

Editorial: Italian Horror Cinema

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Since its inception in 2013, the *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies* has been a valuable outlet for research that seeks to complicate ‘national’ orientations of Italian film history. Its inaugural edition was framed by the Editor’s mission statement to place Italian cinema ‘within the realm of a post-national and trans-cultural debate [...] transcending geo-ethnic land and sea borders and moving away from merely celebratory local cinematic experiences’ (Laviosa 2013: 4). This has provided a much-needed corrective to a tendency in Italian film studies diagnosed and lamented by Alan O’Leary and Catherine O’Rawe in their oft-cited polemic from 2011:

Italian cinema has been perceived (or asserted) to be a key site for the elaboration of Italian nationhood and identity. The privileging of cinema’s allotted role of ‘mirror’ of the nation has led to a downgrading of popular genres and a kind of nationalistic cinema history in the scholarship (O’Leary and O’Rawe 2011: 109).

It would of course be absurd to claim that concepts of nationhood have since been – or should be – discarded from this discipline. Rather, *JICMS*’s mandate points to an increased focus on the innate instability of the national referent, allowing ‘transnational’ methodologies to aid understanding of the complexities at work within particular national, local or sub-cultural contexts.

There are, however, areas of Italian film history that have long been studied for how they complicate national paradigms: notably, those surrounding the very ‘popular genres’ identified by O’Leary and O’Rawe as having been neglected by nationalistic scholarly tendencies. Nowhere is this more evident than in scholarship surrounding the country’s wide array of horror films from the 1950s onwards. It is common practice to examine in these

films and their various cycles a tension between a culturally specific register pertaining to 'Italian' outlooks on the one hand, and cosmopolitan, transnational or 'translocal' flows of influence on the other. Work by Gary Needham (2003), Mikel J. Koven (2006), and Stefano Baschiera and Francesco Di Chiara (2010), for example, emphasises the tensions between parochialism and cosmopolitanism, tradition and modernity, and the national and the transnational that are to be found running through Italian horror's preoccupation with travel, tourism and foreignness. Initially spanning a period of traumatic socio-political upheaval, an ever-increasing importation of American fashions and styles, and lucrative international co-production models, Italian cinema's various vampires, witches, zombies, cannibals and serial killers can be seen to document the complexities of cultural moments finely perched between the local and the global.

A special issue of *JICMS* dedicated to 'Italian Horror Cinema' therefore seems apt on two counts: first, such films have yet to be analysed in the pages of this journal; and, second, Anglophone study of Italian horror cinema has seemingly been limited to a mere handful of methodological approaches. It has been rare for Italian horror cinema to be considered beyond the limiting parameters of cult discourse, often being written about in response to – or because of – the violent content of films and the run-ins that movies such as *Cannibal Holocaust* (Deodato, 1980) have had with film censors at various points in their distribution history. Therefore, in both fan culture and the academy (which are frequently connected), Italian horror films have been singled out for their alleged transgressions, and the challenges they arguably pose to various 'norms', 'whether these be aesthetic norms of commercial mainstream cinema filmmaking or broader social and ideological norms' (Hutchings 2003: 132). This has meant that issues of cultural specificity have been overlooked, due in part to a predominantly Anglo-centric outlook, which has often (but not always) prioritised the UK and US cult legacy of such films (see, for example, Guins 2005; Olney 2013), or the tendency

for scholars to adopt ahistorical, continental theory-led, approaches to Italian horror movies (see, for example, McCormack 2004; Powell 2012). The field is, however, starting to change, and the study of Italian horror cinema is now clearly emerging as a key area of cultural-historical investigation in Italian film studies (see, for example, the forthcoming volume *Italian Horror Cinema*, edited by Stefano Baschiera and Russ Hunter (2016)). This special issue seeks to engage with this developing trend, as an outlet for such trans-disciplinary research: sitting within the concerns of both Film Studies and Italian Studies, while embracing the exigencies of historically-informed nuance.

The idea for this special issue arose from the second *Spaghetti Cinema* conference and festival at the University of Bedfordshire, which brought together diverse perspectives on the cultural-historical coordinates of Italian horror cinema. Encompassing the broad and porous cycles of gothic horror, *gialli*, zombie and cannibal films, this event considered antecedents to Italian horror films, studies of their political and historical contexts, their industrial histories and distribution patterns, and their on-going global legacies. Accordingly, this issue seeks to reconsider the heterogeneous strands of influence that feed into and out of such films, the contexts that birthed them, the scholarly discourse that has framed them, and their continued circulation in the digital world.

To begin, in “‘I have a picture of the Monster!’: *Il mostro di Frankenstein* and the search for Italian horror cinema’, Russ Hunter embarks on an archival reappraisal of Italian horror cinema’s pre-history, which is commonly seen to begin with *I vampiri/Lust of the Vampire* (Freda, 1957). Drawing on existing accounts and archival research, he seeks to establish the place of the lost film *Il mostro di Frankenstein* (Testa, 1921) within ‘horror film’ discourse, in spite of it having been made in a period before ‘horror’ was used to denote a specific generic category. Hunter asks: does *Il mostro di Frankenstein* represent the starting point for ‘Italian horror cinema’ as we know it today?

Alexia Kannas' article 'All the colours of the dark: film genre and the Italian *giallo*' tackles the generic problems inherent in classifying the *giallo*. In bringing together a multitude of sources from academic criticism – from genre theory to work on the notion of *filone* – and a number of key case studies – from *Sei donne per l'assassino / Blood and Black Lace* (Bava, 1964) to *L'étrange couleur des larmes de ton corps / The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears* (Cattet and Forzani, 2013) – Kannas strives to make sense of the *giallo*'s near resistance to coherence and unity.

With 'A Comparative Analysis of the Factors Driving Film Cycles: Italian and American Zombie Film Production, 1978-82', Todd Platts explores what he identifies as the key factors involved in the development (or, indeed, non-development) of film cycles, in relation to the seminal American horror film, *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero, 1978), which was re-cut for the Italian market by horror maestro Dario Argento. Drawing on issues relating to the film's commercial success, the socio-political events and broader social currents it engages with, the influence of supporting cultural phenomena, and, lastly, industrial compatibility, Platts considers why it was that Romero's film initiated a cycle of popular zombie films in Italy, but not in its native North America. While both Platts' and Kannas' approaches are applied to particular cinematic moments, together, they offer more widely applicable analytical models for future film cycle scholarship.

Lindsay Hallam's "'Why are there always three?': The Gothic Occult in Dario Argento's Three Mothers Trilogy' then examines how Argento's trilogy goes beyond Christian iconography to adopt occult and Western Esoteric beliefs. The article examines how these films transcend their apparent flaws (in terms of narrative and characterisation) by imbuing their *mise-en-scène* with layers of iconographic meaning, which belong to a long tradition of art forms that have investigated the allure of the occult.

Continuing the focus on Argento, Xavier Aldana Reyes's article 'The Cultural Capital of the Gothic Horror Adaptation: The Case of Dario Argento's *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Dracula 3D*' assesses the director's films since the 1990s: a period commonly thought to signify a decline in his output. Aldana-Reyes proposes that Argento's gothic adaptations, *Il fantasma dell'opera / The Phantom of the Opera* (1998) and *Dracula 3D* (2012), reveal a tension between what he perceives to be, on the one hand, Argento's desire to be regarded as a credible auteur (thus his choosing to adapt 'high' gothic novels), and, on the other, his legacy as a ('low') horror filmmaker.

Stefano Baschiera then brings things even more up to date in his article, 'Streaming Italian horror cinema in the UK: Lovefilm Instant', which examines the presence of Italian horror movies on video-streaming websites. Through close scrutiny of the genre's presence on such websites, Baschiera argues that the ways in which such films are catalogued have shaped understandings of the genre in relation to notions of 'long tail' distribution and the importance of 'niche' marketing for the online availability of exploitation films.

This issue then offers a new interview with acclaimed Italian filmmaker Sergio Martino, conducted by Giulio Olesen ("An Interview with Sergio Martino: An American in Rome"), as well as two reports of conferences dedicated explicitly to Italian horror cinema in recent years (which are themselves testament to a growing field of interest): the first, by Neil Fox, of the aforementioned 'Spaghetti Cinema' event; and the second, by Louis Bayman, of 'The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh and the Giallo: an International Film Conference' at the Austrian Historical Institute in Rome.

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