



grim

Issue No.3 October 2018

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WOKE?**

**DIGITAL GHOST
STORIES**

**MONSTERIZING
MENTAL ILLNESS**

**SLEEPOVERS & THE
SUPERNATURAL**

Ghost Worlds

**RADICAL RITUALS &
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Plus:

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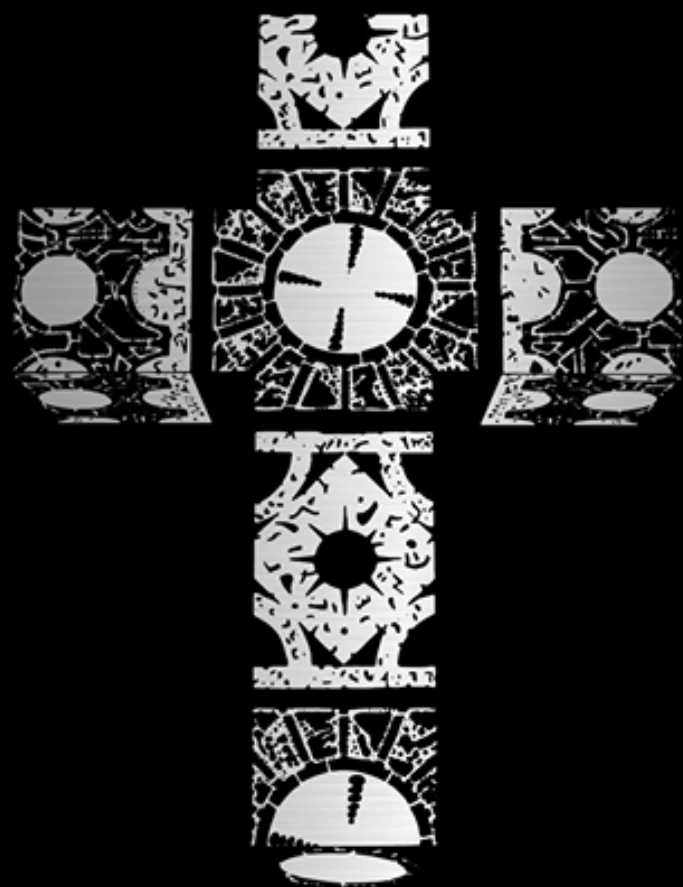
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Editor's Note

Happy Hallowe'en season!

It truly is the most wonderful time of the year. The air gets crisp, the pumpkins proliferate, and our obsession with ghosts and ghouls becomes (briefly) culturally acceptable.

This issue celebrates the supernatural: possessions, ghost hunting, occultism, vampires, and more. The power of the paranormal cannot be denied. Humans have always speculated about the possibility of life after death and been excited by phenomena that seem to have no rational explanation. There is a reason why occult rituals such as séances and ouija boards are staples of the horror genre — these practices tap into our cultural fascination with the unknown, offering us dark possibilities and delicious shivers.

I'm so happy to have put together an issue dedicated to my favourite subgenre!

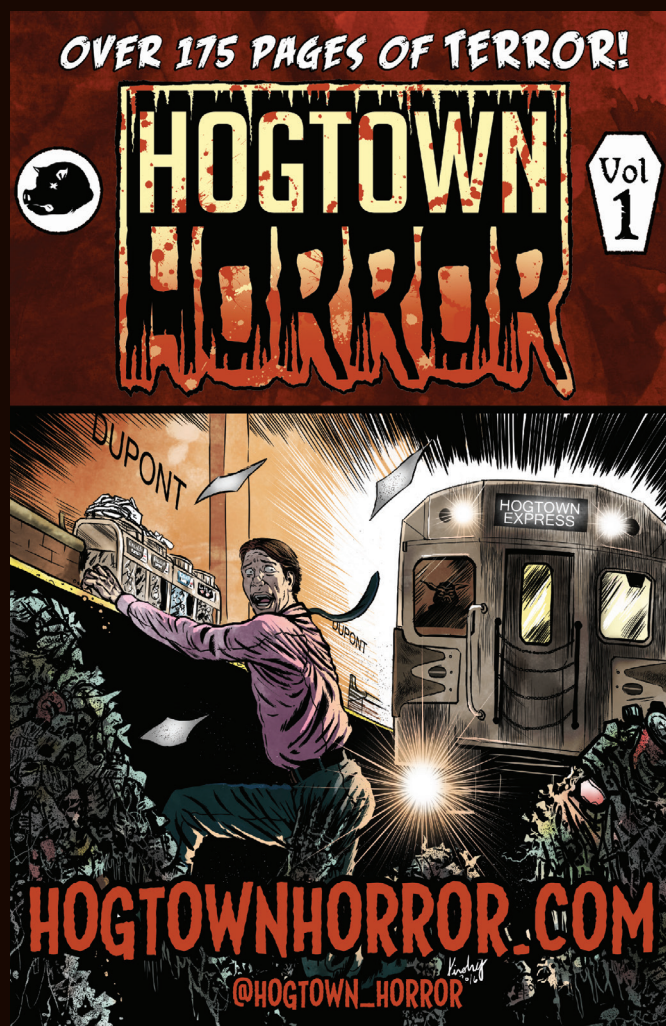
I'm grateful to our wonderful October editors: staff editor Joe Lipsett and guest editors Carling Kirby and Gina Freitag. Though they could have been out doing early Hallowe'en shopping, they chose instead to work their dark magic on endless pages of prose. The heroes that we need, and more than we deserve.

Thank you to all who made our October Spooktacular possible: our platinum sponsor, House of Leaves Publishing, the rest of our sponsors and advertisers, and our wonderful Indiegogo backers. We really couldn't do it without you!

Stay spooky, pumpkins!

Valeska Griffiths
@bitchcraftTO

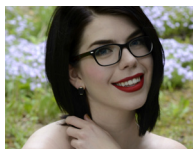
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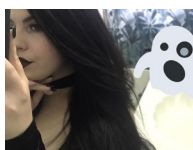
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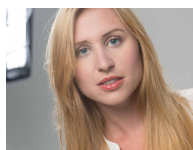
Ahlissa Eichhorn is a freelance writer and reviewer. She's a columnist at Morbidly Beautiful, where she analyzes horror movies. She's also a features judge for the Nightmares Film Festival based in Columbus, OH. When she's not watching horror, she's reading and reviewing it on her blog, Haunted by Deadlines. If she's not doing any of that, she's either listening to Meat Loaf or taking photos. Sometimes both. You can find her on most platforms @hauntedbydeadlines.



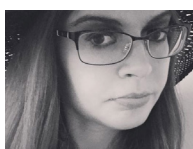
Alejandra Gonzalez When she's not passionately championing the work of Rob Zombie and her beloved *Hobbit* trilogy, Alejandra Gonzalez writes about movies over at FThisMovie.com and makes guest appearances on their podcast. She has also appeared in other podcasts such as The Screencast and Pop Culture Case Study, and is currently working towards a degree in English with a certificate in film. Follow her impassioned musings about horror on twitter at @sick__66.



Ashley Maniw is a freelance writer and screenwriter living in Toronto. Her short screenplay, "Firsts," was shot in Los Angeles in 2010 and she recently completed a feature length horror screenplay. Her current obsession is critiquing lackluster female representation in horror films in an effort to ruin your favourite movies. She blogs sardonically about film on her website ashleymaniw.wordpress.com. You can find her lurking on twitter and Instagram @AshleyManiw.



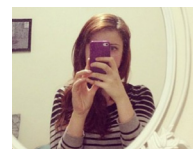
Ali Chappell is a writer, personality, and actor. She holds a degree in both business and musical theatre. She's skilled in the art of balancing spoons on her face and, after three drinks, is really good at throwing axes. She's obsessed with horror and romcoms and enjoys an afternoon of archery. She's often found curled up watching *Brooklyn Nine Nine* or *The League*, or in a movie theatre with a glass of gin and bag of popcorn. Follow her on twitter and Instagram at @thealichappell.



Carling Kirby is a freelance writer, media communications graduate, and horror junkie. Along with *Anatomy of a Scream*, she has also contributed to *Rue Morgue*. She has a fascination with psychology, the occult, and true crime, and hopes to start her own podcast looking at various forms of media under a critical lens. Upon asking her best friend to describe her, she was dubbed "Vincent Price and Paris Hilton stuffed into one body."



CC Stapleton is an artist and writer from Atlanta. Having studied art history in college, specifically Renaissance-era devotional iconography, she can find – and rave at length about – the symbolism embedded into anything. She contributes to *Bloody Good Horror* and *Anatomy of a Scream*, and hosts her own podcast *Something Red*, uncovering haunted worlds pressed betwixt pages. She welcomes you to get dark with her on twitter @callsinthenight.



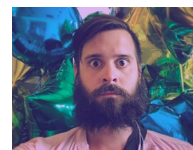
Elizabeth Grice has always loved creepy stories. She has an MA in English Literature from Queen's University, where her research focused mainly on reanimated corpses in Gothic fiction. Since her main interests in film are death, femininity, and the supernatural, she spends a lot of time watching horror movies (and costume dramas). She also enjoys peppermint tea, pretty much anything involving ghosts, and curating a look that has been described before as "preppy witch."



Emily von Seele hails from Seattle, where it rains a lot, which gives her plenty excuses to stay inside and watch movies. She has written for *Bloody Disgusting*, *Daily Dead*, and *Talk Film Society*, and is co-host of the *Dead Ringers* podcast. You can usually catch Emily on twitter (@horrorellablog), where she has been known to gab excessively about movies and tweet adorable pics of her two cats - seriously, they are the cutest ever.



Gina Freitag is a writer, cinephile, and horror enthusiast, with an M.A. in Film Studies from the School for Studies in Art and Culture (Carleton University). She has previously served as a coordinator with *Cellar Door Film Festival*, *Eve Film Festival*, *TIFF*, and the *NFB*. Some of her horror musings are published online via *The Black Museum* and *Anatomy of a Scream*. She is co-author of *The Canadian Horror Film: Terror of the Soul*. Follow her on twitter @SmallDarkThings.



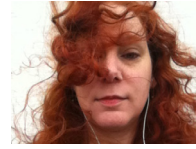
Jacob Trussell is an actor and writer based in Brooklyn, New York. He's worked Off-Broadway and in regional theatre and short films. His writing has been featured in *Rue Morgue*, *Film School Rejects*, *Ghastly Grinning*, and *Diabolique*. He also manages *HorrorCal NYC*, a calendar for horror screenings and events across New York City. Follow Jacob on twitter for pictures of his cat @JE_TRUSSELL.



Jess Johnson is a writer born and based in London, England. During the day she creates product copy for an old luxury department store in Soho; at night, she writes pieces for fashion publications and independent zines. She thinks a lot about the *Dyatlov Pass Incident*. Find her at @jkjohnson.



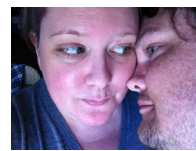
Molly Johnson is a recent History graduate from the University of Leeds. Her favourite artists on Instagram are @Exotic.Cancer and @kliuwong, influencing some of her more colourful digital illustrations. Working with both biro and digital tablets, she also creates scratchy, Edward Gorey-inspired monochrome images.



Jennifer Williams is an author, editor, cat lady and all around geek living in New England. Her fiction has appeared in various horror and erotica anthologies, most recently in *Women Who Love Monsters*. She is currently editing a collection of erotica, *Dressed in Black*, inspired by the works of Edgar Allan Poe for *Circlet Press*. You can find her on twitter @JenWilliams13 and at www.goodreads.com/JenniferWilliams.



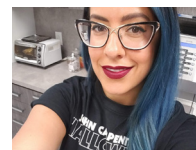
Joe Lipsett is a TV addict with a background in Film Studies. He co-created TV/Film Fest blog *Bitchstolemyremote.com* and has written for *Bloody Disgusting* and *Anatomy of a Scream* He enjoys graphic novels, dark beer, and plays multiple sports (adequately, never exceptionally). While he loves all horror, if given a choice, Joe always opts for slashers and creature features. Follow Joe on twitter at @bstolemyremote and be sure to join the *Bstolemyremote* FB group for daily TV and film updates!



Kathleen Killian Fernandez & Chris Vander Kaay are a husband and wife writing team who agree on almost everything except whether or not *28 Days Later* should be considered a zombie movie. They've written award-winning short films and their first feature premiered in 2014. They've written for *Bloody Disgusting* and *Deseret News*. After years of championing the idea that the horror genre should be taken seriously, they hope the idea is finally catching on. Follow them on twitter at @ckvanderkaay.



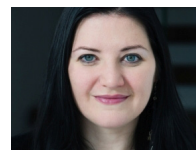
Laura Di Girolamo is the co-director of *The Bloody Mary Film Festival*, an annual fest that spotlights genre films directed by female-identifying Canadians. Her writing has appeared in *Exclaim!* and *Nightmare on Film Street*, and she has performed at storytelling shows *Raconteurs* and *True Stories Told Live*. Her skills include finding cool stuff at vintage stores and competing in classic *Simpsons* trivia nights.



Lindsay Traves is a writer, blogger and columnist based in the Big Smoke. After submitting her Bachelor's thesis, "The Metaphysics of Schwarzenegger Movies," she focused on writing about her passions which include sci-fi, horror, sports, and graphic novels. She's probably talking about *Scream* right now or convincing a stranger to watch *The Guest*. Find her blogging on @TheSmashList, recommending often missed great movies to fill your watch list. Find her running internal monologue @smashtraves.



Mary Beth McAndrews is a freelance writer based in Chicago, working towards her Master's degree. She's a writer for *Much Ado about Cinema* and *Nightmare on Film Street*, where she focuses on gender and horror film. When not watching horror movies, she's singing to her cat.



Rayna Slobodian is an old goth who enjoys reveling in the darker side of life. Outside of working full-time, she spends her free time as a graduate student at York University. Her research topics have included outer space settlements, anti-aging, astronomers, death, immortality, and poverty. For fun, Rayna enjoys experimenting with her creative side through cosplay. She is also a songwriter and has released two albums. She plans to work on a new album following her master's thesis.



Rebecca Booth has a master's degree in Film Studies from the University of Southampton, UK. Formerly the managing editor of *Diabolique Magazine*, she is the co-editor of *Scared Sacred: Idolatry, Religion and Worship in the Horror Film* from *House of Leaves Publishing*, and is the author of *The Devil Rides Out* [Devil's Advocates] from *Auteur Publishing*. Follow her on twitter @rebeccalbooth / @UNHPodcast.



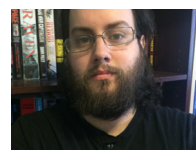
Suri Parmar If one were to describe Suri as the sum of three fictional characters, she'd be equal parts Joanna from *The Female Man*, Hazel from *Seconds*, and *Adventure Time's* Marceline the Vampire Queen. She has written and directed award-winning short films that have screened all over the world. She includes Angela Carter, Kelly Link, and the Wachowskis among her literary influences and is a diehard fan of *America's Next Top Model*. Follow her on Instagram at @SOTefilms.



Valeska Griffiths is the Toronto-based creator and editor of *Anatomy of a Scream* and the executive editor of *Grim*. She balances a passion for maple syrup with a love for blood, has written about genre film for several horror websites, and contributed to *Scared Sacred: Idolatry, Religion and Worship in the Horror Film* from *House of Leaves Publishing*. She spends her time critiquing slasher films, watching makeup tutorials, and living deliciously. October is her natural habitat. Connect with her on twitter at @bitchcraftTO.



Vincent Bec is a queer horror enthusiast and fierce *Saw* franchise advocate. She recently graduated from North Carolina State University with degrees in psychology, media communication, and gender studies, and dreams of becoming a filmmaker, writer, and visual artist. Next on her agenda is getting into a film studies doctorate program in hopes of becoming an official expert in horror movies and queer cinema. Keep up with her on twitter at @slasherdaysaint.



Zack Long is the editor-in-chief of *Scriptophobic.ca*, a site dedicated to helping genre writers improve their craft. When he isn't researching film, studying screenplays, or helping writers, Zack can be found meditating, studying neuroscience and psychology (for fun!) and writing obsessively. In his spare time he is a lover of cats and a muppet of a man.

SLEEPOVERS & THE SUPERNATURAL

THE IMPORTANCE OF OCCULT GAMES & RITUALS IN FEMALE BONDING

by Laura Di Girolamo

The term “sleepover” immediately conjures up a host of nostalgic memories. Renting horror movies and seeing who kept their eyes open during all the scary parts. Eating so much candy you felt like puking in your sleeping bag. Shit-talking the girl who fell asleep first. Sleepovers could mean your first sip of alcohol, or your first stealthily smoked cigarette (exhaling surreptitiously out the window, while trying to smother the coughing into a pillow).

Beyond experimenting with booze and cigarettes, sleepover pastimes often ventured towards the paranormal: Ouija boards, Tarot cards, Bloody Mary, “Light as a feather, stiff as a board.” These were rituals passed down from sleepover to sleepover, girl to girl, reflected onto our screens via iconic scenes in films like *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Craft* (1996). And, as a unified group, facing each jolt of the Ouija planchette and every shadowy shape in the mirror after a recitation of “Bloody Mary” created powerful bonds.

The cult classic, coming-of-age film *Now and Then* exemplifies how paranormal rituals, and the excitement and fear that comes with them, are a uniting force for young women – and how belief in paranormal ritual itself becomes stronger the more tight-knit the group. After sneaking out to the cemetery one night, Samantha (Gaby Hoffman), Roberta (Christina Ricci), Chrissy (Ashleigh Aston Moore), and Tina (Thora Birch) conduct a seance and convince themselves they’ve resurrected the spirit of a young dead boy. Although, as adults, these four women have lost touch, they recall the “seance” as being one of the most pivotal moments of their youth: the catalyst that brought them back together, and what allowed them to develop and grow into independent, self-actualized women.

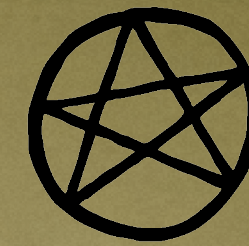
In *The Craft*, the infamous “light as a feather, stiff as a board” scene actually occurs at a sleepover, just as our four heroines Sarah (Robin Tunney), Bonnie (Neve Campbell), Rochelle (Rachel True) and Nancy (Fairuza Balk) are beginning to understand that the powers they can conjure as a coven are more vast than they first realized. By participating in what

they initially assumed to be a silly party game, they discover that, together, they can accomplish something as impossible as levitating Rochelle with just two fingers on each hand. They really are making magic – and for young women at sleepovers, taking part in paranormal rituals together often feel truly real.

“Facing each jolt of the Ouija planchette and every shadowy shape in the mirror after a recitation of “Bloody Mary” created powerful bonds.

Anelise Farris’s 2017 essay “Experimenting with the Occult: The Role of Liminality in Slumber Party Rituals” analyzes how the sleepover as a closed space is conducive to belief-based rituals. Farris found that this liminal environment (“a space or condition that is in between, that occupies a transitional or indefinite state”) heightens the experience of participating in “rituals that involve the occult...allows participants, who might in other circumstances feel less permitted to engage in these activities, to experience a measure of freedom.” Deciding to take part in supernatural rituals at a sleepover was often one of the first times a girl could make an adrenaline-inducing decision – on her own, with no parents to tell her what to do. To play with the supernatural meant taking a risk, and taking that risk into your own hands.

Sleepovers were a means for girls to congregate outside the confines of adult supervision: most sleepovers were “supervised” by mom or dad taking cursory glances down into the basement every so often to make sure nobody was drinking or doing drugs. For the most part, girls were left to their own devices. It was especially liberating for young women who came from strict or religious families that didn’t allow them as much leeway. Spending the night at someone else’s house, especially someone with cooler parents and more lax family rules, allowed such girls the freedom to do, say, and watch what they couldn’t at home.



Dozens of Christian blogs have posts about the dangers of the occult at sleepovers. In 2012, former ghost hunter Kristine McGuire wrote a memoir entitled *Escaping the Cauldron: Exposing Occult Influences in Everyday Life*. The book describes McGuire’s journey from devout Christian to practising witch and medium, then back to devout Christian. McGuire identifies childhood sleepovers, where she experimented with seances and fortune-telling, as dangerous stepping stones on her path towards embracing witchcraft and, essentially, turning her back from God.

Millenials and Gen Z no longer identify with Christianity as much as they once did. In 12 out of 22 European countries surveyed this year, over half of young adults claimed not to identify with any particular religion or denomination (according to the 2014-16 European Social Survey), and a Pew Research Center study conducted in 2015 showed that more than one-third of millennials say they are unaffiliated with any faith, up 10 percentage points since 2007. Now more than ever, young people are choosing either to embrace a life free from religious influence, or turn to a more alternative spiritualism. Is it any wonder that now witchcraft and the occult are so huge in North America among millennials whose first exposure to occult and the supernatural was via childhood sleepovers?

The concept of a sleepover is very different today. A quick Google search leads to a deluge of articles from parents about why and how they’re avoiding sending their children to sleepovers. A variety of factors seem to be the blame, from the rise of “helicopter parenting” to the fear of abuse, sexual or otherwise. Modern depictions of sleepovers are grittier, and more bittersweet, such as David Robert Mitchell’s *The Myth of the American Sleepover* (2010), which centres around two different sleepovers occurring over the course of one night in Detroit. It’s easy to bathe our memories in the glow of idealized nostalgia, but too often we forget that sleepovers were occasionally an excuse to gossip and bully. When the teens in *The Myth of the American Sleepover* break out the Ouija board, it’s exciting and risqué, but it’s also coupled with drug experimentation, sexual anxiety, and mean pranks.

Sleepovers are also no longer one of the only ways to escape supervision. Teens today prefer to hang out online,

on Snapchat or Instagram, away from the prying eyes of adults. The slumber party itself, the one we remember from our childhoods, exists in a vacuum: that single space (a bedroom, a living room), in the middle of the night, relatively free from authority figures, does not exist today as it did in the 1980s and 1990s. But Ouija boards, Bloody Mary, tarot cards, and “light as a feather, stiff as a board” live on, in our collective consciousness – and on the Internet.

Women need a space of our own. We’ve always needed them, and over decades these have manifested in a number of different ways: sororities, salons, and, now, social media “safe spaces”, communities to vent and show support for other femmes away from cis white male dominance. The rise of female-only networking events and seminars designed to address fixing broken patriarchal systems, like male-dominated industries, and the “Time’s Up” and #MeToo movements also exist as spaces where women work together to create a world that is better for us. In summer 2016, when my co-director Krista and I were conceptualizing a film fest that would celebrate not only Canadian female film directors, but the types of weird, spooky, and fantastical stories women were telling through a cinematic lens, we couldn’t land on a name for the festival that felt right. When we finally landed on “The Bloody Mary Film Festival”, it felt right. An unmistakably feminine ritual, and a shared experience, one we were all familiar with that recalled the feeling of being afraid – and yet, as women facing the unknown together, powerfully in-control. *g*



Possession as Comfort in The Blackcoat's Daughter



by Mary Beth McAndrews

Possession films are known for being full of screaming, projectile-vomiting, spider-like crawling, and unruly female bodies. Think of Regan from William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973), Nell from *The Last Exorcism* (2010), or Emily from *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005). Victims of possession in these films are typically young women who are initially viewed as merely hysterical, until it is almost too late. Their possessions are spectacles of an erupting female body, contorting into impossible shapes, spewing profanities, and oozing bodily fluids. Further, these young women are usually virgins and their purity is being defiled by an evil entity. The body must be cleansed to not only remove the demon, but to restore purity. In his book, *Abstinence Cinema: Virginity and the Rhetoric of Sexual Purity in Contemporary Film*, Casey Ryan Kelly says, "With their emphasis on the threats to young women's physical and moral integrity, the dangers of lost fatherhood, and the protections of religious faith and the heterosexual family, possession films also project collective fears about the perceived vulnerability of young women."

However, Oz Perkins' 2015 horror film, *The Blackcoat's Daughter*, subverts these common possession film tropes to create an empowered young girl who accepts her possession and uses it as a source of friendship. There is no erupting female body, extravagant exorcism, or male priest's ego to satisfy. Instead, the film focuses on a young girl named Kat, her loneliness, and what she does to escape it.

The Blackcoat's Daughter takes place at an isolated all-girls Catholic boarding school in the dead of winter. It is break, but two girls, Kat (Kiernan Shipka) and Rose (Lucy Boynton), haven't been picked up by their parents yet. They must stay in the school's darkened halls alone, while a mysterious presence begins to haunt them. Kat discovers the entity in the boiler room and is then possessed. Per the demon's instruction, Kat kills Rose and two nuns. Meanwhile, another young woman, Joan (Emma Roberts), has just been released from a mental hospital and is trying to travel to the same school. As the film progresses and the violent events begin to unfold, it is revealed that Joan is an older Kat, making her way back to the now-abandoned school and the scene of her original crime.

From the film's beginning, Kat is shown as a loner. She doesn't have many friends and her source of friendship is the older priestess she invites to her recital. However, since it's break, these priestesses are leaving campus. She also has a dream of her parents getting into a fiery car accident. She knows they are dead and won't be picking her up from school, which emphasizes her loneliness — she doesn't have any family left. Even Rose 'abandons' her, leaving campus to meet with her boyfriend. Kat is truly alone and seeks some kind of comfort or companionship. That companionship comes in the form of a demon in the school's basement.


What makes *The Blackcoat's Daughter* so terrifying is Kat's awareness and acceptance of her unravelling. As she kills Rose

and the nuns, Kat is calm and calculating. It isn't in a fit of madness; it is a carefully executed plan to give her "friend" what it wants. The climax is full of blood, knives, and severed heads, all in the name of making a friend.

While religion is generally at the forefront of possession films, it merely lingers in the background of *The Blackcoat's Daughter*. It is mentioned with the Catholic school setting, two creepy nuns, and the male priests briefly taking the place of a father figure for Kat. However, this is not a film about faith. Instead of focusing on those elements, *The Blackcoat's Daughter* focuses on Kat's unravelling, rather than the dramatics of her possession or the male priest who will save her. The film also echoes some of the commonly-seen tropes of possession films, such as Kat puking at the dinner table, to let the audience know that, yes, this is about demonic possession—but in a way you have never seen before.

The focal point of most possession narratives is the exorcism scene. A young girl is tied down to a bed, while one or more male members of the clergy shouts prayers and douses her with holy water. It is dramatic, violent, overwhelming, and focused solely on removing the demon. This isn't the case in *The Blackcoat's Daughter*. While there is an exorcism scene, it is entirely focused on Kat, rather than the male priest trying to 'free' her. The camera focuses on Kat as she mutters, "Don't go" to the demon, her friend. Instead of freeing her, the exorcism is damning her to loneliness. This is about Kat's journey and her methods of coping rather than satisfying a male ego or aiding in their journey of self discovery.

Running parallel to Kat's possession narrative is Joan, an older Kat, returning to the school. Her motivations aren't clear until the film's third act: she is returning to the school's basement to find this long-lost friend. She even brings an offering of severed heads, just like her initial crime. Joan is making a conscious decision to murder two people to try and get this friend back. There is no act too desperate. Ultimately, Joan wants to be possessed because it means she would not be alone. As she looks around the desolate, frozen landscape, she realizes that nothing can bring the demon back and she is truly alone. She begins to cry; not for her victims, but for herself.

With *The Blackcoat's Daughter*, Oz Perkins creates an empowering look at possession rather than an exploitative one. By having Kat accept her possession and focusing on her experience, rather than that of a priest or male protagonist, Kat is given agency and nuance; she is not a little girl who must be saved. Rather, she is a lonely girl who seeks friendship and comfort from the only source she can find. *The Blackcoat's Daughter* is a chilling and melancholy twist on the typical possession horror film, one that makes the audience actually think about the character being possessed, rather than the characters trying to 'save' her. 

FINE YOUNG CANNIBALS:

Digesting Dehumanizing Attitudes (and Human Flesh) in *The Neon Demon* & *Raw*

by Elizabeth Grice

"Honey, people believe what they are told." These are the words of wisdom dished out by talent agent Roberta (Christina Hendricks) to the aspiring young model Jesse (Elle Fanning) in an early scene of *The Neon Demon* (2016). Of course, Roberta is explaining to the sixteen-year-old that if she tells people she is nineteen, no one in the fashion industry is going to bother to question that claim. But to take this quote wildly out of context, as I certainly plan on doing, there's something here that gets at the central themes of both *The Neon Demon* and another recent film revolving around young women and cannibalism. *The Neon Demon* and *Raw* (2017) centre around girls living in chilling, highly stressful environments, and, through their representations of cannibalism, both films suggest that when harsh requirements and dehumanizing attitudes are internalized over a long period of time, the results can be full-fledged horror.

Before I get into the nuances of the cannibalistic themes in both movies, I'd first like to point out that the main characters of the two films, Jesse of the *The Neon Demon* and Justine (Garance Marillier) of *Raw*, have notable characteristics in common. First of all, both are very young, and in many ways, the films present these characters as ingénues. Jesse, as mentioned previously, is sixteen, and Justine is in her first week of veterinary school. Three slightly older young women (two models and a makeup artist) serve to emphasize Jesse's youth, while Justine's relationship with her older sister, Alex (Ella Rumpf), emphasizes hers. Also — Elle Fanning and Garance Marillier look more than a little alike in the two films.

Similarities between Jesse and Justine further extend to their chosen lines of work. Both girls—and, very significantly, all of the women in these movies who engage in cannibalism—live and work in intense environments and in roles that require high levels of detachment. On top of the pressures of veterinary school (which, as I learned from CSI reruns during my teen years, is harder to get into than medical school), Justine is also subjected to the stressful environment of 'rush week.' Several of the instances of hazing that Justine experiences in the film, such as being forced out of her room in the middle of the night, being yelled at, having her belongings thrown out of a window, being required to march, chant, and then crawl, border on dehumanizing. At the very least, her experiences are highly stressful. (If you think I may be exaggerating a bit here, go back and watch the scene where dozens of freshmen in various states of discomfort and undress silently crawl across an underground parking lot during the early hours of the morning; it's one of the creepiest in the entire film.)

There is a glaring sense of dehumanization in *The Neon Demon* as well, even before we get to the

cannibalism. There's also an equally strong sense that years spent in a creepy, dehumanizing industry are at the root of the cannibalistic attitudes of Sarah, Gigi, and Ruby. The two more experienced models, Sarah (Abbey Lee Kershaw) and Gigi (Bella Heathcote), have clearly come to view themselves, and each other, with a sense of detachment, and primarily as commodities rather than as individuals or friends. As Sarah says to Gigi at one point while discussing Jesse's star-potential: "Your expiration date's almost due." She then goes even further: "Who wants sour milk when they can have fresh meat?" 'Fresh meat' may be a figure of speech, but it's also a pretty telling one. Given that Sarah and Gigi literally eat Jesse later on in the film, Sarah's choice to equate Jesse with 'fresh meat' in this conversation heavily foreshadows the cannibalism to come. More than that, though, Sarah's statement also highlights a serious lack of empathy between the two friends, and reveals the detached, objectifying attitude with which she views her fellow models.

Sarah and Gigi have clearly come to view themselves, and each other, with a sense of detachment, and primarily as commodities rather than as individuals or friends.

Gigi, for her part, seems totally cool with that same approach. Later on, she patiently stands still in a restaurant, during off-hours, while a pretentious fashion designer, Sarno, (Alessandro Nivola) and Jesse's sort-of-boyfriend (Karl Glusman) evaluate her beauty. (In the end, the two agree that she's "fine," but nothing special. Gigi only sits back down once the



designer gives her permission to do so.) Moreover, the only person Gigi seems to like or admire at all is her plastic surgeon, Dr. Andrew, whom we never see, but who sounds like he views Gigi kind of the same way that I imagine a mechanic might view a car. (The models even jokingly refer to his office as “the body shop.”) However cruel and frightening Sarah and Gigi are, it’s clear that over the years they have been deeply messed up by their line of work. Indeed, they appear to have internalized the attitudes of men like Sarno and Dr. Andrew themselves.

In stark contrast to Sarah and Gigi, Ruby (Jena Malone) appears for much of the film to be the only (somewhat) kind and caring woman in this vampy trio. Nonetheless, *The Neon Demon* reveals a chilling detachment on Ruby’s part, too, when it shows her at work. Ruby seems to split her time pretty evenly between doing makeup for models on the way to photoshoots and doing makeup for the recently deceased on the way to the funeral parlour. The work is all the same to her. The first time we see Ruby getting to work in the mortuary, the objectivity she shows in her work is admirable; the bodies of the deceased deserve care and dignity, too, and doing makeup for the dead (much like veterinary work) isn’t a job for which just anyone has the necessary skills — or the stomach. During the second mortuary scene, however, where things get full-on necrophilic, the context changes completely. As Ruby grinds against the naked body of a recently deceased young woman, it becomes unmistakably clear that her indifference toward things that most people would find frightening or disturbing is not something helpful or admirable. Instead, Ruby’s indifference has been something twisted and threatening all along.

In the context of earlier scenes where Ruby repeatedly praises Jesse for her beautiful (icy) skin; tells her that her “whole deer-in-the-headlights” look is perfect for the fashion industry; and flat-out asks Jesse which of two things (“food or sex”) she is, during a discussion about lipstick naming conventions — there’s a case to be



made that Ruby’s work has been a factor in causing psychic damage, too, encouraging this idealization of doll-like qualities that the second morgue scene takes to a horrifying extreme. Like the industry in which she works (as *The Neon Demon* represents it, anyway), Ruby has come to fetishize (and exploit) pretty, wan, passive young women as objects for consumption. (As a side note: in allegorical terms, I’m okay with the artistic choice of including the second mortuary scene. In terms of the sole queer representation in the film, this choice doesn’t feel artistic at all — just mean and skeezy on the part of the director.)

In *Raw*, Justine—like Gigi, Sarah, and Ruby in *The Neon Demon*—demonstrates a detachment and lack of empathy toward others, even before she begins consuming human flesh onscreen. In an early scene in the film, a creepy classmate of Justine’s tries to steer lunchtime conversation toward the practical considerations of “fuck[ing] a monkey.” Both Justine and her roommate Adrien (Rabah Nait Oufella) express their disgust, but then there’s another unsettling lurch in the conversation when Justine insists: “I bet a raped monkey suffers like a woman,” pointing out that monkeys are self-aware, but refusing to acknowledge a difference in the levels of psychological suffering that the two might experience. Even when a girl sitting at the same table asks incredulously, “So a raped woman, raped monkey — same thing?” Justine insists: “Yeah,” leaving the rest of the table visibly uncomfortable.

By now, *Raw* has already established

that both Justine and her sister Alex grew up as vegetarians, and, as Justine’s statements show, Justine considers the pain and suffering of all self-aware creatures to be equal, regardless of species. It’s worth noting that by the time of the cafeteria scene, Justine has already been compelled to eat a raw rabbit kidney. Although Justine’s point that monkeys can see themselves in a mirror (and are thus self-aware) suggests that, for her, monkeys and rabbits belong in different categories, Justine still insists that “animals have rights,” regardless of species or awareness-level. As Justine moves from miserably swallowing a raw rabbit kidney, to trying to steal a hamburger, to being too distracted by shawarma to care that Adrien is being physically menaced by a truck driver, to ravenously consuming raw chicken breast on the kitchen floor in the middle of the night, her path from strict vegetarianism toward cannibalism becomes clearer in light of this early conversation. Justine’s assertion that animal suffering and human suffering are the same shows that, for her, there isn’t a world of difference between consuming animal versus human flesh. As Justine becomes increasingly eager for meat, it’s her indifference toward the distinction between human and animal pain that hints at what her next raw meal will be once she’s run out of chicken.

I think it’s a significant point that in both *Raw* and *The Neon Demon*, the cannibals are young women, as there’s a distinctly gendered element to the harsh attitudes that these women have internalized. For example, it’s



worth noting that Justine’s comment about the suffering of a woman being no greater than the suffering of a monkey is the first comment that brings gender into the cafeteria discussion at all. Adrien’s remark about how only a human might develop an eating disorder or require therapy in the wake of a traumatic event like a sexual assault doesn’t include any specifications about gender; Justine’s remark, however, implies a coldness directed specifically toward her own.

Justine demonstrates a detachment and lack of empathy toward others, even before she begins consuming human flesh onscreen.

There’s also a line that Alex delivers right before the fateful waxing scene that I think is particularly important. Alex (notably the only cannibal sister in *Raw* who actually kills anyone) dismisses Justine’s question about whether waxing will hurt with the adage that “beauty is pain.” In so doing, Alex echoes a line from a similar scene in *The Neon Demon*. When Jesse asks Gigi if her numerous cosmetic surgeries were painful, Gigi responds that “anything worth having hurts a little.” The two scenes are eerily similar, and their similarities point to a shared interest between the two films in highlighting the normalization of, and indifference toward, bodily pain among women. Obviously, there’s a huge difference between accepting Brazilian waxes (or even plastic surgery) as a normal part of life and taking up cannibalism, but these are horror movies; they take buried fears and vague yet troubling ideas to extreme, literal places. I would argue that the care that both films take to

emphasize dismissals of female pain among women themselves, in prelude to scenes of female cannibalism, are intended to suggest that the normalization of cruel ideas and adages can lead to further horrors — and that these attitudes are particularly damaging in the ways that they are directed at young women.

In the end, the parallel themes of *The Neon Demon* and *Raw* come out very differently. *The Neon Demon*’s ingénue, Jesse, ends up eaten by Ruby, Sarah, and Gigi. Throughout the movie, Jesse mostly seems to have a pretty good head on her shoulders. She’s aware that despite her vague yet rocky background, she “can make money off of pretty,” in order to support herself; she still thinks of her beauty in practical and pragmatic terms. She consistently offers kind words of support to Sarah and Gigi when their confidence appears low, but she also makes a point of not letting them push her around once she’s gotten to know them. She also handles unwanted sexual advances with sensitivity at first, and then more forcefully when her feelings are ignored. Unfortunately,



because Jesse hasn’t internalized the harsh culture that Ruby, Sarah, and Gigi have internalized over the years, in *The Neon Demon*, she is marked as prey. By far the most striking and memorable moment of horror in *The Neon Demon* is the final reveal that three women literally tear another woman to pieces for food because they’ve so deeply internalized a culture of dehumanization. Justine, on the other hand, although open to eating a stray finger here or there, refuses to kill random drivers for food as Alex advocates. At the end of the film, she seems deeply troubled by the knowledge that Alex has killed and then cannibalized Adrien.

Roberta’s early remark in *The Neon Demon* that people believe what they are told is an unintentionally spot-on introduction to the two movies’ central themes about women’s internalizing damaging attitudes over time. The final words in *Raw* offer a nice contrast to end on. Justine’s father (Laurent Lucas), after revealing to Justine that the desire to consume human flesh is actually a matrilineally-inherited quirk: “I’m sure you’ll find a solution, honey.” He then slowly unbuttons his shirt to reveal a heavily scarred, partially cannibalized chest.,” he says evenly—sardonically?—to a frightened, tearful Justine, after slowly unbuttoning his shirt to reveal a heavily scarred, partially cannibalized chest. Justine, it seems, truly does want to be kinder than her sister and her mother, but will she be able to? Neither movie ends on an optimistic note, and that’s stayed with me far longer than the imagery of any regurgitated eyeball. [g](#)

What's Your Favourite **Scary** Movie? Alexandra West & The 90s Slasher Cycle

by Joe Lipsett

Toronto-based Alexandra West has written about genre films for *The Toronto Star*, *Rue Morgue* and *Offscreen Film Journal*, but she's arguably best known for her work as the co-founder the Faculty of Horror podcast. In 2016, she published her first book, *Films of the New French Extremity: Visceral Horror and National Identity*. This summer saw the release of her second, *The 1990s Teen Horror Cycle: Final Girls and a New Hollywood Formula*. I reached out to Alex to discuss why now is the right time for a 90s horror book, why *Scream* is so influential, and how *Urban Legend* made the cover.

First off, congratulations on the new book. There's no immediate through-line between this one and your first book on the New French Extremity, though there's an obvious nostalgic element in your acknowledgements. What made you decide to write about 90s teen horror and why now?

The 1990s have been hot for the last few years culturally and I've wanted to write about these films and their larger context for a long time so it kind of felt like it was now or never. A lot of the established horror people who were at the helm when I entered the horror scene didn't really care for these films so they weren't really talked about and often still aren't. However, there are people around my age and younger (and even some older) who really enjoy these films so I wrote the book to begin a conversation.

The book is a nice balance of historical, theoretical and analytical readings that are still very accessible to the "average" reader. How vital was it to start off the book with an overview of Anita Hill, the Clinton scandal, the Riot Grrrl movement, etc as well as a foundational introduction to Third Wave Feminist and intersectional film theory?

Very important. I want to write books that are kind of a one-stop-shop on the topic. If you're going to spend money on my book or take the time to order it from the library, I want to make sure that as many of the key elements are there - from context, to history, to citations. Art is not made in a vacuum; it is always, in ways big and small, informed by the word around it.

I'm a huge Buffy fan, so I loved seeing an early chapter dedicated to it. It does, however, feel like the writing picks up steam and the arguments solidify around the chapter on the Scream franchise. Is it fair to argue that Scream's success reoriented 90s horror to focus almost exclusively on the slasher subgenre, or that it comes out around the halfway point of the decade, or a combination of both?

Absolutely. *Scream* is the epicentre of the cycle. Before *Scream*, teen genre films were coming out but they weren't codified yet, like many of the slashers that came out before *Halloween* (1978). *Scream* gave this cycle something to buy into or rebel against, and in doing so created a shorthand for 90s teen films. Had it not been for *Scream*'s critical and commercial success, I don't think we would have seen the boom we did.

Art is not made in a vacuum; it is always, in ways big and small, informed by the word around it.

Another 90s horror trope that Scream came to symbolize is self-awareness and metatextual references. Do you think that Kevin Williamson is to thank/blame for this or is it merely reflective of the culture at the time (easy accessibility of VHS of old horror, emergence of the Internet and the 24 hour news cycle, etc)?

Completely reflective. Williamson didn't invent self-aware meta films. There were many horror films and cultural pieces that were already in dialogue with the culture around them. He successfully put them into a formula that had been flatlining for the last few years.

Obviously your interest in exploring how 90s horror reframes and recontextualizes female characters at the forefront of the narrative helped you to identify which films make the cut, but there are some unusual choices in here that may have gone overlooked by horror fans (Cherry Falls immediately comes to mind). How did you decide on the final set list? Were there other films you considered including that failed to make the cut?

All the films had to be made by major studios and marketed to teens. There were a couple exceptions like *Wicked* which went in to the book because it starred Julia Stiles who would go on to be quite the Teen Queen and it was such an odd exploration of teen sexuality that I thought it added something I couldn't get out of the other films. The only film I had intended on including when I drafted my proposal but omitted was *Campfire Tales* which on the re-watch felt more like an adult B-horror movie rather than a teen horror film. Also it's dull as dishwater.

Several reviews highlight how refreshing it is that you include less than great films, but you don't condescend to them or seek to cover up their flaws. How important was it to you to give these

films a fair shake? Was there a really unfairly maligned film that you wanted to rescue?

A film being good or bad is subjective, so if you only talk about films you think are good then you're painting yourself into a corner. I've always been a believer that just because I don't personally like a film does not mean it's unworthy of discussion or thought. It's always easier to talk about the things you like but it's a unique challenge to deep dive into something you don't personally care for as much.

Scream gave this cycle something to buy into or rebel against, and in doing so created a shorthand for 90s teen films.

Being familiar with your work on Faculty of Horror, I went in expecting a strong feminist perspective in your analysis. I was intrigued by how this intersects with the capitalist elements, particularly the straight-from-the-WB casting and the marketing/ancillary tie-



ins. Why do you think this synergistic approach came to dominate 90s horror?

Leveraging and turn over. As an actor you can work long hours on a TV series, then go off and shoot a film in two months in order to capitalize on your popularity. People underestimate the value of a familiar star: if you like and identify with their character in one property, you're more likely to check out something new they're doing. Studios also feel a lot better about putting money into a film with recognizable commodities. Part of the interesting thing about this cycle to me is how unabashedly and unapologetically commercial it is even though the films are often selling some sort of anti-conformity message.

I've always been a believer that just because I don't personally like a film does not mean it's unworthy of discussion or thought.

One argument that really resonated with me when I read the book is the impact of trauma that pervades 90s teen horror. "The portrayal of trauma in these films is not a deeply mystifying trait but rather a tangible one...These films deal with the consequences of violence, the lasting impact traumatic events can have on survivors, and the idea that sometimes survival is not enough." Why do you think this became a defining element of these films?


The rise of the 24-hour news cycle cannot be understated. As much as horror films and teen culture

were commodities in the 90s, so were tragedies - from tell-all to all-access interviews. There was also an exhaustion from the 1980s slasher where antagonists hacked away at their victims, if you're going to revisit the formula you have to add something new to it and the exploration of trauma is a very interesting way in.

The title of the book insinuates that 90s horror is a cycle, an argument that bears weight a) theoretically if you consider how Steve Neale discusses genres and b) practically if you compare the 80s slasher fad to the 90s. How do you see contemporary horror cycles drawing on the influence of the 90s cycle? Should we be expecting the return of the repressed slasher any day now?

I think Blumhouse is definitely working on a new teen cycle. We can see the beginnings of a new cycle with *Happy Death Day* and *Truth or Dare* and I think they are smartly pulling from the 90s by creating complex and likeable characters - particularly in *Happy Death Day*. The best cycles reflect elements of their surroundings which, ultimately, make them dated through technologies, attitudes etc - but if we don't make contemporary movies that speak to our current fears, then what's the point?

Finally, I learned about your unconditional love of Urban Legend during our Grim Slasher Madness contest back in June, but why use the film's poster for your book cover (rather than one of the many other memorable 90s entries)?

That was the publisher's selection and with McFarland it's basically their call but as you say, I love *Urban Legend* so I'm very happy it was used. Joshua Jackson's blond phase was peak late-90s. 

Psycho. Maniac. The Crazies. Horror has a long standing relationship with the more troubling aspects of the human psyche. But is it all in good scary fun? Or do these tropes do more harm than good? The answer depends on who you ask, of course. The average movie-goer has, historically, cared little for the consequences of their entertainment. "It's just a movie" is a common refrain, often heard from those more privileged in American society. Indeed, there is value in the simple joys of a story well told. Movies can lift our spirits, inspire us, or simply make us forget our troubles, even if only for an hour or two. But there is a flip side to that coin. The subtle messages of the media we consume worm their way into our collective subconscious, not unlike that of a mass hysteria. Belief has power, and if seeing is believing then film is the canvas that informs those beliefs, for better and for worse.

To understand the legacy of mental illness as monster we must travel back in time to what film critic Roger Ebert dubbed "the first true horror film", Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). Much of horror cinema to this day owes its bones to this silent classic. From its shadowed, angular sets, to its unforgettable denouement, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* sets the tone for horror films decades after. You need not see the movie to know the story. It's one any lifelong horror fan knows: a madman comes to town and terrorizes its citizens. We've seen this trope time and again in films such as *Halloween* (1978), *Scream* (1996), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). *Cabinet's* most lasting horror legacy, however, was its twist ending in which it is revealed that the main character is, in fact, a resident of an insane asylum and therefore becomes the classic "unreliable narrator".

This twist, along with the premise of an unhinged killer at large, set the precedent for a long line of films depicting mentally ill characters as monsters subject to the whims of their madness. Films such as *Psycho* (1960), *Maniac* (1980), and *The Stepfather*

We're All Mad Here: Mental Illness as Monster in Horror Cinema

by Jennifer Williams

(1987) posited that childhood abuse would lead to irreparable damage compelling the victims to murder in their adult lives. In *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), *Dressed to Kill* (1980), and *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), we see trans men as monsters, highlighting society's fear of both women and gender non-conformity and harkening back to a time when gender dysphoria was considered an illness that needed to be cured. Then we have the likes of "Baby Jane" (1962's *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*), Pamela Voorhees (1980's *Friday the 13th*), and Annie Wilkes (1990's *Misery*), all of whom represent the psychotic woman trope, a genre unto itself, which is expertly explored in Kier-La Janisse's *House of Psychotic Women* (FAB Press, 2012).

The subtle messages of the media we consume worm their way into our collective subconscious, not unlike that of a mass hysteria.

Do these films have merit, either as cultural phenomenon or as masterpieces of cinema? The answer is a resounding "yes". But it is equally true that much of this celluloid landscape has paved the way for ableism, transphobia, and misogyny. In fact, the cultural collective link between the concepts of mental illness and violence are so strong that doctors performed a post-mortem brain examination on Stephen Paddocks, the Las Vegas shooter, in the hopes of finding a neurological explanation for his actions. It should be noted that their search came up empty.

Now we find ourselves at a narrative and societal crossroads. Our presence, both in the streets and

on social media, is affecting change; sometimes in ripples and sometimes in thunderous waves. We've seen it in the #MeToo movement. We've seen it in celebrities speaking openly about their sexuality, their gender, and their struggles with both addiction and mental health issues. And little by little, we've also seen it in film.

In Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook* (2014) we see not mental illness exactly, but overwhelming grief as monster. In fact, the film is based on an earlier short work of Kent's, aptly titled *Monster* (2005). In *The Babadook*, Amelia (Essie Davis) loses her husband in an automobile accident as he's driving her to hospital to give birth to their son (Noah Wiseman). Six years later, she and her son are tormented by an entity known as the Babadook. They become prisoners in their own home and Amelia becomes increasingly more violent as things spiral out of control. But rather than going the route of madness leading to murder, Kent chose instead to portray grief as something that needs to be tended and cared for. Like chronic mental illness, you can never truly make grief disappear. You can only acknowledge it and treat it as best you can. In the end, Amelia and her son relegate the Babadook to their basement, occasionally feeding it worms and calming it as necessary; a sort of monstrous self-care.

A year later, we saw the release of writer/director Perry Blackshear's indie film *They Look Like People* (2015) in which a young man struggles with his emerging schizophrenia. At first the film plays out in typical horror movie fashion. We see Wyatt (MacLeod Andrews) invading the domestic space of his childhood best friend, Christian (Evan Dumouchel). Where Christian is seemingly

accomplished, Wyatt appears to be floundering. Christian listens to self-help recordings, he is aiming to move out professionally at his job, he works out, and has a romantic eye on his boss. Wyatt, conversely, is jobless and homeless, and we quickly learn that he is hearing voices in his head, though initially he tells Christian none of this. As the film progresses, we see Wyatt hoarding weapons in the basement of his friend's building and there's a scene where he stands on the rooftop taking aim at people on the street below, unbeknownst to them. All signs point to this ending very badly either for innocent bystanders and/or for Wyatt's friend Christian.

They Look Like People is a story about choice and trust and toxic masculinity with schizophrenia as the engine.

The film culminates in the aforementioned basement with Christian tied to a chair and unable to see or speak due to a rag in his mouth and his eyes being covered. Right until the very end, Blackshear plays out the trope of mental illness as monster perfectly. Will Wyatt kill his friend or won't he? Ultimately, Wyatt chooses not to and that moment is one of the key elements that set this film apart. *They Look Like People* is a story about choice and trust and toxic masculinity with schizophrenia as the engine. In

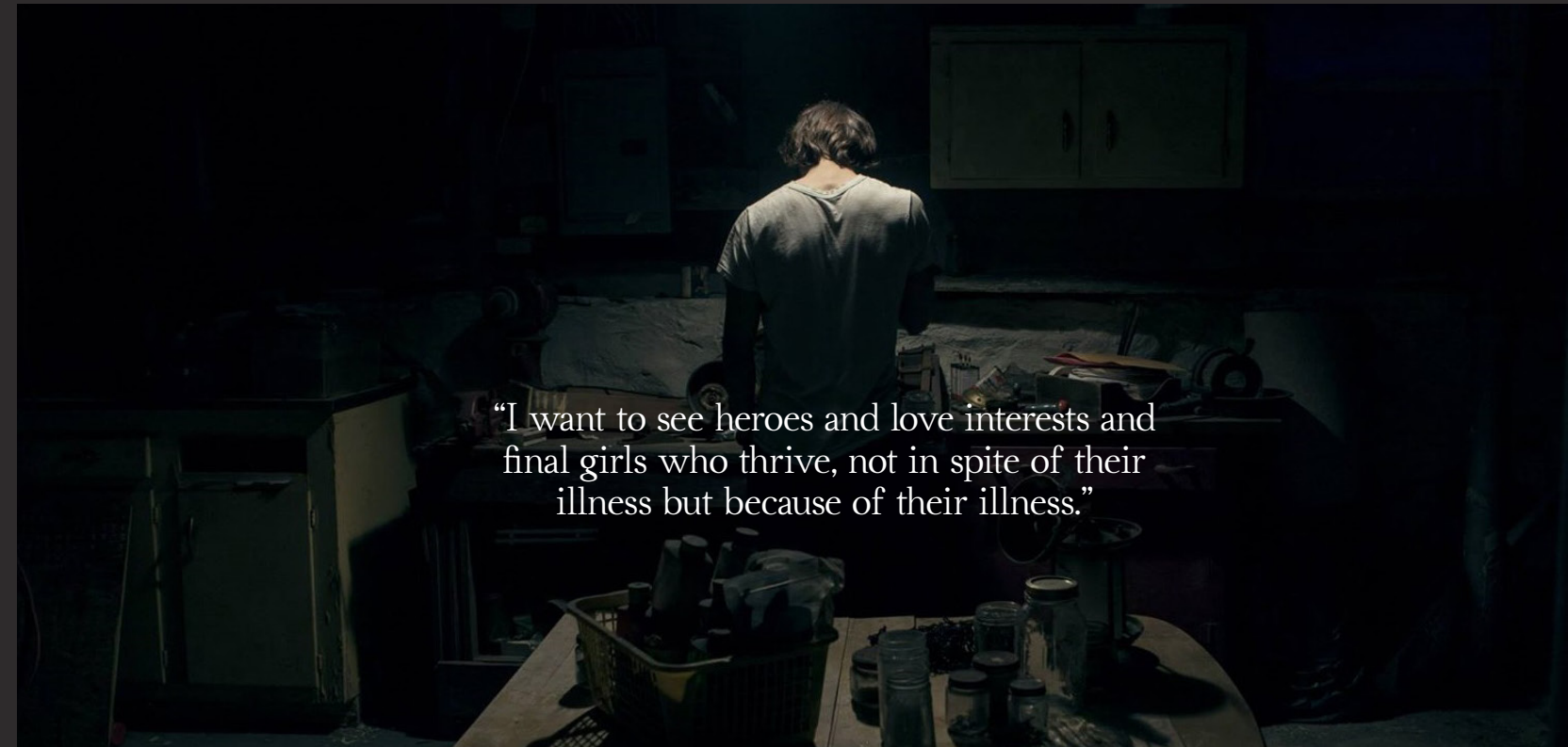
it we repeatedly see Wyatt attempt to take responsibility for his illness – by seeking therapy, by choosing not to consume alcohol, and by confiding in those around him – but it also, importantly, shows that self-awareness and therapy are not cures. He has to do the hard work of making the right choices himself, knowing the illness will always be present.

It's also about Christian's choices, too. While Christian represents the detrimental effects of toxic masculinity, he also represents the allies of those with mental illness. He is the family member/friend/lover that all mentally ill people have at some point in their lives. Instead of immediately ostracizing Wyatt upon learning of his illness, he opts instead to reach out to a former therapist of his own – itself a revelation – and ask questions about Wyatt's condition. He does the same of Wyatt, telling him "I don't believe what you believe, but I know you believe it. So just be honest with me." He ends up helping Wyatt sell off his accumulated weapons and when Wyatt's delusion tells him that war is imminent and he must seek shelter, Christian chooses to trust his friend and go along with him. He willingly goes to the basement with Wyatt and willingly allows Wyatt to bind, gag, and blindfold him. By choosing to trust Wyatt, Christian is able to face his own fears and the two of them bond in that moment.

The importance of a narrative such as this cannot be overstated. We live in a world where those with mental illness are viewed as incapable of making rational decisions and best avoided altogether. This leads to isolation, job insecurity, and even medical malpractice. The irony of this is that there's an estimated 44 million people in the United States alone suffering from mental illness. They're our neighbors, family, and coworkers. Many of them hold jobs and run households and contribute to society. Many of them also do not speak openly and frankly about their illness for fear of judgment and prejudice.

If seeing is believing then film is the canvas that informs those beliefs, for better and for worse.

As we've seen a shift in cinema in terms of the roles of women, queer representation, and the success of POC driven properties, so too, do I hope to see a shift in the representation of mental illness on-screen. Representation matters, as they say. And seeing 'the other' helps to change collective beliefs on what can otherwise be alien and frightening. I want to see heroes and love interests and final girls who thrive, not in spite of their illness but because of their illness. I want these things because that is who we are. We are not our illness and we are not monsters. *g*



"I want to see heroes and love interests and final girls who thrive, not in spite of their illness but because of their illness."

MADE IN CANADA

In Conversation with the Blood in the Snow Film Festival's Carolyn Mauricette & Jen Gorman

by Valeska Griffiths

Canada is known for many things. Maple syrup, of course. Hockey, naturally. Politeness, cold weather, cowboys, and the noble moose. But if the Blood in the Snow Film Festival (affectionately known as BITS) has its way, Canada will be more famous for its frights than for its forecasts. Since 2012, the Toronto-based festival has shone a spotlight on incredible genre films by Canadian filmmakers, steadily growing its enthusiastic audience year after year. I was able to sit down with Carolyn Mauricette and Jen Gorman, two women who take on multiple roles within the festival. Both women sit on the Board of Directors, while Carolyn also serves as a Programmer and Special Events Coordinator, and Jen is BITS's Publicist, Festival Coordinator, and Front-of-House coordinator, while also handling its social media. And I thought I was busy!

How did you get involved with the Blood in the Snow Film Festival?

CM: I was covering the BITS festival for my blog Rosemary's Pixie, and Kelly Michael Stewart, the festival director, had been reading my reviews and posts for some time. I guess he liked my perspective and he asked me to join the team in 2015. It's honestly been so amazing. I love the team, I've learned a lot and met some really talented people.

JG: I came to Toronto from Newfoundland in 2012 and knew almost no one. An acquaintance at the time (Board Member R.X. Zammit) invited me to this upstart little horror fest in the dead cold of winter (it must have been -20°) so I figured I'd check it out. It was my first step into Canadian Horror. I remember being totally dazzled at the quality of the films being made by these indie filmmakers on tiny budgets. I met Kelly at the opening screening and met for the first time the filmmakers who would become good friends and local icons in the Canadian indie horror community – Ryan M. Andrews (*Art of Obsession, Save Yourself*), Navin Ramaswaran (*Poor Agnes*) and actor Ry Barrett (*The Heretics, Demolisher*). I thought they were so cool!

The passion, hard work, and raw talent of Canada's indie horror filmmaking community is infectious—so I stuck around! Starting as Front of House Coordinator in 2013, six years later I'm still here in the position of Festival Coordinator. I'm honoured that I get to be part of this community providing a platform for our homegrown talent, and all the friends and family I've made along the journey.

Canada has produced so much incredible and innovative horror since the 1970s. *Black Christmas, Pontypool, Ginger Snaps, American Mary, The Void ... the list goes on. Margaret Atwood once theorized that Canadian cultural identity is tied themes of survivalism, due to an ongoing battle with the wilderness (and our oft-unforgiving climate!) That may be a reductive take, but do you think that there is something about living in and creating art in Canada that inspires such interesting genre work?*

CM: I think there is a distinct feel to Canadian genre film and I've never been able to put my finger on it. There's an element to survivalism for sure, since most people from other countries think we still live in perpetual winter, but there's also a

notion of being more observant here in a way too. We take in what other countries put on film and do our own thing. We have a real independent spirit in the sense of wanting to show our uniqueness while making it accessible like in *Ginger Snaps*. It's coming of age, teenage angst, and horror but in a clever and Canadian style. Plus, there's also a morbid delight in being so completely shocking and weird like Cronenberg when we have this reputation for being so "nice" here!

JG: There is definitely something about the cold driving Canada's love of horror films. We see it a little less in Toronto, but get outside the city and it's amazing how quickly you realize that humans are not the ones in control. In my hometown of Corner Brook, NL, there were many winters when the snow would pile higher than the houses, and I would legitimately worry if I would be buried alive.

The most terrifying things are the things we have no control over, and I think we are face-to-face with that reality here in Canada – with the weather anyway, we haven't had the zombie apocalypse yet but I am prepping for it! We like to imagine we are smart enough, strong enough, or

have the ingenuity to survive these scenarios, so maybe that's a part of why Canadians have such an affinity for horror.

As an aside, I think we have just scratched the surface of this trend in Canada. There are some incredible projects coming down the pipes from the Arctic where the weather is unforgiving and darkness rules for months on end (or months of constant sunlight which is just as terrifying), as well as from Indigenous filmmakers, whose stories are just beginning to be told thanks to funding from organizations like Telefilm. So stay tuned for more on that front.

Through programming BITS and sifting through all of the submissions, have you noticed any trends in Canadian horror over the past few years?

CM: Definitely the female and indigenous participation. It seems to grow every year. Other than that, I don't think there is a distinct trend, because we are often blown away by the creativity of filmmakers, so in terms of themes, budget, and subject matter, we get a lot of variety.

The team make-up of BITS skews female, which is pretty awesome and inspiring. Is this a coincidence or a deliberate effort?

JG: It's a little bit of both. The team kind of organically came together, especially in the early years of the festival. But we also think it's important to have representative

voices at the top of our organization –after all women make up slightly more than half of the population of Canada so shouldn't we have the same proportion running the show? (I'm looking at you Bay Street...)

Besides, there are enough horror film festivals by and for white men, and we're looking to do something a little different. I think it's a great thing we have so many amazing women on our team. It brings a little different perspective to our goals. By having so many ladies on our team I think we are a little more conscious of the social and political messaging being sent by the films that we program, as well as through our industry programming.

Of course the fellas on our team are amazing allies—we really operate like family, and every voice on our team is important.

CM: I think it's both. Kelly (the festival director) is very aware of being inclusive wherever he can be and the fact that 50% of the programmers and 75% of the board members are female is very important to him. It helps that the team is aware that it's 2018 after all, and including women on the team shouldn't be an issue! To me, it shows that this film festival is not only respectful to all views of genre film, but putting it into action instead of just say, programming a couple of female-directed films.

Does BITS have a policy in place that encourages diversity in programming?



L to R: Jen Gorman, Melaine Turner (programmer), Carolyn Mauricette, R.X. Zammit (Board of Directors; Front of House), Sarah Lauren Parrish (Front of House, Webmistress)

Creepy Canada: 6 Haunted Attractions Around the Nation

Keg Mansion, Toronto, ON

One of the steakhouse franchise's numerous locations is the Keg Mansion, which was once home to the prestigious Massey family. When daughter Lillian passed away in 1915, one of the maids was so distraught that she committed suicide. Glimpses of the maid's spirit have been caught by both staff and visitors, hanging in the grand staircase where she died. Other instances of paranormal activity within the mansion include children running around, a presence in the women's washroom, and patrons feeling as if they're being touched.

HI-Ottawa Jail Hostel, Ottawa, ON

What has since been renovated as a spooky tourist attraction began as Ottawa's first major prison. Nowadays, visitors sleep in its cells willingly, but that doesn't mean its sordid past has been erased. The prison's most infamous resident was Patrick Whelan, a falsely convicted murderer. Whelan claimed his innocence until the day of his execution in 1869. Buried in an unmarked grave in the prison courtyard, his soul continues to roam the halls of the hostel to this day. Some guests even claim to have seen him sitting on the edge of their beds.

Hockey Hall of Fame, Toronto, ON

Long before it was an ice hockey museum, the Torontonion building was a Bank of Montreal branch. In 1953, a young clerk, Dorothy, attempted suicide on the premises. She was rushed to the hospital, where she died. As news coverage of her death halted, frightening instances began to take place within the building, such as lights flickering, windows and doors opening and closing of their own accord, and the echoing sound of a woman sobbing. They haven't stopped since.

The Old Spaghetti Factory, Vancouver, BC

Having operated for nearly five decades, this particular restaurant branch has had a great number of



L to R: Carolyn Mauricette, Kelly Michael Stewart, Jen Gorman



JG: Absolutely. We are constantly fighting stereotypes in horror. In the early years of the fest the vast majority of the films that were submitted were from white dudes (sorry dudes, you know we love you but there's more out there).

We started with active outreach to women horror filmmakers and have made it a priority to put our female-directed films in a place of prominence (usually the opening or closing film). We have had some incredible female directors as BITS alumni—see Audrey Cummings (*Darken, Berkshire County*), Karen Lam (*Evangeline*, writer on *Van Helsing*), and April Mullen (*Farhope Tower, Below Her Mouth*). The strategy seems to have worked because the number of submissions we receive from women has increased significantly over the last seven years – though it's still lower than we'd like.

We have taken the same strategy with Indigenous filmmakers, developing partnerships with organizations like Dead North Film Festival, and imagineNATIVE to increase the representation of Indigenous content at BITS. We are starting to see an increase in submissions from

Indigenous filmmakers, and we're looking forward to seeing more!

This year we're turning our attention to increasing submissions from LGBTQ communities and other demographics. Canada is an incredibly diverse country, and horror fans come in all shapes and sizes. Our goal is to have our programming represent all Canadians. We are working hard to get there.

CM: I think as a team we want to represent everyone in Canadian society and that means people of color and LGBTQ films. In a perfect world, we wouldn't have to think twice about having everyone represented, but we aren't quite there yet. Things are changing globally and even though we seem to have access to other cultures at our fingertips through technology, there is still some work to be done in terms of the film industry catching up to inclusivity and giving up tokenism. Being a person of color myself, I want to be represented on screen, in genre film, and not as background. I want to see a person of color as the final girl or in a lead role. I think we hope to see more directors of color feeling at home with Blood in

antiques imported world-wide. Unfortunately, the combination of the building's old age and the spirits that have attached themselves to these antiques have transformed the location into one of Vancouver's biggest supernatural hotspots. The four most prominent spirits who roam the restaurant include a train conductor, an impish red-haired man, a young boy named Edward, and a young girl who claims to be looking for her mother. While many customers have reported sightings, it is staff members who receive the brunt of these ghostly encounters.

West Point Lighthouse, O'Leary, PEI
Sleep in a lighthouse, drift off to the sound of rolling waves... and meet the ghost of William MacDonald, the lighthouse's first keeper. His transparent shape has been spotted lingering nearby the inn, which was originally established in 1984. In the distance off the coast, numerous "ghost ships" have also been reported. They are believed to be inhabited by the spirits of sailors cursed to be lost at sea forever. One ship in particular - one that supposedly appears covered in flames - is said to belong to pirates who made a deal with Satan. As one can probably imagine, it did not work out in their favour.

The Olde Angel Inn, Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON
Established in 1789 and rebuilt in 1815, this English-style pub is charming and scenic on the surface, but has a dark history. During the War of 1812, British soldier Captain Colin Swayze stopped by the inn, only to be tracked down by American soldiers. He was brutally murdered, and those who stay in his old room have reported strange noises at night. Among the unsettling happenstances at the inn, utensils are frequently rearranged in the dining room, but perhaps the most peculiar aspect of the legend are the rumours that Swayze's ghost will turn malevolent if the British flag does not fly outside the inn.

CARLING KIRBY

THE BLOOD IN THE SNOW CANADIAN FILM FESTIVAL

November 22 to 27, 2018
The Royal Cinema - 608 College St. Toronto Canada

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the Snow. I know there are other film festivals created specifically for most of our cultural demographics in Canada, but I would love for us to have genre films for our festival unique to each group and their experiences here. I mean, a Jewish or Japanese or African horror film shot here in Canada or by a Canadian crew? Yes, please!!

That would be fantastic! Which upcoming Canadian horror films are you most excited about? And what are some of your past favorites?

CM: The Soska Twins upcoming production of *Rabid* is exciting. If you ask me to narrow down to a few past films, I'd have to say *The Pyx* (1973), *Pin* (1988), *Black Mountain Side* (2014), *Dead Ringers* (1988), *Darken* (2017), and *Clean Break* (2013).

JG: I am VERY excited to see what the Soska Sisters come up with on the remake of *Rabid*, as well as Audrey Cummings' new film *She Never Died* starring the fiercely talented Olunike Adeliyi (*Darken, Boost*).

My past favourite I think is still *Discopathe*, by Montreal director Renaud Gauthier, which was our Best Feature from 2013. A maniac who is triggered by disco music? So amazing. The disco dance floor kill scene is among my favourites, and you can't go wrong with that soundtrack!

Which new Canadian directors would you recommend keeping an eye on?

CM: I sincerely want to list all of the up-and-coming directors I've encountered! I fell in love with Sharon Lewis's Afrofuturistic *Brown Girl Begins*. It's an adaptation of Nalo Hopkinson's book *Brown Girl in the Ring*. I can't wait to see what else she does. Torin Langen who did *3 Dead Trick or Treaters* from our festival in 2016 is always so innovative, so I'd like to see what else he has in store for us. Jared Bratt who directed *Streamer*, also from that year, has such a sensitivity about him as well as a great attention to detail that I can't wait to see what his next project will be. I also want to see more of Naledi Jackson, director of

the short *The Drop In* (2017).

JG: Not one but a group – the Arctic Chills anthology being produced in partnership with Telefilm and imagineNATIVE is developing a group of projects from Indigenous filmmakers from the Arctic. These stories are still largely untouched in the horror genre, so I can't wait to see what they come up with!

The Bloody Bits compilation DVD is a collection of shorts that have screened at past festivals. You've screened so many amazing shorts over the years -- is BITS planning on releasing more Bloody Bits volumes in the future?

JG: YES! We LOVE our shorts filmmakers. This is where most filmmakers get their start, and where some of the most innovative and craziest ideas come from. We place our shorts program in primetime for this reason.

CM: Stay tuned because we've got Bloody BITS volume 2 coming out this fall!



LOVE CAN TEAR YOU APART...
SKIN DEEP
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“Is There Someone Inside You?”

Possession as Repressed Sexuality

by Ashley Maniw

Occult films really spoke to me as a teen, especially the ones about possession. I was raised Catholic but when I was a teenager, I found it difficult to reconcile what I had been raised to believe with the actual history of the Church. For me, these films presented a subversive take on Catholicism—or to put it more cheaply, I loved the fact that they got under the skin of religious wingnuts. Plus, the characters who were possessed were almost exclusively young women, which resonated with me at the time since I was around the same age. Now that I'm older and jaded, I'm less enthralled with the on-screen female representation in these films. Tropes I used to think were examples of rebellious horror that mocked an archaic religion—evil spirits possessing women, grotesque body movements, crude language—now have underlying sexual connotations from a perpetually male gaze that make me feel uncomfortable.

I rewatch these films and it's like I know too much. In her book *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, Carol J. Clover postulates that possession films reverse the one-sex psychoanalytical view of male and female bodies, arguing that instead of having the masculine body as the standard and the feminine the variant, it's the other way around. In these films, feminine

bodies and psyches have something extra that's open to possession that the male bodies lack. The conflict revolves around the men trying to open themselves up to the mystical.

While I appreciate her deep dive into the genre, the book was published in 1992 so it excludes all the films that have come out since. Modern possession films that have followed in the footsteps of the *The Exorcist* (1973) have a much more basic, patriarchal view of young women and their bodies. They're more concerned with her sexuality and how it's something bestial and horrific that must be repressed and tamed by an older man.

Films like *The Exorcist*, *The Last Exorcism* (2010), and *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005) present the victim as a teen girl or young woman with childish qualities and a man, usually a priest, is appointed to save her. Even if the characters are older than Regan, like Nell and Emily, they tend to be socially stunted and emotionally immature due to an isolated religious upbringing.

The sexual connotations become more obvious and troubling when the films' characters go into full-tilt possession mode. These films focus on the girl's body whether it's via spurting bodily fluids, contortionist acts or vile rhetoric. Of course,

the crude language is sexual in nature, suggesting that when women verbalize their sexuality it is disgusting and immoral. But it's the way these girls' move their bodies when possessed that really highlights the sexual undertones—they arch their backs, writhe around, scream, sweat, and moan. They're always in thin white nightgowns while doing this and are sometimes strapped to a bed. The subtext is most obvious in the notorious crucifix scene in *The Exorcist*—a heavy-handed embellishment of puberty and menstruation.

“The sexual connotations become more obvious and troubling when the films' characters go into full-tilt possession mode.”

Looking at it as a metaphor for nascent sexuality, the exorcisms take away any sexual agency the young women could have had by reverting them back to good little girls when the demon is exorcised, at least when it comes to Regan. She's quiet and docile by the end of the film. Unfortunately, Nell and Emily Rose are not saved and don't survive. Since they've already gone through puberty and the exorcisms don't cure them, it also implies that these traditional possession films are about ensuring that women stay virginal and that their womanhood and sexuality are demonic and destructive unless controlled by a man.

With all of that being said, there are some new entries to the genre that bend the narrative in a less sexual direction. Films like *Lovely Molly* (2011) and *The Blackcoat's Daughter* (2015) position the demon as something that manifests from trauma and isolation, symbolic of the rage these girls develop when their suffering goes unrecognized.

These films focus less on the possession and more on the inner world of the characters. The young women in these stories have more explicit trauma in their past or they're isolated within their communities. In *The Blackcoat's Daughter*, Kat has no friends to talk to as she grows increasingly worried when her parents fail to pick her up for winter break and she can't contact them. She attempts to befriend the beautiful and popular Rose with no luck. The adults around Kat placate her with false assurances that everything's fine, even as it becomes obvious that something's wrong. In *Lovely Molly*, the titular character starts unraveling after moving back into her childhood home. Her erratic behaviour hints that her father abused her, but her coworkers and friends just assume it's a sign that she's relapsed into drug addiction.

They're alone with no one to turn to so they internalize everything. The trauma they're harbouring festers and makes them look unstable, which

isolates them further and creates a scenario where there's no release. At this point the possessions become violent, but instead of hurting themselves they lash out at the people who have failed them. Molly murders a priest, a neighbourhood girl, and her own husband. Kat kills everyone left at the school with her.

The demon also acts like a form of self-sabotage. By hurting the people around them in a rage, they make it impossible to create a supportive network to work out their trauma. Molly is consumed by the possession and disappears. Kat is given an exorcism but goes on a murderous rampage to summon the demon because it was the only thing that gave her a sense of comfort. In the end, possessions in horror cinema shun and remove women from society either as a sexual being that needs to be reined in or as the manifestation of a rage that isn't heard. A girl just can't win!

“By hurting the people around them in a rage, they make it impossible to create a supportive network to work out their trauma.”

Still, I obviously can't quit the genre. I'll probably continue to watch these films as long as studios continue to make them. But I'd love to see a more female point of view – one that gives women the agency to engage with the demon directly as a shadow of herself instead of a mockery of her sexuality or repressed emotions. A film that doesn't present the demon as someone else inside of her but as something that's inherently there—a wild, untamed nature that can't and won't be controlled or “saved” by men and religion. *g*



Ghost Storytelling in the Digital Age

by Ciina Freitag

With the haunting season upon us, the time is nigh for spooky stories. New horror movies break into theatres, thrillers fly off book shelves, the hunt for Halloween attractions begins, and creepy materials are harvested from the internet for urgent consumption. There's just something deliciously addictive about scary tales when there's a chill in the air, a good story keeps the blood hot and pumping. Where once we favoured soft words spoken around a crackling campfire, our technologically-driven brains, needing the constant stimulation that they do, seek out ways to enhance those chills and take us deeper into the dark.

Our collective and generational fears are often conveyed through ghost stories, but sometimes it's the spark of subjective fears that speak to each of us in a very specific manner.

Modern storytelling methods cater to this intimate, phenomenological experience. Arguably, the virtual communities we build through our online presence lend to a more profoundly felt sense of solemnity and isolation, where the mind dwells on needling ideas and interactions are often exchanged without even a spoken word.

As with the oral tradition, digital technology reflects the ghostly nature of storytelling, where shapeshifting concepts enter the mind and sometimes linger. Goldstein, Grider, and Banks Thomas' vastly engaging tome, *Haunting Experiences: Ghost in Contemporary Folklore*, delves into supernatural storytelling traditions and evolutions, and the ghosts within them, emphasizing the way in which ghost storytelling helps to capture narratives that scare us and keep them contained for our

attention. As we know, ghost stories draw on foundations in folklore: tales shared amongst members of a community, providing warning or advice to be heeded, typically rooted in a cultural or personal significance. They continue to illustrate 'the uncertainty of life', the conditions, mores, dysfunctions, attitudes, thoughts, and actions of a given period, thereby deepening the connections people form with others and their landscapes. These stories are a means to better understand our surroundings.

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But ghost stories have also served as entertainment. Historically, they have been associated with

seasonal and family holidays. From Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* to Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*, literature has drawn on Christmas as a time to reflect on the uneasiness that stirs within us, and while supernatural belief may have been more widespread in the past, it endures in contemporary audiences who have their share of strange accounts of the unexplained. Modern ghost storytelling uses extreme detail, historical facts, and episodic structures to feed our need to consume more, and thanks to viral culture and evolving digital platforms, we can experiment with sensory techniques and interactive elements outside of TV, movies, and gaming, to immerse ourselves in the very narratives that we both crave and dread, through websites, social media platforms, apps, and podcasts.

The Web

If you want to recall old folklore, share supernatural tales, research terrifying travel sites for future exploration, buy haunted artefacts from eBay, or piece together info about true crimes, it's simple enough to search the web, where an unending plethora of content awaits you. Some of the more unsettling stuff come from subreddit threads where users list and discuss ghostly encounters, or from succinct little verses of creepypasta where readers can absorb and disseminate strange stories with only a few words. A noteworthy phenomenon is that of Slender Man, a story and icon that stems from a creepypasta meme of a thin, lanky, featureless supernatural figure that stalks those entranced by him, most often children. The fictional figure has gone on to inspire terrible true crime (i.e. that case of two girls who violently attacked and nearly killed their friend in Waukesha, Wisconsin, claiming it was under the Slender Man's bidding). This communicable narrative has since been transmitted across media into comics and film.

Social Media

Many social media platforms also take advantage of high impact

storytelling. You've probably heard of that Snapchat story where someone used a face-swap filter and captured the features of a disturbed spirit lurking in her room, superimposed over her own face. And, if you're haunting the Twitter timeline, you're likely to have come across the Dear David thread by popular illustrator, Adam Ellis. The serialized account compiles several months' worth of increasingly unnerving tweets of encounters in and around his apartment. They tell of a small ghost boy with a misshapen head who he believes is behind the strange occurrences that stirred up his pets, moved his belongings, invaded his dreams, and appeared in video and photos he captured over that period. While there's a lot of scepticism and trolling around the legitimacy of his content, countless users still anxiously await updates. Like the Slender Man narrative, Ellis' unusual narrative has garnered enough attention to transform this viral ghost story into a transmedia sensation, with a movie version in the works.

Apps

Certain applications on your phone allow you to participate in ghost storytelling. If you're familiar with Wattpad, the creative writing app where you write your own genre stories and interact with readers, you might also know of its sister app, Tap, which sources original stories from its writers to create atmospheric narratives, building off of the appeal of video gameplay and the immediacy of the Snapchat generation. It conveys narrative through text messaging: by tapping the screen, the user advances in the story, revealing each new text between characters. One of its popular previews, 'Hide: No Way Out' is especially affecting, using standard horror tropes and texting features to tell the fictional story of a couple who foster a strange and violent orphan. It builds anticipation with each conversation and chapter, and leverages pictures and audio clips to lure you further into its depths.

Podcasts

In countless horror narratives, a sense of dread often follows from sound. Perhaps you, too, have been startled by a strange sound heard from somewhere outside, just out of sight, which begs for further investigation: what made the noise, what direction did it come from, and how close is it getting? Like radio plays and news updates before them, podcasts (and audiobooks, for that matter) activate our instinct to listen and feed off of our need to know more. Their serialized narratives and episodic formats allow listeners to devour the installments almost as quickly as they're released, captivated by the sounds and voices that hover inside headphones: urban legends, tales of terror, hallowed historic accounts (see Aaron Mahnke's *Lore*, which has expanded into both book and television forms, and his *Cabinet of Curiosities*).

True crime is just as fascinating, even when it contrasts gruesome gore with light-hearted comedy. On a weekly basis, you can tune in to *My Favourite Murder* to hear Karen Kilgariff and Georgia Hardstark exchange details of interesting but brutal murders that feed their own morbid curiosities. What's more, they encourage their listeners to engage with the storytelling aspect and send in their own hometown horror stories, which are in turn shared with the larger listening audience. Of course, if those don't suit your taste, you can always tune in to frightening fictional narratives (*Alice Isn't Dead*), or the eerie interwoven fact-and-fiction podcasts floating around (*The Last Podcast on the Left*, *The No Sleep Podcast*).

Modern storytelling practices find new and interesting ways to combine our anxieties with entertainment. Yet even as we individually seek out these virtual ghost-stories out, there is still, in the end, the unifying nature of horror. We build communities with those who share our fears, or those simply wanting a recommendation for a terrifying tale — the creepier, the better. **g**

TOP 10 MOST HAUNTED PLACES IN NORTH AMERICA

by Ali Chappell

Since the Halloween season is so very very close. I'm sure you are also hoping to find some real life hauntings. Maybe see some ghosts. Sometimes, a real life scare is all you need to make the Samhain season that much more authentic. Let's go down the rabbit hole of the top 10 Most Haunted Places In North America. Who knows, there could be one in your hometown. Let's get spooky.

1 The Cecil Hotel, California, USA

There is a murder hotel in California. It's called The Cecil. It was built in 1924 for wealthy people during the depression but quickly became home to transients. In 1947, Elizabeth Short was last seen at this hotel before they found her body and she became forever known as The Black Dahlia. In 1964, Goldie Osgood was raped and murdered in her room. Infamous serial killers Richard Ramirez and Jack Unterweger often stayed here. Many suicides occurred over the years including one where the person jumped out a window and killed a pedestrian on the street. Also the body of Elisa Lam, the girl from that freaky elevator video, was found in a water tank. Remember her? Yeah, that also happened here. It's now called the Stay On Main and it's business as usual. Anyone want to go with me for a weekend away?

2 Lalaurie Mansion, Louisiana, USA

This house is so famous that Nicolas Cage once bought it. In 1834 there was a house fire that led the town to discover that Madame Lalaurie was locking up her slaves and performing horrible acts upon them and torturing them. Since then no one

has held on to this house long as they claim it is too haunted.

3 Myrtles Plantation, Louisiana, USA

Myrtles Plantation is home to at least 12 ghosts but that's not the weird part. The weird part is that only one death is recorded. The murder of William Winter. There are plenty of legends about what went on in this house when the Myrtles still resided there, but it is believed they were murdered by their slaves who were allegedly committing other murders. There is also the ghost of a little girl being treated by a voodoo doctor who perished in 1868. As well, and this is the kicker, it is reportedly believed to be built upon an Indian burial ground. We have all seen *Poltergeist*. That house is haunted.

4 Christie Mansion, Ontario, Canada

Wanna know what I love? Taking an Oreo cookie and dipping it in peanut butter before I eat it. Oreos, Chips Ahoy, Dad's Old Fashioned Cookies. Basically, Toronto's Iconic cookie baron, Robert Christie of "Mr. Christie, you make good cookies", actually trapped his mistress in a room for years until she eventually hung herself after going insane. Since then, people have claimed to have been trapped in certain rooms of the house for hours, and in a few cases, overnight. Makes eating those cookies a bit more intense, right?

5 The Mackenzie House, Ontario, Canada

This home claims to be one of the most famous and most historical haunted locations in Toronto. It is the home of Toronto's first mayor, William Lyon Mackenzie, and

rumour has it that he hasn't left. He has been spotted countless times in his old bedroom, his daughter's bedroom, sometimes he sits in his rocking chair causing it to rock on its own. His old printing press has been heard working in the middle of the night. His haunting presence doesn't seem to be scary, just kind of annoying. Like when mom makes you stay with grandpa for a week.

6 Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel, Alberta, Canada

The Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel is a beautiful place to stay, but also home to a great many horrifying sightings of ghosts. It was built in 1888, as a part of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Over the years, a bride has fallen down the marble stairs to her death on her wedding day, a family was murdered in room 873, and there have been many sightings of the ghost of Sam McAuley, a bellhop who died just after he announced his retirement. Whether these ghosts are real or not, this seems like the perfect family vacation. Come play with us forever and ever and ever.

7 The Entire Town Of Salem, Massachusetts, USA

The fact that an entire town can be haunted is crazy, but Salem has a rather sordid past. Since 1692, there have been over 20 executions of supposed witches. Witch trials were huge in Salem, as we all know, and you can feel their spirits and their presence in every step taken along their streets.

8 Frank Slide, Alberta, Canada


This one is fairly lesser known but it is bone chilling. Go with me on this one. In the wee hours of April 29th, 1903, before anyone

was awake, an 82 million tonne landslide tumbled down and killed 70 to 90 people in the mining town of Frank, Alberta. The rocks also destroyed the railway and coal mine, burying them in a pile of rubble. They remain there to this day. Since then, people say that they see a sort of mist coming off the rocks and unexplained lights can be seen on the mountain where the landslide happened. Just remember, those bodies are still there under those rocks, so be careful where you step.

9 The Winchester Mystery House, California, USA

Since its construction in 1884, in San Jose, California, this Victorian-era house has seen its fair share of sickness, disease, death, depression, hauntings, and so much more. After Sarah Winchester's husband died, she inherited \$20.5 million dollars and part ownership of the Winchester Repeating Arms firearms company. Pocket change. Shortly afterward, her daughter also died. That was when Sarah reached out to a medium who said she needed to build a home to house all the ghost of people who were killed by Winchester guns. She even built a séance room. She is just inviting these ghosts and demons into the house! You can even visit the house and take a tour around.

10 The Amityville House, New York, USA

We can't have an article about real haunted houses without talking about one of the most famous ones of all. *The Amityville Horror* is based off the real 1974 killings and so-called possessions of Ronald DeFeo Jr., who murdered his entire 6-member family in the middle of the night. All were found lying on their stomachs in their beds. No evidence of drugging or signs of struggle. No neighbors heard any gunshots. Demons or not, it's a beautiful house. Straight up haunted, though. 

The Fantastic Foxes: Spiritualism & The Sisters Who Started It

A woman dies due to a weakness of the heart. Her sister succumbs two years later from failing kidneys. The third sister passes peacefully in bed just one year after. All three women died within a span of three years. And all three spoke to ghosts. The above are the ill-fated ends to New York's very own Fox sisters, the women responsible for kickstarting the Spiritualism movement in 1800s America.

John and Margaret Fox lived with their two daughters, Kate and Maggie, in Hydesville, NY, in a small farm house. March of 1848 ushered in strange noises to that farm house: rapping, the sounds of someone going up and down the stairs, and knocking. These noises continued and brought Margaret to finally confront the faceless beings responsible for the sounds. They proved to be intelligent, spelling out names and ages at her command via cracking and rapping patterns. Startled by the unearthly communing, the concerned mother asked the next-door neighbors to come over and listen for themselves. From this night, the unlikely future of those young girls began and spiraled to heights they never fathomed.

The two girls were sent away to live with their older sister, Leah, in Rochester. Word traveled fast about Maggie and Kate's story. Soon enough, they were invited by the curious and the skeptical to divulge more about their peculiar experiences. Interestingly, new guardian Leah displayed an ability to similarly communicate with spirits once reunited with her younger sisters. The duo then became a trio and subsequently a tour of seances began. The Fox sisters would perform in hotels for audiences with private readings scheduled in between sets, charging one dollar for admission.

Kate was so passionate about her field that she married a fellow Spiritualist and sharpened her own skills as a medium. Maggie stepped back from the Spiritualism life briefly

and chose to convert to Catholicism for her husband, who sadly passed soon after their marriage. She found solace in alcohol thereafter. Leah remarried and continued working, both with and without her sisters.

In 1888, in an act of seeming desperation, Maggie publicly denounced Spiritualism and the existence of ghosts, and exposed the tricks the sisters used throughout the years. She stated that she and her sister would tie apples to strings for "knocking" and crack their toe joints for the rapping noises. The press declared it a "death blow" to the movement. A year later, she recanted her declaration.

Leah did not falter from her sister's statements and continued promoting the movement valiantly until her death in 1890 due to heart inflammation. Kate never lost faith. Unfortunately, she had also developed a habit of drinking and died from it in 1892, two years after Leah. Maggie died at home on March 3, 1893, ending the illustrious journey of the Fox sisters in the same month as it began.

The proclamation of talking to ghosts was generally written off as ludicrous, especially during this time, as women around the pubescent age were thought to be susceptible to hysteria and seizures. Curious enough, this age range is also known for increased poltergeist activity. This mindset of the medical world, in combination with the girls' claims, made for a very interesting outcome: they were believed. Not only were they welcomed into homes and halls for demonstrations and readings, they were wildly successful doing so. It was a near miracle that these women could make long careers from the outcome of that fateful March night. Whether or not these sisters were capable of conversing with spirits, it's undeniable that they understood how both the living and the dead work.

AHLISSA EICHHORN

Through Samuel's Eyes: Mother or Monster?

by Vincent Bec

Jennifer Kent's 2014 monster film, *The Babadook*, ignited many discussions about its complex meanings and metaphors. For the last four years, *The Babadook*'s connection to mental illness has been discussed ad nauseam. One may think the discussion is complete, that everything that needs to be said has been said five times over, but there is still a glaring gap. *The Babadook* is as much about Samuel's (Noah Wiseman) problems and coping skills as it is Amelia's (Essie Davis).

Most people seem to be in agreement that the Babadook monster could be a manifestation of Amelia's mental illness, however, it could just as easily be the fantasies of a child justifying his parent's abuse and neglect. Through Amelia's eyes we see the Babadook as an entity that is attacking her. Yes, it is her depression, but that depression is an outside force invading her and changing her. Seen through Amelia's eyes, the Babadook is manifested through her. It is created from her problems and stress. Therefore, the Babadook exists because of her presence. Viewed through Samuel's eyes, the Babadook is no longer an outside force invading Amelia. Instead, it is Amelia herself who is the Babadook manifested through Samuel's view of her, and therefore, the Babadook could not exist without Samuel.

Samuel's Symptoms

In most discussions of *The Babadook*,

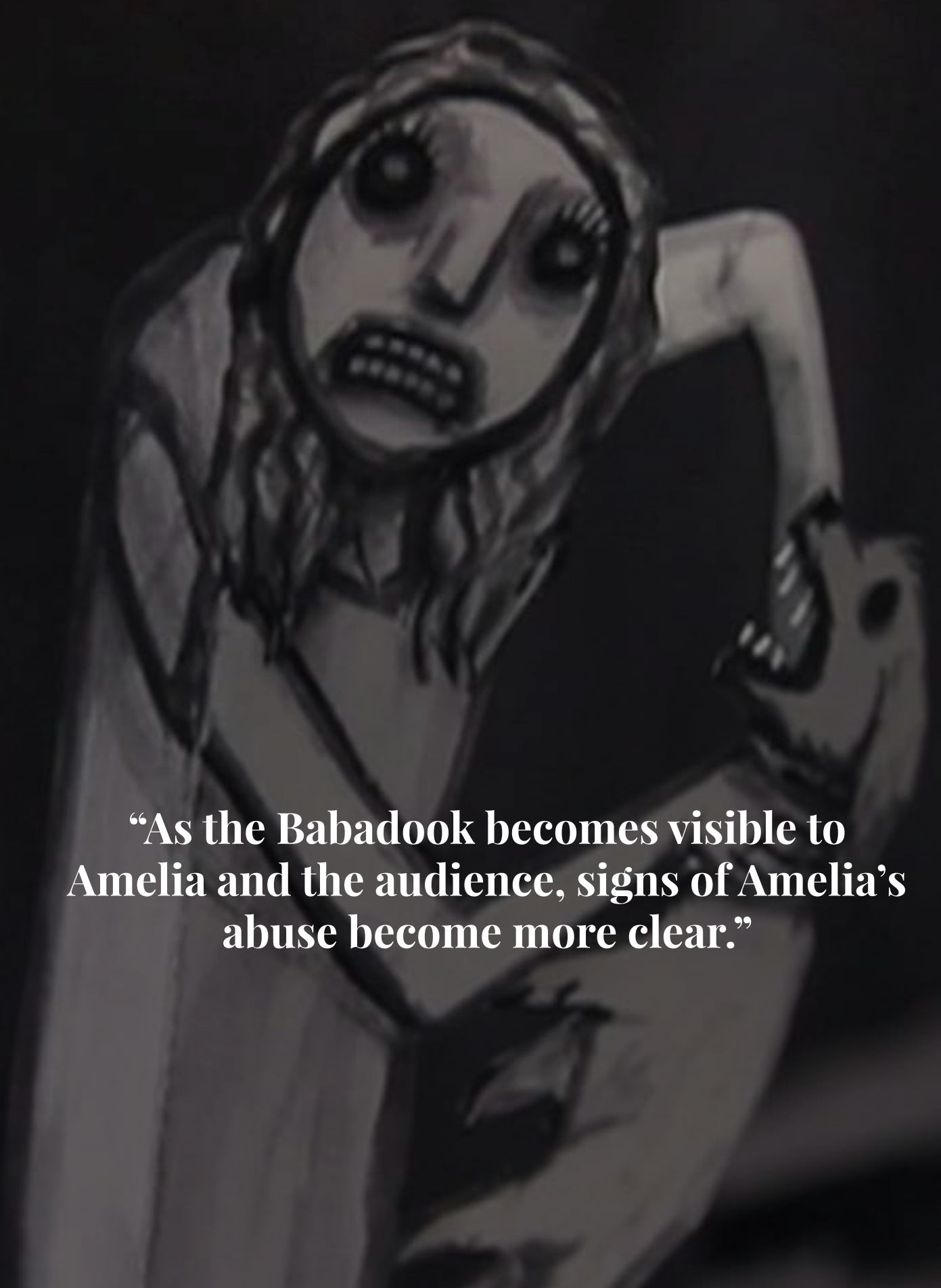
signs of Amelia's mental illness, such as teeth grinding and an inability to sleep, are mentioned. However, Samuel's symptoms, which are perhaps even more evident than Amelia's, are rarely looked at. The audience is focused on Amelia as the main character, therefore the audience sympathizes with her. Samuel's place in discussions about *The Babadook* is limited to jokes about how annoying children are, how Samuel is 'the best birth control', and so on. Samuel is excessively clingy, almost never wanting to let his mother go. When he sleeps in bed with her, he holds on to her all night. Often, this affection is rejected by Amelia—near the beginning of the film, Samuel hugs Amelia and she pushes him away. Samuel is constantly begging his mother to look at him, but she rarely does. Even when she is alone with Samuel doing motherly tasks such as helping him get ready for school, she resists looking directly at him. Samuel acts out in school, severely enough for the school to want special accommodations for him. He later shows aggression towards his mother, pushing her down at one point. Clinginess, acting out for attention, and aggressive outbursts are all some of the key warning signs of a child who is not receiving the attention or affection necessary for development.

Manifestation Through Samuel

The first time the audience sees the "Mister Babadook" book, the

Babadook is shown harassing a little boy, not a woman. The events shown in this original book do not predict the future of the film. It isn't until this book comes back a second time that it shows Amelia's potential future. Instead, the original book depicts a boy living with a monster. This is a reflection of the present in the film: Samuel is currently living with a monster in his house. Before the Babadook is visible to Amelia or the audience, only Samuel can see him. During this time, the Babadook shows up when Amelia is yelling at her son for reasons he can't understand. When his mother yells at him in the car for not being "normal," Samuel sees the Babadook and then has a fit. Children do not have the same concept of normal as adults do. They can understand how certain actions, such as making a mess or too much noise, can make their parents angry, but they do not have the framework necessary to understand how their personality can make their parent angry. When Samuel cannot understand his mother's anger, he copes by seeing the monster instead of her.

Later in the film, there is a scene where Samuel appears to be asleep on the couch while Amelia washes dishes and watches their neighbor, Mrs. Roach. It is not until Samuel wakes up and walks into the room that the Babadook appears in Mrs. Roach's house. This could suggest that the Babadook appears through Samuel, not Amelia. A sign



“As the Babadook becomes visible to Amelia and the audience, signs of Amelia's abuse become more clear.”



of the Babadook being Samuel's understanding of his neglect is the repetition of Amelia insisting that he not tell anyone about the Babadook. More than once, Amelia pulls him aside and warns him not to tell anyone, just as an abusive parent would tell a child to keep the abuse a secret.

Signs of Abuse

As the Babadook becomes visible to Amelia and the audience, signs of Amelia's abuse become more clear. As the audience can see Samuel's fantasy of the Babadook, they can also see what his fantasy was covering in Amelia. She bribes Samuel with ice cream twice to cover her sudden outbursts. Samuel has to beg Amelia for food. Even the act of having to call someone, like a family member or neighbour, for help during a parent's episode is a familiar scene for people with parents like Amelia. She makes Samuel feel guilty for reaching out to Mrs. Roach by saying he will hurt their neighbour in doing so, introducing a fear so that

he will not reach out again in the future. Fear is a tool of abuse. Samuel echoes this when he tells Amelia that the Babadook first wants to make them afraid. When Mrs. Roach comes to check on them, Amelia acts meek to throw suspicion away from her possible wrongdoing. She then promises Samuel that everything will be okay and that they will go to Mrs. Roach's house — this is a lie to gain his trust so that she can get close enough to choke him.

Amelia as the Babadook

Amelia's melding with the Babadook comes to a climax when she yells, "I am your mother." Sam, and the audience, don't want to believe that Amelia could act so awful to her son. We want to believe that there is a monster making her act this way, but Amelia assures us it is her. The woman we thought was a loving mother can verbally abuse her son. At this point in the film, Amelia becomes less human the more awful her words are. When she calls Samuel 'a pig' and scuttles up to him

like a bug, the camera is in Samuel's position. We see through his eyes that he cannot accept this thing as his loving mother. Later, Amelia tries to attack Samuel as he runs from her. During this scene, she says things one would expect a mother to scold her child for— do not play with weapons—but her voice and her bodily movements make her monsterlike instead of motherlike. This is how Samuel sees Amelia when she escalates her anger over mundane events.

During the climax of the film, Sam tells his mother that he will always love her, even if she can't love him because of the monster. This is what many abused children have to work through the rest of their lives—a feeling of love for their abusive parents and an inability to understand what made their parents unable to love them back. Which would be more terrifying: feeling yourself being consumed by a monster or watching your trusted protector turn into a monster? ^g

The Ninth Gate (1999) is a fascinating and often overlooked entry into satanic cinema. It fits nicely into the subgenre in that it incorporates religious artifacts, enigmatic puzzles and a ritual that has the power to raise the Devil. But what makes it stand out from other films is the way it follows an unconventional path and incorporates its characters in unexpected ways.

Johnny Depp stars as Dean Corso, a sort of "book detective" who tracks down rare editions of celebrated books and brokers deals for his clients. Here, he is approached by famed collector Boris Balkan (Frank Langella) with a peculiar request. Balkan has recently acquired the infamous book, *The Nine Gates of the Kingdom of Shadows*, a seventeenth-century work rumored to have the power to raise Satan himself. There are two other known copies of this book; Balkan enlists Corso to travel to Europe to compare his copy to the other surviving two. He believes that only one copy is authentic.

Corso complies, and over the course of his journey, discovers that all three books are indeed authentic, but there exist slight variations among them. Each book contains nine engravings. In each copy, three different engravings are signed by an artist calling themselves Lucifer. Corso comes to believe that the secret to communing with the Devil lies within these images and has been spread over the three books, rather than contained in just a single volume.

During his travels, Corso is aided at multiple points by a mysterious young woman (Emmanuelle Seigner) who repeatedly crosses his path. She provides him with physical protection at several key moments where Corso's safety is threatened by other parties trying to track down the books (though, she is thankfully absent when Lena Olin's character breaks a bottle over his head) and she also offers guidance and insights to keep him moving toward his goal. At first, he believes that she has been sent by Balkan to monitor his

The Devil, Agency, and Choice in *The Ninth Gate*

by Emily von Seele

progress, but over time it becomes clear that her motives are entirely her own.

The audience (and Corso, too) eventually come to realize that this woman is not a human ally, but a supernatural one - specifically Lucifer herself. Her plan, as it happens, was not only to collect the engravings from the three books, but to find and employ a worthy emissary to carry out the ritual. She finds that emissary not in Balkan or in any other of the cultists we meet over the course of the story, but in Corso.

In many satanic horror films, our focus is on the humans who are hoping to execute some sort of plan that will see the Devil rise, the Antichrist born, or any other similar outcome. The presence of the Devil is dependent entirely on the actions of the followers. *The Ninth Gate* breaks with that tradition, and gives the Devil agency and power throughout the story. Instead of being a silent, enigmatic figure offscreen, waiting to be summoned, she has an active role in how that happens and who participates. Not only has she hidden the secret to discovering the Ninth Gate in the engravings of the books, but she has some control over who will do so. She chooses Corso, aiding him on his journey and planting a seed of interest that will eventually grow into an obsession.

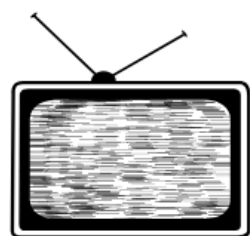
When the story begins, Corso is simply a shark - willing to do whatever is necessary to meet his needs. Yet over the course of the film, he begins to change. Though his mission and loyalty are to Balkan and to the promise of payment, he is drawn deeper into the enigma of the Nine Gates. The text and the mysterious engravings have a hold on him, as he increasingly focuses on discovering their true secret.

Though the Devil assists Corso throughout the story and helps

to stoke the fire of his newfound obsession, ultimately, the choice to take up the mantle and become her emissary is his alone. Not because he is tricked, or out of the promise of money or power, but because his obsession with the books has grown to the point where it cannot be ignored. Though he can walk away at any time, he reaches a point of no return where the need is just too great, and he must see his task through to the end.

This film gives its characters an agency that is rarely found in satanic horror - a Devil with a certain amount of control over her own destiny and an unbiased character willing to assist her of his own free will. Both of these aspects are illustrated in the film's last few moments. In the story's climax, Balkan retreats to a dilapidated French castle and uses the engravings to attempt to gain access to the Ninth Gate. He sets himself on fire, believing that the power of Satan will protect him, but to no avail. He burns, and Corso is able to escape with the pages intact.

As they drive away, Corso asks the woman why Balkan's ritual failed. She says that one of the engravings—that of a young woman riding a seven-headed beast—was a forgery. She disappears soon after and Corso returns to Spain to retrieve the authentic page. The true image is slightly different: here, the woman is drawn in the likeness of the Devil herself and is gesturing toward a drawing of the castle in France. The final shot of the film is of Corso, having decided to see his task through to the end. He approaches the castle at dusk and is granted entry, as a bright light pours from its doors. The Devil, acting on her own behalf, withheld the appropriate page from Balkan and instead offered it up to Corso, if he chooses to accept it. He does, of his own volition, and satisfies his obsession by walking through the Ninth Gate. ^g



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21st Century Shocks: New Supernatural Myths for a New Millennium

by Kathleen Killian Fernandez & Chris Vander Kaay

The late 1990s were a confusing time for horror films, especially ones that were supernatural in nature. Influenced by the self-referential nature of the successful *Scream* series, entries like *Bride of Chucky* (1998) and *The Frighteners* (1996) leaned heavily into comedy as well as supernatural scares. In 1999, when ghost stories should have been at their zenith, thanks to the hugely successful and Oscar-nominated *The Sixth Sense* (1999), most of what reached screens were remakes of Japanese horror films like *The Ring* (2002) and new versions of classic haunting stories like *House on Haunted Hill* (1999) and *The Haunting* (1999). What could have been a pinnacle for supernatural horror felt more like the beginning of a downward spiral.

However, something interesting started to happen at the turn of the new millennium, the year after groundbreaking mainstream films like *Being John Malkovich* (1999), *Fight Club* (1999), and *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) were released: horror

turned towards the future. Perhaps because of new voices coming to horror from independent film and television, the voice of supernatural horror became more personal and intimate. Its monsters were more complex than their ancestors and more representative of the changing fears and anxieties of the day. Between 2000 and 2014, five films stood out that exemplified the post-millennial desire to eschew the classical supernatural archetypes of ghosts, demons, and monsters of the first 75 years of horror film for shapes, concepts, and fears that were wholly their own.



Final Destination (2000)
Released mere months after the Y2K

scare and a year and a half before 9/11, *Final Destination* was the first horror franchise born in the new millennium. Though it seems on its surface to be a story about the revenge of Death, cheated out of its victims, the film smartly removes any personification of Death. When a group of teenagers escape their intended demise by airplane crash, an invisible and omnipotent Death uses elaborate manipulations of machinery, nature, and everyday life to reclaim those lives. Unlike previous incarnations of the Grim Reaper with black cloak and scythe, creators Glen Morgan, James Wong, and Jeffrey Reddick recognized that the new shape of anxiety was the conscious unknown.

After the fear-based campaign of Y2K proved to be nothing, *Final Destination* warned audiences that the danger of technology was not in its failure, but in its success. The world now operated on new rules, run by machines we interacted with but didn't understand; we were at the mercy of machines. The invisible spectre of Death was

"the algorithm," the Rube Goldberg series of seemingly benign changes that resulted in gruesome ends for the unsuspecting victims. Viewers were once terrified about the idea of a cruel and arbitrary world that wasn't concerned whether we lived or died; *Final Destination* reinvented the fear of Death by reminding us that it's far more terrifying when something smarter, stronger, and invisible is watching and manipulating our every move.



Session 9 (2001)
One of the most frequent clichés of the traditional horror film is the secret killer whose murderous identity remains a mystery even to himself, usually explained away by an elaborate psychiatric excuse or classic demonic possession. Writer/director Brad Anderson skillfully revived the power of the secret killer in *Session 9* by sidestepping the psychiatric and demonic explanations to introduce viewers to something deeper, more primal, and far more disturbing in its implications.

An asbestos removal crew is hired to renovate a dilapidated, old psychiatric ward, and while one employee, Mike (Stephen Gevedon), becomes obsessed with listening to a series of tape-recorded interviews with a multiple personality disorder patient, other employees deal with escalating strangeness that threatens their lives and their sanity. The ultimate reveal of the film—that one of the seemingly kind-hearted employees, Gordon (Peter Mullan), is responsible for the murder of several coworkers, his wife, and his infant child—is juxtaposed against the final patient interview in which a murderous personality explains its origins: "I live in the weak and the wounded." This evil personality, Simon, is something deeper than a personality split, something more haunting than a demon; it is a bone-deep malevolent presence, separate and distinct from its host, living in silence and patiently awaiting its host's victimization. Then it feeds on that fear and pain, growing in strength to kill, only to vanish back into the shadows of amnesia. It is a supernatural, nearly mythic explanation for what the court calls temporary insanity. Because everyone has moments of weakness and pain, that means Simon lives silently inside us all, waiting for his opportunity to feed. We are all the secret killer.

Resolution (2012)
Worldwide communication, instant

and interactive, has been a hallmark of the new millennium, allowing people of different languages, cultures, and geography to build relationships both personal and professional. The clear and obvious advantages that come from this technology are so apparent that humanity rarely looks deeper to discover the haunting truth underneath it.



In *Resolution*, Michael (Peter Cilella) seeks out junkie former best friend Chris (Vinny Curran) in a dilapidated cabin in the woods to help him get sober. During their ordeal, someone leaves increasingly disturbing and violent photographs and videos for Michael and Chris to find, and they struggle to identify who is leaving them and escape with their lives. They discover that some entity beyond time and conventional understanding has been trying to communicate with them, to make them act out a narrative with a tragic ending that will cost them their lives.

The shapeless, distant being talking to

Boo! Did I scare you? What if I told you the call was coming from inside the house? Or, if I whispered that I could hear the voice and it wants to hurt you? From the monster movies of the 1930s to modern jump scares, the "horror" of horror films is always evolving. But, while the scares change, fear remains the same. The Boogie Man is always the Boogie Man, but he'll get you in new ways.

In an analysis of the evolution of scares, the obvious reference is the quintessential horror masterpiece, 2013's *Monsters University*, in which monsters are employed to scare kids as a means of harvesting power. But, as time passes, kids just aren't frightened by the old-fashioned

scares the monsters deliver. Young monster Mike Wazowski (Billy Crystal) tries a new kind of scare with record-setting effectiveness. What *Monsters University* brilliantly points out is that to garner a scare from people, scares had to evolve. It was no longer enough to be a scary monster—modern youth demanded new and different scares. The new crop of kids were still afraid of the monster, but weren't spooked by the same old methods.

While surface layers evolve, underlying themes of horror remain consistent. The Boogie Man has been grief, demons, puberty, military unrest, the unknown. It's even been Fear Itself. Because the appeal of horror is its ability to speak to very real fears and distill them down to a scare. Scares raise our heart rate; the themes keep us afraid.

Scare evolution is trackable. When Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* came out

in 1960, film fans were shocked by the surprise kills and twists. *Psycho* stands as scary tale of the unpredictable killer next door, but what really spooked the audience? The blood. That blood flowing down the shower drain is etched in our minds. This unforgettable scare is one of the most heavily referenced horror moments of all time. But would blood scare you now? Blood took the trip from absolute fright to campy prop when it showed up in 1981's *Evil Dead*. By the time *Evil Dead 2* came out in 1987, blood was a complete laugh.

In 1978, the world was graced with *Halloween*. The film ushered in the culture of "slashics," giving us *Friday*

the 13th (1980) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). These movies terrified audiences around the world. But what happened to the slasher? Without ignoring the terrifying modern slashers still packing a punch (or a stab, if you will), the version of knife-wielding baddies has graduated from pure scare to meta and camp. There are blatant similarities between *F13* and *Hatchet* (2006), but while *F13* stands as atmospheric horror, *Hatchet* uses blood, guts, and brains for a laugh. The genre has evolved.

In the past 10 years or so, filmmakers have gotten to us through the jump scare. It shifted those on first dates from enjoying minutes-

long, eye-shielding cuddles to one straight-up scream in the ear of an unsuspecting plus one. Between the cultural phenomenon that is 2007's *Paranormal Activity* and the James Wan/Leigh Whannel expanded universes, there is no shortage of score-coordinated jumps in horror. However, we're currently seeing the graduation of the jump scare from scary to campy, and the rise of the slow burn. Not long ago, *Paranormal Activity* stood as the biggest scare you could find. Now, the expanded *Insidious* films stand as campy and fun. The new scare is slow and creepy; see new horror champions like 2018's *A Quiet Place* and *Hereditary*.

The Evolution of Horror

by Lindsay Traves

Michael and Chris solely via images has no sense of their autonomy, their lives and feelings. It sees them only as a furthering of its need for story, for drama and conflict. The nameless terror depicted in *Resolution* stands in for us, staring at a screen on one end of the world, peeking through a virtual window at something we don't fully understand or recognize outside of our experience of it. Sometimes, we are the ones being watched and pushed through our paces; sometimes, we are the ones doing the pushing.

***It Follows* & *The Babadook* (2014)**

In a world driven by brilliant new technology but still plagued with anxiety and isolation, it's no surprise that the average family dynamic does not escape unscathed. Machines have made life easier, but they've also positioned themselves between family members. Technology entertains us and keeps us safe, roles which were once reserved for our loved ones, so the remaining ties are sometimes tenuous.

It Follows is an excellent and disturbing film that has unfairly been dismissed as a film about a 'sexually transmitted haunting.' Its plot, about a slow-moving specter that murders sexually active people unless they sleep with someone else to pass along the curse, can be seen through this simple lens, but there

is a deeper meaning that speaks to the schism in modern families. There are nearly no speaking roles for adults in *It Follows*, and that is no coincidence. Its glacially-paced villain stalks them after their perhaps poor relationship decisions, not because of an intentional trespass, but because of an ignorant one. The film is an exploration of a generation of parentless children trying to navigate adult relationships in the absence of any mature guidance. Sex is a virtual minefield, but intimacy is far more dangerous. The fact that the creature sometimes appears as a beloved deceased family member is more evidence that what these teens lack is also what may be their undoing.



The children in *It Follows* aren't wrong in their estimation of their parents' absenteeism, at least not according to *The Babadook*. After a traffic accident kills her husband, widowed

single mother Amelia (Essie Davis) struggles to raise her son (Noah Wiseman) alone. A strange bedtime story about the titular creature terrifies her son and pushes her to the breaking point. The creature, an oddity reminiscent of the darkest fairy tale, is an allegory for the exhaustion and pain of parenting, the often-thankless role that robs parents of their individuality and sexual freedom. When Amelia tries to kill her son in the final act, it could be because she is possessed by the Babadook, but it could also be a darker reality: she no longer wants to be a parent.

The 21st century has certainly had its share of excellent ghosts, demons, and monsters, and the horror genre has no interest in getting rid of them anytime soon. After all, a great icon will always be worth revisiting. However, the specifics of post-millennial fear have also given rise to some of the most intriguing, unique, and relatable horror creatures and narratives that audiences have been lucky enough to experience. These five films have only begun to scratch that surface.

You can further explore the new face of the supernatural with: *Martyrs* (2008), *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012), *Re-Cycle* (2006), *The Interior* (2015), *Splinter* (2008), *The Burrowers* (2008). [g](#)

The different themes of horror have always boiled down to the Boogie Man. But the Boogie Man is merely a placeholder for our commonly held anxieties and fears. From remakes to comparable films, the evolution of what scares us is observable. As horror fans, we seek comfort in the classics, cheer during modern camp, and shudder with fear while watching modern slow-burns. The rich spectrum of horror is such a gift. Now, if you'll pardon me, I have to refresh my Zombie Contingency Plan to prepare for these modern fast-running zombies. [g](#)

When *The Babadook* (2014) broke through, a lot of armchair critics came for it for being your average haunted house, Blumhouse-style jump-scare-a-thon. After a viewing, it's obvious the film is about the cultural "Boogie Man;" the angst of a single mother, of societal pressure, of grief. There are many similarities between *The Babadook* and the more recent *Hereditary*. Both films centre on a mother handling grief while struggling with motherhood and her identity. Both films explore terrifying haunts layered over this theme. But while *The Babadook* is filled with your 2014 jump scares, *Hereditary* is a creepy slow burn, attempting to

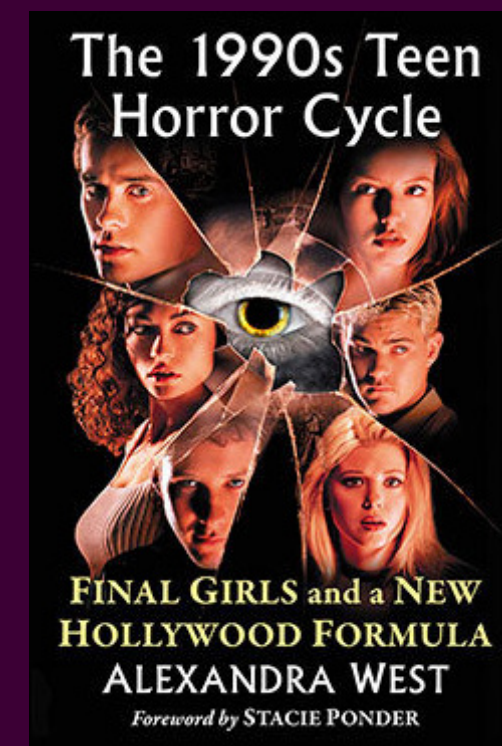
induce long-running anxiety. This is the style of scare most effective in 2018.

To analyze a movie as "cheap" for having jump scares is to miss the deeper themes of horror. It is to miss their ability to instill fear and provide a contextual viewpoint of cultural anxieties. The first time a movie made you jump and scream, not an ounce of you thought it was cheap. You were scared. The jumps in 2008's *The Strangers* may not scare me now, but I am still afraid of the psychos next door and I still think about them every time I check if my doors are locked at night.

"Alexandra West is one of the most brilliant minds working in the field of film studies today. The fact that she devotes her considerable intellect to our little bloody corner of the film world is truly a gift. If you have any love for the 90s or simply want to know why some of us find the decade so appealing, pick up THE 1990s TEEN HORROR CYCLE."

- Jeff Schmidt, *Nightmarish Conjurings*

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Paranormal Activities: The Paradoxical Intersection of Science & Spiritualism

by Valeska Griffiths

Humans have long been fascinated by the mystery of death and what comes next. Through funerary rites, ancestor veneration, and occult rituals, we try to make sense of and define our relationship to the unknown. The concept of life after death has held particular significance and endurance. Its appeal is obvious — the notion of not only continued existence beyond death, but the potential to reconnect with loved ones who have already shuffled loose their mortal coils. While ghosts often appear in film and literature as figures of horror, this wasn't always the case.

Spiritualism is a religious movement based on three core beliefs: spirits exist; they continue to evolve after death, and; living humans, acting as mediums, can facilitate communication between the living and the dead. Spiritualism arose in the 1840s and remained enormously fashionable until the 1920s. A backlash against the new emphasis on scientific rationality and a 19th-century crisis of faith contributed to the movement's popularity. The incredible interest in the afterlife during this period, combined with gender politics that positioned femininity as particularly sensitive and spiritual, allowed women to develop independent careers as clairvoyants and mediums during a time in which women had relatively few opportunities to gain either power or income. The movement gained a huge boost in mainstream popularity through the work of the



Fox Sisters in 1848 (see page 24), who earned a living through their alleged ability to communicate with spirits.

New technologies were a potent influence as well. Victorian inventions such as X-rays (which offered previously unimaginable glimpses into the human body via ghostly imagery) and radios and telephones (which brought disembodied voices into the home) expanded ideas around what was possible. As Richard J. Noakes explains in his 1999 article "Telegraphy is an Occult Art: Cromwell Fleetwood Varley and the Diffusion of Electricity to the Other World," the introduction of telegraphy in the early 1850s held a certain resemblance to Spiritualist

practices like table rapping, which some Spiritualists began to refer to as "celestial telegraphy." This bolstered the idea that mediums could facilitate connections between planes of existence in the same way that the electric telegraph connected people on different continents.

Many respected and educated people were part of the movement. The Ghost Club, founded in 1862, counted among its members novelists Charles Dickens and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, poet William Butler Yeats, and Charles Babbage, the inventor of the first mechanical computer. But Spiritualism also had its fair share of detractors, like Harry Houdini, who dedicated much of his life to debunking Spiritualist claims.

And there were many claims to debunk. Spiritualists invented many new practices and tools in an effort to pierce the veil between the worlds of the living and the dead. The Ouija board became popular during this period, as did the séance (Mary Todd Lincoln held several at them at the White House after the death of her son). The term "ghostwriter" could be taken quite literally — Elana Gomel's 2007 essay "Spirits in the Material World: Spiritualism and Identity in the Fin De Siècle" relates the story of Oscar Wilde's final book, published 26 years after his death by a medium named Hester Travers Smith, who claimed to have penned the book using automatic writing, a process through which the words of a spirit are conveyed. Spirit photography allegedly captured the visages of ghosts as well as ectoplasm (a viscous substance said to be of the spiritual realm). Spirit trumpets, constructed of metal or cardboard, reportedly levitated during séances, emitted noises, and released ectoplasm. One popular activity was table-turning, during which a group would sit with their hands clasped around a table, calling out letters of the alphabet. The table would turn as certain letters were called out, spelling out the spirit's message.

Spiritualists invented many new practices and tools in an effort to pierce the veil between the worlds of the living and the dead.

As Spiritualists devised new methods and tools through which they could contact the dead, skeptics invented new technologies with which to challenge them. Table-turning, in particular, attracted a lot of skeptical attention. Physicist Michael Faraday invented an instrument that would reveal small muscular movements made by participants. Spiritoscopes, invented by Professor Robert Hare in the 1850s, were complicated mechanical alphabetic devices that used dials, counterweights, and pulleys in an attempt to minimize a medium's direct influence on

the celestial messages delivered. John Fraser's 2010 book *Ghost Hunting: A Survivor's Guide* describes other devices then-popular with both skeptics and Spiritualists: galvanometers (used to detect electric current), thermographs (used to monitor temperature), electroscopes (used to detect electrical charges on a body), and barographs (used to record atmospheric pressure).

As Spiritualists devised new methods and tools through which they could contact the dead, skeptics invented new technologies with which to challenge them.

Connections between science, technology, and the supernatural strengthened over time with both believers and skeptics employing scientific tools and methodologies. With the rise of automobiles and increased mobility, amateur ghost hunting became a thing. Figures like Harry Price, Elliot O'Donnell, and Ed and Lorraine Warren built names for themselves as paranormal investigators. Andrew Green's 1976 book *Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide* recommends that would-be ghost hunters bring with them flour and coloured chalk, to detect footprints and shifting objects, but also a camera, a thermometer, a tape recorder, and an infrared telescope.

Present-day ghost hunters employ ever more sophisticated equipment. As Joshua P. Warren notes in his 2003 book *How to Hunt Ghosts*, today's tools can include thermal and digital cameras, audio enhancers, electromagnetic field meters, strobe lights, tone generators, infrared meters, electrostatic generators, and (inexplicably) dowsing rods. These tools can be seen in the many films and television programs devoted to paranormal investigation, which continues to hold our interest today though Spiritualism has long fallen out of vogue.

In her 2013 essay "Phantasmic Science: Medieval Theology, Victorian

Spiritualism, and the Specific Rationality of Twenty-First Century Ghost Hunting," Brenda S. Gardenour Walter notes the strange tension between (and blending of) faith and science in paranormal investigations, which may employ cutting-edge scientific technologies and processes as a means to support, rather than refute, the existence of unseen entities — the belief in which is dependent upon an epistemology of faith:

"The specific rationality of the paranormal, then, is neither truly faith nor truly science, but an entity unto itself, a mixture of both—an uncomfortable proposition for many modern Western thinkers for whom faith, which does not require evidence for validation, and science, which requires purportedly unbiased and validated evidence to reveal potential truth, should be mutually exclusive categories" (p. 135).

The unwavering commitment to the idea of an afterlife despite a complete lack of scientific corroboration is a testament to the human desire to believe in life after death. In the face of scientific progress, the ghost remains a potent source of both thrills and comfort, a beacon of hope, and a firm challenge to pure rationalism.

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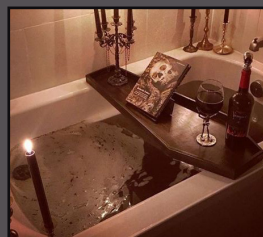
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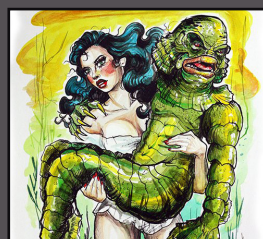
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A Perfect Score

with Janal Bechthold & Emily Milling

by Suri Parmar

Music can make or break a film – particularly genre movies, which rely on atmosphere and tone. From director William Friedkin eerily augmenting *The Exorcist* (1973) with Mike Oldfield's Tubular Bells, to John Carpenter's hallmark synthesiser sounds. Toronto locals Janal Bechthold and Emily Milling have cemented themselves as rising stars in the pantheon of genre composers. Janal has honed her craft with an impressive range of media including interactive graphic novels and video games. And among Emily's scoring credits are the feature films *Teddy Bomb* (2014) and *Impossible Horror* (2017). Find more of their work at marcandomusic.com and emilymilling.com.

I spoke with Janal and Emily about their affinity for genre and the realities of navigating a media industry dominated by males.

JANAL BECHTHOLD

You recently kick-started a research study through the Screen Composers Guild of Canada that draws attention to how female musicians in media are underrepresented, underpaid, and subjected to bias. How has the film community responded?

JB: The industry response to the report has been quite supportive, particularly from organizations and individuals who are already advocating for women in film. They recognize that the number of female composers is less than the number of women working in almost every other role in the industry! We've had a number of people speak out about their own positive experiences working with female composers while spreading the word about the research.

On the other side, we've also had a few people speak out on

social media about meritocracy or in outrage and disbelief at the economic realities, but these are the facts. We worked with Circum, a third party research and consulting firm, to make sure that the facts are accurate and that proper research methods were employed.

For each one of those disgruntled voices I've also been personally approached by people asking how they can help or if I can recommend composers to be considered for a project. That has been encouraging. It's also been enlightening to speak with producers and production companies and hear their perspectives about the hiring process. I'm taking note of all the comments we've received for review as the Screen Composers Guild of Canada develops strategies for advocacy.

You've also publicly discussed hearing of female composers being passed over for genre media because it's perceived as a "man's domain." (Which is ridiculous.) And yet you've scored a number of genre games and films. Can you talk about your history with genre?

JB: I love working on great stories where music can really bring something to the audience's experience and help to push forward emotion, or drive the action, or even scare the pants off someone! I guess I fell into genre

projects because those are the stories I'm drawn to watching or reading myself, especially sci-fi, fantasy, action, a good mystery... I've never been into films with gratuitous violence (except for maybe *Kill Bill*) but I love thrillers and stories that do a number on your inner psyche. It's terrifying how they stick with you long after the film has ended - I chalk it up to having an over-active imagination! I learned how to write for films and video games by watching and playing them. I remember early on in my career watching films like *Sixth Sense* or *Stir of Echoes* by myself at night and every time I got scared or it creeped me out I would rewind the film to hear the music, since I knew that was the driving force behind my reaction. It's amazing how silence can be the scariest thing!

Luckily I've been able to work with some great directors where the creative process has been wonderfully collaborative, like my recent film collaboration with Ryan M Andrews on the psychological thriller, *Art of Obsession*. I'm also thrilled to see more women helming horror projects and hope that having more diverse voices will remove the notion that women don't have the sensibility to score genre.

As for female composers being passed over for specific types of jobs? It's true. I know composers



Photo: Megan Terriss



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who have been told that they aren't the right person to score action films or first person shooter games since the music has to be "more masculine" even though their musical style was on point. I was really heartened to hear that composer Pinar Toprak is scoring the upcoming *Captain Marvel* since all it takes is one woman to break through (in this case big Hollywood superhero movies). Her success raises the glass ceiling and makes more opportunities available to composers behind her.

Does composing music for games require a different creative process than film?

JB: Stories in videogames aren't linear the way a film is so there is a different approach to writing music. Music works to create atmosphere and build tension but it can't play intimately to the action of the scene the way it would with film. Instead, the music either has to loop or transition from one loop to the next. Generally, when you're creating music that loops it can't grow as dramatically as with film because emotionally it has to come back to where you were at the beginning of the piece in order to feel seamless. Technology plays a large role in creating drama and there are ways to build levels and tension to the music through adding or removing layers.

I feel that the purpose of music is also very different in videogames since the experience is very player driven. I suppose one way to think about it would be if you were scoring a film but only playing to the audience's reaction to it. The game play is designed to motivate the player to keep playing, and music can help get the player into the right state of adrenaline or emotional connection to feel immersed in the game experience.

Collaboratively, the composer has to work very closely with the sound designer, voice director, and audio programmers to make sure that all the audio elements work together. I get a lot of inspiration

from the artwork and visuals in addition to the controls and style of gameplay so I need to interact with almost every department in the game at some point. I'm usually brought in on an interactive project as it's being created so unlike a film where I would score to (ideally) the final version of the film, usually with games I am lucky if there is something for me to see or play when I first start working! We're all creating elements simultaneously so there's lots of back and forth and tweaking during testing. The only time I've had a similar experience on a film is with Michelle D'Alessandro Hatt's 80s girl power film *Brave Little Army*, where I worked very closely with the songwriting duo Moscow Apartment and sound designer/mixer Bridget Tang where our combined efforts created something that was truly special – and sonically perfect for the film.

Who are your top five female composers and why? How have they influenced your creative voice?

JB: Shirley Walker will always be remembered as a pioneer for women film composers. She was one of the first to receive a solo score credit and by the time of her death she had amassed more credits on major studio pictures than any other female composer. What a legacy!

Rachel Portman has been a long time inspiration. I love how, in her scores like *Emma* or *Chocolat*, she uses single instrument melodies to represent an unseen force or presence that is influencing the character's choices. I often have thought about these scores when considering how to use music as it's own character and speak to something we don't see on screen.

Wendy Carlos is most well known for scoring the original *Tron*, *Clockwork Orange*, and *The Shining*. Her exploration of synthesizers and computer programming in combination with traditional orchestral scoring methods was particularly revolutionary. I also have to mention the work of Delia

Derbyshire here, as a pioneer in electronic music who turned the theme from *Doctor Who* into the beloved and genre-defining piece of music. I like to think that their influence on me one of creative process. Sometimes when faced with a hard deadline their influence is a good reminder to keep trying to push what you're doing, explore creative boundaries, and try new things, whether it's sampling a sound from the film or recording a piece of junk I found on the way to the studio. I participated in the Canadian Music Centre's 2018 EQ program where I learned more about how to sample and use synthesis and electronic processing to create new sounds for scores. Some of my recent scores have included a garbage can, an old wooden box, cutlery, electric trains, water sounds, gargling...

The videogame world is also full of amazing female composers whom I admire, including Winifred Phillips, Penka Kouneva and Sarah Schachner.

I would be remiss not to include Canadian composer Lesley Barber on this list. From her work on *Mansfield Park*, *You Can Count on Me*, and Mary Harron's *The Moth Diaries*, to the acclaimed *Manchester By the Sea*, being able to watch Lesley's career has influenced me by affirming that as a woman, and a Canadian, it is possible to be a successful composer!



EMILY MILLING

I don't often come across composers who are also producers. Did you start out scoring films and then developed project management and marketing skills out of necessity, or vice versa?

EM: I've always been a bit of a marketer, but then again I've

always been a leader, musician, and filmmaker. My mom taught me piano from age 2, and I was in figure skating which led me to acting, which led me to directing and producing throughout high school. I started pursuing non-creative work because I thought it was "the right thing to do" and essentially decided my dreams weren't really worth pursuing (read: I lost all confidence in myself). I went to school for events. I learned project management there and met my partner Justin Decloux around the same time. He reignited a love of filmmaking for me and we've been creating projects ever since.

I had been writing music for a few years on my guitar for fun, so he asked me to write a score for a film he made with a friend over a weekend. I had no idea what I was doing and it honestly sounded awful! But it gave me the tools I needed to write the score for his first feature film, *Teddy Bomb*. After that was done, we decided to make *Impossible Horror*. He wrote the script and I basically appointed myself producer and composer. I'm glad that something inside of me was strong enough to actually pursue the creative work I've been passionate about all these years, and because I spent so much time working at jobs that were related to event management (projects and marketing) I was able to apply all of those things to our film.

How do you juggle producing and composing? What's your executive task management strategy?

I sit down, I work, and I only get up to eat and sleep most days. I do so many different things and, to be honest, I have no clue how I manage to do them all. The thing (or the magic maybe) about ADHD is that I get big grand ideas and when I get very serious about something, I have no choice but to do the thing. I also naturally assume that things won't take as long as they do. When I realize they're not getting done fast enough, I get into hyper-focus mode and work at an insane pace. I work very

well under pressure and I probably create the pressure for myself to keep my attention on projects. I like what I've accomplished and I'm very proud of what I've been able to do with my career so far, so while it might seem like a bit of a bonkers and not sustainable way to go about life, it works for me and it has allowed me to become what I want to be... everything creative.

Your produced work ranges from podcasts, to splatter films, to parody music videos. How do you choose the projects you undertake? Why are you drawn to genre?

EM: I choose things primarily based on the people connected to the project, and secondly for the content. For example, *VRMP*, the radio play I produced and wrote the music for was initiated by a very rad-tastic writer and comic book editor, Stephanie Cooke. She brought in myself and Lily Mills to get the monthly live podcast recording on a stage with at least 7-10 actors per episode! Our skills were very complementary and we got along very well. Without that type of mutual respect and allowing each other to play to our own strengths, the project would have gone nowhere.

Growing up, I loved watching anything with Jim Carrey and all of Tim Burton's early work. When I made movies with my friends at the park after school, they'd typically involve some sort of gruesome murder requiring a lot of ketchup, or 5-6 wardrobe changes and props for comedic effect. I got into splatter comedies and horror more as I grew up, specifically after being introduced to *Evil Dead II*. I think there's something so engaging and exciting about films that blend horrific and terrifying situations with fast-paced comedy, especially if the pieces are directed well. Genre films are also a great escape from the normal world, especially when I've burnt myself out on whatever project I'm working on! Having my attention on the perils of a human character who is being chased by ghosts, demons, or zombies lets

me take necessary time away from my work without being bored and gives me an opportunity to see my work differently for the next day. Heck, I love a drama too, but I know my strengths and I know what I have fun creating! Although I absolutely hate being covered in fake blood now.

Where do you see CANMAKE Productions heading in the next five years? Please tell me you have more electro-pop tracks in store!

EM: Of course there will be more electro-pop! I'm still working through the burnout from such an intense level of focus on *Impossible Horror* and we're prepping the film to be released this year. We released the soundtrack a couple of months ago on Bandcamp and shared it with our Indiegogo contributors. Since Justin and I are doing it all on our own, it takes more time than a normal production might.

We're still on the film fest circuit heading to New York for a screening as part of the Scary Movies XI annual event, so that's going to be a big part of what's next. CANMAKE will be producing work related to film as well as narrative film. We decided to move all of the corporate marketing work we do into a separate company I just launched called The Ultimate Creative. The great thing about having two branches is that we can share resources as the companies continue to grow. This way, we also don't go broke pursuing our dreams! Plus, I can still use all of my creative skills to produce corporate videos, create content, write podcast theme songs and, most recently, host a bi-weekly screening series at The Royal Cinema called Mega Fun Movie Explosion – a retro kids movie series! Slowly but surely, I'm figuring out how to use all of my skills on a variety of projects while keeping myself creatively satisfied. It's definitely not how I pictured myself achieving my goals, but honestly I couldn't be happier with the ridiculous amount of opportunities I've created for myself over the years! 

The Monstress in the Mirror

The Female Vampire in *Near Dark*
& the Female Spectator

by Rebecca Booth

According to theorist Barbara Creed (1993), dominant spectator theory traditionally operates around a triadic model of 'looks': the camera itself, the character(s) within the film, and the spectator's look at the screen. Though there is an abundance of spectatorship theory and ethnographic study focusing on women in the audience across cinema more broadly, which is filtering into the horror genre, critical theory surrounding the horror film posits women as invisible viewers in relation to a singular focus upon male spectators.

On screen, despite accusations of misogyny, horror as a genre has provided some of the most subversive and progressive female characters in cinema. The representation of women in horror is a complex and rich area for analysis, particularly in the dualism of woman's role as victim and monster. The figure of the female monster is generally constructed critically as a reproductive body of abjection in relation to the fears of a Western patriarchal culture. However, the vampire film presents a fascinating insight into this duality via the relationship between the representation of women onscreen and the female spectator, allowing consideration of "woman as victim; woman as creature; gender and metamorphosis; abjection and the maternal" (Creed, 1993, p. 59).

In regards to the attraction of what she terms the 'monstrous-feminine' figure, defined by her sexual difference, Creed asserts that the appeal of the female vampire lies in her ability to "threaten to undermine the formal and highly symbolic relations of men and

women essential to the continuation of patriarchal society" (p. 61). Creed states that the lesbian vampire is "doubly dangerous" as "she threatens to seduce the daughters of patriarchy away from their proper gender roles" (p. 61). Though the film doesn't portray lesbian vampires, it can be argued that the female vampire within Kathryn Bigelow's *Near Dark* (1987) is similarly doubly dangerous when considering her sister on the other side of the screen, in that the film has the potential to seduce the spectatorial daughters of patriarchy from such socially defined gendered positions.

Despite accusations of misogyny, horror as a genre has provided some of the most subversive and progressive female characters in cinema.

In doing so, a semiotic reading of this figure is key. Julia Kristeva's notion of the semiotic is emotional, poetic, and instinctual, and is closely aligned with the feminine. It operates outside of the world of language, which can be read as the paternal or symbolic world of patriarchal law. Here, identity is constructed from within the boundaries of this law. This includes the image of woman as signifier of the phallus, thus affirming—by her lack of a phallus and subsequent desire for men—the masculine position (Kristeva, 1980). Within *Near Dark*, a transgressive and subversive reading of the semiotic/symbolic dialectic and the manipulation of the image of woman as sign can be observed.

Bigelow sets up a stark contrast of day and night as two different worlds throughout the film. Set in Midwestern America, the relentless sun is penetrative. Caleb (Adrian Pasdar) is initially depicted lying lazily on his back in his dusty pick-up truck, completely at home in his environment. His clothes and the visual iconography are generic signifiers of the western, which is significant in terms of the generic dialectic constructed around night and day within the film. Sara Gwenllian Jones (2003) highlights the male subject and masculinity as the focus of this genre in her reference to the archetypes of the western:

“Like European historical narratives and mythology, the western has its lone heroes, its intrepid explorers, its 'kings', warriors, profiteers, rebels and renegades. But the western renders those elements and themes specific to an American context, drawing its iconography and narrative details from the history, culture and geography of the Wild West. This is the America of an imagined golden age, nostalgically recalled (p. 57).

Coupled with her reference to the Wild West as American nostalgia, Gwenllian Jones' list suggests that such patriarchal roles are diminishing. This is reified in *Near Dark* through the juxtaposition of worlds. Whilst the impotent day world of paternal law relates to the symbolic, the darkness and violence associated with the night invokes the strength, exotica, and power of the semiotic, suggesting that the horror genre takes woman as its study. This can be observed through the introduction

of Caleb at sunset, which is referred to by Gwenllian Jones as a markedly dangerous period in the context of the two worlds of the film. Like dawn, she states that dusk is a liminal temporal zone in which "one jurisdiction slides into another" (p. 62). The danger of the encroaching darkness is signified by the foreboding staccato music and image of the sun setting completely as Caleb drives on into the night. Gwenllian Jones describes this sequence as "an evolving aesthetic of threat" that culminates in Caleb's reflection within the rear-view mirror as a cinematic marking of his character as victim (p. 62). Further to this analysis, it can be argued that the importance of this shot marks Caleb as woman and thus as sign; framed within the reflective surface of the mirror his image stares back at him as he enters the semiotic night world of darkness, chaos and violence.

Whilst the impotent day world of paternal law relates to the symbolic, the darkness and violence associated with the night invokes the strength, exotica, and power of the semiotic, suggesting that the horror genre takes woman as its study.

This semiotic approach is defined further with the introduction of the female vampire, Mae (Jenny Wright); a lusty male character informs Caleb and the audience to "feast your eyes"

on her figure. This reference seems to conform to the traditional masculinised look of the camera. Bigelow, however, manipulates convention by framing Mae within a long full body shot. When Caleb approaches, she is filmed from her side as opposed to lengthy or voyeuristic shots of her face or body. The quick, furtive shots of her shadowy face and mannerisms as she turns away from Caleb and the camera, combined with her dialogue, alert the audience that she is in fact the seducing predator. When Caleb flirtily asks for a bite of her ice cream cone as he is "dying for a taste", Mae repeats the words "bite" and "dying". Despite Bigelow's reference to the semiotic power of the monstrous-feminine as image, which alludes to the affiliation between the female vampire and the archaic mother, the antagonism of the modalities suggests that the semiotic feeds upon the symbolic; Mae reinterprets the sexualised, passive status of women to seduce, victimize and literally feed off men in order to survive; she does not claim a single female victim.

Similarly, the ten-minute bar scene further expresses the excessive femininity inherent in the character of Mae. In an interview with Gavin Smith (2003), Bigelow states that this sequence is "a film within a film. With a beginning, middle and end. It's very lyrical in a way, its rhythm. Its strength is its patience" (p. 25). The patience that Bigelow refers to is largely due to the juxtaposition of the slow build of gratuitous violence within this scene,

climaxing with Mae's eerily gentle handling of the last intended victim. Embracing the boy in a slow dance, Mae responds to his spoken knowledge that she is going to kill him with soothing, whispered words. This culmination is far more powerful and significant in terms of feminine subjectivity than if Mae's behaviour was synonymous with Diamondback's, whose swift, business-like murder of the bar waitress renders her as an unsexed figure in relation to her male peers, who revel in the murdering of the patrons in a childlike, animalistic way. This is reified by the fact that Mae's vampire family all stop what they are doing to watch her dance, as if enchanted.

Though Mae has been critically deemed an androgynous figure due to "her slight figure, cropped hair and command of traditionally 'male' spaces (the night, the road)", (Jermyn and Redmond, 2003, p. 8) I would argue that she is instead excessively feminine and this is where her power truly lies. This reading is particularly interesting when considering female spectatorship. Brigid Cherry (2002) writes that the specific viewing strategy of the vampire masquerade, while resisting social norms in terms of:

“the accepted ideals of femininity, does not break entirely from patterns of feminine behaviour. This is linked to the relationship between style, fashion and beauty and female spectatorship...As a form of consumerism this is connected



to extra-cinematic identification... Transformation of the self occurs not just as a viewing fantasy but to various extents in real life (p. 55).

Therefore, despite the ignored status of the female horror spectator, Cherry likens the act of viewing the vampire film, and the female vampire in particular, to the feminine attributes of style, fashion, and beauty in relation to female spectatorship. This suggests that female spectators do have the potential to elicit a similar fantastical affinity with the character of the female vampire. While the adoption of dressing up to act out a fantasy may be excessive to casual viewers, or simply not a part of fan behaviour for others, transformation of the self can occur on a much more subtle level. This was indicated in the response given by a 24-year-old participant in Cherry's research, revealing that she experienced:

“positive, empowered and sexual affiliation with the female vampire in that she ‘enjoyed the vicarious pleasure of the female sexual excess and expression...As a rather shy, mousy and introverted youngster it really filled a void in me...characters I could escape with into a fantasy world of glamour as I watched these films. I really found them arousing, exploring a sexual life which I had never had any contact with before... beyond my imagination, confidence and certainty in real life’ (p. 176-177).

Again, even without the corporeal guise of the vampire costume, this spectator reveals the closeness of the connection between spectator and female monster, an affiliation that relies extensively upon gender, both biologically and in terms of sexual repression. This attraction of the monstrous-feminine figure, and the juxtaposition of the lifestyle that the female vampire leads in *Near Dark* against the day world of the symbolic can be further defined against the diminutive passivity of the fairy tale heroine. As Angela Carter (1979) observes:

“To be the object of desire is to be defined in the passive case. To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case – that is, to be killed.




This is the moral of the fairy tale about the perfect woman (p. 76).

Carter's reference, though affiliated to the fairy tale, can seemingly be transposed easily onto film in relation to the horror genre, and Mae's choice. Ironically, in rejecting her preordained status within the paternal day world, a society presented as phallogocentric, to become a creature of the undead, Mae is no longer the object of desire and thus cannot be determined as lack or representing the phallus, for she does not affirm the masculine position. Instead her very status as female vampire threatens to shatter the phallogocentrism of the society that claims her at the end of the film. Essentially, the moral of the fairy tale about the perfect woman seems to be a feminist warning - though it alludes primarily to the edited, male versions of popular fairy tales and the passivity of the heroines - about the danger of remaining within the identity politics of social phallogocentrism in reality.

This danger is explicitly referred to in *Near Dark* in that the film ends with Mae's betrayal of her adopted vampire family and an eschewal of the freedom and immortality of her status as semiotic woman or monstrous-feminine. Whilst Caleb's family is dysfunctional in its shifted triadic roles due to a complete lack of a maternal presence, the family is completed when Mae is cured of her curse and takes up her place within paternal law, and day. The final scene, without any spoken or cinematic reference to Mae's

compliance, depicts her waking from an induced slumber in which her borrowed blood, excessive in its doubling of the association of woman and blood in her status as female vampire, has been transfused and replaced with Caleb's blood. The final shot reveals Mae blinking in the light, her face lit up while Caleb's remains in the shadows of the barn as they embrace. This suggests that, despite Caleb's journey into the semiotic world and back, Mae and her monstrous-feminine identity is the true focus of the film.

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IS CHUCKY WOKE? Breaking Down Patriarchal Structures in Child's Play

by Jacob Trussell

"Is Chucky woke?"

I asked myself this question when *Cult of Chucky* (2017), the seventh installment of Don Mancini's classic *Child's Play* franchise, debuted last October. That film finds Chucky (voiced by Brad Dourif) returning to terrorize Nica (Fiona Dourif), the progeny of the woman he loved decades before, as she recovers in a psychiatric facility following the events of *Curse of Chucky* (2013). When I saw the film, something began to click for me as I waded through my Kindertrauma of the many nightmare-filled nights that the series conjured: Chucky has the distinction of being a uniquely feminist horror franchise. In essence, the series is about strong women standing up to the toxic patriarchal voice of Charles Lee Ray. Since the first film, Chucky has always been defined by his violent machismo. He talks with his plastic fists, not his words. He's never found a gender-based slur that he didn't like. This ego is always in direct opposition to two things: the youthful innocence that 'final kid' Andy Barclay (Alex Vincent) represents and, more emphatically, the empowered woman. Beyond that, *Child's Play* represents the only horror series that even attempts to look at gender identities in a non-traditional way. Yes, *Child's Play*, the franchise about a loud mouth killer doll, just so happens to be woke AF.

How, you ask? The franchise gives Chucky a varied emotional arc, but this arc can be divided into three distinct phases: aggressive dominance (*Child's Play 1-3*), dependence (*Bride, Seed*), and acceptance (*Curse, Cult*). Yes, they are all aggressive...but hey, this ain't Howdy Doody.

In the trilogy, Chucky plays the lone male voice of 1980s toxic masculinity burgeoning from the gender stereotypes of 1950s baby boomers. He exerts this masculine venom on Andy and his mother Karen (Catherine Hicks), attempting to dominate them not only by gaslighting Andy, but in perceiving that he has the same control over women that he did when he was human. Chucky is fundamentally weaker than the characters he encounters, despite his overcompensation in trying to prove that he isn't. I'm not saying that this is because he begins as an anatomically incorrect doll, on display at the textbook Reagan-era "PlayPals Company" in *Child's Play 2* (1990), but I'm also not saying it isn't. Chucky won't even let a woman kill him. Karen is the hero of *Child's Play* but when she eviscerates Chucky, it still takes a man's gun to his heart to kill him. An ironic tableau considering the gender spectrum he'll encounter later.

Child's Play represents the only horror series that even attempts to look at gender identities in a non-traditional way.

Mancini further subverts cinematic

gender roles in *Child's Play 3* (1991). Andy has his sexual awakening with Kristen (Perrey Reeves), a fellow cadet who exudes the characteristics of the typical male soldier: she's tough, doesn't take shit from anyone and, when she stands up for him, he's enamored. But it's her physical strength that piques his curiosity. He watches intently as Kristen, reprimanded, gives 25 push ups, finishing one-handed because she's rad. This isn't your typical love interest reveal. Kristen's physical prowess isn't treated any differently than if this was, say, Catherine Deneuve's entrance in a Jacques Demy film. The tables are turned in the next scene when, as young Tyler (Jeremy Sylvers) is about to be possessed by Chucky, an adult admonishes him: "Playing with dolls is for girls!" Hearing an authoritative male voice reinforce antiquated gender roles affects Tyler, who is later irked when two cadets put makeup on Chucky. Mancini intentionally pits these ways of thinking against each other to support his point on outmoded gender stereotypes. Kristen is dominant early in her relationship with Andy, making the first move when he remarks how fearless she is; not a remark on her looks or intellect, but rather on her power. It subverts





the typical trappings of genre cinema in the way it handles gender.

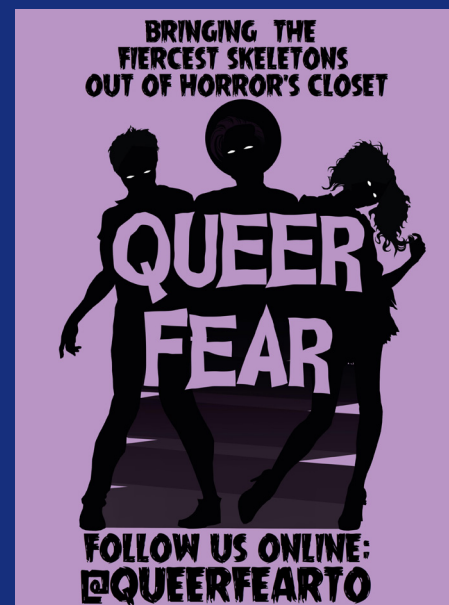
Chucky transitions into ‘aggressive dependence’ when his world view is opened to allow Tiffany (Jennifer Tilly) to be part of his life in *Bride of Chucky* (1998). With this relationship, Mancini gets to play in the world of domesticity, siphoning inspiration from the likes of *The Honeymooners* television series (1955 - 1956) to allow Chucky to grow. They may be cursed killers, but Mancini lets them love each other in their own twisted way. It’s tender when Chucky wants to share his passion (for murder) with his partner. This parallels an era when common gender roles were beginning to change, with more women becoming “Family Breadwinners” in the late 1990s. From the first death in *Seed of Chucky* (2004), matrimony has made Chucky a changed doll.

His bloodlust is only magnified by his connection with Tiffany, the love in his porcelain eyes gleaming as blood sprays on her face. This all leads to, finally, ‘acceptance’; specifically of women, gender fluidity, and his own sexuality by possessing Nica in *Cult of Chucky*. And as Chucky learns from his past toxic relationships with women, so do these films reflect what’s happening right now: a reckoning for men after centuries of patriarchal oppression and abuse. Late in the film, Chucky knocks out a psychiatrist who’s sexually assaulting Nica. Realizing what is happening, he is taken aback. “Wow! And they call me sick?” Chucky may be a vicious serial killer, but through his self-shaping relationships with women in *Cult*, even he can understand consent.

As Chucky learns from his past toxic relationships with women, so do these films reflect what’s happening right now: a reckoning for men after centuries of patriarchal oppression and abuse.

Mancini may have only been in college when writing the original *Child’s Play* (1988), but it’s evident that he has ensured his indelible stamp on every entry in this series. While still a fast and fun genre film, *Child’s Play* isn’t here to discuss this in a prudent, measured way. Mancini uses the distance that the killer doll movie gives the audience to deliver his commentary in a more unexpected way than the typical “issue film.” By

having Glen/Glenda (voiced by Billy Boyd) in *Seed of Chucky*, tears running down their plastic cheeks as they ask their mother “Who am I?,” Mancini poses the question that many LGBTQ+ teens face when understanding their own sexuality. It’s through his child that Chucky—seeing Glenda fully take over and blowtorching Jennifer Tilly’s ex-assistant—finds a greater understanding of acceptance simply by not using her dead name and calling her Glenda. This is the level of care and attention that Mancini has brought to the franchise. I don’t believe he set out to write a woke series featuring killer dolls, but the honest and accepting way that he treats gender and sexuality in these films is endlessly inspiring. His characters’ open acceptance of each other are, more than anything else, rewarded. The gender oppressors of the world meet their demise while Andy, Karen, Kyle, Kristen, Nica, and all the empowered women and men of *Child’s Play* live on. *g*



Celtics to Candy: the origin of our greatest holiday

Hallowe’en is one of the most anticipated days of the year among lovers of horror, tricks, and treats alike. Like many of our holidays, it has been in a constant state of evolution since its origin over 2,000 years ago in the Celtic festival of Samhain. Notorious for costumes and all things haunted, it was first celebrated predominantly in Ireland as the Celtic celebration of another harvest season coming to a close, as well as the beginning of winter and a new year. It was believed that the veil between the living and the dead became the thinnest on this night, allowing spirits to return to earth for offerings left out by the living.

The resemblance between the holiday then and now is clear: traditional animal skin costumes worn around bonfires eventually transformed into the wide range of costumes we don today, and the offerings left for the returning spirits evolved into the candy treats given out to the children who go door-to-door. But how did Hallowe’en become so widely celebrated, taking unique shapes across varying cultures and developing into something different today?

Though there is no way to know for sure, we’ll start with Hallowe’en’s journey into the United States in the second half of the 19th century. As the population was predominantly Protestant (particularly in New England), the celebration of Hallowe’en was pretty uncommon before the 1840s, at which point the country experienced a massive wave of immigration from Ireland as a result of famine. This naturally led to the gradual assimilation of

Irish traditions into American culture, including what we now call Hallowe’en.

It’s interesting to think that the holiday is relatively new in North America, considering the thousands of years that Hallowe’en has been around. Even more striking is how quickly it has been popularized as a commercial holiday as opposed to a spiritual one. Typically, the commercialization of spiritual holidays would be something to frown upon, but Hallowe’en still maintains some familiar customs and iconography even 2,000 years later. For example, people celebrating Samhain would hollow out and carve squash and other vegetables in order to put candles inside of them and light up the night for spirits. The tradition remains the same, except today we carve mainly pumpkins. Samhain was celebrated for centuries as a harvest holiday, but we are a more commercialized people today, so the holiday inevitably evolved alongside the society that celebrates it.

Hallowe’en is a holiday anticipated by many year-round in the most palpable way (as many readers of this magazine can attest!) In fact, it only seems to be growing more popular with the progression of time. Hallowe’en is still about being less afraid of the dark, and celebrating the harmless, mischievous fun that makes life more palatable sometimes. And it’s not just a holiday -- it’s a lifestyle!

ALEJANDRA GONZALEZ



The Eldritch Ladies Product Guide

story by Jess Johnson illustrated by Molly Johnson

I. Preparation Essentials

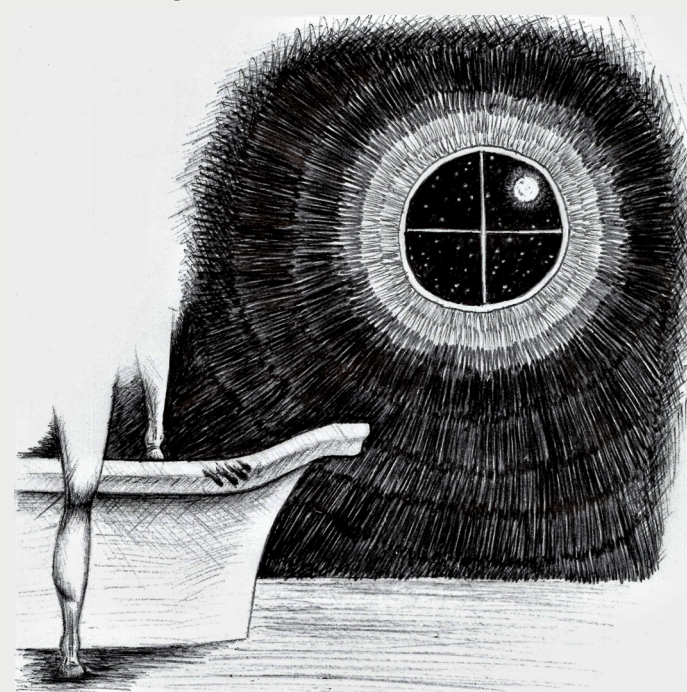
Preparation is the key element of any beauty regimen. Our Carmilla night cream refines and polishes fine lines around the eyes, adding a potently alluring shimmer. When used religiously each nightfall as instructed, the cream's effectiveness subtly but steadily grows.

The day before an important social event, why not add a drop of Báthory bath essence into your nightly soak? Relax into its thick, rich infusion – this iron-rich concoction nourishes and feeds the skin, leaving you glowing. We guarantee that you will emerge somehow more ethereally youthful than ever before.

Wrap yourself in luxury with the help of this opulent pelt. Ashen grey for much of the month, it becomes silky smooth and flawless white when the full moon glows – perfect for those crucially special occasions.

II. Seductive Talismans

Tonight's the night! Be the hit of every party with a flawless lipstick smile. Slick on the perfect shade, then locate the object of your affections to work that coquette magic. Lips coated in Siren Silver demand to be kissed, while application of Succubus Scarlet will encourage him to take you home.



Lend your body the overpowering, unquestionable appeal it deserves, with this seductive lingerie set from Mata Hari Intimates. The balconette bra is crafted from runic whalebone and ancient silk, hung with shards of precious opal and silver that demand to be pricked by eager fingers.

I am his Highness' dog at Kew. Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you? Once under your spell, bind your beloved with this elegant collar as a thoughtful and romantic surprise. Crafted from the supplest leather, the slipped knot structure is sure to help you retain their adoration – at least until the morning.

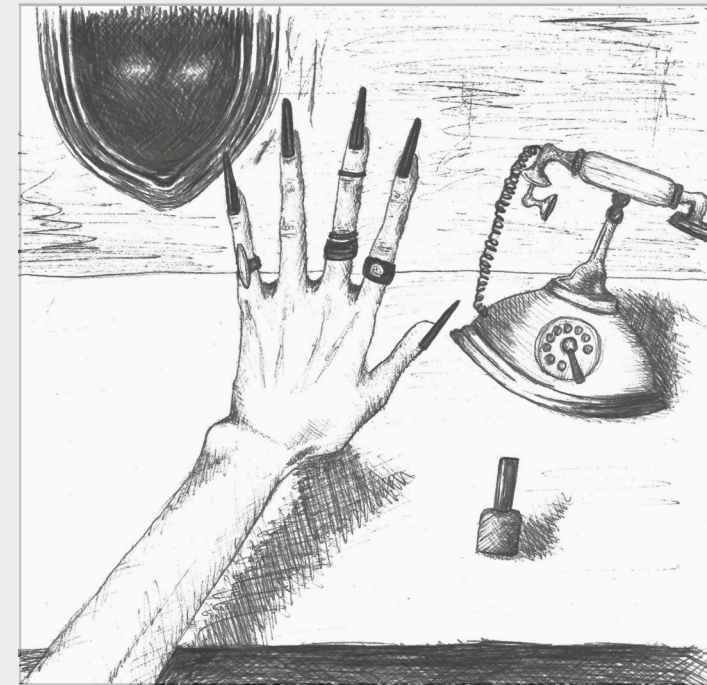
III. The Waiting Game

Is that special someone failing to call you back? Use your time sitting by the phone wisely. We recommend Civette's bestselling cuticle cream to keep those talons strong, perfectly shaped, and always growing, growing, growing. File them into points with an elegant silver emery board, and stud them with the finest ruby droplets from our Cruor nail art kit.

Tick tock, tick tock. This elegant timepiece from the Forever collection will never let you down, unlike drowned sweethearts or unfaithful lovers. Let the comforting mechanical heartbeat soothe you to sleep every night – if it dies, simply wind it right back up again.

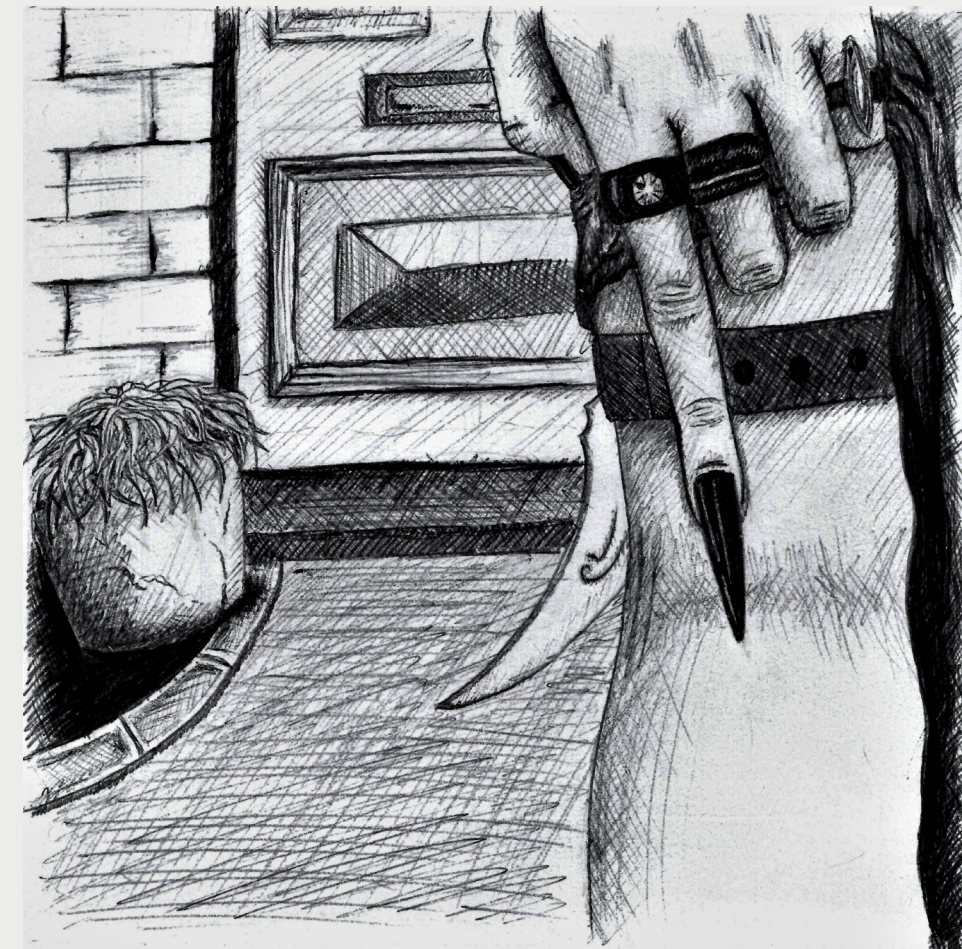
When your passions are burning extra bright, try brimstone and blue violet pillow drops. Just as soothing as a bubble bath, this concentrated solution helps to calm the seething inferno within. This reduces premature ageing, preventing stress-related blemishes and the outbreak of small fires. Comes with a complimentary eye mask.

Sometimes, darling, enough is enough. Remind that special someone of your attentions with a thoughtful final gift. From glittering blood-red gemstones to coagulated monkey's paws, we have trinkets to suit your every whim and intention. Slip one into his briefcase or nail it above his door to let him know you haven't forgotten him.



IV. Elegant Accessories for Avengement

Feeling down in the dumps is no excuse for a lapse in grooming – buff those pearly whites to perfection with our Sharpening Pallor powder. They'll be gleaming – even in low light! – before you know it. Don't forget to keep your lips sealed if you need to slip into an unlit house unnoticed.



A lady should never go creeping out after dark without her favourite ceremonial dagger. Crafted from the finest alloyed silver, its blade slides with ease through everything from curtains and phone lines to viscera and bone. It is so imperceptibly sharp, in fact, that it can even slice the very fabric of our dimension. What will come from the Other World, slithering out of the slit in space and time – who can say? Every man enjoys a surprise.

Once again, the night is thick with screams! Pay your respects to the Old Ones, then blot out the screeches and ceaseless, droning ululations with our newest cordless VIND.ICTA headphones. Their rich sound characteristics and depth of tonal frequency will make sure, once and for all, that bloodcurdling yowls and guttural moans become just another thing tucked handily out of mind – allowing you to get on with all your usual rites and rituals in peace.

Time always passes just the same, and the New Order becomes the norm. Single and out on the town again? We're on your side, dear one. With our Crushed Pupae body glitter, you will mesmerise any man lucky enough to fall into your path. Pair with luxurious false eyelashes, all the better for batting. This time it will be different – we're sure of it. *g*

INVASION OF THE POD PEOPLE

Horror Podcast Showcase

by Valeska Griffiths

When we're not watching horror movies, we're listening to women talk about them! This month, we're spotlighting CC Stapleton of the spooky literature podcast *Something Red*.

Listen: patreon.com/bloodygoodhorror

For readers who haven't yet heard an episode of *Something Red*, how would you describe the podcast? What's your five-second pitch?



Something Red is a show that covers dark or strange fiction and horror literature and discusses how it influences other mediums. We review and discuss books, recommend similar titles, have author interviews, and even pit the book versus the movie, sometimes. I feel like most listeners could listen to the intro and know whether or not it's something they would be into.

I know that you always have a lot on your plate, being a podcaster, a writer, and an artist. How do you decide which books to make time for? What draws you to a book?

I read a lot of reviews and best of lists to start. My reading list is out of control but usually if I've seen a book on multiple lists or been recommended it several times, I move it up. Mostly, I try to pick based on their summary and if something just really sticks with me. I've really started getting into audiobooks, which isn't the same as carrying around a tattered paperback but it gets the job done. I will say that, in terms of audiobooks, Audible is great because you can return the book for a different one if you don't like it - and sometimes the performances just don't resonate with you. And a lot of libraries have audio books to rent as well.

You always have such fascinating insights and observations. What's your educational background?

Ah! Thank you! I grew up in the Bible Belt of the United States and always found religion, especially its imagery, super fascinating. I went to college for studio art and while I was there fell in love with art history. I had two fantastic professors who really opened my world to symbolism and its voice through art. I've always been super obsessive and drawn to semantics and imagery - so, ultimately, I double majored in studio art and art history with a concentration in devotional art, specifically Christian iconography. I basically wanted to be a combination of Lara Croft from *Tomb Raider*, Robert Langdon (the symbologist), and Sophie Neveu (the cryptologist) from *The Da Vinci Code*.

Something Red is part of the *Bloody Good Horror* podcast family. How did you get started with BGH?

I had done some freelance book reviews for other websites via twitter around 2012 and saw that *Bloody Good Horror* was looking for a full time book reviewer - so I sent them my review of Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan's book, *The Strain*, and I got the job! After about a year, they asked me to be on an episode of their podcast reviewing the movie *As Above, So Below*. I was doing guest spots until this year when I got promoted to a full time cast member. Along the way, I got to start the BGH Book Club (hosted on Goodreads) and my own podcast, *Something Red* - so I'd get to talk about horror/dark fiction literature to my heart's content!

Which came first, *Something Red* or the BGH Book Club? It's such a natural pairing!

Initially, it was only the BGH Book Club, which is set up

with listings of books to read each month and an open forum to discuss them at your leisure. When I was offered the platform to create and host *Something Red*, I had really wanted the show and the book club to coincide more often, but haven't had the consistent time to make that happen. I do try to feature at least some of the books written by my podcast guests in the book club and reach out to guests based on how popular a book is with the group. So, it's still loosely connected.

Who are your favourite horror authors? Who did you grow up reading and whose books do you reach for now?

My mom read a lot of Stephen King, Dean Koontz, and Anne Rice. I grew up in the late 80s and that was just such a prime time for them—I remember always sneaking around and reading their books—which really added to the creep factor. I still love Stephen King and return to his work often. More currently, I'm really into S.P. Miskowski, Philip Fracassi, Gillian Flynn, Michael Wehunt, Paul Tremblay, and Ania Ahlborn.

Do you have any tips or software recommendations for people looking to dive into podcasting? What sort of equipment do you use?

I hate to admit this and I'm working to rectify it, but I'm really horrible with technology. So, I definitely have to ask for help from others who are more knowledgeable in editing and equipment. But I do think that's one of the best tips - don't be too prideful to ask for help or feedback. I also think that trying out a few different formats until you find what works for you is a good way to start - you'll come into your own and really develop your voice the more practiced and comfortable you become.

For equipment, I keep it pretty simple. I use either Skype or Google Hangouts to connect calls, and record those with Call Recorder and then import it into Audacity to edit. In terms of actual equipment, I use a Blue Yeti USB microphone.

Apart from horror, what can we find on your bookshelf or in your Netflix list?

Oh lord - so much. I love books. Absolutely love them. I have a lot of academic books, symbolism, obscure religion, a lot of history books about behind the scenes things, some occult readings, art resource and artwork, lots of fiction, short story collections (both fiction and non fiction), some poetry. I've also just started collecting late 60s/70s gothic romance thrillers. More so for the cover artwork, but they are a little bit of a guilty pleasure, too. I also have a collection of antique Christian bibles.

VOD-wise, I watch a lot of true crime documentaries and shows, even ridiculous ones like those on Investigation Discovery. But, I also try and balance all that out with some good comedies or action films - I can get behind some solid historical dramas, too. I know that it's a super

broad answer, but I'll really give anything a shot. I might not finish it, but if there's a recommendation attached to it, I'll definitely check it out. I'm currently obsessed with this show, *Claws*, on TNT. It is so fantastic; the depiction of female relationships and conversations - everything is just so good. Not to mention the cast is phenomenal. I just think film and TV are such interesting forms of storytelling and just really appreciate the creativity behind it.

Which female creators do you think are killing it currently?

There are several artists, Polly Nor, Marena Skinner, and Stacey Rozich, whom I follow on instagram - I absolutely love their work and their productivity. I'm really into Carmen Maria Machado's writings, I just started reading the collection, *Her Body and Other Parties*. Director-wise, I'm a big fan of Patty Jenkins, Ava Duvernay, and Cathy Yan. I'm really looking forward to seeing more work from Kay Cannon (who directed *Blockers*) and Coralie Fargeat (who directed *Revenge*). Ellen Datlow is a phenomenal editor and I'm really looking forward to seeing where Alma Katsu's (author of *The Hunger*) career takes her.

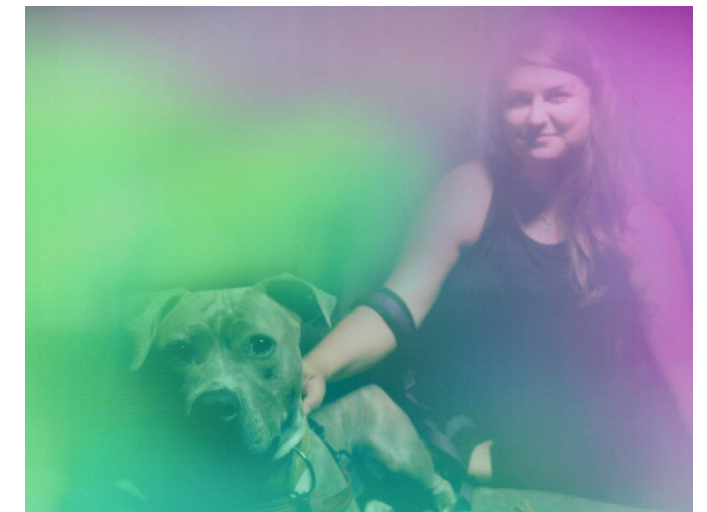


Photo: Charlotte Watts Photography

What other podcasts do you listen to?

There are so many! Last Podcast on the Left, Casefile, The Vanished, Lizard People, That's So Retrograde, Stuff Mom Never Told You/Unladylike, True Crime Garage, Beware an Electric Terror (via *Bloody Good Horror*), *Bloody Good Horror*, TuneDig, and Alligator Hour.

I also love *Casefile* and *True Crime Garage*! If you had to pick one episode to recommend as a good introduction to *Something Red*, which episode would you pick?

That's so difficult! I think one of my favorite episodes to do was *Lords of Salem* - my husband (who has his own podcast called TuneDig about music) was on that episode as my guest. We both sat in my art studio with some drinks and just kind of riffed about how we liked the book and movie and what did or didn't work in either. It was really fun to fully embody and capture the type of conversation experience and vibe that I aim for in every episode.

The Dark Theologian:

Professor Douglas E. Cowan &
the Religious Imagination of Stephen King

by Valeska Griffiths

Comprised of an intriguing and compelling blend of literary analysis and sociology, Professor Douglas E. Cowan's latest book, *America's Dark Theologian: The Religious Imagination of Stephen King* (NYU Press) explores the way that King incorporates religious themes, imagery, and characters into his work. Drawing examples from a broad assortment of King's novels and short stories, *America's Dark Theologian* is an accessible and engaging look at not just the role of religion in horror fiction, but the roles of religion, myth, and skepticism in culture.

In addition to *America's Dark Theologian*, you also wrote *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen (2008)* and *Sacred Space: The Quest for Transcendence in Science Fiction Film and Television (2010)*. What is it about genre film and literature that makes them such fertile territory for analyses focused on religion?

I think two things are central here. First, both genre literature and film are part of what I would call the "ocean of popular culture" in which we are all immersed. It's around us all the time. It inflects how we see the world. And it sorts us into groups of fellow travelers. Think about all the conversations you've had that started, "Hey, Valeska, did you see the latest X movie? Or read so-and-so's latest novel? Or, did you watch last night's episode of insert-cliffhanger-television-show-here?" Now think about how left out you might feel if you haven't seen or read or watched this. Put differently, popular culture—of which genre fiction is an incredibly important component—provides much of the common language of categories, symbols, and myths that allow us to navigate the world. Second, genre fiction is about fiction. That may seem obvious, but we cannot overstate the importance of story in our lives,

both individually and socially. We live, culturally, by the stories we tell each other, we tell about each other, and we tell about others. Whether horror, science fiction, epic fantasy, romance, western, murder mystery—you name it—stories are like the water in millennia-deep well of shared cultural experience. And, for millennia, many of our most important stories have revolved around the gods and their interaction with us.

You say that "the mystery of death is the driving force behind both horror culture and religious belief" -- do you think that the mystery of life is what drives a lot of science fiction?

I don't know if I would put it quite that way, except to say that I think much of science fiction is based on a more hopeful version of the question "What if...?" than horror. Not that there isn't a rich trove of dystopic sci-fi, nor fabulous hybrids of science fiction and horror, but many of these are speculative versions of what happens if what we hope for goes wrong. Victor Frankenstein tries to solve the riddle of death and winds up creating a horrific simulacrum of life. Revival, Stephen King's nod to Mary Shelley's masterpiece, follows the same question: what happens when we die? And what his character Charlie Jacobs discovers beyond the veil is terrifying indeed. Science fiction, though, is what I consider the preeminent vocabulary as religious believers often use the term, but in the sense of going beyond, moving past, transcending limitations. As a species, we are never satisfied living with the shadows dancing on the walls of Plato's cave, and our varied quests for transcendence are often the direct result of being told, as the enigmatic Q says to Captain Picard in the pilot episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, "Go back or you will certainly die!"



King's prolific output and the rich intertextuality of his novels make him an ideal subject for this sort of study and *America's Dark Theologian* reads as though written by a true fan. Have his books been a big part of your life? Did you read a lot of genre fiction growing up?

They haven't, though I know that they have been a huge part of life for millions of other people. I was much more of a science fiction and fantasy geek growing up, and read virtually everything my small town library had. But when I came to think more and more about the "ocean of popular culture" of which horror forms a significant part—that is, when I started to write *Sacred Terror*—I wondered what such a prolific author as King could tell us about the perennial questions we ask. We often think of these as "religious questions"—Where do we come from? Why is there suffering? What happens when we die? Does life have any purpose?—but they aren't. And that's important to realize. Religions have certainly claimed to answer them, but these are what I call "properly human questions." That is, they are the questions we ask because we are human, not because we are religious. I think this is what I enjoyed most about reading King's work: that he doesn't propose to answer these questions. Rather, he continually questions the answers we claim to have found. As a body of work, his fiction highlights the reality that however much we think we know about the ways things work is dwarfed to insignificance by what we don't know.

As a King fan, I found your analyses of his work fascinating, but some of the most compelling work in *America's Dark*

***Theologian* is in the sections dealing with religious socialization. What drives your interest in this subject?**

As a sociologist, I'm primarily interested in how people form beliefs about things, how groups form around similar sets of beliefs, and how these groups maintain their beliefs in the face of contradiction, challenge, and outright disconfirmation. As I think about horror, science fiction, fantasy—and you could certainly extend this, for instance, to such genres as romance, mystery, and military thrillers—I am more and more struck by how powerful story is as a motivator for group behavior and solidarity. We are socialized through story. That is, we are taught the norms and expectations of our particular group through the stories we are told as children, and those we pass on to our own offspring. And that includes, most importantly, religious stories. Which is to say, religious beliefs are not based on fact—no matter what ardent believers say. They are based on the multitude of stories we have told about how we think things work in the world. What I find particularly compelling in King's work are the number of times religious socialization goes wrong, when it produces precisely the opposite result to what it intends. A quintessential example of this is Jack Torrance's experience of Roman Catholic catechism class in *The Shining*.

You've led an intriguing life: you were ordained as a minister in the United Church of Canada, have taught a course on Atheism, Skepticism, and Free Thought, and your doctoral work critiqued the Christian Countercult movement (and got some pushback from online Christian communities). How does your background inform the way that you approached this book, and pop culture in general?

I think, more than anything, it gives me an eclectic approach to popular culture, in the sense that I don't try to bend it to be one thing or another. One thing that interests me, which I've written about in both *Sacred Space* and *Magic, Monsters, and Make-Believe Heroes*, a book on fantasy culture that's due out in January, is the way in which religious believers seek to "baptize" a wide variety of pop cultural products to serve their own particular faith ends.

That is, by mapping their own beliefs onto, say, horror or science fiction, they can bend these stories to their religious will. Consider the number of books you might have seen entitled, in one way or another, *The Gospel According to Insert Title Here*. This is a huge part of the process of religious socialization. If believers can make *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter* or Hammer studios horror about the Christian gospel, then they make it palatable for their particular group. It confirms their beliefs, rather than challenges them—and challenge is what Stephen King's work is all about.

Were there any sections in this book that you found particularly challenging to write? Or particularly satisfying?

Rather than particularly challenging, the most difficult part of the book was the decision to leave out King's works of epic fantasy, particularly *The Dark Tower*, which he himself considers his magnum opus. Because I chose to focus on his horror fiction, his "scary stories," as the woman in the Sarasota supermarket says, there simply wasn't room to include discussion of *The Dark Tower*. What I hope from this book, though, is that readers will find enough in it to use as an invitation to look at their own favorite stories in a new light. That is, I want it to be an invitation rather than a foreclosure. Readers should be skeptical of books that claim to be "the complete guide" to anything, and I'm certainly not making that claim. Readers, though, could take the way I talk about socialization, and use it to enrich their understanding of or appreciation for, say, *Harry Potter*,

which is, as much as anything, about the British public school experience. They could take the chapter on ritual and use it to explore religiously motivated killings in any number of murder mystery stories.

In the chapter "Thin Spots: What Peeks Through the Cracks in the World," you talk about the importance of understanding historical context when analyzing novels or films, particularly when it comes to horror texts which tap into cultural fears. We've entered into a turbulent new era, politically and ideologically -- how do you think these circumstances will shape horror fiction going forward?

At the risk of speculating, and this may be the result of my own bias, I can see much more sociologically informed horror and science fiction. That is, rather than nuclear monsters such as *Godzilla* (though who doesn't love a good *Godzilla* movie?) or alien invasion films (which are often thin cover for fears of this or that country taking over), I think the incredible uncertainty of the current situation, the speed with which our models of the world are changing—and our resistance to that change—will drive some fascinating new stories in the future. Though it's not as though we haven't asked these questions before. As a sort of companion volume to *America's Dark Theologian*, I am currently working on *America's Reluctant Prophet: The Nightmare Visions of Philip K. Dick*, which takes a similar approach to one of the most influential science fiction writers of the twentieth century, and whose work is explicitly sociological in nature. **g**



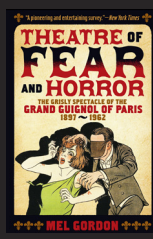
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by Zack Long



Lost Girls: The Phantasmagorical Cinema of Jean Rollin

Ed. Samm Deighan
Spectacular Optical



Theatre of Fear and Horror: The Grisly Spectacle of the Grand Guignol of Paris 1897-1962

Mel Gordon
Feral House

Jean Rollin is a divisive filmmaker. To watch a Rollin film is to enter a world of beautiful images, threadbare plot, surreal nudity, and hypnagogic characters. It is also to enter a world that is dominated by female characters and their stories, which makes *Lost Girls: The Phantasmagorical Cinema of Jean Rollin* the most important piece of work on Rollin's career.

Composed of sixteen chapters (and an afterword) by fourteen different female critics – including Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, Kat Ellinger, Samm Deighan, Rebecca Booth, and more – *Lost Girls* covers a wide array of topics, from the influence of the surrealists and dadaism to the effects of sexual assault; female intimacy to orality; and much more. It also gives a platform for voices that have been noticeably absent from the scholarship on Rollin. Previous entries within the scholarship have been written by men and, as Kier-La Janisse writes in her beautiful afterword, “there is no denying that female viewers’ readings of Rollin films will come from a different place than that of their male counterparts.” Speaking as a male, it is refreshing to read a female perspective on one of my favorite filmmakers – female protagonists are at the forefront of many of his works and obtaining a female perspective has given me a new and deeper appreciation of his films.

Across 434 pages, *Lost Girls* proves to be one of the most beautiful books I’ve ever read. The layout, also by Janisse, is sprinkled with stills, behind the scenes photographs, posters, and artwork from the world of Rollin. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the gorgeous cover art (and illustrations throughout) by Jessica Seamans. The cover art, inspired by *Fascination* (1979) and the Castel twins, is simply breathtaking. Alas, the typos and spelling errors that permeate the book prevent me from calling it a flawless as their sheer number pulls the reader out of the text; still, I wholeheartedly recommend this wonderful tome.

When one reads the scholarship on the horror genre, quite often they will come across references to the Grand Guignol of Paris. The Grand Guignol was a theatre that specialized in tales of horrific violence and terror, and stands as the key influence on the rise of the gore film as well as boundary-pushing horror. Mel Gordon’s *Theatre of Fear and Horror: The Grisly Spectacle of the Grand Guignol of Paris 1897-1962*, revised 2016 edition, covers this fascinating theatre at length.

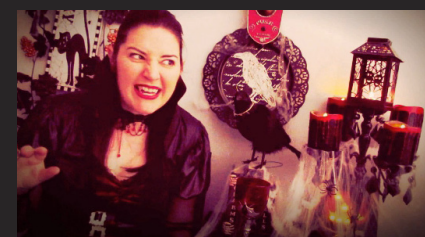
The first thing readers will notice when they open the book are the striking photographs and illustrations that are sprinkled throughout. These are taken from contemporary promotional materials that include flyers, photos of the plays, newspaper accounts, and behind the scenes pictures. They’re so striking in part because they feel so familiar; anyone who has seen behind-the-scenes or promotional material for horror films will see the resemblance to our current age. While most of the book is in black and white, there are more than a dozen color printings of these fliers in the middle and they are shockingly violent and vibrant.

Gordon begins *Theatre of Fear* by exploring the history of the Grand Guignol before moving to its influence, various stage tricks, and an encyclopedia of more than 100 plots broken up by topic. The horror section covers helplessness, infanticide, insanity (including an adaptation of 1920’s *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*), mutilation, mysterious death, suffering of the innocent, surgery, and vengeance. (There is also a section on Guignol comedies). The second half of the volume includes a 1927 essay by Guignol playwright André de Lorde, a 1938 newspaper interview with Paula Maxa (fittingly called “I am the Maddest Woman in the World,” as Maxa would be murdered more than 10,000 times on stage), and finishes with the scripts of two of the plays. The inclusion of this second section allows Gordon to present both a modern and a contemporary account of the Theatre of Fear and Horror.

A quick, but horrifically delightful read, this account of the Grand Guignol is a must for anyone interested in horror scholarship and the roots of the genre. **g**

Dear Countess Valencia

Countess Valencia is a certified Gothic therapist, an interior decorator with a soft spot for spooky, and a 6000-year-old Vampire-Canadian with more opinions than she knows what to do with. In each issue of Grim, her advice column will tackle timeless dilemmas and dish out practical solutions.



How does one deal with pet hair when you’re goth?

Is fluffy (aka Elvira Moonflower Nightshade) leaving her fur on everything you own? Do not worry. There are many ways to tackle this common problem. Firstly, you must create a ritual and call down Bastet if you have a cat, Anubis if you have a dog, or Edgar Allen Poe if you own a raven. They will be there for you to help with your pet’s shedding. However, if the gods are away at the time, you can always grab one of those sticky rollers that are on the television ads. I have heard some people say that you just shouldn’t wear black, however that is not an option for us night children. So brush your familiar regularly to get rid of excess fur.



When it comes to décor, how many taxidermied bats is too many?

This is a tough one. We want to embrace death, and keep our pets with us always. At what point does it become too creepy for yourself or others? Having several taxidermied bats is a must for us creatures of the night. Honestly, how else can we have intelligent conversations? Just make sure you do not live near a pet cemetery, as it might give your friends the wrong impression. You don’t want to have a soiree and have your dead critters coming back, scratching at the front door to come inside to kill you and your guests. Unless they have paid for that service of course.

RAYNA SLOBODIAN

Have a question for Countess Valencia? Need advice about the spookier side of life? Submit your queries via the contact form at www.anatomyofascream.com.

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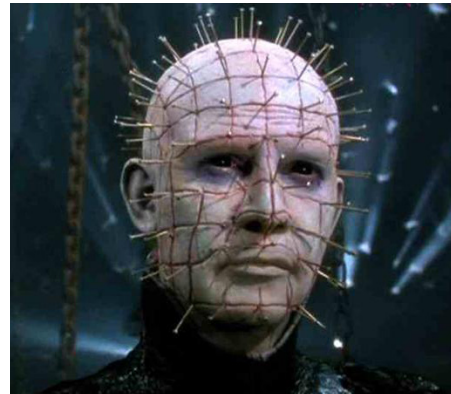
LOOKING FOR strong, hard-working, well-muscled, preferably tall men for... uhhh.. moving boxes. Sure, yeah. Definitely nothing to do with sinister experiments. Call Yuliya at (666) 822-4665 if interested and well-groomed.

For Sale

Still selling slightly-used laboratory equipment. Very faint bloodstains, moderate amount of ectoplasm. Call or text Rosita (666) 864-2932.

How many lives are cats supposed to have? Nine? Anyway, mine has come back about 14 times already. Unfortunately, I'm still allergic and can't keep him. Free if you can pick him up -- I'm near that old Pet Semetary.

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