

grimm

Issue No.5 June 2019

**LIVING
DEAD GIRLS**
Of Monsters
& Metaphors

THE ZOMBIE
ORIGIN STORY

DRAGULA'S
MONSTER QUEENS

THE TRIUMPH
OF HORROR NOIRE

GRIEF & THE
MODERN GHOUL

THE POLITICS
OF CATASTROPHE

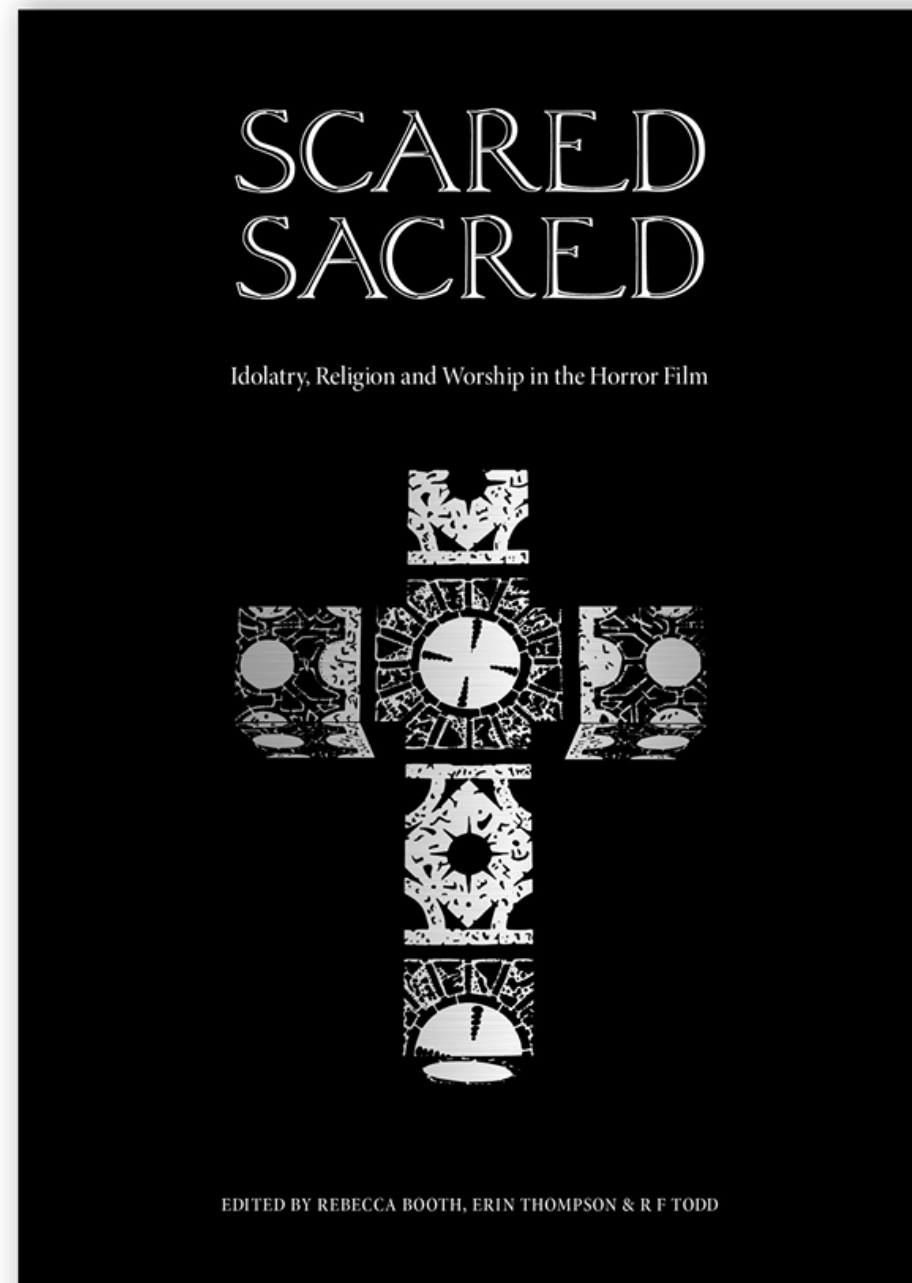
Plus:

AUDREY
CUMMINGS
on FILM

Gender Roles
in META
HORROR

GOOD
Mourning,
NANCY

KEVIN LYNCH
talks SALEM
HORROR FEST



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grim magazine

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the Apocalypse!

Summer is here, and with it comes the not-so-subtle reminder that we're deeply entrenched in a period of catastrophic climate change. As the temperatures soar and the sweat drips, you may be tempted to seek escapist pleasure in (relatively) more lighthearted apocalyptic scenarios. Enter: the zombie (also known as the ghoul, shambler, walker, biter, rotter, hungry, wight, infected, necroambulist, and the living dead).

The figure of the zombie is one with a long and complex history, a multitude of meanings, and countless depictions in film, television, books, comics, videogames, and the visual arts. Since starting *Grim*, I've been looking forward to eventually putting together a zombie-themed issue and letting our talented group of contributors bite into this meaty subject matter and examine the zombie from multitude of different perspectives.

I was not disappointed.

The writers who pitched for this issue took some radically different, fascinating, and oft-unexpected approaches to the figure of the zombie, tackling zombie the monster, zombie the metaphor, the politics of the apocalypse, and even zombie sexuality. I'm delighted with the results and hope that you find some intellectual sustenance in this issue (that is the closest I will get to a "braaaains" joke, I promise). And don't be surprised to see another zombie issue in the future —there is so much left to say and I want to read it all.

Happy feeding!

Valeska Griffiths
@bitchcraftTO

CC Stapleton



OVER 175 PAGES OF TERROR!

**HOGTOWN
HORROR**

Vol
1

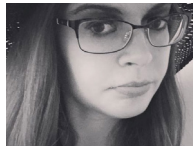


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Carling Kirby is a freelance writer, media communications graduate, and horror junkie. Along with *Anatomy of a Scream* and *Grim*, she has contributed to *Rue Morgue*. She has a fascination with psychology, the occult, and true crime, and hopes to 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.”



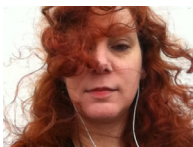
Carolyn Mauricette is a programmer for the Blood in the Snow Canadian Film Festival. She is also a film writer and has contributed to the *Encyclopedia of Japanese Horror Films*, *Encyclopedia of Racism in American Films*, and has written pieces on diversity and women in sci-fi for *graveyardshiftsisters.com* and film reviews for *cinemaaxis.com*. She dodges commuter zombies daily.



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.



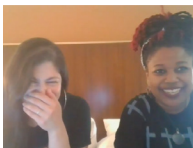
Gina Freitag is a writer, cinephile, and horror enthusiast, with an M.A. in Film Studies from the School for Studies in Art and Culture at Carleton University. She has previously served as a coordinator with Cellar Door Film Festival, Eve Film Festival, TIFF, and the NFB. Some of her horror musings are 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.



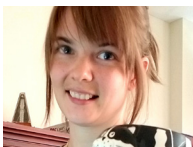
Jennifer Williams is an author, editor, cat lady, and all around geek living in New England. Her fiction has appeared in various horror and erotica anthologies, most recently in *Women Who Love Monsters*. She is currently editing a collection of erotica, *Dressed in Black*, inspired by the works of Edgar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



Joe Lipsett is a TV addict with a Film Studies background. He co-created TV/Film Fest blog *QueerHorrorMovies.com* and writes for *Bloody Disgusting*, *That Shelf*, *The Scoop*, *Grim*, and *Anatomy of a Scream*. He enjoys graphic novels and dark beer, and he plays multiple sports (adequately, never exceptionally). Follow Joe on twitter @bstolemyremote and join the Bstolemyremote FB group for daily TV and film updates.



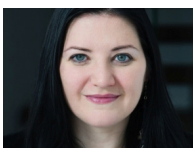
Mariam Bastani & Monika Estrella Negra have been in a successful creative partnership for four years in form of the *Audre's Revenge Film Collective*, making films, writing, and organizing screenings internationally. Their upcoming short film, *Bitten*, is a vampire tale exploring transgenerational trauma in the black community. They've lectured at Yale University, University of Pittsburgh, and other institutions. Their work is and will always be intentional and groundbreaking in order to elevate overlooked narratives.



Morgan Milobar is an owner/writer at *View from the Morg*. She is a contributor at *Popcorn Horror* and is currently working on her first novel. Her ability to type and watch '80s slashers while her cats sit on her keyboard is impressive. Connect with her on twitter @MorgBlog.



Paul Wegner is an anthropologist and writer who began blogging about film after his friends told him they were sick of hearing him talk about it constantly. His blog, *Reel Distracted* (reeldistracted.com), touches on the subjects of language, gender, intertextuality, and material culture. He loves all things English Gothic, zombies, and slashers. He can be found on Twitter at @ReelDistracting



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 singer-songwriter who has released two albums and is currently working on her latest. Follow her on Instagram @raynaelizabeth1 for updates.



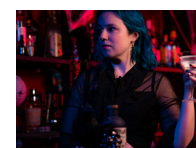
Sophie Day may be one of the wimpiest-est horror fans you've ever met, but she wears that title like a badge of honor. She is a contributor to *Bloody Good Horror*—where she enjoys being accused by trolls of being an angry feminist—and is one of the hosts of the podcast *Behold an Electric Terror*.



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 @SOTEFilms.



Valeria Villegas Lindvall is a Mexican ghoul living in Sweden. She is a PhD student in Film Studies at University of Gothenburg, where she is currently conducting research about Latin American horror film with a feminist focus. She is also part of the editorial board for *MAI: Feminism and Visual Culture* (maifeminism.com), a journal founded by Dr. Anna Backman Rogers and Dr. Anna Misiak, and has also written for several publications, most prominently at *Rolling Stone Mexico*. She is on twitter and Instagram @morenadefuego.



Valeska Griffiths is the founder 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 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 @bitchcraftTO. [Photo: Ryan Couldrey]



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. She is a valued contributor to *Anatomy of a Scream*. 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 editor-in-chief, podcaster, writer, and script consultant of *Scriptophobic.ca*, a site dedicated to helping genre writers improve their craft, and the author of the upcoming *Scream Writing: A Comprehensive Guide to Writing the Horror Screenplay*. He hosts *Fade to Zack*, a podcast where he and a guest brainstorm a movie plot and show the creative process in action. He's written for *Grim*, *Daily Grindhouse*, *Scriptophobic*, *Anatomy of a Scream*, *Film and Fishnets*, and *Horror-Writers*. He can be found on twitter @LightisFading.



A new study is seeking **horror-loving queers** to take part in the first extended survey about **how LGBTQ+ people view horror film**. The goal of this research project is to **better understand the habits, tastes, and experiences of queer fans of horror**.

All you have to do is complete an online questionnaire.
The questionnaire is anonymous and will take about 20 minutes.

<https://mmu.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/queerforfear>

This survey is part of PhD research being conducted at the Manchester Centre for Gothic Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University.

For more information, please contact:
Heather O. Petrocelli,
PhD Researcher
heather.petrocelli@stu.mmu.ac.uk

You must be at least 18 years old to participate



The Tragedy of Lost Possibilities in Dawn of the Dead

by Vincent Bec

Roger DiMarco is having a hard day on the job. What was supposed to be a routine raid has turned into a rough night of zombie-killing. When he ducks into the project's cellar for some relief, a deep voice calls out to him. From behind a sheet comes a tall figure. Roger and the mysterious man both draw their guns as tension fills the air. The stranger, named Peter, lowers his weapon and sits down. Roger studies Peter as he slowly closes the space between them and sits down beside him. He lights a cigarette and, after a quick drag, offers it to Peter. With a simple puff of the cigarette, Roger and Peter's lips have shared the same space within moments of meeting. A pastor stumbles into the room. As the pastor speaks, Peter glances frequently at Roger to gauge his reactions. Already, a connection can be felt between them. After their talk with the pastor, Roger and Peter go back to the grind of the job. While gunning down a room full of the undead, Peter stops to reload his gun. A zombie crawls towards him as he attempts to reload. Roger jumps in to shoot the zombie. After sharing a meaningful look, Peter touches Roger's upper arm in thanks.

Ah, a meet-cute for the ages. When watching *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), people expect to see a classic zombie flick rooted firmly in the horror genre. An unexpected secret of the film is the tragic romance that develops, not between the most obvious of characters—established, heterosexual couple Stephen and Francine—but between Roger and Peter. The bitterness and sorrow found in lost possibilities is a biting theme of the film for sentimental viewers.

Stages of the Relationship

A meet-cute is a cinematic trope used to introduce two characters in a way that allows their relationship to flourish quickly. It is often used in romantic films that have to develop a deep connection between characters within time constraints. A meet-cute usually includes elements of awkwardness, embarrassment, and sometimes even hostility (for example: holding guns on each other in the basement of a zombie-infested apartment building). The tension and budding emotion established between characters during their meet-cute is used to explain why one would declare

an intense love for the other within days of meeting them—or why a man hardened by military and police experience, living during a time of distrust and chaos, would invite a stranger he just met to escape with him. Roger's decision to bring Peter to the helicopter is an emotionally-driven one, made with the same fervour audiences are used to seeing in a love-at-first-sight narrative. If Roger was being guided by logic, he would have questioned his decision. How could he know Peter was trustworthy? Would Peter be a drain on the resources they found? How would his presence in the helicopter affect the distance that they could fly?

With a simple puff of the cigarette, Roger and Peter's lips have shared the same space within moments of meeting.

Roger and Peter's romance starts in a whirlwind of movement, from zombie killing to quick escapes. When the group lands at the mall, the stability its enclosure provides fosters growth in their relationship. Shortly after getting to the mall, Roger tells Peter: "You better get some sleep too, buddy." This sentence not only introduces terms of endearment to the relationship, it marks the moment the pair begins to vocalize their thoughts about each other. During their meet-cute, the couple's connection is conveyed through silent looks. With this simple line, Roger confirms that he is actively thinking about Peter. However, instead of sleeping, Peter, desperate for some alone time with Roger, playfully suggests a raid of the mall. Although this plan could have been carried out at any time, Roger and Peter quickly, and excitedly, dismiss Francine's concerns and attempts to wake Stephen, in order to immediately enjoy this adventure as a duo. As they hide in a corridor, Peter searches for something with which to light his cigarette. In classic, gentleman-of-Hollywood fashion, Roger quickly pulls out his lighter and lights Peter's cigarette for him. Later, when Roger isn't nearby, Peter is able to quickly find a match to light his next cigarette. Perhaps Peter was deliberately seeking that original intimate gesture. During the raid, Roger and Peter hear Stephen shooting elsewhere in the mall. Peter wants Roger to help Stephen as Peter takes care of the

supplies. Roger originally argues that he should stay with Peter. With this argument, he reveals that he prioritizes Peter's safety over his friend Stephen's. Later, when Peter and Roger venture out to block the mall doors, Roger jokes about Peter's size, answering the question we have all been asking ourselves since seeing Roger studying Peter for the first time. Roger has indeed noticed Peter physically. The reason their relationship deepens the moment they enter the mall is because of the possibility the mall represents. It is a place where they can make a home—perhaps together.

After Roger is bitten by a zombie, there is an urgent need for closeness between him and Peter. During their mission to clear the zombies from the mall, it is Peter who pushes Roger in a cart. It would make more sense for Stephen to push him for a number of reasons. Stephen is a bad shot, therefore Roger could shoot for him as Stephen pushes. Instead, Peter now has his hands occupied with the cart, limiting his excellent shooting skills. Additionally, Stephen is shorter than Peter, meaning he wouldn't have to bend down as severely to push the cart, allowing him to move more quickly. During the mission, Peter and Roger have a moment alone in an elevator. Peter begins to tell Roger his feelings, but Roger stops him, saying he already knows. Although Francine is Roger's primary caregiver, he only calls out for Peter. At the end of Roger's life, he cries out in pain. At the sound of Roger's shouts, Peter runs to him, telling the others to leave the room. He holds Roger and wipes his forehead with a damp cloth. Instead of wishing to be surrounded by his friends, Roger passes wanting only Peter's comfort.

After Roger is bitten by a zombie, there is an urgent need for closeness between him and Peter.

Building Parallels

It is undeniable that Peter and Roger share a close bond in *Dawn of the Dead*, but what evidence is there of romance? Other than the fact that an atmosphere of love oozes from every scene they are in together, the most concrete hint the audience is given about the romantic nature of their relationship is the parallels it creates with the firmly established couple Stephen and Francine. Throughout the film, situations occurring between Stephen and Francine are echoed between Roger and Peter. Before the group gets to the mall, they attempt to fuel their helicopter at a zombie-infested gas station. Stephen and Francine run into a pair of zombies. As one stumbles towards Francine, Stephen pushes her out of the way and awkwardly knocks the zombie to the ground. Later in the scene, Roger shoots a zombie that has cornered Peter. As the mission to block the mall doors begins, Francine and Stephen have a tense, emotional moment stemming from Francine's decision to confront the men on their exclusion of her. The scene has an element of tough love to it as Francine confronts the possibility of Stephen's death, pulling him into the reality of their situation. During the same mission, Peter has to pull Roger back to reality with his own tough love after Roger begins to act manic. Roger is often positioned as



Stephen's foil. In the gas station scene, we see Stephen failing to shoot zombies over and over before Roger steps in and kills a zombie with a single shot. We see Stephen's clumsy attempt to save Francine, contrasted with Roger's smooth execution of a zombie to save Peter. With Roger and Stephen placed in similar roles to create this foil, it makes sense to have moments of similarity between Peter and Francine. We get a visual example of this once the group has secured (and looted) the mall, as we see both Peter and Francine wearing large fur coats, while Roger and Stephen are not.

The most revealing parallels of the film happen after Roger's death. As the days wear on, the reality of what has been lost in this new apocalyptic world weighs more heavily. In a moment of calm, Stephen and Francine sit down to a nice dinner served by Peter. Leaving the couple alone to dine, Peter visits Roger's grave. The dinner is just as much about Peter's alone time with Roger as it is about Stephen and Francine's time together. Peter uncorks a bottle of champagne while at the grave, mirroring the beverages he poured for the dining couple. Stephen offers Francine a wedding ring. The ring is rejected, however—a marriage between them is no longer possible, both because of the hellish world they're living in and because the parallel to their relationship has already been destroyed with Roger's death. Towards the end of the film, we see that Peter has been wearing Roger's ring since his death. The presence of the ring, which often symbolizes eternal love, coupled with the foreshadowing of a pastor breaking into the couple's first meeting at the beginning of the film, alludes to an alternate world in which Roger and Peter could have been partners for life. In the end, Peter leaves Roger's ring at the mall before he and Francine escape, the only ones still alive. For both couples, all possibilities for what could have been are laid to rest permanently. **g**



Sugar, Spice & Everything Nice

Gender Roles, Meta Horror & the Female Horror Fan

by Morgan Milobar

Picture this. You're at a party, dragged there by a friend. The inevitable small talk begins as people mingle and begin to introduce themselves.

*How do you know so-and-so?
What do you do?
Seen any good movies lately?*

Like any good horror fan, you just can't help yourself. You begin to deconstruct the ending of *The VVitch*. Perhaps you're more of an *Us* girl. Maybe you recently discovered *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* and are dying to talk about how beautiful the cinematography is.

That's when the inevitable happens.

Horror movies? Really?

On the surface, the fact that I am questioned on my love for horror is not that uncommon. Horror is a bit of a niche genre, and is notoriously underappreciated and criticized for many different reasons. Now and then, the person that I am making small talk with is right there with me, but horror is not something that everyone can understand. What sets the female fan experience apart are the follow-ups that are added on to the initial surprise of meeting a genre lover.

*But you look so sweet!
Aren't they too scary for you?
You don't look like the horror type!*

Horror is too scary for me! becomes *Isn't that too scary for you?* It's subtle, but the difference is there, and it suggests that women enjoying horror films is not only unusual, but taboo. The direction that this particular conversation takes has always puzzled

me. What exactly is it that a horror fan should look like? Should we be dressed head to toe in black? Wearing bone white makeup and dark lipstick? Donning a t-shirt with a pentagram on it? Is it my outfit that confuses people, or is it my gender?

It is easy to pretend that horror is a genre tailor-made for men; snakes and snails and puppy dog tails and all of that. Horror is notorious for portraying women as victims, brutalized by killers that are often men. However, it is just as easy to argue that horror empowers women in a way that they are not empowered in reality. In horror, women can find outlets that allow them to cheer on a narrative where the survivor is a strong woman. From slashers to revenge films, modern horror is seeing the final girl evolve to be more dimensional and less informed by tropes. In the end, is it really all that surprising that women are interested in seeing female-led films? So where does this belief that women are outlier horror fans come from?

Before delving in to some of the screen stereotypes that have helped to form this belief, the viewing atmosphere of a horror film also needs an examination. This fall, I went to a crowded showing of *Halloween* (2018). A couple sat down next to me and, as the movie began, he put his arm around her, and she hid her face in his shoulder. As the film progressed, he held her tighter. She shrieked repeatedly, her legs over his lap as she clung to him. Her body language screamed the need to be protected from big bad Michael Myers. Horror fan or not, this is something that every movie goer has seen at a scary movie,

or perhaps participated in as part of the experience of being scared.

It got me thinking about some of my own experiences, particularly as a teenager. As teens, we are finding our way in the world. Unfortunately, this means that we are also thinking a lot about what other people think and mimicking what we see our peers doing. I remember seeing scary movies with my girlfriends. We screamed, we giggled, we ate too much junk food, and we cheered on the heroines. It was bonding. In contrast, in high school, seeing scary movies with boys was different. My girlfriends would burrow into the guy's arms and cover their eyes. There was no giggling, everything felt more serious. Looking back, it's clear that the idea was to make yourself more attractive by showing that you needed saving.

While social politics do inform the view of the female horror fan as strange, it is also fuelled by what we see on the big screen. In meta horror films, real world horror films are acknowledged and exist within the context of the film. Characters know how people would react to certain situations in a horror movie, and they often lovingly poke fun at the plot and logic holes in genre tropes. As such, they are considered a celebration of the genre, filled with references and Easter eggs for horror fans to find and obsess over.

In the end, is it really all that surprising that women are interested in seeing female-led films?

Meta horror had one of its most famous successes in 1996, when Wes Craven introduced the world to Ghostface in *Scream*. Randy (Jamie Kennedy), the horror film buff, is seen as awkward, intrusive, and annoying in his passion. He harbours a crush on the final girl, Sidney Prescott (Neve Campbell), but is never seen as a possible love interest for her. This endears him to the audience because he is comic relief. This trope of the know-it-all, loud, and virginal outsider stuck, and Randy's character began to shape the portrayal of the horror fan in meta films.

According to the rules of horror movies laid out in *Scream*, Randy must also be a suspect. As such, he is portrayed with a little bit of a creep factor to him. Horror fans are often seen as desensitized, their excitement over blood, guts, and arterial spray merely a hop, skip, and a jump from serial killer tendencies. These characteristics are seldom applied to females in the context of horror fandom. *Scream* also portrays the love of final girls as singularly male. The male high school students are portrayed as watching horror for the possibility of seeing breasts while the girls roll their eyes. Women in meta are often seen as too practical and logical to enjoy horror. In fact, in *Scream*, Sidney goes so far as to explain why she hates horror movies, calling them "insulting" and citing lack of female leads making smart choices as her chief complaint.

As a major pioneering example of meta horror, *Scream* is thankfully not a stranger to the female horror fan, as seen in Drew Barrymore's character, Casey Becker. However, there is a mixed message sent about horror fandom when she is given the ultimate I-told-you-so by being murdered after failing to correctly answer a trivia question. In the first three movies, the common theme seems to be that women are not active in the conversations deconstructing horror, or they are criticizing the rules or lack of representation. In *Scream 4*, we are introduced to the series' most active female horror fans. The film begins with two girls sitting on the couch having a weekend movie night. One is a horror nut, raving about how she loves to re-watch the (presumably very long-running) *Stab* franchise. The other isn't sold, but the two have an earnest conversation about the movies. One is a fan, and one is not, and that's okay; the fan is not made to feel strange, and the non-fan is not looked down upon.

Later in the film, we are introduced to Kirby (Hayden Panettiere). Kirby is smart, beautiful, funny, and popular. She also loves horror movies. However, Kirby doesn't publicly acknowledge her horror love. She brushes off the unpopular boys who



approach her about it. She doesn't participate in conversations with the experts of the school's film society. Later, the fact that she is not just a casual viewer is revealed, and she is suddenly seen as attainable to the unpopular male. However, she talks to him in the privacy of her own home, while drinking. While it is great that she is a female fan who can "trivia your ass under the table," this part of her is hidden, as she feels that it won't be accepted by her peers.

Women in meta are often seen as too practical and logical to enjoy horror.

A related portrayal of acceptance of female knowledge of horror is also found in 2016's *Found Footage 3D*. In the film, a small crew is making a found footage movie. The director and main financier, Derek (Carter Roy), is recently divorced from Amy (Alena von Stroheim), and it turns out that she is set to act in the film. She has done her research and takes it very seriously. However, her explanations and ideas are completely bulldozed by Derek at every turn. It is uncomfortable to watch as she is belittled, especially because, as the financial backer and director, he has complete power over her. Product of divorce or not, the message is clear: "Your opinion doesn't matter here."

One of the most successful examples of a female fan is *Chuck in You Might Be the Killer* (2018). The film follows Sam (Fran Kranz) as he wakes up in a summer camp where all of the counsellors have been slaughtered. He panics and calls his best friend Chuck (Alyson Hannigan). Chuck fits

the traditional mold of antisocial nerd. Talking to Sam takes priority over the customers in the store she is working in. She guides Sam through the rocky terrain of the splatter movie situation that he is in, casually relaying the rules and excitedly asking about body count. In this film, Sam is not a horror fan, and Chuck has to give him the skinny on what to expect living in a summer camp slasher film. There is no need for her to hide her love of the genre to meet an expectation that she feels he has for her. They are friends, and loving horror is a part of her personality, plain and simple.

Watching Chuck articulate her knowledge of and passion for horror is empowering, and unique in that she is portrayed using many of the same tropes as Randy in *Scream*. It's easy to imagine the filmmakers wrote Chuck as a female and gave her a traditionally masculine name to be subversive (although the script was actually based on a Twitter thread between two men). On the other hand, it is also fun to imagine that Alyson Hannigan just crashed an audition for a role that she wanted. Either way, it works in this film, and Chuck is highly relatable.

While there seems to be strides being made in incorporating women into society's view of what a horror fan can be, not all of these stereotypes that exist about horror fans come from what we see on screen. Hopefully, meta can continue to portray fans as FANS, regardless of gender. Maybe, in time, we'll be seen as plain old horror freaks, instead of those freaky girls who love horror. And really, that's all we ask. [g](#)

THE PUTREFYING BITE: How Zombies & Vampires Complicate Our Understanding of Necrophilia

by Zack Long

When it comes to fuckability within horror, there can be no more polar opposites than the vampire and the zombie. The vampire's erotic potential has been explored through numerous films: they offer sensuality and pleasures the likes of which are more arousing, at least from this viewer's perspective, than anything the Cenobites ever offered. The vampire's eroticism is so culturally pervasive that the peddling of a fanged sex symbol to a cult-like teenage base in *Twilight* was seen as merely another fad (and, true enough, we've weathered that battlefield to the point where no one cares). But the zombie is another matter. The zombie is not an erotic symbol but a rotting symbol. They are the abject and to be feared. Or, depending on the compassion of the filmmaker, perhaps to be pitied (but never pity-fucked). This might seem an obvious point to some: "It's a corpse!" after all. Yet, so too is the vampire, and it is through the vampire's undead status that the idea of an alive/dead dichotomy to attraction breaks down. In order to mend this breakdown, we must explore what truly separates the zombie and the vampire.

There are two key points of separation between our fiends, the first of which is the issue of consciousness. Both zombies and vampires spread their infection through their bite. The victim of the vampire transforms into a perverted version of themselves, one lacking morals; the poor soul undergoes a transformation that sees their personality changed yet still identifiably them. In this way, the bite of the vampire destroys the soul but spares the consciousness. The victim of the zombie is in for a more troubling journey. As the zombie turns, the person disappears, the consciousness that represented them is lost to the animal urges of the undead beast. This is troubling because zombification both destroys the consciousness but

also offers the suggestion that it might be hidden inside (as the endings of 2004's *Shaun of the Dead* or 2005's *Land of the Dead* suggest). Without the consciousness, the zombie offers pure flesh, cold and pale. With the consciousness hidden within, the zombie offers its flesh—but not its consent. The vampire offers the same pale cold flesh, not only consenting but often within the role of primary seducer.

"Stay young forever," the vampire coos. The offer to be frozen in time at the peak of perfection one often too tempting to pass up. From Lugosi and Lee to Pitt and Stensgaard, the vampire is beautiful to behold. The zombie offers a perverted form of life but not a glamorous one. Its body is the site/sight of the abject. In its capability to move and threaten, the zombie taps into both the uncanny valley and abjection. If the vampire's body is the site/sight of everlasting youth, the ultimate rejection of the decay of age, then the zombie's body is the brutal reminder that we will all one day become a corpse and, barring cremation, be placed into the ground to rot, our bodies feeding back into the system around us as literal worm food. In this way, the zombie makes clear its focus on the physicality of death; its form of unlife a perversion of life. In opposition, the vampire's death is the death not of body, but of morality, of soul, not truly death as opposite of life but more like pressing pause on life.

With the consciousness hidden within, the zombie offers its flesh—but not its consent.

Our aversion to the sexualization of the non-conscious, rotting body is demonstrated by films such as *Contracted* (2013) and *Rot* (1999). Both of these films pinpoint the origins of their respective contagions at a necrophilic act. Sexual intercourse

may lead to the further perpetuation of the contagion yet the initial act of corpse-fucking is presented in a manner that suggests its intention to disgust us. That these films then go on to frolic in the images of physical decay demonstrates their focus on physical abjection despite their sexuality. The zombie can only be sexualized by also infecting that sexuality itself. Another common approach that further demonstrates our aversion are those films that present the necrophilic act as one to be lamented: so much so that the only recourse is the death of the living sexual partner. *The Party's Over* (1965) sees an act of necrophilia committed without the perpetrator's knowledge, an act that the perpetrator commits suicide over the next day when he realizes what he's done. Similarly, *One Minute Before Death* (1972) ends with a mother murdering her beloved son once she realizes that in his unstable mental condition he has been continuing a romance with the corpse of his lost love; this act of filicide is presented as the only way of saving her son, the logical choice to his perverse desires. The act of necrophilia is seen as one that infects those that commit it, branching out to hurt the community around it, or as an act against which the only recourse is the destruction of the perpetrator. Our cultural fears of the corpse are understandable when we consider that the abject is often that which threatens physical harm through illness.

That we should want to avoid fucking a corpse is understandable. But the fact that we view vampires as highly desirable erotic creatures demonstrates that our comprehension of death, and our attraction, are not dependant upon the internal workings of death. It is through a lack of consciousness and/or the rotting of the physical body that we identify death and retract our attraction. **g**

Black Horror Beyond The Sunken Place

In Conversation with Horror Noire Producers
Ashlee Blackwell & Tananarive Due

by Carolyn Mauricette

If you're a horror academic, writer, or fan worth your salt, you've probably heard of *Horror Noire: A History of Black Horror*, the documentary that made a big splash this February when it was released by horror streaming service Shudder. Based on the 2011 book *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from 1890s to Present* by Robin R. Means Coleman, the documentary, directed by Xavier Burgin, encapsulates the book's subject matter into a living testament of the misrepresentation and reclaiming of blacks historically in horror, to blaxploitation and horror in the '90s. With candid interviews from *The Craft*'s Rachel True (Rochelle), directors like Rusty Cundieff (*Tales from the Hood*), and *Candyman*'s Tony Todd, viewers get an inside look into what it was like to make black horror films and the gravity of representation. The reception has been overwhelmingly positive, with people posting reviews, thinkpieces, and boundless amounts of love for this documentary. I got a chance to talk to two of the documentary's producers—writer, producer, and scholar Ashlee Blackwell and author, executive producer, and educator Tananarive Due about the impact of the documentary, the future of black horror creators, and the upcoming *Candyman* remake.

Ashlee, your site Graveyardshift Sisters has been documenting black women and people of color within the horror

genre for over 5 years now. Did it feel like you had come full circle with your work when you became involved with Horror Noire?

Ashlee Blackwell: All of my work feeling like it has come full circle didn't dawn on me until after much of the fanfare surrounding *Horror Noire* and its release. Having a minute to reflect, I simply just feel lucky to have been able to take such an active role in the project. It really did force me to give myself some credit for all the effort I've put forth in order to embrace the opportunity.

I thought that the documentary did an amazing job encapsulating Means-Coleman's book. What was it like writing it and considering all factors, like producer's input, author's input, length of the documentary and deadlines?

AB: It's difficult to explain because it's simply a process of feedback-knowledge-intuition-execution. I've always been a hands-on learner so it's really about communication, being attentive to others' suggestions, and truly trusting your own voice.

The conversational tone of the documentary also makes it easy to digest. Was that a happy accident or did you purposefully aim to get your cast to talk freely?

AB: The original vision was for the documentary story to be told in

conversational form. Many of my talking points began with me saying, "Talk to each other about...". The discussions that followed were all very natural.

It really did force me to give myself some credit for all the effort I've put forth in order to embrace the opportunity.

Ashlee, can you tell us about the Horror Noire Syllabus?

AB: It's simply a resource that offers more films and readings that expand the story we told in the documentary. To quote from Graveyardshiftsisters.com, "Myself and executive producers Dr. Robin R. Means Coleman and Tananarive Due present a digital, living document we hope will guide further inquiry into what was covered in *Horror Noire* and beyond. This is just the beginning of what will be developed as we create a fluid discourse on Black horror from here on." [You can find the entire list of films at: graveyardshiftsisters.com/2019/02/the-horror-noire-syllabus.html.]

Tananarive, Horror Noire is an excellent addition to the education of film students and something that was sorely needed for a long time but, even before the documentary, you've been teaching a course called "The Sunken Place: Racism, Survival, and Black Horror Aesthetic", inspired by Jordan Peele's



Cast photo, *Horror Noire* premiere at the Egyptian Theatre in L.A. // Shudder

Get Out. Can you tell us about your course and whether the documentary has changed how you teach?

Tananarive Due: That's a great question! I started teaching *The Sunken Place* in the fall of 2017, so it took me a while after *Get Out* came out to get the course together. *Get Out* came out during my Afrofuturism course and I definitely did discuss it but I really felt that just opened a door to a whole new subject area of the scholarship of horror specifically. I was tweeting about creating a course and a reporter wrote a story about the fact that I was creating a course, so it became this surreal experience where Jordan Peele actually came to my class within a few weeks of when it started. It was a surprise for the students and it's been pretty much an incredible ride since then. *Get Out* is sort of the linchpin that enabled me to discuss black horror in more totality.

One difference between my course and the documentary is that my course also incorporates horror literature, like Octavia Butler, my novel *The Good House*, and a bunch of short stories by several artists. I will say I've noticed in reading the last crop of essays that the students take advantage of

the documentary and it seems to me that it gives them a lot more clarity in their thinking; quoting from the documentary and the book in a way that they didn't previously. I feel like the documentary has really enriched the course, because it gives students a much deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Have you had any backlash from the documentary?

AB: The biggest criticism has been that people have wanted more. That it could've been more comprehensive. Budget, timeframe, and other restraints that come with the nature of production didn't allow for us to tell a story that was completely exhaustive. We wanted to!

TD: I think Shudder disabled the comments on the trailer, so I haven't seen any blowback from the troll audience at all.

Tananarive, you know the book inside out; were there any pleasant surprises when you were actually putting the documentary together?

TD: The book was published in 2011, so of course that predates *Get Out*.

I had helped arrange an interview with Jordan Peele but I was very surprised that the final cut was able to incorporate footage from *Us*. It was at the very last minute, so they had to go back and recut it so it would be current. I'm very excited about the way it was able to incorporate the "Peele era" as a part of the story. You can't really leave it out but that was outside of the purview of the book. I'm really glad about how that all came together.

“The biggest criticism has been that people have wanted more.”

In terms of black identity, I think *Get Out* opened the floodgates for black representation, and *Horror Noire* has opened up discussion and education; revealing that some white people were uncomfortable, perhaps spurred by guilt, once they learned of the exclusion and misrepresentation of blacks in the genre. What are your thoughts on this?

TD: What I find really fascinating and gratifying is that so many white horror fans are not just accepting of the critique, but they seem genuinely grateful to have their eyes opened. They are so many tweets from people

thanking us for doing it. I really wasn't quite expecting that. Everyone seems to get that this is a valid subgenre, these are valid critiques and, "Gee, I learned something!" I've seen some people out there happy to learn about the movies they had never heard about, the backstories and the tropes that they hadn't thought about so that has been—I can't call it anything except a big surprise. The degree to which it's been embraced by the horror community in general—I'm just not used to that, you know what I mean? I'm not used to having people saying thank you for critiquing the thing that they love—that's not usually the way it works.

AB: There have been famous people who have come up to me and been really floored by what black people in horror and behind the scenes in horror have had to deal with because it hasn't been their experience. And understanding what horror means to black people and black audiences in a humble way without any hostility. I think, as we all know, there are online trolls who you'll never see face-to-face speaking up in comments sections, and there's been some horrible, nasty, and very ignorant things there. But people come up to me who say, "I never thought of this", so I do appreciate that. My website is kind of a testament of all of these resources, and I guess that's where my strength has been as an educator. Sometimes,

I can get deep and in-depth and I'm proud of myself; I love that I'm able to do that because, for the most part, my intellect is a resource, so everything I can dig up that people may have not thought of before is all there. And the accumulation of that is *Horror Noire*.

Are you concerned the momentum *Horror Noire* has created will encourage, let's say, white opportunists in the industry looking to capitalize on black horror just because it's the latest wave and perhaps do damage to the progress of how blacks are represented in genre film, or should we just ride with it since blacks have been commodified for centuries anyway?

TD: Yes! Absolutely yes! This is one of the things that I think is part of the lasting value of *Horror Noire*—with a more educated horror audience, it won't just be black people saying, "Ah! Sacrificial negro trope again!" or, "Magical negro trope again!" I think what we need is more white horror fans to be able to critique these films themselves. Just because a movie has black people in it does not make it black horror, that's the first thing that needs to be clear. And this is a point that Robin R. Means Coleman makes in her book—there's black horror, which is black-driven horror with black agency and most often black creators although not exclusively, and then there's blacks in horror where you mostly have horror made for

white audiences that happens to have black people in them.

Are we in an era where there is the perception that black horror is profitable? Absolutely! There are going to be people who are not up to the task of making black horror. For instance, let's say, a hypothetical film with a black lead with almost no other black cast members. Who is that film intended for? Is [it] the black person as monster? That's not new, and the black person as monster is not progressive. Also, it's not necessarily black horror, right? They've been doing that for a long time, there's nothing new about that, so I really feel like we're in a better position now to have informed conversations. Even *Bird Box*, which I enjoyed for the most part, has some sacrificial negro tropes that were problematic. I don't blame the actors, and I don't feel like the filmmakers should never make another movie or anything like that, because what I like to see is not cancellation culture, it's correction culture. So, correct yourself: don't do it anymore.

AB: Executives understand that black horror is an accessible genre for people of all walks of life that will make money at the box office. As long as business is being done in an equitable and favouring manner, I want black producers to fund the black creatives who are making horror films because it's important that everyone is being treated fairly, given their creative control, making their own decisions, and being paid fairly. Let these creatives make their movie. It becomes exploitive if it's the white producer's version of the black film by enforcing stereotypes of say, being more of a thug or punk. If they're taking profits and not making fair deals that's exploitive. If a white producer has all this leverage and black horror is making money, why not give someone a shot? And they're probably not looking at the movie, right, they're looking at the money. If someone has been struggling for years, I know these people, you know these people, I want see them get these kinds of opportunities.



Ashlee Blackwell

As much as the film is greatly loved, it's pointed out in the documentary that *Candyman* was problematic because, for instance, he did prey on poor blacks instead of the perpetrators of his death in the original film. Do either of you have any thoughts on, or hopes for, the remake being produced by Peele?

TD: It's kind of a love—and I don't want to call it "hate" thing—but a love-wince relationship with *Candyman*. It's obviously very scary and memorable and I'm glad it exists. It is a very scary film but, as we pointed out in the documentary, it is problematic, it is very much stamped of the Clinton era and fear of the urban, so I'm glad that it's getting reintroduced. I don't know if it would be considered a remake, a sequel, or a prequel, but I'm glad it's in the hands of Monkey Paw Productions. I do hope there will be some kind of part for Tony Todd. I get that you want to start fresh but, at the same time, he's so much a part of *Candyman* it's hard to imagine it without him in some way shape or form.

“What I find really fascinating and gratifying is that so many white horror fans are not just accepting of the critique, but they seem genuinely grateful to have their eyes opened.”

AB: I'm really excited because obviously Jordan knows film and I enjoy all of his insight in including the right people in front of and behind the camera. Getting Nia DaCosta involved is fantastic! Hopefully I can write more in depth about this someday, but I think she is literally the first black woman to direct a mainstream horror film. This is major, so I'm already feeling enthused with what we might see. I think for this particular *Candyman*, I want him to have more agency and I want to see black characters and how they relate to that myth. *Candyman* is not just seen terrorizing black people, like how does he play an integral part in black folklore, especially black American folklore, and how the past relates to what black people deal



Tananarive Due

with today. Because I think they're going to go into what Chicago looks like today and what is happening there, so I'm really excited about that.


Clearly Horror Noire has surpassed expectations and quite frankly is inspirational to all the black horror fans—and horror fans in general. How have you absorbed the impact you're making?

TD: This is a surreal time right now, to tell you the truth. I have a lot of exciting stuff happening and, one day, I'll hopefully be able to talk about it or some of it will show up on a screen somewhere. I feel very optimistic right now and it is quite surreal.

What's especially surreal about it is that I feel like all of this attention has come to me on the basis of being a lecturer at UCLA and a scholar as opposed to being an author, which is interesting because you try to get famous when you're a writer, but no one goes into teaching expecting to get famous! That's some kind of weird, but I embrace it and accept all of it. Who knows how long this moment in time will last? I really do feel like we're just at the beginning, but it's worth remembering that we have other periods like the '90s in particular where black arts were on the rise and a lot of these same

black horror filmmakers were getting big chances and some great films, but they did not get the traction and they did not get the second chances they deserved. That's the one thing I would worry about—can we sustain this movement or will it be another flash in the pan like the '90s?

I think it's a little harder to contain us now because there are so many outlets and platforms. You can shoot a movie on your iPhone and put up your own web series like Issa Rae (*The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl*), but Hollywood is still about trends coming and going. So, I'm very mindful that I need to be grateful for everything that's happening. Hopefully, young artists will have an easier time and they won't have to hear as often, "Do the characters have to be black?" I'm not naïve enough to think that it's over, that we have reached the promised land. Because unless we can greenlight projects, and there are fewer gatekeepers in the way, we still have long way to go.

AB: I still am. It's very nice that people have been so receptive. To my dying breath, I will always say how thankful and fortunate I've been to have started something that led to participating in *Horror Noire* and playing a role in making it happen. 

Survival horror takes on a whole new meaning when viewing modern zombie films through an ecofeminist lens. Against a dystopic backdrop, horror unfolds during an outbreak of the undead, and humanity itself is called into question. But while characters flee, trying to outlast or combat these terrifying attacks, mutating beings, and feasting on flesh, something more is at play. A wild, encroaching environment reclaims its territory as a troubled society suffers, and humankind's perspective and behaviour shifts to reflect on and even embrace feminism. Like any good horror movie, zombie films reflect the social anxieties around subjects that are in public focus. Of late, two of those concerns are especially pressing and in many ways intertwined: feminism and climate change.

Past iterations of zombie films are noted for the ways in which they emphasize the "otherness" of the zombies: the turned, the mutated, and—in some more recent narratives—the cured. Social commentary embedded in these films tackles topics of racism, capitalism, and consumerism, all influenced by a patriarchal system. What I seek to sink my teeth into is the way in which ecofeminism has found its own place in this discourse as well. For those unaware, the term refers to a branch of feminism that draws connections between women and nature, a theory that "utilises intersectionality, that is the interconnectedness of identity traits (race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.), to recognise similarities between the oppression of the environment and the domination of women" (Capriccio, 2017). It's entirely appropriate for this dynamic to play out in the framework of a zombie "cinemyth", where this latter term denotes a public space "within which patriarchal and matriarchal myths compete with each other, and where conservative and progressive ideological forces struggles against each other in working through collective anxieties, traumas, or aspirations" (Capriccio, 2017). In other words, survival in zombie films means interrogating and

It's Only Natural: Ecofeminism & the Modern Zombie Cinemyth

by Gina Freitag

working against oppressive systems (Picart, 2011). Many empowered, socially-minded narratives position ecofeminism as a worthwhile worldview, communicating the value of life through themes of mortality, growth, change, connection, and a reassertion of balance, alongside the prominent use of wild natural landscapes and complex characters of all backgrounds.

Les affamés (2017) aka *Ravenous*

Robin Aubert's French-language film drops its audience into small-town rural Quebec sometime after a devastating outbreak. A random handful of townspeople scattered by the ongoing disaster slowly form a sense of community as they navigate open fields and dense forests while facing a reality inhabited by treacherous, flesh-hungry creatures. Discouraged by evidence that the city is overrun and hopeless, the group plots a course away from the path of the infected crowds. Throughout this contemplative film, characters of all backgrounds process their grief and guilt, and lament regrets, lost lives, and uncertain futures.

In other words, survival in zombie films means interrogating and working against oppressive systems

Like the mindless zombies who erect strange towers built with household objects—monuments to their loss of humanity—many of the hardy survivors carry tokens for comfort or in remembrance of their past. Among them is Bonin, a shooter who has been patrolling the land and disposing of zombie remains; he frequently uses his sense of humour in a dark time to keep from dwelling on death (a distraction from his own family, whose whereabouts are unknown, and among whom he was considered

a black sheep). For resourceful, elderly couple Pauline and Thérèse, a sense of peace and home is represented by their homemade preserves, the pickles they offer fellow survivors as sustenance. Tania, a solo survivor with an untreated dog bite, clings to an accordion that she later uses to distract zombies away from the group's final survivor, a young girl named Zoe. She assures the girl she is "the strongest" of them all, a sentiment echoed by the film's director in an interview for *The Verge*:

"I do think that one day, if a zombie world exists, women will be the survivors. Not men. Men are too weak. If there's another revolution in the world, I think it's going to be a woman who survives first. And I think nature is going to come back against us, stronger than it is."

It is Zoe, a symbol of the younger generation, that carries this token at the end of the film. She connects with a racecar driver who is passing through in search of safety, after all others have succumbed or sacrificed themselves to the hordes. Zoe, whom some might consider to be the most vulnerable amidst this chaos, manages on her own until she is offered an escape and hope from a friendly stranger along the open country highway.

Endzeit (2018), aka *Ever After*

Director Carolina Hellsgård offers a female-helmed zombie film, with female protagonists and a crew of females in major creative roles (including German author and illustrator Olivia Vieweg, who adapted the film from her original graphic novel). The film, also set after an outbreak (one that has taken all but two cities in Germany), follows Eva and Vivi, characters who manage to connect as civilization crumbles around them. They depart from an overtaken compound on a supply

train which then breaks down and leaves them abandoned in the middle of the countryside. As they seek shelter and safety on foot, dodging the infected around them and sharing details of their regrets and their pasts, they witness the way in which nature has reclaimed the dangerous land outside of the cities in a strange and fantastical way.

As with *Les affamés*, this film shares in the sensibility that the afflicted horde is our sense of guilt pursuing us. We have reached a point where our past indiscretions or inaction are more quickly catching up with us: the damage we have caused others and our environment cannot be ignored. Its heavy presence serves to remind us that, as the characters in the film discuss, "What's important is: we are still here." In effect, they must think about how they have survived, and what can be done with the time they are given. In turn, we can reflect on how best to instil positive change moving forward.

The Girl with All The Gifts (2016)

Colm McCarthy's film (adapted by Mike Carey from his own novel) is perhaps the strongest case to be made in these examples of the ecofeminism dynamic. This journey for survival hinders on the special abilities of a young girl, Melanie (Sennia Nanua), a unique figure in the apocalyptic landscape whose zombie-like need to feed developed in utero, causing her to retain a semblance of humanity in addition to her dangerous hunger. While those at the facility where she's kept view Melanie as a threat (one of the "hungries"), less than human ("it" or one of the "friggin' abortions"), and a monster (one of the "creepy little fuckers"), she is also extremely intuitive, resourceful, clever, and thirsty for more than flesh—she craves knowledge and human connection.

She somehow possesses a unique resistance to the full extent of her darker instincts. For this reason, she is maintained and studied in a military facility for future medical use towards a vaccine. But when the facility is overrun by the infected,



she is muzzled and hauled away by a military unit during an escape alongside scientist Dr. Caldwell (Glenn Close) and a dedicated instructor, Helen (Gemma Arterton), both of whom have very different intentions for Melanie's future.

In turn, we can reflect on how best to instil positive change moving forward.

As the group traverses the former urban space of empty London, its streets and buildings lush with flora, they encounter a giant fungal structure with pods containing zombie-inducing pathogens, proving that there is little hope of returning to the way things once were. Melanie also proves (on more than one occasion) during their journey that, once unmuzzled, she is the saving force that allows for survival: for her group members (before self-interest, dumb mistakes, or fierce nature takes over), and for a generation of her kind, discovered living feral in the city ruins.

In the end, Melanie unleashes the pathogen by burning the fungal tree, thereby embracing the change and the results of its release on the remainder of humankind. To our knowledge, only Helen survives in her human state to act as Melanie's sole caregiver and to serve as teacher of the feral children. Like Melanie, they were born into this way of life, reflecting on the sense of nature v.

nurture as a guiding measure for a different version of humanity.

Perhaps one interpretation these films propose is that we are meant to acknowledge and take ownership of the horrific state we have created, but that we must then also take action and find a way forward that reflects a respect for nature and for one another. All three of these films are laced with an impending sense of doom, and yet, there is still room for hope in each of their endings, and that's something we can hold to.

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What is Lost May Not Be Found

Grief & the Modern Zombie

by Carolyn Mauricette

When we think of the dead returning, most of us picture the zombie. It's not a ghost or ethereal apparition, it's flesh and blood, with historical origins coming from Haiti and the anxieties of slaves, moving to a modern representation of social anxieties, inequalities, and consumerism. These days, a populist vision of the undead seems to have the zombie all figured out: a reanimated, decaying corpse craving human flesh. Countless creative projects have speculated about what happens when they appear, like George A. Romero's classic *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), the insanely popular AMC TV series *The Walking Dead*, or the fast zombies of *28 Days Later* (2002), just to name a few. But there is also another manifestation of the zombie: the undead who have simply returned intact or have been cured by modern medicine, bringing with them emotional turmoil.

In *Les Revenants* (*They Came Back*), a 2004 French film directed by Robin Campillo (which spawned the 2012 and 2015 television series), the dead suddenly reappear globally. In one small French town, the streets are flooded with the newly risen and orderly undead; clean and in good physical health, but suffering from memory loss, lethargy, and sleeplessness. Their stunned loved ones must figure out why they've come back—and what to do with them. Officials and medical staff immediately process them as though they are suffering from an epidemic. The undead attempt to re-establish themselves into their past lives, but this proves difficult due to the memory loss, and they are quite frankly changed. They congregate with other undead late into the night,

much to the bewilderment of the rest of the town. The undead are planning something. We learn this because they are put under surveillance, but we never find out their intentions, since they set off explosions to mask their escape and disappear forever into a set of subterranean tunnels. Those stopped by the military with a paralyzing drug simply fade away like a lost memory.

These days, a populist vision of the undead seems to have the zombie all figured out: a reanimated, decaying corpse craving human flesh.

These undead aren't stumbling, mindless creatures, but the personification of grief. Campillo creates a vision that makes, as he describes it, "mourning a global crisis"; seeing the dead as residuals the living just can't shake off, suggesting the bereaved is unable to let go. Mental health professionals agree that different types and stages of grief impact people in very different ways. *Les Revenants* captures the range of emotions the bereaved experience. A woman's husband, the mayor's wife, and a young boy are among the returned. With Rachel (Géraldine Pailhas), her last moment with her husband Mathieu (Jonathan Zaccà) was an argument before he died in a car crash. Rachel's disbelief, uneasiness, and renewed grief is palpable, especially when she must





say goodbye to him a second time. The mayor (Victor Garrivier) must cope with his graceful, seemingly vacant wife Martha (Catherine Samie); a literal angel of death when she gently coaches him into his own demise during a heart attack. Most disturbing is Sylvain (Saady Delas), a young boy who is now eerily mute. His parents experience the joy of having him back, but his odd behaviour leaves his mother suspicious of who he really is. Their secrets keep them separated from the town, oblivious to the pain they've brought back. It's the living, not the returned, who must make sense of this event and how they deal with grief, and nurse the hope that, someday, the lingering feeling of loss and lack of control will recede into the tunnels of their minds to once again make their lives bearable.

“These undead aren't stumbling, mindless creatures, but the personification of grief.”

In both the BBC television series *In the Flesh* and the film *The Cured* (2017) directed by David Freyne, the dead return through the miracle of modern medicine, resurrected from a zombie virus so they can live a “normal” life. Here, society is able to conquer death to a degree, with most zombies being cured. But, when these rehabilitated humans try to reclaim their lives, they are ostracized because they killed people while in their zombie state. They are also traumatized by the memories of these kills; some of their victims were their own friends and family. Emotional wounds long healed or forgotten are flayed open, and, like parolees, the former zombies are left on the fringes of society to fend for themselves, forming alliances both good and bad.

In the Flesh explores the challenges faced by the “Partially Deceased” trying to live normally despite prejudice and misunderstanding, focusing on Kieren (Luke Newberry), a recently revived suicide who must deal with the memory of his kill, the loss of a friend, the shunning by his community, and a family divided by his return. There is also *The Cured's*

rehabilitated Senan (Sam Keeley) who, burdened by the memory of murdering his brother in his zombie state, must save his sister-in-law Abbie (Ellen Page) from a radical, albeit mistreated, “cured” group. This time, we see life from the point of view of the undead, giving us three types of grief in play: that of the rehabilitated and their remorse for the lives they took, those who have been affected by the undead's actions, and the grief of the living whose family could not be cured. Both Kieren and Senan deal with injustice as well as many complicated emotions, leaving all involved coping with heart-wrenching consequences.

None of the stories end with easy answers, since grief isn't an easy human experience. Instead, they show the zombie in a sensitive light and demonstrate how our deepest sense of loss can come back when we least expect it. Ultimately, it's up to us to deal with grief respectfully and with care, not like an undead emotional interloper that must be policed. Whether it's a shot in the arm or a slow fade, grief is something that's as inevitable as the death that causes it. *g*

Like all film, popular horror is seeing an era where Black narratives are being sought out. It's true that Black narratives have largely been ignored in horror, but it's also a genre where underrepresented voices can present their philosophy and opinions about culture without any institutional rules—just the rules of the camera. One horror sub-genre wherein we have consistently seen Black characters are tales where Vodou is present. Mainly used as a vehicle for white narratives and as a representation of evil, African spiritual practice has largely been depicted as a type of devil worship and something that is clearly out of place within Western culture. Not as dogmatic as Abrahamic religions, Vodou is a spiritual practice where good and evil exist in equal power but are not enemies. The idea is that individuals exercise their own free will and face consequences based purely on their own actions. In this sense, Vodou does not operate on the binary scale which European ideologies have always favoured: good versus evil, Black versus white, and so on. In addition to having no formal hierarchies, the fact that Blackness is the epicentre of Vodou has aided in its demonization.

With white supremacy positioning Blackness as inherently evil within the binary praxis of the West, Blackness has always connoted terror of demons, savagery, and primitivism. It should come as no surprise that this perception of 'Blackness' found its way into the genre of horror, and in every Vodou-themed horror looms the terror of the real-life zombie. Vodou zombies, in particular, have been a vehicle for themes of anti-Blackness because they are real, and the threat of Black people not only controlling their own bodies but also having the ability to control white bodies pierces deep into white supremacy's collective psyche.

As horror lovers, we all enjoy, even love, problematic content, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't be critical of it. In that spirit, let's unpack some of the ways that horror has

BLACK MOON, WHITE SUPREMACY: THE ORIGINS OF THE HORROR ZOMBIE

by **Mariam Bastani**

with **Monika Estrella Negra**

treated Vodou zombies. Let's look at the beginning of Vodou zombies in horror in the 1930s and the reemergence of Vodou in popular horror on the late '80s by examining two films popular during those times: Victor Halperin's *Black Moon* (1934) and Wes Craven's *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988). By no means is this a comprehensive study, but a jumping-off point for anyone curious about how horror fits into our lives beyond entertainment.

“As horror lovers, we all enjoy, even love, problematic content, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't be critical of it.”

Misrepresentations of Vodou have been used as justifications of the need to control Black people. Institutionally and culturally, the U.S. in particular has been justifying

slavery and anti-Blackness since its foundation, because it is its foundation. Once legal controls of Black people began to break down and Black culture started to make its way into white households, the world started seeing the fear of Blackness manifest in Vodou zombies.

1930s North America saw a rise in lynching in the south, calls for white people to be given preference for work during the Depression, inner-city zoning in the north further cementing institutional racism, and racial inequality within the New Deal—just to name a few developments of the time. While the legal landscape for Black people in the US stayed largely the same or worsened—specifically in the Jim Crow south—this era marked a cultural shift with the popularization of jazz. As a cultural phenomenon, it had a trajectory that propelled Black culture into the homes of white



people. Not only was the sound infectious, but Black narratives by Black authors were finally reaching a white audience *en masse*. The earliest recognized Vodou-themed film with zombies is *White Zombie* (1932). While the film has a swarthy-looking Bela Lugosi as its zombification mastermind, Vodou is positioned as a vehicle for the white protagonist's storyline. Even though there are barely any zombies in the film, there are anti-Black stereotypes such as Black men demonstrating a predatory nature toward white women, à la D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915).

Once legal controls of Black people began to break down and Black culture started to make its way into white households, the world started seeing the fear of Blackness manifest in Vodou zombies.

This era in the U.S. saw a large number of Vodou-themed horror films. One of the best examples of this fear of Blackness permeating white culture is *Black Moon*, in which the white female protagonist, Juanita (Dorothy Burgess), returns to a tropical island where she had lost her parents to the evils of Vodou. While the island is never identified, it is important to note that at this point Vodou was already internationally recognized as the primary religious tradition of Haiti. Funded by the Guggenheim Fellowship, the anthropological work



Tell My Horse (1938) by Zora Neale Hurston detailed spiritual and cultural rituals in Haiti which fascinated white audiences. It is also important to know that resistance against French colonization and slavery were primarily led by Vodou leaders and all had some element of Vodou present. It is with this knowledge, viewed through a Western lens still unable to understand Vodou as an inextricable part of the Haitian identity, and a fear of the perceived encroaching Black culture, that we must contextualize this storyline. Upon returning to the island with her husband and daughter, Juanita is revered as a Vodou priestess and, being bewitched by Vodou, wants to kill her daughter as a sacrifice during a Vodou ritual. *Black Moon* manages to position whiteness as being considered the highest form of humanity by Black and white people alike. It also supports the anti-Black

stereotype that Black people are inherently violent, as demonstrated by Juanita's infanticidal urges and by depictions of the natives as ignorant, superstitious, and murderous when they eventually want to kill all the white people on the island. There is also a loose association that taking on "Blackness" by way of Vodou causes white women to lose their morals, becoming "overly" sexual. This movie very much reflects the fear of Black culture of the time, while upholding the idea of an assumed natural order where white people must be in control—especially white men in their constant need to "protect" white women. To learn more about these attitudes, we recommend watching *Ethnic Notions* (1987), a documentary by Marlon Riggs.

In the 1980s, we see the reemergence of Vodou in popular horror with films like Alan Parker's *Angel Heart* (1987)

and *The Serpent and the Rainbow*. We also see films like John Schlesinger's *The Believers* (1987) throwing some Brujaria and Santeria into the mix, expanding to an overall fear of indigenous spirituality. We can't talk about the '80s without mentioning its huge number of zombie movies unconnected to Vodou or any spiritual tradition. Zombies without connection to religious tradition will always be a "cultural metaphor," but the horror of a man-made zombie is inextricably connected to Vodou.

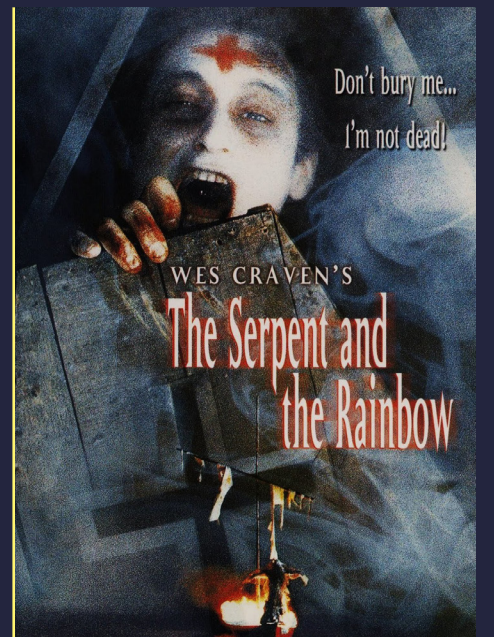
Zombies are unnatural as they defy the natural order of life and death. Vodou and its practitioners acting as a primary means of creating real-life zombies is viewed by white people as defying the natural order. Seen as unnatural and evil by the white narrative, the Vodou zombie has been used to create a moral commentary on Black societies, whose agency was taken away as a "justifiable action," because not only are Black people defying the natural order, but they already enslave their own people through Vodou, so whites can enslave them, too. White people justify slavery and its legacy by way of institutional racism: they're "protecting" Black people from themselves and protecting other white people from Black people.

The early '80s also saw the first appearance of the fabled "Chicago Welfare Mother," a stereotype coined by Ronald Reagan to demonize social welfare aid. Creating the stereotype of the lazy Black woman with tons of kids living in the Chicago projects and leeching off of the system was part of a long-standing vilification of Black people as part of the New Southern Strategy adopted by the Republican party. It uses coded language drawn from the legacy of the racist south in order to attract disenfranchised white voters (sound familiar?). At this time, the world also noticed—then largely ignored—the great famine in Ethiopia. The Anti-Apartheid movement gained momentum in South Africa, creating a fear of the destabilization of white rule in the area and leading to further violent oppression.

The '80s was also a time when Haiti saw an AIDS crisis decimate its population. From 1957 through 1971, the world followed news about Haitian President François Duvalier (A.K.A. Papa Doc) and another example of U.S. intervention on foreign soil gone awry. Duvalier rose to power with the help of the U.S.-funded anti-yaws effort, which positioned him as a humanitarian. Once in power, he used Vodou very deliberately to control the population, claiming he ruled by divine mandate. This was heavily publicized by international media. With this cultural memory in place, his son Jean-Claude (nicknamed Baby Doc) took power in 1971 and maintained it until 1986 when the AIDS crisis hit. Political opinions in the U.S. during this time theorized that Haiti would have been fucked anyway, regardless of U.S. intervention and French colonization—which is, incidentally, always the argument of the colonizer.

Seen as unnatural and evil by the white narrative, the Vodou zombie has been used to create a moral commentary on Black societies.

With these major events in mind and recent memory of Vodou present in the political and international landscape, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* is released in 1988. Based on Ethnobotanist Wade Davis's 1985 work of the same name, there have been many critical pieces written about the book, the movie, and the problems contained in both. Taking place during the Haitian revolution at the end of Baby Doc's regime, the movie tries to capture the air of repression felt by the people of Haiti. It features beautiful landscapes and colour design, but they are meant to make the white protagonist Doctor Dennis Alan feel isolated and "alien," supporting a white narrative based on fears of Black mysticism and a "confusing" culture. The fear felt by white people hits a crescendo when Alan



is picked up by the Tonton Macoute (a special operations unit within the Haitian paramilitary) to be tortured (leading to the famous scrotum-nailing scene) and finally subjected to the process of zombification. There are definite "resurrection" vibes as the breaking of the zombie curse of a white person coincides with the liberation of the Haitian people at the end of the movie. Not only does this movie position white people as saviours, it is also blatant in its colourism, positioning light-skinned Black people as "good" and dark-skinned Black people as "evil." Alan's appearance is incidental to the brutality and chaos of Blackness. Only when a white person is subject to the same terror does the white audience understand not only the "evil nature" of Black people, but their ability to harm one another in ways that white people would view as some sort of anomaly.

The propagation of these racist stereotypes are deep-seated. While we are talking about horror films here, there are many real-life examples of how white supremacy and anti-Blackness affect our everyday. With these examples, we can understand how visibility doesn't necessarily mean representation. With the rise of new narratives capturing the attention of horror fans, let's keep our fingers crossed that we will start seeing some new examples that turn these stereotypes upside down. **g**

Looking to further enhance your understanding of the sociocultural underpinnings of the zombie? Toronto-based production company 3rd Culture Media's upcoming feature-length documentary, *Black Zombie*, will present a thoughtful and thorough exploration of the cultural origins of the figure of the zombie, tracing its journey from Haitian folklore and religion to its deployment as monster and metaphor in Hollywood horror films.

Director Maya Annik Bedward's previous works include *Hot Docs*

selection *The Haircut* (2018) and the award-winning short narrative *The Foreigner* (2014). Her sharp, dynamic visual style, yen for engaging storytelling, and passion for the subject matter promise that *Black Zombie* will offer viewers an insightful and arresting study of one of horror's most misunderstood monsters.

As described by 3rd Culture Media, the documentary will examine "popular misrepresentations of this symbolic figure to reveal the buried history and transformative power it holds."



Learn more about this project at blackzombiefilm.com.

VALESKA GRIFFITHS

Bad Blood:

Why *Day of the Dead: Bloodline* Misses the #MeToo Mark

by Sophie Day

It's no secret that horror films often reflect the social context of their time. We frequently talk about the films that are able to translate our most visceral fears into a format that we can more easily understand. But what happens when a film attempts to seize the moment and fails?

With the proliferation of the #MeToo and Time's Up movements, films like Natalia Leite's *M.F.A.* (2017) and Coralie Fargeat's *Revenge* (2017) have explicitly taken on issues of sexual assault—and the patriarchy's indifference to it—in ways that are brutal, authentic, and deeply sensitive. On the other hand, 2018 brought us one of the worst films on the topic, Héctor Hernández Vicens's *Day of the Dead: Bloodline*. This final instalment in George A. Romero's line of zombie films (which I will henceforth refer to as *Bloodline* so as not to besmirch the legacy of the original *Day of the Dead*) is a rape-revenge film of sorts that trots

out all of the worst tropes of the misbegotten sub-genre, with few redeeming qualities.

When I first watched this film, I yelled out loud in disbelief as the closing credits began. I watched intently for any female names. I was disappointed, but not surprised, to discover that the film's creative team was made up entirely of men. It was yet another glaring example of men thinking that they are more equipped to tell stories of women's trauma and suffering than women are.

Throughout its entire runtime, the film isn't the least bit interested in understanding its main character—a medical student named Zoe (Sophie Skelton)—or her experience. She is a one-dimensional character, defined primarily by what happened to her in the film's opening sequences.

A few hours before an unknown contagion sweeps through the

streets turning people into flesh-eating "rotters," Zoe is forced to contend with harassment and assault by a patient named Max (Johnathon Schaech). You see, Max has special blood. When Zoe asks her supervisor for help because Max has been creeping her out, her concerns are brushed aside. When he is predictably verbally and physically inappropriate with her, Zoe's friend tells her "You can't let people treat you like that. You have to be stronger next time."

After his initial appointment, Max sneaks back into the hospital to confront Zoe again. When she attempts to flee, he punches her in the face and throws her to the ground. Zoe tries to scream for help, but Max covers her mouth before he tells her, "I like it when you fight" and licks her face. Max's assault of Zoe ends only when he is attacked by a zombie and she is able to escape. Within moments, the hospital—and,

soon, the entire city—are overrun with the undead.

Unfortunately for Zoe (and for all of us), the same anomaly in Max's blood that made him valuable as a research subject has also made him into something *more* than the rest of the zombies. As we learn five years later when Zoe and other members of her survivors' outpost venture back to the site of her assault to look for much-needed medicine, Max's body has begun to decompose but he has retained some of his consciousness and memories. Zoe is forced to relive her trauma over and over again because Max's blood is the key to keeping everyone she loves safe.

In the film's final act, Zoe is forced to once again confront Max on her own. Rather than providing any satisfying or meaningful end to this story, Max's death comes quickly and leaves no perception of closure. Zoe stabs him in the stomach (famously not an effective way to kill a zombie) and he growls, "You are mine." But Zoe can't even get a decent comeback line in this victorious moment. She tells him: "No, you're mine, motherfucker," before chopping off his head.

The writers' fundamental misunderstanding of their chosen subject matter is apparent almost immediately when we see the way that other women react to Max—

and to Zoe's discomfort around him. First, she is ignored. Then, she is scolded for allowing someone to treat her that way. By the end of the film, Zoe appears to have learned to stand up for herself, and the implication appears to be that it was only through her trauma that she could learn this valuable lesson.

Zoe is forced to relive her trauma over and over again because Max's blood is the key to keeping everyone she loves safe.

All of this is put in stark contrast by the fact that Sophie Skelton, who plays Zoe, also plays Brianna in Starz's *Outlander*. In the show's most recent season, Brianna is brutally raped in a public boarding house while a crowd of people outside the room do nothing. *Outlander*, unlike this film, is known for its ability to grapple with narratives around sexual assault in a sensitive and humanizing way. Watching her storyline as Brianna not long after watching *Bloodline* only makes all of this movie's errors more glaring.

Zoe is not alone in being poorly fleshed-out and not treated well by the film. Without exception, the female characters in *Bloodline* are one-dimensional and static, and

almost all of them meet brutal ends. Zoe's supervisor and friend are both killed during the initial outbreak. Her mother doesn't survive the night, with the film implying that she either died while Zoe was on the phone with her or that Zoe discovered her after the fact. The three women that we're introduced to within the compound don't survive the siege and all die unceremoniously.

Worse still, the majority of the male characters that surround Zoe are poster boys for toxic masculinity. Miguel (Jeff Gumm), who fancies himself the dictator within their little world, is insecure and hyper-aggressive. He resents Zoe and berates her in every scene they share. Zoe's boyfriend, Baca (Marcus Vanco), is seemingly intended to be a nice guy, but our introduction to their relationship is him voicing irritation and displeasure with her because she has a flashback to the assault when they are becoming intimate. He does apologize to her in the morning, but as soon as the film offers Zoe any grace it undercuts that completely by having her tell him that he doesn't need to apologize, that it was *she* who shouldn't have reacted that way. Later, when Miguel discovers that Max and Zoe have some kind of history, he tells Baca that he never trusted "that bitch." Baca runs straight to Zoe and accuses her of hiding the fact that Max is an old beau of hers, forcing her to share her trauma with him on his terms.

In case the film's thesis wasn't clear enough, the endcap sequence features a voiceover from Zoe that says, "From now on, when you greet the day, know this world is not as dangerous as it used to be. Things are changing. And while we can't put the world back, there's still beauty in it. There's still hope that we can be safe. And that it's okay for us to let our guard down now...to be happy... and to love." So, you see, all Zoe needed to do was get over it. Her assault made her stronger and she's better for it. Good thing we have male writers and directors to explain that to us. I guess we've just been overreacting this whole time. g



Practice Makes Perfect: Audrey Cummings on Learning from Experience

by Joe Lipsett



As one of Canada's leading genre filmmakers, Audrey Cummings has come a long way in a very short time. In this exclusive interview for Grim, Cummings chatted with me about honing her craft in the Canadian Film Centre's intensive program, why she's so attracted to horror and science-fiction, and why genre films need diverse voices moving forward.

You began your film career in the prestigious CFC Director's Lab program. How did that intensive six-month filmmaking experience prepare you for work in the industry?

The Director's Lab was one of the best experiences I've had. It's intensive and you're fully immersed in filmmaking for the entirety of the program. You get to work every day on your craft and take risks and try things you might not otherwise do out in the real world. It really helped me find my voice as a director. It was also an incredible opportunity for networking and making partnerships with talented people that I still collaborate with today.

Why did you decide to make your first feature, *Berkshire County*, a throwback to '70s "babysitter-in-peril" movies? What influences did you draw from?

I grew up LOVING the old 1970s babysitter-in-peril films (*Black Christmas*, *Halloween*, *When a Stranger Calls*). I also love Stanley Kubrick and how he took his time to build the world and build his story in order to create a higher level of suspense. So combining the two were really the influences I drew from. I had made seven short films and was ready for my feature. All the funders turned us down for *Berkshire County* and I was so determined to make that film that I used my own money, line of credit, and every resource I had to get it made. It was an amazing experience and I got to work with so many talented people who really wanted the film to succeed as much as I did.



It was nerve-wracking getting it out into the world because I had so much on the line, but we started getting accepted into a bunch of film festivals and it wound up getting a lot of buzz, so I was able to relax a little bit. Our worldwide premiere was at Shriekfest Los Angeles where we ended up winning the Grand Jury Prize for Best Feature Film, making me the first female to win the award in the 14-year history of the festival! The film took on a life of its own after that and did incredibly well on all fronts. I'm happy I followed my gut, believed in myself and just went for it.

What were some of the lessons you learned on *Berkshire County* that helped you to prepare for bigger budget productions like *Darken*?

The more prepared you are going into each and every scene, the more prepared you are to deal with the endless problems that come at you every day. Good preparation really allows you to get inside the world of the film and visualize the

infinite possibilities for bringing your story and characters to life. It also gives you the vision to confidently cut shots, combine things, change direction, and do what's necessary to get what you really need and not lose your day. I can't stress enough how much preparation actually liberates you on set.

The other big lesson I keep learning over and over is to trust your gut. You are the keeper of the story that you are bringing to life. Don't forget that.

The environments of both *Berkshire County* and *Darken* play a huge role in creating tone and atmosphere. How much of that is location scouting and how much is dressing the set and using FX to augment what's actually there?

The right location is so important because it greatly influences the look of the film. I try never to settle on a location just because it's convenient. It's hard work finding the right location, but it's really important and worth the time and effort.

Locations are like characters in a film. They convey tone and emotion and have a strong presence on screen, so the location needs to work for the story you're telling. The perfect location can also make your budget seem larger than it is. The production designer is in charge of making sure every location is taken to a whole new level. I spend a lot of time with my production designers gathering images, different textures, materials, and ideas that help us define the look, so that our creative ideas align and we are always on the same page while executing the vision of the film. I have to say I'm always wowed watching it all come together on set.

The more prepared you are going into each and every scene, the more prepared you are to deal with the endless problems that come at you every day.

Both *Berkshire County* and *Darken* were festival hits and won multiple awards. What has your experience been like, showcasing the films at various horror and sci-fi film festivals and winning awards?

All I can say is it's so much fun. After a year of hard work to complete your film, having the chance to screen it at festivals and getting it out into the world is the best feeling. It can also be nerve-wracking though, as you can sometimes feel vulnerable and exposed screening it for a theatre full of people but, in the end, I'm always amazed at how supportive audiences are.

The biggest lesson I've had from my festival experience is how important your festival strategy is. Your world premiere is an important decision because it sets the path for your film and its entire festival rollout. After that, you need a strategy for who gets to premiere it in each country and then city. You really need to research so that you can use the film circuit to your advantage and have the best possible chance at launching your film.

Your new film is *She Never Died*. There isn't currently a lot of information available about it, aside from the fact that it may be a sequel to 2015's *He Never Died*, an action noir starring Henry Rollins, and that *Darken's* Olunike Adeliyi stars. What can viewers expect?

She Never Died is a sister film to the horror/thriller comedy *He Never Died* and lives in that same world of the Cain mythology. The film manoeuvres the fine line between delicious dark comedy and the horror thriller underworld it lives in. Olunike Adeliyi stars in the lead role of Lacey, a cannibal who is living out the punishment of immortality for something she did back in ancient Biblical times. I'm really proud of this film. The depth of talent is incredible and the actors brought so much to every one of their roles. I'm in postproduction right now finishing up the last bits of audio and VFX and I'm hoping to have the film completed by June. I'm really looking forward to getting it out into the world.

Locations are like characters in a film. They convey tone and emotion and have a strong presence on screen, so the location needs to work for the story you're telling.

You're very outspoken and passionate about supporting and encouraging female filmmakers. Why is this important to you? Do you feel like there has been progress for Canadian female creators in the industry?

It's healthy for the industry to have a variety of different voices giving us new diverse perspectives on stories and ideas and, really, a larger worldview. At the beginning of my career, I used to get the question as to whether or not a woman could even direct horror! Obviously, that's a ridiculous question, but I'm happy to say that I don't get that question anymore. I see many more genre films directed by women now and they're great; they're successful, and they're winning awards.

I think we still have a way to go, but I have most definitely seen the progress and it's really quite energizing. g

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The advertisement shows four t-shirts with different horror-themed designs: a red silhouette of a person running, a white hockey mask, a yellow graphic of a face, and a cartoon character holding a knife.

“You Look *Vile*. You Look *Disgusting*. You Look *PERFECT*.”

The Redeeming Indeterminacy of *Dragula*'s Zombie Queens

by Valeria Villegas Lindvall



Drag. Filth. Horror. Glamour. Disgusting, vile, and perfect. While these terms combined may sound like unlikely bedfellows, they comprise the gospel by which every contestant of *Dragula*, *Search for the World's First Drag Supermonster*, abides. The horrific brainchild of Swanthula and Dracmorda Boulet (A.K.A. the Boulet Brothers) was initially conceived of as a nightlife event, but was later turned into a web reality drag competition via Hey QweenTV during Halloween of 2016. Two seasons have been released and a third has been announced to come out this year. Both seasons have achieved enormous popularity and deserve their own analysis—a lengthy story for another night, no doubt.

Each *Dragula* episode puts its participants through a main challenge (mostly involving horror and sci-fi characterizations) and closes with an “extermination” challenge that ranges from being buried alive (season 1, episode 1) to being pierced with hypodermic needles (season 2, episode 1). At the end, each eliminated queen enacts a cinematic and violent death, gleefully adopting

the trope of the unsuspecting slain girl so prevalent in horror cinema. Dying a spectacular death over and over again, these monsters come back transformed each episode, reclaiming the transgressive nature of indeterminacy and its possibility to disrupt and challenge the constraints cast upon gender performance and sexuality. There is no better way to describe these queens than as ghouls: they embody that which is not dead or alive, real or imaginary, male or female, animal or human.

These bizarre and beautiful creatures adopt the traditional role of the monster as the bearer of fears and anxieties past and present, and do so by underscoring the monstrosity historically ascribed to queer bodies. It is the embrace and celebration of these alleged monstrosities which allows, I argue, for a reparative reading of the zombie (featured in season 1, episode 3). This exercise reflects on the otherization of the queer body, metabolizes the fears that have led to its ostracizing, and enamours the audience in the process.

In the episode in question, titled “Zombies in Dead Valley,” the seven

remaining queens present their own renditions of the undead, each one infused with the participant's drag personality. In the scorching heat of the desert, the zombies take unsuspected forms, from the obscure undead animal/human hybrid presented by Loris to a spectacular living and slithering skeleton embodied by Vander Von Odd. The versatile avatars of the zombie in this instalment further highlight the plasticity of a figure onto which the fears and threats to patriarchal white heteronormative order have been projected. Even more tellingly, the extermination challenge for this episode entailed eating brains with ravenous impulse. This reads not only as a reminder of the brain-eating ghoul created and reproduced in visual culture; when performed by queer bodies that opt for abjection as a means to reclaim the monster, the gesture seems like a veiled way to eat and digest a structure of thought that has for so long maligned the monster as the incarnation of all things different. These drag queen zombies acknowledge the potential for the monster to challenge boundaries and categories—a prime feature of these

figures, as posited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in his 1996 book *Monster Theory*—and reclaim its capability to produce meaning for itself instead of reflecting meanings cast upon it.

“The versatile avatars of the zombie in this instalment further highlight the plasticity of a figure onto which the fears and threats to patriarchal white heteronormative order have been projected.

Moreover, the undead featured in this episode of *Dragula* also evoke a long history of the zombie in visual culture since its introduction in Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932), foregrounding its nature as a body that is no longer able to communicate and therefore bears, but does not generate, meaning of its own. From its first stumbling motions, the zombie has lent itself as a device of the uncanny, the familiar human entity rendered strange and deviant

from the norm, be it a racialized, queer, and/or disabled body. Inhabiting a space that fluctuates between the dead and the living, the zombie becomes a paramount figure of indeterminacy. *Dragula*'s drag homage to the living dead presents the zombie as a presence that lurks unapologetically and rises as a threat to heteronormative constraints to gender and sexuality in Western culture.

The affordances of horror allow for these monsters to upset the binaries on which conventional female impersonation rests: not only does this exercise question the expectations weighing on male and female bodies, but it also spectacularly bypasses the boundaries between clean and abject, human and non-human, proper and obscene. Here, the drag queen zombie becomes a fitting allegory to address the metabolization and subversion of the fears inscribed on the queer body. The performances in *Dragula*, resting on exaggerated features in order to challenge these binaries and categories, embrace the notion of abjection (as posed by Julia Kristeva) as a threat to the boundaries of the self.

Enacting the gospel's dictum of filth, the performances are decidedly uplifting the danger signified by dirt as famously theorized by Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, from 1966. Douglas proposes the notion of filth or dirt as a rejected element, one that does not belong in the given order. Transgression of order entails danger to the categories and structures of thought that entire cultural frameworks are woven around; to flirt with that hazard is taboo. It is that uncategorizable inbetweenness which the ghouls in *Dragula* exploit, inhabiting multiple, dialectical spaces: the zombie queen is living dead, claims no fixed gender, and can even challenge the notion of humanity by assuming the form of an anthropomorphized carnivorous bunny. In short, the zombie and the drag queen thrive in spaces of indeterminacy, reclaiming abjection and havoc. The gesture also positions *Dragula* in a camp and queer cultural pantheon associated to icons of transgression such as Divine and John Waters, who become significant references later in the season. The message is clear: filth is my politics; filth is my life!





Nevertheless, the coupling of queer bodies and monstrosity in visual culture is certainly not a new one, though its agendas have morphed throughout time. As Harry M. Benshoff poses in his touchstone book *Monsters in the Closet* (1997), the metaphorical conflation of homosexuality and contagion doubled down after the AIDS crisis. This followed a rhetoric of homosexuality as disease, characterizing it as the threat of dissolution of moral tissue and cementing the association of decay with non-normative sexualities and identifications. This history of otherization thus falls in line with the presentation of the queer body as a zombie, a ravenous and dangerous living dead body condemned to

exist in marginality. In this sense, *Dragula* follows a different path, imagining what would happen in the normalization of this abjection, its incorporation as part of a world that envisions categories as arbitrary and inexistent. Much like the exercise that Bruce LaBruce performs in *Otto; or, Up With Dead People* (2008), exaggeration and provocation become critical tools to reflect on the constraints that binary understandings of gender and sexed bodies entail. Filth (which, in LaBruce's trajectory, is conjured via pornography) is somewhat weaponized here. Successfully understanding and flipping the bundled meanings of abjection and queer, both LaBruce's and the Boulets' horrific spawn revel in

the fears about sex and death that monsters, as Benshoff points out, have come to arouse. This is rendered evident in *Dragula's* incorporation of the zombie image and its voracious appetites for consuming everything it encounters, acknowledging and exploiting the idea of queer bodies as diseased for its own purposes. This gesture, as I mentioned above, suggests the metabolization of vocabularies of monstrosity by queer bodies that embrace, repurpose, and throw them back to the audience without remorse.

Benshoff's elaboration around the notion of homosexuality as a "monstrous condition" reminds us of the creation of a proverbial closet in popular culture, a set of normative

“The coupling of queer bodies and monstrosity in visual culture is certainly not a new one, though its agendas have morphed throughout time.”

guidelines regarding gender and sexuality, where “monster is to ‘normality’ as homosexual is to heterosexual.” The difference is, though, that just as the desert spews out these monstrous zombies and allows them to run rampant in Death Valley, the closet is now incapable of containing the dialled-up threat teased in *Dragula*. Even better, here the closet never existed. The fascinating allure of these forms of drag is rather the denial of normalcy, and the delight in transgression that abjection and disgust provide.

The incorporation of *Dragula* to fringe popular culture and its reflection on marginalized forms of entertainment reclaim a space for the misfits and outcasts and successfully exploits the richness of visual culture to imbue it with a playful yet political touch. These ghouls expose the notion of indeterminacy not as a deviation, but as a powerful device to exhibit the arbitrariness of boundaries placed literally and figuratively on gendered bodies. The rejection of these premises allows for the monster to renounce its status as a defeated entity that suffers due to its impossibility to be categorized and turns it into an ally to decentre the norm. As Asa Simon Mittman poignantly puts it: “Monsters do a great deal of cultural work, but they do not do it nicely.” So, bring on the filth and the brain eating. It's about time.

Watch *Dragula* at: heyqween.tv/shows/dragula.

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Girls Just Want to Have Fun, with Submachine Guns:

Challenging Gender Ideals in the Post-Apocalypse

by Paul Wegner



Some guy once told me “You hit like a girl”. What does that even mean?

This is supposed to be some sort of dig on me, a measurement of my masculine prowess. It hints at the culturally created perceptions of gender performance—those perceived ideals about how a person is supposed to act based on their gender. Gender performance varies from culture to culture and it has a huge impact on how we perceive the people around us. It can even have an impact on how characters in films are portrayed. This is especially true in the post-apocalyptic, dystopian, or zombie film genre. When all hell breaks loose, we revert back to our “natural” gender performances that are based on biological evolution—wherein men are aggressive defenders of passive, helpless women. Thom Eberhardt’s 1984 zombie film *Night of the Comet* flips these post-apocalyptic, preconceived gender performances around. The protagonists are decisive

women who perform “male” tasks, while the men in the film are either subject to zombie feasts or zombies themselves.

We meet the main characters, Regina (Catherine Mary Stewart) and Samantha (Kelli Maroney), a few hours before a comet passes into the earth, turning most of the people in the world into a red dust, except those who spent the night in a steel structure and are lucky enough to be saved. Regina (Reggie) is avoiding doing work at a local theatre, the El Rey. Samantha (Sam) is avoiding interacting with her stepmom. These circumstances provide insightful introductions to the characters: while Reggie is calm and avoids conflict as much as possible, Sam is impulsive and has a propensity to start trouble. It is these character traits that get them into the steel structures that allow them to survive. Reggie ducks up to the projection booth, where she

spends the night with her boyfriend after he propositions her. Sam dukes it out with her stepmom, literally, after pointing out her infidelity to her face—“You were born with an asshole, Doris, you don’t need Chuck.”

Like most zombie films, the characters go through a transformation as the world shifts from normal to dystopian. But, unlike most zombie films—wherein characters lose their identities and undergo total transformations—Reggie and Sam succeed by using “male” skills they already possess. For example, they know how to use guns and where they are stored. As Reggie states to male lead Hector (Robert Beltran), “the MAC-10 submachine gun was practically designed for housewives.” Sam knows the weapons well enough to comment on the firing mechanisms: “See, this is the problem with these things, daddy would have gotten us Uzis.” These women ride motorcycles, make decisions, and do

not need “protector” men. Nor do they need to abandon all of their “feminine” inclinations (read: stereotypes) in order to succeed. They are perfectly capable of going on a shopping spree and fighting zombie stock boys at the same time.


Like most zombie films, the characters go through a transformation as the world shifts from normal to dystopian.

Night of the Comet passes the Bechdel Test, which seems obvious given that the two main characters are women and are alone in Los Angeles for the beginning of the film, although they do talk about men. The Bechdel Test, however, isn’t a good measure of female agency—*Night of the Living Dead* (1968) passes it, yet the women in that film are portrayed as passive, weak, and stupid. But the test gives us a good starting point for the measurement of women’s place in a

film. The women in *Night of the Comet* have agency and actively advocate for themselves. Regina and Samantha are not the only women in the film who do this. Among the scientists, the only one who has any redeemable qualities is Audrey White (Mary Woronov), a doctor who is not identified as such, though every male doctor is. Killing another male scientist, White sets in motion Samantha and Hector’s ability to rescue Regina and is, therefore, a driving force in the film.

Compared to the women, men in *Night of the Comet* seek to exploit those around them, through eating them, torturing them, or using them in some way. Hector is the only male in the film that seems to have the girls’ best interests in mind. He is introduced to Regina, Sam, and the audience as a manly man, carrying a gun and demanding that the girls do what he says. But this masculine performance of Hector’s is not his true nature. He

is really just a nice guy who loves his mom, is afraid of zombie children, and doesn’t put the moves on Regina when the two are alone.

To recap, *Night of the Comet* is not your traditional zombie film. While it uses known tropes and is clearly an homage to B monster films, it does this in a way that reminds me of a John Hughes film. Regina and Samantha do not fall into the category of ‘normal’ female zombie film survivors. They retain their (stereotypical) “feminine” behaviours (shopping and cheerleading) while riding motorcycles, shooting guns, making decisions, and fending off zombies for themselves. Their survival does not depend on renouncing their femininity. It is through these performances and characterizations that we get the opportunity to see what apocalypse would be like if women were in control and the burden of civilization was upon them. After all, hasn’t it always been? 

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Bitter Are The Wars Between Brothers:

A Retrospective on *Basket Case*

by Carling Kirby

When you think of Frank Henenlotter's filmography, what are the key elements that pop into your head?

It might be the unapologetic weirdness of his features, which have a quality akin to watching one of your cold-sweat fever dreams come to life. The content presented before you is so outrageous, so gleefully demented, so deliberately tasteless, that the average moviegoer can't help but ask themselves what kind of person you'd have to be to come up with something like that. How free of fear and shame you'd have to be in order to put those ideas down on paper, hire a whole cast and crew, and show off the brazen results to the rest of the world.

Even back in the eighties—arguably the most pivotal, game changing, and iconic decade for the horror genre, where nearly anything was possible and many legendary franchises saw their humble beginnings—there wasn't anything quite like a Henenlotter picture. His work challenged the traditional, clear-cut style of American cinema at the time; concepts like right and wrong, good

and evil were practically spoon-fed to audience members. The grimy backdrop of New York's destitute 42nd Street neighbourhood was just as much of a character as the rest of the Henenlotter motley crew, who ranged from pint-sized vigilantes to high-inducing brain parasites to mad scientists and their zombified lady loves.

I'm fully aware that Frank Henenlotter never deliberately set out to make a serious horror film. He's gone on record numerous times stating that he doesn't consider himself a horror director at all, and prefers to be known as an exploitation filmmaker. According to Eric Schaefer's 1999 book, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959*, an exploitation film, or "trash film," is classified as cinema that attempts to succeed financially by capitalizing on trending topics, niche genres, or lurid content. These types of films were usually low-budget and centred around subject matter that was then deemed too controversial for the mainstream, such as drugs, deviant behaviour and explicit sexual content. Schaefer's analysis of the exploitation genre

detailed the films' evolution during that forty year period, and touched on not only how those films were reflective of social issues at the time, but on how exploitation films played a role in shaping the policies and attitudes of the general public.

Though the American film industry underwent some serious changes post-war, exploitation cinema continued to act as a reflection of society's values and challenged the norm—something that was prominent in Henenlotter's work as much as any other exploitation piece. While he may not have intended to create anything culturally or historically significant, that's exactly what ended up happening with *Basket Case* (1982), which was officially inducted into the Museum of Modern Art back in 2017. (According to one of Henenlotter's Facebook posts, he was so baffled by MoMA's decision that he asked them if they actually watched the movie, which they assured him they did.) The inclusion of *Basket Case* speaks volumes of the film's significance—not just as a glimpse into what life was like for impoverished New Yorkers back in the day, but for the film's thematic



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elements, which shine through underneath all those layers of gore, sleaze, low-brow special effects and deliciously hammy acting.

On a surface level, the main plot of *Basket Case* is a simple one. Originally released at the Waverly Theatre in early 1982, the film follows Duane Bradley (Kevin Van Hentenryck), a socially awkward twenty-something who’s travelled to the mean streets of Manhattan with a mysterious wicker basket under his arm. Within the basket resides his disfigured, formerly conjoined twin brother Belial, a vengeful telepath hellbent on finding the doctors who cut them apart as children, wreaking bloody havoc. The film follows the brothers as they track the surgeons down one by one while dealing with surprisingly heartfelt personal issues, such as jealousy, codependency and a shared sense of self-loathing that ultimately turns them against each other.

My issue with *Basket Case* does not lie in the social commentary itself, but rather the commentary’s mixed and somewhat contradictory messages. The most popular interpretation of the story I’ve seen is that Belial is the visible manifestation of Duane’s darker side: that Belial is Duane’s id,

the primitive and instinctual half of his brother that is forcefully repressed, while Duane is representative of the duo’s superego, acting as their supposed moral conscience. Though this is a valid interpretation of the story at face value, I personally feel that the characters of Belial and Duane are much more nuanced than that, and that there are many key factors about them that tend to get overlooked.

At the beginning of the movie, most viewers assume it was Belial’s idea to take vengeance upon their tormentors. To assume this is what feels most natural—Duane is depicted as naive and innocent-looking, an unassuming outsider in a strange new world where he doesn’t belong. Belial, on the other hand, comes across as a sinister presence. So severely malformed that the subject of his humanity is called into question and quick to fly off the handle, it’s established early on that Belial’s presence causes Duane a lot of stress. We initially wonder how much of Duane’s participation in the murders is of his own volition and how much is out of obligation to his brother. Because we’re meant to identify with Duane, we assume that his increasingly irritated reactions are justified and that Belial is indeed

a malignant, oppressive force. We anticipate that Belial will do terrible things at his brother’s expense, and we interpret his actions as malicious. So that means we aren’t intended to sympathize with Belial...right?

But that’s exactly where things begin to get fuzzy. In the flashback sequence that takes place halfway during the film, we’re shown that Belial’s life has been exceedingly difficult right from the very start. Blamed for the death of his mother during childbirth, Belial is immediately condemned by his father, who views him as an evil omen and even goes so far as to name him after a demon—or, more specifically, after a Hebrew term often understood as “lacking worth.” Mr. Bradley (Richard Pierce) disowns Belial based on his appearance alone, yet is willing to “salvage” Duane due to their physical similarities and the fact Duane would, as far as Mr. Bradley knows, be able to conform to the social norms expected of him once he is separated from his deformed brother.

The way this flashback is set up makes it clear we are not intended to like or agree with Mr. Bradley. He is shown to be irrational, cruel and deeply harmful to both of his



children, so much that the twins' aunt (Ruth Neuman) feels the need to shield them from him. It's only when she's out of town that Mr. Bradley pays a crooked team of doctors under-the-table to perform the operation, stating outright that Belial is better off dead and there's no hope for him. Sedated and crudely hacked off Duane's side, Belial is then thrown in the garbage and left for his brother to eventually find. With lingering shots of Duane's horrified reaction and Belial's little hand reaching out from the trash bag, it's obvious that Henenlotter wants us to understand the true gravity of what was done to these young men.

It certainly helps that two out of the three doctors who operated on them are characterized as opportunistic, selfish and downright predatory individuals, so we don't feel particularly sorry for them when they're killed. While the reasoning behind the deaths of Dr. Lifflander (Bill

Freeman) and Needleman (Lloyd Pace) are left vague at best during the first viewing, by the time Dr. Kutter's (Diana Browne) demise rolls around, the flashback scene has already happened. We are able to justify why the Bradley brothers harbour so much hatred towards her, and may even take pleasure in her demise, especially given the theatricality of which Belial disposes of her. (Look at the thumbnail of the "visit to the vet" scene on YouTube and you'll know exactly what I'm talking about.)

For those of you reading this who have not yet seen *Basket Case*, you're probably thinking it sounds a lot like a wacky, low-budget Tarantino-esque revenge film with latex puppet monsters—and, for the first half of the movie, you'd be right. It's during the second half, immediately after the flashback, that the tone shifts into something much more dark and insidious. This is where my problems with the way *Basket Case* handles its subject

matter and core characters start to arise. While Belial is introduced as a menacing, disproportionately angry figure, a look into his past paints him in a much more sympathetic light. While his rampage cannot be condoned, we at least understand what drove him to it. They also make a point of showing us that Belial generally leaves innocent people alone and will not attack anyone who has not personally wronged him. This changes during the final act, in which he displays predatory behaviour of his own towards Duane's neighbour Casey (Beverly Bonner) and especially Duane's girlfriend Sharon (Terri Susan Smith), who is viciously mauled and left for dead in the film's shocking climax.

Even if one were to make the argument that Belial was acting out of misguided curiosity as opposed to pure sadism, entitlement or spite towards his more romantically successful brother, it would seem that the film is condemning him

for having any sense of sexuality in the first place. Scenes that depict Belial showing sexual interest are exaggerated into something gratuitous, unsettling and voyeuristic, which dramatically alters the atmosphere of a story that was, up until then, morbidly funny and quite sad. It feels like *Basket Case* no longer knows what it wants to be or what it's trying to accomplish, and I find myself asking why the movie would bother showing us Belial's tragic history if it was going to demonize him shortly thereafter. So much emphasis was placed on the fact that he did not deserve to be treated that way, yet the beliefs of Dr. Kutter and Mr. Bradley seem to be confirmed at the end—that Belial is not worthy of being considered human, and that he is an abomination doomed to hurt everyone who comes into contact with him. Worse yet, Duane is even shown parroting some of their father's beliefs in one scene, going so far as to laugh at Belial's misfortune and calling him

names. It is not brought up again, but we do see Casey's uneasy reaction to the mockery, hinting that we're not supposed to be taking Duane's side.

The manner of which Duane's character is handled is another thing that leaves me feeling not only stumped, but frustrated as well. It would be one thing if *Basket Case* held both Duane and Belial equally accountable for the destruction that was caused, but it seems all (or least most) fault has been placed onto the outcast twin while the outwardly "normal" one is painted as yet another victim of his brother's madness. What the film seems to forget is that Duane is not only complacent in Belial's revenge scheme, but spends the first thirty or so minutes actively coaxing and encouraging him to go through with it, even going so far as to give him specific instructions—which seems to imply that Duane has a lot more say in their plan than he lets on. It isn't until Duane finds a life

outside of Belial in Sharon that he begins showing disinterest in the killing spree and openly expresses a desire for freedom.

These aren't things that make Duane a bad character. In fact, I feel these are factors that make him much more nuanced and interesting. The problem is that the narrative structure seems insistent on presenting Duane and Belial in black-and-white. We have to rely on Duane to be the translator of Belial's motives because the latter is unable to speak for himself. Because we identify with Duane and have no other way of understanding Belial prior to the flashback, we take everything Duane says about his brother to be the truth. It does not cross our minds that Duane may be manipulating information or trying to absolve himself of his guilt by projecting it onto an easy scapegoat. With this in mind, Duane suddenly seems like much less of a victim and Belial less of a monster; or, alternatively,

the brothers may represent two different types of monstrosity.

Belial is monstrous in the tangible sense. In the words of American horror scholar John Edgar Browning, "Monsters are cultural constructions of the terrible that define what it is we subconsciously fear and what it is we're told to hate or love." Belial represents the "Other." He is the physical embodiment of anxiety towards societal norms, forced into the margins because he cannot exist according to conventional standards. Those who have been disenfranchised and alienated by the mainstream may identify with Belial's struggles, recognizing parts of themselves in his "Otherness" and in the way his existence is repressed. Watching Belial take vengeance upon his oppressors may act as a form of catharsis for these viewers, allowing them an outlet without turning them into monsters themselves.

Duane, meanwhile, is monstrous in a far more disturbing, realistic sense. He is the monster who could easily be our neighbour, our co-worker, or even someone from our own family. He walks among us undetected, a ticking time-bomb of simmering rage prepared to go off at the most unexpected provocation. When attention is brought to his wrongdoings, he'll deflect it onto anything and everything that could possibly remove him of fault—and in Duane's case, he sees Belial as a convenient means of doing so. Much like his father before him, Duane now views social conformity as the ideal and "Otherness" as something that is shameful and deserving of punishment. Therefore he is able to rationalize that any abnormalities within himself are actually Belial's doing and that Belial must suffer for it, denying himself of his own monstrosity and making even worse monsters out of them both in the process.

The eventual *Basket Case* sequel, *Basket Case 2* (1990) (released nearly a full decade after its predecessor), does seem to acknowledge these themes and even makes an attempt to rectify them. In doing so, it brings up an entirely different slew of concepts and issues. That, however, is another piece for another time. For now, we must put all Freudian metaphors aside and remember the baseline story—which is, at its heart, about the different manifestations of trauma, the weaponization of one's "Otherness" and the struggle to moderate tension within our interpersonal relationships.

If we wrote stories like this with the conscious understanding that humans can be monstrous and monsters can be humans, we could absorb not only cinema in a richer sense, but also the media we consume in general. g



The Persistence of Memory

Ghostly Histories & The Politics of Catastrophe in Art Imitating Life

by Valeska Griffiths

Could you thrive in a dystopian future? Detailing your apocalyptic survival plan is a common and entertaining thought experiment, but it takes more than a Prepper weekend workshop, a sharp machete, and a closet full of bottled water to ensure survival. When disasters strike, existing governmental policies, infrastructure, and access to resources play a large part in determining who lives...and who dies. And the foundations of these determinants were laid long ago.

Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), James DeMonaco's *Purge* series, and Nalo Hopkinson's 1998 novel *Brown Girl in the Ring* deal with the aftermaths of natural or institutional crises that bear catastrophic change primarily to certain groups, bringing into stark relief class disparities in society that often fall along racial lines. When the levee breaks, when the storm hits, when the Purge begins, or when the wall goes up, it becomes impossible for even the most privileged to deny the

gaps separating the dominant and the marginalized, even if they are unwilling to remember why they exist. Read alongside Hurricane Katrina's devastating effect on poor black communities of New Orleans, these texts demonstrate how catastrophic effects fall disproportionately on populations that are *already* marginalized, largely due to social neglect and harmful governmental policies. This does not happen in a vacuum; histories of oppression and their material consequences create the conditions of possibility for this imbalance.

American History: The Ghost Haunting the American Dream

The reality of life in North America differs wildly depending upon whether you are middle-class and white, or poor and racialized. One may have the backpack full of privilege and a bank balance that cushions them from the need to question wealth inequity and strong undercurrents of white supremacy, but the other (or, often, *Other*) breathes, battles, and may

be battered by these truths daily. Obviously, not all racialized people are poor, nor are all white people middle-class. However, to speak of class in North America as if there were no racial connections is to ignore the mechanisms and processes by which certain people have historically been targeted, politically and culturally, in ways that limit access to opportunities. These histories are a palimpsest upon which the state of being racialized is imprinted. Spectres of colonialism, slavery, and "yellow peril" still seep from the holes rotting through society's veneer of progress; as Avery Gordon noted in her 1997 book, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, power dynamics haunt the geographies of "any historically embedded society [and] are never as transparently clear as the names we give to them imply" (p.3).

Legacies of discrimination that guide beliefs about certain populations may frame structural inequalities as pragmatic. If a group is discursively dehumanized in the



dominant cultural imagination, it is easier for the dominant culture to cast them aside as an *Other*, whether consciously or unconsciously. They may then be seen to exist outside of “the nation” and their effect on “real” citizens weighed and considered. The criminalization of black people, for instance, is a tactic wherein representations of black people as victims of white supremacy are, as Carol Stabile observes in her 2007 article “No Shelter From the Storm”, historically inverted “so that attention [is] focused on the criminal behavior not of white aggressors but of black people themselves” (p.686). These processes happen in plain sight yet may seem strangely slippery or difficult to pin down, as North America remains so deeply in denial about its white supremacy that to name these practices for what they are is often considered *verboten* in polite (or Conservative) company.

“When the levee breaks, when the storm hits, when the Purge begins, or when the wall goes up, it becomes impossible for even the most privileged to deny the gaps separating the dominant and the marginalized.

Dehumanizing discourses work to effectively racialize poor white populations as well, as demonstrated by the eugenics movement during the so-called Progressive Era, when poor whites were sterilized in order to prevent the further proliferation of faulty hereditary “germ plasm” (Paul, 1998). Though the dominant classes in North America are made up of descendants of immigrants, these discourses were also used against newer immigrants during the Industrial boom, a historical precedent that remains largely intact, although modern versions focus on immigrants of colour, said to be “criminals”, “terrorists”, or “not the best” people, either taking jobs from “real” citizens or, conversely, not taking jobs at all and living off of the largess of the state (despite ample evidence to the contrary).



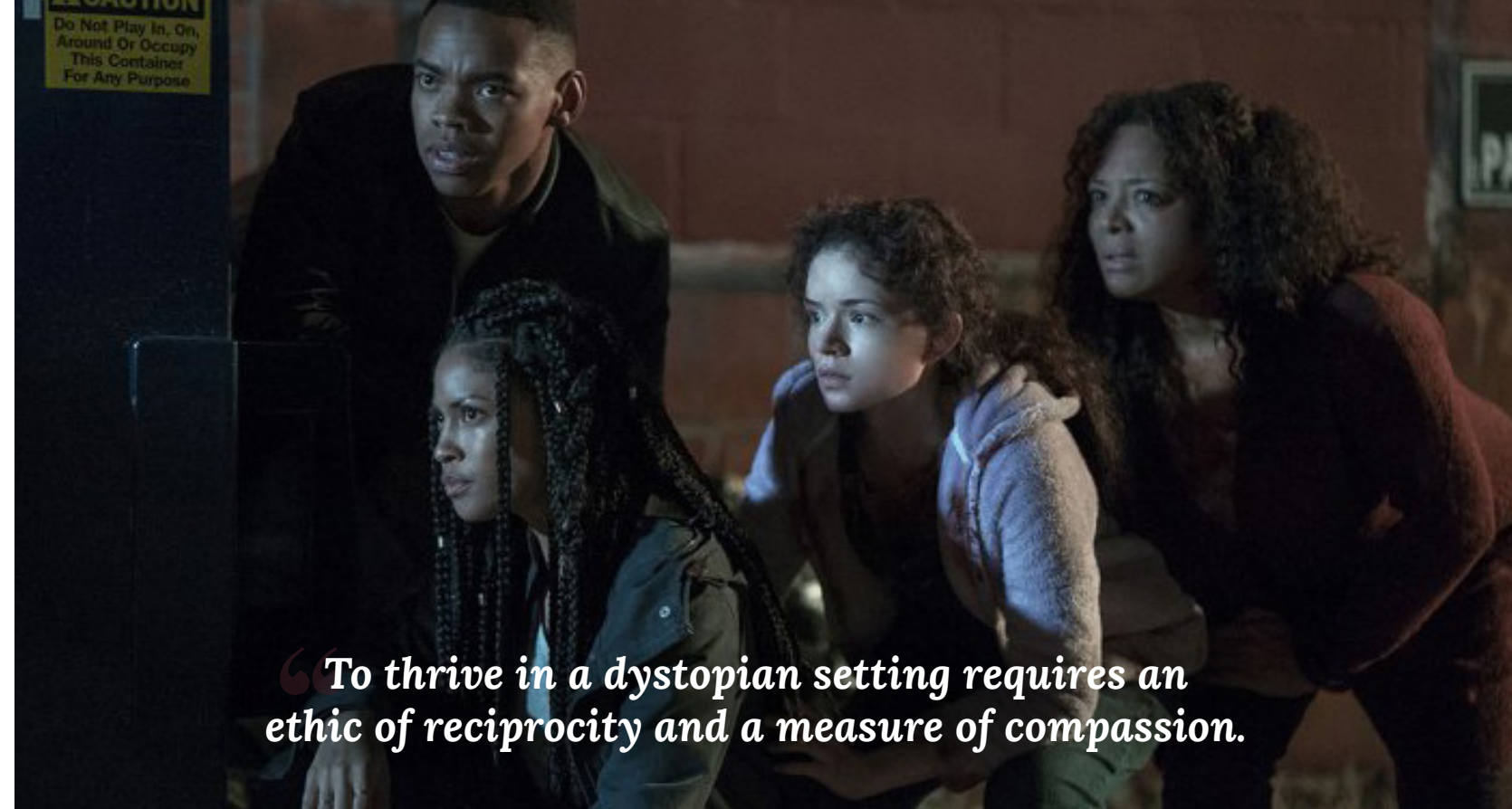
Unfair practices, policies, and beliefs are so deeply embedded in the national psyche that they may not be widely viewed as being *particularly* discriminatory, regardless of the man-made conditions of possibility that led to certain groups being *particularly* susceptible. Individualistic neoliberal ideology conflates lack of success with lack of hard work, bad choices, or poor character, a fiction that masks an economic system reliant on exploitative wages, as well as the racist undercurrents flowing beneath the surface that quietly guide the stream of wealth. Neoliberalism’s false prophecies encourage a stigmatization of the poor further complicated by the racial biases. Historical beliefs and policies that have marginalized, disenfranchised, sterilized, enslaved, or colonized these groups are largely absent in neoliberal analysis or the mainstream press (Stabile, 2007), yet these histories haunt current power dynamics—visibly or invisibly, depending upon whether you are privileged enough to have the luxury of forgetting. For example: debates about American welfare in the 1980s villainized poor black women by drawing on Antebellum-era stereotypes of the oversexed, conniving “Jezebel”. These types of representations are best conceptualized as “cultural [fantasies]’ manipulated by the dominant to defend their positions of privilege” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2002, p.796). By leveraging historical prejudices, the government was able to paint welfare

as an undeserved hand-out rewarding bad behaviour, rather than necessary assistance granted to marginalized citizens in legitimate need.

Histories of discrimination fuel current realities: longstanding stereotypes mobilize the dominant class against policies that would reduce disparities. In this soil of neglect, marginalization, and discursive violence are the seeds of uneven catastrophic effects sown. The absence of effective social safety nets exacerbate the vulnerability of those whose earning capacity may be limited, and the existence of these nets remains precarious when historical processes of discrimination are reiterated and reinscribed by segments of society that greedily hoard their social and financial capital.

Uneven Geographies: Mapping Socioeconomic Landscapes

The communities in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, the *Purge* series, and *Brown Girl in the Ring* are made up of these marginalized groups. That *Beasts* takes place in Louisiana and features a catastrophic storm makes its connection to Hurricane Katrina impossible to ignore. While the film’s community, the Bathtub, appears post-racial, its members still live in abject poverty, cut off from government-run healthcare, education, or social welfare. Their physical separation from the state via a levee is a more extreme version of the existing separation between middle-class residential areas and the slums; the urban and



“To thrive in a dystopian setting requires an ethic of reciprocity and a measure of compassion.

rural poor (and their urgent needs) are invisible to the affluent unless they choose to seek them out. This dynamic is also visible in *Brown Girl*—which details the middle-class pursuit of “slumming”—and in the *Purge* films, where marginalized communities are less-equipped to protect themselves once the ominous sirens sound.

“The urban and rural poor (and their urgent needs) are invisible to the affluent unless they choose to seek them out.

Beasts’ levee demarcates the borders of those included in the nation-state; those on the outside must fend for themselves. Young protagonist Hushpuppy (Quvenzhané Wallis) remarks: “They built the wall that cuts us off. They think we all gonna drown down here...but we ain’t going nowhere.” The levee is easily read as a metaphor for economic policies used to keep the poor in poverty; it bars the people of the Bathtub from the opportunities and protections the state grants its “real” citizens. When the storm arrives and devastates the Bathtub, the state remains unharmed. The poor are always most vulnerable to atmospheric and economic

violence. During Hurricane Katrina, the poverty of those most heavily affected was directly implicated in their inability to evacuate. Like the so-called “welfare queens” of the 1980s, they were characterized simultaneously as irresponsible and responsible for their own fate. But their “failure” to leave New Orleans was rather the failure of the state to create conditions of possibility facilitating it. Many of those who stayed relied on public transportation, lived in institutions that did not facilitate evacuation, or had disabilities affecting mobility. As Eric Cazdyn emphasized in his 2007 article “Disaster, Crisis, Revolution”, the material consequences of this systemic neglect can be seen throughout the history of the United States in the effects of other natural disasters “whose fallout [is] social—products of human choices, political systems, even cultural assumptions” (p.648). Post-disaster aid also reflects these disparities. Kriston Capps’s October 2018 *CityLab* piece, “Why Are These Tiny Towns Getting So Much Hurricane Harvey Aid” documents the disproportionate amount of funds disbursed to smaller, wealthier, predominantly white towns versus larger cities with more diverse populations, and Jason Cortés’s 2018 article “Puerto Rico: Hurricane Maria and the Promise of Disposability”

provides an overview of the Trump Administration’s appalling neglect of Puerto Rico, a territory of the United States, in the wake of Hurricane Maria. The magnified effects of disaster felt by the marginalized are both predictable and logical; earthquakes and tsunamis are most damaging to houses constructed of low-quality materials, tornadoes are more lethal in trailer parks than in posh subdivisions (Stabile, 2007), the consequences of flooding are exacerbated by proximity to Superfund sites (Johnson, 2018), colonial policies can result in criminally lackluster relief efforts (Cortés, 2018), and consequence-free, 12-hour crime sprees are most terrifying to those who cannot afford a top-of-the-line security system.

Communities in the *Purge* series are similarly divided along racial and class lines. Where the wealthy white family in *The Purge* (2013) can afford to armour their home and install high-definition cameras, families in *The Purge: Anarchy* (2014), *The Purge: Election Year* (2016), and *The First Purge* (2018) benefit from no such protections. And it isn’t only the victims: wealthy Purgers are able to invest in high-tech gear and vehicles to ensure their survival—and increase their kill count.

“ This complex, paradoxical boundary figure lying between two states is a metaphor that may extend to the marginalized underclass as well, even apart from the Marxist interpretation of zombie as labourer afflicted with false consciousness.



While the Purge may be sold to the American public as a neutral policy that affects all Americans equally, the series painstakingly highlights both the discriminatory aims of the practice (culling the population of specific groups) and the conditions that lead to uneven impacts (economic disparity paired with racism). As Gerard McMurray's *The First Purge* reveals, the Purge pilot project was staged in a working-class, urban area with a predominantly black population, rather than in the more affluent suburbs. It's not difficult to figure out why.

As Stabile (2007) affirms, the fallout from catastrophe must be viewed as being at least partially controllable by public and corporate policies. As these policies complicated the evacuation of poor Katrina victims, so too does the levee exacerbate the damage to the Bathtub, and the wealth gap divide the wealthy and the poor into uneven victims of the Purge. Tellingly, it is by destroying the levee that the protagonists of *Beasts* halt the destruction of their society. If structural policies and decisions haunted by racist histories had not tilted the effects of Hurricanes Katrina, Harvey, and Maria so heavily, what might the aftermaths have looked like?

The Zombie: Rebelling From the In-Between

The community described in *Brown Girl* is also cut off from wider society. Walled off from the surrounding areas by roadblocks, the Toronto core has been abandoned by the affluent. As seen during Katrina, the population left behind includes those who lack the means to relocate and those who are historically under-served—the street-involved, the poor, and people with substance addictions. *Brown Girl* also calls upon additional histories in its depictions of Caribbean *obeah* and the making of zombies, which traces a direct line to the West African spiritual practice of vodou, carried to what is now present-day Haiti by the transnational slave trade. The zombie is a figure of exploited labour, as illustrated in the character of Melba, a woman robbed of her autonomy and consciousness. However, the zombie signifier may also be linked to the history of Haitian revolution, allowing the zombie, paradoxically, to also stand as a symbol for autonomy and rebellion, as Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry conclude in their 2008 essay “The Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism”. By calling upon the spirits to assist her

while she is on “the bridge between worlds” (Hopkinson, 1998, p.221), the character of Ti-Jeanne rebels against her father's injunction to give up her life and become his helpless slave. The zombie is “a figure defined by its liminality” (Lauro & Embry, 2008, p.91), straddling the boundary between one state and the next. It is simultaneously linked to and drawn between *being* and *un-being*; a figure of uncanniness.

“ The fallout from catastrophe must be viewed as being at least partially controllable by public and corporate policies.

This complex, paradoxical boundary figure lying between two states is a metaphor that may extend to the marginalized underclass, even apart from the Marxist interpretation of zombie as labourer afflicted with false consciousness. Peripheral to society and yet living within the state, the poor, the street-involved, the colonized, and those living with disabilities or substance addiction are both *there* and *not-there*. Their existence within the state (and as national citizens deserving of rights) is politically ignored or disavowed, despite their

presence in every city or township. These populations remain liminal; their acceptance and acknowledgment as full citizens frustrated by lingering historical prejudices, the prevailing ethos of neoliberal individualism, and a resulting cultural apathy. In a society allegedly designed around ideas of equality and democracy, their enduring status as citizens-yet-not, subjects-and-nonsubjects (Lauro & Embry, 2008) raises questions about the rhetoric of “equality” espoused by the state.

Community Efforts: The Healing Power of Resistance

The communities in the Bathtub, *Brown Girl's* Toronto core, and the *Purge* series work to resist the reiteration of historical domination by instituting ethics of cooperation and reciprocity, rather than individualism and scapegoating. In *Beasts*, children are taught that we are all small moving parts of a giant universe and to take care of people “smaller and sweeter” than themselves. Thus are the ideals of a cooperative community imparted to its youngest members. The Toronto core is likewise committed to the principle of cooperation; citizens trade literature, medicine, food, and other items. In the *Purge* series,

families and communities work together to fend off attackers and keep each other safe. While city-run services are unavailable, community residents work together to provide their own mobile medical services. By breaking the cycles of discrimination and marginalization that feed into and off of each other, the communities in these texts reveal the emptiness of neoliberal rhetoric.

To thrive in a dystopian setting requires an ethic of reciprocity and a measure of compassion. Neoliberal individualism cannot guarantee one's survival in this setting, let alone success. The historical legacies that bolster selective marginalization against the poor and the racialized have been soundly rejected by these communities. Though potentially existing on the brink of actual starvation, these groups resist notions of starvation economies, systems based on competition for limited resources. Instead, they endorse resource-sharing. Despite their grim narratives, these texts offer a glimpse into an optimistic alternate framework for society, one that encourages the strength and health of its collective members, rather than a handful of individuals.

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Anti-Blackness, Microaggressions, Capitalism & Zombies

My Takeaways From George A. Romero's Work

by **Monika Estrella Negra**

We can look at the progression of Black representation in horror through George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). George A. Romero was one of the key directors who used the horror genre as a means of political commentary. The depiction of the zombie was the most similar to the actual identity of the Haitian zombie, though Romero insisted that the creatures were more "ghoul-like" than zombie-like. Choosing to cast Duane Jones as the lead character, Ben, was not only a deviation from the formula used by most film directors at the time, it was quite revolutionary. Duane and his co-star Judith O'Dea broke with the stigma of the Black man being the threat, surprising audiences at the time and arguably sparking discourse and controversy. The two characters were placed together in an abandoned house for safety, attempting to survive in a world that was set on destroying them.

For a white woman to be alone in a room with a Black man came as a shock; the tragic history of Black men being murdered for false accusations of rape or for merely glancing at a white woman still remained an open wound in the fabric of the United States. Emmett Till had been murdered just over a decade earlier, with no one brought to justice for the crime. Jim Crow and segregation were still fresh in the minds of most. For Romero to

purposefully situate these characters alone together in a home in a country where segregation was as American as apple pie was heroic.

The character of Ben also provided a first in documenting the consistent gaslighting that Blacks endure when in leadership roles. Every action of his is questioned. While that may seem standard in situations where groups find themselves in crisis, it is a reality most Black people experience every day. Duane Jones' character being able to call the shots—"You can be the boss down there, I'm boss up here"—is an override of white male authority that probably made a lot of audience members wiggle in their seats. Historically, in cinema, Black characters had always been depicted as subservient when faced with majority (white) protagonists. Ben makes it known to the entire house that he is in charge, and rightfully so. While the house was eventually besieged and Ben was left to die, he ends up becoming the sole survivor. The state of the world wins, however—the reality of the world to a Black person, that is. Even though Ben was able to survive the night, he is ruthlessly killed by cops—life imitates art, once again!

Black people in the Americas have never been afforded the luxury of "standing their ground", even if their lives are at stake. Hurricane

Katrina in New Orleans is a prime example. When residents were stranded without food and water, many decided to take resources from businesses. The majority Black victims were quickly labelled by the media as "rampant animals" and "dangerous looters". In response, many whites who were partially unaffected by the storm, shot and killed "looters" who they assumed to be dangerous. It doesn't stop there, of course—every day, Black people are injured or killed by those who suspect them to be dangerous. It makes sense that even in a zombie apocalypse, Black people would not be safe.

“The character of Ben also provided a first in documenting the consistent gaslighting that Blacks endure when in leadership roles.”

This leads us to the brutal opening scene of *Dawn of the Dead*. In perfect form, the film opens with the evolution of the state's continuing demonization and criminalization of Blackness. A mixture of cops and Black people became zombies, resulting in a raid that murders both human and zombie alike. At the time, the heroin epidemic plagued the majority of inner cities and resulted in the 'white flight' to suburban neighborhoods.




Choosing to cast Duane Jones was not only a deviation from the formula used by most film directors at the time, it was quite revolutionary.

Whites were bombarded with multiple stories of violence, drug infestation, and poverty that took on the color of Blackness. The zombie also took on a more menacing and terrifying aesthetic, one that differed from the 'clean cut' zombie of *Night of the Living Dead*. This could be due to the grittiness most cities developed into and is also a nod to the alienation many Blacks felt by racist zoning laws. Multiple policies that were enacted post Civil Rights movement (blatantly sugarcoated and reformed Jim Crow-esque legislature), resulted in the Black character maintaining the role of subhuman entity within an otherwise 'civilized' nation.

Instead of dealing with the inequalities within the system, our survivors head to the mall, a bastion of the consumerist culture that gave

rise to the "haves and have-nots" of the '80s. Despite the poverty endemic to communities that are systematically disenfranchised, whites were able to live in isolated suburbs complete with shopping malls, corporate office buildings, and sports bars. This migration was dubbed 'white flight'—which I chuckle at, considering they were sincerely running for their lives. Romero's *Land of the Dead* (2005), the most underrated film of the early 2000s, takes a different twist. Fiddler's Green became the gross representation of 'urban renewal' during a time of great crisis (the recession and the Iraq War). Taking place a few years after the apocalypse, the super-rich seem to have successfully segregated themselves into a giant, luxurious high-rise building. The 'lower class' are situated at the base of the high-rise,

-serving as a type of barrier against a possible zombie attack. Interestingly enough, gentrification had just taken on a new form in major cities across the U.S. and the displacement of many people of colour, poor people, and marginalized groups was the result. This was precisely the opposite of white flight that was seen in *Dawn of the Dead*—yet another example of Romero's radical screenwriting.

George A. Romero was and always will be a political film director in my mind. Even though there are claims that he did not intend to racialize/politicize *Night of the Living Dead*, the film has spawned many opinion pieces that have held a mirror to our own realities. It is my hope that more zombie films are created that reflect the inequalities still faced by marginalized communities today. 

Bursting onto the scene in 2017 like a bat out of hell, Salem Horror Fest has quickly developed a well-deserved reputation as a must-attend event for the horror community. Boasting an enviable assortment of special guests, plentiful screenings, and the ideal setting for a spooky celebration, it has become a favourite festival of the Grim team. I spoke to festival director Kevin Lynch about Salem Horror Fest's programming, reception, and the power of fear.

2019 marks Salem Horror Fest's third year and the event has grown in scope since it first launched. How would you like to see the festival grow and expand in the coming years?

Salem is a unique place. For such a notable and frequently visited destination, it's still a small city. As much as we'd love to be the SXSW of Halloween, there are some practical logistics we need to navigate like hotel inventory, congestion, and unpredictable weather. This year, we'll be introducing a more convention-like experience in partnership with the Salem Waterfront Hotel called the Haunted Harbor. It will be our headquarters during the festival for attendees to meet celebrities, browse vendors, and check out additional programming. We'll still have our main events held at CinemaSalem, the Peabody Essex Museum, Count Orlok's Nightmare Gallery, and the Salem Visitor Center—new this year!

Fear & Film in Witch City: Kevin Lynch Discusses



by Valeska Griffiths

What has the local community response been like? As mentioned, you worked with several other businesses and institutions in the area. How did these collaborations come about? Has Salem wholeheartedly embraced the Salem Horror Fest?

I moved to Salem in 2006 and have since produced and promoted hundreds of events. I started in the arts, theatre, and music. For a few years, I had an LGBT event company that hosted events in the Greater Boston area, including some epic Halloween parties at the Hawthorne Hotel with Sharon Needles. This has allowed me to collaborate with so many people and institutions in the area building a track record of successful events and relationships as a result.

People are happy to see that we're offering something counter to witch exploitation with a social purpose and educational component. October is batshit nuts, so we all stand together to survive the month.

I'm always impressed by your programming choices—the festival features a perfect mix of classic and contemporary programming, always

thoughtfully arranged by theme, and often accompanied by additional content such as panel discussions or local entertainers. What is your programming decision process?

Thank you. I look around to see what kinds of cultural fears are bubbling to the surface and try to match them with certain films. Letterboxd has become my go-to app! I have endless lists of films categorized by all kinds of themes. I'm constantly watching and discovering new and old films. Last year, I averaged one movie a day.

That's impressive. Salem Horror Fest has a strong academic component which sets it apart from many other film festivals. Why is it so important to include these lectures and discussions?

One of our key missions is to promote critical thinking and media literacy through conversations about film. Regardless of the filmmakers intent, art is a product of a certain place in time that can reveal so much about our culture and society. The lectures further place our program in context and allow attendees to see how many opportunities the genre has to offer people who want to get more involved.

#KnowFear is the fest's tagline. I understand that you have a personal relationship with trauma, after living through an intense car accident. What does the phrase Know Fear mean to you? What do you think we gain through becoming more intimately acquainted with our own fears?

Fear is one of the most prevalent and motivating forces in our lives. It influences who we are and everything we do. It's weaponized to suppress entire communities while emboldening others. Given the history here in Salem, we see it as our responsibility to remind the world

what fear is capable of when left unchecked. Often times, we mistake fear for something else: insecurity, anger, survival. We internalize and cast blame. Psychology shows that fear is an evolutionary chemical reaction in the brain to protect ourselves from harm. If we can better recognize and understand fear, we can better love ourselves and reduce the vitriol and violence against others.

I look around to see what kinds of cultural fears are bubbling to the surface and try to match them with certain films.

As the political climate grows more dire and hard-won rights are in greater jeopardy by the day, the horror genre becomes an increasingly vital artistic outlet for processing sociocultural anxieties. What new trends in horror do you predict we'll see in the coming years?

Now that we're two years into the Trump presidency (feels like 20), we are starting to get films that started development after the election. I think we'll see zombies and cannibalism make a comeback—anything dealing with the deepening divide between communities. Jordan Peele's new film *Us* is a great example. The Tethering. We are going to be reminded of how

close we are to our primitive state.

I also expect Mother Nature's revenge becoming more prevalent in the years ahead as extreme weather continues to take lives and destroy people's way of life.

Horror is a genre that lends itself beautifully to the stories of the outsiders. What are some of your favourite queer horror films (be they explicit or subtextual)?

Carrie is a hugely important film to me. I love some of the obvious ones like *Freddy's Revenge*, *Fright Night*, *Rope*, *The Haunting*, and *Bride of Frankenstein*. *Cruising* and *Stripped To Kill* are considered problematic but I really connected with them. I'd add *Cat People*, *The Neon Demon*, *Tragedy Girls*, *Ginger Snaps*, *ParaNorman*, and the documentary *Tickled*.

You're a strong advocate for the Salem community—how do you think Salem's historical background has shaped its spirit?

Everyone knows about the witch trials, but there are a lot of other fascinating aspects to our history. The Massachusetts Bay Colony is largely responsible for everything the United States has become—for better and worse. Salem used to be a crucial trading port that opened access to the outside world bringing aspects of different cultures from all over the globe. Today, you will find Salem is an extremely progressive and welcoming city with transplants from all over the world. It's a very entrepreneurial city full of curious minds.

Learn more about Salem Horror Fest and purchase tickets at salemhorrorfest.com.



Kevin Lynch // Patrick Sporleder



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The Day We Fell

by Jennifer Williams

When the world fell they tried to cage us, living and dead alike. We were all dangerous, they said; all of us holding the potential for rot and ruin. Never mind that we were passive wanderers. Dead eyes and dead mouths feeding on the flattery that put us here in the first place. Our chests gaped open, cavernous and grey.

Be still, they had said, back when we still breathed. Our bodies twitched, shying away from their touch. They held us in their rough grips, forcing us down into graves made of candied hearts and gas station bouquets. We would know their love, whether we wanted to or not.

Their eyes would seek out our moving parts, would feast on supple flesh. And we would let them. Because we were told to. Because that's what boys do. Because isn't that all a girl's ever wanted? To be seen? By them?

And if it wasn't enough, if rough hands and wandering eyes couldn't tame us, then surely their words would do the trick. Poison darts laced with sugar so sweet. "Not you," they would say. "You're not like the others." Our pride would flare and fan and for a moment we'd forget ourselves, comfortable in the silence that followed.

Until that day when a bullet took a sister down. And then another. And another. Because she said "I know" instead of saying "thank you." Because her face rested the wrong way. Because her leggings were too tight or because she had the audacity to say no.

We bled. Crimson tendrils of our former selves pooling at the feet of the living. We stared up at the sky with our doll eyes turned milky white. Each cloud that passed was a dream, wispy and unreachable. Our ribs, shorn from Adam, cracked like thunder, splitting us open for all to see.

For a time we stayed that way. We watched as they stepped over us. marvelled at the tread of their shoes, little labyrinths pocked with dirt and stones. Our limp bodies lolled as they toed us, mocking our fragrant corpses. Our hunger grew in this new way of being, became a thing unto itself, lifting us till we rose, one dead girl after the other.

We shambled. We moaned. We stretched out our arms, seeking. We wanted someone to hear. We wanted someone to see. *Listen*, our open mouths implored. *Become*, our teeth begged.

Our new bodies frightened them, sent them scurrying to the shadows like bugs. Girls with rib cages spread like wings. Girls whose feet moved without permission. Girls with no hearts on which the living could feed. Unnatural things, we were. Abominations. Perverse under their watchful eyes.

The world shifted under our weight, plates sliding against each other in a seismic symphony. Our stench clogged their lungs, made them choke as they breathed us in. Night came and didn't leave. They called us by our names, said them like a prayer as we became the monsters they always knew we were.

They sent us sacrifices dressed in white. Girls with blood on their lips and resistance sewn into their skins. Girls immune to flattery, who wore defiance like armour. We took them in, our new daughters in this new world. We fed them what bits of ourselves we had left, shoring them for the coming storm. And when all our meat was gone, when our hollow bones fell to the ground below, sucked dry by hungry mouths, we felt glad. We knew that these girls would not survive.

No. These girls would live. *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 Gracie Jarvis & Abbey Brown of *Good Mourning, Nancy*.

Listen: <https://goodmourningnancy.com>

What sparked the creation of *Good Mourning, Nancy*?

Gracie: Frustration and desperation. I was working an office job at the time and was feeling stagnant. At first, I began the podcast as a fun, creative outlet. When it started to gain traction, I quit my office job to pursue it full-time. I was 29 and determined to find a career worthwhile before turning 30 and, since there weren't any jobs for me, I created my own, I guess. I remember thinking "All I want to do is drink coffee and talk about feminism in horror films with friends!" So, I contacted Abbey right away. Our families have been close for many years. She's always felt like a sister to me. I knew she would be perfect for the show.

Abbey: Gracie asked me to be a part of this project and I was more than happy to participate. I was going through a really hard time in my life and I just felt like I needed a creative outlet to keep me motivated and to keep my brain going, and I think it was just serendipitous timing. Also, I love Gracie with my whole heart and we've been friends since literally forever, so the thought of taking on a project like this with one of my oldest friends was like a dream come true!

That's really sweet! There is a great depth and breadth of information provided in each show. What's your research process? Do you plan out who'll cover each topic beforehand?

G: We usually plan our line-up a few weeks ahead of time. It gives us room to change it up a bit if we feel a certain film might fit better for any current events that pop up and also to



read or order any books that we don't already have. If there's any chance for Abbey to discuss the psychological or artistic side of things, I give that to her! She knows more about that than I do! I like to research more of the historical, literary, and social themes.

A: It usually takes about a week to put the script together. We both add topics that we feel really cover what we're trying to convey about our interpretation of the films. Gracie works on the podcast full-time, so she does a lot of the research and really shapes the show, and then I go in and add my thoughts and little bits of research here and there. I'm really interested in the scientific, psychological, artistic side of the films, and Gracie is really great at identifying the social, political, and literary themes. But, to be really honest, Gracie is doing a majority of the research for both regular episodes and the specials, because I also have a full-time job aside from the podcast. She's amazing and so focused when it comes to that stuff, because it truly is a job in itself. She puts in a lot of hours!

Speaking of your specific interests, can you tell us a little bit about your educational backgrounds?

G: I have a BA in English and a minor in Theatre. I also studied theatre and sketch comedy in New York City. I love reading, writing, and performing! I've always been very interested in Women and Gender Studies, too. I remember being really young and having a deep desire to help women feel more empowered. That's always been a big part of what I've wanted to do in life. A few years ago, I started to seriously look into getting a master's degree in Drama Therapy. I wanted to help women who had been through trauma and abuse to express

themselves through performance art. That fell through miserably but that's around the time I started the podcast. Horror is one of the only film genres that consistently shows women as the heroes. I think it's important to talk about that! Horror movies give women the opportunity to face their abusers and fears in a safe environment—much like performance art.

A: I studied Psychology and Art in college, and wanted to pursue a career in Biopsychology, but college wasn't really for me. I loved my time learning and experiencing the world of psych, but I didn't have enough time for my creative endeavours and that really started to eat away at me. So, I got a degree and left. I have worked in and around the food industry for basically my entire life—I'm very passionate about the world of food and creating things with my hands, because I'm also a painter. The ability to provide sustenance for people, be it in the form of food or podcasts or art is really important to me.

"Provide sustenance"—I love that. I also love how unabashedly feminist the show is. How do you think your politics have shaped the way that you approach genre film?

G: I'm definitely more critical of genre films now than I was before. Horror is very important, but it still has a long way to go when it comes to positive representation. We need more genre stories written and directed by women, by people of colour, by members of the LGBT+ community. There are so many stories to tell by so many different kinds of people. I want to hear and see all of those stories.

A: I had a stint when I was in college of not caring about politics whatsoever. I was really passionate about human and animal rights in high school, and then I just stopped focusing on that and really started to hone in on my schoolwork. Then, when I left college to work in the restaurant industry (which is full of a variety of people including immigrants, gay, trans, and non-binary humans), I started to notice that the political stuff really matters. That whole time, I had been watching horror and really taking in the genre as a whole and I could see the patterns that horror films followed, and they really matched up with the sociopolitical fears of the time that they were released. Then, when we began working on the podcast and I woke up on my birthday to the news that Trump was our president, I was like...okay, it's time to really get back to the fiery feminist that I was when I was younger. *GMN* really lit a fire under me and got me motivated to spread the message that there's no room for the current hateful rhetoric in our politics anymore. I think the podcast does a really good job of inspiring people who might be on the fence about politics and certain human rights to really take a step back and say "I need to be more tolerant and accepting of my neighbours." The really great thing about the horror genre is that there isn't really a lot that's taboo, so people are pretty open-minded. And the horror genre is SO social that it is, in my opinion, a good way to open up conversations about the direction that our country is headed.



Did you have podcasting and audio experience coming in? What software and equipment do you use?

G: We had zero experience going in (and we're still learning). I am lucky to have multiple family members who know what they are doing! I've always used Adobe Audition for editing and I can't imagine using anything else, to be honest.

A: I've learned everything from Gracie and her husband, Luke. A lot of our audio has been trial and error and, with remote recording, we're trying new methods to get the cleanest sound possible.

What advice would you give to women looking to start their own podcasts?

G: Don't be afraid. I know that sounds cliché and easier said than done, but if you can get over that initial hump of pure fear then you can do anything. I love that TED Talk by Reshma Saujani about teaching young girls bravery, not perfection. We're all so worried about being perfect all the time and, because of that, we tend to just...not do anything. I know a few women who haven't started their dream podcasts because they're afraid that they won't have good audio, that no one will listen, or that they'll say something that others—especially other feminists—won't find agreeable. They want to be perfect. So, that's my advice: be brave!

A: If you have an idea or interest, there should be a podcast about it. The worst that could happen is you learn how to record and produce a podcast and nobody listens. But chances are pretty good that if you keep working at it and are passionate, you'll gain an audience. And we need more women in the industry; it makes the environment rich.

Totally agreed (obviously)! Can you pick one episode to recommend as an introduction to *Good Mourning, Nancy*?

G: A lot of our listeners reached out to us to let us know that Episode 42: *The VVitch* (2015) - Marvelous Well is their favourite so far! Personally, my favourite episodes are on *Frankenhooker* (1990) and *Near Dark* (1987).

A: *The VVitch* was one of my favourite films to talk about, but *Frankenhooker* (1990) is a close second. We discussed a lot of important and current topics in both and they're just a lot of fun. *g*

Living Nightmares: Facing Fear with Shannon McGrew

by Suri Parmar

California-based writer Shannon McGrew has parlayed her lifelong passion for horror into *Nightmarish Conjurings*, a go-to website-cum-guidebook for all your frightening fixes. From film festival coverage to announcing new roller coaster rides, *Nightmarish Conjurings* is unique in that McGrew focuses less on critical analysis than delving into the raw reactions and impressions that genre-based experiences evoke. McGrew shared with *Grim* the hows and whys of parsing horror, the therapeutic aspects of terror, and the key to an outstanding interview.

Nightmarish Conjurings covers a diverse range of media: film and live theatre reviews, articles, interviews with seminal horror personalities. Are you planning on expanding the empire?

It's weird to hear someone else call *Nightmarish Conjurings* an empire outside of me joking with friends! Honestly, I would love to expand *Nightmarish Conjurings*. I work full-time as an interior designer which makes it hard to work full-time on my site, but when you're passionate about something you do what you can to make it work. As of right now, I don't have any solid plans, but there are definitely some ideas brewing and I hope to have a more solid plan by the end of the year!

What prompted you to write about horror? What's your process when you're reviewing a film or television show?

Horror is more than just a genre for me; it's a way of life. I've worked through a lot of trauma and hardship by writing about certain films within the genre. I guess you could say it's cathartic. Funnily enough, that's not how I got into writing about horror. About five years ago I had just finished reading Stephen King's *IT* and was pissed. There's a moment in the book—and if you've read it you know what I'm talking about—that angered me so much; I felt it took away from everything King was trying to convey. A friend of mine who isn't into horror suggested that I start blogging my

thoughts about anything horror-related. I thought to myself, "why not?" and started *Nightmarish Conjurings*, never thinking it would be anything more than just a little blog. When it comes to writing a review I'm not the most academic, and though I struggle with that sometimes I've come to realize it isn't my style. I write a lot from an emotional standpoint because that's what I'm used to, so I'll typically think to myself, "How did this affect me on an emotional level?" and go from there.

You've written a lot about *Pet Sematary* (the 2019 reboot of the 1989 classic film). It's been positively received by critics and fans, though Stephen King's books are notoriously difficult to adapt and remakes are often derided. What makes it an outlier, in your opinion?

I think the biggest thing is the change from Gage to Ellie dying. There's so much that comes from that one decision that I don't think many people took into consideration. I've been onboard since day one because in the book Ellie and Louis's relationship centres around the discussion of death and the afterlife, so when it was shown in the trailer that she dies, I thought it was a smart decision on the directors' part. King's work is incredibly emotional and terrifying and anyone trying to adapt him must ride a very fine line. In the case of the new *Pet Sematary*, I think it was accomplished. In the end, it doesn't matter if you follow King's work exactly or if you deviate from it—people will always have something bad to say, which is a shame because we should be celebrating the horror genre, not hating on it.

You aspire to design haunted attractions. Why does interactive horror appeal to you?

Haunted attractions, whether theme park haunts, home haunts, immersive experiences, or extreme haunts, push me in a way that few things do. As a kid in New England, I grew up visiting a haunt called Spooky World and in my 20s started attending Halloween Horror Nights in Orlando. As a designer, I wanted to be someone that helped with bringing these concepts to life and that is still a goal of mine, but now I get to experience them in a brand new way through reviewing them. I'm still able to bring my knowledge of interior and set design to my reviews which is something I never even thought would happen.

As with the horror genre, I've worked through traumatic events in my life through immersive and extreme haunts. There's a lot of beauty in these experiences and a lot of blood, sweat, and tears that go into the design, and I'm fascinated by that process. I also LOVE the adrenaline rush of being scared, and though I don't feel it as much because I've become somewhat immune, it's something that I'm constantly looking for when attending events such as these. We all have vices, and I guess you could say one of mine is being scared. I do hope that some day, if the stars align, I'll have the opportunity and time to dive into haunt design.

What makes a memorable interview? If you could interview any horror creator, living or dead, whom would you choose and why?

Interviewing is something that did not come naturally to me, but throughout my almost five years doing this, I've definitely gotten better. I find that the most memorable interviews are the most laid-back ones. I've had amazing interviews with Michael Madsen, Ethan Embry, and Guillermo Del Toro, that felt more like a conversation with an old friend. There's a connection there that seems so genuine and it's one of my favourite things to happen when I'm conducting an interview.

I've been insanely lucky to have had the opportunity to interview not only people I admire but people that have had a huge impact on my life as a horror and cinema fan. One of my favourite new directors to come on the scene is Ari Aster—I think his film *Hereditary* is an absolute masterpiece and I would love to someday have the opportunity to pick his brain. Though I don't agree with his politics nor his views on women and minorities, I would have loved to have interviewed H.P. Lovecraft as I'm a MASSIVE fan of his work. I also believe that Jordan Peele is our generation's Hitchcock and I think speaking to him about his process and his love for the genre would be one of the most eye-opening experiences.

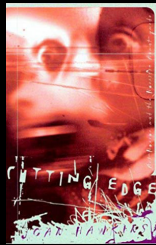
Visit nightmarishconjurings.com!

You can follow Shannon McGrew and *Nightmarish Conjurings* on Twitter at [@shannon_mcgrew](https://twitter.com/shannon_mcgrew) and [@Nightmar1sh](https://twitter.com/Nightmar1sh), and on Instagram at [@horrorchick](https://www.instagram.com/horrorchick) and [@nightmarishconjurings](https://www.instagram.com/nightmarishconjurings). 



THE HAUNTED LIBRARY

by Zack Long

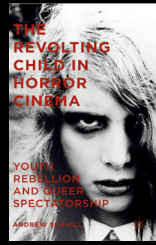


Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-garde

Joan Hawkins
University of Minnesota Press, 2000

Written in 2000, Joan Hawkins's examination of the connection between avant-garde film and horror, *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-garde*, manages to be both an engaging piece of film study, as relevant today as it was when it was written, and a time-capsule documenting the horror film culture of the late '90s—a culture which is nearly unrecognizable by today's standards. The enjoyment of *Cutting Edge* is thus twofold. First, *Cutting Edge* explores similarities between paracinematic viewing practices and those of arthouse audiences. Through this comes an examination of art's fluctuation between "low culture" and "high art." This is best exemplified, I found, in Hawkins's discussion of Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932) and the journey that this film has had since its initial release. This is just one of many fascinating explorations that Hawkins undertakes. Also of interest is her discussion of Georges Franju and the way she brings an examination of Jess Franco's work into the conversation. In exploring how the avant-garde borrows from the horror film, the chapters on Yoko Ono's *Rape* (1969), Michael and Roberta Findlay, and the films of Warhol and Morrissey illustrate Hawkins's points astutely.

From a 2019 perspective, it's hard not to think about Iain Softley's 1995 cyberthriller *Hackers* when casting your mind back to the era Hawkins describes in her discussion of video culture, with its references to VHS black markets and slang derived from VHS tape-deck manipulators. In her exploration of the modern landscape of film culture, Hawkins had no way of predicting the massive changes we've seen in the two decades since. Unfortunately for her, this shift gives *Cutting Edge* a minor camp feel. If you can look past the dated aspects of the first part of the book (or if you're like me and you actually enjoy them), you'll find that *Cutting Edge* opens up into a discussion that offers as many relevant (if not timeless) insights now as it did in the Willenium.



The Revolting Child in Horror Cinema: Youth Rebellion and Queer Spectatorship

Andrew Scahill
Palgrave Macmillan, 2015

In *The Revolting Child in Horror Cinema: Youth Rebellion and Queer Spectatorship*, Andrew Scahill combines an interest in queer horror studies (with liberal references to the work of Dr. Benshoff) and the role of the child within horror cinema (of which Dominic Lennard's *Bad Seeds and Holy Terrors: The Child Villains of Horror Film* is a must-read). Here, Scahill explores the way that the figure of the revolting child offers itself up to pleasurable identification through queer viewing practices.

A short read at only 150 pages before notes, the book is kept interesting by its slightly off-beat structure. The first chapter lays out a taxonomy of child monstrosity that is of particular interest to anyone exploring the role of children in horror. Here, it is used to explore the different points that child monstrosities offer the queer spectator to identify with. The next two chapters focus on reading a particular film (though the discussion ropes in peripheral films). First up: an exploration of Mervyn LeRoy's *The Bad Seed* (1956) and the character of Rhoda Penmark. This is followed by an examination of Linda Blair's famous Regan MacNeil. The two closing chapters then move away from particular films to look at behaviours shaped and shared across films. While the closing chapter—"It Takes a Child to Raze a Village: Demonizing Youth Rebellion"—is a thoroughly engaging read, it is a prior chapter—"Raising Hell: Rejection, and the Unwanted Queer Child"—where I found the most compelling and mull-worthy ideas.

In *The Revolting Child*, Andrew Scahill puts forth an interesting and passionate argument on the figure of the monstrous child and its relationship to queer spectatorship. This argument is both well-supported through the evidence and presented in an engaging and enjoyable way. If you have interest in queer spectatorship, the child in horror, or just in horror cinema itself, *The Revolting Child in Horror Cinema: Youth Rebellion and Queer Spectatorship* is well worth the investment. **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 tackles timeless dilemmas and dishes out practical solutions.



I want to come out as a demon to my parents, but I'm afraid that they may have trouble accepting me. How should I approach this?

All supernatural beings have a hard time with this one. First, you have to ask yourself: do you really want them to know? Are they people you still want to have in your life? Being a creature of a mystical nature, you will lead a much more dangerous life, which makes those humans around you susceptible to attack. The parents who have the hardest time accepting the new information must change their ideas of what your life would have been like. You can say "Mom, I know you wanted me to have babies, but how about minions instead, idk?" Hopefully, your parents are supportive. If not, remember that you can seek out your fellow ghouls and fiends to make your chosen family. Be proud of who you are! Go out and paint the town red, literally!



Do astral projection dates count as real dates? I'm just so busy!

Oh—what amazing wonders are in store for you! With astral projection, you are not limited to the boring places around you. You can choose on which plane you would like to meet up! It would for sure be a real date, and just think of the time and money you will save! However, young darklings, you must be careful with this one.

You need to make sure you have practiced this many times on your own. The last thing you want is to set up a date and lose yourself in a different realm. Then, the person will think you stood them up! But, in reality, you *can't* stand because you can't find your body. If neither of you are adept at this practice, then maybe just hit up your local IHOP and grab some pancakes, instead.

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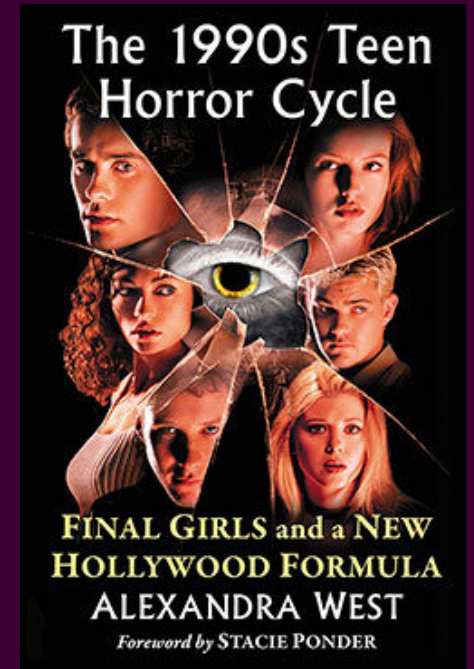
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"Alexandra West is one of the most brilliant minds working in the field of film studies today. The fact that she devotes her considerable intellect to our little bloody corner of the film world is truly a gift. If you have any love for the 90s or simply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

- Jeff Schmidt, *Nightmarish Conjurings*

Available at Amazon and McFarland Books.



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