



# grim

Issue No. 6 February 2020

## *Memento Mori* Traversing the Veil

WHAT HAUNTED  
SHIRLEY JACKSON

OBSERVING THE  
*GHOSTWATCH* EFFECT

THE AMERICANIZATION  
OF AOKIGAHARA

ISA MAZZEI,  
CAMGIRL ON TOP

TRANS IDENTITY  
& SIDNEY PRESCOTT

DRACULA'S  
GREATEST TRIUMPH

*Plus:*

GEORGE  
A. ROMERO'S  
LEGACY

TWO  
Girls, ONE  
GHOST

SLEEP PARALYSIS  
in CULTURE  
& CINEMA

SEAGULLS &  
TOXICITY in  
THE LIGHTHOUSE



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# grim magazine

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## Editor's Note

### Happy Women in Horror Month!

It's hard to believe that we've made it to the third anniversary of *Grim*. It's been an incredible experience and, quite often, a challenging one. When *Grim* first launched, I had almost zero familiarity with the process of publishing a print magazine. From day one, it has been a learning process—much of it learning from my own mistakes as I made them. A software snafu that occurred during the layout of *Grim* No. 1 resulted in the entire issue having to be completely recreated from scratch within a week. A crowdfunding setup error on Indiegogo led to all international shipping costs being paid out-of-pocket for the first round of issues. Despite these setbacks, I never gave up on bringing my vision of *Grim* to life. Because the horror community needs publications that feature the voices of women, BIPOC, queer folks, members of the Disability community, and others with oft underrepresented and vital perspectives.

As more and more of these types of publications launch crowdfunders, put out calls for pitches, and publish digitally or in print, I urge you to show them your support. If you cannot afford to donate or purchase their publication, then share their links on social media. Give them a follow. Pitch a piece. Tell a friend. Niche publications like these aren't sustained by revenue—they are sustained by passion and determination. Many are produced by a skeleton staff or a single creator, with releases cobbled together on evenings and weekends between other jobs. It's hard, usually unprofitable work, and it is done because those doing it believe wholeheartedly in its importance.

Without community support, these publications are unlikely to survive long.

Let these creators know how much their hard work means to you. Reach out to them on social media and share your appreciation. Speaking as an indie publisher, these small demonstrations of support mean the world. Dare I say it: they are more valuable fuel than even coffee.

Thank you for believing in *Grim*.

Valeska Griffiths  
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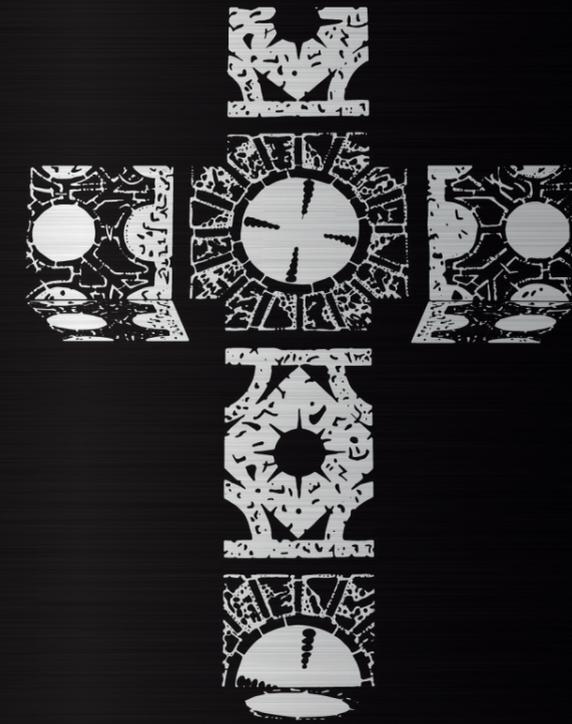


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# SCARED SACRED

Idolatry, Religion and Worship in the Horror Film



FOREWORD BY DOUG BRADLEY

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# TRANS GIRL SCREAMING

## Sex, Power & Sidney Prescott

by Evelyn Kronfeld

Horror movies are super gay and I'd hope anyone reading this would agree. They're also super trans, as it turns out. Disconnection with one's body, identity turmoil, discrimination, adolescent nonconformity; these are things that most transgender people will deal with at some point in their life and are prominent themes in many of the greatest scary movies ever made.

For me, horror has been a significant feature of my transition. This has to do, in large part, with the characterization of various feminine protagonists in my favourite franchises.

Plenty of trans people have spoken to being "awakened" by a character in their favourite book series, TV show, or movie—maybe it was a cis character like Hermione Granger, whose bookish grace probably drew in young people for whom such beauty was off-limits. Or, perhaps, gender-expansive kids of tomorrow might find themselves looking in adoration to a wealth of characters who are actually trans (yay!). I mean, sure, the character that taught me what "transgender" even meant was Adam from *Degrassi: The Next Generation* (who was played by a cis girl and killed off before graduation), but good trans representation seems to be on an upward trajectory. Hell, if we've got *Pose* and *Steven Universe* now, what awesomeness might come later?

With that said, the character who so enticed me when the feminine felt forbidden was not trans. She was, and always will be, Sidney Prescott of the *Scream* franchise, portrayed by Neve Campbell.

These films were my first horror obsession. The franchise lit my passion for scary movies ablaze and, as much as my tastes within the genre continue to shift and expand, I can safely guess that the series will always remain uniquely treasured for me. A certain vulnerability persists in lead protagonist Sid—this makes a lot of sense given the commonness of the whole Vulnerable Teen Girl archetype in anything written by the arguably brilliant queer screenwriter Kevin Williamson.

The character who so enticed me when the feminine felt forbidden was not trans. She was, and always will be, Sidney Prescott of the *Scream* franchise

Unlike a lot of these plagued young ladies that feature prominently in horror, Sidney survives and actually becomes quite a badass despite shitty odds. And those shitty odds have been kinda relatable for me.

### Bad Seed

A lot is going on with Sid when the first murder occurs in Woodsboro. We are introduced to her issues with intimacy when her boyfriend Billy Loomis (played by Skeet Ulrich and later revealed as one of the film's two killers) comes through her window to lecture her about how "hot and heavy" their relationship seemed to be turning a couple of years prior; he considers the current state of their adolescent sex life "edited for television." This is the main tension between Sid and Billy for most of the film: she doesn't want to fuck.

Everyone is hushed about the death of Sid's mother, at first. It is uncomfortably alluded to rather than spoken of bluntly; saving for, of course, a seemingly bloodthirsty local TV press, eager to relate the Ghostface killings to Maureen Prescott's torturous murder (soon to be a year old).

Over the course of the first three *Scream* films, the story of what happened to Maureen slowly unfolds. Cotton Weary (Liev Schreiber) is convicted of her rape and murder based largely on Sid's testimony, but is eventually exonerated. By the denouement of the third instalment, the full story is revealed.

In the '70s, Maureen Roberts (maiden name) spent a couple of years in Hollywood as an actress under the pseudonym "Rina Reynolds." She was blacklisted when she tried to speak up after enduring a group sexual assault at a party held by the Weinstein-esque producer John Milton (Lance Henriksen); she "wouldn't play by the rules" as Milton recalled, and so she was forced to move home after putting a son up for adoption. Her pain lingered upon her return to her hometown of Woodsboro. She would have affairs with several men and gain a debauched reputation which would follow her forever.

The son she left behind in Hollywood, Roman (Scott Foley), would eventually track her down. After she cast him off as a remnant of her horrid past, he vowed revenge. Roman stalked her and accumulated video evidence of her promiscuity. After Roman shows Billy Loomis this footage—which included



his father Hank with Maureen—Billy was enraged and certain that the entanglement caused his family's deterioration. With Roman's guidance, Billy and his douchebag friend Stu (Matthew Lillard) murdered Maureen and framed Cotton Weary, one of Maureen's sexual partners.

Sex had a lot to do with Maureen's murder. Although fierce in her insistence that her mother had no affair with Cotton, Sidney couldn't help but be ensnared by the pervasive rumours circulating around town. Right before she sleeps with Billy, she tells him: "I think I'm really scared that I'm gonna turn out just like her, y'know? Like the bad seed or something..."

### "Don't Be Her"

Transness is something I learned about from *Degrassi*. While this isn't ideal, the flawed representation of a trans guy wasn't nearly as detrimentally warping for me as the images of transgender women I was exposed to everywhere else. Brazen, unquestioned transmisogyny has long been a feature of mainstream media, and if we are actually in a cultural moment wherein this is harshly scrutinized, then such a moment is in its earliest infancy.

Just about any film or television show that crossed my eyes before transitioning portrayed trans women the exact same way. In *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, she was a sex worker hired by Steve Carrell's friend for him; she utterly repulsed him, making him rant to his co-workers about how she was obviously a transvestite—how funny. In *Family Guy*, she was Brian the Dog's drunken mistake, one that made him vomit uncontrollably for close to a full minute when he learned that she was trans—wow, even funnier.

It wasn't just comedy that influenced my thoughts on trans women, however. One of the biggest purveyors of transfeminine stereotyping is reality television—shows like *Cops*, *Jerry Springer*, and *Maury*—programs that came about in the '90s and made a sizable impact on the culture of the next decade.

What was the story these shows told about the community to which I would eventually realize I belonged? It was, consistently, the story of a slutty tranny who ruined a man's relationship and/or family stability, who was gasped at beside a jeering host, who was justly lashed out at by the man she horrified with her revelation.

These are the stories I was told, things that flipped across the television screens I sat in front of as a kid. Even if I wasn't tuning in, or the messaging was just scattered through snippets of broadcasting, I received the message loud and clear: "No matter what, just don't be her."

In an environment where shows with titles like "Man or Woman?" on *Maury* or "Spoiler Alert: She's A Man" on *Jerry Springer* would run and re-run nationally, and where footage of trans sex workers getting arrested and tormented was all just a televisual spectacle, what else was I supposed to internalize about myself, my sexuality, and my femininity?

### Taken Girlhood

If you don't count *Double, Double, Toil and Trouble*, the '90s made-for-TV Halloween flick starring the Olsen twins, *Scream* was my first horror movie. While I hadn't developed the clarity necessary to realize why, I connected to Sidney Prescott in a way that I had never connected to a fictional character previously.

"Taken girlhood" is a topic I think about a lot. For me, it means that much of my youth has a piece missing. I don't mean to suggest that my life has been some tragic tale, like something out of a tear-jerking drama about a tortured trans kid living in the closet. I'm a white, able-bodied trans woman with an accepting family and access to hormone replacement therapy—it could be much, much worse for me.

What I mean is that, for much of my youth, I felt removed from who I was supposed to be. Despite never being a little girl, I must navigate the still-daunting space of womanhood.

I watched Sidney Prescott go through much the same struggle. A key part of her growth as a young woman was stripped from her, first by her mother's death, then by the murderous rampages which followed her throughout four movies. I felt chased by an image of trans women as promiscuous, homewrecking, and deserving of harm. And what is the image of her mother that Sid is chased by? One of a promiscuous homewrecker who deserves to be harmed.

For much of my youth, I felt removed from who I was supposed to be. Despite never being a little girl, I must navigate the still-daunting space of womanhood.

I don't think it is overly Freudian of me to suggest that for Sidney Prescott, the loss of Maureen Prescott was akin to stealing femininity from her (both sexually, and in other ways), forcing her to reclaim it in a captivating journey from victim to victor.

### Out of Darkness

With the help of friends, Sidney defeats her horndog boyfriend, then defeats that dude's vindictive mother, and then, following a harrowing and sorrowful battle, defeats her aforementioned half-brother Roman—who resented Sid as the only child Maureen would claim as her own. After all of this, Sid appears to find some peace. In the final scene of the original trilogy, she notices her door creak open and smiles to herself when she isn't compelled to shut it in fear.

In the unexpected 2011 instalment *Scream 4*, an older Sidney does a lot of the shit that a trans public figure would go through—she writes a popular and inspiring memoir (*Out of Darkness: A True Story of Survival*), deals with a capitalizing publicist who doesn't understand her struggle, and tries her best to tell her authentic story.

Despite dealing with recurring feelings that she'll have to play the role of "victim for life," as well as ultimately having to end the jealous and fame-hungry murder spree of her teen cousin Jill (Emma Roberts), Sid remains a champion, and a plagued badass.

If this saga had ended differently for Ms. Prescott, I don't think that young girl in hiding, who feared becoming something the world said she'd be, would have fallen for this franchise like she did years ago. But she did, and I know she's still screaming.

While I hadn't developed the clarity necessary to realize why, I connected to Sidney Prescott in a way that I had never connected to a fictional character previously.



# HIGH TENSION, CHEAP SCARES

## How Lesley Manning's *Ghostwatch* Shaped Found-Footage Horror

by Mary Beth McAndrews

**Found-footage horror as we currently know it is often met with eye rolls and heavy sighs;** it is seen as a dried-out sponge, wrung of its creativity. Many don't understand the subgenre's history and the impact that a woman director had on its tropes and stylistic choices. While *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, is often credited for kickstarting the modern iteration of this horror movement, Lesley Manning's 1992 television film *Ghostwatch* is regularly overlooked. *Ghostwatch* helped shape the look and feel of found-footage films set in haunted houses, from the use of security cameras interspersed with shaky cams to the lingering shots used to build tension. Without *Ghostwatch*, films such as Oren Peli's *Paranormal Activity* (2007) may not pack such a terrifying punch—or even exist, let alone spawn a franchise.

*Ghostwatch* was initially marketed as a live television event investigating poltergeist activity in the house of Pamela Early (Brid Brennan) and her two daughters, Suzanne and Kim (Michelle and Cherise Wesson). The show is hosted in a studio with cuts to a live feed inside the Early's supposedly haunted house. In the studio is Michael Parkinson, an actual news anchor playing himself, and paranormal expert Dr. Lin Pascoe (Gillian Bevan). On the ground are Sarah Greene, again an actual reporter playing herself, her cameraman Chris (Chris Miller), and her sound guy Mike (Mike Aiton). As the investigation progresses, poltergeist activity increases and the studio begins taking calls from viewers about their own ghostly experiences, adding to the illusion that this is, in fact, a live news broadcast, not a fictional film. The broadcast culminates in countrywide poltergeist activity, with the cameras fuelling the spirit. The BBC faced backlash for the program, receiving thousands of calls from terrified viewers. Many claimed to suffer from PTSD after viewing.

This is not unlike what happened after screenings of *The Blair Witch Project* and the alleged widespread panic following Orson Welles' 1939 *War of the Worlds* broadcast. In fact, the reaction got the film banned in the U.K.

*Ghostwatch* is not framed as found footage but as live news reporting. Yet, many of the handheld techniques utilized while the news crew investigates the Early house were later adopted in other found-footage films. Using techniques and tropes set forth by *Ghostwatch*, *Paranormal Activity* marked a resurgence in found-footage films and showcased a fear of the invasion of domestic spaces. The film documents a couple, Micah (Micah Sloat) and Katie (Katie Featherston), as they attempt to get to the bottom of a series of paranormal events occurring in their home. Katie claims to have been followed by an inhuman presence since she was a kid, but Micah doesn't buy it. With his newly-purchased video camera, he begins documenting their lives to capture any evidence of ghosts or demons. Unfortunately, this only eggs on the entity and the activity increases to the point of violence, not unlike what happens at the end of *Ghostwatch*.

*Paranormal Activity* is marked by its doubtful male protagonist, who grabs a video camera to help discover a logical explanation; he wants to be the hero. Micah's video camera is a main source of the film's tension as they try to use technology to debunk Katie's fears. While not an uncommon trope in haunted house films, *Ghostwatch's* use of those characters pre-dates this male figure and creates a more nuanced portrayal of doubtful men and women. While the framework of each film is different—*Paranormal Activity* is a more personal depiction of a haunting while *Ghostwatch* is a news broadcast—journalist Sarah Greene embodies an empathetic yet objective character who approaches the family as a means of

support rather than regarding them as sensational news.

In contrast to each doubtful character, there are the young women—targeted by their respective entities—that serve as the centre of each film. This is common in both horror movies and real accounts of paranormal experiences: young girls and women are seen as more susceptible to the influences of violent ghosts or demonic entities. They are desperate women and girls who are being tormented by something unseen while also grappling with the persistent doubt of those around them. However, *Ghostwatch* creates doubt without

enforcing harm. It doesn't exist on a binary of doubters and believers, but rather occupies a more nebulous space where belief exists on a spectrum. Again, the character of Sarah Greene approaches her subjects with care and objectivity, rather than immediately dismissing their experiences. While an understanding of the hauntings does come later in *Paranormal Activity*, *Ghostwatch* establishes that understanding and sensitivity as soon as the crew enters the Early home.

**Without *Ghostwatch*, films such as *Paranormal Activity* may not pack such a terrifying punch—or even exist, let alone spawn a franchise.**

When it comes to camera techniques, however, *Paranormal Activity* draws direct inspiration from Manning's film, particularly in its use of static cameras and lingering empty shots that get the viewer on the edge of their seat. *Ghostwatch* employs two different types of cameras in the Early house: a giant handheld camera and security cameras installed in specific points around the home. The handheld camera gives the camera operator mobility and a chance to capture paranormal activity as it happens in any part of the house, such as small crawl spaces or the basement. The security cameras, in contrast, provide a singular view of one specific angle which can detect any changes, no matter how small. These moments are the most tense, as the viewer scans the screen for any small glimpse of a phenomenon. They linger for what feels like seconds too long which only heightens the assumption that something is lurking just around the corner. Instead of having to show an actual apparition, the film can get away with moving a door or squeaking the floorboards, offering low-cost yet effective scares.

This combination of cameras is used in *Paranormal Activity* to achieve low-cost scares, with a single video camera that is both carried by Micah and placed on a tripod in their bedroom. The tripod serves a similar function to the static security cameras; capturing continuous footage of one angle over a long period of time. The most terrifying events happen in these shots; doors shut on their own, there are loud footsteps, and Katie is pulled out of bed. The

static camera provides a distance from the horror, which becomes almost voyeuristic as the events become progressively more violent. This is echoed in *Ghostwatch*, but as the special only occurs over one night, the distance becomes more observational and scientific.

These techniques culminate in each film's climax, shot with a shaky cam that reveals the entity—but only for a second. Both films involve someone being dragged out of the shot by an unseen force and make each home feel like a maze. While shaky cams are used in films such as *Cloverfield* (2008) and *The Blair Witch Project*, these take place in vast landscapes. *Ghostwatch* and *Paranormal Activity* are much more confined, making their characters feel trapped with no way to escape. Each also utilize different camera technology to reveal what hides in the dark. When Chris and Sarah are separated, he utilizes the infrared setting on his camera to find her heat signature. Within this technique lies the potential for scares: will a figure appear behind Sarah? Will something grab her in the dark? The viewer's eyes dart around the screen, looking for clues or a glimpse of something. Micah, on the other hand, uses night vision to track movement in the dark. While less visually arresting than the purples and oranges of a heat signature, its green hues cast an eerie glow on the couple as they sleep, keeping some of the room and hallway in shadow—letting whatever lurks in the darkness continue to hide.

Manning's *Ghostwatch* paved the way for found-footage horror, creating camera techniques that built tension until a horrifying break at the film's end. It also established a blueprint for empathetic and nuanced characters that, unfortunately, haven't necessarily translated well to later films. While many found-footage horror films rely on scares rather than emotional investment, *Ghostwatch* strikes a balance which could perhaps have aided future films in the subgenre. Regardless, *Ghostwatch* was a horror phenomenon that illustrated the creativity and possibilities of the subgenre, all under the leadership of a female director. Its techniques have expanded the way future directors have approached horror storytelling and helped shape found-footage as we know it today. 

## Ephemeral Bodies: A Brief History of Ectoplasm

by CC Stapleton

Humans have always yearned for connection and the knowledge of what lies beyond life. In the mid-1800s, the burgeoning Spiritualist movement tapped into those desires. The movement stemmed from reports that Kate and Margaret Fox, young sisters living in New York City, could communicate with the spirit of a deceased boy through rapping sounds. Séances became a popular pastime for believers in the new movement, which held that death is an ever-evolving state and that spirits of the deceased continue to exist and have both the ability and the desire to communicate with the living.

Spiritualism established itself and gained esteem through word-of-mouth and impromptu gatherings, without any conventional rules or texts. It spread from North America to Europe, eliciting individuals, especially women, to connect to their transcendent side. The rise of mediumship and the development of Spiritualist tools quickly followed. The term 'ectoplasm' was coined by French physiologist Charles Richet at the turn of the 20th century and comes from the Greek *ektos* meaning 'outside' and *plasma* meaning 'something formed or molded.' It was used by Richet to refer to the substance produced by mediums when channeling spirits during séances. Though Richet did not believe in ghosts or the afterlife, he did believe that mediums could possess a type of extrasensory perception.

Early séance photography shows mediums in a trance-like state emitting a gauzy substance which could vary wildly in appearance, ranging from thick

and gelatinous to a thin, fine fabric. The emission of ectoplasm was considered paramount for communication during séances, as the gauze-like material would allow spirits to cover their evanescent body and interact with the physical world. Antique photos of mediums interacting with ectoplasm show ghostly faces within the folds of the cheesecloth-like form, regurgitated from the medium's orifices or from lifelike dolls made up to seem alive with the spirit of the deceased. The desire to know the beyond or communicate with a lost loved one intensified the need for new and more visibly tangible results during séances. Though mediums were already utilizing phenomena like table-rapping and flipping, levitation, and other psychokinesis, the ability to produce ectoplasm elevated their performances to the highest degree. In a superstitious time already primed for the supernatural, mediums conducting midnight séances in dimly lit rooms constructed the extraordinary for their attendees.

**The efforts exhibited by mediums to gain credibility were legendary.**

The desire for and interest in supernatural events increased rapidly, partly due to the efforts of Spiritualists such as Canadian doctor Thomas Hamilton, who photographed mediums interpreting their ectoplasmic experiences. Unfortunately, with the growing popularity of psychic apparitions, mediums found themselves at the centre of a dangerous game; psychical researchers became so interested in the appearance of this otherworldly phenomenon they sought to either explain it—or debunk it.

By the late 1800s, many established and popular mediums were concluded to be fraudulent by the Society of Psychical Research after in-depth investigations. The existence of ectoplasm or any psychic energy able to produce similar results was never scientifically duplicated and the appearance of such matter was found to nothing more than clever trickery on the medium's part. However, it must be said that the efforts exhibited by mediums to gain credibility were legendary. French medium Eva Carrière cut images of faces from magazines and glued on them onto gauze, Scottish medium Helen Duncan would swallow and regurgitate cheese cloth, and Danish medium Einer Nielsen hid his muslin ectoplasm in his rectum during seances.

While scientific investigations call mediumship into question, the idea has withstood the test of time and technology. Even today, mediumship and the concept of ectoplasm continues to elicit chills. Popular culture and entertainment mock the deceit surrounding historic examples of feigned ectoplasm, yet our continued fascination demonstrates just how willing—and wanting—we are to believe. *g*

## DRACULA'S GREATEST TRIUMPH

Recognizing the Vampire Inside Me

by Stephan Hoda

From the moment I heard the vampire's name, I associated him with forbidden desires. I was only seven years old when the very R-rated Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1992) was released to theatres and I was very much forbidden from seeing it. Despite my begging, my parents decided it "just wasn't for kids." Unacceptable! We were a family of horror fans (seriously, my dad had me convinced he was an actual werewolf) but vampires were definitely *my thing*. Perhaps as a consolation, my mother went out and bought me a high-collared black cape from our local K-Mart. That Hallowe'en, an elementary-aged but very convincing Count Dracula stalked the streets of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi in white face paint and plastic fangs.

Dracula is my hero. There are a small handful of interests that I would cite as being life-long loves and Bram Stoker's vampire king is definitely among them. In fact, a children's abridged version of the novel was the first ever chapter-book that I read of my own volition. Of course, nothing brought me more gothic glee than that cheap vampire cape from K-Mart. Well beyond Hallowe'en, I would swoosh about in that exquisite garment, imagining myself an undead creature of the night. It looked especially cool billowing behind me as I rode my bike up and down our dirt road driveway. Little could I have known, of course, what these Dracula-imaginings were going to come to represent in my life. At that age, I was only beginning to perceive the dichotomy between hegemony and otherness, let alone my place in the scheme of it. How could I

have known that my affinity for vampires was a hint as to the man I would grow up to be? How could I have known that swooshing about in my K-Mart cape was a child's performance art that would someday come to imitate an actualized queer life? I did not see *Dracula* in '92... but he had certainly seen me.

**Little could I have known, of course, what these Dracula-imaginings were going to come to represent in my life.**

After years of holding Stoker's masterpiece near and dear to my heart, I have come to realize that my adoration for both his work and its resulting iconography (including films) goes well beyond the simple enjoyment of a spooky story; I find *myself* in the narrative. Indeed, it takes no stretch of the imagination to see how people who identify as queer might relate to the undead. Just like vampires, we undergo a transformation the day that we realize who we truly are. Just like vampires, many of us go through a phase of living in the shadows, hiding who we are from the light of day. And, just like vampires, we know the danger of holy men brandishing crosses with righteous indignation. To exist is to be reviled; *Dracula* ends with a stake through the vampire's heart.

While this appears, at first glance, to represent and underscore a more tragic understanding of queerness, I would argue for a reclaiming of the vampire metaphor through a recognition of its

liberating characteristics. Stoker's novel undeniably validates and exploits the fear of otherness, yet I find, with a queer reading of *Dracula*, a relevant metaphor for awakened sexuality, the coming-out process, and the inherent awareness of potential violence borne by queer communities. *Dracula* may have been written as a monster, but is it *he* who is truly the villain?

Bram Stoker set out to write a *horror* story. As such, it is necessary to understand the horror *Dracula* wields, the terror he is meant to inspire, if we are to get at the heart of his transformative power. The horror of *Dracula* is, necessarily, the heteronormative focus of the book. While the interpretations are many, what is commonly agreed upon, and relevant in this case, is the reading of Stoker's work as expressing Western anxiety toward the foreign. *Dracula*, an effeminate foreigner, comes to Victorian England to infect and claim good virtuous English ladies. The fear of exogamy, as John Allen Stevenson writes in his article "A Vampire in the Mirror," is what's truly at play in *Dracula*. *Exogamy* is anthropology-speak for marrying outside one's tribe. In other words, exogamy means to leave behind the people and customs of one's ancestors through union with an outsider. *Dracula*, then, is a force that has come to claim and pervert the next generation. He represents the fear of societal infection by the other.

The fear of infection and conversion by the other is one that will be immediately familiar to the queer reader. It is a

common fear/faulty narrative that heterosexual cis youth are in danger of being seduced and converted by the denizens of the LGBTQ community. This is, essentially, the fear of queering through exogamy: "As a mother, I know that homosexuals cannot biologically reproduce children; therefore, they must recruit our children," said Anita Bryant, American singer turned anti-gay rights activist. When discussing *Dracula* as a narrative of threat-to-the-norm (as Stoker intended), the characterization of queerness becomes painfully clear: dangerous and infectious. The vampire, then, stands as a rather chilling metaphor for queer people; one that seeks to tempt, convert, and destroy. Looking to *Dracula*, the process of conversion (i.e. queering) is detailed in the climactic episode involving the seduction of Lucy Westenra.

Lucy Westenra is a victim of *Dracula* and represents the book's only complete transformation to vampirism. She is described by Stoker as remarkably beautiful, with golden hair and a sweet disposition. In Coppola's film, she is played by the vivacious Sadie Frost as exceedingly flirtatious and overtly sexual. This is the version of Lucy that I was most familiar with growing up, though it must be said that she isn't quite so forward in the novel. In either case, however, Lucy has attracted the attention of three potential suitors. Having rejected the first two, she agrees to a marriage with the wealthy and handsome Arthur Holmwood (Cary Elwes: swoon!). In today's parlance, Lucy is what you might call a "femme icon." I remember seeing her on screen, in those fabulous gowns, owning every scene graced with her presence...and she got THREE boyfriends! I absolutely wanted to be her! Of course, the story progresses and Lucy ultimately attracts the attention of yet another suitor—in this case, a vampire.

*Dracula* is drawn to Lucy. It seems rather obvious that her flirtatious nature is what was written to have attracted the attention of a vampire. From the novel and many film interpretations, we see this depiction of her, again and again: Lucy strays from purity, from behaving like a proper lady, and thus attracts the harbinger of her downfall. In other words, the problem wasn't the vampire. It was her own "wantonness." Even as *Dracula* attacks her, even as her doom



**Lucy strays from purity, from behaving like a proper lady, and thus attracts the harbinger of her downfall.**

becomes more and more apparent, Lucy is seen to crave him. In a manner of speaking, "vampirism" was already within her. *Dracula* simply gave her permission to embrace it.

**When discussing *Dracula* as a narrative of threat-to-the-norm (as Stoker intended), the characterization of queerness becomes painfully clear: dangerous and infectious.**

As with Lucy Westenra, the vampire was already inside of me. I knew I was different. I knew from bullies and conservative family members that my outward femininity was a flirtation with dark possibilities. I suppose it came as no surprise to anyone when I began to notice other boys. Night after night, I would lay in bed, reflecting on what that meant. "I am gay," I would repeat to myself. "I am gay." I would repeat it so many times that it started to sound like a different language. "I. Am. Gay." Each daybreak brought the growing realization that these feelings were real and not going away. It didn't matter how

hard I prayed. It didn't matter if I hung a crucifix above the bed and cloves of garlic on the windowsill. This thing was coming, invited or not. Like Lucy, I both anticipated and feared the possibility that I might be becoming different. I both desired and reviled it. My own personal "*Dracula*," the acceptance of myself as a gay person, inspired no less a terrifying presence than the vampire himself.

The queer reading of *Dracula* necessarily reinterprets the vampire's role from antagonist to hierophant. Whereas he is written as a corrupting force of the vulnerable, I would argue that *Dracula* is a liberator. He brings not damnation but empowerment. He bids us to own and live our truths; to abandon the repressive tendencies of patriarchal institutions and embrace the courage to lead an authentic life. Indeed, who *wouldn't* want Count *Dracula* to be their guide through the initiation of queerness?

By the age of seventeen, I, like so many queer people before me, had lived through the terror of *Dracula*...

the terror of queer exogamy. Through my attraction to men, I had abandoned the norm and become a monster: an avowed homosexual. In the subsequent years, *Dracula* has become for me the very personification of queer awakening and self-love. Of course, the life of a "vampire" is fraught with danger and, with the end of *Dracula*, we find one more lesson for the queer initiate: survive! There will always be those, often emboldened by faith, ready to exact vengeance upon the *other*. Lucy is killed by the very men who professed to love her. Having driven a stake through her heart, it is remarked that she once again appears to be of "...unequaled sweetness and purity." Lucy, then, is forcibly realigned with the norm by means of her murder. In the eyes of our "heroes," she is better off dead. *Dracula* meets the very same fate, by the same men armed with wooden stakes. Mina Harker, *Dracula*'s second fixation, is thereby saved from the vampire's curse. With the women subdued and the vampire defeated, all is set right by our gallant heroes. The patriarchal order is restored and *Dracula* is, at long last, dead...or is he?

I can find no way to write this eloquently: growing up gay meant that I had to come to terms with the reality

that I might someday be beaten or killed for being who I am. In a queer reading, my reading, the real horror of *Dracula* lies in the hands of those ready to do violence in the name of their bigoted convictions. The boogeyman isn't some vampire beckoning at the window, it's the angry men waiting to reduce your life to ashes via violence or legislation. Stoker wrote his "happy ending" with the intent to say, "The monster is defeated! The norm prevails!" He alleviates the fear of (vampiric) exogamy through destruction of the *other*. Well, with all due respect to the author of my favourite book, I'm happy to report that *Dracula* has survived.

**I would argue that *Dracula* is a liberator. He brings not damnation but empowerment.**

If countless sequels, spin-offs, and reboots have taught us anything, it's this: *Dracula* is never truly vanquished. What if the Count's greatest return isn't on paper or film but in the hearts of those branded with the label of *other*? What if it is we who are living *Dracula*'s greatest triumph? It's been a long time since I argued with my parents about seeing the movie but, after all these years, *Dracula* still has a hold on my heart. For me, the real beauty of *Dracula* comes in

reading its presentation of monstrosity as empowerment and *Dracula*'s death as existing only insofar as we *allow* him to die. *Dracula* reminds me to push back against institutions that seek to oppress. He reminds me to resist the call of the norm and speak out for those who are *other*. He reminds me that I am not alone, for the *other* is many.

Francis Ford Coppola went on to open a winery. As a mass-marketed product, his wine is relatively easy to come across. So easy, in fact, that I've made a little tradition out of grabbing a merlot or cabernet (always red, of course) to enjoy with friends, paired with a viewing of *Dracula*. I always enjoy tipping my glass to the screen as *Dracula* explains, "I never drink...wine." On one such occasion, I recall a friend asking me if I believed in vampires. "You believe a lot of crazy stuff. Do you believe in *vampires*?" Literally, of course, the answer was no. Still, I couldn't help but remember that little boy in the K-Mart cape and the long journey that has brought me to where I am. "You're sitting next to one," I replied with a wink. Somehow, I don't suspect he was very afraid.

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Aokigahara is located in the Yamanashi Prefecture of Japan, which lies within the Chūbu region on the main island of Honshū. In Japan, the forest is referred to as *Aokigahara-jukai* or the 'Sea of Trees.' As part of the Minamitsuru District, the 3,000 hectares of forest sits at the northern base of Mount Fuji. Renowned as a geological beauty spot, with Lake Sai and Lake Shoji to the south, there are several walking trails and caves that visitors flock to each year. It is easy to lose one's way in the dense forest and hikers often leave markers of ribbon or similar material on their route to guide them back through the forest.

Similar markers are also used by a particular group of visitors to Aokigahara for another purpose: to guide authorities to their bodies. The forest wields an infamous reputation as a site at which people commit suicide, usually by drug overdose or hanging. Several sources note that the volume of reported suicides within Aokigahara makes the forest one of the world's most popular places for people to take their own lives, second only to the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. The highest number of suicides recorded in Aokigahara was 105 in 2003. In recent years, Japanese authorities have refrained from releasing data relating to suicides in an attempt to prevent further instances. Signage at the entrances to trails, in Japanese and English, also implores potential suicide victims to rethink their intentions with such phrases as, "Your life is a precious gift from your parents."

The forest paints a picture of pathos, and such familial references call cultural factors into context. This article does not have the means to provide the complex background detail necessary to touch upon the cultural, political, and economic landscape of Japanese society, but the question must be asked: why do so many people choose to take their lives in Japan each year in this particular spot? Suicidal thoughts can plague people at any point in their lives, regardless of gender, class, or other such distinctions. Human behaviour is incredibly complex; the decision to terminate one's life is completely subjective, depending on comprehensive and unique factors and experiences, as well as the individual's psychological and emotional state at the time.

# Fear to Tread

However, some cultural patterns can be drawn in regards to the limited information recorded about suicide victims within Aokigahara. The fact that most people are reported to be males between 40 and 50 years of age suggests that financial difficulty, specifically related to high positions of corporate responsibility, the stigma of unemployment, and social expectations in a traditionally patriarchal society amid changing gender politics, is a contributing stress factor. This is supported by the fact that suicides increase in number during March, which is the end of the fiscal year in Japan.

Traditionally, Japan has culturally and socially demonstrated a high tolerance for suicide. When faced with the humiliating prospect of informing loved ones and peers of a 'shameful' situation—as modern corporate demotion or dismissal could be interpreted by the afflicted individual—Japanese culture often historically embraced suicide as an honourable or morally responsible alternative. This harkens to the way of the samurai (medieval nobility and officers), who, in ancient times, would perform *seppuku* or ritual disembowelment upon themselves as a means of suicide reserved specifically for samurai who had committed a serious offence or brought shame upon themselves and their family.

Though Japanese crime writer Seicho Matsumoto's novel *Kuroi Jukai* (*Black Sea of Trees*, 1960) has been accused of popularizing Aokigahara's dark reputation, due to characters taking

their own lives in the forest, the location has a historical association with death. In Japanese mythology, Aokigahara is said to have been a site associated with *ubasute*; the practice of leaving elderly or ill relatives in a specific location to die, often during times of austerity. According to folklore, this is said to have taken place until the nineteenth century in Japan (though there is no evidence to support this).

*The Forest* (2016) is an American supernatural tale set primarily in Aokigahara. The directorial debut of Jason Zada, the film was written by Ben Ketai, Nick Antosca, and Sarah Cornwell. Drawing on the imbalanced relationship between twin sisters Sara and Jess (both played by Natalie Dormer), predicated by a childhood trauma that was witnessed by one and not the other, the main action of the film is interwoven with the forest's suicidal history—and this is where the tenuous link ends. This isn't to say that *The Forest* isn't enjoyable as modern horror fare; despite the usual formulaic use of genre conventions, the film is entertaining and contains a cleverly executed subtle use of formal storytelling to colour the narrative and Sara's character (in which the dialogue, recounting a memory, does not match a visual flashback). I did, however, feel uncomfortable in regards to the film's apparent disregard for Japanese culture and decision to use the sensitive site of Aokigahara as the central focus of the story. The film could well have been set in any American forest, and this wouldn't have affected the story in the

# The Americanization of Aokigahara

by Rebecca Booth

least—instead, the filmmakers chose to Americanize Aokigahara.

The film begins with Sara waking from a nightmare in which a woman in distress is running through the forest, before Sara suddenly gets on a plane. The film then gradually backtracks to the days before her departure, intercut with Sara travelling alone to her destination. The flashbacks reveal that Sara's twin sister, Jess, an English tutor in Tokyo, did not return from a school trip to Aokigahara.

The opening sequence is edited in such a way that the audience is automatically distanced from her character due to the little time spent with her and the formal way that she is introduced. Despite explaining to her fiancé Rob (Eoin Macken) that she knows her sister isn't dead because of their psychic connection, Sara feels completely detached from the other characters onscreen, as well as the audience. Aside from this brief scene showing that she is in a long-term relationship, viewers know nothing about her character, her job, or the life she so quickly leaves behind in order to search for her sister.

Additionally, Dormer's portrayal of Sara is somewhat cold, pronounced by the way she confidently travels alone to a foreign country, fully expecting—and even demanding—that the domestic culture caters to her. In a restaurant, she is the source of laughter for a group of local women who find her disgust at the (extremely) fresh sushi she is offered comical. When she ventures into a tourist station on the outskirts

of Aokigahara to enquire if anyone has seen her sister, Sara does not respond to the friendly greeting of "*Konnichiwa*" from the woman behind the counter at all, in Japanese or English, and does not pause to ask her if she speaks English; she simply launches into her series of questions. Sara is the embodiment of Westernization; everything must be on her terms and she is ignorant, disrespectful, and expresses an air of superiority in relation to the cultural nuances of the country in which she finds herself.

This is also the case in the way she bargains with an American journalist, Aiden (Taylor Kinney), whom she meets in a bar. Aiden is fluent in Japanese and is entering Aokigahara the next day with a guide for a piece he is writing on the forest. He shares Sara's insatiable appetite and somewhat disrespectful ethics in getting what he wants, in that he agrees to take her into the forest if he can add her very human story, the search for her suicidal sister, into his article. Tactful. However, this does provide a perfect narrative prompt for Sara to reveal why she feels compelled to search for her sister. Inseparable, almost like they were one person, Sara informs Aiden's Dictaphone that the girls were robbed of their parents by a car crash. A series of flashbacks accompanying her tale reveal that Sara's father shot her mother and then killed himself; Jess saw the aftermath but Sara wouldn't open her eyes. Ever since, Sara has looked after and taken responsibility for her difficult sister partially out of guilt that she was spared

the traumatic scene that has troubled Jess throughout her life.

**Sara is the embodiment of Westernization; everything must be on her terms and she is ignorant, disrespectful, and expresses an air of superiority in relation to the cultural nuances of the country in which she finds herself.**

Through the character of Aiden and their guide, Michi (Yuki Yoshi Ozawa), the script does touch on several elements associated with the history of the forest and its folklore. Not long into their trek, the group discover a tent and Michi has a brief chat with its occupant. In a subtle yet sobering scene, he then informs Sara and Aiden that if a person brings a tent to the forest, they are still debating whether or not to end their lives. The group also come across a body hanging from a tree, which later returns as an embodiment of either psychological or paranormal activity to 'haunt' Sara.

Within the lens of this folkloric history, the souls of suicide victims are said to be absorbed by the 'sea of trees' and become *yūrei*, ghosts in torment kept from the afterlife. In the two main or traditional Japanese religions—Shinto and Buddhism—the spirit or *reikon* is said to exist in a state of purgatory or limbo until the correct funerary rites are performed, allowing the deceased person to travel into the afterlife. If these rites aren't performed, and especially if the person was in a state of anger or another acute emotional state

“Instead of embracing and capturing the spiritual, sombre, and silent world of the forest, it is used to house generic and—more importantly—Westernized ghostly spirits that appear via shallow jump-scares and have no sociocultural relevance to Aokigahara.

at the time of death, the spirit becomes a *yūrei*, able to physically manifest on the earthly plane. Cinematically, this spirit is often depicted in Japanese horror as a woman with a pale complexion, long black hair, and dressed in white—with disjointed movements and preternatural abilities (popularized in films such as *Kaidan Kasane-ga-fuchi* (*Ghost Story of Kasane Swamp/The Depths*, 1957); *Kwaidan* (1965); *Ringu* (1998); and *Ju-on: The Grudge* (2002)). Unfortunately, the two main entities in *The Forest*—one the hooded body cut down from the tree and the other a schoolgirl who turns into a demonic creature—do not develop or explore this figure beyond visceral scares.

However, despite this apparent cultural ignorance, the film's strength lies in the fact that the ghostly activity is never definitely confirmed as such. Michi warns Sara, as they enter the forest, that she may see strange things, but that these are only the ghosts within her mind—implying that the dense, silent forest, combined with knowledge of its apparent spiritual history, can have a psychological effect on visitors. This is reified by the clever inclusion of a scientific anomaly; Aiden shows Sara that his compass is spinning strangely, which is due to interference caused by the magnetic iron content in the soil.

Thus, when Sara is haunted by apparitions, the audience is never sure if Sara is confronting her inner demons or the manifestation of spirits in the forest. Though the film doesn't explicitly mention the fact that around 2am is considered the witching hour in Japanese culture, when the veil between the physical and spiritual

worlds is weakest, the first instance of ghostly activity occurs at night. Sara stubbornly refuses to leave the forest after discovering her sister's tent, even though darkness is closing in and it would be safer for the trio to leave and come back the following day. Aiden decides to stay with her and Michi, reluctantly, leaves.

This is the point at which the film turns away from the history of the forest and instead uses it as a pretty backdrop for the action. Instead of embracing and capturing the spiritual, sombre, and silent world of the forest, it is used to house generic and—more importantly—Westernized ghostly spirits that appear via shallow jump-scares and have no sociocultural relevance to Aokigahara.

Whereas *yūrei* are spirits trapped in purgatory and were in an emotionally distressed state when they took their own lives, as one would assume in regards to the ghosts of Aokigahara, the two main spirits that appear seem to have an agenda in tormenting Sara about her sister. This provides further evidence of Sara's guilt in not looking when her father killed her mother and then himself; Jess did see their bodies and has been severely affected, bailed out of each mess by the responsible Sara. Jess has attempted suicide several times due to her personal trauma and it is ironic that Sara travels to Aokigahara to save her sister, only to find herself the victim of her own demons.

The spirits are thus goading Sara to take her own life and are part of the hallucinations, or hauntings, related to her personal psychological trauma. One other reading is of note: that the filmmakers intentionally Americanized

Aokigahara as a commentary on Westernization. This is interesting considering that Sara is ultimately claimed by the forest, after murdering Aiden under the influence of the spirits, while Jess is free to escape. Jess has been immersed in the national and local culture for some time, having travelled to Japan to tutor and thus contribute to cultural exchange in a respectful way. She has survived in the forest for several days while Sara has apparently succumbed to the demons of the forest/her mind overnight. When coupled with Dormer's glacial performance, the film takes on a very different tone and suggests that Sara (via the internalization of her childhood trauma) is the embodiment of Western guilt for refusing to look, to acknowledge, to see.

It is ironic that Sara travels to Aokigahara to save her sister, only to find herself the victim of her own demons.

However, the *yūrei* presented in *The Forest* appear to be agents of the area itself, calling people to commit suicide and join them in death. This generalized, and thus Western, approach ignores completely the very real tragedy of so many lives lost in Aokigahara; any spiritual associations with the site, or the national, cultural, political, and socioeconomic conditions that led to the decision of so many to take their lives there. Though *The Forest* has an interesting central character with a plausible backstory of personal trauma related specifically to suicide, this narrative could have played out in any isolated location. Aokigahara, and the audience of the film, deserved so much more than Americanization. **g**

## Strega Nona: Tracking the Origin of Italy's Most Famous Witch

by Laura Di Girolamo

As a little Italian-Canadian kid, my earliest introduction to witches was through my Nonna (“grandmother” in Italian). Whenever I stayed over at her blast-from-the-past, mid-70s-decorated house (a dead ringer for Cher's in *Moonstruck*), she'd read me a story: the popular children's book *Strega Nona* by Tomie dePaola. Strega Nona is a little old lady who lives in a cottage in Southern Italy, casting helpful spells on her neighbours to help them fall in love, shrink warts, and cure headaches. When her not-very-bright assistant Big Anthony accidentally misuses Strega Nona's magic pasta pot and floods the entire town with delicious carbs, it's up to Strega Nona to reverse the spell and save their village.

*Strega Nona* was written in 1975, won a Caldecott Honor Award in 1976, and is considered a classic of children's literature. Many people of Italian descent (including an informal poll of my Italian-Canadian relatives and friends) have fond memories of the book and can recall various other Strega Nona myths and legends passed down to them by their grandparents. While *Strega Nona* was initially sold as “an old tale retold,” dePaola has made no secret of the fact that Strega Nona was a character of his invention, inspired by other Italian folktales. So, what was the inspiration behind *Strega Nona*, and why is this character—a benevolent old witch who uses folk magic for curing headaches and making unlimited pasta—so beloved?

She may have roots in the actual folktale of La Befana, aka “The Christmas Witch,” who flies down on her broomstick to visit children on January 6th, the Christian feast of the Epiphany. Much like Santa Claus, if you were good during the Christmas season, you'd receive gifts from La Befana. But, if you were bad, there'd be nothing but

coal and soot in your stocking. Unlike Santa Claus, though, La Befana's origins trace back to the early 14th century. She's most often associated with a legend that states that she hosted the Three Wise Men on their way to find the newborn Christ. As a thank-you for her delicious food and warm hospitality, they invited her to come with them. She initially declined, citing too much housework, but, eventually, her curiosity won out. She followed the same star they did but wasn't able to find Jesus in time (apparently the originator of this myth didn't think much of female navigational skills). Now, she rides on her broomstick, searching for good children all over the world after Christmas.

Interestingly, historians believe the story of La Befana may have originated from several other pre-Christian, pagan gift-giving traditions in Rome (with coal representing fertility), or agriculture-based practices that involved wicker branches—also associated with the broomstick La Befana rides on—shaped like “old lady” dolls, ritualistically set on fire to signal a bountiful start to the year.

Like *Strega Nona*, La Befana is a story told by cobbling together other stories—in this case, with both Christian and pagan influences. So, where do they fit within an even broader context?

La Befana represents a wise mythical figure who rewards or punishes, teaching children that their negative actions have negative outcomes. Blessings from this wise figure result in an overall sense of auspiciousness. Strega Nona helps fellow villagers with their everyday troubles but punishes Big Anthony by making him eat all of the pasta he has magically conjured. Sounds like a dream come true, but trust me...it's way too much pasta.

As an avatar of the Wise Old Woman archetype in mythology, La Befana's (and Strega Nona's) primary function is to bestow knowledge to the younger generation, much as our Nonnas passed down both conventional advice and folkloric superstitions like wearing horn-shaped charms to repel evil or making sure to never give a knife as a gift to a loved one. It's often Italian women who are the keepers of this wisdom—it's no surprise that Strega Nona's male assistant Big Anthony has no idea how to use her magic pasta pot.

As an avatar of the Wise Old Woman archetype in mythology, La Befana's (and Strega Nona's) primary function is to bestow knowledge to the younger generation

These stories also teach us that the concept of magic is an accessible one. “Kitchen witchery,” as it is known in occult circles today, can be as simple as making a wish on some spices and adding them to your cooking. Strega Nona's pasta pot was so wondrously abundant it could feed—or bury—an entire town, and La Befana's cooking was so good it galvanized the Three Wise Men into inviting her on their sacred journey. They used the few things women traditionally had available to them—herbs, flour, pots, and pans—to make magic.

There's a pleasure in going back to these ancient vessels of female agency that feels almost primal—cooking, after all, is just fire, boiling water, knives to chop up gifts the Earth gives us. To cook is to create. And, really, isn't a fantastic plate of carbonara, with its perfectly glossy egg-and-Pecorino coating that requires just the right amount of starch and time and heat, pretty damn magical? **g**

The found-footage subgenre has been a potent driver of innovation in storytelling of late; films like *Open Windows* (2013) and *Unfriended* (2014) tap into modern anxieties involving technology while offering a thrilling sense of immediacy. The lower budgets associated with the subgenre encourage experimentation and filmmakers have developed fresh new approaches to their narratives.

Michelle Iannantuono's *Livescream* takes place entirely within a gamer's livestream and boasts numerous tension-boosting levels. Despite having no 'real' interaction between its characters, it elicits a surprisingly strong emotional response at several points. I spoke to Michelle about filmmaking, gaming, and her next moves.

**Livescream feels like a tale plucked from a creepypasta website; a modern urban legend with a millennial twist. What inspired it?**

I've been immersed in streaming and Let's Play culture since 2013. It's the primary entertainment of an entire generation at this point. And regularly sitting down to watch 1-2 hour long YouTube videos like that—feature-length content—the filmmaker in me wondered if I could ever make a narrative feature within that format.

**You proved that you could! You created nine very different games for the film using Unreal Engine. What was that process like?**

It was about a three-week process, mostly brute-forcing my way through it with lots of YouTube tutorials.

**Have you thought about making a Livescream game available?**

I have wanted to make it playable! Maybe as an expo booth thing or promo thing. I probably wouldn't bother selling it, just because the games themselves are so referential.

**Part of the fun of the film is recognizing the inspiration for each level. Were there games that you would like to have paid homage to but couldn't fit in?**

We somehow didn't get much Resident Evil in there, despite it being such an iconic horror franchise. But if I get to do a sequel, RE will be one of the core inspirations.

**Gunner Willis is perfect in a very demanding role, essentially delivering a 70-minute monologue. How did you find him?**

I invited about 15 guys to audition.



224 USERS ONLINE

**EURIMEED:** this game is creepy  
**LUIXA:** Simon isn't answering.  
**DELUCKY:** he trolling YOU fam  
**LUIXA:** stfu, this is real  
**LUIXA:** maybe his gf can check  
**JUMPINGWOLF:** It's a loop...  
**GLAZRR:** wallpaper's yellow now  
**BANGHARDER:** I can't watch!  
**PARROTPARTY:** I'm not scared  
**RAWKSTAR:** mother of...  
**KNOTTYDAWG:** hey my exwife  
**LEMONHEDD:** GET HER



## Play or Die: Michelle Iannantuono Talks Livescream

BY VALESKA GRIFFITHS

Four got called back and Gunner was cast from the callbacks. I auditioned and interviewed these guys quite extensively. I needed to know they could carry the whole film.

**Was Gunner playing the game during the shoot or just reacting to a prerecorded gaming session? It all flowed so naturally!**

It was definitely pre-recorded. We didn't want to throw out one of those very long takes because the game bugged in the middle of filming or Gunner had trouble jumping or something! But really it's because no one had a more intimate knowledge of the triggers and timing of the levels than me. They're more like funhouses than games. Monsters don't attack randomly like a normal game—they're all on timers and stuff. So, it was easiest to just have Gunner react to it.

**Were aspects of Scott Atkinson inspired by any real-life streamers?**

Definitely the friendliness and approachability of Markiplier and JackSepticEye, maybe Jeremy Dooley as well. I didn't want to make him an edgelord gamer—the type who uses slurs and gross humour. I went more for the guys that try to foster positivity. His backstory is quite similar to Mark's, I believe—the listlessness of adult life that turned into an obsessive dedication to this new purpose.

**Livescream seems like one seamless take. Its very few cuts are practically unnoticeable. How long did it actually take to shoot and what was it like on set?**

The film is made up of three takes. We had two shoot days to make sure we could get it done the way we wanted it. It was the strangest "set" ever. Just me and Gunner in my living room for eight hours a day.

**The film has screened at a number of festivals. What has the reception been like?**

Overwhelmingly positive, which really surprised me. Since the Blu-ray release, I've been able to introduce it to my online fans, which is also very cool. They're gamer Millennials—literally who the film is made for—so, getting it in the hands of the right audience is very satisfying.

**While you've made several shorts previously, Livescream was your first feature film. What's next for Octopunk Media?**

We are hard at work on another feature! We did a fan film short this year called *Detroit Awakening* which has nearly half a million views on YouTube. From that, we were able to crowdfund a sequel, *Detroit Evolution*, which will shoot in October and release in the spring. It's based in the universe of the video game *Detroit Become Human*. We also have a comedy short called *Seven Deadly Synths* about envy, synthesizers, and queer Millennials that is currently on the festival circuit.

**You've explored different media, including novel-writing and boardgame development. Are particularly drawn to any medium, or do they each fulfil different aspects of your personality?**

I think film is certainly the most fulfilling, but I'm excited to get into video game development and see what stories can be told there. Overall, I'm drawn to visual mediums the most.

**Do you have advice for female filmmakers looking to make their first feature?**

Tell the story only you can tell—and use the unique resources within yourself, and your unique perspective, as your greatest strength. **g**

# When Life Haunts Art: The Legacy of Shirley's Ghosts

by Gena Radcliffe

**Even when she was young, she looked like a spinster aunt.** By the time she reached middle age—the true age of spinsterhood, we were all led to believe—time and lifestyle choices had not been kind to her. In her forties, she appeared to be sixty, and had long since surrendered in a lifetime battle with her weight, dressing mostly in oversized cardigans and men's flannel shirts. Though she was both a prolific and well-regarded writer, she was intensely private, averse to talking about her craft, let alone herself. Few recordings of her speaking exist; in the ones that do, her voice is whiskey-and-cigarettes dry, a little like Lauren Bacall.

Shirley Jackson wrote six novels, more than one hundred short stories, four children's books, and three essay collections, before dying in her sleep at age 48. Writing was all Jackson ever wanted to do, even when she was young. She lived a life of privilege then, and the only thing she had to

trade in for it was a loving, secure relationship with her mother who, from the moment Jackson emerged from the womb, seemed to find nothing but fault with her.

It would be a pattern that repeated itself until she married Stanley Hyman. Then, she had a spouse who supported and encouraged her writing, but in turn couldn't remain faithful if someone offered him a million dollars and the keys to a brand new car. One has the sense that while Hyman was impressed with Jackson's intelligence and talent, he also resented her for it. Rather than hold her back from succeeding, as other insecure men would do, he made her pay for it in a different way, by humiliating her with one affair after another.

Even a cursory glance at Jackson's stories show a common thread: the distrust that comes when people show you one face, only for that mask to

slip once your back is turned. Many of Jackson's protagonists believe that people are talking about or laughing at them behind their backs, and often, they turn out to be right. Eleanor Vance, the main character of Jackson's most well-known novel, *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), is equal parts naive and suspicious. She's eager to befriend her temporary housemates Theo and Luke, but is also convinced that they're mocking her for her inexperience, and their friendly gestures towards her are insincere and malicious.

Eleanor's paranoia becomes worse the longer she stays in the house. But in the end, what's even scarier than strange knockings on the walls and cold spots is the knowledge that you're utterly alone in the world. When Eleanor leaves Hill House, she knows she will have nothing and no one.

So, she ends up staying forever.



Because Hyman, a literature professor at Bennington College in Vermont, chose to sleep with his students, he and Jackson's marriage, as well as Jackson herself, were often the subject of gossip. Hyman ignored it, while Jackson alternately claimed to both dismiss and relish it. She cultivated her image as an unconventional wife and mother, often claiming to be a real-life witch, but she resented being patronized by the college faculty and treated with smiling derision by other women. A similar image of small-town busybodies who enjoy making their neighbours squirm is particularly jarring in her short story "The Renegade." The main character, a young housewife and mother, discovers that her dog has murdered a neighbour's chickens. More accurately, she's told this, without seeing any evidence of it. Adding to the stress and embarrassment of the situation, it seems that every single person in her small town already knows about it, and they all have suggestions for her on how to dissuade the dog from any further misbehaviour, each one more gruesome than the last.

*Even a cursory glance at Jackson's stories show a common thread: the distrust that comes when people show you one face, only for that mask to slip once your back is turned.*

There's an unsettling sense that they're all lying to her, making up such repulsive punishments as tying a rotting chicken carcass around the dog's neck just to see how she reacts. The story ends with her children coming home from school and revealing that even they've already heard what their dog has supposedly done. They've been given the most horrifying advice of all: put a spiked collar around the dog's neck that will, should it go after any neighbour's chickens again, tear its head off. "Cut your head right off," her son says, giggling like he's just told a good joke. Everything we fear about gossip is perfectly captured—the random cruelty of it, and the idea that even your own home and the people who love you have been tainted by it.

Stephen King, who's named Jackson as

one of his biggest influences, has often written about the undercurrent of evil that exists in small towns, but his is more of the supernatural variety than simply small-minded, provincial neighbours. In Jackson's "The Lottery," she spends a great deal of time describing the care that goes into the choosing of the rocks that will be used in a town stoning ritual, one in which the individual to be sacrificed is randomly selected. We are told nothing about what happens when the stoning begins; in fact, it ends with one of the most unsettling closing lines in literature: "And then they were upon her." Tessie Hutchinson, the woman chosen to be stoned, laments the unfairness of it, evidently not believing that her name would ever be drawn, but her pleas fall on deaf ears. She's not their friend or neighbour anymore. She's not a person—she's a sacrifice.

The second ghost that haunted the periphery of Jackson's stories is James Harris, a name that shows up in more than half of the short stories featured in the same collection as "The Lottery." Inspired by a Scottish ballad called "James Harris, The Daemon Lover," Jackson wrote Harris, in one form or another, to represent faithlessness, desire, and danger. In her story "The Daemon Lover," a young woman engaged to Harris discovers on their wedding day that he's disappeared. After expending great effort in trying to find him (with growing conviction that she looks silly, if not pathetic), she tracks Harris down to where she believes he lives, but can only hear voices and laughter inside his apartment, where no one answers her knocking at the door. Again, there's playing to the fear that somewhere, someone is having a good laugh at your expense, a feeling that is already present in Eleanor when *The Haunting of Hill House* begins, and that consumes her as the story unfolds.

Harris appears again in "Like Mother Used to Make," a fascinatingly weird story about a timid young man who, while trying to court his obnoxious neighbour, finds himself pushed out of his apartment when the neighbour invites her boss over for dinner. Here, Harris is the boss, and barely acknowledges the young man's presence. The young man, who meekly goes along with his neighbour taking credit for the food he's made and

even claiming his home as her own, eventually leaves unnoticed by anyone, essentially switching places with the neighbour and taking over her shabby, dirty apartment.

As in "The Daemon Lover," Harris is only spoken of in "Of Course," but his presence looms large, even ominously. In this story, Mrs. Tylor makes the acquaintance of a shy new neighbour, Mrs. Harris, who speaks almost entirely about her husband, an academic who doesn't allow anyone in the household to go to the movies, listen to the radio, or read newspapers, deeming them "intellectually retarding." The story is an excellent study in quiet menace—Mrs. Harris, though her demeanour and tone suggest otherwise, speaks as though her husband's unreasonable demands regarding what she and their son can do for entertainment is normal.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Tylor is increasingly disquieted by the conversation for reasons she can't really articulate. Mr. Harris never appears, but his shadow falls over everything. It wasn't clear in 1949, when "Of Course" was published, but isolating one's spouse from outside influences like newspapers and movies is common in abusive relationships; otherwise, they'll eventually figure out that what they're experiencing is, of course, not normal at all.

*The story is an excellent study in quiet menace—Mrs. Harris, though her demeanour and tone suggest otherwise, speaks as though her husband's unreasonable demands regarding what she and their son can do for entertainment is normal.*

Though he wasn't particularly handsome, tall, or thin, as James Harris was often (but not always) described, it's not difficult to see many of Harris' both attractive and negative qualities in Stanley Hyman. Hyman was drawn to Jackson through her writing and they had a passionate courtship. Though he claimed to be a "militant atheist," and was a liberal-minded intellectual, after they married

he became a run-of-the-mill chauvinist, expecting Shirley to be both the primary breadwinner through her writing and handle all the housekeeping and child-rearing tasks. While he claimed to be proud of Jackson's writing ability, he often minimized her talent, describing it as a sort of 'on autopilot function' that he had to help edit into shape. Like Mrs. Harris' husband in "Of Course," he was disdainful of most mass-market fiction—which, of course, is the kind of work that Jackson wrote.

Then, of course, there was the rampant, almost compulsive cheating which, in Hyman's defence, he did warn Jackson about when they became a couple (but refused to curtail even when it became clear that it was psychologically damaging to her).

The more Jackson was consumed by depression and, later, agoraphobia, which made writing difficult and promoting her work impossible, the more Hyman insisted that his behaviour wasn't at least part of the problem. As with her mother, who, even once Jackson became successful, continued to harangue her about her appearance and the subject matter of her stories, Hyman believed Jackson's emotional well-

being to be of minor consequence. The tangled, co-dependent nature of their marriage complicated things further, with Hyman helping Jackson stay focused on her work and Jackson all but brushing Hyman's teeth before they went to bed at night. He needed her as much as she needed him, but she was the only one who suffered for her neediness.

Shirley Jackson was quoted as saying "I delight in what I fear," which suggests that the choice of her stories reflecting painful situations from her real life was a conscious and deliberate one. Her sixth and final novel, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (written in 1962 and adapted for film by director Stacie Passon in 2018) began with a familiar theme—an odd little family is ostracized in their small New England town—but ends with the townspeople, after destroying the family's home, bringing them food as an act of contrition and allowing them to continue living there undisturbed. It's a nice thought that finally giving one of her stories, if not a happy ending, then at least a peaceful one brought Jackson some comfort. Sadly, upon completion of the novel, she fell into one of her longest depressive episodes yet and refused to leave her house for six months. Perhaps

giving her characters the peace that she longed for was too much to bear.

Nevertheless, she recovered and began writing again, both keeping a journal and starting a new novel. This one had a different tone than her previous work—lighter, hopeful. It was a story about a woman who leaves her family and moves away, even changing her name. How much of it was just Jackson putting her hopes and dreams rather than her fears into her work and how much of it was her working out some sort of plan for her real-life future is unknown, because she died before it was finished. Jackson wouldn't live to see her name become synonymous with American gothic literature, alongside her contemporaries Flannery O'Connor and J.D. Salinger, and later Joyce Carol Oates and Cormac McCarthy.

If she minded being dismissed in life as a pulp novelist, as opposed to a "real" writer, she never said so publicly. As much as they haunted every aspect of her life, when Jackson wrote, she kept her ghosts under control, pinning them down like a butterfly specimen. There was a certain witchcraft in that, in calling them forth and forcing them to do her bidding. *g*



# Exorcising the Family Demons: The Spectre of Sexual Abuse Haunting Verónica

by Valeska Griffiths

2017's *Verónica*, directed by Paco Plaza and co-written by Plaza and Fernando Navarro, is a Spanish horror film that fell victim to its own marketing campaign, which touted it as the scariest film ever made. The film faced backlash from viewers who felt that its scares fell short of the extravagant terrors that they had been promised. But while the film may have lacked shocking gore or visceral, over-the-top supernatural frights, it was rich with the undercurrent of a more domestic (and sadly more commonplace) style of terror.

Ostensibly based on true events, the film follows the story of Verónica, a young woman whose family life is anything but tranquil. Following the loss of her father, Verónica is forced to take on the involuntary role of surrogate parent to three young siblings while her mother works long shifts at a local cafe to support the

family. As the primary caregiver of her siblings, Verónica essentially takes her mother's place as the head of the household, compelling her to grow up too quickly. After an ill-fated bout with a spirit board, in which she attempts to make contact with her father, Verónica and her younger siblings seem to be stalked by a terrifying paranormal presence in their home.

Taken at face value, the film could be seen as nothing more than a competently produced supernatural thriller, one that falls short of the hyped-up promises of its scare-centred marketing. But, throughout the film, there are layers of nuance that complicate the simple, straightforward narrative. When pieced together, these clues deepen the horror to an uncomfortable degree. *Verónica* is steeped in rich symbolism and disturbing imagery that hints toward a far darker subtext. The film is a sensitively-wrought coming-of-

age story and family drama wrapped up in paranormal horror, but it also lends itself to another, more sinister, interpretation: there's a case to be made that Verónica is a survivor of both physical and sexual abuse.

*Verónica*: "You're never home. You don't know what goes on here."

*Mother*: "So, what goes on here?"

*Verónica*: "He wants to hurt us."

When Verónica is first haunted by the spectre taking the shape of her father, he is naked and approaching her in her bedroom. The unexpected nudity and incest taboo render the scene both shocking and repulsive. As her father moves towards her bed, a terrified Verónica is suddenly overpowered and pinned to her bed by demonic hands, which roughly take hold of her body and will not let go. Is



this simply a cinematic scare designed to elicit the maximum shock value, or could it be interpreted as a psychic echo; a flashback or allusion to an earlier incident during which she felt powerless, violated, and robbed of her bodily autonomy?

### *Could the stains act as a metaphor for the trauma experienced at these sites?*

Is it a coincidence that so much of the haunting is connected with the beds of the children? In a harrowing sequence, Verónica gets her first period after waking up from a nightmare about being eaten alive by her family. When attempting to clean her bed, she finds large, corrosive stains on the underside of her mattress—stains that are matched by similar marks on the mattresses of her siblings. These stains are not composed of blood, but of some supernatural substance that eats away at the physical objects it touches. Could the stains act as a metaphor for the trauma experienced at these sites? A physical manifestation of psychic shame? Even the chronic bed-wetting of the youngest child, Antoñito, is often a strong indication of child sexual abuse.

Verónica's body also displays wounds which seem to have no rational explanation, and are interpreted by another character as being self-inflicted (another possible signal of sexual abuse).

There are a number of sequences or shots in the film that employ mirrors, doubles, or camera tricks to imply a psychological split or crisis affecting Verónica. In an early scene, Verónica enters into what appears to be a fugue state while eating dinner with her siblings, dissociating as a meatball is perched on a fork halfway to her mouth. She becomes non-communicative, sitting nearly frozen and staring blankly ahead. Against seemingly great resistance, her arm fights to move her fork towards her mouth. When the meatball eventually finds its way between her lips, her trance breaks; she hurriedly spits the meatball back onto her plate to the surprise and concern of her siblings, her chin covered with red tomato sauce. The scene tells the story of resistance and rejection, penetration and bloody expulsion.

*Verónica: "Whatever you don't say goodbye to, stays with you."*

People who live through abuse in childhood often grow up to either become perpetrators of abuse within their own homes or communities or enter into relationships in adulthood wherein they suffer further victimization. Verónica's haunting may be interpreted as a potent metaphor for intergenerational transmission of violence, which can occur between parent and child, but also between siblings. This idea is explored several times during the course of the film. During one scene at the midway point, Verónica finds herself unable to move as she watches a shadowy hand move over the body of her sleeping sister, only to wind up with her own hands gripping the young girl's neck. When Verónica claims that someone else was there and responsible for the attack, the sister insists that no one else was in the room.

When Verónica seeks help from a nun regarding her supernatural visitor, she is told that she must return to the ouija board and say goodbye to the spirit. But she is unable to do so alone. It is significant that, in order to attempt to expel the evil from their home, the siblings must work together. The disruptive violence and trauma that

plagues their home life cannot be healed without the cooperation of all who have been affected.

*Verónica's haunting may be interpreted as a potent metaphor for intergenerational transmission of violence, which can occur between parent and child, but also between siblings.*

The cycle of violence is most transparently referenced during the climax of the film, when it is strongly suggested that the assaults on the three younger siblings have been perpetrated by Verónica herself. Was she compelled to commit these acts because of the influence of a supernatural spirit, or was she instead enacting the same violence upon her siblings that she herself had experienced? The film is ambiguous on this point, yet offers more than enough tantalizing clues to encourage further discussion.

As family violence continues to be depressingly prevalent, underscoring its devastating and lingering impacts remains a valuable pursuit. **g**



## Spanish Satanic Panic: The True Story that Inspired Verónica

by Jay Blanco

Let me tell you a spooky story. While many of you may be familiar with Paco Plaza's *Verónica* (2017), you may not be familiar with the real-life events that inspired the film and initiated the Satanic Panic that shocked Spain during the '90s.

Estefania Gutierrez Lazaro was a teenage girl who, after participating in a séance with friends, began experiencing paranormal phenomena. The séance took place in a high school and was interrupted by a teacher. The teens wanted to communicate with a friend who had died in a motorbike

accident; instead, an entity claiming to be Estefania's grandfather made contact. Estefania's friends claimed that the glass they used as a planchette exploded, releasing a black smoke that entered the girl's body. Their teacher tore the hand-made Ouija board apart and dismissed the group. Estefania began to suffer from seizures and hallucinations after the incident. Members of her family have gone on record that she spoke in tongues and even levitated on one occasion. Estefania died a year later, in July of 1991, at 17 years old. The cause of death was Sudden Death Syndrome.

The paranormal phenomena did not stop after Estefania's passing, however. On the night of the 19th of November, 1992, the police arrived at the family residence in Vallecas. Her frightened family waited for the police in the street—they didn't feel safe inside the home. Officers searched the flat and witnessed strange things, later reporting that they saw a crucifix fall from the wall, heard banging noises coming from empty rooms, saw a cupboard magically open its doors in the living room, and witnessed a gooey substance materialize on a piece of furniture. It was the first and only police report in Spanish history to mention supernatural events.

A journalist got hold of the police report and published the story. It quickly became a media circus that planted the seed of Satanic Panic in the country. Just like Amityville, 'The Vallecas Case' was not free of controversy. Many people saw it as a lucrative hoax, while others took it as

concrete evidence of the existence of the spiritual realm. The story became a modern folk-tale.

The film takes a number of artistic liberties, condensing real-life events down to three days as a grieving Verónica plans to contact her dead father using a Ouija board from a magazine. She takes the board to school and performs a séance with two other girls while the rest of the school goes outside to watch a solar eclipse. The séance goes wrong and strange things begin to happen to Verónica, her twin sisters, and her little brother.

On paper, *Verónica* doesn't seem very original, but the context is what makes this film so special. Plaza draws inspiration from American films such as *The Conjuring* (2013) and *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), but *Verónica* is an unabashedly Spanish film. The music, dialogue, and scenery are a perfect representation of Spanish culture in the early '90s.

Sadly, this isn't just a film. This is the tragic story of a young woman who died too soon and was later demonised, quite literally, by the press. It didn't matter whether the possession and haunting were genuine. To the public, Estefania dared to cross a line that wasn't meant to be crossed. To quote the film: "No one escapes the consequences of passing the limit that divides reality from fantasy". Unfortunately, that was the message that lived on. It is no coincidence that Estefania's name was changed to Verónica in the film. In Spanish culture, Verónica is the name of Bloody Mary—an unnecessary message that there was something inherently wrong or evil in Estefania.

During the '90s, Estefania's story was used to warn children about the dangers of delving into the occult. I grew up Catholic and, although these events happened before I was born, I remember hearing iterations of the story throughout my entire

childhood; in catechism classes, during school recess, and at sleepovers. As a teenager, I watched a television programme on the Vallecas Case and realised that the stories I was told as a child were urban legends based on Estefania's death.

The Vallecas Case experienced a resurgence ahead of the release of *Verónica*. New television specials, articles, and podcasts were dropping every week. Some members of Estefania's family were consultants for the film. Her two younger brothers, however, were interviewed by a national newspaper and declared that it was all a hoax orchestrated by their mother, who they claim suffered from mental illness.

At the end of the day, whether it was fiction or reality doesn't really matter.

Because Estefania's story transcends this discussion; more than just a story, it became part of our culture. **g**

# Laying It All Bare

## In Conversation with Isa Mazzei

by Valeska Griffiths



*Sometimes it was difficult for me to put myself back into the headspace where I was back then, but that was part of the process for me. If I ever felt any fear, I reminded myself that the truth belongs to me too.*

Photo: Caitlin Fullam

**Whipsmart, raw as hell, and weighted with an unforgivingly searing emotional core, *Camgirl* is a more than just a memoir: it's an education.** Drawing on her experiences as a camgirl and misunderstood seductress, filmmaker and author Isa Mazzei's brilliant debut all but demands the reader's attention, drawing them into a nuanced and ever-compelling exploration of the author's family life, professional ambitions, and belated understanding of her own desires.

I spoke to Isa about her process, her 2018 film *CAM*, and the politics of sex worker representation.

*This book is extraordinarily intimate in many senses of the word. Readers get a deep understanding of your*

*family dynamics and your journey to understand your sexuality. The writing feels so fearless but were there any points during the writing process where you worried about the potential ramifications of being so open?*

Being honest to my experiences was incredibly important to me while writing the book. Sometimes it was difficult for me to put myself back into the headspace where I was back then, but that was part of the process for me. If I ever felt any fear, I reminded myself that the truth belongs to me too.

*How did you negotiate the boundaries of public and private while writing *Camgirl*? Was this something that you determined before you began or was it a continuous process?*

There is always a tension between being honest and respecting my privacy and the privacy of those in my book. That's why I changed all the names except my own—ultimately, this is my story.

*How long did it take to write?*

It took about two years, from conception to finish. That said, I didn't write it every day for two years. There were large breaks in there, like while I made *CAM* for example.

*What were the most useful notes you were given on the manuscript?*

When you're writing a memoir, it's very hard to remember that not everything will fit in a standard-length book. The original manuscript was much

longer than the final book, because I kept trying to cram in every little experience in chronological order. My editor kept reminding me to stick with the parts that mattered most, that left the largest impression. There simply isn't room for everything.

*Was writing the book a cathartic process? I imagine that that level of introspection would lead to at least a few psychological breakthroughs.*

Yes, incredibly. It was a very moving process, and a difficult one.

*I love that *Camgirl* places equal emphasis on 'sex' and 'work,' detailing the behind-the-scenes labour that goes into camming. Do you find that many people are surprised by that revelation?*

Yes, and that's a huge reason why the book is so important to me. When *CAM* came out, people pointed often to Alice's calendar, where she tracks her shows and her regulars, or the scene where she watches the top camgirl and takes notes, and were like, "wow, I had no idea camgirls did that!". So I really wanted to continue to demonstrate the reality of sex work—it's work. And just like any business, a lot of time, thought, and preparation goes into it.

*'Sex worker literati' has become a thing of late, with authors like Brooke Magnanti, Charlotte Shane, and Tracy Quan publishing confessional works detailing their day-to-day experiences of sex work and its impact on their personal lives. Obviously, we still have a long way to go in terms of battling stigma, but it's been heartening to see the positive reactions to both *CAM* and *Camgirl*. How would you describe your 'coming out' experience?*

It's been very positive overall. I feel very lucky to be in a position where I am privileged enough to be able to be open about it within my community and my family.

*I began to realize how much *CAM* was really Alice's story, not mine, and how much I needed to tell my own.*

*Having seen *CAM* prior to reading *Camgirl*, it was fascinating to see how much of the film was inspired by your own experiences. Had you decided to write the memoir prior to working on the script for the film? What was the timeline?*

I don't remember exactly when I decided to write the memoir. It was somewhere during the process of making *CAM*. I had already written *CAM*, but it wasn't made yet, and I started to think about how necessary a memoir felt. First, from a practical standpoint: to answer all the questions I kept getting about how much of the film was real, how much was based on my life. And then, from a personal standpoint, I began to realize how much *CAM* was really Alice's story, not mine, and how much I needed to tell my own.

**CAM* is a really interesting and nuanced exploration of the ways that the digital age and social media, in particular, have precipitated new anxieties around identity. We all spend so much time cultivating and curating our images on different platforms, and so many of our friends and acquaintances know us primarily or exclusively through these mediums. Did your work on *CAM* alter the way that you think about social media?*

Absolutely! *CAM* is so much about this distance between ourselves and our digital selves and how to reconcile the two. If there's one thing I try to remind myself, it's that everything on social media is curated, even the most "real" posts. We are still seeing only the things

that not only our friends are choosing to show us, but also the things that the platform itself wants us to see.

*Speaking of false presentation, the rise of deepfake technology definitely lends CAM an air of plausibility. As it becomes more common, accessible, and credible, do you think it will change the way that society reacts to things like revenge porn or leaked videos?*

Deepfake came out when we were in post-production and I remember we were so surprised! It was this totally crazy moment of feeling like prophets. I am hopeful that society as a whole is beginning to change how we react to revenge porn regardless of the technology that exists. There is nothing shameful about sex, and nothing shameful about taking nudes. It's time we start focusing on those who think

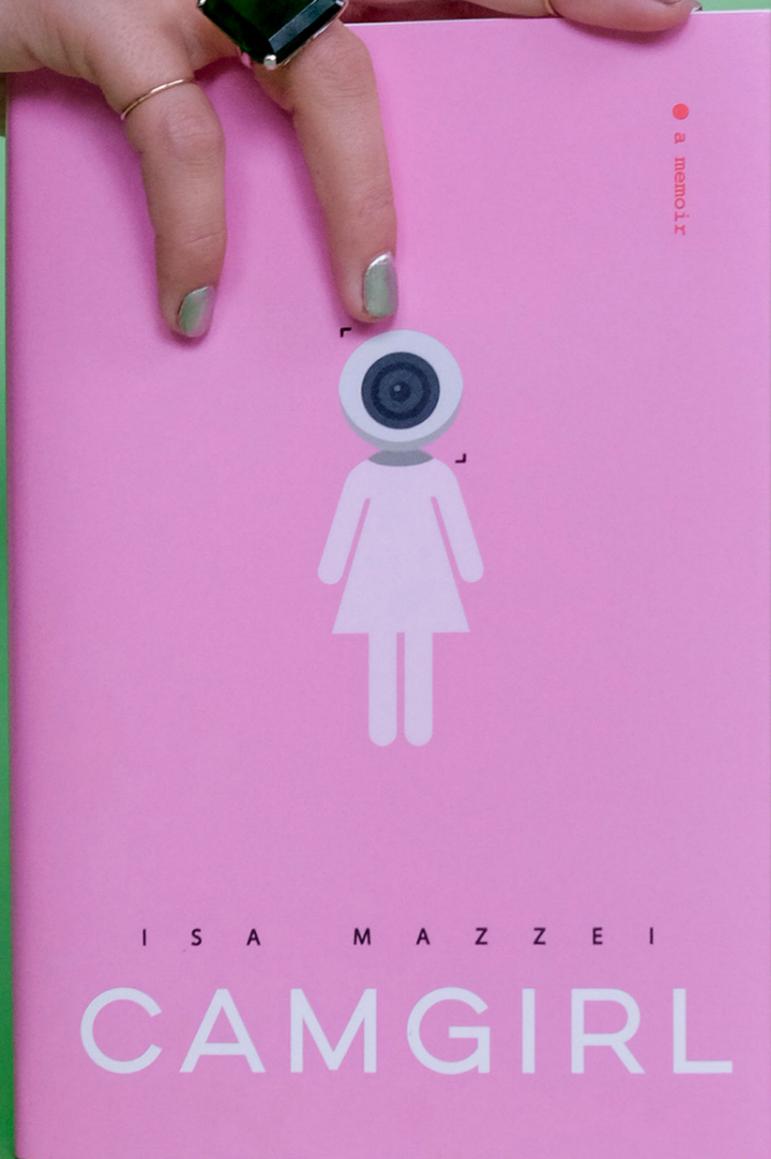
it's acceptable to wield a woman's sexuality as a weapon against her.

*100% agreed. In an interview published on Anatomy of a Scream, you explained how deeply involved you were with all aspect of CAM's production. Is directing or writing another feature something you see in your future?*

Oh, yes! Already working on it. 

Signed copies of *Camgirl* are currently available from The Boulder Bookstore. Visit [boulderbookstore.net/book/9781644280355](http://boulderbookstore.net/book/9781644280355) and enter 'signed copy' in the comments.

Photo: Sara Baar



## Lost in the Canadian Woods: Mothers, Monsters & Matricide in *Pyewacket*

by Joe Lipsett

**Let's be honest: every teenager has dreamt of killing their parents.**

For Leah Reyes (Nicole Muñoz), the teenage protagonist of Adam MacDonald's *Pyewacket* (2017), that desire is born as the result of recent events: in an attempt to recover from the loss of her husband, Leah's grieving mother (Laurie Holden) moves them to a secluded house on the edge of the woods, far away from Leah's school and her support network of friends. The ensuing conflict between the mother and daughter is exacerbated by Leah's burgeoning interest in black magic and the occult, which smacks of teenage rebellion by way of *The Craft* (1996). But whereas that defining 90s text trafficked in peer-on-peer violence, *Pyewacket* tackles the universal teenage feeling that parents simply don't understand, serving up a female-centric conflict with a side of supernatural menace.

Leah's dual issues—circumventing her mother's interference and developing her rudimentary skills in the dark arts—coalesce in one defining, misguided moment when she wanders into the woods behind her new home and summons a shapeshifting demon called *Pyewacket* to kill her mother. In this impetuous act of rebellion, Leah reinforces her own childishness: rather than communicate with her mother and attempt to work out their issues, Leah uses a powerful shortcut without fully understanding the implications. In doing so, she seals both her and her mother's fate.

Writer/director MacDonald has leaned into the inherently nationalistic tension surrounding the liminal boundary between the woods and civilization before. The myth of the Canadian

identity, propagated by a historical legacy culled from film and books (particularly Margaret Atwood's *Survival*), is famously associated with an internalized fear of the great wilderness that comprises the majority of the country. MacDonald used our implicit fear of the wilderness to great effect in his debut feature, *Backcountry*, in which a stranded hiker lost in the woods wages a battle to the death against a murderous bear.

*Pyewacket is a richly layered text that draws on the Canadian dread of the wilderness*

In *Pyewacket*, MacDonald positions the wilderness as a dark, corrupting influence that encourages Leah's worst impulses. The performative ceremony that Leah embarks upon to summon *Pyewacket*, as well as a terrifying sequence late in the film that finds the girl confronting a doppelganger of her mother, both make excellent use of the woods as a source of horror. MacDonald's camerawork in these sequences is disorienting and haunting in equal measure, stranding viewers in the same uneasy predicament as the protagonist.

The symbolic use of blood in the centerpiece ceremony, as well the aftermath of an encounter with *Pyewacket* wherein Leah awakens one morning bloodied in the woods, equivocates the feminine with both nature and the supernatural.

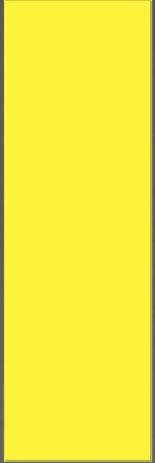
This is in keeping with MacDonald's interest in exploring mostly female characters. *Backcountry* has barely

concealed contempt for the masculine posturing of Alex (Jeff Roop) and brutally kills him off relatively early in the narrative in order to focus on Jenn (Missy Peregrym). The third season of the Netflix horror anthology series *Slasher*, directed by MacDonald, is heavily populated by women. In *Pyewacket*, the narrative is entirely focused on the mother/daughter relationship, as well as Leah's friendship with Janice (Chloe Rose), who acts as Leah's confidant and sounding board.

Fascinatingly, *Pyewacket's* interest in women even extends to its monster. Despite being glimpsed only briefly in shadow or dark corners, the demon is coded as female thanks to actress Bianca Melchior. The creature's shapeshifting capacity also enables it to assume the guise of Leah's mother at a key moment in the text (when Leah attempts to reverse her spell). This clever ruse not only works to confuse Leah in order to set up the narrative's grim—and quintessentially Canadian—ending, it visually conflates the mother and the monster as one and the same.

*Pyewacket* is a richly layered text that draws on the Canadian dread of the wilderness, while also reinforcing MacDonald's interest in the interior lives of women. This is the rare horror film that critically and unflinchingly examines teenage anxieties about parental authority, rebellion, and independence. In doing so, *Pyewacket* joins *Carrie* (1976), *Ginger Snaps* (2000), *Raw* (2016), and *Blue My Mind* (2017) as the rare coming-of-age horror film about teenage girls that is both nuanced and horrific.

Maybe that's a feat worth trekking into the woods to summon *Pyewacket* for. 



# Yer' Fond of Me Lobster—Say It!

## Toxic Masculine Ideals in *The Lighthouse*

by Adam Norton

*The Lighthouse* (2019) is the tour-de-force sophomore effort from writer/director Robert Eggers, who previously gave us 2016's *The Witch*. The film features amazing technical feats and standout performances by Robert Pattinson and Willem Dafoe. However, audiences and critics have struggled with whether or not to classify *The Lighthouse* as a horror film. The story of a man becoming aggressively intoxicated and killing someone in a rage is a terror of reality, not the fear of the unknown.

Eggers, when asked about the film's themes of toxic masculinity, has stated that "nothing good happens when two men are trapped in a giant phallus," underscoring the film's premise that two men in said situation will wind up killing each other. *The Lighthouse* illustrates a type of masculinity common in the late 19th century—one that is still reflected in most of our world today.

Toxic masculinity is a concept that has broadly expanded in the public consciousness in recent years. The term derives from the mythopoetic men's movement of the 1980s, which focused on returning to a deeper Jungian cultural idea of manhood through ritual and camaraderie between men, as opposed

to isolation and competitiveness. The movement focused on men's emotional and psychological well-being and was criticized by feminist and gay-rights advocates for being apolitical.

The original definition and its claim of an ideal singular masculinity has been firmly rejected by sociologists like Raewyn Connell (2005), who noted the impact of the intersectionality of race, class, culture, and sexual orientation on definitions of masculinity. Connell and her contemporaries posited that traditionally masculine values such as social respect, physical strength, and sexual potency can become problematic when the standards become unachievable. These social expectations and entitlements of the culture around masculinity may lead to violence to assert perceived dominance. I will therefore use the term "toxic masculine ideals," as conceptions of masculinity are not inherently toxic.

**Ephraim is punished for sharing his trauma; his desire to confess and be more open with Wake destroys their relationship rather than enhancing it.**

*The Lighthouse* manifests these toxic masculine ideals through the relationship between the two main characters, Ephraim Winslow (Robert Pattinson) and Thomas Wake (Willem Dafoe). Winslow comes to work at the lighthouse for a fresh start. He is escaping his previous trauma of possibly killing his former employer, evoking the cycle of violence that repeats in the plot. He begins the story tight-lipped, refusing to discuss his trauma. The inciting scene that leads to the violent downfall of Wake and Winslow's relationship occurs when Winslow tells Wake about the death of his old boss. The line "Why'd you spill your beans?!" literally echoes throughout this story. Ephraim is punished for sharing his trauma; his desire to confess and be more open with Wake destroys their relationship rather than enhancing it. This is the purest distillation of a toxic masculine ideal—Winslow is rejected and chided for discussing how he feels.

Winslow also begins the film as a teetotaler, attempting to follow a societally-imposed rule of lighthouse keeping—do not drink on the job. Wake urges Winslow to drink (eventually to a dangerous extent) during the limited time they have to socialize. This becomes the new norm for what

is socially acceptable. When they run out of food, they adhere to a liquid diet, drinking kerosene to preserve normalcy when the liquor supply is exhausted.

A study undertaken by Mahalik, Burns & Syzdek (2007) found a positive correlation between men who adhered more rigidly to traditional masculine norms and the normalization of risky behaviors such as heavy drinking, tobacco use, and avoidance of consuming vegetables. The historical connection between alcohol abuse and domestic abuse is well-documented and reflected in the film's inevitable conclusion.

**Winslow and Wake represent numerous behavioural hallmarks associated with toxic masculine ideals—denying emotion, excessive risk-taking, and violent competition.**

Wake is a controlling force in Winslow's life. Not only is he his boss, denoting a power imbalance, but he controls his food and daily activities. Wake represents an idealized version of masculinity—he provides for others, is unemotional unless provoked, is in

control, and speaks like classic heroes in Miltonian prose. He is also hyper-controlling of Winslow—he locks up the lighthouse and his logs, recommends that Winslow should have his pay docked without discussing it with him, and is hypercritical of every action Winslow takes. Unable to live up to the standards of masculinity thrust upon him by Wake, he responds with substance abuse and eventually violence.

Some have described this relationship as that of father and son, but it can also be read as a codependent domestic partnership. Wake relies on Winslow to perform the highly physical daily tasks of the lighthouse, while Winslow relies on Wake for sustenance and levity. Both men resent their partner, yet need the other to maladaptively function. A fight about Wake's cooking, though played for laughs, signals greater conflicts to come. Reading their relationship as a domestic partnership renders Winslow's actions at the end of the film more akin to domestic violence (abuse, degradation, and murder) than to the patricide of Greek tragedy that the picture attempts to portray.

Interestingly, we eventually learn that Winslow's real name is Thomas as well, a name that means twin. Winslow and

Wake represent numerous behavioural hallmarks associated with toxic masculine ideals—denying emotion, excessive risk-taking, and violent competition. They are doomed to have their story repeated, like the mythic Prometheus having his liver daily plucked from his body. It is only by breaking the cycles of toxic masculinity and violence in our culture that we can avoid the tragedy and loss of life that the film depicts. Only through education and a cultural shift toward positive masculine ideals can we avert this horror and reshape our reality.

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'The Nightmare' (1781) // Henry Fuseli

# No Rest for the Wicked: Sleep Paralysis in Culture & Cinema

by Valeska Griffiths

**You awaken suddenly.** Or maybe you experience a softer, groggier transition between slumber and wakefulness, muddling your way through a brief foray into that disorienting liminal space between states of consciousness. However you arrive here, you're now alert and ready. For what, you're not sure. You sense something, some presence, just beyond your sight-line. You try to turn your head in order to get a better look and realize that you're unable to move. The panic begins to set in; not only are you paralyzed, but you almost feel as though you're...floating? No. No, that can't be possible. Yet the sensation, ludicrous and uncanny as it may be, is undeniable.

Perhaps you hear a voice murmuring strange, unintelligible words. Perhaps you see odd lights illuminating your bedroom walls. There seems to be a pressure on your chest, as though someone (or something) is pressing down on you, making it difficult for you to draw the breath to scream. Not that you would be able to, of course—your attempts to call for help are thwarted by an involuntary muteness. There is nothing for you to do now but lie helpless...waiting for whatever has invaded your nighttime sanctuary to fulfil its terrifying and inscrutable mission.

While this reads like a passage from a ghost story or the account of a survivor of alien abduction, this experience

is an unsettling reality for many people, with studies across various populations showing prevalence rates ranging from 5-60% for isolated experiences of sleep paralysis (Wing et al., 1999), a condition described by Cheyne, Rueffer & Newby-Clark as "a transient, conscious state of involuntary immobility occurring immediately prior to falling asleep or upon waking" (1999, p. 319). Sleep paralysis (SP) has been linked to stress, and large discrepancies in the prevalence rates observed in different groups can be attributed to the higher levels of stress experienced by some populations; Paradis & Friedman (2005) found recurrent SP more common in African Americans, particularly those who experience stressors such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness or home insecurity, and exposure to racism and crime. Hinton et al. (2005) recorded high rates of SP among Cambodian refugees who suffered severe trauma under the Pot Pot regime.

Episodes of SP can occur during the hypnagogic period (the state immediately prior to falling asleep) and hypnopompic period (the state immediately before waking), while skeletal muscles are deeply relaxed in order to prevent potentially injurious movement during REM sleep. Davies (2003) notes:

"Those affected by sleep paralysis can see and hear, because under REM sleep there is intense central

nervous system activity, but they are unable to make significant movements, because muscle activity is suppressed" (p. 181).

Reported SP episodes across all cultures and eras have much in common: the physical symptoms (immobility, sensation of chest pressure, and floating sensations); the emotional experience (fear, hypervigilance, the sensation of being watched); and, most terrifying of all, visual and auditory hallucinations (Cheyne, Rueffer & Newby-Clark, 1999).

This leads to the most fascinating aspect of the condition: cultural and societal beliefs not only shape the way that SP hallucinations and sensations are interpreted, but the way that they are experienced. The stories that people tell themselves and each other about these experiences vary depending on their temporal and social context, with interpretations ranging from demonic activity to lascivious spirits to supernatural animals to vengeful ghosts. How did this condition become associated with so many different supernatural explanations?

### History

While the science behind the condition was not as well understood, European and Chinese writers described SP more than two thousand years ago. During

Demons, incubi, and succubi are common villains described in SP experiences, but they are far from the only midnight visitors to have been reported. Historical records reveal a motley crew of nightmare-dwellers drawn from regional folklore and ranging from traditional spirits to malevolent corporeal beings to the living dead.

the second century CE, the Greek physician Galen hypothesized about its causes, settling on an explanation involving gastric disturbances, impeded circulation, and irritation of the nervous system (Davies, 2003). The *Zhou Li/Chun Guan*, a Chinese tome on sleep and dreaming possibly dating as far back as 400 BCE, describes a type of dreaming called e-Meng ('dreams of surprise') that resembles the modern concept of SP (Wing et al., 1999; Davies, 2003; Thompson, 2017). The term 'sleep paralysis' was first used to describe the condition in 1928—prior to this, it was variously referred to by names such as 'cataplexy of awakening,' 'waking fit,' or 'delayed psychomotor awakening' (Liddon, 1967).

Nor are links between SP and the supernatural a recent phenomenon. A 1664 clinical description plucked from the case histories of Dutch physician Isbrand van Diemerbroeck reads as follows:

"...in the night time, when she was composing her self [sic] to sleep, sometimes she believed the devil lay upon her and held her down, sometimes that she was choaked [sic] by a great dog or thief lying upon her breast, so that she could hardly speak or breath, and when she endeavoured to throw off the burthen, she was not able to stir her members."

Dr. van Diemerbroeck diagnosed the woman as suffering from 'Incubus or the Night-Mare' (Kompanje, 2008). An excerpt of the 1834 book *The Philosophy of Sleep* by Robert Macnish describes a typical SP experience of the time:

"At one moment he may have the consciousness of a malignant demon being at his side; then to shun the sight of so appalling an object, he will close his eyes, but still the fearful being makes its presence known; for its icy breath is felt diffusing itself over his visage, and he knows that he is face to face with a fiend. Then, if he looks up, he beholds horrid eyes glaring upon him, and an aspect of hell grinning at him with even more hellish malice. Or, he may have the idea of a monstrous hag squatted upon his breast—mute, motionless and malignant." (p.135)

In his 1931 book *On the Nightmare*, Dr Ernest Jones affirmed that monsters such as vampires, werewolves, and incubi were products of the nightmare experience. American psychiatrist Sim Liddon, author of *Sleep Paralysis and Hypnagogic Hallucinations: Their Relationship to the Nightmare* (1967), believes that SP hallucinations bolstered belief in these creatures, as well as more general beliefs in ghosts and demons. Liddon also speculated that the term 'nightmare' originally referred to SP hallucinations, rather than anxiety dreams in general, as "[m]any authors who wrote about the nightmare prior to this century vividly described this condition" (p. 89). Indeed, the 1781 painting 'The Nightmare' by Henry Fuseli depicts a young woman sprawled supine on her bed, while a grimacing incubus perches on her chest; as Cox (2015) observes: "The painting is literally the clinical presentation of sleep paralysis" (p. 2).

As is so often the case, an etymological investigation provides additional support to the theory: the word 'nightmare' can be traced to the same root as the Germanic *mahr*, Old English *mære*, Old Dutch *mare*, Old Norse *mara*, and Old Irish *mar*—all refer to a "supernatural being, usually female, who lay on people's chests at night, thereby suffocating them" (Davies, 2003, p. 183). The association can be found all over Europe—*nachtmahrin* (German), *nachtmerrie* (Dutch), *mæritt* (Norwegian), *cauchemar* (French), *zmora* (Polish), *muera* (Czech), *morica* (Croatian), *martröd* (Icelandic), *mæridt* (Danish), and so on (Cheyne, Rueffer & Newby-Clark, 1999; Davies, 2003; Emslie, 2016).

### Folklore

In the Early Modern period, belief in the *mære* had faded in the face of a new threat—the witch—with witchcraft fantasies and nightmares feeding into each other and nightmare testimony appearing as evidence in witchcraft trials (Davies, 2003). Here, we see a powerful example not only of the influence of societal beliefs on the SP experience, but of the SP experience's effect on societal beliefs. As Davies declares:

"The nightmare encapsulates a unique aspect of human experience: a moment when reality, hallucination, and belief fuse to form powerful fantasies of supernatural violation. The paralytic nocturnal assault may play a statistically minor role in witchcraft accusations, but its

influence on the development of the conception of the witch and associated beliefs may be far greater [...] its hallucinatory content was also a potent confirmation of a witch's power and, in some cases, a vivid proof of guilt" (p. 182).

Demons, incubi, and succubi are common villains described in SP experiences, but they are far from the only midnight visitors to have been reported. Historical records reveal a motley crew of nightmare-dwellers drawn from regional folklore and ranging from traditional spirits to malevolent corporeal beings to the living dead. Greeks could experience a frightening nocturnal visitation from the *græae* (grey witches of Greek mythology), Romans may have trembled in the presence of the *lamia* (a child-eating monster), and Germans feared the nighttime experience of *Hexendrücken* (witch pressing) or *Alpdruck* (elf pressure) (Cheyne, Rueffer & Newby-Clark, 1999). Certain parts of southeastern and central Europe have associated SP experiences with undead beings such as revenants or vampires (Davies, 2003). SP experiences in Mexico are referred to as *se me subió el muerto*, or 'a dead body climbed on top of me' (de Sá & Mota-Rolim, 2016). Animals have also been implicated in SP experiences; the Catalan *pesanta* is a black dog or cat that tramples on people's chests at night (de Sá & Mota-Rolim, 2016). The Irish *thetromlúí* was a giant bird that "first lay on sleepers' legs, then moved up to press down on the whole body" (Davies, 2003, p. 194).

Many supernatural explanations for the phenomenon are still touted to this day, with varying degrees of credulity. For many, the experience of SP cannot be separated from traditional beliefs; studies describing SP using folk expressions garner more fruitful results than those using clinical language (Jiménez-Genchi et al., 2009). In Newfoundland, SP is still described as 'the Old Hag'; in Ethiopia, you may be smothered by a ghostly *Zar*; and, in St. Lucia, you may be swarmed by the souls of dead children, known as *Kokma* (Emslie, 2016). The *pisadeira*, a southeastern

Brazilian folk figure, is said to be "a crone with long fingernails who lurks on roofs at night and tramples on the chest of those who sleep on a full stomach with the belly up" (de Sá & Mota-Rolim, 2016, p. 1). In China, SP has been linked to 'ghost oppression' and many elders fear retribution from the spirits for discussing their experiences (Wing et al., 1999). Jiménez-Genchi et al. (2009) note that:

"the 'a dead body climbed on top of me' expression is highly familiar among Mexican adolescents. This is hardly surprising. In fact, it is consistent with results from studies that have found that 98% of Japanese college students have heard about the kanashibari phenomenon, and 93% of Chinese young adults know the 'ghost oppression' phenomenon" (p. 548).

As with traditional beliefs, lived trauma can have a powerful (and often devastating) impact on the SP experience.

The influence of these cultural beliefs can be witnessed in many horror films dealing with SP, including Clive Tonge's 2018 film *Mara*, which features a demon (fittingly called *Mara*) that kills people in their sleep. 2016's *Dead Awake*, directed by

Phillip Guzman, tells the story of a social worker investigating a series of mysterious deaths linked to SP; the perpetrator, in this case, turns out to be a 'hag' monster that visits victims in their sleep. In his 2011 film *Marianne*, writer-director Filip Tegstedt explores SP and the idea of the Mare through the lens of Swedish folklore. Jonathan Hopkins's *Slumber* (2017) focuses on the Slavic mythological figure of the *nocnitsa*, a malevolent nocturnal spirit.

As with traditional beliefs, lived trauma can have a powerful (and often devastating) impact on the SP experience. Studies on Cambodian refugees experiencing *khmaoch sângkâ* ('the ghost that pushes you down') reveal that these subjects frequently hallucinate the spirits of acquaintances murdered during the Pol Pot period, evoking both trauma memories and survivor's guilt (Hinton et al., 2005). Sensations common to SP such as chest pressure and breathing difficulties:

"may also recall memories [including] near-drowning experiences; having a plastic bag placed over the head; being forced to carry heavy loads on the head or shoulders during the Pol Pot regime [...] or experiencing any traumatic event in which anxiety resulted in shortness of breath and chest tightness, a feeling of held and stifled breath" (Hinton et al., 2005, p. 48).



Interpretations of SP may evolve as societies are influenced by other cultures. SP has long been recognized by the Inuit in the Qikiqtaaluk and Kivalliq regions of Nunavut as *uqumangirniq* and *aqtuqsinniq*, respectively. While traditional Inuit interpretations of SP drew on a rich shamanistic cosmology and understood SP in mystical terms that reinforced the existence of the spirit world, Law & Kirmayer (2005) found that contemporary youth interpret the phenomenon “in terms of multiple frameworks that [incorporate] personal, medical, mystical, traditional/shamanistic, and Christian views, reflecting the dynamic social changes taking place in this region” (p. 93).

SP experiences can also be heavily shaped by popular culture. The sensational story of Betty and Barney Hill, a New Hampshire couple allegedly abducted by aliens in 1961—and the couple’s subsequent recovered memories under hypnosis—inflamed imaginations around the world. The publication of the best-selling book *The Interrupted Journey* in 1966 and the inevitable television movie adaptation *The UFO Incident* in 1975—along with frequent tabloid coverage, articles, and additional film and television appearances—contributed to a rise in UFO sightings and alien abduction reports around the world (de Sá & Mota-Rolim, 2016), as the idea of the little green (and eventually grey) men became embedded in the collective consciousness. These scenarios became a common interpretation of SP, particularly in the United States, and have given rise to some truly extraordinary embellishments, including the belief in bodily implants and probes. Narratives involving aliens and UFOs have since proliferated in science fiction and horror cinema, with films such as Philippe Mora’s *Communion* (1989), Robert Lieberman’s *Fire in the Sky* (1993), Olatunde Osunsanmi’s *The Fourth Kind* (2009), Scott Stewart’s *Dark Skies* (2013), and Leigh Janiak’s *Honeymoon* (2014) depicting the experience and/or aftermath of unearthly abductions.

Aliens aren’t the only modern horrors haunting our dreams. In 2016, a woman in Moscow reported being crushed by a real-life



Pokémon (Tompkins, 2017) during an episode of SP (I was unable to find documentation specifying which Pokémon was responsible, but you’re welcome to point fingers at your best guess). As augmented and virtual reality games, blockbuster films, and new types of digital storytelling such as creepypasta and the Momo Challenge introduce new figures, folklore, and frights into our lives, the identity of the things that go bump in the night may forever be in flux.

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# Decolonize the Supernatural: Respecting the Bonds Between Spirituality & Culture

by Mariam Bastani

In my many years of watching horror movies, the one that messed me up the most was William Friedkin’s *The Exorcist* (1973). I don’t know if it remains terrifying in 2020, but seeing it in the 1980s on a cable network was, and its appearances on television a decade after its theatrical run breathed new life into the conversations around exorcism initiated by its release. This resurgence was nothing compared to its initial impact; in 1973, the film scared the shit out of people. Catholic churches saw a spike in membership, people spoke publicly about their experiences with demons, and there was a flurry of media coverage discussing possession. These conversations reached average people in their homes, from the most secular to the deep believers. For once, all of America was feeling the influence of the supernatural in their everyday lives, which is actually the case for most people in the world. By supernatural, I mean its most familiar, broad form of religious tradition. A majority of the world practices some form of religious tradition, which is often inextricably tied to their cultural fabric.

For the rest, we cherry pick. We momentarily focus on aspects of the supernatural that just might have an influence in our immediate context, and we attempt to manipulate them through rituals—we knock on wood, we avoid cracks in the sidewalk, we toss salt over our shoulders, and even create our own systems to generate luck and keep the bad things away. From supernatural ritual to superstition, we all do it. It’s irrational, but it makes us feel better because, at some time in our lives, we all feel as though everything is out of our control. It is either terrifying or liberating but, whatever the case may be, we look for signs that will tell us that it’s okay. That we are okay. At its best, this relationship to the supernatural is comforting. At its most simplistic, it’s a slogan on a shirt such as, “We are the ancestors

of the witches you couldn’t burn”—it may be symbolically true for the wearer, but there really are whole generations of people who actually are ancestors of people who survived the witch hunts targeting their spirituality, alongside their language, customs, and other inextricable parts of their culture.

**A majority of the world practices some form of religious tradition, which is often inextricably tied to their cultural fabric.**

Living in a primarily secular part of the world, it is hard to understand that spirituality is not something always easily unraveled from culture as a whole. We are talking about layers upon layers of culture. Methods of colonization used the compartmentalization of these aspects of culture to attack whole populations. While most everyone would agree that genocide and colonization is bad, we inadvertently dismiss the presence of spirituality

other cultures, often older cultures, as superstitious and, worse, “primitive.” Indigenous cultural practices are often treated as a caricature or exotified with false reverence by people who have no understanding of what it is they are mimicking. Cultural expressions like Dia de los Muertos makeup and headdresses are seen as exotic, shocking looks to be commodified—they are not respected or taken seriously. The visible is extracted from its sacred meaning. Shock value may be the goal, but ignoring how this tactic has been used for oppression by dominant (white) culture is ignorant.

The identification and expression of supernatural presence in everyday life is not a vestige of a primitive society, but often an expression of generational defiance. Many populations live with legacies of transgenerational trauma, blood memory that links them to their ancestors in ways that are hard to understand, even by those with open access to their history. As horror lovers, we often dismiss religion and cultural traditions as fodder for the



scary stories we love so much, but they are so much more. We may not fully understand other cultures, but we know a cheap plot device when we see one; using another person's spiritual practice to enhance your own story doesn't make you a good writer.

One familiar and misunderstood expression of superstitious practice is Mexican Catholicism, with its harmonization of Indigenous spiritual practice. I can't deny that Bloody Jesus, footage of people crying whilst praying, and the skeletal remains of a saint consisting of one foot are worthy of wonder, but dismissing the people engaged in the supernatural is what I take issue with. These rituals are practiced not merely to gain the favour of some unseeing force, but to stay connected to a history that was subject to genocide.

In 2017, another major Aztec temple was found in the middle of Mexico City, having been built over by the Spanish once they forcefully took over. The message is very clear that Cortez and the Spanish hordes wanted to stamp out and erase the population of Indigenous people who were there long before. After

centuries of conversion to a Catholic country, Mexico's expression of Catholicism still retains some of its Indigenous roots. Spirituality and mysticism are part of its expression, using candles, rituals, herbs, talismans, and more. The continuing effects of colonization endure and shape our world, including colorism, suppression of language, erasure of black history, and prejudice within Latin America, but the memory of a world history is not far behind. This harmonized expression of Catholicism has always caused a problem, particularly with the advent of Liberation Theology and its acceptance of deeply-rooted Indigenous practice and mission to help those disenfranchised due to colonization. This is the enduring thorn in the side of a nationalist Catholic government that dismisses how spirituality is practiced by its people.

So, what the hell is the point? When you see articles or Buzzfeed-type videos devoted to "crazy" religious sightings, statues crying, or Jesus in toast, sometimes it's not just people looking for something to believe in. The willingness to accept

the possibility of the supernatural without the attempt to manipulate it is fundamental to who many of us are as a people—and, for some, a revolutionary act. I am not talking about how religion is used to manipulate people into giving everything of value away, nor am I claiming that big "R" religious institutions are beneficial. However, staunch opposition to another person's simple act of seeing a stain that resembles the Virgin Mary as a sign that they are not alone is unnecessary.

In this western interpretation of religious tradition, separation of ethnicity and spirituality is informed by much more than just practicality. It is also informed by colonialism, dispossession, and racism. Living unlike most of the world in our denial of any spiritual connection, why do you care if people believe in ghosts? Ask yourself why it bothers you. If our western and Eurocentric thought demands that spirituality has no place in logical and scientific thinking, what difference does it make?

In the end, it's none of your damn business. **g**

## When East Haunts West: Comparing the Cultural Camera in *Shutter* (2004) & *Shutter* (2008)

by Rebecca Booth

*Shutter* is a 2004 Thai horror film, directed by Banjong Pisanthanakun and Parkpoom Wongpoom. An American remake released in 2008, also titled *Shutter* and directed by Masayuki Ochiai, retains many of the cultural elements surrounding the supernatural focus in the original film. However, it is in the cultural differences between the two films, as signifiers of differing practices and beliefs in the East and West, that interesting analyses can be drawn. This is particularly evident in the representation of the protagonists, in terms of gender politics and the cultural nuances in the way that spiritualism, death, and folklore are portrayed.

In the original film, after a wedding party, Tun (Ananda Everingham) and his girlfriend Jane (Natthaveeranuch Thongmee) are driving home when Jane sees a woman in the middle of the road. Jane is unable to avoid a collision and the woman lies unmoving in the road. Panicking, Tun convinces Jane to leave the scene of the accident rather than check to see if the woman is alive.

Tun is a photographer by trade. In the weeks following the accident, as the pair put the incident behind them, he begins to notice strange shapes and a blurred figure, both through his lens and in his photographs. Unlike the dismissive Tun, Jane is more intuitive regarding the photographs—particularly as she also experiences several supernatural incidents. Jane becomes convinced that the woman's ghost is haunting the couple, a belief stemming from her guilt at leaving the woman behind.

Tun, however, refuses to acknowledge Jane's suspicions and becomes increasingly affected by a severe pain in his neck that he attributes to the car accident. During a subsequent

medical examination, nothing physical is found to be wrong with him—despite the strange fact that a routine weight check reveals his weight has almost doubled without him visually gaining any extra mass.

Jane thus takes it upon herself to investigate, beginning initially with a magazine dedicated to spirit photography. Taking a closer look at Tun's photographs from a shoot outside the university he formerly attended, she notices that the light leak or blurred shape on each seems to cover one floor of a building in the background. Jane explores the floor and takes photographs on a Polaroid camera until she sees the ghostly form of a woman. A group photograph on the wall behind where the woman was stood falls to the floor, and Jane recognizes one of the subjects as the woman from the car accident. A caption reveals her name is Natre (Achita Sikamana).

***It is in the cultural differences between the two films, as signifiers of differing practices and beliefs in the East and West, that interesting analyses can be drawn***

Confronting Tun, Jane learns that he had a secret relationship with Natre when the pair were students. Natre was socially awkward and we learn through flashbacks that she loved him dearly despite his refusal to acknowledge their relationship in public or stop his close friends from bullying her in front of him. Tun explains that Natre was obsessed with him and threatened to commit suicide if Tun left her—which he did.

As Jane begins to realize the true horror behind Tun's story, his three close friends from the opening party scene are also visited by Natre's

spirit and subsequently commit suicide. Tun finally acknowledges that he will be the next victim of this supernatural curse and travels to Natre's family home with Jane. In talking with Natre's mother, the couple are surprised to hear that Natre is in her bedroom upstairs.

To their horror, they discover that Natre has been dead for some time after taking her own life. Natre's mother couldn't bring herself to cremate her daughter's body. Tun and Jane convince the grief-stricken woman that they must perform the necessary rituals and cremate her body to release her (as they know to be) restless spirit.

After the funeral, the pair believe that the ordeal is behind them; that is, until Jane realizes from a collection of photos that Natre is still very much with them and that she has a message for her. Led to negatives hidden on a shelf by Natre, Jane develops them in Tun's dark room and discovers that Tun's dead friends sexually assaulted Natre. When Jane demands the truth from Tun, he admits that he walked in on the attack and took photographs at his friends' request so that Natre will not report them—describing the ordeal as a way out of his relationship.

After Jane leaves, disgusted, Tun is furious and uses a Polaroid to take photographs of the apartment. Unable to find any evidence of Natre he throws the camera across the room, which skids on the floor and takes a photograph of him. The resulting photograph reveals that Natre is on his shoulders. She is the reason for the extra weight and neck pain. Tun stumbles, falling from the window. The final shots of the film reveal him sitting in hospital, slumped, as Jane tearfully enters the room. The reflection in the swinging door's window again shows Natre on his shoulders.

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In the 2008 remake, newlywed photographer Ben (Joshua Jackson) and Jane (Rachael Taylor) move to Japan for several months due to Ben's work placement; Ben was previously based in the country and thus met his doomed love, here renamed Megumi (Megumi Okina). Though the action has been transposed to Japan, supposedly for budgetary reasons, the Eastern locale serves merely as a backdrop. Though the film retains an emphasis on spirit worship and photography, the religious prominence of the original Thai film has been replaced with a folkloric, Western conceptualization of Eastern spiritualism.

In terms of the spiritual aspects of its culture, Thailand is a fusion of faith: it encompasses a harmonious triad of religious beliefs such as Animism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, as well as some Thai Chinese indigenous religions. The most ancient of these beliefs is Animism, which is one of the oldest forms of worship in the world; it centres around the belief in an extremely powerful spirit world, which must be respected and exists in tandem with our own material plane.

Around 95 percent of Thailand's population is Buddhist, largely practicing the Theravada, or Doctrine of the Elders, school of belief. This scripture is too complex to discuss

in detail, but one particular aspect of Theravada can be applied to cultural and character readings, along with Animism, to explore the differences between the two films. This is the belief that individuals are responsible for personal self-awakening, liberation, and actions and consequences. While, upon a first reading, this may appear to refer to the men in the films—Tun/Ben and his friends—an Animist/Buddhist approach actually suggests Jane is the central character.

**The relationship between Natre/Megumi and Jane is a warning to women everywhere about patriarchal power, and comments upon the historical, and disguised, relationship between women, orality and folk or fairy tales**

The titular reference to a camera shutter literally indicates the curtains or blinds within the camera body that control how long the sensor is exposed to light. In the remake, which is much more verbally overt in its exposition, Jane is told by a medium that light is energy; spirits or souls manifest when captured, as light, through the lens of a camera. This is the reason for the light leaks or marks within spirit photography

and is thus a form of communication from Natre/Megumi.

From the initial encounter with Natre/Megumi in the car accident—which could be read as her initial spiritual communication, a powerful embodiment of her spirit at the moment that she took her own life—it becomes apparent that Jane is the intended recipient of the messages, as both incarnations of the character state when they realize the true nature of Tun/Ben. Jane is thus the shutter that the title refers to: through her investigation, she lets in the light (the manifestation of Natre/Megumi), and thus exposes the film, literally, to reveal a sexual crime. She is therefore no longer 'blind' to the actions and nature of her partner.

The pivotal difference in the representation of the women occurs in the beginning and final scenes. In the original film, Jane laughs along with Tun and his friends as they sneakily refer to Tonn's (Unnop Chanpaibool) adultery in front of his new bride and is pressured into leaving the scene of the subsequent accident by Tun; it is this guilt that fuels her intuition and investigation. In the remake, Jane falls unconscious before she can help the woman in the accident, who disappears when she awakens, and is compelled by a moral duty to find and help her. This is enhanced by Jane's



sense of helplessness and loneliness as she navigates through a new life in another country and culture, ignored by her work-consumed husband. The films are a journey for Jane, as she discovers who the man she loves really is. The relationship between Natre/Megumi and Jane is a warning to women everywhere about patriarchal power, and comments upon the historical, and disguised, relationship between women, orality and folk or fairy tales—both in the East and West.

The ending reinforces this message: in the remake, an Animist/Buddhist reading suggests that Jane, as a result of her journey and actions, is self-aware, liberated, and morally free in that she doesn't visit Ben in hospital. In the original film, Jane's tearful return to Tun suggests that the consequences of her actions—refusing to help Natre's spirit at the scene of the car accident—mean that she, like Natre, is not liberated, as she is unable to sever her ties to Tun and thus, symbolically, patriarchy.

As an extension of this reading, Tun/Ben and his male friends, as the embodiment of patriarchy, are punished for their exploitation of this power. In the remake, Ben not only takes the photographs after intentionally drugging Megumi in order to blackmail her to leave him

alone but sits in the other room and literally looks the other way when his friends take advantage of the incapacitated woman. The fact that Jane does not return to him at the end of the film suggests that his actions, as an agent of patriarchy, result in Animistic consequences; unlike Tun, Ben is forever bound to Megumi but has lost Jane.

Similarly, Tun's friends are largely absent from the original film; aside from the initial scene and flashbacks, Ben's friends have far more screen time in the remake. Omitting one character to focus on Bruno (David Denman) and Adam (John Hensley), the remake reveals their sleazy natures in several scenes involving cameras and female models. This screen time and recurring reference to the camera also translates to the deaths of the characters. While we do witness Tonn's fall from the balcony in the original film, the deaths of Tun's other two friends are merely verbally referenced. In the remake, Adam's death in particular is not only more overt in terms of Megumi's involvement but, like Bruno's embellished death scenes, involving him shredding photographs with a razor until his fingers bleed, it is physically linked to the camera. In the remake, the camera is not simply a window into the spirit world: it is a weapon. Megumi turns the camera, a

tool used against her by Ben during the rape and thus symbolic of the phallic assault, back on her attacker. She literally uses the glass of the lens to penetrate Adam's eye socket, not only an orifice but also a lens.

Thus, a cultural comparison of the two films, through the lens of the camera, reveals that the Animistic and folkloric focus of both films—the Western remake borrowing heavily from and therefore literally haunted by an Eastern construction of spiritualism—translates to a universal and historical folkloric message regarding gendered politics. The Animist/Buddhist approach reveals that Jane is the protagonist of the film, communicating through the camera with the spirit world to receive a warning about patriarchal power from an abused, doomed woman.

At their heart, both films are feminist folktales, reminiscent of the historical oral stories in which older women warned younger ones about the dangers of living in a man's world. Jane, the embodiment of the title, is the conduit for both the spiritual message within the film and the folktale relayed to the film audience through the lens of the film camera.

This piece was originally published in *SQ Horror Magazine*.

# Home for the Holidays: Decoding the Symbolism of Father's Day

by CC Stapleton

**Holidays is an anthology film released in 2016 that takes a subversive stab at a handful of commonly observed days of celebration.** As anthologies go, it's fairly standard: some segments are memorable, while others are regrettable. Among the eight shorts, the obvious standout is *Father's Day*, which was both written and directed by Anthony Scott Burns and stars Jocelin Donahue (*House of the Devil*) as a grieving young woman named Carol. On its surface, *Father's Day* is a beautiful and heartbreaking story of the unbreakable bond between a father and daughter. However, once you take a deeper look at the film's rich symbolism and spiritual numerology, *Father's Day* reveals itself to be far more tragic and horrifying than it first appears.

We meet Carol as she is gathering things from her car. The cinematic palette in this scene is an immersive green—establishing a tone for her life. The green hue provides a harmonious setting, suggesting that Carol is content in her daily life. Green is also the colour of the heart chakra and is often used to reflect the connection between the spiritual and physical worlds. As the short unfolds, the grey of Carol's jacket comes into focus, balancing and reflecting the green tone of the opening—marking her as detached, neutral, and outwardly emotionless.

Inside, while on the phone, Carol says has to grade 52 tests this weekend. A seemingly throwaway line is actually a clever narrative trick—it tells the audience that there's more going on beneath the surface of what we're watching unfold and invites a closer look. In numerology, most compound numbers are reduced down to single digits; therefore, five and two are combined to make a seven. The number seven is associated with trying to understand the underlying meaning of things and is also linked to being a seeker of spiritual truths. As Carol discovers, opens, and listens to a found

cassette tape containing a recording of her father's voice, the audience is immediately drawn into this journey with her. Whether seven is associated with Carol or her father (who the audience only hears via the cassette), numerology dictates individuals with the destiny number seven are known to be deeply rooted in spirituality, mysticism, and learning the secrets of the subconsciousness.

**A seemingly throwaway line is actually a clever narrative trick—it tells the audience that there's more going on beneath the surface of what we're watching unfold and invites a closer look.**

Using color symbolism and numerology, it can be interpreted that Carol's father was a seeker of spirituality. Interestingly, the symbolic number seven can be applied equally well to either Carol or her father, as he was seeking something greater and is inviting her to seek him, now that she's grown stronger.

Drawn back into her grief by the unexpected and mysterious voice recording, Carol is overcome with the desire to find her father and drives to the last place they were together. The stark change from grey to red in Carol's car, jacket, and shoes could represent her love for her father; red is usually associated with love, energy, and the primal life forces. The importance of numbers continues: as she is driving, the landscape flashes three times. Perhaps this not only represents the three days it takes her to reach her destination, but also serves as a reference to another triad: Heaven-Earth-Human or, more importantly, Past-Present-Future. We also get a good look at her license plate—7GAA687. Converting letters to numbers and adding, we get the number ten, which signifies a conclusion of a cycle—a solid cue that Carol is

embarking into something she may have been persuaded into completing.

When Carol arrives at the now-dilapidated waterfront property where she and her father were last together, her father's voice on the cassette instructs her to begin walking and states that he will guide her. Not only is this a genius narrative tool, it also illustrates a guided meditation (often used in spiritual rituals) where Carol (armed with a portable cassette player) is being led by her father to the otherworldly realm that he now inhabits.

The first instruction to head south on Reville. The road sign is conjugated in the second person singular present, but it comes from the Latin word *revello*, which means to 'pull or pluck out'—much like Carol, who is being drawn out of her own sense of reality. Carol then turns right onto Third. In Judeo-Christian terms, 'right' can also be translated as the direction south, which is often representative of adventure but also loyalty. Carol's father, speaking to her younger self on the tape, tells her that they will be together again when she is "old enough, strong enough."

The right turn onto Third Street also reinforces Carol's willingness to find her father. The number three has already been utilized several times in the short in a spiritual capacity, but taking a right turn onto Third Street is a physical representation of Carol accepting her destiny. The number three is frequently described as embodying both human and spiritual qualities. A left turn would blatantly infer that it's the opposite of the right, while also alluding to the 'Left Hand Path'—used to describe alternative religious movements and practices that involve the occult or ceremonial magic. This is reinforced by her younger self, as she interrupts her father's directions: "I found a stick—it looks like a magic wand," and her father agrees: "It does look like magic."

The address that Carol's father tells her to look for is 433 Marmont. In numerology, the number 433 combines down to the number one, which is very important. One in spirituality pertains to the spark of raw energy required to create something. The building that Carol finds herself standing in front of is the same building responsible for creating the misery that Carol has experienced her whole life—it is the last place she saw her father. As if sensing that Carol would have reservations, her father begins to quote Buscaglia: "The person who risks nothing, has nothing, is nothing, and becomes nothing." Buscaglia, or Dr. Love, as he was known on American television during the 1980s, was a self-help guru who preached love without bounds. This could be a stimulus for Carol to remember her childhood and follow her heart in her desire to secure the love of her father.

**Carol's actions after this exchange is reflective of her entire journey: is she really making the decision to cross the threshold into her father's world of her own volition, or is this a foil to fulfill someone else's needs?**

As Carol lingers at the doorway of the building, her younger self is heard on the recording saying, "I'm ready," and her father responds, "I wish you were." Carol's actions after this exchange is reflective of her entire journey: is she really making the decision to cross the threshold into her father's world of her own volition, or is this a foil to fulfill someone else's needs? A dark figure rushes through the shot, as if to answer this question.

Once inside the building, the colour palette changes again. Now, everything is awash with blue, but it's not comforting so much as it is oppressive. Utilizing the negative aspects of blue's symbolism, the depressing nostalgia of Carol's past highlights her emotional instability, as well as the manipulation and the deceitfulness of her father's life, to which she is tethered. Inside, there's nothing left of what she and her father saw in the past; their time there together is as forgotten as the ruins themselves. On the recording, young Carol asks her father about a picture in the room they're standing in and he tells her that it is "a symbol of faith." Her

father checks in with a receptionist and tells Carol, "You only get one chance to meet Him, to visit this place." Carol approaches the same door she saw her father disappear through years earlier and must make the personal decision to open the door and follow. As she moves through the doorway, the screen flashes to the eclipse, reinforcing its importance. It is believed that when eclipses occur, psychic energies become extremely conducive, allowing negative energies to amass black energy. More simply, eclipses are a prime opportunity for psychic energy to be both attacked and used against others.

Carol passes through the doorway and sees a dark figure in a large wingback chair, facing away from her. As she approaches, we see there is a line of white salt on the ground. Lines of salt can be used for spiritual protection, in particular for keeping energies trapped within a space or preventing them from entering. Carol sees this line and crosses it, while her father says, "If you are here, you're finally here in this room of your own free will—this means we can be together again."

Carol's father admitting that she needed to make this a decision of her own free solidifies the motive behind this reunion: Carol's father needs her to sacrifice herself willingly in order

to increase the potency of the ritual. Though she is misled by his promises, Carol brings herself there in the naïve hope of reconnecting, while he merely requires her life force to further his own personal gain. A free-will offering is used in religious rituals to gain favour with a deity. The ultimate truth would require the ultimate sacrifice.

**Carol approaches the same door she saw her father disappear through years earlier and must make the personal decision to open the door and follow.**

Carol reaches the chair and finds a grotesque, starving being dislodging its jaw. She screams, and the cassette player falls to the ground as her father's last words echo a resounding, "Together."

*Father's Day* explores the intensity of familial connection and its lingering effects with deft emotion. Even without the obsessive exploration into symbolism, *Father's Day* leaves a lasting impact. The generational pull between a parent and a child is something beyond biology and the longing for that love is otherworldly; depending on who is on the other side, it's either wonderful or downright horrifying. **g**

**Father's Day explores the intensity of familial connection and its lingering effects with deft emotion.**

# A Hope for the Future: The George A. Romero Archival Collection

by Vincent Bec

Described as a “renaissance man” by his wife, Suzanne Desrocher-Romero, George A. Romero, the father of the zombie film, could do it all. From screenwriting to cinematography, directing to editing, Romero’s sense of humour and social knowledge is woven throughout every step of his films. “His strength,” says Suzanne, “was that he instinctively understood the underbelly of what was going on in society and he was able to explore it—with *Night [of the Living Dead]* having a black protagonist, with *Dawn [of the Dead]* which was commercialism, then fast forward to *Diary of the Dead* with social media—he really had an innate sense of it.” Thanks to the work of Suzanne, his daughter Tina, his business partner Peter Grunwald, and the University of Pittsburgh, Romero’s legacy will not be confined to the passive rewatching of his films. Instead, artifacts from his career have been used to create the George A. Romero Archival Collection, which will be held at the University of Pittsburgh’s Hillman Library as the first step in the creation of a horror studies centre.

When asked what motivates her to continue Romero’s legacy in this proactive way, Suzanne points out Romero’s dedication to a quality-over-quantity approach to filmmaking. Having control over how his name and brand are used is important to her, because the intelligence in his work deserves to continue influencing and provoking thought both in future filmmakers and audiences. Suzanne still remembers when horror creators were treated as jokes in the filmmaking world. Although perceptions of horror have shifted, the genre still faces dismissive attitudes: too often, horror films that receive accolades are rebranded with terms like ‘social thriller’ or ‘elevated horror.’ For Suzanne, an important part of Romero’s legacy includes working towards significant goals, such as helping nurture current filmmakers and bringing recognition and respect to the horror genre.

The coordinator of the horror studies centre, Ben Rubin, has spent the summer conducting an inventory of the items donated by Romero’s family, with the help of three University of Pittsburgh graduate students. According to one of the graduate students, Sonia Luper, the next step is determining how to organize the collection for public and scholarly use.

One of the things Suzanne hopes people learn from the archive is what a prolific writer Romero was. Ben and Sonia agree that seeing Romero’s numerous scripts has been one of their favourite parts of the process so far. “What I enjoy most about the scripts is seeing how versatile he was,” Sonia reveals. “He had broad interests, he was well-read and well-traveled, and he watched all kinds of movies. His wide-ranging experiences and interests are reflected in his scripts, which comprise various genres. Many of them are comedic, while others reimagine everything from classic monster movies to operas and Shakespeare plays.” The large number of scripts in the George A. Romero Archival Collection aligns with the University’s dedication to fostering primary source literacy in its students. “We have seen that students gain a lot of perspective from literary archives by being able to trace the creative process—by seeing drafts, edits, publishing correspondence and contracts,” Ben explains. “Researchers can really trace the process from a first draft to viewing the final version of the film to see how the idea went from inception to completion.”

Ben has no doubt the horror studies center will go a long way towards legitimizing horror. “While there are people already studying horror, it remains a fairly neglected area—or at least one that doesn’t have widespread respect,” he observes. “This mirrors the genre generally, I think—it has a huge and dedicated fan base and a long history in literature and film, yet is

often viewed as non-literary or trashy. Deciding as an institution to proactively support and encourage the study of horror helps elevate the standing of these academic inquiries.” Sonia agrees, pointing out that many of the initiatives in the study of horror are independent, with founders managing these initiatives in their spare time without institutional support. “I think having a dedicated center for horror research will help to legitimize the subfield,” she says. “It will also open opportunities for scholars working on these labors of love. Maybe it can even lead to financial or other kinds of support for many of these projects.”

There are a lot of lessons that can be learned from Romero’s experience with independent filmmaking, Ben believes. His work outside of the big studio process can be inspirational for many new filmmakers. Suzanne intends for the George A. Romero Foundation to help nurture independent filmmakers alongside the horror studies centre. Independent filmmaking is what allowed Romero to have tight control over his narratives and to stay devoted to the location of Pittsburgh. As Sonia notes, his films really capture the tone and spirit of Western Pennsylvania. “Every region in the country (and the world!) has a unique culture and things that only people living there know about intimately, and film is a promising medium for exploring those cultural nuances in visual terms,” Sonia explains. “So many filmmakers are eager to leave their cultures and go to the big filmmaking cities like LA and New York, and many of their films eventually tend to lose the local influence from wherever they were from. Romero did the opposite.”

Another vital aspect of independent filmmaking is that it creates opportunities for people who may not have a significant chance of getting big studio funding to explore their talents and create media with important messages.

Horror, in particular, is a genre that has a complicated history with marginalized identities. Horror filmmakers who are women-identifying, LGBTQ+, and people of colour are sometimes erased from its history in favour of a narrative that paints the genre as overtly masculine and unfriendly towards these identities. While receiving film artifacts from icons of the genre, such as Carpenter and Craven, brings recognition to the centre, Suzanne, Ben, and Sonia agree on the importance of including as many horror creators, both big and small, as they possibly can. “For a truly robust horror collection, we should be seeking out work from all types of creators, regardless of their profile or popularity,” Ben affirms. The promise of a horror studies centre that places the work of small creators next to giants of the genre brings with it the hope of highlighting the hidden history of its marginalized creators.

Both Sonia and Suzanne are dedicated to recognizing women’s contributions in horror. Although the George A. Romero Foundation, started by Suzanne, will help independent filmmakers of all identities, she expresses a keen interest in women directors. One project on her mind is a remake of Romero’s 1973 feminist film *Season of the Witch*, helmed by a woman director. Sonia has founded a database of women filmmakers in horror called *Cut-Throat Women*, which

can be accessed at [cutthroatwomen.org](http://cutthroatwomen.org), and formerly worked with Dr. Jane Gaines on the Women’s Film Pioneers Project, a digital database aiming to uncover women’s contributions to film in its foundational years. As Sonia explains, because these women are no longer alive, their history has essentially been hidden. Scholars all over the world must dig through local and national film archives for any surviving information on these women’s careers in order to slowly reconstruct their history.

The work of contemporary women filmmakers in the horror genre is often still erased. In 2018, Jason Blum, owner of a production studio responsible for giving many horror directors funding, said that there are not many women who would direct horror—a claim ably refuted by Sonia’s work. “I started keeping a mental list of horror films directed by women for my own amusement—this was probably in 2011 or so,” she says. “By 2012, I was starting to see more and more women-directed horror, but still found that many people couldn’t list a single horror film directed by a woman. I thought women’s filmmaking in horror was an aspect of history in the making that could so easily be lost, and that it was better to try and document everything about them while they’re alive, so that future generations don’t have to go to such lengths to uncover their work and

lives. Many of the names appearing on *Cut-Throat Women* are names I’ve learned about through attending genre festivals, and a handful of them have only directed a short film or two. Those are the kinds of filmmakers who can easily be lost to history.” When she launched the site, she received DVDs and interviews from Ashlee Blackwell of the online web resource *Graveyard Shift Sisters*, which focuses on scholarship relating to black women and women of colour in genre film, and has since collected more artifacts from filmmakers and scholars. With the creation of the horror studies centre, these artifacts, representing a vulnerable part of film history, will hopefully find a permanent home in an academic institution where they can be preserved and studied for much longer than they could be if held by an individual.

Everything about the George A. Romero Archival Collection and Pittsburgh’s horror studies centre should excite fans and scholars of horror, not just because of the physical items the public will be able to view, but because of what they mean for the future of horror. As Suzanne wants everyone to know: there is a future here. We are excited for this future. The Romero Foundation and archive doesn’t exist to rely on a past legacy, but to look ahead and create a future legacy for horror. **g**

“A CHARMING AND OCCASIONALLY FUNNY LOVE LETTER TO VAMPIRES” -

**RUE MORCUE**

“SMART AND INSIGHTFUL... A MIRTHFUL MASTER CLASS IN VAMPIRIC THEOLOGY... A FINE READ” -

**FANGORIA**

“THIS IS A BOOK THAT SCHOLARS OF BOTH HORROR AND THEOLOGY WILL SURELY APPRECIATE.” -

**IRISH JOURNAL OF GOTHIC HORROR STUDIES**

**SUCH A DARK THING**  
THEOLOGY OF THE VAMPIRE NARRATIVE IN POPULAR CULTURE

M. JESS PEACOCK

In Japanese literary history, it is common for spirits to inhabit the natural world. In Shikibu Murasaki's eleventh-century novel *The Tale of Genji*, these spirits, or *mono no ke*, also inhabit the bodies of others, often with deadly consequences. Throughout the novel, Aoi, Yūgao, and Murasaki, all Genji's lovers or wives, are possessed by the jealous spirit of the Rokujō Haven, Genji's first lover. Why are only women possessed in the novel, despite the many jealous men and women at court? Critical readings of the text, studies of religious practices in Japan, as well as studies of Heian Era (794-1185) political doctrines suggest that the women in *The Tale of Genji* are particularly susceptible to spirit possession due to a lack of political power and agency.

Doris Bergen addresses the topic of spirit possession in the novel via a feminist lens in the book *A Woman's Weapon: Spirit Possession in The Tale of Genji* (1997). Bergen states that possession by a spirit is, knowingly or unknowingly, a union and alliance which weaponizes the possessed, claiming "spirit possession was a constructive phenomenon that engaged women in female bonding and in collective self-assertion. The *mono no ke* acted as the apparent victim's vehicle for dramatically calling attention to otherwise inexpressible grievances. Despite its extraordinary aspects, spirit possession was an integral part of Heian culture" (p. 6). The problem remains, however: why must the three women's bodies be possessed?

In the first possession of the novel, the spirit originally interacts directly with Genji via a dream, as: "Late in the evening, he dozed off to see a beautiful woman seated beside his pillow. She said 'You are a wonder to me, but you do not wish to visit me: no, you bring a tedious creature here and lavish yourself on her. It is hateful of you, and it is wrong.' She began shaking the woman beside him awake" (Murasaki, 1008/2001, p. 67). If the point of spirit possession is, as Bergen claims, to have "the spirit's complaints and wishes, voiced directly through the possessed" (Bergen, 1997, p. 12), then why does the spirit visit Genji in the dream? And if it is to voice the spirit's complaints, what need is there to possess its first victim, Yūgao? To begin unravelling this question, we should first explore the tradition of hauntings in Buddhism and Shintoism to get an idea of Heian society's view of spirits and spirit possessions.

## Spirit Possessions & Power: Gendered Hauntings in The Tale of Genji

by Skylar Kay

The presence of spirits and the supernatural is not isolated to *The Tale of Genji*. Existence of the supernatural in Japan and Japanese literature can be traced as far back as the *Kojiki* (712 CE), in which "Yomotsu-shikome (ugly women from the land of the dead), and the eight-headed, eight-tailed serpentine creature Yamata no Orochi, who consumes seven of an old couple's eight daughters—probably influenced many demons" (Li, 2014, Para 3). Immediately, one can see a trend developing in these origins; the demons, or those killed by said demons, are typically women or girls. This connection between women and demons in early Japanese literature could perhaps be founded in religion, as: "Nowhere outside of the *Lotus Sutra* is there any indication that women can attain 'buddhahood'. In fact, in the sutras preached prior to it, women are looked on with great distaste. Thus the *Flower Garland Sutra* states, 'Women are messengers of hell who can destroy the seeds of buddhahood. They may look like bodhisattvas, but at heart they are like 'yaksa' demons.'" (Heisig, Kasulis & Maraldo, 2011 p. 88).

This view of women as spiritually inferior would have changed in the late Heian era, as "Chief among these popular healing scriptures when *The Tale of Genji* was written was the *Lotus Sutra*" (Barnes, 1989, p. 108). The type of demons and hauntings too had changed, as it became:

"Common belief in Heian Japan... that spirits and demons were all around, haunting the world of the living; unappeased, these supernatural beings could cause illness, death, or other calamities... A distinctive feature of Japanese belief, however, was the notion that a living person could, if his or her spirit were sufficiently provoked, assume a kind of secondary existence and rush out invisibly to attack its enemies" (Barnes, 1989, p. 107).

These spirits of living people, the *mono no ke*, are the spirits in question in *The Tale of Genji*. Before, it was claimed that women were inherently more

spiritually vulnerable—unable to attain buddhahood and rather monstrous—which, in part, contributed to a position of inferiority. This paper suggests that it is the other way around: it is the lack of political and social agency that causes women in *The Tale of Genji* to be more vulnerable to spirit possessions.

To explore women's agency within the context of hauntings, we should begin with the first haunting: Yūgao. Yūgao is courted by Genji in secrecy, as the two never fully reveal their identities to one another. Her seclusion to the private sphere is noted by Genji's confidant, Koremitsu, who reports to Genji that "she is hiding from everyone. Her women have little to keep them occupied" (Murasaki, 1008/2001, p. 61). Her seclusion and boredom are compounded by Heian society's law, in which "Women's inheritance was limited only insofar as it involved only private property, but not public offices, which women could not hold or inherit" (Ambros, 2015, p. 59). When Genji first meets her, he requests to talk with her in private, away from her ladies and "she let him have his way and yielded completely. Her utter submission, however curious, was extremely engaging [to Genji]" (Murasaki, 1008/2001, p. 62). It is when Genji takes Yūgao away to an even more isolated location that the possession occurs. The seclusion to the private sphere increases as Yūgao is removed from her isolated home, now fearful. Genji, however, finds her fear amusing, and "assumed that she just missed the crowd always around her at home" (p. 65).

This isolation to the private sphere and total lack of agency is a catalyst for the spirit possession, a point further reinforced by Genji's ability to avoid the spirit's grasp via masculinity and power. The spirit first appears to Genji in a dream, as previously noted. After the spirit delivers its message of displeasure to Genji, he wakes up and grabs for his sword. As Bergen notes, this move for the sword allows Genji to overcome "this sensation of vulnerability through a gendered reflex: he reaches for his sword, symbolic of male power, and quickly dispels all

fear for himself" (Bergen, 1997, p. 53). Yūgao, isolated and without any sort of protection or power allotted to her gender, is not as fortunate, and "she was shivering violently, helplessly, soaked with perspiration, she seemed to be unconscious... and [Genji] saw that, childlike as she was, a spirit had taken her" (Murasaki, 1008/2001, p. 67-68).

Before examining the possession of the second victim, Aoi, we should compare the consequence of jealousy when two men are involved, which allows another glimpse at the power dynamics involved in spirit possession. In the Suma chapters of *The Tale of Genji*, it is revealed that Genji made an offence against the emperor, similar to the offence of Aoi against the Rokujō Haven (at least in principle). However, while the Rokujō Haven has no means to punish her offender, the emperor does, and Genji voluntarily goes into exile for a short time to avoid scorn at court. This dynamic between men is, in a sense, preventing a spirit possession, as women who cross one another have no way to receive or deal scorn to women in court, so the agitated spirits of offended women resort to possession.

The spirit possession of Aoi, while not initially placed in an environment of isolation like that of Yūgao's, is still segregated to the private sphere, and during a very feminine act—that of childbirth. During this possession, the spirit once again demands to speak to Genji, but this time through Aoi, as "The spirit wept in misery and cried, 'oh please be a little more gentle with me! I have something to say to [Genji]... the voice, the manner, were not [Aoi's] but those of someone else... the Rokujō Haven" (p. 174). Aoi's possession does not initially kill her, but it is when she is isolated, much like Yūgao, that she passes away, as "The residence was quiet, for there was hardly anyone about, when [Aoi] was suddenly racked by a violent fit of retching. Before anyone could reach the palace, she was gone" (p. 176). The Haven and Aoi's position and lack of political power allows a spirit possession to occur that is not seen between men, while the isolation to the private sphere results in the demise of Aoi.

The third and final possession that this project addresses is that of Lady Murasaki, Genji's favourite wife. By this time, the Rokujō Haven has passed

away, but, as Donald Keene notes, "after her death, her 'dead ghost' torments Murasaki" (Keene, 1991, p. 498). Murasaki, unlike the two previous victims, however, survives her possession by the Haven's spirit, and "when the Third Princess [another of Genji's wives] appears 'unwell'... diagnosed with pregnancy, Murasaki's condition gradually improves" (Bergen, 1997, p. 147).

Murasaki is not the same after the haunting, however, as "her composed self-confidence is a sign that she has overcome both her sorrow about her own barrenness and her envy of other women's fertility. She has become immune to conflict with Genji... Yet in terms of her interest as a fictional character she has, paradoxically, all but died" (p. 147). It is during her possession and altered state that we once again see how masculinity is an escape from spirit possession, this time through religion, as "Murasaki begs to be allowed to become a nun, but Genji cannot bear to let her go" (Keene, 1999, p. 484). This desire for nunhood is important when considering gender-based power dynamics because, by wearing monk's clothing and cutting one's hair, "the withdrawal from an overt sexual identity and the adoption of an androgynous monastic name entitled legal and political privileges for the nuns. Through this monastic masculinization, women were occasionally able to act on par with men in the public sphere" (Ambros, 2015, p. 73). Without this release from the spirit's torment via a pseudo-masculinity, however, Murasaki passes away only four years after the hauntings begin.

Each of these spirit possessions demonstrate that women are vulnerable due to their position in society—without political power and secluded to the private sphere. These possessions also show the privilege and power that men have in comparison which allows them to avoid or resist the spirits and *mono no ke* around them. While Genji has protection via his sword, and is briefly in exile before returning to a position of power in the court, Murasaki longs for the androgynous escape to nunhood, Yūgao is defenceless in an isolated house, and Aoi is secluded even while at home. It is these disadvantages plaguing the women in *The Tale of Genji* that allow for spirits to more readily possess them throughout the novel.

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The Tale of Genji (1868) // Toyohara Kunichika

# Change

by Shannon Conaty-Garofalo

**Ingrid didn't understand what had happened.** She had been home for a long weekend, spending the morning thinking through the talk she and her girlfriend needed to have when she went home while she waited for the traffic to die down. Her parents, and most of the people living in the sleepy cul-de-sac, were off at work in the industrial plaza that didn't seem so far away until the alarms went off. School and her own apartment—and the argument that led her to need a weekend to cool off—seemed even further. Had it really only been two days since she ran for the remote to see what had caused the foreign blaring that filled the street?

The news hadn't been very helpful in explaining the situation before all signals were lost, just that the air wasn't safe. If it had been a bomb, she must be far enough away that it didn't impact the structure of the house. She closed all the windows and used duct tape around the edges and the AC to insulate the house from outside air as much as possible. But now, she needed to go outside to see what was happening. She couldn't stay here forever and, since she didn't know how far she would need to go to reach safety, Ingrid thought it best to try to be prepared. She had pulled out the boxes of old Hallowe'en costumes and winter clothing that hadn't been used since the age of trick-or-treating and snow angels to find something to cover her face. She was now using duct tape to secure any gaps at her wrists, ankles, and neck, as well as between the doctor's mask over her mouth and the ski mask over her face, before venturing out to see what the hell was happening.

She exited through the garage and figured she would start four houses down, where Mr. Phillips still lived even after his children had moved away and his wife died. He was a retired police officer and she knew he had at least a rifle in his home for hunting. She wasn't sure what she would need, but figured a gun would be a good start, and he would be able to at least walk her through the basics of how to handle it. The street was deathly quiet, the alarms had died down after a few hours and now it seemed like even the air was holding its breath—there was not even enough of a breeze to make the leaves twitch.

As she approached Mr. Phillips's house, she immediately knew something was wrong and didn't want to go in. Mr. Phillips was an avid gardener, so it was easy to see the clear footprints in the soil around the perimeter of the house. Prints that went deep into the dirt at some places where it was clear something large had stood still for a time.

Gathering her courage, she crept up to the window. She didn't want to know, but she had to know. She was about to turn away when the light glinting off the glass on the floor caught her eye.

A window on the other side of the house had been shattered. Once her eye was drawn to that spot, she looked more closely. The glass was speckled with red. Moving to another window, she saw the lower torso and legs of a man—Mr. Phillips, she presumed—in a doorway. The legs were bent awkwardly and there was blood pooling on the floor around him.

Her breath caught in her throat. She screwed her eyes shut and debated running back to the safety of her home. Mustering her quickly-depleting courage, she forced herself to move to the next window. While she couldn't imagine anyone still being alive given the amount of blood she saw on the floor, she knew she would never forgive herself if she could have helped him and did nothing. Continuing her trek around the house, she realized that the rest of him was not on the other side of the doorway—or, if it were, it was no longer attached to his lower half.

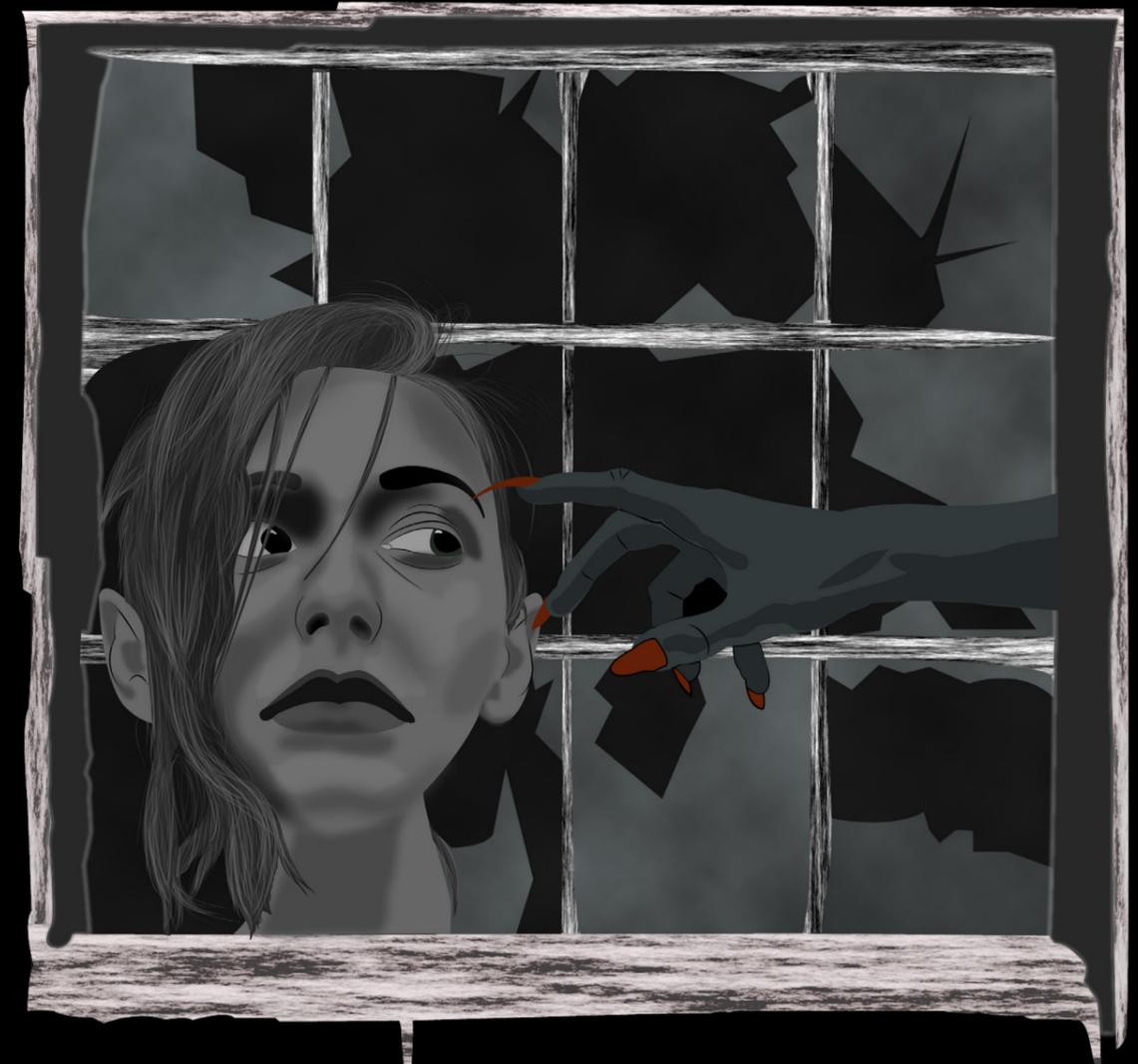
Although the street remained quiet, Ingrid realized the silence had a new quality to it and she suddenly realized how flimsy her protective gear truly was. She might as well be out here in her underthings, *a la* Ellen Ripley, for all the protection a balaclava could give her against whatever had done that to Mr. Phillips.

Ingrid felt, rather than heard, the presence behind her.

She turned, stunned to see a figure, arms and legs too long, face and body covered in a thick leathery skin, but definitely feminine in form appraising her. She kept telling her legs to turn and run, but found she couldn't move. The figure reached out a hand and Ingrid held her breath. Almost lovingly, the creature (had it once been human?) reached out a sharp fingernail and ripped the mask from Ingrid's face, scratching her in the process. It (she?) immediately turned and bounded away.

As the figure receded, Ingrid let out the breath she had been holding. As she inhaled she could almost taste something in the air. The scratch already burned. She knew she needed to get back to her home, but found herself on her knees after a few steps. She rolled onto her back and stared up at the lazy clouds moving across the sky, carrying whatever was in the air to other places. She felt the burning sensation spreading. She thought of the stupid fight with her girlfriend that had brought her here this weekend, the angry words and the need for space. She thought of her parents passive-aggressively dismissing her feelings as they left for work this morning. Ingrid wondered vaguely of the creature's motives and what it would make of her when it returned.

The figure's return was the only thing she was sure of anymore. **g**



Lily Todorov

# INVASION OF THE POD PEOPLE

## Horror Podcast Showcase

by Valeska Griffiths

When we're not enjoying spooky things, we're listening to women talk about them! This month, we're spotlighting Corinne Vien & Sabrina Deana-Roga of *Two Girls, One Ghost*.

Listen: [twogirlsonghostpodcast.com](http://twogirlsonghostpodcast.com)

**How would you describe the *Two Girls, One Ghost* experience?**

**Corinne:** We've taken to describing it as the most haunted podcast in the world... listen at your own risk! But in all seriousness, it's a podcast where two friends discuss the strange, the spooky, and the unknown. When we created this podcast, we really wanted it to be a way for us to combine two things we loved: hanging out with each other and talking about paranormal activity.

**Sabrina:** Our podcast format very much reflects that. We want our listeners to feel like we are all sitting on the couch together, gripping onto the edges of the pillows, and excitedly telling ghost stories. It's scary, but it's fun!

**That's exactly how it feels! So, why start a ghost podcast?**

**C:** It's weird to think that we started this podcast over TWO years ago! We met in 2011 as freshman at Loyola Marymount University and almost instantly bonded over ghost stories.

**S:** Corinne was my go-to when it came to weird paranormal activity in my college dorm. She literally came over with a briefcase full of cleansing materials to get rid of the ghost. Fast forward to 2017, we were a few years out of college, trying to figure out our lives...and Corinne tells me she is freaking MOVING!! I was like "HELL NO, you BOO-TCH." I don't want you to leave.

**C:** Sabrina said something along the lines of, "oh no. Who am I going to talk about ghosts with? We should just start a podcast or something." That was that.



**S:** Well, first it started out as a joke...we both were like, "yeah, that'd be fun..."

**C:** We thought it was a great idea. We'd hang out with each other every single week, talk about ghosts, and try out an entirely new thing—podcasting! And here we are, two years later, over 150 episodes in. We'll be doing this thing even beyond the grave.

**So you've had some paranormal experiences!**

**S:** Oh boy, yes, we do have some paranormal experiences. I had quite the haunted childhood and Corinne somehow finds spirits wherever she goes. Even if we tried to avoid paranormal activity, our friends now utilize us to deal with any and all ghostly business, though we are by no means experts! We've recounted many of our experiences on the podcast, as well as the experiences of our friends, family, neighbors, and so on.

**The podcast has become very popular. What is it about the supernatural that resonates with so many people?**

**C:** Ghost stories are just good clean fun! Whether you believe in the supernatural or not, you can't deny that it's thrilling to hear a good spooky tale in the right setting. Sometimes, just hearing someone recount what they've experienced can send the biggest chill down your spine. It makes it real. These people are real, and their experiences are very real. We give everyone a safe space to share their experiences, no matter how far-out it may sound. We believe everyone's experience was legitimate, even if they don't quite know what to make of it themselves!

The paranormal world is also something you can't really be wrong about. Is it real? Is it fake? Nobody knows. People have opinions, but they're just that—opinions. It's really fun to discuss a topic that prompts a million questions, and know that those

questions may never get answered. It makes the whole topic of paranormal activity quite magical.

**S:** Ditto to everything Corinne said. Ghost stories have been around since the beginning of time, dating back to as early as the first century A.D. They keep history alive, they teach lessons, and they bring people together. My fondest memories of ghost stories aren't experiencing them firsthand—because that gets scary AF—but telling them over a campfire with friends and having to sleep with the lights on for a month.

Most importantly, ghost stories offer hope. Hope that there's more after this life... hope that your loved ones are in a better place... hope that someone or something is looking out for you. It's magical, really.

**I agree. I'm not sure I'm 100% a believer, per se—more an involuntary skeptic who really, really wants to believe—but I've always enjoyed a good ghost story. Particularly those purported to have actually happened. How many ghost stories have you received from your listeners?**

**S:** We have close to 5,000 listener emails at the moment. Our listeners are very haunted. VERY.

**Of the stories that you've covered on the show, which are your favourites?**

**C:** Both of us tend to gravitate toward possession stories. There's something so unsettling about possessions and how many people are involved with each case. The average ghost story includes one person and one ghost, but possessions? You've got a crew of 20 people playing witness to the multiple demons residing in a poor soul. It's absolutely terrifying to think that this can happen to anyone, anywhere. These cases are really what made us create two rules to follow to best avoid a bad and possibly demonic haunting: 1) trust your pet and 2) when in doubt, move out.

**Following those rules would drastically reduce the run-time of 20% of all horror films! Speaking of multiple people bearing witness, what are your live shows like?**

**C:** Ours shows are a lot like our actual episodes. We hang out with each other, struggle with our recording equipment, and get a bit too excited over the stories we picked. While many performers don't enjoy being interrupted, we often rely on our audience members to fill in the blanks when we forget a word or answer odd questions here or there. On our podcast, we enjoy each other's company and casually tell each other ghost stories, and that's what we do with our audience. We all hang out together as if we are posted around a campfire, delighting each other with spooky tales.

**S:** We are also surrounded with such engaged and loyal listeners, so often we will spot someone in the crowd whom we recognize from our Facebook group or Instagram and be like, "Oh, it's you! Hey!" And we even get to meet some of our listeners after the shows at the VIP meet-and-greet.

It's one thing to do this podcast in our pajamas over Google Chat, it's another to do it in front of the people who have literally



L to R: Corinne & Sabrina // Mike Paskin, Instagram: @mikepaskin

made this podcast what it is. It's magical. There's nothing quite like it.

**What advice would you give to women wanting to start their own podcasts?**

**S:** DO IT! We cannot express that enough. There is nothing stopping you. The amazing thing about podcasts is that all you need is a microphone and access to the internet and you can do it. Share your opinions with the world, get your voice out there, and just have fun with it.

**C:** Utilize the amazing networks of other podcasting women out there! We immediately joined Facebook groups like 'Lady Pod Squad' and 'She Podcasts.' These groups are filled with women who have similar aspirations and are excited to help one another and celebrate each other's successes. Don't be afraid to reach out to other podcasts for advice either (shout out to Wine and Crime and Ologies, to name a few).

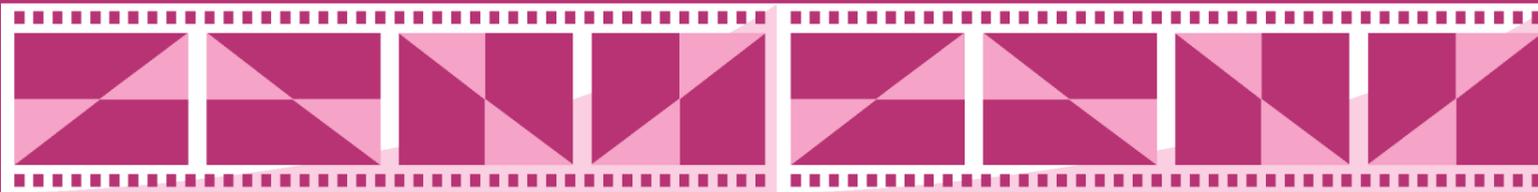
**Great advice. Final question: if you could pick one haunted location in which to spend the night, which would you choose?**

**C:** As much as we don't want to say it, we'd probably go to the Waverly Hills Sanatorium.

**S:** WHAT?! No. No. No. No. I don't know what possessed Corinne, but something must have because I can promise we've decided to never go there... but yeah, okay, I could be convinced.

**C:** We've lost sleep just thinking about the hauntings there, but it's also a one stop shop—doppelgangers, shadow figures, and many, many spirits. Though I'm not confident we'd make it through the night.

**S:** If we did survive, we'd definitely go home with an evil attachment of sorts. If we go, we're going together, and I'm going to superglue myself to Corinne for two reasons. 1) She'd make me go into a dark creepy space first and then never follow me and 2) because Corinne is a fighter and will kick ghost butt... but if she can't, I'm a flight-er and will run our butts out of there. 



## Reel Good: 5 Tips for Up-and-Coming Filmmakers

by Suri Parmar

Jumping into the world of filmmaking can be daunting and mastering the technical skills is only one part of a successful strategy. Here are five tips to help you get an edge!

**So you've completed your own DIY filmmaking bootcamp.** Which may or may not include watching *Midsommar* (2019) so many times you know the runic alphabet by heart (and think meat pies are gross). And memorizing every screenwriting book, to the point that you're repeating Blake Snyder in your sleep. (Show and don't tell, folks!) You've polished your script, enlisted your dream cast and crew, and have Starbucks on speed dial.

All set to start making movies, right?

Not necessarily.

No matter how prepared you might feel, it's always helpful to have a few more tricks up your sleeve.

### Build a Network (Without Being Weird)

I was recently told that the film market is so saturated as of late that even shorts need sales agents. Find out who's buying what and how major festivals select films by attending industry events and participating in workshops and initiatives. But whatever you do, don't treat the people you encounter like resources. Be straightforward and build true, professional bonds with no expectations. If something comes of it, wonderful. If not, you've still won by getting yourself out there and learning the lay of the land.

### Don't Chase the Market

You've been eying the latest billion-dollar film franchise about goblins and want some of that action. (Because if you've learned anything from trade publications,

it's that horror sells.) But by the time you write your own ghoulish script, build your team, package your concept, and secure distributors and funders, goblins have become passé. Tell stories from your heart that you want to tell, and they will find their audience. If you're genuine and respectful to viewers, you will be treated in kind. Bear in mind that you're competing with people who eat, breathe, and sleep film and that niche markets like horror are accordingly rooted in passion and grassroots support. Before producing *Aliens* (1986) and *The Walking Dead* (2010), Gale Anne Hurd cleaned toilets on Roger Corman's sets as a rite of passage. There's no room for dilettantes or "get rich quick" schemes in the film industry.

**If you can't guarantee a secure set, then you shouldn't be making movies.**

### Remember the Medium!

In my early filmmaking days, I'd shoot scenes with generic wide, medium, and close-up shots and slice and dice them in the editing suite to highlight actors' performances. Unsurprisingly, those efforts resemble television in that they lack a cogent vision. While TV shows are becoming more cinematic these days, film is still the dominantly visual medium. Remember that you're creating an experience. Plan your shots and assemble them to showcase emotional beats and the mood you wish to convey. But don't go overboard; every stylistic choice must serve the story. (Nothing screams student

project more than an intimate two-hander with an ultra-wide aspect ratio.) If your films still look "TV," don't fret. Many marquee filmmakers shoot and edit for performance and not emotion...but I won't name names.

### Don't Be a Jerk to Others

This goes back to tip number one. Remember that you are human first and a filmmaker second and that your production team's wellbeing is paramount, particularly during shoots. Maybe you can't yet pay industry rates, but you should feed everyone well with healthy and abundant craft services. (I still have nightmares about the one time I ordered pizza.) Consider trading favours, like helping team members with their own film projects, and be mindful of their needs. Make sure actors are satisfied with their takes and do not, do not, *do not* work your crew ridiculous hours nor ask anyone to compromise their safety. If you can't guarantee a secure set, then you shouldn't be making movies.

### Don't Be a Jerk to Yourself

Filmmaking is an acquired skill that can take decades to finesse. Be patient. Start with small projects and work your way up to your magnum opus. (I myself am still figuring this out!) In the interim, look after yourself. Live and enjoy life; take naps and eat lots of cupcakes. Most importantly, keep enjoying movies. If you become one of those types who grade the colour, composition, and editing rhythm of everything you watch, you will drive yourself crazy. (Speaking from personal experience!) 



# THE HAUNTED LIBRARY

by Zack Long



## Screening the Dark Side of Love: From Euro-Horror to American Cinema

Eds. Karen A. Ritzenhoff & Karen Randell  
Palgrave Macmillan, 2012

*Screening the Dark Side of Love: From Euro-Horror to American Cinema* is a collection of essays edited by Karen A. Ritzenhoff and Karen Randell that is about...well, the dark side of love. If that seems a rather ambiguous description, that is because it is ambiguous by design. With nothing more than "the dark side of love" to connect them, the essays within are able to explore a wide variety of ideas with none feeling out of place.

Of the fifteen essays collected in the volume, I would like to highlight a couple of standouts. Janet S. Robinson's attitude towards censorship is clear from the title of her chapter, "Re-imagining Censorship as 'Reel' Mutilation: Why Not Release a G-Rated Version of David Cronenberg's *Crash*?", which explores the ways that censorship can problematize the true meaning of a film (by way of Cronenberg's auto-cum-mutilation film). Samm Deighan (perhaps my favorite living film studies scholar) explores "Female Pleasure and Performance: Masochism in *Belle de Jour* and *Histoire d'O*" and shines a fresh light on these two classic art-house/erotic features. Finally, and perhaps most thought-provoking of all, is Sarah Schaschek's closing chapter, "Fucking Machines: High-Tech Bodies in Pornography", which explores the use of machine partners within pornography with a reading that is both insightful and begging to be explored metaphorically within either the horror or science-fiction.

While these essays are standouts, the rest are enjoyable and well written. A particular nod must be given to Ritzenhoff and Randell as editors. Film studies texts seem to be especially littered with errors that often pull this reader out of the experience. In reading *Screening the Dark Side of Love*, I was never pulled out of the text by the text itself. Considering the great editing and the wonderful essays, *Screening the Dark Side of Love* is one of the best books I have reviewed to date for *Grim*.



## Gender and the Nuclear Family in Twenty-First-Century Horror

Kimberly Jackson  
Palgrave Macmillan, 2015

Kimberly Jackson's *Gender and the Nuclear Family in Twenty-First-Century Horror* is a book that, when it works, serves as a fantastic update to Tony Williams' seminal *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in American Horror Film*. Jackson's opening sentence sets forth what should be expected of the book, "[This book] focuses specifically on the ways that patriarchal decline and postfeminist ideology are portrayed in popular American horror films of the twenty-first century." Whether the book succeeds is a slightly more complicated point.

The first two chapters are absolutely excellent. In particular, I found chapter 2, "Like Son, Like Father: Tracing the Male Possession Narrative through Shymalan's *The Sixth Sense*, Koepf's *Stir of Echoes*, and Wan's *Insidious* and *Insidious: Chapter 2*," to be a truly eye-opening piece of film scholarship that is well worth the price of admission. But when we move into chapter three, "Family Horror, Media Saturation, and the Phenomenon of True Crime in Derrickson's *Sinister*," Jackson moves away from gender and the nuclear family (though still briefly discussing them in regards to *Sinister*) to instead investigate the media and true crime in a more broadly cultural sense. I don't want to give the impression that it is bad writing; it merely feels misplaced, as if the title lied about what the contents were to hold. The final chapter looks at the figure of the archaic mother within Collet-Serra's *Orphan*, Muschietti's *Mama* and Flanagan's *Oculus*, and manages to be engaging if a little overlong.

Ultimately, Jackson's *Gender and the Nuclear Family in Twenty-First-Century Horror* is a good book that only fails to be great because of some issues with pacing and drifting off topic. But, when it works, it is exceedingly interesting and it offers new perspectives on the relationship between gender and family as interrupted by horror. **g**

# Dear Countess Valencia

Countess Valencia is a certified Gothic therapist, an interior decorator with a soft spot for spooky, and a 6000-year-old Vampire-Canadian with more opinions than she knows what to do with. In each issue of *Grim*, her advice column tackles timeless dilemmas and dishes out practical solutions.



**My werewolf boyfriend sheds a lot—is it a faux paw (pun intended) to gift him a hair net?**

What a sensitive topic for our furry fiends! Many werewolves define themselves by the amount of fur they produce. However, when one starts to shed too much, it can be embarrassing. If you feel close enough to bring up the topic, then discuss it with your boyfriend. Communication is key!

Don't be shy in investigating further. Are they using too much MoonGlow™ hair product? Is it genetic? Once you know more about the cause, figuring out a solution will be easier. You can suggest the hair net if you think he will be open to it, or you can be more subtle. Tell him you love hanging out in the den, brushing his hair. That way, you can remove any excess fur and spend quality cuddle time together, too!



**I'm intrigued by someone in my office. Is it unethical to cast a love spell on someone I work with?**

Oh yes, office romance! Nothing beats the lure of Karen in Accounting or Larry in Human Resources. Using spells to play with the heart deserves much caution. Especially if that person works with you day in and day out!

Make sure to keep the spells light and end the cantations with "only if it is meant to be." I'm sure Karen or Larry are fabulous people, but you must know that they are autonomous beings who also get to choose their own fate. Feel free to help them along with some love spells, but be careful not to demand too much love. You may find yourself trapped in an unfulfilling lifelong marriage with bratty kids and a cat that wants nothing to do with you.

RAYNA SLOBODIAN

**Have a question for Countess Valencia? Need advice about the spookier side of life? Submit your queries via the contact form at [anatomyofascream.com](http://anatomyofascream.com).**

# CLASSIFIEDS

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## Services - Offering

Deal w/ nightly visitations from little grey men? Let me ET-proof your home. Quick & dirty installation, satisfaction guaranteed. Amit: (666) 401-2300.

I can deliver one hell of a spooky chant for seances, exorcisms, birthdays, or summoning rites. I specialize in Latin. Call Casey: (666) 871-4503.

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

## Services - Seeking

Have you ever danced with the devil in the pale moonlight? Do you want to? In need of a ballroom partner Tues & Thurs evenings. Lucy: (666) 661-5666.

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## Jobs

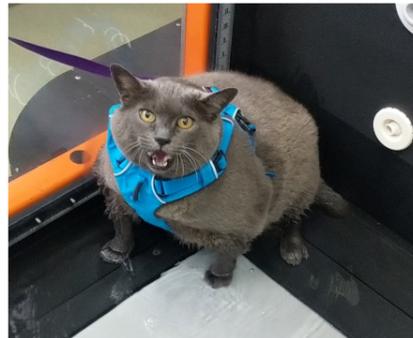
Hiring freelance gravediggers for extremely flexible shifts. Must be available on-call & have a valid driver's licence—there is no telling when or where I'll need you & it will always be urgent. Agatha: (666) 221-8699.

## Buying & Selling

Looking to offload an accursed knickknack? I will pay a modest amount of money for anything that promises to bring chaos and/or ruin upon its unfortunate owner. Call Rachael after 11pm: (666) 241-1035.

For sale: abnormally large mutant baby shoes, never worn. Call Alberto at (666) 312-8730. Will accept best offer.

## Romantic Encounters



Big, beautiful cat seeking platonic tender loving care. I don't enjoy long walks on the beach or anywhere else, but I have a warm heart and would love to cuddle up on the right lap. Holla at Cinder Block: (666) 547-2281.

## Humans for Humans

Seeking experienced camera man for weekend documentary shoot in Maryland. Must be comfortable with night work, camping & wooden effigies. Individuals with toxic masculinity or passive aggressive map skills need not apply. Belief in the supernatural an asset, but not required. Leave a voice mail for Heather at (666) 891-1244.

PLACE YOUR FREE 'HUMANS FOR HUMANS' AD via the Contact Form at [anatomyofascream.com](http://anatomyofascream.com).

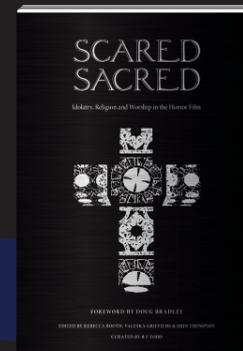
# grim



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

- Laura Kemmerer, *What Sleeps Beneath*



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

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

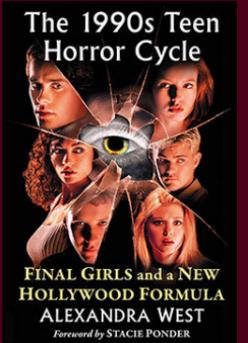
Foreword by Doug Bradley.

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“Alexandra West is one of the most brilliant minds working in the field of film studies today. The fact that she devotes her considerable intellect to our little bloody corner of the film world is truly a gift...”

- Jeff Schmidt, *Nightmarish Conjurings*

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female-founded, queer-positive horror entertainment site offering reviews, interviews & analyses with an intersectional feminist perspective.

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