

grim

Issue No. 8½ June 2021

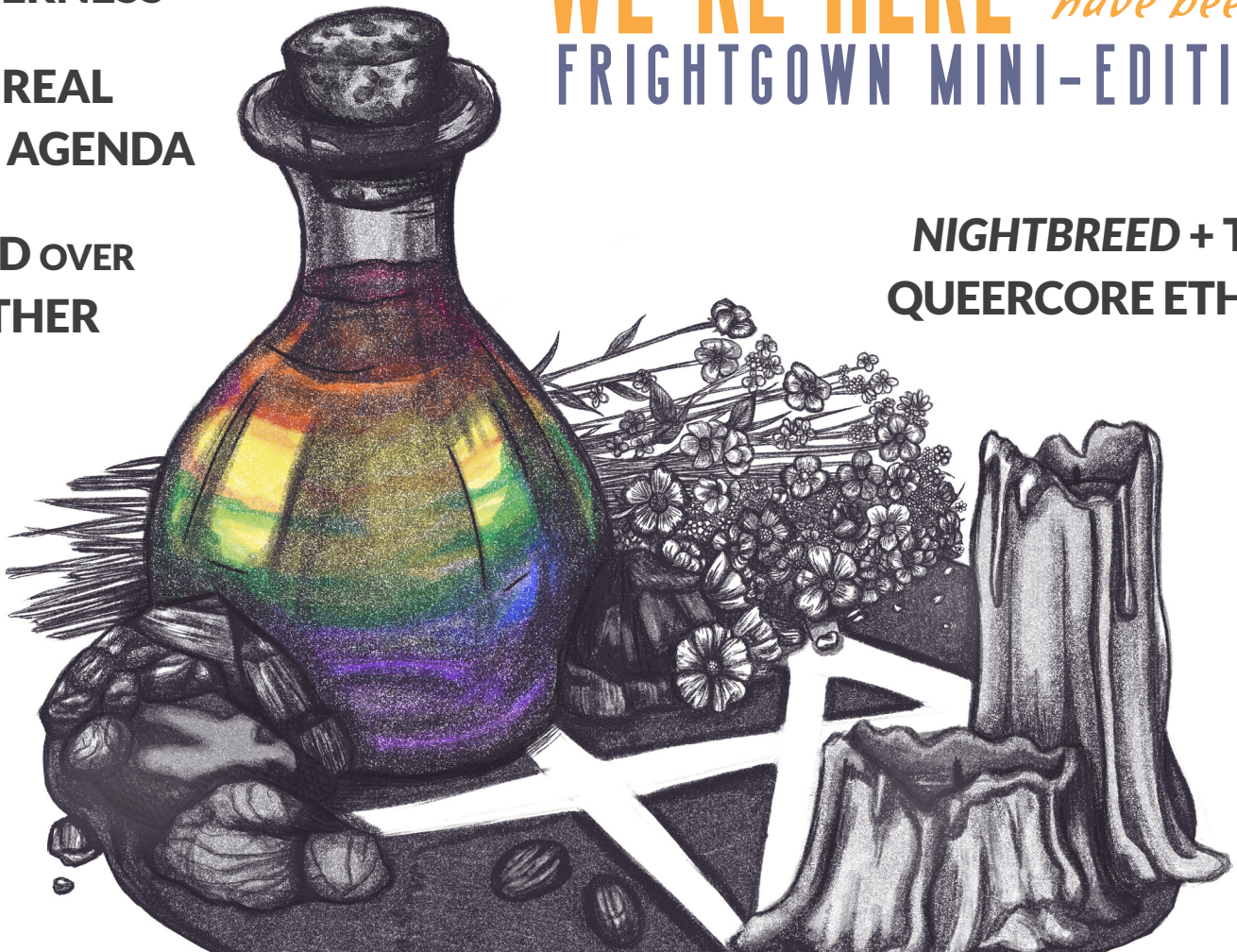
19TH CENTURY
QUEERNESS

THE REAL
GAY AGENDA

MIND OVER
MOTHER

WE'RE HERE *(and always
have been)*
FRIGHTGOWN MINI-EDITION

**NIGHTBREED + THE
QUEERCORE ETHOS**



**DRACULA'S
SUBVERSIVE
FLUIDITY**

**SLASH HER
PODCAST**

**DARREN
ELLIOT-
SMITH**

**GHOULS
NEXT DOOR
PODCAST**



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WE'RE HERE *(and always have been)*

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June 2021

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Special Thank You

K Lynch

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Editor's Note

This edition of *Grim* was produced in partnership with FRIGHTGOWN, a brand new, weekend-long, online celebration of queer horror both current and classic, featuring feature and short film screenings, panels, virtual hangouts, and other exclusive content. The event serves as a fundraiser to support the Transgender Law Center, which works to change law, policy, and attitudes "so that all people can live safely, authentically, and free from discrimination regardless of their gender identity or expression."

When offered the opportunity to participate by putting together this mini-edition, I naturally jumped at the chance.

I urge readers to seek out and support this festival, and not only for its admirable philanthropy. Brought to fruition by the minds that gave us the inimitable Salem Horror Fest and the seminal queer horror podcast *Horror Queers*, FRIGHTGOWN promises to deliver a dazzling array of queer-focused content that affirms the vital creativity and tenacity of our community—and I have no doubt that it will deliver.

Though this issue is being released in June and features LGBTQ+ contributors exclusively, please don't consider this a "very special Pride edition." Our pride is not confined to a single, sun-drenched 30-day period once per year. We don't dust off our rainbow flags on June 1st, pay token tribute, and then relegate queer content back to the closet once July rolls around. Like *Horror Queers* and Salem Horror Fest, *Grim* and *Anatomy of a Scream* celebrate and elevate queer voices, perspectives, and texts all year long. Because we've always been here. And we always will be.

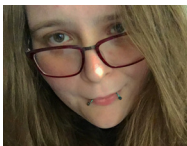
So, let's stay loud!

And have a safe and happy Pride <3

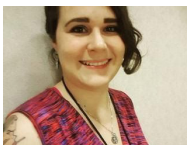
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Adam Messinger is a Los Angeles based writer and enthusiast of all things that go bump in the night. He is currently the scriptwriter and researcher for *10 Minute Murder* and loves overcasts, true crime podcasts, Courtney Love, and corgis in Hallowe'en costumes. Check out some of his work on Film Daily Co., OutBuzz, and Ithaca Times. Follow him on twitter @adamessinger.



Alice Collins is a producer, composer, archivist, talking head, columnist, and activist. Her lifelong love of the creepy, kooky, mysterious, and spooky paired with an intense fascination with the performing arts led her to pure obsession. You can find her work on Bloody Disgusting, Infinite Frontiers, Shudder's *The Bite* and upcoming *Untitled Queer Horror Documentary*, as well as the film *Fontaine* and the *Vengeful Nun That Wouldn't Die*.



Danielle Ryan is a freelance writer with a passion for things that make people uncomfortable. A cinephile before she could walk, she writes for /Film, Daily Grindhouse, Birth.Movies.Death, and others. She also occasionally guests on podcasts, where you can hear just how fluently she swears. Her current obsession is how horror cinema allows us to examine race, gender, and sexuality and understand viewpoints quite different from our own. You can find her on twitter @danirat.



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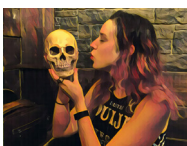
Mary Beth is a freelance writer based in Chicago, working towards her master's degree. She's a writer for Much Ado about Cinema and Nightmare on Film Street, where she focuses on gender and horror film. Her work has also appeared in *Grim*. When she's not watching horror movies, she's singing to her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



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Terry Mesnard is the owner/EIC of Gayly Dreadful, the co-host of the *Scarred for Life* podcast, and the editor of the magazine *We Are Horror*, and knows that *The Dream Master* is the best *A Nightmare on Elm Street* sequel. Find Terry on twitter @gaylydreadful.



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BRINGING THE FIERCEST SKELETONS OUT OF HORROR'S CLOSET



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Mind Over Mother

The Horrors of Coming Out in Vera Miao's "Ma"

by Paul Lê

"I love you," I whispered, hugging Mom close...

Being tethered to cultural expectations and commitments is why I am not out to my family. My parents choose to remain in the dark despite nonverbal evidence and rumours, and I indulge their ignorance by staying quiet and free of scandal. As much as I would like to feel the outpouring of support and well wishes I have seen others experience after coming out, I feel in my heart that my parents, particularly my mother, will never look at me the same way.

So the otherness I live with is exactly why I am drawn to horror and its ability to capture that alterity with distinction and power. When it comes to seeing my own private disquietude played out in the genre, Vera Miao demonstrates closeted dread and family discord with insight and transparency. *The Two Sentence Horror Stories* showrunner directed and wrote a segment called "Ma" that shows how compromising one's individuality and freedom to placate family can be harmful to not only ourselves, but to those around us.

At a glance, Mona (Wei-Yi Lin) is the dutiful daughter who puts her mother's needs before her own but, looking past the surface, shouldering that burden for

so long has taken a seismic toll on the young woman's spirit. Mona's emotional awakening begins with something as innocuous as dinner; the mother (Mardy Ma) adds food to her daughter's bowl unbidden, even after she is finished. Mona grudgingly eats, then plants her chopsticks down on the table as a sign she is now done. The mother feels otherwise and, without asking, pushes another helping of food towards Mona. Rather than acquiescing like she always does, the daughter pushes the dish back. This small act of defiance is a sign of things to come, as Mona grapples with who she is and how she wants to live her life.

...the otherness I live with is exactly why I am drawn to horror and its ability to capture that alterity with distinction and power.

Mona has been conditioned to not express herself in any sort of way that suggests she is different. It is a familiar story for those of us held back by the fear of being outed. Mona keeps up the appearance of a heterosexual woman by simply not dating; the ambiguity shields her from her mother's disapproval. Yet when she hears the neighbour's music

through her bedroom wall one night, Mona is drawn to it like a sailor to a siren's call. The sensual sounds and muffled lyrics—"How does it feel to be so alone?"—arouse a desperate and lonely Mona. Later, while returning home from her errands, Mona meets the neighbour whose music touched her so deeply; Erica (Ayesha Harris) recently moved in next door. Their mutual attraction is evident, but upon hearing her mother rattling around in her apartment, Mona panics and hurriedly escapes the hallway encounter. The chance of being exposed triggers a full-on flight response. While this patent method of avoiding intimacy and interaction might have been admissible in the past, here it only creates mixed signals.

The exchanges with Ma become more tense and telling with every subsequent scene. As Mona paints Ma's toenails and listens to her blather about a Chinese soap opera she watches every day without fail, the subtext reveals itself. The drama's plot of a woman unable to bear an heir for her husband and then being wiped from history's records is upsetting to Mona's mother. Not leaving behind a legacy, in this case a child, is unimaginable to someone from a culture in which family is above all the most important thing in life. The question is, though, would Ma love

her grandchildren just the same if they are not raised in a heteronormative environment? It is a thought that has crossed my mind many times whenever my parents ask why they do not have any grandchildren yet.

The power to literally control the world around you has a dual purpose in the story; Mona's telekinesis is a metaphor for her latent sexuality as well as a way of recouping her agency when she feels like she has no control over her life.

In their next run-in, Erica catches Mona reading tabloids, smoking a joint, and listening to music on the fire escape. This Mona is visibly more relaxed and dressed up than before; her lips red, her feet heeled, and her legs bare. The women briefly flirt until one of Mona's books shakes and then inexplicably falls off the escape. Like before, Mona runs off with nary a goodbye or explanation. Their third meeting is initially more awkward, as Erica has come to the conclusion that Mona is straight or just not interested. When she is set to walk away, Erica is yanked back by an unseen force. She realizes Mona is responsible and brings her back to her apartment

to understand what has happened. Mona's telekinetic ability is not a new development seeing as she has "always been this way," but it manifests whenever Erica is present. The power to literally control the world around you has a dual purpose in the story; Mona's telekinesis is a metaphor for her latent sexuality as well as a way of recouping her agency when she feels like she has no control over her life. When she is honest with Erica about her gift, Mona confidently floats a cup without strain.

"Since she died, I haven't been able to let her go."

It would seem Mona's life has improved, but as to be expected in a series like this, her happiness is short-lived. The third act takes a dark turn as Ma walks in on her daughter getting ready for a date. Feeling as if Mona is abandoning her, the mother attacks with every accusation and put-down she can think of; everything from saying her date will never accept her to blaming Mona for her father's departure. Having grown up with a mother who sees my growth and independence as almost an affront to herself, witnessing Ma threaten to take her own life just so Mona will stay with her is all too real. As it turns out, though, everything we have seen in this drab and suffocating apartment is not

real, either—at least not in the way it has been presented so far.

Meanwhile, Erica believes she has been stood up and heads for her apartment when she notices Mona's door is ajar. Upon entering the kitchen, she sees Ma's decayed body floating as an anguished Mona voices every bit of anger she has stored up in her body. Still frantic and outside of herself, Mona inadvertently launches a knife straight into Erica's gut, killing her on the spot. The episode comes to a close, ending exactly where it started; Mona sits at the kitchen table and eats dinner with her long-dead mother. Only this time, they now have a guest.

Even in death, Ma still manipulates her daughter's thoughts and actions. That type of psychological trauma is hard to shake, much less endure, when it comes from a place you are told is love but does not feel like love. Mona, I, and others like us withdraw not necessarily because we want to. We do it because our families never made us feel safe enough to come out and be ourselves without the threat of reproach; that same anxiety extends to other areas of life. There is always the fear that being open and out will leave you alone, and Vera Miao's unique depiction hits close to home. *g*



Perhaps in retaliation to the way society has historically viewed the LGBTQIA+ community, some queer artists embrace the idea of the monstrous queer in their work. Recently, when Lil Nas X pole danced his way into hell to give Satan a lapdance, he joined a long line of queer artists who've fought against the status quo by combining queerness with monstrosity. While queer people at large fight for equality and acceptance by "normal" (read: cishet) society, another subset of queer artists have pushed against that kind of assimilation and, instead, lifted a middle finger to any concept of heteronormative life.

"Montero (Call Me By Your Name)" surprised *because* it embraced the otherness thrown at the queer community. It's the kind of punk rock imagery that brought to mind a different queer movement that started in the 1980s. Dubbed queercore or homocore, this punk rock sensibility began with a group of underground artists, filmmakers, and musicians who not only railed against the prevalent conservative and heteronormative culture, but also separated themselves from the larger queer culture that was, in their mind, working towards assimilation. While Clive Barker wasn't associated with the world of queercore, his *Nightbreed* creations in his novella *Cabal* (1988) and his film adaptation

THE DEVIL LOVES A LAP DANCE

Queercore, Punk Rock + the Nightbreed Manifesto

by Terry Mesnard

Nightbreed (1990) exemplify that same ethos of anti-conformity, but offer an intriguing way ahead.

In Yony Leyser's 2017 documentary *Queercore: How to Punk a Revolution*, underground/experimental filmmaker Bruce La Bruce discussed the roots of this particular brand of queer punk, saying, "the early roots of punk were radical and diverse. The problem with the gay scene in the mid-'80s was that, for us, the gay scene was completely bourgeois and conventional. There was a lot of conformist behavior."

Conformity is at the heart of *Nightbreed*, in which a young man named Aaron Boone (Craig Sheffer) spends his days with his girlfriend Lori (Anne Bobby) and his nights dreaming of a mythical

city called Midian, where monsters live free from the shackles of society. Barker's script never states that Boone struggles with his sexuality, but the subtext verges on textual. One of the few scenes of him in "normal" society shows his attempts to fit in by embracing the hyper-masculine idea of a man, greased up and muscular and working on cars. It verges on camp, but it's this conformity to the strongest degree that allows him to blend in and move through heterosexual society without being seen for the monstrously queer thoughts he hides within. Barker shows that conflict with a particular scene in which Lori performs "Johnny Get Angry," locking eyes with Boone in the crowd and begging him to fight for her. As she sings, "I want a brave man, I want a cave man / Johnny, show

me that you care, really care for me", he turns away because the thought of Midian pulls too heavily.

Boone represents the concept of queer assimilation the queercore movement sneered at, and when he meets his first Nightbreed Peloquin (Oliver Parker), Boone's struck by the monstrous queer Peloquin represents. It's confronting because it's a physical manifestation of the inner thoughts Boone's tried unsuccessfully to hide from his entire life. Peloquin's punk aesthetics and disdain for anyone outside of his tribe of avant-garde monsters feels ripped from the way Bruce La Bruce talked about his own group of outlandish queer punks. His guiding principle was that if homosexuality was criminal, they'd embrace "the criminality of homosexuality," a sentiment Peloquin so eloquently states when he sees Boone's perceived innocence. Even though Boone inwardly harbours the same queer thoughts, Peloquin sneers at him and calls him a "natural" because Boone is able to pass and would rather be a part of the so-called natural culture than embrace what makes him unique. His initial response to Boone is to eat him: "Fuck the law, I want meat."

This disdain for "normal" or "natural" and the assimilated queer is inherent in the queercore movement. The same year *Nightbreed* was released, underground performer Penny Arcade released her show *Bitch! Dyke! Faghag! Whore!* Penny straddled the line between the queercore movement and what that counterculture would turn into as it progressed through the '90s. But this particular show had similarly harsh words for those who conformed with cishet society or hid their queerness from the world. "Queer means that you have sustained a period of rejection, isolation, and exclusion so profound that it marks you as an outsider forever," she said. "Queer means refusing to be part of the status quo, refusing to accept the mantle of so-called normalcy."

In a couple of sentences, Penny articulates the ethos that the remnants of Midian also represent. Both the citizens of Midian and real-life queer cultures dealt with years of oppression and genocide, and it's telling that *Nightbreed* came out in the midst of the AIDS crisis. Barker showcases the Nightbreeds' historical genocide in one particular flashback, staged with a striking image of a cloaked bishop



holding Christian iconography while slaughtering the fleeing monsters. It's an image that requires no real analysis, but it informs the Nightbreeds' creed as much as it does members of the queercore movement. Why join a society that has historically othered and slaughtered them, the flashback reminds the viewer, while also asking who the real monster is. It's the same rallying cry members of the queercore movement would plaster on their marches: "Liberation Not Assimilation."

Both the citizens of Midian and real-life queer cultures dealt with years of oppression and genocide, and it's telling that Nightbreed came out in the midst of the AIDS crisis

Clive Barker himself wasn't associated with the queercore revolution, but his filmography has a history of utilizing various aspects of underground or queer counterculture in films meant for the mainstream. To create the Cenobites for his *Hellraiser* (1987) adaptation, for instance, Barker relied on his visits to S&M clubs and even handed costume designer Jane Wildgoose an issue of *Piercing Fans International Quarterly* for inspiration. The same feels true for the titular *Nightbreed* creatures, who buck "normal society" by living as avant-garde and openly as possible.

It's no surprise, then, that the creatures of Midian come in all different shapes, sizes, and monstrousness. Bruce La Bruce would be pleased as he's not-so-quietly pushed against conformity, saying, "Gays now are really selling themselves short...they traditionally have had such a great opportunity to be different and to be the avant-garde...to be glamorous and to be outsiders who look at the dominant culture...from a distance."

That "distance" also sets apart the city of Midian from the rest of society, as it creates a beacon for those who don't belong. A place where they can not only be safe, but be themselves. A rather hopeful and fantastical thought for queer people living in the conservative 1980s, who had an administration whose complete apathy was killing them in droves. But the *Nightbreed* only succeeded at the "not assimilation" part of the queercore creed, and it's here that Barker seems a bit more egalitarian in his views.

It's ultimately the city of Midian that is ransacked by the police, who descend on the *Nightbreed* as a lynch mob. And while *Nightbreed* is a hero's journey of discovery for Boone, who is forced to embrace his otherness and stand up for his community, it's also a story of two divergent communities coming together. "Brothers and sisters, it's time to fight," Boone loudly proclaims as he takes his mantle as the leader of the group. It's through both the *Nightbreed* and the man once deemed innocent and "natural" that their culture is able to persevere. It suggests that two sides are actually needed. Boone, Lil Nas X, and the queercore movement; assimilation, the avant-garde, and the monstrous queer—working together to progress queer rights. Ultimately, *Nightbreed* is a rallying cry to embrace our differences and what makes us unique, but also to work together as a community to secure a place in the world. Sometimes, you work within the system to change it. Sometimes, you flip up your middle fingers and go toe-to-toe with the devil.

Sometimes, you just give him a lap dance.

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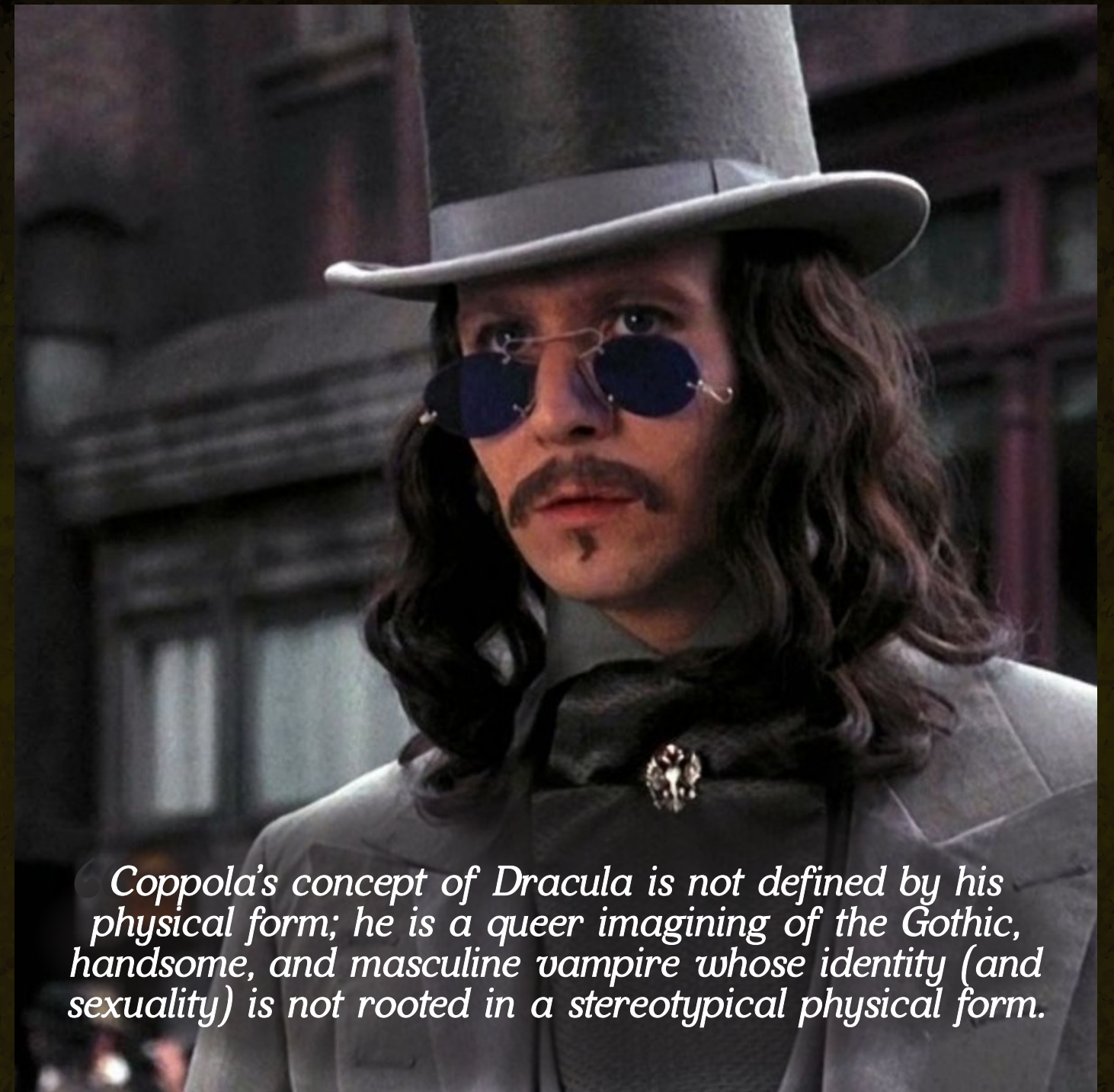
A Sea of Wonders

Discovering Gender Fluidity in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*

by Mary Beth McAndrews

Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is one horny adaptation of the classic gothic horror novel. Full of wolf copulation, gazes full of desire, and a lot of heated neck caressing, this film oozes sex. It subverts the expectations of a typical *Dracula* adaptation by fully leaning into the sensuality of the vampire within his various forms. That pervading sexuality—regardless of his body—illustrates the idea that identity is not held in a corporeal form. In rewatching the film, that fluidity of identity reminded me of navigating my own gender identity. Regardless of how I may present my body, I am still who I've always been; the changes in my physical representation do not mean my entire self is different. While the film is anchored in heterosexual attraction, its queerness flourishes as Dracula refuses to stay in one single form.

Bram Stoker's Dracula by no means portrays a truly unique version of Dracula. There are an endless number of adaptations of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, and Dracula is known for his physical transformations into bats



Coppola's concept of Dracula is not defined by his physical form; he is a queer imagining of the Gothic, handsome, and masculine vampire whose identity (and sexuality) is not rooted in a stereotypical physical form.

and wolves. But what sets the 1992 film apart from the rest is that no one form is revealed as Dracula's "true" identity. While he is introduced as the old man, he flows into the body of a young man, a wolf creature, a mist, and a monstrous bat figure. Coppola's concept of Dracula is not defined by his physical form; he is a queer imagining of the Gothic, handsome, and masculine vampire whose identity (and sexuality) is not rooted in a stereotypical physical form. Rather, the concept of Dracula exists within his own consciousness. It does not matter how he appears to others, but how he remains himself

within different bodies.

Dracula is first introduced as a mortal being with stylish, muscle-like armor and long shiny hair. In showing this vampire as an attractive and powerful figure, it sets an expectation that he'll continue to be shown in such a body as a force to be reckoned with. But the next time Dracula is shown on screen, he is a decrepit old man with long white hair, sharp yellowing nails, and extravagant flowing robes, which establish a contradiction within his physical presence. He now appears weak due to old age, a delicate being

who seems on the precipice of death. But his bright red robes tell a different story. The sheen of his clothes stand out against both his body and the dark, dank castle, echoing the powerful man seen at the film's beginning. While outwardly Dracula seems meek and like he is no longer embodying the violent rage of his younger self, that identity, mentally and emotionally, still lives inside of him. His two different bodies may seem jarring, but it serves a purpose to begin introducing this fluidity of vampiric identity.

Age is then shed like an old snake skin



and Dracula becomes young again with the explicit intention to seduce Mina Harker; this new body is young, charismatic, sensual, and decorated in beautifully embroidered fineries. He embodies the image of a high-class young man, while his old body conveyed weakness and fragility. These bodies, while aesthetically total opposites, are both used as tools of manipulation. Dracula chooses a body depending on his plan, wearing them like costumes, never revealing his true corporeal form. He is ageless, existing in a liminal space not grounded in the physical realm.

...in his monstrous transformations, Dracula interrupts the concept of one core identity.

The form of the young man may seem to be his actual body as it is his most consistent identity shown on screen, but in his monstrous transformations, Dracula interrupts the concept of one core identity. His body shapeshifts and transcends the human body while he still maintains his own self within his conscience. He becomes a wolf man and targets Mina's best friend Lucy to

both have sex with her and transform her into a vampire. There is no seduction here, but pure animalistic—quite literally—sex meant to fulfill carnal desire, indicating not only a shift in his body but a revelation of his more aggressive nature. This is revelation and not a total change, as this part of his true self is hinted at throughout his restrained dignified appearance. Only in this monstrous body can he fully reveal that side of himself, rejecting the human body as an outlet of sexuality.

Then Dracula takes this even further by abandoning a physical form and opting to appear as a mist, perhaps the most authentic version of himself. While the mist does serve a purpose as it's used to gain access to his servant Renfield, its translucent presence merely carries Dracula's consciousness and voice on the wind. Without a humanoid form that can either seduce or terrify, Dracula merely exists in the ether, a stripped-down presence that truly reveals who Dracula is—a terrifying monster. Further, Renfield's unwavering dedication to Dracula even as a mist shows that Renfield does not worship a body, but an idea; a consciousness. No matter how Dracula appears to his servant, he continues to emanate his overwhelming power.

Finally, as Dracula is rushed to his

castle during the film's climax, his body becomes monstrous once again as he takes on the form of a sickly humanoid bat creature. It is a combination of the wolf and old man as Dracula's physical meekness is no longer just a sign of fragility, but also of terror. At his weakest, he harnesses his animalistic and violent side to take such a shape. And yet, this hideous creature exudes a charisma that keeps Mina with him, instead of scaring her away. Like Renfield, Mina is in love with the consciousness and core of who Dracula is, rather than what he appears to look like.

In examining my own gender identity and revisiting this strange and horny retelling of a classic Gothic horror tale, something clicked in my brain—I am who I am regardless of how I choose to present on any given day. I may feel more masculine one day, and feminine the other. I am fluid just as Dracula is fluid. Monstrosity, attractiveness, and sexuality can exist inside in one consciousness, whether that be as old or young, animal or human. Many queer people find comfort within monstrosity and the subversive identities they represent, and I'm no exception. In watching someone transcend the physical realm, I see the beauty in my own version of monstrosity. I am subversive. In a way, I am Dracula (without the mist). ^g

FRIGHTGOWN

SCHEDULE

June 25 - Shorts Block I

June 25 - BAD GIRLS Premiere

June 26 - Horror in Session: NIGHTBREED Tribute

June 26 - BIT Panel

June 26 - DEATH DROP GORGEOUS Encore

June 26 - Bobby Likes It Spooky: NIGHTBREED Tribute

June 26 - Gaylords of Darkness

June 26 - Shorts Block II

June 26 - Prime Time Bitch presents HOT GHOUL SUMMER

June 27 - Horror Queers Podcast: NIGHTBREED Tribute

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THE GAY AGENDA

INCLUSION IN THE HORROR GENRE

by Adam Messinger

Let's Talk About It. In 2019, the final instalment in the reboot of Andrés Muschietti's *IT* franchise, entitled *IT: Chapter 2*, was released. The movie was the highly anticipated follow-up to 2017's first chapter, which ended up becoming the highest grossing horror film of all time. The sequel—that saw the children of the first movie being played by some big name actors like Jessica Chastain, James McAvoy, and Bill Hader—was an exciting beginning to the fall horror film season. My friends and I went on opening day and we even pondered buying our tickets in advance as to not risk being disappointed when we showed up as the previews were rolling—we're often late.

We were all avid horror movie connoisseurs and had seen countless first-run showings at our local Regal. But *IT* was a movie that we didn't come to be frightened by.

The first movie, filled with its bright-eyed stars and kitschy lines, was more closely related in tone to films like 1985's *The Goonies*, as opposed to 2019's *Suspiria* remake. Needless to say, we weren't there ready to cover our eyes and clutch our pearls. But, as you likely know by now, *IT: Chapter 2* starts with something that we did not see in the first film: a super blatant and bloody homophobic hate crime.

The film opens with a young gay couple at a carnival. Their names are Don Hagarty and Adrian Mellon (played by Taylor Frey and Xavier Dolan). They are white and cis, they are a bit sassy, and they are in love—the safe image of a queer person in media. We hear them planning their future to get out

of Derry, Maine, and move somewhere more accepting.

Just when you start to think that maybe this is a new casting choice for one of the lesser-known members of the Losers Club, the pair are berated by a homophobe and his friends, who follow and then horrifically beat them almost to death. Then, Pennywise drops in and is like, “Oh yes, me too” and takes a lethal bite out of Adrian.

I have never read the 1986 novel, but this scene is pulled straight from the pages written by author Stephen King. Before we get too mad at the old guy, it's important to talk about how this story is handled in the book, on which both films are based. The novel, which totals in at 1,138 pages, provides a much stronger sense of who these characters are outside of their gay identities. We get their backstories, as well as an exploration of the gay social scene in Derry. But, most importantly, there is a bit of justice for both of these characters in the book. In the film, after Adrian is murdered, we never hear about it again, apart from a brief police investigation wherein the couple is barely mentioned. There isn't even a scene including Don, the lone survivor of the attack.

Naturally, my friends and I were shaken by this. Not in a “snowflake triggered” sense, but in a general “Wow, it's kinda horrifying and upsetting to see something so real and plausible represented in the opening scene of a movie like *IT*” kind of way. Like I said, I go see every new horror movie out there. And I can't remember the last time I was genuinely taken out of a film by

something so upsetting and misplaced. The (spoilers!) baby-eating scene in *Mother!* (2017) and the decapitation scene in *Hereditary* (2018) left me horrified, but not so genuinely upset that I was unable to focus on the movie.

No, Like, Really... Let's Talk About IT

Why did this happen in 2019? Again, in defence of Stephen King, he was inspired to write the story of Adrian and Don after the 1984 hate crime murder of Charlie Howard, which occurred in Bangor, Maine, while King was writing the novel. The scene does not open the book and was written during a very different time. In an interview published on *Variety*, the director of *Chapter 2*, Andy Muschietti, said this about his choice to include the scene:

“For me, it was important to include it because it's something that we're still suffering. Hate crimes are still happening. No matter how evolved we think society is going, there seems to be a winding back, especially in this day and age where these old values seem to be emerging from the darkness.

It is important to note that Muschietti and screenwriter Gary Dauberman are both straight white men. So, this statement does make them seem clueless as to what they have actually done. What is painfully clear is that this scene is a perfect example of straight creators being out of touch and trying to create content for queer audiences. When you add this scene to the fact that Richie (played by Finn Wolfhard and Bill Hader), is now portrayed as closeted and working through his feelings for another member of the



Losers Club, Eddie (played by Jack Dylan Grazer and James Ransone), you see that maybe there was a dash of queerbaiting at play. Something along the lines of “We'll show the hate crime, but give them a queer narrative halfway through so that they will stay engaged.”

For years, films in and out of the genre had to rely on subtext for any sort of queer representation.

And wouldn't it be nice to say that this is just an anomaly in the wonderful and non-problematic history of queerness in horror? Sure...but this is not a fairy tale, and you are not even the Final Girl. What went down in *IT* is indicative of widespread problems regarding the utilization of queerness in the horror industry.

A Horrific History

None of these choices exist in a vacuum. For years, films in and out of the genre had to rely on subtext for any sort of queer representation. While the representation was rarely positive, it was the beginning of queer bodies in media—even if it had a harmful effect. For example, Norman Bates from Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film *Psycho* is written as an effeminate man who enjoys dressing up in women's clothing. He is queer-coded as gay or even transgender—

although the writers probably weren't concerned with getting the terminology and identity correct. They were purely trying to prey on society's expectations of queer people—and often those expectations went hand-in-hand with a tragic ending, in which the vilified queer person meets a bloody and well-deserved end. Much like the characters at the beginning of *IT*.

As time went on, these tropes were defied, slightly. Or, rather, creators learned to use workarounds.

The Motion Picture Production Code (known as the Hays Code) was a system of moral guidelines developed in 1930 which introduced an element of censorship to filmmaking. American filmmakers began to follow it in 1934, and it more or less subsided in the late 1960s, giving way to the less rigorous MPAA film rating system, which is more focused on the societal values that we hold today.

As time progressed and more liberal values were (slowly) adopted, filmmakers found ways to queer-code their characters without being explicit, and sometimes with positive intentions. Vampire movies were a popular way to do this, and having two male or female companions spend their afterlives together in a totally normal

and not-at-all-gay way became a widely explored trope. Such films include *The Daughters of Darkness* (1971) and *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), which live up to their titles and provide sexy girl-on-girl-in-fangs action. While this queerness was acceptable only as long as there was room for the straight male gaze, these are still the earliest signs of horror becoming gay as hell. Other films embraced a more subtextual queerness; this didn't rely on concrete examples of homosexual acts. Queer subtext is a way to signal that your characters are super gay, without being super loud. The gays in the audience can recognize it, but the homophobes cannot.

An infamous example of such a practice is the 1985 film *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*, directed by Jack Sholder. The main character, Jesse (Mark Patton), is clearly queer-coded as a gay teen struggling with his sexuality in the way he reacts to Freddy Krueger's (Robert Englund) antics within his dreams. And it honestly is quite subtextual; if you weren't someone who either related to or was explicitly looking for the deeper meaning, maybe you would miss it.

But things get #explicit with queerness, including a scene in a gay bar where Jesse outs his gym teacher, then follows him back to the gym showers where he is



killed by Freddy. We are also treated to a scene in which Freddy runs his knife-hands over Jesse's mouth in a way that can only be read—by any reasonable person—as wildly homoerotic. Also, many young male characters are sweaty and shirtless for no reason at all.

The intended meaning of the film has been heavily debated by critics. Sholder at one point said he didn't intend it to be queer, then later—when public perception of homosexuals had become more favourable—claimed that he had always intended to make a movie about queerness as a way to help gay teens who might be bullied for their sexuality. A true martyr.

And we all know that the sequel to a teen slasher flick is the perfect place to make a political statement.

With all of that in the past, we are moving towards a society in which queerness can be explored in many ways, in and out of the horror genre. My first recollection of a cinematic queer narrative was one that initially polarized both critics and audiences—as well as my middle school.

Karyn Kusama's 2009 horror-comedy, *Jennifer's Body*, tackles queerness in a way unseen on the mainstream screen before this time. Written and directed

by two straight women, the film deals with Jennifer Check (Megan Fox), the most popular girl in school, who is sacrificed by an indie boyband—and instead of dying—becomes a demon whose insatiable bloodlust is only ever quenched by boys.

“...we are moving towards a society in which queerness can be explored in many ways, in and out of the horror genre.”

On top of these feminist themes, writer Diablo Cody—of 2007's *Juno* success—manages to tackle queerness as well. Specifically, feminine queerness, which has a long-standing history of being acceptable, but only as a means for male masturbatory material—remember the hot lezbvampires? The vampire movies discussed earlier often included queer-coded gay characters, but utilized female sexuality in a way that would at times put themselves in jeopardy of being almost pornographic. These tendencies can be argued as earlier examples of female queerness being explored onscreen, but, more often than not, can just be viewed as exploitation by male writers and directors.

What is so interesting about *Jennifer's Body* is that it does show a seemingly gratuitous make-out scene between the

film's two female leads (at the height of stars Megan Fox and Amanda Seyfried's careers) that some, at the time, perceived as random and exploitative. But since 2009, there has been a resurgence of attention paid to the film, which has been the subject of many articles embracing its feminist and queer undertones.

The steamy scene in question was written as a culmination of Seyfried's character Needy's confusing feelings towards Jennifer, feelings that had been brewing throughout the film's runtime in anticipation of this scene. While Cody is a straight woman, she has reportedly said that Seyfried's character is “100% gay for Jennifer”; some of the subtext was lost during editing, but was always there and was always *intended* to be there.

A Post-Jennifer's Body World

So, with this clear, queer example—however distorted it may be—of intended positive representation, the question must be asked: how is it that almost exactly ten years has passed since the release of *Jennifer's Body*, and films like *IT* still struggle to portray queerness correctly?

I personally view it as both a lack of education and a wholehearted desire to give us proper representation. *IT* feels like a film that attempted to

get the 'woke treatment,' and used its straight guilt to try to make the outdated situation more relevant, while having the opposite effect. And while there is so much to unpack about why this is still happening, I think a better use of our time is to turn away from what is going on behind the scenes—because we all know that problematic white straights are still running the show—and instead explore the stories of the queer audiences who, despite everything, still turn out in droves to see every new horror flick the day it's released.

“...in a world in which queerness is so rarely portrayed effectively and happily, why do queer people line up out the door to see themselves so negatively and unrealistically portrayed?”

As I explained earlier, I saw *IT* with a group that was ¾ queer. I was the only gay person, but two other members of my group were bisexual. Leading up to the film's release, I was aware of many queer people who were excited to see it. This is a trend that I see often: queer people being excited for horror.

In a world in which queerness is so rarely portrayed effectively and happily, why do queer people line up out the door to see themselves so negatively and unrealistically portrayed?

This is not a simple question. And I think that, in order to answer it, we need to look at why humans in general watch horror films. Since the dawn of time, humans have listened to ghost stories around the campfire and had their interest piqued by tragedies like shootings and murders. There is a human desire to experience the emotion of fear. Some crave it more than others but, regardless of where you fall on the spectrum, fear is a unique emotion that we usually try to dispel in our daily lives. So when we get the chance to conjure it up in a harmless way, it can be quite exciting—for some.

The love of ghost stories has only grown through the medium of film. Now we have something even more vivid than our own imaginations to delight and terrify us for future generations. And yet this genre has stood to be even more divisive than simple scary stories. Every person has their own opinion on how they handle and process horror

films, and that is something that I think is interesting as hell.

Researchers Jonathan Haidt, Clark McCauley, and Paul Rozin conducted a study about how the brain processes fear and upsetting images. In 1994, they developed a tool they named 'The Disgust Scale,' and exposed a number of college kids to a video made up of real-life horrors, such as close-ups of surgical procedures and animals being prepared for consumption. Ninety percent of the students turned off the film before it was completed. But this same group had no qualms about going to see a Hollywood horror film with equal, if not greater, amounts of blood and gore.

So, what is the difference between the two?

McCauley concluded that: “the fictional nature of horror films affords viewers a sense of control by placing psychological distance between them and the violent acts they have witnessed.”

Now, *that* really makes you think...

Time to Get Personal

My own experience with the genre is one with many ups and downs. I grew up afraid of most things. I was not a fan of horror films and tried to stay away from most scary things. I still went

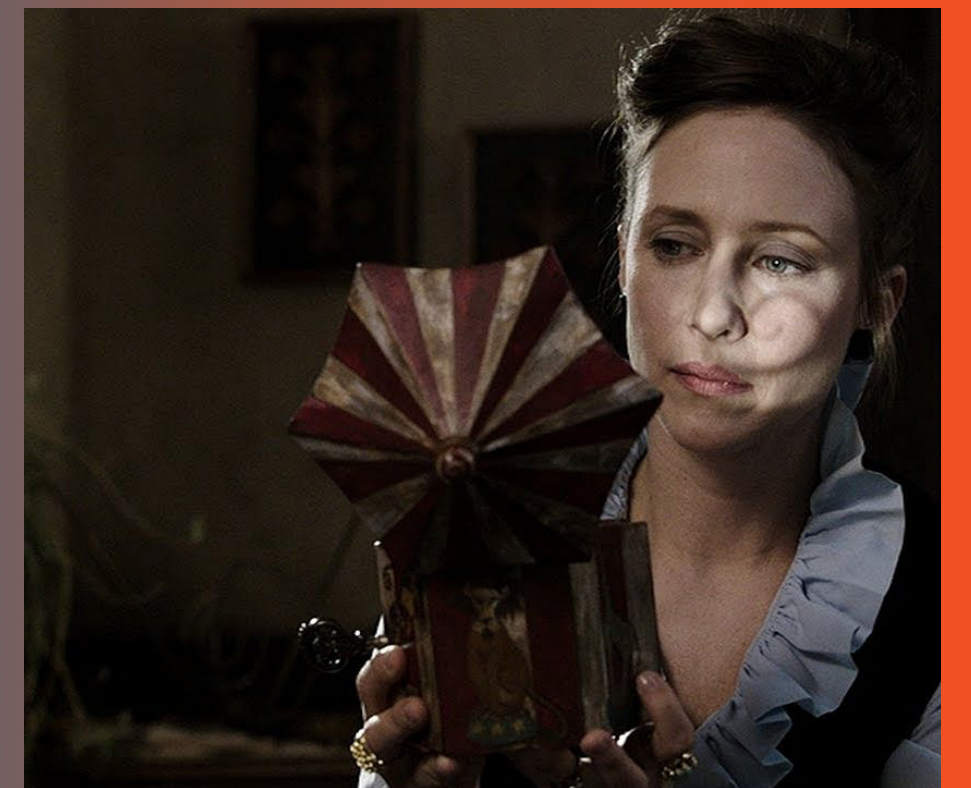
to haunted houses and loved ghost stories—I was just scared as fuck.

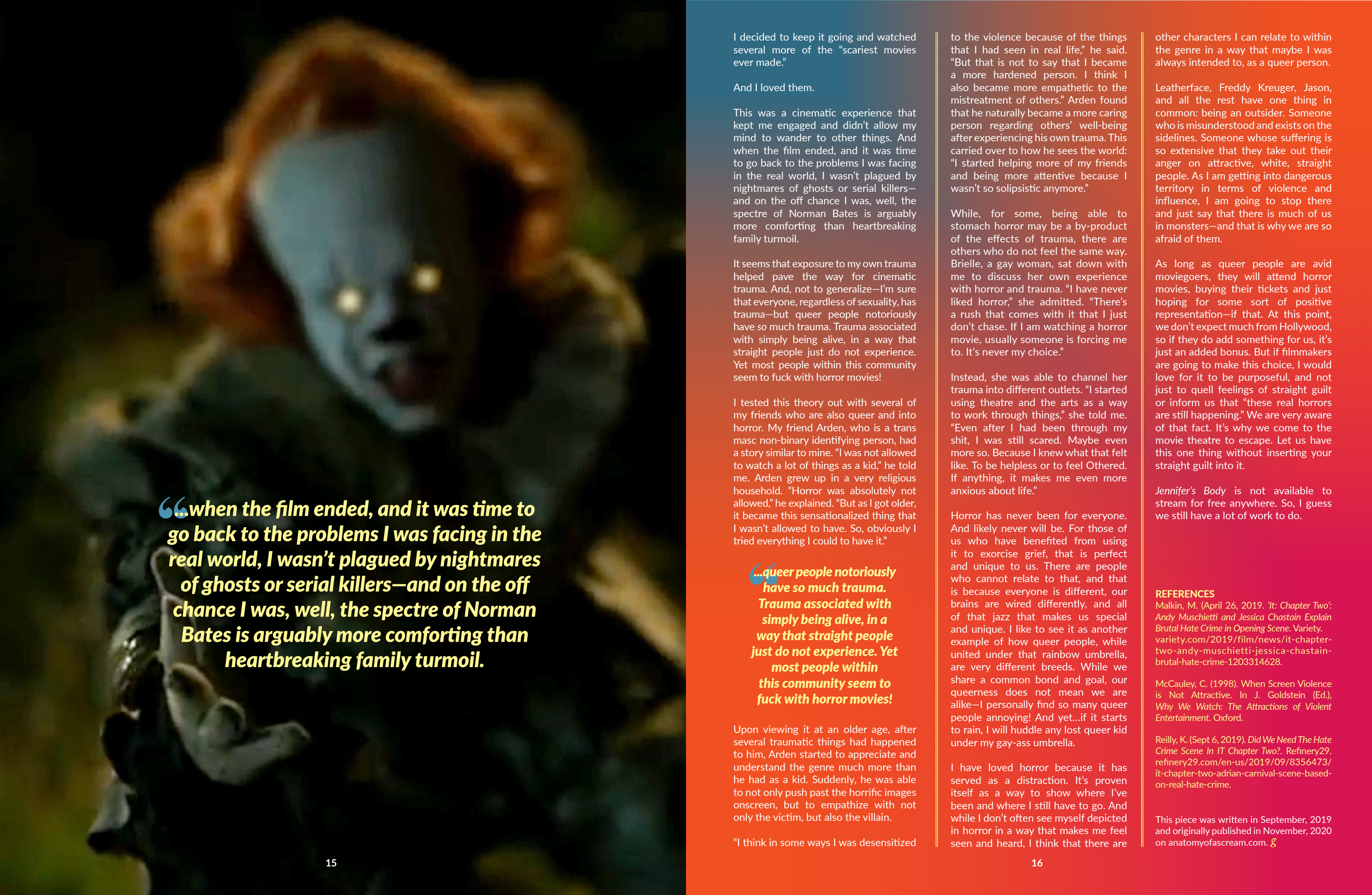
And I lived this way until I was sixteen. Then, my brother died of an overdose. Needless to say, my life significantly changed. Not only physically, but emotionally. I viewed the world very differently after. I had new priorities and generally moved through life with a newfound sense of self, and of how we fit into the universe.

But, on top of that, I was suddenly able to watch horror films.

It didn't happen overnight. But one day, very soon after, around Hallowe'en, I was still grieving and ended up watching James Wan's *The Conjuring* (2013) with a few of my friends. This was purportedly “the scariest film of the year” according to not only several publications, but also many of my friends who had seen it.

So, I posted up with my friends, trying to forget about the tragedy that had befallen my family. I instead tuned into another family that was dealing with an entirely different tragedy—one involving ghosts and spooks! And while the jump scares still made me twitch, the overall impending creepiness of the film did not. In fact, it slightly comforted me. And when the film ended, I was fine. We were all still there. We had made it through the darkness.





“When the film ended, and it was time to go back to the problems I was facing in the real world, I wasn’t plagued by nightmares of ghosts or serial killers—and on the off chance I was, well, the spectre of Norman Bates is arguably more comforting than heartbreaking family turmoil.

I decided to keep it going and watched several more of the “scariest movies ever made.”

And I loved them.

This was a cinematic experience that kept me engaged and didn’t allow my mind to wander to other things. And when the film ended, and it was time to go back to the problems I was facing in the real world, I wasn’t plagued by nightmares of ghosts or serial killers—and on the off chance I was, well, the spectre of Norman Bates is arguably more comforting than heartbreaking family turmoil.

It seems that exposure to my own trauma helped pave the way for cinematic trauma. And, not to generalize—I’m sure that everyone, regardless of sexuality, has trauma—but queer people notoriously have so much trauma. Trauma associated with simply being alive, in a way that straight people just do not experience. Yet most people within this community seem to fuck with horror movies!

I tested this theory out with several of my friends who are also queer and into horror. My friend Arden, who is a trans masc non-binary identifying person, had a story similar to mine. “I was not allowed to watch a lot of things as a kid,” he told me. Arden grew up in a very religious household. “Horror was absolutely not allowed,” he explained. “But as I got older, it became this sensationalized thing that I wasn’t allowed to have. So, obviously I tried everything I could to have it.”

“...queer people notoriously have so much trauma. Trauma associated with simply being alive, in a way that straight people just do not experience. Yet most people within this community seem to fuck with horror movies!

Upon viewing it at an older age, after several traumatic things had happened to him, Arden started to appreciate and understand the genre much more than he had as a kid. Suddenly, he was able to not only push past the horrific images onscreen, but to empathize with not only the victim, but also the villain.

“I think in some ways I was desensitized

to the violence because of the things that I had seen in real life,” he said. “But that is not to say that I became a more hardened person. I think I also became more empathetic to the mistreatment of others.” Arden found that he naturally became a more caring person regarding others’ well-being after experiencing his own trauma. This carried over to how he sees the world: “I started helping more of my friends and being more attentive because I wasn’t so solipsistic anymore.”

While, for some, being able to stomach horror may be a by-product of the effects of trauma, there are others who do not feel the same way. Brielle, a gay woman, sat down with me to discuss her own experience with horror and trauma. “I have never liked horror,” she admitted. “There’s a rush that comes with it that I just don’t chase. If I am watching a horror movie, usually someone is forcing me to. It’s never my choice.”

Instead, she was able to channel her trauma into different outlets. “I started using theatre and the arts as a way to work through things,” she told me. “Even after I had been through my shit, I was still scared. Maybe even more so. Because I knew what that felt like. To be helpless or to feel Othered. If anything, it makes me even more anxious about life.”

Horror has never been for everyone. And likely never will be. For those of us who have benefited from using it to exorcise grief, that is perfect and unique to us. There are people who cannot relate to that, and that is because everyone is different, our brains are wired differently, and all of that jazz that makes us special and unique. I like to see it as another example of how queer people, while united under that rainbow umbrella, are very different breeds. While we share a common bond and goal, our queerness does not mean we are alike—I personally find so many queer people annoying! And yet...if it starts to rain, I will huddle any lost queer kid under my gay-ass umbrella.

I have loved horror because it has served as a distraction. It’s proven itself as a way to show where I’ve been and where I still have to go. And while I don’t often see myself depicted in horror in a way that makes me feel seen and heard, I think that there are

other characters I can relate to within the genre in a way that maybe I was always intended to, as a queer person.

Leatherface, Freddy Krueger, Jason, and all the rest have one thing in common: being an outsider. Someone who is misunderstood and exists on the sidelines. Someone whose suffering is so extensive that they take out their anger on attractive, white, straight people. As I am getting into dangerous territory in terms of violence and influence, I am going to stop there and just say that there is much of us in monsters—and that is why we are so afraid of them.

As long as queer people are avid moviegoers, they will attend horror movies, buying their tickets and just hoping for some sort of positive representation—if that. At this point, we don’t expect much from Hollywood, so if they do add something for us, it’s just an added bonus. But if filmmakers are going to make this choice, I would love for it to be purposeful, and not just to quell feelings of straight guilt or inform us that “these real horrors are still happening.” We are very aware of that fact. It’s why we come to the movie theatre to escape. Let us have this one thing without inserting your straight guilt into it.

Jennifer’s Body is not available to stream for free anywhere. So, I guess we still have a lot of work to do.

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Taboos + Transgressions

In Conversation with Darren Elliott-Smith

by Joe Lipsett

Dr. Darren Elliott-Smith is Senior Lecturer in Film and Television at University of Stirling, Scotland. His research is focused on representations of queerness, gender, and the body in horror film and television. He has published numerous academic articles, contributed to book collections, and is the author of *Queer Horror Film and Television* (I.B. Tauris, 2016) and co-editor of *New Queer Horror Film and Television* (UWP, 2020) with Dr John Edgar Browning. I was able to sit down with him for a chat about his work, the link between horror and eroticism, and the current queer horror moment.

Where does the fascination with queer horror stem from? How did you get started teaching and writing about it?

My fascination with queer horror really stems from my own experience with horror film as a young queer child. I remember being obsessed with a book borrowed from my grandparents' library that focused on Universal horror makeup and costume—a photography book with glossy images of The Wolf Man, famous pictures of Lon Chaney in *London After Midnight* (1927)—and found an affinity between my own perceived difference and these supposed monsters. As a child, I still saw these as entirely sympathetic monsters or Others and, of course, they just look more interesting, so I sought to mimic them in plentiful fancy dress costumes.

At an early age, 6 or 7, my aunt and uncle would show my brother and I countless horror films, from Cronenberg's *The Brood*, *Scanners*, and the television adaptation of *Salem's Lot*, to the more outrageous Italian cannibal film Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* (a lot of the films were actually banned as 'video nasties' in the UK).

I was intrigued, but utterly traumatised by these films. I'd often have night terrors afterwards, as well as extreme physical responses (nausea, etc.). My brother and guardians would ridicule

my reaction, so they were always tinged with a sense of guilt or shame.

I also associated horror with a fascination for the transgressive: I was seeing things I shouldn't, feelings I connected to my own queerness. It was something society was telling me not to tell anyone about, something I should keep to myself or avoid.

Later, as an adult, these memories fascinated me. As a young gay man, horror spoke to my own sense of the taboo, but it was also bound up with a sense of guilt, shame, and humiliation as different.

How did your relationship change as you matured and how did you begin writing about it?

I often saw horror as intensely erotic at times. A lot of the films' combinations of sex with death wasn't lost on me even at that early age, and later this drew me to the obvious gaysploitation erotic horrors that I academically analysed when I was at University and on into my PhD.

I was interested in developing my understanding of an emerging subgenre that I saw was "coming out of the shadows." I noticed that in my local Blockbuster Video there seemed to be a trend in slasher horrors that didn't just focus on female victims killed in erotic

ways, but instead focused on male characters—often in states of undress.

Here, I refer to the ridiculously bad David DeCoteau series of films in the early to mid-'90s—*Voodoo Academy*, *The Brotherhood*—that seemed to bring together all of these aspects (however poorly produced) that connected with my love of horror and the erotic spectacle of male objectification.

So, I embarked on a PhD that was initially building on Harry Benshoff's work in *Monsters in the Closet*, but built on the films that were coming out in the wake of that publication: works that were 'out horrors'—works that no longer used queerness as metaphor or allegory, but were explicitly part of the narrative proper. Many of these texts were merging 'out' queerness with a sense of camp performance, genre-play, and eroticism.

My initial work was connecting this 'softcore' gaysploitation horror to other works of legitimate queer horror like *Hellbent*, revisions of *Carrie* in theatrical performance and drag, and in hardcore experimental porn shorts like *Indelible* (and also the obsession with gay porn studios' own pastiches and parodies of horror films such as the *The Hole/The Ring*). As I was researching, more and more films were coming out: television shows were engaging more explicitly with queer

darren elliott-smith

I.B. TAURIS

QUEER HORROR

film and television

sexuality and masculinity at the margins



aspects and I was lucky enough to find myself with more than enough material to analyse and consider from a sociopolitical perspective.

How do you define queer horror?

It's hard to define. My PhD examiner (the late horror academic Peter Hutchings) asked "Isn't all horror queer?" and I would agree that it is—or, at least, has the potential to be queer. This is precisely because, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes in *Tendencies*, "queer is

a continuing movement [...] recurrent, eddying, troublant" and horror's oppositional, subversive, troubling aspects resound completely with the queerness of one's existence.

Horror also clearly connects sex with transgression (whether this is punished or not); it defines sexuality with fear and terror, and also with desire and the erotic lure of difference. As a young queer man growing up through the AIDS epidemic, this was how I developed my own sexuality: through

a recognition of a passionate, erotic desire that was seen as different, but also dangerous and terrifying. The fear was part of the allure.

I would say that all horror is queer, with some indeed queerer than others. In my book, I try to outline that queer horror is really in the eye of the beholder. I can define a horror film as queer precisely because of the way I connect with it and use it—so, for me, *Carrie* is queer—but the film (despite its camp excesses and connections to bullying and teen sexuality) is not explicitly queer as such.

But then we could also define queer horror as horror that has 'out' identifying creatives or cast, or a queer plot, character, or storyline. Indeed, it doesn't need to be explicit in its representation of queerness. What is queer is also subjective, so I try to avoid a clear cut definition—as that would go against what 'queer' really means.

How has Harry M. Benshoff's seminal 1998 work Monsters in the Closet affected your research and the study of queer horror more broadly?

Benshoff's book is a really important piece of work that furthered my love of the 'closeted' horror period (i.e. when queerness in horror is suggested). But due to the limitations of the time, it stops short of discussing what happens to the monstrous metaphor of horror when the queerness of horror becomes 'outed' and more explicit. In my work, I argue that the metaphor is starting to be used again, but this time to critique problems within LGBTQ+ culture.

Queer Horror Film and Television is primarily focused on contemporary queer films and television shows, and the vast majority are gay/male-centric. How did you decide which films and shows to include?

My book is an adaption of my PhD, which had to be slightly narrowed in focus due to the sheer scope of queer horror. It's not intended to focus on ALL aspects of queer horror, from a subjective POV—it is indicative of one particular area.

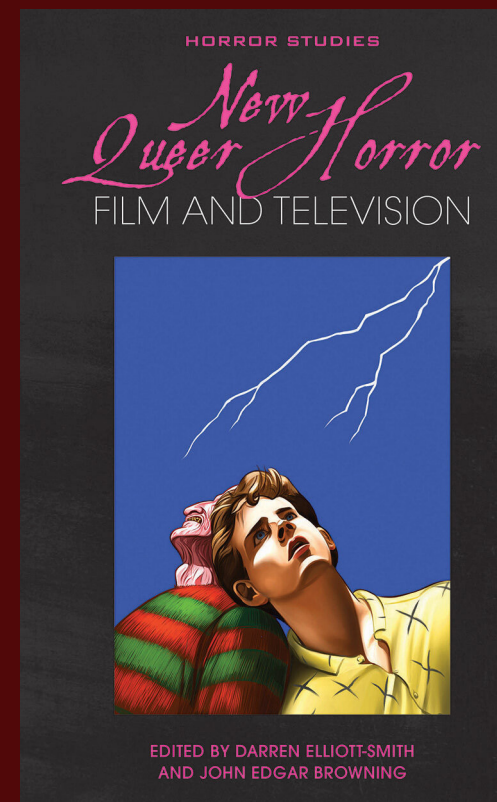
But as is usual in the world of queerness, there is more content and more vocal representations of white, male, middle-class, western subjects in terms of writing, directing, production,

and on-screen representation. Due to this bias, there was simply more textual evidence and films being produced for me to look at. At that time in the early 2000s-2010s, most of the LGBTQ+ horror being produced was focused on queer male, bi male, and gay male figures/themes.

While there's a long history of queers in the horror genre, the last five or so years have seen the concept taking off in the mainstream press to the point that queer horror is having "a moment". How do you account for the rise in interest in the subject?

Clearly there's money in it now, so the development and popularity of the marginal productions—from HereTV! and DeCoteau and the festival circuit—proved that an audience exists. Then, with the shift to online PPV channels, cheaper methods of digital distribution and the rise of television horror, there was a means to hit the right demographic without fear of missing the mark (a lot of DeCoteau's early films did this, which had lots of straight male horror fans a little pissed off).

I think that once financial viability is proven, then the producers go where the money is. So Ryan Murphy's *American Horror Story*—queer horror television show par excellence—is a case in point. It's clearly queer in style,



structure, excess, casting, production, narratives, and it worked to hit a number of different audiences, a multiplicity of queerness. Hence the proliferation of that series.

You're based in the UK so I'm curious if you have a different perspective on queer horror films coming out of North America compared to other countries. Do you see distinctions in the depiction of queer characters and storylines in horror films from different world cinemas?

My recent work tackles queer horror productions coming from European directors (*Der Samurai*, *Knife + Heart*, *Stranger By the Lake*, *B & B*, *Unhappy Birthday*) and wider afield in terms of Asian cinema (*The Wig*, *Remington and the Zombadings*).

There's not a HUGE amount of UK queer horror, but that is changing thanks to productions like *In the Flesh* (BBC Three series) and the Irish zombie film *The Cured*. Both borrow from the history of recent zombie cinema (Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*, but also a history of film and television based in Kitchen Sink Realism), so I can see more European/UK references and styles influencing the queer horror from this side of the pond. There are connections between Canadian and German queer horror that Bruce LaBruce delved into in his queer zombie films *Otto* and *LA Zombie*.

Our culture is so awash with US/North American content, so because of the programming here being overwhelmed by that, it's second nature now to me to connect with US/NA content.

What are you hoping to see more of in queer horror of the future (texts, people, reception)?

I hope that we get a diversification of gender/sexuality in terms of production and particularly a more nuanced depiction of trans-horror. There is a clear resistance at the moment (I see this in my own students studying queer horror) that echoes what LGB people in the '90s felt about horror's associations of queerness/non-normative sexuality with the monstrous as being dangerous. Things (thankfully) have slightly moved on since then (much like the issues around the embrace of the word 'queer' for some people) to embrace the monstrous and celebrate difference.

Emerging Trends in Queer Horror

as identified by
Darren Elliot-Smith

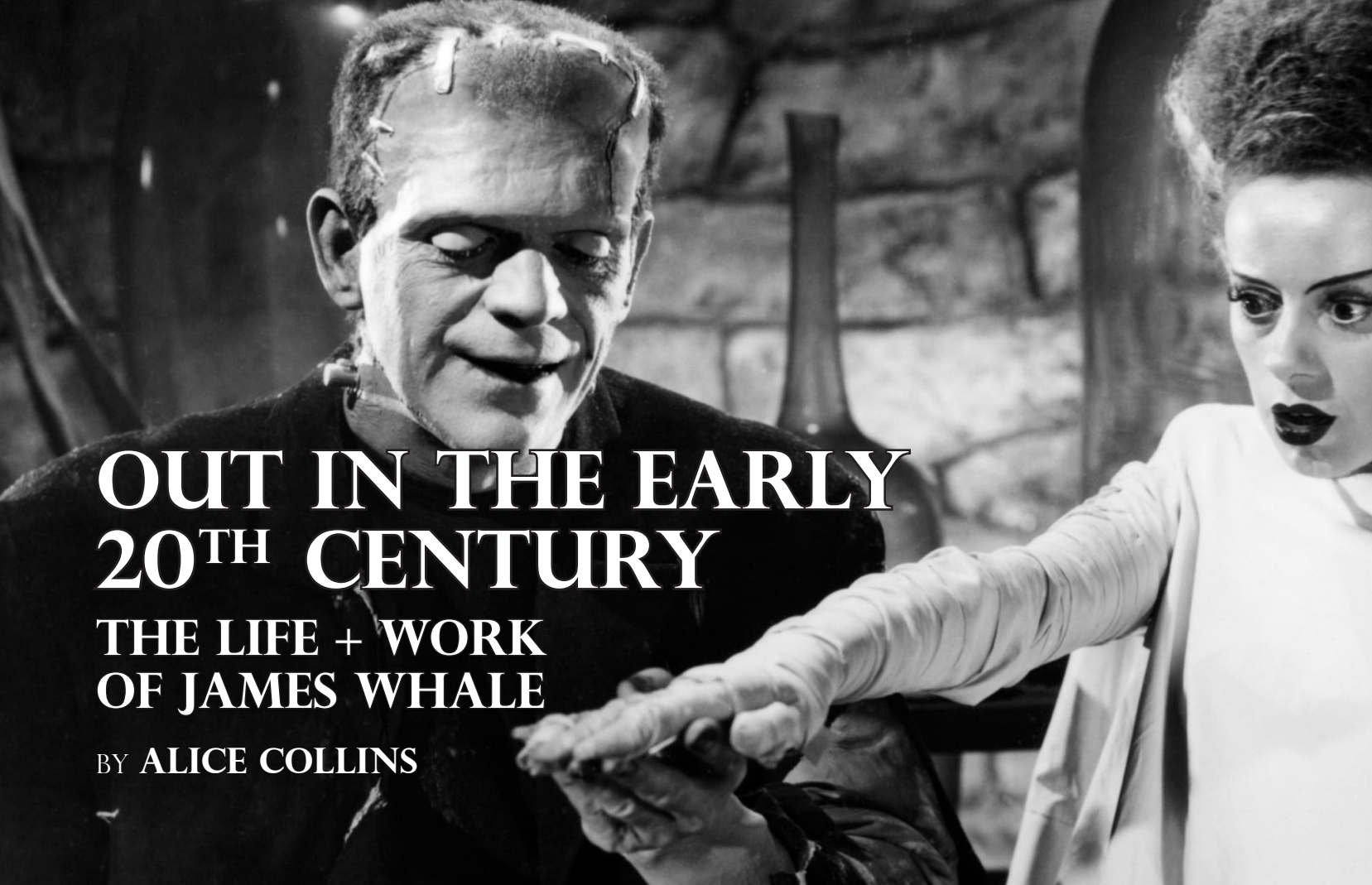
- ▶ "Guilt/shame and reconfiguring our sense of sexual and gendered difference via the sympathetic Other (identification with the monster), or via the concept of hauntology (the past haunting the present in order to inform it by way of recurring trauma or ghosts)."
- ▶ "Issues around femininity being associated with gay/queer masculinity and some subsections of queer male culture's effeminophobia."
- ▶ "Rejections and negotiations of gender stereotyping in the draggy excesses of some queer horror."
- ▶ "Echoes of AIDS anxieties and fear of infection, but also the embrace of this 'unnatural reproduction' seen as community-building through monstrous bites, etc. "

Trans spectators still struggle with the representations of trans-ness in horror that are aligned with monstrosity, and rightly so. I'm not sure what would have to happen to allow that to also be a source of celebration and empowerment. Perhaps more trans-sympathetic stories and producers/writers might help? There is some negotiation still happening with this, so we're still in the process of developing a more positive embrace of queer horror for certain audiences.

If someone is trying to get into queer horror, what's a good starting point you'd recommend?

Probably the stuff coming out of Europe like *Knife + Heart*, *Raw*, *Thelma*, and *Rift*. There's also *The Perfection* and *What Keeps You Alive*, and I really like *Closet Monster* (2015).

But my favourite is *Carrie*, always *Carrie*. She always comes back. Again its not explicitly queer—but it is so, so queer.



OUT IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

THE LIFE + WORK OF JAMES WHALE

BY ALICE COLLINS

Horror is queer. It is a genre created and powered by the queer for centuries. When one is born into a society that actively hates you and threatens your safety from day one (without you doing a thing other than existing), it becomes pretty easy to come up with truly terrifying creations.

One of the pioneers of the genre wrote a little story called *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818). She was a bisexual teenage girl by the name of Mary Shelley. Her imagination was sparked by a gaggle of people in multiple countries around the world making a spectacle of electrocuting dead bodies, and the ensuing debate of whether or not the electricity could bring a person back to life. It was like dinner and a show: go grab something to eat and then pay to watch some person, not always a scientist, use a portable early battery attached to rods applied to nerve clusters to make a body twitch. Due to the nervous system running on internally produced electricity, some thought the dead could be brought back to life with the correct application of an external energy source. This idea—

plus an ill-fated vacation fraught with never-ending disaster, a dare, and nearly nightly thunderstorms—birthed *Frankenstein*.

In 1910, a very unfortunate adaptation of the story was made by Thomas Edison. Other than being one of the earliest horror films, there's not a whole lot to say about it other than... it's fine. It would take another 20-ish years before Universal Studios decided to give the story a go. With the unexpected and explosive success of Tod Browning's *Dracula* in 1931, producers rushed *Frankenstein* into production with an openly gay man named James Whale in the director's chair. Just think about it for a moment. This is a gay man, bringing to life a story with a plethora of trans subtext that was originally from a novel written by a bisexual woman. You can't get much more queer than that!

It is very hard to know James Whale. Separating the truth from the fiction is a daunting and nearly impossible task. The majority of the information we have comes from secondary sources, like the people who knew him and

semi-biographical accounts such as books and a film about his life. There is an air of mystery and mystique surrounding him, and while interviews with him exist, they are few and far between and difficult to track down. The majority of the confirmable facts about him come from public records. His true and complete self was never able to be fully realized or shared with the world in any authentic way. He lived in a time when you could go to prison for decades for getting caught in the ecstasy of sodomy. His later life and death are also shrouded in mystery—he fell largely out of the limelight and his films and paintings (a handful of which were lent to Bill Condon's 1998 production *Gods and Monsters*, starring Sir Ian McKellan as Whale) were not yet fully recognized as the works of art that they truly are.

James Whale was born in the UK in 1889. Going through life, he had a rough hand dealt to him—and not just because he was gay at the turn of the twentieth century. He was unable to finish school, pulled out by his family who needed his labour to survive. He wasn't as strong as his siblings, so he

turned to less physically demanding work like cobbling and selling the reclaimed nails from shoes as scraps for extra money. It was around this time he discovered his talent for the visual arts with painting. He made money selling his artistic talent by lettering signs and price tags.

As World War I ramped up, Whale saw conscription as an inevitability so he enlisted, as typically volunteers were treated better than those forced to fight. He most likely made Second Lieutenant before becoming a prisoner of war during a battle on the Western Front in Flanders and being kept in the Holzminden Officers' Camp. Not to say that it wasn't traumatic, but those at the Officers' Camp were treated leagues better than those at the Holzminden Internment Camp. It was at the Officers' Camp that Whale became involved in writing, producing, designing sets for, and occasionally acting in theatrical productions. He was kept there until the end of the war. Finding this work to be a "source of great pleasure and amusement," he would soon make a career for himself.

Back in the UK, a free man once again, he found his footing in that source of respite he discovered during the war and began working in the theatre. If I had to take a guess as to what brought him in that direction, I'd say it was the best place to find more queer people just like him. Theatre for queer individuals has always been a safer space than other areas of life. This is not to say that James Whale was a man afraid of his sexuality or that he went into the theatre just because he'd be able to find others. He embraced his sexuality; he was out. He lived in a time when it was excessively rare to be an out homosexual male because it was downright dangerous to every aspect of your life. You were punished for being anything but cis, white, and straight. There were no protections for you and you could be arrested at any time. Being in the theatre while out could be seen as an act of both self-preservation and love.

Being 'out' during this period is not even close to what our society in 2021 could even consider as being out. You could be out, but not OUT. This version of out is more like having a beard to trick the straights. You would have to use code words that other queer

people would recognize but would still come off as innocuous to mainstream society. To massively understate it, a little bit of subterfuge was required. A few examples from over the years are "family," "a friend of Dorothy," "a club member"—even the word "gay" itself was code at one point.

Words weren't the only way queer people could signal to each other. They also used non-verbal cues. One of the more widely known examples comes from the drag scene, and that's acting campy. Another way of signalling to other queer individuals while avoiding the attention of the straights was through being fashionable and adopting certain ways of dress, while being careful to skirt the boundaries of getting into dangerous legal territory. Remember, cross-dressing was (and is) so stigmatised that even the infamous Stonewall Inn (operating many decades later in the late 1960s) would only let a few cross-dressing individuals and trans people in each night. The amount of stereotypes that came from these signals could be an article all to itself. And these are just the more widely known American codes that queers have used. Nearly every country has their own cultural references for queerness (though there are numerous cultures in which being physical with and showing affection to those of the same gender is accepted and seen as 100% straight). Describing and compiling the sheer number of code words and behaviours used to signal queerness throughout history could fill an entire library.

JAMES WHALE'S WORK REVERBERATES IN POPULAR CULTURE TODAY NEARLY 100 YEARS LATER.

Due to Whale's success in theatre, he was noticed and scouted by film producers. With the era of the silent film ending and the time of the talkies just beginning, producers sought out people who had experience with dialogue. In 1929, he signed with Paramount Pictures. Around the same time, he met David Lewis, who would become a prominent film producer in the 1940s and '50s. He became Whale's partner a year later and they were together for 22 years, separating in 1952. Despite not being together when Whale died, he

was still involved with the late director to a certain extent. It was Lewis who made the decision to have Whale cremated and later on released the contents of his suicide note.

Whale had multiple successes, which led to Universal Studios signing a five-year contract with him beginning in 1931. His first film with Universal, *Waterloo Bridge* (1931), was such a critical and commercial success that the head of the studio, Carl Laemmle Jr. offered him the choice of any property the studio owned. Wanting to move away from the war films that brought him success and looking for a project that truly interested him, he decided upon *Frankenstein*, thus cementing his place in queer horror history.

His work in *Frankenstein*, *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), and *The Invisible Man* (1933) were a gigantic piece of the foundation that set up the Universal Classic Monsters cinematic universe, and Whale is probably one of the people who has most left their mark on the current climate of filmmaking today. Besides *The Wolf Man*, I believe it is the *Frankenstein* creature that makes the most appearances in that cycle of films. Universal was still milking *The Invisible Man* franchise way into the 1950s. There were crossover films, vs films, a recurring cast of characters, and the same actors would appear in subsequent films. Universal didn't care too much about the established canon of each character and kept mashing all those monsters together. They've all been brought back from the dead more times than Charles Xavier.

James Whale's work reverberates in popular culture today nearly 100 years later. Every film studio now wants their own shared cinematic universe. It's a shame that Universal colossally botched their attempt to re-launch these Classic Monsters as their own money-printing machine, *twice*. It would've been interesting to see which ideas from the original film cycle stayed, and the which ideas they would inject for a contemporary audience.

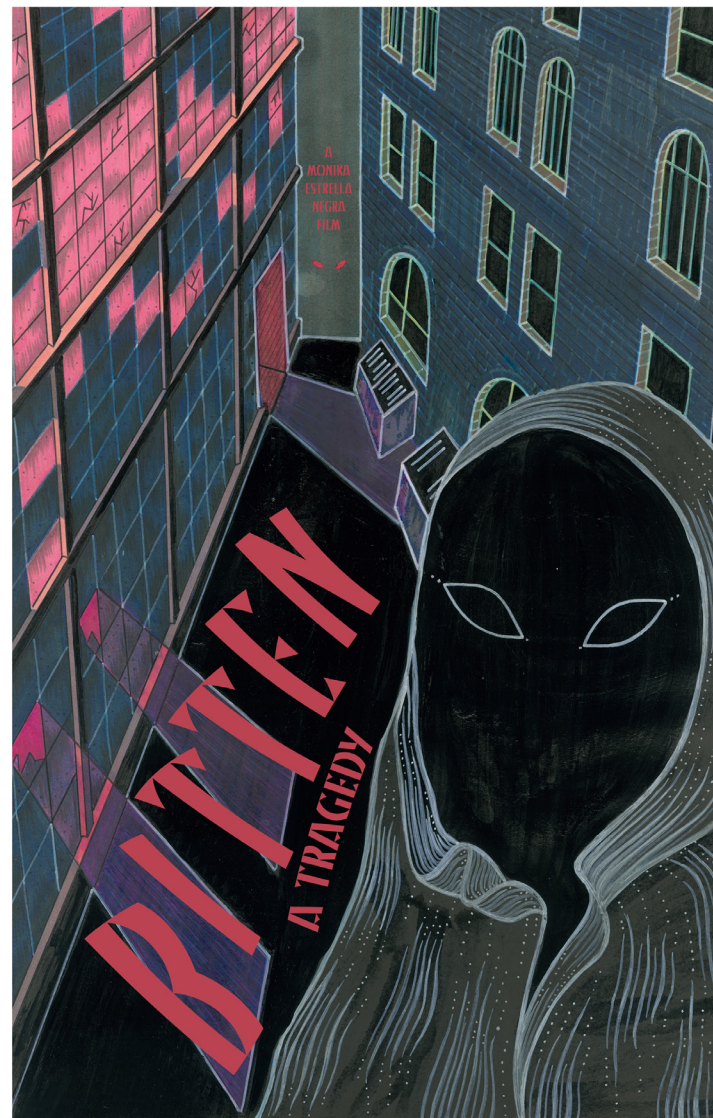
Queer readings of Whale's work at Universal are, well, universal. It's almost impossible not to see the glaring signs everywhere. It doesn't hurt that you've got one of the queerest horror films ever made in *The Bride of Frankenstein*. The relationship

between Dr. Frankenstein (Colin Clive) and Dr. Pretorius (Ernest Thesiger) just screams gay; for example, Frankenstein leaves his new wife Elizabeth (Valerie Hobson) to go work and live alone with Pretorius as the same-sex parents of a “monster”. There are certain scenes in which Pretorius looks absolutely jealous of Elizabeth and even turns his back to her. You could even read the relationship between The Creature (Boris Karloff) and the blind man (O.P. Heggie) as a satire of heterosexual family values. Despite statements to the contrary from Whale’s partner David Lewis, it’s a little hard to believe that all of James Whale’s work was about the artistry of film...and none about injecting queer subtexts into it.

A short six years after his success with *Frankenstein*, Whale “retired” from the mainstream film industry. In the years between 1937-1950, he took on a handful of projects such as a short film for the US military during World War II, a Broadway play, and a final short film as a director. Rumour has it that he was ousted from the industry because he was homosexual. The true reason will never be known, because no one has spoken up about it. Just as Whale’s career was winding down, his partner’s was ramping up, so Whale was alone and lonely a lot. Lewis bought him a sizable supply of canvases and paint to help him pass the time, and it rekindled his love of painting. Eventually, he had a dedicated art studio built.

He lived out the rest of his years mainly with David Lewis until 1952, when he started a relationship with another man, Pierre Foegel. After a series of events involving Foegel, Whale informed Lewis that he was enamoured with the man and intended to move Foegel in with them. At that point, Lewis had enough and left. In 1954, Foegel moved in full time with Whale, but in 1956 Whale’s health began declining. He suffered a couple of strokes and severe depression which was treated by shock treatment. No longer wanting to deal with the mental decline, he committed suicide by drowning himself on May 29, 1957. His life was fraught with hardship, but also much happiness and success. His legacy is firmly cemented in film history and in queer history. His work and the work of those inspired by it will entertain people for generations to come. [g](#)

AUDRE'S REVENGE FILM AND 4MILECIRCUS PRESENT



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Starring Monika Estrella Negra, Dylan Mars Greenberg, Luzifer Priest and Sarah Schoofs
Soundtrack by Anna Vo • Produced by 4MileCircus • Executive Producer Mariam Bastani

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The Expiry Date

by Valeska Griffiths

The buzzer sounded for a sixth time, a sonic abomination that drilled into Sonya’s brain with a sharp insistence that was beginning to override her determination to ignore it. Yet ignore it she did, not even glancing at the button beside the speaker that would unlock the entryway and grant ingress to the would-be interloper currently having a tantrum in the apartment building’s run-down lobby.

The sound abruptly ceased, mercifully. Sonya waited—eight seconds, twenty seconds—then breathed a sigh of relief. She imagined the visitor, who was undoubtedly her now-ex-partner Sam, angrily pushing the exterior door open and marching across the street to the bus stop. At this moment, in fact, Sam was most likely glaring up at the third-floor window in an attempt to catch Sonya parting the polka-dotted IKEA curtains and gazing down at her.

Let her, Sonya thought.

She remained at her workspace and focused on the task at hand, not even tempted to approach the window and confirm her suspicions. Sam had no real reason to be here—Sonya had already packed up her belongings (a toothbrush, a worn-out copy of *Her Body and Other Parties*, a few t-shirts, a Godzilla Funko-Pop, and a sad-looking rubber vibrator with a chipped battery cap) and handed them to her during their last uncomfortable meeting.

Sam hadn’t taken it well, but Sonya

supposed that was to be expected.

It wasn’t that Sam wasn’t fun to be with. She could be a blast, at times. The sex was good, they shared a fondness for the outdoors, and Sonya had loved her wickedly dirty sense of humour. If that were enough, they could have been a great couple long-term.

But it *wasn’t* enough, was it?

Sonya gazed down at her current project, a dreamy smile languidly bleeding across her face like a stroke of cerise watercolour on wet paper. Sam would never have understood this passion of Sonya’s, this *need*, and that incompatibility is why they would never have worked as a couple. After all, if you couldn’t share your biggest dreams and accomplishments with your partner, then what was the point of being with them? Besides, it had been an enjoyable six weeks, and as long as they’d both had a good time and there was no betrayal, there was no real harm done. Satisfied with her reasoning, Sonya set the thought of her former lover aside. Sam would get over it and find someone new.

And so would Sonya.

She idly picked up her phone and opened the camera app. Aiming it at her work-in-progress, she hovered her thumb over the button that would record her work for posterity, patiently waiting for the bound form lying at her feet to stop struggling, if only for a second or two.

Sonya hated a blurry photo. When he paused his desperate exertions, Sonya captured the moment quickly, pleased with the composition and the excellent lighting provided by the sheer dotted curtains. “Looking good,” she told him, nudging his blindfolded face gently with her Converse-clad toes. He moaned into the gag, his face tilted downward into the tarp that protected Sonya’s pristine hardwood floors from the thin crimson streams that continued to flow, though much more slowly now, out of the many narrow slits adorning his nude torso.

Closing the camera app, she scrolled over to the Tinder icon, neatly tucked away in a folder just off the home screen. While she hadn’t opened the app during her relationship with Sam, she hadn’t deleted it, either. Opening it now, she clicked on her profile and tapped the pencil icon to edit her bio.

Midtown girl prefers Bloody Marys to IPAs and horror movies to rom-coms. I love hiking, biking, and getting my hands dirty. Currently looking for a genuine partner-in-crime to join me on all of life’s adventures—no matter where they lead us.

Glancing down at the once-aggressive frat boy now rapidly fading on her living room floor, Sonya admired her handiwork for several delicious seconds before returning her attention to the phone and confirming her new Tinder bio.

Maybe the next swipe would be Ms. Right, at last. [g](#)

INVASION OF THE POD PEOPLE

Horror Podcast Showcase

by Joe Lipsett

When we're not enjoying spooky things, we're listening to queer folks talk about them! This month, enjoy a double serving as we spotlight Gabe Castro and Kat Kushin of *Ghouls Next Door* and Adrian Rodriguez and Stormy Monson of *Slash Her!*

Listen: podbay.fm/p/the-ghouls-next-door, podbay.fm/p/slash-her

First, full disclosure: I've been a guest on Ghouls Next Door. For readers who haven't yet experienced your delightful podcast, however, what's the elevator pitch?



Gabe: *Ghouls Next Door* is a media-analysis podcast from a horror lens where we explore the historical and psychological influences behind our cinematic fears. We call ourselves "edutainment" since we are a sweet mix of education and entertainment! Each week, we discuss a film, television show, or even video game and then unpack the influences behind it. Zombies aren't just scary cannibal creatures but can also represent racism, consumerism, and fear of disease!

How did you meet? What was the genesis of the pod?

G: Kat and I met on Craigslist! She answered an ad for a roommate here in Philly and I asked my friend to move in with her. So we all became roommates. At first, Kat and I didn't like each other. We were both in pretty awful places in our lives, but we actually became friends *after* I moved out. As a film student at Temple University, I would get pre-screening passes to watch films and no one would ever come with me to watch horror movies, but Kat answered my call and we started watching them together. It was a moment of "Oh, so you're a weirdo like me!" and the rest is history.

As for the podcast, I had always wanted to create one. I work in media and it seemed fun. I spent a lot of time listening to podcasts and would joke that I couldn't go anywhere without the "voices in my head." Podcasts were a comfort tool for me, so I wanted to create that for someone else. But I knew I

wanted it to be more than a film review show or just friends goofing off. I also didn't want to do a show on my own, which is when Kat volunteered to be my co-host. So Kat tackles the history portion of our show and I tackle the film analysis.

Kat: Gabe sums it up pretty nicely. I had just graduated from College with a degree in History and a double minor in Asian Studies and Anthropology (a long-winded degree that I never was able to use prior to the podcast). I had actually never listened to a podcast before Gabe started pitching the idea and didn't really know what went into making one. All I knew is I loved talking to Gabe. Our first few episodes were...rough, and mostly filled with us just laughing at each other. It really started to turn into something worth listening to though when we found our stride by focusing on media analysis (something Gabe was educated on) and history/anthropology (something I was educated on). It's really become the perfect mix of our expertise and passion from there and makes up the show we do today.

You've covered a super broad range of films and topics. How do you pick the films you cover?

G: We usually decide on a theme and then select films that explore those themes. The themes are diverse but the core principle is the same: we want to educate and entertain. We recently covered natural disasters like avalanches but we've also done biographical series about horror writers or directors. We've done series like 'Horrors of Technology' (covering the internet, video games, and VR), 'Isolation' (wilderness, space, underground), 'Representation in Horror' (sex workers, Black women, LGBTQIA, Latiné), and 'Queer Horror'.

We sometimes reach out of the horror landscape for the media, since the themes can get broad. For example, our



Gabe + Kat // Photo: Roland Boyden

'Horrors of Society' series covered some really tough subjects, such as the oppression of women where we used *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Stepford Wives* to explore it. But we also try to cover films that we feel show our favourite part of horror, which is the ability to tell unique and emotional stories that provoke empathy and understanding. Our 'For the Culture' series featured films from different communities such as Indigenous Peoples (*Blood Quantum*), Sudanese (*His House*), Guatemalan (*La Llorona*), and many others.

K: The topics, as random as they can be, do follow a sort of pattern. Generally, we'll do a series covering a really heavy topic such as cultural trauma and identity, and then follow it with a more lighthearted and wacky topic that acts as a self-care moment for both of us. That's kind of been the pattern for the past three years.

At one point, we were worried we might run out of films or ideas to cover, but we keep finding new things to cover or recover from a different angle. I think ultimately we seek out films and topics that have intentionality behind them, and that either do an amazing job or a horrible one.

My favourite episodes tend to be when we cover serious topics and unpack how representation can impact people (the horrors of capitalism, white supremacy, and other issues). As stressful as these episodes/films can be, it really helps to make sense of the world. Even when it doesn't make sense, it gives it some context.

What distinguishes the pod from other (queer) horror podcasts?

G: I would say our approach to the media, in that we not only cover horror films but also the outside influences of the films. We have listeners who don't even like horror but enjoy our podcast because they can learn about the film and context without having to be scared. In our recent series we were discussing mental health awareness, so I was unpacking

the film or media (horror and non-horror) but the other half was Kat breaking down the mental illnesses depicted and offering tools to help that community.

We believe in not just educating and informing our audience, but also equipping them with tools or next steps. We want people to leave our episodes with knowledge and ways to improve our world. For example, in 'Blood Quantum', we're talking about what a fun zombie film it is, but we're also talking about what blood quantum is in reality and why that's horrific. I don't think you'll find another show like ours in horror or anywhere else!

K: I agree, I don't think there's another podcast out there that does exactly what we do. The research that we put into the episodes and intentionality behind them makes the podcast something special. We try to make our content as accessible and inclusive as possible, and tailor it to appeal to people who may not feel seen elsewhere.

You've been doing this for four seasons. What have you learned about yourselves and your movie tastes since you started?

G: Since we started the podcast, we've become a lot more aware of the media we watch. We never quite remove our "media-analysis glasses" and are always asking key media literacy questions. We still enjoy media and certainly watch things just for fun, but we're also always looking for more.

Because of the way we approach the episodes, we learn quite a lot from our research. For our 'Apocalypses' series, we covered pandemics and so we had some knowledge of how to stay safe when Covid-19 first hit. It's interesting now looking back and thinking that our fun edutainment show actually helped us during a global pandemic! We have become better people because of this show and continue to grow and learn as we go.

K: If you listen from beginning to end, you can really see our growth, not only as podcasters, but as people. Gabe and I have done a lot of growing up throughout this journey. The whole process has really shown us that there's always so much more to learn, and new ways to view things. I think our movie tastes have changed a lot since the beginning of our show, in that I think we analyse the media we watch so much more than we used to. It's hard to just enjoy a movie now without thinking of the cultural context and influence of it. It's brought us to some amazing films that I don't know we would have seen if not for the podcast.

If you had to pick a favourite episode, which would it be and why?

G: Oh geez! This is tough because they're all so different. But if I had to choose, it'd be one from our 'Isolation' series since we were absolute goofballs and had a lot of fun recording them. That was also when I learned that I probably have claustrophobia and do not do well in enclosed spaces. Listen to our 'Isolation in Space' episode if you really want to hear me freaking out.

Or, alternatively, any of our 'Mindfuck' series, which was also super fun. We dressed up for those episodes, so you can see Kat and I dressed as Trinity from *The Matrix* while I rant about capitalism. It's a treat. (You can also see Kat dressed as Trunks from *Dragon Ball Z* in our 'Time Travel' episode, but *warning* that episode gets really emotional towards the end.)

K: I love when we unpack societal issues and the many ways we could die, so my favourite episodes fall under that category. In terms of costumes and content, my favourite episode is when we covered Bong-Joon Ho's *Parasite* and *Snowpiercer*. I dressed up as Chris Evans and Gabe dressed up as Tilda Swinton and, as serious as the content is, we had a really fun time. I also really loved our 'Cosmic Apocalypse' episode because it was really funny, and was one of the many instances we got to laugh about how trash humanity is.

G: Oh yes, the futility of humanity is quite entertaining!

Can you give readers a quick description of what *Slash Her* is all about?

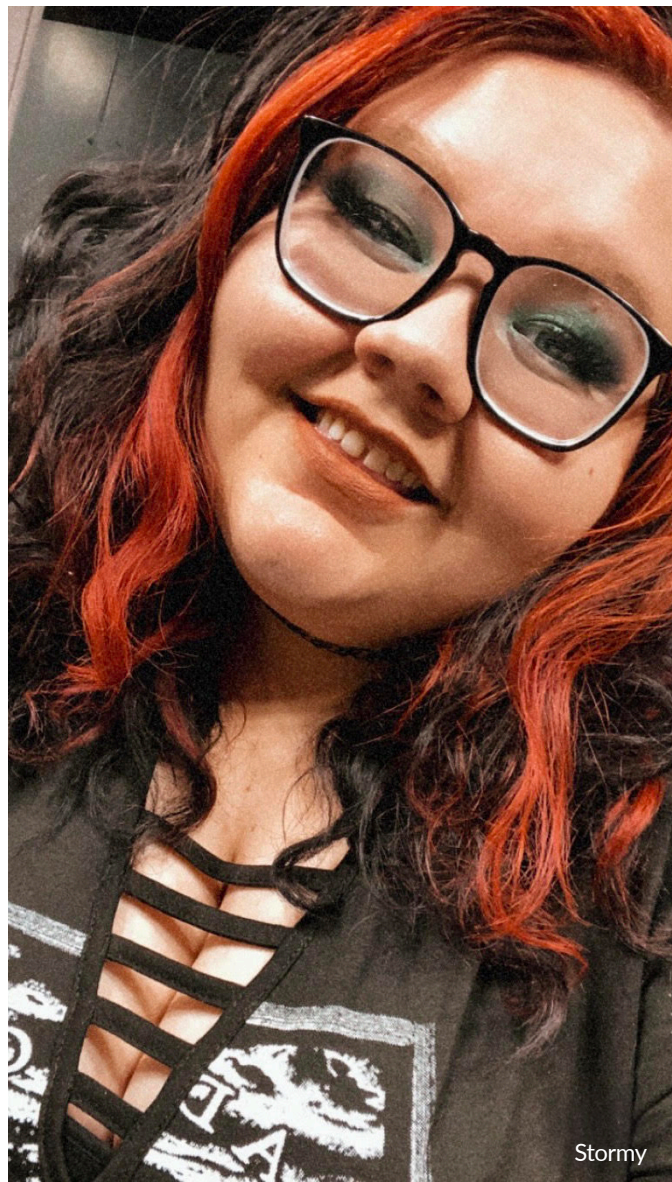
Adrian: We're two best friends taking a weekly dive into all things spooky, kooky, and terrifying! When it comes to our discussions, we want the listeners to feel like they're part of the conversation and hanging out with their friends. We don't like to take ourselves seriously and like to spout off with whatever comes to mind—both horror-related and not.



How did you meet and how did the podcast come to be?

Stormy: We actually met in a training class for an IT position for a major "golden arched" company about five years ago. We instantly hit it off, had a movie date, and the rest is history!

A: Funnily enough, it was a horror movie that we watched. While scrolling through Netflix, we ended up on *The Last Shift*,



Stormy

a 2014 horror film about a rookie cop on a haunted overnight shift. We both were scared out of our pants and we talked about it for weeks following.

S: Early in our friendship, we talked about doing a podcast. At first, I took it as a joke, but the more we talked about it, the more interested I became. The timing never felt right, but cue the pandemic...

A: About a month into the pandemic, we were both feeling the effects of self-isolation and being disconnected from the outside world. Of course, I took to watching horror movies constantly as a sense of comfort. At the time, I really had no one to talk about horror with beyond Twitter. Then, one day, I thought to myself, "a really fun name for a horror podcast would be *Slash Her*". Then, I thought, "wait... that could be me and Stormy's podcast name!"

S: Boom. Here we are. The pair of us grew up loving the horror genre and often used it as a form of escape. Through the years, we both fell off the wagon, so to speak, and really thought the podcast could be a great way to document our journey back into the genre.

What goes into the choice of films you cover?

S: To be honest, there's not really a method to our madness. Initially, we picked movies we had a lot to say about, and slowly we've fallen into a groove. While we try to adhere to a themed schedule nowadays, our tagline is 'delusional', so sometimes we just roll with the punches.

How is *Slash Her* different from other (queer) horror podcasts? What's the secret ingredient?

S: Along with documenting our journey back into the world of horror, the podcast is a safe space where we are also very open about our own personal journeys, including navigating the queer space, mental health, adulthood, and everything that comes with it.

A: I think as someone who initially identified themselves as a "gay man", my journey of self-discovery is ongoing. One thing we want to accomplish with *Slash Her* is to show everyone that it's okay to not fully grasp where you fall within the community. Stormy and I both have our own stories to tell and that sets us apart.

S: While we are horror focused, we're also more than just horror, and I feel that's what sets us apart. We just want to connect with people who love the genre as much as we do and, at the same time, use our voices to create a space where everyone knows they're valid and loved no matter your label or guilty pleasure film.

In May, you celebrated your one year anniversary. What have you


learned about yourselves over the time making the pod?

S: When we first started the podcast, I had no idea the literal rollercoaster ride I was boarding. The pandemic forced me to sit with things that I'd been avoiding and process them, all while projecting a voice out into the void. I never realized how creative I could be or how much fun I'd been denying myself.

A: It's given me a type of confidence that I never really felt I had. For years, I wanted to express myself creatively, but I never felt brave enough to try anything. It's rather exhilarating because I feel like I've found what I'm meant to be doing. *Slash Her* has allowed me to enjoy life in a way I didn't think was possible.

If you had to pick a favourite episode, which would it be and why?

S: My personal favorite is 'Megladaddies and Babysitting Clowns'! It's one of our less popular episodes, but I think it's hilarious. Adrian is one of the funniest people I know and we really took to our own storytelling in that episode. It was a blast!

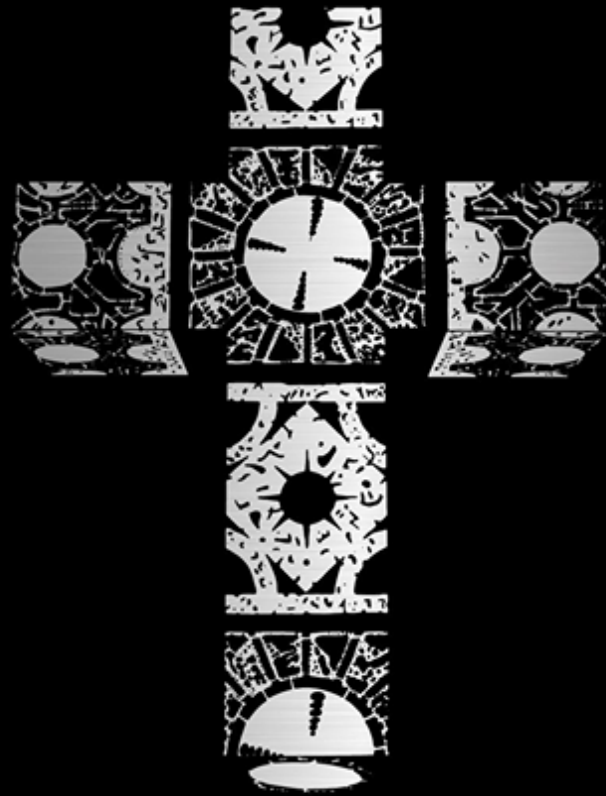
A: It's so funny that we both chose episodes that don't focus on movies, because I love our 'All About Aliens' episode! Our film-specific episodes are amazing, but I love when we go off the rails a bit. It's so much fun when we get to talk about our own spooky encounters. 



Adrian

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Dear Countess

The Countess 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've started to feel as though I might be a shapeshifter, and I'm not sure how my family and friends will react. Do you have any advice?

First of all, *félicitations* on discovering this amazing fact about yourself! I definitely understand your trepidation; we live in a world obsessed with binaries, and many people struggle to understand (or even feel threatened by) the concept of existing betwixt them. Are you human or dragon? Boy or girl? Panther or parrot? Lacking a definitive answer will jumble their brains. That's *their* problem to deal with, though many of them *will* try to make it your problem.

My advice? Ignore the bigots wherever possible, be patient with parents trying their best to learn, and find people who'll cherish you for who you are. To quote Christina Aguilera, "You are beautiful, no matter what they say." *Bonne chance*, my love!

I've been seeing this really hot masc vampire and I'd really like to, um, "stake" him, but I'm not sure he'd be into that. What should I do?

You won't know if he's open to it unless you ask! As with most relationship questions, the answer is "use your words." Why not plan a date night this week and set the mood? Cook a nice dinner (remember: no garlic!), light a few sexy red candles, throw on some moody organ music, pour him a big glass of warm blood, and talk about what turns you on and what you're curious to try. If he's interested, he'll let you know! If he isn't, don't push it—informed, enthusiastic consent is the name of the game.

You didn't mention whether you'd be using your own "stake" or a store-bought one, but if this is new to him, start small and size up as he gets comfortable. Hot tip: lube = love. Enjoy!

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

CLASSIFIEDS

Commercial & Residential Real Estate

AUG 1: Deceptively spacious home in desirable gated community. Either 5 or 6 bedrooms and up to 4 bathrooms, depending on the time of day and whether Mercury is in retrograde. Constantly changing layout offers exciting surprises every time you turn the corner! Do NOT go in the basement, for the love of god. Contact Li at (666) 787-5789 for a tour (will take anywhere from 30 min to 3 days).

Services - Offering

You haven't had a real exorcism until you've had one from me! I'm the best there is, baby! Lemme come through & expel that spirit! M: (666) 541-0700.

Sick of video meetings? IT hex artist avail. to curse your team lead's laptop. Render Microsoft Teams or Zoom unusable for 12 hrs! Contact Rain: (666) 412-4771.

Experienced theremin player available to perform anywhere in the tri-city area. Make your next party, séance, or alien autopsy 100% spookier! Contact Ji-yeon at (666) 828-6289.

Services - Seeking

NEEDED: personal chef skilled in non-gluten, Transylvanian-fusion cuisine. I'm on an O+ blood-type diet (I'll supply the blood). Ezra: (666) 355-5551.

Crime scene clean-up needed! Timing of crimes negotiable. Call Priyanka or Lita: (666) 455-8123. Rates still v fair!!

Jobs

A glowing, pulsating cloud of mist has been hanging out in the corner of my bedroom for 4 months and is constantly yelling at me in Russian. Not sure what it wants, translator needed, paying \$100/hr. Call Alejandro: (666) 633-4911.

Buying & Selling

Looking to offload two glowing ancient books. The words inside are in a dialect that is not of this earth, but they can double as nightlights. Text Jesi (666) 732-2504.

I have a major summoning ceremony coming up & I need 5 goats ASAP!! (Not to kill, just to chill with. I'm vegan.) Text only: (666) 325-6467.

Romantic Encounters



Strong, protective type looking for someone to take care of. Polyamorous + open to getting into as many people as possible. I love cold climates (better for cuddling!). While I can appreciate a nice butt, I'm really more of an arm guy. Call 1-888-999-6488 (Ontario).

Humans for Humans

I don't think you noticed me, but I definitely noticed you. You were the sultry redheaded siren perched on a rock in the Pacific at N 48° 27' 30.0668", W 141° 24' 47.2055". I was the besotted sailor humming along to your haunting melody. I can't stop thinking about you. You can shipwreck me anytime. Call Amrita (666) 436-0423.

PLACE YOUR FREE 'HUMANS FOR HUMANS' AD via the Contact Form at anatomyofascream.com.

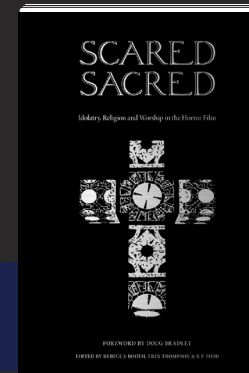
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"Every once in a while, I encounter a book, or even the rumor of one, that feels like it was written just for me: *Scared Sacred: Idolatry, Religion and Worship in the Horror Film*, an anthology of critical essays published by House of Leaves Publishing, more than lives up to the beautiful promise of its name. [...] With my previous book reviews, I tried to exercise some kind of professional restraint in expressing my enthusiasm for a particular work, but I'll make no such pretenses here: So far, *Scared Sacred* is very much the book I wish I'd had when I was first getting into horror a few years ago. We are perpetually haunted by old symbols and old ideas, and this book is a beautiful reminder of that."

- Laura Kemmerer, *What Sleeps Beneath*

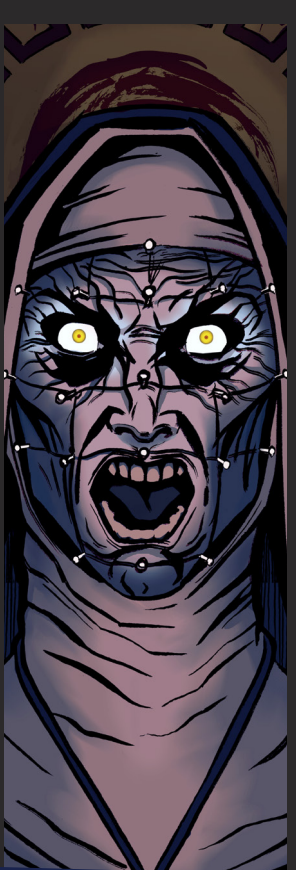


Scared Sacred: Idolatry, Religion and Worship in the Horror Film

Edited by Rebecca Booth, Valeska Griffiths, and Erin Thompson. Curated by RF Todd.

Foreword by Doug Bradley.

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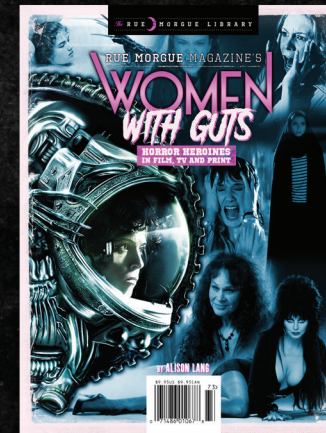
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