FILM REVIEWS

HANNIBAL: THE EARLY YEARS

Hannibal Rising (Dir. Peter Webber) France/UK/USA 2007
& Thomas Harris, Hannibal Rising (London: William Heinemann, 2006)

From Varney the Vampyre in the 1840s onwards, producers of horror have always been in thrall to the economics of the franchise. Sir Francis Varney, having returned from innumerable deaths, implausibly revived time and again by the light of the pale moon, was finally killed off by his publisher, Edward Lloyd, when the series stopped making money. As those of us who spent our youths watching slasher movies can testify, horror icons never really died, no matter how final it seemed – they could always be counted on to return for One More Heave, provided the conditions were right, if there was a buck to be made. And so Hannibal Lecter is back! And what an icon! Positioned precisely half way between Freddy Krueger and George Steiner, the Baltimore Renaissance Man – gourmand, psychiatrist, anatomist, artist, musician, orientalist, historian of high culture, patron of the arts, serial killer, cannibal, demon – has been giving a grateful world his mordant shtick for over a quarter of a century now, and I suppose we should always be glad to see him back. I have to say, though, that Thomas Harris's heart doesn't really seem to be in it this time around.

Also not in it is Anthony Hopkins. There is of course a Law of Diminishing Returns that tends to apply when sequels become franchises, so that, say, Steve McQueen and Charles Bronson in Part I become Warren Oates and Robert Fuller in II, then George Kennedy and Joe Don Baker in III, only to settle on Ralph Waite and James B. Sikking by IV (as Joe Queenan once observed, there's a whole repertory company of actors – Martin Kove, Richard Roundtree, Patrick Macnee – whose entire later careers consist of Part IIIs). Now, there are some purists who will tell you that the only real Hannibal Lecter is Hannibal Lecktor, as played by Brian Cox in Michael Mann's Manhunter (1986), but they're wrong. Not that Manhunter isn't a great film – it is – or that Cox doesn't give a great performance – he does. No, his status as an icon means that Hannibal Lecter belongs at large in the cultural imaginary, and he doesn't enter our collective memory palace (as Harris might grandly put it) until brave Jodie Foster, who wears Evian skin cream and L'Air du Temps, but not today, takes her trepidatious walk along the dark corridor of the supermax dungeon, down past Multiple Miggs ("I can smell your cunt!"). There, waiting for her, at the very end of the line, last stop, is the Worst Man in the World. There are few things in contemporary cinema to match this scene from Jonathan Demme's The Silence of the Lambs (1991), and for once the Academy made good decisions in awarding the Best Actor Oscar to Hopkins (in spite of minimal screen time), and Best Actress to Foster. Hopkins claims to have forsworn Hannibal Lecter for good, but he's a famously capricious man, so you never know. I was really hoping for a cameo appearance from Hopkins, or even Brian Cox, in Hannibal Rising, perhaps there in the closing scene, cackling though his muzzle. Alas, no – but in compensation we do get not one but two villainous Welshmen, Rhys Ifans as the vile Grutas, and Richard Brake as his sidekick Dortlich, which must count for something.

In fairness, this is the first Lecter movie for which the Law of Diminishing Sequels has really applied. Everyone knows that Manhunter is a terrific movie – even if Mann's 80s chic makes everything look like a Level 42 video, there's still Cox and, even better, Tom Noonan, a Lost Soul if ever there was one, as Dolarhyde, complete with hare-lip, stocking mask, shortie kimono, and sawn-off shotgun, blasting suburban families away to the sound of Iron Butterfly's 'In-a-Gadda-Da-Vida'. It's my favourite scene in the film, and one of the great moments of 80s cinema. And am I the only person who loves Ridley Scott's 2001 Hannibal? Scott was well up for adapting the novel's unremittingly vulgar commodity-fetishism – so many types of expensive cologne! – so many chichi Italian fountain pens! (you don't get this stuff in Wal-Mart, you know). This is, to paraphrase Ezra Pound, Thomas Harris's Guide to Kulchur, red in tooth and claw. What's more, Hopkins has Lecter develop a bizarre fondness for using the phrase 'okey-dokey' at inopportune moments, and, well, who hasn't wanted to see Ray Liotta eat his own brain? So much to love, so much. For Red Dragon (2002), the remake of Manhunter, producer Dino di Laurentiis gathered together as good a cast as it's possible to assemble in a contemporary film – Hopkins, plus Edward Norton, Ralph Fiennes, Emily Watson, Harvey Keitel, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Mary-Louise Parker – and then saddled them with a director, Brett Ratner, who'd be out of his depth working with Martin Kove, Richard Roundtree and Patrick Macnee. The result is a dull mess, from Hopkins sporting a ponytail as the 'young' Hannibal Lecter, to Ralph Fiennes's decidedly un-deformed Dolarhyde, turning a character whom Harris's novel calls "cunt-face" (he likes that word, Thomas Harris) into a mere Joaquin Phoenix, rather than the full Tom Noonan. They should have left it there, but they didn't.

What we have here, then, is a prequel. Hannibal Rising is Hannibal, the Early Years. Lecter is a Lithuanian aristocrat, traumatized by witnessing his sister being eaten by starving irregulars on the Eastern Front. This we knew already from Hannibal, but Rising fills in some crunchy details. Hannibal is brought up in Lecter Castle, last of the Lecters, warriors and artists, descendents of Hannibal the Grim (1365-1428). Young Lecter witnesses the death of his parents in a Stuka attack, and then is imprisoned by the irregulars, wannabe Nazis who, being Lithuanians, have names which Harris clearly relishes as fantastically villainous – Vladis Grutas, Enrikas Dortlich, Petras Kolnas, Bronys Gentz, Zigmas Milko. After liberation by the Russians, little Hannibal walks out of the snow with a chain around his neck. He is returned to Lecter Castle, now a Stalinist orphanage, where he "does not observe the pecking order" and instead hurts the bullies "very quickly and sometimes severely". Escaping (in the film) or being rescued by his uncle (in the book), Hannibal is brought up in a French chateau, under the tutelage of his glamorous Japanese aunt, Lady Murasaki, whom he loves.

Hannibal becomes the youngest student ever admitted to medical school in Paris, where he is always top of his class, and earns his scholarship through drawing anatomical illustrations. He discovers the identities of the evil Lithuanians, all wanted for war crimes, tracks them down, and kills them all, at the same time losing whatever little humanity remains in him. As Inspector Popil, the policeman/war crimes investigator who pursues him ineffectually throughout the second half of the novel, muses:

The little boy Hannibal died in 1945 out there in the snow, trying to save his sister. His heart died with Mischa. What is he now? There's not a word for it yet. For lack of a better word, we'll call him a monster.

Like Hannibal before it, Hannibal Rising causes Harris some serious narrative and ethical problems, which he is unable to resolve. As novels, Red Dragon and The Silence of the Lambs were basically police procedural thrillers, focused around the (admittedly often somewhat wacky) FBI serial killer division at Quantico, where both Will Graham and Clarice Starling are based. Lecter, like Dolarhyde and Buffalo Bill, lurks in the background of these works, emerging only occasionally from the narrative shadows, but with truly startling effect. Less really is more here, as John Carpenter knew when he conceived of that other great serial-killer monster, Michael Myers. In Hannibal, Lecter is elevated to full heroic status, front of house. The novel succeeds – just – because of the sheer energy of its riotous baroque excess: Harris abandons all pretence of realism to create one of the maddest books I know. But even here, Hannibal is now only the Second Worst Man in the World, as we're rooting for him against an Even Worse one, Mason Verger, his billionaire nemesis/victim, who drinks martinis made from the tears of children (how evil is that!). In Rising, Hannibal has become a kind of righteous avenger. Set in post-war Paris, all Hannibal's victims are war criminals, profiteers, Vichy informers. They deserve to die; they even deserve to be eaten. Lecter is a one-man war-crimes tribunal, far more effective, and at least as just, as his official counterpart, Popil.

In Hannibal, Thomas Harris seemed to have decided that Hannibal Lecter, his Man of Wealth and Taste, was in fact the devil himself after all. That novel is steeped in Satanic imagery, and while Rising tones this down a little, there are still a few Faustian allusions and epigraphs thrown in for good measure. In keeping with all this, the makers of Hannibal Rising cast in the title role Gaspard Ulliel, a young French actor with the most Satanic-sounding name this side of Louis Cyphre. He also leers and gurns brilliantly. Towards the end of the film, it struck me that both Ulliel and Ifans were in fact involved in a secret David Bowie lookalike competition. Both chose the Berlin-period look, in dress and hairstyle, which could have been worse.

So where do we go from here? If Sylvester Stallone can return to the big screen as a geriatric Rocky (and, soon, a geriatric Rambo), then, as a matter of principle, we should rule nothing out – like Fu Manchu, that other Devil Doctor, the world may well hear from Hannibal Lecter again. You may remember that Hannibal the novel closed with Lecter and Clarice eloping together to set up a new life in Buenos Aires, where they are occasionally glimpsed at the opera house. My sources tell me that, as I write this, Thomas Harris and Dino de Laurentiis are cooking up the next Hannibal movie. It's a musical, to be directed by Alan Parker, in which Hannibal Lecter (Rhys Ifans) and his diva wife Clarice (Madonna) set themselves up as his'n'hers fascist dictators of Argentina. When it comes out, I'll be first in the queue, but until then, adios amigo! Okey-dokey?

Darryl Jones

The Innocents (Dir. Jack Clayton) UK 1961
BFI 2006

Since its first publication in 1898, Henry James's The Turn of the Screw, in addition to being acclaimed as one of the finest ghost stories ever written, has proved a veritable battleground for chin-stroking literary academics. Is it a ghost story pure and simple, in which a young, unnamed governess contends for the souls of her charges, Miles and Flora, with the spectral apparitions of her predecessor, Miss Jessel, and her lover, the sinister former valet, Peter Quint? Or is it, as Edmund Wilson insisted in his 1934 essay, 'The Ambiguity of Henry James', a study in sexual repression in which the governess projects her own desires and fears onto the children, inadvertently destroying them in the process?

The question of how to interpret James's deliberate ambiguities was perhaps the most pressing problem facing film-maker Jack Clayton and his scriptwriters, William Archibald, Truman Capote, and John Mortimer, when they came to adapt the story for their 1961 film, The Innocents, now released on DVD by the BFI (£19.99/€29.99) with a splendidly informative and enthusiastic commentary and introduction by film historian (and, entirely coincidentally, fellow IJGHS editorial board member), Sir Christopher Frayling, who recalls being suitably traumatised by the film as a fourteen-year-old.

Cinema, of course, does not lend itself happily to ambiguity: objects, ghostly or otherwise, are either seen or they are not. In this respect, Clayton and his colleagues opted to follow the precedent set by the American stage adaptation, in which the ghosts were "real", while also appropriating its name for the governess (Miss Giddens), and its title, The Innocents. The resultant film, though wonderfully creepy and boasting fine performances, fell victim to a not dissimilar divergence of critical opinion as the original novella, with more literary-minded critics opining that it was too unsubtle, while the more bloody-minded (in the literal sense) considered that, though it shared some stylistic similarities with the then-booming Hammer output, it fell somewhat short in the shock-horror department. Clayton himself, it transpires, was in two minds about how best to present things going bump in the night, and was not entirely satisfied with the results either. Certainly, the appearances of Quint and Miss Jessel, while genuinely eerie and unsettling, tend to suffer from the law of diminishing returns – the more we see of them, the less frightening they become – and by the time of the film's delirious climax, Quint has indeed been reduced to little more than a Hammer-style monster.

As to the vexed question of interpretation, the key scenes in support of a literal reading of The Turn of the Screw occur when the governess first sees a figure standing on one of the towers of Bly House and looking directly at her. The governess can, apparently, discern it quite distinctly; later, after encountering the apparition again, she gives a detailed description, right down to the colour of its chin whiskers, to the housekeeper, Mrs. Grose, who identifies it as the late, unlamented Peter Quint. From this point on, in theory, one is obliged to accept that the governess has indeed seen the ghost of the former valet. In The Innocents, however, Clayton handles this sequence quite differently. Initially, Miss Giddens sees only a silhouette on the tower. Later on, during a game of hide-and-seek, she finds a miniature portrait of Quint in the attic, and is soon after terrified by his second appearance, in leering close-up, through a window. When she asks Mrs. Grose (Megs Jenkins) how she could have described Quint so accurately, the

housekeeper points out that Miss Giddens has recently seen the miniature, implying that she may have imagined the whole episode.

However, just as James provides a sticking point by having the governess describe Quint so accurately (without, as far as the reader is aware, having previously seen an image of him), so Clayton does the same, through composition. Miss Giddens' first vision of Quint (Peter Wyngarde) is shown from her point of view, thereby allowing the viewer, if so inclined, to question if what she is seeing is "real". But with Quint's second appearance, Clayton shows both the ghost and Miss Giddens in the same shot, at which point the viewer is obliged, by the grammar of cinema, to accept that he or she is indeed seeing a "real" apparition. Later on in the film, Clayton repeats this effect in a scene with Miss Jessel (Clytie Jessop). In the brilliant, skin-crawling shots of the former governess standing in the reeds across the lake, she is seen only from Miss Giddens' point of view, but during her appearance in the schoolroom, she is shown in the same shot as Miss Giddens. (This is followed by a highly suspect moment in which Miss Giddens discovers a distinctly corporeal teardrop on the desk, the inclusion of which, Capote later admitted, was a mistake.) And in the climactic scene, where Quint appears on a pedestal above Miss Giddens and Miles, Clayton includes a high-angle shot in which all three appear in the same frame. The deliberate use of these objective shots means, in effect, that it is not possible to view The Innocents solely as a psychological portrait of a repressed spinster, as claimed, for instance, in The Aurum Film Encyclopedia. Indeed, rather than presenting "the very psychological narrative which James' writing painstakingly invalidated and avoided", Clayton may be said to have found a perfect visual metaphor for the central ambiguity of the original work.

In James's novella, the governess is an inexperienced twenty-year-old, "the youngest of several daughters of a poor country parson." Her story, though ostensibly told in her own words, is filtered through several other characters (a narrator retells the story as he remembers having heard it being read aloud by a man who knew the governess in later life, and to whom she sent her memoir), thereby allowing the reader to question the reliability of the entire narrative. Having provided the afore-mentioned sticking point, James then proceeds to undermine the governess's credibility. Utterly convinced of her own rightness and unattractively self-laudatory, she proves frighteningly quick to jump to conclusions and to impose her interpretation of events on others. By story's end, with young Miles dead, one is entitled to wonder whether the governess's recollections might not be an entirely delusional exercise in retrospective self-justification.

In The Innocents, Miss Giddens is played by Deborah Kerr, who was then in her fortieth year, a fact which, on one level, makes the "sexual repression" interpretation more plausible than when applied to James's much younger governess (whom, one may assume, has no reason to suppose she might not make "a good match" at some point in the future). Nonetheless, the casting of Kerr only tends to strengthen the case for a literal reading of the film; her screen image (From Here to Eternity notwithstanding) was one of well-bred competence, composure, and common sense, and viewers, certainly in 1961 (and not least due to the exigencies of the Hollywood star system), would have been unlikely to question the veracity of her character's impressions.

In one major area, the depiction of Miles and Flora, Clayton and his colleagues may be said to have vastly improved on James's original. In The Turn of the Screw, the children are ill-defined characters, seen only through the increasingly hysterical eyes of the governess. Their actions give little support to the latter's conviction that they are somehow in league with the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel, who allegedly wish to possess them, and the reader is more inclined than not to conclude that they are indeed "innocents". In the film, however, a clever use of lighting and editing – highlighting a quick, exchanged glance, a secret smile, a long-held look – allows Clayton to bring a real ambiguity to their characters, and one is constantly forced to remind oneself that it is only Miss Giddens' interpretation of certain events or gestures, such as Miles's seeming invocation of Quint during a fancy-dress performance or Flora's disposition to reverie, that makes the children seem actively sinister. Clayton's casting of Martin Stephens (who had already made his mark the year before in Village of the Damned) as the creepily self-possessed yet vulnerable Miles, and of débutante Pamela Franklin as Flora was little short of inspired.

To a large extent, then, and given the fact that the medium of cinema itself militates against adapting James's novella entirely satisfactorily, Clayton and his team must be credited with intelligently navigating the problems inherent in such an undertaking. If the director's approach is occasionally rather ponderous (a tendency often displayed in his other films, all literary adaptations), it is a failing of which, at least in this instance, he seems to have been aware. Nonetheless, The Innocents remains, along with Jacques Tourneur's Night of the Demon (1957), Sidney Hayers's Night of the Eagle (1961) and Robert Wise's The Haunting (1963), not only one of the best attempts to present the supernatural in an adult manner, but also, perhaps, the most satisfying and successful.

John Exshaw

‘Don’t Look Now’ (Dir. Nicolas Roeg) Italy/UK 1973
Optimum Home Entertainment 2006

‘Don’t Look Now’, Nicolas Roeg’s 1973 horror masterpiece, has been spruced up for a new generation of cinephiles with its November 2006 special edition DVD release by Optimum Home Entertainment (in association with Studio Canal). The film has been given a digitally-restored widescreen transfer and now comes equipped with a series of extras that will further appeal to those who are already fans of Roeg’s work. These include an appraisal of the film by the critic and author of The Rough Guide to Horror Alan Jones; an exclusive audio commentary by the director himself; a ‘making-of’ documentary which features contributions from Roeg, cinematographer Anthony B. Richmond and editor Graeme Clifford; and an interview with the composer Pino Donnagio, who scored the haunting and foreboding music for the film. The package is rounded out by an informative sixteen-page booklet which includes a new essay on the film by critic Ryan Gilbey and behind-the-scenes stills.

Having made his reputation working as a cinematographer for directors such as Roger Corman on The Masque of the Red Death and for François Truffaut on Fahrenheit 451, Nicolas Roeg turned to directing in 1970 with the controversial Performance, which he followed with Aboriginal thriller Walkabout (1971). ‘Don’t Look Now’ was his third film, an adaptation of the Daphne Du Maurier short story of the same name. Roeg’s attraction to Du Maurier’s story centred on what he felt was its illustration of the lack of control one has over one’s own fate. The film recounts the tale of grief-stricken couple John and Laura Baxter (played by Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie). Following the tragic death of their young daughter Christine in the film’s opening sequence, they travel to Venice where John has been given the job of restoring an old church. There, they encounter a pair of old sisters, one is a blind psychic who tells Laura that she can see Christine and also warns that John is in imminent danger if he continues to remain in Venice. John, a sceptic and disbeliever in ESP, ignores the warning and so the tension builds as he moves towards his own death at the hands of the red-hooded, dwarf-crone whom he mistakes for Christine.

‘Don’t Look Now’ is perhaps one of the most finely-executed examples of psychological horror, which Roeg in part achieves through clever editing and the repetition of the key motifs of water, shattered glass and the colour red throughout the film. The images of Christine in her red raincoat and the red-hooded figure that John sees in Venice, for example, provides the horror genre with one of its most chilling doubles. However, the film’s continuing resonance also lies in its subtle and tender treatment of loss, grief and mourning. Bereavement is explored through a contemplation of time and space, a theme which is evident from the opening moments of the film. Throughout this remarkable opening sequence, Laura sits reading a book entitled Beyond the Fragile Geometry of Space, a title that captures the essence of the film as a whole. As she attempts to find the answer to a question of Christine’s – “If the world is round why is a frozen pond flat?” – she discovers that “Lake Ontario curves three degrees”, prompting John to respond that “Nothing is what it seems”. And indeed nothing is what it seems, for moments later Christine drowns in a small pond in the family garden, and with this event John and Christine’s lives take on an increasingly unstable direction. Throughout the film time tends to overlap and become confused. Life and

death co-exist in the psychic visions of the blind sister; in John's premonition of his own death; and in the multiple montage sequences which inter-cut the past, present and future. The labyrinthine space of Venice further highlights the underlying fragility of life and the fragile boundaries of existence. Shot out of season, the city takes on a character of its own. With its dark, damp, dead-end alleys and confusing network of narrow streets, the watery city disorientates both characters and viewers alike. Constantly folding in on itself through the repetition of streets and bridges, Venice challenges and defies concepts of stability, space and time, effectively mirroring the narrative techniques and themes of 'Don't Look Now' itself.

Another notable element of the film is, of course, the infamous love scene between John and Laura (which was actually the first scene shot). The scene caused controversy at the time of its release on both sides of the Atlantic because – as Julie Christie comments – "People didn't do scenes like that in those days". However, Roeg insists that the scene was pivotal. The suggestion is that this is the first time the couple have made love since the death of their daughter, and by the end of the film it is further implied that indeed Laura may, as a result, be pregnant again, adding yet another layer to the film's meditation on life and death.

On viewing the film, Daphne Du Maurier wrote to the director: "Dear Mr Roeg, I saw your film of my story and your John and Laura reminded me so much of a couple I saw in Torcello having lunch together. They looked so handsome and beautiful and yet they seemed to have a terrible problem and I watched them with sadness." It is this perceptive treatment of grief and sadness of a couple coming to terms with the death of a child, along with the psychological dimension of unease and horror, which makes 'Don't Look Now' such a powerful film, and firmly establishes it as a classic of horror cinema. This re-release on DVD should continue to keep the film at the fore of cinema's greats, a position it undoubtedly deserves, both within the genre of horror and beyond.

Maria Parsons

Pan's Labyrinth (El Laberinto del Fauno)(Dir. Guillermo del Toro) Mexico/Spain/USA 2006
Optimum Home Entertainment
This review contains spoilers

Oscar night, 2004: the bespectacled, bearded and portly director of an effects-laden fantasy film takes the stage. Peter Jackson has just added Best Picture to his Best Director gong in an awards ceremony which has seen The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King make Oscar history by winning in each of the eleven categories for which it had been nominated. It has taken Jackson three films and nearly ten hours of screen-time, but Oscar has finally acknowledged fantasy filmmaking. Fast forward three years, and another bespectacled, bearded and portly director has delivered a new fantasy film which has been rewarded with a more modest six nominations. Admittedly, Guillermo del Toro's Pan's Labyrinth (El Laberinto del Fauno) had lost out on the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film to Letters from Iwo Jima; but Oscar had nominated Clint Eastwood's film in the Best Picture category, and del Toro had scooped the BAFTA and practically every Film Critics Association award going. In the year of the safe bets (Helen Mirren for Best Actress; Forest Whitaker for Best Actor; Martin Scorsese for Best Director), surely del Toro's fusion of fairy-tale and historical drama would be a shoe-in. But Pan's Labyrinth will end the night with a respectable three awards (for Make-up, Cinematography and Art Direction), making it the second biggest winner at the 79th Oscar ceremony. However, del Toro himself will go home empty-handed, losing out for both Best Original Screenplay and Best Foreign language Film. Oscar, it seems, still isn't fully comfortable with rewarding fantasy filmmakers.

The real strength of Pan's Labyrinth lies, of course, in its use of memorable and unsettling fantasy sequences as a means of dramatising the rise of Fascist Spain under Franco. Set in 1944, it follows the story of Ofélia (Ivana Baquero) as she and Carmen, her recently-married and heavily-pregnant mother (Ariadna Gil), adjust to a new life under the regime of her dictatorial stepfather, Captain Vidal (Sergi López). Vidal has been charged with locating and suppressing resistance forces hidden in the mountains which surround the family home, and governs young Ofélia and her mother with a similarly iron fist. The imaginative Ofélia is immediately drawn to a mysterious labyrinth that adjoins the house, despite having been warned to stay away from it by kindly housekeeper Mercedes (Maribel Verdú). Here she encounters a faun (Doug Jones) who informs her that she is a long-lost princess of the underworld and gives her a "Book of Crossroads" as a means to guide her through three increasingly dangerous tasks. Should she successfully complete them, she will be permitted to return to her kingdom. As she fulfils these tasks, the fantasy world and the real world of Fascist Spain collide and influence one another, with devastating end effects.

On an initial viewing, the crossover between these two worlds appears to be introduced quite gradually; a repeat viewing, however, reveals just how closely they are linked from the opening frame on. The film opens with a caption which locates the story in historical terms, and fades into the opening shot of a dying Ofélia, gasping for breath, and with blood pooling from her nose. This segues into the fairytale prologue which tells of Princess Moanna's escape from the underworld into the blinding light of the "real" world. From here, the camera pans over a ruined church and a devastated post-Civil War landscape, before

introducing us to Ofélia and her mother en route to their new life. The opening of the film does not so much alternate between fantasy and reality, then, as present them as one continuous narrative in which these boundaries are permanently blurred. This merging of the two worlds is continued throughout in subtle details: the image of the faun, for example, is engraved on the banister inside the house and is echoed in the carvings on the headboard of Carmen's bed, while uterine imagery is prevalent throughout the film, from the faun's horns to the dying tree to the bloody premonition in the Book of Crossroads of Carmen's troubled pregnancy.

Similarly, keys and knives prove significant in each narrative. The key retrieved by Ofélia in her first task leads her to the second in which she must collect a dagger and avoid waking the eerie and brutal Pale Man (again played by Doug Jones). ****SPOILER FOLLOWS**** Significantly, in this sequence Ofélia refuses to obey her three fairy companions' insistence that the dagger lies behind the centre door, and trusts her instincts in choosing for herself where the dagger lies. Through the imagery of the key and the knife, Ofélia's disobedience here is linked to the revolutionary acts of Mercedes throughout the film. She acts as an informer in Vidal's household, assisting the resistance fighters who hide in the surrounding hills. It is Mercedes who provides these rebels with a key with which to open the locked storeroom and liberate supplies from the grip of the fascist Vidal; and later in the film (in the same storeroom) she puts a knife of her own to effective use in disfiguring the vain Captain. ****SPOILER ENDS****

Vidal himself is the character that best bridges the fantastical and realistic realms within the film. On a first viewing, his fascist Captain arguably appeared a little too stereotypical to function in a "realist" realm. However, with the more layered interpretation that repeated viewings allow, Vidal's direct links with the fantastical realm become more and more apparent. This is particularly notable in the careful set design that places him at the head of a table that is laden with food as he hypocritically sets out his plans to ration supplies more strictly for the surrounding households. This scene has its direct counterpart in the Pale Man sequence: he too sits at the head of a long table overflowing with food which Ofélia is not permitted to share. The setting of the two sequences closely mirror one another, and the Pale Man and Vidal ultimately combine as two related images of faceless and violent authority. ****SPOILER FOLLOWS**** (It is no coincidence, then, that Mercedes's most gruesome knife attack is to Vidal's face.) ****SPOILER ENDS**** Together, they embody an ogre made flesh, a figure that transcends both fantasy and reality. It is an effective narrative technique that characterises Pan's Labyrinth as a whole.

The film more than comfortably makes the transition from the big screen for this DVD release; indeed, when viewed on a smaller scale, it feels more like the personal film that del Toro has often described it as. The subtleties of the story and set design become more apparent, and the texture of the colour schemes and cinematography are more tangible with repeated viewings. In the "real world", Ofélia is always dressed in green, for example, linking her throughout with the organic costume of the faun; and the light schemes of the two worlds gradually mesh throughout the film as the "real" and the "fantasy" elements combine. These technical riches are showcased in a series of informative documentaries, featurettes and interviews on an extras-packed second disc; while the film itself comes equipped with an entertaining and revealing commentary from del Toro. All combine to demonstrate that Pan's Labyrinth is del Toro's most

assured film to date, the product of a director and his collaborative team at the height of their creative and imaginative powers. This is genre filmmaking at its inventive and challenging best.

Jenny McDonnell

Them (Ills) (Dir: David Moreau, Xavier Palud) France/Romania 2005

This review contains spoilers

Although it received several positive reviews and a widespread release, French-made, Romanian-set horror movie Them is a tedious, hackneyed disappointment; which in spite of a lean running time (76 minutes), still manages to overstay its welcome. Its only notable accomplishment may be in furthering the suspicion that for budding European horror directors, the former Eastern block is currently fulfilling the same unsavoury role that the American south so often did for genre filmmakers across the Atlantic during the 1970s. Where they once used states such as Texas (The Texas Chain Saw Massacre), Georgia (Deliverance) and Louisiana (Southern Comfort) as the prime location for narratives which pivoted upon the contrast between educated, naïve (and often arrogant) city folk and inbred, savage and aggressive hicks, in recent years European-set horror has begun to use the Eastern perimeter of Europe for much the same purpose, albeit to somewhat different effect. Noting this tendency in American films, Carol J. Clover suggested that such narratives were tacitly founded upon the assumption that "People from the city are people like us. People from the country…are people not like us" (Clover, Men, Women and Chain Saws, 124). So far as recent European-set horror is concerned, the consensus seems to be that "People from the West are people like us. People from the East are not like us".

2006 saw two major horror films based upon this premise. In Severance a band of quirky British and American white-collar workers found themselves picked off one by one by a vengeful band of psychotic ex-paramilitaries in a location which was wisely never explicitly named, but was clearly somewhere in the former Yugoslavia. American director Eli Roth's cynical, xenophobic and deeply unpleasant Hostel (filmed in the Czech Republic, but set in Slovakia) suggested that impoverished Eastern Europeans will do absolutely anything to make a quick buck. Now we have Them, in which yet another pair of educated, naïve Westerners are terrorised by the psychotic residents of a former Communist country.

French schoolteacher Clementine and her boyfriend Lucas have settled in Romania. She teaches her native language in a busy secondary school in Bucharest (itself a nightmarish vista of ugly, repetitive tower blocks), whilst he is a writer. We don't really get to find out much more about them than that (a fact that makes it difficult to care much for their struggles to survive: much of the Australian film Wolf Creek's effectiveness came from the fact that almost half the film was spent gradually getting to know the ill-fated victims before the inevitable "hapless foreigners versus psychotic local" dynamic presented itself). Clementine commutes from work to their rural home, a large hunting lodge rather like the one in which vile former dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife were tried before being unceremoniously executed by revolutionaries. The young couple have no idea that only the night before – in the typically clichéd broken-down-car-on-a-dark-country-road scene which opens the film, and isn't referred to again – a mother and her surly teenage daughter were brutally murdered. Clementine and Lucas make love, eat, watch TV, and finally go to bed for the night, only to be awoken a couple of hours later by strange noises. When he ventures outside to investigate, Lucas discovers that their car has been broken into, and the surrounding woods are filled with shadowy assailants. The rest of film is an allegedly tense succession of cat-and-mouse scenes in which the couple desperately try to escape their attackers,

punctuated by the oh-so-familiar kinds of moments that are a staple of this kind of horror film. The dog is barking! The lights are off! The phone is dead! There's someone in the house!

It is the revelation about who these attackers are – something which should take a viewer of average intelligence all of say, ten minutes to figure out – which supplies Them with its supposedly resonant twist. ****SPOILER FOLLOWS**** For the killers who stalk Clementine and Lucas come not from Romania's supernatural or folkloric past, but are rather a legacy of the much more recent Communist era: a group of grubby, near-feral kids, aged between ten and fifteen, clad in trainers and hooded tops, sorely in need of a few ASBOs to sort them out. This potentially interesting, but not-particularly-subtle, East versus West dichotomy may be linked to the opposition between adults and children first hinted at in the opening scenes of the film, in which the doomed mother and daughter bicker with one another. It's also further highlighted by Clementine's drive home from the classroom, which takes her past the monstrously vast presidential palace built by the same dictator whose ruthlessly anti-birth control policies resulted in thousands and thousands of unwanted children being sent to squalid state-run orphanages. In addition, given the current level of anxiety in the tabloid press about out-of-control teenagers, the notion of helpless grown-ups menaced by sinister adolescents is a particularly timely one. Anyone who has ever stood in front of an uncooperative secondary school class knows firsthand that hostile teenagers can be genuinely intimidating, especially when you're not armed with a poker, as Lucas is. So what we have is three apparently pertinent, if fairly familiar, elements meshing here: educated foreigners menaced in a backwards and unfamiliar country; adults set upon by evil children; and city folk being terrorised in the woods. Whilst the unusual setting is interesting at first, and the 'evil-hoodies' revelation at the end sounds appropriately timely, in actuality this is a hackneyed, tedious and predictable viewing experience which only brings to mind the superior films from which it so obviously draws inspiration – The Blair Witch Project and Halloween amongst them.

While the performances are serviceable (if uninspired), the actual look of the film (at least in the print I saw) is unpleasantly grainy and cheap-looking, in a manner that detracts from, rather than adds to, the negligible atmosphere; an overhead shot of Clementine's car winding its way through Bucharest is so poorly composed that it looks as though it was filmed on a mobile phone. One of the very few moments of inspired direction here comes in a scene which is practically a direct lift of the infamous "splinter/eyeball" scene from Lucio Fulci's Zombie Flesh Eaters, whilst the supposedly chilling coda is more laughable than disturbing, as we are told by the onscreen-scrawl that the children, when arrested a few days later, said that they "only wanted to play". The fact is, although mildly unsettling, at least at first, the threat faced by the couple simply isn't made half as frightening as it could so easily have been. There have been several interesting and effective European horror movies released in the past decade, unfortunately Them cannot be included in their ranks. Those interested in movies which feature genuinely scary children should go watch glassy-eyed moppet Dakota Fanning simper her way through Charlotte's Web instead.

Bernice M. Murphy

Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film
(Rachel Belofsky , Mike Bohusz & Rudy Scalese)
USA 2006

While attending last year's 'Horrorthon' at the Irish Film Institute in Dublin, I encountered something rather special: Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film. Most horror documentaries leave one with the distinct impression that interviews have been cut too short, or that any form of in-depth analysis has been removed for the sake of showing some over-familiar and conventionally 'shocking' footage. By contrast, Going to Pieces presented itself as a fully-realised documentary from its elaborate opening sequence, which was a visual cross-section of horror's finest directors, actors, producers and writers commenting on the nature of the slasher sub-genre. The film is based on Adam Rockoff's book of the same name, the definitive academic study of the development of the slasher film from John Carpenter's Halloween (1978) to its misunderstood and poorly-received finale in April Fool's Day (1986). To date, there is no other guide to this controversial sub-category within the horror genre which rivals the sheer scope and depth of Rockoff's book. The film's structure mirrors the book's chapters and arguments, and is interspersed with illustrative extracts from the slasher films under discussion, making it a worthy companion piece to Rockoff's study.

The documentary begins by examining the roots of the slasher genre, placing them firmly at the heart of the real 'American Nightmare': the Vietnam War. In particular, make-up artist Tom Savini - whose most notable work includes George A. Romero's zombie films and Sean S. Cunningham's Friday the 13th - draws on his experiences in Vietnam as a combat photographer who documented the devastation of the region and its inhabitants. Savini recalls seeing severed limbs, torture victims and badly decomposing bodies strewn around like garbage, an experience which profoundly affected him. Wes Craven similarly recollects the effects of the era's political upheavals, paraphrasing Allen Ginsberg's Howl to encapsulate end results of this ongoing national trauma: "All that bad Karma has to go somewhere". He describes his graphic rape/revenge film Last House on the Left (1972) as an immediate response to the Vietnam crisis, illustrating the violation of a vulnerable America from within. Another excellent horror documentary - Adam Simon's The American Nightmare (2000) - examines these social
and political contexts for 1960s and 1970s horror in more detail. In contrast, Going To Pieces builds on Simon's work by acknowledging the contributions of such forefathers as Wes Craven, but focuses more specifically on the rise of the slasher sub-genre from Halloween on. Once Carpenter succeeded in securing a regional release for Halloween, the film began to gain unprecedented momentum, grossing over $50 million at the US box office: the slasher sub-genre was officially born. Carpenter's interviews in Going to Pieces are often poignant, especially when he speaks about his long-time producer (and former girlfriend) Debra Hill, who passed away in early 2006. In following the specific history of the slasher sub-genre, the film focuses on the immediate aftermath of Carpenter's success, particularly on the release of bandwagon-hopping films such as Sean S. Cunningham's Friday the 13th (1980) and the franchise it generated. As Going to Pieces suggests, no national or cultural holiday was safe from the genre's creative clutches once the films of Cunningham and Carpenter had established the basic conventions of the slasher, and subsequent filmmakers drew further inspiration from Bob Clark's influential (and prescient) Black Christmas (1974). Other films which receive notable mentions in the documentary include My

Bloody Valentine; New Year's Evil; Silent Night, Deadly Night; Sleepaway Camp; and Happy Birthday to Me.

Going to Pieces is not merely concerned with the most popular films of the genre, but also showcases a litany of 'B'-roster slasher films that attempted to cash in on the sub-genre's newfound popularity. These often boasted unintentionally hilarious or virtually non-existent plot lines, as well as a healthy dose of cringe-worthy dialogue and imaginative onscreen deaths. A series of revealing clips merges classics of the sub-genre and its many imitators, and adds to our appreciation of the whole. A notable and often forgotten scene from Silent Night, Deadly Night (1984) is included, in which a maniacal Grandpa (Will Hare) informs young Billy (a genuinely traumatised Danny Wagner) that Santa Claus murders naughty children on Christmas Eve with an axe, a clip which helps illustrate both the genre's ludicrous studio spin-offs and the controversies that emerged as a response to the slasher's popularity. Protests over the film's content sparked a litany of criticisms of the genre and brought the slasher to the public's attention as a medium of low culture and bad taste. And as the documentary correctly chronicles, the slasher was to suffer badly from the studio's demand for sequels, a trend which helped turn a genuinely interesting sub-genre of horror into a cash-cow of mediocrity.

Going to Pieces is a very glossy, well-researched documentary that leaves the viewer thirsty for more. The film is stylishly presented, making memorable use of music throughout its thematically and historically structured segments, and is edited in such a way that there is a sense of real excitement in viewing it for the first time, even if one is already an aficionado of the sub-genre. At ninety minutes, the documentary does necessarily under-represent some sub-categories, and it would perhaps have benefited from some elaboration on the "spaghetti splatter" movies of Italian filmmakers like Mario Bava and Dario Argento. However, as the slasher sub-genre is recognised as a predominantly American phenomenon which often dramatises overtly American issues and anxieties, one can forgive this omission of a topic which surely deserves a documentary of its own anyway.

It is a documentary that is indispensable for both scholars and loyal fans of the genre, and an interesting medium with which to recruit a new fan base to horror overall. As the horror genre is finding itself in a state of legitimacy in both academic studies and mainstream taste, this documentary fulfils two important functions: it promotes and encourages horror filmmakers of thefuture (in keeping with producer Rachel Belofsky's work with her annual "Screamfest" festival in Los Angeles) and it successfully and compellingly narrates the history and the cultural importance of a neglected but fascinating sub-genre. As yet, no release date has been set for the documentary in Ireland or the UK (although Swiss-based distribution company Ascot Elite Entertainment Group has recently acquired the rights for German-speaking territories); however, it is available through online American retailers. Going to Pieces has received critical acclaim in the US and richly deserves further attention in Europe. It offers invaluable insights, lots of humour and rare archive footage, which is in itself a treat for any hardcore fan. Overall, it is a delightfully bloodthirsty pleasure.

Sorcha Ní Fhlainn

Scream Queen: An Interview with Rachel Belofsky:
Producer of Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Movie & Festival Director of "Screamfest", Los Angeles

Ní Fhlainn: How did the project come together?

Belofsky: Rudy Scalese had previously read the book. At the time, he was working at a management company that represented a director that was in "Screamfest" 2003. Rudy and I kept in touch during the following Spring 2004 and he asked me if I would be interested in producing a documentary based on the book. He knew that I had previously produced the documentary, Fast Women: The Ladies of Nascar, and had documentary experience. Also, due to "Screamfest", I have relationships with the vast majority of people we interviewed. During the summer of 2004 the company Rudy was working for closed its doors. I hired Rudy to work for "Screamfest" and my production company. Shortly after he was hired we secured the rights to the book from the publisher. We shopped it around and it ended up at Starz [entertainment media group and distribution company]. Actually Adam Rockoff made the introduction for us at Starz. Ironically, Rudy and I had met Michael Ruggiero [executive producer] a few months prior to him joining Starz and told him about the project. He loved the idea back then. Once Michael joined Starz he championed the project at Starz and was able to get a greenlight in the summer of 2005. We began production in January 2006. Michael Bohusz is a 2001 winning "Screamfest" director. He joined our team in June 2006 and edited the documentary. The wonderful tongue-in-cheek humour is definitely Mike Bohusz's style. He did a fantastic job.

Ní Fhlainn: Was Adam Rockoff (author of the book Going to Pieces) closely involved with the film?

Belofsky: Adam was not closely involved with the film. We did speak with him early in the development stage. He came up with a few of the segment title cards that we used. However, the narrative flow, the interview questions, the interviewees, the clip selections, the graphics and overall theme was all created by us. Adam did an amazing job writing the book and it gave us great joy to bring it to the screen.

Ní Fhlainn: While this film is an obvious labour of love, was it difficult to bring it to the screen?

Belofsky: Going to Pieces was indeed a labour of love and it was very difficult to bring to the screen. We had a limited production budget and had to get as many people as we could in the allotted days. Unfortunately there were several people we just could not schedule. Another chore was tracking down the rights to some of the older films. That proved to be quite tedious. The studios gave us great deals but it was still extremely expensive and took quite a chunk out of the budget. There are film clips we simply could not feature due to licensing issues.

Ní Fhlainn: Did the experience change any of your perspectives or opinions on the Horror genre?

Belofsky: It did not change my perspective or opinion on horror because I already love it!

Ní Fhlainn: Do you have a personal favourite interview and experience from the film?

Belofsky: My personal favourite interview from Going to Pieces would either be Greg Nicotero or Felissa Rose. Greg had such great knowledge and insight on the genre. Felissa Rose gave such a fun, energetic and at times comedic interview. When she referenced her role in Sleepaway Camp as the "chick with the d*ck", the audience roared with laughter. The way she describes the Italian horror is quite poetic. She is a true passionate fan. My favourite experience from the film was definitely working with Mike Bohusz. It was a great experience to work with "Screamfest" alumni and we are looking to team up again, this time Mike will direct.

Ní Fhlainn: Did you encounter any personal heroes during the filming of the movie?

Belofsky: Meeting Bob Shaye (head of New Line Cinema) was a thrill. I admire the fact that he risked everything to make A Nightmare on Elm Street. His gamble paid off, and it made New Line Cinema what it is today.

Ní Fhlainn: In your own opinion, what kind of reception is horror receiving in the US?

Belofsky: The genre fans love horror. I think the studios are embracing it more because it is such a money-maker for them. However, I do still feel that horror is looked down upon. Horror is never going to go away, it may have its ups and downs but it is here to stay.

Ní Fhlainn: And what do you think about the 1970s horror remakes currently being churned out by Hollywood?

Belofsky: I wish Hollywood would stop remaking the classic films and create some new and inventive films. It seems now when you reference one of the classic films such as Black Christmas or The Texas Chain Saw Massacre that you have to clarify by either saying the remake or the classic. There are so many talented writers in Hollywood that do have great new ideas and those are the films I would personally like to see on the screen.

Ní Fhlainn: What kind of reception did Going to Pieces receive in the US? It was very popular at "Horrorthon", Dublin.

Belofsky: Going to Pieces was very well received in the US. Entertainment Weekly chose it as the "What to Watch of the Week". The Hollywood Reporter also gave it a glowing review.

Ní Fhlainn: Do you have any upcoming projects in the horror genre?

Belofsky: I do have upcoming projects in the horror genre. My festival, "Screamfest Horror Film Festival", will celebrate its seventh anniversary this October. As well, we have a few horror features we hope to begin production on in the later part of 2007.

Ní Fhlainn: And finally, just for fun: if you could star in any slasher film, which film would it be and why?

Belofsky: I would have to say either Halloween or A Nightmare on Elm Street. I like strong female characters. I think Nancy is a much stronger character than Laurie but either character would be great to play.

Sorcha Ní Fhlainn

Many thanks to Rachel Belofsky for her time, and to Ed King who facilitated this interview.