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**Sensory Overload:
Unconscious Communication and Inter-Personal Psychosis
in David Cronenberg's *The Dead Zone***

Mikaela Bobiy

The Dead Zone (1983) is a film about unconscious communication—more specifically, it is a film about what happens when the unconscious permeates consciousness. Based on Stephen King's 1979 novel of the same name, Cronenberg's film is a triptych, a film in three parts that asks us to think about what happens when the unconscious spills out and over, creating a sensorial overload. In Cronenberg's film, this spilling over results in disturbing premonitory visions (auditory and visual) for protagonist Johnny Smith (Christopher Walken). While psychoanalytic discussions of pseudoscientific phenomena like ESP tend to focus on unconscious communication and the return of the repressed (through the guises of the uncanny or melancholy, for example), this analysis examines the film through the lens of psychosis, and more specifically, from an experiential or embodied understanding of psychosis (a reading that is further reinforced by the film's *mise-en-scène* and the actors' performances).¹ In *The Dead Zone*, the protagonist's visions take the shape of a psychotic break, one that is inter-personal in nature, and mirror the experience of patients with schizophrenia as it is represented in psychoanalytic literature.² More specifically, I will put the film in dialogue with Christopher Bollas' discussions of schizophrenia, as it both engages with, and diverges from, Lacan's topography of the imaginary and symbolic order. In the film we watch as Johnny tries to straddle these two orders, while committing a final act that definitively expels him from the latter. Finally, *The Dead Zone* is a film that adds to Cronenberg's cinematic project of embodied explorations of psychoanalysis, though here, it is an exploration that also leans heavily on the supernatural—

¹ This in-and-of-itself will not preclude an examination of the return of the repressed, which remains important to the discussion, but my approach is from a more distinctive, and phenomenologically informed, psychoanalytic position.

² This is not to say that Johnny is suffering from clinical psychosis, but that his visions mimic the form of psychotic breaks experienced by patients with schizophrenia.

this isn't just a breakthrough of Johnny's unconscious, but the unconscious of others as well.

Somatic language

As with Cronenberg's most explicitly psychoanalytic film *A Dangerous Method* (2012), *The Dead Zone's* exploration of psychoanalysis is an embodied one.³ For Cronenberg, the most compelling parts of the unconscious are those directly linked to the physical symptom, and much of Cronenberg's body horror is rooted in this visceral exploration of the symptom.⁴ While some would argue that psychoanalysis has always been a practice rooted in the body (from the earliest discourses around hysteria), psychoanalysts like Christopher Bollas look at phenomena like psychosis as particularly embodied experiences. In *The Dead Zone*, Johnny's visions are experienced somatically—the entire body (involuntarily) participating in an experience akin to that of psychosis.

In 2015, Christopher Bollas published *When the Sun Bursts: The Enigma of Schizophrenia* which chronicled over forty years of working with people suffering from schizophrenia, both children and adults. His approach to treatment was an unusual one: rather than focusing solely on medicating the condition, which can result in a kind of overall numbness, Bollas looked to uncover the hidden logic of the psychosis, and together with the patient, through intensive talk therapy, bring the various realities and selves together.⁵ In the case of the film, this “hidden logic of psychosis” follows certain patterns. For Johnny, his visions, triggered by touch, often anticipate violent psychopathic acts (a president with his finger on the button, a serial killer and one of his victims). It is as though there were a shared, Jungian unconscious pool of repressed violence to which Johnny's accident connects him. This is emphasized by the physicality of Johnny's condition telegraphed by Walken's physical performance (falls, limping, twitching, wincing, etc.).

³ In *A Dangerous Method*, Cronenberg examines the relationship between Sigmund Freud, Sabina Spielrein, and Carl Jung.

⁴ See, e.g., *The Fly* (1986) and *Dead Ringers* (1988).

⁵ The goal of this essay is not to romanticize mental illness, as was often done in literature of the 1970s, with the idea that psychosis was somehow the rational response to an irrational world; rather, it should be acknowledged that schizophrenia is an illness that causes great suffering.

All of these physical acts are outward representations of a kind of unconscious sensory overload. Bollas writes: “Work with schizophrenics has taught me that when defenses against the complexities of mind break down, there can be a breakthrough of too much” (2015, 4). This idea of “a breakthrough of *too much*” refers to the schizophrenic patient’s relationship to their unconscious. In many psychoanalytic interpretations of schizophrenia, the understanding is that the patient lacks the traditional barriers or mechanisms that are set up as a defence against the bursting-through of the unconscious, and, as a result, the unconscious now permeates consciousness. This often becomes overwhelming, and the individual copes in a variety of ways—including among these, a creation of a fantastical world where the individual feels safe, with the threat of annihilation kept temporarily at bay. While Johnny creates a physical world that keeps him safe (see my later description of his apartment, and the closets and cabinets therein), it is the fantastical world that is imposed upon him by his visions that creates more of a prison cell, than a refuge. In addition to fantasy worlds, the patient may also fragment the self, projecting parts of the self into inanimate objects for safekeeping. It is worth noting the various barriers, both physical and mental, Johnny erects in order to keep his own, and others’, unconscious at bay (also discussed further below).

Whatever the case, Bollas writes:

It is [...] the loss of un-self-conscious participation in the everyday that constitutes the gravest tragedy for the adult schizophrenic. *He can no longer simply lose himself in the everyday, free to bear “the unspeaking speech that is the soft human murmuring that is in us and around us.”* Those unconscious processes of thought that have woven our own idiomatic pattern through the materials of our world now, for the schizophrenic, punch their way into consciousness—as *vivid visual images*, powerful bodily dispositions, the sound of accusing voices, or as a smelling of the world, shifting from moment to moment. (2015, 122, my italics)

For Bollas, the patient with schizophrenia exists on the “edge of perception” (4). The patient is unable to move through life unperceiving (an idling mode of low-level taking-on of stimuli—I see and hear but can tune out things that are background to me); in fact, they perceive too much and must bear the weight of perpetual, and more intensified, levels of perception. For this reason, they often try to distance themselves from the conscious knowledge of the everyday. For Bollas, “Not knowing that we think unconsciously is vital to our functioning in the world” (120); without this non-knowledge, people would suffocate under

the weight of meaning, but for the patient with schizophrenia, the unconscious is experienced consciously. If this sounds romantic, Bollas assures us that it is not—the patient suffers under this weight, as does Johnny.

The Dead Zone

The Dead Zone opens in a small-town Maine classroom, with high-school teacher Johnny, played by Christopher Walken, reciting poetry to his class. This scene, and the one that follows, establish the romantic relationship between Johnny and fellow teacher Sarah, and cement Johnny's role as educator, a role that will be problematized after his accident. The poem Johnny recites to the students is Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" (1845), which is often interpreted as being about one man's descent into madness.⁶ This poem sets the tone for the rest of the film:

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted—nevermore!

This scene is prophetic and will later reflect Johnny's view toward his "gift"—it traps him in a series of unwanted visitations of a foreboding future; for most of the film he sees it as a curse, something inescapable. "The Raven" is referenced again later in the film when Johnny is reading the poem with his young student, Chris. Throughout the film, Johnny's visions hound him, as does the raven in Poe's poem.

Johnny's "gift," or what Sarah calls "second sight," doesn't surface until after a car accident, but earlier scenes depict Johnny suffering headaches, dizziness, and vertigo. In a scene where the two ride a rollercoaster at the amusement park, Johnny seems to experience pain and disorientation, symptoms suggesting a kind of pre-psychosis.⁷ Early on, there is already a sense

⁶ See pages 73-74 of Daniel Hoffman's *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* (1990 [1972], New York: Paragon House).

⁷ This could relate to the fact that, in the book, we find out that Johnny had been suffering from a brain tumour even before the accident. This is not articulated in the film.

in the film that Johnny is a “highly sensitive person” who is beginning to feel the shocks of a relentless modernity.⁸ After the accident, and a coma that lasts five years, Johnny begins having visions. Just like the patient with schizophrenia or PTSD, whose psychosis is triggered by a particular event that they can’t outlive or outrun, the car accident causes Johnny to experience a kind of unconscious-to-conscious communication. While there may be genetic predispositions to psychosis, the patient with schizophrenia usually experiences their first psychotic break as a result of a particular event.⁹ For Johnny, this precipitating event is the car accident.

Once awakened from the coma induced by the accident, Johnny begins to experience visions triggered by touch. His first psychic vision is triggered by the touch of a nurse as she mops his brow; this mirrors the classic synthesis case of the patient with schizophrenia who reverts back to somatization, experiencing the world through the senses. It is a kind of return to the full sensorium (not just the intellect) that we tend to lose sense of after childhood. In this way, Johnny is beginning to (re)experience the world as an infant or toddler would, where the child is bombarded by the constant pressure of the external world; it is a return to Lacan’s imaginary, before the mirror stage which ushers in the toddler’s entry into the symbolic (see more extensive discussion below). In parallel, Johnny’s visions are experienced proprioceptively—that is, the visions themselves create a physical response in Johnny: gasping, pain, stuttering, gaps in speech, etc.. It is as if, for those few minutes, Johnny inhabits an alternative reality. Walken’s delivery reinforces this—his use of language, particularly the staccato-ed way he speaks; both his speech and movement seem automated or mechanical in some way—another trait of the psychotic individual. While these physical traits were observable before the accident, they are further emphasized after Johnny’s exit from the hospital, becoming almost caricatural.¹⁰

This uncanny sense of the individual as automaton can also relate to what Bollas calls “psychotic revelation,” which “involves the feeling that more truths are being expressed in the here-and-now than are uttered by normal conscious

⁸ Because the film strips away the brain tumor of the novel, it seems even more likely that Cronenberg and screenwriter Jeffrey Boam wanted to present Johnny as highly sensitive and therefore somehow “primed” for his new “gift.”

⁹ Though there are some psychoanalysts, like Bruce Fink (1997), who argue that the psychotic structure has always been present in the psychotic individual.

¹⁰ See the way Johnny lurches across the snow-covered lawn as he makes his way to see Sarah upon her first visit to his house post-accident.

verbalization” (2015, 117). In this sense, what Johnny is experiencing is not so much a psychic vision, as it is a psychotic revelation: “The schizophrenic sense of intuition is rather remarkable. Having reverted to sensorial proprioceptive perception, [the subject] is unknowingly making use of complex unconscious perceptions” (Bollas, 165). We can think of Johnny’s visions as a form of “unconscious sensorial communication” (Bollas, 165). Rather than having a psychic vision, Johnny is perceiving the unconscious of the other, perceiving something beyond “normal conscious verbalization” (Bollas, 117). This is something many of us do without being aware we are doing it. Over the last century, many psychoanalysts have looked into the phenomenon of unconscious-to-unconscious communication. Usually referring to the psychoanalytic dyad, these investigations beg the question: “Whose unconscious is it, anyway?”¹¹ Even Freud urged this unconscious listening: “The analyst must bend his own unconscious like a receptive organ toward the transmitting unconscious of the patient. He must adjust himself to the patient as a telephone receiver is adjusted to the transmitting microphone” (Freud 1912). While Johnny’s desire to be at the receiving end of this unconscious messaging is lacking, he can’t help but eventually act on this information.¹² It is for these reasons and others to follow that Cronenberg’s film is both unabashedly psychoanalytical *and* sensorial, bringing the body significantly into play in Johnny’s “psychic” visions.

If we consider Johnny’s visions as unconscious sensorial communication—or psychotic revelation—we can locate Johnny’s experience of the world in the Lacanian order of the imaginary.¹³ The imaginary is the psychic register that has to do with fantasy and the spectral image; it is separate from language, at least in the sense of symbolic language. It is also in this register that the infant recognizes their reflection in the other (identification), thus creating an ideal that can never be attained (a form of alienation from oneself). As young children, we occupy the realm of the imaginary, and the same is true of the patient with schizophrenia. According to Bollas, “the schizophrenic child does not have a barrier between conscious and unconscious thought—” (122). This is true of children in general, and just like the child, the patient with

¹¹ Anthony Bass. “It Takes One To Know One,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, vol. 11, no. 5, 2001, p. 685.

¹² Johnny’s ‘dead zone’ refers to the elements of his psychic visions that are gray, murky; the ‘dead zone’ exists in the space and time in which Johnny can alter the outcome.

¹³ Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan orders our psychic reality into three registers: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real.

schizophrenia—and Johnny—live in the realm of the imaginary, with the unconscious surfacing through visual imagery and voices, as in the aforementioned discussion of Johnny’s first vision. Though this is certainly the case within Johnny’s visions, it is also the case without—Johnny experiences the word through colours, sounds, and images, as opposed to pure symbolization (and verbalization). While owing a great deal to Lacan here, Bollas also challenges the Lacanian contention that the psychotic individual is entirely removed from the symbolic. For the patient with schizophrenia, there is something like a symbolization of the imaginary, with the patient creating their own mythology through both image and word. For Johnny, this fantastical world is the world within his visions, one that is populated with images of lost and adulterated childhood.

Childhood Revisited

It is through the realm of the imaginary *and* the symbolic that childhood is central to the film. Johnny’s first vision is of a young girl in her bedroom as it is being consumed by fire—we share Johnny’s perspective, the camera panning over melting crayons, charred stuffed animals, and a boiling fishbowl. The vision then shifts suddenly, and it is Johnny in the burning bedroom, taking the place of the child, once again bringing Johnny’s visions to a painful embodiment. Back in the hospital room, a sweating Johnny grabs the nurse’s wrist: “Amy’s screaming! Your daughter’s screaming! It’s not too late!”¹⁴ Johnny’s second vision also involves a scene between a mother and child; in this instance the child is a young Dr. Weizak, Johnny’s attending physician, and we watch as his mother seems to sacrifice her life to save his own. Having assumed that his mother died in WWII, Dr. Weizak (along with the viewer) learns as a result of Johnny’s vision that she is alive and well, and locatable in the phonebook.

The theme of childhood, and a certain haunting nostalgia, persist throughout the film. Following his coma, and the death of his mother, Johnny moves back into his childhood home with his father; little Denny, Sarah’s young son, sits in a high-chair made by Johnny’s father when they visit Johnny after

¹⁴ This may be a direct allusion to the dream “The Burning Child” which is described in Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* (1901). After falling asleep attending to his dying child, a father dreams that his child is at his bedside saying “Father, don’t you see that I am burning?”. Upon awakening, the father sees that the candles surrounding the deceased child’s bed have tipped over and the bed is on fire.

his return from the clinic. We also witness Johnny reconnecting with the world through his relationship with Chris, the sensitive young boy Johnny tutors, but the most arresting scene of childhood in the film takes place in the childhood home of deputy officer Frank Dodd.

After finally agreeing to help investigate a string of unsolved murders in Castle Rock, Johnny accompanies local sheriff George Bannerman to the home of Bannerman's deputy officer Dodd, the primary suspect in the murders. The scene that ensues is the most experimental in the film and one that constitutes a shift in the audience's relationship to the perception of space—that is, it enacts a proprioceptive reorientation. Bollas writes: “It is a common observation that, following their breakdown, schizophrenics seem highly sensitive to colour, light and sound. This is because they are now organizing reality according to a particular type of proprioceptive skill” (2015, 164) Proprioception, related to kinesthesia, connotes the awareness of one's body in space, an awareness of movement, location, and motion. It is often referred to as a “sixth sense”—a heightened awareness of your body in the world. This means the psychotic patient is experiencing and organizing the world not through their mental capacities or faculties, but rather through a more fully sensorial engagement. This kind of unconscious communication is central to the relationship between infant and caregiver, and is present in all of us, but is typically repressed to a much greater degree than in the individual with schizophrenia. This shift from a kind of cushioned to a more heightened, more fully embodied state of perception is important to note, as the scene in Dodd's house seems to be taken from another film altogether, particularly in its shift in colour palette and perspective. Up to this point in the film, the colour palette has been muted, with drained tones, punctuated only by flames in the two visions. While the visions are shot with more colour and from an almost cinematic vantage, the scene at Dodd's house seems to be shot in a funhouse, with the camera angles to match. As spectators, we experience this funhouse as Johnny does, sensorially—saturated colours, skewed perspectives. Dodd's house becomes a living, breathing monster, engulfing the viewer. The scene has all the qualities of a nightmare, much like Johnny's visions and is, unsurprisingly, the most Cronenbergian scene in the film.

The scene begins with a slow zoom-in on the house. As we approach, the white clapboard exterior offers no hint of the horrors that are to be (and have been?) committed inside; the house itself exists less as structured ties to a sense of history as we might understand it in the symbolic order—a childhood home—than as a physical, architectural manifestation of the unconscious: of repressed desires, of childhood trauma. Dodd's mother answers the door, and

as she does Johnny grabs her hand: “You knew!” he says, immediately sensing the mother’s culpability. As Johnny pushes past Mrs. Dodd and enters the house, the camera pans across collected trinkets, floral wallpaper and cracked floorboards; everything in the home is bathed in a sickly green glow. Entering Dodd’s bedroom, we lose the green luminosity, and the floral wallpaper is replaced by that of Cowboys and Indians. In some ways an echo of the childhood room of *Psycho*’s Norman Bates, the room is filled with artefacts from Dodd’s childhood: dolls, nutcrackers, pirate ships, comic books, and spinning tops. The few objects of adulthood (ashtrays full of cigarette butts, a set of weights), seem out of place and momentarily pull us out of the realm of childhood fantasy, but at the same time, their presence suggests a crossing-over of the imaginary and symbolic. We have indicators of the conscious world (cigarette butts, weights) nearly engulfed by the unconscious that dictates and dominates the “logic” of the scene: toys, violence-as-play in the wallpaper. Eventually, the camera follows Dodd into the bathroom—it is brightly lit, overly so, existing in sharp contrast to the dim glow throughout the rest of the home. The bathroom’s peeling pink paint and mildewy floral tiles add to the stark reality of the horror of Dodd’s act, as he opens his mouth and exposes his face to an open pair of scissors. Although we’re spared the act itself, the gleaming scissors, and Dodd’s later death throes, create the most horrific scene of the film. The scene also represents a turning point for Johnny—having momentarily glimpsed, and in fact experienced, all the horrors of Dodd’s unconscious, Johnny gains useful and terrifying insight. While by diegetic logic, the encounter with Dodd is accidental, by thematic-narrative logic, there would seem to be parallels. Is Dodd a manifestation of what Johnny might (have/or still) become?

As the camera moves through Dodd’s house, we experience it as Johnny does—colours heightened, voices distorted, a kind of tunnel vision.¹⁵ We are left wondering whether our experience of the house can be trusted—are we experiencing objective reality or the psychotic’s reality? Regardless, the house, and more specifically Dodd’s bedroom, are manifestations of an unconscious suffused with the traumas of childhood; whether these are entirely Dodd’s

¹⁵ This tunnel vision recalls a scene just prior to the entry into Dodd’s house, where the sheriff, accompanied by Johnny, with Dodd trailing behind, stand in a cold, wet tunnel, examining a leftover cigarette packet possibly left by the killer. We can think of the tunnel imagery as an allusion to Johnny’s visions.

remains unclear.¹⁶ What *is* clear is that this house triggers a bursting-through, a bubbling-over—Johnny experiences too much, perceives too much.

Doomsday

The climactic scene in Dodd’s home concludes the second act of the film. Act three opens with a snow-filled street, white-picket fences, and snow-covered trees. It is months after the incident in Dodd’s home and Johnny has moved to a new town, one where he hopes to remain anonymous, working as a tutor. His new home consists of a small apartment at the top of a rooming house, with brightly-lit rooms filled with doors and cabinets. Johnny's new reality is decidedly even less stark in its contrasts than in the film's opening act. While partially owing to a new colour scheme, the shift in contrast also signals the degrading separation between conscious and unconscious. Months after Johnny’s initial hospitalization, Dr. Weizak comes to visit him in the new town. At first Johnny is resistant to Dr. Weizak’s visit, but eventually relents. After discussing Johnny’s bleak prognosis (as the visions become more frequent and more intense, his body begins to break down, another example of the embodied nature of his symptoms), Johnny shows Dr. Weizak a closet in which he keeps all of his correspondence, forwarded from his father. These consist of requests to find missing objects, missing pets and missing children (Johnny’s gift, now made public, has turned him into a combination of saviour and carnival curiosity). Through this change of scene and arrangement, we get a more deliberate view of the barriers Johnny erects in order to keep the “spilling over” at bay; here, Johnny has a physical barrier (the closet door), separating him from desire (the many invitations to re-enter the ‘Dead Zone’), separating the conscious from the unconscious. Johnny’s intentional isolation in this scene gives us the greatest sense of his fragmented self. The patient with schizophrenia experiences the self as fragmented—a schism between their former and current selves. This is further reinforced by reports of scattering and slippage, the feeling that the self is falling apart. Friends and family of the patient with schizophrenia often speak as though they have “lost” their loved one, and this perceived loss

¹⁶ In this way we can make a connection to Cronenberg’s earlier film *Videodrome* (1983). In *Videodrome*, Max Renn also inhabits a world that breaks down the borderlines between conscious and unconscious, often acting on impulses that may or may not be his own, but may be coming from another source (the Videodrome signal), just as Johnny's visions force themselves upon him like a signal that dictates what he sees and how he experiences and negotiates reality.

informs how the patient negotiates, and relates to, society. We can use this understanding of schizophrenia to better understand Johnny's character and his deliberate removal from society. Perhaps anticipating a society in which he is already 'lost', Johnny isolates himself in the attic. In this last scene, Johnny tells Dr. Weizak, "Nothing can touch me here. I'm alone, I'm safe."

Following the scene with Dr. Weizek, we are introduced to Johnny's new student, Chris. It is through this meeting that the final events of the film are set in motion. Johnny's first meeting with Chris takes place in Chris's bedroom—a space very unlike Dodd's bedroom. It is bathed in bright light, covered in light, bucolic wallpaper, and filled with fine furniture and model trains. However, despite the idyllic scene setting up Chris's world as that of the well-adjusted child of wealthy parents, the unconscious seeps through, in the form of a bizarre poster on the wall. The poster features a surreal scene featuring a child sitting on the bed in a bedroom much like Chris's, while bright-orange goldfish swim through the bedroom. While not articulated in the film's dialogue, the poster uncannily recalls Johnny's first vision with the boiling fishbowl, connecting the first and third acts.¹⁷ Even this cozy domestic scene cannot escape Johnny's "gift." While it will eventually be the cause of his dismissal from the tutoring job, it is also Johnny's second sight that eventually saves Chris from drowning in his backyard pond.

By the third act of the film, we move closer to Johnny's most important psychotic revelation. These final scenes usher forth the main moral crux of *The Dead Zone*, in that they recall the classic moral dilemma (as related by Johnny to Dr. Weizak)—if you had a chance to kill Hitler as a child, knowing what he would later set in motion, would you do it? After meeting Greg Stillson, a candidate for the U.S. Senate for whom his former lover Sarah is campaigning, Johnny is overcome by a vision of Stillson as future American president, initiating a nuclear strike. Shot with dramatic lighting and staged like a play, this vision is comprised of three men, including Stillson and his right-hand man Sonny, standing in a room that is part-study, part-dungeon. Just as with Dodd's house, the dungeon/bunker in this final vision works as a manifestation of Stillson's bare motives and violent unconscious urges. In the vision, Stillson, as president, orders his military general to complete the sequence which would launch global missile strikes, presumably initiating the next World War.

¹⁷ One could also argue that it connects with the second act as well. In both cases we have different visions of healthy (and unhealthy), nostalgic childhoods, with each scene featuring different "bubbly-over" of certain unconscious details. These often connect across scenes.

In order to avoid this catastrophe, Johnny makes a plan to assassinate Stillson at his next political rally, therefore answering the above-mentioned moral question by making himself the sacrificial saviour. Shot during the Cold War, *Dead Zone* takes place during a period when the threat of nuclear war is ever-present in the minds of Americans; it is woven, in fact, into their symbolic framework.¹⁸ Here Johnny, like the patient with schizophrenia, experiences this possibility of nuclear war through the realm of the imaginary (through visions, fantasies, and auditory cues), but the psychic pain he experiences as a result is real. This personal stake stresses the *interpersonal* nature of psychosis, as expressed by Bollas; Johnny is both integrated into, and expelled from, the symbolic order in his final act.

Ultimately, Johnny's attempt to assassinate Stillson fails, but it results in Stillson being exposed as the coward that he is—violently snatching Sarah's infant child to hold it in front of him as protection—and thus Johnny fatalistically accomplishes what he had initially set out to do.¹⁹ Committing the ultimate sacrifice, Johnny finally regains the love of Sarah, single-handedly averts global disaster, and, as he lies dying, finally acknowledges that what was first perceived as a curse might actually be a gift.

What is most horrific in *The Dead Zone* is not the notion of the paranormal, or the ability to see the future (and the past), or this “dead zone,” but the breaking-through or permeation of the unconscious; Johnny is trapped in, and by, his unconscious, and the unconscious of others. The fact that this breaking through is experienced somatically, points to *The Dead Zone* as being one of Cronenberg's most embodied explorations of psychoanalysis and the symptom. This embodiment is linked to the tragedy of the film—Johnny can no longer participate unconsciously in the everyday, and, as such, this breakthrough of the unconscious, of “too much,” hounds Johnny until he is overtaken. Bollas writes: “Living in the everyday [...] is not something that the schizophrenic can do. He cannot forget his authorship and is weighed down by a world that seems constantly to demand from him some form of understanding, enlisting his anxieties, keeping him always on the edge of a

¹⁸ We can draw parallels here with the film *The Omen*, which was released in 1978, and its second sequel, *The Final Conflict* (1981), both of which abound in Cold War imagery and apocalyptic dread. Cronenberg's vision of Cold War paranoia is decidedly more embodied and personal than these other films—which turn on corporate schemes and powerplay among the elite—would have it.

¹⁹ In a final vision, Johnny sees that Stillson's political career is over and that Stillson commits suicide as a result.

precipice over which he might fall into the stream of unconscious thinking” (2015, 121). This is Johnny’s lot, constantly balancing on this precipice, and like Poe’s unnamed narrator, trapped in the shadows of a space and a visitation that are both of him and outside of him.²⁰

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted—nevermore!

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²⁰ This essay is a revised and expanded version of a lecture given on 12 February 2019, as part of the Montreal Monstrum Society course, “A Year in Horror: 1983” (<https://monstrum-society.ca/2018-2019-courses.html>).

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FEATURE INTERVIEW

Talking *Knifepoint Horror* with Soren Narnia

Jeffery Klaehn

Upon first discovering Soren Narnia's elegantly minimalist podcast, *Knifepoint Horror*, I was struck by its creator's talent for economical and fast-moving storytelling.

Narnia (cited in Cutter, 2016) explains: "I envisioned this type of fiction to be as direct and efficient as possible, aiming only for the scare and nothing else. The term just came to me and seemed as descriptive as any. Blade goes in, blade comes out, piercing only the proper nerves, and you move on to the next story."

Knife in, knife out, quickly.

The stories and characters come across as existing in places that are simultaneously real and otherworldly.

Knifepoint Horror is a podcast waiting to be discovered. In this interview I discuss horror, writing and storytelling with Soren Narnia, and explore *Knifepoint Horror* as a transmedia horror project.

Jeffery Klaehn: Please tell me about your goals with *Knifepoint Horror*.

Soren Narnia: I'm more and more seeing podcasting as an act of one-way friendship with the world; it's satisfying to play the role of the familiar voice for people, keeping them company on a regular schedule and in times when they just want to feel a little less alone or want an escape. The solo podcaster in this case can become a trusted ally in life, one who doesn't demand any reciprocation. I think it's part of why people far prefer it when I deliver a very traditional first-person story with minimal effects as opposed to anything more elaborate.

In terms of horror, it's become a mission to give people a sense of surprise, of something they haven't quite heard before. Success for me now is having someone say, "That story went somewhere I wasn't quite expecting" more than "That was scary." I think what I owe the listener is originality.

It makes me feel good sometimes to think that I have no workable ideas left, because that means a new direction, even a subtle one, must be coming for me. I do often crave that horror would sort of just leave me alone, that no new ideas for that type of story will come and I'll be seized with a permanent sense of "That's it, it's over." I think there'll be an exciting freedom then to do other things. But horror keeps holding onto me, still just satisfying enough a pursuit to indulge the ideas that do come.

JK: What does *Knifepoint Horror* mean, for you?

Soren Narnia: Originally, when I was just trying to test the waters of podcasting as a way of getting the stories out there, *Knifepoint Horror* meant a very direct and spare approach to storytelling, with the goal being to tell the scariest tale in the fewest words I could, stripping them of adornment almost entirely. But the concept has changed a bit over the years. These days there's an exhausting number of first-person audio horror stories to choose from, so I slowly began to look around for other concepts to play with, to keep myself interested in writing in the genre. In the last few years, it's been more about seeing what *else* horror can do—adding that second layer of theme, focusing more on the characters and how they see the world, experimenting with different formats.

JK: 'digs' is one of my favorite *Knifepoint Horror* stories. In it, a man who has just leased an apartment finds his world unsettled by a string of creepy events. The story subsequently leads us through a maze of dark hallways and strange entanglements. Please share your thoughts and reflections about this story.

Soren Narnia: 'digs' is kind of an unusual story compared to the others. There's a bit of an element of dark comedy to it, which I'm trying to embrace just a little more, as I'm a big believer in varying tones within a single piece of fiction. Getting weird and wild and then pulling things back to straight terror can work beautifully and create something more memorable; I'm thinking here of some favorite movies, such as the original versions of *The Wicker Man*, *Dawn of the Dead*, and *Suspiria*. All of these have somewhat absurd moments of frenetic

wonkiness, then go dark at just the right times. I want to push that envelope a bit more.

JK: The entire story is grounded in a sense of the familiar but leaves so much to the imagination with the ending – which brings the knife.

Soren Narnia: I usually don't go much for truly weird "breakaways" in fiction, where we're thrown for such a loop that time and space get muddled. But something about 'digs' needed more of a push than I was giving it; it was crying out for more of an existential threat. That ending, to me, tells us that the narrator—one of the very few in these stories who is not under direct threat of death—may have stumbled into something far weirder than he thought, and I like the dark humor of that, the sense that he thought he was out of it all, safe and sound, but nope! God only knows who's knocking at that door. But no matter who it is, it *can't* be good.

JK: Your *Knifepoint Horror* stories feature a lone speaker telling the stories. What was the initial idea behind this in relation to the making of the audioplays?

Soren Narnia: The "solitary voice" effect on the listener was never anything planned; it was just the most efficient and logical way to convey these stories without getting too heavy into the realm of radio drama. Only after the podcast had been going for a few years, and I myself had become a fan of a certain style of podcast as a listener, that I really became aware of the power of a single voice in the dark. The best comparison I can make is the experience of listening to a baseball game on the radio. I like it when there's only one person in the booth because it feels like they're relating the story of the game directly to me, and we're sharing something. When a color commentator is added, that dynamic is broken, and I'm essentially listening to a talk show.

JK: Is *Knifepoint Horror* popular?

Soren Narnia: *Knifepoint Horror* may be popular within the very small genre of horror fiction podcasting, but that doesn't mean it's remotely recognizable in the broader horror realm, or that there aren't many podcasts like it that people listen to more. These stories certainly aren't something you're going to stumble across unless you're hunting specifically for horror fiction.

JK: Have you always been a fan of horror? What authors and works have influenced and shaped your perceptions of horror and the possibilities that storytelling affords?

Soren Narnia: For whatever reason, I was one of those kids that horror clicked for right away. It's funny how you can go into a bookstore and see Dracula or Frankenstein being depicted in books written for six-year-olds: our minds can grasp these concepts that early.

From the library I would check out oversized volumes of classic stories written between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and I liked the atmosphere and the creepy quiet those stories delivered: Poe, M.R. James, Algernon Blackwood, Ambrose Bierce, H.P. Lovecraft, and so many others who perhaps had one or two stories survive them. Later of course came Stephen King, who may have been responsible for first putting it into my head that the *people* behind the horror were so important, a truth that hit me ever deeper with writers like Joyce Carol Oates and Shirley Jackson.

JK: Please discuss your approach to writing and storytelling.

Soren Narnia: I usually don't feel much like a questing artist—that is, when I'm trying to create something, I'm not in it for the journey and there are no demons being exorcised here. I think of the writing as a product, not much different from an end table at Ikea, and the final result that the reader experiences is all that matters to me. I'm just trying to build you a solid end table, not tell you about myself or follow some road to personal enlightenment. Every story is a piece of craftwork to me, something to be shaped and sanded and painted and then presented. I like that aspect of it, the slow crafting, working through all the rough edges until one day comes the presentation. And then I just want to move on, to build something else that will both catch your eye and support a bowl of popcorn without collapsing – not just today, but for years to come.

JK: This reminds me of the mention of Ikea in your story “A Convergence in Wintertime” and also of Stephen King likening Ira Levin to a “Swiss watchmaker” (1981, p. 284) in *Danse Macabre*, that craftwork metaphor, likening fiction and writing to other products that represent creative vision, artistry, skill, care, and years of practice, hard work and investment. Furniture, architecture and watches can be mass produced products, created and manufactured to market, *or*, alternatively, they are sometimes created as art, to be singularly unique representations, of vision, creativity and intent. Your stories definitely fall into the latter category – in an era when many writers, especially younger writers who are hopeful about finding audiences, are seemingly obsessed with “writing to market.” Can you please speak to this, of your thoughts on how your

own writing and creative work fit (and really don't) within the broader contexts of markets and commercialization of creative work? Your work so wonderfully strikes as, as you say, being concerned only with the stories themselves, and with their presentation in your podcasts.

Soren Narnia: I bet I'd be a very different writer if I'd had some sort of commercial success early. Better or worse, I can't say, but by *not* making money, I think I was given the freedom to write whatever I felt like writing, in whatever format most intrigued me at the moment, and to grow.

I do think money corrupts pretty much everything, but as they say, it's useful if you want to buy things. I only begin to resent commercialization when it creates friction with my actual experience of someone's work. It's possible for a creator to become so concerned with success that a tacky veneer is added to that experience. I far prefer it when I sense that someone is letting a desire for excellence guide their work, not a desire to make it popular.

Occasionally people will ask me for advice, and I usually say the same thing: that there's a big difference between having a life in the arts and making a living in the arts. You can absolutely have the first thing, as much of it as you want. You're free to revel in being an artist 24/7, starting today and lasting the rest of your life. That daily existence, that way of being, is right there for the taking. It's trying like hell to make a financial score off your creations that comes with a very high cost. Some people, like me, are probably better off not paying it.

JK: Isolation, vulnerability, regret, decay and sense of place are thematically central to many of your stories, contextualizing the anxiety and fear, the nightmares.

Soren Narnia: There's no horror without isolation. The places I set the stories in are all chosen to bring it out as intensely as possible. It's not just geography; it's meteorology, the effect of the seasons, the nature of the air and the light, the sounds of the wind and the rain. So many things go into making a listener feel that dread of being cut off from familiar things. I don't know if I have the skill to write something scary that takes place in a big city. I always need to clear as many people as possible out of the equation.

As for regret and decay—well, those themes emerge just from being in the world, seeing and sensing emotional pain, making mistakes, feeling the passage of time, watching the people we know get older. It all has to go into the stories, if they're going to feel real.

JK: How did your podcast initially come about? What inspired your approach and the set up? Do you recall your early thinking about it?

Soren Narnia: I was intrigued by this new format that would let me send stories directly to the public with no gatekeeping, no permissions. My first thinking was that I would put out a collection of whatever type of story I had the most of, which happened to be horror. I wasn't aware of what else might be out there on the market already; it was purely an experiment. When I was finished with that first round of podcasting and had no more stories to share, I thought, "Well, that's interesting, maybe this is something for the future," and let it die. But the listenership kept seeming to increase long after I had stopped posting stories. I credit the listeners almost entirely with pulling me back in. They asked for more, and would not stop. I was surprised to find out how much I liked diving back in and continuing to write in this genre.

JK: Do you see your work as falling within the "new weird" genre, and what do you see as the most important parts of what you're doing, as a writer and creator?

Soren Narnia: This is the first time I've heard the term, although I'm certainly familiar with the old-school term "weird fiction," which I've always liked. I don't know that I'd classify this work as "new weird" as I understand it to mean after my three-minute deep dive on Wikipedia—it's more throwback than anything else. There's never a conscious attempt to world-build, or blend elements of sci-fi or fantasy into the mix. I'm a bit outdated even, a tad creaky in my approach, as if you picked up a horror anthology in 1963.

What makes it tough for me to put *Knifepoint Horror* into any particular bucket is that I have so little knowledge of today's buckets—I'm pathetically uneducated in what's going on in the world of horror fiction. I'm mostly aware of the trends of horror cinema instead. My reading habits are woeful. Woeful!

I would say the only important thing going on with *Knifepoint Horror* is that it might give a few more writers hope that an audience can be won from scratch, on an absolute shoestring, with no conscious promotion, no advertising or courting of the public on social media, no taking the focus off anything but the stories themselves. But we'll see if even that remains true in the years ahead as podcasting becomes ever more monetized and our listening choices are influenced more and more by marketing money. It could be that a podcast like this one, if started in 2022, would simply drown unnoticed in a sea of others.

JK: Is writing horror enjoyable for you? Is it sometimes challenging?

Soren Narnia: It just gets more and more challenging. I feel the need to not repeat myself. I respect the listeners' time too much to go back over tired ground. I know that when I sit down to a movie or a book or a podcast, I don't want my time wasted by half-hearted effort. It's just not fair to ask someone to trust you with their time and attention if you haven't busted your butt to craft something sturdy.

I love the parts of creating that come before sitting down to the laptop—the dreaming, the imagining, the neighborhood strolls as I work out the kinks and play and experiment. The writing itself can be, to me, a dry, lonely, and fairly boring business, and not even in my top five things to do on a Saturday.

JK: What do you mean by “play and experiment” here? What type of thinking do you do at this stage?

Soren Narnia: It's great fun to bend a story this way and that when it's still harmless to do so. Changing the setting, changing the characters, doing a little gender switching maybe, plugging one element in and dropping others, trying out different themes to see if I can get a story to work on two tracks simultaneously. This is how some of the stories start out one way and slowly become something entirely different: mentally swatting everything against a wall to see what survives. Particularly entertaining and useful is playing the story as a movie in my mind—movies have ruined me, I can't stop thinking cinematically. Scenes get cut, a soundtrack is even added here and there. I even love the problems that pop up—story holes, logic gaps, problems with the suspension of disbelief. Each one is a challenge to turn the story left and right to get it back on course.

When I finally start typing, I feel far more locked in. Play time is over. Then it's just slowly chiseling the language and writing to create the tiny effects I need, sort of like putting various filters on a camera to see what gets the right tint or exposure.

JK: Do you have a favorite story from among those you've written to date?

Soren Narnia: I tend to like the ones where the elements come into play—I really feel the cold and the snow and the wind and the rain, see them and hear them in my mind so clearly when I write. I'm very partial to a story like “Twelve Tiny Cabins,” but not entirely because of its wintry atmosphere. It's an example

of adding layers to a story, adding mystery and dimensions of character, so that the listener can't quite know exactly what sort of tale they're experiencing until it's all wrapped up.

JK: I also wanted to ask you about your story "The Tears of Sisyphus" – what inspired that story?

Soren Narnia: I'm fond of the idea of late second chances. So many of us don't get many opportunities to rewrite the story of our lives. I like human dramas that depict the hard reality of misspent years, but then give the characters an unexpected light at the end of the tunnel. These dramas are kind of rare. The message of "The Tears of Sisyphus" is the same as in the *Knifepoint Horror* story "I Was Called Anwen": You can break free. You must never stop hoping that you can.

As much as I like a good horror story, I really treasure a well-done inspirational tale. Those are harder to make plausible, but when they're pulled off, it's such a beautiful thing, and something that can be revisited for a lifetime. I've often considered leaving the horror genre and devoting myself fully to the more hopeful stories. But I've actually found little ways here and there to sneak that positive feeling into the dark stuff. Let's call it "humanist horror."

JK: *Knifepoint Horror: Book One* (2007) and *The Complete Knifepoint Horror* (2012) are print collections of your stories. Please share your thoughts and reflections on these.

Soren Narnia: This was another kind of experimentation: self-publishing as opposed to podcasting. The stories in those two volumes are generally experienced just as effectively in print as they are to the ear, so I thought I'd set them down. The books were eventually retired, but the stories reappeared in the newer *Knifepoint Horror* transcript collections.

In the end, I'd rather people have the experience than audio than in prose form, especially since the radio dramas are stripped of almost all their power on the page, but the written word in a paperback in one's hand always has a pull on certain corners of our imagination, so why not have every single story available in book form as well? It also helps those who want to do their own narrations or adaptations of the stories.

*Interviewer's Note: You can listen to Knifepoint Horror at:
<https://knifepointhorror.libsyn.com/>.*

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**Selling Bela Lugosi,
with and without Added Sugar:
Vampires and the American Television Commercial**

Gary D. Rhodes

During Bela Lugosi's lifetime, he costumed as Dracula. Since Lugosi's death, Dracula has costumed as him. From Lugosi's initial performance as Dracula on Broadway in 1927 to the cape in which he was buried in 1956, he was irrevocably linked to the character. His facial appearance and costume were distinct from Bram Stoker's description of the vampire count in his 1897 novel. Lugosi did not have grey hair; he did not wear a white moustache; he did not dress solely in black "from head to foot." True, Lugosi spoke with what many listeners would call a "strange intonation," to use Stoker's description of Dracula. But there are many timbres of "strange." Lugosi was Hungarian; Stoker's Dracula was not. And it is Lugosi's Dracula that has become the culturally dominant of the two, from the 1920s to the 2020s, even though his image changed slightly during his own lifetime, such as in the lining of his cape becoming red for Charles Barton's film *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948).¹

Lugosi's prominence as Dracula attests to the power of cinema, the power of his persona, and to the power of mimesis. Those who will dress as Dracula to celebrate Halloween will imitate Lugosi's look and voice, even if they do not know Lugosi by name. Lugosi has been dead for over six decades, but his Dracula is alive and well, thanks to imitations that began during his own lifetime. Indeed, the first documented Lugosi imitation comes inside the running time of Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931), with Mina (Helen Chandler) teasing Lucy (Frances Dade) by repeating Dracula's own words in an approximation of his accent. A related example occurs in Wallace Fox's *The Corpse Vanishes* (1942), which stars Lugosi as Dr. Lorenz, a mad scientist; Elizabeth Russell, portraying his wife, a vampirish "Countess," adopts his accent to sound as if they both hail from the same foreign country.

Imitations of Lugosi's visual appearance became equally common, as in Lou Costello parodying Lugosi's hypnotic hands and the use of his cape in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*. Cartoon imitations of Lugosi's Dracula appeared in *Mickey's Gala Premiere* (1933), *Wax Works* (1934), and *G-*

¹ While *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* is shot in black-and-white, color-tinted publicity materials for the film indicated for audiences that the cape's lining was red.

Man Jitters (1939). Lugosi himself participated in the mimesis, playing “Bela Lugosi as Dracula,” a wax figure that comes to life in the short subject *Hollywood on Parade A-8* (1933). But the key examples are those of subsequent screen Draculas, such as John Carradine, Lon Chaney Jr., Frances Lederer, Christopher Lee, Jack Palance, Louis Jourdan, George Hamilton, and Frank Langella, all of whom, even if in varying degrees, appear visually closer to Lugosi’s Dracula than they do to Stoker’s description.²

Most of Lugosi’s cultural influence stems from his titular role in Browning’s *Dracula*, more so than, for example, the hundreds of times he played the role onstage. Even though many modern viewers haven’t seen the film, they paradoxically remember it. And while most box-office stars of 1931 are long forgotten, Lugosi’s Dracula endures, thanks to the mimesis that became increasingly common after his death. Beginning in 1957, Gabriel Dell repeatedly performed his Lugosi imitation on *The Steve Allen Show*, speaking in a Lugosian voice while wearing a Lugosian costume. Lenny Bruce began impersonating Lugosi’s accent in his act at roughly the same time, as would his drummer, Philly Joe Jones. For pop songs like Zacherle’s “Dinner with Drac” (1958) and Bobby “Boris” Pickett’s “Monster Mash” (1962), singers imitated Lugosi’s Dracula. And such vocal parodies weren’t limited to adult entertainment, as the Bugs Bunny cartoon *Transylvania 6-5000* (1963) illustrates.³

Such mimesis was intended to be humorous, even though the overwhelming number of Lugosi’s own vampire appearances on stage and screen were serious in tone. The reasons were two-fold. For one, most imitations of American celebrities in the twentieth century were comical in approach. For another, particularly from the late 1950s through the 1970s, a period sometimes referred to as the “Monster Kid” generation, the treatment of the Universal Monsters was often humorous, a curious

² My reference here would be to Lon Chaney, Jr. in *Son of Dracula* (Robert Siodmak, 1943); John Carradine in *House of Frankenstein* (Erle C. Kenton, 1944), *House of Dracula* (Erle C. Kenton, 1945), and *Billy the Kid Versus Dracula* (William Beaudine, 1966); Francis Lederer in *The Return of Dracula* (Paul Landres, 1958); Jack Palance in *Dracula* (Dan Curtis, 1974); Louis Jourdan in *Count Dracula* (Philip Saville, 1977); George Hamilton in *Love at First Bite* (Stan Dragoti, 1979), and Frank Langella in *Dracula* (John Badham, 1979). I would suggest the same of most, though not all, of Christopher Lee’s screen appearances as Dracula, particularly in *Horror of Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1958), *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* (Terence Fisher, 1966), *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave* (Freddie Francis, 1968), *Scars of Dracula* (Roy Ward Baker, 1970), *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (Peter Sasdy, 1970), *Dracula A.D. 1972* (Alan Gibson, 1972), *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (1973). By contrast, Lee does not show the Lugosi influence in the film *Count Dracula* (Jesús Franco, 1970).

³ Ben Frommer adopted a Lugosian accent to voice Count Bloodcount. Frommer had earlier appeared in the Lugosi films *Bride of the Monster* (1955) and *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1958), both directed by Ed Wood.

tempering of their original, intended seriousness.⁴ Here was the world of television horror hosts making fun of horror movies, even inserting themselves into them by superimposition, beginning with *Shock Theater* in 1957. Here was the world of puns regarding horror movies that populated so many pages of Forrest J. Ackerman's magazine *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, from its first issue in 1958 until its last in 1983.⁵ Here was the world of television programs like *The Addams Family* (1964-1966) and *The Munsters* (1964-1966).⁶ And here was a world in which Boris Karloff became known affectionately as "Uncle Boris," and in which Lugosi became more popular in death than he had been during the final decade of his life.

Indeed, the Lugosi-Dracula persona not only continued after his death, but it also evolved, with impressionists adding nonsense words that he never said in any stage play, film, radio program, or television show: "*blab, blab, blab,*" or perhaps, depending on the enunciation, "*bleh, bleh, bleh.*" The origins of the phrase likely stem from Allan Sherman's song "My Son, the Vampire," released as a single in 1963, as well as becoming the theme to a Lugosi film of the same name, the American release of his British-made *Mother Riley Meets the Vampire* (1952), directed by John Gilling. During the song, Sherman repeatedly shouts the word "blood" in a Lugosi accent, with the letter "d" not clearly enunciated. As a result, the Lugosi lexicon grew notably and noticeably. "*Bleh,*" the only word that the vampire in the Pink Panther cartoon *Pink Plasma* (1975) says, for example, with animator and voice actor Art Leonardi repeating it in a Lugosian accent.

The proliferation of fun and sometimes funny Lugosi imitations in the five years after his death came parallel to the rise of Lugosi merchandising, most famously embodied by the Dracula model kit released by Aurora in 1962 (figure 1), but also present in numerous other products, from lunch boxes and rubber masks to board games and playing cards. Here was commercial success, enough so that Lugosi's son Bela G. Lugosi sued Universal Pictures over the licensing rights to his father's image. Legal action led to more than one lawsuit and outcome, but eventually Lugosi's son proved victorious.⁷

⁴ With regard to the term "Monster Kid" in popular culture, see Bob Burns with Tom Weaver, *Bob Burns' Monster Kid Memories* (Albany, Georgia: BearManor Media, 2013).

⁵ The "Monster Kid" era, particularly its tempering of horror with comedy, deserves a monograph to explore these matters in-depth.

⁶ It should be noted that *The Addams Family* began in the form of Charles Addams' print cartoons, as published in *The New Yorker* magazine from 1938 to 1964.

⁷ For more information on these lawsuits, see Jane M. Gaines, *Contested Culture: The Image, the Voice and the Law* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). The sheer complexities of these lawsuits and their aftermath deserve another monograph, one that could examine the history since 1991. For the sake of full disclosure,

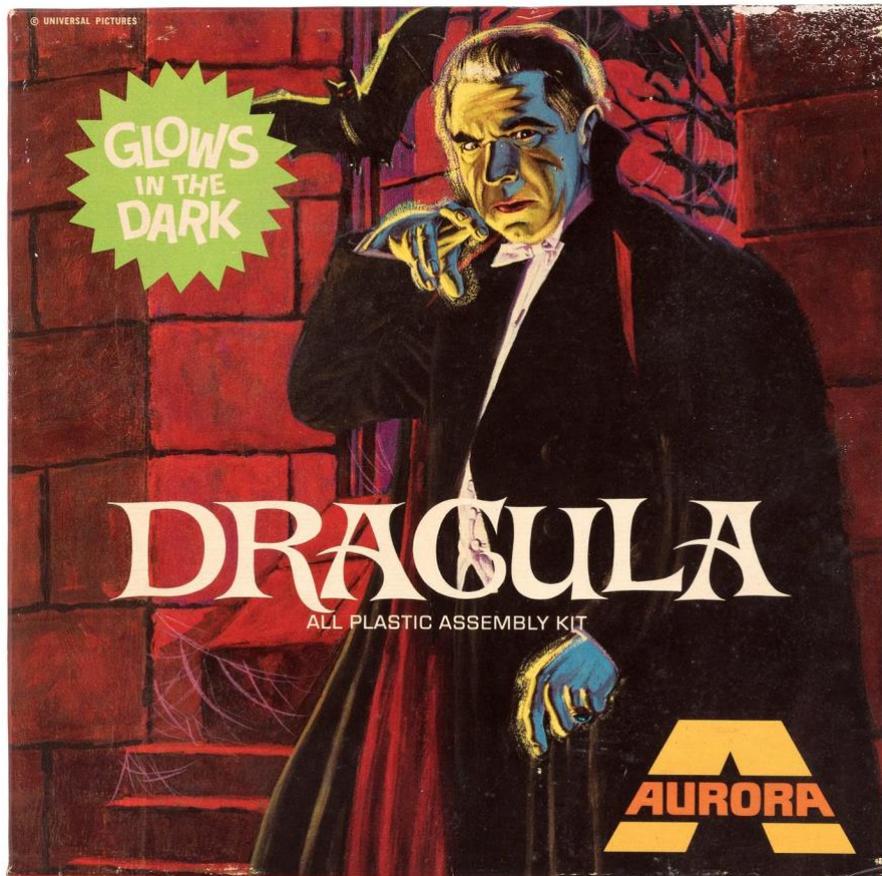


Figure 1. Cover image for the Dracula model kit released by Aurora in 1962 (Universal Pictures / Aurora Plastics Corp.).

From the 1990s to the present, Universal has continued to license its Dracula for numerous products, though sometimes without the involvement of the Lugosi family's business, Lugosi Enterprises. The Draculas on such products simultaneously do and do not look like Lugosi. They are distinct enough from his now-trademarked facial appearance to avoid litigation, meaning they do not use the trademarked name "Bela Lugosi" and they are not photo-realistic depictions of Lugosi. Nevertheless, in terms of costume and hairstyle, they evoke Lugosi's Dracula rather than, say, Stoker's.⁸

I should note that I have been friends with Bela G. Lugosi since 1985, and that I have provided much historical information for the Lugosi Enterprises website, www.belalugosi.com.

⁸ One curious example would be Hasbro's 12-inch doll *Son of Dracula*, released in 1997 as part of its group of Universal Monsters. The same group did not have a Dracula. The toy company relied on licenses from Universal, the studio who made *Son of Dracula*, and from the Lon Chaney, Jr. estate.

The result is akin to Helen Chandler’s imitation of Lugosi in Browning’s *Dracula*, or to Gabriel Dell on the late-night TV, meaning that a Dracula can simultaneously be close to and distant from Lugosi. A Halloween decoration might appear very similar to Lugosi, but not enough to provoke a lawsuit. Christopher Lee’s Dracula might be different than Lugosi’s, in part because he is a different actor, but his Dracula is visually part of the Lugosi lineage, something that he might have even realized, at least to a degree, as in most of his Dracula films he knowingly wore a duplicate of the ring that Lugosi wore in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*. Legally and culturally, Lugosi’s Dracula resides somewhere between Lugosi and “Lugosi,” between what is an original and what is an imitation, between what is a duplicate and what is a parody.

Consider Count von Count, the popular Muppet that has appeared on *Sesame Street* since 1972. As voiced first by Jerry Nelson and then by Matt Vogel, Count von Count sounds like Lugosi, an approximation of Lugosi’s accent that does not infringe on existing trademarks.⁹ He also looks like Lugosi, meaning the slicked-back hair with widow’s peak, pronounced eyebrows, and evening dress with cape. But he doesn’t look like Lugosi, meaning he is short and purple and only has four fingers on each hand. He also wears a monocle.¹⁰ And then there is the fact



Figure 2. Artist’s rendering of Lugosi with fangs in the one-sheet for Ed Wood’s *Bride of the Monster* (1955).

⁹ “Count von Count Puppet,” Smithsonian National Museum of American History. Accessed February 11, 2022. Available at: https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1444767.

¹⁰ In Browning’s *Dracula*, Lugosi did have a monocle as part of his costume, but he did not wear it.

that he evokes Lugosi through a common misconception. Count von Count has sharp fangs, which Lugosi did not use in any of his Dracula appearances onstage or in film. That said, audiences presumed he had sharp teeth, including the artist who drew the poster artwork for Ed Wood's *Bride of the Monster* (1955), which depicts Lugosi with canines like those later worn by Count von Count (figure 2). For film historians, Lugosi's Dracula didn't wear fangs; in popular memory, he did, a fact that has so often aided product sponsors who want us to bite into their tasty food products. The complicated result means that arguably the more different that Count von Count is from Lugosi, the more like "Lugosi" he becomes.

Lugosi's Dracula sells, whether he is Lugosi or "Lugosi." And by the 1970s, Lugosi's Dracula could sell products of himself. His identity, his iconic status, became such that—like so many famous film, television, music, and sports stars over the decades—he could sell other products, his endorsement carrying cultural weight. If Dracula uses it, why shouldn't I? If Dracula likes it, then I should as well. And if he looks different from Lugosi, he might still look very much like him, so that I know this really is Dracula, even if it is not: hence, the Dracula television commercial in the United States, imitating Lugosi, with a pronounced emphasis on consuming, if not blood, then our choice of a fine array of other products. "Lugosi" is a hypertextually significant cultural presence, including as an ongoing marketing strategy, one featuring as much or more comedy as horror.

Viewers and critics usually dislike commercials, though at times they heap praise upon them, including some of those produced for the Super Bowl. It is evident that an important and ongoing dialogue between the cinema and television commercials began in the fifties and continues to the present day, each aesthetically informing the other. In the book *Consuming Images: Film Art and the American Television Commercial* (2020), Robert Singer and I argue that TV commercials are short films, some of them qualifying as examples of important cinema.

The power of TV commercials is manifold, given the sheer number of times that even a single audience member might see them. Unlike films and television programs, which many viewers watch only once, an individual commercial can be not only repetitive, but also relentless. The result might at times be unwelcome or irritating, but audience hatred of commercials does not necessarily dispel their ability to sell products, or, for that matter, to introduce new film aesthetics. For example, more American viewers were exposed to the Steadicam shot in the late seventies by TV commercials than by feature films; the same was true of the "Bullet Time" shot in the late nineties (Rhodes and Singer, 2020).

The first discussion of vampire commercials in the industry did not have to do with characters rising from the grave or sucking blood ("How to

Kill a TV ‘Vampire’” 1961, 42). In the early 1960s, “vampire videos” were commercials that did not maintain strict focus on the product being sponsored, the vampires being those “components that suck strength away from the main story” (Untitled article in *Sponsor* 1961, 51). To “split” the viewer’s attention between audio and video meant that “either can work as a ‘vampire’ against [the] other’s strength” (“Beware of ‘Vampires’ in These Commercial Productions” 1961, 43). Offbeat costumes, production “gimmicks,” and some film techniques (such as animation and wipes) could also be detractive, “in vampire fashion” (“Beware of ‘Vampires’ ...” 1961, 43).

And now for a few words from our sponsor, who initially considered Mean Joe Greene or Cindy Crawford to promote a given product, but who decided instead on the Undead. On a small number of occasions, the selected vampire has not been Dracula. For example, in 1980, the Kenyon & Eckhardt agency produced a television commercial for Pils Beer featuring Donald Pleasance. One of its images recreated Count Orlok’s shadow on a wall from F. W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922), his claw-like hand reaching for a bottle of beer. Fascinating, perhaps, to horror film buffs, but a critic in *Advertising Age* didn’t recognize the image, mistakenly referring to Orlok as a “hag” (“Pils’ Bizarre Appeal 1980, S20). *Nosferatu* had its place in popular culture, increasingly so thanks to Werner Herzog’s remake, *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979), and—in terms of Orlok’s visual appearance—Tobe Hooper’s *Salem’s Lot* (1979). But despite dating to the 1920s, Orlok was not yet an icon of American pop culture, certainly not to the degree he became in the decades that followed from various types of exposure, including E. Elias Merhige’s *Shadow of the Vampire* (2000) and animated imitations on *SpongeBob SquarePants* (1999-present).

A small number of other non-Dracula vampires have also appeared in American television commercials. *Vampire Decision Engine*, a 2009 commercial promoting Bing, features a long-haired, trendy vampire who looks as if he could be a costar in Neil Jordan’s *Interview with a Vampire* (1994). And the unshaven vampire in two Nissan Murano ads from 2017 resembles the undead depicted in the *Twilight* film series (2008-2012).¹¹ Similar examples include a Ray-Ban commercial from 1988 (in which a hip male vampire dies at sunrise because he forgot his sunglasses), a 2000 commercial for Sony DVD players (in which a hip male vampire explodes because of the clarity of a sunrise played on his DVD), and an Audi commercial from 2012

¹¹ These two commercials are generally known as *Dracula and Nails* and *Dracula and a Girl*.

(in which the “daylight” power of a hip male vampire’s headlights accidentally kill all of the vampires at an nighttime party).¹²

By contrast, most American vampire commercials have overtly drawn upon Lugosi’s *Dracula*, sometimes to the extent of recreating audiovisuals associated with the Browning film. A 1987 commercial for Schlage Security Systems mimics *Dracula*’s attack on Lucy, her asleep in bed, him appearing at the window as a bat before transforming into human form. In this recreation—which features a woman with short hair not unlike Frances Dade, who played Lucy in the Browning film—*Dracula*’s entry is comically halted by a security system. Five years later, a 1992 commercial features *Dracula* invading a spooky old castle to bite a woman who successfully entices him to sink his fangs into a can of Coca-Cola instead. The story’s background music is the theme from Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake*, which is heard during the opening credits of the Browning’s *Dracula* and long associated with Lugosi, to the extent that it was subsequently heard Tim Burton’s *Ed Wood* (1994), in which Martin Landau played Lugosi, and in Gary D. Rhodes’ documentary film *Lugosi: Hollywood’s Dracula* (1999).

To further their connection to Lugosi (rather than to, say, Christopher Lee), the Schlage and Coke commercials are black-and-white rather than color, thus strengthening their direct link to the Browning film. The same is true of a 2002 commercial for Hostess Cupcakes and its Lugosian vampire. A 2006 vampire commercial for DiGiorno Pizza is also in black-and-white; it features a female victim who resembles Mina (Helen Chandler) in the Browning film. And then there is a battery commercial from 1993, in which a Lugosian *Dracula* attempts to catch the Energizer Bunny. Its first nine shots (constituting approximately twenty of its thirty seconds) are predominantly black-and-white, with limited color tinting present in the form of blue lightning and the pink bunny.

The narratives in these commercials vary, but only to an extent. Either *Dracula* dislikes the product (as in the DiGiorno Pizza ad, because garlic is among the ingredients), or he prefers the product over the blood of would-be victims. That is the case in the 2002 Hostess commercial, as well as in *Drinkula*, a 2017 commercial in which *Dracula* selects Dr. Pepper instead of blood. These are in addition to *Vampire Boyfriend*, a 2015

¹² A 2009 commercial for Delissio Garlic Bread features a teenager who looks like a goth rock musician, but who turns out to be an actual vampire. However, this commercial seems only to have aired in Canada. The company’s product manager noted that the ad was inspired by *Twilight*. See Matt Semansky, “Delissio Touts the Multiple Advantages of Garlic” in *Marketing* (June 3, 2009) <http://marketingmag.ca/brands/delissio-touts-the-multiple-advantages-of-garlic-8997/>.

commercial for Doritos.¹³ In it, an overweight but still Lugosian vampire keeps trying to bite his partner, or so we believe. At its conclusion, she invites him to sit beside her on the sofa, playfully calling him “Nibbles.” He goes not for her neck, but for a bag of the corn chips.¹⁴ This “Lugosi” is as familiar as he is funny.

Other commercial storylines humorously involve sunlight. In 1986, Texas Instruments aired an ad for the Anylite Solar Calculator that featured a Lugosian Dracula in his coffin operating the device with artificial light, rather than relying on the sun. A Kellogg Fruit Crunch Bar commercial of 2013 features Dracula and family, who hate mornings until trying the product; “Now we love mornings,” Dracula explains, despite the sun. By contrast, in the aforementioned Energizer commercial, Dracula gets locked out of his castle while pursuing the bunny, the morning sun destroying him. And in a 2008 commercial for Sunny D (aka Sunny Delight), Dracula tries to hypnotize a bottle of the orange drink, but it manages to destroy him with its sunny rays.

As with Universal’s Dracula merchandising, created without the permission of Lugosi Enterprises, these TV commercial Draculas resemble Lugosi in the macro, not the micro. They look and/or sound like Lugosi, but not exactly so, the actors’ faces being different than Lugosi’s; thus, the imitations avoid lawsuits because they are not photorealistic and therefore do not infringe on the trademark. Nowhere is this more evident than in the aforementioned Coca-Cola commercial, the company feeling obliged to offer the following text onscreen: “Dracula used with permission of Universal City Studios, Inc.” But Lugosi Enterprises is not credited, the image and voice existing outside a trademark infringement. All of this makes the commercial’s slogan, “Can’t Beat the Real Thing,” simultaneously true and false.

The Draculas in a 1977 Post Alpha-Bits cereal commercial, a 1982 commercial for the video game Electronic Dracula, a 1990 Pepsi

¹³ Much the same is true of a 1993 commercial for Kellogg’s Crunchy Nut Cornflakes, in which Dracula arrives at a would-be victim’s window in the form of a bat before transforming back to his human appearance. He first intends to bite a woman’s neck, but he is distracted by the cornflakes. This commercial aired in the United Kingdom. And in a 1999 Canadian commercial for the Dairy Bureau, Dracula prefers a cheese casserole to Mina. Not dissimilar is a 2004 commercial for Chips Ahoy! cookies broadcast in Canada. A Lugosian Dracula bites a woman who has been eating the cookies, leading him to remark on how much chocolate they contain.

¹⁴ In a 1983 commercial for Wattie’s Tomato Sauce, a scared woman runs through an old castle on a dark, stormy night while Bach’s *Tocatta and Fugue* plays in the background. When Dracula confronts her, she apologizes for having let the servants do the shopping. They purchased a tomato sauce other than Wattie’s, which leaves Dracula disgusted. This commercial aired in New Zealand.

commercial, and a 2020 commercial for the Kit Kat candy bar are clearly Lugosian in appearance and voice, but also not enough to provoke legal action. A 1981 commercial for Hasbro's game *I Want to Bite Your Finger* features a voice that sounds like Lugosi, even though the face used in the game is quite different from his; the same is true of the vampire in a 2021 commercial for Realtor.com. The title character in *Dracula's Blood Drive*, a 2013 commercial for the insurance company GEICO, parodies Lugosi's appearance and voice, but his hair is longer in the back than Lugosi's. Even more curious is the vampire in the aforementioned DiGiorno commercial. He sounds like Lugosi's Dracula and dresses like him, but he is also bald and rises completely erect from his coffin, the result being an amalgam of a Lugosi's Dracula and Count Orlok.

With regard to the issue of legal rights, one of the more curious Lugosi-inspired commercials is perhaps one for Duracell batteries aired in 1988. Here again is the spooky old castle on a dark, stormy night. *Dies Irae* plays in the background. The coffin lid rises, and Dracula emerges. It is not a human actor. Nor is it an animated cartoon. Instead, it is a prop that resembles Count von Count of *Sesame Street*. He is short and purple. But it is not Count von Count. He wears no monocle. And rather than being made of foam, like a Muppet, he appears to be plastic. He is Lugosi refracted through Count von Count into a legally permissible but still recognizable variation of Count von Count.

But nowhere are the issues of Lugosi/not-Lugosi more present in the history of television commercials than in those featuring Count Chocula (figure 3). In 1969, General Mills asked the advertising agency Dancer Fitzgerald Sample to generate ideas for its new chocolate and strawberry

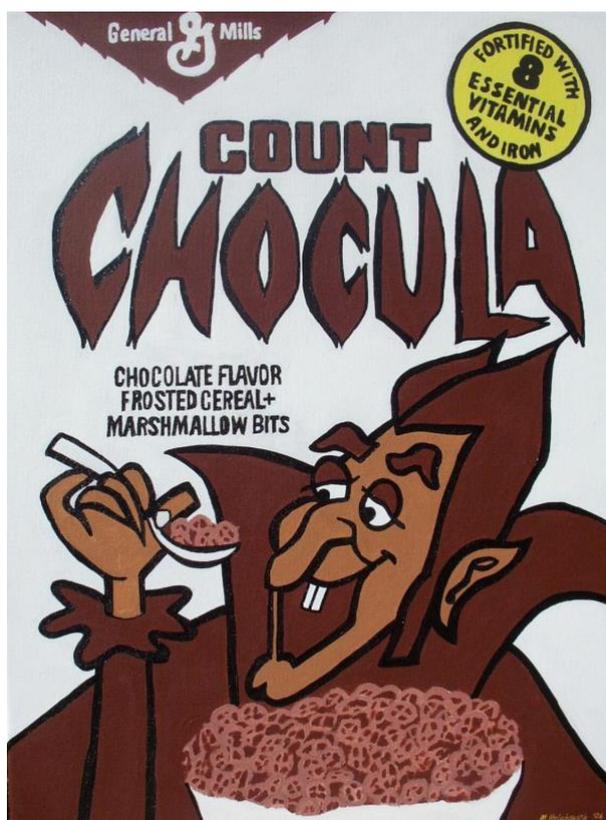


Figure 3. Original Count Chocula cereal box image (1971, General Mills).

flavored cereals. Copywriter Laura Levine created Count Chocula and the Boris Karloff-as-Frankenstein Monster-inspired Franken Berry. George Carn drew the first Count Chocula artwork (“Monsters,” n.d.). Thanks to various animators (one of them Bill Melendez, best known for his work on films featuring Charlie Brown and the Peanuts characters) brought the two monster characters to life for a 1971 television commercial (Rossen 2016).

Levine later recalled, “The whole concept was monsters, but monsters who were scaredy cats. They’d act tough, and then they’d be terrified by the sight of a little kitten” (Rossen, 2016). The idea was original for a breakfast cereal, but one that had appeared in various prior feature films and animated cartoons. Lugosi himself played such a role in Phil Rosen’s horror-comedy *Spooks Run Wild* (1941). The film positions his character as a Dracula-inspired monster stalking the countryside, but he is just a red-herring, one easily frightened by his costars, the youthful East Side Kids.

“Don’t be scared,” Count Chocula says at the beginning of a 1971 television commercial, the first in which he appeared. He emerges from a cardboard box that contains packages of the cereal, the flaps of its lid squeaking like a coffin. His appearance is Lugosian, with cape and evening dress, though they are brown, like his hair, to evoke chocolate. He has a widow’s peak similar to Lugosi in the Browning film, but his hair extends upwards into what look like two horns. He has fangs, but he makes clear that he is a “super sweet monster with the new super sweet cereal.” His fangs are thus sweet teeth, biting breakfast chocolate rather than human necks.

Overall, the caricature is visually further from Lugosi than Count von Count. And yet, as General Mills’ blog indicates, Count Chocula was a “take-off of Bela Lugosi’s Dracula portrayal in 1930s movies” (Olmstead 2015). Larry Kenney, who has voiced Count Chocula for decades, explained, “I was told at auditions that he needed to be funny and not scary, so I added more highs and lows. Lugosi was always low and very scary” (Olmstead 2015). The voice was simultaneously Lugosi and not Lugosi. The overall character was a “take-off” that has not infringed on anyone’s trademark.

Franken Berry appears in the same first Count Chocula commercial, his voice being an imitation of Boris Karloff’s. The two argue over whose cereal is better, their adversarial relationship subtly invoking that of Karloff and Lugosi in the films they made together, such as Edgar G. Ulmer’s *The Black Cat* (1934), Louis Friedlander’s *The Raven* (1935), Lambert Hillyer’s *The Invisible Ray* (1936), and Robert Wise’s *The Body Snatcher* (1945). It also subtly invokes the professional rivalry attributed to the actors by some monster fanzines and books in the 1960s and 1970s.

Subsequent commercials continued to depict arguments between Count Chocula and Franken Berry, but they also add the element that Levine

intended: the monsters become frightened when a third character unexpectedly appears, even though said character normally announces that he or she enjoys both of their cereals. Consider, for example, a 1978 commercial in which the two monsters bicker at a wishing well. A frog emerges to endorse both cereals equally, but his presence causes the duo to jump into the well in order to escape. The approach aligns clearly with the strategy employed during the “Monster Kid” generation, making monsters as friendly and/or comical as they were horrifying.

The commercials repeatedly relied on this narrative, as in one from 1977, in which a cuckoo from a grandfather clock scares the duo into hiding, as well as one from 1979 that has the two arguing over which scary movie to watch on TV; the TV aerial turns out to be the ears of a bunny, with both monsters escaping in a bed that folds upwards, Murphy-style.¹⁵ In other commercials, the two manage to frighten themselves, as in a 1980 commercial, in which the sound of a closing drawbridge scares them, and in a 1981 commercial, in which a collapsing pool table causes them to shiver, and in a 1982 commercial, in which Franken Berry knocks over a Gramophone speaker, its noise scaring them into hiding behind a curtain.¹⁶

Count Chocula commercials have occasionally varied from this format. A 1979 commercial featured Count Chocula and Boo Berry, a blueberry character introduced in 1972 as a ghostly imitation of Peter Lorre. The two argue inside a bell tower. Various other commercials included Count Chocula, Franken Berry, and a third character, whether Boo Berry in more than one 1972 commercial, Fruit Bruit (a werewolf character) in more than one 1973 commercial, and Yummy Mummy (aka Fruity Yummy Mummy) in a 1988 commercial. And in some commercials, the punchline conclusion of monsters becoming frightened does not appear, thus allowing time within thirty seconds for General Mills to promote toys temporarily included inside the cereal boxes.¹⁷

Count Chocula appeared in commercials by himself on some occasions, his appearance changing slightly during the 1980s and 1990s, his facial features appearing more exaggerated and his movements more fluid, the apparent result of efforts to modernize the character. But such evolutions at times looked backwards to Lugosi. In a 1984 commercial,

¹⁵ Another example is a 1982 commercial in which Count Chocula and Franken Berry are aboard a pirate ship, with a talking parrot scaring them.

¹⁶ Another example is a 1981 commercial in which an old automobile collapses, its sound frightening Count Chocula and Franken Berry.

¹⁷ Examples include a 1972 commercial that promoted “Monster Action Rings,” a 1973 commercial that promoted “Monster Mystery Riddles,” and 1981 commercial that promoted “Spooky Speedsters.”

animators gave Count Chocula hypnotic hand gestures that make the cereal's marshmallows float. Lugosi's Dracula in Browning's *Dracula* and in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* had famously used similar gestures. And yet the hand gesture itself was not a legal liability: it is not part of the trademarks held by Lugosi Enterprises.

On two other occasions, commercials for General Mills' monster cereals overtly conjured the Universal horror movies of the thirties and forties that inspired them. In circa 1988, one spot featured text and editing akin to horror movie trailers, featuring large, spooky onscreen text (echoed with voiceover) pronouncing, "They're Enormous," "They're Humongous," and "They're a Scream," to promote the inclusion of large marshmallows ("Monstermallows"). Images of children enjoying their breakfast are in black-and-white, though the cereal and cereal boxes in the same shots appear in color. Intercut are black-and-white clips of Lugosi from Browning's *Dracula*, Karloff from Karl Freund's *The Mummy* (1932) and James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), and Elsa Lanchester from *Bride of Frankenstein*.

Even more notable is a 1987 commercial that promotes Count Chocula. A little girl appears in black-and-white, enjoying the cereal. Pictured in color, Count Chocula is happy with her choice, but he becomes puzzled when a bat flies into the room. The commercial cuts to an image of Lugosi from Browning's film. "The real Dracula!", the little girl exclaims. The notion scares Count Chocula. The little girl is then superimposed onto footage of Lugosi approaching a table, another excerpt from Browning's film. Yet another image of her superimposed onto Browning footage shows Lugosi with milk instead of a wine bottle. Here is the original Lugosi Dracula and his animated imitation, in the same commercial, the juxtaposition bringing differences and similarities into sharp relief.

And the similarities are greater than expected, as the Lugosian voice emanating from Lugosi is not Lugosi's, but rather another Lugosi imitator, reading lines for him that suit the commercial's narrative and the general remit of making monsters acceptable for children. "Good morning," he says (rather than "Good evening," since this is a breakfast food), as well as asking "May I have some?" His final dialogue announces, "I'll sink my teeth into ... the delicious chocolatey marshmallows in Count Chocula's cereal." The specific words suggest the fangs wrongly attributed to Lugosi's Dracula. The pause echoes the pause in Lugosi's dialogue "I never drink ... wine," words he spoke in the very scene from the Browning film clipped for this commercial.¹⁸

¹⁸ This 1987 commercial was not the only connection between Lugosi's Dracula and Count Chocula that year. Computerized artwork of Lugosi's trademarked image also appeared on boxes of the cereal, which resulted in a controversy due to the medallion he wears. It features six points, which some persons took to be an inappropriate use of the Star of

The most notable visual transformation that Count Chocula underwent occurred in a 1991 commercial that featured no animation, but instead a live-action actor in a mask. His eyes blink, but his face is otherwise motionless. The reincarnation proved unpopular and was not repeated. It was similar to the original animated Count Chocula, but neither close enough nor far enough away to prove successful. Rather, the breakfast cereal vampire had fallen into something of an uncanny valley, one that worked much better as parody. In 2020, comedian Pete Davidson played a live-action Count Chocula for a sketch on *Saturday Night Live*.¹⁹ Davidson's version was meant to be comedic; his makeup and costume are curiously closer to the animated Count Chocula than the actor in the 1991 commercial.

In terms of sheer numbers of commercials as well as popularity, Count Chocula has been the most notable vampire to appear in American television commercials. In 2018, General Mills requested help from film industry professionals to develop a feature-length film based on Count Chocula, Franken Berry, and the company's other "legacy" monster characters.²⁰ Such a film would help sell cereal, in the manner that so many blockbuster movies sell ancillary products. As of 2022, no such film has gone into production, but companies like Retro-A-Go-Go! continue to sell Count Chocula products, including "collectible" patches, pins, and wall décor.²¹ The products bear trademark information, which belongs to General Mills.²²

David. See Caroline E. Mayer, "Necklace Chokes Count Dracula: General Mills Pulls Box Design with 6-Pointed Star," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1987. Accessed February 9, 2022. Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-10-19-fi-10380-story.html>.

¹⁹ See Cassie Gill, "Dave Chappelle & Pete Davidson Break Character & Laugh During Aunt Jemima Skit on SNL," *Hollywood Life*, November 8, 2020. Accessed February 9, 2022. Available at: <https://hollywoodlife.com/2020/11/08/snl-pete-davidson-laughs-count-chocula-aunt-jemima-sketch-video/>.

²⁰ See Amid Amidi, "General Mills Wants to Make Movie Stars Out of Count Chocula, Franken Berry, and Boo Berry," *Cartoon Brew*. Accessed February 9, 2022. Available at: <https://www.cartoonbrew.com/feature-film/general-mills-wants-to-make-movie-stars-out-of-count-chocula-franken-berry-and-boo-berry-166735.html>.

²¹ These products appear on Retro-A-Go-Go!'s website, as accessed on February 11, 2022. Available at: <https://www.retroagogo.com/categories/brands/general-mills/>.

²² Some links to the General Mills website in the references list below may have been updated, removed or changed. The website does (currently) feature an article by Hanna Johnson entitled "The History of Our Monsters" (August 1, 2021), along with related links to information and stories about them at

<https://www.generalmills.com/news/stories/the-history-of-our-monsters>.

Retro-A-Go-Go! also sells various Lugosi products, all bearing the trademark of Lugosi Enterprises.²³ Lugosi products are available from other companies as well, among them T-shirts, hoodies, socks, blankets, stickers, lunch boxes, masks, models, statuettes, dolls, action figures, bobbleheads, replica movie posters, and replica props. Currently, the most expensive Lugosi doll sells for \$399.99 retail; the least expensive for under twenty dollars: priced to fit any budget, and all “officially licensed.” By contrast, many of the current Universal Monsters products either avoid showing Dracula, or he’s present as “Lugosi,” not as Lugosi.

Lugosi’s Dracula sells. He sells himself, and, with arguably greater success, he sells others. It doesn’t matter that he died in 1956. It doesn’t matter that so many people don’t know his name. Customers buy, at the request of Lugosi or “Lugosi.” They consume. Rather than being “vampire videos” that suck attention away from given products, these commercials and their mimetic depictions of Lugosi’s Dracula entice customers to sink their teeth into them, figuratively and at times literally. In commercials for Kit Kat aired in 2020 and 2021, the Lugosian Dracula wants to eat the chocolate bars, he wants to bite them, and thus so do we.

“Lugosi” also continues to evolve, just as he has over the decades with red-lined capes, sharp fangs, and “*bleh, bleh, bleh.*” Indeed, “Lugosi” became friendly and funny thanks to the many parodies and imitations that became commonplace from the late 1950s to the present day. Such evolutions may well keep Lugosi’s Dracula alive (undead?) and well and available for future product endorsements. Consider the vampire that has appeared on Spectrum TV’s monster commercials since 2017. “When I bite you,” he explains in a 2022 commercial, “there’s no surprises. You know exactly what you’re going to get.” His remarks speak to repetition, the codes and conventions that we expect of genre, including the vampire genre, and—by extension—the vampire commercial genre. And yet, we don’t *always* know exactly what we’re going to get, given the evolutions that genres undergo. The Spectrum vampire is dressed in a variant Lugosi costume (including the red-lined cape), but he looks like Count Orlok and he speaks with an American voice, no trace of the Lugosi accent.

In the Browning film, Lugosi said “I am Dracula.” In popular culture, “Lugosi” says “I am Draculas.”

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²³ These products appear on Retro-A-Go-Go!’s website, as accessed on February 12, 2022. Available at: <https://www.retroagogo.com/categories/collections/bela-lugosi/>.

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**It's All About Repetition: Maternal Time in Horror
from *Jeanne Dielman* (1975) to *The Babadook* (2014)**

Qian Zhang

The Babadook (2014), directed by Jennifer Kent, is one of several recent horror films in which female directors use the genre to renegotiate the cultural understandings of maternal subjectivity, especially in context of gender and domesticity. More specifically, these filmmakers draw on the tradition of women's cinema from the 1970s in which feminist filmmakers explored women's subjectivity within enclosed domestic spaces. *The Babadook* develops and intensifies the experience of maternal temporal anxiety associated with reproduction and child-care by providing a distinctive temporal experience for the audience. In this essay, I argue that *The Babadook* uses what I call *feminine repetition*, a temporal mode that emerges from Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) as a gendered manifestation of Gilles Deleuze's "time-image" (1989). *The Babadook* develops the time-image in relation to the repetitions inherent in the maternal, work, and domestic time (Deleuze, 1989). I theorize this concept of cinematic feminine repetition through both a comparison of formal elements between *The Babadook* and *Jeanne Dielman* and critical readings of Claire Johnston's (1999) notion of women's counter-cinema and Lisa Baraitser's concept of maternal time (2008, 2017). Uncovering this key temporal marker in *The Babadook* makes evident the film's important contribution to horror's engagement with representations of the maternal experience, a perspective that is often excluded from the genre but that can be found in the 1970s-to-1980s experiments on the idea of 'women's cinema.' Although *Jeanne Dielman* is usually taken as an art film, and *The Babadook* falls into horror, a more popular or commercial genre, I argue that it is the revelation of gendered repetition that allows us to read this horror film, *The Babadook*, as aligning with the pioneering art film *Jeanne Dielman*.

A Temporal Critique of *The Babadook*

Sarah Arnold (2013) has traced the centrality of the mother in horror films to Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, released in 1960 (1). According to Arnold, maternal horror has become an accepted subgenre in horror studies since then. In this

subgenre, the maternal body is the key figure used to analyze gender roles. Films in this subgenre present a conflict between embodied gendered experiences and the social and affective demands of motherhood. The social assumption that mothers should love their children and take on the roles of social education comes into conflict with, and distorts, the social milieu of the embodied experience of motherhood. As Arnold argues, these films present a dichotomy between the good and bad mothers based on their ability to repress their needs as mothers and to fit into the social consensus of the maternal role. Films such as *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski 1969), *The Omen* (Donner 1976), and *The Brood* (Cornenberg 1979), have become standard films in this subgenre.

A group of contemporary horror films, including *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (Ramsay 2011), *Goodnight Mommy* (Fiala and Franz 2014), *The Babadook* (Kent 2014), *Prevenge* (Lowe 2016), *The Nightingale* (Kent 2019), *Relic* (James 2020), *Titane* (Ducournau 2021) and *Umma* (Shim 2022) have contributed fresh insights to this subgenre. Unlike the horror films of the 1960s, in which the mother was often condemned for her failure to live up to her proper social role, films like *The Babadook* and *Prevenge* use images of motherhood as conflicting sites of social negotiation, expressing a tangible, affective 'troubling' experience of gendered domesticity. Most importantly, these films focus on the maternal experience itself, rather than on the child as a figure of evil or corrupted futurity. These films share many similarities: they are directed by women; they center on a single mother whose mother-child relationship replaces the conventional Oedipal family structure; and they problematize the assumption of a clear-cut division of good and bad mothers. These similarities set the films apart from earlier maternal horrors directed by male directors, such as *Rosemary's Baby*, in which the protagonist maintains a 'good' mother role, learning to accept her domestic duties, despite being a socially transgressive woman since her baby is suggested to be a demon. In other words, in Polanski's film, Rosemary plays the role of the good mother, but is also the social vessel for a demonic evil. In this sense, she is both a good and bad mother because her role as a good mother is hijacked by the men around her.¹ By contrast, as I discuss in this essay, *The Babadook* directly confronts and challenges the cultural and moral expectations placed on mothers and thus provokes an awareness of the differences between the mother as a character and the maternal as a social construct. This new trend in horror reformulates the relation of the maternal to the horror genre in at least

¹ Barbara Creed uses Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection to argue that the monstrous-feminine is associated with the maternal body in horror films, such as *Rosemary's Baby*. See Creed (1993).

two ways. First, it challenges the social consensus on the mother's unconditional love for children. Second, it features women as film auteurs recreating the ways of representing mothers and expressing gendered experience of domesticity in the horror genre.

A number of critical and theoretical interpretations of *The Babadook* unsurprisingly center on the mother-son relationship between Amelia and her son Samuel in the narrative. Most of the literature on *The Babadook* focuses on the ways in which the film challenges the conventional mother-son relationship. For example, Aviva Briefel (2017) focuses on maternal authority as a form of reassurance and argues that by “exploring reassurance as a fraught motherly act” (3), Kent's film creates fear out of the failure of maternal reassurances and promises. With a similar focus on the maternal role in the narrative, Shelley Buerger (2017) uses Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject as well as Barbara Creed's idea of the monstrous-feminine to argue that Amelia's “dispassionate reactions to her son” (39), rather than her love, is the source of maternal abjection. In a recent essay, Greg Burriss (2019) uses Robin Wood's framework to engage with the filmic text in *The Babadook* from a political perspective. By contrasting *The Babadook* with another film, *Under the Shadow* (2016), Burriss argues that *The Babadook* reveals a political dead end, while *Under the Shadow* energizes the struggles for political liberation. Although *The Babadook* negotiates the boundary between the normal and the Other by suggesting that Amelia is herself the monstrous Babadook, according to Burriss, the coexistence with the Babadook while living a make-believe peaceful life at the end of the film renders a pessimist view of political change, or its impossibility. These scholars recognize the problematic social position of the mother in *The Babadook*, but their narrative analyses continue to focus on Amelia's role as caregiver to her child from the perspective of the child. What is not acknowledged is the maternal temporality centered on Amelia's embodied sensations, allowing maternal subjectivity to unfold as a haptic and affective experience, and reframing her child as the Other. This essay therefore shifts the attention from *The Babadook*'s narrative structure to the formal elements that contribute to unfolding maternal time and thus revealing maternal subjectivity.

Repetition and Maternal Time in *Jeanne Dielman*

The formal features used in *The Babadook* bring to the horror film characteristics that were central to the work of many feminist filmmakers of the 1970s. In particular, *The Babadook* has a number of surprising formal affinities with

Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman*. This formal continuity points to contemporary horror's interest in depicting the gendered experience of domestic time, a critical theme of Akerman's film as well as of numerous other feminist films of the 1970s.² By tracing and re-examining Akerman's unconventional uses of formal techniques, such as long takes, repetition, and spatial discontinuity, I develop a distinction between *feminine repetition* and *masculine repetition* to rethink the cinematic revelation of a gendered experience of time. *Jeanne Dielman* encourages a gendered approach of an affective gendered experience of temporality that has been taken up in recent horror cinema. *Jeanne Dielman* was released in 1975, around the same time as Laura Mulvey's (1975) "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Due to the explicit investigation of women's gender roles and female subjectivity in art cinema, *Jeanne Dielman* is usually treated as a feminist film made under the influence of the second wave of feminism, which aimed to reshape the relationship between women and cinema (Margulies 1996). *Jeanne Dielman* depicts a single mother, primarily in her role as a homemaker, but who also relies on sex work to help cover the costs of raising her teenage son. Akerman spends three hours and twenty minutes showing the mother's daily experience across three consecutive days. The length of the film, as well as of the long individual shots, confronts the viewers with the mother's mundane experience of time in post-war capitalist societies.

The use of extended duration in *Jeanne Dielman* is key both to the film's deconstruction of classical and mainstream narrative codes, and to its creation of affective experiences beyond the limitation of onscreen representation. The film's use of what some scholars have called "real time" is often understood as at once a realistic and experimental gesture.³ Akerman's use of the long take confronts the viewer with an experience of the affective duration involved in the mundane tasks of domestic labor. This is an experience that is often excluded from mainstream narrative cinema due to the latter's prioritization of eventful action over slow time. Akerman claims that she wanted to make the audience *feel* real time (Poglajen 2016). The use of real time thus challenges the classical narrative codes and editing conventions that are designed to seduce the audiences into giving up their experience of durational time in the theater.

² Interpreting *The Babadook* through a parallel reading of Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* also suggests a collapse of the binary between high-culture / art cinema and low-culture / horror cinema. See Williams (1991) and Hawkins (2000).

³ Many essays mention this point. See Kinder (1977), Rich (1978), De Lauretis (1985), and Kinsman (2007).

Julia Kristeva (1981) posits the notion of women’s time to address the lack of discussion of temporality as constitutive of women’s experience. According to Kristeva, “when evoking the name and destiny of women, one thinks more of the *space* generating and forming the human species than of time, becoming, or history” (1981, 15). Kristeva highlights female subjectivity within a temporal dimension (1981, 17). She further introduces two facets of women’s time—*repetition* and *eternity*.⁴ The first refers to “the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm,” and the latter indicates “the massive presence of a monumental temporality” (Kristeva 1981, 16). However, it is worth noting that Kristeva’s concept of women’s time, although shedding some light on my understanding of gendered time images in cinema, presents women’s time as an opposition to the dominant male time, and thus obscures the specificity of maternal time under the category of women’s time. The notion of maternal time, as Lisa Baraitser (2008) notes, consists of the ‘again-and-again’ of repetition (58). For Baraitser, “The lived experience of mothering is closer to a seemingly endless series of ‘micro-blows’ [...] the mother’s durational experiences bringing her back ‘again and again’ into the realm of the immediate, the present, the here-and-now of the child or infant’s demand” (2008, 68). As Baraitser suggests, maternal time bears an essential relation to the (child) Other, distinguishing maternal time as a ‘time of mattering’ from the ‘meaningless’ implication of women’s time. Since both Kent’s and Ackerman’s films are focalized through the maternal figure and focus on the experience of motherhood, my argument builds on Baraitser’s notion of maternal time with an emphasis on temporal repetition.

To rethink the notion of repetition through the lens of gender, I want to make a distinction between onscreen representations of feminine and masculine repetition. I find that the notion of feminine repetition is easily ignored and treated as interchangeable with masculine repetition, which is exemplified by the demands of Fordism and standardized production. In cinema, masculine repetition can be visualized within the linear and progressive framework of the filmstrip, which is often allegorized in films themselves. Like the assembly line in a factory, masculine repetition can visually create a product line, which is usually taken as the major spatial dimension onscreen. Normally, commodities in an assembly line are presented with the help of a horizontal dimension within the frame. The same product is visualized in a line with repeating breaks or

⁴ As Kristeva writes, “As for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains repetition and eternity from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations.” See Kristeva, Jardine, and Blake (1981, 16).

intervals (Figure 1). However, women's time has no obvious relation to progress and production. Kristeva describes women's time as cyclical and non-progressive. Women's time suspends rather than animates duration. I find this distinction useful to break down the concept of repetition of work. It is not that repetition is only assigned to a single gender. Rather, there are two types of repetition: one is visible and valued, even if it is shown to be alienating (as in Figure 1 below), while the other is invisible and devalued. The latter is what I call *feminine repetition*, since it seems never to produce the kind of progressive temporality that characterizes masculine time. To be clear, I do not intend to use the word 'feminine' to perpetuate a binary understanding of gender. Since I connect the temporal repetition to the notions of production and reproduction, which have been assigned along gender lines, the notion of feminine repetition aims to acknowledge this culturally gendered division in terms of (re)production, rather than perpetuating the biological binary.



Masculine repetition. *Modern Times* (Chaplin 1936, 0:14:52)

It is striking, in this context, that *Jeanne Dielman* focuses exclusively on gendered sensations within a series of 'endless' long takes and the affective

experience of repetitions.⁵ In a sequence from *Jeanne Dielman*, after the son departs for school, Jeanne starts to clean the apartment. At one point, a long take shows her doing the dishes. Akerman places the camera behind Jeanne, so that the audience sees only her back and arms. Throughout this long take, Jeanne never turns to the camera; her manual activities are shown through the movements of her anonymous body onscreen (Figure 2). In doing so, the film provides the audiences with neither images of her facial expressions, nor images of her hands at work. With this limited visual knowledge, the audience cannot predict the end of this chore and with it, presumably, the end of the shot, as the pressure of *waiting* builds. The audience’s eyes and attention thus frequently drift within the cinematic frame, and they spend their time with Jeanne doing the dishes.



Figure 2. Jeanne doing dishes in *Jeanne Dielman* (Akerman 1975, 01:00:27)

In this long take, the dish rack—which is so carefully placed that it never gets full and only shows one plate onscreen at a time—plays a striking role in revealing *feminine repetition*. Jeanne cooks dinner, cleans the bathtub, sets the dinner table, cleans the dinner table, makes the bed for her son, makes coffee, serves breakfast, polishes shoes, does dishes... A series of chores are easily

⁵ In many mainstream narrative films, such as action movies and thrillers, characters’ emotions are usually emphasized by speeding cuts and close-ups of facial expressions. In doing so, each following shot serves to intensify affects shown in the previous shot.

recognized, but these chores are too “trivial” to count as “real” labor. Because they do not produce value, they are socially unmeasurable. Housework is repetitive and time-consuming, but is not quantifiable. As Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English (1975) note:

Housework is maintenance and restoration: the daily restocking of the shelves and return of each cleaned and repaired object to its starting point in the family game of disorder. After a day’s work, no matter how tiring, the housewife has produced no tangible object—except, perhaps, dinner; and that will disappear in less than half the time it took to prepare. (6)

It is worth noting that repetitive housework has historically up until the present moment most commonly been assigned to women. As women are conventionally and socially deemed responsible for the (un)productive, repetitive housework, I thus describe this type of repetition as *feminine repetition*.

Returning to the medium shot of Jeanne doing dishes, the cleaned plates are shown in a “singular” form. Within the frame, only one plate faces the camera. The audience can see how the clean plates are placed in the drain basket one by one, each plate marking a bit of repetitive time. However, due to the frontal framing, the audience cannot count the plates, and thus cannot quantify the amount of work that has been done. In this sense the repetition of labor does not produce a new or additional image, the image repeats with almost perfect symmetry, so that each image can be said to replace the previous one from which it nonetheless does not differentiate itself; Jeanne’s time can only be felt, not seen or marked.

Two additional elements contribute to this shot’s experience of gendered time. Akerman’s decision not to center the shot on Jeanne’s face or active hands encourages the audience’s eye to wander, skimming the surface of the screen. This visual wandering exaggerates the anxiety of “nothing to see.” The chores are de-familiarized by de-visualizing Dielman’s *actions*, while depicting a form of pure repetition. The repetition diminishes the depth of temporality. The ‘again and again’ feature, in Baraitser’s words, makes the beginning and the end of the work impossible to define. Due to the lack of traces of progress aligning with the emphasis on the repetition, any prediction, as a temporal consciousness for imagining differentiation, loses its power. That said, the process of prediction and visual tension becomes a mere act of reclaiming something that has happened in the past or at present, without a future. The audience thus also partakes in the domestic labor of repetitive reclamation that characterizes

housework. Moreover, the repetition also makes time sense-able. Prolonging the repetition onscreen via long takes bores the audience with “nothing-new images.” The culturally and socially devalued time of doing dishes here becomes a major barrier in the audience’s desire for narrative pleasure, engagement, and identification. Thus, the boredom of domesticity intensifies across the boundary of the cinematic screen, from image to spectator. This reveals, in a powerful and shared affect, the experience of women’s alienation under capitalism. Jeanne is akin to a machine, which is repeatedly working without any emotional investment, an affective stance that she will repeat across her many chores, including her sexual encounters with the Johns. An anxiety thus arises from a gap between two senses related to time: the awareness of time passing and the awareness of the unpredictable. This anxiety is particularly assigned to women, who are excluded from linear temporal progression.

In addition to the direct investigation into time, Akerman also maintains a sensorial suspension by embracing the recurring empty frames and the offscreen space that defines them. In Gilles Deleuze’s (1989) words, these images are a direct representation of time. Empty frames and offscreen space are not two isolated concepts. According to Noël Burch (2014), the empty frame is often used as a marker for emphasizing offscreen space and offscreen activities. But due to the “nothing happening” in the offscreen space, both empty frames and offscreen space become non-identical “landmarks,” which are recurring but disconnected. So, these empty frames onscreen become what Deleuze calls pure optical and sound images, that is, direct time-images (41). In *Jeanne Dielman*, Akerman’s camera position is carefully chosen, and the camera never moves to track Jeanne’s movements. Thus, Jeanne is not a star, adored and followed by the camera, but a figure for repetitive time and its emptying out of space. Although Jeanne steps offscreen, the camera never stops filming and thus reserves many of the empty frames for a recognizable time. A sense-able slowness becomes tangible to the audience due to the emptied onscreen space. This way of using the camera helps the audience *feel* Jeanne’s existence in the offscreen space, an existence characterized by the anxiety of empty repetition.

***The Babadook*: A Revision of Akerman’s Feminine Repetition**

Although *Jeanne Dielman* and *The Babadook* were made in vastly different generic and institutional contexts, their narrative and formal similarities are striking. Both films depict a widowed mother rearing her son alone. Both films show memories while eschewing the flashback structure, thus placing the past within

or as a component of the present image.⁶ In addition to these narrative similarities, *The Babadook* also borrows and complicates Akerman's formalist inventions in *Jeanne Dielman*, further negotiating the early idea of women's counter-cinema. This section shifts the focus to Kent's 'horror remake' of *Jeanne Dielman* to interrogate how this contemporary horror film creates an affective gendered temporal experience of the emptiness of domestic time, and how this affective experience created in horror sheds light on women's counter-cinema as well as the subgenre of maternal horror.⁷

The Babadook opens with a sequence depicting Amelia's dream that begins with her in a car accident at night. Several scholars read this opening sequence as a narrative clue to account for Amelia's problematic relation to her son (e.g., Ingham 2015). Aoife M. Dempsey (2015) and Paula Quigley (2016) emphasize that the car accident depicted in the opening sequence mirrors the car accident that caused her husband's death on the way to the delivery room. For Amelia, her son's birthday thus becomes a scar reminding her of the loss of her husband. This, it is often claimed, explains Amelia's troubled maternal relationship to her son (Dempsey 2015; Quigley 2016; Pyles 2019; Konkle 2019; Mitchell 2019). Additionally, this opening sequence expands the cinematic exploration of repetition. This sequence immediately raises a question of the relationship between the maternal subject and repetition. The nightmare is a present repetition of the past trauma, opening a new dimension to rethink repetition in a non-chronological way.

The use of a close-up facilitates the audience's recognition of Amelia without delivering any detailed context. Following the imbalanced sensational experience, the audience is abruptly introduced to Amelia, who is *returning* the audience's gaze in a close-up (Figure 3).⁸ A woman is presumably sitting in a passenger seat of a car and traveling at night. She tries to control her breathing

⁶ Without any flashback sequences, both films carefully distinguish memories from the past. In other words, no past image is released, the only image is memories haunting the present.

⁷ I do not literally mean that *The Babadook* is a horror remake of *Jeanne Dielman*. I use "horror remake" to emphasize that *The Babadook* shares or inherits a gendered concern from an earlier art film made by a female filmmaker.

⁸ Here, I intend to echo the discussions on male gaze in two main journals *Screen* and *Cinema Obscura*, since Laura Mulvey's (1975) essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In 1970s and 1980s, many film scholars joined in the arguments on negotiating the potential "female gaze" and female spectatorship in cinema. Although these arguments may be tangent to my argument in this essay, I want to play with the idea of returning women's gaze to mark how those essays influence on me. And, to be clear, I do not mean that Amelia as a female character connecting her eyes to the audiences' would reconstruct the patriarchal structure of male gaze.

but fails immediately after some small glass fragments fall into the frame. A series of narrative questions may linger in the audience's mind without any absolute answer given at this moment: Who is she? Where is she? Why is she there? The lack of clear answers isolates viewers from the character in the film and allows them to recognize their experience of time in the theater.



Figure 3. The opening Shot of *The Babadook* (Kent 2014, 0:01:07)

The close-up shot also challenges cinematic convention, which prefers to build a familiarity gradually between the character and the audience via the structures of “interpellation, imbrication or suture” (Powell 2005). These concepts are used to emphasize a passive spectatorship. That is, the audience is stitched into films and their ideologies. However, in this opening close-up shot, the audience of *The Babadook* must actively confront the protagonist and her gaze. The impossible avoidance of eye contact between the audience and Amelia is further intensified by the first unpredictable close-up shot, which negates any relaxed space for the audience to be comfortable voyeurs of Amelia and her life onscreen. Thus, the close-up of Amelia's face, rather than fetishizing her body for gendered pleasure, creates an uncomfortable communication between the onscreen body and the audience in the theater, encouraging the audience's awareness of time.

This unexpected use of a close-up of the return gaze from Amelia in the opening scene unleashes an anxiety, contributing to a sense of avant-garde self-awareness or self-reflexivity. As Nickolas Rombes (2016) mentions, “The cinematic avant-garde has always been highly self-aware, that is, aware of itself as a counter-narrative” (857). Due to the self-aware nature of *Paranormal Activity*

2, Rombes (2016) regards this low-budget horror film as an “avant-garde” film and its filmmaker Tod Williams as an avant-garde artist (842). This emphasis on a film’s self-awareness can also be linked to Peter Wollen’s (2004) concept of counter-cinema and his emphasis on the self-reflexive in counter-cinema in his essay “Godard and counter cinema: *Vent d’Est*.” According to Wollen (2004), counter-cinema refers to an alternative cinema negating the classical values in Hollywood filmmaking (525). Accordingly, counter-cinema has the following seven characteristics: narrative intransitivity, estrangement, foregrounding, multiple diegesis, aperture, un-pleasure, and reality (Wollen 2004, 525). The self-reflexive spirit strongly supports counter-cinema to wake the audience up and thus subverts the dominant ideology of mainstream cinema. In this sense, the opening sequence in *The Babadook* can be understood as self-aware, reflexive, and drawing from the tradition of counter-cinema within a generic framework.

In addition, drawing on the marginalized *gendered* temporal experience, *The Babadook* directly engages with the notion of “women’s counter-cinema.” Using Peter Wollen’s concept of counter-cinema, Claire Johnston (1999) posits the concept of women’s counter-cinema. Noting that mainstream representations of women serve a patriarchal and sexist ideology, Johnston promotes women’s counter-cinema in filmmaking to subvert the iconography and objectification of women in film, and to “interrogate and demystify the workings of ideology” (1999, 40). The feminine repetition exemplified by the shot of Jeanne washing dishes in *Jeanne Dielman* can be understood as an example of women’s counter-cinema, and Kent remakes Akerman’s shot of Jeanne doing dishes in *The Babadook* to complicate this gendered time-image.

Kent’s visual echoing of *Jeanne Dielman* is not simply a formalist homage to Akerman, but further develops the potential for horror modes to create an affective experience of maternal time. As I argued above, the representation of housework in *Jeanne Dielman*, such as doing dishes, exemplifies the notion of feminine repetition, which provides the audience a chance to experience the emptiness of gendered time in the domestic space in cinema. In *The Babadook*, this sense of feminine repetition is recreated. What Kent borrows from *Jeanne Dielman* is the way of *portraying* feminine repetition. While similar camera work expresses a similar experience of gendered temporality within enclosed space, Kent further develops the notion of feminine repetition by repeating Amelia’s dishwashing sequence at her workplace (Figure 4). This repetition continues to interrogate the questions dominated in Marxist-feminist discussions on gender

and division of labor.⁹ In *The Babadook*, Amelia appears in the kitchen within a long shot. Like Jeanne, Amelia’s back is turned to the camera throughout the shot. As in *Jeanne Dielman*, Amelia’s facial expressions and hand movements are not visible to the audience, and even the drain basket is similarly placed on her right-hand side. Meanwhile, the camera is also static and shows nothing more than encouraging the audience to “imagine” Amelia doing dishes. As I argued earlier, this image of doing dishes exemplifies non-progressive time—it is an image of feminine repetition.



Figure 4. Amelia doing dishes at her workplace in *The Babadook* (Kent 2014, 0:05:27)

Kent’s film further complicates the cinematic depiction of feminine repetition in *Jeanne Dielman*. Notably, Kent adopts a different shot scale. While Akerman uses a medium shot to demonstrate the claustrophobia of Jeanne’s kitchen space, Kent enlarges the kitchen space onscreen by including a much wider shot of Amelia in the kitchen, situated among its modern appliances. Furthermore, Kent constructs a strict symmetry in the mise-en-scene, a mirroring of the space broken only by the figure of Amelia. Two coffee cups hang on the right, and two picture frames are placed on the left. Even the chairs seem to be doubled around a table. In this context, Amelia becomes a piece of kitchenware which stands out for being unpaired and solitary.

The color tone of this shot is grayish. This cold tone disrupts a stereotype of the kind of warm-colored kitchen that is usually shown in advertisements.

⁹ I would also argue that Kent’s borrowing the idea of filming a woman doing dishes is a kind of feminine repetition in women’s cinema practice. In this sense, *The Babadook* not only illustrates, but advocates for women’s counter-cinema, which is self-aware and rewrites the classical cinematic codes by repeating feminine repetition.

The use of color thus creates an office-like or professional look of this kitchen. As Kent's kitchen becomes an office, the relationship between women and the kitchen becomes clearer: featuring Amelia in a workplace kitchen implies that the kitchen in general is women's workplace, regardless of physical location. In fact, more than one kitchen appears in *The Babadook*. The kitchen at Amelia's home is also repeatedly shown onscreen. By interweaving the images of kitchens both at work and at home, *The Babadook* blurs the boundary between workplace and home, making the notion of "domesticity" more ambiguous. Amelia is like Jeanne, doing dishes repeatedly, endlessly, and "unproductively," but the difference between these two films is crucial: Amelia is not only doing dishes at home but also at work, while Jean is confined within her apartment.¹⁰ As a 'working mother,' Amelia's office space becomes an extension of her home-office, a space that can be intruded upon at any time with calls about her son's troubles at school or with other demands of child-care. Kent translates Akerman's idea of women's social position as domestic labor into a question of gendered social status in contemporary society: has mothers' sense of time changed?

This blurring of the boundary between home and work cinematically reflects some feminist scholars' discussions on domestic labor. For example, many feminist scholars, including Silvia Federici (2012) and Michele Barrett (2014), focus on women's relation to housework and explore the exploitation of women in the capitalist mode of production. In general, these scholars recognize that under capitalism housework has come to be "naturalized" as women's unwaged labor (Federici 2012; Barrett 2014). Behind the doors of the bourgeois home, housework is further made socially invisible and non-productive. In *The Babadook*, Kent echoes the idea of unpaid and invisible "housework" by providing an image of Amelia being "unseen" in the kitchen at her workplace. Following the shot I analyze above of Amelia doing dishes alone, a shallow-focused close-up of Amelia's face makes a space for introducing her male colleague. He "intrudes" on the enclosed kitchen through the door in the blurred background. Once he steps into the kitchen, the camera shifts focus to the male colleague in the background, leaving Amelia's face out of focus in the foreground. Kent relies on this racking focus to undercut any primacy of place for Amelia in the scene, further articulating the naturalized relation of women and housework in Amelia's conversation with her male colleague. He says, "[j]ust where a woman should be, in the kitchen." Although the words are

¹⁰ Leopoldina Fortunati argues in her book *The Arcane of Reproduction* that reproductive work, including housework, is productive. See Fortunati, Creek, and Fleming (1995, 105-112).

expressed as a joke, they explicitly, ironically render Amelia's labor invisible. As Silvia Federici (2012) notes, "The second job not only increases our exploitation, but simply reproduces our role in different forms," and thus women "become nurses, maids, teachers, secretaries—all functions for which we are well trained in the home" (20). Federici' helps us to make connections between the kitchens shown in *The Babadook*. These kitchens cannot be separated from each other. Rather, they contribute to demonstrate women's exploitation *repeatedly*. From this perspective, the feminine repetition is replicated beyond the confines of home. Thus, feminine repetition, which is essentially located in empty time, goes beyond the boundary of "domesticity" in *The Babadook*.

Conclusion

In this essay, I examine the formal elements that construct a repetitive maternal time in *The Babadook*. Shifting away from an exclusive focus on the film's narrative, helps us to recognize that *The Babadook* provides an affective experience of maternal time, a gendered time ignored in the cinema outside of women's counter-cinema. I read *The Babadook* with reference to *Jeanne Dielman*, as against the binary view that identifies art-film by its relation to so-called high culture, and horror as "trash," or low culture. Similar to what Joan Hawkins (2000) points out, the boundaries between art cinema and body genres are blurred here; *The Babadook* cannot be confined within a single category of taste or aesthetic.¹¹ Comparing *The Babadook* with *Jeanne Dielman* also allows us to see how women's counter-cinema subverts some of the dominant aspects of genre, and how the cinematic exploration of maternal time evokes the unfolding of maternal subjectivity.

Blending the formal aesthetics of art cinema with the building-up of affective experience in the horror genre, and highlighting the excesses in style shared by both, *The Babadook* inherits *Jeanne Dielman*'s thematic experiment of gendered experience and expands it to a consideration of maternal horror. This inheritance echoes what David Church (2021) defines as "post-horror" (also known as "smart horror," "elevated horror," "slow horror," and "prestige horror," among other terms), which refers to a self-conscious contemporary horror film cycle that can be traced back to the art-horror in the 1970s-1980s

¹¹ Some scholars argue that *The Babadook* can be situated between high culture and low culture. See Balanzategui (2017) and Howell (2017).

and that is characterized by its stylistic and thematic ambiguity between art and genre (3). Through an unfolding maternal temporal experience, *The Babadook* does not take a conventional approach to notions of ‘mother as the Other’ in horror cinema; instead, it takes its mother to be the maternal subject who *encounters* the Other. Conversely, through the retrospective lens of horror, the subtle perturbations in *Jeanne Dielman* with respect to maternal experience come closer to terror than tedium.¹²

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¹² As part of our commitment to developing scholars doing original work in horror studies, *Monstrum* is pleased to collaborate with the Horror Studies Scholarly Interest Group (SIG), part of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS), in the selection and publication of this annual prize-winning graduate student essay for 2022, selected by a jury of SCMS-SIG scholars and members of the *Monstrum* editorial team.

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SPECIAL FEATURE

Horror Reverie I: A Symposium Celebrating 100 Years of *Nosferatu*

INTRODUCTION

Nosferatu: A Glacial Draught of Air Still Blowing from Beyond

Cristina Massaccesi

It is a real pleasure to take part, albeit only virtually and *post facto*, in the first Horror Reverie symposium organised by Kristopher Woofter, Gary D. Rhodes and Mark Jankovich to celebrate the centenary of F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*.¹ This occasion has stirred all kinds of interesting ways to pay homage and remember such a crucial contribution not simply to horror, but to cinema in general. In the last few months, I have had the chance to discuss *Nosferatu* with journalists, radio programmes and, last in time but not least in terms of interest, with a very engaging group of North London secondary school students whom I met last week during a symposium entirely devoted to the heart-shattering cultural and political events that took place in 1922, the year during which the plague of Fascism was unleashed on Europe while the vampiric plague was brought by the Undead onto the unsuspecting town of Wisborg and its inhabitants. All this interest in *Nosferatu* seems to echo the famous words of Thomas Elsaesser:

the excess energy of the undead is now readable as belonging to the cinema and its eccentric patterns of propagation and proliferation across the culture at large. Not only in the way films have deposited their coffins in galleries, museums, schools and libraries, but also thanks to the Renfields—cinephiles turned necrophiles—at home in archives, lovingly restoring perished prints and reviving the ‘originals’ at Sunday matinees or special retrospectives. (2007, n.p.)²

¹ The subtitle to this Introduction is an allusion to the words of Béla Balázs on the chilling effect of *Nosferatu* as “the glacial draughts of air from the beyond.” The line is quoted in Lotte Eisner's *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967, p. 97.)

² The essay, “No End to *Nosferatu* (1922),” appears in the booklet accompanying the DVD of *Nosferatu* released by Eureka in 2007. See also Thomas Elsaesser (2009), “No End to

I think these words ring as true now as they ever did. Contributions such as the one by Stephen R. Bissette on the unexpected link between Henrik Galeen and Vermont and on his search for the final resting place of the “retired movie director” prove how far the interest in a film and in the people involved in its making can go, and in what surprising direction our interest can take us. Having had the chance of watching the recordings and reading the proceedings of the symposium, I have found all contributions original, fascinating, and also crucial in adding new and intriguing details to the film and its paratext. The strong impression of a never-ending dialogue between the film, its makers and us, here on the other side of a one-hundred-year divide, runs as a sort of leitmotiv throughout the three panels.

Imbued as it is with Albin Grau’s esoteric vision, *Nosferatu* speaks across ages and generations, and the cyphered letter the Count sends to Knock is a particularly intriguing piece of dialogue *in absentia*, of a voice that we like to think was launched into the future. While I was researching my 2015 book on *Nosferatu* for the Devil’s Advocates series, I came across a 1980 article by Sylvain Exertier published in the French magazine *Positif* that conducted an intriguing breakdown of the letter. Although the document was not entirely deciphered, Exertier explains an ample selection of the symbols and drawings used in the message. As I discuss in my book (47-8), the letter is marked by what Exertier calls a “relative legibility” (quoted in Massaccesi, 47, my translation), a rather striking fact considering that the document is a grimoire that should not be readable without the help of a key usually only owned by the ritual’s master and his disciples. The symbol opening the letter—a Kabbalistic square enclosed in a circle representing chaos—should function as a key providing the details for the performing of the ritual. The first line of the letter, instead, can be read as a sort of title and it is enclosed in between two Maltese crosses—the symbol of the crusading order of the Knights Hospitalier—that seem to suggest that Count Orlok is indeed about to embark on his own personal crusade. There are many other fascinating symbols used in the letter, such as traditional swastikas representing perseverance, and a dragon’s head placed before a wavy line suggesting how death will bring destruction coming from across the sea. Exertier and other scholars with him are not conclusive on whether the letter represents a tongue-in-cheek touch in the film or an actual message to fellow occultists: some details—such as the rapidity of the sequences in which the letter is featured and the employment of rather obvious drawings (a dragon, a skull, a snake) to represent common concepts like death and destruction—

Nosferatu (1922)” in *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era*, edited by Noah Isenberg (New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 79-94).

seem to point in the first direction. At the same time, however, Albin Grau's serious and lifelong involvement with occultism and the interest for the mystical sciences that was widespread amongst many German Expressionist filmmakers would appear to be an indication that what we have here is something deeper and much more complex than a simple cinematographic prop. In response to Grau's grimoire, we have, of course, the one prepared—but ultimately not seen—for *Shadow of the Vampire*. What Mehrige calls “a living conversation between *Shadow of the Vampire* and *Nosferatu*,” this sort of bridge that can create a dialogue on a much deeper level, constitutes one of the most fascinating and enduring aspects of Murnau's work.

It was interesting to notice throughout the symposium several references to the pulse of the film, to the idea of *Nosferatu* almost as a living and breathing act of cinematography. The film's narrative is sustained by an inner rhythm that quickens and slows down, keeping the viewers on the edge of their seats. For most of its narrative, *Nosferatu*'s plot unfolds in a linear fashion, and we witness the events as they take place, discovering what is happening roughly at the same time as the characters. From a cinematographic point of view, this coherent universe is put on the screen by following the editing principles of continuity and by avoiding shots that could potentially disrupt the audience's perception of space, time, and cause-effect links. There are, however, some instances where Murnau shakes the linearity of the narration through the technique of crosscutting, and it is easy to notice how the director switches to this narrative mode in every sequence that constitutes a crucial turning point in the narrative. For instance, Orlok's attack on Hutter is intercut with Ellen's somnambulism whilst the vampire's voyage towards Wisborg is orchestrated as a piece of cinematic virtuosity that is crosscut with four other narrative strands. Finally, the narrative climax of the film intertwines three storylines: Ellen waiting for Orlok in her bedroom, the vampire's shadow approaching along the stairs, and Hutter going to fetch Doctor Bulwer for help. As stressed numerous times during the symposium, Murnau's use of dramatic crosscutting is certainly one of the most interesting features in *Nosferatu* and it fully validates the use of the word “symphony” in the film's subtitle. The director's approach to the crosscutting technique is also notable throughout the film because Murnau invests it with a series of complex and highly symbolic meanings that go well beyond the exclusive production of narrative tension. In *Nosferatu*, the events, characters and sets are interlocked through a series of sinister correspondences and analogies that could appear to be shocking or somewhat inconsequential to a distracted eye (think for example of the use of the shadow of the vampire's hands that connects in a circular narration Orlock's attack on Hutter and Ellen's sacrifice) but that are in fact perfectly interconnected. This all-encompassing approach to film editing, bringing

together narrative threads and deeper correspondences, has at the same time an anticipatory and intellectual quality: it propels the action forward by providing the film with a frantic pace, especially in the film's second half that is entirely sustained by the tension caused by Hutter's and Orlok's parallel rush to Wisborg. At the same time, though, simultaneous actions resonate at a deeper and visionary level by filling the narrative gaps that are inevitably created between events taking place in distant spaces and times.

The cohesive universe of *Nosferatu* is not only created by what we see, but also by what we do *not* see on the screen—hence the importance of the lost scenes eloquently discussed by Lokke Heiss in his contribution. The “less is more” principle is a powerful force behind the enduring vision of *Nosferatu*, not only in the scenes that were not realised, but also in the way other moments have been rendered more poignant through a process that we could call, borrowing a famous definition by Scott McCloud (1994), “amplification through simplification” (30). At times, we have clear annotations made by Murnau in the film's script that suggest modifications to Galeen's work. At other times, the result on the screen is significantly different from the original idea. A good example of this process of stripping down details to reach the meaningful core of a moment is the medium long shot with Ellen sitting on a solitary bench along a windy beach dotted with several crosses bent by a relentless wind. The original script—that, slipping back into Stoker's novel, names the place as ‘the graveyard of Whitby’, a mistake that was corrected by Murnau to ‘Heligoland’—suggests a rather different set up for the scene: “a long row of benches. People are strolling up and down looking out on to the sea...sitting on the benches and enjoying the view.” Compared to the more mundane idea suggested by Galeen in the script, what we have on film is an infinitely more haunting and melancholic vision. Ellen's solitude and concern are heightened by her physical isolation from other human beings and by her demeanour and attire. She appears on the beach in the attitude of a *Rückenfigur*³—thus investing the sea with the extra function of becoming a mirror for her turbulent state of mind—and the beach seems to be completely devoid of other signs of life and is on the contrary full of reminders of death and loss such as the crosses and her black dress. The haunting vision of Greta Schroeder staring out at sea—whence, it is crucial to remember, Orlock is coming, not her husband—is a powerful example of the amplification process applied to the film.

The female heroine in *Nosferatu*, as underlined during the symposium, is portrayed in an elusive and subtle way. Mina, Ellen's literary counterpart in Stoker's *Dracula*, is a modern Victorian woman. Although not a “New Woman” in the purest sense of the word and somewhat conventional in her

³ A figure seen from behind.

outlook on life, she nevertheless has a job and knows how to use technology—it is thanks to her skills in using a typewriter that Dracula's movements are reconstructed and the vampire is finally killed—and her character is fashioned as a combination of traditional feminine warmth and masculine determination. As Van Helsing declares in Chapter XVIII: “Ah, that wonderful Madam Mina! She has man's brain—a brain that a man should have were he much gifted—and a woman's heart” ([1897] 1988, 238).

Compared to Mina, Ellen is harder to understand. The first time we see her, she is playing joyfully with a kitten and could at first appear as a rather carefree and even childish character. However, this superficial impression is soon dispelled by what can be interpreted as a deep affinity with nature hinted at by Ellen's easy proximity with a domestic predator. There are many instances in the film when this aspect becomes clear; for example, her reaction in the sequence where she is presented with a posy of flowers by Hutter gives us a glimpse into a melancholic personality finely in tune with the idea of mortality. If Hutter is constantly filmed running about the set or in motion—as pointed out in the symposium by Argyle Goolsby (Panel One), “the one time he stops, the one time he collapses, and lets go and accepts everything that happened, that's happened to him, [Ellen] is gone”—his wife is often framed in a static situation, for instance embroidering at the window or sitting on a solitary bench on the beach. Yet, her constant proximity to thresholds and open spaces, such as the window and the sea, seems to suggest the possibility, perhaps even the desire, for an escape into a different reality to which she seems to be already alert on a deeper and metaphysical level. When compared to Mina Harker, who eventually survives her encounter with the vampire—or more precisely, is saved from the vampire by the Crew of Light, the men surrounding and protecting her—Ellen is also a much more tragic and solitary heroine whose faith almost coincides with that of martyrs. Her death is not caused by weakness, but it is rather an act of supreme self-sacrifice, and also of self-assertion.

Many other interesting points have been discussed during the symposium, from *Nosferatu's* distinct lack of modernity (John Browning, Panel Three) to the repurposing of Orlock's vampiric image (Murray Leeder, Panel Two) in later films. It would be beyond the remit of this short framing piece, however, to touch them all. I will leave the discovery of the many engaging angles brought out by the contributors to the readers of this issue of *Monstrum*. Before doing that, though, I would like to briefly recall the circumstances of my first encounter with Murnau's film, as all the speakers have done during the symposium, thus providing a sort of virtual logbook detailing the format, time, and impact of this initial meeting. I first watched *Nosferatu* during a late-night broadcast on the third channel of Italian public

television. It must have been in the early 1990s, most likely in 1992 or 1993, when I was a high school student and always on the lookout for old films. Like many of the contributors to the symposium, my first glimpse of Count Orlock was on a small TV set, in a black-and-white copy of the film, and I have no idea to this day of the version I watched that night. I distinctly recall, however, that I had only recently finished reading *Dracula* for the first time and that I was slightly obsessed with the novel and its imagery. I had also gone to the cinema to watch Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), and the three things somehow coalesced in my brain: the romanticised grandeur of Coppola's film, the grittiness and desperation conjured up by Murnau, and somewhere in-between Stoker's novel, modern and ancient, scientific and outlandish. It would be years before that late-night watch would find its way into my academic work, but I think it would be safe to say that the first impact with the film stayed with me always. And this idea of the formative encounter, of a meeting that somehow managed to shape our imagery and stayed with us even when not directly involved with Murnau's film, is an aspect that comes across very clearly throughout the symposium and brings us together.

Thank you for reading.

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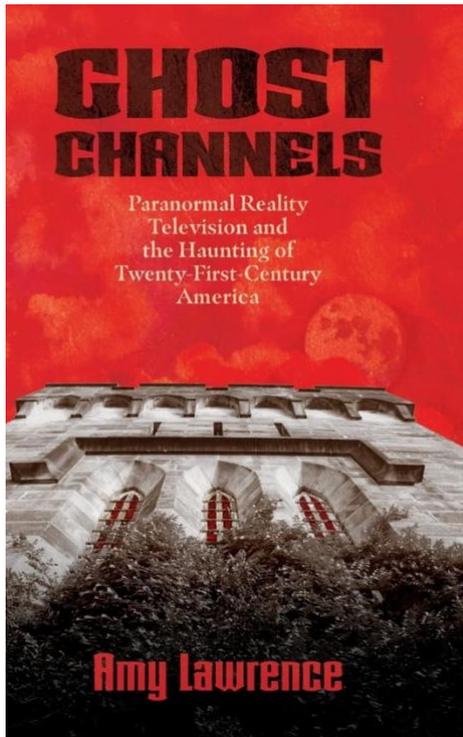
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BOOK REVIEW

Ghost Channels: Paranormal Reality Television and the Haunting of Twenty-First Century America

By Amy Lawrence
University Press of Mississippi
2022

268pp.

Paranormal reality television has been a staple on cable channels, and now streaming services, since the turn of the millennium. On the heels of the reality TV boom with programs including *Survivor* (2000-present) and *Big Brother* (2000-present), as well as the phenomenal success of paranormal films such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007-21), paranormal reality TV has proven to be an enduring subgenre. Amy Lawrence's new book *Ghost Channels: Paranormal Reality Television and the Haunting of Twenty-First Century America*, the first monograph dedicated to the scholarly study of the subgenre, provides thorough analyses of a variety of shows including *Ghost Hunters*, *Ghost Adventures*, *Long Island Medium*, *Paranormal State*, *Celebrity Ghost Stories*, and more. Indeed, Lawrence writes, "Between 2004 and 2019, over six dozen documentary-style series dealing with paranormal subject matter premiered on television in the United States," demonstrating the surprisingly saturated market of this televisual niche (3). Lawrence's central argument, however, is a familiar one for those well versed in horror scholarship: paranormal reality television, as a popular genre form, reveals "the fears of a particular cultural moment" (13). Although the book contains many insights that demonstrate the socio-cultural and political import of the supernatural in our contemporary epoch, including, as Lawrence writes, "the precariousness of deeply held beliefs about who Americans are, what the country stands for [...] and who must pay for the past" (214), the book too often defines paranormal reality television strictly as a representation of, or reaction to, contemporary crises while sidelining the rich

and nuanced histories of haunting. The book's best moments occur when Lawrence embeds the current vogue for paranormal reality television within the deep-seated history of haunting in American culture, outlining the versatility and representational power of the ghost. *Ghost Channels* nevertheless offers a valuable taxonomy of the subgenre, delineating the form, structure, and function of these shows while importantly emphasising why ghosts continue to matter.

Across seven chapters, Lawrence demonstrates how, despite the variation in format, all paranormal reality television is constituted by a paradoxical imperative to establish the ordinariness of the extraordinary. The first chapter "Paranormal Survivors: Validating the Struggling Middle Class" discusses what Lawrence calls the first-person paranormal show, in which an individual is interviewed describing their supernatural experiences while re-enactments represent their accounts. Here, eye-witness testimony is foregrounded as the "privileged source of evidence" as the interviewee seeks validation of their personal experiences (25-26). Lawrence's allegorical hermeneutic is evidenced when she describes *The Haunted, Paranormal Witness*, and *When Ghosts Attack!* as parables depicting "when a good house goes bad" (29). Interviewees describe their dreams of home ownership succumbing to nightmares of supernatural dispossession, "using spectral metaphors to stand in for issues and effects they cannot articulate otherwise" (32). Despite this initial dismissal of ghostly encounters as metaphor, Lawrence acknowledges that witnesses are not speaking metaphorically and evince a genuine belief in their supernatural experience (33). Certainly, these programs engage with the contemporaneous housing crisis and middle-class financial instability, as Lawrence demonstrates; however, the haunted house has endured through centuries—millennia—and would therefore seem to evince a perpetual concern with the essential instability of the notion of property, thereby resonating far beyond the Great Recession of 2008 and the housing crisis highlighted by the book's allegorical take on haunted houses.

The second chapter, "Ghost Hunters: Men on Edge" distinguishes the first-person paranormal show of the previous chapter with the investigative mode of ghost hunting. Lawrence identifies this mode as "fundamentally conservative" as ghost hunting shows are male-dominated enterprises concerned with recuperating fragile masculinity within technophilic logics of reason and outward displays of aggression (53). Lawrence persuasively argues that these shows rely on technologies such as night-vision cameras, EMF readers, EVP recorders, SLS cameras, REM pods and so on, in an effort to avoid the feminized 'passivity' of traditional mediumship and construct a sense

of masculine mastery and control. “If you do not establish yourself as the master of technology,” Lawrence writes, “you risk becoming the technology” (80). The gendered politics of paranormal reality TV is further explored in the third chapter “My Favourite Medium: Women’s Work” in which psychic mediums like Theresa Caputo in *Long Island Medium* must minimize their extraordinary power by emphasizing their status as ordinary suburban moms (90). This is accomplished by situating scenes of psychic readings within domestic settings of the home and kitchen, presenting psychic abilities as a gift that provides support and comfort, and by including non-supernatural storylines within its episodes. Referencing the visibility of female mediums in the 19th century and their advocacy for liberal policies including universal suffrage and abolition, Lawrence argues these programs tame the transgressive power of mediumship by couching their psychic ability in ignorance. That is, the psychic often does not know or understand what message they are communicating to their client; what matters is that communication happens: quite literally, the medium is the message.

The book’s best chapter is its fifth, entitled “Abandoned Institutions: ‘It’s in the Walls.’” Lawrence examines the predominance of decaying buildings in ghost hunting shows, particularly hospitals, prisons, and asylums, as “hollowed-out monuments to reason, scientific progress, and social control” (134). Like Bentham’s panopticon, these institutions sought to discipline their inhabitants and induce moral and spiritual reformation, exorcising criminality from the subject and imposing state-sanctioned ‘civility.’ The crumbling walls of buildings like Waverly Hills Sanatorium, a location that has re-appeared numerous in ghost-hunting shows, therefore simultaneously signify “idealism and failure,” (135): the utopian belief in modernity and progress and its failure to actualize a better future. Lawrence provides a fascinating discussion of architectural design and the goal of stopping the spread of sound in the halls of prisons and asylums in an effort to limit communication amongst the institutionalized. Prisoners, however, learned to employ noise—knocks, tapping—in order to communicate, forming a telegraphic system of communication not unlike the rappings of a Spiritualist séance or the conventional sounds of hauntings (139-140).

Lawrence highlights an important ethical dimension that is often neglected in discussions of paranormal reality television; that is, that the systemic violence and suffering of real people, often the most marginalized in our society, is used as fodder for sensationalized supernatural programming. The use of archival, historical photographs that depict real people and use real names, for example, is particularly problematic (153). The question of ethics and

our collective responsibility continues in the sixth chapter “In America There is Real Evil: Excluded Americans.” Lawrence rightly criticizes the depiction of Black and Native American peoples in the subgenre: “Present as an idea but absent as individuals, both groups haunt contemporary popular culture while being denied an actual presence” (161). In these programs, Black and Native American peoples appear either as ephemeral spirits or witnesses describing their experiences to teams of mostly white, mostly male investigators. Even more pernicious for Lawrence is the way in which these shows situate the horrors of colonialism and racism firmly within the past, obscuring the current manifestations of racial oppression and white supremacy. “The most reassuring thing about history as depicted in these programs,” Lawrence writes, “is its utter disconnectedness from the present. For the hosts of paranormal TV, ‘history’ is something that happened to someone else” (162). The show *Ghost Brothers* therefore stages a significant intervention as it centres a team of Black investigators as protagonists, a rarity in the subgenre. Lawrence demonstrates how *Ghost Brothers* engages with ghosts differently from its ghost-hunting peers, approaching the victims of systemic violence with respect and deference rather than with demands of exposure like “show yourself” that often characterize paranormal investigation.

What ghosts consistently epitomize, of course, is the co-presence of present and past, the inability of the past to be fully externalized, othered, or construed as ‘finished.’ Spectrality is, as Frederic Jameson (1995) articulated, “what makes the present waver” (85). What haunting ultimately demonstrates is our collective responsibility to the past, to a history that continues to make demands of us and to a future that awaits fulfillment. Lawrence’s critiques of paranormal reality television as fundamentally conservative are well taken, but belie the function of the ghost as an agent of historical refusal: a refusal to fully vanish. The ghost is inevitably and inherently an entity of radical potentiality. To be sure, Lawrence expresses this sentiment when she writes, “Belief in the paranormal is a declaration of doubt—an assertion that established belief systems of any kind have not, will not, or cannot explain everything” (132). Despite the book’s overreliance on the allegorical function of paranormal reality television, *Ghost Channels* is a valuable, insightful, and thought-provoking contribution to scholarship concerning the supernatural and popular culture as it navigates the ways in which televisual form attempts, and fails, to fully contain the transgressive power of the ghost.

— Kevin Chabot

Kevin Chabot holds a PhD in Cinema Studies from the University of Toronto. His research examines the relationships between contemporary media and the supernatural with a particular focus on the ghost as a transmedial figure. His research interests include: film theory, spectrality, horror film, paranormal investigation, intermediality, and documentary evidence. His work has appeared in *Shift: Graduate Journal of Visual and Material Culture*, *Film International*, and the anthology *Horror in Space: Critical Essays on a Film Subgenre* (2017).

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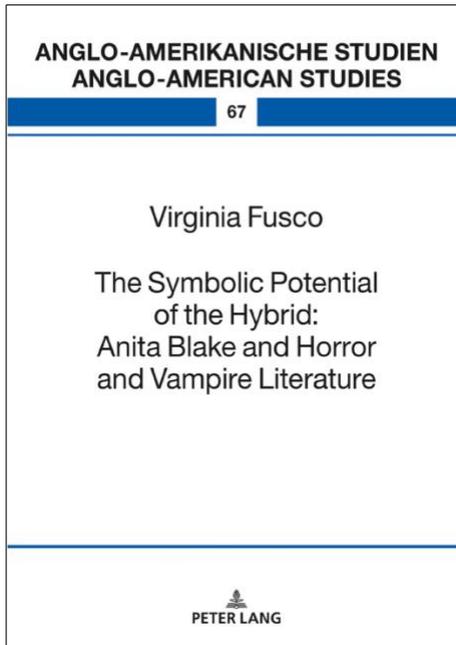
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BOOK REVIEW

The Symbolic Potential of the Hybrid: Anita Blake and Horror and Vampire Literature

By Virginia Fusco
Peter Lang
2021

212pp.

Virginia Fusco's new book, *The Symbolic Potential of the Hybrid: Anita Blake and Horror and Vampire Literature*, studies the neo-gothic monster through its genealogical

and etymological origins to uncover the figure's racial and sexual symbolics. Fundamentally, she argues, "monsters" (*monstrum: to warn and to show*) are omens that foretell a breach in norms or represent the manifestation of boundaries horrifically broken (31). With this framing, Fusco specifically analyzes the vampire and zombie across several key narratives—namely, *Dracula*, *The Magic Island*, *White Zombie*, and *The Gilda Stories*—as these figures factor prominently in her culminating case study, Laurell K. Hamilton's long-running series, *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* (1991-present). As Fusco posits, vampires and zombies also share a legacy as the imagined physical *topoi* of imperialist Anglo-American male anxieties regarding white women's racial and sexual "contamination" (24, 95). By placing Hamilton's series in conversation with these narrative histories, Fusco positions *Anita* as a modern, queer remediation of the monstrous feminine. For Fusco, the titular Anita embraces traits previously constructed as horrifically embodied cultural breaches, such as racial hybridity and women's sexual pleasure (23), in a neo-gothic, feminist reclamation of the monster.

Fusco's discussion is divided by seven chapters, which are further organized into three thematic groupings: *Genealogy*, *Cartography*, and *Cross Roads*. In the introduction, Fusco positions her analysis as methodologically interdisciplinary, variously employing critical perspectives from anthropology, cultural studies, feminist theory, and critical race theory to answer two central questions: What does the monster do? And what does it represent? (16).

In *Genealogy*, Fusco examines contemporary monstrosity (as exemplified with *Anita*) as a reformation of nineteenth and twentieth-century monster tropes. With the first chapter, “Navigating Gothic Monstrosity,” Fusco contrasts two modes of interpretation: the *bio-political*, as informed by Michel Foucault’s construction of power/knowledge as normativity, and *liminality*, adapted from Victor Turner’s theoretical model of conventional rites of passage (31). Here, Fusco suggests that monstrous figurations reveal the limitations of normativity, as their physical and behavioural ambiguities and contradictions inherently oppose socially accepted norms and hegemonic discourses; in other words, monsters are bodies in resistance. Depicted as frightening in nineteenth and early twentieth-century narratives, Fusco later repositions the resistant monstrous body as emancipatory in *Anita*.

In “Genealogy of Desire,” Fusco utilizes Edward Said’s foundational work on Orientalism to analyze *Dracula* as an allegory for Britain’s dying empire, focusing on Jonathan Harker’s colonialist travelogues and Lucy Westenra as the vulnerable West (Westenra) corrupted by the racialized Other, Dracula. Fusco offers a compelling reading of Lucy and Mina Murray’s friendship, suggesting that its homoeroticism deepens Lucy’s characterization as Fallen Woman and Mina’s as a dangerously independent New Woman (a proto-feminist archetype), who is ultimately “saved” by avoiding lesbianism and accepting heteronormative rites (becoming a dutiful wife and mother) (74).

The focus shifts from vampires to zombies in “Genealogy of Fear,” in which Fusco explains that the figures share a cultural gene in Anglo-American imperialism. Fusco insightfully stresses the zombie’s origins in slavery and white patriarchal imaginings, influences seen in William Seabrook’s novel, *The Magic Island* (1929), and the United Artists film, *White Zombie* (1932). As articulated in this chapter, zombie narratives generate and reinforce white supremacist treatments of Black cultures and bodies as Othered vessels to be seduced, consumed, conquered, and feared—but never understood or humanized (93).

Cartography is foregrounded in Rosi Braidotti’s definition of the term as “a way of embedding critical practice in a specific situated perspective, avoiding universalistic generalisations and grounding it so as to make it accountable” (qtd. in Fusco 103). Fusco situates her critical perspective in “Playing in the Dark,” studying Jewelle Gomez’s 1991 novel, *The Gilda Stories*, as a pivotal departure from *Dracula*’s legacy of subaltern racial Others and “corruptive” homoeroticism. In a revealing contrast, Fusco positions Gilda as the inverse Dracula; for Fusco, she is a vampire with a narrative voice and humanity whose Black lesbianism radically rejects the Gothic canon’s historical perpetuation of patriarchal white supremacy. Instead, *Gilda* reclaims the monster-lesbian as an

emancipatory figure of community and affection, subverting the genre's earlier depiction of vampiric queerness as socially destructive (107).

In the final section, *Cross Roads*, Fusco studies Hamilton's *Anita* series as another feminist disruption of monstrous narrative tropes, particularly racial hybridity and "deviant" female sexuality. *Anita*'s titular protagonist is a vampire hunter and necromancer who, through her adventures (sexual and otherwise) gains supernatural powers from vampires, werewolves, wereleopards, and myriad other creatures (125). Fusco's reading suggests that Anita, who is *mestiza* (she has Mexican and German heritage), embodies the blending of physical and cultural boundaries that have generically signified monstrosity, like metaphorical miscegenation (131-32). However, Fusco notes that Hamilton still perpetuates colonialist anxieties; some characters, like the dark-skinned, Voodoo-practicing, Spanish-speaking Dominga, are vilified by their racialization, while Anita, who is Christian, light-skinned, and Anglophone, is the model assimilated minority (134). Thus, *mestiza* Anita demonstrates that the metaphorical hybrid figure is acceptable, so long as they are predominantly characterized by the normative (i.e., white) side of their identity. Notably, though Anita is socially Othered, she is a human who polices monsters; further discussion is needed to situate Anita within Fusco's core analysis of literal monsters, like vampires and zombies.

Fusco discusses the series' engagement with gender performance in her sixth chapter, "The Remake of the Beastly Boys," in which she applies Élisabeth Badinter's framework of the Hard Man/Soft Man/Androgyne masculine archetypes to Anita's primary love interests: werewolf Richard and vampire Jean Claude (135-36). For Fusco, Richard is the Hard Man, strong, decisive, yet controlling and violent (153). Conversely, Jean Claude—the androgyne—is an ambiguous figure who embodies the positive masculine traits of the Hard Man (wealthy, a satisfying lover) while rejecting the negative (masculinity based on the subjugation of the feminine). Fusco uses Jean Claude to exemplify the vampire's ability to fluidly embody masculinity and femininity, ultimately transcending heteronormative boundaries (158). Further, Fusco intriguingly questions whether the popularity of Hamilton's series with female readers is due to its alternative vision of an ideal partner—one who exists outside rigid gender constructs (162).

With "Let's Talk About Sex, Baby," Fusco contextualizes her analysis of the series' sexual politics through Andrea Dworkin and Patrick Califia's contrasting views in the 1970s and 1980s feminist sex wars, ultimately aligning *Anita* with Califia's sex-positivity. In *Intercourse* (1987), notes Fusco, Dworkin reads *Dracula* as another representation of rape as the only possible physical interaction between men and women, specifically drawing parallels between

vampirism's oral-centricity and the 1972 pornographic film *Deep Throat* (1972). Contrastingly, Califia's short story, "The Vampire,"—from his collection, *Macho Sluts* (1988)—explicitly links *experiencing* the vampiric bite with consensual BDSM, highlighting their transgressive connection of pain blended with pleasure (175). Within this anti-sex vs. sex-positive framework, Fusco argues that Hamilton recognizes the sexual excess inherent to vampire literature by making it an explicit plot element and aspect of Anita's character. From her sexual experiences with monsters, Anita gains the power of *Ardeur*, a supernatural force sustained with intercourse every twelve hours. Rather than consider this a curse, Fusco suggests that Anita's *Ardeur*—sex made monstrous because it is unmarried, non-procreative, and polyamorous—is a feminist reclamation of women's sexual autonomy, subverting earlier generic depictions of women's sexuality as deviant, like *Dracula's* Lucy and Mina (179).

Fusco's *Symbolic Potential* is a fascinating genealogy of the monster (particularly vampires) as a metaphoric omen for trespassed cultural boundaries. Her book is a helpful guide for scholars interested in studying vampires and zombies with an interdisciplinary approach, specifically the figures' racial and sexual trajectories. By retracing this lineage, Fusco engagingly reveals the monster as a marker of feminist thought, demonstrating its challenges to cultural and literary notions of what is truly monstrous.

— Ian Clark

Ian Clark is a PhD student in the Department of English Literature at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. His research focuses on the intersection of queerness and medicine in the monstrous or transformational body, particularly in nineteenth-century British Gothic literature. Other interests include Victorian queer culture, the supernatural, and depictions of the metaphoric Other in contemporary film and television. His current work centres on the literary and historical genealogy of homoerotic vampirism.

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BOOK REVIEW

Giving the Devil His Due: Satan and Cinema

Edited by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock and Regina M. Hansen

Fordham University Press

2021

216pp.

Contemporary popular culture is filled with images of the satanic. However, as Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock and Regina M. Hansen claim, *Giving the Devil His Due: Satan*

and Cinema—their edited collection dealing with cinematic portrayals of the Devil—is “the first of its kind” to finally “give the devil his due” (10). This collection of thirteen essays seeks to introduce and expand the scholarly discussion on the satanic from the Devil to the Antichrist. Horror fans and scholars will find plenty to engage with here; however, a surprising number of essays extend beyond the conventional horror subjects, from animation to comedy, to biblical epics. All in all, the scope of the material and the many different approaches make *Giving the Devil His Due* a refreshing and informative read for anyone interested in the satanic in film.

Between the book’s striking cover, featuring the Antichrist child from *The Omen*, and its title, the suggestion is that these essays will explore depictions of the Devil primarily in horror films. However, *Giving the Devil His Due* is interested in the satanic and its relationship with film and filmmaking more broadly. In the introduction, Weinstock and Hansen highlight the many ways in which the satanic can take form: as an antagonist whose values need to be rejected (6), as a misunderstood and reclaimed progressive figure that should be embraced (9), and more generally, as “the absence of God” (10). Organized

chronologically according to their subject matter, all thirteen essays deal with at least one of these assertions. Starting with “The Sign of the Cross: George Méliès and Early Satanic Cinema,” Russ Hunter introduces another common theme among all the essays: the shared affinity between the satanic and the cinema for the art of illusion, trickery, and seduction (24). The major strength of this collection is that each essay continually reinforces this central claim that film form and the satanic are inherently linked.

A wide range of topics and approaches are introduced for the relationship between this broadly defined satanic and the medium of film. With J.P. Telotte’s “Disney Devils” and Katherine A. Fowkes’ “What’s the Deal with the Devil? The Comedic Devil in Four Films,” we move away from the horror genre into more comedic and silly portrayals of the Devil. Biblically inspired epics and their depictions of the Devil get some attention in Catherine O’Brien’s “Roaming the Earth:” Satan in *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *The Passion of the Christ*.” However, the volume does not solely focus on the explicit figure of the Devil, turning to other evocations of satanic evil. For example, in R. Barton Palmer’s “From Eternal Sea He Rises, Creating Armies on Either Shore: The Antichristology of *The Omen* Franchise,” the Antichrist, an extra-biblical figure, often found in evangelical end-time prophecies, becomes the main subject. Similarly, Weinstock’s “The Devil’s in the Detail: Devilish Desire and Roman Polanski’s *The Ninth Gate*” is more interested in the culture of the satanic or “the modern desire for [the Devil]” than the figure itself (136). Despite this variety, I am not convinced that this collection needed two essays on *Constantine*. While I understand the collection’s exclusion of TV series, such as *Lucifer* or *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*, there is the flamboyant devil of the film *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut* or the satanic house of *The House of the Devil* that call out for coverage. Nonetheless, *Giving the Devil His Due* features a robust and diverse set of films from a variety of genres and closely related satanic elements.

Aside from its wide range of films, this collection highlights how the different supernatural evils come to represent and resist different societal issues. These essays offer insightful observations on how the Devil, as a cinematic metaphor, is used in popular filmic narrative and aesthetics. Katherine A. Fowkes insists that her filmic subjects “feature the devil as personifications for many ills” (69). Similarly, Simon Bacon argues, in his essay “Agency or Allowance: The Satanic Complications of Female Autonomy in *The Witches of Eastwick* and *The Witch*,” that while the Devil liberates women from patriarchal society, there is tension between the Devil as a liberator and as a masculine presence furthering the same system of oppression (159). The contradictions embodied by such devilish figures is furthered in David Sterritt’s “His Father’s

Eyes: *Rosemary's Baby*,” which again, shows tensions between the Devil as an agent of the patriarchy but also a tool for critiquing that very system (83). As stated in the introduction, this collection of essays follows from Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s concept of monsters as “cultural bodies,” and ones that are inherently contradictory. Hansen and Weinstock write that the Devil in films provide narratives that are “reinforcing, although occasionally revising or calling into question entirely, a familiar belief system” (2).

While *Giving the Devil his Due* provides a fantastic introduction to the study of the satanic in film with plenty of different approaches and subjects, a significant challenge comes in how scholars might define the different elements of Judeo-Christian supernatural evils. Within this broad category and in the essays, we find both the capitalized forms of the “Devil,” “Satan,” and “Antichrist,” as well as their lowercase counterparts (i.e., “antichrist,” “devil,” and “satan”). In the introduction, the editors use “Satan” as an umbrella term meant to function interchangeably with these other concepts. Yet the lack of a clear definition of, and distinction among, these terms may lead to confusion for readers who may have a widely differing conception of these satanic figures. With the potential for such research to become a full-fledged field of study, there should be special attention to how scholars define these terms. Here, more terminological clarity would help to enrich the analyses.

Despite this caveat, the breadth of subjects and approaches in *Giving the Devil His Due* provide a solid introduction and suggest many avenues for future research. The focus on the metaphorical essence of the satanic here provides a great starting point for thinking about how we grapple with supernatural forms of evil. These thirteen essays provide plenty of fascinating analyses of a subject often neglected. As it stands, *Giving the Devil his Due*’s rich material will no doubt foster new and exciting research on the supernatural evil in media.

— Zachary Doiron

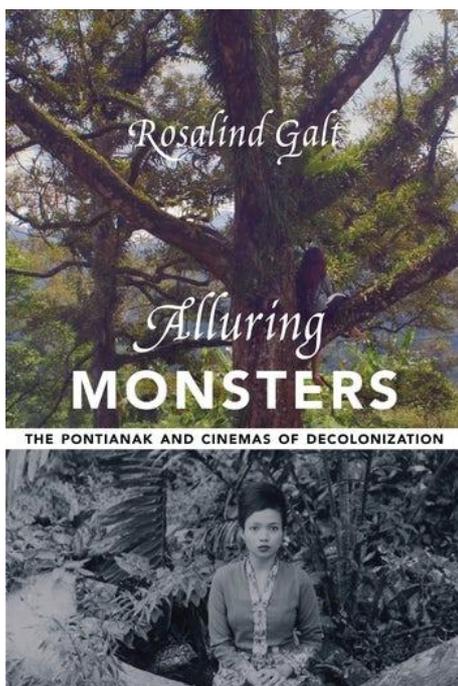
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BOOK REVIEW

Alluring Monsters: The Pontianak and Cinemas of Decolonization

By Rosalind Galt

Columbia University Press
2021

290pp.

In *Alluring Monsters: The Pontianak and Cinemas of Decolonization*, Rosalind Galt poses the *pontianak*—a supernatural creature of Southeast Asian origins—as a paradoxical figure that defies

categorization. It is this very complexity, notes Galt, that enables the semiotic richness of the *pontianak*. Galt argues that the use of the *pontianak* in Malaysian and Singaporean postcolonial cinema provides a deeper understanding of the local and transnational dynamics in the region. Galt analyzes *pontianak* films from the 1950s to the present, tracing a history of their production and addressing their relationship to world cinema—i.e., non-Hollywood productions during “an era of Hollywood domination” (2021, 8). In doing so, Galt’s broader argument is that the *pontianak* is a “uniquely valuable cinematic figure” (Galt 2021, 5) that is significant beyond its geographic context. Although the *pontianak* film speaks to Malay cultures, Galt argues that the *pontianak* figure also provides a symbol through which feminist, postcolonial, and critical theory can be applied to an analysis of broader world cinema.

Since *Alluring Monsters* locates the *pontianak* within “cultures of decolonization” (Galt 2021, 21), Galt draws from scholarship on postcolonial cinema (Ponzanesi and Waller 2012), as well as the concepts of haunting and spectrality (Blanco and Peeren 2013; Gelder 2000), in order to further develop several discourses of decolonization that are relevant to the *pontianak*. Specifically, “the force of precolonial belief systems in the face of often violently produced modernities, the discontinuous temporalities of postcolonial experience, the significance of possession (understood as the ownership or usurpation of one’s subjectivity or land), the excessive and uncanny process of remaking identities, and the role of monstrosity in navigating cultural trauma and upheaval” (Galt 2021, 21).

Galt sets the stage in her introduction by pointing out the significant overlaps between postcolonial studies and film studies, citing Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller's 2012 *Postcolonial Cinema Studies*, as well as Ken Gelder's "Global/Postcolonial Horror: An Introduction" in *Postcolonial Studies* (3, no. 1 [2000])—both of which place haunting and horror as central to theorizing postcoloniality. Galt writes that the pontianak is an especially intriguing figure in this study because while traditionally, the pontianak has a fixed nature and is of Malay origins, its representations on screen indicate a fluidity that defies categorization. In order to appreciate the semiotic richness of the pontianak on screen, it is necessary to understand the traditional pontianak figure and Galt provides a comprehensive overview of it.

Galt explains that the conventional pontianak is the ghost of a woman who died as a result of male violence or in childbirth. She is often referred to as a vampire in English—even though this translation is not entirely accurate—because typical representations of the pontianak show her consuming the blood and/or flesh of her victims. Galt highlights some common complaints from Southeast Asians about the pontianak film—namely, how its genre markers and the portrayal of the pontianak are influenced by the Western vampire (Lee 2016; Ng 2009; Yeo 2004, as cited in Galt, 2021). These critiques imply that screen representations of the pontianak are a result of cultural imperialism. Galt acknowledges that the influences exist, but argues that the flow of influence is not as simple as critics describe.

Continuing in the introduction, Galt cites scholarship on Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to show that its Gothic qualities emerged from a fascination for "folkloric figures of Britain's colonies" (Galt 2021, 6), as well as noting that Isabella Bird's travel memoir *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* (1883), based upon her travels to the Malaysian peninsula, was one of Stoker's sources for the idea of the vampire. The Chersonese, notes Galt, is an old term for Malaya and it is explicitly mentioned in Stoker's book as a place where vampires can be found. Galt concludes that the Malay pontianak is "at the source and foundation of modern vampire mythology" (Galt 2021, 8). What Galt successfully shows is that before European vampire tropes became an influence in Malay cinema, the European vampire had already appropriated Malay indigenous narratives. What this means for Galt is that the concept of the postcolonial does not only apply to studies of cinema in formerly colonized countries but is also a way to examine "circulatory systems of world cinema" (Galt 2021, 8). Thus, *Alluring Monsters* is a compelling work for film studies and genre studies, but also provides valuable insights for scholars looking into postcolonialism, Southeast Asian and/or Malay cultures, as well as critical theory.

Each of the chapters in the book focuses on a specific aspect of the pontianak and addresses an area in contemporary film studies. Chapter 1 examines the production histories of the pontianak film—highlighting the multiracial makeup of cast, crew and audiences in the late-colonial Singapore—in order to elucidate the role of the pontianak in “creating cultures of decolonization” (Galt 2021, 41). Galt concludes that the pontianak—who is Malay but does not conform to conservative Malay ethnonationalism—disturbed the dominant vision of Malay identity that arose as a form of anticolonialism during the 1950s.

Chapter 2 focuses on feminist and queer film theory, and, here, Galt argues that understanding “historical forms and meanings of gender” (Galt 2021, 83) are necessary for studying Malay postcoloniality—and, synchronously, that a feminist reading of the pontianak film allows for a better understanding of Malay postcolonial histories. Galt notes that the pontianak is female but does not conform to conventional gender roles. Thus, the pontianak in Malay film “embodies patriarchal anxieties around femininity” (Galt 2021, 83) and “forms a key site of contestation in postcolonial Malay societies” (Galt 2021, 100). In the same vein, Chapter 3 argues that the figure of the pontianak enables contestation of national, racial, and religious identities in postcolonial Singaporean and Malaysian cinemas. Galt does this by reading pontianak films through the lens of race, analyzing how race and religious identities are represented in various cinematic forms.

Chapter 4 explores the concept of cinematic space, looking at the typical setting of the pontianak film i.e., the *kampung* (village). Galt uses the *kampung* as an organizing principle to examine histories of postcolonial land ownership, as well as concepts of heritage and historicity in film theory. In addition to making a case that folkloric horror and the heritage film have commonalities, Galt also uses the pontianak film to question the idea of heritage in Malay postcoloniality. As Galt explains, in the pontianak film, the *kampung* is surrounded by the jungle, which both sustains and endangers the villagers. The pontianak is shown as entering and sometimes inhabiting the *kampung*, but she is just as much a part of the jungle. Thus, this chapter probes the question of who owns the *kampung* and the land it was built on.

This consideration of the jungle segues perfectly into Chapter 5, which considers a “pontianak theory of the forest” (Galt 2021, 197). In this chapter, Galt turns to animism as method for theorizing world cinema. Instead of positioning animism as a foil for modernity-derived problems—which is the typical stance—Galt traces how Malay animistic beliefs can be used to better understand postcolonial visual cultures. Of particular interest is Galt’s analysis of optical point-of-view shots in pontianak films. These are “unclaimed, never connected to any character’s vision or knowledge” (Galt

2021, 225). Instead, Galt says, the shots are framed so as to imply that the point of view originates from nature i.e., the forest is doing the watching. For Galt, this framing allows a further examination of the history and politics of the forest.

The pontianak film genre has been largely overlooked because like the pontianak, it cannot be neatly categorized as political cinema or popular cinema. However, Galt in *Alluring Monsters* has shown that the pontianak reveals cultural anxieties and issues that are still relevant in Southeast Asia today. Thus, analyzing these pontianak films opens up new insights for how these cultural phenomena can be understood. At the same time, this deeper understanding of Malay postcolonial cultures opens up new avenues for discussing cinema produced in other postcolonies around the world.

— Jeannette Goon

Jeannette Goon is a Master of Research (MRes) candidate researching pornography and sex media in Malaysia. Her dissertation explores a range of Internet platforms to look at how the Malay/sian female body is deployed and manifests in the registers of Lacanian psychoanalysis. She is currently developing a PhD proposal to consider how the monstrous-feminine disturbs scientific and medical understandings of the female body in a modern postcolony.

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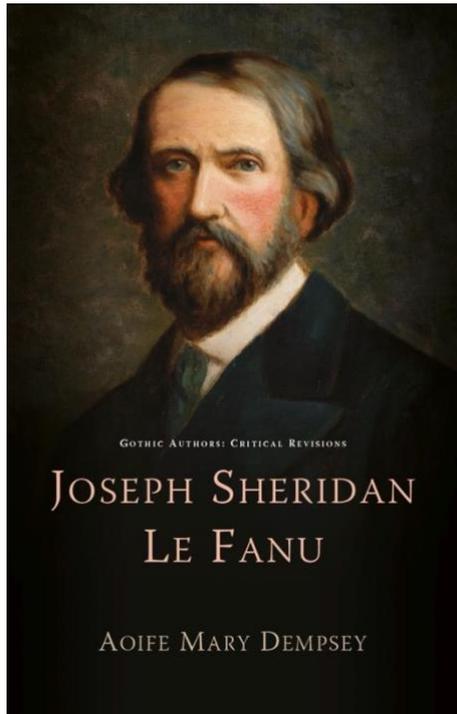
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BOOK REVIEW

Joseph Sheridan LeFanu

By Aoife Mary Dempsey

University of Wales Press
(Gothic Authors: Critical Revisions)

2022

224 pp.

Little is known about “the invisible prince,” Sheridan Le Fanu, the reclusive writer of Gothic and sensation fiction, despite his popularity in his own time and continuing influence. In this critical survey of Le Fanu’s major works, their publication history, historical context, and subsequent criticism, Aoife Mary Dempsey looks back on canonical Le Fanu scholarship and sheds some light on this shadowy figure and “the extant confusion regarding his literary corpus” (18). Not since W.J McCormack’s 1980 biography has anyone attempted such a comprehensive account of Le Fanu’s life and work. *Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu* is part of a series of “innovative introductory guides to writers of the Gothic,” Gothic Authors: Critical Revisions, whose stated purpose is offering “new critical approaches and perspectives” while being “both accessible and informative.” It currently includes critical surveys of Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, Richard Marsh, Patrick McGrath, and Charles Brockden Brown.

Dempsey situates Le Fanu’s body of work within the context of original periodical publications, and Le Fanu’s relationship with the publishing world, especially the journal he owned and operated, the *Dublin University Magazine*. Noting the tendency of both popular and scholarly audiences to read Le Fanu’s stories in posthumous anthologies rather than as how they originally appeared in the periodical press, Dempsey advocates for “reading laterally.” That is, she encourages us to consider the influence of audience demands and market trends on his work, and to consider this market relation and reading context more deeply in our interpretations, explaining that “Reading laterally can help us to

understand Le Fanu's motivations and to consider how his fiction would be interpreted by his readers within the context of the articles, poems and literature present in the holistic discourse of the magazine" (144). Describing the political and aesthetic positions of the main journals in which he published, Dempsey emphasizes that these periodical contexts played an important part in Le Fanu's creative process, as well as affecting contemporary audience reception.

While some scholars have begun to consider the importance of the periodicals in which they originally appeared for understanding individual short works, Dempsey surveys Le Fanu's oeuvre with an eye towards its relationship with periodical publishing. In a sense, this is also a history of Le Fanu's engagement with the publishing industry, tracking his literary influence as not only a writer, but as an editor, publisher, friend, critic, and journalist. Dempsey outlines some of the ways, directly and indirectly, Le Fanu influenced other authors, such as Charles Dickens, Bram Stoker, James Joyce, and the Brontës.

Dempsey also points out that the context of periodical publishing is intertwined with social and political history, and her primary concern is the Irish political landscape. The intricacies and nuances of tensions between Protestants and Catholics and the evolving nature of these tensions throughout Le Fanu's lifetime is a key context Dempsey explores in depth and illustrates with close reading of his work. Informed by New Historicism, post-colonial theory, and periodical studies, Dempsey's critical method is primarily close reading as well as the aforementioned lateral reading favoured by periodical studies.

In addition to explicating the historical and periodical contexts, Dempsey provides a critical overview of Le Fanu studies to date, and offers a much-needed update, contextualizing not just Le Fanu's work, but critical trends and their influence on the field today. In essence, she gives the reader a picture of the state of Le Fanu scholarship and points to possible avenues for future research. Despite its overarching view, the book also notes where gaps exist and where more research is needed, providing useful direction for the curious student.

Now, having held their breath this long, the cultists may ask, in a collective sapphic sigh: what about *Carmilla*? They will be both delighted and disappointed at turns. *Carmilla* criticism tends to be divided between that which addresses the sexual content, and that which focuses on its connection with Irish politics. Although noting that, "Indeed, much of the story's afterlife has been due to the queer interpretation of the primary relationship, with both lay and academic readings following this line of thought" (99), and providing key sources for the curious, keeping with the Irish political context rather than the

history of sexuality, Dempsey herself does not pursue “this line of thought,” at least not here.

For Dempsey, *Carmilla*, set in a foreign country, marks Le Fanu’s move away from Irish fiction to an English context, in an English periodical, to express Irish political interests (101-106). She notes that in this period, he makes a strong turn towards the supernatural gothic, which he had only dabbled in before (106). However, she tempers her critique by reminding us that *Carmilla* cannot merely be an analogy for Irish politics, ending her explanation of the larger contexts of this work’s production history with the suggestive caveat that “A fuller reading of the contexts of the story shows that a myriad of [sic] influences were at work” (106) and that “This story, like all Le Fanu’s work, cannot be plucked from its material or socio-cultural contexts in order to support a larger argument about waning Protestant power in nineteenth-century Ireland” (106-107). Those other contexts, Dempsey leaves for other scholars to contend with. Although some might disagree with her claim that “The patently queer relationship between the characters [in *Carmilla*] is practically unidentifiable elsewhere in his work (excepting, perhaps, the relationship between Maud Ruthyn and her cousin Milly) (100),” Dempsey is careful to leave her claims open to further discussion, and, just as we are left with *Carmilla*’s “ambiguous alterations” (Le Fanu 78), one gets the sense she might even welcome such disputations.

With its comprehensive breadth and clear, accessible style, Dempsey’s work is a must-read for Le Fanu scholars and fans alike. Surveying existing Le Fanu criticism to date, while also expanding upon it, this is perhaps the ideal, got-to book on Le Fanu that fictional seeker Harriet Vane dreamt of writing when she pursued her research on his life and work at Oxford in Dorothy Sayers’ 1935 novel, *Gaudy Night*. As interest in Le Fanu is gathering steam once again, let Dempsey’s tome be the starting point for future research.

— Anne Young

Dr. Anne Young is an independent scholar living in London Ontario, where she enjoys gothic and horror media through an intersectional feminist lens set in a gilded arabesque frame. Currently engaged in writing the biography of *Carmilla Karnstein*, she has previously published on women’s hidden authorship in both the cult novel *Story of O* and the popular films of Dario Argento.

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APPENDIX: HORROR REVERIE 1 TRANSCRIPTS

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Horror Reverie I:
A Symposium Celebrating 100 Years of *Nosferatu*

TRANSCRIPT

Panel 1 - The Legacy of *Nosferatu*
19 February 2022
(duration 1:16:59)

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Nosferatu, vampire, grimoire, *Shadow of the Vampire*, monster, death

00:04 - Kristopher [Kris] Woofter

Well welcome everybody. This is quite a pleasure to welcome you to this celebration of 100 years and two days since the premiere of *Nosferatu*. I'm just-really quickly there's some feedback, so if people who are not muted can just mute that would be great. My name is Kris Woofter, I'm the editor of *Monstrum*, one of the organizers of the event, along with Gary Rhodes and Mark Jancovich. It was important for us that this symposium featured the voices of both artists and scholars. And we have a terrific lineup of speakers for you today including a very special guest Elias Merhige, director of *Shadow of the Vampire*. Today's symposium is being recorded and will later be published in *Monstrum 5.1*, which will come out in June, along with an accompanying transcript, and an original framing text by Cristina Massaccesi, author of *Nosferatu*, the book for the Devil's Advocate series for Liverpool University Press. So look for that in the future.

Horror Reverie is the first of what we hope will be many such symposia. It's co-sponsored by the collective for research on epistemologies of embodied risk or CORÉRISC. The Montreal *Monstrum* Society, the journal *Monstrum*, Oklahoma Baptist University, the University of East Anglia and the Moving Image Research Lab with funding support from the Fonds de Recherche du Quebec (FRQSC).

We ask that audience members please keep their cameras off. If you have questions for the speakers in a given panel, please send those as a direct message to the chair of

the panel in the session so that that person will identify themselves right off the bat. Our chairs today are Gary Rhodes for panel 1, Erica Tortolani for panel 2 and Robert Singer for panel 3. Before we begin in earnest with some opening remarks from Gary Rhodes, we would like to express our condolences to Mark Jancovich, who couldn't be here today due to the recent loss of his mother. Our thoughts are with Mark and this symposium is dedicated to the memory of Mark's mother and also to the continued recovery of vampire scholar Wayne Stein, who just finished months of stem cell treatment for cancer. We also lost at the end of last year Dracula historian Elizabeth Miller, and so we'd like to add a final dedication to her many years of research. And for now, I'll turn this over to Gary.

03:15 - Gary Rhodes

Thank you very much, Kristopher. And welcome everyone to the first of what, as Kristopher said, we hope will be a series of years of these symposia celebrating anniversaries of important horror films. We want certainly to add to the list of thank-yous Kristopher Woofster himself who so kindly has put in a great deal of time to make today's event happen. And of course, today's event might well have happened at Hallowe'en, given *Nosferatu* that we're here to celebrate...it could have also happened in March, due to the Berlin premiere in March of 1922. We are, as Christopher briefly alluded, we are here today because of the original first premiere of *Nosferatu*, which took place not in Germany, but in Rotterdam. When the film opened on February 17, of 1922, just a few days ago, of course, and this very weekend, 100 years ago, people were in Rotterdam seeing *Nosferatu* the first time. So that's just a bit of explanation of why we're gathered here virtually in February, rather than any other month of 2022.

With that said, I'd like to introduce the first speaker on this panel, that we're so excited to be with us. As I think myself, as a film historian, in about a 130 years of cinema history globally there truly have been 1000s of tremendous filmmakers, in all countries of the world in all eras. But very, very few, a very select few have taught us to literally see in a new way, George Méliès, Robert Vinas...a very select few. And I would aver that one of those very select few is our first speaker E. Elias Merhige, with his 1989 feature film debut *Begotten*. Mr. Merhige is, of course, is well known for his work in theater, his work in music videos, and certainly his other acclaimed films such as *Suspect Zero* from 2003. And, of course, one of many reasons that he's kindly agreed to be with us today is the 2000 feature film *Shadow of a Vampire*. With John Malkovich and William DeFoe, a fantastical alternate history, of course, of the production of FW

Murnau's *Nosferatu*. We welcome him very much, very kindly at this time. So thank you, Mr. Merhige for being with us.

06:11 - E. Elias Merhige

It's my pleasure. Thank you for having me. Before I start out, I just want to say because of the pandemic, I haven't been able to see people that I love... dear friends and family. Some of them, I think, have linked into this conference. So I just want to welcome them and welcome everybody that is here right now. And especially my mom who's turning 91 in this next week. And I know she's mortified for me announcing her age, because she thinks she's the oldest person in the room. But Mom, you're not the oldest person in the room. *Nosferatu* is actually 100 years old. So with that said, I want to say hi to my brother as well in New York. And now I'm just going to jump right in.

What I've decided to do is not talk so much about everything we know about *Nosferatu* already, and everything we know about *Shadow of the Vampire* already, but talk from this sort of interstate from an artist's mind...from my own Interior Laboratory of thinking, when I was working on *Shadow the Vampire* and tried to pull a mosaic of experiences together that somehow makes sense to all of you. So I'm going to take you back to a week before Christmas 1997. I'm on a flight from Los Angeles to Newark, New Jersey, where I'm then going to get a cab to go to New York City. And I'm going to sit down with Stephen Katz and go over the script for *Shadow the Vampire*. But this flight, like a lot of things in life you know, took a different course, because of a massive snowstorm in the New York area. The flight was grounded in O'Hare Airport in Chicago for nine hours. And we had to wait because there was a backlog of landings in Newark. So in the course of waiting, I had brought the script, *Shadow the Vampire* along with me--the early draft--and took it out and was reading through it making notes. But I was also reflecting on *Nosferatu* and my first experience with it as I was reading through the script and trying to access those feelings that I had when I was actually a very small child. What it was, is that my parents never allowed us to watch TV, which I'm actually thankful for now. But when we did watch TV, it had to be, you know, the public broadcast...had to be PBS, had to be educational. And there were a few times when my parents would be out and I would turn on the TV and limit myself to PBS. But there was one time at a very early age that you know, there was, it was like a holocaust memorial. So they had *Night and Fog* was actually one of my first

09:25

you know, really bizarre experiences watching bodies being bulldozed into mass graves. And when I tried, when my dad asked me later on, about, you know what I did, I started to describe, you know, what I saw...he actually grounded me for a morbid imagination. And so, a couple of years later--how this ties together with Nosferatu is that a couple of years later on the same public television station there was Nosferatu, and these two films, Night and Fog and Nosferatu, they somehow coalesced, combined. And, you know, led to this kind of feeling of, you know, contemplating both death and immortality and the way the two somehow feed each other in our own consciousness. And, and so these were the kinds of notes that I was making at the back of the script on Shadow the Vampire. But I had the middle seat. So we all know what that means...and in coach. And the person next to me, was just this very nice guy. We didn't talk for the whole flight. But when we were grounded, for nine hours in Chicago, he kind of leaned over kind of reading what I was reading and seeing the kind of notes I was making. And he asked me what I was doing. And so I told him that I'm working on rewriting and making notes on this script that I hope to make into a film. And he asked me what it's about. So I told him about Nosferatu. I told him about, you know, FW Murnau. And he started to light up in a strange and interesting way. And, you know, he was just basically a very, you know, polished business guy, you know, so I didn't think he even knew anything about Nosferatu, or was even interested in the fact that I was working on the script. And so he said, you know, you have to meet my fiancée. When we land, you know, she's going to be picking me up, and you have to meet her. And so I said, okay, you know, I said, that's great. So hours later, it wasn't just nine hours, it was 12 hours, we land finally at Newark, it's like midnight. He wasn't able to communicate with his fiancée, this was before cell phones, and his fiancée's furious. She's been there for hours waiting for him. And so the first thing he says is...he greets his fiancée, then "meet my new friend!" and, and she was not in the mood to meet his new friend. And she just kind of looked at me, like...like, I had just taken the shit in front of her or something. You know, I mean, it was just one of those moments where she didn't want to have anything to do with me. And so she openly said, "I do not want to,

12:45

I don't want to drive this guy. You know, please, I just want to get in the car. I just want to get home." And I said--and he kept insisting, the fiancé, the guy that I was with, kept insisting, so I went up to him. And I said, "Listen man," I said, "I'm going to get a cab. Don't worry about this. I'm totally going to take care of this. You enjoy yourself. Good luck." And so he said, No, no, no, you have to talk to her. You have

to talk to her. So anyway, we're in the parking lot. We get in the car, we're driving, I'm sitting behind the driver, she's driving, she's blowing off steam, she's angry, she's upset. She's looking in the rearview mirror of her car, keeps eyeballing the road, eyeballing me in the back. And so she says, "So my fiancé tells me that you make films, what films do you make?" You know, it's just very pointed, very direct. And I said, "Well," I said, "I've made one film, but I'm almost certain that you've never heard of it." And then she said, "Well Try me." And so I said, "Well, it's a black and white silent film, and I am pretty sure you never heard of it." And she said, "Well, what's it about?" And so I said, "Well," I said, "it's kind of a creation myth, where you have the death of God and the birth of nature." And so I just decided, You know what, I'm just going to unload right now and just get into it and not try to hide anything. And so her face changes. Instead of getting more angry or puzzled, she goes, "Wait a minute, is the name of this film begotten?" And I said, "How on earth do you know this film?" And she says, "You know, I worked for a post production company in New York. And my boss made all of us that worked there watch this film." And I said, that is the most bizarre story I've ever heard. So she so then she started to open up and she was quite lovely. She was great. And she asked me what is it that you're working on now? So I started getting into *Nosferatu*, where I'm now and the whole story that that I'm doing. And she says "Oh my God," she said, "you know, you know, my great uncle was very close to, to FW Murnau." And I said, "Well, who's your great uncle." And she said, "Walter Spies." And I said, that is just incredible. I said--you know, and none of this impacted me until much later because I was more concerned about getting to New York getting rest, and then waking up and fighting with Stephen Katz about, you know, the script, the screenplay, but, but later on reflecting, I realized that that's so much of *Shadow of the Vampire* had these incredible uncanny confluences that relate back to *Begotten*, I mean, you know, it's interesting, because when I wrote *Begotten*, I had, at the age of 19, I had wanted, I wanted to stage it as a multimedia piece of opera, you know, I wanted it on stage, not as a film. But my sense of temporality, you know, and my love of poetry, made me really feel that I wanted to have a permanent record of all of my effort, and all of-you know, what I wanted to create with *Begotten*. So, the first impulse was theater, but then it became a film, not so much...it became a film, not because it was meant so much to be a film, but because I wanted a permanent record. And this, where this feeds into *Shadow of the Vampire* is that it feeds into the, the character of Murnau. And what I wanted to bring to life, on the screen, with his character was someone who was more obsessed with creating a masterpiece, you know, that would outlive, you know, our normal human life and, and create that masterpiece at the expense of life. And, and so one of the

important aspects of *Shadow of the Vampire*, for me was to show that the real monsters are these human beings, you know, and that, that Murnau moves in the story from being, you know, the guy that's making a movie to the guy, who's the real monster in the end, and the monster winds up becoming more human. By the time we get to the...the vampire becomes more human by the end. But I never saw the vampire genre as something that was

17:41

that was really part of the horror genre, to be honest. I always, for me, growing up and thinking about vampires and supernatural creatures, they just seemed like extensions of nature, and even extensions of the darker side of our own humanity. I mean, you know, whether it's eating a meal, we all have to eat something that was once alive, even if we're vegetarians. And, also in life and politics and the way that corporations work and the way business works, you know, there's a lot of vampirism alive and well, in the world. So when I look at *Nosferatu*, I think the genius of that film is really in the motion picture camera. And the fact that at the time that *Nosferatu* is made, you know, cinema was considered a suspicious craft, because it was the Stoker estate that wanted, that thought it was vulgar to make a movie out of *Dracula* and, and that it should be dignified as a stage play in London. And so, that was part of the fight that they had. But going deeper now, one of the things that really opened up for me was a few months after returning from New York from that experience with Walter Spies' great niece. And the kind of uncanny coincidence of that opened up for me an idea that, well, maybe, as I'm building this movie, as I'm thinking about it, as I'm meditating, as I'm...both spiritually and artistically moving into the zone of making this film come to life in material existence...maybe there are things about the film that are actually speaking to me. So what I did is I started watching *Nosferatu* many times. I don't know how many times but it was a lot. And what I kept stopping on was the actual Grimoire. There is this contract that Hutter, you know, shows the vampire and asked to the vampire design. And that was created by Albin Grau. And when you get into Albin Grau's history, it's kind of explosively interesting. Albin Grau was a dedicated esotericist. As I was from the time of 25, to about 36, I was deeply immersed in alchemy and hermeticism. Begotten, you know, after it was seen by a lot of people, there were some very brilliant minds and great people, one of them being Dennis Jacobs, who is Francis Coppola's ghostwriter...who came up to me and said, you made the first hermetic, truly hermetic film. You are an alchemist. And I didn't know enough about alchemy at the time to really talk to him about it. But he turned me on to some to some literature, some books, things. So I just took that and dove

very deeply into it. And I would say that, from my...the way that I create, I don't create for entertainment, I create for transformation. And what I recognized in Albin Grau, not only as a person, but as a producer, as an artist, as a thinker, and an esotericist is that he was interested in transformation too. So I took note of that, and I started looking more. And because Albin Grau not only produced the film, but did the production design, I started looking more carefully at the geometry of the sets and *Nosferatu* and started looking more carefully, not through the eyes of architecture, but through the idea of, of symbolism, of secret sigils and symbolism. And, and one of the things that I want to talk about now is the extraordinary thing of,

22:09

the Grimoire. That contract that Hutter hands over to Orlok. If you freeze frame it, it is a series of symbols, and these symbols, these sigils actually are not nonsense, they actually have a significance. So what I did at the time, in the spring of 1998, was I brought the film to a group of friends that I was studying alchemical texts with, and particularly the *Corpus Hermeticum*, at the time, we were, we were studying the unabridged edition of that, that took a number of years. And I brought it to them. And we all sat down and it was my dear friend, Lee McCloskey, who was both an artist and a great esotericist that, you know, we sat, we discussed the film, but we also looked at the Grimoire in *Nosferatu*. And so I said to Lee, I said, "Lee, do you think it's possible that Albin Grau, is somehow not ...not creating this grimoire for the film for *Nosferatu*, but creating it for the future? For people like us? Who actually can see not that this is just decoration or a prop piece, but something that is actually a conversation through time. And at the time, this was 77 years after the premiere of *Nosferatu* and and so I said, Why don't we create a Grimoire that I will use in *Shadow of the Vampire*. And it was..and so Lee went to work. Lee has the you know, the brilliance and the gift of like, like a Renaissance painter. And at the same time, he has the mind and the gift for understanding and translating exactly what I was talking about and getting at. So I wanted to create a living conversation between *Shadow of the Vampire* and *Nosferatu* through this Grimoire being the bridge to that. In the end the Grimoire was cut out of the film, as were several other very esoteric scenes that dealt with alchemy, that dealt with immortality and dealt with vampirism on a much deeper, more alchemical level. But those scenes just sort of took the film away from what it what it really was meant to be. And but I'm going to put a link to Lee's Grimoire because that even though I filmed it, it's not in the film. And I have...there are scenes of Albin Grau at a séance, played by Udo Kerr, that are not in the film, there is the Grimoire, where he begins to understand that the future is not good for

the making of this film that, that, in a way the crew is doomed. And he understands this through his own Grimoire in the film, in *Shadow of the Vampire*, so it's...it was an interesting process. But what I really want to, to underline is that...God, I lost my train of thought, but ...Lee's, the Grimoire that he created for me, you know, went on and had a life of its own. It became part of the Rolling Stones world tour. It was the imagery that was used during that tour. So, even though it wasn't in *Shadow of the Vampire*, it had a life of its own, outside of the life of shadow. And, and I'm proud that that was created as a collaboration between Lee and myself. And how I want to wrap this up, basically, is to say that I'm very...I feel now that 100 years later, there's something still absolutely indelible and terrifying and visceral about *Nosferatu*. But I see *Nosferatu* and I see vampirism as a kind of way of, of expressing our own sort of genius and dread of the technologies that we create. Because *Nosferatu* could not exist without the motion picture camera. And the motion picture camera is both a blessing and a curse.

27:06

As much as any kind of you know, image making can be. And with that, I will I have like just way too much to to talk about but I don't want to eat up the time of everybody else on this panel. But let me try to post this link to Lee's.... Okay, I just posted a link to the Grimoire that was created for *shadow the vampire*. And you can read about its history there. And with that, I'm going to say thank you. And if there any questions definitely get either a hold of me or one of the creators of the symposium.

28:49

Thanks, thanks so very much for those illuminating thoughts. Elias has agreed to stay with us throughout the panel. So this first panel so we'll be able to take a small number of questions at the end. But we have first two more speakers and I'm very thrilled to introduce Stephen R. Bissette, who is a pioneer graduate of the Joe Kubert School and was an instructor at the Center for Cartoon studies from 2005 to 2020. But of course most of us to know him for his work in so many tremendous aspects of comics as well as some film studies work. He's renowned of course for his work on *Swamp Thing*, *Taboo*, 1963, *Tyrant*. He has been a comics creator, including *SpongeBob* comics, *Paleo* and *Awesome possum*. He's an illustrator. He's an author. I think Steve Bissette does about everything, which is one of the many reasons I'm so glad he's a friend of mine. His short fiction in *Hellboy*, *Odd jobs*, co-writer of comic book rebels, prince of stories, the *Monster Book*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and his forthcoming book entitled *Cryptid Cinema*, which I was so very proud to write the foreword for. I

think the other thing interesting about Steve Bissette as he's known globally, but probably a little less for his being the purveyor of all things Vermont film, and Vermont film history, his state of residence, which brings into focus, Henrik Galeen. And his later life, which was spent outside of Germany, and surprisingly to many of us, in Vermont. And so we do kindly welcome Stephen R. Bissette. Thank you, Stephen.

30:52 – Stephen R. Bissette

Thanks for inviting me in it's an incredible honor to be here. Gary, you primarily asked me here because of the Vermont Film History Connection. And I am here with some secret information to share with you about Henrik Galeen's death here in Vermont. Like why...why was the screenwriter of *Nosferatu* in the state of Vermont in 1949. But before that, something I hadn't planned. Um, I can't believe...Elias and I have never met we have never spoken. I'm here because Gary invited me in. Everything you said Elias... I did a comic story back in 2008, called *Secrets and Lies* windows and wounds, in which I used the film, *Nosferatu* to talk about storytelling, and specifically to talk about storytelling as time travel. And there's a sequence I drew in here involving Hunter. And those symbols that we do see a *Nosferatu* that letter he gets. Um, and to set up that sequence I talked to the readers about when I was a kid, I would have dreams of *Nosferatu* coming out of our closet and standing over my bed. Those dreams are inspired by-- not by seeing *Nosferatu*... I didn't see *Nosferatu* until a couple of years after that. But because I saw a photo of *Nosferatu* in *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, the monster magazine that so many kids of mine...I was born in 1955, so I'm a monster kid like Gary Rhodes, and no doubt many of you. And I had dreams in which *Nosferatu* came and loomed over my bed. And then when I finally saw *Nosferatu* it was really the character of Hunter that terrified me more than the vampire. And later in the story, I wind up the story with an image of how *Nosferatu*... I then had a dream where he just sat down in my bed and read a comic with me, he became sort of like this, you know, boogeyman friend. Um, and then I was only going to mention this story at the end but this might be something of interest to some of you to seek out. It's in a book called *Secrets and Lies*. But after what Elias said, my mind is blown, because the point of my story is that a cinema, like comics, is a form of secret language. And I relate in the story, how comics that I drew while on the convention trail that my friend Rick Veatch gave to me almost 20 years later, predicted the future of me teaching at a cartooning school. And I have these drawings I did 20 years earlier of me as a teacher in a classroom full of cartoonists, and that's what I ended up doing for 15 years. And I don't know why I chose *Nosferatu* as the vehicle.

But there's something out there going on. After hearing what Elias had to say. Um, I first saw *Nosferatu* when I was quite quite young, I didn't see it on television. I was a collector of eight millimeter films when I was a kid. In the 60s, it was impossible...if a film was on TV, that might be your only chance in your lifetime to see it. You would stay up ungodly hours of the night to watch films that started on late night television at one in the morning because you might never get to see it again. And the arrival of eight millimeter film, specifically Blackhawk films out of Davenport, Iowa, I mail-ordered the first feature film I ever bought, which was *Nosferatu*, and it was whatever version was available to us at that time. It's not the restored *Nosferatu* or I should say series of restorations we've had today. And I not only fell in love with the film, it was one of the first films to give me nightmares.

35:25

But nightmares I loved! The odd thing I should share with you all to end that story about *Nosferatu* coming out of my closet looming over my bed because I'd seen an image of Max Shreck as *Nosferatu* in a monster magazine is that the dreams stopped after one night when a bat flew out of our closet. And I slept as it crawled up the foot of my bed. I shared the room with my older brother Rick who woke my parents up, my father came in, I slept through this whole thing. My father knocked the bat off the bed, caught it in a coat and brought it outdoors and put it in a barrel and burned it to death. Please forgive my father, you know, it was believed back then bats carried rabies. It was the next morning when I was told that this had happened. And I never dreamt again about *Nosferatu* living in the closet. I don't ascribe any supernatural origins or possibility to what happened. But I, like Elias, believe that there are alchemical aspects of dream states of how we communicate as artists, of the work we create and how it resonates through time. And how doing storytelling whether it's through vehicle cinema and film like *Nosferatu*, or the comics that I've had a hand in in my lifetime, it becomes a way of messages in a bottle that are going to live on through time, beyond us. And we've all seen that, as of today, the 100th anniversary of the week in which *Nosferatu* first opened. As I mentioned, Gary invited me here because of my love of film history and specifically, born and raised in Vermont I'm fascinated by regional film history, Vermont film history. And there's some wonderful stories I've uncovered. Some of them involve very sad aspects of people's deaths. And one of my favourite, intimate moments in Elias' film *Shadow of the vampire* is there's this great sequence where Udo Kier as Albin Grau and I believe it's Aidan Gillette who plays Hendrick Galeen. In a film where they're sitting down and they're talking to Max Shreck, they're talking to Willem to follow as, as Max Shreck. And Max Shreck

is bemoaning how terrible it is that in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, that the protagonist in that portion of the story accidentally sees Dracula setting his table, right? He doesn't have servants and how embarrassing this is that an aristocrat would have to you know, be demeaned that way. This is this is something that really bothers Max Shreck about the novel *Dracula*. And I had a similar sensation a number of years ago when my very good friend of Vermont folklores, Joe Citro and I took a pilgrimage to Randolph, Vermont because I wanted to try to find out: How is it that Henrik Galeen ended up in Randolph Vermont? How is it that he died in Randolph Vermont? There are some amazing stories I've discovered over the years related to how certain people in cinema history spend the end of their days here in the Green Mountain State. Charles Bronson and Joe Ireland are buried in the same grave in Brownsville Vermont, you can visit that grave anytime. It's the most visible grave in the local cemetery in Brownsville. But I have not been able to find the grave of Henrik Galeen. In fact, where the records state Henry Galeen's gravestone is supposed to be, it is not there. What we do know is that at some point, Henrik Galeen, either was exiled or self-exiled from Germany, to Sweden, and then move to the United Kingdom. He then moved to New York, and married a woman who I see her referred to as a baroness, but I often see the Baroness and in quotation marks, so I'm not sure. Baroness (il seven shank?). They were married in 1948 in New York City, and the Baroness worked in New York and she was a manufacturer of toys and dolls.

40:06

The work on those dolls and apparently on the costuming, I'm still trying to research this as well, was done by independently contracted older women who lived in and around White River Junction, Vermont. And White River Junction, Vermont. For those of you who don't know, the geography of the state, is about 20 to 25 minutes south of Randolph, Vermont where Henrik Galeen ended up spending his last days. Um, the circumstances of Henrik and his new wife- they were only married a year before he died. The circumstances of their being in Randolph was probably connected to a visit upstate to Vermont, to either pick up or drop off work for those women who were doing so much of the work on the dolls. Whatever happened, happened in Randolph, it's possible they were visiting friends. Galeen was admitted into the local hospital in Randolph on June 30 of 1949. The first death notice that I found in any newspaper that was local, was dated from August 4 1949. We now know of course that Henrik passed away, July 30. I went to Randolph Vermont with my friend Joe Citro, and we scoured through the bound volumes of Randolph's still extant local newspaper. Now this is at a time when Vermont newspapers would have notices about

everything that went on in town. Okay, I'm not exaggerating, so and so went to Stowe to bake pies with they're aunt, right. So and so is having a sledding party this Sunday, on the northern slope of such and such Hill. And much to the embarrassment, no doubt of many of the people who ended up in the hospital, the newspaper would list who had been admitted into the local hospital and often gave rather agonizing accounts of what they were going through. Reading the accounts of Henrik's stay at the hospital it read as if he had a form of stomach cancer. He checked into the hospital with abdominal pain that did not subside. He was there in the hospital from June 30 until the day he died on July 30. So he spent a full month in this little Vermont Hospital in Randolph. I then went to the town clerk's office and I will scan and send this to Gary and to the organizers. This is the official town clerk's record of Henrik Galeen's death, this is the death certificate. It said that he was in the hospital for 33 days. The hospital at that time was Gifford Memorial Hospital. It was referred to in the newspaper as a sanitarium not a hospital. His street address at the time where he lived with his new wife was New York City at 680 Western Avenue and I will leave it to any scholars listening to this who might be in the New York area to scout out what used to be at 680 Western Avenue...I'd be curious. Um, it notes that his occupation was "retired movie director," his father's name Aldoph Galeen from Austria, his mother's maiden name was Maria, also Austria-born and under the medical certification part of the form it says that the disease or condition leading directly to death was metastatic carcinoma of the peritoneum, carcinoma of stomach and that there was an interval of one year between the onset of the ailment and Hendrik's death. What is the ongoing mystery still connected with this which I'm hoping once our snow melts and spring arrives, and hopefully it'll be safer to move around in this pandemic...very odd that I'll be moving around in a plague much like that, which afflicts the city in Nosferatu.

44:55

They don't know where he's buried! The town clerk was very confused. When I went back to them with the information that there was no verification from Granville, Vermont that He was buried there. And at that point, the town clerk discovered that on the back of the death certificate since all I was handed was a copy, I never actually held the real death certificate...on the back of the death certificate it was indicated in someone's handwriting: "burial was in South hollow cemetery. Change noted August 9 1949." That's the other end of the state from Randolph. For some reason Galeen was carried from the Connecticut River side of Eastern Vermont over to Western Vermont. His body actually had to have gone over a ridge of the Green Mountains to

get to his final resting place. I'm hoping to find out where exactly that gravestone might be. If it still stands at all. I did contact the town clerk and try to discover where that gravestone might be. But I was told that at the south Harlow cemetery, in Granville, Vermont, there is no listing in the list of headstones for Hendrik Galeen. The town clerk I spoke to in fact checked all those cemeteries and found no names starting with the letter G on any gravestone there. Um, so that's it. That's the best I could find out Gary and gathering. We don't know where Henry galleons body lies, which also resonates perfectly with the 100th anniversary of Nosferatu. Perhaps I'll dream tonight about Henrik standing over my bed. I don't know. So that's what I've got. And it's a real honor to be here.

47:02

Wonderful. Thank you so much, Steve for sharing the various stories and your research on Galeen. We turn now to our third speaker Argyle Goolsby, who is the co-founder of horror punk pioneers, Blitzkid, or whom he has served as bassist and singer for 25 years. When not touring, he is the US label rep for the German record company Theme force records. He's also a resident tattoo artist at Black hydra tattoo in Fitchburg, Massachusetts. And so we welcome now. Argyle Goolsby. Thank you, everybody, how are you?

47:47 – Argyle Goolsby

First, I just want to say Gary, thank you very much for the introduction. I just realized that we have a mutual friend this past week through a gentleman named Larry (Woolf?) of the band Mammals. So he wanted me to tell you hello. So before I forget, first, I just want to say that it's an honor to be here amongst such a distinguished panel of speakers. I really do appreciate the opportunity to hopefully not embarrass myself in front of all of you out there watching and on this panel as well. I do want to say to Elias if I may before I begin, you know, everyone has talked about the inspiration that the Shadow of the Vampire film has given them over the years. I'm included in that, that list as well. There's a song that I wrote that I recorded in 2015 on my album, Darken your doorstep, entitled Shadow of the vampire, which is I know a little on the nose for the title. But the movie was such an inspiration to me during a time when I was practicing as a tattoo artist, there was a small theater down the road from the shop that I worked at. I remember the first time I'd seen it was in this theater on a break and I had the day off...the second half of the day off. And it stuck with me the imagery stuck with me. It resonated and eventually wrote a song about it. So anyway, a little bit about myself. I guess publicly, I'm known as Argyle Goolsby. I'm from the

rock and roll part of the forest, which means I should probably preface all this by saying that I'm not so used to public speaking as much as I am public screaming. And I won't promise that the next seven minutes of this will be heaven. But it should at least be interesting watch. Basically, I'm used to at this point, everyone's drinking Heinekens and shouting Freebird at me. So if you want to do that, that's totally cool. It'll make me much more comfortable. Um, basically I stumbled my way into a band during my first year of college. And by the time I graduated four years later, that band Blitz kid had graduated to playing shows for more than free beer. And this was basically enough for me to hang up my pursuit of a master's degree and jump headfirst into a smelly van. Basically, from the beginning my band like myself had drawn inspiration classic horror movies and gothic literature as well as cryptozoology. Being from West Virginia. We have many of them there, we had the Flatwoods Monster, the Mothman, you name it. But aside from a few obligatory songs that basically snubbed the local stockade of rednecks continually hunting us down, there really wasn't a song that my band could play that didn't involve ax wielding, coffin rising or premature burials. But yeah, that's enough of my misadventures. I just want to talk a little bit about Nosferatu and my connection to it. It definitely, to me is one of the most potent spirits ever distilled into celluloid. I think my hardest part for preparing this for the symposium was trying to find a way to concisely share examples as to why I love this film so much. The first time I saw any imagery of Nosferatu was in a library book at my elementary school of all places. I don't remember the title of the book. But I do remember seeing the image of Max Shreck on the deck of the (Impreza?) looking down at the captain with his arms all straightened out and looking menacing as possible. And there's something about that image that it just resonated with me. It's stuck with me. I was already an artist as a kid, I was the one of two kids in my class that drew and painted or did anything artistic like that. So I just spent years and years with that image, drawing it and just hoping one day that I could see the film that produced it. And that didn't happen for a very long time. Because I'm 45 now so whenever that first came to me I was I mean, it was like the 80s. So there was like, I think Mr. Bissette said earlier, you didn't see these movies unless you saw them on TV and I would see them on AMC MonsterVision from time to time but never Nosferatu. Anyway, basically, my point here is you can bring up the pros and cons of drop D tuning on a bass, and I'll show up with all the pieces necessary for a coherent conversation. If you light the Nosferatu fuse, I'm suddenly blindfolded and the gas pedal is fully down. There's a slim chance I'll keep it between the lines, but most likely the conversation is going off road and maybe even down the mountain. That's where

the best most beautiful art takes you in my opinion. And that's where Nosferatu has taken me.

52:29

I feel like there's an indefinable mechanism within this film that keeps me feeling it, no matter where I'm at in my life. And that's saying something because time has a way of blunting the sharp edges of inspiration. Songs you want to love lose their meaning. Hobbies you once loved snuck out the back door when you were filing state taxes for the 900th time, and took all their inherent magic with them. You remember why you love these things, but the once wild spiritual thrall that they held you under is dissolved into some watered-down cerebral process. Nosferatu on the other hand, for me hasn't loosened its hooks one bit. It's still inside lighting, creating fires and throwing sparks into the dark. And this experience isn't entirely unique to myself. And that's an example of what makes this film so special. It's lit a fuse to an unprecedented amount of art and homage spanning nearly 10 decades now. I feel like it's escaped the tropes of the time period in which it was made. And such tropes don't necessarily make movies bad or anything. But very often you have to make a conscious effort to connect with them. You watch them through the lens of their time, which is cool. But that lens becomes a subconscious barrier between you and spirit of the film that brought it into existence. I feel like you're not a spectator when you watch Nosferatu. You're not watching a film made in 1922. You're watching a film outside of time, much less any era. For example, I've seen the movie *Step Brothers* 765,000 times and it's exactly the same movie every time. I know exactly when and where I'm going to laugh. It's predictable. And that's cool. That's the charm of a movie like that. A movie like Nosferatu on the other hand sidesteps all of that. For me, it's been a roulette, where I'm going every time I watch it. And that's saying something. Because by all intents and purposes, I should be totally burnt out on this movie, especially after scoring it. I'll talk a little bit about that for a moment. I'll digress from my little notes here. I apologize for those. I don't do this very often. Um, I moved to Connecticut from West Virginia in the year 2015. And a mutual friend of mine and my guitar player...the guy by the name of Mange had contacted me and said, Now that you're a resident of Connecticut, you need to check out this place called the Witch's dungeon. And I had heard of the witch's dungeon. But I've never been. A little bit about the witch's dungeon. What it is, is it's a museum that's run by a gentleman named Cortlandt Hull who has been running it since 1966. He started it when he was 13 years old. Cortlandt is the great nephew of Henry Hull, who was the actor in *Werewolf of London*. So I believe that had a little bit to do with why he got into horror movies

and films like that as a kid. Basically, I started going to the Witch's dungeon to visit and Cortlandt would show 16 millimeter films twice a month for like \$3. So my wife and I would go up there, my fiancée at the time, and we would watch these films. So in time, the conversation Nosferatu began and I explained to Cortlandt that through my band I've been to, fortunately Orava castle in Slovakia. I've been to Murnau's grave, I was actually at Murnau's grave the week after someone grave robbed it, which I didn't even know about until the officials of the cemetery who are haranguing us the entire time came up and explained to us why they were haranguing us. I've been to Alexander Granach's grave, I basically taken every opportunity I can to commandeer everyone's travel plans to do anything while I'm on tour...to see anything that had to do with the movie. Nosferatu. So I was telling Cortlandt about this. And he explained to me that he had a 16 millimeter print of the film Nosferatu that he had gotten as a kid from the Museum of Modern Art, and that it had never been transferred that particular reel. And he had wanted to do so but it had no music. And that's where the discussion of me scoring Nosferatu came...to be. I'd never scored film, I'd only ever really written rock and roll music, stuff like that. But, you know, I wanted to give it a shot. So I came home, I blocked myself basically my room for three months and started writing, what I hoped would be a score for Nosferatu. And I entered the studio. Not long after that, and begin, you know, the whole recording process. And that kind of takes me back to what I was saying earlier, I must have watched this film 100 times within the course of time, it took me to write record, mix and master everything, because I needed to watch it through a different lens than I'd ever watched it through before. And this is not counting the other 100 times I've already watched it over many years leading up to that for no other reason than just watch it and write 18 more songs about it for my band. But the amazing thing for me is that despite the complete and utter dissection of this film that I put it under,

57:30

I'm still able to find new angles and experiences within it. And I'll give you an example of that. This is probably purely anecdotal, someone could probably cite this as either being true or false. But I had read somewhere that Murnau had a tendency to film to a metronome. And that always intrigued me. And I really wasn't sure if that was true or not. But one thing that I discovered when I did start scoring this was it does fall into a consistent rhythm, a four four beat from start to finish. And that was extremely helpful for me because one thing that I feared was the pieces of music that I was creating, overlapping, like, like a scene would end and maybe the music from the prior scene is still carrying on...like it needed to stop at the right points. And I was able,

because of this time signature to write everything in a way where it stopped precisely where it needed to stop. And that was amazing to me. So I don't know if there's any real relevance to that. But that's something that I did notice. And another thing that kind of jumped out to me after so many times of watching it was...Nosferatu's abode, you know, in the in the abandoned *Salzspeicher*, or however you say it...there's one scene where, um, well, I mean, there's many scenes where you see it in the background. It's kind of while Hutter and Ellen are engaged in dialogue. It's almost like this third party watching them spying on them. And it occurred to me that of all of the spider and fly references made in that film what you see when Alexander Granach is in the jail, he's watching spider spin the fly into its web, it occurred to me that that house looks like a spider. It has the stacked eyes, unmoving, like a spider watching them almost the entire time. So it's as if they themselves are in the thrall of Nosferatu's web without having even noticed it. So it's little things like that, to me, that still, I guess, reveal themselves and make this film...fresh every time I see it. I think if I could give one more example of that, um, I watched it last night. I didn't get to finish it. But another thing that I noticed is there's the scene where Professor Bulwer at the very beginning says to Hutter, you can't escape destiny by running away. And it occurred to me from the very beginning of this film, that's all he does is run. The very beginning, he's imposing himself upon nature breaking the feminine breaking the flower, taking it to Ellen and running to her with it. Encountering Bulwer on the way, poking his head into the room very forcefully, running around the room, running, packing his bag. It's-he's on the run the entire time. And it's not until the point that Orlok backs him up against the fireplace that it starts going in reverse to me. That's where he becomes reactionary to everything that's happening to him, that's where his course changes, and Ellen becomes the person driving the action. You know, he runs and runs and runs. The final scene, you have Bulwer standing next to the deathbed of Ellen while Hutter's standing next to her. And it's almost like it's bringing it full circle this statement, you can't escape destiny by running away. The one time he stops, the one time he collapses and lets go and accepts everything that happened, that's happened to him, she's gone. So it's little things like that, to me. Um, I don't really have a whole lot more to say I'm sorry, again, I truly am very appreciative of being invited to be a part of this. But in closing, I would like to say that, despite no real poignancy, maybe being made in any of these observations whatsoever, it's poignant to me in the sense that a hundreds of watches later, it's still making me think it's still making me as an artist want to create. It's still stirring thoughts in shadows. It's my personal muse, no matter how many times I tap into it for inspiration. And it never comes up short. Still commanding me to detour as I said earlier, other people's travel

plans, so I could stumble around castles, ruins and all the cemeteries connected with it. And I'm truly grateful for all is given to me and revealed to me artistically. With that, I really have nothing else to say. So, again, it's just been an honor. Thank you very much.

1:02:03

Well, thank you so much, Argyle for those illuminating thoughts. And to the entire panel, of course. We have time before our break for three or four questions. And so if anybody would like to send them in the chat, I'll be happy to read them to the panelists. And so, so I'm now on pause, I think briefly waiting to see if there's any, any questions. There's certainly a lot of wonderful feedback.

1:02:36 – Question period

And I'm seeing a question for Elias, from Julia F. asking, is it possible Shadow of the Vampire created a more human vampire, while humans became the real monsters in the narrative?

1:02:55

Thank you for that question. That is- that was consciously the, the way that I wanted to move the narrative arc for the vampire where the vampire starts out as the monster- he's terrifying, he's otherworldly, he's supernatural. And it's Murnau, who starts out as the urban, you know, film director that eventually becomes the monster, and the monster is the one that we start to really feel, you know, deep, deep feeling for and, and so yes, I would say that that is...that is the arc of the film. I mean, there's a lot of different levels, like I wrote a script just for the color, the use of color, the esoteric use of color in light...everything from lensing this film, to the compositions, to the production design, which is a whole other aspect of the film was done from an alchemical hermetic intention. So there's symbolism that's laden into the sets of Shadow of the vampire that you can unearth and discover within the film, but you need to freeze frame the film.

1:04:17

Wonderful, thank you. Thank you for that Elias. We also have a question from Abu in India, for Elias and asking what it was like working with John Malkovich and Willem Defoe...were they method actors, what was the casting process? Perhaps a few thoughts there would get to Abu's question?

1:04:40

Yes, well, I had the rare luxury of, of spending a month with John Malkovich in Paris while he was shooting a film at the time. So basically, when he got off work, or if he didn't have days that he was shooting, we just would walk around Paris just talking about *Shadow of the Vampire* and I just kept haranguing him with, with ideas. Now, John is a brilliant, he has a brilliant intellect. So the way to reach him as an actor is through his mind, if he respects and understands deeply, you know, the kind of novelty with which you are pursuing, you know, an emotion, or a moment within his character, he is ready to drink it up. And I also, when we were in Luxembourg, filming *Shadow of the vampire*, he, I got him to...there was a cottage just outside my apartment, in the courtyard in the back of where I was staying in Luxembourg. And that's where John...I put John. And so every evening, I basically would walk to his cottage and we would have dinner together, we took turns cooking. And, and, you know, the problem that I had with the script was that the big disagreement was that, you know, Steven saw the film as a, as a vampire film. And I kept telling Stephen, that I don't really think he understands his own script. Because, you know, I really with a lot of love, and a lot of articulation tried to get Steven to understand that the real beauty of *Shadow of the vampire* is about

1:06:35

you know, that the, that the real vampire is not the vampire, it's, it's, it's the director, it's the artist, and the exploration of the artist, as someone who transgresses, as someone who does not, you know, tether himself to any kind of moral code, but is only after the unknown, and bringing out of the void, something that is so awful, so ecstatic, so beautiful, that it transfixes the audience in such a way that it is eternally, internally and eternally moved by it. Now, Willem was a completely...so I would say that John, you know, reaching him through his intellect, talking to him about ideas, we would talk about everything from Goethe's theory of colors, to, you know, Holderlin's poems, you know, as inspiration. And we played a lot of music, which is something that Murnau I believe, did on the set, you know, he used music, and talked a lot during production, which I, I sort of love...I wish that that films remained silent, that sound wasn't invented until 1940. Because I really feel like-not feel, I know-that a grammar, a film grammar would have evolved, that would become quite sophisticated, because if you look at the photography, the special effects, the camera movement, the moving of the camera, from Napoleon to, you know, a, you know, Murnau's *Faust*, or, you know, it's just...you could see that there was this voracious appetite to invent new ways of seeing, and instead of falling back on dialogue and

words and everything else. But Willem was very different, Willem was acrobatic, he was...he was very, he's a very physical and very talented man in that regard. So, so Willem, we would rehearse. And, you know, he was not method at all, you know, he just wanted direction. And he just wanted you to just be on point with that direction. The problem that I had with Willem was that he moved too gracefully, so I had to create difficulties for him to move. So I had my costume designer, put together a corset that restricted his mid-body movement, making it awkward for him to take steps forward or backwards. And then I put him on very high platforms, you know, boots that made it difficult for him to walk. I also made the boots slightly too tight, even though I didn't tell him and, and so...to restrict his movement actually made him better. And, and, you know, and more inventive. And, and so, so the two were very different. So talking to John was completely different than talking to Willem. And the last 20 minutes of the film...the closing of Shadow of the vampire was entirely written over two bottles of wine and cocktail napkins being passed between Me and John Malkovich. And because in the original script, there's a very campy sort of ending where the vampire dies, and they wind up making their film. And everybody's kind of slapping each other's backs and congratulating each other. And I didn't want the film to end that way, I just felt like it was just cheap and actually wrong. And so, so that last portion was in a very high pressure situation, work done, you know, just four days before shooting. And basically what it was was I would be writing down ideas, lines, passing them to John, he'd be eating and drinking, he'd look at the line, he'd crumble it and throw it back at me, meaning, you know, forget that, you know, bad idea. And then I would pass another one along to him. He'd read it. And it gets like that little John Malkovich smirk, like, like, okay, kind of you didn't know whether he liked it, hated it, or was completely in love with it. And, and so that's the way I began to piece and structure, the end of the film.

1:11:07

Wonderful. Well, thank you so much. for that. We have time for just one last question. There's been a few for Argyle about his score. And you may have seen these in the chat, a lot of great comments in the chat. And of course, thanking all of our panelists, and excited about the. Argyle I think one way to maybe look at some of the questions that have been asked would be your score for Nosferatu in relation to some of the others that have been done, such as by James Bernard, who was obviously associated with Hammer Horror films, Type O negative, etc, perhaps you could speak to that for just a couple of minutes before we then we'll take a break.

1:11:45

So in regards to, you know, in the old silent films, you primarily had just needle drops scores, you don't I mean, like people who had distro-ed these, they would just put public domain music on top of the film. And it really had nothing to do with the emotion or the direction of the film or what it's meant to invoke. So you know, like, in the case of 'Type O, which you'd mentioned, that's not necessarily, I think, something that was written by them as much as it was an amalgam of their music put together for that film. For my film, I wanted to do something from the ground up. I'm in no way a composer, I don't have any formal training when it comes to music or when it comes to theory or anything in that regard. But I think that that actually was advantageous to me in the case of *Nosferatu*, because it is such a visceral movie. And I have such a personal connection to it, I think that if I cerebralized it too much that I probably wouldn't be able to, I guess distill the emotion into it that I wanted to. Um, my process was basically this, I watched the film. And I knew that I needed to break it up so it wasn't 160+ minute piece of music, I wanted it to be something that could be digestible in increments. So I started looking when the iris would open when the iris would close to me that was a song. And that was a change of a scene. So each scene became a song, I would write down all of the emotions, everything that I felt in scene to scene, and I would start piecing those together through color, through just imagery, things of that nature. And then when I had all that left, I more or less just had a big sheet, a big mess of words and things that I needed to decipher into music. The only real structure that I knew that I wanted going into this was I wanted to start out whimsical, very bombastic, full of hope. And, you know, just beauty to reflect that period. To feel like you're in the Biedermeier era. And that's why the opening scene everything is very upbeat. There's a lot of stringed instruments, a lot of natural, woodwinds, things like that. As the film progresses, and it gets closer and closer to the land of phantoms, that's when I started introducing more and more atonal and abstract instruments, but not in a way that it's just a mess of sounds, like I wanted there to still be some type of, I guess, harmony and some melodicism to what I was doing. By the point that he reaches the capital, all of the prior instruments, all the natural instruments are gone. I want to be, you know, an alternate world, another realm. And that's more or less where I went with it, from that whole process. And I just carried it through to the end. And thank God, I didn't really think about the, the weight of what I was doing, because it wasn't until the end that I realized what I was trying to accomplish. You know, like, I realized once it was all done, like, I may have just ruined the best movie ever made by putting this music on it, like, you know. But it's my love letter, you know what I'm saying, to that movie, to my experience with

that movie, and to everyone else who's shared that experience. And if I may, I just want to like point this out...this isn't anything that I'm trying to do like a cheesy promo on. But all of those notes that I took, ended up becoming more like prose than anything as I started putting it together. And I took all of that and I created a book called 'The Book of the vampires. And I wrote all of my, I guess, my personal experiences watching it and the feelings that I said I had earlier, and I put those into art as well. So there's obviously the picture of Knock reading the letter, and I have it all broken down into scenes, again, like there's, you know, Orlok reading the ciphers and whatnot. And the great thing I just want to say, I want to end with was we did have the opportunity of having Mark Hamill, you know, Luke Skywalker, of all people do a foreword for us on this little intro by Mark Hamill. Um, he was great. We asked him if he would be interested in doing something for it, should we write it up for him? And he was like, no, no, absolutely not. I love this film. I'll be more than happy to write my own foreword for it. And he did. And it's really special. So I'm very thankful for all these things that I've really been given through this movie.

1:16:21- Gary

Wonderful. Thank you so much for that Argyle and we are all here today from across the world, all of the audience members so thankful to the panelists that we've just heard from. Elias Merhige, Stephen R. Bissette and Argyle Goolsby, we thank all three of you so very, very greatly. We are going to take a five minute break before panel two starts with the chair Erica Tortolani chairing that panel, we'll take a five minute break. So wherever you are in the world that will be 25 past whatever hour whatever time zone you're in in five minutes, thanks.

Horror Reverie Organizers: Mark Jancovich, Gary D. Rhodes, Kristopher Woofter
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Horror Reverie I:
A Symposium Celebrating 100 Years of *Nosferatu*

TRANSCRIPT

Panel 2 - Historical and Other Contexts
19 February 2022
(duration 52:03)

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Nosferatu, vampire, *Dracula*, cinema, correspondence, rats, coffins, organism, screenplay, F.W. Murnau

00:00- Erica Tortolani

Alright. So hello, everyone. My name is Erica Tortolani. And this is the second panel on the historical and other contexts of *Nosferatu*. Just a brief shameless plug before we begin, if any of you are interested in additional horror scholarship, which I'm assuming so if you're in this symposium, some of my work has been or will be published in an edited volume called *Bloody Women: Women Directors of Horror* co-edited by Victoria McCollum, and Aislinn Clark [Lehigh University Press]. So that's coming out next month, and it should be available on ebook as well. So, yeah, that's, uh, let's go ahead and get started. I believe we're just going to go in alphabetical order. We are going to start with Steve Choe. Also, just a reminder to when we do break out with q&a, just please go ahead and put it in the direct message, please. All right. So Steve Choe is an associate professor of Critical Studies in the School of Cinema at San Francisco State University. He is the author of *Afterlives: Allegories of film and mortality in early Weimar Germany*, *Sovereign Violence: ethics and South Korean cinema in the new millennium*, *Refocus: the films of William Friedkin*. He is also a co editor of *Beyond Imperial Aesthetics: Theories of art and politics in East Asia*. So welcome, Steve.

01:36 - Steve Choe

Thank you, Erica. I'm going to share my screen. Hope that that will work. Okay, so I'd like to take a sequence from *Nosferatu* actually mentioned briefly in the first panel and generate some historical themes concerning film form contagion and the body

politic. Let me begin with an inner title that quickly takes us into the significant sequence. Professor Bulwer is researching the mysterious secrets of nature with his students. He's shown in a seminar room in Wisborg surrounded by his students, he gestures for them to gather around directing their attention toward a small wooden box of soil sitting on his desk. Soil derived from Orlok's homeland. Nosferatu cuts to a close up of a fly crawling around a carnivorous plant. As a small insect lingers around its menacing leaves. The Fly suddenly triggers the small hairs on its lobes and snaps the trap shut, Murnau cuts to a close up of Bulwer's face and remarks with a sly look "Like a vampire, no?" The film then cuts to another location to an asylum where the vampire servant the real estate agent Knock is locked up. With this juxtaposition the film brings shots of disease infested coffins and Bulwer's botanical demonstration in correspondence with a shock of Knock's increasing agitation. The one is seemingly instigating the other. Sitting in a cell Knock laughs crazily and swats at the air for flies, nervously, putting them into his mouth, bizarrely becoming the venus flytrap of Bulwer's experiment. The film then cuts back to the classroom. Bulwer motions for his students to gather even closer while remarking "And this one here..." and gesturing toward an elongated polyp with tentacles. In extreme close up it is shown suspended in dark water as one might observe under a microscope illuminated such that its body is nearly transparent, almost ethereal, the organism almost takes the appearance of a letter on a page, a provocation, perhaps that the image itself be read as a living signifier. A more miniscule life form suddenly enters the frame and begins to flit around the polyp. After a few moments, the creature becomes entangled in the larger organism's tentacles, and as it struggles to break free, the slender finger-like members of the predator pull its prey towards its ostensible mouth. [*Sound cuts out*] ... subdued by the psychiatric guard position behind him. The real estate agent looks up and points towards one of the corners of the room exclaiming "Spiders!" Murnau shows us a close up of the spider shot in the same manner as the polyp, phantom like against the dark background. It's in the process of spinning a net around the small fly, apparently the one that Knock had earlier sought. So on holy earth, spiders, vampires, carnivorous plants, a microscopic polyp, the real estate agent Knock, and spectral phantoms form a series of vampiric correspondences that Bulwer happened to be investigating. Correspondences = that are forged through cross cutting. Distances between here and there are overcome, borders are transgressed. Highlighted in the lives of the organisms here, depicted here, is their shared vampiric capacities made possible through their particular species specific morphology and their individual will toward life. Orlok's grasping fingers may be compared to the grasping tentacles of the tiny polyp. The poisonous bite of the Nosferatu is like the bite of the spider.

Furthermore, the fang-like mouth of the horrifying flytrap is akin to the teeth of the spider, each constituting a specific mode of existence that render them Other to the human being. In this sense, these correspondences recall Jakob von Uexküll's theory of the organism, elaborated in a text published in 1920 called *Theoretical Biology and the phenomenon of congruence between the morphology of the organism and the Umwelt that enables its life to flourish*. From these vampiric beings depicted in *Nosferatu*, we see that the fangs, tentacles, and mouths are designed to consume the life of the Other in order to continue living.

06:24

The image of Orlok as a carrier of disease and a threat to the body politic of Wisborg persists throughout *Nosferatu*. Cultural studies approaches remind us of the representation of the vampire myth and Murnau's film, and its association with anti-semitic stereotypes of the Eastern Jew, including notions of degeneracy and parasitism. As we know, the stigmatization of Jews intensified after the war in Germany, as their increasing integration into society seem to compel evermore integrate conspiratorial theories that distinguish ostensibly essential racial differences. The association between encroaching contagion and the vampire can also be contextualized, of course, with the pandemic, the so-called Spanish flu that spread across the globe between 1918 and 1919. As a consequence of new means of transporting people and commodities across borders, as well as the close quarters of trench warfare. This massive H1N1 pandemic killed tens of millions of people. A striking shot from *Nosferatu* shows a procession of pall-bearers, coffins on their shoulders, marching through Wisborg to the cemetery while the living remains quarantined in their homes. The notion of the contaminated body politic finds its historical correspondence with texts such as Karl Binding's *Zum Werden und Leben der Staaten* and Eberhard Dennert's *Der Staat als lebendiger Organismus*, both published in 1920. In this year Uexküll published his biology of the state, *Anatomy physiology pathology of the state*, where he applies his theories of the organism to the functioning of the whole nation. In it he describes a chain of individuals who collaborate their specific abilities in conjunction with their *Umwelt* to produce bread. In this chart, for example, the farmer, miller and the baker function as individual organs, each carrying out their mutually exclusive roles to transform grain flour and yeast into nourishment for the inhabitants of the state. In doing so each realizes their possibility of being by harmonizing with each other and contributing their specific talents to the state's continued existence. Significantly, Uexküll refers once more to the cinematograph to illustrate the proper functioning of individual individual organs within the body of the state. And the following he compares the two

dimensional space of representing the chain of individuals with that of the film screen. “If we draw our attention on a certain area of the diagram and pursue the lines of exchange among the different organs of the state, we may obtain a perspective like that provided by a cinematograph, which presents various durational images on the same surface. In the cinema image, figures emerge and pass by according to a determined law, on which the mechanics of the apparatus depends, and whose sprockets jerkily advance the film role, animating the still diagram. The cinema is particularly suited to representing biopolitical life in corresponding the unfolding of the moving image with the unfolding life of the state organism. Yet it is on this basis that Uexküll can identify the pathologies and parasites that invade the state, introducing more politically volatile correspondences to the allegorical vampire in Murnau’s *Nosferatu*. In the latter sections of *Biology of the state*, the zoologist singles out enemies of the state such as the Free Press Americanism, and the influx of foreign races, particularly those who originate from other nations and whose styles of being remain alien to Germany. “Genuine parasites that are dangerous to the state and are against its living participants may be called a foreign race. On the other hand, when they may be deemed useful to the state, one speaks not a parasitism, but of symbiosis.” Moreover, just as it is innate to its species that spiders entrap and consume flies, which we saw in the montage sequence from *Nosferatu*, so it is concomitant with nature’s plan that one nation, quote on quote, consume another.

11:02

This was a postwar biopolitical situation that Uexküll wanted to explain in his text and which finds its resonance as a discursive potentiality and *Nosferatu*. Murnau’s film reminds us of the speed by which questions of politics contaminate the discourse of life, and the crises that arise as borders are continuously transgressed in our modern age. So that’s it. I’ll just leave it here for now, for the sake of time, but I’m happy to address other things in the q&a. Thanks so much.

11:38 – Erica Tortolani

Wonderful, thank you so much, Steve. All right. So our next speaker is Lokke Heiss. Lokke has a medical degree and an MFA in film studies from USC. While in film school, Dr. Heiss was asked by film historian David Shepherd to help restore *Nosferatu* and provide a commentary track for the film. As part of Heiss’s research for this project. He traveled to Germany and Slovakia to find the original locations for the production, providing perhaps the first *Nosferatour* available for fans. Heiss has

contributed his research for the last 30 years, including two trips to Romania to find the origin of the word Nosferatu. Dr. Heiss writes about film on his website, Lokkeheiss.com, I can copy and paste the URL into the chat tool for anyone who's interested. So yeah, feel free to begin whenever you're ready Lokke.

12:37 – Lokke Heiss

Thank you for that introduction. And I think I'll go right ahead and try to share my screen. And let's see if this works. Here we go and share. And did that work? Yeah, it did. Ok so Nosferatu, I'm going to talk about the name, the screenplay and the lost scenes. And I'll try and do that in less than 10 minutes. Obviously, I'll go quickly. What I'd really like to be doing today is to introduce these areas for the people watching or listening. So that they can go back on their own time and investigate. And that's if I can get that I'll be accomplished with my goal. So, the first part of this will be discuss the name Nosferatu itself. Where did it come from? And what is the most up to date discussion of this question? And for this, I have been researching this for decades. Last year, I was part of a congress that who was related to this, Dracula Congress, which had some Romanian, some Romanians in the Congress. And so we had a big get together, we went through a lot of different names. And what I'm going to talk about now is a result of that. So what most people are aware of, if they're probably attending this is that Murnau got the name Nosferatu from Bram Stoker's novel. And Bram Stoker got the name from Emily Gerard, who was born in Scotland, lived in Transylvania for two years, and wrote about it later. And we know that Stoker read Gerards work and he used a lot of what she wrote as a source for his book. So that's obviously where Galeen and Murnau got Nosferatu from. One thing people hear the name, and it's a very arresting name, so I think that a lot of people hear different words and they come along and they find one that that is interesting, and they can they remember it. But who came up with the word before Emily Gerard? And so my research has basically showed that

14:55

that she did not make...she had a bad rap for a long time. She misheard a word, she didn't have any background in folklore and did not speak Romanian. It turns out though that she did not mishear the word. She merely copied it down. The word was around in Romania in the 1800s. We have a couple different locations where it was found, for example, another person Heinrich von Wlislöcki wrote about it, although he used Nosferat, not used the u, which in some ways, is a sign that the word was really there because he heard a version of it. But the person that was most important to this

was a man named Wilhelm Schmidt, a German school teacher at Hermannstadt, which later became Sibiu. And this is the town where Emily Gerard lived herself. And so all she had to do was to go down to the library and find the Austria Review magazine. She herself was doing research before her book. So ironically, she was doing what Bram Stoker would do later. And this is, the evidence for this is that the information in her book, the words and sentences match up very well to what Schmidt wrote about 20 years before she wrote her book. So William Schmidt was, was there first. And so then the question is, where did he hear it from and the best guess we have here, and this is from the people who speak Romanian. And after going through all the options, they thought that the word was most likely from the word Nefârtatu and the issue is, is that the F sound probably got some slippage there, from the F to the s, which is a very common thing to happen in people who are who are vocal, spoken language, and not writing things down. So that language changes quickly. This was a local word. Nefârtatu is not a word that's common in Romania today. And that's why I had to be with some Romanian scholars who are familiar with this to really get the best guess. Fârtat is 'brother,' Nefârtat is 'not my brother'. In other words, it's a name for the devil. And so that all matches up. And so, you know, of course, nobody's knows for sure. But this is this was a consensus of about, oh, five or six different Romanian scholars who actually are familiar with the whole idea of Nosferatu. So that's what I'm going with now until someone can come up with better evidence and make sense to me. So I'm going to move right over to Nosferatu, the lost scenes. And this is an important slide really the most important I guess we can make this link more easily accessible, but it is the slide if you don't need this, you just Google Murnau Nosferatu screenplay and maybe Lottie Eisner, and it should get there the same place. I recommend anybody reading this, watching this to read the shooting script. It's from Lottie Eisner's book on Murnau. And in the back of the book, she had this shooting script given to her by Murnau's family, and she had it translated into English, or in this edition it was translated in English. And so this is a way of seeing close to what was intended. This of course, was not the original screenplay, but the shooting script. So you see a lot of additions that Murnau put in as he took...added or took away. But I'm going to show you what, course we don't have time to go over the whole script, but I'm just going to identify a couple scenes. For example, this is the original scene and "Fade in townscape, Wisma"r. This is you know that location shooting. "View over the roofs of a small old fashioned town built in the style of the 1840s." And we get right into the scene about Hutter and Ellen. And right away those of us familiar with the film, come up with this very odd scene where she gives him, he gives her flowers and she's not happy about it. It's the intertitle is strange, you know, "why did you kill

them”? I saw one intertitle someone made the effort of saying Why did you destroy the flowers? So this is certainly an issue with translation. Why did you cut the flowers maybe?

19:40

Another way of looking at this, I joke with people that because this is such a Freudian story. That one of the answers of this question could be she could look at what he did and ask her why did you castrate the flowers? Since that seems to be what's going to be happening with him over the next part of the film. Anyway, you can look at the screenplay and get a better sense of what's going on there. And you see that a lot of the discussion of what was going on is left. Murnau either did not shoot it or edited it out as a trim. But very important to the scene is that this couple is poor. She doesn't have the money to do any real, to do shopping the way she wants. And then in the next scene, he tries to give her money from a purse and there's nothing there. So you have this very obvious motivation for the for the next scene where he's going to decide to go to Transylvania. So we don't have really the, the financial aspect of it at this point, we just have the odd rather strangely sexual content of the flowers, and then we move on. So we have to infer about the poverty in the in the scene coming up. And, and so that it I think it has the advantage in some ways of collapsing or truncating the plot to more like a dreamscape where, you know, when we have a dream, we don't always have motivations that are clear either, so we have to infer. So sometimes less is more. I want to show a copy of what the shooting script actually looked like. And this is of course in German. And the notes you see on top of that are Murnau's personal scribbled notes on this. I know the x that goes, you know, from doing films myself, this is carried on even today, when you x out a scene after you've done it, it was funny for me to look at it and see that it was going on even back then. This is the pages is the scene from when in the castle where Hutter looks out the window and sees the coffins being lined up. And I'm guessing that what we see on top of the page is some representation of the coffins perhaps going into the cart. And then it says End of Act II at the bottom there. It would be also if you really wanted to do it right you would get the original German texts which I believe are available and then you would have the ability to see what even closer to what Murnau was looking at when he when he shot the film, including one other scene that was copied that is in the in the book by Lottie Eisner, because it's the famous stairway scene. And you see that how Murnau constructed the scene visually, he drew out the stairway and then below that you see the camera setups and, and how he wanted to position the, the walk up to the ladder and so I always am very intrigued by how people can translate, you know, directors,

filmmakers translate something from word to image. And you can see Murnau's intent in doing that by looking at this picture. And finally, there are lost scenes. So for example, in the original screenplay, Nosferatu takes longer to die. He actually has an extra scene, and I'll read to you. "The bed is bathed in sunlight. He looks about in amazement for a moment he stands legs apart, as if trying to regain his balance. He touches at his heart and falls on his knees, his face turned to the sun." So from after this shot, then you had a shot a reaction shot of Ellen, realizing that she was successful, and then we should we go back to the scene that we do know, which is when he sort of walks away from the bed and then disappears. That seems intact. But this scene was eliminated. And

24:15

it's a very interesting comparison. Because when we look at any film made, let's say even in the 1960s with Hammer, there is no way you would not have the scene included in the film. If you think about the vampire's death. It's stretched out, you know, he has to have one reaction or two or three. And I think that that it shows you sort of different kind of styles of filmmaking. I think, though my own opinion is that some of this wasn't put in for more practical reasons and for aesthetic as this film was shot on a very little budget. And as someone who's tried to make films in film school, you get, you get the films you're trying to put it together in the workprint. And you realize it that you don't have the right coverage for what you want. And then you just lose scenes and I sense that that there was probably some of that going on here too, although for this particular shot who knows? Now you if you want to go on your own and read the screenplay, you'll see scenes like this throughout the film where you have more going on and then, what for me what's helpful for this is it gives you more of the motivation for the characters. You know, maybe you don't have to have them [*cuts out*] first time you see it because I think the first

25:41

[*cuts out*] fifth I think it's gonna be very interesting to see what happens when you when you read the film, and read the screenplay working print as you have the film in front of you in terms of your screen. And then you get to a part and you think, Oh, this this wasn't you know, this is extra. So these are sort of the lost scenes of Nosferatu at least as the as the concept was. I'm sure that in the original screenplay, there were far more scenes and as what happens almost always with these they get lost as the film gets tighter, but this was the very last thing to go in terms of scenes lost and you get motivations for Ellen and Hutter more, you have motivations for everything all the

other characters you see, you have more cross cutting that goes on in the scenes. This film is famous for a lot of cross cutting which is very ambitious for its for its time and there was even more cross cutting going on before, there was a scene in the Demeter where we actually see the ship and we have the rats going, you know, we have the coffins going back on the ship. So there's there's just like a whole another 10 or 20 minutes of the film that exist in our minds when we see the screenplay, but not in the actual film. So I think I've hit my 10 minutes and I'll be happy to. I'll be happy to get off- stop sharing the screen. And then I'll let I'll let someone else take over and...stop share. And thank you for that. And of course I'll be here for questions afterwards.

27:24 – Erica Tortolani

Yes, thank you so much Lokke. Oh, right. Next up, we have Murray Leeder. Murray is an adjunct professor in the Department of English film theatre and Media at the University of Manitoba. He is the author of *Horror Film: A Critical Introduction, The modern supernatural and the beginnings of cinema and Halloween*. And he's also an editor of *Cinematic: ghost haunting and spectroscopy from silent cinema to the digital era*, and *Refocus: the films of William Castle*. So whenever you're ready, Murray, you can take over.

28:00-Murray Leeder

Thank you very much, Erica. And I'll give my thanks for those who invited me here. It's been a great privilege, I'm just going to go ahead and share my screen now. Or share my PowerPoint here. I'm going to start by echoing some of what has been said already, in terms of like, first contact with Nosferatu always seemed so important. So for me, too, it came from books. I was a monster kid, you know, of the VHS era. And so my first contact definitely came from library books such as the Ian Thorne one that you see on the left here, from the one on the right, is from this book, actually, horror movies by Daniel Cohen, which was published sometime in the early 80s. And, and there are many others in which a set of stills you know, perhaps five or six tops would regularly be reprinted. And I'll draw your attention to the caption there, which alleges that it's claimed that Max Shreck was a pseudonym, that he was really Alford Able in disguise. Somebody should make a movie out of that. I don't know where that came from. And Nosferatu I recall a kind of moment in my childhood, maybe I was about 12. When I was thinking, you know, I could just get to go get a copy of this. So I found a VHS copy being sold at a video store. And I think that was the first VHS I ever bought with my own money. And again, I was probably 11 or 12 at that point. So I think that a lot of ways Nosferatu is responsible for, you know, my interest in film history, that it was a gateway drug so to speak. I don't want to use that term too

flippantly but I think it applies here. That it opened up all these all these possibilities about horror about silent cinema and about cinema in general that once I'd sat down with *Nosferatu* and taken in all of its amazing images, I just wanted to see more and more what else was there in film history. So I think it's no exaggeration to say that *Nosferatu* sent me on a path that led, well here, I suppose to speaking to you as a, as a film scholar. And kind of, it's always been a film that I love so much that I find it hard to write about. I'm always more comfortable writing about films that I liked a lot, than films I outright love. So when asked to write about *Nosferatu* for a forthcoming piece, I ended up, for forthcoming collection, I ended up more talking about the repurposing of the images of *Nosferatu* in later cinema. So that's what I want to briefly talk about today. And there are many more examples than I will get to here. In fact, the Internet Movie Database lists 230 movies in which footage from *Nosferatu* is featured. It's not just-that's television, as well as movies, of course. But even that seems like perhaps a bit of an understatement. And I think the fact that *Nosferatu* always existed, not always, but for a long time existed in this kind of copyright limbo, where hypothetically it was under copyright, but nobody was enforcing that copyright for most of the 20th century, so the footage gets repurposed all over the place. Now two of the most important earlier examples are *Boo* in 1932, and *The Vampire* by John Painlevé in 1945. And I sometimes when I teach *Nosferatu* I screen these side by side because they're very different in every respect other than that they both repurpose footage from *Nosferatu*. *Boo* is a is a comedy in which Universal is making fun of its own nascent horror franchise basically. And students are always interested in seeing it. It's a short that repurposes footage from *Frankenstein*, footage from *Nosferatu* and other films into this very silly kind of narrative. One of my students likened it to the honey badger video, where like the silly VoiceOver is making fun of all the images that we're seeing and so on. And people were surprised by how modern it is. Also that it makes contemporary jokes about the depression and about Congress and that sort of thing. Somehow the idea of political humor having existed in these other periods seems surprising.

32:43

The vampire by Painlevé, of course is a different ball of wax. It's a science film ostensibly about the habits of the vampire bat, which is intercut with footage from *Nosferatu* but it also functions as an allegory for fascism. And famously, there's a bit in there where the, they've managed to photograph the vampire bat looking like it's giving a Heil Hitler salute with its with its wing. So those are the two important I think, early examples of the repurposing of *Nosferatu* exactly. Now, you see many examples,

and I won't linger on all of them, which are very different in character like in Roger Avery's film *Killing Zoe*. Footage from *Nosferatu* is a kind of film brat citation intercut with a sex scene to kind of tie together sex and, sex and death and of the kind of heritage of European art cinema. In *Fahrenheit 911*, the Roger Moore film, the presence of, of Romania in George W. Bush's *Coalition of the Willing* is represented by footage from *Nosferatu*. In *vamps*, which I always like to shine a spotlight on this film because I think it's-it's an interesting hidden gem. It uses a lot of, repurposes a lot of clips from films like *Nosferatu* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Metropolis* as kind of ironic counterpoints on his own comic vampire narrative. And in particular, Count Orlok's mastery over rats is put into counterpoint with the two vampire characters played here by Alicia Silverstone and Krysten Ritter who work as exterminators that's like their day job or night job I suppose, technically, and who also feed off that feed off rats rather, including literally sticking straws into them to drink their blood. So there are many other examples in in horror films, *Scream 2* for example, throws footage from *Nosferatu* onto a TV screen at one point during a tense sequence, this kind of fannish citation. *Nosferatu*, I think, boosted in visibility in the 90s quite considerably. And then you also have the repurposing of the aesthetic, particular the visual aesthetic of, of Orlok's makeup so that you get it in in *Salem's Lot* of course, in Herzog's literal remake, and to a lesser extent in its bizarre sequel *Vampire in Venice* or *Nosferatu in Venice*. Certain vampire films pick it up later on like *Subspecies*, and it usually represents the more bestial aspects of a vampire. Like in *Subspecies*, for example, there, there are two main vampires, a good one and a bad one, so to speak. And they are contrasted in terms of their visual design and reduce the bad vampire gets aspects of the Orlok makeup design. You also get it in *Aliens*, and this is the subject of the forthcoming essay that I referred to before. So in an episode called *The Space Vampire* in *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*, space vampire is clearly influenced by the by the Orlok design with the pointed ears, bald, prominent brow and prominent eyebrows and the and the fangs, somewhat modified, but you can see the influence for sure. Other aliens, *Dark City* of course, is another example where aspects of the *Nosferatu* look have been repurposed. In this case, not in terms of...not for actual vampires, just for characters that are coded as vampiric in some way or another. And there's the Pa'uans in *Star Wars* they appear ...they appear briefly in in the return of the Sith I believe.

37:03

And in *Star Trek Nemesis*, possibly the worst *Star Trek* film, certainly the one that killed the film franchise for a while, it's more bestial Romulan offshoot called the Remans is

clearly and unapologetically styled after the Orlok look. In fact, I have an excerpt here from the screenplay by John Logan in which Nosferatu is overtly cited. There's a very citational quality to that screenplay where *Alien* and other films are like overtly mentioned in the screenplay as a reference point. And it should be said that in most cases, these are fairly unsympathetic characters that when the Nosferatu look is repurposed, it's for vampires that we're supposed to mostly hate...to think of his bestial and clearly, you know, unequivocally evil. So that's basically what I want to talk about here. I've spent more time writing about *Star Trek Nemesis* than I ever thought that I would. But as somebody who, as a kid was obsessed with both vampires and *Star Trek*, it was a perfect post hoc merger of my, of my research interests. So I guess I'll leave it there. Thanks very much, everyone.

38:18- Erica Tortolani

Wonderful, thanks so much, Murray. Okay, lastly, under certainly not leastly we have Milly Williamson. Millie Williamson is a senior lecturer of media communications and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths University of London, and author of *The Lore of the vampire: gender fiction and fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy*. So, whenever you're ready, Mellie you can take charge.

38:45 - Milly Williamson

Thank you, Erica. And thank you for inviting me to take part in this symposium. It's been really interesting. And just as an aside, before I start, I wanted to say to Lokke that I was discussing some of the ideas and what I'm going to present with my 20 year old daughter, who knows of Nosferatu from *Spongebob*, which I think somebody mentioned in the in the chat and asked me what you know, where does Nosferatu come from? And what does it mean, of course, I had to blag it because I had no idea. But now I can go back and be informed. So thank you very much.

39:20

Okay, so what I wanted to talk to you about today is I just really want to say a few words about women in relation to Nosferatu. And think about some of the gendered themes in the film. And I want to do that by way of comparison to those themes found in-in *Dracula*, the novel and and its adaptations. We know that Nosferatu was seen to be an adaptation of *Dracula*, close enough for content to infuriate Bram Stoker's widow, who sued for copyright infringement, yet different enough in its depiction of a vampire, not as a suave intellectual, but as utterly repellent, so that Florence Balcombe Stoker was seven years in litigation to try to wipe from the cinematic record

any association of the film *Nosferatu* with the novel. I want to think about the gendered themes in the film, as I say by contrasting them to those more associated with *Dracula*, the seducer. And actually some of the themes are similar, although Murnau's film handles them quite differently. In both, women are symbolic of the threat the vampire represents. And as such, both roles draw on the symbolic power of the virtuous woman and the question of betrayal. But Count Orlok is not depicted as a seductive foreign invader. Actually, most of the film is about the vampire space being invaded by the Harker character we know was renamed Hutter. And the count is kind of palpable, is quiet at this intruder in his environment. Instead, we can think of Orlok representing, as Steve said in his book, plague and pestilence. And when he finally arrives in civilization, which is about two thirds of the way through the film, he's accompanied by a plague of rats, Orlok's appearance and his association with plague and disease, led a number of commentators again, as Steve pointed out, to express unease at the way that the film parallels the widespread and growing anti-semitic tropes of the early 20th century. And of course, this view of the film seems to be given further weight by the fact, by the way that the vampire communicates—he uses a mysterious code that includes actually some Hebrew letters and the Star of David. And, of course, Nazi propaganda in Germany at the time, but also the *Daily Mail* in the UK, our lovely *Daily Mail* overtly likened Eastern European Jews to plagues of rats. The film may be drawing on this imagery. And of course, this might then shape our understanding of the threat that the vampire represents, and also this kind of symbolic significance of the woman as his victim. In the case of *Dracula*, this is a threat of invasion. And the fear it animates is tied to a Victorian version of woman as virtuous and pure and in need of protection, and thus the threat is gendered. It is figured as the threat of sexual desire being awakened in an honorable and/or Virgin femininity. Orlok's threat in contrast, is one of disease and contagion. In fact, in the domestic space, although of course, it is also about the body politic. But unlike *Dracula*, Orlok doesn't try to seduce Hutter's wife. And indeed, he seems utterly incapable of human discourse and interaction. Instead, he sneaks into a room and bites her. And this is exactly what he did, you know, that was the way he previously attacked Hunter in his castle. So it's interesting that in *Dracula*, it's the symbols of patriarchy, in the shape of the crew of light, who dispatch *Dracula*...that Jonathan beheads him while Quincy stabs him repeatedly. And the dispatch, therefore, is a very male affair with the woman as a symbol of the nation in need of protection. But *Nosferatu* seems to imply that plagues are made by men. The film was made again, as Steve pointed out, not long after the Spanish flu pandemic, itself a likely product of the wreckage wrought by the First World War. But in *Nosferatu* it is a woman, Hutter's wife Ellen, who dispatches the

threat of disease. And in this case, it's not the violence of weapons wielded by man, but the cleansing power of sunlight and the trickery of women. In the scene where Orlok dies he actually appears as if he's starving and is so distracted by feeding on Ellen's blood, that he doesn't realize the dawn has broken. And like other diseases he's killed by the light. Orlok is very much ensnared by Ellen who herself is a symbol of the realm of the domestic, but not in a placid or non-agentive way. And in fact, when we first see Ellen, when she first appears on screen, is holding her cat, and like the feline, she's a domestic hunter who catches the rat-like Vampire who's invaded her home and also actually her body. In Warner Herzog's 1979 remake of *Nosferatu* this introduces romantic themes found in contemporary *Dracula* adaptations- he's a much more vulnerable figure than those *Draculas* and he's also trapped and killed by a woman. This time though, she is depicted as the woman he loved. She picks him when he's feeding on her and this is in the '79 film hit and he pulls back kind of sated. She pulls him towards her again to feed more, which he takes as a sign of love returned. But actually, it's a con and a betrayal because she knows that the sun is breaking and its power will finish him off. So these women dispatch the threat represented by the power, power not afforded to women in the *Dracula* tale. Although the power is not unproblematic, though, but for in the original film, Ellen's agency is clearly located in the domestic sphere, and may also really be read through the film's anti-semitic themes. In the later 1979 film, the female agency is situated in notions of feminine betrayal. But nonetheless, these are symbolic, you know, they are-the women of a symbolic center of the final action rather than the male characters. And of course, it's another woman Florence Balcombe Stoker who tries to kill *Nosferatu* off completely in cinematic culture, although she was far less successful than her cinematic distance.

46:00 – Erica Tortolani

All right, thank you so much, Millie. Yes. Um, do we have time for questions? Gary? Do we have time for questions? We have time? Yeah, we have time for about five minutes of questions. Yeah, we're running quite a bit late. But okay. Yes, yes, whoever has questions, feel free to direct message me.

46:27-Lokke Heiss

While we're waiting for that, I've heard Thomas Elsaesser, who's a great film critic talks about *Nosferatu*, the visual image of him as the conjoined collection of paradoxical others. And I can't think of a better way to describe that situation, because he has the anti-semitic but he has also the aristocracy he's got whatever it is that other, it's

somehow found in his being and at least in the image. So I like I like that a conjoined collection of paradoxical others. Not mine. I read it.

47:06-Erica Tortolani

See, okay, this is a question from Penny Goodman for Murray, has the extensive use of quotations from Nosferatu in other films helped to create a reputation for it as the or Ur-horror film? So you are for them?

47:24-Murray Leeder

Yes, I think the answer to that is definitely yes. And it routinely appears on lists of best horror films, it's probably the only film of the silent era that that routinely appears on such lists, in fact. But what I find especially interesting about Nosferatu is that its status is art cinema sort of clings to it, even though it's been very much claimed by popular culture. And I don't think I can quite articulate that dynamic entirely, you know, but I think that's very much the case that Nosferatu gets evoked as a kind of arty vampire film, much in contrast with the universal and hammer traditions, which have different resonances of different sorts, obviously. But so I think the the answer is definitely yes though. After all, many more people are aware of Nosferatu from citations of it, including SpongeBob, I'm told that are unlikely to ever see it at this point, you know, that it, it is sort of present in the ether. So I think I think that is an important thing to note that, you know, it's but it's public profile has been hugely reshaped by its extensive portability, for sure. Yeah.

48:42-Erica Tortolani

Thank you. We have a question from quick from Chris. For Milly. Is Nosferatu also a kind of weird love story between Ellen and Nosferatu?

48:58-Milly Williamson

I'm unmuted I think that those themes are brought out. And Am I unmuted? Yeah, I think those themes are brought out and more fully in the 1979 film. But I wonder if they really are they're in the original 1922 Nosferatu because of the kind of vigor that Count Orlok is and his kind of his incapability of kind of human connection. So yeah, I think probably not so much.

49:31-Erica Tortolani

Yeah, thank you. We have I think this may be just the final question um for this panel. It's for everyone from Steven Bissette. So he says curious to me that only Nosferatu

links vampirism with rodents. It's not even stressed in the makeup designs of subsequent adoptions of Shreck makeup design for later screen characters. So I guess thoughts on that remark.

49:57-Lokke Heiss

I mean, there's two obvious answers. As the past the plague rats from that, and then that puts him to the pandemic, you have all that connection. And then also, at that point the play was going big guns, which the play would have had a different take on this. And so I, I think, the play eventually it became the very seductive, handsome vampire. But at this point that wasn't codified any way. And I think he-he clearly wanted to connect this to contagion. And so you're going to make rats as part of that rather than canines, because canines have a sort of a little more, you know, we have canines, I mean, so we have a connection to that, it's more human, more human than, than a rat, a rodent, like face.

50:50-Steve Choe

But I also add that there's another kind of anti semitic resonance here of rats being associated with cities and this sense in which cities are these un-hygienic places, you know, something like this, again, you know, the Elsaesser quote, I think is really helpful here and conglomerating all these, you know, images and xenophobic and otherwise.

51:19-Erica Tortolani

Awesome. Well, I think yeah, I think will elicit a Milly-did you have something to say? Should we go to break? Kris or Gary, or should we wrap up the fantastic panel? Just might I add really, really interesting stuff. Yeah. So yeah. How do we want to approach this?

51:39-Kristopher Woofter

Sure. Let's go. Let's have...let's give people a break. It's been a while and we're running quite a bit over time. Let's give until 3:40 return at 3:40 gives the people a chance to use the restroom and whatever else they have to do. And then we'll try to keep, panel three is three speakers. We'll keep that on on track. And yeah, see you at 3:40. Awesome.

52:00

Thank you, everyone.

Horror Reverie Organizers: Mark Jancovich, Gary D. Rhodes, Kristopher Woofter
Transcript Preparation, Technical Support: Sydney Sheedy, Steven Greenwood



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**Horror Reverie I:
A Symposium Celebrating 100 Years of *Nosferatu***

TRANSCRIPT

Panel 3: Style, Theme, Politics, Aesthetics

19 February 2022

(duration 42:50)

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

vampire, *Nosferatu*, *Dracula*, horror, queer, Stoker, monster, postmodern, horror genre

00:02 - Robert Singer

Good afternoon, everybody. Can you hear me? Am I coming through?

00:08

Okay. Wonderful. Thank you. I'm clear. Great. My name is Robert Singer. Welcome to everybody, whether it's the morning, afternoon or evening, wherever you may be, I have the pleasure of hosting the third panel of this, I think, really wonderful afternoon, this comprehensive look at a major work of Film Art, a part of I think international film culture at this point. And just a few words, Gary told me I have to say something about myself. I'm a former professor at City University of New York. I'm now retired. I work with Gary as the series editor on the Refocus series, and we're working on a second volume on the commercial as Film Art. And also, I'm working on my own book on film naturalism. Aside from that, I have the distinct pleasure now of introducing three people who are going to present some fascinating work. The first person I'm going to introduce is John Edgar Browning, who's a recognized authority on the horror genre vampires and Monster theory. I'm interested in Monster theory. He has contracted or published in the fields of 20 academic and popular trade books, and over 90 articles, chapters and reviews. John?

01:31-Kristopher [Kris] Woofter

Sorry, John was having some technical difficulties, and he sent us a recording of his talk. It's a six minute piece, I think. And Steve, do you have that?

01:43 - Steven Greenwood

Yes, I have it already. I will pull it up and share my screen for it

01:47-Robert Singer

A miracle of technology. Who could figure.

01:56-John Browning

Hi, John Browning here, if you're watching this.

02:04 (someone doing tech)

Sorry, it'll just take one second. Is that good everyone?

02:20

Yes, yes. It's all perfect. But it's not playing it's but we see it. Okay.

02:29-John Browning

Hi, John Browning here. If you're watching this recording, it means that my Zoom is bugged out or my internet connections bugged out. And I do apologize. So I realized that probably was going to happen during the other panels that are speaking right now. So I decided to make this recording very quickly for the chairs to play for you in case this happened. Well, first, let me say that my first mail order video that I ever bought was *Nosferatu* as well, in the early 90s. In fact, the second one was the '79 Werner Herzog version, which was really hard to find. In fact, it was a bootleg version, because that's all you could find in the early 90s. So anyway, I just wanted to say that. But I'm here today to talk to you just briefly about *Nosferatu's* lack of modernity which is one of the hallmarks of Stoker's original novel. I have in the past and in the present had two projects on contemporary criticism of Stoker's novel. The first came out in 2012, I think, or 2013. It reprinted about 91 contemporary book reviews of *Dracula* and what it did, decidedly I hope, was dispel the myth that *Dracula* the book received mixed reviews. Of the reviews I collected I think a total of maybe three were negative. A few were mixed, and the rest were all positive. So by all accounts, *Dracula* was very well received. The current project of mine should be published to Edinburgh University Press this year, hopefully early next year, is reprinting those in addition to several others, and there's a total of about 275 contemporary book reviews reprinted in this upcoming book that were published between 1897 and about 1920. So of those reviews, a resounding number of them are positive, like it only added a couple, two or

three negative reviews, I think, to the original set of negative reviews. So that's really great. I mean, that basically shows that not only was Stoker's novel, a fantastic read by the critics that be, but that it may also have been one of the most reviewed books in the entire Victorian canon. But anyway, one thing I want to bring up about it in connection with *Nosferatu* is that two huge things I noticed across many of the reviews was that reviewers brought up two things that they found when they were reading *Dracula*. The first is that we have a gothic book, a book in which there is a vampire that is bringing the story from the past to the present, which was pretty out there for Gothic literature, okay; it always took place, as you all know, at least 100 plus years in the past. Stoker's novel did not do that, okay. Combined with that, it brought it from the past to the present, but also brought it from over there to over here. Okay, so there was from Transylvania to London. That too just took people aback, okay. This is a book taking place in the present day, and it's taking place in London, okay. I mean, Gothic literature happened in the past, it always happened over there. Because in the past, you can see things like ghosts may be happening. Oh, and it has to happen in that country over there where, you know, people can sort of exoticize it and think perhaps, that that's the kind of place that would have those kinds of goings on. So that combined was the first item that a lot of reviewers commented on. The second though, and it kind of goes along in tangent with this is the, the modernity and the technology in the novel. It was enough for the readers to see *Dracula* in London, in the present day, but to see all of this technology of the day, because you know, Stoker really loved his technology. He put all that in the book, and readers just thought it was fantastical. Many of them even though they were like, I can't believe he did this, but I kind of like it. And they didn't realize what why they liked it. And as we know, now Stoker's novel was really instrumental in kind of helping bridge this gap between the Gothic and kind of weird fiction and horror, okay, because before then, you know, horror took place in the past, but now it can be happening for us in the present. What I-what I find interesting about *Nosferatu* is that it doesn't take place in the present; it takes place I think in like the 18, late 1830s or something like that. So nearly a century before it's released. That's interesting because it goes back to this this early sense of the Romantic Period. Combined with that, or going along with that rather is the central character of the Ellen character. She plays a much more central presence in the story than she did even in Stoker's novel. It needs her innocence and her devotion and her willingness to sacrifice herself because she's the only one that really knows what's going on. And that too, was powerfully romantic in reference to the period so both of those thematics...

08:04-Robert Singer

Oh he's experiencing a technical difficulty here.

08:10-(someone doing tech)

and the audio the audio is also not playing on my computer through the videos I think that the audio didn't record properly in the video. Oh, okay, so the audio comes back in a couple of seconds. I'll just keep going and ignore the parts with no audio...

08:37-John Browning

...these thematics from from Stoker's everybody commented on and relocated story in the past and kind of relocated in the sense of the Romantic period. I mean, I can only imagine what the what the movie could have been if they located it, as Stoker did in the present time. Can you imagine Orlok or Dracula coming to Germany of the 1920s. I mean, it really would have spoken to the devastation, the desolation, the downtrodden feelings that were experienced there at the time. The visuals would have been fantastic. In fact, it probably would have been cheaper to do that. Okay. But you know, I'm sure there are many scholars here who have some of these answers that I've always wondered. But the first thing I always notice when I watch *Nosferatu* is just this lack of technology, the lack of modernity, and it is also something my students pick up on. So I hope you enjoyed this presentation. I'm sorry if I had to give it this way through a recording, but I'd be interested to hear your thoughts.

09:56 – Robert Singer

Thank you very much. We'll take some questions afterwards. I now have the distinct pleasure of introducing somebody whose work has fascinated me Mario de Giglio-Bellemare, PhD, who teaches courses in genre cinema, grotesque traditions, and Monster ethics in the Humanities department of John Abbott College in Montreal. He also coordinates the Montreal Monstrum Society. His forthcoming book is [on] Grand-Guignol cinema and the horror genre. And I eagerly anticipate reading that book as soon as it's out. So I have the pleasure of introducing him now.

10:35 – Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare

Thank you so much. Can you hear me properly, everyone? That's good. Um, I'm very, very happy to be here. I'm very happy to be celebrating a movie that I think is not only, you know, a great film within the horror canon, but just one of the great films I think ever made. I know that I start with a lot of hyperbole, but I actually really truly believe this about this movie. I want to sort of just think about, open up questions about what a queer sublime [reading] of Murnau kind of looks like. Through my

interest, of course, in French, French surrealism in the French traditions, that of course, as you know surrealists are were the first to really kind of appreciate this movie. Béla Balázs says in 1924, that he compares *Nosferatu* to a “glacial draught of air from the beyond”. And I think that's probably the most beautiful quote ever written on the film. And I think that probably exists because someone like, you know, Albin Grau was, you know, he believed basically in vampires. He was an occultist. We've heard people talk about this, he did the set and costume design, he was a person who was sort of a believer in you know, Pan sophism and you know, theosophy those kind of things, I mean, theosophy. I think that um, you know, the vampire that we get from just mixing together of a queer Murnau, as you know, he was gay. And this you know, Albin Grau focused on theosophy and pan sophism, we get this very, very electric mix, in the creation of *Frankenstein*. So the Surrealists were really, really appreciating this film in the 20s. *Nosferatu* actually is released in Paris on October 27 1922. At the Cinema Opéra, André Breton is writing about this movie in several places, and obviously talking about the movie in relation to his dreams. And, of course, the surrealist project is a project of trying to create art from the unconscious. And so this is what is happening in Paris in the 20s and 50s. We have another kind of renaissance of studies in France, we sometimes forget that the first book on the horror genre is called *Le Fantastique [au cinéma]* by Michel Laclos, the horror genre from 1958. And at that time, what Lotte Eisner is also publishing, and the great Ado Kyrrou...a lot of people don't really know that well, because this stuff has not been translated. Eisner is writing in French too, and living in Paris, as you know. So there's a lot going on in the 50s here, starting to take the monster basically on their own terms, in terms for scholarship. Um, Eisner says that basically *Nosferatu* is a kind of documentary you know, and it's very true. There's something about the film that's very hybrid, right. It's like this expressionist, realist, sort of, you know, presentation of the monster. So this hybridity is very, very important to me, in terms of the kind of queer kind of perspective that I'm interested in and I want to get to at the end. Ado wrote for *Positif* and was kind of critiqued by a lot of people at the *Cahiers du Cinéma*. But he writes a beautiful sentence on on *Nosferatu*. “Murnau’s masterpiece, the film that places him very high...

14:27-Kristopher

Mario did your sound just cut out. I'm not sure if you went on mute.

14:33 – Mario

Sorry about that. That was Mario hitting his mouse. Yeah, I'm back. Yes. So I'm actually reading a quote from Ado Kyrou. So he's saying "a symphony of horror as the film's subtitle insists, from Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, Murnau and his script writer Henrik Galeen have created the most terrible nightmare of the cinema." He continues, "In the Carpathian castle, in the alleys when a demonic cart rushes to meet us, in the holds of a cursed ship in the streets with endless macabre funerary processions. These are the sites that generate the shivers of terror." Of course the surrealists are really interested in bridges, right. And of course, the Gothic tradition is full of bridges and portals. And there is this famous moment in *Nosferatu* where Hutter goes over the bridge into the "land of phantoms," I think one of the cards says. So these borders are important. In the horror genre they speak to, of course, I have already mentioned, the paradox of the monstrous. Noël Carroll actually pulls out in his analysis, that actually at the core of the horror experience, of a horror story, the horror narrative, in his terms, is this paradoxical, impossible monster that fascinates us. So we are starting to think about the monster much more in a kind of paradoxical way in this moment. This, I think, also links up to the notion of the sublime that Rudolf Otto in his book, *The Idea of the Holy*, kind of describes as a religious experience, as an encounter with the *mysterium tremendum*. Right, that radically other mystery that brings on a stupefying combination of fascination, terror and wonder and dread. Right. So, Lovecraft did this very well. And there's something about this movie, I think that could be read through—I think Kris [Woofter] would agree with me—a kind of weird lens, because a kind of cosmic kind of sublimity really comes through for me in the awfulness of, you know, of this creature who's awful and awesome in the same time, right? So, even in the Bible we know from the work of Timothy Beale that a monster like Leviathan doesn't...he's not only against God like, God is good monsters are bad, but no, monsters are both all full of awe, so awful and awesome. So they're both demonized and deified in the same moment. I'm going to say a few things about [Gilles] Deleuze's kind of notion of the sublime, but I just want to finish on: so what does a queer vampire look like? From my perspective, the borders that interests me, are the borders of the taboo, of the abject, of the deviant, of the transgressive, of the excessive. The borders of queer theory. So for me, horror is always a kind of drag, the kind of performance of excess, right, we love excess. Those of us who love the horror genre... so Judith Butler writes the drag gesture is found in the performative, but also in the parodic, mimetic, and of course, disruptive, and this is what interests me. She situates these gestures on the surface of the body, she says, right. For Butler performativity does not mean that all gender construction is a performance, as it is sometimes understood. Butler uses performance to signify that the body is no longer an inner

being. So that in a Cartesian sense. But rather a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated. So, identity then is very much shifting in the kind of queer drag aesthetic, right? And so, bisexuals understand this, right. And I see the creature in the movie, you know, Orlok is a kind of bisexual figure, right? And who is identified with this very strong, powerful woman called Ellen, you know, who is sort of like, is able to kind of fix everything at the end, she reads from the Forbidden book, right? She, she takes on the monster, there are no authority figures at the end of this film;

18:54

she's really, kind of has a power. So through...even, she's sitting at the sea, kind of waiting for Hutter to come back. But really, it's the vampire who's coming by sea. So there is a kind of interesting Othering that, that brings together, Ellen, and, and the vampire. And I agree with Kris [Woofter], that there is something, I mean, this is not the story of a seducer in the sense that it is sort of done later in the Gothic tradition. But it is the story of a kind of performative...a performance of transgression. So in the same way that I would say, there's something transgressive about Nosferatu entering Hutter's room and you know, biting him too. So vampirism is associated with you know, deviant blood practices and stuff. So I think that there's a way to read this film as a kind of drag film coming from a filmmaker who's queer and queering the monster in this particular way around the subliminal. Yeah. So that's what I've got to say. Thank you.

20:10 – Robert Singer

Well, thank you very much Mario. Appreciate that. And I'm sure we'll all have some questions and points to raise. Again it's a fascinating study. I now have the pleasure of introducing. Now I get points if I get this right. This is Sorcha Ní Fhlainn.

20:28 - Sorcha Ní Fhlainn

Very close (*corrects pronunciation*).

20:30 – Robert Singer

Thank you. Thank you. So Sorcha is a senior lecturer in film studies and American Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University in the UK. She's a founding member of the Manchester Centre for Gothic studies, and author of *Postmodern vampires: Film, Fiction and popular culture*, which was awarded the Lord Ruthven prize by the International Association of the Fantastic and the arts in 2020. She has published

widely on socio cultural history, subjectivity and post modernism in film studies, American Studies, horror studies, and popular culture. Sorcha, please.

21:07 - Sorcha

Thank you, I'm just going to share my screen and forgive me, for all my efforts might not be the most amazing in terms of ability on this one. Okay. So I'm going to make this nice and brief. One of the things I'm fascinated by when looking at the history of vampires, which I've spent the majority of my life thinking about, especially as an Irish woman, because of course, you know, we got dibs on the undead as well for some time. One of the things I'm fascinated with is the history of the undead. So part of this is looking back at the book I did do back in 2019. And I'm continuing this now today looking at other forms of Irish undead folklore, the *na marbh* of the undead, that kind of stock, the folkloric elements of Irish culture and Irish history. But today, I'm going to talk a bit about, you know, the legacy of this film aesthetically through Hollywood cinema and thinking about the vampire as a particularly important cipher, or cultural mirror for the socio-political anxieties of the day, because it does change quite a lot. And what happens when they invoke the image of Shreck's Nosferatu, what happens with... there's something fascinating to say about that. So come with me down the rabbit hole. So vampires are of course, inherently political, this is absolutely...has been found to be absolutely the case. In this image, which is Alex Ross, he used as a protest image against George W. Bush's war on terror, particularly looking at the use of the Patriot Act. What Ross was trying to identify was essentially this vampirism, so vampirism not only necessarily feeds on, in undead fashion, feeds off the body politic, but also extends very, very troubling, in his view, very, very troubling ideas around the corpus of the government. The idea that we can actually draw down from the life blood of the people...of the greater people of the United States at the time. So what I thought was quite interesting about using this was that you know, we're going back to those images of Lugosi, we're going back to Dracula, but what I find quite interesting on this was that it still uses the vampire and associates him with power, and almost supernatural power in this instance. So I'm going to jump back a little bit to where Murray was kind of talking about earlier as well, because I'm—as Murray is as well—I'm also fascinated with the kind of undeadness or the postmodern reiterations we have of vampires. And in this image, which you see of Kurt Barlow in Stephen King's Salem's Lot, the film directed by Tobe Hooper in 1979. What I found quite interesting about this was that there is a shifting change in the political spectrum that we get in terms of Nosferatu, or this image indeed, of Graf Orlok coming through various vampire typographies afterwards. So in the case of Kurt Barlow, what's so interesting

about him is that he transgresses into the American homeland, of course, illegally. He has his coffin or his box is found to be without custom stamps, for example. So this shows again, that kind of the vampire coming into this sort of small town, King himself describing the novel as *Dracula* in the American heartland essentially. What he's interested in is this idea that infiltration happens, we can never shore up our borders completely because this is how vampires transgress and take over. And in the case of Kurt Barlow, a terrifying vampire, which I came across as a child watching it through my fingers one night as a kid when it was on TV. Not exactly 1979 mind you but a while after. What I will say about this is that it is such an interesting image, to conjure up this idea and this style essentially that Tobe Hooper uses of Graf Orlok because it invokes with it the authority of ancient vampires. Recall that the 1970s is a period of huge vampiric evolution and change. So what we have here is, contradictions of the image of the vampire come up a lot in the 70s, particularly in 79, 79 is such an important year, because you have, of course, you've got Werner Herzog's gorgeous make remake of *Nosferatu*, you have this film as well. But then you also have *Love at first Bite* with George Hamilton. So there are numerous different ways of looking at it. And, you know, it'd be wrong of me to say it's not mentioned Frank Langella as the stunning universal *Dracula* at the same time. So *Dracula* is everywhere in the late 1970s. And this falls in line very much with sort of the idea of malaise, the terror of being (ingrown?) and the terror of being forgotten in economic terms. And this is something that really comes up in the 70s as an anxiety, as a projection of this anxiety. So when Kurt Barlow takes over in *Salem's Lot*, it is quite a frightening sight to behold.

25:44

As I was saying with Herzog's remake, there is a beautiful sense of artistic...nostalgia in one element, I do think that there's a desire to reinvoke and reanimate in this vampire, but I also think as well, there's a heightened sexuality, which I know Millie was referencing in her talk as well. And this heightened sexuality is something that I think again, very much reflects the 70s evolution of vampirism, more generally. It's most certainly lovingly recreating the image and does again recall that image of rats which you know, we were talking about before, as well. So we do see this sense of plague and pestilence, but we also see again, that idea of sexual trysts and using the vampire in the female body as a conduit for that kind of expression of desire and, and horror as well. So that when we get to a little bit later, I'm going to jump into the 80s. And the reason why is I'm working a lot in the 1980s, at the moment anyway, but one of the things I wanted to think about was that vampires do change when they transform on screen in later postmodern initiations. So this is Max from *The Lost Boys*.

You'll notice that towards the end of the film, when he's revealed to be the head vampire. And what I do you find quite interesting is this is the beginning of several evolutions...moments of evolution on screen, we see the transformation of the face into something that resembles at least in part, elements of Shreck's makeup. Again, the arched eyebrows, and you often see it again, this sort of sense of pronouncement in the cheekbones, this sense of sort of pestilence. And what Max is peddling as his form of pestilence is of course popular culture. He works in a video store. So this idea of, MTV generation sense of, you know, living permanently at the fairground, this idea of vampirism is something that promises eternal youth but really draws down the economic life the youth in the film, this is something that comes up again and again. So I thought this was a nice illustration of it, because again, using the fangs, the teeth, the placement of it, it falls in line with trying to gain some sort of legitimacy or authority out of the image of Graf Orlok, but put through your filter in the 1980s of course. Later ones then, this is a real favorite of mine, and one that doesn't tend to get enough love is *Vampire's Kiss* from 1988. It's a really, really special film because it is a film that really allows Nicolas Cage to go completely off piste, go completely nuts. So he is a yuppie who—he's a literary agent up and he gets bitten by the gorgeous Jennifer Beals and then slowly believes that he's turning into a vampire. And it's intercut with sequences from *Nosferatu*, from Murnau's film. As Cage is slowly transforming and becoming increasingly more unhinged as the film progresses, he doesn't bother investing in expensive fangs so he buys these awful cheap plastic ones. He ends up eating a pigeon in Central Park, so to show the true level of his derangement. What I found quite interesting about watching this again is not only is it so firmly planted in 1980s anxieties, as the yuppies begin to have their breakdown on screen, but that it calls back again to *Nosferatu* in order to again gain back legitimacy away from sort of early or other vampires that are in the culture at the time, the Ricean vampire the like, and actually call back to gain that legitimacy of "I could only be turning into a vampire. And of course, then I must then emulate the physicality of Orlok on screen." So again, when he's, when he's attacking people he gets stiff as a board, he looks like an erect sort of almost like a penis, it's quite interesting to see this sexual anxiety and his inability to fully perform is coming through as an expression of Graf Orlok through again, the 1980s lens. Later once again we see something like let's say *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, so if you're watching TV in the 90s, this is The Master from the first season. And what I found interesting about The Master was again, even to legitimate Buffy's arch nemesis nemesis in the first season, we have to go back to this image of Orlok. And I think that is quite interesting because on one level, the big-bad isn't even the most interesting thing in the show. It's almost like a sideshow in order to legitimate the story arc of the

series. But on another level, I found that it was something that was really interesting in the late 1990s. You're still having these sorts of ideas of, in order to be a truly legitimate and frightening vampire, in contrast with the sexy gorgeous ones that are running around in the series, you do have to then produce this ancientness in the sense of ancient horror, which you get in that in the case of *Buffy*. And this again, pops up again and again. But I thought this was quite an interesting way to kind start it out. Remember, Buffy kills Dracula—a terrible iteration of Dracula—in the fifth-season opener. So we do see this idea of having to kill off the patriarchs involved if Buffy and her postfeminist heroes and colleagues are to survive. Then we get to gorgeous, wonderful Willem Dafoe whom I believe, you know, Elias spoke to this beautifully earlier so I don't have much to add to that, except to say that of course, I completely found the reading of him being the sympathetic vampire at the mercy of Murnau's monster in *Shadow of the Vampire*, found this to be completely apt and definitely indicative of a turn more generally and 21st century vampire revolution that we see as they become increasingly not only sympathetic, but in some cases, also pathetic in later iterations. So this is a lovely turn, and a particularly timely one at that, I think at the millennium. We also get—I'm sorry, for the quality of the image, is not that good—in *Blade 2*, we have the Reapers, again transformed through sort of DNA, and scientific discovery and mutation. And we see this sort of perfect eating machine, as they're described, their cancer with a purpose in the case of *Blade 2*. And again, the idea of this ancientness is so important. It's this fusion of ancient myths and technology, exactly what John Browning was speaking about earlier, this is the fusion that we get them in the case of Del Toro's version in *Blade 2*. What I found particularly wonderful about this was that because of the removal of the mandible bone, you get this sort of fusion of the vampire with a science fiction kind of character, like, let's say predator. So you see the sense of the mouth becoming all-encompassing, all frightening, and also taking on sort of sexual genitalia imagery as well. So it fuses that with the vagina dentata quite nicely. And then we come to the most recent one I have thought of, in terms of popular cinema. Of course, there are many other minor versions start to think about. And this is Peter, Peter, from *What We Do in the Shadows*, if you have seen Jemaine Clement and Taika Waititi's film from 2014. And Peter, unfortunately, is killed in a fatal sunlight accident, as described, and Peter is also 8000 years old in this flatshare and is a fascinating character because unlike a lot of other postmodern vampires, Peter doesn't really speak. So Peter just kind of sighs and sits there, and then of course, is eventually killed off in this accident. What is really nice though about this is that Peter is possibly the most vampiric of all the vampires in the flatshare. All of the other ones are representative of various different cinematic ancestors on screen. But Peter is the true

vampire of them all, and unfortunately, gets killed off in the case of the film. But what I thought was quite nice about including Peter here is that at the end of the day, despite all the offspring that you can have of postmodern vampires, you still have to have that nod of that recognition and that power to recognize Graf Orlok and and his offspring from Nosferatu. I'll leave it at that. If there's any questions, I'll be happy to answer them. Thank you.

33:14-Robert Singer

Well, thank you very much. That was a wonderful presentation there. And I we do have some time for some questions. I have one earlier from Matthew, who asks, and I think that's been answered, but perhaps we can just give a quick summary if people are interested about the lasting legacy of Nosferatu, in particular in relationship to the horror genre and beyond. I just want to chime in there and say that, um, one of the things I picked up from all these, really fascinating presentations, is an almost aberrational genetic lineage. It's—they're linked, but they're not identical, but they are linked together in some malformed genetic structure. And I think that all of you made a very strong case for one of the ways in which horror and in particular genre theory operates. It's there, but it's always somewhat different. And I would point out one last thing, the vampires on Broadway...Gary's done some work on Lugosi, but I happen to see many years ago, Frank Langella on Broadway, doing the Dracula and I could tell you, the equal number of men fainted as many as equal number of women. It was a very, very successful production there. But there's I think room here for some questions if people would like to just come right on board and ask that would be a wonderful way to start, to finish up our day. Who would like to take it away here?

34:48 - Sorcha

Can I just add I met Frank Langella several years ago in Dublin and I can tell you he is today still as swoon-worthy as he was in the 1979 film, so much so that my mother who doesn't like vampires was like, Oh, my God, he's beautiful. So there you go.

35:04-Robert Singer

So you've seen him in the late 70s.

35:07-Sorcha

I wasn't alive, but I would have.

35:11-Robert Singer

Do we have some questions here? Some people would like to ask. Just rush on right in.

35:19 - Kristopher

Yes, there are questions in the chat coming through. There's from Penny Goodman and an earlier one from Robert Gadsby. Can you—do see those, Robert?

35:31-Robert

Oh let me just get that I'm sorry. No I...oh, question for Sorcha, contemporary media has romanticized the physical look and added a somewhat charm to vampires. Would *Nosferatu* have had the same impact on popular culture if Orlok was portrayed as more human and dignified, as seen in later culture by actors like Lugosi or Gary Oldman. What would we look in the film for differently as we look at the films today? In other words, the question of charm and affability. Good looks.

36:11-Sorcha

Yeah, no, I agree. I think that it is that otherness, that strangeness that, that sense of? Yeah, that sense of complete, I don't want to say monstrosity because there are human elements there, of course, but I do think that has had the lasting impact where we've evolved away from that, and especially with the obviously...the sexuality component that comes through from Lugosi onwards in particular, I think that's a huge contribution to that evolution. So I think that in some ways, then when they're trying to cite back for legitimacy in cinematic terms, at least, it is going back to that image of Orlok, because Orlok is so different from what comes afterwards. Yeah, so I think it's a fantastic observation.

36:55-Robert

The other point is, somebody mentioned before, there's this shot in the Coppola's *Dracula*, where he sort of physically deconstructs into rats, and they flee the room. That's the only other illusion I can remember to rats in the *Dracula* film. But there's an example of a very charming, literally romantic *Dracula* who crosses oceans of time, as opposed to just the actual ocean. But was there another question here? I thought maybe we'd ask, let's see. Oh, for Mario.

37:34

Could you expand on the comment you made about Orlok being the kind of bisexual vampire, which I found very interesting. I got the impression you didn't mean he just bites men and women.

37:47-Mario

The Vampire is always a very sexual figure in the Gothic tradition. And so when our queer filmmaker who's not out is making a film about a vampire, that aspect kind of gets kind of pulled into the kind of experience I think. Vampires are often gendered feminine, by the way. Right. So they suck, right? They have long nails, are often dandies, in traditions, I think Linda Williams talks about this, in her essay on, you know, there's a woman look, and she's the one who sort of starts thinking about the ways in which then the woman, Ellen, and Orlok actually have a kind of commonality. So, yeah, I mean, I, you know, the window on window action too between Orlok and Ellen, I think is very sexual. Of course, during censorship, with censorship, you know, sexual acts had to be sort of presented differently. And I think that happens in you know, a Tod Browning's *Dracula* also, coming into the Abode right. And so, that's, you know, that man on man scene for me is about a scene of bisexual, young love, and that resonates as queer for me.

39:03-Robert

And *True Blood* have a lot of that to the series on HBO, between male characters. Well, I'm getting the sign from above that it's time for me to wrap up and turn this over to Gary or Kris. So if I may, thank the panelists for really wonderful presentations. I found each one of them really worthwhile and brought so much to the table in our symposium today. So Kristopher, Gary, would you like to chime in here?

39:36-Kris

Literally pop in. Well, yeah, thank you so much, everyone. This is... as for being a half an hour overtime at the beginning, we're only 20 minutes over time now. So I feel that's a success. And everything was so fascinating. And yes, thanks so much for being here. We're still, we're closing up here with still 85 contestants with from an original 150. So that's that feels pretty great. By the way these things go. I would just like to close, I'm not sure if Gary is here and I'll let him say something if he's, if he's out there, but to close with: thanks to everyone, the wonderful speakers today. Elias Merhige and the scholars, the artists, the practitioners that we've heard from today. It's just been a kind of fantastic mix of perspectives. Thanks also to Gary Rhodes and Mark Jancovich. And again, Mark, really wanted to be here, but he will for the next one. And once

again, just to remind you that this symposium will be published online, in *Monstrum*, in video form, along with a transcript with a framing piece by Christina Massaccesi. I'll actually I say I'm going to put a link to *Monstrum* in the chat, but what I might do is just send it out through the Eventbrite and then to the list of speakers on email, I'll send you a link to Monstrum. So you can check that out. Let's see, we have already, also just to note, that we've already decided upon the next two Horror Reverie symposia that we're going to do. So stay tuned for 50 years of *The Exorcist*, next year. And after that, 50 years of *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, same time, same place, probably just a couple years from now. And finally, thank you to our sponsors. We have the CORÉRISC. Collective, research collective, the Fonds de recherche du Québec, Montreal Monstrum society- Monstrum. And Gary's...Oklahoma Baptist University and Mark's at University of East Anglia. Thanks so much. And yeah, I guess we'll see you next year around this time for round two. So thank you very much. Thank you.

42:29-Gary

I want to thank everybody again, Kristopher, including yourself for all the hard work you've put into this. We really appreciate everybody being here and we will look forward to seeing everybody next year to celebrate the 50th of *The Exorcist*.

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