MONSTRUM

MONTRÉAL MONSTRUM SOCIETY / SOCIÉTÉ MONSTRUM DE MONTRÉAL

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Volume 2 (June 2019) | ISSN 2561-5629

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

The editors would like to thank Shiloh Carroll, Chelsea Korynta, and Annaëlle Winand for valuable editorial assistance on MONSTRUM 2. Thanks also to Steven Woloshen for the cover image, and to our peer reviewers.

- 2019 -
MONSTRUM is published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society
(https://www.monstrum-society.ca/)

MONSTRUM 2 (June 2019) | ISSN 2561-5629

Le Féminin et le diable : Possessions et exorcismes comme manifestation de la répression sexuelle féminine

Alexandra Dagenais

Jamais ou presque un homme ne sera possédé. Cette pensée étonnante traversa mon esprit après le visionnement de *The Last Exorcism* (Daniel Stam, 2010) en salle. Les années qui suivirent, je continue de consommer l`horreur qu'on me servait en salle et en Dvd dans les clubs Vidéotron. *The Devil Inside* (William Brent Bell, 2012), une femme est possédée. *The Possession* (Ole Bornedal, 2012), une adolescente est possédée. *The Last Exorcism 2* (Ed Glass-Donnelly, 2013), encore une femme est possédée. *Inner Demons* (Seth Grossman, 2014), *The Taking of Deborah Logan* (Adam Robitel, 2014), *Grace: The Possession* (Jeff Chan, 2014), *The Devil's Hand* (Christian E. Christiansen, 2014), *The Quiet Ones* (John Pogue, 2014); toutes des femmes. La norme ici est le féminin. Pourquoi cette répétition quasi compulsive du personnage de la femme possédée? Cette pensée devint vite un cri qui ne voulut plus se taire dans ma tête. Face au décuplement de ces frêles figures en robes blanches possédées par des démons, il m'a semblé pertinent de m'attarder au rôle de la femme et à l'étude de son corps malmené dans le film d'exorcisme. Ce qui m'intéresse particulièrement dans la lecture que l'on peut faire des œuvres cinématographiques est l'analyse des identités sexuelles et des liens entre les sexes comme constructions sociales. Ces construits sont variables selon les époques et les sociétés. Ces dernières étant traversées par les rapports de domination et de résistance. Mon objectif sera de démontrer comment la

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Alexandra Dagenais est fascinée par le cinéma de genre depuis la nuit traumatisante où à 12 ans son père lui fit découvrir *The Exorcist*. De sa rencontre avec l'horreur naquit une passion pour le cinéma qui la transporta jusqu'aux études supérieures à l'Université de Montréal. Elle est maintenant détentrice d'une maîtrise en cinéma d'horreur traitant de la répression sexuelle féminine dans les films de possession. Elle songe poursuivre au doctorat pour pouvoir se faire appeler Docteur Terreur.

possession est la manifestation d'une sexualité féminine refoulée par la société patriarcale et comment le spectacle de l'exorcisme comme attraction cinématographique objectifie cette sexualité. La production répétitive de ces films est un signe, le symptôme d'un problème plus profond. Le symptôme est le signe physique d'une maladie. Suivant la psychanalyse, lorsqu'une représentation pulsionnelle tombe sous le coup d'un interdit, elle est refoulée dans l'inconscient par la censure du Moi, mais jamais anéantie. Il peut arriver qu'un processus de tentative de réapparition des éléments refoulés se mette en place : c'est le retour du refoulé. Les symptômes sont le résultat de ce refoulement. «Ces formations sont des formes de déguisement de la pulsion refoulée rendues acceptables pour la conscience. Les représentations déguisées permettent la satisfaction du désir sans éveiller la censure du Moi en formant un compromis entre désirs et interdits» (Laplanche et Pontalis : 1976, 45). Selon moi, les films de possession sont un moyen acceptable de faire échos à une pulsion refoulée de la société patriarcale, à savoir la volonté de contrôle de la femme.

Figure 1: Emily poussant un hurlement (*The Exorcism of Emily Rose*)

Cet article est un condensé des passages et réflexions importantes de mon mémoire de maitrise publié à l'Université de Montréal. Le corpus étudié se concentre sur les films de possession ayant suivi l'engouement renouvelé pour le genre que créa *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*. *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (Scott

Derrickon, 2005), *The Last Exorcism* (Daniel Stamm, 2010), *Exorcismus* (Manuel Carballo, 2011), *The Possession* (Ole Bornedal, 2012), *The Devil Inside* (William Brent Bell, 2012), *The Last Exorcism 2* (Ed Gass-Donnelly, 2013), *The Quiet Ones* (John Pogue, 2014), *The Devil's Hand* (Christian E. Christiansen, 2014), *Grace: The Possession* (Jeff Chan, 2014) : Ces films regroupent des femmes sous le joug de la religion catholique, vierges, enfantines et naïves. Elles ne sont pas sexuellement actives et obéissent à l'autorité parentale. Le diable apparaît au moment où ces jeunes femmes veulent s'émanciper du carcan établi. Leur recherche d'autonomie attire le diable vers elles. De plus, les films choisis comportent tous au moins une scène d'exorcisme. Les paramètres identifiés vont de la glossolalie à la lévitation en passant par de l'agressivité sexuelle. Les films regroupent donc plus ou moins les mêmes caractéristiques quant aux formes de possession et ses manifestations.

La présente étude s'insère dans un cadre théorique socio-psychanalytique au sens où l'analyse de l'inconscient social contemporain peut révéler la relation entre la possession dans les films d'horreur et la répression de la sexualité féminine. Bien que je crois que celle-ci ne soit pas une science herméneutique ne présentant aucune lacune, j'adopterai cette approche. Il peut être effectivement problématique de l'appliquer à n'importe quelle situation. Mais l'utilisation de la psychanalyse est appropriée puisque les films d'horreur sont le véhicule parfait pour exprimer ce qui a été refoulé. Suivant l'école psychanalytique freudienne, comme l'ont fait d'autres théoriciennes féministes du cinéma tels que Laura Mulvey, il est possible d'analyser l'inconscient collectif pour en définir les pulsions et angoisses. La psychanalyse fait l'objet de critiques quant à son caractère archaïque et la pseudo scientificité que les adeptes de l'école freudienne et lacanienne lui attribuent. Dans leur ouvrage intitulé *Psychanalyse ou morale sexuelle: un dilemme centenaire*, Nestor Braustein et Jacques Nassif défendent la légitimité d'un tel cadre théorique. La psychanalyse s'emploie à examiner des sujets qui sont porteurs de leur passé. Les auteurs font remarquer que la sexualité à une histoire, mais que la pulsion sexuelle n'en a pas. Celle-ci est de toutes les époques bien que sa façon d'être exprimée diffère selon les normes sociales établies aux différentes décennies de notre histoire. La psychanalyse prend en compte ces modalités et les applique à l'existence des sujets. En ce sens, cette méthode d'analyse n'est pas dépassée. Comme les théoriciens sur lesquels je m'appuie pour construire ma recherche ont utilisé cette approche (Robin Wood, Barbara Creed, Laura Mulvey, etc.), je vais continuer dans cette lignée.

D'autre part, cet essai tend vers les études féministes puisqu'elles cherchent à comprendre et expliquer l'impact d'une dimension sociale sur la

représentation des genres dans les films d'horreur. Finalement, me basant sur la théorie de Robin Wood sur le retour du refoulé, je m'interroge sur la nature de la figure récurrente de la possédée. Se combinant avec l'affaiblissement de l'influence de l'Église au cours du XXe siècle, cette longue répression du corps et de la sexualité féminine a produit un retour de ses pulsions sous une forme monstrueuse. Comme je l'ai dit plus haut, l'horreur demeure le théâtre du retour du refoulé, c'est pourquoi il est intéressant de fouiller de ce côté pour déterrer les pulsions enfouies de notre société. Wood affirme dans son ouvrage «Introduction to American Horror Film» que «it is the horror film that responds in the most clear-cut and direct way, because central to it is the actual dramatization of the dual concept of the repressed/the Other, in the figure of the Monster» (1979, p. 26). C'est pourquoi son approche est essentielle à la présente étude.

L'ordre symbolique

Pour qu'un être soit apte à la vie sociale, il doit se conformer à l'ordre symbolique. Il agit au sein d'un processus d'assujettissement à un système de règles hiérarchisées, à savoir celui du patriarcat. Freud dépeint, dans son essai intitulé *La Morale sexuelle civilisée et la maladie nerveuse des temps modernes*, les normes de son époque comme étant restrictives et favorisant la répression sexuelle chez les individus se conformant au système social. Cette répression sexuelle se solderait, selon lui, par des maladies névrotiques et la solution serait de changer cette morale sexuelle «civilisée» (Freud : 1969, 2). L'ordre symbolique est dirigé par le père, car il manifeste l'autorité lorsque l'enfant découvre l'absence de phallus de la mère. D'après Freud, l'enfant face à la différence génitale des sexes éprouve l'angoisse de perdre ou la frustration de ne pas avoir de pénis. Pour Irigaray, psychanalyste française, c'est le symbolique qui structure l'imagination collective et la représentation des fantasmes de l'ordre dominant. L'ordre n'étant pas de genre neutre, mais bien masculin, les fantasmes de l'imaginaire masculin sont systématiquement supportés et normalisés par les institutions sociales. Irigaray s'oppose aussi vivement à la théorie lacanienne du phallus comme signifiant. Elle est contre l'idée d'une subjectivité unique masculinisée alors que seules la chair et les fonctions maternelles biologiques seraient féminisées, même animalisées. Elle croit en un ordre à double subjectivité et non à une subjectivité égalitaire. Car ce qui est égalitaire le sera toujours en comparaison de l'ordre symbolique dominant. Dans son essai *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, Irigaray explique comment

la subjectivité masculine étend sa domination jusqu'au niveau de la sexualité féminine. La femme trouve un certain plaisir dans l'exposition de son corps, mais celui-ci passe toujours par l'engrenage du schème phallocentrique. Elle se tient dans une position masochiste qui soumet son corps au regard. Dans cet imaginaire sexuel, elle n'est que support plus ou moins complaisant à la mise en acte des fantasmes de l'homme. Qu'elle y trouve, par procuration, de la jouissance, c'est possible et même certain. Mais celle-ci est avant tout prostitution masochiste de son corps à un désir qui n'est pas le sien ; ce qui la laisse dans cet état de dépendance à l'homme qu'on lui connaît (Irigaray: 1974, 54). La sexualité féminine a toujours été pensée à partir de paramètres masculins et vue à travers les yeux d'une société patriarcale. Cette vision de la sexualité féminine se traduit dans les films d'exorcisme avec des exemples tels que Nell (Ashley Bell dans *The Last Exorcism*) qui propose un «blowing job» au révérend Marcus (Patrick Fabian), car elle croit que c'est ce qu'il désire. Son erreur dans le terme utilisé démontre qu'elle ne sait pas très bien de quoi il s'agit, donc que ce n'est pas son désir à elle, mais plutôt ce qu'elle croit qui provoque du désir chez l'homme. Elle ne désire qu'être désirée. Barbara Creed, quant à elle, est consciente de la répercussion de la loi du père au cinéma. La problématique de Creed est semblable à la nôtre au sens où elle explique «that when woman is represented as monstruous it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive fonctions» ([1993] 2007, 7). Elle se sert de la psychanalyse pour trouver la base des peurs face au féminin monstrueux. Elle va dans le sens contraire de Freud en affirmant que la femme est monstrueuse, non parce qu'elle est castrée, mais bien parce qu'elle est castratrice. Selon elle, «the male fears woman because woman is physically whole, intact and in possession of her sexual powers. The notion of castrated woman is a phantasy intended to ameliorate man's fear of what woman might do to him» (Creed: [1993] 2007, 33). La femme doit être réprimée dans ses désirs. Ainsi, inconsciente de ses pouvoirs, elle est moins dangereuse. D'ailleurs, comme l'auteure le souligne si bien, la présence de la femme monstrueuse dans les films d'horreur représente plus l'anxiété et les peurs masculines qu'un désir de subjectivité féminin. Dans son chapitre dédié à *The Exorcist*, la possession est abordée comme la représentation de l'incapacité de l'homme et de l'ordre patriarcale à contrôler le corps en rébellion de la jeune femme. Cette impuissance conduit à un besoin de réprimer la perversité de ce corps en transformation à travers l'exorcisme. D'ailleurs, une équation revient quasi compulsivement dans chaque film de possession, à savoir l'impuissance de l'ordre patriarcal face au corps possédé. La jeune femme doit être contrôlée pour ainsi joindre le système de règles auxquelles elle est prédestinée. Déroger

du chemin se révèle être monstrueux. Comme Creed le dit, Regan n'est pas possédée par le diable, mais par «her own unsocialized body» ([1993] 2007, 40).

L'horreur et le refoulé

L'horreur est le théâtre du retour du refoulé. Les films de possessions nous présentent des figures féminines fortement réprimées dans leur sexualité. Se combinant avec l'affaiblissement de l'influence de l'Église au cours du XXe siècle, la longue répression du corps et de la sexualité féminine a produit un retour des pulsions sous une forme monstrueuse. Ce retour se fait fortement sentir dans le cinéma d'horreur puisque la sexualité, ayant toujours été séparée du sacré, est le parfait terrain pour l'exploitation monstrueuse du corps. Robin Wood explique : «it is the horror film that responds in the most clear-cut and direct way, because central to it is the actual dramatization of the dual concept of the repressed/the Other, in the figure of the Monster» (1979, 26). De nouveau, la théorie du retour du refoulé provenant de la psychanalyse freudienne est utilisée.

> Le moi se défend contre le danger en utilisant le phénomène du refoulement, l'émoi pulsionnel est, d'une manière quelconque, entravé et l'incitation ainsi que les perceptions et les représentations concomitantes sont oubliées. Mais le processus n'est pas pour autant achevé car, en effet, ou bien la pulsion a conservé sa force ou bien elle tend à la récupérer ou bien enfin elle est ranimée par quelque incident nouveau. […] Tous les phénomènes de la formation des symptômes peuvent être considérés comme des « retours du refoulé ». Leur caractère distinctif est la déformation qu'ont subie, par rapport à leur forme originale, les éléments resurgis (Freud: [1939], 2011).

L'émoi pulsionnel face à la sexualité féminine est refoulé dans la société. La pulsion est transformée en déplaisir afin d'être plus facilement contrôlée, mais elle réapparait en un autre accès sous la forme d'un symptôme. Une des manifestations de ces symptômes est selon moi la présence des personnages féminins possédés au cinéma. Pour intégrer l'ordre symbolique et devenir un être social, l'humain doit réprimer ses pulsions primales, ce que Freud établira plus tard comme étant le complexe d'Œdipe. Comme mentionné plus haut, Freud dénonce cet ordre comme étant trop restrictif. Il croit que le système en

place provoque l'éclosion de maladies névrotiques en particulier l'hystérie de par la répression exercée. La répression cause des symptômes névrotiques ou, dans notre cas, cinématographiques. Ces dits symptômes seraient-ils produits par la même instance causant la répression ? Je crois plutôt que les symptômes ne découlent pas directement de la répression, mais bien du retour de ce qui a été réprimé. Ils sont les signes d'une forme d'expression. Le concept psychanalytique du retour du refoulé fut très répandu chez les théoriciens du cinéma, dont Robin Wood qui l'appliqua au cinéma d'horreur. Wood a analysé la figure de l'Autre dans son essai «The American Nightmare, Horror in the 70's». L'Autre est tout ce qui ne rentre pas dans l'ordre hétéronormatif phallocentrique, soit les ethnies, les enfants, les idéologies différentes, le prolétariat, les déviations des normes sexuelles et les femmes.

> Otherness represents that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with (as Barthes suggests in Mythologies) in one of two ways: either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself. (Wood: 1979, 27)

Comme il l'explique, la sexualité et le diable ont toujours été connectés dans l'esprit puritain occidental. La répression des femmes est «a classic and extreme case of the projection on to the Other of what is repressed within the Self in order that it can be discredited, disowned, and if possible annihilated. It is repression, in other words, that makes impossible the healthy alternative—the full recognition and acceptance of the Other's autonomy and right to exist» (Wood: 1979, 27). Selon Wood, il y a la répression naturelle, nécessaire pour être un individu fonctionnel, et il y a la répression de surplus. Cette forme de répression nous force à nous mouler à l'idéologie en place soit «into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists» (1979: 28).

Judith Butler illustre ce phénomène en termes de performance de genre. Dans son ouvrage *Gender Trouble*, elle explique que le genre n'est pas déterminé par le sexe biologique. Le corps est une sorte d'écran sur lequel seraient projetés les traits socialement construits liés au genre attribué au sexe biologique. Le genre fluctue sans cesse selon l'époque et les changements culturels. Au lieu d'être né fille ou garçon, le genre et l'identité sexuée se «matérialisent» d'une manière continue dans les rapports sociaux. «Both masculine and feminine positions are thus instituted through prohibitive laws that produce culturally intelligible genders, but only through the production of an unconscious sexuality that reemerges in the domain of the imaginary»

(Butler: 1990, 8). Buttler poursuit en déclarant que la construction de l'identité sexuelle selon l'axe binaire masculin/féminin est vouée à l'échec (1990, 10). En effet, ce qui a été réprimé réapparait inévitablement à la surface. L'échec d'une telle identité sexuelle préétablie révèle non seulement la construction de celle-ci, mais aussi l'insuccès de l'ordre qui a imposé la dominance de cette binarité. Témoins de la défaite du patriarcat, les gens seraient alors en mesure de s'élever contre celui-ci. Cette peur de renverser la binarité classique des sexes, et par le fait même des rapports de dominance, transparaît dans les films de possession. Dès que la jeune femme déroge du genre qu'elle se doit de performer, les représentants de l'ordre symbolique (prêtres, parents, médecins) angoissent et essaient de contrôler ce qui était, à la base, refoulé. Le démon n'est autre que le cri de révolte de celle-ci, elle ne cherche qu'à fuir un carcan répressif. Elle devient Autre. Elle passe de l'enfance à l'âge adulte pour devenir une femme. Le problème est que la femme ne restera pas vierge si elle choisit d'exprimer sa sexualité. Elle pourrait devenir active sexuellement et incarner une menace pour l'ordre symbolique.

Figure 2 : Le mur se décompose sous le visage de Nell qui écoute les ébats amoureux d'un couple dans la pièce d'à côté. Éprouver du désir sexuel revient sous forme monstrueuse (*The Last Exorcism 2*).

En réfléchissant aux ressemblances entre les films, j'ai noté que la répétition de certains éléments indique la présence d'une vraie tendance dans le cinéma d'exorcisme à vouloir contrôler la jeune femme possédée. Son corps en révolte contre le carcan qui l'oppresse. Les menstruations, le milieu familial, la virginité et le comportement sexuel sont autant de caractéristiques que partagent entre eux les films de possession. Ces éléments sont les signes d'une féminité qui ne sait plus comment s'exprimer.

Les fluides de l'abjection

La puberté chez la femme, c'est aussi le début des menstruations. Ce phénomène biologique suscite angoisse et curiosité chez le garçon et chez la fille. Pour aborder la possession, il faut aborder l'abjection face à ce corps. Vomis, sang menstruel, urine ou selles, tous les fluides corporels participent à rendre la femme impropre et monstrueuse. C'est pourquoi les films de possession sont souvent le lieu de monstration de ces divers fluides, dont en particulier le sang menstruel. Dans son fameux ouvrage *Pouvoirs de l'horreur, essai sur l'abjection*, Julia Kristeva établit les paramètres de l'abjection. Les fluides corporels sont l'une de ces formes. Kristeva établit une distinction claire entre fluides polluants et les autres. Selon elle, les excréments et les menstrues sont les fluides polluants. Les excréments sont au-dehors et menacent le «Moi». C'est la société menacée par son dehors (Kristeva: 1982, 80). Quant aux menstruations, elles sont polluantes au sens où elles viennent de l'intérieur de l'identité. Elles menacent l'ordre social et les rapports entre les sexes. Le sang rappelle directement la peur de l'homme face au pouvoir de reproduction de la femme à savoir un pouvoir interne, un pouvoir abject (Kristeva: 1982, 77). Il y assurément une fascination face au corps de la femme «possédée» par une autre entité. L'effusion de fluides lors de l'exorcisme est très fréquente dans les films au corpus. Les possédées expulsent et salissent, contaminent ce qui les entoure. C'est un refus des conventions.

Figure 3 : Nell dans sa robe tachée de sang (*The Last Exorcism*)

La souillure échappe à l'équilibre social et questionne l'ensemble de règles imposées à l'individu. En définitive, pour Kristeva, l'abjection est un rejet en masse de la religion, du système social et des valeurs familiales. Une telle effusion de fluides corporels représente un refus de se conformer à l'ordre établi. Comme le dit Kristeva : «De cet élément, signe de leur désir, je n'en veux pas, «je» ne veux rien savoir, «je» ne l'assimile pas, «je» l'expulse. […] Ce n'est donc pas l'absence de propreté ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles» (1980: 12). Cette abondance de fluides est aussi présente pour rassurer le sujet qui ressent une «dépossession» de son «Soi». La possédée se rassure face à l'existence de son corps en lui-même.

Le système patriarcal est donc menacé par ce corps féminin qui exprime désirs et pulsions. Cette abjection ressentie par l'ordre en place suscite une volonté d'oppression. L'abject est la fin du refoulement. L'intérieur du corps et la teneur même des pulsions sont exposés. Il n'est pas loin le temps où les menstruations étaient perçues comme la preuve de la possession démoniaque. Dans son ouvrage Witches, Whores, and Sorcerers: The Concept of Evil in Early Iran, Mendoza Forrest explique comment, lors de leurs menstruations, toutes les femmes étaient considérées «impure as a harlot, and as blighting to the creation. […] menstrual blood was caused by demon-possession. During the menstrual period, a woman was considered a possessed creature who was capable of inflicting the same harm that her possessing spirit could inflict» (Forrest 2011, p. 79). Lorsque la femme saignait, elle était isolée dans une hutte sans fenêtre jusqu'à ce que ses menstruations cessent. Personne ne pouvait entrer en contact avec elle. Ceci n'est pas sans rappeler l'isolement des possédées et le statut de «contaminée» qui leur est attribué. Elles sont en quarantaine jusqu'à ce qu'elles soient aptes à réintégrer l'ordre social. Shelley Stamp explique:

> Prohibitions surrounding first menstruation and menstruating women exist in many cultures and are grounded in fears that during menses a woman is polluted or possessed by dangerous spirits. Hovering on the edge of the supernatural, such women are deemed especially treacherous and subject to taboo. Exceptional states like menstruation and puberty foster taboos, Freud believes, because they elicit contradictory, yet acute sensations of veneration and dread. Poised between natural and supernatural realms, then, the menstruating adolescent girl occupies a liminal state, an object of both aversion and desire (Shelley Stamp: 1996, 334).

Il est intéressant de constater que les jeunes femmes possédées sont présentées dans leur corps et dans leur comportement comme étant des objets de désir, mais aussi d'abjection. Le désir de la sexualité féminine est dangereux. Dans *The Devil Inside* (Brent Bell 2012), lorsque le prêtre appuie sur le cou de la jeune possédée avec son étole, elle laisse échapper un flot abondant de menstrues qui viennent éclabousser la lentille de la caméra et par le fait même notre œil de spectateur. Elle crie alors de toutes ses forces en se contorsionnant. L'ordre religieux expulse le mauvais, l'essence féminine du corps de la fille. Lorsque le sang touche la caméra, il y a des grésillements et l'image vacille prête à s'éteindre. La caméra épaule suit la scène et devient très agitée dès l'apparition du sang. Les personnages commencent aussi à crier comme si le sang était la preuve de la manifestation du diable.

Milieu géographique et familial

Les jeunes filles sont souvent isolées géographiquement et socialement. Les lieux les entourant sont loin de toute civilisation dans des endroits aux frontières flouées. Même si certaines maisons se situent dans des banlieues américaines moyennes, aucun voisinage ne nous est présenté à l'écran. Le cadrage reste généralement serré en légère contre-plongée sur la maison abritant le démon. Ladite contre-plongée fait paraître la demeure imposante et inébranlable comme l'institution millénaire qu'est la famille traditionnelle nucléaire. La maison est un établissement archaïque qui génère un malaise chez celui qui la regarde. La demeure d'Emily Rose (Jennifer Carpenter) nous est notamment présentée dans un plan d'établissement qui l'isole dans la campagne grise et décolorée, ce qui la rend menaçante. La plupart du temps, les personnages empruntent une longue route déserte avant de se rendre à la demeure de la possédée. Dans *The Last Exorcism*, «it's at the end of the road». Dans *The Possession*, «it's in the middle of nowhere». Nell habite à la toute fin d'une route déserte dans la campagne louisianaise. La maison familiale est entourée d'une forêt et le village le plus proche est à des kilomètres. Et dans *The Quiet Ones* (Pogue 2014), le groupe faisant des recherches sur Jane (Olivia Cooke) lui bande carrément les yeux avant de parcourir une longue route de campagne qui les mène à un immense manoir isolé à l'allure de maison hantée. *The Devil's Hand* (Christiansen 2014) exploite davantage cette caractéristique de l'isolation, car les filles évoluent dans une communauté amish nommée New Bethleem. Elles n'ont droit à aucun contact avec l'extérieur et sont constamment surveillées de peur que leur comportement bifurque sur une

mauvaise voie et invite le démon sur leur petite communauté. Leur confinement est traduit par la multiplication de plans larges sur la forêt les entourant et sur les champs déserts. New Bethleem semble englouti par la nature. L'environnement des jeunes femmes est claustrophobique, car les paysages vides qui les entourent deviennent vite étouffants. Renforçant cette sensation, parfois, les pièces dans lesquelles les jeunes femmes évoluent contribuent à accentuer l'effet d'enfermement. Par exemple, Jane (*The Quiet Ones*) est carrément enfermée dans une pièce sans meubles à des fins de recherches. Dans un plan, Bryan (Sam Clafin) pose même des barreaux à sa fenêtre. Elles sont isolées ainsi afin de préserver leur innocence.

Figures 4-7: Les maisons isolées des possédées. En ordre, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (en haut, à gauche), *The Last Exorcism* (en haut, à droit), *The Quiet Ones* (en bas, à gauche), et *The Devil's Hand* (en bas, à droit)

Il y a une certaine dualité entre le monde privé de la famille à la maison et celui des institutions d'enseignement publiques où progressent les filles. Les parents cherchent à préserver l'innocence de leur fille en les tenants en l'écart de la société moderne et de ses vices qui sont souvent représentés par le monde de l'éducation. Dans certains films, l'école est un milieu abstrait qui n'est que mentionné, mais jamais présenté. Nell (*The Last Exorcism*) vit seule avec son père et son frère. Elle n'a aucun contact avec le monde extérieur, ce qui rassure son père qui craint que le monde extérieur corrompe son enfant. Il

affirme: «Since she died [la mère], I've been very determined to give my children a more fundamental Christian upbringing...I'm not... well crazy about the things that envisions the world today and therefore I decided to home school now». Emma (Angie Ashford dans *Exorcismus*) reçoit aussi son éducation à la maison par ses parents catholiques. Ces derniers refusent qu'elle aille à l'école de peur que cela trouble davantage leur adolescente révoltée. Dans d'autres cas, l'école est présente et marque le début des ennuis. Entre autres, Grace (Alexia Fast dans Grace : The Possession) est élevée par sa grand-mère extrêmement religieuse. Lorsqu'elle quitte la paroisse pour la première fois afin d'aller étudier, sa grand-mère désapprouve fortement son choix se méfiant de l'endroit ayant corrompu sa fille (la défunte mère de Grace). En effet, cette dernière était tombée enceinte. Nous apprenons vers la fin du film qu'il s'agissait plutôt d'une grossesse causée par le viol perpétré par le pasteur de la paroisse. La grand-mère redoute donc l'université: «This place is full of sin and sex !». La maison où elle vit est austère et sombre, les pièces où Grace est confinée semblent étroites contrairement aux vastes espaces verts où elle évolue au collège. Son arrivée à l'école marque pour Grace, comme c'est le cas pour Emily Rose, le début de la possession. «Before she went away to university, my Emily was so very happy», déclare la mère de celle-ci. L'université est perçue comme un milieu de débauches et de tentations alors qu'Emily ne souhaite qu'aller y acquérir les connaissances nécessaires pour devenir enseignante. Une voisine de la famille d'Emily témoigne en Cour, ce qui nous offre un aperçu du milieu strict dans lequel Emily a grandi: «Yes. She wrote me a letter saying that she'd been to a dance and she'd met a boy named Jason. She didn't want her mother to know this because her mother did not approve of dancing and had warned her about the boys at school». Pour Emily Rose, les manifestations démoniaques commencent à l'université. Les flashbacks par lesquels on la voit vivre sa possession sont sombres et délavés. L'université nous apparaît bien vite comme un univers inquiétant, notamment lors de la scène où Emily perd le contrôle et hallucine des manifestations démoniaques partout: un camarade de classe arbore soudainement un visage démoniaque grimaçant, des étudiants dans la rue la regarde avec les mêmes visages monstrueux ou un homme dans une voiture passe devant elle sur le campus et la fixe le visage déformé par une bouche et des yeux noirs béants. La possession pour Emily survient d'ailleurs une nuit lorsqu'elle est seule dans son dortoir. Une force incroyable la cloue au lit et presse sur son corps de telle façon qu'elle s'enfonce dans le matelas. Elle lutte alors que la présence lève sa robe de nuit et semble l'étrangler. Dans cette scène, la puissante entité prend le contrôle sur son corps contre son gré. Le tout nous amène à faire un parallèle

avec une scène de viol. Cette force cherche à soumettre sexuellement la jeune femme avant que cette dernière ne puisse découvrir par elle-même sa propre sexualité. Emily résiste tant bien que mal à la possession. Suite à cet évènement traumatique, elle n'est plus la même. L'université est assurément un endroit peu recommandable.

La Virginité

La plupart des possédées sont vierges et leur virginité est un élément important de la possession. Notre société hypersexualisée fait miroiter l'idée d'émancipation sexuelle aux jeunes femmes, alors que ce n'est qu'une autre façon de les juger par rapport à leur sexualité. Jessica Valenti, écrivaine de nombreux livres sur la femme et fondatrice du blog Feministing explique: «A woman's worth lies in her ability - or her refusal - to be sexual. And we're teaching American girls that one way or another their bodies and their sexuality are what make them valuable. The sexual double standard is alive and well, and it's irrevocably damaging young women» (2008, 10). En effet, on fait grand cas lorsqu'il est question de la perte de la virginité chez une fille, alors que pour un garçon il s'agit d'un passage à l'âge adulte, reçu avec un «high five». La valeur de la fille n'est pas déterminée par ses actions, ses opinions et son intellect, mais plutôt par la teneur de ce qui se passe entre ses jambes. Plusieurs caractéristiques présentes dans la mise en scène des films de possession suggèrent la virginité des filles en mettant l'accent sur leur innocence initiale. Que ce soit dans leurs répliques où par la direction artistique, il y a insistance sur leur comportement enfantin. Ce n'est pas nouveau que les films d'horreur jouent sur l'innocence des jeunes femmes. Clover a abordé la question en parlant de la fameuse «final girl» dans les slashers pour ensuite s'attarder à la figure de la femme dans les «occult films».

> The Girl as the ultimate figure of innocence is here emphasized. Girls before or on the verge of puberty, when their sexuality has not yet been awakened and the reproductive function of their embodied being established, provide material for appropriation and inhabitation in the narratives of possession. The body of the possessed girl is a vessel or a tool for someone else's self expression and action. When they have reached womanhood, they serve as nursing containers in the reproduction of demons and angels a like. (Clover: 1987, 130)

Lorsque les jeunes femmes de New Bethleem se questionnent sur quelle activité organiser pour leur 18e anniversaire, Sarah suggère «pony rides and noon banquets». Quant à Emily Rose, elle est décrite comme étant une gentille fille, intelligente ayant une foi inébranlable. La virginité d'Emily avant l'université est sous-entendue et son innocence quasi enfantine est très soulignée. Par exemple, lorsqu'elle reçoit sa lettre d'acceptation à l'université, elle saute de joie sur son lit avec sa jeune sœur. Nell (*The Last Exorcism*) est certainement un des personnages les plus enfantins de tout le corpus. Elle s'exprime comme une enfant alors qu'elle a 16 ans. La caméra intradiégétique du caméraman isole en inserts plusieurs dessins enfantins accrochés au mur de la chambre lorsque Nell nous est introduite, ces dessins seront plus tard remplacés par des collages un peu plus inquiétants représentant les membres de l'équipe de tournage décapités et démembrés. Nell porte toujours des robes amples vieillottes et ne met aucun maquillage. La première fois où elle nous est montrée, elle interprète un air naïf à la flûte pour la caméra. Elle se trompe plusieurs fois dans les notes et glousse de joie lorsque le révérend l'applaudit. Dans le deuxième volet (*The Last Exorcism 2*), elle évolue dans un centre pour jeunes femmes en Nouvelle Orléans. Elle essaie de s'intégrer dans le nouveau groupe social qui l'entoure. Les personnages féminins lui apprennent à être «normale». Ce qui semble signifier parler de garçons et de maquillage. Nell est désorientée et peu à l'aise dans son corps qui l'a auparavant trahie. Elle cherche à mener une vie normale parmi ses consœurs qui se moquent gentiment d'elle et de son innocence si décalée de leur réalité. Nell ne se souvient pas des évènements qui ont suivi sa possession, donc son innocence est, en un sens, préservée. Le film joue avec ceci pour faire paraître de façon plus dramatique son parcours vers la corruption de son âme. Grace (*Grace : The Possession*), quant à elle, est une jeune fille dépeinte comme étant extrêmement innocente. Elle ne boit pas, refuse le joint qu'on lui passe, est vierge et ne s'est jamais masturbée. «I don't do that…» dit-elle au groupe de jeunes qui la presse de questions personnelles. Les personnages s'adressent à elle comme à une enfant. Le diable se manifeste à travers Grace la première fois où elle se laisse tenter à mettre du rouge à lèvres. Un soir, Grace se rend à un party de fraternité, où habillée plus «sexy» qu'à l'habitude, elle boit de l'alcool et parle avec le garçon qu'elle aime bien. Lorsqu'elle croit voir Jessica (sa colocataire) embrasser Brad, elle se rend sur le toit de la maison, furieuse. Jessica la rejoint et se met à la narguer en faisant passer le caractère enfantin de Grace pour un défaut, un manque : «You still a child. Nobody wants you».

La robe blanche

Toutes les femmes possédées dans les films d'exorcisme portent à un moment ou un autre une robe de nuit blanche. Toutes. Ce morceau de vêtement vieillot détonne souvent avec la jeune fille qui le porte. Pourquoi s'obstiner à faire porter à de jeunes femmes un vêtement archaïque datant d'une autre époque ? Le vêtement signifie-t-il une volonté de retourner vers des valeurs plus conservatrices ? La robe de nuit blanche dans sa forme ample et sa couleur semble incarner le symbole suprême de l'innocence féminine. C'est pourquoi lorsque la robe devient tachée de sang c'est d'autant plus horrifiant. La robe tend aussi à infantiliser l'image de la jeune femme. Elle renvoie soit à l'enfance, soit à la vieillesse, deux catégories étant censées ne pas avoir de sexualité. Du moins, leur sexualité est taboue. La chemise de nuit peut aussi évoquer la toge de la Vierge Marie. Le démon vient les déflorer malgré l'obstination tenace de leur famille à vouloir conserver leur pureté. Il les choisit, car une vierge a une pureté convoitée par les hommes. Par exemple, en plus de porter au moment de dormir une robe de nuit blanche, Grace ne porte tout au long du film qu'une série de robes fleuries enfantines dont elle tord le tissu avec ses mains dès qu'elle est embarrassée.

Figures 8-11: Différentes possédées portant la robe blanche. En ordre, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (en haut, à gauche), *The Last Exorcism* (en haut, à droit), *The Quiet Ones* (en bas, à gauche) et *Grace : The Possession* (en bas, à droit).

L'Alter ego

Si la possédée est le personnage central féminin des films au corpus étudié, elle est souvent accompagnée d'une présence féminine représentant son contraire. Autrement dit, elle est flanquée d'un alter ego sexualisé et autonome qui finit par être puni par la narration. L'alter ego agit à titre de figure opposée à l'innocente jeune fille que l'on nous présente en début de film. Je me dois de faire référence à Freud qui fonda les bases de la théorie qui nous intéresse ici : le complexe de la «madone et de la putain».

> […] l'homme se sent limité dans son activité sexuelle par le respect pour la femme et ne développe sa pleine puissance que lorsqu'il est en présence d'un objet sexuel rabaissé, […] Il ne parvient à une pleine jouissance sexuelle que lorsqu'il peut s'abandonner sans réserve à la satisfaction, ce qu'il n'ose pas faire par exemple, avec son épouse pudique. De là provient son besoin d'un objet sexuel rabaissé, d'une femme moralement inférieure à laquelle il n'ait pas à prêter de scrupules esthétiques, qui ne le connaisse pas dans sa vie et ne puisse pas le juger. (Freud : 1969, 61)

Uwe Hartman, psychologue clinicien, écrit d'ailleurs que ce complexe «is still highly prevalent in today's patients» (2009, 2335). Aujourd'hui, il se traduit par une femme qui ment à son copain concernant le nombre de partenaires sexuels qu'elle a eu, un homme qui décrit une femme comme étant «une bonne fille» et se trouve choqué lorsqu'il apprend que cette dernière a eu plusieurs partenaires, ou encore le concept de «fille facile». Le complexe de la madone et de la putain est la distinction que font les hommes entre les femmes qu'ils respectent et celles qu'ils désirent, les deux ne pouvant aller dans la même catégorie. C'est pourquoi il est peu étonnant de constater que cette contradiction cognitive crée de l'anxiété chez l'homme qui cherche à préserver l'image de pureté de sa compagne, parfois en ayant une relation extraconjugale avec une autre femme. Si la femme ne peut être respectée que dans sa virginité, elle réprime son être sexuel pour se conformer aux attentes de ses pairs (pères) créant ainsi une dissonance en elle-même. Le complexe est bien illustré dans les films de possession par la présence de l'alter ego. Comme à l'époque de la chasse aux sorcières, l'alter ego agit comme bouc émissaire à l'anxiété générée par la répression sexuelle. Elle est, comme nous l'avons mentionné, l'opposé visuel et narratif de la possédée. En fait, elle agit à titre d'avertissement pour la possédée et par le fait même, la spectatrice. La plupart du temps, l'alter ego est puni pour avoir exprimé ses désirs et pour avoir

démontré une féminité condamnée par l'ordre symbolique et patriarcal. Dans *Grace: The Possession* (Chan: 2014), Jessica (Alexis Knapp) est la colocataire de chambre de Grace à l'université. Elle nous est introduite buvant une bouteille de vodka et portant des shorts très courts. Elle propose de l'alcool à Grace qui refuse. L'opposition entre les deux jeunes femmes est souvent illustrée dans le cadre. Par exemple, lorsque Grace est au téléphone avec sa grand-mère qui lui fait réciter une prière, nous voyons en arrière-plan Jessica assise sur le lit, qui ajoute de la Vodka dans sa bouteille. Grace calque peu à peu son comportement sur celui de Jessica en lui empruntant des vêtements, du maquillage et en la suivant dans les soirées. C'est aussi à ce moment que les visions démoniaques de Grace deviennent plus présentes, comme un signal face au comportement «inapproprié» qu'elle adopte. Jessica devient bien vite jalouse de l'attention masculine que reçoit Grace et confronte cette dernière après avoir copieusement embrassé le garçon convoité par Grace. Dans une robe très révélatrice, Jessica déclare: «Do you know what it feels like to be touched little girl ?» Dans cette scène, elle incarne la tentation. Elle est celle que tous les hommes désirent, mais qu'aucun ne respecte. Dans *The Quiet Ones*, Krissi (Erin Richards) est l'alter ego de Jane. Elle est intelligente et conduit les recherches «scientifiques» sur Jane au même titre que ses collègues masculins. Elle entretient des relations sexuelles avec Harry et Joseph (le professeur). Krissi sait ce qu'elle veut et exprime haut et fort sa pensée. C'est elle qui révèle un bout de cuisse pour entraîner Harry dans sa chambre, qui embrasse Joseph et qui exprime toute l'énergie sexuelle réprimée du film. Elle n'associe pas nécessairement sexe avec amour et a des relations sexuelles quand bon lui semble. «You had to ruin the mood with that filthy word (amour), very filthy», dit-elle à Harry. Elle sera d'ailleurs punie plusieurs fois par Jane qui éprouve de la jalousie devant sa liberté. Toutes les fois où Krissi fait référence au sexe, une ampoule ou un objet éclate. Après une altercation où Krissi accuse ses trois collègues mâles d'être tous amoureux de Jane, elle est victime d'une attaque télékinésique dans sa salle de bain. Finalement, elle est la première à être tuée par Jane. Dans *The Last Exorcism*, Iris (Iris Bahr), la réalisatrice, est l'alter ego de Nell. Elle dirige l'équipe, fait valoir son opinion quant à la situation déplorable dans laquelle se trouve Nell et porte des Dr. Martens (des bottes à l'allure masculine qu'elle donnera à Nell). Nell pose sur Iris un regard admiratif, car elle représente le monde moderne et l'accès vers l'extérieur qu'on lui refuse. Encore une fois, le récit punit Iris par la mort pour avoir fait miroiter l'indépendance et l'expression de soi à Nell. Elle est démembrée en hors champ par les membres de la secte. Dans *The Last Exorcism 2*, Gwen (Julia Garner), une grande blonde qui n'a pas peur de dire ce qu'elle pense,

prend Nell sous son aile et l'introduit à la vie «normale» où les filles écoutent de la musique rock, portent du rouge à lèvres et sortent pendant le Mardi gras. Elle se moque sans cesse de l'innocence de Nell qu'elle qualifie de «naïve». Son personnage n'est néanmoins pas motivé que par de bonnes intentions. Elle agit comme passage pour le démon qui tente de séduire Nell. C'est elle qui en étant possédée tue Louis lorsque ce dernier veut tuer sa fille pour la «libérer». *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* nous offre un alter ego plus subtil, car Emily est déjà décédée dans l'espace-temps de la diégèse. Erin Bruner (Laura Linney), l'avocate du père Moore, est en fait le personnage principal du film. Indépendante, forte et carriériste, elle mène le dossier d'Emily seule avec professionnalisme. Elle n'est peut-être pas punie par Emily, mais la narration s'en occupe. La répression de l'ordre symbolique est forte avec elle. Seule femme dans un environnement d'hommes, elle est sans cesse contredite par ses pairs, menacée par la défense, remise en question par le public. Elle vit seule et travaille très tard, ce faisant elle est généralement présentée comme une personne qui vit seule, avec des habitudes. À travers ces représentations comportementales, le cinéaste nous invite à porter un jugement. Le père Moore avertit Erin que des forces démoniaques entourent le procès et qu'elle doit être prudente. Depuis le début du procès, elle se réveille toujours la nuit à 3h du matin, heure du démon comme l'explique le père Moore, et aperçoit des silhouettes noires. Pourtant, Thomas, avocat de la couronne, ne reçoit pas le même avertissement et n'est aucunement perturbé par les forces entourant le procès. Il se moque d'ailleurs bien de sa collègue lorsqu'elle souhaite aborder cet aspect en cour.

Miroirs : Regard sur soi

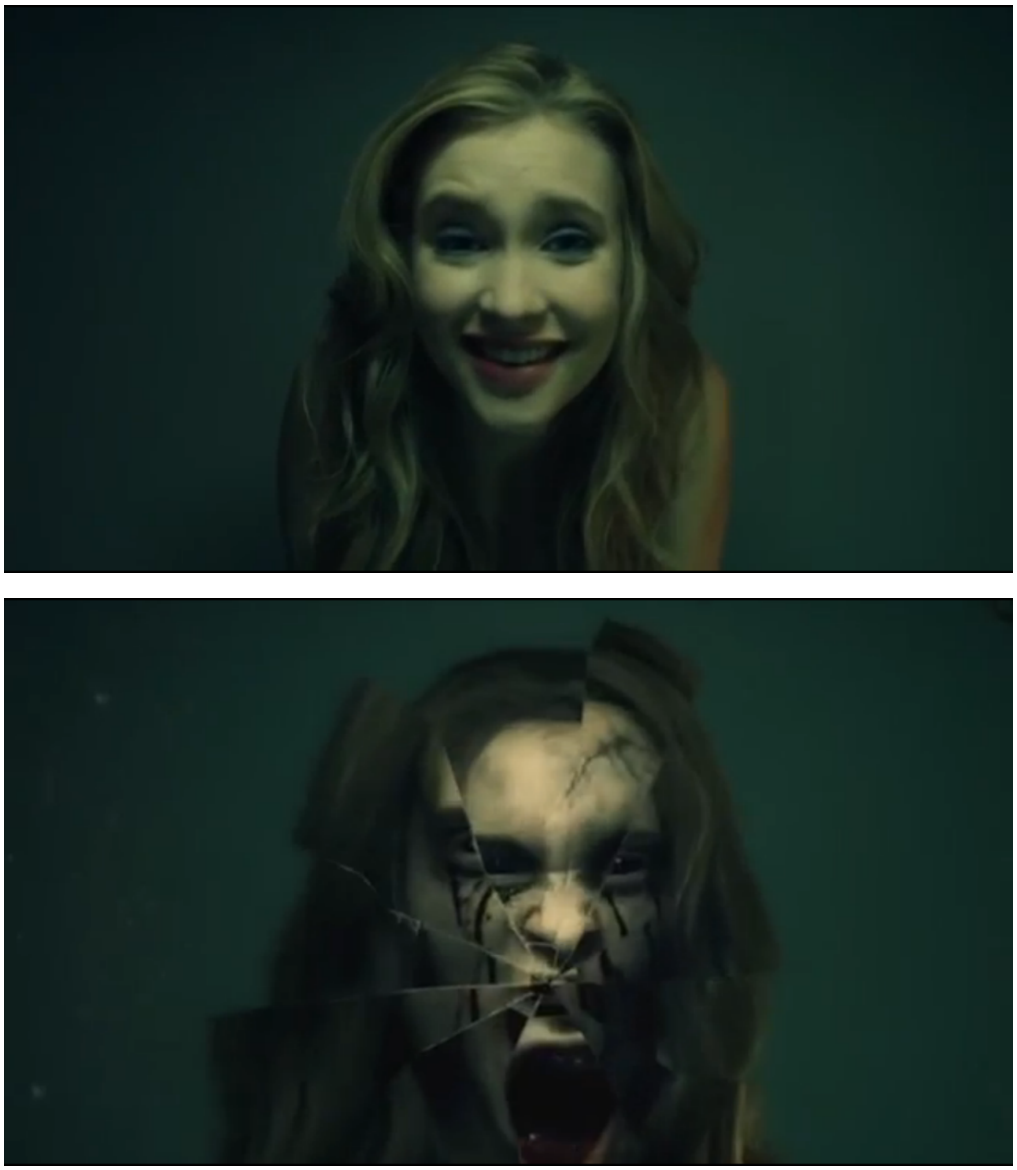
Le cinéma est un véhicule formidable pour les émotions. Comme l'explique Tarja Laine, il existe une intersubjectivité entre ce qu'il y a à l'écran et la personne qui le regarde. «I have come to see cinema as a matter of affects that emerge from between the inside of the self and the outside of the world, and also from between different temporalities and spatialities, that are holding the intersubjective world together» (Laine: 2007, 10). Selon elle, la honte est l'ultime affect de communication entre les hommes. «Shame most directly reveals the intersubjective foundations of individual existence, as shame is simultaneously an interpretive process, a way of seeing oneself from the standpoint of others, and a sensed inability to take control of one's identity and organised a response» (Laine: 2007, 19). Un malaise est créé lorsque nous

dérogeons légèrement aux règles comportementales à observer en société. Que ce soit face à une poignée de main trop longue ou une blague qui ne rencontre aucun rire, la honte est un sentiment désagréable qui nous empêche de répéter les mêmes «erreurs». Que ce soit dans la réalité ou à l'écran, elle est une émotion tellement forte qu'elle génère une réponse empathique chez ceux qui sont témoins de l'auteur du malaise. Cela modèle une réponse spectatorielle différente de celle imaginée par Freud et Mulvey. Face aux changements dans leur corps et la réaction de leur entourage face à ceux-ci, les jeunes femmes possédées développent une conscience honteuse face à leur condition.

> Shame is shared by everyone who as the Concept of the Other, because the intersubjective relationship between the subject and the Other can be disturbed in a moment of shame. For precisely the same reason shame can be a critical resource to rearticulate the terms of self-obsessed societal norms and ideals. (Laine: 2007, 24)

L'Autre est abject et génère une distorsion de l'ordre symbolique. Si l'on ressent de la honte en dérogeant aux règles, c'est que ces mêmes règles nous ont été inculquées au départ par un système. Comme le fait remarquer Judith Butler, ce même système conditionne la performance d'un genre lié à son sexe biologique, prône la monogamie hétérosexuelle comme étant la «normalité» et réprime la sexualité féminine (1990, 227). Les femmes sont punies par la honte face à tout écart à leur conditionnement initial. Non seulement les jeunes femmes sont à un âge où elles doutent d'elles-mêmes et construisent leur identité, mais la société s'occupe de diriger leur jugement à travers le prisme du slut-shaming. «The emotion of shame can momentarily reveal this structure, as it at the same time blinds us to the community and detaches us from it : if the subject had never interiorised the communal norms, shame would not occur in the first place» (Laine: 2007, 101).

Le regard féminin est puni à travers la mise en scène en transformant la curiosité et le désir des possédées en une honte conditionnée par des apparitions horrifiques. On refuse le regard appréciateur de la jeune femme sur elle-même. Seul un regard honteux est permis. Se contempler dans le miroir équivaut à provoquer les démons et l'on peut s'attendre à voir quelque chose venir troubler le reflet de la femme. Par exemple, la première manifestation du démon en Grace se déroule lorsqu'elle s'applique du rouge à lèvres devant un miroir. À un autre moment, alors qu'elle contemple son reflet ivre en rigolant, la glace se brise et l'on y entrevoit un visage démoniaque (Figures 12 et 13).



Figures 12 et 13 : Le reflet de Grace est soudainement déformé par une vision démoniaque d'elle-même.

Dans *The Last Exorcism*, Nell, complètement nue, se contemple dans le miroir alors qu'elle est possédée. La caméra est hors foyer ce qui brouille son corps nu. Elle craque alors son cou rendant horrifiant ce corps dénudé. Dans *The Last Exorcism 2*, Nell se contemple plusieurs fois dans le miroir. Lorsque Gwen (sa colocataire) lui applique du rouge à lèvres, elle regarde son reflet, surprise et embarrassée de la féminité qu'elle ose exprimer. Ou encore, après un rêve

érotique, elle s'observe dans le miroir en flattant son visage et une mouche vient se déposer sur son reflet. Plus tard, elle remet sa chaîne en or, hésitante, en se regardant dans le miroir; de nouveau son reflet est fracturé dans la glace. Puis, à la toute fin du film, elle accepte la possession et les pouvoirs qui lui sont accordés. Elle lance un regard directement à la caméra dans le rétroviseur de la voiture et sourit l'air sûr d'elle. Cet effet miroir renvoie à ce que dit Williams à propos du monstre. Selon elle, lorsque la femme s'admire dans le miroir dans le film d'horreur, elle est punie. Elle veut ainsi révéler le système de punition du genre cinématographique, mais aussi les affinités entre le monstre et la femme. En regardant le monstre, cette dernière est prise d'une paralysie contemplative et reconnaît son statut similaire comme menace au pouvoir masculin en place. Elle croit que puisque la femme s'identifie au monstre dans l'horreur, la destruction dudit monstre servirait à exterminer le pouvoir de leur propre sexualité. Dans notre cas, le monstre se trouve à l'intérieur de la femme. L'exorciser ne reviendrait-il pas à anéantir une part du Soi?

> This would help explain the often vindictive destruction of the monster in the horror film and the fact that this destruction generates the frequent sympathy of the women characters, who seem to sense the extent to which the monster's death is an exorcism of the power of their own sexuality. (Williams dans Keith Grant (dir.): 1996, 40)

Williams croit qu'il n'y a pas une grande différence entre un objet de désir et un objet de peur lorsqu'il s'agit du regard masculin. En étant violemment punie par l'exorcisme, la possédée est contrainte d'adopter les règles de conduite appropriées à son sexe.

Provocation et comportement sexuel

L'éclosion de la sexualité est l'un des premiers symptômes de la possession. L'entourage révolté par le comportement jugé anormal et en complète opposition avec l'innocence initiale de leur progéniture fait vite appel au médecin et au prêtre. La sexualité est monstrueuse et doit être éradiquée de la jeune femme. Selon Barbara Creed, il existe plusieurs formes de féminin monstrueux. Les possédées se trouvent dans une catégorie où la monstruosité est directement liée aux questions du désir sexuel. Creed établit un lien entre la peur du désir sexuel féminin et le *vagina dentata*. Le *vagina dentata* existe dans la mythologie de plusieurs cultures dans le monde entier, et ce depuis des

millénaires. Il s'agit d'un terme latin signifiant «vagin avec dents». Le mythe suggère que la femme peut castrer l'homme en utilisant son vagin comme arme. «The vagina dentata is the mouth of hell a terrifying symbol of woman as the «devil's gateway»[...] The vagina dentata also points to the duplicitous nature of woman, who promises paradise in order to ensnare her victims» (Creed: [1993] 2007, 56). Freud mit de l'avant plusieurs théories impliquant le *vagina dentata*. Il explique que l'angoisse de l'homme vient du fait qu'il craint la femme castrée. Comme nous l'avons vu plus tôt, Creed croit que la femme serait monstrueuse non parce qu'elle offre l'horreur du rien à voir, mais plutôt parce qu'elle incarne la menace de la castration. Pour ma part, je crois que la possédée est monstrueuse parce que ses désirs, qu'il faut réprimer, menacent l'Ordre établi tout entier. Pour éviter le chaos que causerait la femme émancipée, l'ordre symbolique réaffirme, par le regard, son pouvoir en l'assujettissant comme objet. Le contrôle de la figure de la jeune fille innocente par une entité démoniaque renforce l'idée de monstruosité du désir féminin, et par le fait même, renforce sa répression. Dans les films d'exorcismes, une femme qui développe et contrôle son appétit sexuel devient une dangereuse aberration qui doit alors être détruite. Donc, les films d'horreur perpétuent l'idée que le sexe pour les femmes mène à la mort particulièrement si elles en retirent du plaisir. Il y a cette perception que les femmes manqueraient de jugement et seraient trop vulnérables, les rendant ainsi incapables de faire des choix responsables concernant leur propre corps, en particulier lorsqu'il s'agit de sexe. La possession reflète donc l'hypothèse que les femmes qui tenteraient de prendre en charge leur sexualité sont déviantes. Ce qu'il faut retenir est que chaque comportement dirigé par un certain désir sera très vite puni dans la diégèse. C'est comme si la possession justifiait le comportement sexuel parce qu'étant démonisé, monstrueux : «Possession become the excuse for legitimizing a display of aberrant feminine behavior which is depicted as depraved, monstrous, abject and perversely appealing» (Creed: [1993] 2007, 31). Les femmes possédées sont celles qui refusent d'occuper le rôle qui leur est prédestiné dans l'Ordre symbolique. Leur protestation est représentée par le retour du refoulé. La possession est la rébellion d'être réprimé dont la seule façon de s'exprimer réside dans la monstration d'un comportement obligatoirement abject. Lorsque possédée, Nell démontre un comportement sexuel et violent peu habituel à la manière de Regan dans *The Exorcist*. La sexualité de Nell se manifeste par son corps en révolte. C'est le retour du refoulé.

[E]xorcism films situate the possessed girl or young woman as a monster

> meant to terrify and horrify. In particular, exorcism films routinely position girls and young women as figures of horror that explicitly threaten the male protagonists, and thus female agency and sexuality become a site of male anxiety. (Olson 2014)

Tout au long du film, dès que le diable prend le dessus sur son corps, Nell se dévêtit. Nudité et démon sont donc associés. Sous l'emprise du diable, elle permet à ses pulsions de s'exprimer. À un moment, elle rejoint le père Marcus dans sa chambre de motel où elle entreprend de se déshabiller dans un état quasi catatonique. La réalisatrice du documentaire tente de lui remettre sa robe alors que Cotton observe la scène, figé devant l'horreur de ce corps féminin qui s'offre à lui. Nell lèche l'épaule de la réalisatrice en émettant des gémissements. L'horreur du corps féminin et du comportement déplacé de Nell est soulignée par la musique horrifiante qui s'intensifie, la caméra à l'épaule qui s'agite et par l'expulsion de vomi (fluide abject) de Nell. Pour être apte à la vie sociale, Nell doit réprimer ses désirs. Ainsi, inconsciente de ses pouvoirs, elle devient moins dangereuse. Ces films sont horrifiants car ils jouent sur la contradiction que représentent toutes femmes : soit l'incarnation du complexe de la madonne et de la putain que nous avons déjà introduite. Cette binarité que chaque femme incarne est représentée par le contraste entre la jeune fille innocente avant la possession et la femme sexualisée et vulgaire lorsque possédée. «Thus, any virgin could potentially become a whore, particularly if she engages in sinful behavior. Because all women hold the potential to transition from virgin to whore, they therefore represent a form of abjection, and as a result they come to represent the monstrous-feminine that threatens society at large» (Creed [1993] 2007, p. 71).

Figure 14 : Jane expose son corps nu à Brian.

C'est pourquoi le contraste entre le comportement initial de Nell et celui qu'elle a lorsque possédée est si troublant. Ceci est aussi horrifiant pour les personnages que pour Nell elle-même qui ne semble pas accepter ce qui se passe en elle. Étant conditionnée à performer le genre respectif à son sexe biologique elle est effrayée de réaliser qu'elle déroge du chemin préétabli par les normes sociales. Par exemple, lorsque le révérend Marcus trouve Nell enchaînée par le pied au montant de son lit et tente de la libérer, elle s'oppose en répétant: «I'm bad. I won't go to Heaven». Il est raisonnable d'admettre que les réactions horrifiées de Louis (le père) et le comportement agressif de Caleb (le frère de Nell) face au corps possédé de Nell ne font que la conforter dans sa perception horrifiante d'elle-même. Un après-midi, alors que Louis n'est pas à la maison, l'équipe de tournage et Cotton Marcus reçoivent un coup de fil du médecin déclarant que Nell est enceinte. Croyant à de l'inceste, Cotton cherche à faire parler Nell qui finalement déclare, en parlant à la troisième personne, avoir eu des relations sexuelles avec un garçon travaillant au café du village. « He turned to her and he asked her if she wanted to have sex. She said yes. She asked him: Am I pretty? He said yes. He took her and laid her back. She loved how he touched her. She said yes. She loved it». Cette façon de parler à la troisième personne met une distance entre ses actes et sa personne. Elle n'accepte pas sa sexualité et confère ainsi ses désirs à l'action du démon. La possession devient salvatrice pour le corps féminin alors que l'ordre établi cherche à l'éradiquer par l'exorcisme.

> By exerting control over their sexuality, women become empowered in their own lives, and potentially gain power over the lives of men. This empowerment appears to manifest in the act of possession, which grants the girls or young women the ability to speak their minds without fear of repercussion, since it was not they but the demon that spoke. (Olson: 2014)

Dans *The Last Exorcism 2*, il y a quelques scènes de nuit qui montrent Nell, endormie, semblant éprouver du plaisir érotique dans ses rêves. Ceux-ci consistent à des flashbacks de l'époque où elle était possédée par Abalam. Elle est vite ramenée à la réalité par une image horrifiante d'elle possédée. L'autoérotisme est puni par des flashbacks horrifiants. Au collège, Grace ressent pour la première fois du désir. Bien sûr, rien de positif n'en résultera. Comme le dit sa grand-mère: «The devil is asking us to betray god for earthly pleasures». Grace développe vite des sentiments pour Brad (un camarade de classe) et avec ses désirs viennent les hallucinations horrifiques d'elle-même.

Un jour, alors qu'elle est dans sa chambre de petite fille chez sa grand-mère, elle hallucine Brad dans sa chambre qui vient la toucher. L'image de Brad est vite substituée par celle du jeune prêtre avec des yeux de démon, une représentation horrifique du désir. Sa grand-mère ouvre soudainement la porte et on se rend compte que Grace se masturbait et qu'il ne s'agissait que d'hallucinations. L'autostimulation érotique révolte à un tel point la grand-mère (l'autorité) que celle-ci la fouette. Lorsque possédée, Grace essaie de séduire le jeune prêtre et on sent qu'il y résiste difficilement. Emma (*Exorcismus*) éprouve un intérêt sexuel/amoureux envers son cousin Alex. Dès qu'il pose une main sur sa cuisse dans la voiture, il s'en suit une vision horrifique de son visage. Emma sursaute alors causant un accident qui se soldera par la mort de son cousin. Le sexe féminin est carrément représenté comme arme meurtrière ici. En effet, lors d'une séance chez l'hypnotiseur, Emma s'endort et se réveille en sursaut, la tête de celui-ci reposant sur son entrejambe, mort. La position des corps n'est pas sans rappeler l'acte du cunnilingus. Le sexe abject d'Emma est une menace bien réelle.

Figure 15 : Rosa fait des propositions de nature sexuelle au prêtre lors de son exorcisme (*The Devil Inside*).

Je conclus cet article sur une incitation à revoir les stéréotypes dans lesquelles on confine la femme au cinéma. Avec cette réflexion, nous avons pu observer que les films de possession sont le symptôme d'une société qui objectifie et démonise encore la sexualité féminine. Bien que nous vivions en Amérique du Nord dans l'une des sociétés plus progressistes sur la question de l'égalité des sexes, il reste encore beaucoup de travail à faire pour parvenir à une réelle égalité. Nous ne devons pas minimiser l'influence de nos voisins du sud dont plus de 11 états ont passé dans les derniers mois (printemps 2019) des lois restreignant drastiquement le droit à l'avortement. L'Alabama, l'état le plus strict du pays jusqu'à présent sur ce sujet, a signé une loi interdisant complètement le droit à l'avortement. L'interdiction n'exempt pas les victimes de viol et d'inceste et criminalise quiconque performant des avortements. Les docteurs pourraient ainsi être poursuivis en justice et faire face jusqu'à 99 années d'emprisonnement. L'existence de cette loi a été possible grâce aux votes de 25 membres du sénat. 25 hommes blancs pour être exacte. La loi doit entrer en vigueur dans les six prochains mois si elle n'est pas bloquée par un juge fédéral comme ce fut le cas pour l'Utah. La Géorgie, l'Ohio, le Missouri, la Louisiane, le Kentucky et le Mississippi (d'autres s'ajouteront surement a la liste d'ici la publication de cet article) ont passé un « Heartbeat bill». C'est-à-dire que l'avortement devient illégal à partir du moment où les battements du cœur de

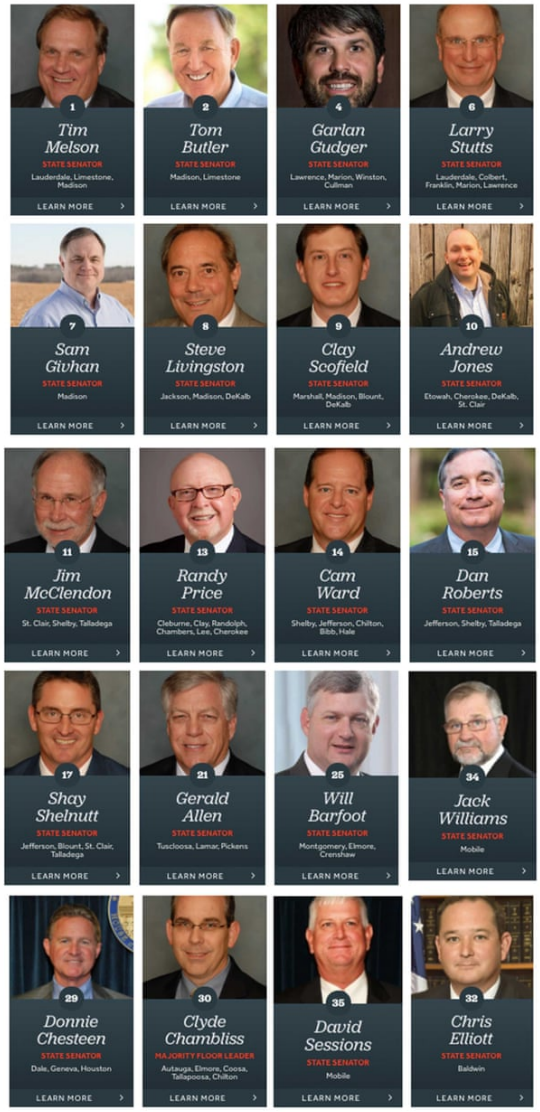


Figure 16 : Les 25 membres du sénat ayant voté pour l'interdiction total de l'avortement en Alabama.

l'embryon sont perceptibles. Ce qui peut être aussi tôt qu'après six semaines. À ce stade, certaines femmes ne savent même pas qu'elles sont enceintes. Ces nouvelles lois attaquent directement Roe v. Wade, l'arrêt historique de 1973 voté par la Cour suprême qui a fait de l'avortement un droit constitutionnel.

Face à ce recul historique des droits des femmes, il est nécessaire de se questionner sur l'autonomie du corps féminin et cette obsession à vouloir le contrôler. Nous devons adresser la façon dont la femme nous est présentée dans les médias et prendre conscience de l'influence que ces images peuvent avoir sur des décisions politiques comme celles qui sont prises en ce moment de l'autre côté de la frontière. Ce travail commence par le public qui doit poser un regard critique sur les images qu'on lui présente. Idéalement, cette tâche incomberait d'abord aux réalisateurs et producteurs de ces films. En considérant le problème, des changements peuvent être apportés et les stéréotypes ébranlés. Dans le cadre de ses recherches, CarrieLynn D. Reinhard est directement allée s'entretenir avec Daniel Stamm, le réalisateur de *The Last Exorcism*, pour lui faire part de sa lecture du film et pour le questionner sur ses intentions de départ. Savait-il que le film était si lourd en sous-texte? Apparement non puisque: «When we (CarrieLynn D. Reinhard et Christopher J. Olson) described our conceptualization of the traditional exorcism narrative to Daniel Stamm he expressed surprise at our reading of his film, and was concerned that he made « such a non-feminist movie» (2017, p. 102). La majorité des films d'exorcisme remâchent le même récit sans le questionner. Peu de films semblent vouloir déroger de la structure classique. Par exemple, la campagne publicitaire pour le film *Grace : The Possession* insistait sur le fait que c'était la première fois que l'histoire de la possédée était racontée à travers les yeux de celle-ci. Toutefois, la subjectivité féminine semble nous échapper quand le récit reprend les mêmes stéréotypes de la structure narrative classique, l'innovation ne restant que dans les prises de vues. Le fait qu'il y ait une réticence à contester le récit traditionnel de l'exorcisme et ses idéologies oppressives ne devrait pas être surprenant. Notamment parce que ce sont encore des cinéastes hétéronormatifs, blancs et masculins qui ont tendance à produire la majorité des films d'exorcisme. La solution résiderait peut-être dans le genre de la personne réalisant le film. Je crois cependant que même si les films d'exorcismes étaient dorénavant dirigés par des femmes, il faudrait que ces dernières questionnent la structure narrative pour éviter de la reproduire. La réponse réside dans l'ébranlement des valeurs conservatrices d'une Amérique malade. Elle se trouve dans l'acceptation de l'Autre en renonçant au régime de la peur. Beaucoup reste encore à faire pour exorciser la société de son angoisse du sexe féminin.

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- 2019 -
MONSTRUM is published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society
(https://www.monstrum-society.ca/)

MONSTRUM 2 (June 2019) | ISSN 2561-5629

Grotesque Realism and the Carnivalesque in Tom Six's *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)* and *The Human Centipede II (Full Sequence)*

Ellen N. Freeman

"Feed her! Feed her!" screams Dr. Heiter, mad surgeon and villain of Tom Six's 2009 film *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)*. Three captured and tortured subjects have been conjoined anus-to-mouth to share a single gastrointestinal tract, creating Dr. Heiter's magnum opus of surgical ability: his fantastical 'Human Centipede'. The 'mouth' and leading vassal of Dr. Heiter's 'Human Centipede' swears in Japanese while his natural bodily functions defy him for the first time since becoming conjoined in this twisted and abject carnival tale, and he involuntarily defecates into the mouth of the subject behind him. This is the scene for which many audience members wait in expectation: the pooping, the suffocation, the gagging; this becomes a source of imminent gratification in *The Human Centipede* franchise. The gruesome act of defecating into a subject's mouth is hardly Tom Six's creation, however. This paper will explore similar intimations in François Rabelais' novel series *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-1564), as discussed by philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin in his book *Rabelais and his World* (1965), to highlight the ways in which crude, scatological horror and humour have been censored and celebrated for centuries. In her foreword to the 1984 version of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, Krystyna Pomorska writes: "Bakhtin claims that life itself (traditionally considered 'content') is organized by human acts of behaviour and cognition […] and is therefore already charged with a system of values at the moment it enters into an artistic structure" (1984: viii). At the core, Bakhtin claims that the human condition, and thus the *art created by* humanity, is considerably solidified by common behavioural patterns and

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Ellen Freeman holds an MA in Film Studies from Concordia University where she specialized in the psychological and sociological functions of horror audiences like herself. In 2018, she conducted a three-week course entitled "Shock Horror: The *Human Centipede* Trilogy" with the Montreal Monstrum Society, and again in 2019 on *The Twilight Zone: The Movie* as part of their "A Year in Horror: 1983" series. Currently, Freeman's research focuses on horror-fan receptions of cult, shock and exploitation cinema.

cognitive archetypes. The idea that observation is linked both to the creator(s) of the film and to its audience figure into the ways that Danish film director Tom Six's *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)* (2009; see Figure 1 below) and its sequel, *The Human Centipede II (Full Sequence)* (2012), can be conceived as a cinematic practice of Bakhtin's semiotic study of cognition, behaviour, and mischief, as well as his theories on the tradition of carnival culture, and the carnivalesque embrace of the grotesque.

Figure 1: *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)*

The Human Centipede films (*THC* and *THC II* from here, onward) operate within a satirical narrative that showcases elements of grotesque realism and are meant to be enjoyed in their evocation of carnivalesque excess. Nevertheless, among the visual and auditory—and perhaps phenomenologically olfactory, or gustatory—senses, Tom Six's first two *Human Centipede* films—although more so regarding *THC II*—develop characters whose actions, situations, and reactions create affect. *THC* and *THC II* have been actively censored by film censorship boards across the world because of their "violent and pornographic" visual representations, yet Six's portrayal of his characters—an emotionally and intellectually disabled man, a pedophilic psychiatrist, an abusive mother, and a megalomaniacal, obsessed, mad-scientist surgeon—is equally disregarded as petty and insensitive (*BBFC*, 2011). *THC* and *THC II* highlight the notion that graphic

entertainment intended to be *amoral*—that is, to hold our culture up to its often misguided, constrictive values by means of satire—is still heavily censored as *immoral* by reactionary tastemakers in popular culture, part of a history of moral superiority (and panic) that seems destined forever to repeat itself. This essay thus explores how 'abhorrent' entertainment can be fulfilling, comedic, participatory, and critical of paradoxical morals and mores—and why, after centuries, this form of participation in the overturning of the so-called respectable continues to be alluring. For all their ostensibly base and exploitative content, Six's first two *Human Centipede* films rub their spectators' noses in the contradictions of sanctioned morality.[1]

The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel

Mikhail Bakhtin's classic of Renaissance studies *Rabelais and His World*, finished in 1940 but published in 1965 due to decades-long opposition and informal censorship by the Soviet authorities, explores the immediate reception of the stigmatized novel series by French renaissance writer Francois Rabelais *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel,* written and published from 1532-1564. The ethos of *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel* is found in the author's prologue. Rabelais states: "Most illustrious Drinkers and you, most precious Syphilitics, for it is to you, not to others, that my writings are dedicated" (1946: 47, original capitalization). It is clear that Rabelais had no intentions of winning over high-class readers with his stories, and instead wrote these tales specifically for the hedonistic, rude, and boisterous.

The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel is a series of five novels that tell of the adventures of two giants, Gargantua and his son Pantagruel. Written in an amusing tone, the stories of Gargantua and Pantagruel are extravagant and satirical and feature an abundance of crude, scatological humour and violence, which was quite controversial for 16th Century literature. In the socio-political conditions of increased religious oppression in the period leading up to The French Wars between Roman Catholics and Calvinist Protestants, the Collège de la Sorbonne censored these 'obscene' novels; thus, *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel*, fully equipped with wordplay and risqué humor, were treated with varying levels of reluctance and suspicion as "'too excessive and too eccentric"' (Putnam, 1946: 3). In fact, François Rabelais' "gross robust humour, extravagance of caricature, and bold naturalism" is now marked by the literary term *Rabelaisian* (Merriam-Webster). The philosophy and spirit of these novels, according to Rabelais, focuses on what we can refer

to as 'Pantagruelism', deeply entrenched in "'a moral doctrine that implies a constant elevation and breadth of soul,' or, in the Maître's own words: 'a certain cheerfulness of disposition preserved in spite of fortuitous circumstances'" (Putnam, 1946: 37). To be good 'Pantagruelists' folks must "live in peace, happiness, and good health, enjoying yourselves always, [and to] never put any faith in such folks as that, who look out upon the world through a peephole" (Putnam, 1946, 365). Although most chapters of *Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel* are wildly fantastic and absurd, a few relatively serious passages have become famous for expressing humanistic ideals of the time, and for mocking and challenging bureaucratic behaviour. For instance, one passage states,

> DO WHAT THOU WOULDST for the reason that those who are free born and well born, well brought up, and used to decent society possess, by nature, a certain instinct and spur, which always impels them to virtuous deeds and restraints [sic] them from vice, an instinct which is the thing called honor. These same ones, when, through vile subjection and constraint, they are repressed and held down, proceed to employ that same noble inclination to virtue in throwing off and breaking the yoke of servitude, for we always want to come to forbidden things; and we always desire that which is denied us. (Rabelais, [1534], Putnam, 1946: 214, original capitalization).

Rabelais describes Gargantua, Pantagruel, and their community as free from societal restraints—and virtuous in their fun, and honest lifestyles, their celebration of 'that which is denied us'—as a commentary on the opposing religious oppressions and censors that rule art and ideology during this period. Bakhtin argues that, for centuries, *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel* had been misunderstood, and wrongly censored. In his *Rabelais and His World,* Bakhtin attempts to ease this misunderstanding by studying two important subtexts: *carnival* (the carnivalesque) and *grotesque realism*, both discussed in more detail below.

Rabelais' Pantagruelism aligns with the aesthetic intentions of *THC* director Tom Six. In two different interviews, Six explains his intentions for the films. The first, he calls "a dark, dark comedy. It's very over the top and silly, but also explores a darkness in humanity" (Hanley, 2015: n.p.). In regards to the entire franchise, he says, "I really took it to extremes the second time for the audience. […] I can't imagine anyone will see part two [or three] and take it seriously anymore. It's such an extreme attraction that it becomes really

over-the-top" (Barone, 2011: n.p.). Like Bakhtin, Tom Six has often spoken out about the absurdities of art censorship. In an interview with Charlie Nash, Six declares: "I believe in movies that bite, burn, shock, hurt, and are unconventional. Where a filmmaker is still a warrior fighting the mediocrity. I want audience to smell the dirty laundry. Nobody is forced to see a movie. Give audiences their own choice to watch it or not" (2017, n.p.).

Tom Six, it seems, wrote these films to parody not only horror fans and the genre's ostensibly over-simplified and over-produced conventions, but to poke fun at those offended by the humour that lingers beneath the filth. He confesses that his need to create a second, and third film—both of which, arguably, are aggressively more 'shocking' than the first—was for the satisfaction of an audience that, he suggests, 'desires that which is denied them'.

Behaviour and the Senses

The term "behaviour," as discussed by Raymond Williams, has been developed under the study of semiotics and cognitive thought, ranging from neutral positions to moral definitions contingent to one's worldview (1983: 43). The term "behaviour" signifies a *reaction* to a specific circumstance. Williams also understands the term in relation to ethics (morality), as a way in which subjects *behave* according to social law—that is, the marking of one's "dignified sense of public conduct" (1983: 43). Williams' definition sheds light on the evolution of the term within psychology as, collectively, "mimicry," the "science of *ethics*", and the "science of character" (1983: 44). In a reading of the *Human Centipede* films, however, his use of the term "experimental" in discussion of controlled and measured conditions of behavioural observation can be situated nicely to the film's narrative, which details the medical experiments and post-experiment observations of German Dr. Josef Heiter (Dieter Laser) upon a group of three tourists (two American, another Japanese). The film's premise begins when the two American tourists become stranded in the dark forests of Germany after their car breaks down. They find a house amongst the trees and are invited in by homeowner Dr. Heiter, who offers them water, food, and a telephone to call a mechanic. His décor is uniquely carnivalesque; he has wall-to-wall photos of Siamese twin babies and dogs plastered on his wall in an artistic fashion, signifying the doctor's pride in his previous work of *separating* subjects who appear impossible to separate (See Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: Dr. Heiter (Dieter Laser) and his thematically suggestive décor in *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)*

The American women trust Heiter to call the mechanic, but when they realize their drinks have been drugged with powerful sedatives, the doctor's newest medical obsession is revealed: he will attempt to conjoin those who are not meant to be conjoined. Dr. Heiter, having respectfully earned the title of "doctor" from what we assume is years in the medical field, proposes to his subjects and the film's audience a "100% medically accurate" bodily experiment that aspires to attach three subjects mouth-to-anus in order to create one digestive system—a "Siamese Triplet", or rather, a "human centipede."

Dr. Heiter observes his subjects' behaviour within a "controlled" system, or what Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris call "systems behaviour" (2013: 11). This behaviour of observing 'systems' is linked more directly to machines, or biological systems – a controlled science, as medical procedures often are (Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris, 2013: ch. *B*). Thus, it is clear that, as a scientist, Dr. Heiter is interested in studying the "manner in which a thing acts under specified circumstances or in relation to other things" (Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris, 2013: 11-12).

Similar to passages found in *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel,* as discussed by Bakhtin, *THC* depicts death and birth as both ultimately humiliating. "Birth" in this instance refers to the creation of Dr. Heiter's centipede, but also as stemming from his enthrallment with Siamese twin

babies and their survival. "Death," of course, is the impending demise of his creature creation (and possibly, the demise of our characters' former selves); if you thought this movie ended happily, think again. On the generation of amusement from such abject (and in the case of death, dire) bodily circumstances, Bakhtin writes:

> The images of feces and urine are ambivalent, as are all the images of the material bodily lower stratum; they debase, destroy, regenerate, and renew simultaneously. When death and birth are shown in their comic aspect, scatological images in various forms nearly always accompany the gay monsters [me, you, horror audiences] created by laughter in order to replace the terror that has been defeated. (Bakhtin, 1984: 151).

While the idea of laughter 'replacing' terror applies to Heiter and his absurdly awful experiments, Bakhtin's intentions in the above statement are more situated in the study of audience engagement, or cognitive and behavioural reaction to, a film or piece of literature. As I mentioned above, *THC* concerns the bodily experiments and post-experimental observation of the mental and physical "systematic behaviour" of three involuntary subjects. Likewise, *THC* and *THC II* depend on the behavioural reactions and cognitive responses from their audience. This intention is made obvious in a scene in *THC* where Heiter takes a moment to demonstrate his surgical intentions to his medical victims using a (hilariously unsophisticated) overhead projector, whiteboard, and pointer (See Figure 3).

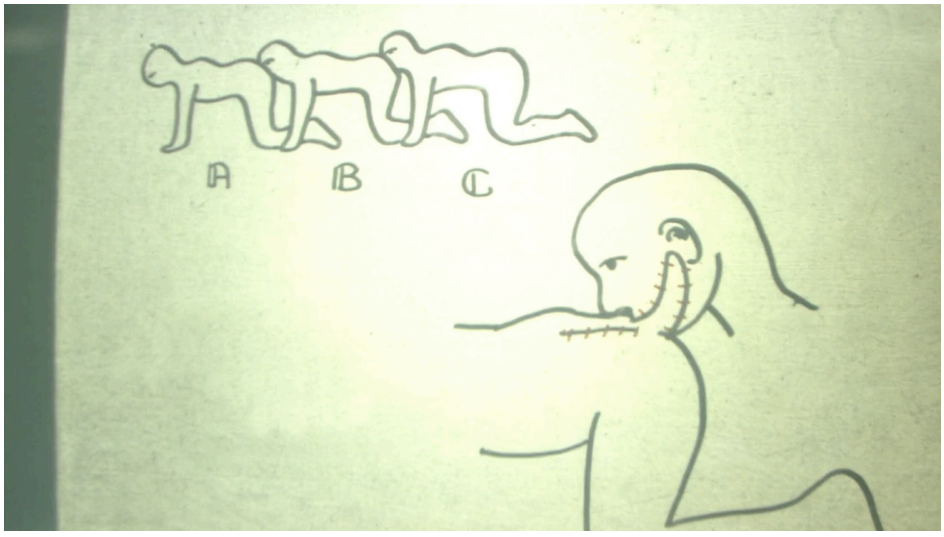

Figure 3: The demonstration by overhead projector in *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)*

There are two audiences implicated in this direct-address telegraphing of the dreadful experiment to come: the victims, and the audience, both of whom are left to feel the tension of knowing what they will eventually feel (the victims) or be forced to witness and *sense* (the audience). "Tactile, kinetic, redolent, resonant, and sometimes even taste-full" is how Vivian Sobchack defines the phenomenological, "cinesthetic"—and in this case, carnival, participatory—experience of cinema (2004: 54). In her essay "What my Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh," Sobchack attempts to understand the meaningful relation between cinema and our sensate bodies in relation to contemporary film theory (2004: 54-55). Tom Six, like Rabelais, is working towards the same goals of "unmasking" the presumed behavioural acts of "public conduct," and forcing an audience to indulge open-mindedly with the discomfort of their entertainment, and with healthy observation. Sobchack would agree; she writes that

> scholarly interest has been focused less on the capacity of films to physically around us to meaning than on what such sensory cinematic appeal reveals about the rise and fall of classical narrative, or the contemporary transmedia structure of the entertainment industry, or the desires of our culture for the distractions of immediate sensory immersion in an age of pervasive mediation" (2004: 57).

In sum, both Sobchack and Six would acknowledge that we must regard horror cinema and *THC* films as welcoming the cooperation of our senses, and of unruly, sensory responses. Audiences have *behaved* in a reflexive and phenomenological way to the content of the *THC*, which serves to "confront and discomfort the audience," a behavioural reaction that was anticipated and welcomed by director Tom Six (Och and Strayer, 2013: 171). In keeping with the definitions of Raymond Williams, a study of audience behaviour towards the film would be linked to the interaction with their environment, "specialized to 'stimulus' and 'response'" (1983: 44), a type of interaction with a text that allows for bodily engagement, rather than immediate dismissal. This bodily, or embodied engagement is like the experience of attractions—the sensation of a rollercoaster ride rather than absorption in the narrative. The linked bodies in the films might be understood as mimicking how the audience is bodily linked to the materiality of the medium. The audience is thrust into the lower stratum of the films, sensually mimicking the bodies there.

Carnivals of the Lower Stratum

While the central premise of these films may be linked to genres that have deprecatingly been called "torture porn"[2] or "goreno" they are also situated, depending largely on the theoretical lens, within carnival expressions of humour and satire, linking the trilogy as a whole with Bakhtin's behavioural and cognitive understanding of the principals of carnivalesque within Rabelaisian writings. "Carnival," "a rowdy [European] tradition" is derivative of festivals and theater that has a counter-cultural reputation for misbehaviour, where "lampooning liberty is allowed, and scandal so highly exalted [… as to] upend conventional social decorum" (Stam, Goldsmith, and Porton, 2015: 69). Linked to the concept of behavioural studies, Bakhtin uses Rabelais and his definition of carnivalesque to depict "utopian jouissance, the celebration of the bodily lower stratum, and free and familiar contact […] that rejects formal harmony and unity in favour of the asymmetrical, the heterogeneous, and the miscegenated" (Stam, Goldsmith, and Porton, 2015: 69). My use of this definition here is not meant to suggest that the participants in Dr. Heiter's experiments are filled with "utopian jouissance" at their transformation, but that the *Human Centipede* films' audiences, (while most appear to be uncomfortable or offended), are entertained by way of a 'carnival' experience (at least part of which involves delighting in seeing others offended).

Mikhail Bakhtin's book is considerably interested in Russian folk culture and its place amongst the satirical literature of Rabelais; more specifically, Bakhtin positions folk culture as a binary of "high culture" (Pomorska, 1984: xi). Bakhtin has linked behavioural studies with his theories of laughter and carnivalesque, which he describes to have a purposeful sense of "heterglossia" (Pomorska, 1984: x). Krystyna Pomorska notes in her Foreword to *Rabelais and His World* that Bakhtin's theories observe carnivalization as "the conditions for the ultimate 'structure of life', that is formed by 'behaviour and cognition'" (x). Bakhtin makes an important shift to sound as a dominant sense, emphasizing auditory exaggeration and enunciation over the sense of sight. Rabelais frequently lists the dynamic characteristics of the body's elimination during birth and death, and writes "a man could belch, fart, poop, piddle, shit, sneeze, sob, cough, throw up, yawn, puff, inhale, exhale, snore, snort, sweat, and wangle the ferrule to his heart's content" (Bakhtin, 1984: 358). In this instance, the spirit of carnival penetrates the sound and language of *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* yet it is "laughter [that] penetrates the highest forms of religious cult and thought" (Bakhtin, 1984: 13), and "laughter was seen as man's highest spiritual privilege, inaccessible to other creatures" (Bakhtin, 1984: 68). In this

context, embodied enunciation and production is as transgressive, if not more so than, articulate speech.

According to Bakhtin, "carnival," or "folk" culture—oftentimes referred to in contemporary cinema and popular culture studies as "cult"—are "comic cults which laughed and scoffed at the deity; coupled with serious myths were comic and abusive ones; coupled with heroes were their parodies and doublets" (Pomorska, 1984: 6). Films like *THC* are filled with "sacred/profane time-out[s] for imaginative play and alternative cosmovisions" that give expression to "the people's second life," and are used to transgress rationalism and ethical behaviour patterns (Stam, Goldsmith, and Porton: 2015, 69). Those who have a *perverse* sense of humour like Rabelais will undoubtedly see Six's attempt to compose satirical and carnivalesque subject matter alongside the scatological plot. The sinister, yet comical parody of the "mad scientist" caricature is hard to miss. Any number of examples come to mind, for example in *THC*, the image of Heiter's three post-surgical patients getting an airing on the lawn as they crawl around in a mouth-to-anus chain at Heiter's direction, or in *THC II*, the wannabe mad scientist / crazy fan, Martin Lomax's, administering a laxative to produce a more extreme effect out of his experiment. The implication of such moments in both films seems to be that the experiment is not enough; what the scientist really wants is abject spectacle.

Mouth-to-Film: Grotesque Attractions

If carnivalesque is enjoyed through a transformation of behaviour and liberation from the "prevailing order," then the "grotesque" body, a term used in relation to Bakhtin's study of carnival, deals with bodily transformation. The film, and Rabelais' novels, undoubtedly relate to Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818), and its titular "mad" scientist's "secret toil" with "profane fingers" in a "workshop of filthy creation" (1996: 32)—"filthy" here referring to both the scientist's gore-soaked laboratory as well as his suspect ("secret," "profane") ethical choices. Stam, Goldsmith, and Porton define "grotesque realism" as "turning conventional aesthetics on its head in order to locate a new kind of convulsive, rebellious beauty, one that reveals the grotesque of the noble and the latent beauty of the 'vulgar'" (2015: 69). Like Dr. Victor Frankenstein's monster, referred to by the monster himself as "the Adam of your labors," Dr. Heiter's Human Centipede patients detest their maker for violating their bodies and, by extension, the laws of

nature. Shelley's novel and Six's films "confront some of the most feared innovations of evolutionism: mankind's status as a species of animal" (Butler, 1993, from the book's back matter), while also stripping the human animal of its so-called superiority over nonhuman animals. If we laugh at the situation created by Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, it is more over the idiosyncrasies manifested by his obsessive, often oblivious behaviour. But Six's films are built on the prospect that audiences will find amusement in the absurdly vulgar scenarios he offers.

The ability to laugh and be entertained by the 'vulgar' allows the audience to grasp a more 'utopic' existence, according to Bakhtin. Linking the concept of the "grotesque" body to carnival, Stam, Goldsmith, and Porton believe that it is not, above-all, the subject matter that makes a text satirical, but the emphasis of *who* is the "*butt* of the joke" (2015: 70). The example he uses is the 'Purim Spiel'[3] who make fun of Haman the tyrant, not the Jewish Esther, who is inferior to Haman's tyranny (2015: 70). In *THC* an audience likely laughs less at the subjects being tortured, and more at the circumstances of the subject's torture. It is not so much the pain and discomfort of the subject that is funny, in other words, but rather Dr. Heiter himself—it is in his mannerisms and his dialogue that an audience cannot help but see the humour. For example, the first time Dr. Heiter's Human Centipede "walks"—that is, the first time we see his victims in the designated hands-and-knees position as seen in his picture-book example (Fig. 4)—he is so over-the-moon with joy that the audience almost feels congratulatory of his accomplishment: "He did it! The Centipede can walk!" Heiter is proud of his success and in turn, the audience is—however conflicting the feelings produced—proud for him. He walks around his Centipede flexing, laughing, and taking photos, his subjects all-the-while squirming and crying with discomfort; nevertheless, this is Heiter's time to shine, and we respect that in part because of his sheer glee. He takes a mirror off the wall and places it in front of his Centipede—a moment simultaneously suggesting and parodying the "mirror stage"[4] of their development as a self-aware creature-subject—and Heiter cries along with his Centipede tears of fulfilment, rather than anguish. This scene implies a positive, emotional forthcoming for Dr. Heiter. With the melodramatic string orchestra playing in the background, this scene is ridiculous, and it is exactly the over-the-top ridiculousness of this film that places the moment's situational comedy above the torment of Heiter's Human Centipede. Stam, Goldsmith, and Porton recognize a certin comedic "rule" which mandates that "laughing at death" is a theme that can be vulnerable to humorous treatment when examined in this context (2015: 70).

Bakhtin declares that to be entertained by carnivalesque images is to defy one's well-established behaviour, and that a certain degree of truth is discovered when one laughs or professes a desire for grotesque or vulgar imagery. As a direct relation to Rabelais, Bakhtin acknowledges a connection between "sexual stimuli together with defecation" that *THC* also visualizes with the quasi-sexual ass-to-mouth foreplay and the stimulated, erect nipples of the fit, tan, and beautiful American tourists. Of Rabelais' Fourth Book, Bakhtin argues that to appreciate the grotesque is to communicate wholeheartedly with humanity and truth:

> At the end [excrement] is described as a tree, something pleasant. And the tirade concludes with an invitation to drink, which in Rabelaisian imagery means to be in communion with truth. Here we find the ambivalent image of excrement, its relation to regeneration and renewal and its special role in overcoming fear. … An heir to grotesque realism he conceived excrement as both joyous and sobering matter, at the same time debasing and tender; it combined the grave and birth in their lightest, most comic, least terrifying form. (1984:175-176)

Again, we see an important shift towards the lower senses: smell, taste, and touch. Bakhtin's emphasis on "the feast" or the "drink" in his book and in this passage is a valid observation in terms of the way *THC* and the literature of Rabelais both rely on celebrations of otherwise abject bodies, collapsing an acute awareness of the body, and of the gruesomeness of birth and death, in a kind of sensorial feast.

These links between deviant behaviour and even observable behaviour, the genre of the carnivalesque, and the beauty of the grotesque body, all relate, on some level, to the idea of nonconformity. To enjoy, or to theorize a film that repulses many audiences is to oppose the initial behavioural "mimicry" discussed by Raymond Williams; to participate in carnival is to leave inhibitions behind, citing again what Stam, Goldsmith, and Porton call "formal harmony and unity in favour of the asymmetrical, the heterogeneous, and the miscegenated" (2015: 69). Likewise, to find beauty and worth in grotesque realism is to ignore sacred implications and acknowledge the body as an anatomical living piece of flesh and blood, rather than the privileged vessel of the immortal soul. They "laughed and scoffed at the deity; coupled with serious myths were comic and abusive ones" (Bakhtin, 1984: 6). In this regard, carnivalesque texts uncomfortably mingle the sacred and the profane.

In Bakhtin's description of death, "the soul, together with bile, blood, phlegm and flesh, leaves its bodily abode which has grown cold and has already acquired the aspect of death" (1984: 359). Grotesque realism acknowledges that death, discomfort, and biological degradation are all behaviours of the body that every living being must succumb to: "the bodily element […] is presented not in a private, egotistical form, severed from the spheres of all life, but as something universal" (Bakhtin, 1984: 19). Bakhtin's book, and these passages, support the notion that behaving according to a social rule is egotistical and in favour of a hierarchical type of humanity, which he declares is elusive and unattainable. To discuss the relation between the literature of Rabelais and Tom Six's *THC,* and their use of inadequate cognitive archetypes, the amusement of carnival culture, and the appreciation for the grotesque body, is to link the concept of humour in one's own decay as a challenge—and an honest response—to the truth of bourgeois morality.

THC concludes with the death of three kidnapped experiment subjects who are surgically conjoined mouth-to-anus, against their will. Two of the subjects, we can assume, die of malnutrition, infection, or bile poisoning, while the other—the first in the chain of bodies—takes his own life after triumphantly escaping maker and captor, Dr. Heiter. Though Heiter is a madman, his attention to detail and his obsession with sterilization, cleanliness, and medical accuracy sets him apart from other villains of the so-called "torture porn" genre (including the villain of *THC II*), and also from what we have come to envision as a 'realistic' murderer. Tom Six successfully places the first film, *THC (First Sequence),* into the diegetic world of his sequel when he opens *The Human Centipede II (Full Sequence)* (2011) (*THC II*) with a point-of-view shot of the 2009 film's denouement, followed by the closing credits, being watched by the would-be experimenter-villain of the sequel. This film-within-a-film, or *mise en abyme,* is used by Six to demonstrate the extreme and ultimately unrealistic silliness of the film's attractions, and the over-the-top inaccuracy (contrary to the tagline "100% Medically Accurate") of Part I's plot line, reminding the viewer that the original film remains *just* a film, albeit perhaps a very *real* object of grotesque fascination. Linda Williams argues in *Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess* (1991) that body genres like horror and melodrama encapsulate the notion of excess. Like Vivian Sobchack's thoughts on the phenomenological sensation experienced by spectators of cinema, Williams agrees that "body genres" "foreground sensational engagement in explicit image and sound content and narrative focus" (Sobchack, 2004: 62). Williams tells us: "we feel manipulated by these texts—an impression that the very colloquialisms of 'tear jerker' and 'fear jerker' express—and to which we

could add pornography's even cruder sense as texts to which some people might be inclined to 'jerk off'" (1991: 5). Again, Williams argues that audiences mimic emotions in body genres because of our attraction to and appreciation of the spectacle. Tom Gunning, writer of "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde" ([1990] 2006), discusses our fondness for, and willingness to identify with, the spectacle and the artifice of the attraction, and that while we know that the "magic" is not real, audiences nevertheless feel assaulted and encapsulated by it. Horror and other "body genres" offer "attractive" moments [attractions] that are willing to exhibit and "rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator" (Gunning, [1990] 2006: 382). In this paper, Gunning offers similarities between amusement parks and cinema, carnivals, and film exhibition. He writes, "the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle—a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself" (Gunning, [1990] 2006: 384). Tied directly into the attractions is the kind of direct address (and confrontation) of spectatorial desire that undergirds the *Human Centipede* films in general, but the first sequel in particular.

THC II thrives on the fear of, and desire for, replication of the first film's grotesque spectacle, providing a compelling re-enacting of Gunning's theories of exhibitionist cinema. Martin (Laurence R. Harvey), a disturbed recluse, is so inspired by the original *Human Centipede* film that he decides to replicate its gruesome experiments. That is, his motives are largely tied to recreating the prior film's attractions for himself as much, if not more than they are to any scientific curiosity. He does this in a way that is in direct contrast with Dr. Heiter's medically comprehensive method, housing his experiments in a filthy abandoned warehouse, and using duct tape and staples in place of sterile needles and sutures. Martin's social and psychological hindrances, in addition to the film's explicit scenes of bodily assemblage, provoke more realistic emotional, and biological reactions from its characters, whose bodily functions literally splatter the stage. Though arguably more gruesome in its imagery than the prior film, *THC II,* as a black and white film, beautifies realistic bodily grotesqueries through the use of low-key lighting, high-contrast close-up shots, and an exquisitely uncomfortable score that carry on throughout the film. In the opening sequence, we enjoy the capture of Martin's first Centipede-subjects. Mise-en-scène *alone* works to construct the psyche of Martin as an authentic psychopath, and to strongly express the exaggeration,

hyperbole, and excess that make up the fundamentals of grotesque style.

Contextualization of the Opening Sequence of *The Human Centipede II (Full Sequence)*

Martin (Laurence R. Harvey) is a mentally and intellectually challenged forty-something-year-old man who lives with his mother. Martin was subjected to sexual abuse by his father for several years and his mother still blames him for the imprisonment of her husband. Martin's therapist Dr. Sebring, a Charles Darwin-type character, confesses his desire to "fuck that retarded boy," thus causing Martin even more grief, aggression, and emotional torment, which drives the motive for his twelve-person *Human Centipede*-induced sexual fantasy.

As discussed above, *THC II* introduces its antagonist, Martin, watching footage from the last two minutes of *THC*. By opening with a point-of-view shot, the film forces the viewer immediately to identify with Martin in that moment, for presumably they have both shared the shock, and/or awe-inspiring pleasure of the Tom Six film-universe offered in Part I. Relating again to Gunning's concept for "rupturing the fictional world", *THC II* reiterates heavily on the fact that *THC*, and horror films as a whole, remain attractions-based, even when committed to an awe-inspiring realism ([1990] 2006: 382). Cynthia Freeland, too, suggests that in "realist horror" there is a shift from narratives committed to intricately unveiling supernatural monsters to "promising and withholding the *spectacle* of violence" (1995: 128, emphasis added). The dread of the *Human Centipede* films is largely attached to the coming spectacle produced by a reprehensible, but otherwise possible characters.

THC II follows its opening forced point-of-view shot with an establishing shot exposing Martin at work in the ticket booth of an underground parking garage. For Martin, this workspace acts as a place of independence and freedom from his disturbing domestic situation, and, consequently, is where Martin gathers the majority of his subjects. The scene is short and straightforward: Martin watches *THC* and as the final credits roll, he notices the security cameras capturing a man and a woman walking towards their parked car. Chaos ensues when the man realizes he has lost his keys and Martin assists them with his crowbar for what we assume is the purpose of helping the couple enter their vehicle. The man and the woman laugh at Martin's social awkwardness; this provokes Martin to shoot the man in the

foot and the women in the leg. Martin then uses his crowbar—a reoccurring weapon throughout the film—to knock the couple unconscious for the purpose of more efficiently loading their bodies into the back of his van. The sequence concludes with Martin back in his office chair, gazing at the now-paused film credits with a wide-eyed expression inspired by his recent adrenaline rush. The sequence occurs in full-circle; Martin's breakdown, or moment of "clarity," begins and ends with his admiration of *THC*. This five-minute sequence becomes a teaser attraction for the film to come: Not only does this scene begin and end with Martin secure in his office, the *film* begins and ends there as well. This turnaround is used to insist upon the psychological disturbance of Martin to the point where *THC* becomes fuel for his repressed aggression, but also a model for his ambition. This sequence epitomizes Martin's belligerence; while it is not the climax of the film, it is the climax of Martin's life as a whole.

Again, recalling Shelly's *Frankenstein,* Bakhtin writes: "The grotesque body, as we have often stressed, is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" (1984: 317). The film starts at the peak of Martin's anger when he begins to implement his fantasy of creating his very own "Human Centipede." These grotesqueries are visualized, just as Dr. Heiter's unrefined projector drawings were in *THC*, in a scrapbook heavily affixed with screen-grabs and doodles that fetishize and romanticize his favourite film. Likewise, Martin's body is equally put on display as one of grotesque appeal: like the gluttonous characters found within *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* Martin similarly possesses the fat, round belly, gaping mouth and swollen, popping eyes of the "gay carnival monster" (Bakhtin, 1984: 335). While Rabelais wrote of jovial, unbiased and utopian gluttony, that of festivals, carnivals, and feasts, Martin is situated within the grotesque image of the body, similar to the "Devil Pantagruel," in his "immeasurable, and infinitely powerful" cosmic terror (Bakhtin, 1984: 335). Bakhtin writes: "This cosmic terror … is the fear of that which is materially huge and cannot be overcome by force. Even the most ancient images of folklore express the struggle against fear, against the memories of the past, and the apprehension of future calamities, but folk images relating to this struggle helped develop true human fearlessness" (1984: 335-336). The scrapbook and *THC (First Sequence)* work as the template for Martin's transformation into manhood. Bakhtin continues: "The struggle against cosmic terror in all its forms and manifestations did not rely on abstract hope or on the eternal spirit, but on the material principle in man himself. Man assimilated the cosmic elements: earth, water, air, and fire; he

discovered them and became vividly conscious of them in his own body. He became aware of the cosmos within himself" (1984: 335-336). A similar evocation of the 'cosmos within ourselves', *THC II,* contrary to the original film, is a look into the psyche of its antagonist, allowing the viewer to take a closer look at the character of Martin, and the motives behind his actions. Tom Six, in his broken English, reasserts this concept of psychological realism: "the film isn't actually about a 'Human Centipede'. It's more, this time, about the main character. […] If the film would be in colour—with all the diarrhoea flying around and the blood, it's *so* distracting from the story—it would only be a gore film. And now, it has much more layers, I think" (Andrews, 2012: n.p.).

While *THC* focuses on the victims, the centipede concept, and the resilience of human nature, *THC II* uses this metanarrative plot structure to examine more closely the personal life of its aggressor, all the while interweaving the central features of grotesque imagery and gritty realism. Martin is not a medical doctor like Dr. Heiter; therefore, his centipede is excessively constructed, as mentioned earlier, by way of staples and duct tape. And his malnourished centipede victims require laxative injections to release their bowels. Unlike the more clinically detached Dr. Heiter, Martin rapes the tail-end of his centipede with barbed wire, creating a façade of power and a comparatively more excessive use of bodily "expressions" than offered by *THC*. As a result, *THC II* is even more a cinematic representation of grotesque realism than its predecessor. According to Bakhtin, the bowels and the phallus "play the leading role in the grotesque image, and it is precisely for this reason that they are predominantly subject to positive exaggeration, to hyperbolization. Next to the bowels and the genital organs is the mouth, through which enters the world to be swallowed up. And next is the anus. The main events in the life of the grotesque body, the acts of bodily drama, take place in this sphere" (1984: 317). While the motives of our villain are more pronounced and scrutinized in Part II than in Part I, the obscene nature of the Centipede's origins, accompanied by the film's graphic defecation scenes, intensify the grotesque nature of the film. Relating back to what Linda Williams discusses about body genres in "excess," *THC II* can also be linked to her theories about the structures of fantasy. She writes: "Laplache and Pontalis maintain that the most basic fantasies are located at the juncture of an irrecoverable real event that took place somewhere in the past and a totally imaginary event that never took place. The 'event' whose temporal and spatial existence can never be fixed is thus ultimately […] that of 'the origin of the subject'—an origin which psycho-analysts tell us cannot be separated from the

discovery of sexual difference" (Williams, 1991: 10). In the opening scene, Martin fantasizes about his own Human Centipede in way that can be ironically psychoanalyzed as fuelled by his sexual abuse as a child, and the lack of compassion he receives as an adult from his mother, his psychiatrist, and his parking-lot customers.

Martin speaks very little dialogue throughout the film; his character is shaped entirely through David Meadows' black and white handheld cinematography composed of close-up shots and Laurence R. Harvey's vital expressions, particularly related to his wild, wide, almost swollen-looking eyes. Bakhtin writes that "the nose and mouth play the most important part in the grotesque image of the body. The grotesque is interested only in protruding eyes […] the bulging eyes, a purely bodily tension" (Bakhtin, 1984: 316-317). Framing and lighting within the mise-en-scène of *THC II* contribute to the narrative development of Martin as a deranged psychopath, and echo Bakhtin's interpretation of grotesque imagery in terms of transgressive bodily exaggeration and hyperbole.

Figures 4, 5 and 6: Martin (Laurence R. Harvey) watches *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)* in *The Human Centipede (Full Sequence)*

At two minutes and thirteen seconds, *THC II* cuts to a frame-within-a-frame shot of Martin's computer screen (Figure 4, above). Off-screen, we hear Martin breathing heavily and coughing amidst the cries, the crickets, and the birds that make up the credit sounds of *THC*. This close-

up shot sets the visual and stylistic tone for the entire film, which is shrouded in shadow and rendered claustrophobic through smudged vignette edges made all the more striking by virtue of cinematographer David Meadows' low-key black-and-white chiaroscuro lighting. When the film cuts away to the left of our antagonist who holds the original perspective, the audience holds its gaze on Martin in the same manner that Martin gazes upon his screen (Figure 5, above). This gaze acts as an examination of the film's main character and the close-up; additionally, the eyeline match offered in Figure 6 above, allows the audience to become engulfed in Martin's personal space.

The close-up shot is used to emphasize Martin's facial features and bulging, highly expressive eyes, which often do the talking for him. Figures 7 through 10 (at right) are taken from Martin's "breakdown" sequence to demonstrate how the use of shallow-focus close-up shots frame his vulnerability, thus again showing Six's interest in the psychology of his antagonist rather than the plight of Martin's victims. Close-up shots are commonly rendered

Figures 7-10: Martin's Breakdown in *The Human Centipede (Full Sequence)*

in shallow focus to "suggest psychological introspection" (Prunes, Raine, and Litch, 2019: n.p.). Close-ups and extreme close-ups of Martin's profile, deviating only slightly between eyeline angles, are framed and bordered in shadows as a way to focus the attention on his emotional and psychological state. Gunning discusses close-up shots in relation to his cinema of attractions, suggesting an added element of spectacle to whatever emotional reality is meant to be conveyed: "Its principal motive is again pure exhibitionism [… .] The enlargement is not a device expressive of narrative tension; it is in itself an attraction and the point of the film [… .] It is the direct address of the audience, in which an attraction is offered to the spectator by a cinema showman, that defines this approach to filmmaking" ([1990] 2006: 384). What I am suggesting is twofold: while such close-ups may, according to Gunning, work in service of a kind of disorientation or distanciation (*dépaysement*), they also work in service of narrative to make a grotesque spectacle of emotion—to prolong emotional and psychological realities for the audience as a kind of extended moment. Edgar Allan Poe created entire stories that were extensions of emotional states, but that can read as strict realism, for all their excesses and occasional hints of the supernatural.

Likewise, the hard lighting creates a grotesque realism focus on Martin in that it both renders the scene in chiaroscuro shadows, and highlights the glare from Martin's saliva, as well as the sweat, the grease, and the oil on Martin's hair and skin. Both the man and woman are similarly framed in tight close-ups, yet they lack the spotlight that Martin is permitted. Martin remains illuminated by stark (unflattering) light throughout this entire sequence—in his office and in the parking garage—while his subjects are merely sculpted by matte greys and immersive shadows that reflect Six's intentions of creating a film about the *character* of his antagonist; Martin does not share the spotlight with his guinea pigs. The opening scene—and ultimately, the entire film—are undoubtedly claustrophobic; we rarely travel outdoors and when we do, we are cemented within Martin's kill-van, or caught in a torrential downpour. *THC II* primarily takes place either within the parking garage or locked Martin's dark, and dingy warehouse, and our sense of claustrophobia are elevated. On the effect that the black and white film and his claustrophobic cinematography had on the construction of character, Six notes: "the story gets a little more dramatic and I think, a little more scary as well, because you, uh, *live more* with the characters" (Six, 2011, n.p.). The result may be termed a kind of spectatorial claustrophobia that forces affective confrontation with the characters.

When Martin shoots the couple, Six zooms in on the glistening blood pouring out of their wounds. Likewise, when Martin knocks the man unconscious with his crowbar, the close-up shot and low-key lighting emphasizes the beauty of the wound that Martin created (Figures 11-13, this page). These close-up shots are clearly not meant to emphasize the emotions of the characters—the light is used in these shots to show Martin's masterpiece of excess; the victims are art objects, and the blood is his paint. Martin is an artist of the grotesque. The lighting in *THC II prefers* Martin as a subject and works in his favour, artfully illuminating his own artful creations, and echoing Bakhtin's notion that "the artistic logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths. The outward and inward features are often merged into one" (Bakhtin, 1984: 317-318).

Figures 11-13: Martin's murder spectacle in *The Human Centipede (Full Sequence)*

Currently, one can find (the cut version of) *THC II* on Canadian Netflix under the "Visually Striking" category, sharing a space with films like *The Revenant* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2015), *Only God Forgives* (Nicolas Winding Refn, 2013), and *Under The Skin* (Jonathan Glazer, 2013), to name a few. The film looks, feels, and sounds

like a cross between Lynch's *Eraserhead* (1977) and Tsukomoto's *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989), films that continually alert the viewer to their aesthetic beauty, while simultaneously pushing boundaries narratively, and atmospherically. Roger Ebert's "complementary: review of *THC II* acknowledges this aesthetic: 'I'm giving this movie no stars, because it exists in a universe where the stars don't shine. And, the black and white in the sequel really helps create a world with no sun, with no light at the end of the tunnel—a completely unremitting bleak, nihilistic horror'" (cited in Andrews, 2012: n.p.).

The sequence concludes with a medium-shot of Martin, viewed from the left, sitting casually, glancing towards his desktop computer as though his current actions were merely a daydream. This scene outlines our protagonist as a simple man driven by carnal, fantastic needs. His abuse as a child, and the physical and (significantly overstated) emotional abuse that he currently suffers from his mother, usurp his plausible fantasies. Likewise, the reoccurring angles and close-up shots of Martin expose his emotional depth. Though Martin is portrayed as being intellectually challenged and nonsensical, these shots, and his expressive eyes, tell us otherwise, even against the film's wider comedic over-psychologizing. This sequence is perhaps the least gruesome in the film as a whole; however, it is a vital example of Martin's progressive spiral into the terrible realities of his maniacal reverie. The use of shallow-focus close-up shots and black and white contrast lighting to frame Martin psychologically and aesthetically, paired with the forbidding humming of binaural pulses, bring Martin's inner world to spectacular life in a similar way to that which Six brings Dr. Heiter's motivations to life as carnivalesque pageantry. The motivations and focus may be different, but the grotesque-realist-attractions aesthetic remains the same.

Conclusion

Bakhtin believes that to participate in carnival and grotesque imagery is to find entertainment in satirical literature/texts (like the writings of Rabelais, and Tom Six's *THC* films), both of which collapse the binary between high and low, sacred and profane, human and nonhuman animal. To free oneself from the restraints imposed by good taste *is* to experience life (Bakhtin, 1984: 8-10). Breaking free from behavioural "mimicry" is to "[celebrate] temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; [carnival] marked the suspension of all hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin, 10).

Tom Six has been known to publically voice his discontent with censor boards, and the overzealous "political correctness" of high-class film criticism as a whole. His entire public figure is built around his embrace of audience backlash. Tom Six and his *Human Centipede* trilogy use gore and excessive corporeal violence to portray and reproduce similar reactions elicited through horror, comedy, and grotesque imaginings to become a 'parody' of oneself, and of the conventions by which he gained his success, and *The Human Centipede* franchise continues to exist outside of the current film universe as a self-referential and self-conscious pastiche of its own excesses. While Six's villains defy the acceptable behaviour of social order, they also break *free* from behavioural and cognitive restraints, as do the audiences who react with a combination of laughter and repulsion to on-screen mouth-to-anus surgeries, drooling beady-eyed wannabe mad-scientists, and spraying diarrhoeal excretions. *The Human Centipede* films' '100% medical accuracy' suspends cultural norms and privileges to offer a not-entirely-unserious (and certainly not uncritical) escape into naughtiness.

Notes

[1] This essay excludes discussion of the third film in the trilogy, *Human Centipede III (Final Sequence)*. While that film maintains Six's interest in upping the ante in terms of confronting a culture's sense of good taste with extremely bad taste (and political incorrectness), it does so in far less sophisticated ways than its predecessors.

[2] See David Edelstein, "Now Playing at Your Local Multi-Plex: Torture Porn," *New York*, 39, no. 4 (6 February 2006): 63-64.

[3] "Purim Spiel," or Purim play, is a satirical Yiddish festival or play dramatizing the Hebrew Book of Esther.

[4] See Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: Norton, 2006).

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- 2019 -
MONSTRUM is published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society
(https://www.monstrum-society.ca/)

"If I stop doing that job, they don't stop eating": *iZombie* and the Sociopolitical Dimensions of Food

Erin Giannini

Zombies serve as a handy metaphor for any number of interpretations: fear of revenge from enslaved or colonized individuals (*White Zombie* [1932], *I Walked with a Zombie* [1943]); rampant consumerism (*Dawn of the Dead* [1978]) (Posey 2014); pandemics (*28 Days Later* [2002]) (Abbott, 2018: 13-23); and contemporary fears of both immigration and one another (*The Walking Dead* [2010-present]). It is a trope that filmmakers and creators continue to turn to, with a significant spike in zombie narratives over the past 20 years (172 released between 2000 and 2010, and 176 released or produced between 2011 and 2016) (Crockett and Zarracina, 2016). Because of their liminal not-dead/not alive status, zombies, like other hybrid monsters, are feared as "the products of the culture that shapes them and bear within their myths the imprint of existing social conditions" (Lauro and Embry 100). They can only infect; "no zombie body is relieved of its condition by passing it on" (Lauro and Embry 100), and thus zombie-ism as a symbol cannot be transformative or liberating, unlike the image of the cyborg (Lauro and Embry 87). The zombie body can, however, symbolize (or reflect) the society in which zombie narratives are employed.

Given the general lack of voice inherent to their state, zombies' individual desires and appetites are frequently reduced to a desire for food; that is, flesh or, in some later variations, brains. "The lack of individual identity continues to 'other' the zombie," argues Stacey Abbott, "rendering the body devoid of soul, spirit, or consciousness"; that is, one of a faceless, abject horde (2018: 162). Amanda Oldring, in her analysis of "apocalypse" media, suggests that since zombies are a "symbol of social decay," their increased use in political

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Erin Giannini, PhD, is an independent scholar. She has served as an editor and contributor at *PopMatters*, and her recent work has focused on portrayals of and industrial contexts around corporate culture on television, including a monograph on corporatism in the works of Joss Whedon (McFarland 2017). She has also published and presented work on religion, socioeconomics, production culture, and technology in series such as *Supernatural*, *Dollhouse*, *iZombie*, and *Angel*.

protest "embrace[s] that reality, and so arbitrarily cuts at the systemic failure that created that symbol in the first place" (2013: 17). Yet the increase in zombies as sentient, sympathetic protagonists in both film and television complicates this reading (Abbott 2018: 162). Rather than a faceless horde, these zombies are both "less" (in that they are undead) and, in the case of horror films such as *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Otto; or, Up with Dead People* (2008), and *Warm Bodies* (2013)—or the horror TV series considered here, *iZombie* (2015-2019)—more (Canavan 2012: 285-296). In that respect, the sentient zombie, like the more sympathetic vampire of works that came in the wake of Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), can serve to challenge audience assumptions about the "other" by allowing the zombies to speak for themselves, even if they will never be fully "domesticated" (Abbott 176).

This increased sentience, however, does not obviate the zombies' need to eat, and for *iZombie*'s zombies (perhaps in a tribute to Dan O'Bannon's *Return of the Living Dead* [1985]), eat human brains in particular. Given the obvious importance of food to maintain life, as well as the increased focus on sustainability (Morawicki and Diaz Gonzalez 2018: 191-196) and ethics (Thompson 2016: 61-74) of its production, food itself has taken on a sociopolitical and socioeconomic resonance. For example, the potential horrors of climate change on crops and food production (Cho, 2018) means less yield, greater insect and parasite activity, and fewer (and possibly sterile) livestock, making the lack of basic necessities such as food a potential geopolitical hot point across the globe.

iZombie's story arcs have consistently engaged with issues around socioeconomics, power, and class, as did Rob Thomas' earlier series, *Veronica Mars* (2004-2007, 2019). Adapting a series about zombies, however, allows the narrative to focus on an element rarely engaged with on television (outside of advertisements): food.[1] As Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry suggest, the "indeterminable boundary" of the zombie body is perhaps most emblematic when focused on the mouth, effacing "the boundary between zombie and not-zombie" (2008: 99). Within the narrative world of *iZombie*, this "food"—its procurement, consumption, and availability—is a vital thread throughout the four extant seasons of the series. These zombies can speak for themselves, rather than serving as only as a metaphor, as well as "speaking" for those whose brains they consume. Despite the differentiation of *iZombie*'s zombie-sentience from, for example, the mute hoards of George Romero's cycle of zombie films, the series' focus on consumption provides a strong link to such predecessors (particularly *Day of the Dead* [1985] and *Land of the Dead* with their increasingly intelligent and politicized zombie characters). In this essay I will

examine the ways in which *iZombie* builds upon this sentient monster to focus on food in particular as central to current issues around consumption, with two particular strands: provenance and food deserts (i.e., places in which fresh food is not readily available due to distance or cost).

"We eat people, Liv": The Ethics of Sourcing and Eating (Brains)

Ethical eating—that is, making food choices based on sustainability and environmental and social impact—has grown into big business (Macvean, 2009). As Jonathan Kauffman suggests, the 60s countercultures' (i.e., "hippies"') focus on organic foods such as chard, granola, and brown rice, has gone mainstream, shifting how consumers think about their food choices to a degree unimaginable a generation earlier (Kauffman, 2018). Reducing one's carbon footprint through eschewing meat and dairy products has also gained traction (Carrington, 2018), and there is continuing research on the ways that both consumer food choices and production-level processes impact the global environment, as well as the ways that both can work together to blunt the consequences (Poore and Nemecek 2018: 987-992). Considering recent journalistic (Schlosser, 2001) and videographic exposés on factory farms (e.g., Shaun Monson's 2005 film *Earthlings*), as well as questions over organic labeling (Whoriskey, 2017), and the ethics of game hunting ("Does hunting help...", *Scientific American*), the exigencies of food provenance and consumption practices remain a multifaceted issue in contemporary North American culture.

The ethics of food consumption is not unique to *iZombie* as a horror series; for example, in Joss Whedon's series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spin-off *Angel*, the line delineating "good" versus "evil" monsters is frequently related to said monsters' consumption patterns. Not only do "reformed" vampires such as Angel (David Boreanaz) and Spike (James Marsters) no longer consume human blood, but demons such as Clem (James Leary) are considered harmless based on a diet consisting of junk food ("Two to Go" 6.20) and felines ("Life Serial" 6.5). *iZombie*, however, foregrounds this element. The series, about Liv Moore (Rose McIver), a young woman accidentally turned into a zombie at a corporate-sponsored boat party ("Pilot" 1.1), deals with Liv's need to consume human brains in the first five minutes of the pilot. Explicitly making humans a source of food rather than a consumer of it allows the series to deal directly with these issues while positioning its zombies as both predators and prey.

iZombie's zombies are not arisen from the dead (a la Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* [1968] or Wes Craven's *The Serpent and the Rainbow* [1988]), but exist in a state similar to vampires: pale skin, almost undetectable heartbeat, and super-strength. It is one of several recent series (and films) that draw parallels between vampires and zombies; the "i-vampire" is joined by the "i-zombie" (Abbott, 2018: 145).[2] Like vampirism, zombie-ism in *iZombie* can be spread by blood/fluid transfer; thus, Liv breaks off her engagement to her fiance, Major Lillywhite (Robert Buckley), and leaves her cardiac surgery internship for a job at the morgue, allowing her to both avoid contaminating humans and gain access to a steady food supply without killing humans.

In terms of food, and given their "dead" state, the series' zombies' taste buds are compromised; most drown their food and drink in various hot sauces for flavor. Initially, Liv takes little care with her meals; she sprinkles chopped brains on pizza, or mixes them with ramen noodles. This is presented as a consequence of her depression over her transformation, which comes with not only lost opportunities and relationships, but the fact that her desires have narrowed to a single point: the acquisition and consumption of brains ("Pilot" 1.1). However, the first episode also reveals that its zombies' food is personalized; that is, they receive the abilities and memories of the brains' former owners after they consume them. In that respect, for many zombies within the series, there is no buffer between source and preparation; not only are they what they eat, but they also cannot deny the origins of their food, as one might do in a supermarket or butcher shop. That is, many zombies must remove and prepare the brains themselves, using either their enhanced strength to break the skull, or particular equipment, such as bone saws or knives. (This, not surprisingly, exempts the wealthy client base of one of the show's villains, Blaine McDonough [David Anders], who have their brains prepared and delivered.) While Liv has access to professional equipment to ease the process, she still has an intimate relationship with her food in a manner not unlike hunters who not only kill animals, but prepare them for consumption (e.g., skinning, preservation, etc.). Further, this intimacy takes on an additional dimension: Liv experiences visions/memories of the deceased she consumes, leading her to team up with Seattle police detective Clive Babineaux (Malcolm Goodwin) to solve crimes. The added role of crime-solver provides a redemptive purpose to her state that ameliorates the loss of her career, her fiancé, and her family inflicted by her zombie-ism.[3] "I need this. This is my one thing," she tells Clive ("Cape Town" 2.9). Neither in preparation nor consumption is Liv (or similar zombies) necessarily allowed to deny her food's provenance. Fellow zombie Lowell—formerly one of Blaine's

clients—forces himself to acknowledge that "We eat people, Liv," emphasizing the sourcing aspect of ethical eating ("Patriot Brains" 1.9).

Complicating this give-and-take dynamic of zombie-ism as a condition that lies somewhere between blight and potential superpower, is the aforementioned Blaine McDonough, former drug dealer, scion of a wealthy family, and the zombie who turned Liv. His unhappiness with his zombie state does not prevent him from turning several others into zombies, with particular focus on Seattle's wealthiest ("Brother Can You Spare a Brain?" 1.2) and/or most powerful ("Flight of the Living Dead" 1.5/"Zombie Bro" 2.2).[4] Operating out of an upscale charcuterie called Meat Cute, Blaine employs an artisinal butcher/chef who prepares high-end meals such as "Motor Cortex Asada" or "Cerebellum Sashimi" ("Patriot Brains" 1.8), all artfully designed to mask their origin. This origin, revealed by the middle of the first season, is the brains of homeless or drug-addicted teens, frequently lured by Blaine and his associates with the promise of free drugs or meals. Blaine's feeding the rich the brains of the poor—chosen because they would be less likely to be reported missing—literally embodies Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," itself a satirical invective against willfully overlooking real solutions to hunger and poverty.

Not that these wealthy customers are necessarily satisfied. Jackie, a trendspotter Blaine seduced and turned into a zombie, responds to a late delivery from Meat Cute by killing and consuming the brains of the delivery boy ("Virtual Reality Bites" 1.6). While Blaine eventually kills Jackie for this transgression, it is clearly not out of any sense of justice or propriety; rather, it is practical: given that the delivery staff is composed of high-school-aged local kids (including Liv's younger brother ["Blaine's World" 1.13]), the threat of exposure if they went missing is higher than the already-forgotten kids Blaine uses as food. Another client, Lawrence Kaiser (Ben Wilkinson), specifically requests brains from (fictional) astronaut Alan York in hopes of visions of being in space. The provenance of his food troubles him only because of its low "entertainment" value: "These visions from runaways and junkies are worse than depressing; they're boring" ("Patriot Brains" 1.9). While none of these individuals asked to be turned into zombies, the suggestion that they are entitled to the "best" brains underscores the class divisions at play throughout the series. In essence, by having the 1%-er zombies so easily take their place as the new top of the food chain allows the series to comment on the ruthlessness of late-stage capitalism by having its most powerful zombies literally embody it.

Most of the zombies, however, fall in between this near-sociopathic corporate nonchalance and Liv's productive repurposing of her food to solve murders, with their increased awareness of their food's source often having fatal consequences. Lieutenant Suzuki (Hiro Kanagawa), turned by Blaine to facilitate covering up Blaine's crimes ("Maternity Liv" 1.7), relies on him for brains, but the actions required to get them, including pinning the aforementioned murders of runaways on others ("Maternity Liv" 1.7), eventually lead Suzuki to take his own life and attempt to implicate Blaine ("Blaine's World" 1.13). Lowell Tracey (Bradley James), a musician turned by Blaine "because he liked my music," initially accepts Blaine's excuse that his brains come from a funeral home until pressed by Liv ("Patriot Brains" 1.9). Lowell in turn forces himself to viscerally accept that "we eat people" by attending the funeral of a recently deceased, beloved teacher, digging him up, and removing his brain. This realization that his food source comes from murdered teens, as well as the full scope of what his brain-eating implies, also leads to Lowell's death. (In his case, it is at the hands of Blaine, after Lowell makes a futile attempt to kill him ["Patriot Brains" 1.9]).

While Meat Cute is eventually destroyed at the end of the first season—a newly human Blaine instead opens a funeral home, appropriately named Shady Plots[5] ("Grumpy Old Liv" 2.1)—the provenance of how zombies acquire food remains an issue throughout the series. Blaine transitions to using the brains of already-deceased individuals, claiming that Liv inspired this shift through her example. In essence, Blaine is separating himself from the "labor" of procurement. As a butcher shop, Meat Cute allowed no filter for the zombies who owned and staffed it; they saw, in Blaine's own words, "how the sausage was made" ("Virtual Reality Bites" 1.6); they "hunted" humans, harvested their brains, and then created the meals sold to upscale customers. While the employees of Shady Plots still prepare the meals, the "hunting" aspect has been removed, bringing them closer in terms of ethical preparation to Liv; however, the socioeconomic stratification of brain distribution remains intact, with high-end clients receiving "interesting" brains and employees given the leftovers. In season four, however, when Blaine opens an upscale restaurant called Romero's, it becomes obvious that murdering individuals for their brains continues; the only difference is this task has been outsourced to others ("Brainless in Seattle, Part 1" 4.3), allowing Blaine—and his customers—plausible deniability with regards to how this food is procured.[6]

As for Liv herself, the second season and beyond shows a marked difference in how she prepares her brains for consumption. If she had an influence on Blaine in terms of "letting the brains come to you" ("Grumpy

Old Liv" 2.1), Blaine's influence on Liv is also obvious in the ways in which she takes particular care in making her brains a meal, rather than merely a necessity. Frequently, the type of food Liv prepares is thematically resonant: nachos when she ingests a frat boy's brain ("Zombie Bro" 2.2); a hero sandwich for the brain of Chris Allred,[7] a shop teacher who moonlights as a vigilante crime fighter ("Cape Town" 2.9); or a cheeseburger for pathological liar Corey Carp in an episode entitled "The Whopper" (2.13). (See Figure 1 below.). While Liv continues to remove and prepare the brains herself, the increased complexity of her food preparation suggests the same masking of the food source that Blaine and Meat Cute/Romero's engage in, as well as Liv's increased comfort with her zombie state. Unlike either Seattle's wealthy zombies or those created by season three's (planned) outbreak, Liv has a steady—and free—food supply as part of her work, meaning procurement is rarely a concern. (The implications of this in the series' fourth season will be explored below.)

Figure 1: The "hero" sandwich

If Liv gets her brains from the morgue, and Blaine from the society's outcasts, and later from a funeral home, the second season introduction of Fillmore Graves, a private military contractor staffed entirely by zombies ("Salivation Army" 2.19), adds a third source: enemy combatants ("Spanking the Zombie" 3.5). Unlike Blaine, who charges his customers $25,000 a month

for upscale brain preparations, or Liv, who personalizes her meals through both her preparation process and using their memories/personality traits to solve crimes, Fillmore Graves feeds its zombies "brain mash"; that is, a blended combination of brains served in plain plastic tubes. While this mass processing serves to make the brains more portable and avoid any memories or personality traits from ingestion (ones that might affect military readiness ["Zombie Knows Best" 3.2; "Looking for Mr. Goodbrain, Part 2" 3.13]), it also further depersonalizes those they have killed. By processing their "food" in a way that masks its origins—suggesting the industrial processing/doctoring of fast and convenience food—Fillmore Graves renders it that no soldier would thus have visions or traits of those they had been contracted to kill; the end result of the product denies them any understanding or empathy. In that respect, the corporate military contractor offers brains the furthest removed from their source; in essence, hiding the true nature of who they are and who they consume.

Energy drink company Max Rager (bought out by Fillmore Graves at the end of the second season) mirrors this distancing from the other side. Max Rager tracks the consumer habits of the initial 322 zombies living in Seattle ("Grumpy Old Liv" 2.1) through their purchases of zombie-specific products (such as the aforementioned hot sauce), thereby adding a further consumption element to the series' focus on food. Additionally, the source of their infection stems both directly and indirectly from this corporation. Not only does an unlisted ingredient within the drink cause violent episodes ("Mr. Berserk" 1.10), but when mixed with a (fictional) party drug called Utopium, it immediately turns humans into violent zombies ("Pilot" 1.1; "Salivation Army" 2.19).[8] It is this combination that first turns Blaine into a zombie, and allows him to create his "brain business," turning Seattle's economic 1% into his customer base. Vaughn Du Clark, Max Rager's CEO, takes some level of responsibility for the initial zombie outbreak, both investing in research to figure out the "rogue" ingredient in his drink, and by "eliminating" the zombie problem: hiring an individual with the ability to physically sense zombies to kill them.[9] Du Clark's corporation and significant financial resources not only allow him to distance himself from the initial adverse effects of his drink but outsource the consequences.[10] Indeed, despite the fact that the company's new release, "Super Max," is even stronger and more prone to cause violent episodes, they use the same type of cost-benefit analyses General Motors used in the 1970s to determine the cost of recall versus the cost of litigation, putting a monetary value on human life at approximately $200,000 ($1.6 million in 2018) (Ballaban, 2014). As Du Clark's daughter Rita (Leanne Lapp), second in

command at Max Rager, puts it: "Accounting-wise, we factored in lawsuits. There'll be violent episodes similar to the frequency we experienced with Max Rager" ("He Blinded Me...With Science" 2.15). The suggestion is that Max Rager/Du Clark employs similar reasoning as GM, in that human life can be sufficiently monetized for profit over risk. Rather than making a safer, if less effective, drink, Du Clark determines that the human cost of consuming Max Rager is less important than the financial gain. Fittingly, Du Clark himself is consumed; when the release of his SuperMax drink causes another zombie outbreak, Du Clark eventually is killed and his brain eaten by his own, now-zombified daughter, Rita ("Salivation Army" 2.19).

For both Max Rager and Fillmore Graves, this disconnect from either the source of their food or its consequences is part of the typical externalizing process of corporations. "The corporation is an externalizing machine," argues Joel Bakan. "There isn't any question of malevolence or of will; the enterprise has within it […] those characteristics that enable it to do that for which it was designed" (2004: 70). As corporations are neither living nor dead—although legally personified (Kennedy, 2010)—one could argue that they share a similar liminal status with zombies themselves. Sarah Lauro and Karen Embry also draw the parallel to the zombie as a "capitalist icon": "the monstrous figure of global capitalism is fed on the labors of the impoverished 'third world' labor force as well as representing both consumer and consumed" (2008: 99). This duality is expressed not only within the zombies themselves—particularly the humans killed and consumed for and by the wealthy—but in the connection between Max Rager and Fillmore Graves. Fillmore Graves buys out the energy drink company responsible for creating the zombie problem, but not for mass sale; Max Rager is available only to employees of Fillmore Graves, and like the classic zombie, its identity is stripped away. Following season two, Super Max is presented in plain silver cans, with no visible branding. Given both the narrative's and Du Clark's focus on the importance of the brand, Super Max's fate mirrors that of its creator: both become just another meal.

"They left you to starve on the streets": Food Deserts

While seasons one through three of *iZombie* focus primarily on the provenance of Seattle's zombies' "brain food"—with a particular focus on the well-off/powerful zombies created by Blaine—the fourth season necessarily switches gears in the wake of a different type of corporate-generated zombie outbreak than that caused by Max Rager. In order to protect their "species"

from human interference, a rogue faction within Fillmore Graves (in a move that suggests an anti-vaxxer's nightmare scenario) engages in multi-level germ warfare; first, by introducing a deadly flu virus into Seattle's population, then, by contaminating its vaccine with zombie blood ("Looking for Mr. Goodbrain, Part 2" 3.13). Both those already suffering from the flu and those who receive the vaccine are made into zombies, upping the zombie population of the city from the few hundred of the first three seasons to at least ten thousand. The questionable logic of this plan is immediately apparent, as it is established that Fillmore Graves struggles to feed the zombies already in its employ ("Looking for Mr. Goodbrain, Part 1" 3.12). *iZombie*'s zombies require regular brains to stay cognizant and not go "full Romero" ("The Exterminator" 1.3).[11] (See Figure 2 below.) Food itself becomes (even more) politicized within the narrative during season four, as Fillmore Graves' actions draw a bright line between zombie "haves" and zombie "have-nots," making large sections of Seattle into what are known as "food deserts."

Figure 2: A "full Romero" zombie from episode 1.3

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines "food deserts" as areas of the country that lack easy access to "whole foods" (fresh fruits and vegetables); that is, at least 33% of an area's population must reside more than a mile (for urban environments) or ten miles (for rural communities) from a grocery store ("USDA defines...", 2011). According to the USDA, approximately 24 million Americans live in food deserts, and thus rely on local convenience stores or accessible fast food franchises for their primary diet. The health implications are higher incidences of diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure within these areas (Diaz de Villegas and Rodriquez, 2016: 3-5). Both food deserts themselves and the health consequences they cause disproportionately affect minority and immigrant populations (Hall Lee, 2017). *iZombie*'s acute class sensitivity around food provision and consumption allegorizes such realities.

It is easy to draw a parallel to *iZombie*'s interpretation of zombie-ism—that is, a virus that can be exchanged through an exchange of fluids—to the AIDS virus. Indeed, at the end of the first season, Liv declines to donate blood to help her gravely injured brother to avoid contaminating him ("Blaine's World" 1.13), an act that seemingly permanently alienates her from her family ("Grumpy Old Liv" 2.1). While "zombie-ism as virus/contagion" (2018: 81-82) has been the subtext of zombie films more generally, Stacey Abbott argues, it has become more overt in contemporary zombie narratives in light of both the AIDS virus and other viral outbreaks. *iZombie*, however, does not quite fit into other zombie narratives focused around pandemic infections caused by either negligence or ignorance. The so-called "zombie outbreak" within *iZombie* is a corporate ploy to force acceptance of zombies as a way of creating a new consumer market; while it is a virus that causes zombie-ism in *iZombie*, some, particularly Fillmore Graves and, increasingly, Liv, view their altered states as an identity rather than an illness, not unlike some HIV-positive individuals who have incorporated their positive ("poz") status into their lives (see, for example, the online lifestyle magazine *Poz* [https://www.poz.com/]).[12] Fillmore Graves' initial plan is to self-segregate on what is dubbed "Zombie Island" once humans discover zombies' existence ("Heaven Just Got a Little Bit Smoother" 3.1); however, others within the organization believe that makes the zombies sitting targets: "They will nuke us into vapor" ("Looking for Mr. Goodbrain, Part 2" 3.13). While the US government's response to "New" Seattle's zombie population suggests this is a distinct possibility ("Goon Struck" 4.5), the new plan (infect thousands of Seattle-ites to stay the government's hand), was built on deception. The zombies involved thought the aforementioned introduction of the flu virus

into the general population was to harvest the brains of the deceased: an "all-you-can-eat brain buffet" ("Looking for Mr. Goodbrain, Part 2" 3.13). This suggests that a number of zombies not only accept it as an identity, but, like the wealthy zombies of seasons one and two, believe that their condition makes them superior to humans.

Like its comic and television predecessor *The Walking Dead*, *iZombie*'s zombies borrow from a combination of earlier sources, including zombie-ism as viral outbreak ("Looking for Mr. Goodbrain, Part 2" 3.13), issues around consumption, and fear of the other. The sentience of the series' zombies, recalling recent films such as *Warm Bodies* and *Husk* (2011), is a factor that Abbott argues, "move the genre […] away from themes of apocalypse and cultural anxiety and explore questions of identity and self in a changing world" (2018: 145). In the case of *iZombie*, the themes of "cultural anxiety," "social apocalypse," and "questions of identity" converge explicitly on the element of food, both in creating the problem (Max Rager/Fillmore Graves) and in the economic stratification of its acquisition or limited supply. Indeed, it is economic stratification that pushes the Seattle of *iZombie* closer to apocalypse, as well as revealing the limitations of acceptance and integration of its residents whose "cultural" differences are strange or off-putting to the general population. With the fourth season's diffusion of the virus beyond the elite, *iZombie*'s sentient zombies can literally speak to—and about—how they identify and their views on their semi-apocalyptic surroundings. As discussed above, the zombies' relationship with their food further complicates the issue of identity (at least for those zombies not limited to the brain tubes provided by Fillmore Graves) due to the aforementioned side effect of zombies taking on the decedent's memories, skills, or personality. That this food (i.e., "whole brains") is limited to either the wealthy or those in government and law enforcement underscores the series' focus on contemporary socioeconomic divisions within the United States.

Further, *iZombie* also differentiates itself from many other "evil corporation" series, including *Mr. Robot*'s E Corp, *Firefly*'s Blue Sun, *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*' Cyberdyne Systems, or *Heroes*' Pinehearst Company, by making these corporations' employees and leaders not only a significant part of the narrative, but in fact frequently positioning at least one of the protagonists as a part of said organization.[13] In that respect, it more closely resembles Joss Whedon's series *Angel* (1999-2004) and *Dollhouse* (2009-2010), in which all of the protagonists either worked for or were trapped by Wolfram & Hart and the Rossum Corporation, respectively. In both instances, the simultaneous benefits of, and entrapment by a mega-corporation allows

the narrative to delve into both corporate motivations and the compromises those who work within them are forced to make (see Giannini, 2017). For *iZombie*, such compromises are addressed mainly through Major Lillywhite, who is involved in both Max Rager (through coercion) in season two and Fillmore Graves in seasons three and four. Particularly during the fourth season, positioning Major—previously established as an ethical and self-sacrificing individual—as an insider allows the viewer access to the reasoning, concerns, and trajectory of a corporate/governmental transition into autocracy without resorting to making either Fillmore Graves or Chief Operating Officer Chase Graves himself into a two-dimensional villain. As Michael Pepe suggests, post-Great Recession films frequently offer an "insider" view of corporate culture, which may not engender sympathy, but work to "dramatize iterations of greed that are psychological, philosophical, and institutional in nature" (Pepe, 2016: n.p.). Fillmore Graves deals with several issues within the fourth season in an increasingly autocratic/non-transparent way, including shutting down a newspaper for printing critical stories ("Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Brain" 4.7), turning the daughter of a general arguing to "nuke Seattle" into a zombie ("Goon Struck" 4.5), and publicly executing human smugglers turning the sick into zombies ("Goon Struck" 4.5; "And He Shall Be a Good Man" 4.13). Yet, the narrative makes clear that the source of these actions is increased desperation because of the limited food supply.

The lack of adequate brain supplies has immediate—and numerous—consequences for both humans and zombies in Seattle. Fillmore Graves' plan to feed Seattle zombies on brains donated from across the country ("Looking for Mr. Goodbrain, Part 2" 3.13) is eventually rejected by the US government due to Fillmore Graves' actions ("And He Shall Be a Good Man" 4.13); the US government builds a wall around the city, trapping the majority of its residents ("Are You Ready for Some Zombies?" 4.1) and unintentionally creates a thriving smuggling business of both humans and brains ("Blue Bloody" 4.2). The series addresses these consequences in the first episode of the season; Major meets with teens ejected from their homes for being zombies,[14] who indicate that the "brain tubes" they receive are so watered down they cannot survive on them. (That one of the Fillmore Graves employees is skimming brain shipments and selling them on the black market is a major [and Major] subplot of the season.) This altruistic act is immediately contrasted with a scene in which Seattle's zombie mayor enjoys a meal at the high-end Romero's restaurant, succinctly suggesting what a later episode will make manifest; that is, the complicity of Seattle's local government with

Fillmore Graves, as well as the mayor's seeming blindness to the plight of the city until it is too late for him to be effective ("Mac-Liv-Moore" 4.9).

The focus on class divisions in *iZombie* was also a feature of showrunner Rob Thomas' earlier series, *Veronica Mars*, set in the fictional town of Neptune, California; the eponymous main character calls it "a town without a middle class" ("Pilot" 1.1). *iZombie*'s focus on "haves" and "have-nots" is equally as prominent as in the earlier series, and entirely centered on food, from Blaine's murders of homeless or at-risk teens to feed the rich in season one, to Fillmore Graves' later struggles to address a completely avoidable food shortage brought about by their own desire to save "their species" ("Looking for Mr. Goodbrain, Part 2" 3.13; "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Brain" 3.7). Given the season four's references to the current U.S. administration, including attacks on the press ("Goon Struck" 4.5) and the season-long arc around border walls and immigration, the food desert affecting Seattle's zombies is unsurprisingly politicized, and taken advantage of by those in or near power. While Chase Graves visibly struggles with the decisions he makes, others, such as his employee Russ Roche, clearly enjoy taking advantage of their positions. Roche is the one responsible for the watered-down rations, teaming up with a local gang member to appropriate shipments, doctor them (with gelatin) ("Chivalry is Dead" 4.8), and sell them on the black market. Angus McDonough (Blaine's father), who had his own father committed in order to take over the family business ("Zombie Bro" 2.2), has a conversion experience after Blaine takes revenge on him for the abuse Blaine suffered as a child ("Eat a Knievel" 3.8), and eventually starts a church preaching zombie supremacy over humans ("Are You Ready for Some Zombies?" 4.1). His congregation is mostly comprised of poor and struggling zombies, drawn in by Angus' promise to keep them fed. While his conversion seems genuine, he is still a rich and powerful individual seeking power, using the fact of his congregation's starvation to gain total control over their actions, from relatively minor (instructing them how to properly savor a meal) to horrifyingly significant (attacking and killing a bus full of prisoners and eating their brains ["Chivalry is Dead" 4.8]), and thus weaponizing their desperation.

It is Blaine, however, that remains the main beneficiary as well as "patient zero" of the zombie epidemic and subsequent food shortage. His $25,000/month brain business in season one, the opening of Romero's in season four, and the fact that he came from a privileged background full of wasted opportunities, all feed into a sense of entitlement as well as his criminal behavior. While the season makes numerous references to Trump, Blaine quietly serves as another: he "washed out" at Wharton, according to his father,

who had paid to get him in; he is perpetually looking for "easy money" schemes; and in season four, attempts a complex real estate scheme that crashes and burns ("Mac-Liv-Moore" 4.9; "And He Shall Be a Good Man" 4.13). It is Blaine who is responsible for creating the initial crop of 1%-er zombies in season one, including Harrison Graves, founder of Fillmore Graves, whose wife Vivian turns the rest of the staff of the company after they are exposed to a deadly pathogen while on assignment ("Heaven Just Got a Little Bit Smoother" 3.1), and whose brother, Chase, turns 10,000 Seattle-ites. In each season of the series, Blaine profits from the class divisions already in existence within American culture, whether feeding the poor to the rich, or manipulating his father into leading his starving flock into a confrontation with, and eventual massacre by, the U.S. military—this latter move made in order to spread the zombie virus across the United States, solely to open Seattle's borders and raise the value of properties he bought ("You've Got to Hide Your Liv Away" 4.12; "And He Shall Be a Good Man" 4.13). It is his greed, abetted by others with their own motivations, including hubris (Angus); xenophobia/anti-human bias (FG soldier Enzo Lambert [John Emmett Tracy]); greed (Russ Roche); or pragmatic, situational ethics (Chase Graves, abetted by Major), that are primarily responsible for Seattle's zombie food desert.

Liv, who works secretly to smuggle sick humans into Seattle and "cure" them by turning them into zombies, arguably exacerbates the issue that leads Chase to take ever-greater punitive measures to cease all human smuggling. As suggested above, Liv is fairly unique within the series in that her work at the morgue provides her food source, and thus she does not have to rely on either Blaine's brain business or Fillmore Graves' brain tube program. This benefit, combined with the increased care she enacts in preparing her meals, limits her perception of the strain she is putting on the food supply in a similar way to those who could afford either Meat Cute's specialty meals or regular trips to Romero's; feeding the zombies she creates is Fillmore Graves' problem. (Literally; she creates fake ID cards so that they can access brain tubes.) That being said, Blaine is either directly (Liv) or indirectly (Chase) responsible for turning both of them; this suggests he is the root of the problem.

In keeping with the darkly comic tone of the series itself, it is significant that of the major players in creating or profiting from season four's class-based food shortage (Chase, Russ, Angus, and Blaine), the only one to survive—and arguably thrive—is Blaine. The consequences he suffers when his plan to open Seattle's borders goes awry—the loss of his father and millions of dollars—is almost immediately reversed when he is hired by

Fillmore Graves as their primary brain supplier ("And He Shall Be a Good Man" 4.13). Such an outcome underscores the series' numerous references to the film *Chinatown* (1974) and its deeply corrupted Los Angeles; as Liv's partner Clive puts it: "it speaks to the futility of obtaining justice in an inherently corrupt system" ("Goon Struck" 4.5).[15]

Conclusion: Eat, Prey, Live

Seattle changes in the fourth season of *iZombie*, but unlike zombie narratives such as *The Walking Dead*, it does not become a wasteland. Humans and zombies work, live, and eat together in the shadow of a corporate-run city where some residents are pale, crave brains, and have the power to declare martial law. While zombie narratives have represented numerous cultural elements—slavery and post-colonialism, consumerism, immigration, and viral contagion/biological warfare—*iZombie*, appropriately enough, creates a tasting menu of several of these elements to build its story world. It straddles the divide between the nihilism of *Night of the Living Dead*, which ends with its racialized hero shot and added to a lynching pyre, and the (slightly) more hopeful *The Girl With All the Gifts* (2016), which suggests its zombies are the future, by making New Seattle a work in progress that requires effort from both humans and zombies to survive.

The series' focus on its zombies' consumption habits as the strongest, and multi-season, narrative arc allows the series to provide commentary on the real-world social and economic realities of contemporary U.S. culture. Employing the sentient zombies of films such as *Warm Bodies* not only allows zombies to speak for themselves, but highlights the ethics of food consumption by also giving a voice to the "food." Further, *iZombie* uses the dangers of food insufficiency—with fatal consequences to both humans and zombies—to highlight the socioeconomic element of the current class and political divisions within the United States. Zombies may be a "symbol of social decay" (Oldring, 2013: 17), but the narrative choice to focus on, and complicate, the zombies' food source suggests that a new paradigm can be enacted beyond the "decay."

Notes

[1] Frequently, the use of food in narrative is limited to storylines around weight and body policing; see, as per example, the character arc of Kate Pearson (Christy Menz) in the

melodrama *This is Us* (2016-present). While the series *Gilmore Girls* makes a character point of its eponymous mother/daughter pair's enjoyment and constant consumption of junk food, the lack of any physical consequences from their food choices puts it in the realm of fantasy (see: Mintz and Mintz, 2010: 235-256).

[2] Despite Romero's having cited Richard Matheson's apocalyptic vampire novel, *I Am Legend* (1954), as a source of inspiration for *Night of the Living Dead*, the latter film's ghouls are not given a clear biological cause.

[3] While Liv maintains a relationship with her mother and brother throughout most of season one, her inability to tell them about her zombie status leads to a permanent break in their relationship by the end of the first season, when she refuses to donate blood to save her brother's life and cannot tell them why ("Blaine's World" 1.13). Due to time constraints, Liv's reconciliation with her brother is limited to a lengthy deleted scene in the episode "The Whopper" (2.13) and her family is not referenced beyond the second season in the main body of the narrative.

[4] Blaine turns both Seattle's chief of police and the district attorney in order to operate his brain business with impunity and take down rivals, rather than the anti-capitalist sentiment his focus on the wealthy might suggest. In season two, when Major is forced to clean up Blaine's work at the behest of Max Rager, he obscures his work's true purpose by spray-painting anti-capitalist rhetoric at the homes/offices of these individuals.

[5] Not only is Blaine's behavior shown to be generally "shady", but the funeral home is also the front for Blaine's attempt to corner the Seattle drug trade ("Zombie Bro" 2.2).

[6] The same episode suggests there is at least one other upscale restaurant in Seattle that caters to zombies: Le Dome. However, the series gives no indication who owns and manages it.

[7] There is another, meta level to Chris Allred's name; it is a tribute to the series' comic book source material, namely the writer Chris Roberson and artist Michael Allred. Liv also takes on the pseudonym "Gwen Tracy" in "He Blinded Me...With Science" to infiltrate Max Rager; Gwen Tracy is the name of the protagonist in the *iZombie* comics.

[8] Whether intentionally or unintentionally, *iZombie* echoes Larry Cohen's anti-capitalist horror satire *The Stuff* (1985) both in tone (comic-horror blend) and in featuring narratives focused on food and consumption. Like the Max Rager energy drink in seasons one and two, consumption of the "Stuff" in *The Stuff* reduces its consumers to a zombie-like state, addicted to, and obsessed with the product to the point of murder. Thank you to Kristopher Woofter for pointing out this connection.

[9] This individual, Major Lillywhite, was turned into a zombie by Liv in an attempt to save his life, and then (temporarily) cured by an experimental drug ("Blaine's World" 1.13). Rather than killing zombies, he incapacitates and freezes them, using decoys to simulate their murders to fool his employer ("Max Wager" 2.6).

[10] An internal memo detailing the violent episodes caused by the drink is accidentally leaked; those who see; those who saw it were killed or bought off and the memo buried ("Flight of the Living Dead" 1.5; "Mr. Berserk" 1.10)

[11] The danger of starving a zombie—that is, they will revert to "brainless shufflers"—is explored through Liv when she spends a weekend in jail for breaking into a car and nearly kills a fellow inmate ("The Hurt Stalker" 2.8) and when her connection to a murder investigation means she is barred from the morgue ("Dead Beat" 2.18).

[12] The comparison here is fraught, however, considering that identifying as Poz is a way of wresting stigma and stereotype from a phobic culture to lend critical and even political power to a sidelined community. Metaphorically, zombie-ism in *iZombie* is similar only insofar as its (unrealized) potential for such social change.

[13] *Mr. Robot* (2015-present), *Firefly* (2002-2003), *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (2008-2009), *Heroes* (2006-2010).

[14] "Are You Ready for Some Zombies?" does tie this in by pairing Major's interaction with the displaced zombie teens with the central case of the episode: a young man whose mother killed his father after he wouldn't accept his now-zombie son (who became a zombie after sleeping with his zombie girlfriend), suggesting the similar situation of many LGBTQ teens.

[15] Indeed, "Chinatown" was Blaine's nickname when he was a drug dealer; in order to establish dominance, he not only hired dealers with fake gang tattoos to attack a beat cop, making the police to crack down on the current dealers in the neighborhood, but also sliced open a rival's nose in the same fashion suffered by Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) in the film ("Eternal Sunshine of the Caffeinated Mind" 2.14).

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- 2019 -
MONSTRUM is published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society
(https://www.monstrum-society.ca/)

MONSTRUM 2 (June 2019) | ISSN 2561-5629

The Demythologizing of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*

Jeff Jeske

Preface: In Memoriam

Will Dodson

I met my friend Jeff Jeske in the Fall of 1996, my first semester at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina. He was my Composition (Advanced, I hasten to add) professor. Early in the course I wrote an essay on Flannery O'Connor's short story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find."[1] I titled my essay, "Good? Bad? … I'm the Guy With the Gun." Now, if you've read O'Connor's story, and you're well versed in Bruce Campbell-isms,[2] then you know that joke is genius-level. Jeff, as they say these days, saw what I did there, and noted his appreciation right below a large "B-." Thus began the first of several courses I took with Jeff, and our twenty-year friendship. Jeff was a fascinating man who lectured on Herman Melville and Herschell Gordon Lewis with equal enthusiasm, who meditated daily and played the accordion in an oom-pah band, who enjoyed a fine whiskey and the odd-numbered *Nightmare on Elm Street* films. He loved cinema in general, but horror films particularly, both for their confrontation of existential dread and for their gleeful camp.

Jeff gave several memorable presentations in the Horror Area of the Popular Culture Association National Conferences, ranging in subject from the asceticism of the *Saw* series (2004-2010) to the apocalypticism of *Hell Ride* (Larry Bishop, 2008).[3] But he shared most of his erudition on cinema, horror films in particular, in conversation with his students, and sadly few of his insights on cinema ever saw print. My friend Jeff died on 23 January 2017, and I'm grateful to the editors of *MONSTRUM* that the following essay, full of his wit and intelligence, can reach the audience it deserves.[4] (Is it a coincidence that Jeff invokes O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find?" Perhaps my undergraduate essay impressed him more than he realized at the time … .)

Jeff Jeske was the Charles A. Dana Professor of English at Guilford College, where he taught American literature and American and global cinema, and advised Guilford's student newspaper, from 1986-2016.

Will Dodson is the Ashby and Strong Residential College Coordinator and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Media Studies at UNC Greensboro. He teaches courses on rhetoric, literature, and film, with a focus on exploitation and alternative literature and cinema.

The Demythologizing of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*

Jeff Jeske

Tania Modleski suggests in "The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Postmodern Theory" that slasher films are "engaged in an unprecedented assault on all that bourgeois culture is supposed to cherish" (1986: 158).[5] In critiquing or overtly attacking dominant ideology—the consumer culture, technology, and/or the family—such films champion both a modernist and postmodern sensibility. In terms of aesthetic and narrative form, they may also exemplify a postmodern oppositional film art with respect to conventional Hollywood filmmaking, defeating viewer expectations of narrative continuity and/or closure and thus adding meta-terror to the fright a film's story itself offers.

We can certainly make some of these claims for Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), a progenitor and ostensible prototype of the slasher genre. As early as 1979, critics like Robin Wood have studied the film as a critique of both capitalism and the family and widely recognized it as an outlaw film that challenged the Hollywood establishment. Its phenomenal success is well known. The film cost $250,000 to produce, and may have since grossed over $100 million, setting at its time a new standard for horror. Like *Psycho* (1960) before it and *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) after, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* derived its inspiration from Wisconsin farmer Ed Gein, who killed women and wore their skin in the late 1950s. Unlike these other two films, however, it was an innovative indie that helped spawn a new genre, an overnight hit that, despite the disparaging criticism of periodicals like the *Los Angeles Times*, which dismissed it as "despicable … ugly, and obscene" (Gross, 1974: 14), went on to transcend its generation.

I would argue, however, that Hooper's film did not succeed principally because of its postmodern impulses. On the contrary, it succeeds because it traffics in myth, providing a modernist encounter with evil that is so universal an experience for audiences as to explain why the film was named "Outstanding Film of the Year" by the London Film Festival in 1974, why it subsequently has been screened in 90 countries worldwide, and why it has become a recognized film classic. Mikita Brottman's seminal essay, "Once Upon a Time in Texas," published in her book, *Offensive Films* (1997), first contextualized *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* as myth, specifically in terms of

the fairy tale. Here I will consider the original film and its remake from the standpoint of "The Journey," as described by Joseph Campbell.

The 2003 remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* directed by Marcus Nispel offers what its producers describe as a "reimagining." In so doing, it follows its predecessor's macro-structure: a group of five van-bound teens falls prey to a murderous family associated with a slaughterhouse in rural Texas and is dispatched one-by-one until only a single female escapes. Despite the considerable narrative similarities, however, this film dismantles the original's mythic structure and, by extension, the earlier film's modernist assumptions about story. In pointing to the possibilities for retelling a classic film for a postmodern age, the sequel offers us something of value. Its lack of critical success, however, offers us a cautionary tale of what happens when the "reimagining" does not go far enough, resulting in a muddle of good intentions compromised by cliché.

Besides deep structural similarities, the two films share other, more direct connections. The remake's opening voiceover narration is provided by John Larroquette, who also did the voiceover for the original. According to *Fangoria*, Nispel explored the possibility of including cameo performances by the original's Gunnar Hansen (Leatherface) and Marilyn Burns (Sally) (C. Allen, 2003: 21). Even more remarkably, Nispel chose the original's cinematographer, Daniel Pearl, to reprise his role.

Pearl's visual style features more prominently in the remake than it does in the original. He devotes more attention to aesthetic surfaces than he did in the original, perhaps because (as anecdotal accounts of the original's filming suggest) inadequate equipment caused Hooper and Pearl to focus their creative energies on simply getting shots filmed. Whatever the reason, the remake offers stunning individual shots that call attention to the film's style in a self-conscious way, one that can invoke a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*—or distanciating effect—as the viewer momentarily suspends his or her identification with the unfolding plot and characters to gaze on striking images. Two prominent examples are the panoramic recessive shot through a bullet hole in the female hitchhiker's head and a later, aesthetically splendid backlit shot of the Hewitt house, a grey-weathered, brooding Gothic horror house that is a far cry from the normal-seeming, white-painted farmhouse of the original (See Figure 4 below).[6]

A greater divergence of remake from original is evident in the narrative style. Whereas Kim Henkel's original script features causal simplicity and straightforward exposition, the remake offers subplots, a more complex narrative, and less useful exposition. We might describe the latter as a nod

toward postmodernist discontinuity. Certainly, the loosening of the original's more episodic narrative order, combined with increased attention to aesthetic surface, shifts the focus away from the original's thoroughly modernist project: the elaboration of myth.

Figure 1: The body sculpture in the cemetery in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974)

The Journey

Both films can be viewed as products of a particular time period. The original evokes the malaise of early 70s American capitalism, the corrupt Nixon presidency, and the end of the Vietnam War—a period marked by generational conflict that gives metaphoric value to Hooper's young flower-power teens being slaughtered and devoured by a murderous Southern family. Nispel's remake, according to the *Village Voice*'s Michael Atkinson, suggests a metaphoric agenda as well: "Texas is the dark heart of Bush Country, a self-expanding territory where business eats the young, death rows teem with the helpless, and Christ-righteous gun law rules from Waco to Tikrit" (2003: n.p.).

The original, however, tilts its localized (national, cultural) concerns towards myth—defined here as a story containing a set of images/symbols that organize and focus unconscious processes of a group or society. The myth begins as the photos flash out of the darkness before the opening

credits, photos of the exhumed corpses that will soon draw Hooper's band of teens to the cemetery. A mythic journey outside of a particular time is about to begin, a journey fraught with apocalyptic foreshadowing. Premonitory sunspots and solar flares appear over the opening credits; then we see the malevolent sun, suggesting that nature itself is out of joint. A close-up of a dead armadillo on its back along the road appears just as the teens' van pulls into view. As Jerry maneuvers Franklin's wheelchair out of the van so that Franklin can urinate alongside the road, we hear a string of news reports on the van's radio: 20 killed by a collapsing building, the mutilated bodies of a young man and woman found in Gary, Indiana, a Dallas couple arrested for chaining their 18-month-old daughter in the attic.

Human affairs in the film's immediate locale are equally foreboding. Several of the cemetery's graves have been opened; there are a dozen empty crypts. Two corpses are artfully arranged in what appears to be a parody of a married couple sitting atop a headstone (See Figure 1, above). Others are missing, or parts have been removed. Sally, Franklin, and their friends join local residents to check on whether her and Franklin's grandfather's grave has been disturbed. A drunk lying on the ground, his face turned to the sky and beating sun, comments, "Things happen here they don't tell about."

As the group drives away, having satisfied themselves that the grandfather's grave is intact, Pam renews the foreboding suggested by the scene's layered intimations of dread as she shares bad news from a copy of *American Astrology*. Saturn, she points out, has entered retrogradation: its maleficence is increasing. She will later confirm the magazine's authority by noting that Franklin's horoscope for the day—"upsetting persons around you could make this a disturbing and unpredictable day"—accurately describes the experience he has with a terrifying hitchhiker.

This heavy concentration of foreshadowing devices resembles that in another tale of a journey gone awry, Flannery O'Connor's short story "A Good Man is Hard to Find," in which a family also wanders off the main road into strange territory to find a house, only to meet three homicidal males who slay them one by one. In O'Connor's story, the Grandmother who initiates the unfortunate side trip will learn that she is strangely connected to the Misfit, the chief figure of menace. Franklin, too, will share a sort of connection to the Hitchhiker in his fascination with the violence of the slaughterhouse, a vocational practice that unites their ancestry in a past of brutality (discussed further below). O'Connor's story offers psychological doubling and a trip into the subconscious, and as in Hooper's film, laces the exposition with devices pointing inexorably toward the conclusion: graves alongside the road—the

same in number as the family—a hearse-like automobile, the town of Toombsboro. Strangely, despite the two stories' chaotic irrationality, primal order prevails in an ironclad causality. This is the world of myth.

It is also the world of Freud and Jung. To a much greater extent than its successor, Hooper's film provides a modernist nightmare that depth psychology can explicate. In Freudian terms, the teens are voyaging into the unconscious to meet the id, and more terrifyingly, Freud's Thanatos, the death drive that expresses itself in aggression, destructiveness, sadism, and cruelty; if the goal of Freud's other great force, Eros, is to promote creation, family, and world unity, Thanatos's goal is to destroy it. In Jungian terms, our characters are voyaging into the unconscious, but with a different aim and trajectory. In the opening narration, John Larroquette describes how "For them an idyllic summer afternoon drive became a nightmare." The news about the cemetery desecration becomes, unwittingly for them, what Jungian mythologist Joseph Campbell names the call to adventure (1968: 51). In response, Sally performs an act of intergenerational family piety. Perhaps motivated by this family duty, the group sets off in search of Sally's grandfather's now-vacant house.

En route, the group picks up the Hitchhiker, who clearly typifies the Shadow figure, embodying repressed elements that Jungian psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz identifies as representing the first stage in the quest into the unconscious (1964: 168). Hooper's Hitchhiker is a nightmarish figure, too grotesque to be pitiable, a displaced slaughterhouse worker who carries photographs of steers he has killed with a sledgehammer. What is most remarkable is the fascination that he inspires in Franklin, who engages in a spirited conversation with him about the craft of killing steers: the sledgehammer versus the pneumatic gun. Franklin acknowledges a direct connection with the Hitchhiker—his own grandfather used to send his steers to the Hitchhiker's slaughterhouse. And even more telling, Franklin has an uncle who works in one. Franklin and the Hitchhiker also discover that they share an enthusiasm for head cheese. After the Hitchhiker demonstrates his bravado by laughing while using Franklin's knife to cut open his palm, Franklin finds himself admiring the act—even though the Hitchhiker also cuts Franklin's arm with his knife, against Franklin's will. Although the two do not exchange blood, the corresponding cuts via the shared knife suggest blood brotherhood. And when the group forcibly puts the Hitchhiker out of the van, he smears its side with his bloody palm, marking it. Later when the van reaches the family homestead, Franklin gazes ruefully at the bloody mark and says, "I bet it's about me."[7]

The opening segment of Hooper's film, then, is rich with mythic markers. The innocent teens have embarked on a quest and have even received a direct invitation to the Sawyer family home, an invitation that they will unwittingly and tragically accept. The film's interconnected imagery points forward to a dire outcome. We are on a voyage that we deeply understand, for its terms and symbols are the stuff of great art, whether film, painting, or literature.

In sharp contrast, the Nispel remake strips this mythic meta material from the narrative. Instead of a group of teens performing an act of filial piety and then searching for the family homestead, we are given five companions headed for a Lynyrd Skynyrd concert. Nor are they depicted as innocent Everyman figures. As the scene in the van opens, we see Pepper and Andy making out in the back seat; they have known each other only 19 hours, the group having picked up Pepper by chance as she hitchhiked in El Paso. Meanwhile, Morgan lights a joint and passes it forward to the driver, Kemper, who we learn in subsequent conversation has concealed in a piñata two pounds of pot that he just purchased in Mexico where, as his girlfriend Erin disgustedly comments, she watched him "getting shit-faced for four days" on weed and tequila.

Instead of the original's concentrated imagery of bad omens, bad news on the radio, and flash-photography shots of the cemetery remains, the remake opens with "Sweet Home Alabama" on the radio and retrospective, faux documentary footage of the film's crime scene, the Hewitt house (formerly the Sawyer house in the original). Rather than suggesting a journey into darkness that is just beginning, the footage signals ahead to its conclusion.[8] And instead of foreshadowing associated with that outcome, we are given only Morgan's warning to Pepper and Andy about STIs and the strong hint that Erin, who has abstained from dope and booze in Mexico and is now nauseous, may be pregnant.

When this group encounters their narrative equivalent of the original's Hitchhiker, it is not a member of the murderous clan inviting them to visit but a mysterious girl who soon shoots herself in the head with a pistol that she pulls from beneath her skirt. As we will learn at the end of the film, Nispel is using her here to set up a framing device that will be completed by Erin, who like this girl, ultimately escapes from the Hewitt house. At the time, however, this episode's function is less mythic than expository: with a dead body on their hands, the group must now figure out what to do with it. This leads to their encounter with Sheriff Hoyt, who will provide the logistics for his, Leatherface's, and other local residents' malevolent designs on the group. The remake's "hitchhiker" episode also complicates the viewer's task. Rather than

providing a straight arrow into the heart of the story, it opens a subplot that will never clearly resolve. The girl tells the group "they're all dead" and "He's a really bad man." It never becomes clear who "they" are—just as it never becomes clear who the "really bad man is"—Leatherface? Sheriff Hoyt? Old Monty? The girl is the first in a series of minor characters whose relationship to others in the story is hazy at best.

The Terrible House

After their respective hitchhiker scenes, the two films move forward with different narrative speeds and degrees of unity: the remake diverges sharply from its predecessor's mythic and focused linearity, loosening the narrative. Hooper's teens make one stop before pushing on to the grandfather's house and the adjacent Sawyer house. This stop is at the combination gas station/general store/barbecue operated by Cook, the elder brother of the Sawyer clan. His role is authoritative, and his appearance draws us directly toward the coming confrontation. Interestingly, Henkel's script provides a more marbled characterization of Cook than we otherwise might expect—he initially tries to discourage the teens from visiting the Franklin house. The effect is to heighten the menace.

From there, Hooper's teens head on directly to the Franklin homestead and the Terrible House. With the cruel logic of the nightmare, all subsequent action will enfold here, except for a brief segment when Sally escapes to the Cook's roadside store only to be returned to the tale's horrific center, the Sawyer dining room. Throughout this action, no extraneous characters appear and the script observes tight unity of space and time: the first killing, Kirk's, occurs at 35:50 and the following murders (or in Pam's case, impalement on a meat-hook—she will die not long after in a freezer) occur at regularly spaced five-to-six-minute intervals. In the remake, on the other hand, the choreography is more diffuse, both spatially and chronologically, and the extraneous characters multiply. At the barbecue/gas station, the group meets a middle-aged woman presiding over a fly-infested meat counter; she calls the sheriff and delivers his instructions to the group to meet him at the Old Crawford Mill. Once they arrive, the action moves between the mill and the Hewitt house, as well as to a trailer, the slaughterhouse, and other outbuildings. New characters appear, including women who may or may not be related to the sheriff or to Leatherface, and a mysterious feral child who

may have been abducted from a hapless family of travelers, or who may, given his severe malocclusions, be the child of inbred residents.

The Sheriff is instrumental in the remake's long middle section and plays a central role analogous to the original film's Cook. Unlike Cook's textured characterization, however, the Sheriff's is rendered heavily in terms of the "Southern sheriff" stereotype, beginning with the pronounced swagger and spitting of tobacco juice with which he exits his police car when he arrives at the Crawford Mill. The actor, R. Lee Ermey, does deliver a powerfully menacing performance, but the viewer's psychic involvement is undermined by this stereotyping[9] as well as by confusingly disparate narrative elements involving a suicide subplot and the back-and-forth movement of the main plot toward its climax. Where Hooper's film draws the plot linearly toward its primary mythic element—Sally's encounter with the cannibal family—the remake dispenses with a central focus altogether and substitutes a more familiar slasher-film strategy. The series of chase-and-kill episodes are here amplified by 1) self-conscious cinematography and gore, 2) resonant but oddly inappropriate images like that of Andy on his meat hook rendered as Jesus on the cross, and 3) an unnecessarily long sequence in which the Sheriff terrorizes three of the teens at the Crawford Mill for no thematically significant reason.

Central to the deep psychological truth of the quest horror tale is the Terrible House, an image that critic Robin Wood says "stems from a long tradition in American (and Western capitalist) culture" (1979: 20). In mythic terms, it may be the climax in the hero's road of trials as s/he journeys into the exotic realm of the unconscious: the cave of the dragon, the castle of the black knight, the witch's house in the woods, the place of greatest danger (Campbell, 1968: 97-109). For Freud, this place might represent the center of the id, or the source of the death drive. Wood notes further that "traditionally, it represents an extension or 'objectification' of the personalities of the inhabitants" (1979: 20). Not surprisingly, both films associate these houses closely with the respective murderous families. In each, the house overflows with decay and menacing artifacts as well as with live pigs and/or chickens and the implements of slaughter. These are spaces associated with death and death-dealing, though they encourage an uncanny fascination with their excessive controversions of the usual comforts and accouterments of "home."

The house in the original film exudes more cumulative power because of the greater thematic focus on it as the place where bad things happen (See Figure 2, next page). Cinematographer Pearl frames it claustrophobically, and Hooper fills the "living" room with unsettling images: a live chicken hanging in a birdcage, a piece of furniture artfully constructed out of human bones,

testifying to the inhabitants' odd creativity and reduction of the human body to use value and *objet d'art* (Figure 3 below). Pam rightfully falls on her knees and vomits when she stumbles into this profusion of irrationality that epitomizes the unconscious. Aptly, when viewed from the outside, this is a normal-looking farmhouse; the juxtaposition between outer and inner is itself exceedingly creepy and fearful, and again, it bears psychological truth.

Figures 2 and 3: The Sawyer home in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974)

The house in the remake is less chaotic internally except for the cluttered basement that serves as Leatherface's lair. Pearl does not frame this house tightly. It sits on an open space of land, and the cinematographer uses this topographical fact to present stylized shots of the two-story Southern gothic against the sky, including one in which the house is menacingly backlit, invoking the sense of effulgent evil (See Figure 4). In treating the house with such aesthetic self-consciousness, Pearl instills fear in the viewer, but it is a detached fear. We do not have the unsettling juxtaposition with normalcy that occurs in the original. Moreover, this is a house with open balconies and porches, and the interior rooms are correspondingly large. There is more room for victims and imagination to roam.

Figure 4: The Hewitt house in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003)

When Erin and Kemper first visit this Terrible House, they are greeted by Old Monty, an irascible, legless cripple who tells them the Sheriff whom they seek does not live there, a statement that may or may not be true, just as Monty may or may not be related to him. It is on this visit that Kemper encounters and is killed by someone who does live in the house: Leatherface. It is Leatherface who theoretically serves as the chief antagonist in both films, the embodiment of the irrational, the principal Other. Certainly, in the first

film, he is the monster who typifies an inner primitivity that must be repressed and who is most dangerous when his vile space is invaded. He represents the worst, most grotesque of one's inner urges—even in his quieter moments where he frets nervously, whimpering over the continued invasions of his space by the teens. This Leatherface is both sub-human, grunting like a pig, and meta-human, unknowable and, appropriately, given his role in Hooper's mythic drama, an agent of seemingly motiveless malignity. Leatherface's multiple roles in the family as infantilized brother, housekeeper, and butcher render his motivations even more inscrutable. Not so in the remake.

Andrew Bryniarski's reprise of Gunnar Hansen's original Leatherface offers us a similarly conceived but less mythically realized version. This more pitiable Leatherface has a name—Thomas Hewitt—and more importantly, he has a motive for mass killing. We learn that since he was a young boy, Thomas had a disfiguring skin disease which caused his face to rot away. Not surprisingly, he was teased mercilessly in school; his mother will say later in the film, "nothing but cruelty and ridicule for my boy all the time he was growing up." Activated both by vengeful anger and the need to cover his deformity, this Leatherface takes off his mask to reveal a skeletal void in a scene reminiscent of Lon Chaney's removal of his mask in the original *Phantom of the Opera* (Rupert Julian, 1925). He immediately replaces this mask with a face recognizable as the recently removed Kemper's. Both give this more recent Leatherface a recognizable human appearance, unlike the original greenish mask, unrecognizable as human skin and with surface features like eyebrows that seem to have been superficially added. Whereas the first Leatherface remains a dark enigma, his successor shows human vulnerability, as evidenced when he falls while climbing through a barbed wire fence in pursuit of Erin and cuts his leg open with his chainsaw. Tanya Modleski suggests that when characters such as Leatherface remain undeveloped, "narcissistic identification of the part of the audience becomes increasingly difficult" (1986: 161). In the remake, greater character development increases the chance of such identification, altering the traditional dynamic of myth in which the audience identifies primarily with the protagonist.

The Final Girl

The original film's Sally first meets Leatherface when he kills her brother Franklin and then chases her. She escapes to the barbecue/gas station, only to be apprehended by Cook and returned to the family house. What ensues is the

notorious dinner scene in which Sally is nearly brained at the table by the clan's grandfather. Here, she is menaced not only by Leatherface but by the entire family. It is a powerful image that epitomizes the film's horror and both anchors the dynamic of Sally's journey and suggests its meaning for the viewer (See Figures 5 and 6). For in the deepest sense, Sally has come home … to herself. She should indeed be familiar with this house, if not with its inhabitants. Sally tells Kirk early in the film that she had spent a summer right next door at her grandfather's house when she was eight, just after her grandmother died. She likely has been there many other times as well. The Sawyer house is visible from the nearby swimming hole to which Franklin directs Pam and Kirk; he too has doubtless spent much time in its vicinity. This locale has been an important, emotionally cathected place of their youth.

Figures 5 and 6: Sally has "come home." *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974)

In search of one family, here close to the center of her unconscious world, Sally has discovered another. Ironically, she finds a grandfather, but not the one she had sought. Instead of an animus/protector, Sally finds the paterfamilias of a family that collectively aims to kill and consume her. This monstrous family of displaced slaughterhouse workers exudes a pathology organized both by their victimization and by what they lack: the feminine. No civilizing influence intrudes on their dinner rituals and noisy sibling confrontations. There is no grandmother here—only the mummified remnants of one upstairs—just as there is a missing grandmother in Sally's own life. Interestingly, when Kirk asks Sally "what happened?" in response to her telling him that her grandmother had died, Sally does not answer him. Her grandmother, with her potential for beneficent influence, is simply absent. Similarly, we do not learn the reason for the absence of the Sawyer grandmother from this other family that provides a negative image of Sally's, complete with a grandfather connected with a slaughterhouse and at least one family member who, like her uncle, works there.

In Hooper's film, unlike in the remake, the cannibalism practiced by the Sawyer family serves as a powerful mythic symbol. Linda Badley compares the cannibalistic action to George Romero's zombie trilogy in both symbolizing and parodying consumer capitalism (1995: 74)—or perhaps America's devouring of its own young. It may be more satisfying, from a psychological perspective, to regard the cannibalism as a symbol of the perverse nourishment that human flesh in fact is, imaged by the grandfather's sucking blood from Sally's finger. In psychological terms, the family's attempt to consume Sally may represent their unconscious desire to internalize the missing feminine principle that she embodies. For Sally, meanwhile, what is imagined is the prospect of her consumption by her rapacious id, or by irrational and now uncontrolled repressed maleness. No grandmotherly internal feminine steps forward to intercede with magical powers.

The remake, on the other hand, subtracts the original's cannibalism and thus the latter's mythic resonance. There is no attempted sacrifice of the heroine by the grandfather at the table, no certainty that she will be devoured like her slaughtered peers. We do not see the family pathology of the original's powerfully unifying dinner scene because that scene has been deleted. What Nispel's film offers in its place is a brief scene set in the Hewitt living room. Erin has been brought here after being drugged by Henrietta and the "Tea Lady," two adult occupants of the trailer to which she runs for help while Leatherface chases her. In the living room, we find the Sheriff, the older woman from the barbecue/gas station, Old Monty, and, eventually

Leatherface. We learn that the Sheriff and Leatherface are the woman's sons. While the woman angrily describes the ridicule young Thomas had suffered for his disfigurement, the Sheriff grapples with Erin erotically. His crude lechery reinforces a theme present from the film's opening. Whereas the motive in Hooper's film is definitely not sexual predation, despite the possibility of interpreting Leatherface's chainsaw as a phallus (the family laughs at Sally when during the dinner she offers, "I'll do anything you want" to save her life) we are led to conclude that Nispel poses sexuality as a primary motive. We have no evidence that the Sheriff or Leatherface intended to kill the hitchhiker we meet at the opening of the film. But the blood on the inside of her thighs strongly suggests that she has been raped. Even after death the Sheriff jokingly "cops a feel" as he shrink-wraps her body and jokes about her being "kinda wet down there." Now, he gropes Erin just as Old Monty had when she first visited the Hewitt house. Other than this common element, we do not learn a motive for the group's waylaying of travelers. If not cannibalism, then what? The Hitchhiker was possibly spared, as has the kidnapped baby that Henrietta, who may or may not be the Sheriff's wife, wants to raise as her own. The feral boy may also be a spared traveler's child.

Figure 7: Sally escapes in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974)

Both Erin and Sally escape from the respective families, though in significantly different ways. Sally's escape anticipates a pattern for the slasher genre to follow: she breaks free of the family, runs screaming from the house,

and rather than confronting her pursuers, is rescued from Leatherface and Hitchhiker by two truck drivers, one of whom rams Hitchhiker with his 18-wheeler, and another of whom happens to be passing by and drives her away from Leatherface in the back of his pick-up (See Figure 7). She ultimately does not directly save herself. This ending, while not rendering women totally powerless, nevertheless offers a nihilist conclusion: Sally escapes, but not intact. The truck drivers did not actively "save" her but rather came along by happenstance; had they stopped to help defend Sally it is unclear they would have had any different outcome than Franklin, Jerry, and Kirk. In fact, the cattle truck driver who gets out of his cab immediately flees to an unclear fate. Leatherface is left relatively intact—minus a nasty self-inflicted leg wound—in the road swinging his chainsaw. Sally's journey is only partly over, and she does not return, in terms of the Campbellian heroic quest, with an elixir. She does, however, offer the possibility of masochistic identification to the male viewer whose journey this may really be (Clover, 1992). Such may be the true elixir. For it is through experiencing one's repressed femininity, represented here by Sally, that the male viewer's wholeness of self may emerge.

Erin offers a seemingly different, though conflicted outcome. Only at moments does she show passivity or powerlessness. In the cab of the truck driver who picks her up when she escapes from Leatherface, for example, she initially shows the same mild catatonia that the hitchhiker did at the film's beginning, responding to this trucker with the same answers that the earlier hitchhiker had given to the van occupants: "I just want to go home"…"You're going the wrong way"…"I can't go back there." But this behavior is atypical for Erin, who, unlike Sally, is more action than reaction, and in that sense resembles less the Final Girl archetype identified with the slasher film and more a hyper-masculinized action hero. From the film's start, Erin shows tomboyish resourcefulness, as when she picks the lock on the outhouse door at the barbecue/gas station; later when making her final escape, she hotwires the Sheriff's police car. Most importantly, she affects her escape, the rescue interlude with the truck driver being only a minor exception to a larger pattern of her agency.[10] The escape begins when she breaks free from the Hewitt basement. There, after trying unsuccessfully to lift Matt off of the meat hook, she stabs him to put him out of his misery. She then rescues Morgan at great personal risk. Later, when pursued by Leatherface in the slaughterhouse, she turns on her pursuer, symbolically castrating him by cutting off his right arm, the arm that holds the chainsaw, with a cleaver. And finally, she steals the Sheriff's car and kills him with it, not only running him down but stopping to run him over two more times. She kidnaps the abducted baby and drives off

under her own power. As in the original, Leatherface stands in the road waving his chainsaw, but this is a greatly diminished Leatherface, thanks to Erin's resourcefulness.

The remake thus offers a what it sees as a revision of the Final Girl, that type of heroine Carol Clover discussed in her groundbreaking *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992). Clover suggests that typically the Final Girl acts as a stand-in for masochistic identification—adopting a masculine agency and becoming a kind of wish fulfillment figure for masculine identification with a masochistic subject position. Several subsequent theorists have argued Clover may be short-sighted in regarding the Final Girl as finding agency only through traditionally masculine traits. As Cynthia A. Freeland and Barbara Creed note, Clover's thesis depends upon masculine readings of agency (Freeland, 1993; Creed, 1993). My interpretation of Erin is in keeping with Clover's thesis and leads to a similar conclusion: Erin blends both feminine and masculine traits and draws upon the latter when needed. Nispel's sequel de-essentializes gender, creating a new portrait of a woman whose attractive truth may help explain why the movie tested higher with females than with males.

Figures 8 and 9: Erin (Jessica Biel) in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003)

Unfortunately, the remake neutralizes this move by fetishizing Erin throughout the film—something Hooper's original film does not do with Sally. Her chest is well lit throughout and often wet. *Fangoria* magazine describes Erin/Jessica Biel as "so gorgeous in this film we could just eat her up" (Allen, 2003: 20). *San Francisco Examiner* reviewer Jeffrey Anderson suggests that "The real star of the picture […] has to be Biel's belly button" (2003: n.p.) (See Figures 8 and 9, this page). While depicting Erin as New Woman, the film simultaneously

regards her like the slab of meat within which she hides when Leatherface chases her through the slaughterhouse. Erin's sexuality reminds us, too, that this is a film where the superego rather than the id appears to play the role of punisher. As in many slasher films that preceded it, the underlying motive for violence against Nispel's teens may be their immorality. Although Sally and Pam dress semi-provocatively in Hooper's film, they are Aquarian innocents. Nispel's group, on the other hand, are portrayed as devotees of sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll. Erin may survive because she is the least self-indulgent of the group. The camera's fetishizing of her is so pronounced, however, as to qualify the healthfulness of the female viewer's identifying with her. [11]

Conclusion

So how, then, do we evaluate Nispel's remake as a postmodern phenomenon? On the positive side, it joins Hooper's original in being oppositional in attacking what bourgeois culture cherishes—"the specious good"—such oppositionalism being a trait that modernism and postmodernism share. It then breaks from the original's modernism in rejecting myth as a narrative ordering principle and by avoiding territory that easily lends itself to Freudian and/or Jungian analysis. It shows other postmodern traits as well: most notably, attentiveness to aesthetic surfaces. And in breaking with some stereotypic genre conventions regarding the Final Girl, it de-categorizes some gender roles with true postmodern spirit.[12]

On the negative side, in giving us an inspirational ending with Erin intact, triumphant, and bearing the future—not only the child she has rescued but the child within her—the film foregoes the fundamental alienation and asocial individualism that is at the core of both the modern and postmodern. It has also undercut its portrayal of the heroine as a new type of heroine through conventional fetishizing. Meanwhile, despite Leatherface's survival, he is not whole and thus less of a threat. The film may not give us the full closure that postmodernism decries, but we do have a partial one: that human agency can suffice to neutralize the forces of darkness. Or, in Freudian terms, Eros *can* overcome Thanatos. A postmodernist would reject such optimism, likely finding more congenial the original's embrace of Thanatos, or, to avoid Freud somewhat, what Cynthia Freeland calls "uncanny horror: a disturbing and relentless vision of evil 'out there' in the world" (2002: 244).

As for the remake's more comprehensive, retrospective relationship to its genre, Jeffrey Anderson sums up the film's lack of postmodern imagination in noting,

> One thing the original had was the outlaw factor. It was made completely outside the system and invented all-new rules for itself. Despite its grungy look, Hooper's original had a very deliberate pace and tone to it; it was made by an artist with something interesting to say during a specific time in history. This new version […] was made completely inside the system and dutifully follows every rule long ago established by the horror genre. It has far more to do with commerce than art. (2003, n.p.)

Finally, then, though we might argue the film tweaks—to little thematic significance—some of the genre rules, the remake fails as a postmodern project, occupying an unsatisfying middle ground somewhere between the postmodern, the modern, and "the specious good." This may help to explain why the meta-review website Rotten Tomatoes awarded the remake a 36 percent (where 60 percent is "fresh") compared with the original's 90 percent, and why Roger Ebert, who admired Hooper's 1974 version, declared of Nispel's remake, "there is not a shred of reason to see it" (2003, n.p.).

Editors' Notes

[1] The full text of "A Good Man is Hard to Find" is available here: http://xroads.virginia.edu/~drbr/goodman.html.

[2] For reference to the scene, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d73XkPQPKiY.

[3] An early version of the following essay was, in fact, presented in the Horror Area at the PCA/ACA National conference, which convened in April 2010 in St. Louis, Missouri. The session was entitled, "The Horror Canon Under Review."

[4] My gratitude also to Chelsea Korynta, who edited the first full draft of this essay with the kind of care and exactitude that Jeff would have appreciated.

[5] This essay has been edited by Korynta, Dodson, and the *MONSTRUM* editors to maintain Jeff Jeske's intended economical style and structure. We offer this note because Jeff did not have the opportunity to respond to slight revisions made to the text.

[6] In fact, the façade of the terrible house in Nispel's film more resembles that of the abandoned Franklin home, which is the teens' ultimate *intended* destination in Hooper's film.

[7] The abandoned Franklin home also contains such portentous markings, particularly in several ominous figures seemingly constructed out of wood, bone, and feathers, and bearing

resemblance to similar artistic expressions in the furniture and décor of the Sawyer home where the teens meet their fate.

[8] The remake builds itself literally around the original film's opening scroll suggestion of a "true" crime scenario, which Hooper then abandons to create an atmosphere of mythical determinism and cosmic dread.

[9] Not to mention the typecasting of R. Lee Ermey, forever associated with his sadistic drill sergeant character in *Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick, 1987).

[10] The same could be said for Sally, who shows similar resourcefulness.

[11] Nispel's film also misses the mark on any kind of productive mythical reading in terms of the female community it creates, an element absent in the original film. Nispel's remake wastes this community in the film—that is, this is a film filled with alternatives to masculinity (a monstrous Mother, a community of misfits) that, like a number of the film's subplots, go nowhere.

[12] On the other hand, it reinforces in almost parodic fashion newer gender stereotypes in which women are promised they can "have it all," in this case as an action hero and single mom.

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- 2019 -
MONSTRUM is published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society (https://www.monstrum-society.ca/)

La mutazione antropologica Italiana: passaggio da una società arcaica e pura ad una società contaminata in Pier Paolo Pasolini

Valentina Mazzilli

Introduzione

Nel corso del mio lavoro, intendo prendere in considerazione il «personaggio» Pier Paolo Pasolini, intellettuale capace di esprimersi in svariati settori specialistici. Attraverso una ricostruzione sintetica d'insieme dell'attività pasoliniana, sappiamo che egli esordisce come poeta in lingua friulana e in lingua italiana, dimostrando d'essere un abile narratore di brevi squarci narrativi e di corposi romanzi; spostando successivamente la sua attenzione al cinema, lavora prima come sceneggiatore, poi come regista cinematografico, continuando la sua attività di filologo, di acuto «eretico» teorizzatore letterario e cinematografico, di critico cinematografico, letterario e teatrale, e di scrittore di costume e corsivista corsaro. Pasolini è una delle presenze intellettuali tra le più alte del nostro dopoguerra, ma è anche una delle figure fra le più inquiete e mutevoli, per la verità di obiettivi e interessi, e la molteplicità di connessioni e interazioni che la sua opera crea tra un «campo» e l'altro. Quindi si rivela difficoltoso scandire i diversi tempi e il complessivo percorso dell'unità e della dialettica di un intellettuale così complesso, specialmente considerando che l'intervento pasoliniano si è manifestato in modi molto diversi, secondo differenziazioni profonde e, sovente, con veri e propri salti.

Per ciò che mi riguarda, ho voluto prendere in considerazione due temi presenti in alcuni scritti e film: da un lato, la scomparsa di quell'umanità contadina e autentica tanto amata da Pasolini; dall'altra, l'eros, che riflette la

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Valentina Mazzilli, laureata in dams, in Cinema Italiano, tesi *"L'eros come metafora nel cinema di Pier Paolo Pasolini, in Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*, presso l'Università degli studi di Torino. Diplomata al Tangram Teatro e al Piccolo Teatro Comico, sezione attore teatrale e presso Soluzioni Artistiche, sezione Speaker Radiofonico. Attualmente membro della Compagnia Vard, in preparazione *Vecchi Tempi* di Pinter. Sta approfondendo la Legge Basaglia del 1978, per preparare un lavoro teatrale sulla chiusura dei manicomi in Italia.

sua personalità nel contempo complessa e completa. Secondo Pasolini, infatti, durante il periodo storico e culturale che riguarda il nostro dopoguerra è ancora possibile entrare in contatto con questa categoria di persone, la cui autenticità non è ancora stata corrotta dalle leggi del consumismo che, durante il *boom* economico degli anni '50, ha stravolto negativamente le abitudini sociali italiane.

L'avvento della televisione, ad esempio, si sviluppa come un forte fenomeno sociale, che spinge le comunità ad aggregarsi, pur di condividere l'utilizzo del nuovo mezzo di comunicazione, e diffonde anche l'utilizzo dell'italiano tra la popolazione. Man mano, però, la diffusione e la presenza degli "elettrodomestici" nelle abitazioni risultano essere dei simboli forti, delle presenze a cui aspirare e rappresentativi della società italiana che sta cambiando, che via via si sta allontanando dalla tradizione.

Così come Pasolini critica la scolarizzazione di massa, che permette a sempre più giovani il raggiungimento di un maggior livello culturale, che, nella realtà, non permette loro di avere una migliore comprensione dell'umanità autentica. La grande "invettiva" dell'autore contro i giovani, ultima generazione che può ancora conoscere l'umanità autentica, si esprime attraverso una critica nei loro confronti, alla loro volontà di abbandonare i valori della tradizione, del passato, lasciandosi sempre più addomesticare, o "corrompere" dai valori delle leggi consumistiche del possesso materiale e la tendenza al raggiungimento della piccola-borghesia.

La "mimesis" Pasoliniana fondata nel sacro dell'antico

> Io sono una forma del passato.
> Solo nella tradizione è il mio amore
> Vengo dai ruderi, dalle chiese
> dalle pale d'altare, dai borghi
> abbandonati sugli Appennini o le Prealpi
> dove sono vissuto i fratelli. […]
> più moderno di ogni moderno
> a cercare fratelli che non sono più.
>
> — Pier Palo Pasolini, *Poesia in forma di rosa (1961-1964)* (1964: 15)

Pier Paolo Pasolini è stato uno dei testimoni più lucidi e appassionati della realtà sociale italiana del secondo dopoguerra, e si è espresso come poeta, narratore, sceneggiatore e regista cinematografico. La sua tensione sperimentale si è accostata non soltanto ai problemi linguistici, ma si sviluppa

in una necessità di intervenire e parlare, un bisogno di esprimersi nei generi più diversi. Egli ha goduto della rara capacità di esprimersi con più mezzi a un alto livello di professionalità, trasformando e adattando alle proprie esigenze qualsiasi materiale gli passasse tra le mani. Egli non può forse essere considerato il migliore o il più rappresentativo nei settori in cui ha operato, ma la somma e la qualità dei suoi atti espressivi lo rendono una figura eccezionale e quasi unica nel panorama culturale del dopoguerra. Egli stesso, nella Divina Mimemis, racconta che intorno ai quarant'anni, si accorse che si ritrovò in un momento molto oscuro della sua vita, momento in cui qualunque cosa facesse, nella «Selva» della realtà del 1963, anno in cui era giunto, assurdamente impreparato a quell'esclusione dalla vita degli altri che è ripetizione della propria, c'era un senso di oscurità. Non parla di nausea, o di angoscia, anzi, in quella oscurità, c'era qualcosa di terribilmente luminoso: la luce della vecchia verità, quella davanti a cui non c'è più niente da dire. Oscurità uguale luce […] era chiaro che stavo facendo esperienza di una forma di vita *allo scopo di esprimerla* (Pasolini, 1976: 5).

Nel 1963 Pasolini inizia il suo progetto di rifacimento in prosa – mai concluso - della Divina Commedia. In quest'opera egli si immagina nella «selva oscura» della degradazione neocapitalistica. Nella *Divina Mimesis*, come sostiene Gian Carlo Ferretti, benché incompleta, «Pasolini traccia la diagnosi di una crisi di una intera fase di ricerca della letteratura contemporanea italiana […]; egli vede questa crisi in rapporto ai profondi mutamenti della società nazionale; individua un "momento zero della cultura e della storia"» (1976: 51), sviluppando la sua metodologia sul nesso tra problemi della lingua e della società. Grazie a questo progetto, possiamo comprendere la crisi e le contraddizioni pasoliniane lungo il percorso della sua l'ideologia.

Pasolini continua ad affermare la sua crisi dicendo anche: "Chi può segnare il momento in cui la ragione comincia a dormire, o meglio a desiderare la propria fine? Chi può determinare le circostanze in cui essa comincia a uscire, o a tornare là dove non era ragione, abbandonando la strada che per tanti anni aveva creduto giusta, per passione, per ingenuità, per *conformismo*? […] Alla luce, fatale, di quella vecchia verità, mi si quietò un po' l'angoscia: che era stato l'unico reale sentimento durante tutto il periodo del buio, a cui la mia strada, *giusta!*, mi aveva fatalmente portato (1976: 5).

Egli, infatti,i vive questo momento di crisi della letteratura italiana come se fosse propria. In questo particolare momento storico, egli si sente come perso in un «universo» che non gli appartiene, che non lo rappresenta. Un universo sempre più corrotto dalla tecnologia e dal consumo, capace di trasformare gli animi, rendendoli sempre meno puri, omologati sempre più verso l'aspirazione

piccolo-borghese. Pasolini, pur misurandosi con questa nuova realtà, in cui si perde, respinge fortemente ogni soluzione di tipo neoavanguardistico.

Quindi incontriamo un interessante dialogo autobiografico tra una «Lonza», in cui Pasolini non ha difficoltà a riconoscersi, che «con tutti quei colori che le maculavano la pelle, non si muoveva da davanti ai miei occhi, come una madre-ragazzo, come una chiesa-ragazzo» (1976: 10-11) e che, per la forza terribile della verità e della necessità della vita, gli impediva di muoversi per la sua nuova strada. Quindi subentra un altro elemento, in cui Pasolini si riconosce, per il quale «il sonno e la ferocia riuniti insieme in una sola forma di "Leone", che, benché spelacchiato, fetido di stallatico bestiale, pigro, vile, prepotente, stupido, privo di altro interesse che non fosse il poltrire, solo, e il divorare, solo – aveva tutta la potenza di chi non sa il male, essendo per sua natura soltanto bene ciò che in cui tutto lui stesso consiste. Dal suo essere sonno e ferocia, egoismo e fame rabbiosa, il "Leone" traeva una ispirazione a vivere che lo distingueva, con violenza addirittura brutale, dal mondo esterno. Che lo ospitava quasi tremando» (1976: 11).

Infine la «Lupa», nella quale, ancora una volta, Pasolini si riconosce: «i suoi connotati erano sfigurati da una mistica magrezza, la bocca assottigliata dai baci e dalle opere impure, lo zigomo e la mascella allontanati tra loro: ridicolo come ogni maschera di morte» (1976: 12). Egli continua chiedendo pietà, per lo stato in cui si ritrova, chiedendosi se la lupa fosse nuova sopravvivenza o nuova realtà: la lupa rappresenta le sue origini, racconta l'origine friulana della madre e romagnola del padre, l'aver vissuto a Bologna. Nacque e crebbe sotto il fascismo, che ritrovò a Roma, sotto altra forma: mentre la cultura della borghesia squisita non accennava a tramontare, andando di pari passo con l'ignoranza delle sconfinate masse della piccola borghesia Pasolini aggiunse, quasi a dettare la sua lapide, di essere poeta e Cantore della divisione della coscienza, di chi è fuggito dalla sua città distrutta, andando verso una città che deve essere ancora ricostruita. E, nel dolore della distruzione misto alla speranza della fondazione, esaurisce oscuramente il suo mandato. Aggiunse, perciò che era destinato a ingiallire così precocemente: perché la piaga di un dubbio, il dolore di una lacerazione, divengono presto dei mali privati, di cui gli altri hanno ragione di disinteressarsi, con la consapevolezza di avere un solo momento nella vita, chiedendosi se fosse meglio restare o tornare alle origini, in piena solitudine.

Attraverso le parole di Pasolini, ne *La Divina Mimesis*, abbiamo delle precise informazioni autobiografiche e delle "dichiarazioni" dettagliate riguardo la sua crisi intellettuale, di uomo di cultura che, nella società e nel mondo letterario e umanistico, non ritrova più la sua dimensione e libertà.

Egli, infatti, non si sente più rappresentato da quelle che erano le vecchie certezze sulle quali fondava la sua ideologia. Dopo aver preso visione delle sue "dichiarazioni ideologiche" espresse nell'opera che precedentemente ho preso in considerazione, ritengo sia importante ripercorrere il cammino intellettuale, sia a livello "personale" che a livello di uomo capace di esprimersi nelle svariate discipline. Tutto ciò mi permette comprendere con pienezza, ripercorrendo parte delle tappe della sua vita, come egli sia riuscito ad esprimersi attraverso vari linguaggi e le ragioni che lo hanno spinto a farlo, fino ad arrivare a capire quale messaggio egli volesse esternare.

Nel 1942, con il padre prigioniero in Africa, egli sfolla a Casarsa, in Friuli, paese d'origine della madre. Il forte legame con la madre -friulana, appunto, e di origine contadina - e gli studi di filologia romanza, lo spingono a cercare nel dialetto materno un mezzo col quale esprimere un delicato e fantastico mondo poetico: nascono così le *Poesie a Casarsa* (1942), poi raccolte con altri versi in *La meglio gioventù* (1975), splendido apice della lirica pasoliniana, in cui il recupero filologico di uno strumento linguistico di forte immediatezza è al servizio della nostalgia per una terra e una lingua materne che a lungo, o forse per sempre, resteranno il momento ideale del suo destino di uomo.

Il suo legame con la tradizione, intesa come il richiamo di una purezza assoluta, di un mondo naturale, incontaminato, primigenio, in cui l'umanità "povera", ricca di tradizioni contadine e valori forti, è capace di dare un valore a tutti gli aspetti dell'esistenza.

La ferale «disperata vitalità» espressa esplicitamente nei più tardi componimenti poetici, quali *Poesia in forma di rosa* e *Transumanar e organizzar,* appare come la vera *Grundform* nel mondo poetico pasoliniano, la segreta cagione delle sue molteplici tensioni. Come Lino Micciché illustra molto lucidamente, «"i motivi" della fuga dal "patto industriale", della ricerca di una palingenesi libidica, della nostalgica attenzione al primitivo e al sacro, della volontà di liberarsi (e liberare la realtà) dai "borghesi sogni"» sono fasi diverse e successive di una maturazione artistica protrattesi nell'arco di un trentennio, «arricchendo un iniziale stupore lirico in "trauma biologico familiare" e quindi in rivoltosa passione antiautoritaria e poi in "torbido e candido" cercare il sacro nell'antico; per concludersi nell'identificazione di eros e Thanatos» (1995:1 81,182).

Comizi d'amore: documento oggettivo sull'Italia degli anni sessanta

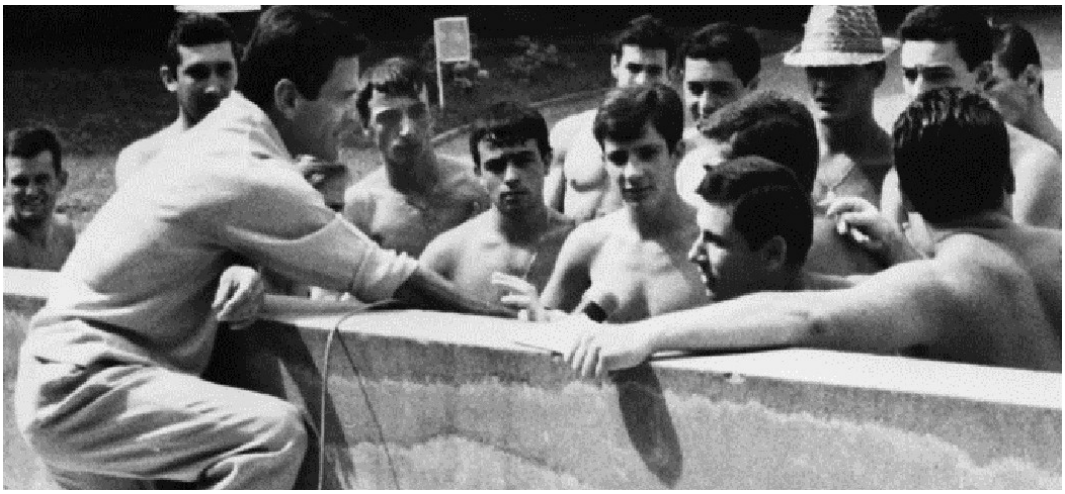

Figura 1: Riprese sul set di *Comizi d'amore*

> Anche il sesso è sempre stato finalizzato: tanto da costringere la donna a diventare madre, santa o puttana. L'atto sessuale, santificato o peccato. E l'uomo, un dongiovanni, un pederasta o un maritato
>
> — Pier Paolo Pasolini (Miccichè, 1999: 33)

Dopo aver stabilito le cause della crisi attraversata da Pasolini, e i miti legati alle sue origini, a cui egli tende fortemente, vorrei prendere in considerazione un documento cinematografico, grazie al quale l'autore vuole, a mio avviso, cambiare registro, iniziando ad esprimere la sua critica nei confronti della società. *Comizi d'amore* (1964) è un film-inchiesta costruito con il metodo dell'intervista condotta dal regista stesso, il quale aggiunge, spesso, un commento polemico e riflessivo. L'opera nasce dalla suggestione «sperimentale» del cinema-verità.

Il film-inchiesta è collocato nella seconda fase del cinema pasoliniano, ovvero *il cinema dell'ideologia*, in cui, secondo Miccichè, «Pasolini prende posizione sugli eventi storici mondiali e sulle realtà sociologiche nazionali, tasta il polso dei tempi facendo domande e sollecitando risposte» (1999: 33). In questo momento Pasolini cerca di cogliere e fissare, nei mutamenti a volte clamorosi delle abitudini e del costume, la presenza di miti, ossessioni e divieti propri di una società «piena ancora di strati arcaici, di livelli culturali primitivi, tipici dei paesi sottogovernati» (1999: XVII). Nell'opera di Gabriella Parca Pasolini rimane sorpreso dal fenomeno della «alienazione femminile» e delle

sue dimensioni. Nel film, invece, egli sposta l'attenzione sull'alienazione maschile, generatrice dell'altra, a sua volta influenzata dalla dimensione e «distorsione storica».

L'inchiesta è composta da un prologo, in cui Pasolini discute con Moravia e Musatti, quattro capitoli - *Grande fritto misto all'italiana*, *Schifo o Pietà*, *La vera Italia* e *Dal basso e dal profondo* – per poi concludersi con un epilogo di *fiction*, con il matrimonio di due giovani che conferma il carattere esortativo del saggio.

Pasolini interpella italiani del Nord e del Sud, contadini e operai, studenti universitari e giovani proletari sui problemi del sesso e dell'amore, prendendo in considerazione i problemi della donna, il matrimonio e il divorzio, la repressione e la liberazione sessuale, l'omosessualità e la prostituzione. Le risposte che gli sono date rivelano un fondo di ipocrisia e conformismo, un qualunquismo intessuto di perbenismo, una quasi totale assenza di apertura critica e razionale.

L'opera ci offre spunti interessanti di spessore storico, sociologico e politico, ma il risultato è viziato dal metodo.

In taluni casi l'utilizzo della macchina da presa e del microfono da parte di Pasolini e il tema dell'intervista, infatti, rendono le risposte degli intervistati in un certo qual modo false e «faziose», inducendoli ad assumere un atteggiamento e un comportamento «rispettabili» di fronte al mezzo di comunicazione utilizzato.

Il film è, comunque, un documento che mostra, attraverso la tematica del sesso, l'Italia del *boom* economico che si presenta inquieta e rappresentata dalla «mostruosità» dell'uomo medio e conformista. L'autore, però, contrappone a questa figura una disposizione umana più limpida e aperta, rappresentata dalla purezza infantile, quasi arcaica, sulla quale ripone la propria speranza di un futuro diverso e dalla «civiltà» contadina, in cui l'amore si presentava con caratteri autentici e profondi.

Pasolini dimostra, quindi, riporre ancora una certa speranza nei giovani, che dimostrano ancora essere rappresentanti di purezza, non ancora corrotta dalla società.

L'eros come metafora sociale capace di distruggere gli equilibri borghesi nella "parabola" *Teorema*

L'arrivo dell'ospite è annunciato da un telegramma, che un saltellante e sbarazzino postino, Angelo (Ninetto Davoli), porta mentre la famiglia sta

mangiando. Angelo, il postino, ricompare con un secondo messaggio, in seguito al quale l'ospite annuncia alla famiglia la sua partenza. E' possibile riscontrare, a questo punto, il forte ascendente dell'ospite nei confronti di ciascun componente della famiglia, ed il rammarico che la sua partenza improvvisa comporta. Nell'esistenza di questi borghesi, l'intrusione dell'ospite non è altro che un momento di rottura e lacerazione. Per cui svanisce l'ipotesi di una vita autentica, nel segno della totale fedeltà a se stessi e alla propria natura, anteriore a qualsiasi condizionamento moralistico e sociale, in contrasto con il loro attuale e logoro modo di esistere. Scomparso l'ospite, infatti, ognuno si ritrova solo e impotente, con il privilegio di una verità, su se stesso e sugli altri, he non gli permette di rivivere la sua vita quale era prima dell'incontro con il misterioso ospite, né lo rende capace di vivere coerentemente.

Figura 2: Locandina di *Teorema*

Pietro (Massimo Girotti), ad esempio, dice di non riconoscersi più, perché il comportamento dell'ospite (Terence Stamp) ha insinuato in lui molti dubbi e contraddizioni, lo ha reso diverso, essendo egli stato capace di distruggere tutto ciò che lo accomunava agli altri; le sue velleità umane e artistiche finiscono nell'autoderisione e nella demenza.

Odetta (Anne Wiazemsky), invece, nello spiegare il suo turbamento, dice che egli è stato il primo uomo che lei abbia mai conosciuto, il primo uomo di cui essa non avesse paura e che sia stato capace di sottrarla all'amore del padre.[1] Ella conclude dichiarando: "Il bene che mi hai fatto, mi ha fatto

prendere coscienza del mio male." A questo punto, Odetta (Anne Wiazemssky), rintanatasi in camera sua, cerca i suoi giochi di bambina, e, dopo aver guardato l'album delle foto in cui compaiono il padre e l'ospite, ha una reazione forte e rappresentativa: inizia a piangere stringendo i pugni, chiudendosi nel silenzio della follia (1990: 94).

Lucia (Silvana Mangano), la figura più risolta del film nel suo impasto di dolorosa autenticità e di trasparenza simbolica, dice che l'ospite è riuscito a riempire il vuoto che la sovrastava, dove lei stessa riusciva a trovare soltanto falsità e meschinità, senza via d'uscita. Il suo turbamento, quindi, la spinge a prendere la macchina per andare in città, dove adesca dei giovani: tutto ciò si conclude con una disperata corsa in macchina, quasi una fuga, e un grido disperato, improvviso e incontrollabile.

Altro turbamento emblematico è quello di Paolo (Massimo Girotti), il padre. Egli, infatti, dice all'ospite: "Sei venuto a distruggere l'idea che io ho sempre avuto di me. Non vedo niente che possa reintegrarmi alla mia identità". Quindi lo vediamo alla Stazione Centrale di Milano, dove si libera dei vestiti. Finalmente lo ritroviamo nel deserto, lo stesso visto all'inizio del racconto, dove egli, errante, lancia un urlo straziato e infinito.

Infine Emilia. La serva, quando l'ospite è in procinto di andarsene, gli bacia la mano e lo aiuta a portare la valigia. Ella, donna appartenente alla classe sociale del sottoproletariato contadino, si allontana dalla casa borghese per ritornare al suo paese, dove fa vita di penitenza. La vediamo, infatti, seduta su una pietra, con una candela di fronte a sé, e mangiare solamente ortica bollita, facendo fiorire intorno a sé la venerazione dei suoi compaesani. Emilia, fattasi santa, sale al cielo, mentre tutti la contemplano pregando. Infine, la serva si fa seppellire: ella non vuole morire, bensì piangere. Ella dice, infatti, che le sue lacrime diverranno sorgente di vita.

Parlando degli attori, in un'intervista del 21 aprile 1968 rilasciata a «L'Espresso», Pasolini spiega le ragioni di certe scelte e persino il senso che il film viene assumendo ai suoi occhi.

Pasolini dice di aver scelto Laura Betti per il ruolo della serva-santa «perché nel suo fondo ha qualcosa dell'Apocalisse, e dentro è biblica, capace di maledizioni potenti come di travolgenti benedizioni» (1990: 94).

Per quanta riguarda il ruolo della madre, inizialmente Pasolini è indirizzato verso Lucia Bosé. Successivamente, invece, la sua scelta si orienta nei confronti di Silvana Mangano, la quale, innanzi tutto, gli ricorda la madre (che, per altro, è una interprete del film), ma soprattutto egli pensa che essa «è di una bellezza che dà nel malaticcio, e come attrice è di una bravura e di una duttilità fuor dal comune» (1990:94): è spirituale, sensuale e misteriosa allo

stesso tempo, portatrice di quel "puro mistero" che egli aveva già fatto emergere in *Edipo Re* (1990: 94).

In merito al "marginale" ruolo del messaggero, ritengo che sia significativa la scelta dell'attore. Ninetto Davoli rispecchia e rappresenta con grande naturalezza l'essenza di questo personaggio, con una freschezza particolare, tipica del suo carattere attoriale.

Riguardo a *Teorema*, lo stesso Pasolini parla di «manualetto laico […] su una irruzione religiosa nell'ordine di una famiglia milanese» della ricca borghesia, di «studio sulla "crisi del comportamento"», o addirittura di «referto», con l'invito a «seguire i "fatti", la "trama"», ad accoglierne la carica soprattutto «informativa»; ora invece di «parabola», ottenuta attraverso una tessitura di «prosa poetizzante» o «d'arte» (1976:62).

Spostando l'attenzione su *Teorema* Gian Carlo Ferretti, dice che il racconto appare sempre come sospeso tra documento ed evocazione; tra inserti di «inchieste» giornalistiche e morbide, dolcissime descrizioni lirico-paesistiche; tra spezzoni di sceneggiatura sui movimenti e gesti dei personaggi, e squarci di «prosa d'arte»; tra una istanza documentaria*,* didascalica*,* informativa, che rimanda all'opera cinematografica di cui in qualche modo partecipa, e una istanza più propriamente letteraria, che sembra quasi nascere in margine a quella, rimanendo al di qua dei personaggi, più visti che penetrati. Da un punto di vista quantitativo, la prima è certo prevalente, ma pur sempre funzionale a qualcos'altro, al film; essa presuppone cioè un costante rinvio ad un terreno di ricerca a cui nel suo libro accenna appena (molti oggetti o gesti o situazioni, come il cero davanti a Emilia o il pugno chiuso di Odetta, sono abbozzi di simboli che solo una ulteriore elaborazione – cinematografica, in questo caso - può rendere pregnanti). Sostanzialmente strumentale, e talora esornativa, si presenta invece negli stessi propositi pasoliniani l'istanza letteraria (il risvolto citato dice esplicitamente che «una prosa leggermente "d'arte" provvede a far sì che si tratti di una parabola, anziché di un puro e semplice studio») (1976: 62-63). Sempre nella nota introduttiva, Ferretti parla di contraddizioni, quasi ad assegnare, ora, un ruolo marginale o subalterno, sostenendo quindi il suo orientamento verso forme di espressione diverse e più appropriate, quali il cinema e il teatro.

Nella versione filmica di *Teorema,* come ci fa notare Ferrero, «l'autore avverte il bisogno di trasporre un discorso molto ripiegato e personale su un piano più largo e, al limite, "esemplare": quanto più, insomma, la sua esperienza esistenziale preme verso una trascrizione immediata, in termini di confessione o di «urlo» (1977: 99).

Gian Carlo Ferretti ci fa anche capire che «tutti i personaggi di *Teorema,* da

quelli dichiaratamente borghesi all'ospite misterioso alla domestica miracolata, sono le provvisorie e labili figure di una metafora lirica-autobiografica, a mezza strada tra il referto psicanalitico e la confessione per poesia» (1976: 62-63).

«L'intrusione dell'ospite» nella quotidianità di questi borghesi, è «un momento di rottura e lacerazione: una sorta di folgorazione irrazionale» (1976: 100-101) che sconvolge la loro normalità, l'autenticità della loro esistenza, la «natura» del loro essere borghesi: «il suo darsi è un rivelare gli altri a se stessi, distruggendone le difese dell'autorità (nel padre) o del contegno (nella madre); i suoi silenzi prima della partenza, suoneranno dunque condanna senza appello» (1977: 99). Il film si risolleva, quindi, nella seconda parte, quando il giovane ospite lascia la casa. Da questo momento ogni componente della famiglia, Emilia compresa, si ritrova solo con se stesso, impotente, con i propri dubbi, di fronte alle verità del proprio inconscio che riesce a vedere solo ora.

Quindi troviamo un amore tanto assoluto da sconvolgere gli uomini, rendendoli santi o disperati. Il divino amatore, rivelatosi, è portatore di una forza che contrasta con la ragione, conduce tutti coloro a cui si è rivolto all'autodistruzione, attestando la storica irredimibilità della borghesia, attraverso Emilia, l'unica che sa perdersi senza rimpianti, anzi donando le proprie lacrime al mondo, ribadendo l'invivibilità proletaria nella storia. Credo siano di fondamentale importanza il periodo storico preso in considerazione, e le conseguenze che ciò comporta negli intellettuali in genere, e nell'autore che io ho preso in considerazione nello specifico. E' noto ed indiscutibile il fatto che il 1968 abbia prodotto grandi sconvolgimenti e mutamenti socioculturali a tutti i livelli.

Il biennio 1968-1970 rappresenta, per Pasolini, una nuova fase. In questo periodo, infatti, egli si esprime, prima in *Teorema* ed in *Porcile,* poi, attraverso una «poesia sgradevole» (1977: 95) ed attraverso invettive contro i giovani e il movimento studentesco.

Com'è noto, Pasolini, coerentemente alla sua necessità di esternare continuamente, si esprime nel suo stile poetico mischiando "poesia" e "vita "; egli, infatti, utilizza i mezzi espressivi per diffondere i suoi pensieri intimi e personali, spesso autobiografici, unendovi dati reali e storici. Tutto ciò lo porta a rendersi uomo pubblico, quindi facile bersaglio della stampa dei "moralisti".

Credo sia importante, a questo punto, riprendere il discorso riguardante la crisi che la cosiddetta "rivoluzione culturale" del 1968 ha provocato negli intellettuali, approfondendo ciò che ho accennato all'inizio del capitolo.

Il 1968, come Gian Carlo Ferretti ha considerato attentamente, ha

provocato stati di disagio e di crisi, nuove prese di coscienza e reazioni varie nell'intellettualità italiana (1976: 39).

Per ciò che concerne Pier Paolo Pasolini, la crisi del 1968 fu più intima e profonda rispetto a quella del *Gruppo '63*. Ferretti ne rivisita le cause generali; per quanto riguarda il *Gruppo '63* dice:

> Quale significato assume il discorso poetico pasoliniano, nel quadro della letteratura degli anni sessanta? Esso contribuisce all'elaborazione e indicazione di una *proposta.*[…] Si tratta di una proposta alternativa rispetto al bivio equivoco e spesso interessato, alla dicotomia tattica e riduttiva tradizione-avanguardia, che nel dibattito letterario più immediato si manifesta come dicotomia fra tutto un versante di letteratura tradizionale più o meno restaurata […], e le istanze liquidatorie del *Gruppo '63*. Questa proposta si era venuta delineando già negli anni cinquanta – per iniziativa di un'intera ala di *Officina,* e con l'opera poetica e narrativa e saggistica maggiore di Pasolini in particolare. (1976: 39).

Pier Paolo Pasolini si trova quindi a metà strada tra «neotradizione» e «neoavanguardia» (1976: 39). Ferretti continua il suo discorso sostenendo che, sin dall'immediato dopoguerra, i recuperi della tradizione naturalistica e veristica novecentesca sono caratterizzati da una sostanziale carenza di coscienza critica e angustia di orizzonte culturale, anche nei casi di maggiore onestà, generosità e rigore intellettuale. Ciò provocò l'esplosione della crisi del 1956, rivelando il loro grave ritardo. L'equilibrio fragile e precario raggiunto talora negli anni precedenti, ma già da tempo al limite della rottura, era venuto meno; e tuttavia gli scrittori più direttamente interessati non ne avevano preso, o voluto prendere, coscienza, impegnandosi a ricomporlo continuamente, con equivoche soluzioni di compromesso, con più o meno sommari restauri dei vecchi impianti. La storia della loro ricerca, da quel momento, avrebbe portato in piena luce una costante di fondo: l'incapacità, o non volontà, a vivere intimamente gli scontri di una realtà sempre più *difficile*, improntata ad una problematicità tanto esasperata quanto ricca di provocazioni ideali; e la capacità altresì, o non volontà, a scontare fino in fondo le contraddizioni e le crisi che tali scontri sarebbero venuti approfondendo nella loro coscienza e nella loro ricerca (1976: 40). Egli continua su questo argomento dicendo che la manifestazione letteraria più tipica in questo senso (protrattasi poi fino agli anni sessanta) era stata una sorta di novecentismo, inteso ora a rifiutare programmaticamente la storia, la società, il mondo dei valori collettivi, in nome di un'autosufficienza antiproblematica e di un vergine nucleo

sentimentale esclusivamente fedele a un'assoluta identità con se stesso […], ora ad ammorbidire e addolcire, finché fosse possibile, ogni contatto con la realtà, rifugiando in un mondo elegiaco, moralistico-nostalgico e letterario-consolatorio, ogni volta che quel contatto rischiasse di farsi troppo bruciante […]. Al tempo stesso non era mancato tuttavia un filone particolarmente vistoso di neonaturalismo che, quanto più sembrava cimentarsi con i problemi attuali della società italiana, tanto più in realtà li annegava in un contesto culturale e letterario ritardato e passivo. L'esempio più significativo e intellettualmente complesso, era stato forse Testori, che nella maggior parte delle sue opere narrative e poetiche e teatrali, si abbandonava ciecamente a una compenetrazione con il mondo subumano delle sue periferie sottoproletarie, dominato da una specie di «dio-sesso», in nome del quale venivano via via consumate estasi mistico-sensuali, sottomissioni alla forza e alla bellezza fisica, rituali connubi tra vita a livello animale e senso cattolico della carne, tra naturalismo e trascendenza, tra «viscere» e «provvidenzialità» (1976: 40-41).

Secondo Ferretti, questi motivi sono presenti anche nel discorso pasoliniano degli anni Cinquanta, ma contestualizzati in una maniera ben più ricca e complessa: il suo discorso è infatti contraddistinto dalla intima e consapevole tensione verso la storia, elemento che lo rende contrastato e doloroso. Per cui egli conclude dicendo "basterà aggiungere che i due termini della dicotomia sopra accennata cui si oppone la proposta alternativa di Pasolini, Roversi e Volponi, sono ben lungi dal porsi sullo stesso piano. Ben più stimolante e dinamico risulta infatti […] il lavoro culturale svolto dalla nuova avanguardia, rispetto alla tradizione restaurata delle generazioni precedenti. […] Resta comunque il fatto che negli anni sessanta la proposta alternativa di Pasolini, Roversi e Volponi, si oppone oggettivamente (e attivamente) in egual misura alla tradizione come all'avanguardia (1976: 42-43).

Per Pasolini il '68 rappresenta non soltanto una critica radicale all'istituto tradizionale dell'intellettuale e a tutti gli equivoci relativi (discorso che riguarda la funzione dello scrittore e della letteratura), bensì un sovvertimento totale delle sue mitologie giovanili e delle relative reincarnazioni: quindi *Teorema* e la poesia-*pamphlet* (*Il PCI ai giovani!!)* sugli studenti. I monologhi di *Teorema* e la citata poesia ripropongono quella pasoliniana esigenza di forme di intervento «politico» diretto più volte accennata e indagata nelle sue interne contraddizioni.

La borghesia antropofaga in *Porcile*

Nel novembre del 1968, mentre *Teorema* è ancora sotto sequestro per oscenità, Pasolini inizia a girare *Porcile* (1969): «un film povero, girato in un mese, con una cifra irrisoria» (1976:42-43). Il soggetto del film è stato ricavato da un ampliamento dell'omonima e coeva tragedia in versi. «La struttura del film è caratterizzata da due storie che si alternano, l'una a far da specchio dell'altra, in montaggio parallelo con convergenza finale» (2001: 1012). Il deserto sul quale si chiudeva *Teorema* torna nel paesaggio vulcanico in cui *Porcile* si apre. La prima vicenda, infatti, è «ambientata in un indefinibile Cinquecento ricostruito sul deserto lavico dell'Etna»(1994:90), dove un'interminabile carrelata-panoramica percorre e raccoglie un paesaggio stagnante e irreale. Un giovane sottoproletario del mondo, inizialmente solo, e alla guida di una comunità di ossessi poi, aggredisce guerrieri e viandanti, per poi cibarsi della loro carne: il cannibale e i suoi seguaci saranno puniti dalla legge e lasciati in pasto alle belve.

Figura 3: Locandina di *Porcile*

In parallelo, vediamo una grande casa aristocratica, delimitata da una duplice fila di pioppi e aperta sui campi, che ci ricorda la villa borghese e periferica di *Teorema*. Julian, figlio del ricco industriale tedesco Klotz, non riesce a uscire da un'adolescenza sospesa e protratta, continuando la tradizione paterna del potere o staccandosene con un gesto di rifiuto. Tutto ciò lo rende

diverso dai suoi coetanei, ordinariamente borghesi, anche nella contestazione e nella rivolta.

Entrambi i personaggi del film hanno senso d'esistere solamente nella loro solitudine (e diversità) e nel loro comportamento anomalo e atroce, che si ritorcerà loro contro: ambedue sono vittime di una vendetta della natura e della società civile. Il senso dell'ossessione e della follia dei due personaggi sono trasposizioni metaforiche di una stessa condizione autobiografica, essi sonovittime e attori di una stessa «vocazione». Analoga è anche la loro fine. Le cause della condanna del primo personaggio risultano meno coscienti, ma egli esprime un orgoglio disperato (ripetendo per tre volte: «Ho ucciso mio padre, ho mangiato carne umana e sto tremando di gioia»), la sua morte assume le cadenze di una crocifissione. Julian risulta, invece, essere cosciente del proprio esistere come irredimibile assenza di vita, di storia e di futuro («una foglia sperduta / una porta che cigola / un grugnito»); è quindi chiara la sua vocazione al suicidio per mezzo della mostruosità dei porci al potere.

La nuova situazione storica che gli intellettuali, la borghesia e il popolo italiani stanno vivendo, spinge Pasolini a convogliare il suo cinema in una direzione diversa, "difficile", e che in *Porcile* raggiunge il suo apice, usando una «forma» e un «linguaggio, programmaticamente élitari» (1998: 104).

Ferretti chiarisce che questa scelta è scaturita, secondo le ripetute dichiarazioni del regista, dal cambiamento del quadro sociale caratterizzato dalla scomparsa del popolo e della sua trasformazione in massa, "fatto che ha comportato la scomparsa di una cultura autenticamente popolare, e l'imporsi della cultura di massa, merce tra le merci. Borghesia e popolo erano classi separate, chiaramente identificabili nei loro connotati culturali e antropologici: ora la borghesia neocapitalistica ha fagocitato il popolo, proletariato e sottoproletariato, identificandoli a sé. Perciò è scomparso dall'orizzonte della comunicazione l'interlocutore privilegiato di Pasolini, il destinatario dell'opera "nazional-popolare" nell'accezione gramsciana. «Ora questa illusione gramsciana è oggettivamente caduta, non ce l'ho più. Perché è oggettivamente cambiato il mondo di fronte a me. Mentre al tempo di Gramsci e al tempo in cui pensavo le mie prime opere e covavo la mia prima ideologia una distinzione nettamente classica tra classe popolare e classe borghese era ancora possibile, oggi oggettivamente non lo è più. Cioè quello che diceva Gramsci quarant'anni fa e ciò che pensavo io dieci anni fa non è più lecito, non è più attendibile, perché l'Italia è entrata in una nuova fase storica. Questo fa sì che la distinzione tra popolare nel senso gramsciano della parola e borghese non sia più possibile. Sono altri i termini in cui si presentano i destinatari dell'opera» (1998: 104).

Quindi Pasolini è alla ricerca di una reazione, vuole che i suoi film costituiscano una critica della cultura di massa; ciò avviene rendendoli difficilmente consumabili dalla massa, quindi dedicati ad una élite culturale. Questo è, secondo il regista, un modo per sottrarsi al consumo. Questo discorso è valido anche per il "Teatro di parola" pasoliniano.

Conclusione

Ripercorro il percorso "ideologico" di Pier Paolo Pasolini, attraverso la *Divina Mimesis* egli dichiara la sua crisi intellettuale, opera letteraria che richiama la struttura dantesca. Con il film-inchiesta *Comizi d'amore* Pasolini cerca di cogliere e fissare, nei mutamenti delle abitudini e del costume, la presenza di miti, ossessioni e divieti propri di una società ancora pregna di arcaicità e di livelli culturali primitive.

Attraverso *Teorema* e *Porcile*, entrambi film metafora, invece, egli esprime una critica alla "inconsistenza della borghesia.

In *Comizi d'amore* Pasolini nutre ancora una certa fiducia nella purezza dei giovani, ancora influenzati dalla tradizione. Mentre In *Teorema* e *Porcile* egli non trova più fondamento nell'importanza dei miti arcaici, manifestando, attraverso il cambio di registro linguistico, la sua critica più che alla borghesia, bensì all'allontanamento antropologico della realtà operaia. Quest'ultima, non più legata alla realtà contadina, intrisa di tradizione, ma capace di rompere gli schemi, già a loro volta rotti dalle leggi del consumo e della scolarizzazione di massa, perché contadini ed operai sono ormai altrove.

Ritengo che la grandezza di Pasolini, oltre alla sua capacità e malleabilità d'esprimersi in svariati settori, riguardi anche la sua acutezza, che gli ha permesso di comprendere la società e di prevedere ed esprimere delle questioni che tuttora risultano attuali.

Appunti

[1] Tutto ciò è riscontrabile nella scena in cui il padre è costretto a letto, a causa della sua momentanea malattia, e Odetta gli esprime il suo amore. Tra di loro si insinua la presenza dell'ospite. Ma ricordo anche la scena che si svolge in giardino, quando Paolo e l'ospite sono seduti e Odetta scatta ad entrambi delle foto, che, successivamente, osserva in maniera quasi maniacale.

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- 2019 -
MONSTRUM is published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society
(https://www.monstrum-society.ca/)

Suburban Ghost Story: Pre-feminist Self-writing Practices and the Gothic in *Must Read After My Death*

Papagena Robbins

Allis's voice aches to be heard even years after her passing. She calls out desperately to a future listener. A listener who might be able to understand the chaos of her mid-twentieth century middle-class suburban American life more clearly than she could at the time. The moments of her anguish are now long past; the historical eras she lived through, her body, and her spirit are no longer present. And yet they resurface cinematically as a burning call to the present—she, too, was once immersed in life with the knowledge that one day it would all be over. Her voice haunts the home movie images of familial bliss that served during her life to conceal her suffering.

Morgan Dews's experimental documentary, *Must Read After My Death* (2009)[1] brings together three of the most fascinating currents in turn-of-the-millennium nonfiction filmmaking: audiovisual self-writing practices, sometimes called first-person or auto- documentary; gothic interventions into the documentary tradition, or "gothumentary";[2] and archive-based

Papagena Robbins, PhD, is a film and critical theory scholar, film festival curator, and university/college educator based in Montreal. She has theorized and created multiple film programs around the margins of documentary film expression, such as hybrid-documentary, gothic documentary, and essay film. She recently finished a lengthy study on urban archive-based filmmaking in the 21st century, in which she investigated the historiographical potential of the "city symphony in reverse". She teaches in the Humanities department at Dawson College and in the Writing Centre at McGill University in Montreal.

filmmaking, also referred to as compilation or found footage. Like *Must Read*, films such as *Tarnation* (Jonathan Caouette, 2003), *Capturing the Friedmans* (Andrew Jerecki, 2003), *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, 2005), *51 Birch Street* (Doug Block, 2005), *Photographic Memory* (Ross McElwee, 2011), *Our Nixon* (Penny Lane, 2013), and much of Alan Berliner's work (*Intimate Stranger* [1991], *Nobody's Business* [1997], and *First Cousin Once Removed* [2013]) have combined home movies, and/or other audio/visual personal archives, with the biographical and/or the autobiographical traditions to provide striking portraits of subjectivities that do not often, and sometimes never otherwise, find their way to the screen. The notion that home movies are capable of providing an archive of previously un(der)recognized evidence of, not only familial history, but also of "state iconography, and consumer technology" (Zimmerman 1995: ix), has made their (re)use and display for wider audiences relevant to the pursuit of the historiography of marginalized people on a more significant scale. Whereas home movies had once been thought irrelevant to all but the individuals contained within the recordings and, perhaps, their immediate family, over the past three decades cultural researchers, public historians, and filmmakers have found that the amateur archive presents an enormous potential to challenge dominant narrative models, especially around race, sexuality, gender, and class. Such challenges, however, require the interpretation of audio/visual amateur media that can be quite cryptic, often with few supporting materials. What makes *Must Read* distinctive within this context is Dews's incredible access to corroborating audiovisual materials of his subject(s) and his experimental arrangement of a familial/personal archive that employs the Gothic mode to critically expose key epistemological impasses around the auto/biographical, female agency, and the evidentiary mediums themselves. In the era of the ubiquitous selfie, *Must Read* demands that we consider the limits of historicity, gender, and medium in the representation of the (female) self.

The film proceeds chronologically to tell the story of one decade, 1961-70, in Allis's, her husband Charley's, and their four children's lives. Upon her death, Allis left to her family 50 hours of Dictaphone diaries and audio letters, some of which include the voices of the whole family; 201 home movies; hundreds of pages of written documents; and numerous family photographs. Filmmaker, Morgan Dews, Allis's grandson, composed *Must Read* entirely from Allis's personal archive, an archive that was largely unknown to the family before she passed away. The only additions Dews makes to the silent home movies and confessional audio recordings are sparse text to convey context overlaid upon the images, and an instrumental soundtrack inserted

beneath and between the collage of the family's archival audio recordings, which make up the film's only other narration.

Exploiting the indexical, emotional, uncanny and even figurative capacities of the recorded voice along with the more symbolic capacities of the photographic and moving image, *Must Read* reflects on the contradictions and confinements of female subjectivity in an era of profound, yet often obscured, patriarchal oppression. *Must Read* is a unique hybrid of the auto/biography (self-life-writing that incorporates a narrative of the life of another), the auto*thanato*graphy (self-death-writing, providing an account of one's death), and the American Gothic modes. These narrative strategies are conveyed through a deceptively simple, but no less perceptive, use of several distinct media—here, photographic images, home movie footage, personal diary recordings, and recorded correspondence—arranged into an experimental documentary film. Through juxtaposition, the various audiovisual media here carry an uncanny effect, like multiple "voices" speaking for (and against) one subject, in contrast to the singular voice speaking for oneself, or for another, that is emblematic of the written tradition of life writing. Dews plays up the inherent uncanniness of various intermedial texts as they would be in the Gothic narrative.

Though Allis's story as represented in the film ends thirty years before her actual physical death, the "Death" evoked in the title (along with many other uncanny moments in the film) is a powerful semiotic agent that guides how we place the film within more conventional narrative discourses and traditions. Moreover, the film avoids pathologizing its subject by complicating the pervasive tendency towards imprisonment and hystericization of women within mid-century American middle-class narratives. Rather, a feminist critique emerges from its hybrid narrative strategy that shines a light on some of the most fundamental roadblocks to expression for self-writers in general, and for female self-writers in particular, which will be elaborated presently.

The hybrid representational strategy of auto/biography typically concerns texts that are autobiographical first and foremost, such that the author of the finished text seeks primarily to represent him/herself but acknowledges the need to represent others simultaneously in order to achieve such a self-representation. *Must Read* is no less a hybrid of the two forms—autobiography and biography—but reverses this strategy: the self-writing, or in this case, self-recording, is arranged to convey its author by another person who remains opaque within the narrative. The other family members speak to each other in the audio recordings, but only Allis speaks to "us"; that is, only she uses this aural medium as a form of self-writing. A text in which one subject has

initiated self-writing, but another—here, Allis's grandson, Morgan Dews—has had to take over the representation of this material to tell the self-writer's story provokes a different interpretive framework, especially after the death of the subject of representation. An interpretive framework more akin to the auto*thanato*graphy rather than the auto*bio*graphy. In the case of *Must Read*, I argue that the specter of death evokes particular narrative traditions and philosophical issues that influence the interpretation of Allis's self-writing and contribute to a feminist discourse on self-representation.

In her feminist theory of women's self-representation, *Autobiographics* (1994), Leigh Gilmore draws our attention to the contradiction inherent in the perception that "woman's writing" is "homelier" than "men's writing," given the wholly *uncanny* position of female subjectivity within the male-generated, and still dominated, autobiographical genre (1994: 2). She goes on to connect the exclusion of women in the development of autobiography to the male exclusive forms of identity and authority inscribed within the tradition, insisting that these manners of representation are inaccessible to, and unsuitable for, women. The autobiographical, as it has been thought and practiced by men, has rarely drawn upon and produced subjects whose authority was compromised significantly by their social/cultural environment—a commonality among female self-writers. According to Gilmore, the conventions of the genre have grown up instead around particular (white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied) subjectivities that could be considered stable, whole, and self-possessed within the dominant cultural frameworks of the "civilized" world. Gilmore argues that the autobiographical form has relied upon and reinforced a formula of self-writing in which the male subjectivity is strengthened within patriarchal systems at the expense of women; at its root, men reading stories solely of other men's lives makes women's self-expression ultimately incomprehensible, and even threatening (Gilmore 1994: 2).

In her book, *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography* (1995), Jeanne Perreault argues that discourses of selfhood are inextricable from the effort to build feminist communities, while at the same time these abilities to write the self are dependent on the existence of a feminist "we": "The processes that the texts of self-writing enact are not solitary or sovereign, and any discussion of a feminist 'I' must take into account the register of 'we,' a contested zone that resists definition but asserts its own existence" (5). Allis is on the crux of a feminist mode of being as she pursues her self-inscription practice in order to identify and understand herself as a woman, but without the social and narrative support of a feminist community, she relapses into moments of

resignation to the prescribed feminine role. Furthermore, her lack of a feminist "we" at the time she creates these documents keeps her self-inscription diaristic or confessional, and does not function as a communication to, with, or from the feminist "we" within her lifetime. Her missives may be redeemed, however, for our current feminist "we" by bringing them to bear on the theory and historiography of female self-writing and feminism.

The subgenre of auto*thanato*graphy (literally, self-death-writing) may at first appear inappropriate to a text in which the self-writer is some 30 years away from a literal physical death, but I argue that death in its metaphoric and metonymic manifestations provide the guiding hermeneutic to *Must Read*. Metaphoric, given the repeated evocation of subtle, yet nonetheless present, Gothic tropes related to the simultaneity of death, life, and the undead, as well as the sense that the period recounted represents a kind of living death for Allis. Metonymic, because, though the various media utilized in the film's assembly were created by living, not dying, people, the whole impetus for its construction into the filmic text through which we experience these lives is inexorably linked to the death of the original material's creator, Allis, who clearly intended her dispatches to be "read" *after* her death. In this way, she herself packages her record as a form of speaking from a grave that she has literally not yet met, but figuratively into which she feels herself *already interred*. Thus, she is always already configured in relation to death from the start of the film.

While Allis's story does not contain all of the typical elements of the autothanatography that Susanna Egan outlines in *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (1999)—that is, the material presented in *Must Read* was not created with the intention of documenting physical deterioration and death itself—there are many points of contact between *Must Read* and this life/death writing sub-genre. The necessity that another individual composes, edits, and submits the work of the self-writer after their demise makes *Must Read* closer structurally and theoretically to autothanatography than to any other mode of self-representation. Moreover, Allis's decision to share, exhibit or make public upon her death the material presented in the film arguably stems from a similar end-of-life impulse, the crucial impulse which brings about the autothanatography, as Egan theorizes it: the need to take charge of one's story in a manner of one's own choosing. Allis's decision to reveal her life, or aspects of her life, that are in conflict with dominant social and cultural mores implies that she felt the motivation that autothanographers share in their *being-towards-death* states: "They want to name their fear and helplessness,

their exact experiences of pain and degeneration, even their failures of character and charm. Crashing the barriers of tradition and taboo becomes for many of them a profoundly personal need" (Egan 1999: 196). The prospect of death's approach provides some autothanatographers with the need to "come clean," to utilize "this ultimate crisis of disconnection to reconnect" (Egan 1999: 197) and allows them the freedom to do so without experiencing possible negative repercussions from their society and those they love. It is also the last chance for "setting records straight, clearing old scores, avoiding misinterpretation," thus influencing how the future will look upon the past (Egan 1999: 196).

Egan emphasizes agreement among autothanatography theorists that Heidegger's notion of "'being-toward-death' [sic] is the only serious form of living" (Egan 1999: 199). This statement privileges autothanatographical stories for their unique perspectives on life gained through a close relationship with death: "Full awareness of mortality, from which most of us protect ourselves most of the time, generates a fullness of being to which these texts bear witness again and again" (Egan 1999: 199). Though Egan focuses on "being-toward-death" as an existential consequence of terminal illness, or the approach of a literal death scene, *Must Read* offers up the possibility of exploring this relationship of one's own life to death as it occurs in the midst of life (as it had originally been theorized). Martin Heidegger created the concept of being-towards-death to play a crucial part in his major work on human ontology, *Being and Time* (1927). He theorizes the concept as a type of comportment gained through the moments of *angst* (more commonly, anxiety) that allow people, what he calls *Dasein*,[3] to experience their own mortality, leading to a deeper relationship to life from their acknowledgement of death, or more precisely, their acknowledgement of their own finitude, the finiteness of being. However, such moments of *angst* should not stem from the anticipation of one's immanent death, according to Heidegger. These moments are essential to living a meaningful life throughout one's lifetime.

Angst for Heidegger is the experience of realizing one's own mortality. A being-towards-death state produces anxiety in *Dasein* because of the realization of *the possibility of the impossibility of existing* in the midst of existence. In acknowledging one's own existence as a limited phenomenon, one realizes that the possibilities of living one's own life are also limited, which is the basis for the anxiety of being-towards-death. How one lives one's own life becomes an issue in the moment one conceives of his/her own possible non-existence. Heidegger warns, however, that "Anxiety in the face of death must not be confused with fear in the face of one's demise" (1962: 295). Thus, while

"*Death is something that stands before us—something impending*" (emphasis in the original, Heidegger 1962: 294), being-towards-death is the individual's relationship to herself in the face of her own negation, no matter when it may occur.

Since psychoanalysis and narrative theory require the concept of *the uncanny* to do significantly more work than the commonly used term, which refers to a kind of vague, unsettling feeling, I would like to take a moment to unpack the concept a bit before looking more closely at the film itself. In their simplest definition, *unheimliche* (German), "the uncanny," and *l'inquiétitude étrangeté* (typical French translation) or *extimité* (Jacques Lacan's French translation, in which the intimate and its exterior coincide) convey the gripping sense of uneasiness, anxiety, or even panic that results from an internal estrangement. While psychoanalysis emphasizes how the recognition of the uncanny exposes our relationship to the dichotomies we create between inside and outside, narrative theory emphasizes specific literary tropes that emerge to undermine a totalizing worldview by blending binary oppositions (Dolar 1991: 6), such as, dead/alive (zombies, ghosts), me/you (the double), real/symbolic, animate/inanimate, public/private, and also, inside/outside. Both the psychoanalytic and narrative discourses evoke the uncanny to point to the need to understand the permeability of our perceptual constructs, for good or for ill. In this way, "the uncanny" acts as a critical concept through which, as Mladen Dolar explains, "[t]he status both of the subject and of 'objective reality' is … put into question," and "the most intimate interiority coincides with the exterior and becomes threatening, provoking horror and anxiety" (1991: 6). In *Must Read*, the very form of the film exhibits this definition of the uncanny: vocalized subjective statements of the self are coupled with photographic imagery of predominately exterior images, ostensibly made to satisfy the demands of the outside world.

The film opens with Allis's refutation of the identity of "housewife," an identity the home movie images seem to convey without impediment throughout the film. She pleads: "I love my children. I want to be a good mother to them. But I'm not a person to sit around and sew and decorate and paint and do things like that. [*Impassioned*] I'm NOT a housewife. I have never BEEN a housewife." (Figures 1-3) As she speaks, we see Super8 home movie footage of a child's outdoor birthday party—what might be thought of as the pinnacle of the traditional housewife's existence—and it is here that we find our bodily signifier for the voice: Allis proudly offering a large homemade cake to the camera in slow motion. "Sew and decorate and paint" is pronounced just as the cake comes into full view.


But I'm not a person to sit around


and sew and decorate,


I am not a housewife.

Figures 1-3

These words and images begin a film in which the voice maintains a continuous tension with the images that coincide with it. The images (misleadingly) convey a typical 1960's suburban middle class white American family, while the voices of all the family members that narrate the film—and especially Allis's—betray how readily subject to stereotypical judgment our visual interpretations are at every turn. In fact, *Must Read*'s voice and image are often so disjointed that the audience is forced to recognize their incongruity; rather than experiencing the voice and image as supportive of the same narrative as we normal would when watching a documentary film, in *Must Read*, we must go between what we see and what we hear as two very different stories unfold around this family. On the one hand, the audio stream provides access to a perspective that issues from the different subjects' verbal expressions. On the other hand, how we interpret the visual stream connects the family's enunciations of identity to larger narrative systems, such as discourses around gender, family, class, nation, psychoanalysis, and the law. The disjunction between content in the audio and in the visual tracks suggests the audience consider an allegorical relationship between the two. Connections between the audio and visual are not always immediate, and never quite certain, in *Must Read*; instead voices and images yoke uncomfortably together, each haunting and holding in tension the knowledge claims the other presents.

Through Allis's initial declaration, we see that she is struggling to find a way to represent herself to herself, and possibly to others, such that she may be able to do some kind of justice to the kind of woman she understands herself to be. As we look at the home movie images, we are compelled to ask: Who is this woman if not a housewife? Were there any other ways of designating a married woman who stays home with four children in the sixties? What does it mean to renounce this role, even as you perform it? Is she in bad faith, or trapped in a world that provides no alternative narratives to her ostensible identity (housewife) through which she could see herself as an agent of her own existence? How do we interpret this apparent contradiction between the visual and verbal semiotic conclusions? They both come to us through highly indexical mediums, and yet from the very beginning Allis's declarations suggest that we must privilege one over the other, if only partially. If, for example, I privilege the visual, I see Allis as "a housewife," but her claim that she is not, tells me she is unhappy in that role, or unsuccessful in it—and thus *she* becomes the pathology that creates the contradiction in my ability to interpret. If I privilege the vocal, I see Allis as a caged, female subject, struggling to live authentically in a world where she is, quite literally, *seen* to have but one role she can occupy—here, *the social order* is

the pathology. The editorial choice Dews makes when he opens the film with Allis's denial of the "housewife" identity crucially positions his primary (female) subject in an infelicitous relationship with the (Lacanian) gaze, the visible symbolic order.[4] Beginning the film in this way asks the audience both to recall discourses related to feminism and women in film, as well as to consider how the different layers of indexical material interact together.

Allis's voice is clearly at odds with its accompanied image throughout the film in ways that provide us with moments of reflexivity on the representational strategies at work to capture individual and familial life. Often, indexical documents indict each other concerning the limits of their particular modes of indexicality. For instance, when the vocal track reveals the complexity of characters that appear so simple and unproblematic in the visual record, we get the implicit sense of the image as a type of deception. In particular, the home movie and the family photograph come into question since these are the preferred mediums (and their use, the preferred strategy) for memorializing a family's history. Nancy K. Miller, writing about memoirs and mourning, offers some motivation for the challenge *Must Read* presents to our common methods of familial memorialization:

> We tend to remember our childhood generically as if it were a home movie—birthdays, summer vacations, snowstorms. Video versions of domestic pastoral. The art of the memoir, we could say, extending the metaphor, entails reediting the movie, putting the pastoral up against history (1999: 51).

We remember our children and our own childhoods primarily through these means, which, in the era represented in *Must Read*, frequently had no synchronized soundtrack. These images, consciously or unconsciously, represent only the good times, *displaying* the integrity of the family unit, but do not and cannot convey an entirely accurate picture of the past—for this, as Miller points out, another layer of narrative must be added, one that provides the depth of time, place, and consciousness.

Super8 cameras were aggressively marketed towards women in the 1950s. The film technology was to be incorporated into familial life by "the woman of the house" as an extension of her domestic duties. The role of family documentarian and the home movie camera were, at the time, thought by many to be as important to the security of the nuclear family as "bomb shelters for civil defense—insurance against the insecurities of the future" (Zimmerman 1995: 134). While "[h]ome movies conscripted 'togetherness,'

family harmony, children, and travel into a performance of familialism," a performance that "promoted the bourgeois nuclear family as the only social structure available for the expression of common, shared experiences that could shore one up against alienation and isolation" (Zimmerman 1995: 133), by contrast, audio recordings did not have the same social and cultural implications as the home movie and they permitted a more reflective and open representation of the family through the individual. Unlike the reel-to-reel audio recording technology introduced in the late 1940s, which was marketed similarly to the Super8 home movie camera as a technology that would facilitate the production of "an acoustic family album" (Bijsterveld and Jacobs 2009: 26), the Dictaphone, or "Voice Writer," that is Allis's primary vocal recording device, was marketed as an office supply, meant to compete with or complement the typewriter to aid in letter writing or note-taking (Morton 2000: 95). Intended for a single listener, the Dictaphone replicates the intimacy of the epistolary form, whereas the Super8, used as a memorialization device, became a means of performing the family for the social gaze. Allis takes home recording technology (mostly audio) into her own hands, as it were, to subvert the expectations that her record of events will serve the grand narratives with which she is clearly at odds. And, through his dissonant editing, Dews, for his part, reinforces his grandmother's refusal to remain stuck as an object of this gaze.

For instance, in one sequence, Allis exclaims that she "stopped entertaining because after every dinner party, there was a fight." She elaborates, "I hadn't said the right thing, or I hadn't done the right thing, or I had sat too long at the table, or something was wrong." As she speaks, the photographs of Allis dressed in different cocktail attire, dancing and conversing happily with her party guests, remind the viewer to think more critically about the ability of the photographic image to tell the whole story. Allis informs us of her husband Charley's excessive drinking. We hear an audio clip in which Charley belligerently demands that Allis "join the party," and in the next breath makes an advance on another woman. Something is wrong here, but we cannot come to this idea through the visible evidence alone.

If in the above instance the imagery can be held up as deceptive, there are other ways that the visual record in *Must Read* proves to hold personal accounts in check. When the stories the family members record need to be brought into question, the visual track is employed to disrupt the face value of the testimony provided. The visual commentary does not function to contradict the claims of the speaking subject so much as to complicate the

speaker's ability to fully comprehend his/her contingency within a larger social/historical framework. For example, towards the end of the film, we encounter Allis's sobbing voice, wondering what went wrong with the family. After recounting her therapist, Dr. Lenn's assessment that all has gone to hell, she cries, "I WANT OUT! … If the kids are going through this anguish and this unhappiness, and this is all that lies ahead for them, God, I—I can understand people who kill their children rather than have them live like this. I just don't have the courage to do it, just end it all." The image accompanying these words is an extremely slow motion shot of the backs of a woman and two children behind her wading out away from the camera in a natural body of water. (Figure 4) The image of a woman leisurely taking her children out to sea connects Allis's desperation with the notorious occurrences of women with little potential to change their circumstances who have chosen infanti- or filicide through drowning. Allis feels alone in this impulse. And yet the visual track makes the audience feel that she is not. She is part of a larger narrative picture, one that contains strong Gothic overtones, even as we comprehend that this home movie footage is not actually a record or reconstructed depiction of filicide. Indeed, it shows a typical day at the beach. Nevertheless, we are unable to ignore the sinister suggestion.

Figure 4

In addition to the use of photography, moving image, and audio recording, text plays an interesting part in this polyvocal, multimedial, familial auto/biography. Through on-screen text the filmmaker presents an exceptionally spare chronological account of the family's life in the 1960s.

Here, the biographical design of the film is indicated through the presentation of a narrative element produced by another person (Dews) not represented in the story, an element which is decidedly restrained in the amount of information it contributes to the story.[5] The consistent use of subtitles for every bit of audio recording used in the film, however, utterly overwhelms the director's meager expositional text. Appearing as though a natural and vital element within the film, these subtitles are often necessary for comprehension due to the slightly distorted audio quality and the emotional speakers' frequently inarticulate speech. Still, there is more to the function of the textual in the film than simply to aid in the identification of verbal signification. The subtitles succeed in projecting an even greater authority onto the voice. By forcing the audience to engage with the voice on two levels of mediation, aurally and visually, and taking the audience's attention away from the imagery to some extent, the subtitle text buttresses the voice, stabilizing its transmission and affirming its significance. The perspective of the narrative is clearly given over to the voices of the family members, specifically to Allis, bringing the audience into the fold, and ultimately emphasizing the autobiographical over the biographical—Allis's narrative, filled with emotional and personal authority, over that of Dews's, which is confined to juxtapositions, transitions, and contextualizing chronologies.

Allis records her most "unspeakable" thoughts in secret for the majority of the film, seemingly somewhere in the depths of her suburban home. Where is she? In the basement? The attic? The bathroom? Where can she find the space to speak her truth? She appears trapped within the family, her gender, the historical period, and this house. She is submerged deep within a faulty structure. Wherever she has had to seclude herself in order to be able to express herself would be best represented by the figure of an attic in which a woman has been cloistered. The attic does not appear, but it is felt throughout the film. The feeling of claustrophobia, doom, and desperation that such a cloistering invokes in the imagination is the closest analogy that comes to mind when conjuring Allis's bodily and spatial presence through her voice. Her voice emerges from a place on the brink of death, even an undead, purgatorial place, which contributes one of many uncanny elements to this strange, hybrid, American Gothic narrative. Gubar and Gilbert's 1979 study of the Gothic narrative's focus on the trope of the "madwoman in the attic" (also the book's title) does not offer an exact parallel with Dews's domestically dislocated positioning of Allis, but the trope itself is a powerful element of the Gothic's feminism, presenting a female character whose voice is so buried in the architecture and narrative (often under layers of narratives told by others)

that she exists in the main narrative as a kind of ghost. The classic example of the trope is, of course, Bertha in *Jane Eyre*.[6] Late in the film, we come to discover, through Allis's voice-over, that many of the tapes in which she alone is speaking, in which she intensely confides all her secrets to the recording apparatus, were in fact recorded in her car, a location that is both an inside and an outside space. (Figure 5) Her spatial and bodily presence then shift to a place where borders have been dissolved and she floats freely in her cage through the suburban backwaters. The liminal outside/inside space of the car further represents an uncanny type of freedom in which the domestic sphere is both escaped and extended.

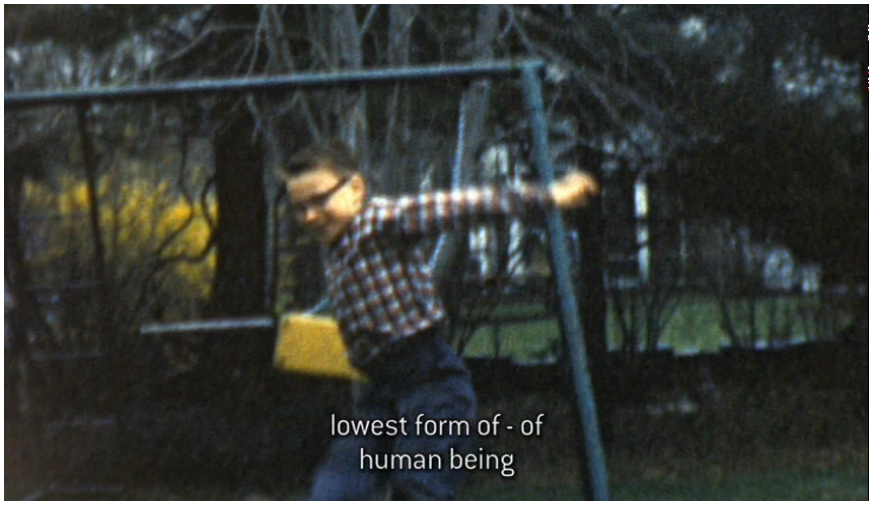
Figure 5

In one sequence, an argument between one of the children, Bruce, and his father, Charley, about the family's budget is recorded. Young Bruce identifies Charley's expenditure on "vices" as a major drain on the family budget and asks that he cut it down by one quarter. Bruce screams that he is not being heard, as does Allis. Charley shouts them both down, asserting his absolute authority within the house. This scene is carried out over a slow pan across an unpopulated living room decorated for Christmas. We are inside but the voices in conflict are not properly inhabiting the space of the interior of the home represented by the photographs and Super8 moving-images because we cannot find a visual referent for the impassioned voices. Moreover, the coziness of Christmas has been disrupted by the vocal presence of the family in turmoil. What conveys the uncanny feeling here is the coincidence of inside

and outside, absence and presence, in an empty room full of voices. The vocal track is simultaneously within the picture, and the space it represents, as well as outside of it. These voices and their concerns coincide with the image—that is, we attribute the space we see to them—and yet there is nothing to indicate their co-temporality. Together, voice and image in this sequence evoke an uncanny flicker of human existence in space and time.

Dolar makes the case that the phenomenon of uncanny eruptions in narrative can be historically situated as a crisis in (or even a complement to) modernity, resulting from the Enlightenment's attempt to rid civilization of structures that previously dealt with paradoxes such as the reconciliation of the principle on non-contradiction (1991: 7). That is, in formal logic, it is not possible to say that something is both one thing and its opposite at the same time ($A = B$ and $A \neq B$, simultaneously). However, in art, as with the Gothic uncanny, it is possible. Significantly, he points to the proliferation of uncanny figures, "[g]hosts, vampires, monsters, the undead dead," as "the surprising counterpart" to Kant's establishment of transcendental subjectivity (Dolar 1991: 7). Rationalism has stripped the individual of its messy, empirical, irrational, castrated, and desiring subjectivities for all practical and political purposes, and these aspects of life struggle for expression as a result. The two discourses that attempt to bring these dimensions back into subjectivity are the Gothic tradition and psychoanalysis.[7]

There are moments in *Must Read* when Allis's unconscious is positioned as some kind of evil twin, or double self, haunting her, possessing her even, in an attempt to corrupt and destroy the "good," "pure," and "whole" other members of the family, the father, Charley, and their children. After her 14 year-old son, Bruce, is committed to a psychiatric institution, Allis cries into the Dictaphone as she recounts her and her son's psychiatrist's assessment that she had intentionally and vengefully turned her son, Douglas, against his father: "Dr. Lenn today made me sound like the lowest form of, of human being that I can imagine. He said that I have damaged my whole family, that I would have killed myself rather than do it consciously, but that unconsciously I had done it." The image we see as she says these words is of her son innocently, yet perilously, jumping and playing (Figures 6-7). Here, instead of putting some responsibility on the more privileged members of the system, Dr. Lenn uses the psychoanalytic discourse of the period to convince Allis that she is not in control of her actions, nor does she know her own mind, and yet somehow, she is still paradoxically responsible for all that happens around her. Dr. Lenn plants the seed in her that her dirty, scheming unconscious mind is undermining her and her family's lives.



Figures 6 & 7

At another point in the film, we hear the voice of a male counselor of some sort (a departure from the family-only vocal narration that dominates the film) promoting the notion that in order to be a "good" wife/mother, a woman must "interpret the leadership" of her husband to the children, presumably through overt obedience to him. We then hear Allis recounting her visit to Dr. Lenn during which time he has told her to be submissive to her husband whether she believes he is right or wrong. Though at many other times in the film she passionately disagrees with such suppression of her

agency, here, she seems relieved at this advice, as though the burden of thought has been taken off her shoulders. Perhaps she is tired of fighting, and to accept her subjectivity as a pathology—even remarking that she thinks she has been in a "more serious psychological condition than she realized"—allows her to put down the fight. To be sure, she seems happy at the prospect of being dispossessed of the demonic, disobedient woman who threatens to destroy the family. This eradication of her "evil" double, and the religiousness with which she visits the enigmatic authority, Dr. Lenn, makes her psychoanalytic treatment appear more like an exorcism than a rational, voluntary, and participatory adult therapy.

The visual accompaniment to this sequence works to undermine Allis's newfound peace, which, after all, has come through her acquiescence to the patriarchal order. For over two minutes, as Allis affirms her commitment to inhabiting her "better" self, rambles about all of the appointments the family has with Dr. Lenn, and expresses how content she is with his suggestions, we see footage of highways cut into other highways, as if we are aimlessly hurrying to get nowhere. The view from the vehicle is almost too modern—there are too many overpasses, big shiny 1950s/60s era cars, factories, power lines, bridges—in short, nothing to look at but signs of brute, ugly, masculine technological "progress" (Figures 8-10, this page and next). We may suppose that Allis is on the run, or at least her "fugitive self" is.[8] Choosing to follow this winding road draws her into an existential void that makes us wonder how it might be possible for Allis to find her way back to herself with the kind of "treatment" she is receiving. The juxtaposition of imagery and voice suggests that Allis has only gone deeper into the labyrinth.

Figures 8-10

How can she tell us who she is if she accepts Dr. Lenn's advice that she make her sole purpose in life to be only for others? If our protagonist were inhabiting the classic "hero's journey," such a loss of autonomy or identity would appear as a temporary setback within the overall quest for liberation and enlightenment. But the chances for such an exultant outcome are slim to none within the social/cultural forces that circumscribe Allis. The Gothic narrative makes significant use of this quest-for-self trope as well, usually leaving its protagonists frazzled and bereft of solutions. In the female Gothic, we also find a setback such as this before the heroine finds her "true" path, which often finds her in a reconstituted domestic arrangement—better than before, but still stuck. Is this outcome the best we can hope for? In other parts

of the film, both before and after this point, Allis is as self-possessed and clear about her values as they come. In one scene, she identifies herself unhesitatingly as a non-conformist: "I think it is a wrong civilization or a wrong culture that requires you to conform in order to do anything," she asserts. In another scene, she refuses to have her son committed to a psychiatric institution upon the recommendation of his psychiatrists because she does not want to give them that kind of authority over her son. While speaking about her son's issues regarding doctors and school, she voices the desire to take the children into the mountains to let them grow up away from the civilization she believes is poisoning them. She is defiant at many moments, but then later reprimands herself for causing problems in the house. A common trope in the American Gothic tradition, the "fugitive self" is D.H. Lawrence's term for denoting that part of the persona in the American literary character that comes roaring out of the unconscious as a response to oppressive forces: "Lawrence's 'fugitive,' … returns to the house of the American ideal persistently; it has a deeply familiar but thrown-off story, a history, that insists upon being told, however indirectly" (Savoy 2002: 171). To see Allis's moments of defiance and rage, and intermittent contrition within and against a system that traps her as a fugitive helps to position Allis's oscillation between compliant and uncompromising within the narrative, not as a sign of a sick or dangerous individual, but as a symptom of the restrictive and contradictory culture she attempts to inhabit. Isn't this "fugitive self," of which Dr. Lenn attempts to rid Allis, the very self that fights for her own "I" and allows her to speak to us as a subject?

As Eric Savoy contends, the American Gothic "embodies and gives voice to the dark nightmare that is the underside of 'the American dream'" (2002: 167). Nevertheless, it is important not to essentialize by dividing dream and nightmare into binary oppositions, Savoy warns; but rather, it is better to understand how they function in their mutual dependence (2002: 167). *Must Read* is particularly adept at creating this incontrovertible dialectic between dream and nightmare. In an exceptionally chilling scene, one of the sons, Bruce, yells at his father for blaming Allis for the children's disobedience. Bruce accuses Charley: "You take it out on mom. You say: 'these are your kids. You brought them up wrong.'" Charley protests and denies the accusation. Allis interjects affirming that he had said it that very evening. Charley warns the group sternly: "I would suggest a very different approach here." Bruce bursts out: "NO! YOU'RE gonna tell the truth!" Charley says to Allis: "You're going to destroy this family, no matter what happens." Bruce passionately defends his mother: "She is not going to destroy the family! She

does not yell! You yell!!" The images throughout the entire argument consist of shaky pans across the fronts of various suburban houses, conveying an eerie sense of the unknown traumas that could be lurking behind any of the doors of these suburban family homes. After Bruce's last outburst, the voices are stopped and the camera slowly, and unstably, makes circles around the front of one house from a fixed viewpoint. This juxtaposition of a lingering and intensifying image with the silence after a domestic disturbance conveys the descent into the hellish alienation that presumably existed, secretly, in the context of the suburban American dream of the 1960s. These are truly haunted houses, made all the more chilling by the non-fiction narrative strategies of auto/biography and documentary employed to depict them.

Tropes that have marked the Gothic since the early nineteenth century in terms of mood or tone include, "claustrophobia, atmospheric gloom, the imminence of violence"; in terms of setting, "the haunted house, the prison, the tomb"; and in terms of plot elements, "the paternal curse and the vengeful ghost" (Savoy 2002: 168). *Must Read* arguably possesses many, if not all, of these markers of the Gothic, while remaining consistent with, though at the margins of, documentary and auto/biographical traditions. None of these traditions are particularly stable here, nor do any of them project a consistent central representational strategy to guide the film. In fact, the film, like Allis seems in search of a proper mode to convey the despair, anger, frustration and longing here. This search for the proper form is endemic to the Gothic narrative and *Must Read* adopts them to unsettle the certainty of the text just as it parallels Allis's struggle to find a voice that resonates. Savoy asserts, "American Gothic is, first and foremost, an innovative and experimental" narrative form already (Savoy 2002: 168). Thus, *Must Read* indeed, as its title urges, requires its audience to *read*, or to interpret, its hybrid narrative development using a multitude of discursive, textual, and media literacy strategies. This dissolution of the boundaries of its rhetorical strategies further adds to the uncanniness of the film by placing the viewer in the position of having to rely on unstable architecture to make meaning.

Savoy quotes Leslie Fiedler's claim in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) that "the whole tradition of the Gothic might best be grasped as 'a pathological symptom rather than a proper literary movement'" (Savoy 2002: 168). If Gothic storytelling is characterized by its ability to be symptomatic of a culture's pathologies, then there is something of the actual, or real, fighting for its expression in Gothic narratives that is capable of exhibiting itself despite the efforts of the dominant order to repress such dissenting, or unharmonious, elements. Thus, it should not appear too curious that non-

fiction forms which rely on their ability to convey a "true" historical reality may also find affinities with Gothic patterns, which have done the work of structuring troubling "pathological symptoms" in tales of warning for centuries. In fact, Savoy himself emphasizes the *historiographic* quality of the Gothic, uniquely adapting itself to "circle around themes and events that are rarely susceptible to direct exposition" (Savoy 2002: 168-9). By combining the Gothic and the auto/biographical, *Must Read* asks us to pay attention to the symptomatic in self-writing and biography as they attempt to relay subjective and "objective" accounts, respectively, of contingent beings.[9]

The primary symptom that *Must Read* illuminates is that of the female subject who attempts to realize herself within the context of powerful and oppressive technologies of the self. In the second half of the film, Allis refers often to her psychiatrist, Dr. Lenn's patriarchal advice, although she does not seem to recognize it as such. "I don't know what to do. Dr. Lenn says that when a man marries, he wants a woman with a capital W. He wants a woman to be pretty and be a hostess, and bolster his ego, and keep a calm happy house for him, and I've done a rotten, stinking job of that! And I'm not a woman with a capital W," Allis sobs. She is deeply shamed by her psychiatrist. There is a strong sense that she believes she has sinned in her "failure" to be this *Woman with a capital W*. Earlier, Allis wonders why other people's expectations of her personality have changed so radically. "I must have been a very nasty little girl," she says, "'cause I wouldn't take any guff from anybody. And yet, they all liked me, and they all loved me. So I don't quite see what's happened since then. I guess people don't like that kind of a person, really" (Figure 11). And in another scene, Allis remarks that the basic problem between herself and Charley is that they have different values, but "according to Dr. Lenn, Charley HAS to live by his values. My values are more permissive." In moments like these, when Allis must reflect on the terms of her own subjectivity—representing it to herself, representing it to others—the autobiographical form comes into question as a possible mode of representation for women whose "I"s have been undermined by a social structure that makes every effort to erase their agency.

Figure 11

"I can't recognize my own voice on this machine of yours," Allis says in the beginning of the film. "It sounds entirely strange and very Hepburnish or something like that." Though the estrangement we feel at hearing our own recorded voices is a common phenomenon, her words take on a symbolic meaning in relation to the existential crisis we witness her experiencing throughout the film. She points out that the apparatus, the Dictaphone, is "yours," referring to her husband, Charley. Not only is she unable to recognize herself by her own recorded voice, to hear herself as she perceives herself, but the very device through which she could potentially come to know herself better is felt to be alien to her as it is owned by another person, someone more privileged than she—she who cannot even own the technology of her self-representation. Furthermore, this "Hepburnish" quality she refers to, a shaky quality in the voice, is a possible indication of uneasiness in the face of an attempt at self-representation with such alien(ating) tools.

In her book *Technologies of Gender* (1987), Teresa de Lauretis evokes a similar conceptualization of "Woman with a capital letter," which she defines as a flat amalgamation of the varied, but limited, representations of patriarchal femininity. But for de Lauretis the saliency of creating this notion of "Woman with a capital letter" is to be able to negotiate one's difference from it and find a voice of one's own (1987: 9-10). Allis is torn throughout the film between the imperative to inhabit this identity of *Woman with a capital W*, and her own strong inclination to reject it. Allis's self-reproach around the inability to inhabit this idealized identity is constructed within the narrative as a betrayal to the dynamic agency and multifaceted identity Allis proclaims at the start of the

film, when she insists that she is "not a housewife." As such, the studied introspection of this self-reproach is a shocking reversal in the narrative, thwarting Allis-as-protagonist's progress toward pursuing a subjective position from which to tell her own unique story, and certainly differentiating her self-inscription from the heroic, largely male tradition of the autobiographical.

Allis performs the disabling effects of attempting to think, to speak, and to write oneself as a woman in an extremely polarized, gendered culture. As someone who feels she cannot occupy the position of (what she and others in her cultural environment believe to be) the only legitimate, authentic, female subjectivity for her time—*Woman with a capital W*—Allis cannot assume the proper role of "author" within her text or speech. The irony is that, were Allis to be able to assume this "proper" subject position offered to her by the patriarchal regulating mechanisms around her, she would not be able to think, speak, or write herself with authority in any case since it is a requirement of *Woman with a capital W* to vacate her existential concern in order to be complete in her ability to provide support to others. In fact, the crucial feature of *Woman with a capital W* is that she have *no* existential concern for herself. (In William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* [1930], for instance, the mother refers to herself in the plural because of her children—she refuses a narrative existence apart from her maternal role, even in death.) *Woman with a capital W* is a silent woman. Allis's words then become uncanny once more in the sense that they emerge from a "castrated" subject who has nowhere else to turn for legitimation of her perspective. In these moments, it seems as if the outside world has invaded her striving sense of self and dismantled it. She is trapped in language, neither able to say "I" and mean it, nor to occupy the structures available for her to express the status of her double bind. As she speaks these words of failure, her choking voice conjures up a bodily image of a woman bound and gagged, appearing uncannily closer to the "Death" in the title than she physically is at this point in her life. As a subject of representation, Allis cannot inhabit the autobiographical properly, which Gilmore asserts is true for women in general, but instead she is thrust into a newer off-shoot of the genre, a sub-genre that does not seek the representation of whole, comfortable, secure subjects, focusing rather on the fragile beings we are when our mortality looms large—the autothanatography.

The desperation of Allis's captivity, which conveys precisely this Heideggerian *angst*, is captured in a short sequence where she goes from speaking about her previous life of adventure to her present loss of direction and ownership of her life. "Your father is very jealous of my years in Europe, of my first marriage, of my singing, anything pertaining to this," she reveals to

her son. Photographs appear of a young Allis on European streets feeding pigeons, a portrait with another man and a little boy (evidence of a previous marriage), ending with a close-up on her youthful, smiling face that eerily seems to be both a photograph and a slowly moving image simultaneously, as the corners of her mouth turn slightly upward while the whole picture shimmers. The still and moving images combine uncannily to disintegrate the boundaries between stillness and movement. The photograph, as a dead object, is reinfused with life by this delicate movement, punctuating the memory of a more fulfilling existence. Indicating the intensity of her existential crisis, Allis continues: "And I got to the point where I wasn't interested in volunteer work anymore. I didn't want to do it, and I don't want to do it. But neither do I want to just sit around the house and do housework. And, I'm not a bridge-playing female. And, I'm not going out to coffee klatches [German for a social gathering around coffee], so what DO I do with my time?" The following is spoken over moving images of a dog with tiny puppies suckling from her, clearly signifying the type of role from which she envisions herself fleeing. She finishes her thought:

> Now, the next question is, do I have the right to take the time from the family to do anything? I've got to find something at which I'm successful. I have gotten to the point at which I am breaking under not having success. And I cannot point out anywhere in my life, in 55 years, that I have had success.

By going back in time to this period of crisis in Allis's life, there is a strong impression that she truly is aware of her own mortality, her troubles stemming from the desire to live fully in a world that seems to project definite and immutable roles upon her. The crisis ends, as does the film, with the death of her husband, Charley, in 1970, which releases Allis from the most burdensome role of her life—the role of wife. With the death of this role, we are told in text that the audio recordings stop. Allis speaks no more. Charley's cause of death is unclear; all we know is that he was found dead next to his bed two days after (illicitly) reading a letter Allis had written to her psychiatrist detailing her feelings about Charley. Because of the circumstances of Charley's death, we are left to infer that either Allis has found peace and no longer needs to record herself, or that she has become so traumatized by her guilt that she loses her voice completely. Many questions hover in the ending credits, however. Does Allis's release from the captivity of (one of) her feminine role(s) give her the liberty to live fully? Does the cessation of self-writing stop

because she is now at peace, as we hope? Or, perhaps the death of her husband merely created yet another role for her in the patriarchal order—widow. And now, middle-aged and left alone to care for her two remaining children, she must continue living in a male-controlled system that cares little about her self-realization.

"The specter of death hovers over all autobiography, usually unnamed," Egan observes (1999: 19). Autobiography depends upon the possible, probable, and inevitable negation of its subject; it requires this specter to propel the subject into the necessary state of anxiety, and care about individual existence, needed to document oneself for the present and the future. What *Must Read* contributes to autothanatography is a text that represents the haunting of life by death and mortality, which autobiography should be able to display if it is to be entirely candid, but generally declines to make explicit. Thus, "writing towards one's death" could be reconceived within autothanatographic theory to include texts resulting from the moments of life filled with Heiddegerian *angst* in which an existential crisis plays itself out on the self-representational scene.

Dews constructs a narrative in which the mysterious Dr. Lenn is a shadowy figure throughout the film. Each member of the family goes to see him and yet the family continues to degenerate. Since he does not appear in the film, yet exerts considerable influence on the subjects that do, his mystery and power contribute to reading him within the Gothic narrative tradition as a shadowy villain. Victorian Gothic is particularly relevant in this case as its narratives often feature persecuted female protagonists (here Allis fits this role quite well), ineffectual heroes (her husband, Charley, who does not support her attempts at self-actualization) and dastardly villains (the reports around Dr. Lenn indicate a clearly patriarchal agenda and his authority seems to be beyond reproach).

Links between Allis and the Gothic figure of the persecuted woman are rather appropriately applied, given that she is truly trapped in the roles provided by her cultural era. Though not ill, psychologically or physically, she cannot explore life. Death appears near at times when one cannot move, cannot see ahead, and cannot be heard. Her last speech act, "MUST READ AFTER MY DEATH," the words she scrawls across the manila envelope holding her deepest secrets, presumably containing her wish that her audio-recordings and home movies be seen and heard, leads to a film in which she is at once always living and always dead (Figure 12). With this narrative, it truly is as if she has been buried alive in a way that only cinema can present because of the way it comprises both narrative and indexicality. Thus, just as the

confessional voices haunt the familial images in *Must Read*, just as the inevitability of death haunts the being-towards-death, and just as every woman's experiences of injustice within patriarchy haunt gender divisions today, the tension and anxiety produced through the repression of hidden truths haunts the stories we tell about ourselves.

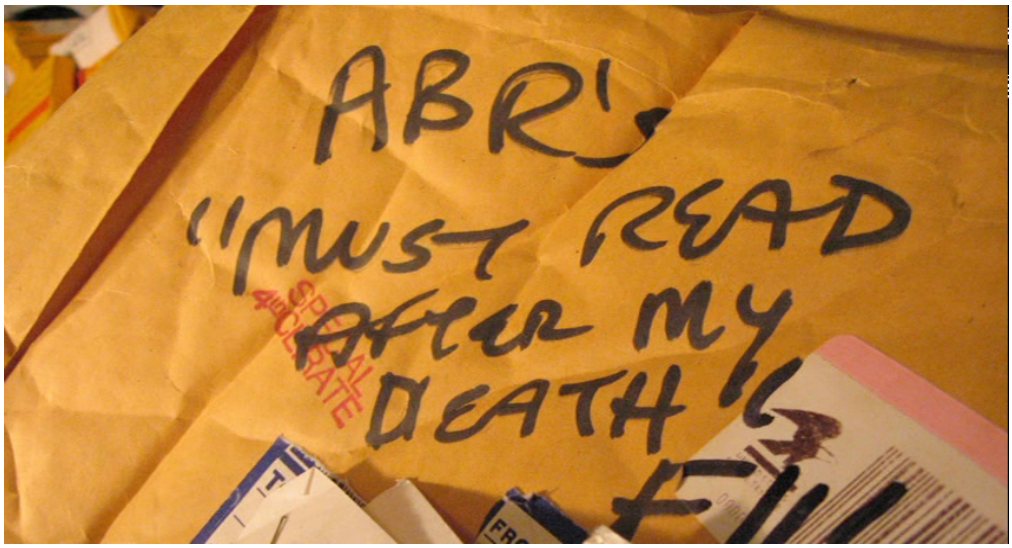


Figure 12

Allis cannot form the coherent, stable "I" needed for autobiographical practices of self-inscription because she has no access to the "we" of a socially acceptable female identity that is not strictly in relation to the roles of wife and/or mother. In her recordings she strives and fails to find this narrative identity from which she can inscribe her subjectivity and tell her own story as stable and heroic, as the autobiographical tradition implicitly mandates. Much like the Gothic figures of the ghost, the persecuted heroine, and the amorphous subjective narrator, Allis is frightfully alone in her quest to communicate a selfhood. We receive her urgent cries as a haunting of the cultural memory of the postwar American suburban middle class. The critique of the pre-feminist paradox around self-writing in *Must Read* provides additional support around the need for continuing feminist self-writing practices, and simultaneously asks the viewer to consider where women are today within that project.

Notes

[1] As of April 2019, *Must Read After My Death* can be watched in its entirety on the filmmaker's personal website: http://morgandews.com/.

[2] For a deeper sense of what is meant by "gothumentary" please see "'Gothumentary': The Gothic Unsettling of Documentary's Rhetoric of Rationality," co-authored by myself and Kristopher Woofter.

[3] Heidegger classifies the kind of beings that we are as *Dasein*, literally "Being-there." The reason he coins a new word for his ontological exploration of what would otherwise be called "man" (at the time) or "human beings" now, Heidegger scholar Richard Polt contends, is to push his reader to consider this subject/object of investigation anew. See, Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction.* 1998. London: UCL Press, 31.

[4] In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1994), Jacques Lacan theorizes the *gaze* as a metaphor for seeing oneself as if inscribed within a picture such that you see yourself as society sees you in relationship to everything around you. The subject's meaningful positioning within this metaphoric picture is based on visual signs that carry social significance, such as age, race, gender, and class.

[5] Given Dews's close relationship to the subjects of representation, that he maintains total restraint from inserting himself into the story is unexpected and shows an intentional decision to keep the focus on the nuclear family, and Allis in particular.

[6] Thanks to Kristopher Woofter for this apt observation.

[7] Though I would love to pursue a richer psychoanalytic analysis of this film, the scope of this paper does not permit me to go into any further depth in this regard.

[8] D.H. Lawrence's "the fugitive self" is explained and examined further below.

[9] In fact, *Must Read* manages this critical combination of the Gothic and the auto/biographical so well that it was instrumental in helping me and my co-author, Kristopher Woofter, to theorize the intersection of the Gothic and documentary traditions in a previous article on the concept of the "gothumentary." (See note #2).

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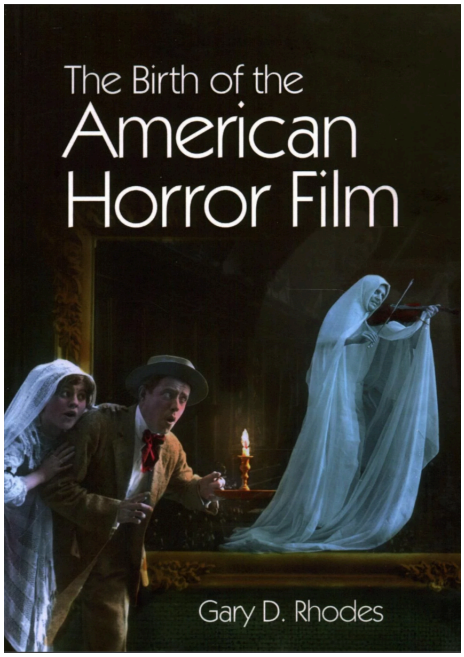

BOOK REVIEW

The Birth of the American Horror Film

By Gary D. Rhodes
Oxford University Press
2018

420pp.

In *The Birth of the American Horror Film*, Gary D. Rhodes takes us on a comprehensive tour of art forms that intersect with the inception of horror cinema. Writing from the stance of "New Film History as defined by such scholars as Thomas Elsaesser," Rhodes further introduces his study as an "[attempt] to understand films as being unique artifacts that feature distinctive aesthetics and formal properties, and that also bear similarities to earlier traditions in literary, theatrical, and visual cultures" (10). Accordingly, Rhodes clearly lays out the scope and range of his topic in his introduction, which is chockfull of information about related contexts for horror film, such as gothic literature, theatre and film genres such as "witches" and "demons." Rhodes also discusses the technical innovations and advances in cameras and projection at key moments in the history of film. He touches on spirit photography, dime museums and Pepper's Ghost, an illusion for the stage that was created by a magic lantern and a reflective pane of glass. As anyone who has read Rhodes's study on Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (McFarland 2006) or Bela Lugosi (BearManor 2018) has come to expect, Rhodes's characteristic strict attention to detail here is both illuminating and informative.

Reading Rhodes is like following all the tributaries of a river. If we were to take up all the directions he points us in via allusions to and citations of other works, we would be reading for years—a testament to the breadth of Rhodes's research. When T.S. Elliot filled his poem *The Waste Land* with innumerable references to history, art, and to current knowledge of the times his poem referenced, he was making the point that we too easily let knowledge slip through our fingers. *The Birth of the American Horror Film* is similar to Elliot's tactics in the sense that Rhodes includes references to countless films

and to neglected art forms, such as published illustrations, as a way of excavating an angle on film history that has been buried. These seemingly obscure references, he suggests, should be part of our education and of our engagement with the world. Rhodes is working to exhume little-known facts that complete a fuller picture of the American horror film's origin story. Rhodes's work is direct, cogent and packed with detail. He celebrates all kinds of media by looking at diverse items such as illustrated song slides and stagecraft. In his chapter entitled "Visual Culture," he discusses paintings, phantasmagoria shows, and photography, analyzing key examples of each medium. These sections of his text are brief but packed with detail. For example, in "Paintings," he discusses how Washington Irving's writings were adapted into paintings by John Quidor, among them *Devil and Tom Walker* (1856) and *Headless Horseman Pursuing Ichabod Crane* (1858), thus giving early form to "horror-themed" art, since the horror genre did not exist in the early period as we now know it.

Rhodes discusses the fact that terminology regarding horror has often been an issue. He uses the term 'horror-themed' to refer to the broad range of media he discusses, adding that these texts represent horror "to the extent that they either tried to frighten or shock viewers, or that they invoked tropes associated with prior horror-themed entertainment, like haunted houses or ghosts, even if these tropes were sometimes used for comedic purposes" (10). The distinction that Ann Radcliffe made between horror as something that appeals to baser (i.e., more embodied) emotions, and terror as closer to the ostensibly more sophisticated sublime is one that has affected the study of the horror genre since its inception. Rhodes's book engages with this binaristic notion and numerous other similar misconceptions skillfully and with precision. It is in this context that he looks at the discourse around the definitive and founding of 'opposing' cinematic styles by the Lumière Brothers, traditionally associated with nonfiction or actuality films that saw cinema as a slice of the real, and Meliès, traditionally associated with the fictional, illusionary and manipulative aspects of cinema as a "trick." The fact that the Lumières' films were seen as just as marvelous a feat as those by Meliès in their time works against a misconception that Rhodes' work goes a long way to correcting. Rhodes suggests that it is also important to highlight the differences between the Lumières and Thomas Edison, who, unlike the former, did not shoot on location. Rhodes thus suggests alternative ways of considering how film history is often conveyed. For example, he refers to French filmmaker Alice Guy-Blaché, possibly the first filmmaker in history to make a narrative film, as 'crucial' to horror-themed film in the years 1913-

1915, though Guy- Blaché's name would hardly ring a bell today for fans or scholars.

Rhodes's text occasionally seems perhaps too focused on minutiae, such as a detailed summary of illustrated song slides. And there is the occasional tendency to list and describe several films which, while useful in service of offering an extensive historical context can delay the main argument for perhaps longer than necessary. Yet, these are hardly major criticisms since this acute attention to detail is also part of the reason Rhodes's text is so deftly shaped into an engrossing survey of horror-themed media. In short, and again, Rhodes's scrupulousness ultimately benefits the patient reader. The impression after reading his text is of someone whose research is wonderfully obsessive, resulting in not only a meticulous survey of a historical upheaval in visual media, but also in a bit of a character study of the painstaking researcher himself—one committed to a rethinking a crucial moment in film history, and the way we represent historical details. When Rhodes gets to film genres, the latter are named for the monsters/concepts the films depict. Among the genres to which chapters are devoted are "Supernatural Creatures," "Mad Scientists" and "Evolution and Devolution." Parallel to his discussion of the films and other media giving "birth" to American horror, Rhodes also refers to important companies such as Esanay, and American Mutoscope and Biograph, careful not to leave out production realities in the formation of early horror cinema. In this way, Rhodes is always juggling multiple and diverse facts about a film such as its genre, production and exhibition to give his readers a broad scope.

The book is divided into three sections and fifteen chapters. Section I is entitled "The Rise of Horror-Themed Cinema," and has chapters on literature, theatre, visual culture and moving pictures. Section II, "Film Genres," includes sections on devils, witches, ghosts, supernatural creatures, death/murder/execution, evolution and devolution, other(s), the powers of the mind, mad scientists, and American literature onscreen. Section III, "Exhibition and Reception," the shortest section of the book, focuses on exhibition and reception.

The feat Rhodes performs in *The Birth of the American Horror Film* is in weaving his thorough and wide-ranging research into a comprehensive study suggesting that while the nascent American horror genre delved feverishly into the depths of the supernatural, it is the non-supernatural that would take precedence. This shift or imbalance may have something to do with that important figure of American Gothic literature, Edgar Allan Poe, who according to Rhodes opted "to explore non-supernatural horror" (11) and

psychological and emotional extremes. As a rigorous historian, Rhodes reminds the reader that "numbers cannot be ignored," asserting that "American horror onscreen has followed in the tradition of [Edison's 1895 realist-spectacular] *The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots*, which featured one of cinema's first (trick) edits, far more than it has [the open supernaturalism of Georges Méliès's 1897] *The Devil's Laboratory*" (8).

The Birth of the American Horror Film is a handsome book filled with reproductions of film stills, photographs and illustrations. Rhodes' work triggers a cumulative effect of wide-ranging associations. One is left with a comprehensive overview of numerous related topics in the service of a measured thesis. I read with interest and pleasure, as Rhodes's prose is remarkably lucid, his reconsiderations important.

— Anne Golden

Gary D. Rhodes, PhD, is Associate Professor of Film and Mass Media at the University of Central Florida's Nicholson School of Communication and Media. He has written and directed a number of commercially-released documentaries. He is also the author and/or editor of 20 books on film history and theory.

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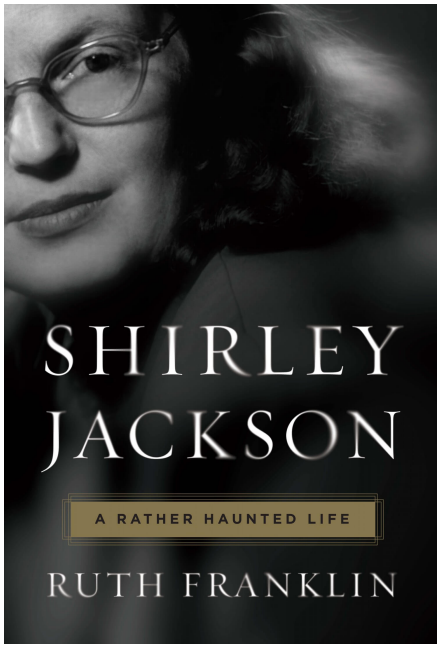

BOOK REVIEW

Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life

By Ruth Franklin
Liveright / W.W. Norton
2016

607pp.

I first read Shirley Jackson at a very young age, having, like so many other kids in the U.S., read "The Lottery" in primary school. It wasn't until my early teens, when I started to be curious about longer-form fiction, that I picked up one of Jackson's novels—I still use that same paperback copy of *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), filled with layer-upon-layer of marginal notes, as my teaching copy of the book. Over the past twenty-odd (very odd) years, I've read it, reread it; taught it, and retaught it many times. But nothing compares to the feeling of reading a work by Shirley Jackson for the first time; that is, to experiencing the unnerving way she creates a substructure of shocking violence, despair, and alienation beneath a surface of mundanity—all rendered in an often savagely comical, ironic mode. I still remember distinctly how acutely Jackson had captured in Eleanor Vance many of my own anxieties as a teen, but particularly the painfully fragile feelings of the outsider who is afraid she'll never belong to anything, or anyone: "They've started without me," she panics, waking up on her second day at Hill House. Eleanor spends the entirety of the novel ensuring herself that she has a place among not only her new friends, but in the world, in reality. She assures herself that she is an individual among others, that she is unique, separate from them, though guaranteed a rightful place among them. In short, Jackson's treatment of Eleanor is a full-scale investigation of the slippages of self into Other against the need for connection, and of the diminishing and disintegration of self into character and spatial doubles that are so endemic to Jackson's Gothic investigation of identity across her body of work.

Published in the 100th year of Shirley Jackson's birth, Ruth Franklin's award-winning biography *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life* is no mere

reconsideration of an overlooked and misrepresented artist, but a full-scale recovery act, and a major contribution to scholarly studies of Jackson's work. What Franklin does here is a feat of character analysis of Jackson herself that does not pander to easy generic play—turning her into a troubled Gothic heroine whose writing is merely a projected call for help. Rather than placing or pitting Jackson herself within and against the genres and modes she experimented with, Franklin takes the time to trace connections between Jackson's emotional and intellectual life and historical moment without essentializing her, or the varied body of work she produced. She avoids reading Jackson's work as though it were the wholesale product of a troubled mind (à la Judy Oppenheimer's 1988 biography, *Private Demons: The Life of Shirley Jackson*), and rather shows Jackson responding critically, often through personal conflict, to the exigencies of her era. The reference to "haunting" in her title thus indicates Franklin's interest in all of the connotations that the word "spectre" brings with it, from the individual and personal to the communal and cultural.

Jackson lived until 1965, and the most compelling aspects of her life, as presented by Franklin, occur from the mid-50s to 1965, encompassing the entire latter nine chapters of Franklin's 18-chapter opus. 1965 was the year Jackson had just gotten back to work after the massive critical and financial success of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962)—a success that sent Jackson even further into a troubled reclusion due to sustained anxiety, resulting in a concomitant decrease in her usually prolific output. The withdrawal into frustration was in part undergirded by anxiety around producing a worthy follow-up to *Castle*, and in part Jackson responding to the shocks imposed upon her by her time. Key among the frustrating variables in Jackson's life that Franklin identifies was the tension between Jackson's domestic role as housewife and mother, and her professional role as a writer of bestsellers. Franklin also anticipates Eric Savoy's (2017) contention that the straightforward humour about these conflicting roles in Jackson's two wildly popular books about her family life—*Life Among the Savages* (1953) and *Raising Demons* (1957)—offer parallels rather than contrasts to the darker undercurrents in Jackson's novels. Critics, especially feminist intellectuals like Betty Friedan (author of the influential *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963), found these two Shirley Jacksons difficult to reconcile. But Franklin's book makes it amply clear that the irreconcilable dichotomy some critics found between the darkly pessimistic proto-feminist of works like *Hangsaman* (1951) and *Castle*, and the comical domestic chronicler of works like *Savages* and *Demons*, was the result of a consistent, often disturbing vision of the

multiple roles women had to take on in the mid-twentieth-century U.S. The result is a comprehensive reconsideration of Jackson's body of work as visionary and critically consistent, rather than characterized by the irresponsible aesthetic flightiness that feminist critics such as Friedan—or, more typically, misogynist critics of the time—would assign to Jackson.

Franklin's study is consistently engaging, nuanced, and impeccably researched. The details of Jackson's early life before the infamous short story, "The Lottery" made her a household name in 1948 take up the first half of the book. Early chapters in the book highlight illuminating facts in Jackson's family history in 1920s and 30s San Francisco, and trace her relationship with her overbearing mother (a character type that appears frequently in her fiction, often posthumously) and Stanley Edgar Hyman, whom she met at Syracuse University and would eventually marry. For those ready to settle in to the intricate relationship between struggle and inspiration in Jackson's life during this period, Franklin's book offers nothing but rewards. Others not quite ready to throw themselves entirely into Jackson's life before she found and began to deal with literary fame, may find the first eight chapters long in detail.

In many ways, Franklin does nearly as much for Hyman as she does for Jackson, opening up the case for reconsideration of the work of the man whose presence in Jackson's life was both an inspiration and a frustration. Hyman's own work—difficult, dense, and ahead of its time—was produced laboriously over many years. The long gestation between Hyman's critically successful *The Armed Vision* (1948) and lesser-so *The Tangled Bank* (1962) was made possible because of the luxury of time provided him in no small part by Jackson herself, as she worked furiously to produce increasingly affecting, best-selling masterworks, while entertaining their friends, raising their children, and struggling with Hyman's need for an open relationship (open infidelity, in Jackson's estimation). The circle of close friends that gathered around Jackson and Hyman included literary luminaries like Dylan Thomas, J.D. Salinger, and Ralph Ellison, the latter of whom cited both Hyman and Jackson as a key reason for his ever completing *Invisible Man* (1952), and who read and discussed Jackson's work with her.

For those more interested in Jackson's life after her first literary successes made her a household name, chapters 8 through 18 enact a simultaneous act of powerhouse character development in Jackson, Hyman, and family, and extended act of literary analysis of all of Jackson's major works. Franklin blends historical and cultural context seamlessly with analyses of Jackson's fictional and epistolary output, so that the study is not only a corrective to the essentialist view of Jackson's output after her death as "mere" genre fare, but

also a significant contribution to scholarship of the author's entire body of work. The extensive focus on the author's letters alone (primarily to her mother, Geraldine) constitutes a major unearthing of a new, essential Jackson text. Franklin unearths in the author's marginalia Jackson's identification of a key theme in her work, via her assertion that the possibly imaginary character Tony in *Hangsaman*, her disturbing 1951 tale of a traumatized female university student, is

> not a he or she but the demon in the mind, and that demon finds guilts where it can and uses them and runs mad with laughing when it triumphs; it is the demon which is fear and we are afraid of words. we are afraid of being someone else and doing the things someone else wants us to do and of being taken and used by someone else, some other guilt-ridden conscience that lives on and on in our minds, something we build ourselves and never recognize. (quoted in Franklin, 2016: 63, preserving Jackson's punctuation)

The fact that Jackson's letters—by turns wry, witty, worrying, introspective, despairing, analytical, and bitingly comical—remain unpublished is a shame, and Franklin's coverage of them is a call to literary arms to an ambitious editor to bring them to light. The sustained epistolary friendship (60 pages of letters) that Jackson maintained with Jeanne Beatty, a fan who shared many of her domestic frustrations, is a highlight in this vein, intriguing enough to warrant its own book.

As the pressures around Jackson grew stronger with fame, Franklin's book grows increasingly darker, each of the last ten chapters periodized around Jackson's creation of one of her major works. Franklin's insights are often so keen and straightforward, they can be unsettling. Of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, she writes, "It is about two women who metaphorically murder male society and its expectations for them by insisting on living separate from it, governed only by themselves" (2016: 442). And in a later statement on *Castle*, she nails down a key meta-theme in Jackson's work that makes seemingly tragic endings—where characters turn entirely away from reality to a world of fantasy that "kills" them—read like triumphs: "Witchcraft […] is again best understood as a metaphor for female power and men's fear of it. It is a last resort for women who feel that they are powerless, the only way in which they can assert control over their surroundings. Even imaginary control is preferable to no control at all" (2016: 449).

If there has been a recent resurgence of interest in Jackson's work, I would suggest that it starts here, with Ruth Franklin's masterful study. Let this piece stand as less a review than as a reminder that scholars of Jackson, seasoned or fresh, can do no better than to start the next phase with Franklin.

— Kristopher Woofter

Ruth Franklin is a book critic and former editor at *The New Republic*. Her work appears in many publications, including *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *Harper's*. She received a Guggenheim Fellowship in biography, a Cullman Fellowship at the New York Public Library, a Leon Levy Fellowship in Biography, and the Roger Shattuck Prize for Criticism. Her first book, *A Thousand Darknesses: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 2011), was a finalist for the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature. *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life* won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Biography, among many other honours. Franklin lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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FILM REVIEW

Children of the Night: Abel Ferrara's *Pasolini*

Still from *Pasolini*, directed by Abel Ferrara (2014, 2019, 84m)

The image that circulated with the initial release of Abel Ferrara's *Pasolini* in 2014 ignited in me a deep cinephilic fascination. In the image (above), Willem Dafoe as Pasolini leans against a silver Alfa Romeo 2000GT, possibly cruising for sex. This car was an essential aspect of a successful night of gay sex for Pier Paolo Pasolini in the mid-seventies. When asked why a Marxist would own such a car, Pasolini stated that it was a good way to pick-up the young men he cruised in the Roman quartiere around Stazione Termini. They simply liked his car. Pasolini was known among that crowd as "il vecchio frocio" (the old faggot) who often came around looking for sex. The Dafoe image continues to impress me in its raw intensity and because it opens up a liminal zone between two very distinct visions of the night: the Roman nights of Pier Paolo Pasolini and the Italian-American grind/arthouse nights of Abel Ferrara's New York City. Today, Ferrara is no longer working from the iconic NYC of his early films. He lives and works in Rome, and *Pasolini* is about this experience of transplantation.

What makes the film *Pasolini* so fascinating, and so misunderstood, is its profound liminality. *Pasolini* is not as a standard biopic: it straddles both the

internal life of an artist during the last day of his life and Ferrara's own vision as a filmmaker. Ferrara, like Pasolini, has been interested in the children of the night from the beginning of his career. Martin Scorsese's neo-noir/western of New York nights in *Taxi Driver* (1976), with its darkly psychotic character Travis Bickle (Robert DeNiro), had a profound impact on Ferrara's career and vision. In his second film, *Driller Killer* (1979), Ferrara himself (credited under his porn pseudonym of Jimmy Laine from his first feature released in the summer of 1976) plays creature of the night Reno Miller, a struggling artist in New York's Greenwich Village who goes crazy and begins to kill people with a power drill to boost his creativity. To quote a famous cinematic vampire: "Children of the night, what music they make!"

Ferrara is in the midst of his own prolific creative phase. His scathing depiction of former International Monetary Fund head Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who was charged for sexual assault in 2011, in *Welcome to New York*, premiered at Cannes on 17 May, the same year *Pasolini* premiered in Venice on 4 September 4. With performances by Gérard Dépardieu and Dafoe that recall the stark portrayals by Christopher Walken in *King of New York* (1990) and Harvey Keitel in *Bad Lieutenant* (1992), the 2014 films are quintessential Ferrara, circulating as they do around the intensity of a major actor. But they are also present the viewer with disturbingly unflinching themes of the night so important to Ferrara's work.

Pasolini begins with the titular filmmaker finishing the French dub of his final film in Paris, based on the work of another artist of the night, the Marquis de Sade. (The French version of *Salò, or 120 Days of Sodom* is the only version actually finished by Pasolini. The Italian version was finished by Laura Betti after Pasolini's death.) A French reporter asks Pasolini in French if sex is political, and Dafoe's Pasolini responds in English: "Of course. There's nothing is that isn't political," and finishes the interview in Dafoe's broken French. Contextually, this movement between languages speaks to the history of financing from multiple national sources in Italian cinema of the period, resulting in the characteristic dominance of dubbing. Pasolini believed that dubbing another actor's voice added a third dimension to a performances that ran in excess of realism, a practice that derived from his interest in Italian art forms such as mannerism. In one such characteristic move, Pasolini (in)famously dubbed his Jesus, played by Enrique Irazoqui, in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964), with a famous actor, Enrico Maria Salerno, whom Italians know as the voice of Clint Eastwood in the Italian versions of Sergio Leone's "Dollars Trilogy."

In *Pasolini*, Willem Dafoe also speaks Italian in the film with a pronounced accent, and there is no attempt to hide this, as it speaks to Ferrara's present reality living in Rome. Dafoe, too, is living in Rome with his partner, filmmaker Giada Colagrande (*Padre*, 2016), who plays Pasolini's assistant Graziella in the film. I can relate to this position with language as the son of Southern Italian immigrants who, like Ferrara (and Scorsese, too) speaks and understands Italian, but has not mastered the language. This lingual liminality is a key aspect of a general in-betweenness that permeates this film about the experience of the migrant who has returned to the mother country. Thematically, it speaks to Pasolini's own aesthetic mixing of realism and mannerism, both visually and musically. In his first film *Accattone* (1961), for example, Pasolini almost reverentially depicts the life of a street pimp to the strains of J. S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, a major departure from the stark tenets of observing reality that Neorealism made famous in post-World War II Italy.

Ferrara's *Pasolini* inhabits the aesthetic vicissitudes of Pasolini's creative work as the film moves in and out of scenes from both Pasolini's unfinished novel, *Petrolio*, and the new script he was working on at the time of his death, *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*. To evoke the latter project, Ferrara hired Ninetto Davoli, a Calabrese youth whom Pasolini met hanging around the set of "La ricotta" in the portmanteau film *Ro.Go.Pa.G* in 1963. Davoli, who was married and had a child at time, became Pasolini's lover and favourite actor, and "La ricotta" landed Pasolini in court for blasphemy against the religion of the state—one of approximately 33 court cases that would plague Pasolini's life as a transgressive artist. In Ferrara's film, Davoli plays Epifanio, who follows a star, like the Magi in the tale of Jesus, that lands him in a feast where gays and lesbians have sex with each other in ritual orgiastic style worthy of the sublime excesses of the Biblical Sodom and Gomorrah. Ferrara's scene is reminiscent of Pasolini's Boschian grotesqueries in *The Canterbury Tales* (1972), which also landed him in court for blasphemy against religion. But rather than Pasolini's mannerist style, Ferrara unleashes in this scene the more excessive style that characterizes the vampiric debauches during the post-PhD eating frenzy of his 1995 film, *The Addiction*.

Davoli's Epifanio in *Pasolini* speaks the Roman dialect of the working classes that fascinated Pasolini and made him famous prior to his filmmaking with his first novel, *Ragazzi di vita* (1955). With *Accattone* (1961) the director brought this violent world of thieves and hustlers to the big screen using mostly non-professional actors, a practice he would continue throughout his career. For the scene leading up to Pasolini's murder, Ferrara chooses

Riccardo Scamarcio to play Ninetto Davoli. In this scene, Ferrara cuts to the night of November 1, 1975, where Pasolini asks Davoli to be in *Porno-Teo-Kolossal*, the film Ferrara has just re-imagined for the spectator. Pasolini is enjoying his last meal at his favourite restaurant Al Pommodoro (which still exists, and by my accounts still serves one of the best carbonaras in the city), in the San Lorenzo district of Rome, where tourists do not visit.

And, as Pasolini did with Davoli, Ferrara finds a non-professional to play Pasolini's murderer, Pino Pelosi (Damiano Tamilia), who was the only person convicted for Pasolini's murder. The murder in *Pasolini* plays out like an early Pasolini film, such as the beating up of Ettore Garofolo in *Mama Roma*, another non-professional that Pasolini paired up with Anna Magnani in 1962. Following the thesis that Pasolini's murder was planned and executed by the Italian right, Ferrara's film features three men who show-up on the beach of Ostia, and pulverize Pasolini with a two-by-four, holding him and kicking him in the groin, shouting: *frocio*! Like a character from Pasolini's own fictional world, Pasolini's Alpha Romeo is driven over his prostrate body, leaving him for dead.

In keeping with film's aesthetic liminality, Ferrara then cuts to Epifanio, played by Ninetto Davoli, who is still looking for his guiding star. There is a quick cut to the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in Rome, the symbol of Italian fascism par excellence, and a cut to Pasolini's home as Laura Betti (Maria de Medeiros) announces the news to Susanna (Adriana Asti), his mother. Susanna breaks down in an operatic performance worthy of the person heard on the soundtrack in this moment, Maria Callas, who also played the lead in Pasolini's *Medea* (1969). Ferrara holds nothing back in this shattering and devastating ending of Pier Paolo Pasolini, an artist who can be said to have "lived the night," in-between his art and life. In an act of both homage and empathy, and working through his own transplantation from the nights of New York City to the ones of Rome, Ferrara conjures an unconventional biographical film that evokes Pasolini's liminal style and existence.

— Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare

Abel Ferrara, born in the Bronx, began making exploitation films in the streets of New York City, which made him a cult director. Apart form the films mentioned in the review, Ferrara made, *Ms .45* (1981), *Fear City* (1984), *China Girl* (1987), *Cat Chaser* (1989), *Body Snatchers* (1993), *Dangerous Game* (1993), *The Funeral* (1996), *The Blackout* (1997), *New Rose*

Hotel (1998), *'R Xmas* (2001), *Mary* (2005), *Go Go Tales* (2007), *Chelsea on the Rocks* (2008). *Napoli, Napoli, Napoli* (2009), *4:44 Last Day on Earth* (2011), and *Tommaso* (2019), among others.

- 2019 -
MONSTRUM is published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society
(https://www.monstrum-society.ca/)

MONSTRUM 2 (June 2019) | ISSN 2561-5629

A Spectacle of Modified Bodies: The Contemporary Grand-Guignolesque as a Feminist Challenge to Somatophobia in *American Mary*

Arielle Corriveau

What if you could make "five grand" in one night? Would you accept, even if it was illegal—even if you might be enticed to turn a single offer into an ongoing practice? In *American Mary* (2012), a horror film directed by the Canadian sisters Jen and Sylvia Soska, the protagonist, a medical student, takes such an offer but soon finds herself unable to come back to her normal life. *American Mary* centers on Mary Mason (Katharine Isabelle), a broke, aspiring surgeon who falls into the strange world of body modification (also known as "bodmod") in order to obtain enough money to continue her studies. However, her life takes a dark turn when her oppressive medical school professor breaks her trust and rapes her at a party. After that traumatic experience, Mary is enticed by the earnings associated with bodmod surgery—and possibly the renewed agency she gains from this practice—and she leaves medical school to open her own underground clinic in the bodmod community. Focused on visceral surgical procedures that provoke affective meaning, *American Mary* offers a critical engagement with bodmod culture and normative patriarchal fears of the body as a site of transformation and (especially in the female body) adaptability. In its championing of bodies on display, *American Mary* is a Grand-Guignolesque horror movie that advances a feminist vision of erotic voyeurism where a woman can inhabit and be in control of her sexuality without being reduced by it.[1] *American Mary* explores

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Arielle Corriveau was born on June 22nd 2000 in the province of Quebec. As a child, she liked turtles, writing and super-hero movies. When she began her studies at John Abbott College in Sciences, she discovered a passion for cinema. After taking a few courses, her instructor Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare proposed that she write a paper on one of her favourite films. The result—this essay on the film *American Mary* (2012)—is her first work to be published. Having now completed her DEC in Honours Science, she will start a Major in Film Studies at Concordia University in the Fall of 2019.

the limits and limitations of body modification as a form of self-expression in order to show how our society's fear of the female body pushes unreasonable expectations onto women, and it concludes that we should instead celebrate and accept the diversity of bodies in our culture.

The Grand-Guignol was a French theater that, from 1897 to 1962, created its own genre of horror plays. Inspired by Emile Zola's political philosophy (Hand and Wilson, 2002: 3), the Grand-Guignol produced plays challenging bourgeois values while showing the daily life and struggles of the lower classes. Out of this naturalism eventually came a more strictly horror-focused theater, with some plays featuring surgical horror, especially those written by its most important playwright André de Lorde. Agnes Pierrot notes that the Grand-Guignol was described as the theater of blood, sweat and sperm (cited in Hand and Wilson, 2002: 3) for its horror plays mixed eroticism with underlying sexual themes. For example, one play, entitled *The Laboratory of Hallucinations* (André de Lorde, 1916) features a cruel brain surgeon who experiments on his wife's lover when he unexpectedly arrives in his clinic after being in an accident. Madly jealous, the surgeon discovers a letter from his wife letter in the man's pocket and proceeds to torture him through intrusive brain surgery. The Grand-Guignol's particular brand of horror became extremely popular, mostly for its visceral special effects and intense bodily spectacle. If the audience squirms at such a spectacle as offered above, it does so because of the play's appeal to the spectator's physical and emotional response as a way of touching upon common social and political realities—here, the intense emotions relating to human relationships and betrayal. I am interested here in three aspects of the classic Grand-Guignolesque tradition as it applies to *American Mary*: 1) its frequent focus on surgical horror as a motif that reminds the audience of its own bodily precarity; 2) its naturalistic content causing an affective bodily reaction in the audience; and 3), its combination of horror and erotic elements in its presentation of bodies and events.

The first two characteristics of the Grand-Guignolesque operate in *American Mary* together in ways that are closely related to one another. Mary is a struggling medical student who does not have enough money to pay for college, but she finds a solution in performing illegal body modification on people in the bodmod community. Mary's financial predicament and the extreme means she is forced to take to survive follow the naturalistic roots from which Grand-Guignol horror originates, highlighting wider social concerns. Most of the characters she interacts with are, like her, members of the lower classes struggling to live their daily lives. For example, Beatress (Tristan Risk) is a stripper at Billy's bar. We can suppose that all the money

she used to get her modifications comes from her working-class job, where she can put her modified body on display. Beatress's bodmod aesthetic is, in other words, potentially part of a statement and political stance on the viability and legitimacy of sex work; she performs both with and *through* her modified body. The film also embraces the Grand-Guignolesque's preoccupation with surgical horror, in ways that are fairly obvious. Yet, it is less the fact that Mary is a surgeon than the terrifying precision with which the surgical procedures are filmed that render the film Grand-Guignolesque in this respect. Most of the operations are shown graphically on screen. The camera follows the scalpel and other instruments with clinical detachment. Blood is drawn, tissues are shown as the blade cuts through them, and the needle bites into the fresh skin as the patients are slowly sown up by Mary. The scenes are very haptic, since the details of fleshly vulnerability and brute potential for bodily change affect the spectator's body through visual cues that activate the aural, the tactile, and olfactory senses, all of which are typically less prioritized than sight (Marks, 2000). The surgical horror scenes in *American Mary* are spectacles, moments of attraction that draw out narrative cause-and-effect to focus on sensorial effects. Tom Gunning explains that the cinema of attractions is composed of "a series of visual shocks" (1989: 116) in which "it is the incredible nature of the illusion [of the attraction] that renders the viewer speechless" (1989: 118). The cinema of attractions stems from circus performances, such as freak shows and magician acts, as they played on—and directly addressed—the audience's curiosity and amazement with bodies pushed to extremes, whether twisting, flying, and suspended in mid-air, or the naturally non-normative body of the "freak." As with the "illusions" of the circus attraction, *American Mary*'s viewers know that the surgeries are staged, but they *look* terribly real, and that makes it so amazingly visceral. No matter how horrifying these spectacles might be, they capture the viewer's attention in a way that garners audience curiosity for even more extreme sights to follow. One needs only to think about the scene where Ruby (Paula Lindberg) undergoes surgery. Ruby, a fashion designer and bodmod enthusiast, seeks out Mary because she wants her nipples removed and her lower parts sown up to resemble a doll. The camera lingers on the skin of her breasts in extreme close-up, as Mary's scalpel slowly cuts into the flesh. Blood is drawn slowly, seeping out in a syrupy stream from the cut skin, before the film changes to even closer shots of skin. The pores of the skin and the different textures between nipple and skin are laid bare to see. The scene's acute focus on the blood, on the gore, on the metallic instruments used to cut and destroy the skin attaches it to the Grand-Guignol cinema's focus on bodily vulnerability

and extremes, on attractions-based moments that halt narrative to court the senses. The surgeries are a spectacle on which the audience is enticed to gorge itself. According to Linda Williams, in such moments, "body genres" encourage a relationship between the film and the body of the viewer, who reacts "in an almost involuntarily mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on the screen" (2004: 4). In this sense, the audience members of *American Mary* allow themselves to be *modified* (if momentarily) by the horrors shown on screen. One spectator might hide his eyes in order to escape the gore while another might cringe in disgust when the scalpel cuts into Ruby's flesh. The peaceful, almost meditative, classical music accompanying the surgery scenes adds a touch of irony to the horror, an unsettling softness to the opened flesh and blood that otherwise fills the screen. The two elements don't at all belong together: the regular rhythm of the music notes clashes with the opened flesh and bodily fluids shown, which creates horror. The extreme surgical close-ups again encourage the spectator to recognize the hapticity of the film, taking in the experience of the scene with their entire body. In this way, *American Mary* affects its audience in a similar way to the Grand-Guignol plays, as both unsettle the viewer's equanimity via the horrors presented. The Soskas use such moments of attractions to shock spectators into an awareness of their feminist perspective on the body, confronting them with the gruesome sight of a body being sculpted as a reaction to oppressive social forces.

As I mentioned earlier, *American Mary* combines such spectatorial curiosity around what most would find disgusting, with an equally intense eroticism. The film's combination of eroticism with horror and disgust as a kind of appealing cocktail suggests once again its Grand-Guignolesque strategies around voyeurism. Linda Williams, a scholar who has looked into the use and representation of bodies in horror and porn cinema*,* asks, "what is a film, after all, without voyeurism?" (Williams, 732: 1991). While Williams is discussing body genres in cinema more broadly, I believe her question is even more essential to horror films, especially those that combine eroticism with the usual horror, awe, and disgust that echoes the Grand-Guignol tradition. Indeed, in *American Mary,* the titular heroine is not only a skilled surgeon, but is also young, sexy, and powerful. While she is often dressed in revealing outfits that accentuate her curves and breasts, Mary is not presented as solely an object of desire to the audience (See Figure 1 below). That Mary dresses and presents herself in a highly sexual way that occasionally borders on fetishistic, even while performing surgeries, is part of the film's darkly comical irony. The Soskas don't shy away from presenting Mary as a sexual entity. Her

Figure 1: Mary (Katharine Isabelle) about to perform a surgical procedure in *American Mary*

outfits—latex, leather, zippers—are closer to fetish wear than to a surgeon's blousy, bulky scrubs. It is in part the extremely sexual way that she presents herself while doing otherwise very clinical work that Mary *owns* her sexuality. The Soskas' camera never lingers on her curves, as the viewer's gaze might wish to. If she is dressed in a way that sports leather and latex and shows skin, then so be it. Jen and Sylvia Soska champion powerful feminist women who dress however they wish. The camera keeps a certain holistic distance from Mary in a way that allows her to be herself throughout the entire movie, no matter what she wears. The way of filming challenges the male gaze that usually reduces women to their sexuality, which creates a different sensual eroticism during the movie in that Mary's body becomes a part of the self-expression of a woman of sublime confidence. Mary's curves dare us to check her out, to gorge on her body in the same way the film asks us to gorge on the gory details of her profession. I found myself immersed in the spectacle of Mary and sometimes having to snap back to the film's narrative. *American Mary* consistently makes me aware of my role as a voyeur peeping at the presented attraction. As in Grand-Guignol plays, the eroticism here is born from a combination of gazes at Mary, at her work, and at Mary's own "extreme" body "looking back" at us. The Soska twins are thus conscious of the effect they are

creating, as they masterfully handle scenes where Mary is not only the center of attention, but *confronts us* with that fact. The cumulative effect of the film's careful presentation of Mary's powerful presence on the spectator is highlighted in a scene where Billy (Antonio Cupo), the owner of the bar who first employed Mary, daydreams about her on the stage of his bar, dressed in black undergarments and dancing for him. The underlying sexual tension between Mary and Billy is rendered rather absurd here in that it is clear that this is only Billy's *idea* of Mary—of Mary as represented through Billy's own desiring gaze. This is Mary as object of male spectacle, not the powerful sexualized self she projects outside of Billy's fantasies. The distinction between the way characters view Mary and her true, highly sexual identity is one of the ways the Soskas use Grand-Guignolesque strategies to create a healthy feminist eroticism that adds style and critical substance to the film.

American Mary's critical, feminist horror is thus also related to contemporary Western society's fear of the body, also known as somatophobia. Elizabeth Grosz, a cultural studies scholar, observes that "philosophy has established itself on the foundation of a profound somatophobia" (1994: 5). This worldview especially affects women's bodies, as they are always changing, and therefore seen as shifting, liminal, even *unstable* through a patriarchal lens. There is the aging body, the pregnant body, the menstruating body—all of which cause fear, and the latter two of which are the exclusive domain of the female body. Somatophobia extends as well to bodmod culture and the resistance to, or even immediate dislike of, those partaking in physical modifications for aesthetical purposes. In other words, the bodmod culture embraces the always-changing body most people have grown to hate or fear because it reminds them of difference. The intense dislike towards bodmod also comes from societal oppression. Scholar Robin Wood discusses the link between cultural oppression and repression, explaining that "surplus repression is specific to a particular culture and is the process whereby people are conditioned form earliest infancy to take on predetermined roles within that culture" ([1986] 2004: 108). That is, under constraining conditions opposed upon us by society, parts of ourselves are repressed as we acclimate to "acceptable" social standards, and adapt to conform to socially sanctioned, normative ideas, beliefs and thoughts. However, all that is repressed, and the trauma caused by it, always comes back to haunt the world. Whether it be created by a single traumatic event (for example, Mary's rape by her mentor, discussed below) or a lifetime spent repressing a part of your own self in order to belong with others (certainly inherent in the male-dominated profession Mary has chosen), this harmful

trauma comes back to torment the subject in most horrible ways. In *American Mary*, Mary faces a traumatic event that unleashes a part of her that she has kept secret, repressed deep in her mind and body, when her professor videotapes his rape of her at a party after she was drugged. She leaves the scene of the crime without a word, without blinking. In the elevator, after her escape from the scene of trauma, her gaze is fixed, focused, showing Mary's apparent readiness to air out some of the repressed anger she has harboured. In the next scene, at Billy's bar, Mary appears dressed in her usual outfit, wanting to "make five grand." Now both broken by the trauma and somewhat freed by it, she tortures her professor, which propels her into an underground surgical career. She even experiments on her professor's body. Before, she was somewhat scared of operating on people, but now she has embraced her role like a modern version of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mister Hyde* (1886), accepting that she is both Jekyll and Hyde. She had been afraid of modifying human bodies prior to taking up the bodmod knife, but now she builds a career on sculpting those very bodies. In this way, Mary works her way out of her own somatophobia and also helps others free themselves from it by creating the bodies they want to inhabit. After all, those who have chosen to embrace such peculiar aesthetical tastes are perceived as threats in a society that shuns those whose bodies challenge conservative bourgeois norms. They are alienated by mainstream society solely because they refuse to police their bodies in the same way as most do, and thus do not experience somatophobia in the same manner, if at all. Body modification enthusiasts decide to opt for a different source of acceptance: an excessive and performative version of themselves. Beatress is a good example of such a view: she wants to be on the outside what she is on the inside and has achieved such an appearance through surgical operations in the bodmod community. Ruby also goes to great lengths to become what she wants to be: a doll that is safely outside the zone of all possible sexual desire. There is also the film's directors playing the twins (Jen and Sylvia Soska), who come to Mary for surgery. Initially, it seems that they want a physical transformation that will turn them into Frankenstein-like Siamese twins. But their sisterly love takes them only as far as asking Mary to exchange their left arms, bringing them freakishly even closer to one another as twins. And of course there is Mary herself, whose very presence and extreme manner of dress suggests another performance of identity that—without fleshly modifications—challenges normative thinking around, among other things, what a professional should look like, or how those attached to sanctioned institutions like medicine should behave.

Figure 2: Ruby (Paula Lindberg)

So many aspects of *American Mary* relate to the issues of body image and somatophobia, especially towards the female body. In the remainder of this essay, I treat each of the above cases in more detail. First, there is the character who is at the top of a popular fashion line called Ruby "Realgirl." Ruby is striving for a distanced, doll-like beauty that she sees as desexualized (See Figure 2 above). She asks Mary for her nipples to be removed and her genital parts modified to look like a Barbie doll. The Soskas here push an aesthetic desire to the extreme by making Ruby desire something greater than simply beauty. Ruby explains her view to Mary: "I've never had any of these surgeries to become a sexual object. […] Dolls are not usually looked at in a sexual manner. […] A doll can be naked and never feel shy or sexualised or degraded." Ruby's problem is with how women's bodies are viewed, and pushed to look a certain way to be accepted. The only solution she has found is to change herself in a desperate attempt to remove the aspects of her body that she believes to be sexualized. Ruby's desperation derives directly from the trauma caused by a patriarchal society afraid of the female body, especially of its power to change, its inherent adaptability. Grosz's words mirror Ruby's: "patriarchal oppression […] justifies itself, at least in part, by connecting women much more closely than men to the body" (1994: 14). In our world, people fear being too fully embodied. Women especially face impossible expectations to which Ruby's actions are a response: girls need to look like Barbie Dolls to be fully rewarded by consumer society. Ruby is so sick with somatophobia that she is ready to do anything to escape it, however much she becomes a grotesque embodiment of it. To the viewer, such a transformation is uncanny in its manifesting in the body the idealized standards normally

made manifest in a toy. The heavy, horrifying nature of the surgeries Ruby has to go through to free herself from society's expectations by confronting them is made clear by the directors' detailed way of filming the surgeries. Ruby creates an unnatural body for herself to hide from the less-controlled female body she is so afraid of. In this Grand-Guignoleque spectacle, the Soskas satirically show both sides of the bodmod spectrum: Ruby, who goes all-out in order to finally escape her internalized somatophobia, and other people, like Beatress, who use this fear to their advantage in order to attract people's voyeurism.

Figure 3: Beatress (Tristan Risk)

Beatress, a stripper who chooses to modify her body for aesthetic purposes that seem to enhance the culturally normative features of her body, seems at first glance to be the very opposite of Ruby, even though the two present some similarities in their beliefs that people should be able to look the way they want to, whatever the price (both monetary and corporeal) might be. However, unlike Ruby, Beatress is empowered by the erotic attention she attracts. Never is she offended by Mary's confused and slightly disgusted reaction to her body, and instead seems to take pleasure in Mary's skeptical gaze. Because Beatress is a stripper, her modified body is often on display, center-stage, for those who gaze upon her for voyeuristic pleasure; and Beatress receives reciprocal pleasure from being the center of an objectifying attention. She becomes a Grand-Guignolesque attraction herself using her body modifications, which have made her into a real-life Betty Boop-style sex object (See Figure 3 above). It is the proportions of Beatress' features that

make Mary feel uneasy. Her lips are pluckily full, her eyebrows almost nonexistent, her eyes gapingly wide, and her nose too small for her face. Her body follows the exaggerated shape of an hourglass. Mary is used to body modifications that remove and cut pieces of skin aesthetically, but Beatress has changed in a way Mary does not expect: she looks out of this world, almost inhuman, a cartoon lady in a gritty, degenerating world. Since Beatress accepts herself because of her body modifications, she strives to help others achieve their own physical adventures, like with her friend Ruby. Yet Beatress suffers as well from society's somatophobia: she has felt so horrible in her own body in the past that she has had to change it in order to provide something *extra* for those who would consume her body with their gaze. She feels the need to become a sexualised icon in order to feel accepted, desired—though in doing so she, like Ruby, ultimately turns herself into a grotesque parody of beauty standards. That is, if Ruby rejects the sexualized parts of her female body in an attempt to escape an internalized somatophobia, Beatress embraces these to the extreme. Mary's uneasy reaction to Beatress's overall appearance seems to model the response the viewer is meant to feel regarding her uncanny features. That feeling of rejection one feels towards the woman who is the very portrait of a universally accepted sex icon creates a critical distance in the spectator, who is encouraged to ask: If one way to be accepted is to correspond to the ideal, then why does Beatress' appearance unsettle so much? The very foundation of the perception of women's bodies is shaken when one reflects on this satirical portrayal of a bodmod enthusiast. After all, Beatress intentionally becomes an attraction, a thing one glances upon with pleasure while knowing that it is fake, unreal. Her amplifications of this illusion and fakery have made it so that her customers can gaze upon her with amazement mixed with fear. Since Beatress is "more" than a simple woman because of her modifications, some discomfort exists in the spectator's heart when gazing upon her. She has turned herself into a "freak," a monster who reveals a culture's supposedly paradoxical fear and attraction in gazing upon the unusual, like the bodies one gazes up on in a carnival. One looks at her voyeuristically with curiosity and with a little disgust towards her cartoonish face and other uncanny features. Beatress's body and career choice combine the Grand-Guignolesque extremes of horror and eroticism, but somatophobia stops her from being anything more than a "freak" on stage: one who both attracts and repeals the spectator. It is unclear if she ever will be able to escape the somatophobia of those gazing upon her modified body, or her own in inhabiting such a body. One cannot help but wonder if one must really go this far, modifying their own body so drastically, in order to be able to accept

oneself. The question that underlies *American Mary* thus becomes, *what are the limits of body modification*? And are either of these cases—Ruby's doll-like de-sexualizing, and Beatress's grotesque exaggeration of the same—in any way a challenge to the norm, or the ugly product of it? If we look at it from a purely aesthetic point-of-view, the film presents its audience with a different world of beauty without judgement, which seems pretty harmless, as one could speculate that most people are happy with their modifications in the bodmod community. However, when somatophobic values cause one to make irreversible changes to oneself as a reaction to oppressive notions of what the body—and particularly the female body—should be, do, and look like, such endeavours seem anything but harmless.

In *American Mary*, Jen and Sylvia Soska show that body modification might seem like a challenge to consumer capitalist society's somatophobia, but they remind the spectator of its tragic realities too. Indeed, Ruby's husband (Travis Watters) is horrified by her transformation. Instead of being understood, Ruby has to suffer a brutal rejection from one of those she loves. Her husband is disgusted by her appearance. He is so angry to have lost her that he tries to kill Mary. He is eventually killed by Mary in a fight that fatally wounds Mary. Neither wins: while Ruby ultimately learns that most will not accept her now that she is "free," Mary, like a bodmod Dr. Frankenstein, ends up indirectly killed by her creation. As her last breath passes her lips, Mary is shown in a process of adapting: she sews her wounded belly up, in a final body modification that might save her life, allowing her to survive in a world that rejects the very existence of those like her. However, she fails and dies. In a quintessential Grand-Guginol ending, the movie closes on a tapestry of death: Mary's own modified body immobile on the cold floor. As shown by this final scene where Mary's corpse is the central attraction, Jen and Sylvia Soska do not reject the body—it is central to the film. Instead, the directors challenge the values behind the somatophobic perception of those bodies that are modified every day, either to fit into, or resist societal standards. Along with Grosz, they believe that "what needs to be changed are attitudes, beliefs, and values rather than the body itself[, …] the ways in which the social system organizes and gives meaning to biology that is oppressive to women" (Grosz, 1994: 16, 17). *American Mary* offers a feminist critique of the way patriarchal perceptions of the body oppress women through the desires of characters like Beatress and Ruby, and the complicity of characters like Mary.

American Mary is a Grand-Guignolesque film that mixes surgical horror with voyeuristic eroticism. It uses body modifications as attractions to explain how somatophobia traps women into fearing their own changing bodies with

life-changing surgical operations as their only escape. The visceral surgerical practices in the film ask us to question the limits and limitations of body modifications as a potentially critical reaction to patriarchal society's somatophobia. The Soskas both champion feminist voyeurism and the acceptance of bodies, especially those bodies that resists attempts to control them, while also staging the uncontrollability of bodily creations as dreadfully and fearfully Grand-Guignolesque.

Notes

[1] This essay was inspired by courses taught by Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare at John Abbott College in the Winter and Fall of 2018, which touched upon the place of the body in film, especially in the horror genre, and the Grand-Guignol as a theoretical framework for understanding horror cinema.

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- 2019 -
MONSTRUM is published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society
(https://www.monstrum-society.ca/)

MONSTRUM

Volume 2 (June 2019) | ISSN 2561-5629

Edited by Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare & Kristopher Woofter

MONSTRUM (ISSN 2561-5629) is an annual, open-access academic journal publishing original, peer-reviewed scholarship in horror and related areas, in English or French, by developing and established scholars working on cinema, television, literature, media studies, popular culture, genre, philosophy, cultural studies, and other fields. The journal is published by the Montreal Monstrum Society, which grew out of a community of scholars and fan-scholars in Montreal and abroad. For more information, please contact us at monstrum.society@gmail.com. To submit an essay or review, please see the journal's Submissions page for requirements and deadlines: https://www.monstrum-society.ca/call-for-submissions.html.

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- 2019 -
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