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John Carpenters *The Thing*. Universal Pictures, 1982.

ABOUT *MSJ*

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Situating itself in film's visual narrative, *Mise-en-scène: The Journal of Film & Visual Narration* (ISSN 2369-5056) is the first of its kind: an international, peer-reviewed journal focused exclusively on the artistry of frame composition as a storytelling technique. With its open-access, open-review publishing model, *MSJ* strives to be a synergitic, community-oriented hub for discourse that begins at the level of the frame. Scholarly analysis of lighting, set design, costuming, camera angles, camera proximities, depth of field, and character placement are just some of the topics that the journal covers. While primarily concerned with discourse in and around the film frame, *MSJ* also includes narratological analysis at the scene and sequence level of related media (television and online) within its scope. Particularly welcome are articles that dovetail current debates, research, and theories as they deepen the understanding of filmic storytelling. The journal's contributing writers are an eclectic, interdisciplinary mixture of graduate students, academics, filmmakers, film scholars, and cineastes, a demographic that also reflects the journal's readership. Published annually in the spring and winter, *MSJ* is the official film studies journal of Kwantlen Polytechnic University, where it is sponsored by the Faculty of Arts, the KDocsFF Documentary Film Festival, the KPU Library, and KPU's English Department. In print, it can be found in KPU's and Cinemateca Portuguesa-Museu do Cinema's libraries. *MSJ* appears inEBSCO's Film and Television Literature Index. ▪

ONE FRAME AT A TIME

Dear Reader:

Welcome to this special edition of *MSJ*: a collection focusing on the horror genre. I'm thrilled (pun intended) to showcase such an eclectic mix of pieces that showcase not only the importance of horror in popular culture but the various ways through which its ideas can be expressed.

In assembling this collection, I felt like a mad scientist ensconced in his laboratory, toiling in the shadows as I gathered the necessary instruments to complete my grand experiment, taking extensive notes while I stitched together a beautiful creation that celebrates the intricacies and complexities of everything that horror can offer us.

Within these pages, you will find a diverse selection of pieces: a video essay analyzing James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber's 1928 short film *The Fall of the House of Usher*; an investigation on the use of light and shadow in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*; an interview with Bram Stoker's great grandnephew, Dacre Stoker; an exploration of domestic abuse between Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* and Bryan Bertino's *The Dark and the Wicked*; and a study of Mike Flanagan's *The Haunting of Bly Manor* that examines how the miniseries engages in a dialogue with nineteenth-century socio-political structures.

You will also discover a fortieth anniversary retrospective of John Carpenter's classic *The Thing* that discusses the film's staying power and why it continues to enthrall audiences; a review of panels and films exhibited at the 2022 Vancouver Horror Show festival; and an interdisciplinary review that focuses on gender in the workplace by comparing Ridley Scott's film *Alien* to Anne Tibbets's novel *Screams from the Void*.

Reading through each of these pieces, I'm reminded of how important horror is for our health and well-being, how important it is to interact with our fears and phobias so as to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of both our individual selves and the greater world. Above all, each of these pieces is a firm reminder that we cannot truly appreciate the light if we never venture into the darkness.

Finally, I would like to thank Greg Chan, editor-in-chief, for entrusting me with this horror-themed issue. I appreciate his boundless patience and invaluable assistance in guiding me through this exhilarating process.

Cheers,

Michael Howarth
Guest Editor

DEVON BRADLEY

Devon Bradley is a PhD student in the Department of English at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She earned her Master of Arts in 2022 from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley with a concentration in Literature and Cultural Studies and Film Studies. Her master's work focused on the intersection of film history and theory in film adaptations of nineteenth century American authors. Her current research analyzes representations of social justice in documentary and comedy films with regard to rhetoric and film form. Devon has presented her research at conferences such as the National and Southwest Popular Culture Association conferences and the Literature/Film Association annual conference.

STEPHEN BROOMER

Stephen Broomer is a filmmaker and film historian. His books include *Hamilton Babylon: A History of the McMaster Film Board* (2015), *Codes for North: The Foundations of the Canadian Avant-Garde Film* (2017) and *Moments of Perception: Experimental Film in Canada* (2021, with Michael Zryd). He held a Fulbright fellowship with the Prelinger Library and University of California Santa Cruz (2020) and an International Council for Canadian Studies postdoctoral fellowship at Brock University (2021). He is the host of *Art & Trash*, a video essay series on underground cinema. He teaches video essaying at the University of Toronto's Cinema Studies Institute.

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Stefan Čizmar is a graduate from the University of Novi Sad with a master's degree in English Language and Literature. His thesis examines the interplay of class, sexuality, and gender in the novels of Angela Carter. He is generally interested in examining these themes in literature, film, and TV series, particularly in the context of the neo-Victorian genre. He has written about class, sexuality, colonialism, and postmodernism in literature, and is also interested in examining the relationship of literature to other media such as film. He is currently an independent scholar.

KELLY DOYLE

Kelly Doyle holds a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies from UBC; she currently teaches film and literature at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Her research and teaching interests focus on the subversiveness of gender and posthumanism in horror film. Her work on zombies in popular culture was featured on CBC Radio, Shaw TV, and in local newspapers, while her recent publications explore anthropocentrism, humanism, and cannibalism in zombie films, as well as the representation of gender and 'the human' in zombie transmedia. She is also a reviewer, copyeditor, and advisory board member for *MSJ*.

SAMANTHA LAY

Samantha Lay is an English instructor at Meridian Community College and an adjunct professor of English at the University of West Alabama. Her work represents her interest in Gothic film and literature, specifically on the intersection between Gothic and social issues concerning gender and class. During her doctoral studies at the University of Houston, she taught film and literature courses focusing on the films of Alfred Hitchcock and the literary and philosophical works that influenced his films. Dr. Lay's chapter, "The Child Hero in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds,*" appears in *Children in the Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), and her book *Monstrous Marriage: Re-Evaluating Consent, Coverture, and Divorce in Nineteenth-Century Women's Gothic Fiction* is forthcoming from McFarland in 2023.

LUCIE PATRONNAT

Lucie Patronnat is a long-time horror enthusiast and a PhD candidate in Film Studies at University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, where she also started teaching recently. Her research revolves around the spatial expression of familial relationships—often analyzed through the lens of gender dynamics—in a comparative corpus of modern and contemporary horror films, mostly from the US. She has written soon-to-be published essays on Ari Aster's *Hereditary* uncanny filmic language ("L'horreur d'*Hérédité*: une mise en scène de l'inquiétant 'familial'") and the cinematic vectors of destruction in the pagan cult/family unit dialectics of Ari Aster's *Midsommar* and Robert Eggers's *The Witch* ("Sur les décombres de la famille, la secte: recompositions horrifiques contemporaines").

PAUL RISKER

Paul Risker is an independent scholar, freelance film and literary critic, and interviewer. Outside of editing *MSJ*'s interview and film festival sections, he mainly contributes to *PopMatters*, although his criticism and interviews have been published by both academic and non-academic publications that include *Cineaste*, *Film International*, *The Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, and *Little White Lies*. He remains steadfast in his belief of the need to counter contemporary cultures emphasis on the momentary, by writing for posterity, adding to an ongoing discussion that is essentially us belonging to something that is bigger than ourselves.

JELENA TRAJKOVIĆ

Jelena Trajković is currently pursuing a master's degree in English Language and Literature at the University of Novi Sad, with her thesis focusing on poetic elements as a means of characterization in Stephen Sondheim's musical soliloquies. Having previously written about medium-specific devices and narrative techniques in Sondheim's *Into the Woods* (1987) on stage and screen, her research tends to concentrate on hypertextual and intermedial relationships between various types of texts. She also has a newly found appreciation for horror media, especially the work of Mike Flanagan, and looks forward to making a contribution toward this area of study.

ZAK WATSON

Zak Watson is a Professor of English at Missouri Southern State University. He earned a PhD in English from the University of Missouri-Columbia. His research examines how discourses on the sublime locate, erase, and turn to profit experiences of subjective and symbolic destitution in film and literature. Specifically, his work builds on Ann Radcliffe's distinction between terror and horror by taking seriously the possibility of an experience of fear that cannot be recuperated. He has published in *English Literature: Theories, Interpretations, Contexts*; *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*; and *(Re)-turn: A Journal of Lacanian Studies*, among other venues.

ONE FRAME AT A TIME

ONE FRAME AT A TIME

ARTICLE

The Big Bad Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

Kubrick's '*Shining*' on Domestic Abuse in *The Dark and the Wicked*

BY LUCIE PATRONNAT
University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

ABSTRACT

The thorough scholarly dissection of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) has yielded many results, among which is a reflection, led by Jack Torrance's "Big Bad Wolf" impersonation, that centres on the implicit theme of domestic abuse. This wolf metaphor stands as the starting point of an examination of Bryan Bertino's *The Dark and the Wicked* (2020) through the lens of *The Shining*'s domestic violence narrative. Both films, although widely different status-wise, and directed forty years apart, seem to tackle this thematic idea through common cinematic elements: prowling shots, hints of fairy-tales, and cannibalistic patterns, together depicting the home as the hunting ground of a patriarchal predator. The domestic abuse theme, subdued in *The Shining*, remains textually absent from *The Dark and the Wicked*, but their synoptic analysis shines a new light on the missing genesis of the characters' devouring trauma, as diverted through its visual narration.

INTRODUCTION

In terms of the tantalizing amount of interpretative content it spawned over the years, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) is arguably one of the most prolific examples of modern horror cinema. It has been examined through numerous lenses, ranging from the socio-historic perspectives of the Indigenous and Jewish genocides to that of the economic landscape of its period and the volatile territory of worldwide conspiracies. This ever-growing subtextual web encompassing *The Shining* has found (or re-discovered) its way into contemporary horror cinema, with some resurgences echoing louder than others. During the promotion of his debut *The Witch* (2014), director Robert Eggers straightforwardly admitted it "reeks of *The Shining*" ("Cinematic Exorcism"). Indeed, the two notably share a dark fairy-tale atmosphere that culminates in *The Witch*'s own "Room 237" sequence, mirroring the content and composition of the original (Fig. 1). The editing of this sequence entangles the perspectives of Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) and his son Danny Torrance (Danny Lloyd), but almost entirely eludes the traumatic experience of the latter, which leaves him with a contused neck. In *The Witch*, Caleb (Harvey Scrimshaw) coalesces Jack and Danny's characters in his prepubescent impulses: his confrontation with the hag as a treacherously seductive woman is equally motivated by childlike curiosity and lustful fascination. The boy's fateful embrace of the witch even entails consequences that are reminiscent, if far more tragic, of Danny's bruised neck.[1]

Another example would be Ari Aster's opening of *Hereditary* (2018), which uses the same continuity trick used

1 In a feverish bout, Caleb seems to be choking before he regurgitates a rotten apple.

Fig. 1 | Jack's encounter in room 237 in *The Shining*, 01:12:49–01:15:24. Warner Bros., 1980. Caleb's encounter with the hag in *The Witch*, 00:40:29–00:42:00. Parts and Labor, 2015.

by Kubrick in one of his seminal sequences: the camera frames Jack studying the garden maze model displayed in the lobby before deceitfully assuming his "overlooking" point of view (00:39:40). A slow, vertical track on the maze ensues and, as distant voices can be heard, tiny figures appear to be moving within it. *Hereditary* reinvests and exacerbates this point of view, placing its protagonists inside the miniature replica of the family's home, itself located inside the actual house (00:01:55). The motif's wide thematic scope notably extends in the artificiality of the (real) home, which, just like the Overlook, was entirely built on set and rendered geographically impossible by the mise-en-scène.[2]

The Dark and the Wicked (Bryan Bertino, 2020) and *The Shining* first appear to share common elements, but their relationship proves more profound when investigated further. The former proposes a relentlessly bleak and violent variation on the familial disintegration—a theme very dear to horror cinema—that plagues the Torrances. Brought back to their estranged parents' goat farm to bid farewell to their comatose father (Michael Zagst), siblings Louise (Marin Ireland) and Michael Straker (Michael Abbott Jr.) soon come to realize the home is now ridden with a dark influence, seemingly linked to the half-dead patriarch and to which they will eventually fall prey. But beyond the small family unit that both films focus on, they also share a similar generic spin. A look at Bertino's first feature, *The Strangers* (2008), informs the lineage of its successor: an ailing couple is confronted with three masked killers, a scenario that fits it neatly into the slasher subgenre. Though the home invasion in *The Dark and the Wicked* is more ethereal, the merciless annihilation of its protagonists and the predatory vantage of the camera betray a similar kinship to the slasher. As for *The Shining*, Kubrick's notorious gliding shots prey on the Torrances as they wander down the Overlook's corridors, conveying a strong sense of predation culminating in the final chase—Jack's wailing as he flails his axe in the maze evokes the last scene of Tobe Hooper's seminal slasher, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). As has been noted by Elizabeth Jean Hornbeck in "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?: Domestic Violence in *The Shining*," the film's initial straightforward Gothic horror later indulges a generic spin that is tied to Jack's pivotal character. His arc, representation, and interpretation "parody the Gothic horror genre and slasher films and even children's fairy tales in what is, at its core, a story about domestic violence" (689).

Hornbeck then places Jack's emphatic rendition of the "Three Little Pigs" tale (02:03:15) at the centre of her reading, making this Big Bad Wolf the emblematic figure of the domestic abuse narrative in *The Shining*. Furthermore, the association of "the nightmarish, predatory beast of fairy tales" (689) with domestic violence, along with the perspective it provides, shed new light on *The Dark and the Wicked*'s own "wolf" metaphor. Heavily embedded in the film's aesthetic and narrative text, the figure of the wolf is similarly pivotal to this Southern Gothic tale of supernatural grief that veers into a deadly hunt. Moreover, it serves as the starting point for an interpretation of the film as a ruthless battle against the trauma of domestic abuse perpetrated by the predatory father.

In an attempt to track down the different steps of this theory's formation, I first explore the *cinematics of grief*, the immediate central theme of *The Dark and the Wicked*. A closer observation of these motifs, however, reveals that their subversive application feeds interestingly into the aesthetics of trauma. Both films lay out the common foundation of their domestic violence narratives through their portrayal of a deeply ambivalent home coalesced with the patriarch as a site of danger. What elements support this subtext in *The Shining*, and how are they echoed in *The Dark and the Wicked*? How do

2 Explored, among other elements, in "L'horreur d'*Hérédité*: une mise en scène de l'inquiétant 'familial,'" a soon-to-be published essay I wrote for the 17th issue of *Mise au Point*.

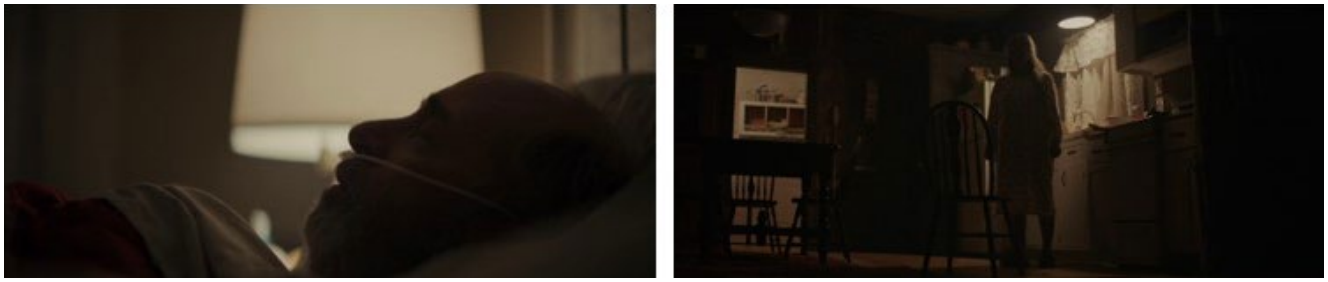

Fig. 2 | The ambiguously occupied bed and chair in *The Dark and the Wicked*, 00:03:47 / 00:05:47. Travelling Picture Show Company, 2020.

these works reflect on each other when considered through the lens of a paternal violence—past or present—intrinsic to the home? A constellation of narrative and visual elements akin to predation, devouring, and digestion is deployed around the emblematic figure of the wolf. I will thus explore how, primarily in *The Shining*, the articulation of these elements could be seen as feeding into the theory of chronic childhood trauma resulting from domestic violence. Finally, I will interrogate the intertwining of those tropes in the re-definition of *The Dark and the Wicked*'s threat as the abusive patriarch and the return of the devouring trauma suffered at his hands in the wake of his passing.

Both *The Shining* and *The Dark and the Wicked* lay out the common foundation of their domestic violence narratives through their portrayal of a deeply ambivalent home coalesced with the patriarch as a site of danger.

SUBVERTING THE CINEMATICS OF GRIEF IN *THE DARK AND THE WICKED*

In *The Forms of the Affects*, Eugenie Brinkema states that

> There is a habeas corpus drive in the cinema, and when a body fails to appear … the loss can be framed by the environment, delimiting the missing being by marking out the space of or in relation to objects that that body should properly inhabit—hence, the clichéd images of unoccupied beds and chairs in narratives of loss. (95)

From its opening sequence (00:00:58–00:05:50), *The Dark and the Wicked* highlights the subversive nature of its central loss: not altogether there, nor completely absent, the unconscious father occupies a liminal space between life and death. In lieu of an empty bed, we are thus presented with an occupied one. As his soon-to-be widow, Virginia Straker (Julia Oliver-Touchstone), chops vegetables, the camera slowly pans in on her back—the sound of a chair scraping against the floor, and settling under an unknown weight, can then be heard. She turns around to find the ominously empty chair has been placed right behind her. The use of these tropes establishes a clear link between the dying father, David Straker, and this menacing presence, but their diversion foreshadows the deceitfulness of this anticipated grief: "It's not what you think," the mother will later tell her son (00:15:23), a warning that could just as well be addressed to the viewers. While the marital bed is still occupied by the vacant body of the undead father, a polarizing disembodied presence sits in the empty patriarchal chair (Fig. 2).

The traditionally empty spaces of grief are therefore subverted in *The Dark and the Wicked*, and this play on vacancy is further exemplified by the second sighting (00:13:10) of the elusive, vampire-like creature that embodies the malevolent force invading the home. As Louise stands at the sink, the front door creaks open, tearing a dark crack into the safety of the house; in a shot-reverse shot dynamic, the camera assumes an eye-level perspective of the character, from the visually-vacant, dark exterior. A panning shot follows her as she crosses the room to the door and catches a backlit silhouette standing on the threshold of the marital bedroom (Fig. 3). The dark, but deceitfully empty, tearing in the protective house is transposed into this solid black shadow that is already inside the lit home. The apparition feeds into the vacant/occupied polarity introduced by the bed and chair and complements it with a play on light and shadow. Moreover, the equation of the menace with the (eponymous) dark recurs: as Louise, alone in the goat pen, scrutinizes the nocturnal space outside, what we first mistake for her own shadow elongates, ominously, against the back wall (00:48:35).

From empty spaces we thus move to shadowed ones, a prominent feature in *The Dark and the Wicked* that is used to convey the estrangement of the Straker family members.[3] Writer Virginia Woolf, here quoted by Gaston Bachelard in his work on space, compares the illuminated room to "an island of light in the sea of darkness . . . [wherein] [t]he people gathered under the lamp are aware they form a human group,

3 This estrangement is rendered apparent by the dialogues between siblings Louise and Michael (00:11:03–00:12:17).

Fig. 3 | The first appearance of the "dark" transposed inside the home; Michael and Virginia in their islands of light in *The Dark and the Wicked*, 00:13:16–00:14:41. Travelling Picture Show Company, 2020.

From its opening sequence, *The Dark and the Wicked* highlights the subversive nature of its central loss: not altogether there, nor completely absent, the unconscious father occupies a liminal space between life and death.

united in a depression, on an island" (Bachelard 128).[4] This poetic imagery highlights the dismantled state of the family unit: instead of being "gathered" under the light, the Strakers are isolated from one another in it, and, accordingly, they are separated by the dark voids creeping around it (Fig. 3). In *Mourning Films: A Critical Study of Loss and Grieving in Cinema*, Richard Armstrong invokes an eerily similar metaphor: "death means that our things have separated from us like objects in space no longer governed by gravity. They float indiscriminately, but inexorably, away" (94). These characters seem to have floated away from one another long ago. But what do these shadowed spaces, devouring the home as they expand throughout the film, stand for?

The Dark and the Wicked's subversion of the empty spaces of grief—ambiguously occupied or invested by shadows—ultimately consists of a manipulation of the absence/presence dialectic which has been investigated, notably, by Tarja Laine in regards to the representation of trauma onscreen. In an article titled "Traumatic Horror Beyond the Edge, *It Follows* and *Get Out,*" the author notes that traumatic events are defined by absences, in both visual and narrative forms. Drawing from that observation, she argues that these two films create and maintain an atmosphere of trauma via a displacement of the threat offscreen, thus conveying "the eternal presence of an absent dread" (284). The ever-present threat of this compounded offscreen presence/onscreen absence, she states, adequately stands for the missing narrative of the characters' trauma, as a suggested event lying just outside the borders of the film's narrative.[5] Moreover, Laine mentions the work of Miriam Haughton, who speaks of trauma as a "shadowed space." With this metaphor, Haughton points to the fact that the kind of trauma suffered in the plays studied—which, interestingly, are focused on domestic violence towards women and children—is figuratively "shadowed" from public discourse and representation (5).

4 "*Un îlot de lumière dans la mer des ténèbres… Les êtres réunis sous la lampe ont conscience de former un groupe humain réuni dans un creux de terrain, sur une île*."

5 Very little, if anything, is indeed said or shown about the initial trauma of the characters, such as the death of Jay's father in *It Follows* (Robert Mitchell, 2014) or that of Chris's mother in *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017).

Fig. 4 | Jack's "home" twisted cliché in *The Shining*, 02:01:57. Warner Bros., 1980. The ambiguous "home" declaration as motive for the masked family in *The Strangers*, 01:10:40. Vertigo Entertainments, 2008.

I therefore posit that the ambiguously occupied, and the literally shadowed empty spaces of the Strakers' home, participate in an expression of trauma. These figures convey the persistent threat of an event that is, in itself, glaringly absent from the narrative. The source of this trauma is domestic abuse, as I will try to justify further in light of Kubrick's *The Shining*.

DOMESTIC ABUSE AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF HOME

Drawing from the work of Judith Herman and her observations on violence within the domestic sphere, Haughton notes, "one may conclude that the most dangerous place for women and children is the home" (27). Indeed, the home is depicted as a highly ambivalent milieu in both of our films, and in ways that seem to respond to one another. Greg Keeler approaches films like *The Shining* through a synoptic analysis articulated around the duplicity of the home. The Torrances's problems, he writes, "are no sooner confronted than they go whipping into the void of the huge 'home' which isolated the three of them" (3). This "void of the home" also adequately portrays the ambiguous space within (or from) which *The Dark and the Wicked*'s invisible guests and infiltrating shadows emerge.

In the climactic sequence of *The Shining*, Jack uses an axe to take down not one, but two doors during his rampage into the heart of the family quarters (Fig. 4). "Wendy, I'm home!" he emphatically exclaims as he hacks through the first one (02:01:56), and just before hacking into the second one, he recites the words of the fairy tale antagonist, the Big Bad Wolf: "Little pigs, little pigs, let me come in…" (02:03:15). This anticlimactic doubling of the intrusion, along with Nicholson's lines, serves a single purpose in two ways. First, the formulation of this clichéd greeting of the bread-winning patriarch to his household, in its very linguistic structure, collapses the abuser and the environment into the ambivalent concept of the "home," effectively associating it with danger: Jack *is* the home. Second, in the repetitiveness and rapid succession of the two scenes, a slippage occurs between his consecrated role as protector and provider, and the "beast within" transpiring in the "Three Little Pigs" re-enactment. Moreover, the reference to this precise tale—"then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in!"—insists on the illusory protection provided by the "home" that the abusive patriarch is conflated with.[6]

When questioned by their desperate victims about the reason they were chosen, the intruders of Bertino's *The Strangers* coldly respond, "because you were home" (Fig. 4). This emblematic line offers a deformed reflection of Jack's ambivalent phrase, and thereby discloses similar concerns. As Kimberly Jackson underlined in her discussion of the film, these antagonists comprise a masked, stereotypical family unit of their own (53-54), and the fact that they are attacking a failed attempt at one adds another layer of irony to their statement.[7] Stripping down the home-invasion genre to its minimalist core, this nihilistic posture further posits the household as a site of impending danger: " … the punishment the strangers mete out happens specifically to those who are 'home'; it is a form of terrorism reserved for the domestic space and those who occupy it" (57). In the same way, the Straker siblings' demise is precipitated by their return to the farm, although this "home" has not been their own for quite some time.

During *The Shining*'s crucial scene in the red bathroom, Jack and Charles Grady (Philip Stone) get into a confusing debate: who is the caretaker here? This ambivalence is

6 Jack's last line—"Here's Johnny"—has been said to replicate the introduction of *The Tonight Show's* host Johnny Carson, circling back to popular culture. But in the perspective of it marking the completion of Jack's transformation from the stereotypical patriarch, through the beast, and to a full-blown "pater familicide," I suggest that it alludes to the infamous John E. List, who executed the five members of his household in 1971. The main motive of his crime, compounding the shame of imminent economic ruin—he was pretending to go to work everyday though he had lost his position years past—and subsequent social demotion are not far removed from Jack Torrance's preoccupations.

7 In *The Strangers*, Kristen (Liv Tyler) just rejected her boyfriend's proposal.

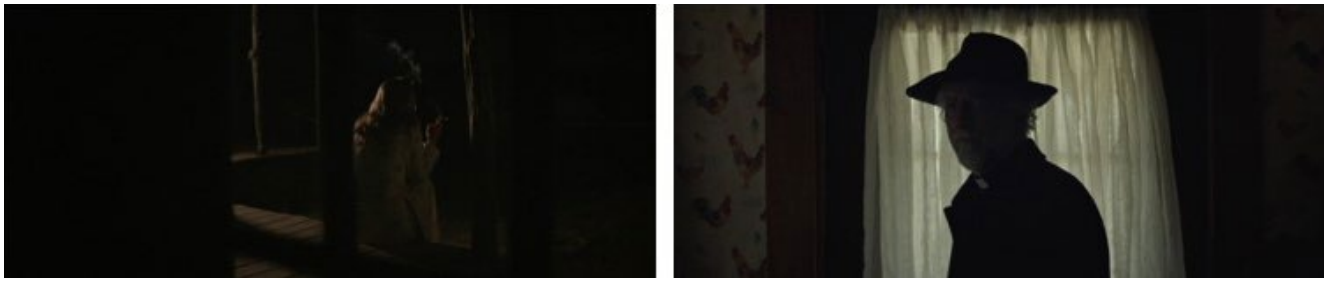

Fig. 5 | A hidden shot of Louise; the priest silhouetted as a solid black shadow in *The Dark and the Wicked*, 00:14:37 / 00:45:50. Travelling Picture Show Company, 2020.

primarily embedded in the narrative through Jack's complete negligence of the facility's maintenance, as Wendy (Shelley Duvall) is shown fulfilling those daily duties. Grady then encourages Jack's legitimate reclaiming of the title: he *is*, and *has always been*, the caretaker. Here, it seems relevant to highlight the pivotal role of the figure in the etiology of trauma akin to domestic violence. As Herman states in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, "chronic childhood abuse takes place in a familial climate of pervasive terror, in which ordinary caretaking relationships have been profoundly disrupted" (98). Thus, in the midst of a scene concerned with patriarchal violence, the heavy emphasis on the polysemous term betrays its subversiveness—meanwhile, the ball band's "home" filters through the walls, bringing this ambivalent caretaker back to the ambivalent home he personifies.[8] Indeed, when confronted with Wendy's suggestion of an abandonment of post (01:43:50), Jack's aggressive reaction makes it clear that the responsibilities he feels so strongly about are not those stated in his initial contract. He must now *take care* of his family, in the treacherous sense implied by Grady as he comes to rescue him from the pantry (01:54:33): "I see you can hardly have *taken care* of the business we discussed." Grady then adds, "We have come to believe … that you haven't the belly for it," and the phrase, stripped of its figurative meaning, rings particularly true in advance of the following segment.

THE MISE-EN-SCÈNE OF PREDATION: HUNTING, DEVOURING, AND DIGESTING

The crucial figure of the wolf in the domestic abuse narrative of *The Shining* was the starting point of this essay, and now that the ambivalence of the home coalesced with the patriarch as a site of danger has been established, I will explore the cinematic forms that this danger assumes. *The Dark and the Wicked* composes imagery of predation from its opening sequence: after Virginia, the mother, hears wolves howling outside, the prowling camera catches a glimpse of a vampiric creature crouched among the agitated goats (00:04:40). It will then hunt the characters through the lighting—or, more accurately, the shadows—as well as the camera work and sound, using deceitful human disguises. The darkness that devours the home as the film progresses evokes the predatory traits that Mary Webb, quoted by Bachelard, attributes to the night: "to those who don't have a home, the night is a wild beast … an immense beast, that's everywhere, like a universal threat" (130).[9] Very low and partially concealed camera angles give off the persistent impression of a creeping predator hidden in dark corners of the room to spy on his prey (Fig. 5). As Jeremy Kibler aptly writes in his review, "long-time character actor Xander Berkeley, a priest who claims to be a friend to Louise and Michael's mother, also makes a lingering impression as a possible wolf in sheep's clothing." The deceiving figure first engages in a cryptic dialogue with the siblings, comparing the evil plaguing them to a wolf.[10] His next visit offers an interesting counterpart to Jack's impersonation, as it is composed and shot like a Big Bad Wolf encounter: in a growling drawl, the hunched-over imposter enjoins Michael and Louise, who are huddled on the threshold of their house like the scared children of fairy tales, to "come outside" (Fig. 6).

The threat of being devoured already implied by this mise-en-scène of predation is intricately woven into *The Shining*. The overt allusion to cannibalism during the family's journey to the Overlook and the repeated reference to the Roadrunner's chase by a ravenous Wile E. Coyote are further elaborated by precise visual and narrative elements. Fairly early in the movie, a dolly shot precedes then tracks Wendy as she wheels a catering cart down from the kitchen to the family quarters. A hard cut switches to a stalking shot of Danny's compulsive tricycle ride around the

8 In the "Soundtracks" section of *The Shining*'s IMDb page, the song is credited as "Home (When Shadows Fall)" and performed by Henry Hall and the Gleneagles Hotel Band. The lyrics read, "When shadows fall, trees whisper day is ending. My thoughts are ever-wending home."

9 "*Pour ceux qui n'ont pas de maison, la nuit est une vraie bête sauvage… une bête immense, qui est partout, comme une universelle menace*" (Bachelard 130).

10 Berkeley states, "You think she's crazy cause she saw a wolf, saw it coming? He's not out there. He's already here" (00:46:00). As he says this last line, he is silhouetted against the front door as a solid, black shadow.

Fig.6 | The Big Bad Wolf encounter with the priest (left to right) in *The Dark and the Wicked*, 00:51:05–00:52:40. Travelling Picture Show Company, 2020.

The Shining therefore seems to display a "to eat or be eaten" logic to the characters' confrontation with their traumas: by regurgitating Tony, Danny manages not to be devoured by his father who, conversely, failed to assimilate his own experience of childhood abuse, and instead revisited it upon his son and wife.

Fig.7 | Danny getting served as Jack's breakfast (left from right) in *The Shining*, 00:34:21–00:35:50. Warner Bros., 1980.

hotel's ground floor, before going back to Wendy as she wheels the cart to the door of the apartment and brings the tray into the bedroom, waking Jack up with a breakfast in bed. These alternating cuts and the continuous tracking shot connecting them equate Danny to Jack's meal (Fig. 7). In "My Dinner with Stanley: Kubrick, Food, and the Logic of Images," Mervyn Nicholson highlights that "the motif of eating people is subtextually present throughout the movie, where dismemberment and death suggest food preparation for a demonic banquet" (285). This image is first brought up by Jack and directly relates to the figure of the predator: when awoken from his grunting nightmare by Wendy, he tells her he "cut [her and Danny] up into little pieces" (00:58:52).

The "little pieces" motif will recur not only to extend this devouring theme with the subsequent organic process—digestion—but also to articulate those aesthetic elements inside *The Shining*'s narrative of domestic abuse. The image is summoned back during Jack and Grady's encounter: "You

Fig.8 | The play theme of Jack and Danny's traumatic bond conveyed through the porous spaces of the Overlook and the maze in *The Shining*, 00:37:37–00:40:12 / 00:57:10. Warner Bros., 1980.

chopped your wife and daughters into little bits" (01:27:28). Keeler describes it in a curiously fitting sarcastic tone:

> Also the little fellow dreams about a strange word spelled redrum, which could easily be mistaken for red room except that it actually spells murder backwards. The most noticeable red room in the huge lodge is a symmetrically designed Stanley Kubrick style public bathroom, a bathroom where the little girls' daddy tells his daddy how he made his kids take their medicine, and his daddy takes this as good advice. (4)

As written by Amy Nolan in an essay titled "Seeing Is Digesting: Labyrinths of Historical Ruin in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*," this room "embodies an interior, claustrophobic atmosphere, evoking the womb, or heart, or stomach" (101). As domestic abuse is calmly discussed in the Overlook's stomach, Wendy is anxiously rehearsing her escape plan when Danny's Tony starts chanting "redrum" like a broken alarm clock (01:31:41). Thus, decor and sequential continuity are used here to further link the mise-en-scène of predation to its peripheral themes of devouring and digesting, thereby inscribing it inside the domestic abuse narrative.

THE EXPRESSION OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA IN *THE SHINING*

The motifs observed so far in *The Shining* are consistently linked to Jack's character and feed into the domestic violence narrative, providing solid ground for a shift of perspective: I now propose to examine the film through the lens of trauma—that of Danny and of Jack—or under the light shone back on this violence by its consequences. Although Kubrick's adaptation eludes it entirely, Hornbeck notes that the paternal violence

The Dark and the Wicked's "wolf in sheep's clothing" eventually visits Louise as a young woman wearing a red cloak, a piece of clothing that hints at the "Little Red Riding-Hood" tale as a counterpart to *The Shining*'s "Three Little Pigs."

suffered by Jack as a child is a crucial backdrop to Stephen King's novel (702-03). This intergenerational trauma narrative is absent from the film, but Jack and Danny appear to be linked through the motif of play, which is "obsessively repeated" post-trauma (Herman 39). The previously approached breakfast sequence includes an inserted tracking shot of Danny's tricycle loop around the hotel's ground floor and ends with Jack's retelling of his first encounter with the Overlook (00:37:04): "It was almost as though I knew what was going to be around every corner," he states, projecting the repetitive play of his son. An offscreen rhythmic sound accompanies the following slow dissolve into a shot of his typewriter, and the camera pans out to reveal Jack's own repetitive play—the throwing of a ball against the lobby's wall—as the origin of the sound. This traumatic bond is symbolically reinvested and further articulated in a later sequence. In this sequence, Danny plays in an upstairs corridor when a pink tennis ball rolls into the panning-out shot towards the boy, then a reverse shot reveals the eerily empty corridor from which it emerged. It is as though the ball travelled from Jack's playing session, through the permeable twin spaces of the maze and the Overlook to resurface, days later, in the labyrinthine upstairs corridors (Fig. 8).[11] The travelling

11 This porosity is established in the following succession of sequences and concludes in the seamless transfer from the maze's model to the real one (00:38:02–00:39:45).

Fig. 9 | Jack's patriarchal throne in *The Shining*, 01:02:41. Warner Bros., 1980.

ball then lured Danny to room 237, where he suffered abuse that would be immediately blamed on Jack. Something akin to an inheritance from father to son is therefore symbolically conveyed here: a "traumatic play" legacy. The later revelation of Jack's neurotic mantra—"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" (01:42:17)—further confirms this intuition.

Hornbeck aptly suggests that an "interpretation of Danny's psychic ability is as a display of a split personality, known today as dissociative identity disorder" (705), a disorder that has been correlated to "situations of massive childhood trauma" (Herman 102-03). This fragmentation of the personality mirrors that of the body, the one dreamed up and then attempted by Jack: could Tony be one of Danny's "little pieces"? This traumatic personality fragment as the little boy that "lives in [his] mouth" and "hides in [his] stomach" (00:12:10) also harbours a strong connection to the ingestion and digestion pattern. Moreover, when needed, Tony is "regurgitated" by Danny in a motion reverting the devouring or ingesting dynamic of the predatory patriarch. Grady incites Jack to "correct" his wife and son in the red room (01:31:41) when "Tony takes over completely… In psychological terms, the alternate personality performs the function for which it was created, to protect the abused child from a dangerous parent" (Hornbeck 706).

In *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman states that reliving a traumatic experience represents an attempt "to 'assimilate' and 'liquidate' traumatic experience" (41), thus invoking a biological process that further extends the digestion metaphor. Relying on the same intertwining of the Overlook and its garden maze that allowed the transfer of Jack's ball, Hannah Mowat writes that "[Jack's] death in the maze has resulted in his complete absorption into the hotel's history—through the hedge-lined exterior and onto the plastered walls of the interior." Additionally, she invests the biological term mobilized by Herman within the context of trauma: "the final dissolve to an extreme close-up of Jack's face offers further confirmation of this ultimate assimilation" (Mowat). *The Shining* therefore seems to display a "to eat or be eaten" logic to the characters' confrontation with their traumas: by regurgitating Tony, Danny manages not to be devoured by his father who, conversely, failed to assimilate his own experience of childhood abuse, and instead revisited it upon his son and wife. Having unfolded the different threads weaving the domestic violence theme into Kubrick's cinematic text, I would now like to superimpose this canvas onto *The Dark and the Wicked*.

TO EAT OR BE EATEN (BY TRAUMA): ECHOES OF THESE TROPES IN *THE DARK AND THE WICKED*

The opening sequence of *The Dark and the Wicked* (00:00:58–00:05:50) along with the one preceding the mother's suicide (00:16:11–00:17:28) display elements that establish a connection between the patriarch, the figure of the wolf, and the threat of being devoured. Similar to the one observed in *The Shining*, this pattern hints at an absent narrative of domestic abuse and childhood trauma. The ambiguously empty chair of the opening sequence is not only associated with the father as the "underbelly" of the occupied bed, but is also charged with a threat of a patriarchal nature: its unseen occupant seems to ensure that the mother's domestic duty—she is chopping vegetables—is fulfilled with due diligence. Virginia's defeated attitude is eerily devoid of surprise, indicating that this is, or was, a regular occurrence. The second sequence (00:16:11–00:17:28) repeats this oppressive ritual: Virginia is once more chopping vegetables when she is made distraught by the chair's scraping noise, followed by the sound of its seat settling under an unknown weight. Suffice to say that this domestic throne is established fairly quickly as the token of the dying, abusive patriarch's persisting dominion over his household. *The Shining*'s patriarch has been associated with kingship as well. While being berated by Wendy for abusing Danny (01:02:04), Jack sits "stupefied in his thronelike, Napoleonic chair" (Nolan 189), and the dissolve into the next scene then puts a chandelier very much resembling a crown onto his head (Fig. 9).

Finally, this versatile symbol of the chair is depicted as an instrument of harm. Its scrapping sound causes such distress in Virginia that her domestic task seemingly turns against her, and

Fig. 10 | The menacing patriarchal chair and Virginia's fragmentation in *The Dark and the Wicked*, 00:16:10–00:19:30. Travelling Picture Show Company, 2020.

Thus, *The Dark and the Wicked*'s Big Bad Wolf hunts down the members of this fractured family unit while the menacing patriarchal throne stands for the persisting, destructive influence of the domestic abuser.

she proceeds to mince her own fingers along with the carrots.[12] This gruesome occurrence recalls *The Shining*'s "little pieces," suggesting cannibalistic consumption and the traumatic fragmentation of the psyche in victims of chronic abuse. The next morning, as the siblings frantically search for Virginia, the creeping camera slowly retracts in the shadows of the goat pen, soon to include in the frame her hanged, backlit silhouette. The ensuing shot of the patriarchal chair placed around the dinner table implies that it was the instrument of the suicide, therefore imputing the mother's fateful gesture to the absent narrative of domestic violence (Fig. 10).

In the closing segment of this essay, I would like to recompose the absent narrative of domestic violence through each member of the Straker family, as all of them seem to display symptoms that endorse this hypothesis. The cinematic portrayal of their battle against dark forces lured to the home by the patriarch's liminal state is lined with another, more grounded tale: the struggle to "assimilate" their resurgent trauma or be devoured by it. In a diegetic lifespan encapsulated between the two "vegetable sequences," Virginia exhibits ambivalent behaviour ranging from meekly disapproving of her children's visit to aggressively enjoining them to leave. The oddly resigned attitude she otherwise displays rings true to the frozen state adopted by captive victims of chronic abuse. Herman contends in a metaphor particularly fitting here that "these are the responses of captured prey to predator" (42). Virginia's attitude betrays an obscure knowledge of what is coming while embracing a somewhat passive, sacrificial posture that could be interpreted as the expression of a guilt-inducing complicity in her children's past abuse. This equivocal stance is moreover reminiscent of Kubrick's portrayal of Wendy's character, which, as Hornbeck highlights, sparked ambivalent commentaries (706).

As for the avoidant attitude of the brother, Michael, it could be seen as re-enacting a past, precipitated departure from the home, one that left his mother and sister to fight for themselves. After he fled in the middle of the night, Louise's harrowing and infantile reproach —"You left me!"— rings like an echo of their history (01:18:38); this point resonates all the more so when her huddled figure is framed in a "dirty shot" with the empty chair previously placed around the table now facing her (Fig. 11).

12 Dawn Keetley took notice of the obsessive wood-cutting associated with male characters to "express their sublimated hostility toward [their] family"; this motif, she states, is notoriously used in Stuart Rosenberg's *The Amityville Horror* (1979) and has been recently reclaimed in Eggers's *The Witch* (Keetley). *The Shining* followed *The Amityville Horror* closely, and Kubrick's trading of the mallet for the axe as the instrument of Jack and Grady's familicides could be speculated to reference this anger-fuelled, stereotypically masculine wood-cutting. In the scope of gender representations, a case can be made of the neurotic vegetable-slicing motif typically attributed to female characters: the fanatic mother of Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976) and the traumatized one of *The Dark and the Wicked* seem to mirror this wood-cutting in horror cinema.

Fig. 11 | Louise reliving her brother's desertion in *The Dark and the Wicked*, 01:18:38. Travelling Picture Show Company, 2020.

Fig. 12 | The shower sequence in *The Dark and the Wicked*, 00:26:17. Travelling Picture Show Company, 2020.

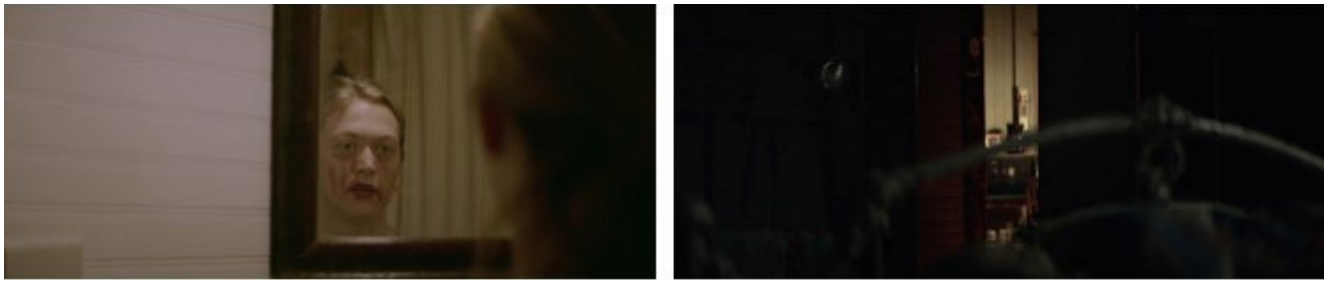

Fig. 13 | Louise's face smeared with red lipstick and the briefly visible chair right before her assault in the bedroom in *The Dark and the Wicked*, 00:40:16 / 1:09:50. Travelling Picture Show Company, 2020.

Michael is then driven to suicide by a hallucination of his decimated daughters and wife around the dinner table, a brutal vision that plays on the illusion that he brought the "trauma" home and visited it upon his own family. The sequence illustrates a divisive point between *The Dark and the Wicked* and *The Shining*, as it feeds into the fact that "contrary to the popular notion of a 'generational cycle of abuse,' the great majority of survivors neither abuse nor neglect their children" and are "terribly afraid that [they] will suffer a fate similar to their own" (Herman 114). Michael catches a glimpse of the table surrounded with empty chairs as he dies: this last occurrence of the fateful symbol conveys his deceptive fear of perpetuating the cycle of patriarchal violence.

But as the last surviving member of the household and primary victim of abuse, Louise represents the most telling case. During a sequence reminiscent—if reversed—of Danny and/or Jack's venture into Room 237, she is confronted with an intrusion of her dying father while in the shower. Shot from her low-angle perspective as she is reduced to a scared child or animal cowering in the bathtub, the apparition sternly stares down Louise (Fig. 12).

She yells for Michael, telling him that "Dad's in here!" and when the siblings later stand around the still bedridden father, she insists, "He *was* there." This line relocates the incident in the character's past, reframing it as a re-enacted recollection. A string of similar occurrences then befalls her. First, she awakes to discover her face smeared with red lipstick in the mirror—two elements echoing *The Shining*'s "Redrum" episode—and finds the tube in the marital bed she now shares with her dying father. She will later lay in that bed, an unseen, grunting beast grinding the springs under its weight while an ominous shadow spreads over her; through the cracked open door of the bedroom, the patriarchal chair fleetingly appears (Fig. 13).

The Dark and the Wicked's "wolf in sheep's clothing" eventually visits Louise as a young woman wearing a red cloak, a piece of clothing that hints at the "Little Red Riding-Hood" tale as a counterpart to *The Shining*'s "Three Little Pigs."[13] Their encounter, in composition, mirrors the nocturnal appearance

13 Other elements seem to refer to this tale: Louise is seen wearing a red coat several times, and just as she shared her dying father's bed, Little Red Riding-Hood slips into bed with the wolf posing as her previously devoured grandmother (Perrault 82).

Fig. 14 | The last Big Bad Wolf's encounter and intrusion in the house in *The Dark and the Wicked*, 01:13:29–01:17:28. Travelling Picture Show Company, 2020.

The Shining builds its narrative of domestic violence upon cinematics of predation that are themselves composed of motifs embodying the hunting, devouring, and digesting gestures proper to the predatory animal, namely the Big Bad Wolf from fairy tales that Jack impersonates in the last segment of the film.

of the priest as the Big Bad Wolf with a shot-reverse shot dynamic revolving around the threshold and a wide framing of the house (Fig. 14). This time, though, Louise explicitly subverts the priest's malicious invitation of "You should come outside" by enjoining the female intruder to come in (Fig. 6). Once inside the home, the creature's metamorphosis unravels, ever-faithful to the tale: her voice distorts to a masculine growl as she chants, "All alone…," and she calls Louise "little girl" while displaying wide black eyes and eerily elongated teeth.[14] This last infantilizing torment reconvenes the wolf and ties the sexually-charged previous occurrences—the shower, lipstick, and bedroom scenes—back to the character's childhood, therefore reinforcing the intuition that we are dealing with the return of repressed (and possibly sexual) abuse from the predatory patriarch.

CONCLUSION

The Shining builds its narrative of domestic violence upon cinematics of predation that are themselves composed of motifs embodying the hunting, devouring, and digesting gestures proper to the predatory animal, namely the Big Bad Wolf from fairy tales that Jack impersonates in the last segment of the film. The wolf figure takes centre stage in Bertino's *The Dark and the Wicked*, too, and this shared antagonist has motivated a cross-examination that not only provided a deeper insight on the domestic violence narrative of *The Shining*, but brought *The Dark and the Wicked*'s implicit one to the forefront. Although formally absent in the film, Jack's own history of abuse is still an ongoing narrative perpetuated in his relationships with his son and wife. Centred around the empty space left by the dying father, *The Dark and the Wicked* tracks its own absent narrative of domestic violence backwards, piecing it together through the belated and far more fatalistic reckoning of the characters' past trauma. About the catalyst of such devastating aftermath, Herman writes,

> Eventually, often in the third or fourth decade of life, the defensive structure may begin to break down. Often the precipitant is a change in the equilibrium of close relationships: the failure of a marriage, the birth of a child, the illness or death of a parent. The facade can hold no longer, and the underlying fragmentation becomes manifest. (114)

Thus, *The Dark and the Wicked*'s Big Bad Wolf hunts down the members of this fractured family unit while the menacing patriarchal throne stands for the persisting, destructive influence of the domestic abuser. Sucked back into the dark voids of this wicked home, the Strakers get caught up in the "repetitive reliving of the traumatic experience" (Herman 41) that they are unable to assimilate: reduced to the "little bits" of Jack's nightmare, they "may well provide dinner for a wolf" (Perrault 84). In the last minutes of the film, Louise refuses to leave her father's bedside. As darkness engulfs them both, he awakes to devour her. This final image, in mimicking the tragic ending of the "Little Red Riding-Hood" tale, seals *The Dark and the Wicked* and *The Shining*'s iconographic bond and thematic kinship. ▪

14 In Charles Perrault's version, the unsuspecting little girl comments on the wolf's big voice, eyes, and teeth (Perrault 84).

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ARTICLE

Dead Doesn't Mean Gone

The Haunting of Bly Manor as a Neo-Victorian Text

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ABSTRACT

This essay places Mike Flanagan's *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020) within the theoretical framework of the neo-Victorian genre. Based on the work of Henry James, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* figures as the second instalment in Flanagan's *Haunting* horror anthology series, exploring the themes of memory and trauma through the Gothic tropes of spectrality and haunting. The essay assesses whether Flanagan's adaptive decisions constructively engage in a dialogue with the nineteenth-century socio-political structures and their haunting effect on the present. Placing emphasis on the issues of sexuality and class, he relies on the neo-Victorian practice of rendering visible the historically invisible, as well as the genre's central metaphor of the mirror as a window to the past. The essay, therefore, considers the extent to which the narrative possibilities Flanagan creates for contemporary re-imaginings of James's characters utilize the neo-Victorian genre's subversive potential.

Henry James's 1898 horror novella *The Turn of the Screw* continues to inspire both literary and transmedial adaptations, appropriations, and rewritings, many of which are subject to interpretations through the neo-Victorian lens. Joyce Carol Oates's *Accursed Inhabitants of the House of Bly*, Sarah Waters's *Affinity*, and A. N. Wilson's *A Jealous Ghost*, as well as films like Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961), Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others* (2001), and, more recently, Floria Sigismondi's *The Turning* (2020), are only a handful of works which borrow characters, motifs, and plot elements from the classic novella and deploy them to different ends, attesting to the persisting appeal of the source material to the contemporary (re)imagination of the nineteenth century.

The most recent adaptation, and the one that concerns this essay, is the second instalment in Mike Flanagan's *Haunting* horror anthology streaming series titled *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020). Although the plot most distinctly echoes *The Turn of the Screw,* the series interweaves several of Henry James's ghost stories into a contemporary gothic romance set in England and the United States in the late 1980s. The frame narrative, however, is set in 2007, with an enigmatic grey-haired woman (Carla Gugino) attending a rehearsal dinner in California, where she offers to tell the guests a ghost story she insists is not hers, though "it belongs to somebody [she] knew" ("The Great Good Place"). Once she begins her narration, the story rewinds to 1987 London, introducing Danielle "Dani" Clayton (Victoria Pedretti), an American expatriate hired as an *au pair* for the orphaned Wingrave children (Benjamin Evan Ainsworth and Amelie Bea Smith) living on a remote family property in Bly under the legal care of their absent uncle, Henry Wingrave (Henry Thomas). While the storyteller's identity remains unknown to the guests, Flanagan offers the viewers clues throughout her narrative, with the show's closing scene confirming that the woman is indeed Jamie, the former gardener at the manor who remained Dani's lover until her death seven years prior.

Whereas James dilutes the governess's story by filtering it through a male perspective, Flanagan's gender-swapping

of the frame narrator, as well as the introduction of a lesbian protagonist, suggests the potential for destabilizing the patriarchal and heterosexist structures upheld during the Victorian period, the ramifications of which persist well into the late twentieth century with Thatcher's reinforcement of "Victorian values," despite Great Britain's seemingly promising redirection toward more progressive politics in the 1970s. Resulting from a contemporary fascination with the nineteenth century, the neo-Victorian genre has opened up spaces for historical, cultural, and aesthetic exploration of the Victorian era and its unyielding effect on the present. In literature and media, this effect is often metaphorically conveyed through the master trope of spectrality and haunting (Arias and Pulham xi), as ghosts are traditionally taken to represent projections of cultural fears and unresolved trauma.

In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, Flanagan's reimagining of a classic Victorian ghost story suggests the possibility for conveying anxieties about social and political uncertainties pervading Great Britain and the United States at the time both nations were under extremely conservative leadership. Such updating of Henry James, particularly his thematic preoccupation with the nature of storytelling and its inherent mirroring of the nineteenth-century social structures, blatantly points toward the Victorian past as a spectral presence that continues to haunt contemporary society. Moreover, it offers a metafictional exploration of the ghost story genre itself and the implications of the genre's conventions in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Placing the series within the neo-Victorian theoretical framework, this essay aims to determine its attitude toward the Victorian past; it considers the changes made to the source material as well as the extent to which the series realizes its subversive potential as opposed to appropriating the Victorian era for aesthetic and commercial appeal.

In *The Haunting of Bly Manor*, Flanagan's reimagining of a classic Victorian ghost story suggests the possibility for conveying anxieties about social and political uncertainties pervading Great Britain and the United States at the time both nations were under extremely conservative leadership.

Although she never uses the term "neo-Victorian" to describe contemporary returns to the Victorian past, Cora Kaplan ponders the motivation behind these returns, highlighting the importance of "asking whether the proliferation of Victoriana is more than nostalgia—and more, too, than a symptom of the now familiar, if much debated, view that the passage from modernity to postmodernity has been marked by the profound loss of a sense of history" (3), thus hinting at the ongoing discussion about historical fiction's critical versus nostalgic engagement with the past as dichotomized by Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (45).

In the frequently cited definition of neo-Victorianism, Heilmann and Llewellyn contend that to be considered neo-Victorian, a text "must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*" (4, original emphasis). Based on this definition, there appear to have emerged two distinct categories of texts that engage with the nineteenth century. The first are the texts in the vein of Sarah Waters's *Affinity* and A. S. Byatt's *Possession*, which operate within the boundaries of historiographic metafiction, revisiting and often rewriting historical events, and problematizing the relationship between history and fiction. Put another way, these texts challenge the cultural memory of the Victorians, seeking to right the wrongs of the past from the vantage point of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, and often doing so by playing upon the contemporary stereotypes about the period or by giving a voice to the historically ostracized. As a result, they often adopt an ironic stance and are characterized by political undertones. Positioned at the intersection of the neo-Victorian genre and postmodernism, these texts rely on dismantling the official version, offering instead a pluralist view of history, that of which Hutcheon is the foremost proponent. By drawing attention to their own fictional nature, they suggest that the desire for the knowledge of history is continually undermined by the postmodernist notion of the impossibility of attaining such knowledge, thus consciously denying the historical plausibility even of the alternate histories that they construct. In that respect, these texts reveal the unreliability of cultural memory, highlighting the fact that it is underpinned by inherited ideas and stereotypes about the past rather than historical facts, and is, therefore, ultimately dependent on the accumulated sense of history.

In the other group are the texts which are not concerned with critically engaging the Victorian past, but rather with adopting a celebratory and often sentimental approach to it, which tends to further perpetuate cultural clichés about the period. Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), for instance, prioritizes aesthetic reproduction of Victorian London over engaging in a critical dialogue with the social structures of the period. These texts emphasize nostalgia with no aspiration to subvert dominant historical discourses. Because they lack both a metahistoric aspect and "a self-analytic drive," Heilmann and Llewellyn are wary of labelling these texts neo-Victorian, referring to them broadly as "historical fiction set in the nineteenth century" (5-6). Elaborating on the example of nostalgic cinema, Fredric Jameson is highly critical of purely stylistic engagements of the past, of "conveying 'pastness' by the glossy qualities of the image" (19), having famously described such endeavours as "cannibalization" due to their negligence of "genuine historicity" in favour of nostalgia.

Nonetheless, because literature and media which employ a Victorian setting, character archetypes, and/or other conventions of the time have proven incredibly versatile, the neo-Victorian genre continues to evade a stable definition despite scholarly attempts to narrow it down to only the texts that exhibit a conscious effort to enter into a dialogue with the Victorian past, often with the objective of resolving present-day social and political tensions that stem from the nineteenth century.

If Henry James's ghost stories are a cultural product of his time, the question that arises is whether Flanagan's setting update is a deliberate attempt at establishing an analogy between the two social climates—the Victorian era and Thatcherism, as well as its American counterpart, Reaganism. *The Haunting of Bly Manor*'s most chilling and memorable line may well be Flora's assertion that "dead doesn't mean gone" ("The Way It Came"), which figures as the motif throughout the series. When considered within the neo-Victorian framework, the line reads as a metafictional affirmation that the Victorian era, although long behind us, continues to exert its influence on the present.

Flanagan's iteration of James's haunted countryside estate is populated with marginalized characters, including two black women, two lesbians, and an Indian immigrant, all of whom are employees of Lord Wingrave; the foundation is therefore laid for a narrative that will abound in political implications. Another significant change to the source material lies in Flanagan's decision to rid the story of its signature ambiguity surrounding the supernatural presence at the manor. In *The Turn of the Screw*, upon her arrival to Bly, the governess begins to see two mysterious figures on the premises. None of the other residents appear aware of the figures, which leads the governess to suspect that the manor is haunted. She soon learns that her predecessor, Miss Jessel, was having an affair with the manor's valet, Peter Quint, and that both of them are dead. The novella's eerie atmosphere is deftly built through the governess's point of view as she becomes convinced that the ghosts of Jessel and Quint intend to harm the children. The governess's narrative ends with Miles dying in the governess's arms after she tries to protect him from Quint's ghost. The ambiguity which permeates James's story has sparked various interpretations; however, the one which appears to have enjoyed the most popularity in critical discussions about *The Turn of the Screw* centres on the governess's presumed insanity.

The Haunting of Bly Manor, on the other hand, confirms early on that the ghosts of Peter Quint (Oliver Jackson-Cohen) and the former governess, reimagined by Flanagan as Rebecca Jessel (Tahirah Sharif), are not figments of Dani's imagination. Flanagan rejects the readings of James's text as a case study for female madness, foregrounding instead social and romantic relationships at the manor as they are embedded within the dominant social institutions that all trace back not just to the Victorian era, but, as the eighth episode, "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" suggests, all the way back to the seventeenth century.

LIBERATING JAMES'S GOVERNESS

Seeing that "subversion is only possible in the presence of a norm against which that subversion is directed" (Booker 188), Dani and Jamie's lesbian relationship is continually contrasted to Peter and Rebecca's, its hetero-patriarchal and ultimately doomed counterpart. The contrasting nature of the two relationships is introduced in "The Two Faces, Part One" when Dani, having learned of Peter's controlling behaviour, concludes that "People do that, don't they? Mix up love and possession. I don't think that should be possible. I mean, they're opposites, really. Love and ownership." Thus, Dani not only alludes to her failed engagement to Edmund (Roby Attal), but also foreshadows a happy and healthy relationship with Jamie. Additionally, unbeknownst to Dani, the dichotomy also takes on a literal meaning as Peter's ghost possesses Rebecca's body before he compels her to drown herself in order to reunite with him in death.

Flanagan furthers the disparity between the two relationships by means of flower symbolism. Although he does rely on flowers as a traditional symbol of romance and sexuality, Flanagan expands their connotations to convey political metaphors. The prematurely cut roses which Peter gives to Rebecca thus become emblematic of their relationship. When Peter is surprised that someone of Rebecca's intelligence is content working as a nanny, "scrubbing up some rich kid's puke while his guardian drinks himself into a coma," she admits to having applied for the job knowing that Henry Wingrave works for a prominent London law firm, telling Peter that she had always wanted to be a barrister—the ambition he ultimately cuts short when he compels her to drown herself ("The Two Faces, Part One"). Appropriately, the bouquet he gives her consists of both red and white roses, while the scene in which Peter is driving Rebecca to Bly for the first time momentarily freezes on the garden, focusing on a single white rose struggling to bloom, with the thorns from the surrounding roses looming over it (Fig. 1).

Dani and Jamie's relationship, on the other hand, is symbolized by a moonflower. In "The Jolly Corner," Jamie reveals that she took up gardening in prison out of boredom, but has grown to love it as she believes it has given her life purpose: "people aren't worth it, but plants… you pour your love, and your effort, and your nourishment into them, and you see where it goes […] you watch them grow and it all makes sense." She then compares Dani to a moonflower (Fig. 2)—a flower which, like marginalized identities, blooms only at night and is "bloody hard to grow in England." Jamie contends that, although "everyone is exhaustive, even the best ones […], sometimes, once in a blue goddamned moon, I guess, someone, like this moonflower, just might be worth the effort."

By using a nocturnal plant to illustrate a lesbian relationship in the 1980s, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* alludes to the contemporary attitude surrounding non-reproductive families. This proves particularly resonant in light of the Section 28 of the Local Government Act introduced in 1988 by

Fig. 1 | A foreshadowing of Peter's intentions, 00:09:47. "The Two Faces, Part One" (*The Haunting of Bly Manor*). Netflix, 2020.

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Fig. 2 | Jamie's moonflower blooms against a prison-like trellis, 00:34-39. "The Jolly Corner" (*The Haunting of Bly Manor*). Netflix, 2020.

Thatcher's government, prohibiting "the promotion of homosexuality by local authorities" on the basis that it clashed with traditional family values which stem from the hypocritical notions of sexual morality fostered in the Victorian era: "Thatcher's invocation of the Victorian era centred upon her particular re-creation of the Victorian family with the heterosexual marriage as the permissible locus for sexual activity" (Mitchell 48). In that respect, Thatcher's idea of the Victorian mirrors the exact image of the period that the neo-Victorian genre strives to expose and ultimately reconstruct. When Dani and Jamie kiss next to the blooming moonflower, the shot is initially framed through the trellis, indicating Dani's entrapment, while in the next shot the trellis is removed, as Dani has embraced the previously repressed transgressive desire (Figs. 3 and 4).

Given contemporary curiosity surrounding the cultural stereotype about the Victorians's rigid attitude toward sex, it is no surprise that sexual liberation is a frequent subject in neo-Victorian fiction. Antonija Primorac infers that the neo-Victorian re-imaginings of Victorian sexuality represent "a foil to contemporary notions of the sexually liberated and sexually knowledgeable individual" ("The Naked Truth" 92). But is Flanagan's apparent favouring of Dani and Jamie's relationship over Peter and Rebecca's actually subversive? To what

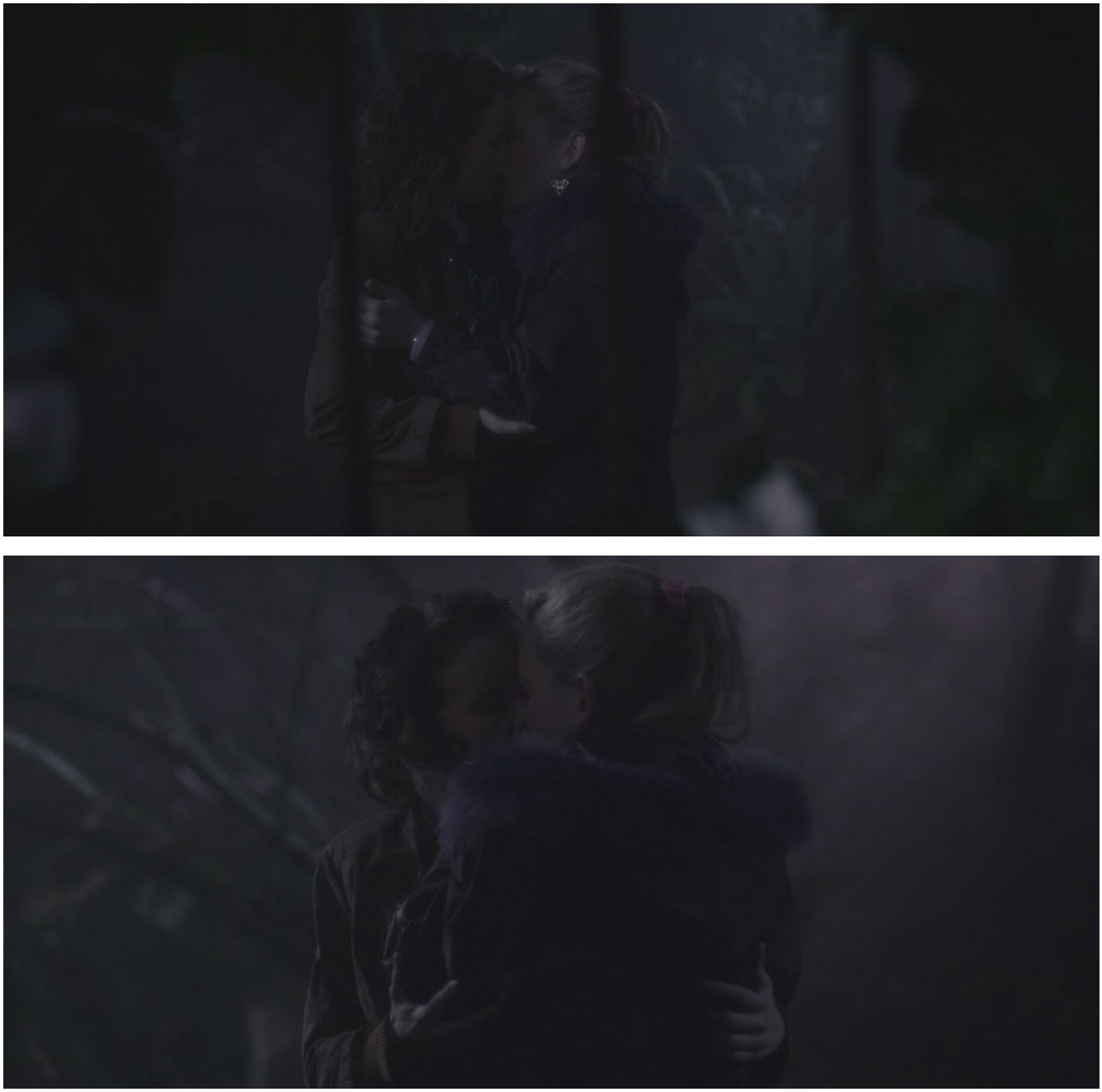

Fig. 3 and 4 | A symbolic representation of Dani's liberation, 00:34:49; 00:34:53. "The Jolly Corner" (*The Haunting of Bly Manor*). Netflix, 2020.

extent, if at all, are dominant Victorian structures de-centred? To ensure the safe distance from which we engage with the Victorian, the neo-Victorian genre relies heavily on the mirror metaphor, which is closely connected to the previously mentioned master trope of spectrality and haunting. In the first four episodes, Dani is quite literally haunted by the ghost of heteronormativity. From the moment she is introduced, she is continually startled by the figure of a man with glowing eyes that appears behind her in reflective surfaces (Fig. 5). In "The Way It Came," it is revealed that the spectre that haunts her is her childhood best friend-turned fiancé Edmund, who was killed in a traffic accident, his eyes reflecting the headlights of the truck that hit him.

The episode delves into Dani's past, outlining the trajectory of her coming to terms with her sexuality since early childhood up to the moment at Bly when she confides in Jamie. Six months before her arrival in England, Dani obliquely comes out to Edmund, saying that she thought "[she] could just stick it out and eventually [she] would feel like [she] was supposed to," ultimately breaking off the engagement and causing Edmund to angrily exit the car and walk into traffic. After Edmund's death, traumatized and overwhelmed with feelings of guilt and shame, Dani develops a habit of covering mirrors to avoid facing him, and essentially herself, as she is illuminated by his glowing eyes, thus symbolically conveying her repressed lesbianism. However, the most eerie and spatially significant of Dani's encounters with Edmund's gaze occurs in "The Great Good Place" when Miles and Flora lock Dani in a closet; Edmund's appearance in the closet mirror causes Dani to have a panic attack, screaming to be let out, as the fear of sexuality is projected onto the fear of spectrality (Figs. 6 and 7). Moreover, Flora and Miles are eventually revealed to have trapped Dani in order to protect her from the murderous ghost of Viola Lloyd (Kate Siegel) who roams the manor nightly, therefore reinforcing the idea of the closet as the only safe space for perceived deviance.

By intertwining sexuality with guilt and trauma, Flanagan evokes the standard Gothic trope in which the return to the repressed is conveyed by means of spectrality. Dani's being haunted by her past thus metatextually reflects the neo-Victorian genre's preoccupation with the Victorian past and its influence on the present. However, to invoke Simon Joyce's idea about the act of looking back, there is "the inevitable distortion that accompanies any mirror image, whether we see it as resulting from the effects of political ideology, deliberate misreading, exaggeration, or the understandable simplification of a complex past" (4). The mirror image therefore reveals our own misconstrued (although culturally accepted) ideas about the nineteenth century. As Heilmann and Llewellyn note, "neo-Victorian spectrality can be seen as a reflection of our inability to recapture the Victorians, and the impossibility of see(k)ing the 'truth' of the period through either fiction or fact" (144). In that respect, Dani does not remember Edmund as he was; rather, the image of him that haunts her is the one shaped by the trauma and guilt

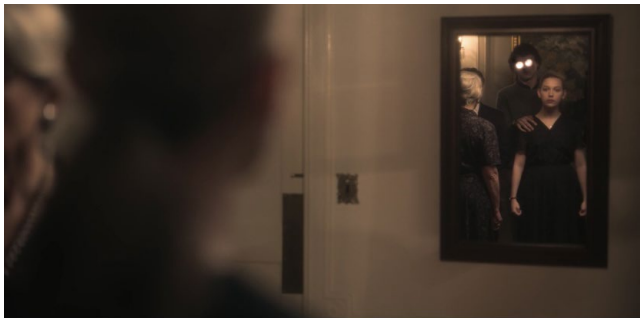

Fig. 5 | Dani is haunted by Edmund's illuminating gaze, 00:36:09. "The Way It Came" (*The Haunting of Bly Manor*). Netflix, 2020.

Fig. 6 and 7 | The fear of sexuality is projected onto the fear of spectrality, 00:48:48; 00:49:01. "The Great Good Place" (*The Haunting of Bly Manor*). Netflix, 2020.

By using a nocturnal plant to illustrate a lesbian relationship in the 1980s, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* alludes to the contemporary attitude surrounding non-reproductive families.

she associates with it. Dani affirms her transgressive desire by burning Edmund's broken glasses, thus freeing herself from his constant surveillance and rendering herself a threat to the hetero-patriarchal system (Fig. 8).

Therefore, having established Dani and Jamie's relationship as a viable threat to the social order embodied by Edmund's now dissipated spectre, Flanagan is able to subvert the mirror metaphor: years after Dani's death, as Jamie is narrating the story to the guests, she reveals that "for the rest of her days, the

Fig. 8 | In "The Way It Came" (*The Haunting of Bly Manor*), Dani renders herself a threat to the hetero-patriarchal system embodied by Edmund's gaze, 00:49:36. Netflix, 2020.

Fig. 9 and 10 | Dani's fear of a spectral presence is contrasted with Jamie's grief over its absence, 00:35:33; 00:39:46. "The Way It Came"; "The Beast in the Jungle" (*The Haunting of Bly Manor*). Netflix, 2020.

gardener would gaze into reflections, *hoping* to see [Dani's] face," as the spectre is now a desired presence rather than a source of terror (authors' emphasis, "The Beast in the Jungle," Figs. 9 and 10).

Focusing on neo-Victorian heroines on screen, Primorac has observed a persisting trend in the neo-Victorian genre's sexing up of female characters, contending that the genre's overemphasis on exposing Victorian sexual hypocrisy ultimately compromises its subversive potential (93). Because these texts are often insistent on sexually liberating the Victorians, "the spectacle of the nude or scantily-clad female body draws viewers' attention away from diminished rather than enhanced female agency in these contemporary renditions of female characters" (93). Notably, Flanagan's screen text steers clear of a sensationalist depiction of its heroine and therefore does not weaken its critical stance on the historically dominant institutions. As a contemporary afterlife of James's repressed governess, Dani's liberation is achieved on her own terms; in other words, her liberation from Edmund's gaze and her subsequent relationship with Jamie effects a change in the historical discourse, destabilizing the hetero-patriarchal system without weaponizing the female body or otherwise compromising Dani's agency informed by her marginalized identity.

Unlike Rebecca, whose relationship with Peter does not pose a political disturbance, Dani is granted full agency over her life and ultimately her death. Both Rebecca and Dani commit suicide by drowning in the lake at Bly, and while Rebecca's is orchestrated by Peter's ghost possessing her body, Dani's suicide marks an ultimate act of service for Jamie, protecting her from the malevolent ghost of Viola Lloyd. Whereas Rebecca's death proves futile and a hallmark of Peter's betrayal, Dani's sacrifice offers a cathartic conclusion to her and Jamie's relationship. Bound by the conventions of the Gothic genre, Dani and Jamie's decade-long domestic idyll, eventually fortified by a civil union in 2000, does end in death. However, Dani's suicide is not painted as a tragedy; rather it is framed through the Wordsworthian philosophy about the renewal of life, tying it up to Jamie's own, inherently romanticist worldview expressed in "The Jolly Corner" and centred around the idea that the beauty of a moonflower lies in its mortality: "life refreshes and recycles, and on and on it goes, and that is so much better than that life getting crushed, deep down in the dirt, into a rock that will burn if it's old enough." Jamie's rejection of the finality of death is ultimately embodied in the final shot of the series, which reveals that Dani's ghost never left Jamie's side, despite Jamie's being unaware of her presence (Fig. 11).

PETER QUINT AND NARRATIVE (IM)POSSIBILITY

As Kate Mitchell points out, "Thatcher used the term 'Victorian values' as a measure against which to identify the social ills of her milieu" (48), particularly in relation to ever-growing class tension. In Thatcher's England, therefore, to reinforce Victorian values meant to strengthen the boundaries of the clear-cut social categories of class, race, gender, and sexuality, as well as the way in which these categories overlap. In the *Haunting of Bly Manor*, the tension between these categories is explored through the characters of Peter Quint, who is immediately established as the main antagonist, and Jamie, who is one of the romantic leads.

While *The Turn of the Screw* deliberately refrains from providing Peter Quint with motivation for tormenting the governess, sparking a debate on whether his ghost really *is* there, as opposed to being a reflection of the governess's deteriorating mental state, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* gives Peter strong motivation which is revealed in "The Two Faces, Part Two." The episode endeavours to explain the roots of Peter's behaviour, ultimately sourcing it to his frustration about Britain's class division. Read in light of the neo-Victorian genre, the exploration of Peter's past opens up a possibility for Flanagan to construct a working-class revenge narrative in the vein of Waters's *Affinity*, which allows its unscrupulous

Fig. 11 | The final shot of the series reaffirms Jamie's romanticist rejection of the finality of death, 00:49:01. "The Beast in the Jungle" (*The Haunting of Bly Manor*). Netflix, 2020.

working-class deuteragonist to deal a severe blow to the rigid Victorian social structures. Namely, Waters's Selina Dawes and her working-class lover, Ruth Vigers, successfully trick the bourgeois protagonist Margaret Prior into helping Selina escape from Millbank prison, ultimately embezzling her, before fleeing the country. The working-class characters are therefore allowed a happy ending in terms of both cheating the class system and cultivating a lesbian relationship despite the confines of Victorian norms.

In contrast, Peter Quint's plan to embezzle the Wingraves and flee to America is cut short by his being killed by the ghost of Viola Lloyd, and *The Haunting of Bly Manor*'s critical attitude toward the issue at hand is immediately brought into question. Although Peter's preoccupation with class immobility does create narrative anxiety, his being denied a chance to free himself from the shackles of the rigid class system suggests that Peter is ultimately punished precisely for his marginalized status as a working-class man. Jamie serves as Peter's foil but despite her marginal status as a working class woman being furthered by her being a lesbian, she is rewarded with a comfortable life in America with her lover, even though she remains relatively passive in effecting a change in the class discourse.

Moreover, Peter's thoughts on the class system in Britain are not a product of inspection and analysis, but of personal anger and naïve idealism. His thoughts are not focused on dismantling the class system; he simply seeks to move from one rigid class system to another that appears less rigid in his eyes. He describes how in Britain, class is the only thing that matters, while in America, it is only money that is important, and he hopes that with the money embezzled from the Wingraves, he will be able to start a new life on top of the hierarchy. Thus, his story is not one of rebellion, but rather one of upholding the capitalist class system and simply climbing its ladder. His description of the differences between the class systems of Great Britain and America only shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the problem, since his statement only uncovers that in both places, class is the only important thing. The only difference is, most of the wealth in Britain is held by families of aristocratic origins, while in America, it is held by capitalists who do not descend from noblemen. However, both countries are ruled by capital and are defined by the same capitalist–proletarian class division present in all capitalist countries. Therefore, Peter remains within the confines of the class system that he seems to detest, and he inadvertently upholds its primary value: the acquisition of capital.

By intertwining sexuality with guilt and trauma, Flanagan evokes the standard Gothic trope in which the return to the repressed is conveyed by means of spectrality.

Peter's naivety is essentially a blind belief in the American dream, the belief that any person may achieve a prosperous life and attain wealth in America regardless of their background, race, creed, or nationality. In Peter's eyes, unlike Britain, America is a place of progress. This belief on Peter's part is quite problematic, both narratively and politically, as the series falls short in critically engaging with American ideology and

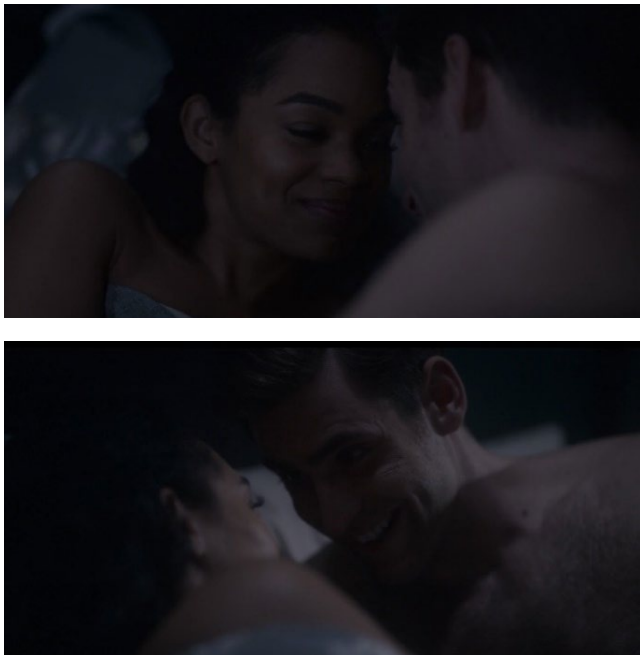

Fig. 12 and 13 | Peter muses about his and Rebecca's carefree future in America, revealing his blind faith in the American Dream, 00:35:41. "The Altar of the Dead" (*The Haunting of Bly Manor*). Netflix, 2020.

history. While *The Haunting of Bly Manor* does engage critically with British past in a manner that is typical of neo-Victorian fiction, it does so from a markedly American perspective and with an uncritical representation of Reaganite America. Peter's idealist idea of America positions the country as a place of progress, whereas rural Britain is shown to still retain a similar social structure that it had in the 17th century when Bly was owned by Lord Willoughby. The place is still owned by a lord, albeit one who evades it due to trauma, and much like in the early modern period, there is a clear distinction between him and his inferiors. This rigid distinction is well exemplified when Peter tells Hannah (T'Nia Miller) that "there's *them* and then there's *us*" ("The Altar of the Dead," authors' emphasis).

Such representation of the British-American relationship appears to strengthen and uphold the position of America as the new global superpower, which looks at Britain as a waning imperialist power that is stuck in the past and cannot step into the contemporary era. *The Haunting of Bly Manor*'s framing of the British-American relationship in this way is what distinguishes the series from the neo-Victorian narratives that engage critically both with the British past but also with the rise of America as a new dominant power. A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, for instance, also criticizes the American drive for acquisition of capital through the heavily stereotypical characterisation of the prestigious literary scholar Mortimer Cropper, who obsessively collects memorabilia despite having no passion for the subject of his study.

Neo-Victorian fiction is deeply marked with an engagement with Thatcherism, whose American counterpart was Reaganism. Much like Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan was a conservative leader whose economic goals sought to decrease government spending and liberalize the market as much as possible. This would allow *The Haunting of Bly Manor* to encompass both systems and create a holistic neo-Victorian critique of both Britain and America; however, the only engagement with America is filtered through Peter's subjective, overwhelmingly positive view of the country. Therefore, the only narrative possibility for Peter is a rags-to-riches story, as is often the case with working-class characters who either seek to climb the social ladder, are represented as antagonists, or in Peter's case, both. The same narrative possibility is given to Dani and Jamie, who rise from working-class to petite-bourgeoisie. However, unlike Peter's narrative, theirs is completed in this manner since their stories are motivated mainly by sexuality and not class. Class struggle cannot be incorporated into capitalist ideology, which is probably the reason why Peter is given no chance at redemption, while Dani and Jamie's struggle, especially when it is stripped of all its revolutionary potential, can. As a result, Dani and Jamie are allowed to enjoy a somewhat happy ending as long as they stay within the confines of the capitalist class system and ideology.

Upon relocating to Vermont, Dani and Jamie start a successful flower arranging business and are shown to be living blissfully as the sequence eerily recalls Peter's musings about his and Rebecca's carefree future in America only moments before he is killed: "We're getting out of here. The things we're gonna be, you and I, in America… A lord and his lady. No. A queen and her stable boy" ("The Altar of the Dead," Figs. 12 and 13).

Although Peter and Jamie come from virtually the same background—the characters are strongly implied to have endured child abuse, and both have juvenile records, with the criminal behaviour overtly linked to their traumatic childhoods—Jamie's antagonism toward the class system is only touched upon and, as previously mentioned, she remains passive in effecting change but is nonetheless allowed sympathy. Conversely, Peter is vilified for being a product of the same corrupt system that ultimately kills him in his attempts to prosper within it.

As the titles of the two episodes centred on him and his relationship with Rebecca suggest, Peter is extremely cunning despite his outwardly charming persona. Accordingly, upon his introduction, his face is first seen in the reflection of a tailor's shop window in Kensington as he pictures himself in an expensive suit, before he is seen shopping for luxurious whiskey and driving away in a Rolls (Fig. 14).

The sequence is framed as Peter's fantasy and his self-deception translates onto the viewers as they are led to believe that Peter is indeed a rich man. However, both Peter and the viewers are soon disillusioned as it is revealed he was only running errands for his boss, Lord Wingrave. Metaphorically, class immobility in Thatcher's England is conveyed by means of the gravity well which surrounds the manor. After Viola's ghost has drowned him, Peter, too, returns as a ghost but soon learns that he is confined to the grounds of Bly. Once "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes" reveals that Viola's spite for

Fig. 14 | Peter 'tries on' an expensive suit in "The Two Faces, Part One" (*The Haunting of Bly Manor*), 00:01:27. Netflix, 2020.

her husband and sister is responsible for the gravity well which traps the ghosts of all who die on the premises, it becomes evident that Peter's chance at crossing the class boundary is denied him by those at the very top of the hierarchy. When even the murderous Viola, the former lady of the manor, is given a lengthy backstory with the intention of painting her as a tragic figure, Peter remains the only character whose personal tragedy is insufficient to redeem his actions in the eyes of the viewers, despite the narrative's insistence that Peter's antagonism is a product of the British class system rather than his being inherently evil.

Peter is notably absent from the story after the events at Bly. Once the curse of Bly has been broken and the ghosts released, Peter's fate is deliberately left unknown as the narrative focus shifts entirely to Dani and Jamie's life in America. Such conclusion, or lack thereof, to Peter's narrative allows Flanagan to expose, and ultimately reaffirm, the historical injustices of the Victorian era that continue to plague Britain in the late twentieth century. However, given *The Haunting of Bly Manor*'s mishandling of Peter's motivation for his villainy, especially in relation to the other marginalized characters, Peter's defiance of the class system is essentially reduced to his being the collateral damage of a wealthy woman's ghost.

CONCLUSION

The central question that permeates the majority of discussions within the field of neo-Victorian studies has been succinctly articulated by Kate Mitchell: "can [the neo-Victorian novels] recreate the past in a meaningful way or are they playing nineteenth century dress-ups?" (3). Undoubtedly so, Mitchell's claim extends to neo-Victorian screen texts as well, despite the fact that neo-Victorianism on screen occupies a marginal position within the field (Primorac, *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* 2). Given the dual approach to the past within the neo-Victorian genre, this essay has explored the ways in which Mike Flanagan's *The Haunting of Bly Manor* revises the work of Henry James. Flanagan transposes James's narrative into the 1980s, assigning the characters ex-centric identities. As a result, the series expounds political themes, raising questions about class, gender, and sexuality in both Victorian and Thatcher's England, as well as in Reagan's America.

While *The Haunting of Bly Manor* does engage critically with British past in a manner that is typical of neo-Victorian fiction, it does so from a markedly American perspective and with an uncritical representation of Reaganite America.

Ultimately, Flanagan heavily relies on the neo-Victorian practice of rendering visible those whose histories are elided by the official version; he writes against the Victorian tradition by allowing Dani and Jamie's lesbian relationship to take up the central position of the narrative, therefore utilizing the subversive properties of the genre. Upon her introduction, Dani is a closeted lesbian whose guilt and fear manifest in the form of her fiancé's ghost. Edmund appears behind her in reflective surfaces, invoking Simon Joyce's idea about looking forward in order to make sense of the past. The story thus acquires metafictional properties as it points toward the haunting presence of the Victorian past in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. In an attempt at renegotiating the official history, Flanagan allows Dani and Jamie's relationship

Fig. 15 and 16 | Aging Jamie seeks Dani's face in the water in The Haunting of Bly Manor's opening scene..., 00:02:01; 00:02:03. "The Great Good Place" (*The Haunting of Bly Manor*). Netflix, 2020.

Fig. 17 and 18 | ...and again in the closing scene of the series, however, this time with her identity known to the viewers, 00:47:31; 00:47:37. "The Beast in the Jungle" (*The Haunting of Bly Manor*). Netflix, 2020.

to prevail over its heteronormative counterpart, with Dani's reaffirming of her transgressive desire by burning Edmund's glasses and therefore freeing herself from the socio-political constraints his gaze represents.

The narrative thread focusing on Peter Quint and class conflict, however, proves problematic, consequently blunting the criticism of the state of the nation. Although it acknowledges the rigidity of the British class system by employing the metaphor of the gravity well, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* fails to engage in a constructive dialogue with class discourse; if anything it further complicates the matter by its portrayal of the character who is most deeply rooted in being working-class as a murderer and whose antagonism is also fuelled by his blind faith in the American Dream. Peter Quint is demonised, marginalised, and eventually omitted from the narrative, which goes to show that *The Haunting of Bly Manor* operates within the confines of bourgeois fiction and ideology, preventing it from fully realizing the potential of the neo-Victorian tropes it employs. On the other hand, Viola Lloyd, whose vengeful ghost ruthlessly drowns everybody who crosses her path during her nightly roaming of the manor, but whose actions are ostensibly rooted in a tragic family history, is a wealthy landlady. Unlike Dani and Jamie, whose relationship withstands and successfully undermines the dominant order, Peter's ambition to climb the social ladder is eroded by his being killed by Viola, his ghost remaining trapped within her gravity well.

Therefore, as a neo-Victorian screen text, *The Haunting of Bly Manor* readily employs the genre's central metaphor of the mirror as a window to the (distorted) past, while the conventions of the ghost story genre prove as useful a tool in delineating the social mores of contemporary society as they were in the Victorian era. Flanagan's adaptive decision to sexually liberate James's governess demonstrates an overt intention of destabilizing the hetero-patriarchal order, as Dani and Jamie's relationship ultimately subverts the mirror metaphor by having an aging Jamie seek Dani's ghost in the reflection of her bathtub in a scene that bookends the series (Figs. 15-18).

Conversely, Flanagan's meditation on the British class system, although given a significant amount of attention, does little beyond merely acknowledging the issue as he steers clear of making bold decisions when it comes to the conclusion of Peter's story. ▪

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The Best Things Happen in the Dark

Lighting in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954)

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the use of lighting in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) to illustrate how the creation of suspense is achieved through carefully created shadows. The use of light and dark call attention to different aspects of *Rear Window*'s character psychology, particularly with regard to their outlook on romantic relationships. This essay contends that *Rear Window* (1954) warrants classification as a horror film rather than its typical thriller label due to its depiction of material psychology that is filtered through Hitchcockian suspense. Through mise-en-scene analysis of a specific scene in the first half of the film, careful attention to the use of lighting and deliberately placed shadows reveal the horror concealed under the façade of domesticity and the mundane.

Alfred Hitchcock's 1954 thriller *Rear Window* encapsulates his masterful use of controlling information to create deep-seated suspense in the audience, as the film is a commanding display of slow-building suspense to a heart-pounding finale. Renowned film theorist Robin Wood describes the technical structure of *Rear Window* as a horror film in which the audience sees "everything from the point of view from the central character, who, as clearly defined as he was, remained an everyman with whom we had no trouble identifying [. . .] his discoveries were ours" (*Horror Film* 20). The film utilizes a wide variety of cinematic techniques to inspire a reaction from its spectators, most recognizably through its use of lighting. Light and dark, brightness and shadows have often been used to signify good and evil, however *Rear Window* blurs these conventions, inviting us to question the morality of most characters. *Rear Window*'s timelessness rests within Hitchcock's command of visual storytelling with its creation of suspense using carefully created shadows. The horror of *Rear Window* manifests not in its overt themes of voyeurism and scopophilia, but rather in its presentation of material psychology and isolation in its creation of a macabre atmosphere.

Hitchcockian films are meticulously designed to elicit suspense and terror, but the creation of these feelings is dependent not on the presence of mutilation, gore, or the supernatural but via more human devices. These boundaries between the genres of thriller and horror, however, can be ambiguous. Dennis White argues that

> The force at work in a horror film might be defined as the triggering of our basic fear of the unknown, our fear of being unable to deal with our environment. The most obvious embodiments of this fear are monsters and nightmarish situations beyond our comprehension and control." (8)

The fundamental fear at the heart of *Rear Window* lies in the protagonist's L.B. "Jeff" Jefferies' (James Stewart) helplessness. He believes a man has murdered his wife and dismembered her body. Additionally, the tension between knowing and not knowing the veracity of the crime, witnessed in sporadic

Fig. 1 | Lisa exits the apartment, half lit by a lamp in *Rear Window*, 00:31:07. Paramount Pictures, 1954.

vignettes framed through windows, remains seen only by Jefferies. White proposes that the sensation of fear itself might be self-rewarding—the act of watching a display of horror provides us with a thrill regardless of the resolution, and we enjoy the film for this reason. *Rear Window* displays the horror concealed under the façade of domesticity and the mundane, and thus reveals the malleability of the genre itself, capable of encapsulating different experiences of fear, both somatic and psychological.

The unease surrounding the nature of the murder in *Rear Window* lies in how much is essentially left in shadows. Specifically, Hitchcock utilizes low-key lighting that presents most of the background as dark, only leaving a portion of the actors visible, rendering them mysterious and suspicious. Looking through the windows of Jefferies's neighbours requires a necessary amount of light to be certain of what actions occur and how. When the rooms are dark or the curtains are drawn, either viewers can barely make out what happens, or they have no idea at all. The number of apparent light sources are limited throughout the film, given the film's setting. Since the story takes place almost entirely indoors, light comes from the lamps around Jefferies's apartment or from the one window in his apartment from which the rest of the film's action is viewed. Furthermore, the lighting outside of Jefferies's apartment comes from within the other apartments or from the use of daylight.

Jefferies spends his days intensely watching the neighbours of his Greenwich Village apartment block while recuperating from a broken leg. Hitchcock presents a cynical outlook of romantic relationships through the interaction of Jefferies's neighbours as framed by light, reflecting the various stages of romance. For example, the Newlyweds (Havis Davenport and Rand Harper) enjoy the honeymoon phase of their relationship behind closed blinds. Indeed, each apartment window reflects different relationship possibilities, including the absence of a relationship in the case of his neighbour Miss Lonelyhearts (Judith Evelyn). Her lovelorn situation contrasts with Jefferies's apparent fear of commitment. This contrast is most evident in the light framing the exchange between Jefferies and his girlfriend Lisa Fremont (Grace Kelly) near the beginning of the film. As Lisa leaves his apartment, she is covered in shadows, the only light making her visible coming from a lamp (Fig. 1). This shot places Lisa in a negative light, literally, as if she were a negative image on a slide viewer, and it symbolizes the conflicting feelings Jefferies has about the state of matrimony, as embodied by Lisa. On one hand, he frames Lisa as the perfect girlfriend—beautiful, intelligent, wealthy—but too perfect, he insists, for marriage. Meanwhile, Lisa remains strong in her position that love will find a way to overcome their differences in lifestyle. She wants to get Jeff into a more structured lifestyle, one that involves his being in one place with regular work—in short, marriage. Her optimism and hope in the relationship are seen in even her frustrated exit (Fig. 1) where she remains half lit—not realizing that this mindset may scare him off.

As Jefferies reflects on Lisa's intentions, he turns towards the window, again only illuminated by a singular lamp. From this light source, the contours of Jefferies's regret resonate with the audience. His isolation from the outside world, limited by his broken leg and his ability to connect within his relationship, hits close to home for viewers, especially amid the COVID-19

Fig. 2 | A view of the neighbouring building, lit from within, in *Rear Window*, 00:31:40. Paramount Pictures, 1954.

Fig. 3 | Jeff awakes in darkness in *Rear Window*, 00:33:27. Paramount Pictures, 1954.

pandemic. He turns to the window to glance outside, not only in an attempt to observe but also to connect. The light of a streetlamp illuminates a car passing on the street below. The camera pans to the right, revealing an exterior view of sparsely lit apartment windows (Fig. 2).

The windows draw our attention so that we, like the unseen residents of each apartment, are limited by the frame of the window and camera through which we gaze. The contrast of lit and darkened windows highlights the spectrum of possibilities for Jefferies, ranging from a life of loneliness to one that would forgo his active lifestyle as a photojournalist.

In the scene after Lisa leaves the apartment, Jefferies turns to the window to observe the street below. The camera shifts to focus on the neighbouring block of apartments. As the camera scans a floor of windows, it suddenly pans in response to an unseen woman's scream. We hear shattering glass and a woman yelling "Don't!," but Jefferies is unable to pinpoint from which window and apartment the noises have come, his confusion and curiosity symbolized in his half-lit visage. He drifts to sleep, the camera fading to black until he wakes up to the same lull of car traffic down below (Fig. 3).

Jefferies's intuition and, by extension, our intuition, is heightened precisely because of the lack of visual evidence. The lighting makes the scene's specific circumstances unclear. We do not immediately see clearly, and what we do see shortly after is extremely worrisome. The absence of sufficient lighting and visibility creates what Christopher Morris contends is a subjective experience of suspense. This subjective tension, in which Hitchcock filters the force of suspense through the characters' points-of-view, creates a distinct restrictiveness in the narrative, suppresses the most important details, and leaves us with only one perspective (7). With intentionally limited lighting, perspective adds to both suspense and Hitchcock's ingenuity.

This scene makes particular use of light—ranging from grey to black—as a literary device, demonstrating how within the shadow, characters engage in "the indulging of morbid curiosity and the consequences of that indulgence" (Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* 100). As Jefferies hides in shadows and low light, covertly watching his neighbours, an activity approved of by both Lisa and his nurse (Thelma Ritter), it raises doubts about whether he is merely an observer in the wrong place at the wrong time or whether he will simply ignore what he encounters. Other characters also utilize this duality of light and darkness. Thorwald (Raymond Burr), the murderer, is typically seen in a darkened apartment with only the glow of a cigarette to reveal his whereabouts, consequently relatively hidden and safe. For example, after killing his wife (Irene Winston), Thorwald sits in his pitch-black apartment smoking a cigar. Later, he disposes of his wife's body during the darkest point of the night. In addition, numerous characters turn off lights when they need to be hidden, such as the couple sleeping on the fire escape. Of course, it is ultimately light, in the form of a camera flash, that Jefferies uses as a weapon at the film's climax, effectively blinding Thorwald into submission as Hitchcock skillfully cuts short, repetitious shots and utilizes both low-key and high-contrast lighting to manipulate his audience's fears.

Hitchcock's framing through lighting in *Rear Window* turns the notion and responsibility of viewing and knowing towards the audience, reflecting our own desires for something potentially dangerous. As audience members, we are likely to project a piece of ourselves into the narrative, contributing to an inner dialogue concerning both ourselves and our fears. ▪

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The Ambiguity or Impossibility of Separation

Dacre Stoker on Bram Stoker and *Dracula*

BY PAUL RISKER
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This year marks the 125th anniversary of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, first published in May of 1897. It has reached beyond the literary concept of the vampire to influence the rendition of this creature of the night onscreen, beginning with Universal's *Dracula* (1931), directed by Tod Browning and starring Bela Lugosi. Since then, Stoker's novel has been a staple of horror cinema, adapted or reimagined to varying degrees of success.

Dacre Stoker, the great-grand-nephew of the author, was raised in Montreal, Canada. He only became aware of the family connection during his college years when, writing a paper on *Dracula*, he read Raymond T. McNally and Radu Florescu's *In Search of Dracula* (1972). It was this moment that began his investigation into the family connection, the first, he says, by this strand of the family's lineage. Since his discovery, he has written *Dracula the Un-dead* (2009), a sequel with Ian Holt, as well as the prequel *Dracul* (2018) with J.D Barker, and has also edited with Dr. Elizabeth Miller, *The Lost Journal of Bram Stoker: The Dublin Years* (2012). In April of this year, *Stoker on Stoker: Dracula Revealed* was published by Telos Publishing, bringing together notes and observations on the development of *Dracula*.

In conversation with *MSJ*, Dacre Stoker discusses his distant relative's seminal Gothic novel, and how the work and its author are revealing mirrors of one another.

PR: The separation of the artist and their work is an often-discussed idea. To begin, who was the man behind the novel—who was Bram Stoker?

DS: Bram Stoker left us no autobiography. He did leave us a journal that I discovered and published, and that has been helpful to me to characterise and to understand him. It's a journal he kept while he was in university, when he first started working for Henry Irving [stage actor and theatre manager of The Lyceum Theatre].

[…] In the first seven years of his life he was sickly, with an undisclosed illness. He was confined to the home, and he states in the book he wrote about Henry Irving, a little bit about himself. One of those things was, "I never knew what it was like to stand upright. I had a very unusual childhood for the first seven years of my life."

I believe at that time he developed a dark sense of imagination because he was told stories by his mother and nanny—Irish folklore, mythology, and superstitions. She [his mother] also told him a story we've a record of, the horrifying, real life account of Charlotte Stoker growing up in Sligo, Western Ireland during the 1832 cholera epidemic. Luckily, she survived as did her family, otherwise Bram and none of us would be here.

This was also a story that involved misdiagnosis and premature burial. Told to a young boy who had a debilitating illness himself, I'm sure it resonated with him. I also think he was blood-let during this time because it was a common practice. He also had an uncle who was well known as a bloodletter, and he also wrote a treatise on bloodletting. I read it and it's horrifying when you think even young children were blood-let with leeches until the point where they passed out. Then the wounds were covered up and they were fed a mixture of oil and claret.

Fig. 1 | Bram Stoker, 1906.

Funnily enough, there's a little piece of blood-letting in *Dracula* that could easily have emanated from Bram's personal experiences. When Jonathan Harker finds the Count in his coffin, he looks like a bloated leech after a full meal.

Here's a young boy with a difficult childhood and a dark sense of imagination, who luckily recovers from this to be a big, strapping young man. He passes his entrance exams to Trinity, and while he was there he discovered the writings of Walt Whitman.

He had a mentor professor, Edward Dowden, who was an expert in the occult, and he was also the head of the philosophical society for a term. So this was an area where Bram began to flex his intellectual muscles. He also became interested in spiritualism, mesmerism and the occult, which were going on at the time.

People were interested in what else was happening in the world, even though they're being fed from religion—be a good man on earth, follow the doctrine, go to church, and everything will be fine in the afterlife. People were looking for more answers. There were people investigating things behind closed doors, like The Hellfire Club and The Order of the Golden Dog. Funnily enough, later on when he was in London, Bram became a member of The Freemasons.

There were people thinking there's more as is above, as is below, of what is beyond the normal thinking, and Bram was that type of a person himself. We see some of that reflected in his writings. Later in his life, while in Scotland, he became involved and interested in second sight. As a man he was interested in the world around him, and he wasn't someone to follow the party line—he was looking at what else there was.

PR: By understanding the man, is it possible to more fully understand the novel?

DS: The more I understand Bram Stoker, the more I understand the things that he wrote. For instance, when I discovered the type script for *Dracula* in Seattle, Washington, which is owned by the Paul Allen Estate, I discovered the first 101 pages were missing. The story, "Dracula's Guest" (1914) was part of this story and it has a very Jonathan Harker like character, although his name isn't mentioned. It's the story of a young solicitor heading off to Transylvania and he stops in Munich where he has a strange incident.

It's so much like Bram Stoker going to Munich and Nuremberg with Henry Irving. So he wrote his stories loosely based on things he did. In Nuremberg, for instance, they went there to look at how to depict the castles in the play *Faust*, on stage at the Lyceum. Stoker some years later then writes the short story, "The Squaw" (1893), [featuring an old tower in Nuremberg], which I've turned into a graphic novel called *The Virgin's Embrace* (2021).

To make matters more interesting, Bram had met Buffalo Bill Cody, the famous cowboy showman while he was in America. He and Irving helped him come over to Scotland and London to do his Wild West show. Cody was the perfect model for three characters that Bram wrote, where he needed an American frontiersman: Quincey Morris in *Dracula*, Elias Hutchinson in "The Squaw," and Grizzly Dick in *The Shoulder of Shasta* (1895), are all derivations of Buffalo Bill Cody.

Bram Stoker is that solicitor Jonathan Harker in *Dracula*, or parts of him are—that inquisitive man who goes off and brings the legal papers for the count to consummate the land transactions for his homes in London. But it's more than that. It's Bram Stoker, the inspector of clerks and petty sessions travelling around Ireland in a train and a carriage, going to places where he's not particularly welcome, or are somewhat foreign to him, and having to make sure all the legalities are correct in the zone that he goes.

There are also experiences that Bram had with the travelling group of the Lyceum actors. He wrote a book called *Snowbound* (1908) because they really did get stuck in a train in the Sierra Nevada mountains in California, when there was too much snow for the train to go through the pass.

Whitby [England] was another perfect example. He found kinship with the guys in the coastguard, who told him about a ship, *The Dmitry*. Bram actually got the details of wrecks off Whitby into his notes from the coastguard man, Mr Petherick. His details of the wreck of *The Dmitry* were turned into the wreck of the *Demeter* that comes over from Varna with the count and his boxes of dirt and lands in Whitby. Bram originally had him landing in Dover, but he was so taken by Whitby and these accounts of this ship.

There is one other thing that's a little more esoteric. There is a quote in *Dracula*, which I believe if you and I were sitting here with Bram by our sides and he said, "What is the meaning of this story?" I think he would say to us, "There are mysteries that men can only guess at, which age-by-age they may solve only in part." This is the crux of the issue for people at the end of the century. In Victorian England, they're trying to make sense of these new mysteries that scientific processes were trying to explain.

Charles Darwin had just recently, in 1859, published *The Origin of Species*. That was cutting edge science and it's still controversial. Bram is introducing a supernatural character from Transylvania, which Londoners were somewhat aware of. They were aware of these treatises about vampire scares and contagious diseases, that people thought were vampires, because that's how they understood it. They could make rationale sense of a superstition, whereas they had no idea about germ theory and so on. Bram was unleashing onto his readers the real fears he understood they had, but he packaged them in a way that was believable and understandable, even though it was a fantastical story. That is Bram Stoker inserting himself into how to tell a great story.

PR: Picking up on your point about the influence of the spatial, could you discuss in more detail the influence on Bram Stoker's creative choices and approach to storytelling?

DS: He was brought up just outside of Dublin and moved to a number of places throughout the city. He had to go to places

to write, and we found out that he went to a little town, south of Dublin, called Greystones. The first piece of writing we've ever found, that has been dated by Bram in his journal, was called "Night Fishing." He would just get out of the hustle and bustle of Dublin, away from the castle and Trinity College. I think that place [Greystones] was stimulating to him because it was quiet, but as he sat on his porch, he could also see the intricacies of these men with their lanterns, fishing at night, and all the things they had to do with the nets. It was mysterious and interesting.

Bram was influenced by the sea in many of his novels. In *Dracula*, there's the mystery as to what really happened on the *Demeter*. The count has control of the weather, of the fog and the wind. He basically takes over the ship with his mastery of the dark arts. Whitby provided this to Bram with his interest of the ocean.

He wrote another book called *The Mystery of the Sea* (1902). Along with his notes from Whitby, he wrote the story in Cruden Bay, Scotland, where there was a rock reef a couple of hundred meters offshore. At high tide you don't see much, other than the waves breaking over some rocks, but at low tide you see the rugged rocks. Bram also knew from the history books and the accounts of the coastguard that there were hundreds of people who had died a tragic death on these rocks, and the souls that were not at rest were littering the seabed with their bones.

Bram would pick up on local superstition and lore. The fog and the sea mist were actually the spirits of the dead—reaching out for lives to bring down, so their souls could be put to rest.

So was Bram influenced by space and the things around him? Absolutely, and just as importantly he went to the London library and picked up books, such as *The Baedeker Guide* [German travel guides]. He read at least four books by people that had been to Transylvania, or what is now Romania. Even though he'd never been to Transylvania, Bram had to get the sense of what the countryside and the mountains were like, how the people spoke that lived there, the different ethnic cultures, the food and the clothing. He got it from these books and he wrote as if he were there.

He chose a part of the world that had a tremendous amount of interesting history, which he utilised in the horrific backstory of Vlad Dracula, or Count Dracula. But Bram also understood this area was rich as a melting pot of different cultures and religions, that created a diverse and complex series of superstitions that he was looking for, to create a fertile area for a vampire to be a believable creature.

So space absolutely, and how did Bram get there? Some say he was there in person, others say he had to study on maps. We found in The Rosenbach museum and library [in Philadelphia], the map that had the coordinates to his fictional Castle Dracula on top of a volcanic mountain. Why we know that's important is that it's definitive in the typescript I looked at, that Bram had originally planned a volcanic eruption at the end of the story.

That's Bram Stoker speaking to us, telling us, "I'm so detail orientated, if I'm going to have a volcanic eruption at the end of my story, by golly, this castle will be on an old volcano." Sure enough, these map coordinates designate this area as a volcanic region. So that tells me the detail-orientated side of Bram is meshed perfectly with the creative side. He puts location and story together on an even keel, but both are an important facet that were put together nicely to make his story so special.

PR: It seems fitting to consider *Dracula*, the novel, as part of a larger story, both in the context of the relationship of its author, but also of the genre to which it belongs.

DS: You've got to look at two parts of it. One is what existed before Bram wrote *Dracula*—what did he know and what was his process? Based on his notes, we know it was a seven-year process. We know there was a story by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu called *Carmilla* (1892), and we know James Malcolm Rymer wrote *Varney the Vampire* (1845), and John Polidori wrote *The Vampyre* (1819) based on a holiday he had as the doctor to Lord Byron and Mary Shelley on the shores of Lake Geneva.

Bram didn't invent the vampire in fiction, but what he did do was to capitalise on stories that already existed, but also as I mentioned earlier, vampire treatises and scares during the Middle Ages. […] You have to look at this whole process, of where was Bram in his mindset, where was he physically when he was writing this because that's a big part of it.

Seven years is a long time from start to finish. We know he wasn't working on it consistently because he was helping run a theatre, and some of the interesting things about that are where does he go, and what influences him while he's travelling around America for instance?

One of the cool things we find is that he had a newspaper clipping from a newspaper called *The New York World*. It was dated 1896, and so we know it was while he was writing the novel. It mentions the New England vampire scare—a contemporary incident that was a result of a tuberculosis outbreak. There were at least fifty state exhumations of bodies from the grave to perform these rituals that were hauled over from superstitions back in the medieval days.

He cuts it out and brings it with him, and it's part of his *Dracula* notes now. Why we know that it made such an impression is because he utilised a reference that Charles Darwin was quoted on in this article, when he discovered vampire bats in South America. He [Darwin] said, "One of my servants found these bats coming out of the trees and drinking blood from our cattle." Bram Stoker used that term almost word-for-word in *Dracula*, when Van Helsing is trying to explain to the band of heroes what's happening with the vampire taking blood from Lucy. Quincey Morris says, "When I was in South America, these bats came out of the trees and one drank so much blood from my favourite mare, I had to put her down." That's contemporary stuff, and then we have to look at the greater story after the book is published.

Fig. 2 | Bran Castle. Photo by Dacre Stoker.

Fig. 3 | Photo of Slains Castle, courtesy of Paul Clashan in Cruden Bay, Scotland.

Fig. 4 | Postcard of Whitby Abbey from the Reliable Series.

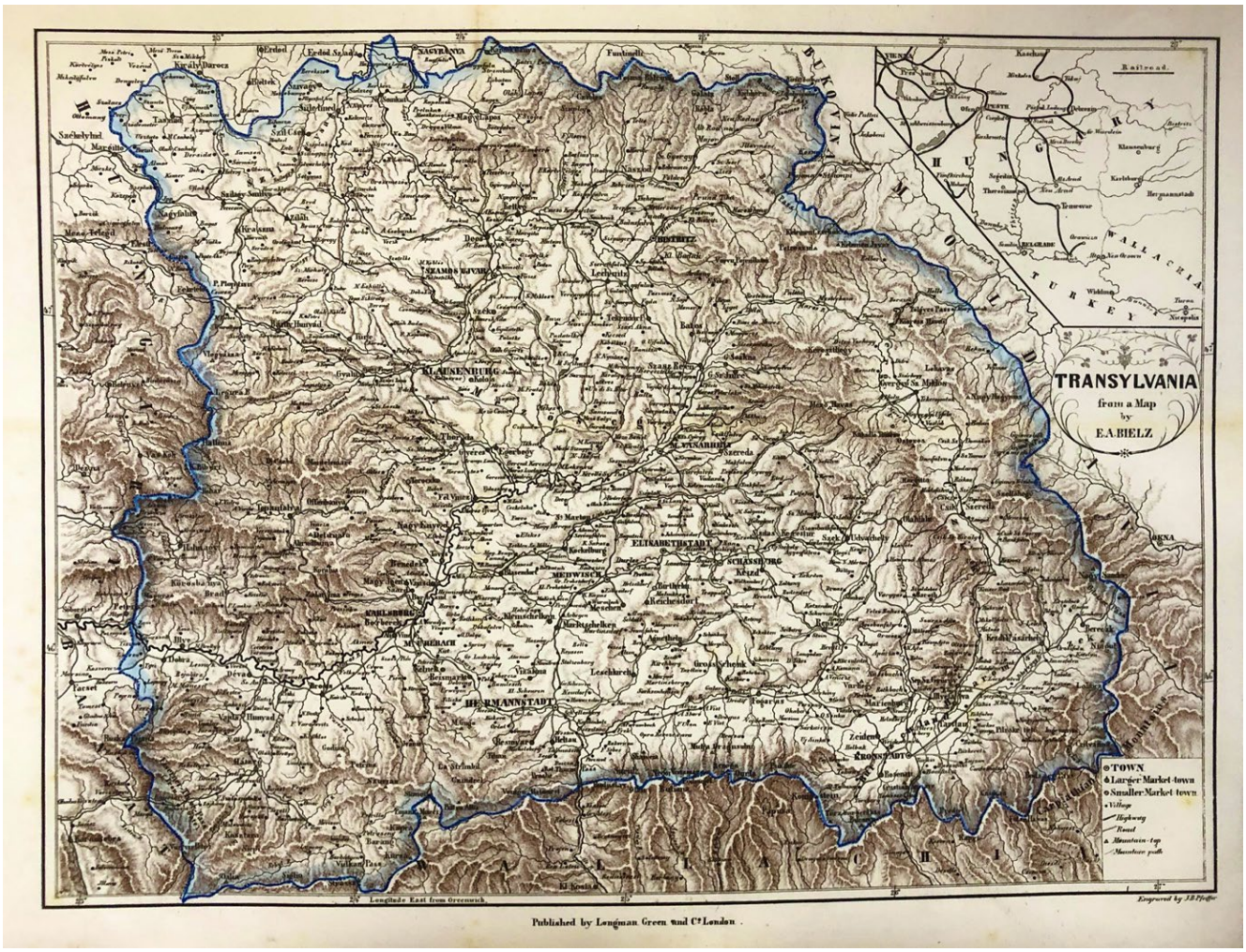

Fig. 5 | Map of Transylvania from the back of *Transylvania: Its Products and Its People* by Charles Boner, 1865.

In some places, *Dracula* is met with mixed reviews because it was so sensational and horrifying—it was almost too much for some of the sophisticated readers to take. It was so fantastical that people couldn't believe that conservative Bram Stoker, the manager of the Lyceum Theatre, could write such a thing. But all in all, researchers, and one in particular, John Edgar Browning, a professor at Savannah College of Art and Design, found that there were hundreds of reviews, and the vast majority were glowing. Yes, there were a few that were horrified, but most of them were glowing towards Bram.

The sad thing was, Bram the theatre manager knew he needed to protect the dramatic rights of the story for the future. He knew what was coming and I think he had an idea this story could go on stage. He had a stage reading six days before the book was published. He followed the rules from the Lord Chamberlain's Office and protected the dramatic rights for the story, but he dies without seeing it go on stage.

His widow, twelve years after his death in 1912, makes a deal with Irish playwright Hamilton Deane. They get the play going on stage in England, and John Balderston from America gets involved. They combine forces and have the play on stage in New York and it travels across America. It became very popular and in 1931 the three sell the film rights to the stage play to Universal, and that becomes the movie with Bela Lugosi, directed by Tod Browning.

From humble beginnings of those early vampire stories, Bram packaging *Dracula* and making it feel like a real story based on a real person, Vlad the Impaler, it becomes this enormous franchise that I don't think Bram would ever have imagined. He played a small role, but a very important role at that. ▪

VISUAL ESSAY

THE INTRUDER

BY STEPHEN BROOMER
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In 1928, James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber adapted *The Fall of the House of Usher* into a short amateur film, translating Poe's classic gothic tale of incest, catalepsy, and an ossifying bloodline into a form that was distinctively abstract and modern. They took broad poetic license with Poe's text, maintaining the author's central metaphor, that the crumbling and ruinous estate of the Ushers was symbolic of the end of their legacy. Watson and Webber's approach allows for a refreshing lack of obedience to the written word and frees up the story to assume a dynamic, interior dimension, which lends it the texture of a nightmare. The most significant departure that the filmmakers have taken in their staging of this story is to transform the visitor, who in Poe's text is the narrator and central witness, into a mystical, antagonistic presence. In Poe's text, the visitor's voice is a shelter for the reader, a station of sanity in a fable of desolation and madness; the visitor first sets the tone of Poe's text by describing the looming manse as melancholy, a source of "insufferable gloom." In the 1928 adaptation, this visitor, played by co-director Melville Webber, is an ignoble trickster whose first appearance coincides with Madeleine Usher's illness and death. He is an interloper, but he is also an extension of the spooky, magical atmosphere that preexists him in this space, implied by canted angles, limitless rooms, and disembodied hands. His face, painted in the style of the Frescoes of Tavant, suggests both the distance of the Romanesque and the contemporaneous vanguard of German Expressionism. This visitor is an elastic presence, and at the height of Roderick Usher's oneiric trance, his face vanishes, and he becomes simply a top hat and a pair of gloved hands. In the tale of Usher, the visitor is a witness; in this film, he is a conductor of the weird terrors that emerge from the pitiless depths of the house. Like Dr. Caligari, this figure embodies opposites: much as Caligari was both the benevolent doctor and the evil medicine show barker, the visitor is both a passing traveller—trapped by circumstance—and a menacing catalyst. In the closing moments of the film, he slips away, into the night, fleeing the crumbling house, his top hat silhouetted by the light of the moon. In Watson and Webber's version, none but the moon bear witness. ▪

A video essay companion to this feature can be found in the online edition of MSJ 7.2 at: https://vimeo.com/759537588/f036f62354

Image from *The Fall of the House of Usher*, directed by James Sibley Watson Jr. and Melville Webber, James Sibley Watson Jr. and Melville Webber Studio, 1928.

The Thing at Forty

BY ZAK WATSON
Missouri Southern State University

On June 25, 1982, John Carpenter's *The Thing* opened to critical censure and underwhelming ticket sales, the latter driven partly by the competition (*E. T. the Extra-Terrestrial* had opened just two weeks before and *Blade Runner* shared its release date) and the former driven primarily by Rob Bottin's gory special make-up effects. In the ensuing years, it has been precisely those practical effects—which repulsed critics and overwhelmed the characters, some argued—combined with the traumas they aim to represent that continue to bring audiences back for more.

Carpenter's film is a remake of the Howard Hawks-produced, Christian Nyby-directed *The Thing from Another World* (1951), and like it, is based on John W. Campbell's 1938 novella *Who Goes There?* Since its 1982 release, *The Thing* has been remade and critically rehabilitated as a 1991 Dark Horse comic book series; as a 2002 video game sequel produced by Konami and Vivendi Universal Games; and as a 2011 film prequel of the same name, directed by Matthijs van Heijningen Jr. It seems that we cannot stop retelling this story.

Since its early critical and box-office failures, *The Thing* has gone on to be recognized as a horror classic, and Carpenter himself has said it may be his favourite among his films ("John Carpenter"). The film's story is straightforward: a Norwegian research team working in the Antarctic excavates an alien being from the ice. After destroying their camp and killing all but two of the Norwegians, the shape-shifting alien escapes as a malamute and finds its next victims in a nearby American research station's twelve inhabitants. Tension builds slowly as the audience and the men realize that the dog can perfectly imitate any creature it infects. As paranoia drives the station workers to hysteria, no one is sure who is human and who is alien in the series of huts that comprise the station. In the first on-screen infection, the juxtaposition of the malamute with the human shadow indicates that someone will be infected, but the audience cannot know who. Viewers are invited to share the camp's uncertainty and fear (Fig. 1). The second half of the film builds to an unnerving and ambiguous conclusion that sees just two of the men—if both are indeed still human—left alive.

The acting is strong, with stars Kurt Russell (scotch-drinking chopper pilot MacReady), Wilford Brimley (senior biologist Dr. Blair), and Keith David (station mechanic Childs) all turning in fine performances. The one-location setting, the small all-male cast, and the muted colours of the sets (coldly dominated by Antarctic blue-white and institutional concrete grey, broken by the red, orange, and pink of the alien emergency) saturate the atmosphere with tension. The Ennio Morricone soundtrack (tastefully overlaid with Carpenter's own synths) traces the film's energy with a building pulse, and Carpenter's direction paces the film so that the blood test scene, near the conclusion, is still shocking today. The practical effects render gory transformations in the harsh light of the research station in a way that makes most of today's CGI effects look unconvincing.

The Thing marks an important moment in the long dialectic between film as narrative and film as spectacle. But what is it that draws us back to *The Thing* after forty years? Sigmund Freud recognized pathology in the compulsion to repeat: *Wiederholungszwang*, in German. The sufferers of repetition compulsion (*zwang*) are dragged back (*holen*) to live their traumas again (*wieder*), chewing over and over what cannot be assimilated, sifting meaning from trauma, just as we return again to *The Thing*, as much to ask ourselves why we are returning as anything else. Even if the immediate metaphorical and cultural contexts of the film have shifted over forty years (the film's comment on the AIDS crisis, for instance, is less obvious now than it was in 1982), the sheer trauma it exhibits (the cinematic spectacle of the make-up effects) keeps bringing us back.

Fig. 1 | The first human at US Outpost 31 is infected. *The Thing*, 00:15:37. Universal Pictures, 1982.

Fig. 2 | In the final stage of his Thing transformation, Vance Norris's (Charles Hallahan) head grows legs and crawls out of the room. *The Thing*, 01:17:06. Universal Pictures, 1982.

Beyond the signification of plot lies the response of the flesh. In *The Horror Film*, Stephen Prince writes that "The horror film is the equivalent of a cultural nightmare, processing material that is simultaneously attractive and repellent, displayed and obfuscated, desired and repressed" (107). *The Thing* presents the material to be processed (the destruction of identity and bodily limits), but its narrative does not exhaust its libidinal energy, its *jouissance*. Just as we cannot be sure whether Childs is human or alien at the end of the film, the horror of bodily transformation exceeds the formal constraints imposed by the film, and we are pulled back (*holen*) to start the process over (*wieder*). That is the trick of repetition: the "*fort-da*" game—a child's attempt to use language to master trauma—must be repeated, with pleasure (Akhtar and O'Neil 15).

The Thing enacts another kind of return: a return to the "cinema of attractions," a term developed by Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault to describe early non-narrative film. Gunning writes that the cinema of attractions "bases itself on the quality that Léger celebrated: its ability to *show* something" (382). That power to show is opposed to cinema's other great power: the ability to tell a story. Gunning calls the cinema of attraction an exhibitionist cinema, and we can see that reflected in the critical response to *The Thing* (particularly the critics who labeled the film pornography). The theory of film as attraction starts with

> Eisenstein and his attempt to find a new model and mode of analysis for the theater. In his search for the "unit of impression" of theatrical art, the foundation of an analysis which would undermine realistic representation theater, Eisenstein hit upon the term "attraction." An attraction aggressively subjected the spectator to "sensual or psychological impact." According to Eisenstein, theater should consist of a montage of such attractions, creating a relation to the spectator entirely different from his absorption in "illusory [depictions]." (384)

So, on one hand we have narrative: *The Thing* provides viewers meaning, which I identify with the chain of signifiers that hauls us along the path of repetition, the "*fort*" and "*da*" that give Freud's exemplary child control over trauma. On the other hand, we have the encounter that creates sensual or psychological impact by exceeding the capacity of the signifier to represent. For instance, the head crab transformation challenges our understanding of biological category and function and disrupts our habitual plot-like schemes for reading bodies, but it creates a psychological impact on viewers, one registered in the scene by Palmer (David Clennon), who exclaims "You've got to be fucking kidding me" (Fig. 2). The Thing itself is not representable, but the attempt to put it on screen creates that sensual or psychological impact. That impact is where *The Thing* does its work, and its continued impact is the reason we keep repeating it as creators in several media, as viewers of the film, and as commentators on the entire phenomena. Indeed, the review itself is another go at treading the path laid before to glean something that we have missed.

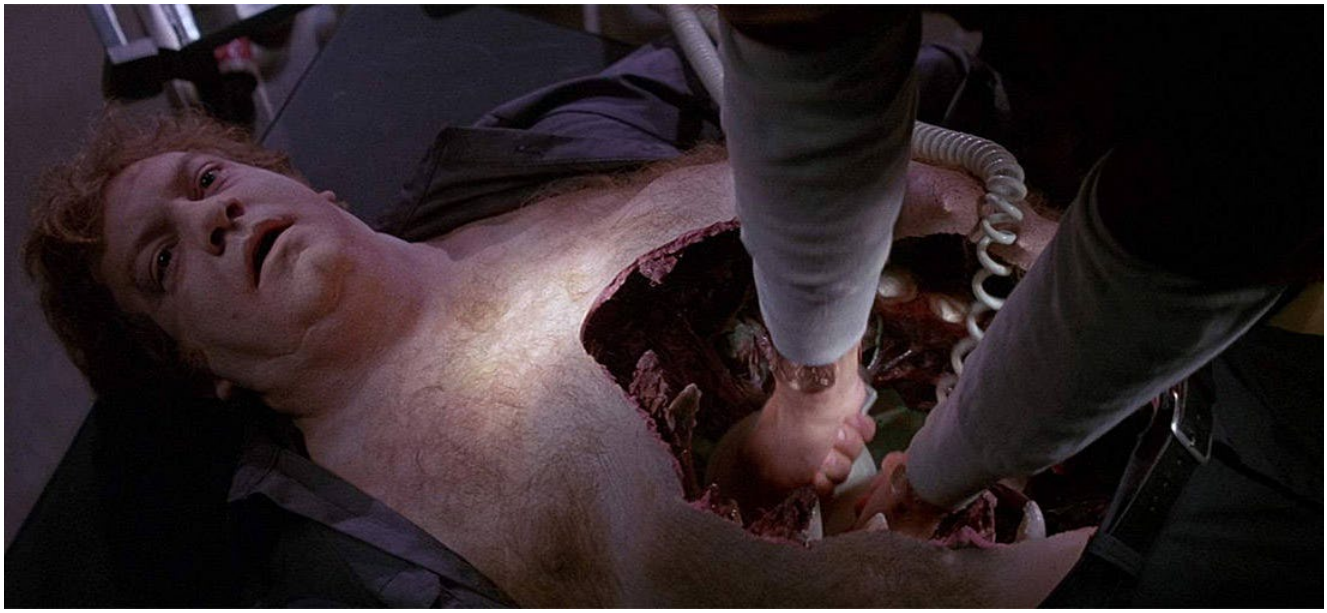

Fig. 3 | Norris's transformation begins. *The Thing*, 01:15:15. Universal Pictures, 1982.

I am not arguing that *The Thing* participates in a Vaudeville-like series of disconnected stimulations paraded before audiences. I am saying that its special effects and makeup place the mise-en-scène of the film in a dialectical relationship with its narrative such that the attractions threaten to take on their own lives. For evidence of that, consider how many views any of the single set pieces of the film receives when excerpted on YouTube. *The Thing*'s post-theatrical viewership emphasizes the way viewers value discrete scenes of particular horror. One clip of Norris's transformation has nearly thirteen million views since it was posted to YouTube in 2016. Removed from the story, this scene becomes pure impact that keeps viewers coming back for more (Fig. 3); fans relive those moments with pleasure.

The necessary and impossible demand to exhibit the Thing itself is why Carpenter had to avoid the "guy in a suit" look of the 1951 film (*Terror Takes Shape*, 54:00). An actor in a suit represents two things at once. At the narrative level, he is an alien. To the extent that the narrative function exhausts the rubber suit creature, viewers can ignore the second representation, that he is also a human actor. The actor in a rubber suit is never the Thing, and the viewers always know it. An audience's laughter at a rubber-suited actor is their relief at a reassuring human presence. Carpenter's Thing, on the other hand, has no actor in a rubber suit behind it. We never see the Thing's own form, only its grotesque imitations of other creatures. The Thing itself is never exhausted by its specular representation on film. That is the paradox that drives our repetition: at once we have seen the Thing, but we know we have not seen the Thing in itself. I posit that we watch *The Thing* because it gets us close to the Thing itself, and we watch it again because it does not get us all the way there.

Doubtless, the need to see it again is one reason nostalgic images of *The Thing* echo in media today. *Stranger Things's*

Fig. 4 | The transforming mouth of the Kennel-Thing. *The Thing*, 00:32:19. Universal Pictures, 1982.

Demogorgon, with its corpse flower mouth, closely resembles the transforming Kennel-Thing (Fig. 4). The synth-heavy soundtrack of Carpenter's film is an object of homage for the Netflix series, as well. The fragility of humanity and the vulnerability of identity returns us over and over to *The Thing*'s wild frontier. We return for dramatic tightness but also the thrill of attractions cinema. That combination may speak to eras of political uncertainty, in which micro-narratives focus our lives intensely between moments of horror that cannot be incorporated into an overarching narrative. Our invisible fears warp even beyond their real threat levels. COVID-19 keeps mutating beyond the narratives imposed on it. *The Thing* still works for us because it turns on the dialectical effect of violence on the plot—at the same time the gory set piece interrupts the plot, it binds us to it, requiring us to follow its next turn to its next encounter, even though we know it will not give us the real thing we keep looking for. ▪

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Horror as Social Critique

Violence Against Women in *Alien* and *Screams from the Void*

BY SAMANTHA LAY
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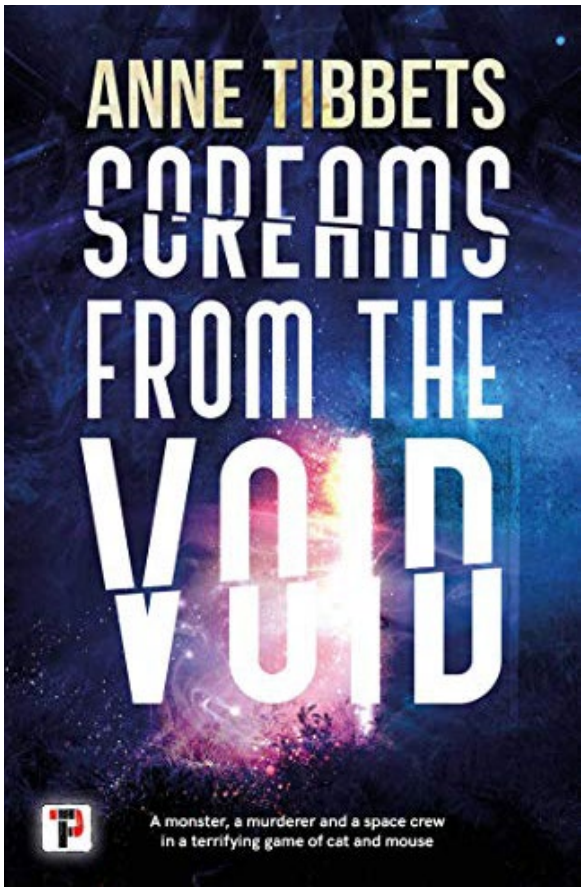

Screams from the Void
Anne Tibbets
2021, First edition
231 pp.
New York City, Flame Tree Press
ISBN: 978-1787585713
$19.95 CDN

Literary Gothic and cinematic horror are closely intertwined, like webbing that continuously spreads to encompass the expanse of fears within the human experience. Scholars of both genres discuss ways that Gothic and horror expose the problem of cultural inequity to invite the audience into a discourse on these issues. In the literary realm, prominent Gothic scholar Fred Botting places Gothic works at the forefront of social critique. Botting writes that the Gothic conveys "social and domestic fears" associated with the transgression of laws and boundaries and that in the plot's resolution, the authors reassert the audience's identity and sense "of justice, morality and social order" regarding their "values [on] society, virtue and property" (7). According to horror scholar Jennifer Selway, the same is true for "horror films [that] draw on deep-seated fears and desires" (ix) where fears about the "other," race, gender, religion, class, biology, psychology, technology, and the supernatural or paranormal can be safely explored. From *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980) to *The Stepford Wives* (Bryan Forbes, 1975), from *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984) to *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin,1973), and from *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017) to *Contagion* (Steven Soderbergh, 2011), horror can be a catalyst for discussions about social concerns.

Gothic novels and horror films are so interconnected that they have become symbiotic. In cinema's infancy, literary texts were being adapted into films; therefore, it is not surprising that there are newly published novels that have been shaped by landmark cinematic works. Ridley Scott's 1979 science fiction horror film *Alien* is an example of such a groundbreaking production that has become a touchstone in popular culture. Set in 2122, a crew of seven must battle a deadly alien. Because *Alien* is set on a commercial spacecraft in a time when space travel has become commonplace, the film can also be considered a workplace horror. In the literary realm, one cannot read Anne Tibbets's fifth novel, *Screams from the Void* (2021), without

Fig. 1 | Ripley aggressively questions Ash in *Alien*, 01:20:13. Twentieth Century Fox, 1979.

noticing its tributes to *Alien*. Set in 2231, the novel opens in medias res, where a crew of thirteen on a botany expedition must also face a deadly alien. In addition to the primal terror of being slaughtered by a "foreign biological," both works also explore women's fears of being sexually assaulted. These anxieties remain with women everywhere: in public, in their homes, and even in the workplace. There is no location in which women are completely safe.

In *Alien* and in *Screams from the Void*, there is a pivotal scene where a male colleague physically assaults the female protagonist, actualizing women's deep-seated fears of their personal safety being violated. The circumstances of these attacks and the crew's responses to them deepen the horror of the protagonists' situations. Both works include scenes that demonstrate what, in horror films Matt Glasby labels as "The Unexpected," which "refers to the many ways horror films seek to surprise us, from jump scares to plot twists" (10). While *Alien's* birth scene is one of the most recognized in cinematic history, it is Ash's (Ian Holm) assault of Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) that catapults the plot to another level of psychological terror. In *Screams from the Void*, Ensign Morven's physical and verbal aggression toward Mechanics Ensign Raina, in the crew's presence, exposes the distressing fact that women continue to be victimized in the workplace. In both works, the women must fight two monsters, while the men only fight one. Using scenes of "The Unexpected," *Alien* and *Screams from the Void* shed light on violence against women in the workplace to decry the endless reign of the patriarchy and to expose the horror that these social issues are far from over.

The horror of unexpected violence against women occurs in *Alien* when Ash attacks Ripley. The crew of five male and two female crew members interacts as equals, portraying the future as progressively gender-neutral where the patriarchy no longer reigns. However, after Dallas (Tom Skerritt) is slaughtered, Ripley assumes his position as head officer. When Ripley discovers that Ash's mission is to prioritize the alien's life over that of the crew, she pushes Ash against a wall and demands answers (Fig. 1).

Her stance is one of authority. She stands over him and pins him against the spacecraft's walls, forcing him to look up at her. Once the spacecraft and all commands are now made by a woman, the patriarchy reasserts itself. When met with silence, Ripley leaves to inform Lambert (Veronica Cartwright) and Parker (Yaphet Kotto), but Ash systematically locks her out of all the passages, isolates her, and attacks. The violence is sudden, unexpected, and intense. He rips a handful of hair from her head and hurls her against a wall. Bloodied, Ripley flees by crawling on her hands and knees as Ash stalks her, picks her up, and flings her against another wall with such force that it incapacitates her. To reinforce the dominance of the patriarchy, Ash concludes his brutal attack with a sexual assault, an additional primal terror for women that equates with, if not surpasses, physical violence.

The setting in this scene dismantles the illusion of a progressive society where women are treated with equality. In a corner, just off of the kitchen and dining area, rooms traditionally associated with women's subjection in the domestic realm, there are stacks of pornographic magazines, and the walls

Fig. 2 | The pornographic images of women on the wall as Ash prepares to assault Ripley in *Alien*, 01:22:26. Twentieth Century Fox, 1979.

Fig. 3 | Ash orally assaulting Ripley in *Alien*, 01:22:33. Twentieth Century Fox, 1979.

are plastered from ceiling to floor with nude women, all silent observers to her assault (Fig. 2).

Despite the seemingly gender-neutral interpersonal dynamics, the sexual objectification of women clearly remains fully intact. Once Ripley is unconscious and unable to defend herself, Ash stands over her limp body, rolls up a magazine, and forces it down her throat in an attempt to silence and murder her, an act reminiscent of oral rape (Fig. 3). Ripley awakens and frantically claws at Ash's neck to save herself. This scene illustrates the continued sexualization of women in the workplace and that, even in a seemingly progressive society, women are still vulnerable to acts of brutality.

In the second half of the scene, Ripley reasserts her authority and challenges the patriarchy. When Parker and Lambert enter the room, they immediately intervene. Parker uses a fire extinguisher to repeatedly hit Ash with such power that he is partially decapitated and eventually stops moving. This act exposes Ash's true identity as an android. In a sign of a woman reclaiming her authority, Ripley uses her technological skills to reboot Ash's decapitated head to interrogate him. With Ash's decapitated head and mutilated body on the floor, he is forced into a lowly position that must recognize her dominance (Fig. 4). Ash must look up to Ripley again, this time, from an even lower position of subservience.

Once she has the information she needs, Ripley pulls the plug on Ash, silencing him. She has ultimate control. Ash's destruction conveys a message that patriarchal violence is no longer tolerated in a progressive society, but the full scene is a reminder that the battle for gender equality is still ongoing.

In *Screams from the Void*, the horror of "The Unexpected" also occurs in a scene of violence against women in the workplace. The crew includes men and women in positions of authority, so there is an illusion that gender bias in the workplace is extinct. However, early in the novel, Tibbets establishes that physical and emotional abuse against women is still a regular occurrence, as is society's tolerance of it. The attack begins when Morven locks Raina outside of a secured room where the alien cannot enter. This act separates Raina from the rest of the crew and leaves her alone and vulnerable to the deadly creature. When another crew member opens the door for her, Raina enters and slaps Morven, who retaliates by attempting to strike her face, but is prevented from making contact when Niall, the head officer, deflects his aim. Despite being surrounded by crewmates who have already shown their willingness to intervene, which should have de-escalated the situation, Morven still charges: "Like a wrecking ball, he plows straight at [Raina], tossing chairs out of his way" (64). As Avram attempts to protect Raina, Morven pushes him across the room, grabs Raina's arm, "wrenches [it] like a demon," and demands, in full hearing of the rest of the crew, "'Are you fucking *him* now?'" (64). The purpose of Morven's inappropriate and invasive question serves to humiliate and degrade Raina by robbing her of her humanity and reducing her to a sexual object, a view which women have historically fought against.

The terror of *Screams from the Void* comes, not only from the physical and emotional abuse that Raina endures, but also from the authority's apathy to it. The second half of the scene reasserts the rule of the patriarchy and the subjection and victimization of women. While Morven still holds Raina's arm, Niall's only solution is to tell Morven to "stand down" (65) and for everyone to "calm down" (66). While "Niall has one of his rifles powered and aims at Morven's head" (65), which is likely the only reason that Morven halts his rampage, Niall's words cause further emotional damage. When other crew members attempt to explain what happened, Niall says, "I don't care" and "It doesn't matter" (65). As lead officer, Niall has the authority to reprimand Morven and send the message to the rest of the crew, and to Raina, that such behaviour is unacceptable. Instead, he dismisses the situation and strips Raina of any dignity, trivializing her abuse. This is yet another form of emotional victimization that further subjugates women and

Fig. 4 | The mutilated Ash looking up to Ripley in *Alien*, 01:25:04. Twentieth Century Fox, 1979.

silences them within the patriarchy. Sadly, Raina knows that, "As always, nothing will change. The officers will smooth things over as if nothing is wrong. They'll placate Raina and take no action against Morven, just like before" (66). There are no consequences for such violence, and there is no justice for the victim, which is the all too common response that adds to the horror of the situation.

One of the most terrifying aspects of the novel and the film is a sense of the isolation and helplessness that women can feel in a workplace that is guided by patriarchal order. The title *Screams from the Void* is reminiscent of the tagline in the original movie poster for *Alien*: "In space no one can hear you scream" ("*Alien*"). When viewed through the lens of aggression against women, these chilling words take on a more sinister tone and remind the audience that no matter how loudly women cry out against the patriarchy, they will not be heard. *Alien* premiered six years after the Roe versus Wade decision when women gained legal autonomy over their bodies and more rights in the workplace. *Screams from the Void* was published 42 years later, in the midst of the #MeToo movement, but only a year before Roe versus Wade was overturned. The futuristic settings in which violence against women transpires fall under Glasby's final scare tactic, "The Unstoppable," which "refers to the sense that the traumas we are experiencing will never end" (11). Even though the novel is set 110 years beyond *Alien*, it exposes how distant the world is from true gender equality. These works reveal that, even hundreds of years into the future, patriarchal violence, which has haunted women for thousands of years, is not going anywhere. Little else can be more disturbing and horrifying than that thought. ▪

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The Vancouver Horror Show (VHS) Film Festival Continues to Make its Mark

BY KELLY DOYLE
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Fig. 1 | *Follow Her*. Classified Films, 2022.

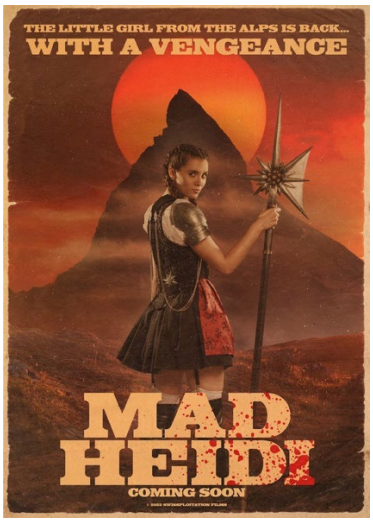

Fig. 2 | *Mad Heidi*. Swissploitation Films, 2022.

When I first discovered the Vancouver Horror Show in 2019, it was in its second year and boasting a total of thirty-two short films from around the world and one feature length film, all screened over two nights. The festival continues to meet and exceed its stated goal of "celebrat[ing] the power of storytelling, provid[ing] a platform for emerging independent filmmakers, and bolster [ing] the artistic community in Vancouver" ("About Vancouver Horror"). Now in its fifth 'season,' the festival has taken on a life of its own, expanding its current programming to include a staggering sixty-one short films and six feature length films from thirteen countries. In the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown, the event has transitioned from virtual streaming to a current hybrid model that accommodates both horror lovers living in Vancouver and those who can't attend in person or who prefer to stream. The in-person portion of the VHS ran from November 4-8, 2022, with three feature films and four blocks of short films screening across three different theatres in Vancouver. Each live event was followed by a filmmaker Q&A and awards ceremonies. The online portion of the festival helpfully and flexibly included the shorts from the in-person screenings as well as three features and twenty-five additional short films, all of which were available from November 8th to 18th for on-demand horror. While some virtual festival attendees might be disappointed that feature films *Follow Her* (2022), *Mad Heidi* (2022) (Figs. 1 and 2), and the highly anticipated *Terrifier 2* (2022) are not available to stream, at $35 CAD a ticket, the virtual offerings are nuanced, plentiful, and wholly satisfying.

The VHS is a truly diverse event, embracing, celebrating, and showcasing horror from Norway, Spain, Italy, The

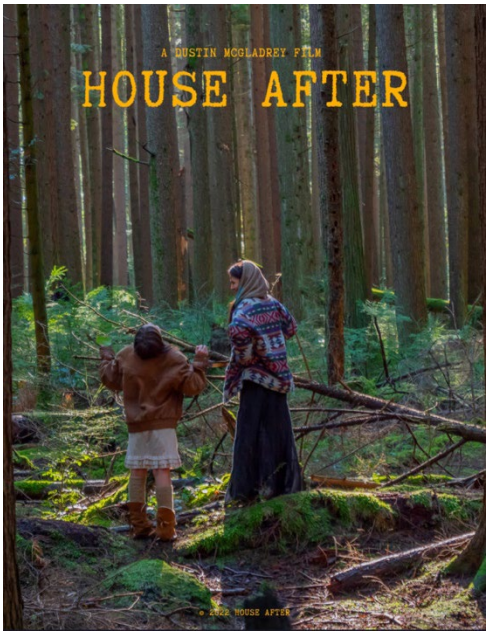

Fig. 3 and 4 | Dustin McGladrey and *House After*. Student short film, 2022.

Netherlands, The United Kingdom, Russia, Finland, Austria, Sweden, Australia, and the US as well as British Columbia. There is a special emphasis this year on local filmmakers including Dustin McGladrey from the Nisga'a Nation (Fig 3). A UBC alumnus writer/director, McGladrey won the VHS emerging filmmaker award in the Student Film category for *House After* (2022) (Fig. 4), which is inspired by his family's experience with residential schools. Grappling with the very real experience of intergenerational trauma, the film resonates with others that are politically charged and which ask the audience to face uncomfortable questions about colonization, like Jenna Kanell's *Trap Door in the Sun* (USA 2021) with its haunting imagery of Lulu screaming silently while cookie-cutter, gentrified suburban homes are built on Cherokee lands, erasing the Indigenous people there while asserting that these colonized, appropriated spaces are "a great place to live, work, and play" (00:33:30)…if one is a settler. Other notable local contributions include *Consumer* (2022) from Vancouver-based writer, director, and actor Stephanie Izsak about the horror of body dysmorphia and toxic beauty standards for young teenage girls in a social media influencer-saturated society; Brian Sepanzyk's compelling film about a woman coming to terms with her estranged father's death and unpacking his sinister death while packing his home (*In the Shadow of God* 2022*)*; and feature film *Follow Her (*2022) that won Best Director and Best Lead Performance.

Striking in this year's selection of films is the depth and breadth of cultural excavation both inside and outside of Canada: The short film *Niyebe* (2022) from Kevin Ang chills with its use of a female monster from the Philippines that sucks unborn children from the womb in the context of a struggling blended family, while from the East Coast comes Shane Mills's *Mummering Legends* (2021). Set in St. John's Newfoundland and doubtless inspired by the real-life 1860 murder in Bay Roberts, Newfoundland (Coles), the film evokes the distinct culture, history, and Irish-inflected dialect particular to Newfoundland and the tradition of mummering: during Christmas, mummers disguise themselves in outlandish costumes and visit homes seeking a dance, a drink, and insisting hosts guess their identities. Uncanny in their anonymity and strangeness, mummers occasionally used their disguises to commit harassment or violence related to "personal grudges, family disputes or religious or class conflicts" (Dohey qtd. in Coles), and it is this dark underbelly of the lighthearted tradition that Mills ruminates on. Indeed, from the stark and sublime cinematography of *Fishwife* (2021), the comedic yet black humor of the animated short *The Fall* (2021), and to the more traditional and chilling supernatural scare of *The Wheel* (2021), there is something for every fan of the horror genre in VHS offerings.

A notable event that has quickly become a successful staple in the VHS is the Screenplay Table Read series, now in its third year. Through Zoom, festival attendees are invited to attend a live table read of the three VHS screenplay finalists, each performed by professional actors with critiques and feedback provided by three industry panelists. This year, the panelists were NYC-based producer, screenwriter, and Professor Vanessa King; performer and comedy writer Ambika Vas; and myself as a professor specializing in horror film and feminist film theory. The finalists included three very different scripts, including Vincente DiSanti's satirical horror-comedy *Ghost Chicken*, Montgomery Burt's taut and skillfully paced *Francine and Gerald* (inspired in part by the 1994 abduction and murder of eight-year-old Kelowna resident Mindy Tran) and Daniel Alan Kiely's hauntingly tragic, horrific, yet beautiful *The Whisper Tree* (Figs.5 and 6). All three finalists reflect the diverse nuances of

Fig. 5 | Promotional image for the Screenwriting Table Reads. VHS, 2022.

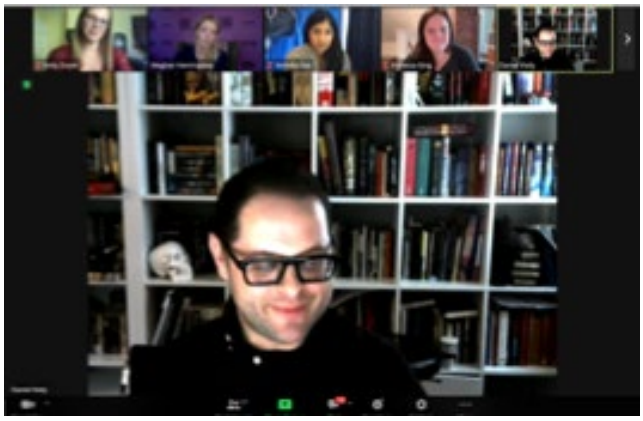

Fig. 6 | Screenwriter Daniel Kiely engages with the VHS panel after the Table Read of *The Whisper Tree*. VHS, 2022.

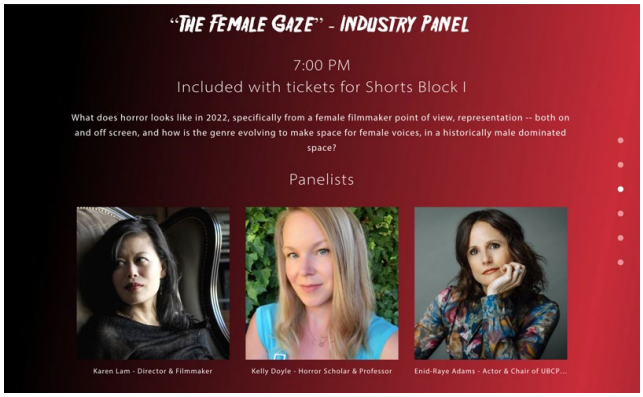

Fig. 7 | VHS Talks Panelists: Director Karen Lam, Actor Enid-Raye Adams and Dr. Kelly Doyle.

horror as a genre and hint at the horrific in the mundane: the discourse around morality and meat eating, the murderer or child predator hiding beneath a veneer of civility and normality in a small town, and the seemingly hopeless reality of sexual abuse, intergenerational trauma, and the unfairness of life, respectively. Each script serves to inspire us to question societal norms, to sit with discomfort, and sometimes to see the light in the darkness. A Table Read is a chance for the casual viewer to peer behind the curtain of this important process in the film industry, and a chance for the screenwriters and audience to see life breathed into their work by talented actors. DiSanti's work inspired laughter while Burns balanced light against dark in a tense and suspenseful showdown between a cop and a child murderer before Kiely moved me to tears. For anyone interested in film and the creative process, this is a rare chance to hear screenwriters discuss their vision and inspiration behind the horror stories they write, and to hear industry experts offer constructive feedback. Organizer and moderator Meghan Hemingway also played the role of "Francine" in Burns' read. Three years in, this event continues to be lauded for its insightfulness and usefulness to writers, and this year, *The Whisper Tree* was chosen as the winning script.

Finally, the most exciting addition to the VHS in 2022 is the inaugural debut of the "VHS Talks" event, a panel discussion of key considerations in horror film which I had the privilege to be invited to participate in (Figs. 7 and 8). This forty-five minute live panel discussion on the female gaze in horror film, moderated by Meghan Hemingway, took place on opening night to an audience of fifty people, some of them including directors and actors from the shorts block that screened just prior. Specifically, the panel considered what horror looks like in 2022 from a female filmmaker point of view, the representation of women on and offscreen, and how the genre is evolving to make space for female voices in an historically male-dominated space.

My role was to situate the conversation in terms of 'the gaze' and its changing resonance since Laura Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in 1975. In the framework of psychoanalytic theory, Mulvey argued that Hollywood film in particular is structured by the totalizing male gaze (defaulting to white, able-bodied, heterosexual men) which literally frames film and ideology through the 'look' of the spectator, the director, the camera, and the central male characters of a film. In this framework, Mulvey argues that the gaze is patriarchal and divided into active male and passive female, where a woman is always the bearer of rather than the maker of meaning, a typically erotic spectacle to be devalued, fetishized, saved, or punished as dictated by patriarchal society's standards and her conformity (or lack thereof) to its ideology. "The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly" (808). Unsurprisingly, such a framework of representation lends itself to misogyny and damaging options for female spectator identification, especially when watching a horror film. If film is largely produced by and for the viewing pleasure of the average

heterosexual man, identification for the female spectator is woefully limited to masochism, masculinization, or marginality. If Mulvey is right in that female spectators routinely are forced to witness, through a sort of narcissistic identification, their own sexualization, humiliation, rape, mutilation and murder, there are good reasons for women to avert their eyes in a horror film. As Robin Wood notes in his analysis of cultural/filmic oppression and repression, "The dominant images of women in our culture are entirely male created and male controlled. Woman's autonomy and independence are denied; onto women men project their own innate, repressed femininity in order to disown it as inferior" (78). Hemingway structured the panel brilliantly to echo and subvert the male gaze to shift women in film from passive spectacles to active agents with myself as spectator/film theorist, Karen Lam as director (*Bring It On: Cheer or Die* (2022); *Evangeline* (2013); *The Curse of Willow Song* (2020)), and Enid-Raye Adams (*Riverdale* (2017-2018), *Bates Motel* (2016)) as actress resisting the role of mere spectacle.

In outlining feminist film theory's resistance to the misogynist framework of the gaze and psychoanalysis that read women as object, my own contributions to the discussion highlighted the power in sexual difference and the potency that the monstrous woman in horror can offer. The short film *Wall #4* (2021) in a later shorts program reflects on the collapse of film's 4th wall and what it might mean for the gaze to be returned by the woman onscreen. One film the panel touched on was *X* (2022), a slasher film that explores cultural fears around aging for women in particular and unsettles by drawing attention to the polarized existence for women as sex objects or despairing old crones. For all three panelists, the film prompted reflections on how women in the film industry are not permitted to age, or to remain sexual and whole persons when they do age. And yet, it is a common trope in slasher horror that women who transgress the social order by being sexual are killed, so the degree to which a woman appears to have sexual freedom and agency in horror films is directly proportional to the violence enacted against her. All three women spoke freely and frankly with humor and acerbic confidence about personal and professional experiences in filming, writing about, and performing horror. Lam discussed her experience of being told by men or male executives that her characters were not attractive or sexy enough, or that her handling of horror was the wrong way. Adams recalled one harrowing scene as an actress in which her character was tortured and the director chose to cut a moment that highlighted a connection between victim and killer, thereby foreclosing the possibility of seeing her character as a full subject to identify with. One of the most germane questions to arise from the sessions came at the end when an audience member asked how we can move beyond misogyny in film and mansplaining of female experience, knowledge, representation, and expertise. The panelists largely agreed that laying the groundwork for other voices and perspectives than those of studio executives, directors, writers, and actors who are traditionally

Fig. 8 | VHS panelists respond to a question from moderator Meghan Hemingway. VHS, 2022.

Fig. 9 | Promotional poster for *Terrifier 2*. Dark Age Cinema, 2022.

white, heterosexual, and Hollywood-based was part of the process, one we were actively engaged in as a part of this panel. After all, Mulvey's critical article did not consider that the spectator is not necessarily white, heterosexual, or male, and that the female spectator might respond with anger and resistance to her portrayal onscreen by writing, speaking, acting, or directing.

The woman who looks back also leaves space theoretically for different cultural, sexual, or racial experiences and viewpoints. Uncoincidentally, shorts block 1, screened immediately prior to the talk, deftly served to exemplify how this resistance can be undertaken. In his short comedy-horror *Black Zombie Movie* (2021), Choni Francis responds to the lack of Black representation in the zombie subgenre and tells his story from the perspective of black characters in a black neighbourhood. With nods to films like *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), Francis creates a fun and witty film that refreshingly positions female characters as no-nonsense fighters, not just masculinized final girls (although the lead does wear a white tank top in what seems like a nod to this role). He opens with a real estate agent trying to make a sale during the encroachment of gentrification;

she loses her sale and her life, but not before pepper-spraying a zombie and delivering a swift front kick while wearing red pumps. Underscoring the hilarity are very real issues that are being addressed: the absence of a person of colour in many film narratives both in front of and behind the camera, and the insidious reason women might realistically have pepper spray on hand. Shot by a female director, *Consumer* relates female experience from a necessary female perspective, and *Bufflehead* (2021) comedically satirizes the near future of a healthcare system that decides who deserves treatment based on their commitment to conservationism…the film title provides a hint to the criteria. Like most effective horror films, these (and many others across the festival) reveal and critique very real societal inequities and assumptions in their politics. Coming full circle, the Irish short *Shadowban* (2018) turns back to the gaze as spectators watch a livestreaming would-be influencer assailed in the middle of nowhere at a red traffic light that won't turn green. As viewer comments roll in during her broadcast, one stands out: "She got what she deserved." The callous dismissal of female terror and endangerment onscreen for likes or entertainment uncannily foreshadowed the discussion to come in the VHS talk that followed, particularly when one considers the symbolic implications of a woman prevented from getting the 'green light' and the meaning of 'shadowban': blocking or silencing comments from users on social media without their knowledge.

Opening night ended with a sold-out screening of *Terrifier 2* (2022) from Damien Leone, a follow up to *Terrifier* (2016) and a unique indie slasher film with no studio backing, no rating, an unprecedented 138-minute runtime, and a shockingly impressive performance in the box office.

In it, Art the Clown (David Howard Thornton) returns to the timid town of Miles County where he targets Sienna (Lauren LaVera), a teenage girl, and her younger brother on Halloween night. It has the VHS tape vintage feel of a slasher B film from the 70s or 80s and is a surrealist slasher nightmare that recalls the blood and gore from grindhouse films. This film revels in pushing the envelope, with one particular bedroom scene that ostensibly led some viewers to vomit or faint. The unspeakable murders of Art the Clown, face frozen in a maniacal grin of teeth and black greasepaint and enacted in complete laughing silence, are enacted across race and gender, but it is still women who bear the brunt of his attentions and with relentless screentime. Sienna is positioned as Art's nemesis, a warrior angel, a light to his darkness (and LaVera fills the role surprisingly well), but she is still the final girl we see through the lingering eye of the camera as it pans over her scantily clad, muscular body for the benefit of only some spectators. Not even entrenched in the gender flux of masculinization usually ascribed to the final girl, Sienna is infantilized in her opening nightmare and sexualized in the film's living one, despite her heroic confrontation with the clown. There are very effective and surreal moments of levity and even hilarity in the film, largely due to Art's expressive pantomime in every situation and some of the campier gore sequences, but laughter and

Fig. 10 | The VHS team celebrates opening night on Nov. 5, 2022.

comedy are, of course, subjective. Leone notes in *Variety* that "There's a very blatant blanket of fantasy over the whole thing. Within the first two minutes, it's clear this movie isn't based in reality, so I was hoping that would make the violence a little more palatable and accessible." One might note here fantasy still involves representation and privileges particular viewpoints. After all, "Leone based much of the [bedroom] scene on a photograph of a Jack the Ripper victim, attempting to '*reverse engineer*' the abject horror and destruction created by one of the most brutal serial killers in history" (Craig). The Ripper's victims were women, and the issues of identification bound up in Art's brutal killing scenes were fascinating and troubling to consider given that this film's screening took place after a discussion of the gaze and how we see women in horror. Theories of laughter are varied, one of the oldest being that it is "the product of malicious joy, gloating, derision, ridicule, and self-satisfied mockery" (O'Neill 35) or "a function of (perceived) superiority" (35) over the victim of the laughter. Art's face, frozen in an intimidating rictus of bared teeth in a derisive and sadistic smile, suggests that the pain, mutilation, and objectification of the people he renders bodies are a function of his superiority over them. It is suggestive, then, that his most brutal kills and disfigurings involve women, but also that it is a woman, unsmiling, that emerges as his nemesis. Overall, the Vancouver Horror Show continues to excel and celebrate as it disgusts, entertains, engages, unsettles, and showcases horror and all the talented people who create it (Fig. 10). ▪

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