BOOK REVIEWS

RECOVERING 1940S HORROR CINEMA: TRACES OF A LOST DECADE
Ed. Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare, Charlie Ellbé, and Kristopher Woofter. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015. 372 pp. $100.00 hardback.

Edited by Mario DeGiglio-Belle-mare, Charlie Ellbé, and Kristopher Woofter, *Recovering 1940s Horror Cinema: Traces of a Lost Decade* is a collection of seventeen essays covering an impressive range of topics: from Gothic literature and the Grand-Guignol to the slasher horror of the 1960s and 70s; from the advent of radio drama to the downfall of the studio system; from the front lines of World War II to the experiences of women and children on the home front. Sandwiched between Universal's popular monster pictures of the 30s and the sci-fi craze of the 50s, 40s horror has been dismissed as offering little more than retreads and parodies of the previous era. Unified by the proposition that the horror films of the 1940s must be judged on their own merits, these essays show how developing technologies, financial pressures, and postwar anxieties which caused the Gothic settings and supernatural creatures of the 30s gave way to the emphasis on realism, psychology, and human monstrosity found in the 40s. This collection urges readers to broaden their conception of the genre, maintaining that many films commonly categorized as noir, mystery, thriller, or paranoid woman's film should be reconsidered as horror.

Recovering 1940s Horror Cinema is divided into four sections: "Interventions," "Hybridity," "History," and "Poverty Row." The first seeks to reframe cinematic conventions and rethink popular ideas about 1940s horror. Kristopher Woofter reconciles the fantastic settings of the conventional Gothic with the realism of 40s horror by tracing its influences back to the American Gothic in a close reading of *Citizen Kane*. Next, Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare's examination of *The Body Snatcher* finds the genre's roots in the Grand-Guignol. Peter Marra and Ian Olney offer compelling arguments about how heroine-driven "proto-slashers" influence films such as *Psycho, Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and *Carrie*, examining how film noir appeals to a female audience in its portrayal of violent masculinity's threat to domestic spaces, an issue of particular concern as psychologically and physically damaged veterans returned home.

The second section, "Hybridity," proposes new ways of approaching classification, reception, and influences. Anne Golden analyzes the influence of the avant-garde on *The Spiral Staircase*; Dennis R. Perry investigates Poe's legacy in the mystery-horror-comedies of the 40s; and Kier-La Janisse shows how the juvenile delinquents of gangster film evolve into the courageous, patriotic, mystery-solving orphans who uncover the plots of Nazis and mad scientists. Charlie Ellbé examines the *Inner Sanctum* radio thrillers and the films that they inspired, proposing that the radio series' reliance on the inner monologues of increasingly unstable narrators developed into the emphasis on subjectivity, perspective, guilt, and mental instability found in 40s film, subjects particularly well-suited to addressing postwar concerns about psychological trauma. Mark Jancovich also focuses on psychological instability in 40s film, uncovering parallels between the of gangster-movie villains and horror monsters played by Humphrey Bogart and Edward G. Robinson.

The third section, "History," considers cultural contexts such as gender and war. David Hanley's essay offers an intriguing exploration of how the films of Nazi-occupied France used horror to criticize the Vichy government without being subjected to censorship. Karen Herland, in her reading of *The Snake Pit*, finds that while 40s film, while often dealing with the psychological damage that external factors such as war inflicted upon men, refused to acknowledge the harm that societal expectations could cause women, urging them out of the workplace and back into the home when men returned from war. Louise Fenton uncovers the zombie's first appearances in early texts about voodoo and charts its development as a film subject throughout the 30s and 40s, while Gary D. Rhodes' essay illuminates how media coverage of Nazi atrocities, the Red Scare, and the breakup of the studio system shaped changing attitudes to horror in the 40s.

The final section, "Poverty Row," focuses on the work of minor independent studios. As the demand for B-movie horror increased, the financial constraints imposed by low-budget studios proved to be advantageous to the creative process. Selma A. Purac shows how the studios' preference for developing stories internally to save the cost of purchasing rights encouraged such creativity; while other studios relied on *Dracula* remakes, the creators of *The Vampire's Ghost* turned instead to Polidori's *The Vampyre* for inspiration, bringing fresh ideas to vampire mythology on film. Paul Corupe's study of anti-Hitler discourses in Sam Newfield's work examines how the minimal cuts and camera movement Newfield utilized to complete a six-day shoot resulted in heightened tension as characters "appear small and vulnerable in a shadowy, largely static frame" (366). Poverty Row films also offer valuable social commentary: Blair Davis considers the relationship between the popularity of ape films and public interest in the Scopes Trial; in a thought-provoking essay that links postwar anxieties about the maimed body to the practice of double feature screenings, Cory Legassic finds that industry discourses framed B-films as freakish, disabled bodies lacking the elements associated with prestige films.

Recovering 1940s Horror Cinema's overall style is engaging, energetic, and compellingly readable, suitable for advanced scholars, graduate students, and capable undergraduates. It is well-indexed, with a thorough literature review that familiarizes readers both with valuable contributions to the field and ways in which scholarship has fallen short. Particular topics, such as literary influences, Freudian psycho-analysis, social anxieties about returning veterans, and media coverage of World War II tend to resurface throughout, resulting in an intriguing synthesis as authors examine those issues from different angles. Since these common themes may run counter to the way chapters have been categorized, this work is best read as a whole.

In terms of its content, this collection is best geared toward film scholars, since the essays frequently cite important features of early film history with which some readers may be unfamiliar, such as the Hays Code, the trend of double features and the resulting top bill/B-movie binary, and the effect of antitrust measures on the film industry. However, because it offers illuminating insights into World War II, gender studies, Gothic literature, detective fiction, and noir as well as horror film, the text has potential appeal for a wide range of readers, including undergraduates, casual readers, and scholars of other fields. With its wide scope and skillful interweaving of film scholarship and culture studies, *Recovering 1940s Horror Cinema* is a useful and welcome contribution not just to the study of early horror film but to popular culture studies as a whole.

Jessica Walker
Alabama A&M University

Jessica Walker teaches medieval and Renaissance literature at Alabama A&M University. Publications include "'We are not safe': History, Fear, and the Gothic in Richard III" (*Shakespearean Gothic*, 2009); "'As crooked in thy manners as thy shape': Reshaping Deformity in Loncraine's Richard III" (*Journal of the Wooden O*, 2012); "'Anathema liked to read about herself': Preserving the Female Line in Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett's Good Omens" (*Feminism in the Worlds of Neil Gaiman: Essays on the Comics, Poetry and Prose*, 2012), and "'Just songs in the end': Historical Discourses in Shakespeare and Martin" (*Mastering the Game of Thrones: Essays on George R.R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire*, 2015).