evident that he is a distinctive and original voice within the tradition of European horror and the fantastique, an outsider certainly, but one who has chosen his position and never deviated from it. No doubt he could have made bigger and "better" films with more established producers and worked with more prestigious colleagues, but in the process he would have stopped being Jess Franco. Such, it seems, are the "misfortunes of virtue."

1. Aguliar, Carlos; Piselli, Stefano & Morrocchi, Riccardo (eds.) – Jess Franco: El sexo del horror. (Glittering Images: Florence, 1999) p. 133.

2. Balbo, Lucas; Blumenstock, Peter; Kessler, Christian & Lucas, Tim – Obsession: The Films of Jess Franco. (F. Trebbin: Berlin, 1993).

Tohill, Cathal & Tombs, Pete – Immoral tales: Sex and Horror Cinema in Europe 1956-1984. Chapter: The Labyrinth of Sex: the Films of Jess Franco. (Primitive Press: London, 1994), and (Titan Books: London, 1995).

Aguliar, Carlos; Piselli, Stefano & Morrocchi, Riccardo (eds.) – Jess Franco: El sexo del horror. (Glittering Images: Florence, 1999)

3. Monthly Film Bulletin. (BFI: London, June 1963).

4. Aguliar, Carlos; Piselli, Stefano & Morrocchi, Riccardo (eds.) – Jess Franco: El sexo del horror. (Glittering Images: Florence, 1999) p. 9.

5. Tohill, Cathal & Tombs, Pete – Immoral tales: Sex and Horror Cinema in Europe 1956-1984. Chapter: The Labyrinth of Sex: the Films of Jess Franco. (Primitive Press: London, 1994), and (Titan Books, London, 1995) p. 77. We are forced to rely on a secondary source in this instance, thanks to the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), whose notion of "classification" is apparently no different (though considerably less honest) than what used to be called "censorship". According to the strangely-named Melon Farmers anti-censorship website (www.melonfarmers.co.uk; an obscure homage to Charles Bronson in Mr. Majestyk, one would like to think), the BBFC have removed 37 seconds from the Arrow Region 2 print of The Awful Dr. Orlof. Anyone wishing to explore Franco's career on DVD is strongly advised to buy Region 1 releases (for which www.xploitedcinema.com can be highly recommended). Indeed, anyone contemplating buying any dvd should run the title through a site like Melon Farmers; it's amazing (and appalling) how many films, not all of them in the sex and horror range, have fallen victim to the BBFC's seemingly elastic "guidelines" (at present, they appear to be chopping out any horse falls in which an animal may have been harmed, presumably to discourage anyone from trying this at home). While one has a certain sympathy with the plight of distributors, the fact remains that many of Franco's films (in particular the Erwin C. Dietrich collaborations contained in The Official Jess Franco Collection) are sold to an unsuspecting public as Director's Cuts, when they should more accurately be labeled "BBFC Cuts" (the worst instance being Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun which has been cut, on the most spurious grounds, by a massive six minutes and fifteen seconds). Why there is no legal obligation on either the BBFC or the distributors to clearly indicate whether or not a film is complete is a mystery. But then that might mean admitting, despite its cuddly and unthreatening new name, that the BBFC is still a censorship body, and as Margaret Thatcher once put it, "In our societies, we don't believe in constraining the media, still less in censorship." So there.

6. Indeed, it is possible to project the European tradition, with regard to early Hollywood and the Universal pictures, in such a way as to seriously question whether there was an indigenous American horror film tradition at all, prior to the arrival of Roger Corman's adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe in the late 1950s. While 'Hollywood' may have provided the money and opportunity, even a cursory glance at the most important films reveals the creative input to have been overwhelmingly European. Frankenstein (1931), The Old Dark House (1932), The Invisible Man (1933), and The Bride of Frankenstein (1935) were all directed by the Englishman, James Whale. Rouben Mamoulian (Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, 1931) was Russian; Robert Florey (Murders in the Rue Morgue, 1932) was French; Michael Curtiz (Dr. X, 1931, and The Mystery of the Wax Museum, 1933) was Hungarian; while Karl Freund (director of photography on Dracula, 1931, director of The Mummy, 1932, and Mad Love, 1935) was German, and Edgar G. Ulmer (The Black Cat, 1934), Austrian. Universal itself was founded by the German émigré, Carl Laemmle, whose American-born son, Carl, Jr., oversaw the

studio's horror heyday. The actors most identified with the genre in the early 1930s were all European or of European background: Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Colin Clive, Ernest Thesiger, Basil Rathbone, Claude Rains, Lionel Atwill, and Peter Lorre. Left flying the flag for Uncle Sam, so to speak, were Tod Browning and Lon Chaney, but their interests were in the grotesque rather than the supernatural (Browning's lack of interest in Dracula is self-evident; cameraman Freund and English-born art director Charles D. Hall are widely credited for the film's mood and look). As if to further underline the point, Val Lewton, the famed producer of the 1940s, was Russian, while the most talented director associated with him, Jacques Tourneur, was French.

7. Interview in The Fall of Fu Manchu, included on the Blue Underground release of The Castle of Fu Manchu, 2003.

8. Aguliar, Carlos; Piselli, Stefano & Morrocchi, Riccardo (eds.) – Jess Franco: El sexo del horror. (Glittering Images: Florence, 1999) p.80.

9. Tohill, Cathal & Tombs, Pete – Immoral tales: Sex and Horror Cinema in Europe 1956-1984. Chapter: The Labyrinth of Sex: the Films of Jess Franco. (Primitive Press: London, 1994) , and (Titan Books: London, 1995) p.103.

10. Aguliar, Carlos; Piselli, Stefano & Morrocchi, Riccardo (eds.) – Jess Franco: El sexo del horror. (Glittering Images: Florence, 1999)p. 89. (Amazon.com lists it as "currently unavailable", which at least indicates it is not a "lost" film.)

11. All three non-Franco efforts were dismissed as "pretentious" in the review of Franco's Marquis de Sade's Philosophy in the Boudoir in The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror, ed. Phil Hardy, (Aurum Press: London, 1985) p. 220.

12. One actor (who shall remain nameless) recently told me how he arrived on the set of a later Franco production, lines learned, to be informed by the director that not only was his scene now gone, but would he mind doing a little song-and-dance routine instead, an idea which had come to Franco overnight.

13. The film was a Spanish-German co-production, and the title on the German print reads Vampiros Lesbos. German lobby cards and press ads, however, use the 'y' variant (followed by a subtitle: Die Erbin des Dracula) which has since become the standard spelling.

14. Glut, Donald F. – The Dracula Book. (The Scarecrow Press: New Jersey, 1975) p.220.

15. Pattison, Barrie – The Seal of Dracula. (Lorrimer: London, 1975) p. 70.

16. Pirie, David – The Vampire Cinema. (Quarto: London, 1977), and (Galley Press: Leicester, 1984).

17. Silver, Alain & Ursini, James – The Vampire Film: From Nosferatu to Bram Stoker's Dracula, revised and updated, (Limelight Editions: New York, 1993) pp. 189-190.

18. Hardy, Phil (ed.) – The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror. (Aurum Press: London, 1985) p. 50.

19. For an excellent and well-written analysis of Vampyros Lesbos and four of his later films, see Maximilian Le Cain's The Frontiers of Genre and Trance: Five Films by Jess Franco at www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/27/jess_franco.html.

Appendix

Franco's films released theatrically in Britain.

Key: Original British title/Principal original title/Current title on dvd or video, if different (Year of release/date of review in the Monthly Film Bulletin/Running times, including cuts, as listed in the MFB)

The Demon Doctor/Gritos en la noche/The Awful Dr. Orlof (1961/June, 1963/86m.)
The Diabolical Dr. Z/Miss Muerte (1965/October, 1967/79m., cut from 86m.)
The Blood of Fu Manchu/Fu-Manchu y el beso de la muerte (1968/March, 1969/61m., cut from 91m.)
99 Women/99 mujeres (1968/April, 1970/70m., cut from 90m.)
The Castle of Fu Manchu/El Castillo de Fu-Manchu (1968/February, 1972/92m.)
Marquis de Sade: Justine/Justine and Juliet (1968/May, 1972/104m.)
Count Dracula/El conde Dracula/Bram Stoker's Count Dracula (1969/July, 1973/98m.)
Succubus/Necronomicon – Geträumte Sünden (1967/December, 1973/81m., cut from 82m.)
Diary of a Nymphomaniac/Le Journal intime d'une nymphomane (1972/April, 1974/76m., cut from 86m.)
The Sexy Darlings/Robinson und seine wilden Sklavinnen (1971/May, 1974/81m.)
The Demons/Les démons (1972/August, 1974/97m., cut from 116m.)
The Lustful Amazon/Maciste contre la Reine des Amazones (1973/August, 1974/61m., cut from 65m.)
Celestine, Maid at Your Service/Célestine, bonne à tout faire (1974/February, 1975/79m., cut from 84m.)
How to Seduce a Virgin/Plaisir à trios (1973/July, 1975/64m., cut from 80m.)
Caged Women/Frauengefängnis/Barbed Wire Dolls (1975/April, 1977/No rt. listed)
The Bare Breasted Countess/La Comtesse aux seins nus/Female Vampire (1973/November, 1978/59m., cut from 101m.)

Swedish Nympho Slaves/Die teuflischen Schwestern/Sexy Sisters (1977/November, 1980/74m.)
Bloody Moon/Die Säge des Todes (1980/May, 1982/83m., cut from 85m.)
Pick-Up Girsl/La chica de las bragas transparentes (1980/July, 1983/92m., cut from 97m.)
The Story of Linda/Orgia de ninfomanas (1980/April, 1984/80m., cut from 91m.)

Vamping the Woman: Menstrual Pathologies in Bram Stoker's Dracula

Maria Parsons

To destroy the vampire, suppress the menstruating woman and to look away from the Medusa, the embodiment of dangerous looking, are all responses to the masculine fear of the female.
(Marie Mulvey-Roberts)(1)

The polarised dialectic of the idealised, perfect woman and the demonised, sexual woman has dominated dominated Western separatist ideology for centuries. In terms of the body, it reaches a significant impasse in the nineteenth century. During the Victorian period, scientific and medical advances developed alongside a resurgence of feminist activism, particularly so, from the 1860s onwards. The female activist was embodied in the concept of the 'New Woman'. According to Lyn Pykett:

> […] the New Woman was a representation. She was a construct, 'a condensed symbol of disorder and rebellion' (Smith-Rosenberg), who was actively produced and reproduced in the pages of the newspaper and periodical press, as well as in novels. (2)

The New Woman not only posed a threat to the social order but also to the natural order, and was represented as 'simultaneously non-female, unfeminine, and ultra-feminine.'(3) Incorporated into varying depictions of the New Woman was a consistent perception of her as over-sexed and unduly interested in sexual matters. Correspondingly, scientific and medical discourses began to mirror public opinion. As such, female sexuality became the locus of attention in the medical world; with the womb, the reproductive organs, and the menstrual cycle, becoming primary sites for medical inquiry and pathologising.

Prior to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the "one-sex" model dominated medical thinking in relation to the human body. For years it was commonly accepted that male and female genitals were the same. In Latin or Greek, or in the European vernaculars until around 1700, there was no separate term 'for vagina as the tube or sheath into which its opposite, the penis fits and through which the infant is born.'(4) It was not until the late eighteenth century that the common discourse about sex and the body changed. Organs that had shared a name – ovaries and testicles – were now linguistically distinguished. The context for the articulation of two distinct sexes was, however, according to the historian Thomas Laqueur, neither a theory of knowledge nor a reflection of advances in scientific knowledge, instead, he attributes reinterpretations of the body to

> The rise of Evangelical religion, Enlightenment political theory, the development of new sorts of public spaces in the eighteenth century, Lockean ideas of marriage as a contract, the cataclysmic possibilities for social change wrought by the French Revolution, post-revolutionary conservatism, post-revolutionary feminism, the factory system with its

> restructuring of the sexual division of labour, the rise of a free market economy in services or commodities, the birth of classes, singly or in combination – none of these things caused the making of a new sexed body. Instead, the remaking of the body is itself intrinsic to each of these developments. (5)

One of the foremost exponents in medical developments and theorizing of the female reproductive organs, particularly, menstruation organs in the nineteenth century was Dr Edward Tilt who published extensively on the subject in the latter half of the nineteenth century. His work included titles such as The Change of Life in Health and Disease, The Elements of Health, and Principles of Female Hygiene, On the Preservation of the Health of Women at the Critical Periods of Life to A Handbook of Uterine Therapeutics and of Diseases of Women. According to Tilt, regulation of the menstrual cycle was imperative to both the physical and mental health of women. As Laqueur notes

> All in all, the theory of the menstrual cycle dominant from the 1840s to the early twentieth century rather neatly integrated a particular set of real discoveries into an imagined biology of incommensurability. Menstruation, with its attendant aberrations, became a uniquely and distinguishingly female process. (6)

A nineteenth century medical text by Adam Raciborski entitled Traité de la menstruation, ses rapports avec l'ovulation, la fecundation, l'hygiene de la puberté et l'age critique, son role dans les différentes maladies, ses troubles et leur traitment, (7) made the connection between menstruation and heat. Writing in an early section on heat in dogs and cats he draws an analogy between the menses and heat in women. He states 'We will see that the turgescence – the crisis – of menstruation (l'orgasme de l'ovulation) is one of the most powerful causes of over-excitement in women.'(8) From the 1840s on, menstrual bleeding became the sign of swelling and explosion whose corresponding behavioural manifestations were aligned with sexual excitement and animals in heat. Thus, the menstruating woman was rendered as "out of control" and in need of containment.

Practical developments in obstetrics and gynaecology also contributed to the focus on the menses as the primary cause of physical and mental ill-health in women. In particular, the redevelopment of the the speculum and the curette, revolutionised gynaecological practice. Furthermore, menstrual out-flow was measured and its consistency and colour recorded in order to determine normative points of reference. This both allowed and contributed to the diagnosis and treatment of a wide ranging number of female ailments as menstrual.

Concomitant with the medical fixation on the menstrual cycle in the Victorian period is the cultural obsession in art and literature with women and snakes and/or women and vampires. The alignment of women with snakes and vampires reinforced notions of female sexuality as lascivious and licentious. Bram Dijksta appraises this obsession as a logical leap from the myth of Eve and her temptation by the serpent in the proverbial Garden of Eden to modern womanhood in the nineteenth century. He states:

> In the evil, bestial implications of her beauty, woman was not only tempted by the snake but was the snake herself. Among the terms used to describe a woman's appearance none were more over-used during the late-nineteenth century than 'serpentine', 'sinuous', and 'snake-like. (9)

He continues linking Lamia and late-nineteenth century feminism, claiming:

> The link between Lamia and the late nineteenth-century feminists, the viragoes – the wild women – would have been clear to any intellectual reasonably well versed in classical mythology, since Lamia of myth was thought to have been a bisexual, masculinized, cradle-robbing creature, and therefore to the men of the turn of the century perfectly representative of the New Woman who, in their eyes, was seeking to arrogate to herself male privileges, refused the duties of motherhood, and was intent upon destroying the heavenly harmony of feminine subordination in the family. The same was certainly true of Lilith, who, in her unwillingness to play second fiddle to Adam, was, as Rosseti's work already indicated, widely regarded as the world's first virago. (10)

The analogy of women and snakes as well as having obvious roots in Genesis and Classical mythology is also located in menstrual myths. In many cultures it is believed that a girl's first menstrual bleeding occurs when a snake descends from the moon and bites her. According to Mircea Eliade, the moon-animal par-excellence has been the snake. He states:

> All over the East it was believed that woman's first sexual contact was with a snake, at puberty or during menstruation. The Komati tribe in the Mysore province of India use snakes made of stone in a rite to bring about the fertility of women. Claudius Aelianus declares that the Hebrews believed that snakes mated with unmarried girls and we also find this belief in Japan. A Persian tradition says that after the first woman had been seduced by the serpent she immediately began to menstruate. And it was said by the rabbis that menstruation was the result of Eve's relations with the serpent in the Garden of Eden. In Abyssinia it was thought that girls were in danger of being raped by snakes until they were married. One Algerian story tells how a snake escaped when no one was looking and raped all the unmarried girls in a house … Certainly the menstrual cycle helps to explain the spread of the belief that the moon is the first mate of all women. The Papoos thought menstruation was a proof that women and girls were connected with the moon, but in their iconography (sculptures on wood) they pictured reptiles emerging from their genital organs, which confirms that snakes and the moon are identified. (11)

This connection between snakes, the moon and menstruation is further observed by Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove who pose the question 'Why snakes?' and, in response, point out that

> during an eclipse of the sun (during which time it was thought by Pliny to be particularly dangerous), the moon's shadow rushing towards you across the land ripples with the refractions of the earth's atmosphere like snakes round the moon's shadow, if you use smoked glass. However, we have also seen that it is a common cultural image of menstruation that a woman is bitten by a snake-god who comes from the moon. The moon sloughs herself and renews, just as the snake sheds its skin, and so does the sexually undulant wall of the womb renew its wall after one wave-peak of the menstrual cycle: the woman renews her sexual self after shedding blood as the snake sheds its skin. The wavy waters of the tidal sea are comparable to swimming snakes, and a good vaginal orgasm can feel to one's penis like a sea undulant with such snakes: a sea which is, of course, tidal with the monthly period. (12)

Ancient languages also gave the serpent the same name, Eve, a name meaning 'Life' and according to the most ancient myths the original primal couple constituted a serpent/goddess dyad. Also the legendary Basilisk is said to be born of menstrual blood and is derived from the classical myth of the serpent-haired Gorgon. (13)

The nineteenth-century lunar influenced, fanged-vampire exploits age-old links between serpents, female sexuality and menstruation. The most famous vampire text of the Victorian period is undoubtedly Bram Stoker's Dracula described by Marie Mulvey-Roberts as

> [..] Far more than a novel about pathologies. […] its gendering of male blood as good and female blood as bad signals that it is menstrual blood and its pathologies that provoke a sense of horror. […] Stoker's attention to the relationship between women and blood is a surrogate for menstrual taboo, which is also eroticized haemofetishism. At the same time, it is a reinforcement of the Victorian conservative medical view that menstruation should be morbidified. (14)

Although Mulvey-Roberts' seminal essay 'Dracula and the Doctors: Bad Blood, Menstrual Taboo and the New Woman' comprehensively explores menstrual pathologies in Dracula, I depart from her reading of the vampire as merely a metaphor for menstruation or as a 'surrogate for menstrual taboo' and will argue instead that the vampire in Stoker's text functions as a displaced embodiment of female sexuality and menstrual blood, demonstrating stratifications of power and the interaction of a multiplicity of (pseudo)-medical and moral discourses. In this article, I will focus on the character of Lucy Westenra as an example of Victorian socio-cultural and psycho-sexual anxieties pertaining to women. From her first encounter with Dracula to her final beheading and staking, Lucy is an exemplary case study in the pathologising of menstruation and the control and containment of female sexuality.

From Jonathan Harker's initial moonlight journey to Castle Dracula, to his moonlight encounter with the three vampire wives of his host, the motif of the moon dominates the narrative. Lucy's nocturnal,

sleepwalking nightmare through the streets of Whitby, her ascent to the graveyard and her encounter with the vampiric Count are illumined by a full moon.

> There was a bright full moon, with heavy black clouds, which threw the whole scene into a fleeting diorama of light and shade as they sailed across […] Whatever my expectation was, it was not disappointed, for there, on our favourite seat, the silver light of the moon struck a half-reclining figure, snowy white. The coming of the cloud was too quick for me to see much for shadow shut down on light almost immediately; but it seemed to me as though something dark stood behind the seat where the white figure shone, and bent over it. What it was whether man or beast, I could not tell […] When I got almost to the top I could see the seat and the white figure, for I was close enough to distinguish it even through the spells of shadow. There was undoubtedly something, long and black, bending over the half-reclining white figure. […] When I came into view again the cloud had passed, and the moonlight struck so brilliantly that I could see Lucy half reclining with her head lying over the back of the seat. She was quite alone, and there was not a sign of any living thing about. (15)

The supine posture of Lucy in this scene is undeniably sexual and her nocturnal sleep-walking and encounter with Dracula reeks of illicit sexuality. Her sexual defilement or moreover her own expression of innate sexuality augers her eventual demise and descent into an uncontrollable blood-thirst, described by Stoker in terms akin to nymphomania. From the outset, Lucy is an example of the discontented Victorian woman, uneasy with her prescribed role. Her coquettish sexuality, flirtatiousness and flaunting of idealised, Victorian womanhood are evident in her response to a series of received marriage proposals. In a letter to her friend Mina Harker, she writes:

> My dear Mina, why are men so noble when we women are so little worth of them? Here I was almost making fun of this great-hearted, true gentleman. I burst into tears – I am afraid, my dear, you will think this a very sloppy letter in more ways than one – and I really felt very badly. Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it. (16)

'Marriage' has a double meaning in this extract, on a superficial level it means exactly what it suggests but on another level it is a codified expression for sexual relations. Lucy, discontent and uneasy with her restricted role as 'woman' has no choice but to suppress any desire to explore her sexuality and is compelled to fulfil her duty as a middle-class Victorian woman. Masochistic self-abnegation is her only option in a society which rigorously denies any expression of female sexuality. In fact, her physical and mental deterioration commence when she accepts Arthur Holmwood's marriage proposal. From this point of submission, to her nocturnal encounter with Dracula, it becomes apparent that she is incapable of fulfilling her required role. It is therefore, unsurprising and indicative of the cultural period that Lucy's encounter with Dracula coincides with a physical deterioration in her health. Mina describes Lucy as 'ill; that is she has no special disease, but

she looks awful, and is getting worse everyday'(17) and Dr Seward describes her condition as 'bloodless' but lacking the usual anaemic signs. He continues:

> In other physical matters I was quite satisfied that there is no need for anxiety; but as there must be a cause somewhere, I have come to the conclusion that it must be something mental. She complains of difficulty in breathing satisfactorily at times, and of heavy lethargic sleep, with dreams that frighten her, but regarding which she can remember nothing. She says that as a child she used to walk in her sleep, and that when in Whitby the habit came back, and that once she walked out in the night and went to the East Cliff where Miss Murray found her; but she assures me that of late the habit has not returned. (18)

Furthermore, Dr Seward is a psychiatrist and notably the most common approach to treating any signs of female sexual transgression in Victorian England was psychiatric. As Elaine Showalter points out in her work on women and madness, The Female Malady,

> Victorian psychiatry defined its task with respect to women as the preservation of brain stability in the face of almost overwhelming physical odds. First of all, this entailed the management and regulation, insofar as possible, of women's periodic physical cycles and sexuality … Nineteenth-century medical treatments designed to control the reproductive system strongly suggest male psychiatrists' fears of female sexuality.Indeed, uncontrollable sexuality seemed the major, almost defining symptom of insanity in women. (19)

The treatment of Lucy's illness (through blood transfusions) obviates the Victorian obsession with treating female mental illness (sexuality) by regulating the menstrual cycle. The symptoms from which she suffers are blatantly sexual and blood related. Blood loss is a significant indicator of menstruation and her lethargy and heavy sleep is, as Bruno Bettelheim notes, symptomatic of puberty. According to Bettelheim in his work on fairy tales, 'During the months before the first menstruation, and often also for some time immediately following it, girls are passive, seem sleepy, and withdraw into themselves.'(20) Perhaps more relevant and more than likely known to Stoker in the 1890s, however, is the work of Dr. Edward Tilt, who documented numerous case studies of what he called Pseudo-Narcotism in a number of his menstrual patients. He describes Pseudo-Narcotism as

> A great tendency to sleep, an uneasy sensation of weight in the head, a feeling as if a cloud or a cobweb required to be brushed from the brain, disinclination for any exertion, a diminution in the memory and in the powers of the mind. (21)

Furthermore, he describes Pseudo-Narcotism as 'very intense when the menstrual flow is either very painful, deficient, or completely absent.' His case study no.25 bears a striking resemblance to the description of Lucy's physical health subsequent to her attacks from Count Dracula. The patient is described as of a

> delicate complexion, drowsy look, and when roused, looks as if she expected to see something dreadful […] She sleeps all night, wakes unrefreshed, often falls asleep during the day; some times feels stunned, and loses her senses for an hour. (22)

He also quotes the case of a patient who 'at menstrual periods, could almost sleep while walking, and once remained sixteen hours in a state of stupor, from which she awoke quite well.'(23) Another patient 'at menstrual periods, would remain for hours in what she called her 'quiet fit', a state of self-absorption, unaccompanied by hysterical phenomena, or by convulsions.'(24)

Lucy's burgeoning sexuality, in conjunction with her prior thinking on sexual mores and behaviour, is opposed to and threatens the established sexual politics of the day. In no uncertain terms, Lucy must be appropriated into the fold of Victorian womanhood or if not face total annihilation of the self. Stoker's Lucy is at a defining point in sexual development, the influence of the moon and the arrival of Dracula is an embodiment of menstruation and the maturation of female sexuality. Showalter, further, makes the point that

> Although a relatively small percentage of women patients were committed to asylums during their adolescent years, doctors regarded puberty as one of the most psychologically dangerous periods of the female life-cycle. Doctors argued that the menstrual discharge in itself predisposed women to insanity. Either an abnormal quantity or quality of the blood, according to this theory could effect the brain; thus psychiatric physicians attempted to control the blood by diet and venesection. Late, irregular, or 'suppressed' menstruation was regarded as a dangerous condition and was treated with purgatives, forcing medicines, hip baths, and leeches applied to the thighs. (25)

Specific examples again from Dr Edward Tilt include instructions that

> [The] labia should be fomented every two of three hours with a lotion containing half an ounce of acetate of lead, and two drachms of laudanum to four ounces of distilled water […] A tepid bath or hip bath, should be taken daily, or every other day, warm water being added, so that the patient may remain in it for an hour, or more if possible. After the full effect of a saline purgative, a sedative rectal injection should be given once or twice a day. (26)

Other notable examples involving purgation, as Showalter has noted, include the leeching of the labia, described by Tilt in case no. 42, whereby, leeches were applied frequently to the labia of a young patient to induce menstruation. Much medical advice and cures for anaemia in the nineteenth century often verged on the macabre. One suggested remedy for anaemia recommended to women was to ingest a daily cup of oxen blood. It was reasoned that what better way to strengthen one's blood than to drink the blood of another, not however human blood, but the blood a strong animal. In consequence, abattoirs began to attract 'blood drinkers' – anaemics who came to drink a daily cup of blood. This medical trend is recorded in the literature and art of the day. Rachilde (the pseudonym of

Marguerite Eymery-Vallette), a French writer, penned a short story 'The Blood Drinker' in 1900 which explored themes of the Eternal Feminine, blood-lust and the degenerative affect of female sexuality alongside contemporary medical cures for anaemia. Dijkstra surmises:

> Rachilde, in her emphatically symbolist story 'The Blood Drinker,' positions herself in the interstices between the reality of the late nineteenth-century cures and the psychological fascination of her contemporaries for the notion of the bestial vampire woman. Her blood drinker is none other than the moon – the feminine principle – beamed in upon herself in 'the eternal desperation of her own nothingness.' (27)

The trend for blood-drinking was also captured in a painting by Ferdinand Gueldry exhibited at the Salon des Artistes Français in 1798. The painting caused a sensation and a review in The Magazine of Art reported that

> One of the most popular pictures of the year is undoubtedly Monsieur Gueldry's gorge raising representation of The Blood-Drinkers. In which a group of consumptive invalids, congregated in a shambles, are drinking the blood fresh from the newly-slain ox lying in the foreground – blood that oozes out over the floor – while the slaughterers themselves, steeped in gore, hand out the glasses like the women at the wells. What gives point to the loathsomeness of the subject is the figure of one young girl, pale and trembling, who turns from the scene in sickening disgust, and so accentuates our own. (28)

The cultural visibility of horrific and gruesome solutions for anaemia only fuelled the period's preoccupation with the degeneracy of women. Consequentially, it is by no means a huge leap to acknowledge how paintings and short stories recounting such practices served to promote suspicions that vampires actually existed, especially vampire women. The blood transfusions in Stoker's novel can, thus, be read as either a morbid example of a cure for anaemia, or, as an attempt to regulate the menstrual cycle. A further possibility suggests that the transfusions act as a type of reverse menstruation. Van Helsing and his band of morally upstanding specimens of Victorian manhood appropriate menstruation through repeated blood donations (periodic loss of blood) and so too begin to exhibit symptoms similar to Lucy's. Yet for the sake of Victorian womanhood, they continue in their weakened state to replace the blood she loses during her nightly visits from Dracula. The replacement of blood can also be read as an attempt to halt or delay menstruation, a method which was widely promoted in Victorian society. Showalter once again referring to Dr Edward Tilt notes that

> Menstruation was so disruptive to the female brain that it should not be hastened but rather be retarded as long as possible, and he advised mothers to prevent menarche by ensuring that their teen-age daughters remained in the nursery, took cold shower baths, avoided feather beds and novels, eliminated meat from their diets, and wore drawers. Delayed menstruation,

> he insisted, was 'the principal cause of the pre-eminence of English women, in vigour of constitution and soundness of judgement, and … rectitude of moral principal.' (29)

However, when most attempts to regulate and bring female sexuality under control had been exhausted, all that remained was the final frontier in treatments, clitoridectomy. It was first conceived as a treatment by Dr. Isaac Baker Brown, who practiced the operation on women in his private London clinic for seven years between 1859 and 1866. Brown was convinced that female masturbation was responsible for female madness and recommended the removal of the clitoris, if not the labia, as a cure. According to Showalter:

> As he became more confident, he operated on patients as young as ten, on idiots, epileptics, paralytics, even on women with eye problems. He operated five times on women whose madness consisted of their wish to take advantage of the new Divorce Act of 1857, and found in each case that his patient returned humbly to her husband. In no case, Brown claimed,was he so certain of a cure as in nymphomania, for he had never seen a recurrence of the disease after surgery. (30)

Van Helsing, Dr Seward, Arthur Holmwood and Quincy Morris fail in their attempts to prevent Lucy from changing into a nymphomanic, blood-fiend whose sweetness has turned to 'adamantine, heartless cruelty, and purity to voluptuous wantonness.' (31) Therefore, as in the treatment of incurable insanity in Victorian women, Lucy finally succumbs to the most horrific and nightmarish of ends. She is staked and beheaded:

> Arthur took the stake and the hammer, and when once his mind was set on action his hands never trembled nor even quivered. Van Helsing opened his missal and began to read, and Quincy and I followed as well as we could. Arthur placed the point over the heart, and as I looked I could see its dint in the white flesh. Then he struck with all his might. The Thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips (labia/ clitoris perhaps). The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut, and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam. But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it. His face was set, and high duty seemed to shine through it; the sight of it gave us courage, so that our voices seemed to ring through the little vault. And then the writhing and quivering of the body became less, and the teeth ceased to champ, and the face to quiver. Finally it lay still. The terrible task was over … Arthur bent and kissed her, and then we sent him and Quincey out of the tomb; the Professor and I sawed the top off the stake leaving the point of it in the body. Then we cut off the head and filled the mouth with garlic. We soldered up the leaden coffin, screwed on the coffin-lid, and gathering up our belongings came away. When the Professor locked the door he gave the key to Arthur. (32)

The critic Darryl Jones describes the power and imagery of the scene as

> […] one of traditional masculinity, the god Thor with his mighty hammer, and the tableau is that of a violent gang-rape. (33)

I agree with his interpretation of this scene but would expand upon the metaphor of rape. Rape is both a violation and a play of power, and can metaphorically be extended to include more covert forms of control over the female body. On a broader cultural platform, I would suggest that in the case of Lucy Westenra, her staking and beheading is an example of clitoridectomy. References to the lips (labia), heart and head (clitoris) to the stuffing of her mouth with garlic (closing the vagina) are analogous to barbaric treatments prescribed to cure 'female insanity'. This can also be applied to vampire films where the most visually disturbing and lasting image is generally the staking and beheading of the female vampire. The scene in Hammer's Dracula - Prince of Darkness (1966) where Helen (the wanton female vampire) is staked through the heart by a priest on what can only be described as a sacrificial alter, is both shocking and unsettling. Even more terrifying is the post-staking image of docility and serenity where Helen, like Stoker's Lucy, is violated into submission.

As I have already demonstrated vampires in literature revolve around the motifs of the moon and blood. In addition, the moon compels the blood-parched figure of the vampire to blood-drinking or, in other words, initiates puberty, menstruation and a sexual appetite which demands to be sated. The novel itself, perhaps merely by coincidence, gives further credence to this argument by including a blatant symbol of female sexuality. Dracula arrives in Whitby on a boat called the Demeter. According to Barbara Belford in her biography of Bram Stoker, on a visit to the lighthouse at Whitby he was told about the Dmitry:

> a Russian Brigantine out of the port of Narva, ballasted with silver sand from the Danube – which ran aground on October 24, 1885. At the library Stoker read the Whitby Gazette's report of the event […] (34)

Thus, it is established that Stoker's change of the ship's name was a conscious decision. It is also more than credible to assume that Stoker was knowledgeable of the Classical Greek Goddess Demeter and what she signified. The definition of Demeter given by Barbara G. Walker is as follows:

> Greek meter is 'mother'. De is the delta, or triangle, a female genital sign know as 'the letter of the vulva' in the Greek sacred alphabet, as in India it was Yoni Yantra, or yantra of the vulva. Corresponding letters – Sanskrit dwr, Celtic duir, Hebrew daleth – meant the Door of birth, death, or the sexual paradise. Thus, Demeter was what Asia called 'the Doorway of the Mysterious Feminine … the root from which Heaven and Earth Sprang'. (35)

The implications of Count Dracula's arrival into Whitby on a ship called the Demeter are manifold. Firstly, it reinforces the argument that the figure of the vampire is essentially feminized (an embodiment of female sexuality and menstrual blood). The whole scene, including the harbour and the convulsing waves suggest the spasming walls of the uterus prior to menstruation:

> Then without warning the tempest broke. With a rapidity which, at the time, seemed incredible, and even afterwards is impossible to realise, the whole aspect of nature at once became convulsed. The waves rose in growing fury, each overtopping its fellow, till in a very few minutes the lately glassy sea was like a roaring and devouring monster. (36)

The Demeter, a symbol of the female genitals, contracting in a spasmic sea, expels Dracula onto the shores of Whitby. Boundaries, both social and physical, are breached as he is bled and birthed from the Demeter. At this point Dracula is menstrual bleeding, infective and invasive, inciting female sexuality. The infection of his victims when it does not involve death is the giving of life, immortality in the realm of the undead. Similarly, puberty is a rebirth, a metamorphosis from one stage of sexual development to the next and the arrival of the vampire is 'usually expressed with the juxtaposition of repressed with uncontrollable sexuality.'(37) Furthermore, the vampire has been described as 'A perfect embodiment of eros and thanatos, an archetype of the unconscious whose coming augers all manner of erotic deliria. Dracula's female victims become deranged psycho-sexual cannibals.'(38)

The significance of the Demeter also reverberates in the nightmarish quality of Dracula's nightly visits to his victims. As Walker points out in her explanation and history of the term 'Demeter' like the majority of Asiatic Goddesses in their oldest forms, Demeter was a triadic figure appearing as Virgin, Mother and Crone, or Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. One aspect of her crone phase is echoed in the legendary medieval Night-Mare. (39) Walker elaborates

> The legendary medieval Night-Mare – and equine Fury who tormented sinners in their sleep was based on ancient images of a Mare-headed Demeter. (40)

The equine association of the nightmare is also explored by Ernest Jones in his work entitled On the Nightmare. After exhausting the etymological origin of the term nightmare, he argues:

> The present point is this. It might readily be supposed that the assimilation of the second half of the word Nightmare to the English word for a female horse, a mare, is a matter of no special significance. But psycho-analysis has with right become suspicious of manifestations of the human spirit that are easily discarded as meaningless, and in the present case our suspicions are strengthened when we learn that in other countries the ideas of night-hag and female horse are closely associated, although there is not the linguistic justification for it that exists in English. (41)

Furthermore, Jones draws a link between the horse and the vulva which reinforces the connection between Demeter, the horse, and the nightmare. Giving examples of horses and women he quotes an old Prussian saying ‘If the bridegroom comes on horseback to the wedding one should loosen the saddle girth as soon as he dismounts, for this ensures his future wife an easy childbirth.’(42)

The footnote attached to this anecdote explains that this ‘symbolic equating of the horse’s saddle-girth and harness with the female vulva is commonly met with in folklore.’ (43)

Thus, the female horse or mare, her saddle and girth, like the Demeter, has a symbolism located in the female genitals, specifically indicating the vulva.

This connection, whether, emanating from the psyche, or else, an example of folkloric memory, is further evidenced in the Victorian preoccupation with the figure of the ‘Fallen Woman’. The Fallen Woman in Victorian art and literature generally denotes the prostitute or the woman who has fallen prey to her sexual appetites. Her fall is frequently connected with horses. The critic Nina Auerbach refers to ‘the symbolic use of horses in novels about fallen women from three different countries’(44) referencing Leo Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina, Émile Zola’s Nana and George Moore’s Esther Waters. According to Auerbach, ‘In their sensuous celebrations of triumphant horses both Tolstoy and Zola commemorate their heroines’ animality and the poignant glamour of its fall.’(45) The most famous example of the Fallen Woman and her association with horses in British literature, however, has to be, Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the D’Urbervilles. The eponymous heroine’s fall is precipitated by the death of the family horse and perhaps the most sexually charged moment in the novel occurs while she is being driven in a horse drawn cart to Tantridge by Alec D’Urberville, furthermore, her eventual sexual encounter (or fall) with Alec is preceded by a journey on horseback. Thus, Stoker’s naming of the ship the ‘Demeter' connotes varying aspects of female sexuality. Vampirism, nightmares and horses meet at a point of cathexis denoting female sexuality, sexual appetite, and sexual transgression. As such, Lucy in Stoker’s Dracula can also be categorized as an example of the fallen woman who has transgressed the codes of accepted morality. Finally, it is impossible to ignore the potential influence of Henry Fuseli’s painting The Nightmare (1781), depicting a supine woman oppressed by a ghoulish incubus-type demon who squats profanely upon her chest, while a wild-eyed horse glares on. The link between horses and sexuality here is explicit. I would also go as far as to suggest that Stoker’s scene of the Demeter entering Whitby Harbour and Lucy’s same night sleepwalking episode with its inference of an incubus type sexual encounter replicates Fuseli’s painting.

It is also notable that the birth and development of psychoanalysis as a field of study more or less coincided with developments and advances in psychiatry, obstetrics and gynaecology. Auerbach notes that

> Stoker might conceivably have known of Freud’s work. In 1893 F.W.H. Myers reported enthusiastically on Breuer and Freud’s ‘Premliminary Communication’ to Studies on

> Hysteria at a general meeting of the Society for Psychical Research in London. Stoker's alienist, Dr Seward, indefatigably recording bizarre manifestations of vampirism, mentions the mesmerist Charcot, Freud's early teacher; Dr. Seward's relentless attempt to make sense of his patient Renfield's 'zoophagy' is a weird forecast of the later Freud rationalizing the obsessions of his Wolf Man and Rat Man. Seward's meticulous case histories of Renfield, Lucy, and Dracula's other victims introduce into the Gothic genre a form that Freud would raise to a novelistic art; his anguished clinician's record makes Lucy both the early heroine of a case history and an ineffable romantic image of fin-de-siècle womanhood. (46)

The characteristic symptoms described by victims after a night-visit from a vampire correlate with similar descriptions of the nightmare. Ernest Jones, Freud's disciple, describes the three cardinal features of a typical nightmare as

> (I) agonizing dread; (2) a suffocating sense of oppression at the chest; and (3) a conviction of helpless paralysis. Less conspicuous features are an outbreak of cold sweat, convulsive palpitation of the heart, and sometimes a flow of seminal or vaginal secretion or even a paralysis of the sphincters. (47)

Lucy Westenra's first encounter with Dracula is most definitely depicted as nightmarish. In a supine position, the most common posture of a nightmare sufferer, she is described as having

> Her lips parted, and she was breathing – not softly, as usual with her, but in long, heavy gasps, as though striving to get her lungs full at every breath. As I came close, she put up her hand in her slip and pulled the collar of her nightdress close round her throat. Whilst she did so there came a little shudder though her, as though she felt the cold. I flung the warm shawl over her, and drew the edges tight round her neck, for I dreaded lest she should get some deadly chill from the night air, unclad as she was. (48)

According to Jones, the latent content of the nightmare consists of a representation of a normal act of sexual intercourse. He describes the exaggerated symptoms exhibited by sufferers of the nightmare as indicative of those experienced in some degree when fear of coitus is present. He also observed the prevalence of the nightmare amongst pre-menstrual women. He describes the case history of a young lady of about fifteen who was

> Seiz'd with a fit of this Disease, and groan'd so miserably that she awoke her Father, who was sleeping in the next room. He arose, ran into her chamber, and found her lying on her Back, and the Blood gushing plentifully out of her Mouth and Nose. When he shook her, she recover'd and told him, that she thought some great ceremony, stretched himself upon her. (sic) She had heard moaning in sleep several nights before; but, the next day after she

> imagin'd herself oppress'd by that Man, she had a copious eruption of the Menses, which, for that time, remov'd all her complaints. (49)

Jones interprets the occurrence as the coming to pass of what she both dreads and desires. He also makes the point that erotic feeling is in most cases more ardent in the days preceding the catamenial period, giving the following example:

> A robust servant Girl, about eighteen years old, was severely oppress'd with the Nightmare, two or three nights before every eruption of the Menses, and used to groan so loudly as to awake her Fellow-servant, who always shook or turn'd her on her Side; by which means she recover'd. She was thus afflicted periodically with it, 'till she took a bed-fellow of a different sex and bore Children. (50)

In his appraisal of the occurrence of nightmares prior to the menses, he concludes that these examples arise during a time when 'Paracelsus stated that the menstrual flux engendered phantoms in the air and that therefore convents were seminaries of nightmares.' (51)

Or, finally to quote from the eminent Victorian sexologist, Richard Von Krafft-Ebing, who in his work, Psychopathia Sexualis, reports the case of a married man who presents himself with cuts on his arm. When questioned as to the origins of the marks, he responded:

> When he wished to approach his wife, who was young and somewhat 'nervous', he first had to make a cut on his arm. Then she would suck the wound and during the act become violently excited sexually. (52)

Nineteenth-century macabre, barbaric and often downright ludicrous pseudo-science served to construct female sexuality and sexual desire as diabolical and vampiric. Overall, Lucy's transformation into a bloodthirsty vampire reifies a case study in the simultaneously, medical, gynaecological, psychiatric and psychoanalytic practice of menstrual pathologising and its concomitant control and suppression of female sexuality.

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33. Darryl Jones, Horror: A Thematic History in Fiction and Film, (London: Arnold, 2002), p.88.

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37. Allen Eyles, Robert Adkinson and Nicholas Fry, ed., The House of Horror: The Complete Story of Hammer Films, (London: Lorrimer, 1981), p.95.

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39. The Oxford Classical Dictionary gives the following definition: 'In Arcadia Demeter was worshipped with Poseidon. The Black Demeter of Phigaleia and Demeter Erinys of Thelpusa were both said to have taken the form of a mare and to have been mated with Poseidon in Horse shape, and at Phigaleia she was shown as horse-headed.' Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth ed., The Oxford Classical Dictionary, (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), p.448.

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Fig.3 Barbara Shelley in Dracula – Prince of Darkness, dir. Terence Fisher, (1966)
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"Sour Ground": Stephen King's Pet Sematary and The Politics of Territory

Kevin Corstorphine

"What wear and tear, what useless irritation, we could spare ourselves if we agreed to accept the true conditions of our human experience and realise that we are not in a position to free ourselves completely from its patterns and rhythm! Space has its own values, just as sounds and perfumes have colours, and feelings weight" (1).

So claims Lévi-Strauss in his classic anthropological work Tristes Tropiques, regretting Western society's loss of a sense of territory that the Amazonian tribes he visits have maintained. Yet the power of space and territory can be felt strongly in horror fiction, particularly in the work of Stephen King, and amidst the corruption and violence that pervades his "bad places" can be detected a strong sense of the power of place. This is emphatically not to suggest that King's writing betrays some kind of hidden New Age spiritualism, but rather to point out that places are symbolically imbued with social, historical, and political values in a way that lends wider relevance to narratives that might otherwise be too easily dismissed as apolitical or inconsequential. Pet Sematary (1983) most definitely falls into this category.

Pet Sematary is the story of a young couple who move to a new house in Maine to raise their two children. Behind this house, they soon discover a cemetery for pets that the local children have made, including a sign with the misspelling that lends the novel its title. When the family cat is run over, however, Louis's neighbour Jud shows him another burial place to put the body, past the cemetery and into the wilderness where an older burial ground lies, one whose strange power becomes apparent when Louis's cat wanders back into his house the next day. The cat, however, has been changed by the experience, and becomes a sinister force in the house. With fatal inevitability, Louis's son is next to be killed by the busy road that cuts past the house and he is compelled by his grief to make what the reader knows will be the fatal error of burying the body in the supernatural burial ground. The plot itself appears to be little more than a spun-out version of W.W. Jacob's "The Monkey's Paw" (1902) (2), yet King's novel reveals its true concerns not through the bare bones of plot, but through the way in which he represents the nature and politics of land.

Pet Sematary, like most of King's work, can too easily be dismissed as apolitical. The theme of an ancient Indian burial ground is by now a horror cliché, yet the political nature of the theme should not be disregarded in a reading of the novel. Horror fiction is often read in the Freudian terminology of anxiety, but in King we can see an author who is fully aware of his own "anxieties", indeed citing their purgation as an aspect of horror that may be said to have worth, here discussing film:

> I believe that the artistic value the horror movie most frequently offers is its ability to form a liaison between our fantasy fears and our real fears. I've said and will reemphasize here that few horror movies are conceived with 'art' in mind; most are concerned only with 'profit' in

> mind. The art is not consciously created but rather thrown off, as an atomic pile throws off radiation. (3)

King himself wouldn't claim to write purely for profit but retains a sincere commitment to storytelling, yet it is not outrageous to suggest that he also has his own work in mind when describing horror films as "throwing off" elements of anxiety. Aspects of King's work can be said to reside in this slightly vague wasteland between conscious awareness of his own fears and an unconscious reflection of those of society.

From the late 1960s onwards, inspired by the successes of black civil rights campaigners, Native Americans began to speak up on behalf of their troubled communities. During the 1970s these protesters used copies of old treaties as the basis for restitution and won significant settlements in states such as Alaska, Massachusetts, and Maine (4). Maine, of course, happens to be the home of Stephen King and the setting for much of his fiction, including Pet Sematary. King explicitly brings the Native American land debate into the narrative. When the family move into their new idyllic home, one of the most striking things about it is what lies beyond the house itself: "I know it sounds funny to say your nice little house there on the main road, with its phone and electric lights and cable TV and all, is on the edge of a wilderness," Jud Crandall tells the family, "but it is" (5). This land, like any other wilderness, is far from being without ideological value. The land is undergoing a dispute from the local native tribe:

> Beyond the house was a large field for the children to play in, and beyond the field were woods that went on damn near forever. The property abutted state lands, the realtor had explained, and there would be no development in the foreseeable future. The remains of the Micmac Indian tribe had laid claim to nearly 8,000 acres in Ludlow, and the complicated litigation, involving the Federal government as well as that of the state, might stretch into the next century. (6)

This is all based on actual events, and in fact the tribe was awarded federal recognition in 1991, bringing with it a nine hundred thousand dollar grant to repurchase tribal land (7). King, then, is not just using the Native American theme as a device for introducing the supernatural, but plants an awareness of genuine political issues in the mind of the reader from the start (8). If we accept the conservative or bourgeois model of the horror novel in this case, then we might expect King to use tribal supernaturalism as the source of his terrors without recourse to such socially relevant details. On the other hand, the novel makes no apologies for representing only the perspective of the middle-class white narrator as cultural outsider to tribal beliefs. Clearly, there is something significant to be exposed in King's discourse of land.

Tony Magistrale (9) recounts asking King in 1984 how living in Maine affects his writing: "He replied that 'there's a Maine very few outsiders ever get to know. It's a place of rich Indian lore, rocky soil that makes it difficult to grow things, and incredible levels of poverty. Once you get out

from behind the coastal resorts, the real Maine begins'" (10). What King could mean by the "real Maine" is interesting. One possibility is that this statement reflects his particular brand of perverse humour, that in the increasingly homogenised and sterile society we live in, the only truly interesting, or perhaps "real" things left are to be found in the darker crevices of life. Taken this way, King's fiction can be seen as an attack on the totalising influence of media representation. There is an inherent scepticism, both in his statement about the "real" Maine, and in the insistence of his narratives to disrupt enlightenment ideals of rationality. The conservatism that King professes, then, is not so much skewed towards reinforcing social norms but rather more like the conservative voice of George Orwell in 1984. The Party, King insists, cannot lay absolute claim to history. Suppose, he suggests in Danse Macabre, "that when the creator of horror is finally stripped all the way to his or her core of being we find not an agent of the norm but a friend (11) – a capering, gleeful, red-eyed agent of chaos?" (12). King's statements, made in the same book, seem contradictory, claiming that he may be conservative or chaotic. He demands that what is abjected by the mainstream (poverty, killing, the pagan past) will make its return in one form or another, thus affirming as Poe did in "The Tell-Tale Heart" that the truth will out, while also conceding to the idea that there may be no fundamental truth at all. "What about that possibility, friends and neighbours?" (13).

The desire to create something fixed and certain is borne out in Pet Sematary, and specifically in the home in which Louis invests his hopes for the future. Everything about his new life suggests certainty and security, as opposed to the recurring daydream he has of ditching his family and running off to Florida to work as a medic in Disneyland. His job as college doctor offers steady money, the routine of his evening beer with Jud Crandall lets him think of the old man as a father figure, and his pleasant new house becomes that most comforting of places, home. The comfort and security of Louis's new life is reinforced incessantly on the reader by the repetition of the theme of home throughout the first part of the novel. Some of the closing lines of the chapters are as follows: "That was how they came to Ludlow" (14), "It was time to go home" (15), "He tacked the memo up and went to bed" (16), "'Yes,' he said. Home sounded good to him" (17). These sentimental returns to familiarity at the end of each chapter impress on the reader Louis's sense of contentment. Not only does the security of home feature highly on Louis's agenda, however, but his wife and daughter seek out certainty in their own ways, most notably with regard to death.

The most obvious way in which these characters seek certainty is to banish the notion of death from the family home. Rachel, Louis's wife, refuses to deal with death in any way after a traumatic childhood when she watched her sister slowly die of spinal meningitis. Ellie, their daughter, is five years old and only confronts death for the first time when she sees the pet cemetery and worries that her cat is going to die. Louis finds his own certainty about death in the medical facts that he has learned as a doctor and subscribes to the view that death is a natural part of life. Rachel, on the other hand, becomes almost hysterical when confronted with the idea. Louis refers to her behaviour as her "death-phobia" (18). Old Jud Crandall's wife Norma comments that:

> 'It's not such a bad idea to be on nodding acquaintance with it. These days ... I don't know ... no one wants to talk about it or think about it, it seems. They took it off the TV because they thought it might hurt the children some way – hurt their minds – and people want closed coffins so they don't have to look at the remains or say goodbye ... it just seems like people want to forget it.' (19)

The idea that such an acceptance is missing from the modern American psyche is partly what informs Goddu's critique of American gothic. Discussing St. John de Crévecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer (1782), she notes a passage where the narrator discovers a tortured slave suspended in a cage:

> Located in a clearing enclosed by shaded woods, the caged slave makes manifest the horror of slavery that the sunny South conceals from the public. Moreover, by fusing contradictory categories, this scene of live burial makes the familiar frightening. The tortured slave is located in the proper pastoral setting but not in his regular place: instead of tilling the ground, fertilizing it with his sweat, he is suspended above it, staining it with his blood. Half-dead and half-alive, a rotting corpse and a Christ figure, the caged slave embodies the abject, 'the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' that disturbs 'identity, system, order'. (20)

Here Goddu uses Kristeva's Powers of Horror to invoke the notion that what is abjected in the national consciousness is a state of ambiguity that presents an irresolvable challenge to the mythical ideals of the Enlightenment. Leslie A. Fiedler famously describes the American novel as being obsessed with death: "However shoddily or ironically treated, horror is essential to our literature [...] Through these gothic images are projected certain obsessive concerns of our national life: the ambiguity of our relationship with Indian and Negro, the ambiguity of our encounter with nature, the guilt of the revolutionist who feels himself a parricide" (21). It is tempting to apply Fiedler's conception of the American novelist as the white male suffering the anxiety of racial conflict and the sexually dysfunctional legacy of Puritanism to writers such as Stephen King, but this picture will have to be adjusted to account for the massive social upheaval that informs American society after the 1960s. Fiedler goes on to argue that:

> The American writer inhabits a country at once the dream of Europe and a fact of history; he lives on the last horizon of an endlessly retreating vision of innocence – on the 'frontier,' which is to say, the margin where the theory of original goodness and the fact of original sin come face to face. To express this 'blackness ten times black' and to live by it in a society in which, since the decline of orthodox Puritanism, optimism has become the chief effective religion, is a complex and difficult task. (22)

The past century has seen advancements in technology that have saved lives, time and effort, while at the same time destroying traditional jobs and giving us the threat of global annihilation. Huge steps forward in civil rights, media communication and youth culture have liberated and excited many, while confusing and alienating others. Uncertainty is the byword of the late twentieth century, and as

H.P. Lovecraft comments, "uncertainty and danger are always closely allied; thus making any kind of unknown world a world of peril and evil possibilities" (23).

Thomas L. Dumm points out that, "Etymologies suggest that fear once meant the experience of being between places of protection, in transit, in a situation analogous to the condition that is commonly referred to in contemporary ethnographic literature as liminality" (24). This idea of being in between places of safety, which can apply equally well to paradigms of knowledge as physical places, helps to explain the discourse of social change and the fear it causes. It is in a situation between places of safety that Louis finds himself once he crosses the deadfall between the "Pet Sematary" at the back of his house and the ancient burial ground beyond. The journey to the burial ground is marked in several different ways by a blurring of boundaries. Louis is haunted by the journey through the woods, which serves as a kind of uncanny junction or barrier not so much between "this world" and the "afterlife", but between Louis's mode of thought and the tribal, pagan past, which is demonised within the narrative. Louis's condition of being between places of safety is an uncanny juncture where a tribal mode of knowledge surfaces and the supernatural becomes the benchmark for the world to make sense, despite his scientific protestations.

Lévi-Strauss, in "The Structural Study of Myth", argues that all myths come from external experience and in fact, "the kind of logic in mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, and [...] the difference lies, not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied" (25). His emphasis, then, is on the way in which myth can be used to describe the world, differences in mythical thought being explained by specific local circumstances. Land and location are what is important to the formation of ideas, religious, mythological, or otherwise. What Louis confronts in Pet Sematary is the idea that land has its own memory, and even power. There is a telling conversation early in the novel when Louis and Rachel look out over the land that sits behind their new home:

> 'You can see everything.' Rachel said in a low, awed voice. She turned to Louis. 'Honey, do we own this?' And before Louis could answer, Jud said: 'It's part of the property, oh yes.' Which wasn't Louis thought, quite the same thing. (26)

The question is whether or not they belong in this place. After an argument with Rachel, Louis broods on the way she had slept on her own side as far away from him as possible: "Territory is that which defines all else, hadn't he read that in some college history course?" (27). The importance of territory is emphasised by the way in which King deals with the spaying of Church, the family cat. Neutering the animal is necessary so that it doesn't want to cross the busy road, but Louis is filled with regret that the operation will "lessen the cat, turn him into a fat old tom before his time" (28). This literal castration anxiety he feels for the cat is a product of his own unconscious fears. Baudrillard points out that, "Animals have no unconscious, because they have a territory. Men have only had an unconscious since they lost a territory. At once territories and metamorphoses have been taken from them – the unconscious is the individual structure of mourning in which the loss is

incessantly, hopelessly replayed – animals are the nostalgia for it" (29). Louis's pity for the cat represents not so much an act of empathy but an expression of this nostalgia for territory that lurks in the part of his mind that dwells in the wilderness.

The wilderness here is associated with a primal past as well as an idealised notion of the Native American as "noble savage". Roderick Frazier Nash argues that it was European civilisation that brought the idea of the wilderness to America:

> We should pause to recognize that at the time of European colonization, there were already hunting and gathering people in the New World who did not recognize the wilderness/civilization distinction. Indeed, 'wilderness', may, in retrospect, be the wrong word to characterize North America at the time of European contact. But the colonists did use it, and they carried the full set of pastoral prejudices. Living on the edge of what they took to be a vast wilderness, they re-experienced the insecurities of the first farmers and builders. There was, initially, too much wilderness for the appreciation. Understandably, the wild people of the New World seemed 'savages,' and their wild habitat a moral and physical wasteland fit only for conquest and transformation in the name of progress, civilization, and Christianity. (30)

Louis is not necessarily a representative of early colonists, but an awareness of this background is lurking in his consciousness, especially in the light of the Native American land debates going on in Pet Sematary's time. Most notably, the old-fashioned prejudice of the Native American as morally inferior has been replaced with the equally false ideal of the "noble savage". More importantly, however, the civilisation/wilderness distinction exists as an idea that informs the way he comes to think about the patch of ground that lies beyond his family home. Rather than being representative of a genuine cultural distinction, this archetypal "bad place" represents a loosening of categories that Louis, as symbolic family man and capitalist, fears. The theme of tribal superstition is introduced as a means of articulating these fears to the reader.

Every horror story needs some kind of monstrous Other to provide the threat, and while in Pet Sematary the fear King plays on is ostensibly the return of the dead as monster, there is also a symbolic Other that appears in shadowy form throughout the story, that of the Wendigo. The Wendigo is a North American tribal spirit that is said to possess those who eat the flesh of another human (31). In the novel, the Wendigo never explicitly appears, but lurks in the woods as a threatening figure in the background: "It was a sound like nothing he had ever heard in his life – a living sound; a big sound. Somewhere nearby, growing closer, branches were snapping off" (32). The Wendigo here is flesh and blood, but undefined, a figure that is monstrous through its indeterminacy. As such, the Wendigo represents a blurring of boundaries between what is rational and what is superstitious, what is natural and unnatural. It is fitting, then, that the creature inspires cannibalism, an extreme breakage of physical and moral boundaries. It is important to note King's emphasis on the fact that the Wendigo is behind everything, that it has conspired circumstances to come about the way

they have, because this means it has power, and power over land is everything. The Wendigo is, in a way, representative of the Native American tribes who occupied this land before European settlers, certainly if we accept the idea that the tribal mode of knowledge is demonised in the novel. Susan Stewart, writing about the popularity of the freak show in the late nineteenth century, claims that the freak, often racialised as in the case of Siamese twins or Irish giants, can be thought of as standing in for a colonised culture:

> The body of the cultural other is by means of this metaphor both naturalised and domesticated in a process we might consider to be characteristic of colonization in general. For all colonization involves the taming of the beast by bestial methods and hence the conversion and projection of the animal and human, difference and identity. On display, the freak represents the naming of the frontier and the assurance that the wilderness, the outside, is now territory. (33)

The taming of the wilderness was the primary concern for settlers in the New World, and the legacy of this sits heavily on modern shoulders. It is no wonder that in the context of a time when guilt over the grabbing of native land becomes a topic of political importance that the figure of the Wendigo, a symbol of the monstrosity of the untamed, should rear its head as a reminder of the fear that underpins the very basis of mainstream American society.

The Wendigo is a figure of boundaries transgressed. The living and the dead, reality and unreality, one body from another in connection with the great taboo of cannibalism, a tangible possibility in the Northern wastelands where the myth originates. The very physicality of the creature is ambiguous, and in the novel it is implied variously that it possesses people, that its touch turns them into cannibals, or that it is an independent creature roaming the woods. In between civilisation and wilderness, it performs the role of a boundary in the Heideggerian sense: "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding" (34).

Deleuze would recognise it as becoming-cannibal. In this literary juncture a mythological beast performs the role that the notion of identity plays in the world; that of codifying the flow of desire. Here, the Wendigo represents an absolute limit:

> In the first place, desiring-production is situated at the limits of social production; the decoded flows, at the limits of the codes and the territorialities; the body without organs, at the limits of the socius. We shall speak of an absolute limit every time the schizo-flows pass through the wall, scramble all the codes, and deterritorialize the socius: the body without organs is the deterritorialized socius, the wilderness where the decoded flows run free, the end of the world, the apocalypse. (35)

Wilderness and Civilisation are nothing more or less than social constructs designed to regulate the flow of power in a certain direction. The Wendigo here erupts from the text as the by-product of this system. Territoriality imposed on an uncodified nature is a temporary fiction that is dazzling in its seduction yet not immune from ill effects.

Jud tells Louis about the Indian ground, claiming that the Micmacs stopped coming to it because "the ground had gone sour" (36). We hear later that the tribe blamed this souring on the Wendigo, who appeared, "if the winter was long and hard and the food was short, there was north country Indians who would finally get down to the bad place where it was starve or ... or do something else" (37). This loaded statement from Jud makes clear the possibility that the Bad Place can be simply a state of the mind, and also signals the notion of cannibalism as so taboo that he can only imply it. Jud and Louis surmise that the native myths sprang up in response to feelings of guilt, and that the ground is "sour" simply because it contains the buried remains of those chosen to be eaten. Yet there is more going on in this discourse. On one level there is an apparent demonization of the native tribes and their culture, tied to the notion of ancient power in the land. When Louis sees a mass of rotting flowers washed down a drainage ditch in the local cemetery he thinks to himself, "These leavings were made in propitiation of a much older God than the Christian one [...] God of dead things left in the ground to rot. God of the mystery" (38). Yet this perspective contains in it the idea of an original truth that has since been masked by Christian colonisation. Although not explicitly stated, the novel does seem to imply that the land "went sour" about the time of European colonisation, which would make this "bad place" a product of European settlers. This corresponds to Nash's view that the morally inferior wilderness condition of America was a product of the settler's imagination.

Pet Sematary, then, presents an irreconcilable opposition between wilderness and civilisation. This opposition is configured as a dispute between two ways of living, that of the native tribal people who lived in a certain state of balance with the environment, and that of the European settlers, who have come to dominate the environment using the notion of ownership (39). This is clearly a one-sided contest, as the capitalist system of land ownership is firmly in place. Perhaps this does imply a sense of guilt on behalf of Louis and his family, repressed and transformed into a haunting force. Near the end of the novel, Louis contemplates a piece of wisdom passed on by Jud Crandall: "What you bought, you owned, and what you owned eventually came home to you" (40). This question of home is crucial to this debate. Although Baudrillard posits humans as nomadic creatures, uprooted from traditional lands, Edward S. Casey points out that we fear this nomadic existence, which implies the condition of being between places of safety discussed earlier:

> A transitory place is better than none at all, but it only spurs on further searching for an enduring or at least reliable place. In the face of this risk, it is not surprising that human and nonhuman animals alike have come to rely on "territoriality" as a means of maintaining the stability and security of a home-place or home-region as defined by an appropriate "biotope" or "ecological niche." The home territory embodies the plenitude that being placeless so painfully lacks. (41)

We deal with this fear by the process of house-building, then, although in late capitalist society this is something transitory in itself, exemplified by the "moving day" device used in *Pet Sematary* and many novels like it.

The home itself occupies a slightly strange place in the narrative. It is at once the most important object of attention in the novel and something that stands outwith total comprehension. When Jud Crandall tells the family that their home is on the edge of a wilderness he means it to be a strange, perhaps unsettling thought. The implication is that such a home, with all its mod-cons, is not supposed to be on the edge of a wilderness. The home becomes unheimlich in this regard; there is something not quite right. The scene at the beginning where the family drive up to their new home is supposed to be perfect, but looking back Louis has a different perspective:

> The four of them settled down to spend a happy and old-fashioned Christmas. The house in North Ludlow, which had seemed so strange on that day in August when they pulled into the driveway (strange and even hostile, what with Ellie cutting herself out back and Gage getting stung by a bee at almost the same time), had never seemed more like home. (42)

This uncanny aspect of the house extends into the very way that Louis begins to see things. A scientist by training and inclination, he submits to feelings of superstition and gives anthropomorphic qualities such as hostility to random events and inanimate objects. This is associated with a stereotypical view of tribal societies. Joseph Grixti raises this point in relation to the feeling of fear:

According to Malinowski and Sartre, magic is dominant when control over the environment is weak. Magical beliefs and the (fearful) reactions which are based on such beliefs can on these terms be said to be the result of the states of uncertainty which are created by this challenge and by the negation of expectations. Feelings of fear can thus be said to derive from the conviction of loss of control and the sense of helplessness which become dominant in situations when (in Piagetian terms) the cognitive system can neither assimilate the environment into its own structure, nor adapt itself to the structure of the environment. (43)

The most contentious point of this argument is whether or not tribal societies feel the kind of helplessness Western anthropologists have postulated, since many tribal societies live within the context of a world view that does not demand control over the environment in the same way as our own society. Nonetheless, this point is well suited to the character of Louis, who finds himself in an environment which is strange and unexpected. His expectations of safety are negated, producing the effect of fear. Grixti's use of the word "structure" is particularly apt here, since the practice of house building shapes the world view of those who live in them. The home is supposed to act as a protective barrier, but here becomes a gateway to terror. The ultimate helplessness for Western society is a lack of authority in one's own home (with the possible exception of one's own body, which is why they are often conflated). Thus the home takes on wider symbolic importance as an

indication of power, which is thoroughly subverted in the text. Near the end of the novel, when all Hell has broken loose, Jud Crandall fearfully approaches the Creed home and thinks back to Victor, an injured boy who Louis couldn't save on his first day in the college emergency room:

> When he saw the billows of smoke, his first thought was that this was something else to lay at the door of Victor Pascow, who seemed, in his dying, to have removed some sort of crash-barrier between these ordinary people and an extraordinary run of bad luck. But that was stupid, and Louis's house was the proof. It stood calm and white, a little piece of clean-limbed New England architecture in the mid-morning sun. (44)

It isn't empirical proof that Jud seeks as a sign of normality, but proof based in intensity of feeling. Louis's house represents an order beyond itself that applies to a mental state as much as bricks and mortar. R.D. Dripps claims that "Architecture holds authority for a culture to the degree that it provides evidence of an ordered world" (45), a theme particularly evident in Jud's line of thinking. It just so happens that on this occasion the proof doesn't hold out. On some level this is surely an attack on the culture of normality that judges rightness by the appearance of respectability, whereas in reality terrible things may be happening behind the "clean-limbed architecture". Here, Louis's house takes on an uncanny aspect by subverting its own accepted meaning. If this place does not give us the order we look for, then what place does? The house becomes a symbolic gateway to chaos, portrayed here as the return of tribal forces that are at the same time supernatural and supremely natural, that it was supposed to banish in the first place by means of its construction.

Robert C. Young discusses territorialization in the context of Deleuze and Guattari's work on capitalism. He focuses on three points that are useful ones to bear in mind in the context of the current discussion. The first implication of their critique "serves as a reminder that colonialism above all involves the physical appropriation of land, its capture for the cultivation of another culture. It thus foregrounds the fact that cultural colonization was not simply a discursive operation but a seizure of cultural (in all sense of the word) space" (46). This focus on the physical aspect of colonialism affirms cultural space as having existence and importance in itself. The second implication is that in colonialism there is often a conflict "between societies that do and do not conceive of land as a form of private property: at one level indeed, colonialism involves the introduction of a new notion of land as property, and with it inevitably the appropriation and enclosure of land. This develops into a larger system of the imposition of economic roles and identities" (47). This aspect, already discussed in terms of Pet Sematary, emphasizes not only the fundamental cultural clash that occurs due to differing notions of ownership, but also that way in which such notions affect the entire world-view of a culture, foregrounding the conditions for thought within a system, and setting limits upon society. The third implication is that, "Colonization begins and perpetuates itself through acts of violence, and calls forth an answering violence from the colonized. Here capitalism is the destroyer of signification, the reducer of everything to a Jakobsian system of equivalences, to commodification through the power of money" (48).

Deleuze and Guattari, then, describe the process by which capitalism inscribes itself on the world and the ways in which methods of resistance make themselves apparent, although here they are fictional. It is interesting to compare Jacqueline Foertsch's claim that "cancers and viruses have both emerged to some degree as late capitalist side-effects: environmental disasters introduced to non-immune populations in the process of military-industrial exploitation of the planet" (49). Indeed, it is the later half of the twentieth century that Western society has begun to fully appreciate the negative consequences of its industrial progress both environmentally and on a human scale. This has brought an increased sense of responsibility, but with it, guilt. Responsibility and guilt are the key themes of Pet Sematary. Louis came close to grabbing his son before the boy ran into the path of an oncoming truck, but didn't quite make it. This nagging sense of guilt on his part is needed as a plot device if we are to accept his motivations for proceeding with the acts of grave robbery and arcane resurrection that both he and the reader know is the wrong course of action to take. Yet throughout his near-mania, Louis maintains a sense of responsibility about what he does: "Besides, he gibbered to himself, it may still come out all right, there is no gain without risk, perhaps no risk without love. There's still my bag [...] There are syringes, and if something happens ... something bad ... no one has to know but me" (50). Jud Crandall's old saying, "A man grows what he can ... and he tends it" (51), appears throughout the novel, haunting Louis's thoughts.

Within the discourse of property and ownership, the human subject is inevitably drawn to projecting values upon landscapes and territory where none naturally exist. In defining their territory, the characters of the narratives discussed seek to maintain their sense of identity, the stability of which is threatened by whatever monstrous forces are introduced. Above all they desire the restoration of social order, be it for good or bad. Louis Creed wants his son back, even through magical resurrection, though he is prepared to kill the boy if he doesn't get what he expects (52). Louis, then, has not lost his sense of place entirely, but rather than seeing himself as part of his surroundings, he defines himself by the territory he controls. Territory in the novel becomes "bad" through the same process of binary categorisation that defines notions of race, exposing the assumptions thrown out by Western capitalism that are as superstitious as the beliefs it attempts to delineate itself in opposition to. Pet Sematary operates both on the level of exploitative horror yarn and as an insightful critique of the culture it is produced in and for. This is precisely the contradiction that underpins much of King's writing and make his work such a fascinating subject of criticism.

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques, trans. by John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Washington Square Post, 1973) p.124

2. In W.W. Jacobs, The Lady of the Barge and Other Stories, Book 2 (6th edn) (London & New York: Harper & Brothers, 1906)

3. Stephen King, Danse Macabre (London: Warner Books, 1993

4. George Brown Tindall & David Emory Shi, America: A Narrative History, brief fourth edn., (London & New York: W.W. Norton, 1984) p.1084-1085

5. Stephen King, Pet Sematary (London, New English Library, 1989) p.30

6. Ibid, p.4

7. See "Brief Synopsis of the History of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs", in Aroostook Band of Micmacs website, < http://www.micmac-nsn.gov/html/history.html> [accessed 13/09/05]

8. At least, the Native American theme is fully disclosed. The spectre of Vietnam, however, could easily be said to hover in the background of this civilisation/wilderness borderline, and should be mentioned here.

9. Also, for a comparison of King and Hawthorne, see Tony Magistrale, "Stephen King's Pet Sematary: Hawthorne's Woods Revisited" in Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1988) pp.126-134

10. Tony Magistrale, Landscape of Fear: Stephen King's American Gothic p.18

11. The expected word here might be 'fiend'. If this is King's typo it is revealing.

12. Stephen King, Danse Macabre, p.444

13. Ibid, p.444

14. Stephen King, Pet Sematary, p.5

15. Ibid, p.37

16. Ibid, p.56

17. Ibid, p.73

18. Ibid, p.77

19. Ibid, p.52

20. Teresa A. Goddu, Gothic America: Narrative, History and Nation (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) p.20

21. Leslie a Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997) p.26

22. Ibid, p.26

23. H.P. Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror in Literature", in H.P. Lovecraft, Omnibus 2: Dagon and Other Macabre Tales (London: HarperCollins, 2000) pp.423-512 (p.435)

24. Thomas L. Dumm, "Telefear: Watching War News", in The Politics of Everyday Fear, ed. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) pp.307-322 (p.312)

25. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" (extract), in Literary Theory: An Anthology, ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) pp.101-115 (p.114)

26. Stephen King, Pet Sematary, p.29

27. Ibid, p.54

28. Ibid, p.56

29. Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994) p.139

30. Roderick Frazier Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind (New Haven & London: Yale Note Bene, 2001) p.xiii

31. King's source is almost certainly Algernon Blackwood's short story 'The Wendigo' (1910)

32. Stephen King, Pet Sematary, p.372

33. Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (London & Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993) p.110

34. Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking", in Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger, rev. edn, ed. by David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993) pp.343-364 (p.356)

35. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: The Athlone Press, 1984)

36. Stephen King, Pet Sematary, p.133

37. Ibid, p.153

38. Ibid, p.352

39. The idealisation of Native American peoples as living in absolute harmony with nature is, of course, inconsistent with facts and not far removed from the rather patronising view of the "Noble Savage". Nonetheless, it remains a powerful fictional symbol.

40. Stephen King, Pet Sematary, p.406

41. Edward S. Casey, Casey, Edward S., Getting Back into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993) p.xii

42. Stephen King, Pet Sematary, p.183

43. Joseph Grixti, Terrors of Uncertainty: The Cultural Contexts of Horror Fiction (London & New York: Routledge, 1989) p.153

44. Stephen King, Pet Sematary, p.417

45. R.D. Dripps, The First House: Myth, Paradigm, and the Task of Architecture (London & Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999) p.21

46. Robert J. C. Young, Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race (London & New York: Routledge, 1995) p.172

47. Ibid, p.172

48. Ibid, p.173

49. Jacqueline Foertsch, Enemies Within: The Cold War and the AIDS Crisis in Literature, Film, and Culture (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001) p.25

50. Stephen King, Pet Sematary, p.375

51. Ibid, p.136

52. The possibility of reading Pet Sematary as an Oedipal parody in connection to Gage's violent reaction towards his father and Louis's authoritarian response with his medical equipment should be mentioned here.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Undead and the Reborn - Current Trends in Gothic and Horror Writing

Dara Downey

As the following reviews will make evident, the very concept of a "Book Review" section in a journal dealing with the Gothic and horror genres is characterised by a certain capaciousness, yet also, paradoxically, by a sense of narrowness, almost of repetition. This effect is produced primarily by the fact that the section encompasses both works of fiction and of criticism, two strands of genre writing which employ similar tactics and yet are becoming increasingly divergent. While it would be fallacious and naïve to assert that five reviews can constitute even a roughly indicative sample of the current state of horror fiction and scholarship, the choice of primary texts under discussion here (Stephen King's Cell, Chuck Palahniuk's Haunted, Bernice M. Murphy's Shirley Jackson, Christopher Frayling's Mad, Bad and Dangerous? The Scientist and the Cinema, Tony Earnshaw's Beating the Devil: The Making of Night of the Demon and the collection of essays edited by Bernd Herzogenrath The Films of Tod Browning) can be seen to constitute a microcosm of major trends on both sides of the fiction/criticism divide. One major aspect of recent tends being that while horror literature leans more and more towards homogeneity and creative stagnation, critics of the Gothic/Horror are turning to earlier works either in an effort to revive the genre's subversive potential, or to demonstrate how the conservative views of the past are alive and well today.

My own review of Chuck Palahnuik's Haunted and Kevin Corstorphine's assessment of Stephen King's Cell bear witness to the unapologetically masculine slant that a sizeable proportion of horror writing has taken in the past few years. Arguably, this is a reactionary response to the "feminisation" of the genre; a response akin to the rise of adventure novels in the nineteenth century which set themselves up as an antidote to the strict realism and domestic settings of the three-volume novel, basing their plots either in the colonies or in the American wilderness, (Showalter 1992, Brantlinger 1996). In a genre which traditionally has been dominated by men - even within the supposedly "feminine" sub-genre of the ghost story – a cursory glance at the Horror Section in almost any bookshop reveals that there has recently been an influx of books by writers such as Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, Laurell K. Hamillton and the apparently undead Virginia Andrews. Fuelled, perhaps, by trends in television programming, but also simply by one another, these bewilderingly prolific novelists churn out sequel after sequel featuring sexy female vampires, sexy female vampire slayers, or sexy female victims of vampires posing on the covers in sexy feminine postures of submission or predatory intent, and plots which are as much if not more about seduction and romance as they are about fear or the supernatural.

Simultaneously, the male horror novelists seem to have become more, well, male than ever before. Unlike the works of writers such as Ray Bradbury and Ira Levin in the middle of the twentieth

century, the novels of Dean Koontz, Richard Laymon, James Herbert, and, of course, the High (Stephen) King of Horror tend less and less to feature any female character who could, as Carol J. Clover puts it, "be imagined as a credible perpetrator […] of the kind of violence on which, in the low-mythic universe, the status of full protagonist rests," (Clover, 1996). For some reason, this shift is accompanied by an upping of the ante on gore and what film censors refer to as "scenes of extended peril". In 1992, King wrote, 'I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find I cannot terrify him/her, I will try to horrify; and if I find I cannot horrify, I'll go for the gross-out, I'm not proud' (Danse Macabre, 2000). Over the past decade or so, writers have wholeheartedly embraced King's lack of "pride" in this regard, and the spectacle of the repulsive (not to be confused with body horror and the painful metamorphoses and monstrous births prevalent in 1980s horror cinema) assaults us unrelentingly. Taking their cues from a mainstream culture pervaded by such unsavoury fare as the American Pie franchise and reality television programmes like Fear Factor, there is recent spate of horror films along the lines of Creep, Hostel, Cabin Fever, Saw and Saw II which wallow in abjection, squeezing from their still-conscious victims not only blood and guts, but also as much vomit, bile, spittle, tears and genital fluids as they can manage. Even these, however, occasionally mingle their parades of bodies in distress with the more ethereal suspense of an unseen, lurking source of terror. No such concession can be made for writers like King, nor even for more "reputable" ones like Palahniuk, who seem to have given up entirely on the terrorising end of things, leaving that to the likes of Al Gore (whose name suddenly seems deeply ironic) and our local news, while simultaneously (and inaccurately) poo-pooing amorphous fear as the preserve of such outdated, namby-pamby "'classical' ghost story writers like Henry James, M.R. James, and Nathaniel Hawthorne," (Danse Macabre, 2000).

Although it is reassuring to see, as Corstorphine points out, that, in response to the events of 9/11, horror is once again politicising itself, the niggling feeling that this response is more of a reactionary than a critical one remains. The Omega Man (the film version of I Am Legend to which King professes to owe such a debt) features a gleefully gun-toting (and, of course, not at all characteristic) Charlton Heston mowing down as many African-American undead as he possibly can. If, in 2006, our zombies have ceased to be mere lumbering displays of bodily ruin, and have once again taken on such distinct overtones of racial difference, fear, and distrust (however oblique or balanced by counter-discourse) then perhaps the bad old days, when horror retreated into the individual psyche of the psychotic killer and bolted the door, might be preferable to a hijacking of its iconography to fan the flames of multi-culturalism's funeral pyre. The new reluctance to "merely" terrorise one's readers, especially when paired with an ambivalent use of the "war on terror" as material, has done little to help horror's image as a progressive genre that treats important political or socio-cultural issues in an informed, responsible, and interrogatory manner. While debates continue to rage as to whether horror is profoundly conservative or open to harnessing for subversive purposes, perhaps what these writers allow us to see is that our much-flaunted, hyper-liberal political correctness our much-flaunted, hyper-liberal political correctness never ran very deep in the first place

There are, of course, notable exceptions, and some very fine work has been turned out in the past decade by the likes of Joyce Carol Oates, Neil Gaiman, Mark. Z. Danielewski, Peter Straub, and such lesser known writers as Susie Moloney, Elizabeth Hand and Tanith Lee. It is also unduly harsh and reductive to tar the far more subtle, gifted and socially aware Palahniuk with the same brush as King, Koontz and their ilk. Nonetheless, the transition from the giddy heights of Fight Club to the considerably less sublime Haunted would seem to indicate that he, too, cannot escape the prevailing trend in horror writing towards books where men are white and straight, women are victims, and everyone gets horribly killed, maimed or wounded, while the kind of spine-tingling epistemological uncertainty that prompted stories with titles like "The Damned Thing," (Bierce) "What Did Miss Darrington See?" (Cobb) "What Was It?" (O'Brien) and "The Thing on the Doorstep" (Lovecraft) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has, by and large, gone right out the window.

All is not lost, however, since academic criticism is doing some sterling work to prevent the sort of thing that frightened people fifty years ago from being condemned to obscurity. If the contributions to this, our first issue's book review section, are anything to go by, many critics have decided to eschew the current crop of fiction, and are turning instead to the classics of the past, the highly popular and critically acclaimed novels, stories and films of the first half of the twentieth century that, nonetheless, have long been deemed unworthy of attention. When taken together, the appearance of books on Shirley Jackson, Tod Browning, the figure of the mad scientist and Jacques Tourneur's Night of the Demon suggest a critical desire to return to what many see as the "golden age of horror", to a time before Psycho changed the face of the genre (and, indeed, as some would argue, of the world as we know it). Far from being a regressive or nostalgic move, it just might be the case, as the opening paragraph of Ann Patten's review makes clear, that only by looking backwards can serious inquiry be brought to bear on where our culture stands right now and where it plans on going. Should this diagnosis prove true, then the future looks rather grim for horror fiction's potential for producing innovative and challenging material, but decidedly bright for academics working in the genre, who have languished on the margins of acceptability for too long. The writers and filmmakers who are the subjects of these books have achieved what modern masculinist horror utterly fails to do – marrying the more gruesome aspects or the psychological concerns of twentieth-century Gothic/Horror with a sense of creeping, indefinable fear and a profound engagement with contemporary issues of prejudice, suburban malaise, and unethical science.

This should not, of course, be permitted to eclipse the sheer diversity of primary source material drawn upon by these texts – indeed, it is this very diversity which distinguishes such examples of horror from those produced in more recent years. It goes without saying that horror has always been a derivative form, more often than not relying upon its audience's awareness and expectations of generic conventions for its scare tactics. In Northanger Abbey, Jane Austen is pretty upfront about letting her readers know that the success of the Gothic depends largely upon its predictability, upon the ability of the even the flightiest and least educated young lady to summarise lucidly its basic elements after reading a mere two or three such novels. In the opening pages of The Turn of the Screw, Henry James, so frequently misrepresented as a pillar of polite realism, demonstrates that he

is equally at ease with the formulaic scene-setting central to a good ghost story. He arranges a group of well-off, rather irritating people around a roaring fire on Christmas Eve (the time of year when otherwise level-headed publications fill their pages with supernatural sensationalism), telling one another chilling little tales of apparitions and unexplained noises. Into the mix he adds the character of Douglas, who hints at but is reluctant to reveal the story of "'general uncanny ugliness and horror and pain'" that he has been keeping close to his chest for many years (Turn of the Screw, 1898). Unsurprisingly, such teasing reluctance on Douglas's part generates a flood of pleas and demands from his listeners, while heightening the reader's own curiosity and apprehensions. Indeed, much of the terrifying effect of the rest of the novella hangs upon this initial exploitation of the reader's prior knowledge of the genre. Similarly, the success of cycles such as the slew of Frankenstein and Dracula spin-off films (from Universal Studios to Hammer Films and beyond) relied heavily upon their audiences being clued in to how their narrative and characters functioned, while at the same time seizing the opportunity to play with and often thwart those expectations.

Post-Psycho, however, (or, perhaps more accurately, post-Halloween), with the birth of the slasher-flick, these practices of repetition and borrowing were taken to a whole new level by the purveyors of cheap frights, who constantly referenced their predecessors, often rather indiscriminately, to the point where Wes Craven parodied this predictability in the Scream trilogy, which was parodied in turn by the Scary Movie franchise. Stephen King is notorious for lifting set pieces wholesale from other works, and seems quite proud of the fact that 'Salem's Lot is, in places, a straight rewriting of Bram Stoker's Dracula, while evidently also owing a hefty debt to H.P. Lovecraft's descriptions of the semi-zombified, degenerate inhabitants of the stereotypical American small town. I would not like to imply that one should censure novels merely for being derivative or intertextual, since that would be to dismiss the Gothic completely. Equally, where secondary criticism is concerned, a concerted project of retrospection is only to be praised for its ability to rekindle interest in neglected texts and to generate new readings of more popular ones. It is simply that there is a point at which, as with the "boy-band" phenomenon, derivation and homage become repetition and mimicry, and when these strategies are deployed in service of Ameri-centric conservatism, we should perhaps begin to be afraid, be very afraid.

DARA DOWNEY

Stephen King, *Cell*
London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2006.

Cell's opening dedication to Richard Matheson and George Romero lays bare King's intentions for this return to horror territory. Matheson's novel *I Am Legend* (1954) and Romero's 'Dead' films, particularly *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), lurk in the background as thematic inspiration for what could ostensibly be called a zombie novel. This, of course, ignores the fact that Romero does not refer to the creatures of his films as zombies, whereas *I Am Legend* is explicitly about vampires, although Matheson places his vampires entirely within a rational science fiction mode. These contradictions are entirely appropriate, as here King creates a narrative familiar to fans of the 'zombie' sub-genre while re-inventing it to suit a specifically contemporary purpose.

Cell can be categorised as a technological thriller, raising more obvious comparisons with authors such as Michael Crichton than the horror movies it so frequently references. King, however, maintains his trademark focus on everyday people and how they react to each other and larger events, rather than attempting to provide any kind of authoritative explanation for what is happening. All we learn of the disaster that is central to the novel comes by way of speculation on the part of the characters. This is in some ways unsatisfying, but is appropriate to the fear *Cell* exploits - the fear that information technology, specifically the ubiquitous mobile phone, might be the downfall of civilisation rather than the bringer of a utopia based on communication. This downfall is triggered by a 'pulse' that hijacks mobile telephone networks, causing anyone who answers their phone or is already using one to become violently insane. The source of the pulse is unexplained (although telemarketers would seem to be an obvious culprit for the inspiration of insane rage). An act of terrorism is frequently suggested, but the possibility remains that this was merely an accident or the actions of nerds with too much time on their hands, in a similar way to computer viruses that spiral out of control. Yet terrorism, whether validated by the narrative or not, remains a powerful spectre and permeates the thematic concerns of the novel, including the tempting wordplay of 'Cell' in the title to refer to a diffuse terrorist unit.

The rather jaunty opening tone of the novel is more akin to an episode of *The Twilight Zone* than the King we are used to:

> At three o'clock on that day, a young man of no particular importance to history came walking – almost bouncing – east along Boylston Street in Boston. His name was Clayton Riddell. There was an expression of undoubted contentment on his face to go along with the spring in his step (King 3).

This light-hearted tone, which includes a rather unexpected reference to the Crazy Frog (surely another possible culprit for the insane rage), soon gives way to a *Grand Guignol* excess of chewed-open necks, spurting arteries, and disembowelled poodles. This makes a suitably shocking impact and sets the groundwork for several gripping chapters, as Clay and a ragtag group of

survivors attempt to escape from the chaos of the city and make some sense out of what is happening around them. Whether or not terrorists are responsible in the context of the narrative, the horrific images of 9/11 are echoed in a series of explosions, plumes of smoke blotting out the sky, and suicidal 'jumpers' plummeting to their deaths from tall buildings. One of the characters wrongly assumes that history is repeating itself: "The dirty bastards are using planes again" (King 19).

It is not so much terrorism itself that appears here, but the fear of its possibility and the resultant suspicion that permeates contemporary Western society. The initial mania displayed by the people that Clay terms the "phone-crazies" develops into a semblance of order amongst those affected as they restructure society in a new way. This is so striking that Clay is forced into taking something of a cultural relativist standpoint, and adopts the term "phoners" instead, marking their difference while refraining from making a value judgement. This is clearly inspired by the ending of Matheson's *I Am Legend*, where the central character realises that as the last non-vampiric human on earth, it is he who is abnormal. *I Am Legend*, written on the cusp of the Civil Rights movement, hints obliquely at its social concerns as the conspicuously Aryan hero, Robert Neville, is taken away by the vampires: "The dark men dragged his lifeless body from the house. Into the night. Into the world that was theirs and no longer his" (Matheson 153). Likewise, King's use of simile and metaphor in *Cell* occasionally has a certain political charge: "Directly ahead, thousands of phoners had gone to their knees like Muslims about to pray" (King 353). The potential crudity of such comparisons, however, are counterpoised nicely with satirical swipes at mainstream American culture including consumerism and gun control. Most interesting of all is the way in which it is Clay and the other survivors who resort to terrorist-like tactics, including martyrdom and car bombing.

Cell is a curious mix of the old and the new in that King harks back in style and tone to literary and filmic predecessors. Film is particularly relevant as his characters have a tendency to view everything that happens in relation to popular movies, including Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), and what seems to be the recent Spielberg version of *War of the Worlds* (2005). Fans of King's oeuvre will not be disappointed with the familiar archetypes; a thinly disguised young Stephen King as chief protagonist, a memorably creepy villain in the form of the Raggedy Man, and the mass of phone-crazies as the rampaging Freudian id. Less familiar are the overtly political allusions and a more pessimistic tone to the narrative as a whole, the two being perhaps related. The pacing undeniably drops off somewhat towards the end, but this does not prevent *Cell* from being King's most tightly constructed novel-length work for some time. Likewise, symbolic themes revolving around telepathy and prophetic dreams start to appear in the final third of the novel that are not resolved in a fully satisfying way, leading the reader to think that King had somewhere in mind a mythology of similar proportions to *The Stand* (1978) but does not fully develop it in favour of constructing a more instantly enjoyable thriller. Overall, there is a slightly jarring effect to *Cell's* competing directions but this does not manage to ruin what remains a compelling premise handled with flair and a tangible sense of macabre joy in the writing.

KEVIN CORSTORPHINE

Christopher Frayling, Mad, Bad and Dangerous? The Scientist and the Cinema
London: Reaktion Books, 2005.

Tony Earnshaw, Beating the Devil: The Making of 'Night of the Demon'
Bradford: National Museum of Film, Photography and Television, 2005.

From *Frankenstein* on down, mad science has played a distinguished role in the history of modern horror. This separation of scientific research and inquiry from any ethical concerns in disciplines as remote as vivisection and nuclear physics has produced a resonant stereotype of the scientist as both more and less than human – capable of playing God, yes, but also morally feeble and physically stunted. This is a stereotype which Christopher Frayling is keen to engage with and redress in his compelling and enormously knowledgeable book, *Mad, Bad and Dangerous?* The Scientist and the Cinema. As Frayling points out, this is a view of scientists and their work that stems from fear and ignorance, often perpetuated by those of us who work in the humanities, and who have virtually no grasp of scientific ideas and methods – as witnessed, for example, in the notorious 'Two Cultures' debate between C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis in the 1950s and 60s, where it was obvious that all Leavis knew about science was the he didn't like it. Having said that, while there certainly are suave, literate and cultured scientific writers (Stephen Jay Gould, Carl Sagan, Richard Dawkins), it has also to be said that scientists often don't present themselves to the public in the best light. As anyone who has ever watched *University Challenge* will know, you can always spot the science student: he (for it is usually a he) is the geeky one at the far right, with the pudding-basin hairstyle and the brown jumper, who has never had sex.

There are a number of important books on science in the cinema – most notably David J. Skal's Screams of Reason, Andrew Tudor's Monsters and Mad Scientists, and Kim Newman's Millennium Movies – and I'm pleased to say that, while it does overlap with these in certain places, Frayling's book mostly complements rather than reiterates them. Where Frayling really engages here is in his account of Hollywood biopics of real scientists, a difficult trick with what seems superficially dull raw material – 'Who wants to see the story of a milkman?' as Jack Warner said of The Story of Louis Pasteur; while Dr Ehrlich's Magic Bullet, in which Edward G. Robinson searched for a cure for syphilis, was accompanied by a poster which strongly recalled Robinson's celebrated gangster roles in Little Caesar or Key Largo. Where Victor (or Henry) Frankenstein was, for Hollywood, a European intellectual and thus abstractly theoretical, inhuman, perhaps evil, his positive American counterpart was Thomas Edison, folksy, practical, self-educated, benign – and thus played by a spunky Mickey Rooney in Young Tom Edison, or a solid, trustworthy Spencer Tracy in Edison, The Man, rather than the neurotic, sexually-ambiguous Colin Clive. Even Albert Einstein, the archetypal abstract European scientific intellectual, was given a Hollywood makeover, transformed into a wise, cuddly, twinkly-eyed humanist as played by Sam Jaffe or Walter Matthau. American cinema doesn't like its intellectuals to be too, well, intellectual – as Frayling mischievously points out, the first thing

that the Scarecrow does after being awarded his doctorate (of Thinkology!) in The Wizard of Oz, is get Pythagoras's Theorem wrong.

The problematics of all this – how to represent science positively to a mass audience who fear it - are brilliantly highlighted in what is for me the best part of the book, a lengthy and fascinating disquisition on the cinematic career of the former Nazi rocket scientist Wernher Von Braun, who, after the Second World War, went to work for the US government as a major figure in its developing space program – thus becoming, of course, one of the models for Dr Strangelove. Von Braun seems to have been untroubled by the politics of any regime he worked for, as long as they funded his research – Uncle Sam or Uncle Joe Stalin, it was all the same to him, he said after the collapse of the Nazi regime meant he needed new sponsors: 'All I wanted was a rich uncle.' Amazingly, one significant step in Von Braun's rehabilitation for an American public was his appearance alongside Walt Disney in the 1955 documentary Man in Space. Then he was given an almost-clean bill of health in his own biopic, I Aim at the Stars, where he was played by that great Hollywood 'good German', Curt Jurgens, a naturalized Austrian, who was imprisoned in a concentration camp during the War for his anti-Nazi beliefs. English audiences – who had been at the sharp end of Von Braun's research – were less charitable, with the film eliciting the famous review, 'I Aim at the Stars – But Sometimes I Hit London'.

As ever, Frayling here is a hugely companionable and good-humoured guide who wears his massive learning very lightly indeed. He also pops up, very welcome, as the writer of the Introduction to Tony Earnshaw's Beating the Devil: The Making of 'Night of the Demon', where he gives an account of M. R. James and of the British Library in the cinema, which neatly prefaces Earnshaw's study of the making of what is, for my money, the greatest of all British horror movies, Jacques Tourneur's 1957 adaptation of James's 'Casting the Runes'. Here, science is treated with maximum scepticism, little more than materialist dogma, as intransigently rationalist American psychologist Dana Andrews (boo!) is given a comprehensive lesson in metaphysics by Home Counties Satanist Niall MacGinnis (hooray!).

Earnshaw's book has considerable virtues, though it has to be said from the start that he's hardly a brilliant critic, and so his analysis of the film itself doesn't really tell us very much. Instead, what the book does is to provide information which, as a long-term admirer and student of Night of the Demon, has enriched my appreciation of it greatly. Firstly, there's the definitive account of the provenance of the demon itself – while the demon, based on a Ken Adam design, is certainly terrifying in close-up, it mostly looks like a puppet, and its inclusion in the film, at the insistence of producer Hal Chester and against the wishes of Tourneur, has always been controversial, with many commentators siding with Tourneur in believing that it ruins the film's air of subtle ambiguity, firmly nailing it instead to one, supernatural interpretation. True, perhaps, but as Earnshaw demonstrates, far from being a crude imposition by the money-men, the demon was there from the start, central to the conception of the film. There are other joys here, too. Censors' reports are reproduced, and characteristically, these are both hilarious and depressing: the censors, for example, were worried

about the film's 'weird music', and – in a film about Satanism! – concluded that 'The use of the word "hell" is unacceptable.' After reading Earnshaw, I also now know precisely those scenes which Dana Andrews played drunk – actually, that's all of his scenes, though there are some in which he is quite clearly smashed and slurring his words. This is not, I think, a book for the casual buyer, but any serious student of the British horror film will definitely want a copy.

DARRYL JONES

Chuck Palahniuk, Haunted
London: Vintage, 2006

The convention of the "large group of people in an isolated setting tell one another stories" is a venerable and deeply respected one. What is easily forgetten, however, is the manner in which, from Boccacio's Decameron, to Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron, it has always been little more than an excuse for bawdy - or, to put it more bluntly, for a mixture of maudlin sentimentality and cheerfully amoral indulgence in sex and violence. While Haunted, the latest offering from Chuck Palahniuk (he of Fight Club fame), might at first glance come across as a complete overhaul of this high-cultural tradition for the "gross-out" and reality-TV era, in this respect at least, it differs little from its antecedents.

The premise of the novel is that a group of would-be writers respond to an advertisement for a "Writers' Retreat", with absolutely no contact with the outside world, in an atmosphere ideally suited to creative output. Those who respond, somewhat inevitably, are all merely escaping from something - failed careers, past crimes (including several murders), bad relationships and the parole officer, events which inspire their faintly irritating nicknames, including Mother Nature, Chef Assassin, the Duke of Vandals, Saint Gut-Free and more in this general vein. With little real talent or even interest in writing, when they discover that the abandoned theatre in which the mysterious, wheelchair-bound Mr. Whittier has imprisoned them is far from five-star luxury, they seize the opportunity to make matters worse in the hope of making their fortune by selling the story of their abuse at his hands to the media. Thus, they set about destroying the cleaning appliances, ruining the freeze-dried food and chopping off their own extremities.

The most damning critique of any book is the inability or disinclination of a reader to bother finishing it, and more than one acquaintance of mine has given Haunted this accolade. It is the kind of book that has passed into legend already, and everybody has a story about it. A friend's brother announced that he felt "violated" by the time he finished reading it, and I have also been treated to a story of someone rather irrelevantly shouting "You're just an American cultural imperialist!" at Palahniuk himself during one of the author's many public readings of the story "Guts", the first tale of the novel/collection, and one which relates two stomach-churningly disastrous masturbation misadventures. In the Afterword, following the kind of surprise ending that I thought were reserved for M. Night Shyamalan's films, Palahniuk tells the reader, rather smugly, how at least one person faints every time he reads this story in public, and while he does mention several female fainters, anecdotal evidence (both my own and his) would suggest that it is predominantly men who are so overwhelmed by "Guts" that they simply black out, a statistic which has an interesting correlation in the gender dynamics of the book as a whole. While male characters are represented as reprehensible for what they do - their bad choices, inhumanity towards their fellow men (and women) and so on - the novel posits the female body itself as the ultimate locus of disgust. Over and over, we are treated to queasy descriptions of various parts of the female anatomy, but particularly to the way in which

women wear clothes and make-up, which apparently are supposed to make the reader shudder or gag. The following passage is a case in point,

> "Miranda" just sits there, his eyes tented under long, thick lashes. His eyes floating in blue-green pools of eyeliner. He tubes red lipstick onto his lipstick. He smears blusher on top of his blusher. Mascara on his mascara. His cropped blouse rides up on his chest. The pink silk of it seems to hang off the tanned ripples of his rib cage. His stomach showing, tight and tanned, it's a male stomach. He's a total sex-doll fantasy, the kind of woman only a man would become. (Palahniuk, 258)

This story, "Speaking Bitterness" - the tale of a women's support group who essentially gang rape another woman because she is so physically perfect they think that she must be a transsexual - is told by Comrade Snarky, who we are meant to dislike because, while the would-be writers are starving, she keeps announcing that this means that they are so thin that they could wear anything. She is later "punished" by the narrative by being cannibalised while still alive. Similarly, Miss America, who sees having lost weight as her life's achievement, discovers early on that she is pregnant, miscarries and is forced to eat her own baby turned into soup before dying messily herself (it's that kind of book). The first victim of the text, she has been set up for this fate by the combination of her physical fragility and victimisation at the hands of a culture which mercilessly objectifies women. On the one hand, the pressures on women to conform to an impossible standard of beauty seem to be vigorously condemned by Palahniuk's recurring anti-cosmetic rants. On the other, the way in which "Speaking Bitterness" figures a women's support group as sadistic rapists can be read as an attempt to suggest that Palahniuk's preference for fresh-faced, unalloyed, Edenic female purity is actually an opinion held by women themselves. By suggesting that women are far more militant, than men, when confronted with cosmetically constructed beauty, and react more violently, the book successfully exculpates itself by acting out its own fear and loathing, while transferring the blame onto the object of its repulsion.

As Laura Mulvey points out in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", the typical reaction within patriarchal discourse to the alleged threat posed by the presence of a female figure in a text is the "devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object," in an attempt to confine the woman within male structures of meaning, so that she exists only in relation to his actions towards her (1975). The Baroness Frostbite (who lost her lips after falling asleep in snow while trying to rescue a Bible-Bashing misogynist from a pool of boiling water, and now replaces them with make-up) conveniently functions to conflate the two, equally unsavoury, subject positions of victim and monster, since her mouth is described as "just a grease-shiny hole she screws open and shut to talk […] just a pink-lipstick pucker in the bottom half of her face," (Palahniuk, 23). As Suzanne E. Hatty points out, visible injury to the body renders that body abject and monstrous, and Palahniuk succeeds neatly in disfiguring his female characters through oblique acts of male violence and then implying that their deformity is an innate part of femininity and of feminine cosmetic practices (2000). He may find make-up icky, but he certainly isn't going to take responsibility for his phobia.

Above and beyond the gender politics, it is difficult to bring oneself to say that the book is an overall success. A major problem is that we are never told which of the characters the narrator is. At first, I expected some sort of revelation on this score, and, when none was forthcoming, I decided that the "we" of the narrative voice was a deliberate attempt to undermine novelistic conventions and centeredness. I was unable, however, to dispel my creeping suspicion that Palahniuk just forgot that he was doing it. That said, there is much to be praised. The "twist" is relatively surprising; the gross-out levels (if one is looking for that kind of thing) are spectacularly high; and the final story, "Obsolete", told by Mr Whittier, is a beautifully crafted little apocalyptic allegory that reminds one of the best of Ray Bradbury's science fiction, and the book very nearly ends on a high note. The effect is somewhat dissipated, however, by the Afterword, which renders all too clear Palahniuk's almost puerile delight at being able to make people faint in public. The perceptive commentary on the devastating effects of the media and the "fifteen-seconds-of-fame" culture on ordinary people becomes buried under a sense that he has simply put together as many things as he can think of to make his readers - and particularly his male readers - go "yuck". Beneath its aggressive postmodern sensibilities, and its commitment to stylistic playfulness and rebellion, lies an assumption that he is writing for a male audience, representing women in a manner that leaves the old dichotomies intact, betraying a conservativism that is as much disappointing as it is disturbing. Good work, but must try harder.

DARA DOWNEY

Bernice M. Murphy. ed. Shirley Jackson: Essays on the Literary Legacy
Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2005

From certain angles, the preoccupations of mid-twentieth century America could be seen as uncannily prescient of similar concerns in the America of today. The rhetoric of conformity and political correctness silenced open debate. A growing recognition of a military and industrial power elite made people feel that their individual votes were subsumed amid a powerless mass at the polls, at the same time that "democracy" and "freedom" were celebrated at home and defended on other continents. Enemies were dehumanised as "evil" and Americans accepted that a war against a hydra-headed enemy needed to last for an "indefinite" period into the future. Everyone feared weapons of mass destruction, and yet this fear was mixed with apathy. A sprawl of homogenised suburbs was touted as having everything but seemed to be lacking something. Many people felt they never had it so good; while unequal class, gender, and race relations left others literally dispossessed. And the world looked on, as Alan Valentine notes in his 1954 book The Age of Conformity, "alternately hopeful that American freedom [would] continue to flourish and expand, and fearful that their own cultures [would] become too like that of America," (Valentine, 1954).

These were the anxieties of the age that made writer, Shirley Jackson, feel that indeed something was askew in her world. This homologous relation to our own time makes studying how Jackson expressed her unease in an inimitable, ostensibly apolitical and downright wacky style particularly timely and a rich area for scholars and general readers alike to consider.

Bernice M. Murphy's newly assembled book of essays on Jackson compiles in one volume some of the best-known essays in Jackson scholarship along with some fresh perspectives from newer voices. This is the first time a multi-authored collection of Jackson criticism has ever been produced. Its principal focus is to widen the scope of Jackson scholarship taking in a field of work that encompasses more than just Jackson's two most famous works, "The Lottery" (1948), a “horrifying tale of conformity” and The Haunting of Hill House (1959), her novel about supernatural hauntings, madness, and being different. Murphy's book includes essays on Jackson's lesser known, though by no means inferior, novels, stories, and family chronicles; and demonstrates the extent to which both those familiar with and those new to her work recognise that there is clearly more that is culturally and aesthetically valuable in Jackson's oeuvre. The volume also contains an index of Jackson's complete works, along with their original publication dates, which is very useful to historicist scholars interested in observing how the author makes oblique references to the above-noted sources of 1950s malaise.

Many of the essays consider how Jackson manipulates Gothic forms in order to reflect some of these contemporary fears and anxieties. John Parks and Diane Long Hoeveler individually consider Jackson's use of Gothic codes. Joan Wylie Hall examines suburbia as a fallen Eden in The Road through the Wall (1948). Rich Pascal discusses The Sundial (1958) and the retreat toward the American miniature as emblematic of the post-war tendency to "think small and look inward". Marta

Caminero-Santangelo looks at post-war representations of female multiple personality in The Bird's Nest (1954). Murphy's own essay evaluates Jackson's work as cohering into a distinctive New England Gothic, one which reflects the author's own uneasy attitudes about the region and its inhabitants. Roberta Rubenstein, Tricia Lootens, Judie Newman and Lynette Carpenter approach Jackson's fiction from psychoanalytic and second-wave feminist standpoints. Dara Downey and Darryl Jones examine Jackson's influence on horror titan Stephen King, while Darryl Hattenhauer reconsiders the David Self 1999 film adaptation of Hill House produced by Stephen Spielberg. James Egan examines the way narrative modes as diverse as the comic, the satiric, the fantastic, and the Gothic are made to interact in Jackson's work. And S.T. Joshi looks at her domestic fiction to show how Jackson so adroitly straddles multiple genres forcing readers to question the appropriateness of genre boundaries, and recognising that a loose label of "weird" is about the broadest and best epithet for a writer like Jackson.

But Shirley Jackson resisted labels, either in a genuine effort to maintain her privacy and artistic integrity, or in the service of a clever manipulation of her persona, which she, her husband and her publisher astutely marketed - she was a mother, a housewife, a witch and a writer. She wrote challenging novels and stories for highbrow literary journals as well as material for her children's school plays, a book on witchcraft and prolific contributions to popular women's magazines, which enabled her to act as breadwinner for her family.

Was Jackson a feminist? It's hard to say. Betty Friedan devotes part of a chapter in The Feminine Mystique (1963) to explaining how Jackson's work quite frankly offends in its popularising of traditional gender roles. However, as Murphy's introduction and the contributions of the volume's four feminist critics discuss, Jackson did focus on female anxieties and the reappropriation of female power, and so, she would seem ripe for feminist scholars looking to rediscover marginialised writers with a subversive message. But Jackson never prided herself on being tidy. According to one of her biographers, Judy Oppenheimer, Jackson's later works clearly demonstrate that she was no feminist: "She had no interest in other women's problems ... [Jackson] had a definite disdain for the sort of young mother who would read her work in Good Housekeeping or Woman's Home Companion and think she had found a soulmate ..."; she "did not need a political movement to tell her that women were capable of exercising power," (Oppenheimer, 1988).

Murphy explains that one of the reasons why Jackson's work has been ignored by critics for so long is precisely because Jackson is so difficult to categorise - she appealed to both literary and popular audiences and apparently was simultaneously both proto- and anti-feminist. Thus, it is likely that the academic neglect of her work arose from the fact that, for critics looking to write smooth narratives of literary history, she was an awkward figure to assimilate. Another reason for the lack of critical attention is the perception that Jackson was somehow a minor writer. From the point of view of Jackson's other biographer, Lenemaja Friedman, this is an accurate assessment, since, in her opinion, Jackson does not "deal directly with the essential problems of love, death, war, disease poverty and insanity in its most ugly aspects," (Friedman, 1975).

Future critics may decide that these perceived weaknesses in Jackson actually combine to produce the author's creative method. As Jackson is re-evaluated from historicist and post-feminist points of view, readers may begin to appreciate that her many stories about the possibility of evil within the everyday (and especially inside the houses, lives and minds of one's next-door neighbours) may actually offer clues that the uncanny or weird aspects in Jackson's writing were used by her, as she says herself, as a "convenient shorthand" for describing all that she regarded as disturbing in the world (Oppenheimer, 1988).

We'll never know the definitive answer to the question that Murphy and others feel compelled to ask - who was Shirley Jackson? - but Jackson's tendency to only ever present the reader with certain, limited perspectives is perhaps one of the pleasures of reading this author. Reading this volume of essays, as a companion to Jackson's complete works, will help readers to decide for themselves.

ANN L. PATTEN

Bernd Herzogenrath, ed. The Films of Tod Browning
London, Black Dog Publishing Limited

The director Curtis Harrington, a close friend of the late James Whale, director of Frankenstein, once told me how he and a friend journeyed out to the Malibu colony in the 1950s to knock on the door of Whale's Hollywood horror rival Tod Browning and see what they could learn about this singularly reclusive director and his legendary work with Lon Chaney and Bela Lugosi, and most especially his notorious masterpiece Freaks. But, like a pair of apprehensive visitors approaching Castle Dracula, they lost their nerve at the last moment, and a unique opportunity was lost.

A comprehensive critical casebook on the enigmatic director once called "The Edgar Allan Poe of the cinema" has been long overdue. While The Films of Tod Browning does an admirably ambitious job in presenting a variety of critical perspectives on Browning, the man himself remains elusive. Like Bram Stoker, whose Dracula formed the basis of his most famous film, Browning never gave a career retrospective interview, or kept journals or notes about his artistic intentions. And, like Stoker, Browning has been a lightning rod for all manner of theoretical interpretations.

As co-author (with Elias Savada) of the Browning biography Dark Carnival, I cannot claim to be entirely objective in my appraisals of the essays in The Films of Tod Browning, but even when I disagreed with certain conclusions I had to admire the intelligence with which the writers argued their points, deftly avoiding the typical smoke-and-screen pitfalls of academic jargon.

The handsomely printed volume includes twelve essays, plus Bernd Herzogenrath's introduction. The contents are divided into two sections. The first, "Themes, Topics, Approaches" opens with Vivian Sobchack's "The Films of Tod Browning: An Overview Long Past." Originally written in 1974, the piece provides a basic survey of Browning's career, his thematic preoccupations, with an special on his "crook films" of the 1920s (Browning in many ways established the conventions of the gangster picture). Sobchack's essay also quotes contemporaneous reviews of Browning's films, giving a useful historical perspective. Modern film criticism too often views cinematic history through the anachronistic point of view of current politics and prejudices. Browning's work is almost always firmly grounded in the zeitgeist of its own period, even though it often has uncanny resonances with our own.

Boris Henry's "Tod Browning and the Slapstick Genre" examines the influence upon Browning's work by vaudeville and burlesque, two fields he worked in extensively as a young man. There is a fine line between humor and cruelty in slapstick, as well as throughout the Browning canon, not unlike the violent uproariousness of a traditional Punch and Judy show. Indeed, in films like The Unknown (arguably Browning's best film) the director often treats his protagonists like battered meat puppets, to which the audience responsed with a stifled scream barely covered by a mordant laugh. The denouement of The Unknown is both a sick joke and probably the most emotionally devastating variation on an O. Henry "twist" ending in the history of cinema, in which a fake carnival amputee

(Chaney) blackmails a doctor into actually cutting off his arms to please an arm-phobic Joan Crawford, who apparently has been manhandled a few times too many in the past. But once his arms are gone, Crawford shakes off her phobia and falls happily into the arms of the carnival strong man. And, of course, sends the mutilated Chaney right over the edge into wild retributive fantasies worthy of the best Jacobean revenge melodramas.

Matthew Solomon's "Staging Deception: Theatrical Illusionism in Browning's Films of the 1920s" explores the relationship between Browning's narratives of stage magic..."The Spectator's Spectacle: Tod Browning's Theatre" by Stefanie Diekmann and Ekkehard Knorer links his work to the Theatre du Grand Guignol of Paris. Browning spent a great deal of time in Europe, and like his many Hollywood horror compatriots, was fully aware of Monmartre's world-famous "theatre des horreurs" and its cinematic possibilities.

"Double Identity: Presence and Absence in the Films of Tod Browning" by Alec Charles tries a bit too hard to imply directorial intention into Browning's often sloppy continuity gaffes. They may be subliminally disturbing and disorienting… but intentional? The jury is still out, and may well not be back anytime soon. But Charles' analysis of the constant reassertion of traditional patriarchism in Browning's films is well-considered indeed.

Translated from the French, Nicole Brenez's "Body Dreams: Lon Chaney and Tod Browning -- Thesaurus Anatomicus" is probably the subject of a full-length book or documentary.

The book's second section, "Films," begins with a particularly fascinating essay by Robin Blyn, "Between Silence and Sound: Ventriloquism and the Advent of the Voice in The Unholy Three" Like Chaney, the whole silent film industry during the cusp of sound wrestled with the representation of voice. A truly original essay vis a vis Browning and Chaney.

Stefan Brandt's "White Bo(d)y in Wonderland: Cultural Alterity and Sexual Desire in Where East is East" is probably the best essay every published on this particular film.

"Speaking with Eyes: Tod Browning's Dracula and its Phantom Camera" by Elisabeth Bronfen spends too much time rehashing plot details of a famous but tedious film. Her stimulating insights into the technical aspects of Browning therefore seem a bit buried, but are well worth excavating.

Leger Grindon provides a detailed analysis of Browning's rarely seen and even more rarely discussed Iron Man, the boxing picture starring Lew Ayres and Jean Harlow that was Browning's final film for Universal. (Universal wasn't happy with him; his original five picture contract was truncated to three). Editor Herzogenrath's "The Monstrous Body/Politic of Freaks" takes a particularly intelligent Lacanian approach to Freaks.

The final essay "Mark of the Vampire" by Matthew Sweney oddly makes no connections between Mark and Browning's London After Midnight, of which it was a quasi-remake.

The book concludes with a section of fourteen full-color, full-page plates of posters from Browning films, several of which this reviewer has never seen before, and a checklist of Browning's film work as actor, screenwriter and director from 1909 through 1939.

Since Browning's personal life clearly influenced his work, the book could have benefited from a basic biographical essay. The drunken traffic accident in 1915 that killed one of his passengers and nearly crippled Browning certainly fueled his every-growing obsession with physical incapacity (Sobchack mentions the incident only in passing). And no one has yet written an in-depth essay examining the relationship between Browning's chronic, debilitating alcoholism and the dark themes of his films.

There is one extremely odd editorial omission. None of the contributors (not even the editor) receive even the briefest biographical note.

But all in all, The Films of Tod Browning is a major contribution in the quest for one of the most elusive and fascinating personalities in Hollywood history.

DAVID J. SKAL

FILM REVIEWS

Year of the Remake: The Omen 666 and The Wicker Man

Jenny McDonnell

The current trend for remakes of 1970s horror movies continued throughout 2006, with the release on 6 June of John Moore's The Omen 666 (a scene-for-scene reconstruction of Richard Donner's 1976 The Omen) and the release on 1 September of Neil LaBute's The Wicker Man (a re-imagining of Robin Hardy's 1973 film of the same name). In addition, audiences were treated to remakes of The Hills Have Eyes, Black Christmas (due Christmas 2006) and When a Stranger Calls (a film that had previously been 'remade' as the opening sequence of Scream). Finally, there was Pulse, a remake of the Japanese film Kairo, and another addition to the body of remakes of non-English language horror films such as The Ring, The Grudge and Dark Water. Unsurprisingly, this slew of remakes has raised eyebrows and questions alike about Hollywood's apparent inability to produce innovative material. As the remakes have mounted in recent years, from Planet of the Apes to King Kong, the cries have grown ever louder: Hollywood, it would appear, has run out of fresh ideas and has contributed to its ever-growing bank balance by quarrying the classics.

Amid these accusations of Hollywood's imaginative and moral bankruptcy to commercial ends in tampering with the films on which generations of cinephiles have been reared, it can prove difficult to keep a level head when viewing films like The Omen 666 and The Wicker Man. Their originals have become deified and venerated since they first appeared: the release of the two remakes in 2006 has led to public outpourings of dismay and anger from horror aficionados who regard the originals as untouchable cultural artefacts. As a popular medium, though, film has always been reliant upon adaptation, and the embryonic years of cinema produced numerous literary adaptations and remakes; likewise, horror cinema has always thrived on such adaptation, from Nosferatu to the Universal classics produced from the 1920s to the 1940s. As the medium has grown in status and stature in the course of the twentieth century, it has produced countless cinematic texts: and it is logical that filmmakers should consistently turn to this vast body of work (as well as to other forms) to provide inspiration for new versions of old stories. With a little originality of vision, adaptation within the medium of film has proven successful time and again: Seven Samurai was successfully transported to the American West for The Magnificent Seven; Rob Reiner updated It Happened One Night for the 1980s and gave us The Sure Thing; and had Howard Hawks not adapted the stage-play The Front Page (which had previously been filmed in 1931) and changed the gender of one of its lead characters, cinema would have been denied His Girl Friday, and with it the sublime, fast-talking screwball pairing of Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell. In theory, then, remakes need not be heinous crimes against cinema; in practice, though, inspiration and originality of vision are not always evident in remakes, and for every His Girl Friday, there's a Switching Channels.

When it comes to recent horror movie remakes in particular, the films produced have tended to be inept or glossy rehashes of older films (The Fog, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre). Moreover, they have further contributed to the perception of horror as a genre that is often derivative, formulaic and sequel-driven (of which the recent direct-to-DVD appearance of I'll Always Know What You Did Last Summer is a timely reminder). 2006 has also brought its fair share of sequels in this vein: Underworld: Evolution, Final Destination 3, Scary Movie 4, and Adrift (a film that was not an official sequel to Open Water, but which has been sold in many territories as Open Water 2 because of its obvious similarities); still to come this year are the forthcoming Saw III, The Grudge 2 (the sequel to the remake of the Japanese original, which itself spawned an inferior sequel), and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning (a prequel to the remake of the original). Horror sequels have rarely surpassed their originals but have often attempted to replicate their successes by sticking closely to the blueprint of a tried-and-tested-formula (witness, for example, the law of diminishing returns in the Nightmare on Elm Street or Friday the 13th series); horror movie remakes are now emerging as a natural offshoot of this process. More than any other genre horror has not lent itself to the remake treatment with any real success: fundamentally, it's hard to scare the living daylights out of people with a film that they've already seen in another incarnation. Yet the trend continues unabated, and next year audiences can look forward to remakes and re-imaginings of the likes of Halloween (by Rob Zombie) Day of the Dead, The Hitcher and The Omega Man (as I Am Legend, the title of the Richard Matheson novel on which it is based), and there's also the persistent rumour about an imminent remake of The Birds.

Within horror there have been instances of remakes which have gained formidable reputations of their own: John Carpenter's The Thing, Don Siegel's Invasion of the Body Snatchers and David Cronenberg's The Fly, for example, all proved iconic updatings of 1950s B-movies: the latter two are being given the movie remake treatment again and are due for release in 2007 (Oliver Hirschbiegel's The Visiting and Todd Lincoln's The Fly), but the long-proposed sequel to The Thing has as yet failed to materialise (except in the form of a video game). While it is apparent that not all remakes can achieve the status as Carpenter's definitive ice-bound classic, they needn't all be hailed as pointless an exercise as Gus van Sant's notorious updating of Hitchcock's Psycho in 1998, which famously only succeeded in transforming Norman Bates into Master Bates in glorious Technicolor. Similar projects in other genres have proven more palatable to audiences and critics alike: Todd Haynes, for example, meticulously recreated the world of Douglas Sirk's melodramas and garnered rave reviews and awards a-plenty with Far From Heaven (a technically brilliant exercise in film-imitation, but its sumptuous reconstruction of Sirk's style was not accompanied by the corresponding substance: the emotional heart that characterised his work). Van Sant's Psycho was fundamentally hampered by the fact that it seemed an exercise in futile imitation, a re-enactment of a classic thriller which pivots on a now well-known but originally ground-breaking and unsettling double-whammy of twists: Janet Leigh's untimely demise in the shower and the climactic unveiling of Mother. Iconic endings will always pose a problem for directors of remakes, as Tim Burton gamely proved with the incomprehensible twist in his re-imagining of Planet of the Apes that fails to

challenge the original's legendary closing scene. It's not just the endings that are tricky, though, and the director that takes on an iconic horror film will always have his or her work cut out for them if they're pitching their work to a genre-savvy audience. This is true whether they deliver a scene-for-scene remake such as The Omen 666 or a 're-imagining' such as The Wicker Man: stick too close to the blueprint and run the risk of an exercise in carbon-copying; but tamper with things too much and face the wrath of outraged film enthusiasts.

Both The Omen and The Wicker Man are iconic 1970s horror films with famously downbeat endings and thirty years of nostalgic nightmares behind them. Obviously, an informed audience will know as much when viewing the remakes, but this prior knowledge is further heightened by the general cine-literacy of contemporary horror audiences, who are notoriously aware of the 'rules' of their chosen genre, as has been evident in the move towards post-modern self-awareness in the likes of Scream and Final Destination. Generic rules have now been unpicked within the genre and parodied in the unnecessary and unfunny Scary Movie series. The informed audience for the horror remake, then, is one that is doubly invested with a sense of authority that undermines the fundamental element of surprise on which storytelling relies. At the same time, the authority of the filmmaker is destabilised when telling a story that is familiar and which may have lost its power to effect an audience on the primal level on which horror should function. The best horror films are frightening on a first viewing, and unsettling experiences thereafter (The Exorcist, 1973); the very best prove frightening on every single viewing (The Texas Chain Saw Massacre, 1974). But there's a cosy familiarity about horror remakes, which counteracts all of horror's main impulses to terrify its audience, and it's an obstacle over which the recent remake of The Omen inevitably stumbles.

In truth, part of the problem lies in the iconic status of The Omen itself, which is such a pervasive presence in the history of horror's move towards box-office credibility and acceptance at the end of the 1970s that is all-but impossible to re-view it with anything close to fresh eyes. There's a hazy, nostalgic glow around The Omen, and in a sense, it has become too iconic, elevated to greatness when compared to its own inferior sequels and the numerous devil-child films that emerged in its wake (for example, Children of the Corn, Godsend). In hindsight, it actually adds up to less than the sum of its parts (Gregory Peck, Jerry Goldsmith's score, those death-scenes), and the main problem with the remake is that it has attempted to replicate those parts exactly without really trying to make them add up to something more.

On the face of it, The Omen 666 remake looks like the worst kind of cash-cow filmmaking, a scene-for-scene remake, released on 6/6/06, taking opportunistic advantage of the commercial potential for a demonically-themed horror movie released on the once-in-a-century number-of-the-beast-tinged date. The gimmick apparently worked: the film did respectably at the box office, and when I tried to see it on opening night, two different cinemas were sold out (forcing me to see another remake, Poseidon, instead). But the gimmick had been used before, also with some success: the UK release of the original Omen was on 6/6/76, as close to the number-of-the-beast as the 1970s would allow. The Omen franchise has always had a commercial eye on its audience, and

even on its initial release, it seemed a little familiar, with a hint of Rosemary's Baby and The Exorcist about it: the 'derivative' tag that haunts so many contemporary films is equally applicable to this, a film that really paved the way for the commercial success of horror throughout the late 1970s and into the early 1980s. Its 2006 incarnation merely capitalises on this commercial savvy for a new generation, and even flaunts its derivative nature by casting Mia Farrow as Mrs Baylock in a nod, not to the original, but to Rosemary's Baby, a film that the original was accused of 'ripping off'. It's a witty gesture in what is otherwise standard remake fare that makes everything bigger and bolder with louder explosions and more elaborate deaths.

It's perhaps unsurprising, since David Seltzer is credited as screenwriter on both the 1976 and 2006 Omens, that the plot is an exact photocopy of the original: Robert Thorn (Liev Schreiber), U.S. ambassador to Italy at the beginning of the film, chooses not to tell his wife Katherine (Julia Stiles) that their first child died at birth, instead opting to pass off an orphaned infant as their own progeny. Damian (Seamus Davey-Fitzpatrick), of course, turns out to be the spawn of Satan; his nanny, the priest who tries to warn Thorn that his son bears the number of the beast, and Jennings, the photographer who gets caught up in matters, all meet satisfyingly nasty ends; and, after the untimely death of Katherine Thorn, the film climaxes with the equally untimely death of Robert Thorn, who fails to kill young Damian, thus leaving him free to pursue his true father's work, as well as giving Hollywood an excuse to tackle (and hopefully improve) the sequels in which Damian paves a path to the White House. There is little new in the film, save some minor modifications to the details of some scenes, and the introduction of some dream sequences. These are effective for a few jumps, but are all-too-brief to really build to anything more than some MTV-style editing. The film is quite stylishly produced, and some imagery is memorable: in particular the starkness of the snow-bound trip across Italy undertaken by Robert Thorn and Jennings in pursuit of some answers, and the recurrent use of blood red imagery on white backgrounds that subtly anticipates the impending trauma of the film's climactic battle. But these are the only subtle touches in a film that is elsewhere heavy-handed and obvious in its execution.

It's in the death scenes that the film seems to feel it must push some boundaries, and it ups the ante for the demise of David Thewlis's Jennings (a more elaborate decapitation than David Warner's) and Pete Postlethwaite's Father Brennan who is skewered by a church steeple in the same way, but ends up resembling Darth Maul in his long black robes and with shards of glass sticking out of his head. These beefed-up sequences probably do play well to a contemporary audience reared on the imaginative demises of the Final Destination series, but the decision to tamper with the death of Katherine Thorn is indicative of the overwhelming lack of subtlety on display throughout the film. The original worked on the power of suggestion, and Lee Remick's tumble from her hospital window was motivated as much by her own growing paranoia as any palpable threat from Mrs Baylock. In contrast, Julia Stiles' character is disposed of in her hospital bed – this time by Mrs Baylock, who proves very handy with a syringe. There is no room for ambiguity in this Omen: from the opening montage of recent events that suggest the eve of Armageddon (9/11, the Asian Tsunami, the Columbia space shuttle disaster) to the closing shot of a George W. Bush look-alike clutching the

orphaned Damian's hand, the film displays a singular lack of subtlety in justifying its own existence and asserting its contemporary relevance. It displays a corresponding lack of originality, and it remains difficult to appraise the film on its own terms: quite simply, it has been seen before, one too many times.

Neil LaBute's The Wicker Man is a different beast altogether, a re-imagining that just about retains enough of the outline of its original text to justify its claim to the title. The original Wicker Man was a low-budget British chiller, a cult classic with much in common with the independent ideals of 1970s American horror filmmakers such as George A. Romero and Tobe Hooper. Its reputation has primarily rested on that ending, as it explodes into horror after a slow-burning eighty minutes or so (depending on the cut) when Edward Woodward's Sergeant Howie fulfils his appointment with the wicker man. Hardy's film revolved around the clash between Howie's repression and the sexual liberation of the inhabitants of Summerisle, and climaxed with the ultimate clash between Christian and pagan virtues, with the virginal Christian police officer burnt as a May Day sacrifice by the pagan islanders so that their apple crops might recover from the previous year's disastrous harvest. The film's power rests in the manner in which Howie's ideals are ultimately used against him to valorise the ideals of his pagan adversaries, and his sacrifice makes for a shocking closing reel. However, there is no such power on display in LaBute's updating and relocation of The Wicker Man to the present day in the Pacific Northwest.

LaBute's film notoriously rejects the original's clash between Christian and pagan ideals, a rejection that is made clear from the very first scene, in which Nicolas Cage's traffic cop peruses the self-help section of a bookstall. Instead, LaBute invokes his favoured topic of the battle of the sexes, but his outmoded gender clashes manage to make the film feel more dated even that Hardy's folky 1970s version: even the sight of Britt Ekland's naked body-double slapping herself while crooning a creepy folk tune was preferable to the offensive and misogynistic gender politics which abound in LaBute's film. His Wicker Man is entirely predicated on a dystopian vision of the oppression of men ('drones') by empowered, witch-like women (led by queen bee Sister Summersisle, played by Ellen Burstyn). The suggestively named Edward Malus (combining the male and phallus that Molly Parker's schoolmistress educates her charges to mistrust) is a doomed man before he even sets foot on Summersisle. Malus is a 'troubled' man, having failed to rescue a mother and child from a burning car in the film's opening sequence, and is lured to Summersisle by his former fiancée, Willow, to seek her missing child, Rowan (later revealed to be his own daughter). But whereas Hardy's islanders were merely eccentric to begin with (and really remain so up until the point at which they burn Howie as a sacrifice), LaBute's islanders are obvious weirdos from the first moment Malus encounters a group of silent men carrying a suspiciously dripping bag and strange women who speak in stilted constructions and refer to one another as 'Sisters'. Every woman in this film seems to be part of a convoluted plot to lead Malus to his appointment with the wicker man, and the film grows to a crescendo of distasteful violence against women, as Malus punches and karate-kicks his way through a selection of these 'Sisters' (to a cinematic swell in Angelo Badalamenti's score) and tries to save his recently-acquired daughter. After some ludicrous, and hilarious, off-screen torture,

punctuated by ridiculous expository dialogue, finally he's strung up in the wicker man, eloquent to the last ('You bitches! Killing me won't bring your goddamned honey back!'), his young daughter lights the flame that will kill him, and the wicker man burns. As the screen fades to black, and the giggles subside, the unthinkable happens: a caption appears onscreen, reading 'Six Months Later', and the incredulous audience is treated to a coda in which another hapless police officer is seduced by an islander. We can only hope to be spared the inevitable sequel if LaBute's film turns out to be the resounding critical and commercial failure it looks set to become.

The problem with The Wicker Man is not just that it's a bad remake of a classic chiller with bludgeoned nods to its original (Cage's character is called Edward, and Willow's surname is Woodward), which elicits giggles where the original unsettled. It's also a film that quarries other classic horror sources, so it looks like a hodgepodge of any number of better films: in Rowan's red cardigan and Malus' watery pursuit of nightmarish visions of her, as well as the blind twin sisters who prophesy the coming of the wicker man, it visually references Don't Look Now (the upper half of the double bill with which the original Wicker Man was released); and in his frenzied search of Sister Summersisle's house, the film borrows heavily from The Shining. But it's also reminiscent of less memorable films: in particular, its reclusive female colony smacks of M. Night Shyamalan's tiresome post-9/11 allegory The Village. But even taken on its own terms, LaBute's film is a convoluted mess, with badly-written dialogue and ludicrous plotting to get Malus to the island, and a central turn by Cage that is all teeth and wild hair, one of the worst cases of over-acting in an actor who is terminally prone to do so. But read in relation to its obvious influences, The Wicker Man almost feels like four bad remakes: they add up to one farcical folly.

Ultimately, both The Omen 666 and The Wicker Man are mainstream horror films that sit at either end of the remake spectrum, but whereas The Wicker Man has been categorically and soundly denounced by fans and critics alike, The Omen 666 has received mixed reviews overall.

The most obvious reason for such different receptions is that, even taken on its own terms, The Wicker Man is an absolute mess, whereas The Omen 666 sticks very close to the blueprint of a solid film (and manages the occasional jump of its own), with the result that it too delivers an average, if unimaginative, film. But there's another reason for the overall indifference to a remake of The Omen and the overall indignation at a remake of The Wicker Man, and this lies in the nature of the original texts themselves. The 1976 version of The Omen was a slick Hollywood production that built on the success of The Exorcist and continued to pave the way for horror's emergence as a respectable genre with Oscar potential (finally endorsed in 1992 when Silence of the Lambs scored victories in the five major Oscar categories); The Omen 666 replicates these credentials, with a bigger budget and an appropriately commercial director in John Moore (whose previous film was the 2004 remake of Flight of the Phoenix). On the other hand, The Wicker Man has come to be seen as a counter-cultural classic produced outside the studio system, and a key example of horror at its subversive best. The remake apparently comes equipped with independent credibility of its own in the shape of Neil LaBute, but this independent spirit has delivered a film that is staggeringly

ham-fisted and derivative. The issue, then, is not that The Wicker Man dares to re-imagine its source material for a new generation, but that it delivers an end product that counteracts the subversive and counter-cultural ideals for which its original has come to stand. In the end, it is a disheartening prospect, but The Omen 666 – a safe remake of a solid film – is the lesser of two evils.

Jenny McDonnell

Three… Extremes (Dir: Fruit Chan, Takeshi Miike, Chan-Wook Park)
Tartan Asia Extreme (18), Out Now

Let's face it, with the notable exception of the classic Dead of Night, cinematic horror anthologies are generally less than brilliant. Anyone who has sat through creaky ensemble pieces such as Asylum, Creepshow, Cat's Eye, Demon Knights, and Body Bags will know how these things usually go: with any luck, there will be one adequate entry, but the rest are almost always guaranteed to be inferior instalments characterised by ropey acting and predictable twists. Even Dead of Night had a rather twee middle segment about a haunted golf course. In other words, whilst literary horror is often at its finest in short story form, filmic horror has rarely been at its best when confined to a reduced running time.

However, when the anthology in question features work by three of Asian horror's most interesting talents, the prospect is intriguing. At a time when mainstream Western horror films have all but run aground in a sea of their own mediocrity, and the blazing talents of the 70s horror boom have, with the notable exception of George A. Romero, lapsed into relative obscurity, discerning horror fans have learned in recent years that they should look further afield if they want to see genuinely interesting, innovative work within the genre. The recent DVD release of Three… Extremes – featuring short works by Hong-Kong based Fruit Chan; Japanese provocateur Miike Takeshi (of Audition and Gozu notoriety); and Korean hyper-kinetic stylist Park Chan-Wook (Old Boy, Lady Vengeance) - again suggests that western film makers would do well to try and inject some of the energy, extra-morbid black comedy and sheer stylistic verve on display here into their own efforts, even if the offerings on display here are at times somewhat uneven.

Hideo Nakata's Ringu famously alerted the west to the fact that horror films could still actually scare people, and that film's unprecedented success (as well as the speed at which an inferior, but generally well-received American remake was produced) meant that it was suddenly much easier to get a hold of Asian films in Europe thanks to distributors such as Tartan and Optimum Asia. The boom has produced many excellent movies (A Tale of Two Sisters, Lady Vengeance); some interesting, but flawed (The Grudge, Hypnosis, Audition); a few very dull ones (Pulse, Uzumaki); and the occasional movie that is downright offensive (Freezer, Visitor Q), as well as having an important impact upon western filmakers. Note to Eli Roth: buckets of gore, vomit and self-righteous xenophobia do not a westernised Japanese horror film make, even if you have somehow convinced Miike to make a cameo appearance. Three… Extremes, which is clearly being targeted at those who prefer their horror gory rather than ghostly, falls into the interesting-but-flawed category, but should still be required viewing for anyone remotely interested in Asian horror and cinema.

The anthology opens with Fruit Chan's satirical, stomach-churning offering Dumplings, which is probably the best of the lot. The premise is this: beautiful Aunt Mei (Bai Ling), who claims to be considerably older than her looks suggest, makes a living providing special dumplings to rich Hong-Kong women desperate to preserve their youth. One such customer is Ching, a frustrated

former actress who believes that by halting the aging process she will be able to save her troubled marriage. It is soon revealed that the secret ingredient of Mei's dumplings is actually foetal tissue. It's provocative conflation of feminine vanity and the unborn means that the film has much in common with F. Paul Wilson's Manhattan-set short story "Foet", in which rich young women find themselves jealously coveting expensive hand-bags stitched together from foetus hides. Understandably revolted when she discovers what she's been scoffing, the vain, self-absorbed Ching nevertheless soon becomes a frequent consumer of these tasty treats, even as she finds out more about where Mei gets them from. Not only does she surreptitiously procure flasks of foetuses from the local hospital, but she also performs the occasional late-term abortion herself (in a particularly gruesome aside, it is revealed that the older the foetus, the more powerful its effects).

One such operation, carried out on a pregnant schoolgirl, is graphically depicted, and the scene allows Chan to make a sly reference to the nature of the relationship between Hong Kong and mainstream China. The witchlike, ageless Aunt Mei hails from the old world, and is here associated with folk medicine and magic: she also seems to take great pleasure in having so much power over the fashion conscious, westernised and intensely materialistic local women who flock to her door. "They never get rid of boys in China", she notes, in an aside which obviously refers to her native land's famously restrictive one-child family policy. Cut down from a full length film, Dumplings proceeds briskly to a suitably disturbing final shot, in which Ching, having been deprived of Mei's recipe, decides to make some dumplings of her own. Not for all tastes, it's nevertheless an uncompromising and at times darkly comic tale of vanity and greed, although at times the narrative does seem rather choppy, a reminder of the fact that it was originally a much longer piece.

The second segment, Cut, directed by Park Chan-Wook, also rests upon an intriguing premise, and has some fascinating visuals, but ultimately fails to work as well as it could have. The protagonist is a nice-guy horror film director whose apparently perfect life is violently disrupted when a disgruntled extra decides to put his mild-mannered demeanour to the test. He faces a terrible dilemma: he must strangle a small child conveniently trussed up on the sofa or watch as his pianist wife loses a finger every five minutes. The film utilises many of the elements which helped make Park's Vengeance trilogy a hit, such as scenes of bloody violence, a frenetic, inventive visual style, black humour and, above all, a preoccupation with revenge and the outrageous extremes people can go to when all that they hold precious is threatened. Park even finds time to throw in some obviously self-referential meditations on the effects of sudden fame. Needless to say, it all concludes with some tense last-minute twists, and a satisfyingly ironic fate for the psychopath who has engineered the whole grisly scenario. The final minutes also offers a rather baffling scene in which the director conclusively proves that he isn't a nice guy anymore. Despite the intriguing film-within-a-film opening, a satisfyingly bleak cruel streak and some impressive visual flourishes, ultimately there is rather more style than substance on display here.

However convoluted the closing moments of Cut are, they still make more sense than Miike's Box, the impressionistic, often hauntingly atmospheric but ultimately too bizarre to take seriously tale of a

young novelist tormented by visions of her dead (twin) sister. Much of the film takes place in silence, and it jumps without warning from (seeming) reality to fantasy throughout.The central image here is that of a young girl painfully contorting her freakishly flexible limbs in order to fit inside a box: it seems that the sisters were once contortionists in a circus, until one of them died in a horrific accident. Those who have seen Miike's most famous film, Audition, will recognise many of the preoccupations on display here: sexual abuse, incest, female entrapment and disfigurement. Thankfully, he doesn't have time to insert any vomit-eating scenes. It's all beautifully put together, and does deliver some delicate chills, but the denouement lets it down somewhat. Audiences will be most likely be torn between thinking, "Ok, that kind of makes sense" or, more likely, "What the hell?!", for the segment concludes with a fairly ridiculous attempt to make psychological sense of what is actually quite a confusing story. I'm not sure Miike knows what he was up to here either. Ultimately, though occasionally uneven, Three… Extremes is still well worth watching, and while there is a lot of gore, it is generally used rather more intelligently than in pretentious American torture-porn like Hostel. To sum up: recommended. The DVD also comes with knowledgeable film notes and a behind-the-scenes documentary.

Bernice M. MurphyBlood For Dracula (Dir. Paul Morrissey)
Tartan Video (18) Out Now

Over thirty years after its original release, Blood For Dracula has been repackaged and is now available on DVD for the first time. The film is now visually clean and crisp, and we may appreciate the particular colour effects and set design. Paul Morrissey's Blood For Dracula is the second instalment of his 'Costume Trilogy', comprising Flesh For Frankenstein (1973) and Beethoven's Nephew (1985). However, there are some questions over directorial credits to Flesh for Frankenstein, and there is substantial evidence to suggest that Italian director, Antonio Margheriti, may have co-directed the film. While Flesh For Frankenstein (also starring Udo Kier and Joe Dalessandro) is deliberately melodramatic and grandiose, Blood For Dracula is intended to be a more subtle production: nevertheless, it spirals into a ludicrous spectacle. It is because of this comic and ghastly representation that the film is still held in high cult status, making its Dracula, Udo Kier, a star in underground horror cinema. The delight in viewing this new edition DVD is the inclusion of a commentary track by Udo Kier, Paul Morrissey and renowned academic Maurice Yacowar, whose expertise on Morrissey is included at critical moments. If I may make a suggestion, leave this commentary on if you have experienced the film before. It is more rewarding in retrospect, and Yacowar's contribution in particular proves to be an invaluable source of both critical film theory and interesting anecdotes for any fan of the underground horror genre or of the 'Warhol Factory'.

Morrissey's film must be commended for its originality in plot; while the original narrative of Dracula (and a number of film adaptations) includes the story of the Count travelling from his homeland to seek new victims, Blood For Dracula humorously makes this necessity hinge on the Count's need for virgin blood. With no virgins left in Transylvania, the Count decides to relocate to Italy, a good Catholic country, where he assumes he will have his pick. Facing potential starvation in his homeland, where this lack of available virgin blood has already condemned his sister to a certain death; it is at the suggestion of his wily servant Anton (Arno Juerging, who also plays Kier's assistant in Morrissey's Frankenstein), that Dracula heads to Italy in search of 'pure' blood under the pretence that he is seeking a bride. Soon we discover that the home of four young maidens and their aristocratic parents provides ample choice for the Count. As Dracula's plans to feed off the young maiden sisters come together, the farm boy Mario (played by Warhol icon Joe Dallesandro) becomes suspicious. It emerges that Mario has sexually conquered the two sisters offered to the Count and has his sights set on the youngest sister, Perla, as a final conquest. In an infamously horrid scene, Dracula bites the sexually-charged Saphiria, whom Mario has 'corrupted' previously, and becomes violently ill, vomiting for two onscreen minutes in a spectacular display of retching and writhing on Kier's part. Only then do we realise the consequences of Dracula's deviance from his 'pure' blood diet. While the aristocratic parents of these doomed young maidens seem oblivious to the vampire residing in their guestroom, Mario investigates the Count's strange habits and his interest in the girls' virginity. Upon discovering that Dracula is a vampire, Mario plans to eradicate him, as he is undoubtedly a competitor. In a Grand Guignol spectacle, Mario rapes the youngest daughter to 'protect' her from Dracula's thirst and finally dismembers the Count limb from limb. This climactic

ending highlights the overthrown power of the bourgeois past and the frailty of our Old World monsters in postmodern times and as the final shot closes, we discover what we had (nervously) suspected all along: Dracula is left to be a victim and it is Mario, the film's Van Helsing figure, who has always been the true monster.

One must not expect this Dracula film to be a remake of the Hammer Horror template. The film lacks the stylisations of Hammer classics while it overtly (and ridiculously) sexualises every possible scene with Dallesandro and the women. While I must confess to enjoying the ridiculous nature of the 'Costume Films' of Paul Morrissey, this film does lack a particular visual beauty, which we have come to expect in costume Dracula films. Moreover, Kier's Dracula is often childlike, a master who is so co-dependant on his servant's common knowledge that it often translates as a child/parent relationship. It is also worth noting the ridiculous overacting: Kier's overly dramatic speech and movements are often exhausting and Dallesandro's Brooklyn accent is hilariously out of place in the film's rural Italian setting. Perhaps, for these reasons and more, the film is primarily of note as a form of titillating pomp 'horror' – for which Warhol would expect nothing less than full credit. The film is both intreresting and mildly shocking for a Warhol novice, and simply delightful for the Morrissey fan, but ultimately one can approach this film both with a serious mind to explore the changing role of Dracula in popular culture and as a filmic celebration of the ludicrous.

Sorcha Ní Fhlainn

Isolation (Dir. Billy O'Brien 2005)

One of the anxieties tapped in Billy O'Brien's low-budget horror film Isolation is the fear of scientific experimentation. The theme was first reflected in Mary Shelly's novel, Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus, in 1818, and has become increasingly relevant in today's world of cloned sheep and genetically modified crops. Isolation repeats this mistrust of scientific inquiry devoid of ethical sensibility first depicted in Frankenstein .

The story is set in a rural Ireland of incessant rain and gloomy skies that has not seen any benefit in the recent economic recovery. Dan O'Reilly (John Lynch) lives alone on the family dairy farm and is in debt. He agrees to allow a scientist (Marcel Iures) to run a fertility experiment on his cattle under the supervision of the local vet, Orla (Essies Davis), who is also Dan's ex-girlfriend. As Dan waits for the incipient arrival of the calf which is a product of the experimental treatment, a caravan parks by his property. Inside are the young traveller Jamie (Sean Harris) and his girlfriend Mary (Ruth Negga). They're hiding out from Mary's family, and need a sanctuary. Dan is hostile to them at first, but later enlists Jamie's help in the middle of the night when the cow goes into labour.

There have been plenty of signs that the experiment has not been going well. The calf bites Orla's hand while it is still in the womb, adding a new twist on the vagina dentata phobia. John, the scientist, is shifty in his dealings with both Dan and Orla, and tight-fisted with the promised cash that Dan needs so badly. Once the calf arrives, Orla recognises that it is deformed. She kills it and performs an autopsy. During the messy and bloody examination of the entrails Orla discovers that the calf has been born pregnant, but the babies are malformed chitinous creatures. As Orla hurries away to conduct tests and consult John, one of the mutants creeps away, unnoticed.

What follows is an escalation of tension and action as the creature infects other cattle on the farm, mutates further, and proceeds to hunt down the farm's inhabitants. It results in a showdown in which Mary must scramble through mucky confined passages under the floor of the milking house to kill the slithering chittering monster before it escapes the isolation of the farm.

O'Brien eschews the recent trend in horror movies, which attempts to offset tension with moments of humour, by making a straight-up moody horror film. There are similarities in style and narrative to both Ridley Scott's Alien (1979), and John Carpenter's The Thing (1982), but O'Brien builds his own credible and claustrophobic atmosphere in Isolation, and directs it with confidence.

The film exhibits careful casting choices. All the actors do a fine job with the strong material O'Brien has written for them. In particular Marcel Iures was an inspired choice for this film's Victor Frankenstein. He's European, obsessive, and devious, and thus, firmly tied into the iconic figure of the mad scientist. Ruth Negga proves again that she is one of Ireland's rising stars with her performance in the film.

The location is eerie, and is used effectively to add to the sense of an unknown menace lurking around every barn, with large halls, wet flapping plastic, and water pounding on tin roofs and mucky fields. In one memorable scene Dan has to drive his tractor into a deep pool of slurry, in which anything might dart out to latch onto him.

O'Brien also proves that he understands a key element to successful monster movies: less is more. The FX are kept to a well-judged minimum. There are flashes of the creature, sufficient to evoke fear, but not enough to prompt mirth or the realisation that it's really a collection of plastic and resin. Instead O'Brien relies on increasing the action as the film progresses, and is unafraid to revel in blood and gore at appropriate moments. This is an example of a director who understands the conventions of horror filmmaking, and most importantly enjoys the genre.

There are weaknesses, such as an under-explained background to the experiments, and flimsiness to some characterisation. Yet, in the last half an hour of the film, as the characters scramble to survive the mutant creature, such thoughts are absent. The film cleverly exploits fears of infection, worries about fertility, and the ever-present dread of the unknown thing that resides in dark corners.

At the Fantastic Fest in Austin, Texas at the end of September 2006, Isolation won Best Director, Best Picture, and Best Cinematography in the Horror Jury Awards, and was placed second in the audience awards. The prizes are a well-deserved recognition of the effort Billy O'Brien and his team put into creating the film.

One can only hope that in the future other Irish filmmakers will be able to forge our long tradition of supernatural storytelling with the visual medium to create more quality horror films like Isolation.

Maura McHughThe Proposition (Dir: John Hillcoat)
Tartan Video (18) Out now

Nick Cave's strength as a storyteller has long been evident in his musical output, and it is a skill that he again puts to good use in The Proposition, his second script for director John Hillcoat. Their first collaboration was Ghosts…of the Civil Dead (1988), a low-budget futuristic horror set in the confines of a prison, populated by brutal criminals. The Proposition is a more restrained, sophisticated and subtle film in almost every respect. The premise is simple: recently relocated from England to a post in the outback, Captain Stanley (Ray Winstone) has been entrusted with the task of civilising the land and suppressing rebellious factions of the population (both settler and Aboriginal). The film opens with his capture of two of the notorious Burns brothers, members of a gang of outlaws who are responsible for the vicious murder of the Hopkins family. In the wake of this attack, the middle brother Charlie (Guy Pearce) has actually parted company with the gang, taking his younger brother Mikey (Richard Wilson) with him, but he is now faced with the titular proposition: locate and kill the gang's leader, his elder brother Arthur (Danny Huston), or condemn his younger brother to the gallows. What follows is a dark study of fraternal loyalty and morality; an examination of man's inhumanity to man; and a meditation on the brutality of the class, national and racial conflicts that laid the foundations of the Australian nation.

The film has most widely been described as an Australian Western, with its outback setting in the 1880s and its double-stranded story that pits the law-enforcer Stanley against the lawless Burns brothers and the indigenous Aboriginal population. Director John Hillcoat has written and spoken widely on his long-held desire to adapt the genre within an Australian context, and the film is commendable for its complex depiction of the relationships between these population groups and of divisions within them in the years leading up to the emergence of Australia as a commonwealth. However, with its brooding and oppressive atmosphere, distinctive brand of Old Testament imagery and judgement, and depiction of a harsh and alien landscape, it also has affinities with the gothic tradition that has manifested itself most famously in the American South (for example, in the writings of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor). Traces of this tradition are littered throughout Cave's back catalogue (in particular on Henry's Dream and The Murder Ballads), as well as in his only novel to date (And the Ass Saw the Angel, first published in 1989): equally, it informs The Proposition's twisted morality tale, in which a tale of bloody retribution is played out in a harsh and oppressive setting.

The desert has proven a rich gothic landscape in Australian literature and film throughout the last century: even in such crowd-pleasing comedies as Crocodile Dundee and The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert it has featured as a potentially disturbing and unwelcoming space, and in Australian horror movies such as Wolf Creek the outback has been utilised as the site of unbearable human suffering. Similarly, it dominates The Proposition, and is captured memorably by director of photography Benoît Delhomme. The film is beautifully shot: the harsh browns and yellows of the exterior shots contrast starkly with the washed-out blues and greens of the interiors of

the Stanley homestead: this location provides some of the most striking shots, in particular of their cultivated garden, lost in the vast, inscrutable landscape which engulfs it. Throughout the film, the desert functions as an unknowable space at the heart of a continent, mirroring the hearts of darkness that both Stanley and Charlie Burns are forced to confront in the course of the film.

The film's strength lies in its fundamental moral ambiguity. It is viewed through the eyes of two anti-heroes, Captain Stanley and Charlie Burns, both of whom are faced with the prospect of doing the 'wrong' thing for their own interpretation of the 'right' reasons, and by the end of the film both men will have confronted the devastating repercussions of their respective attempts to do right. The film manages to blur such binaries as 'right and wrong' and 'civilised and barbaric' throughout: for example, it is the most refined characters (the local landowner Eden Fletcher, played by David Wenham) and Martha Stanley who are responsible for the film's most violent sequence when they ill-advisedly order that Mikey be whipped (thus setting things up for the film's disturbing final act). Equally, Danny Huston's Arthur is first established as an eloquent and almost enlightened soul long before we see him in action as the bloodthirsty killer that Stanley has described him to be.

Considering the bloodthirstiness and brutality that pervades The Proposition, the film demonstrates considerable restraint in the scenes of violence that punctuate the narrative. This is most evident in the pivotal scene in which Mikey is whipped: there is just one brief glimpse of his shredded back after less than half of the proposed one hundred lashes, while the rest of the scene focuses on the blood-spattered faces of the increasingly silent and repulsed spectators, on the sodden whip itself, and on the puddle of blood which collects on the ground. Elsewhere, the violence remains bubbling under the surface (as in Charlie's early scene with bounty-hunter Jellon Lamb, played by John Hurt in a startling cameo), or is depicted off-screen. The bloodiest moments are implied through reaction shots and sound effects, and crucially, the event that provides the immediate context for the film – the attack on the Hopkins homestead – is never shown. As the film hurtles towards its devastating final reel, it erupts into action in the climactic scenes at the Stanley homestead, and the full ramifications of Stanley's proposition are revealed.

All in all, Hillcoat and Cave have delivered a complex and unsettling film that lingers in the memory long after the credits roll. With excellent performances from Guy Pearce, Ray Winstone and Danny Huston in particular, a haunting and affecting score by Cave and Warren Ellis, and an impressive two-disc set, this proposition is one worth considering.

DVD extras: Two documentaries ('Making Of The Proposition' and 'Meet the Cast and Crew'); Exclusive interviews with Guy Pearce and Danny Huston; Theatrical trailer; Feature-length commentary with John Hillcoat and Nick Cave

Jenny McDonnell

HORRORTHON: TERROR IN THE AISLES (1998 to Present)

How did it all begin? Believe it or not, it all began in my house back in 1994. As a child growing up I adored the horror film. It was such a rush to be thrilled and put oneself in the skin of the victim for ninety minutes. It was such a rush that I knew one day I'd end up working within the horror genre and making horror films. Myself, my cousins and my friends would get together on numerous weekends watching ten to fifteen horror films starting on a Friday night right through to Sunday. It was so much fun that I decided I wanted to take it to the next level. My friend Derek O'Connor suggested that I should talk to Pete Walsh in the Irish Film Institute and create Ireland's first and only horror film festival. So, with the help of my friend and festival co-director Michael Griffin, we got the wheels turning.

Ironically, Pete in the IFI was considering bringing over a festival in the U.K. called Phantasm (named after the film, I gather) but after speaking to him I convinced him that we didn't need to do this: I could programme what started as a one-day event, and is now a four-day festival. My goal was to give an entire younger generation a chance to see a film that hadn't been allowed video due to the BBFC banning many films during the whole video nasty era: that film was The Texas Chain Saw Massacre. I knew one screening in a 260-seater cinema was not going to be enough, and I was right: three days before the screening, it had sold out. I suggested that we needed to do a second late-night screening, which we did, due to the fact that some publication had booked 150 tickets for the first show. This was something I had never heard of before, especially with a 25-year-old film. However, it proved a point: the horror film had been neglected in Ireland. Considering that the most famous horror story of all time – Dracula – was written by an Irish man, Bram Stoker, it seemed odd that nobody in Ireland was doing festivals or making horror films. This was 1998 and it was the start of my professional career within the genre.

Over the years, Horrorthon has grown beautifully. When one creates something it's like watching a child grow up and seeing how different it is with each passing year. It's always a great pleasure to be greeted and thanked by festival-goers for doing it: that means more than anything and out of this I have made plenty of new friends personally and professionally. To say what the best year was, hmm? My own personal favourite was 2001. For the first time I had a great guest over, Brian Yuzna of Re-Animator and Society fame. It was such a hit with the audience and I was showing his new movie Faust: Love of the Damned. I also had what I felt was the best year in terms of programming. When would you get a year where every major horror director had a new film out? 2001 had John Carpenter's Ghosts of Mars, George A. Romero's Bruiser, Dario Argento's Sleepless, Jack Sholder's Arachnid and the surprise film was The Others. It also had some great retrospectives: Mario Bava's Blood and Black Lace, Robin Hardy's The Wicker Man and a 70mm screening of John Carpenter's The Thing. God, that was some year! Premiering my own produced feature film Dead Meat in 2003 was also a great buzz. In fact, I owe a lot to Brian Yuzna who I considered my mentor when producing my first film. He gave me a lot of great tips and advice that was all invaluable.

Since then, the festival has had some great films and guests. We had Danny Boyle and the cast over for 28 Days Later; we gave Rob Zombie's House of 1000 Corpses it's only ever Irish screening and Ruggero Deodato came last year for the 25th-anniversary screening of his notorious film Cannibal Holocaust. It

was the first ever screening in Ireland and I found Ruggero to be a very kind and sincere Italian gentleman. One would look at the film and then look at him and never put two and two together! So, here's an inside story I'll share with you. When I told Ruggero that Cannibal Holocaust had sold out, holding his hand up to his forehead, he said "Oh no, oh my God the animals!" Since the film is not recommended for vegetarians I understood immediately what he had meant. I reassured him by saying "Everybody here tonight knows what this film is, there will be no problem." He and his partner Valentina then joined everybody in the foyer for drinks before the screening and then I had the pleasure of experiencing something that doesn't normally happen. I sat right beside Ruggero watching Cannibal Holocaust twenty-five years after the film was originally made. Normally filmmakers never watch their films again because by the time it's all done and dusted they are normally sick of them. But Ruggero obviously wanted to see how an Irish audience reacted. So, he sat right next to me and towards the end of the screening when all hell breaks loose in the final reel, Ruggero turned to me, held his hand up and, referring to the violence, said: "It's terrible!" Michael and I have said it before and will say it again – "It could only happen in Horrorthon". True, but without those who attend every year it wouldn't happen at all, and I thank you deeply for that!

Ed King (http://horrorthon.com/)

Horrorthon 2006: Or, what does one do with 50 free Kit-Kats?

As the Horrorthon approaches its tenth anniversary, it's clear from the entertainment provided by this year's festival that the event is going from strength to strength. After a program last year which was in places a little lacklustre, it was reassuring to see a much more promising line-up this time round. Indeed, a sure sign of the organisers' confidence was the fact that this year's festival began a day earlier than usual, with the Irish premiere of the hit Korean monster-movie-with-a-conscience *Host*, which by all accounts lived up to its promising reputation, followed by Bernard Rose's (*Candyman*) new film *Snuff Movie*.

Things got into full swing on Friday, as the mayhem kicked off with a screening of *Friday the Thirteenth Part 2*. Next came Mary Lambert's underrated 1990s hit *Pet Sematary*, unusual in itself for being one of the very few mainstream horror movies directed by a woman. For the first half hour or so, the film is actually quite good, despite the fact that leading man Dale Midkiff has only two expressions (both of them variations on mild befuddlement). However, as pets (and small children) are successively crushed by monster trucks, things just get sillier and sillier, and protagonist Dr Creed comes across more as the dumbest man alive rather than the grieving father rather effectively portrayed in Stephen King's source novel. Still, the evil cat was quite menacing, and any film in which a distinctly non-scary toddler has to pretend to be a soulless zombie is worth a look.

Pet Sematary was followed by another film in which a doctor decides rather unwisely to up sticks and move to the countryside: Anders Banke's hit Swedish vampire flick *Frostbiten* (*Frostbite*) which proved to be one of the best films of the weekend. From the eye-catching opener in which Scandinavian Nazis try to fight off blood-sucking peasants to the refreshingly grim conclusion, *Frostbiten* was a delight from start to finish, and found time to include idiotic teenagers, talking dogs, a hilarious "meet the parents" type scenario in which a family pet comes to a bloody end, and the first "death by gnome" that I've ever seen.

Friday's proceedings came to a suitably gory end with a rare showing of Lamberto Bava's *Demons*, which the director himself introduced. Completely ridiculous, outrageously sexist and deliriously gory as it was, *Demons* was still an enjoyably over-the-top ninety minutes, even if it did, rather confusingly, star badly dubbed Italian actors pretending to be American whilst starring in a film apparently set in Berlin. Featuring the most stereotypical 1980s soundtrack ever (including songs by Rick Springfield and Motorhead, surely the first time the two have ever been in such close proximity), a fast-thinking pimp who seems to have walked in out of a Blaxploitation movie, and the most unlikely appearance of a helicopter ever, *Demons* went down a treat with the audience, and if nothing else, no matter how incoherent, still made more sense than the woeful *Demons 2*.

By Saturday, the hardcore elements in the crowd had amassed at least a dozen free Kit-Kat's each, and Horrorthon-induced blood clots were beginning to take hold. One of the few outright duds of the weekend was the dire Welsh-set *Darklands*, here shown in a special cut reedited by director Julian Richards. He really shouldn't have bothered: *Darklands* was dull, silly, and ill-conceived from start to finish, and had the look of a particularly tedious ITV drama. It's amazing that Anthony Schaffer, writer of the *The Wickerman*, didn't sue, as this was such a poorly-executed rip-off of his much superior film which merely substituted evil Scottish Pagans for evil Welsh nationalists. The only disturbing thing about this flop was the scene in which 'star' Craig Fairbass is doped up and greased with baby oil so that he can father the new messiah ala *Rosemary's Baby*.

Thankfully, after a rather clichéd, 'girls around the campfire menaced by psychopath' opening, Jack Ketchum adaptation *The Lost* was a much more effective and accomplished effort. The tale of a small-town psycho (who even works in a motel) perpetually on the verge of a complete breakdown, *The Lost* proceeded to a brutal, genuinely disturbing climax which owed something to the similarly downbeat classic *Witchfinder General*.

The second screening of Showtime's *Masters of Horror* series (introduced by series producer Andrew Deane) proved to be a strong one, featuring as it did the shorts "Family" (by John Landis) and "Pelts" by Dario Argent. "Family" was a witty, morbid tale of madness and obsession set in the suburbs which briskly proceeded to a slightly predictable but gruesomely enjoyable 'biter-bit' style ending, whilst Argent's contribution was much stronger than his previous *Masters of Horror* offering, *Jennifer*. Starring Meatloaf as a shady fur merchant who acquires magical racoon pelts, the film showcased Argent's abilities to effectively combine sex, sadism and gore, and climaxed with an unforgettable scene in which Meatloaf met a suitably ironic fate, which I can't reveal here without ruining the story for those who haven't seen it. Definitely not one for the faint-hearted!

As is by now traditional, Saturday's screenings were rounded off by a camp classic, *Jaws* rip-off *Grizzly*, which featured the least menacing killer bear of all time, but did provide one of the best exchanges of dialogue of the whole festival, which went as follows:

Square-jawed Park Ranger: "Only one person can tell it like it is, and that's little Bobby."

Dopey Girlfriend: "You mean he's alive?!"

Ranger: "Part of him is."

Sunday probably featured the strongest line-up of the weekend, opening with a screening of the highly entertaining Hammer classic *Countess Dracula*, which featured more ridiculous moustaches and conveniently topless dead servant girls than you could shake a stake at. It was followed by another *Masters of Horror* anthology: this time of *Machinist* director Brad Anderson's *Sounds Like*, (which I didn't get a chance to see myself, but which was according to reports somewhat underwhelming), and of Takeshi Miike's controversial *Imprint*, shown on the *Bravo* channel here some months ago, but banned from television on the United States, for reasons that soon became clear during the screening. Miike can generally be counted upon to produce something unforgettable (his earlier film *Ichi the Killer*, a truly bonkers Yakuza/Horror flick, went down a treat at this festival a couple of years ago) and *Imprint* was no exception. Starting off as an unusual historical drama about the relationship between a mysterious American abroad and a Japanese prostitute, things soon became increasingly surreal and violent. Featuring a truly horrific torture sequence, stomach-churningly realistic abortion scenes and a genuinely bizarre denouement, it was certainly one of the most talked about movies of the Horrorthon.

Continuing this years pleasing tendency to showcase genre classics, Sunday afternoon also brought a showing of George A. Romero's groundbreaking *Night of the Living Dead*, the most influential Zombie movie ever made. Though unsurprisingly creaky in places, and at times even a little dull (or maybe my chocolate-only diet was beginning to catch up on me), the film still has a stark, uncompromising energy to it, particularly in the opening and closing scenes, and it's not difficult to see why unsuspecting kiddies who were accidentally shown the film during matinee screenings in the 1960s

would have been very freaked out by what they saw. Maybe *Dawn of the Dead* could be screened next year and *Day of the Day* the year after?!

The surprise film is always one of the best attended and most eagerly anticipated events of the Horrorthon, if not always of particularly high quality, and much of the fun of the weekend comes from trying to guess what will be shown. Indeed, Horrorthon stalwarts will recall with fondness the moment a couple of years ago when, just as a scheduled screening of another film was due to take place, the projectionist accidentally put on the wrong opening reel and a chorus of delighted geeks, realising that the cat had been let out of the bag, shouted "It's *The Machinist*!". This year's surprise film, *See no Evil* starred charisma-free wrestler and Tor Johnson look-alike Jacob Goodnight as 'Kane', a monosyllabic crazy (with predictable mother-issues) who dispatches idiotic teenagers in an old rundown hotel (which looked just like the hotel in Tobe Hooper's similarly woeful *Toolbox Murders* remake). Though it seemed to go down well with many in the audience, it was a derivative, tedious and formulaic ninety minutes, and I think that the closing scene, in which a dog pissed in the dead killer's eye sockets, was a metaphor for what hack director Gregory Dark had just put the non-wrestling fans in the audience through.

My personal favourite of the whole Horrorthon, and possibly the best film of the weekend, was Guillermo Del Toro's justly acclaimed fantasy-thriller *Pan's Labyrinth*. Set in Fascist Spain during the 1940s, the film tells the story of a book-loving little girl who escapes into a rich fantasy world in order to evade her brutal Stepfather, a Captain in Franco's forces. Whilst the sequences in which the young heroine descends into Pan's underground kingdom and meets all manner of magical (and sinister) creatures are well rendered and striking, it was the scenes set in the 'real' world above ground which ultimately proved to be the most horrific and the most heartbreaking. The film was enthralling from start to finish, and the poignant climax in which both worlds violently come together was genuinely affecting.

As is traditional, Monday kicked off with a couple of documentaries for the truly hard-core genre enthusiasts in the crowd. *Going to Pieces* was apparently a fascinating and extremely well-researched look at the rise of the Slasher movie, whilst *Ban the Sadist Videos 2* was a well-received follow-up to last years look at the 1980s 'video nasty' phenomenon.

Fittingly enough then, the film which followed, *Behind the Mask: The Rise of Leslie Vernon* was an at times genuinely amusing mockumentary which affectionately spoofed the Slasher genre, and in particular the trope of the 'Final' or 'survivor' girl. Though initially owing much to 1990s Belgian hit *Man Bites Dog* (another film in which a camera crew record the exploits of a serial killer and become complicit in his crimes), thankfully *Behind the Mask* distinguished itself by means of an agreeably flippant tone, and an ending which featured a somewhat predictable but thoroughly enjoyable twist. And what horror fan couldn't help but admire a film in which Robert Englund imitates Donald Pleasance in *Halloween* and Zelda Rubenstein (the diminutive medium from *Poltergeist*) meets a gory end?

Monday's offering from Hammer was the deeply dated Terence Fisher film *The Devil Rides Out*, notable mainly for Christopher Lee's great goatee, lots of plummy English accents, and a hilariously inept giant-spider attack that was even less convincing than the giant bear in *Grizzly*. Korean ghost story/psychological thriller *Cello* was very disappointing indeed: a dull, derivative and ultimately quite silly variation upon *Jacob's Ladder* (something which the 2002 surprise film *Dead End* did with a great deal more style and energy). The most disturbing thing about this movie was the fact that someone vomited in the cinema entrance during the opening credits (no doubt due to the vast amount of free junk

food on offer during the day) thus blocking off the main exit (and preventing escape) for most of the film as IFI staff bravely endeavoured to clear up the mess.

Finally, Horrorthon 2006 concluded with a thoroughly enjoyable screening of Tobe Hooper's *Poltergeist*. Well, I say Hooper (it's his name on the credits), but as many other critics have previously pointed out, the opening thirty minutes or so, set as they are in an idyllic, child-centred suburban paradise, have executive producer Steven Spielberg's fingerprints all over them. Indeed, for a while one wouldn't be surprised if E.T. waddled into frame at any moment. I'd forgotten just how funny the opening third of the film is (at least once I put out of my mind the depressing fact that the two young girls in the film, Dominique Dunne and Heather O'Rourke, both died tragically young in real life), which makes it all the more alarming when giant trees start coming to life. Mind you, as my brother noted, if Robbie found the tree so scary at night why didn't he just close the curtains? Hooper's influence begins to manifest itself at this point, as the children's bedroom becomes a swirling vortex of evil and little Carol Anne gets sucked into another dimension by the 'TV People'. There are also some surprisingly gory sequences (although, as a colleague pointed out, the pop-up corpses seem to have been borrowed from *The Raiders of the Lost Ark*). *Poltergeist*, like *Jaws* last year, was a real crowd-pleaser and a highly fitting way to finish Horrorthon 2006.

Ultimately, this was one of the strongest Horrorthon line-ups I've ever sat through, and one can only hope that with the much-anticipated tenth anniversary the festival continues to thrive. Though it coincides with the weekend of the Dublin City marathon, I know which endurance test I'd rather attempt again next year. With thanks to Eoin Murphy, Lizzy McCarthy, Emma Croot, Sorcha Ni Fhlainn, Jenny McDonnell, Dara Downey, Maria Parsons, and everyone else who risked deep-vein thrombosis to brave the Horrorthon Experience…

Bernice M. Murphy

A Touch of Frostbite

An Interview with Swedish Vampire Filmmakers Anders Banke and Magnus Paulsson

Without a doubt, one of the biggest crowd-pleasers of Horrorthon 2006 was the hilariously droll Swedish vampire movie *Frostbiten*(or *Frostbite*). We were fortunate enough to be granted a brief interview with Director Anders Banke and Producer Magnus Paulsson, who took time out from their busy film-watching schedule to discuss topics such as the difficulties in getting a Horror film made in Sweden, the effects of perpetual darkness upon the human psyche, and the reason why so many small animals meet a nasty fate in their first feature-length film…. (Those yet to see the movie should note that this interview contains some spoilers).

Murphy: This is the first Swedish vampire film – indeed the first Swedish horror film – that I've ever seen. Are you a one-off?

Magnus Paulsson: The audience is there, but the will to make such films, especially if one needs state financial support, is not. This is the first Swedish vampire film in the history of cinema, and the first horror film to be given support by the Swedish film institute since it was founded in 1964.

McCarthy: Does Swedish film making generally then look down upon films of this type?

Paulsson: Yes, I think there is a tradition amongst the establishment that they are supposed to look down on genre movies.

Banke: I call it cultural fascism.

Paulsson: Which is what it is.

Banke: They have a very narrow view of what is culture and what is not, and to what to them isn't culture shouldn't be supported. And since Swedish is such a small language, most films need some state support. So of course the film makers who want to make films adapt to the existing market. They make a hell of a lot of drama, some police films, and a few comedies. Hopefully it's beginning to change.

McCarthy: I'm sorry to do this, but I'm going to have to mention Ingmar Bergman. The best Swedish horror film I've ever seen is Bergman's *Hour of the Wolf* – I don't even know if you would consider it a horror movie. Because Bergman is such an iconic figure, do you think that he is in some way responsible for the fact that Swedish film makers are now associated with a certain type of film?

Banke: I haven't seen that film in a very long time. Is it a horror movie?

McCarthy: That's how it was marketed to the English-speaking audience.

Banke: Wasn't "My Summer with Monica" marketed as some sort of sex film in the United States? The story of a bad girl?! I can see why they'd try to market other films in the same way, to make them more commercial. Where our film stands in relation to that one, I wouldn't know. In the 1960s, just after the Swedish Film Academy was established, for the first year or two the criteria used to admit new students were designed to favour people who psychologically resembled Bergman as closely as possible. Bergman rules, and there could be nothing else, so for a year or two at least, the questions would be along the lines of, "Do you have doubts about God? Do you have a conflicted relationship with your parents?", and so

they seriously tried to find people as close to Bergman as possible. Of course, once such students left the film school, they tended to do quite badly. That's the level of narrow-mindedness that has existed in Sweden for some time.

McCarthy: To make a vampire film these days is quite a brave move, as the Hollywood vampire has been defanged in recent decades: he's cute, he's someone to love, to feel sorry for.

Banke: I agree that there aren't that many vampire films now. I don't know why that is, they're fascinating.

Murphy: Where there any existing vampire films which you watched and thought, "Ok, I like that", or "I'll avoid that" – films which influenced you during the making of *Frostbiten*?

Banke: The reason we made a vampire film was first of all because we are genre buffs from way back, but secondly because we received a very good script that happened to feature vampires.

Paulsson: It was very, very funny.

Banke: That's what caught our attention.

Murphy: There's a real deadpan quality to the film… Do you have a vendetta against small animals? Because there are a lot of dead pets in the film!

Banke: (Laughs) We had one extra scene in which we did really bad things to another small creature, but we cut that out.

Paulsson: That will be in the special edition. It's been shot.

Murphy: You can put "Even more animal mutilation !" on the cover.

Banke: I find small dogs irritating, but I have a cat. We don't do anything bad to cats in this film. I actually had a white bunny rabbit when I was little, exactly like the one in the film. I didn't bite its head off, of course...

Murphy: I was hoping the rabbit in this film would become a vampire.

Banke: Well, we actually planned a scene with the little dog who became a vampire, the one that talks to Sebastian, in which the dog is running about on the ceiling, slagging him off, but we ran out of money and time towards the end of the shoot and thought, "we can lose that!".

Murphy: The film has quite an open-ended conclusion. Was this to make a sequel possible?

Banke: No, that was nothing to do with the wish for a sequel, but was actually a homage to Polanski's *The Fearless Vampire Killers*, in which the heroes survive, and escape, but actually spread the virus all over the world. Here, the family escapes, but two thirds of them are vampires.

Murphy: It's a reassuringly un-Hollywood ending.

Banke: It never occurred to us to have a Hollywood-style ending. It would just be stupid to us.

McCarthy: The darkness factor in this film, the whole idea of setting a vampire film in a place that is perpetually dark - it's a very interesting idea.

Murphy: Yes, have you read the Graphic novel 'Thirty Days of Night' which has a similar premise?

Paulsson: Yup, I read it recently, actually. It's quite good.

Banke: I know there are people on the internet who will say "Oh, they're just copying Thirty Days of Night", but we actually got the script back in 1999, which is long before the comic book was released. I haven't read it yet. Our script writer is from the far north of Lapland, where they have a whole month of darkness every year, so it was based upon his experiences of that.

Murphy: People here in Ireland might have only the vaguest idea of this concept; they may have heard of the Norwegian film Insomnia (set during a time of perpetual daylight), but that's about it. But this literally means that you will have thirty days in a row of darkness. How do people survive?

Banke: You have to be born there to survive it. We come from southern Sweden: it takes us a whole day to travel north. It's pretty strange to us… we shot the exteriors up north, and the interiors in a studio in the south.

McCarthy: Two very quick questions before we let you go: one is about Swedish horror, on which I've carried out a quick investigation…

Banke: It must have been a very short investigation!

McCarthy: Yes, it was! It seems like most Swedish horror films to date have been comedy horror, as in films such as "Evil Ed" and "Camp Slaughter".

Banke: This is how small the Swedish horror community is: *Evil Ed*'s special effects guy did our special effects , and the lead actor in that film played the young Beckert in the opening scenes of *Frostbiten*!

McCarthy: So there are a lot of connections.

Banke: Yes, it's a small community.

Murphy: Do you have hopes that the film will be an international hit along the lines of last year's Russian success *Nightwatch*?

Banke: Yes, indeed, we're getting a British and Irish release – on the eight of December, I think – and the film is currently number one in the independent films chart in Russia. We're also being released in Turkey, Malaysia, Singapore…. Did the humour in the film translate?

Murphy: Absolutely, especially the film's very wry, sarcastic strain of humour. I think that's a very Irish trait as well…

Banke: Yes, I think that Scandinavia, Canada, the UK, all Northern countries have the same type of humour.

Murphy: Finally, do you have plans to make any more genre films in Sweden?

McCarthy: A Swedish western perhaps?

Paulsson: Yes! That's one of a number of projects we're looking at.

Banke: Yes, we have about seven projects lined up at the moment: they're all very different. We will find one to develop, and try to get funding for it. We don't just want to work within the Swedish market: *Frostbiten* has shown that it's possible to make this type of genre film in Sweden, in Swedish, when beforehand people would say, "Do it in English, you'll earn so much more money."

Paulsson: Now we've proven that it's possible to do it here. *Frostbite*n is by far the biggest-selling Swedish film this year. We've done very well internationally.

Frostbiten will be released in Ireland and the UK in December. We would like to thank Anders and Magnus for kindly agreeing talk to us, and wish them all the best with this and with future projects. Thanks also to Ed King for facilitating this interview.

Bernice M. Murphy and Elizabeth McCarthy

MULTI-MEDIA REVIEWS

Glossary:

Nintendo DS: latest handheld Nintendo game system. It has a secondary touch screen, adding a greater interactive gaming experience.

Survival Horror: Video games where your only mission is to survive.

Slowdown: Occurs during game play, when too many things occur on screen at one time, resulting in the graphics slowing down or jumping.

FMV: 'Full Motion Video' – a video sequence you watch rather than play, often used to advance the plot.

NPC: 'Non-Playable Character' – any characters that are controlled by the computer rather than the player.

Survival Horror: The Good, the Bad and the Zombie

Eoin Murphy

What differentiates video games from movies is that they do away with the barrier placed between the participant and the action depicted onscreen. In other words, a video game puts the player squarely in the midst of the story. Your choices, rather than those of the author or director decide what happens next, whether you live to fight on to another level or end up as a mindless zombie scrabbling for brain matter.

This article is intended to welcome the non-initiated to the world of horror games and give you a taste of what's been missing in your life. The taste of raw human flesh…

Horror games have been around for almost as long as games consoles. The original of these games was Sweet Home, produced for the Famicon, the Japanese name for the Nintendo Entertainment System. The game tells the story of five people going to the mansion of dead artist Manyimas to take photos of her frescos. Unsurprisingly, the front door locks behind them and the five characters are soon being hunted down by Manyimas's ghost and a horde of monsters. Sweet Home was, unusually for a horror game, a Role Playing Game (RPG) with five characters controlled by the player, each with individual abilities. Resident Evil Producer/Director Shinji Mitami has acknowledged Sweet Home as one of the main influences on the game, with the mansion setting and puzzles. Soon after Sweet Home came Alone in the Dark, the original survival horror game published by Infograms in 1992. The story followed intrepid adventurer Edward Carnby investigating the mysterious death of a millionaire and the dark secrets within his mansion. The game was heavily influenced by Lovecraftian horror, with the main characters

name a reference to John Carnby, a character in the Lovecraftian mythos story "Return of the Sorcerer" by Clarke Ashton Smith.

Alone in the Dark was recently made into a film by Uwe Boll the (sort of) champion of transferring video games to films. Starring Christian Slater as Carnby and Tara Reid as an archaeologist (you can tell because she's wearing glasses) it's surprisingly boring considering the plot consists mostly of shooting monsters and lingering shots of Tara Reid's rear end.

After this early hit, the genre bumbled along, a minor distraction from the more popular platformers, beat 'em ups and shoot 'em ups that dominated the industry for the eighties and early nineties.

During this period the closest to a successful horror game was Doom, produced by Id Software studios. Doom followed the story of a Marine based on a Martian research facility that through experiments with teleportation has accidentally opened a doorway to Hell, with the armies of Satan spilling across the Martian landscape. The game itself had several novelties, being a first person shooter and having a large selection of enemies, where at this stage in the industry it was standard practise to face the same enemy model over and over again. Doom filled its gaming landscape with Zombies, Imps, Demons and HellKnights but to name a few. The sheer variety of weapons on hand was also a big selling point of the game, with the player able to utilise everything from a chainsaw to the BFG 9000 (That's 'Big F***ing Gun' to those in the know). The horror elements of Doom centre around the players expectations of what was around the next corner, a part of the game that was helped along by the game soundtrack, which occasionally filled with the sounds of souls in agony and a demonic voice telling you it was going to rip your head off. Doom relied heavily upon 'Jumpers', whereby an enemy would appear from behind a moveable section of wall, causing the player to jump a mile in the air and let out a small scream. At least it did with me…

Following Doom, there where a few clone games, such as Quake (Alien Stroggs attempt to conquer the Earth) and Wolfenstein 3D (Nazi's performing nightmarish experiments on humans whilst attempting to conquer the Earth).

The majority of these games where only available on PC, which only those who had jobs or generous parents were able to access. Whilst there were Consoles available at the time (the Sega Megadrive and the Nintendo Games System being the most popular) they were considered the domain of children, with games generally sticking to the formula of bright graphics and simplistic plots (collect coins, jump on enemies heads, rescue the princess).

This all changed when Sony produced the Playstation, a 32 bit console that redefined the market. Suddenly video games became more and more adult oriented (helped along by the fact that the original gamers, those of the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64 were now in their late teens and early twenties and still playing). With this reorientation of the videogame market, games began to take on a more adult nature, with the Princess replaced by a deadly virus and walking mushrooms becoming terrorists hell bent on destroying the world.

And this is where the Horror game market really came to life. In Japan, Games developer Capcom, the creators of classics like Streetfighter, produced BioHazard (released in the West as Resident Evil) the story of an evil corporation and a deadly virus that not only kills you, but brings you back from the dead. And that's only if you're lucky…

With the release of Resident Evil a rush of Horror games hit the market. A revamped version of Alone in the Dark appeared. Silent Hill was released, a game where players took over the role of a father searching for his daughter who's gone missing in the strangely deserted town of Silent Hill. Silent Hill is filled with nightmarish deviations of the human form, with the familiar humanoid shape twisted and contoured. The true star of the game is the town itself which warps beyond recognition at the sounding of a siren, the roads turning from tarmac to rust encrusted steel, covered with the remains of the town's butchered population.

Since this initial onslaught Horror games have been one of the most popular genres within the video game market, spawning countless spin off films, books and graphic novels.

Horror games have played an important role in the resurgence of Horror on the big screen, as can be seen by the explosion in the last few years of films based on games. To date films have been made of Silent Hill, Alone in the Dark, Resident Evil, Bloodrayne, Doom, House of the Dead and countless others, with the horror aspect of the games generally replaced by the horror of poor script writing, bad set pieces and worse acting than an Ed Wood Anniversary Special.

Of all of the games mentioned above, Resident Evil has had the most influence, with the game single handedly breathing life (or unlife) back into the zombie genre. Heavily influenced by George A Romero's Dead trilogy, Resident Evil brought movie-style production values to video games and exposed a new generation to the terror of zombies. Since Resident Evil's release in the 1990's there have a number of high profile zombie films, such as Land of the Dead (the latest zombie film by George A Romero), 28 Days Later (where Zombies are replaced by 'the infected') and the tongue in cheek Shaun of the Dead by Edgar Wright and Simon Pegg.

Despite the age of the series it is still going strong with Resident Evil 4 revitalising the series by doing away with zombies all together and instead replacing them with weapon wielding eastern European villagers with a dark secret. In addition Capcom have recently released Resident Evil: Deadly Silence, a relaunch of the original game on the Nintendo Dual Screen, which is reviewed in this section.

Eoin Murphy

Resident Evil: Deadly Silence
Game Publisher: Capcom
Number of Players: One
Format: Nintendo DS

The forests surrounding Racoon city were a haven for hikers, holiday makers and kids running through their summer holidays. The first disappearances were put down to accidents and bear attacks, the bodies that were found showing signs of having been fed upon by carrion eaters. As the months went on the attacks grew worse, with reports of groups of cannibals descending upon people roaming the forest and indulging in savage attacks.

Racoon City called in the S.T.A.R.S (Special Tactics and Rescue Service) to investigate. Bravo team were selected for the mission and sent in by helicopter. Within minutes of landing contact was lost, nothing returning from desperate attempts to contact them but radio static.

With the Secondary team missing in action, there was only one option left. Send in Alpha team. Led by Captain Wesker, who wears sunglasses even at night, the team arrives to find an abandoned STARS helicopter and a severed hand holding a standard issue pistol. This discovery is soon followed up by an attack by ravening mutant dogs and a mad dash to a supposedly abandoned mansion in the middle of a zombie infested forest. As ideas go, it isn't a great one.

And this is where the game begins, with players taking control of either Chris Redfield (strong jawed hero, quick with his pistol) or Jill Valentine (who despite being on official S.T.A.R.S. business still manages to keep a hold of her lock picks) as they try to solve the mystery of the zombie outbreak and survive to tell the tale.

The version of Resident Evil recently re-launched on the Nintendo DS is a direct port of the original, right down to the terrible voice acting and cringe worthy live action opening sequence. This dedication to the original game is part of the beauty of Resident Evil: Deadly Silence. Rather than go for a brand new story, Capcom has produced an exact copy of the original, bringing back fond memories of sitting in a darkened bedroom, joypad clutched in sweaty palms and eyes searching desperately for that ammo clip that may just save your life.

Deadly Silence has two game play modes; Classic and Rebirth.

The Classic mode provides gamers with a direct copy of the original game following the same linear pathway and puzzles. Rebirth mode is a revamped version of the game, making use of the unique features of the DS to add an extra level of interaction to the game experience. Every so often the game will slide into a first person perspective as the player is attacked and with a quick flick of a finger you can lash out at zombies, rabid crows and mutant dogs with your knife. Rebirth mode also offers a few additional puzzles, which whilst not adding much to the plot itself, do provide the odd extra health power up or valuable clip of ammunition.

The graphics on both modes of the game are slightly sharper on the DS than the Playstation, although not to the extent that you'll be shocked. A few welcome additions have been made to make the game play smoother, such as the ability to skip the loading sequences that occurred every time you opened a door in the original game, with the game jumping to first person and leaving the gamer clutching their joypad in frustration, especially during chase scenes. Thanks to Capcom's re-jigging of the DS version you can simply press the shoulder button and get back to the killing.

The most obvious influence on Resident Evil is that of George A Romero's iconic Living Dead trilogy. An abandoned home filled to the brim with zombies has been a main stay of the zombie movie ever since Night of the Living Dead. However, on closer examination, other ideas filched from genre greats also become apparent. The mansion that forms the main setting of the game has been designed by a madman, who has filled the mansion with a variety of traps and puzzles, from roofs that descend unrepentantly to massive stone balls rolling down a corridor. Enemies encountered later in the game include the Hunters, monstrous reptiles that are vaguely reminiscent of the servants of Dagon from Lovecraftian horror and giant human eating plants, as in Little Shop of Horrors.

A running theme in the Resident Evil series, as in almost all zombie movies, is the fear of becoming infected; in this case the fear is of becoming exposed to the T-Virus. Throughout the game this dread is highlighted, with the player coming across the diaries of those who were present during the outbreak and who describe their slow, inexorable change into one of the living dead.

This fear of infection is a mainstay of human nature, with the fear of deformity or infection being a part of the species consciousness since we first climbed down from the trees. Like most mammals, the visceral human response to seeing someone who is obviously ill is to draw away from them, in the hope of not becoming infected as well. The idea of the modern zombie is of a creature that is a walking personification of illness. They're covered in wounds and leaking sores that don't heal, and they stink of rot. On top of this is the horror of the loss of identity, where those infected slowly lose their minds to become a mindless creature, operating on the lowest instinctual level, that of eating.

Resident Evil also confronts the fear of uncontrolled corporations, with Umbrella Corp using the outbreak as an excuse to test the effectiveness of the virus as a weapon. This is replicated in 28 Days Later, in which an Animal Rights group breaks into a research lab and accidentally unleashes the Rage virus onto an unsuspecting population.

Resident Evil: Deadly Silence is a good relaunch of a classic game, with enough extras to keep the player interested. It is a tad disappointing that Capcom did not create a new game specifically for the DS. It does however indicate that there is life in the Resident Evil series yet.

Game Rating:

Graphics: 7/10
Sound: 7/10
Story: 8/10

Replay Value: 7/10
Overall Score: 7

Eoin Murphy

Dead Rising
Publisher: Capcom
Number of Players: One
Format: X-Box 360

Some people will do anything to get a Pulitzer. Travel to a war torn nation, interview serial killers who dress like clowns and take photos of Labradors in suits.

But charging into a zombie infested shopping mall? You have to wonder if it's really worth it…

Ace photojournalist Frank West has done just that, cadging a helicopter ride and getting dropped off on the roof of the Parkview Mall. He's there to investigate the militaries mysterious quarantine of the town and earn a Pulitzer Prize for photojournalism.

After he gets into the mall, things naturally take a turn for the worst as he is confronted by hordes of zombies munching down on the occasional helpless shopper. Frank finds himself trapped inside for 72 hours, fending off zombie hordes and trying to rescue trapped survivors. Along the way he's also called upon to deal with, amongst other things, insane preachers attempting human sacrifices, escaped convicts with machine guns and a mysterious cult.

Again, for anyone who has ever heard of George A Romero, the starting point of Dead Rising seems surprising familiar and indeed the game consciously styles itself as the unofficial adaptation of his 1979 classic Dawn of the Dead, with the suburban location of American capitalism again overtaken by the ultimate consumers.

In many ways Dead Rising delivers exactly what a zombie fan wants. With up to 800 zombies on screen at a time it's a technically amazing game, helped along by the 3rd generation technology of the Xbox 360. The zombies shuffle and moan in flesh eating anticipation, reacting to the player whenever you get near them, with enough variation in the character models to ensure you don't get attacked by the same zombie over and over again.

Dead Rising takes a more tongue in cheek approach to the survival horror genre than other similar games such as The Suffering and Resident Evil. The ability to pick up almost any item in the Mall and hit a zombie with it is amazingly fun, especially the remarkably effective bowling ball with which you can quite happily spend hours cracking zombies in the head.

The game itself is somewhat limited in its missions, with only three main types – a plot quest, whereby you can move along the games overarching plot, rescue missions in which you can earn experience points, and a strand in which you must stop psychopaths taking advantage of the chaos to indulge in a spot of mass murder. In addition to these elements is Frank's quest for a Pulitzer winning photograph, again acting as a booster for experience points with which to unlock new abilities and skills.

With no slowdown, high quality FMV sequences and more zombies than you can shake a severed head at, you would think Dead Rising had everything, and yet this reviewer found it strangely lacking. The story of Dead Rising is a tad passé, with an intrepid reporter caught up in a zombie apocalypse, an attractive female Federal agent also trapped in the chaos and a horde of zombies trying to eat your brain. Dead Rising brings nothing remotely new to the genre, preferring instead to hit every cliché that has appeared in any zombie film over the last 30 years.

Certain aspects of the game also add to the negative image portrayed of the horror genre, with players able to add to their experience points by taking 'Erotica' photos of non-playable characters, i.e. taking photographs of female characters in a compromising position. This harkens back to the days of appealing to the lowest common denominator of giving your female characters the largest chest possible and allowing the fourteen year old male player to zoom in on her animated bosom.

Most importantly however, as a fan of horror films and games, I've come to expect one important aspect of horror games to always hold true and that's they should occasionally be somewhat frightening. Dead Rising just isn't scary! Rather, it goes for an Evil Dead approach, relying upon humorous death scenes for zombies (including ramming a tap into their heads and turning it on) and over the top attacks to compensate for its lack of original plot and repetitive attacks. Whilst the game plot does expand in later sections, it does little to keep you interested in the long run, adding little replay value to the game.

The thought of being trapped inside a well stocked shopping centre during a zombie apocalypse is many a horror fan's dream come true, but Dead Rising fails to introduce the level of terror that is present in other survival horror games. Rather, Dead Rising seems to have picked out the high profile aspects of the genre but chooses to ignore what makes zombies such a figure of fear. The loss of identity and fear of contamination which we associate with the zombie is here replaced by brain parasites and bowling balls.

Resident Evil: Outbreak approaches the same genre more effectively, with a choice of characters, multiple endings and the very real threat of actually becoming a zombie yourself and turning on your team mates.

Dead Rising is still a fun game, and you could, fairly happily, spend hours racking up immense zombie kills with your favourite weapon, be it a broad sword or a shopping trolley. However, anyone expecting a game full of depth and genuine moments of terror would do better to spend their £50 on a copy of Resident: Evil Deadly Silence and a DVD collection of George Romero films, to see how this kind of thing should be done.

Game Rating:
Graphics: 9/10
Sound: 8/10
Story: 6/10
Replay Value: 6/10
Overall Score: 7

Eoin Murphy

Another Forty Whacks
The Borden Tragedy : A Memoir of the Infamous Double Murder at Fall River, Mass., 1892
by Rick Geary
ComicsLit, £6.00. ISBN: 1-561631892

Despite the fact that she was accused of killing only two people, one alleged American murderess has achieved a cultural pre-eminence denied all others. The case of Lizzie Borden has gripped the nation's interest since the crimes occurred in 1892. There where axe murders before Lizzie Borden, and there have been axe murders since: similarly, more than one child has suddenly and violently turned upon his or her parents. But the continuing resonance of the Borden murders is such that as Dorothy Dunbar, one commentator on the case has declared: "Lizzie isn't an example of nineteenth century murder; she is nineteenth century murder".

The Borden case has been the subject of dime novels, a play, an opera, a made-for-TV movie (starring Elizabeth Montgomery of Bewitched fame), many true crime investigations and several novels. There is a Lizzie Borden museum and bed and breakfast, an international Lizzie Borden society, and she has even been the subject of a college course. An entire industry keeps the memory of those terrible crimes alive for fun and profit. Borden has even briefly popped up in an episode of The Simpson's: surely the truest sign of cultural prominence in this age.

Now, as part of his macabre but compulsively readable "A Treasury of Victorian Murder" series, veteran comic book writer and artist Rick Geary has given us The Borden Tragedy, his own intricately drawn and intensively researched take on the murders. Presented to the reader as excerpts from the unpublished memoirs of "an unknown lady of Fall River, Massachusetts" who knew both a great deal about the case and about the dysfunctional Borden clan, the comic book serves as an intriguingly ambiguous primer on the events of that "grim and seething summer of 1892". Geary presents the known facts of the case in a clear, methodical manner, but unlike Alan Moore in the somewhat similar From Hell (a celebrated graphic-novel retelling of the Jack the Ripper case), he refrains from presenting us with any definitive solution to the mystery. The murderer is never drawn in full here, but rather depicted as a mysterious, axe-wielding shadow-figure.

The facts of the case, depicted by Geary in meticulous black-and white, almost wood-cut like drawings, briefly, are as follows. The brutal murder of Andrew Borden and his wife Abby took place in Fall River, Massachusetts, in 1892. Fall River was a New England industrial town, latterly made prosperous by wealth emanating from mills staffed by badly paid immigrants. The Borden's were part of the local Yankee aristocracy, one of the areas most prominent local families. Andrew J. Borden, had, ironically enough, started his working life as an undertaker, but by the time of his death was a bank president worth over a quarter of a million dollars – about ten million in today's money. By all accounts, despite his wealth, he remained a thrifty, careful man who did not believe in expending his hard earned cash on what he deemed frivolous pursuits – a trait that may have proved fatal. Abby Borden was his second wife: his first, the mother of his two daughters, had died relatively young. His daughters were Emma, a quiet, home

loving, introverted woman who was in her forties at the time of the murders, and Lizzie, nine years younger, and a great deal more demanding.

From the outside, the Borden household seemed like "a portrait of New England home life in the 90s": Andrew was the firm, benign patriarch whose word was law; Abby the passive, engaging stepmother, and Emma and Lizzie their loving, ladylike daughters. Bridget, their hardworking Irish maid, completed the family circle. Theirs was an apparently unremarkable picture of somewhat dour respectability and staid religiosity in the closing years of the nineteenth century, a fact highlighted by Geary, who, in introducing us to the family, tends to draw them head on, as through the Borden's were posing for a portrait.

However, for all their apparent tranquillity, the Borden's were really a house divided. The sisters resented their stepmother and constantly argued with their long-suffering father about money and property. Lizzie in particular felt that the family was living well below its means and dreamed of entertaining lavishly. She constantly badgered her father for money, requests that he by and large acceded to in the hopes of placating the forceful daughter, who, following a particularly vicious argument, had ceased to address Abby as 'mother' and thereafter coldly referred to her as 'Mrs Borden' (when Geary depicts this scene, he does so by providing us with a chilling close-up of Lizzie's blank-looking eyes).

All was not well with the Bordens, but then again, many families have quarrelled without recourse to the axe. There was little reason to anticipate the terrible events of August the Fourth 1892, events that would transform the respectable, well thought of Lizzie Borden into a figure of mythic proportions whose alleged crimes still exert a gruesome fascination. On that fateful summer morning, a frantic Lizzie staggered into the kitchen and told Bridget "someone had killed father". It was the most unlikely of crime scenes: the bloodiest of murders carried out in broad daylight: the victim bludgeoned to death whilst he slept on the living room sofa, his head so disfigured by blows that he was all but unrecognisable. That was terrible enough, but there was more to come: it was soon discovered that the unfortunate Abby had been dispatched in the same manner but that her death had occurred 90 minutes earlier. As was the case with Jack the Ripper's last known victim, advances in technology meant that police officers were able to take an infamous photo of the crime scene: this allows Geary to render the gory aftermath of the murders in meticulous detail. As with Moore's tale, the reader is relieved that events are depicted in Black-and-White rather than colour.

From the outset, the police suspected an inside job. Lizzie's story simply didn't add up. Her alibi for the morning of the murders was notably weak (although as Geary points out, in the days following the deaths, Lizzy was given large doses of Morphine to calm her nerves, which may have accounted her for her later narrative inconsistencies). What appeared to be the fatal axe was found hidden in the basement, having been recently scoured clean; Lizzie had lied and said that her famously reclusive stepmother had gone visiting that day, when she in fact lay dead in her bedroom. Perhaps most damming of all, Lizzie's good friend Alice Russell had seen her burning a suspiciously stained blue dress in the stove the day after the murders – a dress just like the one she was said to have been wearing that day.

There was also the fact that Lizzie had tried to purchase a powerful poison at a local pharmacy earlier in the week – providing an explanation that even the chemist found wanting. And, if Lizzie's story of

mysterious intruder were true, what kind of killer would murder a complete stranger, hide in an occupied house for 90 minutes, and then strike again? It simply didn't make any sense. After days of mounting speculation, Lizzie was arrested. The next day, the entire nation read the newspapers over their breakfast tables and asked themselves the same question – "How could a woman do such a thing?"

The Borden deaths became the first nationally prominent murder case in the United States. As Edward H. Porter, one of the first authors to examine the case, noted, "the crimes soon became the theme of universal comment, both in public and in private… they had about them that fascination of uncertainty, horrible though they where, which fixes the attention and holds it continually." The wholly unexpected nature of the chief suspect was a key element in this popular fascination, for the accused was no "hatchet wielding maniac, but a church going, respectable Sunday school teacher, charged with parricide, the murder of one's parents". This incongruity between the ladylike suspect and the violence of the crimes she was said to have committed would ultimately help Borden gain acquittal, as did the fact that that the evidence linking her to the murders was almost entirely circumstantial. Lizzie soon attracted a host of powerful advocates, amongst them women's rights advocate Lucy Stone and her suffragettes. Lizzie's friends in the Women's Christian Temperance Union rallied to her cause as well. After all, they argued, how could a devout teetotaller commit such an act?

The trial got underway in June 1893. Support for Lizzie had steadily grown since her indictment. Sermons proclaiming her innocence began to outnumber those declaring her guilty. Though the prosecution was unable to include several key points in their argument – including Lizzie's visit to the pharmacy, and the axe found in the basement – the facts seemed damning (perhaps rather more so than Geary presents them here). But they didn't have a chance. The defence's argument is typified by their closing speech: "To find her guilty, you must believe she is a fiend. Gentlemen, does she look it?"

Though confronted with a suggestive case for her conviction, and the fact that no one else can be reasonably said to have done it, the jury nevertheless preferred to accept Borden for what she seemed to be: a pious spinster and loving daughter, who couldn't even contemplate murder, much less carry it out. The same domestic ideology that held that the proper role for a middle class woman was that of carer and homemaker, a moral guide to the men in her life, couldn't afford to acknowledge the disturbing implications raised by the fact that a well brought up young woman could so violently and unexpectedly violate the sanctity of the home and the authority of her patents.

In the aftermath of her acquittal, Lizzie was briefly the toast of the town. However, it didn't take long for most of her support to fade away. She had been acquitted largely on the grounds that she seemed a portrait of piety and domesticity – as the Boston Journal called it, "a woman of pure and noble life" but her conduct after the trial soon drew this into question. No longer a resentful heiress, Lizzie and her sister Emma where now women of considerable wealth, and Lizzie seemed determined to enjoy unfettered access to her father's money wealth. They bought a large house in a fashionable part of town; and Lizzie was able to indulge her taste for the high life, making frequent trips to Washington and Boston, and once throwing a lavish, weeklong party for her actor friends that scandalised Fall River and proved the final straw for her quiet sister. Though freed by the courts, Lizzie was convicted in the fickle arena of public opinion, and as the years progressed she became increasingly isolated.

Yet even after death, Borden's strange legacy endured. She is a genuine American legend – the Lady with the axe. As Lincoln puts it, "the Greeks had Clytemnestra, we have Lizzie". She was even immortalised in the famous (though inaccurate) doggerel rhyme chanted by generations of American school children:

Lizzie Borden took an axe
Gave her mother forty whacks
When she saw what she had done
She gave her father forty-one

Supplemented by reproductions of contemporary press clippings and a copy of her original indictment for murder, Geary's retelling of the Borden case is a chilling, immensely readable summary of the facts of one of nineteenth-century America's most infamous crimes. He seems to refuse to come down firmly on one side or another as regards Lizzie's alleged guilt or innocence. Perhaps the most suggestive evidence of Geary's own opinion can actually be found on the back cover of the text, which highlights the remarkable parallels between her case and that of the similarly acquitted O.J. Simpson, over a hundred years later. As the blurb states, "whilst the jury returned a verdict of not guilty…No evidence, however, points to any other individual, and the defendant remains under a cloud of suspicion". A century on, that cloud of suspicion remains as tantalisingly murky as ever.

Kelly Grant

The Walking Dead Volumes 1, 2 and 3: Days Gone Bye, Miles Behind Us and Safety Behind Bars
Writer: Robert Kirkman
Artists: Tony Moore (Volume 1), Charlie Adlard and Cliff Rathburn (Volumes 2 and 3),
Publisher: Image Comics

Zombies... Seems like you can go for years on end without hearing anything about them and suddenly they're everywhere…

The Walking Dead is described by its author, Robert Kirkman, as "The zombie movie that never ends." A fan of classic zombie movies, Kirkman takes the genre in a new direction by staying with his characters through thick and thin, not stopping when they seem to reach safety and can begin a new life, because, as with any true horror story, things can never be the same again, and neat endings don't exist. The Zombies are still out there, you still need food, and to cap it all off, that darn wife of yours is pregnant with your best friend's baby.

The Walking Dead begins in a similar vein to Danny Boyle's Zombie, ahem, I mean "Infected" movie 28 Days Later (an opening itself copied from John Wyndham's The Day of the Triffids) as Rick Grimes, an amiable small town cop, wakes up after being in a coma for a number of weeks following a shoot out with a deranged ex-con.

Rick wanders around a seemingly deserted hospital until he meets his first zombie, escaping death by the narrowest of margins. The story then follows Rick's desperate attempts to find his family and get them to safety, which are of course severely hampered by the zombie hordes that roam the landscape.

What differentiates The Walking Dead from other similarly themed stories is the way the zombies react to their new "life" situation. Many of them seem content to sit and wait for food to come to them. Only a small number of them roam the landscape, making the rural areas relatively safe to travel in, with Rick meeting up with the occasional group of survivors. Another interesting aspect of the story is the fact that the zombies are notably un-picky in their choice of food. So long as it's warm and wriggling, they'll eat it, unlike most films, where they'll happily ignore a field full of cows and spend the night trying to get into a house with only four or five skinny humans in it. One particularly gruesome moment that articulates this difference has Rick being ignored by a zombie horde in favour of his horse, which is graphically torn to pieces.

Unlike most other zombie tales, the story also does a good job of explaining just how the undead came to overrun civilisation so quickly, with the government herding survivors into the cities, attempting to save them from the undead but instead bringing the food source for miles around to just one place. For instance, we are told that the once thriving city of Atlanta has become a charnel house, with hundreds of thousands of walking dead in the city waiting quietly for their next meal.

The story heats up when Rick is reunited with his family, and the focus shifts from Rick's quest to the problems of the people who he now finds himself surrounded by. His wife is ecstatic to see him, his son

finally able to sleep, but his best friend, who took both of them under his wing whilst Rick was left behind in the hospital, is standoffish and quick to anger, his motives soon becoming suspect.

There are several stand-out moments in the first volume of The Walking Dead. Chief among them is the moment when Rick realises that zombies differentiate between the living and the dead by smell; a discovery which leads him to cover himself and another survivor in rotting flesh so that they can forage for weapons in the city, undetected.

The art in The Walking Dead is generally good, with the living depicting in strong pencil strokes and simple lines and the zombies full of detail, with flies and maggots a regular accompaniment to their torn and twisted features. The writing itself is realistic, Kirkman doing a good job of creating believable characters in an unreal situation by representing each one's reaction to the zombie apocalypse as different and interesting.

There are, of course, some clichés in the comic book, with, for example, the usual selection of characters hell bent on revenge against the zombies and the scenario of an older man shacking up with a much younger woman. Whilst this isn't truly noticeable early on in the series, in later volumes it becomes a bit much, with Rick's attempts to create a new society hampered by old prejudices and desires. The second and third volumes are often repetitive, with minor characters guaranteed to die gruesomely every 30 pages or so, a characteristic that reaches its lowest point when a Richard Laymonesque serial killer stalks the women and children of the group in an abandoned prison whilst calling "Come back here, you slut! It's time to take your medicine, you fucking whore!" Surely in a world where we've been exposed to Hannibal Lecter and Jeffery Dahmer for three decades it was possible to come up with a deranged madman who doesn't spend his time fantasising about killing all those whores and sluts out there?

Despite these problems, The Walking Dead is generally an interesting, readable contribution to the Zombie genre, if one that is somewhat let down in later volumes by an over reliance on clichés and cynical gore. However, for the sake of £10 (or €13) a volume, it's worth a look.

Eoin Murphy

I Was a Teenage Messiah

Chosen
Written by Mark Millar
Artwork by Peter Gross,
Dark Horse Books,
Mature Audience

For the first New Media review for The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies, where better to start than with a story about the apparent second coming of Christ?

Jodie Christianson is an ordinary 12 year old boy growing up in the 1980s. He spends his time skipping school, smoking cigarettes and looking for fabled abandoned porn magazines with his school mates.

And then he gets crushed under a 40 ton truck.

Now for most 12 year olds that would be the end of the story, but for Jodie, who survives completely unscathed, it's just the beginning.

Chosen is a three part miniseries written by Mark Millar, the visionary behind the spectacular re-launch of Marvel's The Avengers in the form of The Ultimates (complete with alien fighting Captain America and wife-beating Giantman); with Chosen he gives the world the story of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The three-part miniseries itself is told as a flash back, with the future Jodie telling the tale of his awakening in an all-knowing manner, accompanied by the occasional glimpse of him in the present day, surrounded by aides and preparing for the biggest day of his life, his face permanently in shadow.

Throughout the story, Millar keeps the reader interested in the outcome, with Jodie slowly realising who he his in a typical 12 year old boy's fashion of taking advantage. A succession of particularly effective scenes show Jodie and his friends ineptly trying to re-enact the original miracles of Christ; he tries to turn water into wine (so they can all get drunk for free), returns sight to the blind (well, sort of – he restores 20/20 vision to a myopic boy called Markie) and feeds the five thousand (well, eight of his school friends) with three sesame seed buns.

It's not all comedic scenes of teenagers trying to take advantage of a clearly miraculous situation, however. A sense of foreboding enters the story when Father Tom O' Higgins, the local parish priest, is approached by a confused Jodie, who is desperately trying to find answers to his new found abilities. The faithless Fr. O' Higgins sends the boy away, denouncing his questions as typical teenage nonsense.

The priest is eventually confronted by his own lack of faith, as Jodie, again displaying his divine powers, reads O' Higgins mind and leaves him a shaking wreck.

The seemingly inevitable confrontation between priest and boy is mitigated by the running over of Angel, Fr. O'Higgins dog. In a replication of Christ's resurrection of Lazarus, Jodie marshals his power in the greatest display of his abilities to date.

The initial slow pace of the story is offset by the quickness with which it comes to a conclusion, deftly taking the unwary reader by surprise. The revelations contained on the final few pages leave you grinning in appreciation of Millar's nerve and will definitely encourage you to read the whole thing again.

With Chosen, Mark Millar yet again shows himself to be one of the top comic writers in the industry, here presenting us with a narrative told realistically and without any of the fan fare or preachiness that might be expected of a story which seems to depict the second coming of Christ (for examples of how other comic writers have handled this event, please see Loaded Bible: Jesus vs. Vampires. No, Really. It actually exists.)

The ending of the comic book is told in such an offhand and matter of fact way that it takes the reader a few minutes to in fact grasp the enormity of what has just been revealed – a sure indication of the cleverness and care with which the previous sections have been told.

The story itself is full of references to the decade it is set in, with Empire Strikes Back Posters on Jodie's bedroom walls and credulous comments on the great quality of video recorders.

One of the most effective parts of the miniseries as a whole is the truly excellent cover art, such as the cover which depicts Jodie crucified against a telegraph pole and the tongue-in-cheek depiction of Jesus on the cross with a decade appropriate "Frankie say Relax" T-shirt.

Peter Gross's art is consistently good throughout, with an exceptional use of colour, some prime examples being the washed out features of the local parish priest who has lost his faith in God and the depiction of Jodie as a grown man amongst his flock.

Well written and effectively drawn, Chosen is an excellent collected miniseries, one I would wholeheartedly recommend to anyone wishing to take a look at the world of Jesus in the eighties. Devote fans of the similarly themed "Left Behind" series may take offence at some scenes, such as one which depicts the teenage messiah playing with himself as he watches the girl next door get ready for bed…

Eoin Murphy

TELEVISION REVIEWS

"In Gore We Trust": Horror and the Modern U.S. Crime Series

Bernice M. Murphy

Television crime in the United States has undergone a radical transformation in the past decade. Prior to the mid-1990s, most detective series, with the exception of rare stand-outs such as Cagney and Lacey and NYPD Blue, were predictable, comfortable viewing fit for all the family – which is why reruns of Diagnosis Murder, Murder She Wrote, Matlock, Quincy, MD, and Columbo are still staples in the daytime viewing schedules. The only thing about the likes of Murder She Wrote that might keep you awake at night would be wondering why no police officer ever questioned the fact that Jessica Fletcher 'just happened' to be present at the site of so many suspicious deaths.

Now, largely thanks to non-terrestrial stations such as the Dublin-only Channel 6, the UK's Channel 5, and the Living Channel (ironic, since so much of its output focuses on the dead, be it in ghostly or corpse form), Irish television schedules are overflowing with prime examples of the new breed of American TV detective. Gone are the Private Investigators, enthusiastic amateurs and sleuthing pensioners of the past (although William Petersen's Gil Grissom in CSI: Vegas is getting increasingly saggy looking). With the exception of precocious high-school student Veronica Mars, American detective shows overwhelmingly focus on government agencies and highly professional police departments staffed by beautiful people in sharp suits (or snappy casual wear made cooler by the strategic addition of Kevlar and handcuffs). They spend much of their time gazing into microscopes or at computer screens, prodding fresh corpses, performing autopsies, or profiling serial killers and deranged killers. They also occasionally find a moment to brood over unresolved personal issues and gaze meaningfully into the middle distance.

Shows such as the various incarnations of CSI, Cold Case, The Inside, Bones, Criminal Minds and Touching Evil owe much more to the conventions of horror and the gothic than they do to those of the more traditional US detective drama. The nation that was allegedly shocked by the 'accidental' exposure of Janet Jackson's left nipple during a live Superbowl broadcast seems to have no problem whatsoever with the intensely detailed, hyper-realistic depictions of violent death, decay and putrefaction which are the very raison d'Être of Bones and CSI. So long as the body is fictional, anything goes – which suggests that the viewing public is more comfortable with dismembered fake bodies than it is with naked real ones.

Today's crime shows are characterised by slick production values (whatever the quality of the writing, they always look good), expensive SFX and frequent use of CGI to illustrate the ease with which the human body can be destroyed. David O. Russell's film Three Kings had a much-lauded scene in which the path of a bullet through the human body was graphically illustrated. Nowadays, moments such as this form the very basis of CSI and Bones, which also display a geekish fascination with technology and weaponry, and a sustained valorisation of the forces of law and order. In a dynamic familiar to all X-Files fans, whilst the guys in charge often fail to understand the methods of the talented mavericks who work

for them, ultimately, the mavericks are still part of the system, and the tools and resources provided by officialdom prove invaluable.

Generally, these shows fall into two main types, although they have much in common beyond this. The first is overtly body-centric, inhabited by scientific geniuses who need only a part of the puzzle to be able to solve the whole conundrum – in this case, I mean the CSI franchise and Bones (recently shown on Sky 1 and TV 3). The obvious antecedents for this strand of programming include Patricia Cornwell's immensely popular Kay Scarpetta novels, which, with their detailed and intensively researched descriptions of the hitherto mysterious processes of crime scene analysis and the duties of a medical examiner, did much to introduce the public to the nitty-gritty of forensic investigation. Indeed, Bones is loosely based upon a similarly themed, if more recent series of novels by Kathy Reichs, a real-life forensic anthropologist.

Though much time is spent in the lab, performing baffling but cool-looking experiments to a moody sound track, the forensic detectives do tend to perform an unlikely amount of hands-on police work as well, accompanying cops on raids, performing interviews and even, as in the so-silly-its-kind-of-enjoyable Bones, taking part in shoot-outs and hand-to-hand combat with dangerous suspects. Both CSI:Vegas and Bones also display a notably goofy sense of humour, as if to offset the sheer unpleasantness of so much of their subject matter. CSI: Vegas almost always has a moment at the end of the opening teaser where chief investigator (and father figure) Gil Grissom makes a bad pun about the crime scene of the week. A prime example is the episode in which, after observing a large rodent coming out of the mouth of a corpse, he wryly notes of the victim that "she ratted herself out". The silliness of such jokes is presumably intended to remind us that what we're watching isn't actually real, and to give a little warmth to characters who might other wise be intimidating insightful. It is also unintentionally reminiscent of the similarly puerile strain of humour found in Slasher movies, which also display a fascination with the mechanics of violent death.

Another big influence is the most successful horror film of the 1990s, The Silence of the Lambs. Made with the full cooperation of the FBI, Silence did much to help rehabilitate the reputation of an agency that had hitherto had an absolutely disastrous decade, as David Schmid's fascinating book on the popularity of Serial-killer narratives, Natural Born Celebrities, notes. As well as helping to establish the 'hunt for a serial killer' as one of the most popular present day cop-show story lines, the scene in which Agent Starling and her cohorts carefully photograph the bloated corpse of a young woman murdered by 'Buffalo Bill' is key here. Prior to this point, death on mainstream television shows tended to be discrete rather than overtly realised. A corpse might have a bit of blood on its face, or a small red hole somewhere to indicate a gunshot, but that was usually all, and Quincy, the original medical examiner, could sometimes perform a whole autopsy onscreen without us ever seeing the body. But like Twin Peaks' fixation upon the corpse of Laura Palmer, and the grotesque scene early on in Seven in which the hugely obese man forced to eat himself to death is splayed out on the mortuary slab, the body-examination scene in Silence tapped into a public appetite to see the most abject of scenes graphically realised on the small screen.

The other category of show I will discuss here is rather less reliant on science and technology (although corpses are frequent), and tends to feature government agents and cops rather than scientists and

technicians. At least five American TV shows in the past decade have focused on task forces dedicated to capturing serial killers – Millennium, Profiler, Criminal Minds, The Inside and Touching Evil (again, thank you Seven and Silence of the Lambs). Millennium, Profiler, and the more recent-but-short-lived The Inside in particular, often had a mythical, semi-or-overtly supernatural element which left us in no doubt as to the fact that we were watching a fully-fledged battle between good and evil. They all feature gifted mavericks with a disturbing, semi-psychic knack for putting themselves in the killer's shoes. The ability to understand such criminals, it is consistently suggested, usually comes at the expense of some terrible personal ordeal. But even shows without any overt supernatural content can, at times, have a vaguely gothic feel: the heavily flash-back reliant Cold Case always ends with a cringe-inducing scene in which the detective in charge of solving old murders quietly smiles at the happy looking spirit of whatever victim she's helped out on that particular week, and in Without A Trace (an otherwise strictly procedural show about an FBI missing persons unit), those who have vanished that week are shown gradually fading out of the picture at the beginning of the show, like ghosts who don't know they're dead yet.

In both types of show, the trope of the young, troubled female investigator is so common as to have become something of a cliché. Like Starling, for whom the lambs were still screaming, the problem generally lies with some sort of unresolved childhood trauma. The parents of Temperance Brennan, heroine of Bones, disappeared when she was a teenager (she should have asked the guys in Without a Trace to help find them). In CSI:Vegas, we eventually discover that team member Sara Seidel is a moody loner because her mother stabbed her abusive father when she was a kid. The main character of Cold Case, a wan Philadelphia cop named Lily Rush, was neglected by her alcoholic mother and brutally assaulted when she was ten, and the fiancée of the main female character in Touching Evil shot himself (he probably sensed that he was doomed anyway). The most bizarre childhood trauma I've come across is that undergone by Rebecca Locke, main character in The Inside (briefly shown this summer on ITV 4). She was kidnapped as a little girl and spent several years in the company of an evil genius. Luckily for the FBI, as well as making her understandably sullen, the experience also gave her an uncanny ability to think like a serial killer – a talent which has obviously become downright commonplace in this kind of show.

Leaving aside the question of just how all of these troubled young women were able to pass the psychological tests necessary to become involved in law enforcement, one cannot help but again notice the extent to which the conventions established in The Silence of the Lambs have trickled down to the small screen. Just as that film was a deft combination of police procedural and gothic horror story (tropes effectively combined in the film's gripping climax), so too do Starling's small-screen successors often find their own tragedy-riddled personal histories affecting the cases they investigate. This is not to say that the men in such shows are entirely trauma free either. They have their fair share of issues too, most notably in the case of CSI: Vegas's ultra-unfortunate Nick Stokes, who has been both stalked by a madman who lived in his attic and imprisoned in a glass coffin full of poisonous ants. But it's the women who generally have the most to put up with, though no one has yet approached Dana Scully's uncanny ability to get abducted by aliens/serial killers/liver eating mutants every time Mulder's back was turned on The X-Files.

The detective shows of the past always concluded with the cunning unmasking of the culprit and a cheerful return to the status quo. Deranged maniacs were notably scarce, and motives tended to be comfortingly old-fashioned: usually jealousy, adultery or greed. Even though the murderer of the week is generally still caught at the end of the new breed of program, the effect is no where near as reassuring. What these shows overwhelmingly have to tell us is that it's a dangerous world out there, one full of demented serial killers, brutal street crime and random acts of senseless violence. And if you think that you're any safer at home, you're wrong, because you're just as likely to get bunked off by your loved ones or creepy next-door neighbour. Like the world weary, justifiably cynical cops and scientists who populate the new breed of detective dramas, we know that the following week will simply bring them another brutal murder to solve. The only comfort comes from knowing that it probably won't be our own.

BERNICE M. MURPHY

There is nothing wrong with your television set: Programming from The Outer Limits (The Original Series, Season 1 & 2, MGM DVD, 2002-2003)

There is nothing wrong with your television set. Do not attempt to adjust the picture. We are controlling transmission. If we wish to make it louder, we will bring up the volume. If we wish to make it softer, we will tune it to a whisper. We can reduce the focus to a soft blur, or sharpen it to crystal clarity. We will control the horizontal. We will control the vertical. For the next hour, sit quietly and we will control all that you see and hear. You are about to experience the awe and mystery which reaches from the inner mind to... The Outer Limits. — Opening narration – The Control Voice – 1960s

It's curious to note how many of the great science fiction TV shows of the past begin with opening narrations similar to this; narrations which ask us to come inside, settle down, open our minds and prepare for the unexpected. Another example is The Twilight Zone which tells us:

"You unlock this door with the key of imagination. Beyond it is another dimension - a dimension of sound, a dimension of sight, a dimension of mind. You're moving into a land of both shadow and substance, of things and ideas. You've just crossed over into the Twilight Zone."

And most famous of all is Captain Kirk's invitation to join the Starship Enterprise on its five year mission to "explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before". Along with providing continuity, the central tenet of these and similarly narrated intros is to provoke a sense of excitement, adventure and mystery and, most importantly, a sense of breaking boundaries, of leaving something old and entering something new and unknown. (Ironically, these narrations have become very familiar, even comforting, to fans of these shows, but that doesn't mean they've lost their excitement.)

This penchant for an introductory narrative in science fiction TV is quite clearly indebted to Old Time Radio shows of the 40s such as Dimension X and X Minus One, both of which began with weird noises and a host inviting you to travel with them through "dimensions in time and space" and listen to "adventures told in future tense". Old Time Radio horror/mystery shows such as Lights Out, The Creaking Door and Inner Sanctum also included exciting and mysterious intros, inviting their listeners into a liminal space of unknown adventures. Yet, curiously unlike their science fiction counterparts, such horror-based radio shows did not find themselves a home on TV so readily. It seems the reason for this may be a matter of perception and, in particular, of genre definitions. As Mark Jancovich so eloquently argues in his study of American horror of the 1950s, Rational Fears (1996), the genre distinctions made between the tale of horror and the tale of science fiction are complex and often contradictory. Among the numerous difficulties arising out of attempts to impose a rigid and coherent formula on genres such as horror and science fiction is the willful denial of the huge variety of classificatory methods used by different audiences. This is nowhere more evident than in the science fiction narrative of 1950s America, where stories of alien invasion and monster movies made rigid genre definitions appear not only arbitrary but futile. Amidst these definitions, we find the attributes that have been most readily associated with the science fiction genre are a tendency toward philosophical and intellectual reasoning, a predilection for social criticism and a perspective which is decidedly pro-science. In opposition to this, the genre of horror

and in particular Gothic horror is often regarded as dealing with individual psychology and emotion, all within a framework which views scientific progress as dangerous and threatening. However, even a preliminary consideration of the science fiction and horror narratives of 1950s American cinema makes these definitions highly problematic. Under such distinctions, tales of alien invasion and mad science must be classified as horror, albeit horror with a science fiction theme. All in all, what such categorization would seem to suggest is that science fiction stories become horror stories when science "goes wrong"; when, for example, aliens prove to be more violent and primitive than us or when a scientist allows personal issues to interfere with his work.

With these distinctions in mind it also becomes clear why TV programmers favored science fiction shows to horror shows. As part of its mission to establish itself as the friendly face of science within the home, the new and exciting medium of television was naturally drawn towards the futuristic pro-science of the science fiction story; and the 1950s presented its TV audience with a slew of high-action tales of adventure such as Buck Rogers (ABC 1950-51), Captain Video (Dumont 1949-54), and Flash Gordon (Syndicated 1953). By the 1960s these were replaced by more adult themed shows, which focused on philosophical and ethical issues through tales of mystery and suspense rather than action-adventure. The most notable of these are of course The Twilight Zone (CBS 1959-64) and The Outer Limits (ABC 1963-65), two of the genre's most celebrated and influential series, which as one commentator notes "frequently engaged in critical commentary on the three pillars of New Frontier ideology--space, suburbia, and the superpowers". (Jeffrey Sconce)

Hosted and for the most part scripted by Rod Serling, The Twilight Zone was an anthology series which frequently, although not exclusively, used science fiction to frame highly allegorical tales of the human condition and America's national character. Science fiction was often used to defamiliarize and question the values of post-war America, be it its suburban malaise or cold war paranoia. Serling's tales usually relied on ending with a twist and often used quite heavy doses of "I told you so" irony to enlighten their audience.

In an attempt to set up a rival series to CBS' Twilight Zone the programming heads of ABC contracted independent producer Leslie Stevens. Stevens undertook the project and employed the skills of Joseph Stefano (script writer of Hitchcock's Psycho). Between them, and the considerable talents of their production team which included directors, Gerd Oswald and Laslo Benedek and cinematographer Conrad Hall, The Outer Limits came into being. With Stevens' interest in the latest audio-visual techniques and Stefano's penchant for German Expressionism and dark tales of psychological drama, The Outer Limits combined the genres of science fiction and horror in an utterly unique and often disturbing way. Its profound awareness of itself as both a televisual product and a science fiction format was perhaps one of its most intriguing elements. The show evidenced this awareness from its very beginning. Unlike The Twilight Zone's decidedly vague references to dimensions in time and space and a land of things and ideas, The Outer Limits made a direct and immediate reference to its existence as a TV program, turning this familiarity into something strange and vaguely threatening in its claim to have interrupted programmed viewing and taken control of transmission. This claim is backed up by the program's opening visuals which begin with a small dot in the center of the screen that transforms into a pattern of broken waves. Curiously, while this brilliant use of technological reference heightens the sense of the show's

contemporary science fiction elements, it also acknowledges the darker possibilities of science itself, turning that most familiar face of household science (the television set) into a medium which can act in unpredictable ways and be used by unknown forces. Indeed, the premise of the show's very first episode, "The Galaxy Being", involves a similar theme of unexpected televisual transmission, when radio station owner and inventor, Cliff Robertson, finds his high-powered transceiver's "three-dimensional static" resolves into a pure-energy alien from the Andromeda galaxy.

Despite their preliminary likeness, The Outer Limits in fact differed quite radically from The Twilight Zone. Firstly, The Outer Limits was more firmly grounded in science fiction than The Twilight Zone, and although both were an anthology series, The Outer Limits' hour-long format lent itself to more in-depth character development and more complex plot lines. And while it too told allegorical tales about science and space it did so in a far darker tone, heavily implicating its audience and American society in the sinister scenarios it offered. Despite its other worldly format it did not shy away from earthly references, be they narratives of enemy infiltration of the American Government, (reaching all the way to the President) ("Hundred Days of the Dragon") or the political manufacture of fear in order to manipulate public opinion ("The Architects of Fear"). These earthly parallels also included the unashamedly "artsy" and intellectual referencing of "The noble Hamlet... Anna Karenina, putting on her gloves on a snowy evening... Gatsby in white flannels... Moby Dick... and Mark Twain's whole meandering Mississippi" ("The Man Who was Never Born"), as well as the legends of ancient peoples "Assyrian, Babylonian, Sumerian, Semitic" ("Demon with the Glass Hand"). This latter episode, dealing in time travel and the fate of the human race, has been quite justifiably referred to as "one of the most narratively sophisticated and willfully obtuse hours of television ever produced". (Sconce) If all of this sounds like too much hard work for the viewer, let's not neglect to mention that The Outer Limits was also a format for highly compelling drama, with a host of fascinating characters and more than a few very creepy creatures. It also boasted a galaxy of acting talent which included Donald Pleasence, Vera Miles, Robert Duvall, Ruth Roman, Martin Landau, Sydney Blackmer, Gloria Graham, Bruce Dern, William Shatner, Don Gordon, Ralph Meeker, Warren Oates, Miriam Hopkins, Lenoard Nimoy, and Cedric Hardwicke.

Like all allegorical tales, the stories The Outer Limits told contained moral lessons but these lessons remained ambiguous and decidedly liberal, with more than a hint of the value system which by the late 60s would be referred to as “hippy”. Nowhere is this more evident than in the control voice's closing words to the episode entitled "The Man Who Was Never Born":

"It is said that if you move a single pebble on the beach, you set up a different pattern, and everything in the world is changed. It can also be said that love can change the future, if it is deep enough, true enough, and selfless enough. It can prevent a war, prohibit a plague, keep the whole world... whole."

Unfortunately, the network heads of ABC did not share this vision, becoming increasingly concerned that the show was too "out there" for a mainstream audience. Unappreciative of Stevens' and Stefano's maverick style, they placed pressure on the duo to radically alter the show's orientation and tone. In short ABC wanted less plot and more action, less socio-political commentary and more monsters. Rather than submit to network pressure the pair quit the show after 32 episodes and thus ended Season One of The Outer Limits. With a new crew, composed of key members of the Perry Mason production team, Series

Two aired in September 1964. Without the creative sensibilities or the vision of the original production team, Season Two suffered from narratives which managed to be simultaneously pedestrian and convoluted, camera work which was flat and uninspired and a cast of marauding alien monsters with little to do but tear up the scenery. Coupled with these changes, a new time slot and a reduced budget sealed the fate of the show and it ended in mid-season. All this said, Season Two is not without its moments; among them the previously mentioned episode "Demon with a Glass Hand" and brilliant exchanges such as the following from the episode "Keeper of the Purple Twilight":

Ikar: "That's the second time you use that word, what does it mean?... love."
Dr. Plummer: "You don't know?"
Ikar: "It's a new word to me."
Dr. Plummer: "It's the opposite of hate!"
Ikar: "That is also a new word."
Dr. Plummer: "These are the two most profound emotions of all Mankind."
Ikar: "Emotions?"
Dr. Plummer: "Don't tell me you don't know that! What in heaven's name, what do you live for?"
Ikar: "Accomplishment!"
Dr. Plummer: "Without satisfaction?"
Ikar: "Knowledge!"
Dr. Plummer: "Without pleasure?"
Ikar: "Conquest!"
Dr. Plummer: "Without hate?"
Ikar: "Energy!"
Dr. Plummer: "For what?"
Ikar: "For control."

Throughout its brief existence The Outer Limits remained intent on exploring the nature of control, the uses and abuses of power and the role of individual responsibility in society. In the current social-political climate these explorations remain as pertinent as ever. The release of the series on DVD is long overdue, however, those with a liking for DVD extras will be sorely disappointed as there are none included. It could be argued that to want more would be pure greed and is it not true that in such passions lies the annihilation of the human race?

We now return control of your television set to you, until next week, at the same time when the Control Voice will take you to... The Outer Limits

Now available in all good DVD outlets, Season One - 8 Disc Box Set, and Season Two - 5 Disc Box Set

ELIZABETH McCARTHY

Satan's School for Girls
Christopher Leitch. American Broadcasting Company. 2000.

Satan's School for Girls, the 2000 Aaron Spelling made-for-TV remake of a 1973 Arron Spelling made-for-TV film, and which was shown on Ireland's Channel 6 in June of this year, is perhaps most notable for failing to live up to the expectations raised by its title. Contrary to the initial reactions of those to whom I have mentioned it, there are no shower scenes, no uniforms, no bondage gear, and Shannen Doherty's character Beth remains fully (indeed, modestly) clad throughout. There is, nonetheless, a lot going on in this rather snigger-inducing little exercise in generic convention. Doherty, undercover as "Kate", enrols at the university attended by her sister before she committed suicide, with the intention of unearthing the motives behind this uncharacteristic move on the part of her beloved sibling. Convinced, for some reason, that the occult is involved, she soon runs afoul of a group of under-fed Goth-girl types, who are hostile, mysterious, and hang around an abandoned building on campus where terrible deeds happened in the long ago – ample evidence of membership of a Satanic cult. We are therefore supposed to feel rather thrown when the leader of the gang is eaten by a wolf, which is controlled by a group of hooded female figures, just moments after these figures are shown having sex with shadowy Things against a vast and twisted tree. All of this comes to our attention via a nightmare of Doherty's, an economical vehicle for the revelation that she is psychic. From here, a vast conspiracy is revealed, one that reaches to the very heart of the college's leadership, who attempt to recruit our heroine into their evil, power-hungry, man-eating ways, an attempt that she foils in spectacular fashion. And all this in just over an hour and a half. That said, it was an hour and a half fairly enjoyably spent. However, one is also left with a niggling impression that, despite being only five years old, the film is strangely old-fashioned.

It is this quality that makes the film an interesting choice for Channel 6, Ireland's newest television channel, one that tells us a lot, both about what almost seems to be a strategy of deliberate anachronism on Channel 6's part, and about the fate, since the late 1990s, of low-budget small-screen productions that can only be termed "horror-lite". By this I mean that particular brand of programme that borrows heavily from the conventions and iconography of the horror genre, while most of the time turning the gore and fright factors down to a minimum. The blood is there, we just don't get to see it very often. It is in the casting that the issues of genre and release date crystallise most palpably. Shannen Doherty is a somewhat older, more sober version of Prue, her character in the series Charmed, a typical example of a late-'90s horror-extra-lite, which features a family group of three witches bravely fighting off demons, saving the world and screaming a lot, with absolutely no blood spilt whatsoever. Her coldly blond evil nemesis is Julie Benz, best known for playing Darla, the coldly blond vampire in the ever so slightly gorier Buffy the Vampire Slayer and its spin-off Angel. Spelling's film takes no risks, recasting actresses from well-known supernaturally inclined programmes in roles more or less unaltered from their earlier avatars. This choice reveals something that is equally plain from the film's plot and mise-en-scène – that it is little more than a parasitic regrouping of situations and images already familiar to its audience. More importantly, perhaps, this is how it functions within the current geography of Channel 6's programming, since, every weekday from 6 to 8, the channel is showing Buffy followed by Charmed each from the very beginning of series one.

In 2001, the year of the 9/11 attacks, and a year after Satan's School for Girls is released, Buffy dies, only to be reborn in the next series into a less sunny Sunnydale, one characterised by loss, failed communication, disintegration, ambivalent evil and general ontological uncertainty. By 2003, the show had come to an end. In an opposite move, in Charmed, Prue is killed off and replaced by Rose McGowan, who signals her new-millennial sympathies by wearing less gloomy, thoughtful, Gothy eye make-up and more bright, sensual, emotional lipstick. While one show wears its cultural malaise on its blood-stained sleeve, the other attempts to exorcise or at least bury it beneath a shiny surface where darkness finds it increasingly difficult to lurk (evidently a good plan, since there were still new episodes of Charmed being made in 2006). One way or another, the era of the television series in which demonic evil is successfully fought off by spunky-yet-complex young ladies has been forever altered. A few months ago, however, Channel 6 made the interesting decision to halt its repeats of Buffy directly after her death and return to random episodes from earlier seasons. Despite resuming in early September with a resurrected heroine, they omitted the episode in which she claws her way out of the grave. It almost feels as if her death is a scandal which needs to be hushed up. More inexplicably still, the episodes of Charmed continue to feature a hale and hearty Prue. On the one hand, Satan's School for Girls fits seamlessly into this rather odd pre-9/11 revival, returning to a time when supernatural evil could be fought off by gifted young waifs without apologising for it either by exaggerating it or toning it down. At the same time, its narrative enacts the passing out of favour of such programmes. The ending is particularly grim in this respect. A smiling Doherty, clad in a flowery print and lugging a hefty-looking baby in her arms, waves a supremely bland Stepford-type husband off to work. She serenely picks flowers (more flowers!) before depositing her bundle of joy in a play-pen and going in to answer the phone. While she's in there, a large crow (reminiscent of those that, along with the Goths, hung around the deserted building back in the university) lands on her fence and proceeds to squawk ominously, followed by another and then another, in an ultra-transparent The Birdsrip-off. Doherty, chatting away, is unconvincingly oblivious. Finally she does notice, looks shocked, the music goes "duhn-duhn duhn", and the credits roll.

Apart from the fact that this is just plain daft – unless it's trying to lead us to expect a sequel, mercy save us – it is also deeply depressing. In an odd foreshadowing of the simultaneous demise of Buffy Summers and Prue, Doherty's character has evidently been stripped of her psychic powers – or worse, has voluntarily suppressed them – at precisely the same moment that her college career comes to an abrupt end, and she happily settles down to be a wife and mother. Only the crows remain to give us some semblance of hope that she might have to give it all up and go back to being a precognisant version of Carol J. Clover's Final Girl who keeps fighting evil even after her sister, boyfriend and various acquaintances get sacrificed to Satan. But no sequel (however badly made) is forthcoming, and we are in the midst of a wave of utterly realist (if equally daft) and somehow, despite having positive female characters, overwhelmingly male programmes like 24, Lost and Nip/Tuck. That feisty girl is now to all intents and purposes dead, and is lying at the narrative centre and on the post-mortem examination tables of the new, unashamedly gory repositories for the tropes of Gothic horror – franchises such as CSI and Law & Order, and "reality" shows like the gob-smackingly prurient Forensic Detectives.

The ending of Satan's School for Girls also spookily prefigures the shift from Sex and the City (which Channel 6 is also playing from the start) to Desperate Housewives. While I would baulk at the idea of announcing that either Buffy or Sex in the City present indisputably ideal models of femininity, what is

most shocking about the return to the 1950s suburban baby factory and the rise of representations of the sex-murders of beautiful women is the ease with which they have been accepted. In a cultural climate no longer dominated by programmes like American Gothic or The X-Files, one in which Dead Like Me, Supernatural, and even all of those alien-invasion shows are doomed to relative obscurity, there are many who refer affectionately to the privileged, soap-opera world of Desperate Housewives as "dark", but like it because it really isn't, while at the same time immersing themselves in televisual universes where women are more often objectified victims than participating subjects. What Channel 6's extended foray into the world of American television before September 11th serves to remind us is that there was a time before women traded in their superhero cloaks for floral aprons, and that, while it was silly, often nonsensical, it really wasn't so bad.

DARA DOWNEY

Someone's At The Door….
American Gothic 1995-96 CBS

Twin Peaks may have garnered the critical plaudits, and The X-Files may have been the biggest hit of the decade, but to my mind the best horror-themed series of the 1990s was also one of the least seen: Sean Cassidy's short-lived, ambitious American Gothic, which has recently been released on DVD for the first time, ten years after its television debut.

As Cassidy and series producer David Eick note during their witty pilot commentary, the series was a rich, strange, and often blackly hilarious slice of southern gothic much indebted to the darker works of Truman Capote, William Faulkner, and the complex inter-familial politics of The Godfather. If that all sounds rather complicated, the concept at the heart of the show was not: essentially it is the story of a father trying to ensure that his young son follows in his footsteps. The trouble is the father in question is demonic Sheriff Lucas Buck (Gary Cole), who rules the Southern Carolina town of Trinity with a combination of devilish charm and brute force. The supernaturally-gifted little boy he tries to groom as his successor is Caleb Temple, (Lucas Black) conceived when his mother was raped by Buck, who quite rightly holds the sheriff responsible for all the misfortune that has befallen his "fambly".

Arrayed against Buck's seemingly unstoppable will are troubled medic "Dr Matt" Crower (Jake Weber), who also takes a fatherly interest in the boy, and Gail Emory (Paige Turco), Caleb's last surviving relative, who returns to Trinity to look out for her little cousin and try to figure out the truth behind the death of her own parents two decades previously.

Whilst this may sound like a fairly hackneyed scenario, what differentiated American Gothic from the standard good versus demonic evil genre piece was the quality of the acting, the morbid wit of the writing, and the shows willingness from the very outset to stretch the very limits of what could be shown on American television. The pilot begins as troubled patriarch Gage Temple goes on a drunken rampage, threatening the lives of Caleb and his catatonic 16 year-old sister Merlee (Sarah Paulson), who can only mutter the delightfully eerie words "Someone's at the door" over and over again as her father batters his way into their room. Forced to leave Merlee behind as he scrambles out of the house to seek help, Caleb runs smack into Sheriff Buck, who greets him with the heavily ironic words: "Time to stop running, son".

Meanwhile, back in the Temple shack, Gage has cornered Merlee and takes a swing at her head with a handy shovel – a scene which so vexed then Presidential candidate Bob Dole and his fellow anti-television violence campaigners that it was cut short. What really shocked unwary viewers however was the fact that the arrival of the supposed forces of law-and-order – Buck and his weak-willed deputy Ben Healy (Nick Searcy) – actually makes things worse. Buck enters the homestead, and breaks the still-conscious Merlee's neck (the sound of her spine had to be drowned out by music after the network again objected to the extreme violence on display).

However, this isn't the last we see of Merlee. In no time at all, her vengeful ghost is stirring up trouble for those who would seek to cover-up the true cause of her death. She functions as a kind of embodied conscience for Caleb, the Jiminy Cricket to his conflicted Pinocchio, although her fashion sense runs to a

tasteful white cloak rather than a garish top hat. For a few episodes it seems alarmingly likely that Merlee will only show up to deliver pious sermons about "what's raaht" to her little brother and occasionally levitate significant objects, Carrie-style. Luckily, it soon becomes delightfully obvious that despite her disembodied state, Merlee is just as flawed and prone to making mistakes as anyone else in Trinity.

In one episode, entitled "Rebirth", Merlee steals the soul of an unborn child so that she may briefly experience normal life; in another, "The Plague Sower", she turns the town's river into blood and infects anyone she deems to have capitulated to Buck with an Ebola-style virus which makes them bleed out of their eyeballs. The fact that Dr Matt and Gail are amongst her victims (she, for falling prey to Buck's irresistible charms, he, for failing to stand up to the sheriff strongly enough) leaves us in no doubt as to the cruelty of her actions. As Eick drolly observes on the commentary, this show was more "Touched by Satan" than "Touched by an Angel", although I'd pay good money to see a crossover episode in which Buck corrupts Roma Downey and the rest of her do-gooding friends.

Lucas Black, now all grown up and recently seen in Jarhead, as well as, somewhat less admirably, Tokyo Drift, is here that rarest of creatures: an accomplished child actor who actually seems like a real child. Unlike creepily composed present-day child actors such as Dakota Fanning and Cameron Bright, Black's performances are seldom less than a pleasure to watch. He conveys rough-hewn intelligence and determination in an appealingly natural manner; an accomplishment all the more notable given the fact that much of his time onscreen is spent talking to a ghost.

Particular mention should also be made of Gary Cole, whose ability to radiate immense evil and irresistible charisma as Lucas Buck carried the series. Buck may be an evil, corrupting force – perhaps even Lucifer himself, as his name suggests – but he is also an immensely likable fellow, the centre around which the business dealings, criminal activities and moral dilemmas of an entire town revolve. After all, what's not to love about a sheriff who advises his morally squeamish subordinate that "conscience is just a fear of getting caught"? Whilst Buck and Caleb both display supernatural abilities during the course of the series, most of the sheriff's devious schemes work out because he so expertly plays upon the foibles and weaknesses of his fellow townsfolk. Like the similarly satanic Lealand Gaunt in Stephen King's novel Needful Things, Buck offers his victims whatever they most desire – but at a very high (and usually bitterly ironic) cost.

Buck's moll-in-darkness is the voluptuous Selena Coombs, elementary school teacher by day and town sexpot by night. As Selena, Brenda Bakke vamps about town in a bright yellow sports car, pausing occasionally to tease whatever poor sap Lucas Buck has his claws into on a particular week. However, in a pattern repeated throughout the series, what would have in another show been a rather stereotypical role is here invested with much more depth than one would initially suspect. Like Buck's unfortunate, but never unsympathetic, sidekick Ben, Selena is soon revealed to be a complex and deeply unhappy character who longs to escape his malign influence but can never quite manage to succeed.

Had American Gothic been shown on a cable network like HBO or Showtime, its combination of supernatural menace, sex, violence and family drama may well have survived. But from the outset, it was clear that a show as uncompromising as this was doomed. Many of the episodes bear sorry evidence of

network tampering; the most obvious being the disappearance of Jake Weber (now playing Patricia Arquette's husband in Medium) halfway through the season as it was felt that his character wasn't strong enough to stand up to Buck. Needless to say, his replacement, the square-jawed, conventionally heroic Dr Billy Peel (John Mese) barely makes an impact.

During the original US run of the series, four episodes were left out of the running order entirely, and those familiar with the show will rightly wonder why the final episode is here placed seventeenth, rather than twenty first. Anyone buying the box set would therefore be well advised to look up the correct running order on the internet before starting to watch the show. Standout episodes include: the three opening instalments, "Potato Boy" (in which a genuinely bizarre and often hilarious story involving a deformed child is interwoven with some startling revelations about Selena Coombs), "Strong Arm of the Law" (in which three out-of-town extortionists learn the hard way that they should have bypassed Trinity, and a shovel once more comes in useful), "The Beast Within", "The Plague Sower" and blistering final episodes "The Buck Stops Here" and "Requiem", which are so good that you'll curse the short-sighted idiots who pulled the plug on the series just as it got into its stride. In other words, if you have any interest whatsoever in supernaturally-themed television shows, the southern gothic, weird family sagas, or undeservedly neglected TV gems, this is the show for you. Just don't make any deals with the devil to get your hands on it…
Now available in all good DVD outlets, RRP: €55.00 / £34.00: also currently showing on ITV 4.

BERNICE M. MURPHY

Dead Quiet: Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel

While recently researching the state of the modern vampire, I was struck by how quiet the 21st century vampire has been, particularly on television. Vampire literature has experienced something of a boom in the past decade, and yet we find the vampire has for the most part disappeared from our television screens in recent years. Why is this? And has the colossally successful phenomenon that is Buffy and its spin off series Angel contributed to this? There is no doubt that the vampire has become a source of contemporary humour and light reading; vampire novels in the style of HBO's Sex and the City have littered 'horror' shelves in chain bookstores for sometime now and it is this reigning perception of the vampire as a benevolent romantic character that has effectively castrated him. This castration may be interpreted as a transition in the vampire's duality from 'other' to both monster and self. While vampires of the past thirty years generally embody human emotions and conditions, we have now become overly saturated in the vampire's dialogue and have grown jaded of 'the vampire's point of view'. Perhaps, I daresay, we have removed the current popular perception of the vampire from the horror genre altogether? Is it the case that in recent years the pop culture vampire has become increasingly estranged from the horror genre itself?

Firstly, we should examine what the modern vampire has become. Unlike his more traditional predecessors, the modern vampire has long left the castles and crypts of lore behind and settled instead in the hotels and apartments of cosmopolitan urban centres such as New York, Los Angeles and London. This change of location cancels out the concept of the vampire as the rural/foreign 'other' and allows an inclusive cultural viewpoint. While the vampire as monster can be viewed as categorically different from the human inhabitants of the city, he is now representative of a cultural minority within the city limits rather than the physical and cultural other represented by Stoker's Dracula. Vampires live among us in the modern world and in our city space; they can be our neighbours, friends and lovers.

In the past ten years, vampires have experienced a resurgence in popular culture thanks to the critical and popular success of Joss Whedon's Buffy The Vampire Slayer. In what initially seemed like an old-fashioned representation of vampires as monsters, BTVS quickly challenged the viewers (and its heroines) initial assumption that all vampires were evil bloodsuckers by introducing the character Angel, a complex, brooding vampire (not unlike Anne Rice's Louis) with a soul who refuses to feed on humans and fights for the forces of good. The central theme in many Buffy and Angel episodes rests on the fear that Angel's soul may be lost to corruption or magic. The ingenuity of this new mythology on the figure of the vampire, as soul bearer and conscious stricken immortal, rests on our belief in his alliance to the forces of good; an alliance which the viewer is never fully assured of. When Angel lost his soul again during the classic season 2 two-part episode 'Surprise'/ 'Innocence', the bloodthirsty vampire fiend of past Hammer representations came to the fore. While Whedon's writing of the character puts modern society at ease with the rules and exceptions of the vampire condition by making vampires benevolent under certain circumstances, he also reiterates the known histories of the destructive vampire's past. This fertile narrative terrain facilitated the transition and expansion of the character's potential so much that a spin off series, Angel debuted in 1999 and ran for five years.

Angel is, without doubt, a much darker series than BTVS. The shows often risqué content was seen by the Warner Bros. network as too daring for the average Buffy viewer (some social commentators had

pinpointed core viewers and fans as young as seven years old). Unsurprisingly, this snared Angel a later timeslot on television in the US and UK and an 18s certificate from the BBFC and Irish Film Censor's Office (IFCO) on its DVD release. However, having the vampire return to a more adult premise allowed the writers to present the audience with a more wholly realised sexual viewpoint on the vampire protagonist.

While all series of Angel tended to be of a more adult nature than Buffy, the relocation of setting in the final series to the headquarters of the powerful (evil) law firm Wolfram and Hart, where Angel becomes a CEO, added a balancing comic element. Lawyers have long been metaphorically associated with vampires – viewed by some as social and financial leeches in our current culture, while the vampire becomes a demythologised being. Associating our protagonist with the culture of litigation updates the vampire to late 20th / early 21st Century life but alters his mythological outsider status. Angel, like Nick Knight before him on television's Forever Knight, begins his quest aiding the police by solving cases and crimes, just another private eye on streets. While the initial formula was only enough to deliver one series, Whedon developed a new mythology for Angel involving procreation, other worlds and prophecies. The series closed with an impending apocalypse and faded out as our heroes faced an impossible battle and certain death – the bloody conclusion (and their certain destruction) cleverly, and poignantly left to our imagination.

In comparison to this, the most recent innovation in television drama, the forensic detective template, leaves nothing to our imagination. Everything is displayed, dissected and scientifically explained. CSI and its spin offs graphically display the wounded body in grotesque detail and the victim is mostly relegated to a secondary focus to solving the case. This excessive drive to reveal every detail of horror on the body in vivid form has reduced our exploration of myths, and demands that all similar displays of horror include the same graphic exposure of flesh and blood.

The romance of the vampire is lost in this new display of revealing all; part of the romantic vampire persona is to be sexually alluring, beautiful and mysterious, whereas the modern serial killer is a monstrous human entity, ensnared by science and reason rather than myth and magic. In this new time of televisual serial killers, terrorism (24) and reality television (The Swan etc), the vampire has fallen dormant. A final breath of life was to come from the US in the form of Blade: The Television Series. However, it was poorly received and boasted no actors from the original film trilogy: the series was cancelled in a matter of weeks. Perhaps for now we should leave the TV serial killers to their work and await a new vampire mythology. I am in no doubt that when this occurs, the vampire will have much to say on this overtly violent and relentless form of invasive entertainment. But for the present it is human monsters that hold our interest, not supernatural ones.

SORCHA Ní FHLAINN