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**Journeys into Perversion:
Vision, Desire and Economies of Transgression in
the Films of Jess Franco**

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:.....

Summary

Due to their characteristic themes (such as ‘perverse’ desire and monstrosity) and form (incoherence and excess), exploitation films are often celebrated as inherently subversive or transgressive. I critically assess such claims through a close reading of the films of the Spanish ‘sex and horror’ specialist Jess Franco. My textual and contextual analysis shows that Franco’s films are shaped by inter-relationships between authorship, international genre codes and the economic and ideological conditions of exploitation cinema. Within these conditions, Franco’s treatment of ‘aberrant’ and gothic desiring subjectivities appears contradictory. Contestation and critique can, for example, be found in Franco’s portrayal of emasculated male characters, and his female vampires may offer opportunities for resistant appropriation. But these possibilities do not amount to the ‘radicality’ sometimes attributed to the exploitation field.

Focusing on international co-productions from early 1960s to mid 1970s, I discuss the ideological ambivalence of their fascination with ‘perversity’ and ‘otherness’. Chapter 1 argues that *The Awful Dr Orlof* challenges dominant standards of quality in contemporary Spanish cinema, that its figuring of monstrosity contains a potential critique of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship, and that it only partially destabilises the genre’s traditional gender codes. Chapter 2 discusses femme fatale stereotypes and fantasy tropes in *Venus in Furs*. Mixing visual discourses of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture in an evocation of male ‘mad love’, this film dramatises vision in a way which problematises the notion of the mastering, coherent gaze. Chapter 3 argues that Franco’s female vampire films embody, while reflexively estranging, heteronormative male fascination with the ‘otherness’ of female/‘lesbian’ desire. Franco’s supposed transgressivity is often referred to as Sadeian; through a reading of *Demoniac* and Franco’s ‘captive women’ imagery, the final chapter therefore discusses the political possibilities, contradictions and limitations of Franco’s Sadeian representations.

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Introduction: The Diabolical Sr. Franco

This thesis looks at the work of one of the most prolific figures in European exploitation cinema, the Spanish filmmaker Jesús Franco Manera, more commonly known as Jess Franco (1930 -).¹ Although Franco has made musicals, comedies, spy adventures and Westerns, most of his films occupy and refer to body genres - most obviously horror and the sex film - attractive to the exploitation industry. Many of Franco's films foreground the sexual content of gothic horror: fetishistic and sadomasochistic props often decorate tales of perverse desire, deathly seduction and destructive erotomania. While Franco can be described nebulously as a 'cult' filmmaker, this is not primarily a study of the construction or consumption of 'cult' cinema. However, Franco's 'cult' status is not unconnected to his films' investment in 'perversity' and 'transgression', and these are central to my analysis.

This thesis was originally conceived out of disappointment. As a consumer since the early 1990s of many reissued exploitation films on video and DVD, I admit that I found the sleazy reputation of Franco's films alluring. But on the whole they fell short both of my hopes for a delirious journey into perversion² and of the exciting accounts given of them in 'cult'-oriented publications.³ Despite their concern with gothic desires, often emblematised in such archetypes as the female vampire, the mad scientist and the aristocratic debauchee, watching Franco's films can be a curiously distracted and impoverished experience. Partly this is a matter of poor dubbing and dubious subtitling. But it is also because they are often monotonously paced, inconsistent, tenuously plotted and less than compellingly performed. However, watching pristine un-subtitled foreign-language prints of Franco's *Vampyros Lesbos* (1970), *Faceless* (1988) and *Female Vampire* (1973) on the big screen⁴ persuaded me that many of his films were at least visually, tonally, thematically and structurally interesting.

After a long absence from my life, my interest in Franco was rekindled in the mid-2000s with the growth of academic work on cult cinema and the allied expansion of what I will call exploitation cinema studies. Again I found that the films did not stack up to the inflated claims often made for them by critics and theorists. Writers on horror movies often seem convinced that each genre film provides a series of ineffable shocks to the viewer; Steven Shaviro, for

¹ I have opted to use the more familiar 'Jess' because this is the name by which Franco is most commonly known. His published memoirs (2004) are titled *Memorias del Tío Jess*. Given the transnational nature of much of Franco's career, the Anglicised name is more appropriate to this thesis.

² The expression 'journeys into perversion' is a reference to Franco's *Eugenie, the Story of her Journey into Perversion* (1969). This film is discussed briefly in chapter 4.

³ The sexism present in some of these accounts is discussed in Hollows (2003) and Read (2003).

⁴ The occasion was *Eurofest '96, Part 2*, a festival of exploitation horror films held at the Everyman in Hampstead in Autumn 1996.

example, claims that horror exemplifies cinema's "tactile" assault on the spectator, an effect so powerful that he or she is left "no space for reflection" (Shaviro 1993: 49). The exaggeration here would suggest that Shaviro has never sat through a Franco film, but Xavier Mendik and Ernest Mathijs have, and even they buy into exploitation cinema's hype by insisting that the field offers an endless parade of "visceral erotic thrills" (Mendik and Mathijs 2004:10).¹ This thesis is partly motivated by a desire to find a way of writing about what makes Franco's films interesting without exaggerating their "thrills". More importantly, exploitation cinema's typical themes ('perversity', otherness and 'abnormality') and style (incoherence and excess) are often celebrated as inherently subversive, and Franco is no exception. Yet close analysis of Franco's films remains uncommon. The things which for me make them worth writing about - their visuality, their textuality, and their ideological tensions - are often barely analysed, let alone interrogated: detailed textual and contextual readings of Franco's work are thin on the ground. The general rhetoric of transgression throws little light on the specificities of style, address and intertextual reference in particular films. This thesis critically assesses hyperbolic claims for Franco and his exploitation field through a reading of his treatment of 'aberrant', gothic desires and subjectivities.

Franco is peripheral in the historiography of popular genre cinema, but he has never been invisible. Mainly dismissive reviews of many of his gothic and fantastic films of the 1960s and 1970s could be found in periodicals as diverse as *Monthly Film Bulletin*, *Positif*, *Midi-Minuit Fantastique*, and *Cinefantastique*.² Franco's name appears fleetingly in two of the foundational critical volumes on horror cinema, Carlos Clarens' *Horror Movies: an Illustrated Survey* (1968) and Ivan Butler's *The Horror Film* (1967). His earlier work also receives brief but occasionally positive mentions in *The Vampire Film* (Ursini and Silver 1975), *The Horror Film Handbook* (Frank 1982) and the *Aurum Encyclopedia* of horror cinema (Hardy 1996).³ But the films are more often a problem for critics in that field, and 'quality' is a large part of the problem. Kim Newman's not inaccurate description of Franco's films as "slipshod affairs" perhaps explains the near-absence of Franco from the first edition of his *Nightmare Movies* as well as from the majority of texts on horror cinema (Newman 1984: 30). Franco's excessive use of the zoom lens in many films of the period under discussion here is often singled out for particular disdain.

¹ The disheartening aspect of watching most exploitation films has been discussed by Sconce (2007). Sconce sees the 'paracinematic' fondness for the paucity of the exploitation experience as a perverse reflection of the failure of Hollywood films to 'deliver the goods'. I discuss exaggerated auteurist claims about Franco in chapter 1.

² *Positif*, for example, ran reviews of films like *The Demons*, *Lorna the Exorcist*, and *Female Vampire* (see Anon. 1973, 1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1976).

³ Hardy's book (with contributors Kim Newman, Julian Petley, Tom Milne, Tim Pulleine and Paul Willeman) provides some of the most insightful views on Franco available at the time of its publication.

But the close proximity of many of Franco's films to sexploitation and pornography may also have alienated horror genre purists. Reflecting the availability of nude publicity stills from his films, picture features on Franco's more explicit sex-oriented (though often still fantastic or gothic) work appeared throughout the 1970s in 'adult' film magazines like *Continental Film Review*, *Cinema Blue* and *Cinema X*. In combination with "slipshod" direction, the lengthy 'pornographic' shots in many of his films after the 1960s may tend to diminish horror's supposedly characteristic affects.

With interconnected expansion of the home viewing market and of exploitation studies, Franco's films have become increasingly acknowledged in horror and exploitation surveys and anthologies, such as Tohill and Tombs (1995), Newman (1996), Wells (2000) and Schneider (2007). Several titles dedicated to Franco have appeared since the 1990s, mainly consisting of copious illustrations and more or less informative filmographies and reviews (Aguilar and Freixas (1991), Balbo et al (1993), Bethmann (1999), Aguilar (1999)). The scattered texts on Franco tend to duplicate platitudes and anecdotes while lauding him as an inveterately transgressive exploitation auteur. Mendik (1998), Hawkins (2000), Pavlović (2003), Lázaro-Reboll (2002), Mesnildot (2004) and Krzywinska (2006) have produced more substantial and circumspect analyses, but an extensive body of material on Franco's output is yet to exist.¹ Besides the issue of 'quality', another factor contributing to Franco's marginal status may be that the work of Spanish exploitation filmmakers has historically been overshadowed: where Europe is concerned, British and Italian low budget genre products have until recently dominated the field. However, the study of Spanish exploitation cinema is now burgeoning with the work of researchers such as Lázaro-Reboll (2002, 2004, 2005) and Andy Willis (2002, 2003, 2004, 2009). Pavlović and Hawkins have also provided thoughtful responses to the contestatory possibilities of Franco's films: Hawkins sees exploitation as a field which problematises dominant topographies of taste, while Pavlović begins to offer an analysis of how the presence of transgressive bodies in Franco's films subverts hegemonic fascist discourses of General Franco's Spain. But Hawkins and Pavlović, both borrowing heavily from Tohill and Tombs (1995) drift towards a mystificatory form of auteurism which leads them to suppress the more problematic and contradictory aspects of Jess Franco's films and overplay their radical difference.

¹ Two forthcoming pieces by Antonio Lázaro-Reboll may help to redress the balance: one chapter on Franco appears in his *Spanish Horror Films* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011) and one in *Companion to Spanish Cinema*, (Jo Labanyi and Tatjana Pavlović (eds.) Blackwell, 2011).

While academic interest in low budget commercial filmmaking can be traced back at least as far as surrealism¹, exploitation cinema as a critical category and object of academic enquiry begins in earnest in the 1960s with work on low budget horror cinema: the Parisian horror journal *Midi-Minuit Fantastique*, the work of critics like Raymond Durnat (1966, 1967, 1971, 2000), *Cahiers du Cinéma*'s auteurist elevation of North American 'B Movie' directors², and the rise of camp discourse as described by Susan Sontag all played a part in the early 'academic cult' of such otherwise divergent filmmakers as Roger Corman, Jacques Tourneur and Mario Bava and stars like Barbara Steele.³ As violent and 'sleazy' down-market horror and exploitation films proliferated in the 1970s, so did they become legitimate objects of enquiry for broadly Althusserian critiques of popular cinema. Now conducted under the sway of structuralism, semiotics and psychoanalytic theory rather than pure auteurism, such studies approached films largely in terms of their relation to the ideological status quo of capitalist patriarchy, with some genres – notably melodrama, film noir and horror – sometimes being singled out for their critical potential. As Barbara Klinger (1986) points out, much of this work stemmed from the influence of Comolli and Narboni's 1969 post-auteur policy "Cinema/ Ideology/ Criticism" editorial essay for *Cahiers du Cinéma*. This had proposed that popular films could effectively deconstruct the classical representational conventions of cinematic verisimilitude from within, creating an internal conflict which "cracks the film apart at the seams" by simultaneously revealing and denouncing "the cinematic framework" (Comolli and Narboni, 1999: 757). From Comolli and Narboni's neo-Brechtian perspective, these "category e" films, as they called them, could produce knowledge, as opposed to the false consciousness in which dominant cinema was thought to immerse the 'identifying' or 'interpellated' spectator.

Comolli and Narboni's argument proceeds on a level of abstraction which prevents them from supplying examples of this textual self-deconstruction. However, in relation to exploitation cinema studies, the impact of their essay was most influentially felt in the 1970s in Robin Wood's (1985) well-known essay on the North American horror film of that decade. Proposing a set of distinctions between reactionary and radical genre films, Wood argues that the

¹ Joseph Cornell's short film *Rose Hobart* (1936), a re-edit of the Hollywood 'B movie' *East of Borneo* (George Melford, 1931) is an early example of 'cult' viewing turned into an aesthetic practice. See Hammond (2000) for surrealist writings on popular cinema.

² An obvious example is Godard's dedication of *Breathless* (1960) to Monogram Pictures. *Alphaville* (Godard, 1965) is in part a homage to American science fiction cinema (given that Franco spent time at the Cinémathèque Française in the early 1960s, it may not be coincidental that two of the stars of *Alphaville* – Eddie Constantine and Howard Vernon – also worked with Franco).

³For Corman, see Willemsen et. al. (eds) (1970), Chute (1982), Hillier and Lipstadt (1981), Middents (2009). For Tourneur, see Siegel (1972), Johnston and Willemsen (1975), Bellour (1990), Linderman (1990) Earnshaw (2005). For Bava, see Silver and Ursini (2000), Koven (2006), Heffernan (2007); for Steele see Jenks (1992).

ideological implications of horror rest on how it represents relationships between normality and threat, the latter being materialised in the genre's array of monsters, deviants and other 'others'. Wood's essay is a reminder that horror's seemingly transgressive fascination with 'otherness' always has ideological ramifications. Wood also influentially proposes that 'radical' examples of the genre can be found at the exploitation end of the popular cinema spectrum: *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) is his central example of how the genre can offer a critical confrontation with the repressed and oppressed 'others' of capitalist patriarchy. In their desire to claim all of the pleasures of exploitation horror as transgressive – and all transgression as unproblematically radical – many writings on cult exploitation cinema enthusiastically take on board Wood's claims for the potential oppositionality of the field while ignoring the more sceptical aspects of his ideology critique. Wood's proposal that the "apocalyptic" nature of exploitation horror films can be progressive relies on the claim that more 'mainstream' horror simply perpetuates the "bourgeois patriarchal Establishment" (Wood 1985: 214). Some recent writings on 'cult' exploitation cinema follow this pattern by celebrating the "spirit of negativity" which according to Wood can lend *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* the "force of authentic art" (Wood 1985: 214). Klinger similarly notes that exploitation films frequently adopt a world view that is pessimistic, "bleak, cynical, apocalyptic, and/or highly ironic" (Klinger 1986: 81), descriptions that would apply to many of Franco's films in the period under discussion here. However, despite his disdain for many Hollywood horror films Wood does not, unlike some cultish discourse, assume that oppositionality is conferred on a film by marginality or lowness alone. For example, he sees the early, low budget films of David Cronenberg as reactionary expressions of the dread of sexual difference.

The potentially "radical valence" of exploitation cinema (Klinger 1986: 82) became apparent to critics of the 1970s and 1980s because of its supposed capacity to overturn the conventions of popular genre cinema and to lay the Id bare.¹ Pam Cook (1976, 1985, 2005) argues that the crude and stripped back qualities of low-budget exploitation films enable them to expose the constructedness of stereotypes and representational conventions. Cook considers the feminist possibilities of the exploitation films that Stephanie Rothman made for Roger Corman's New World Pictures. Echoing the terms of Comolli and Narboni's 'category e', she replaces Laura Mulvey's (1975) avant-gardist demand for the destruction of visual pleasure in narrative cinema with an argument for feminist negotiations of popular entertainment forms. Cook proposes that

¹ Carol Clover's analysis of North American horror cinema of the 1970s and 1980s picks up on Wood's claim that the horror film represents the return of the repressed in an unusually obvious form. Clover suggests that slasher films at "the bottom of the horror heap" offer a "transparent", "unmediated" and "startlingly direct" glimpse into "(sub)cultural attitudes to sex and gender" (Clover 1992: 21-22).

the genre codes and conventions of exploitation cinema can be manipulated in order to produce meanings and pleasures amenable to feminist audiences. In terms redolent of Comolli and Narboni's claim that certain commercial films could subversively reveal internal fissures in the dominant representational system, Cook argues that Rothman's *Terminal Island* (1973) uses elements of gender role reversal, female revenge and distancing strategies of masquerade, excess and exaggeration to "produce contradictions, shifts in meaning which disturb the patriarchal myths of women on which the exploitation film itself rests" (Cook 1976: 127). The influence of Cook's argument can be found in writing on exploitation cinema by, among others, Studlar (1991) Bowen (1997), Zalcock (1998), Foster (1999), and Luckett (2003); it is useful in relation to a filmmaker like Franco because it suggests the possibility of resistance within as well as to the framework of heterosexual male fantasy. I return to it briefly in Chapter 4. One problem with it is that it tends to essentialise that 'male fantasy', and the 'gaze' through which fantasy is supposedly articulated, as a structural feature of an inflexible cultural dominant.

Resistance to the 'dominant' often leads critics to exaggerate the formal radicalism of exploitation cinema. Klinger makes the reasonable observation that linear narration exists in cursory form in many exploitation films only "as the most minimal acknowledgement of that system of construction" (Klinger 1986: 82). Narratives exist only and obviously as pretexts for displays of sex, nudity, and/or violence. Whether by accident or design, the editing of Franco films like *Vampyros Lesbos* (1970, discussed in chapter 3) and *Venus in Furs* (1969, discussed in chapter 2) stretches the legibility of this narrative system almost to breaking point. In the same vein, many of Franco's films treat narrative closure with indifference or even contempt, often through the sudden arrival of a victorious police detective who saves the day just before the final credits roll, but whose risibly throwaway triumph "imparts a rather hollow victory to this convention" while making a mockery of "the inviolability and/or ultimate benevolence of the law" (Klinger 1986: 83). Franco's films also contain many reflexive elements, and often appear to revel in the display of their own artifice. Monster make-up looks cheap, blood usually resembles red paint and cameras and booms are sometimes glimpsed in reflections. *Barbed Wire Dolls* (1975) includes a slow-motion sequence in which Franco and his co-star Lina Romay engage in a struggle; instead of the usual 'special effect' Romay and Franco merely *perform* in slow motion, even when Franco's character is beaten over the head and falls in less than convincing pain (at one point Romay seems to laugh). Such moments clearly undermine any possible verisimilitude, but they can also produce disturbing tonal collisions: Franco and Romay's rather comic struggle follows an attempted incestuous rape.

But it is another matter to say that being "slack with classical devices" produces an aesthetic of disjunction and disorientation (Schaefer 1999: 92), and that these textual disruptions guarantee oppositionality by dint of the simple fact that they block the ostensible pleasures of

identification. Echoing Cook's Brechtian reading of Rothman's relationship to male fantasy clichés, Craig Fischer claims that the breast-fixated sexploitation films of Russ Meyer are "'incoherent' and deviant from Hollywood narration due to many digressions and inserts that bear at best a peripheral relationship to the plot", but his desire to assert the 'experimental' credentials of Meyer's 'deviant' editing techniques leads Fischer to overstate Meyer's distance both from 'classical' Hollywood and traditional fetishism (Fischer 1992: 22). I am not making the point that fetishism is objectionable, but that, as in Comolli and Narboni and Wood, the rest of 'mainstream' popular cinema is projected solely as the site for complacent ideological reproduction. The presence of reflexivity or absence of closure in many of Franco's films is significant, but is no more intrinsically subversive than identification is always ideologically dangerous.

This thesis builds on the foundations laid by many of these critics while rejecting the supposition that the meanings and pleasures of exploitation reside solely in subversion and transgression. It would be tempting but disingenuous to declare that my own investments in Franco's films are only or even predominantly rebellious, and to this extent, though without being confessional, the thesis emerges from recognition of the need for critical reflection on my own spectatorial subjectivity. Hence much of my analysis is based on the assumption that the fantasies staged in the films have an intended gendered and sexed address. To make this assumption is neither to suppress polysemy nor to deny the possibility of other viewing positions. Pavlović and Hawkins discuss the subversive potential of Franco's monstrous women and heroines and in doing so draw attention to the possibility of Franco's texts as spaces for variously gendered and sexed pleasures; opportunities for such appropriation are discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to the 'female vampire' subgenre, and in Chapter 4 in relation to Franco's "women in prison" films, but my analysis does not hinge on the idea that alternative meanings have to be wrested from an otherwise monosemic body of films that simply presents an undifferentiated male imaginary. Rather, I look at how the films exploit what Comolli and Narboni might call the "cracks" and "seams" of that imaginary.

Vision and visuality play a key role in my analysis but two of the central planks of gaze theory – namely unconscious determination and the process of identification – are seen as insufficient. The textual properties outlined above, while in no simple sense 'radical', render the psycho-semiotic concept of primary identification inadequate to the viewing positions invited by exploitation films like those of Franco. Many of Franco's films contain sex-horror situations that are readable as Freudian primal scenes. For example in chapter 2 I discuss a scene in which the male protagonist of *Venus in Furs* (1969) spies on an act of sadomasochistic flagellation. The scene could easily be interpreted as a representation of fantasies of parental coitus, along the lines of Laplanche and Pontalis'(1989) influential reading of the Freudian primal scene.

Likewise Franco's *Female Vampire* (1973) can be said to refer at certain points to fantasies of oral fixation as well as castration, but such fantasies are not taken here to 'explain' filmic vampires of either gender.¹ Psychoanalytic perspectives often argue that moments like these are motivated or speak to the unconscious anxieties of the male imaginary. Hence Dadoun (1989), Neale (1980), Williams (1996) Creed (2005) and many others draw on Freud and Lacan to argue that horror speaks directly to deep-seated castration fears that are then projected on to the onscreen bodies of female monsters or victims. Individual films illustrate or manifest primal fantasies of the archaic mother and of castration, and these fantasies are seen as foundational to the formation of male subjectivity. 'Dominant ideology' is replaced in Lacanian theory by an even more generalised, monolithic and ahistorical imaginary/ symbolic order.

I do not reject psychoanalytic theory out of hand. It can play a part in discussions of how Franco's films simultaneously articulate and destabilise a phallogentric perspective on female bodies and desires. In some respects Franco's films expose anxieties that would certainly be readable through a psychoanalytic paradigm, not least because phallic potency – or its depletion in the face of its objects of desire – is so often at stake. Various 'fatal' types of femaleness populate Franco's films. Many feature female characters who leave male characters trembling, enfeebled or dead in their wake, and who have therefore been seen by Pavlović, Hawkins and Hallam (2004) as in one way or another unruly or dissenting. To this extent I concur with Creed's view that the troubled representation of masculinity in horror cinema – or in Franco's case sex-horror cinema – sometimes questions phallic power and the values of "identity, rationality, ascendancy and control ... [and] undermines the notion of a coherent, stable, civilised self" (Creed 2005: 201). Peter Hutchings argues in similar terms that horror cinema makes men's "relation to ideals of masculinity...fraught and problematic" by showing that patriarchal power "is structural and provisional rather than personal" (Hutchings 1993: 92). On this basis Hutchings defends horror against the common charge that it is misogynistic. Perhaps Hutchings protests too much. However, it is possible that Franco's fascination with otherness and the sometimes aberrant optical imagination through which that fascination is framed can offer a decentring experience of 'male fantasy'. My analysis suggests that the misogynistic aspects of many of Franco's films belie a gaze that is considerably "more complex" than some psychoanalytic theory would allow (Hutchings 1993: 93).²

¹ A more psychoanalytic analysis of some of the films discussed here – especially *Vampyros Lesbos*, *Female Vampire* and *Venus in Furs* – might also involve the masochistic fantasy of 'oceanic' union between the 'presymbolic' infant and its mother.

² Chapters 2 and 3 include discussions of credit sequences in order to demonstrate the gendering of the exploitation 'lure', but also to suggest the potential complexity of the invited viewing position.

Instead of supposing that Franco's films provide access to unconscious processes or that they are the effects of an unconscious cause, I take the view that scenarios of perverse desire, both in Franco's films and in psychoanalytic theory, drink from a shared pool of what Judith Halberstam has characterised as gothic forms of modern subjectivity (Halberstam 1995: 1-27). Many of Franco's films draw quite consciously from psychoanalytically derived conceptions of subjectivity and desire. Hence the attempts at 'dream-like' evocation in *Female Vampire* and *Vampyros Lesbos*, as discussed in chapter 3, refuse to favour a single 'explanation' of their masochistic fantasies of sublime surrender. Psychoanalytically-inclined critics disagree over whether masochistic passions are based in Oedipal or pre-Oedipal fantasies.¹ But given that the figure of the vampire is usually seen as interstitial, liminal and even hermaphroditic, and given that Franco's films draw haphazardly on any number of Freudian themes, it seems unnecessary to pin Franco's vampire excursions down to a single aetiology.

This thesis is organised around four chapters, each of which centres on one of Franco's better-known films from the early 1960s to the mid 1970s. In light of how prolific Franco has been,² a greater number of case studies might have been expected, but there is such a high degree of recycling across his films that familiarity with many of them enables careful attention to a few. For this reason, intertextuality is taken into account throughout the analysis. The view of popular culture as an arena in which "no one text is sufficient, no text is a completed object" (Fiske 1989: 126) is borne out by most of Franco's output: cross-fertilization across films is often so extensive that the borders between them become porous. This permeability is important to my analysis; none of the films is taken as a self-enclosed or discrete entity. The chronological arrangement of the chapters does not imply a teleological narrative. Franco's repetition, reworking and cross-referencing from one film to another militates against any sense that his ideas might have evolved in a linear fashion. The Appendix (Films Cited and Table of Concordances) is designed to illustrate the extent of Franco's recycling.

The early 1960s to mid 1970s time-frame has been chosen mainly because it is the favoured period in most cultish writings on Franco, with much of his more inventive and interesting work being thought to have been made at this time. While I would not necessarily disagree with this assessment, my selection has not been based only on taste. Focussing on some of Franco's relatively well-known films risks reproducing something like a canon of significant cult works while writing Franco's (admittedly fewer) interventions in genres outside the sex-horror orbit out of the account. But centring the analysis on some of his more written-about films facilitates

¹ See for example, Silverman (1980), Rodowick (1991: 78-82), Studlar (1985).

² Figures for how many films Franco has made vary from around 160 to almost 200; the confusion arises mainly because some films are re-edited versions of others (see for example the discussion of *Demoniac* in chapter 4).

engagement with the rhetoric of transgression and subversion that often surrounds his work. The four films also occupy fuzzy-edged phases in Franco's career¹, and these help to shape – without determining – my analysis. The time-frame also broadly corresponds to a set of inter-related contextual changes. Censorship codes in Spain and elsewhere constitute one such context, and though not discussed in depth are referred to in each chapter. Changes in production circumstances are similarly taken into account in as much as they impact upon the films: although I try to keep the films themselves in the foreground throughout, different production companies, shrinking budgets and the vagaries of international co-production play parts in the analysis. Shifting fashions in the exploitation field are equally important: Franco by no means participates in every exploitation cycle of the period, but his films are shaped by – as much as they contribute to – on-going generic modifications and trends, particularly those that favour an increasingly explicit approach to sex and violence. As well as specific subgenres such as the 'women in prison' film or surgical horror, I also situate Franco's films in relation to contemporary trends such as the rise of Spanish horror, the development of the European² 'adult' arthouse film and changing approaches to gothic conventions. The volatile and oppressive political context of Spain under General Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975) is seen as part of the subtext of some of the films' representations of perversity, otherness and monstrosity, but is not central to my analysis for reasons outlined below.

Whereas several recent publications have taken audience-centred approaches to 'cult', horror and exploitation cinema³, I attend to the textuality, and especially the visuality, of a small number of Franco's films. This constitutes an auteur study in the sense that it looks in a certain amount of detail at the work of one filmmaker, but not in the sense of placing that filmmaker at the heart of all possible meaning and value. Questions about the rhetoric of transgression could have been posed in relation to any of Franco's 'Eurotrash' contemporaries, but while similar questions might have been addressed to, say, Jean Rollin, José Larraz or Joe D'Amato, the particularities of their films means that the same answers would not necessarily have been arrived at. Yet it is possible to talk about specificity without exaggerating uniqueness or

¹ Aguilar (1999) divides Franco's career up to the late 1970s into the following periods: 1959-1961 (short documentaries, musicals and comedies); 1961-1965 (monochrome "expressionist" horror, thriller and adventure films); 1965-1968 (colourful, risqué, free-wheeling "comic-strip"-style films); 1968-1970 (increasing nudity and 'perversity' and larger budget films with the British producer Harry Alan Towers); 1971-1973 (very low-budget "sex monster" and crime films for French and German producers like Robert de Nesle and Artur Brauner); 1973-1978 (mainly "mediocre" sex films dominated by the actress Lina Romay). Aguilar's chronology seems roughly right (Balbo 1993, Tohill and Tombs 1995, and Lucas 2010 are more or less in accordance), but the overlaps prevent me from following such periodisation rigorously.

² The notion of 'European' cinema as a specific entity is not undisputed. See Dyer and Vincendeau (1992), Everett (1996), and Galt (2006).

³ See for example Hills (2005).

autonomy. As well as directing, Franco often acts in, writes, edits, composes the soundtrack and operates the camera in many of his films. I do not place any special weight on this fact. Partly as a response to the excessive auteurism of cult discourse, I continually acknowledge the contingency of Franco's authorship upon material and ideological conditions. Thus my textual readings see Franco's films as conjunctions of or 'meeting places' for authorial idiosyncrasies, exploitation cinema as a field of production, genre traditions, and discursive formations.¹ How these factors feed into and off each other shapes Franco's sometimes eccentric textuality. Hence I present a reasonably close analysis because economies of transgression should be discussed film-by-film rather than assumed. But I do not argue that transgressivity can simply be measured or read off the text. Supposedly transgressive or subversive themes and images, as well as 'deviant' formal particularities, are not applauded for their own sake but are read in relation to some of the specific discursive and material conditions in which they 'take place'.

Elements of contestation and critique can be found in some of Franco's work, but these can only be read in relation to multi-determined contexts. That exploitation horror can serve as an arena for oppositionality has clear implications for Spanish films produced under the Francoist regime, as Willis and others have pointed out. Charles Derry has argued, in relation to recent films like *The Orphanage* (Juan Antonio Bayona, 2007) that "it is increasingly clear that the historical period of [Francisco] Franco and his legacy is as relevant to the genre of political horror as is the nineteenth century American West relevant to the genre of the Western" (Derry 2009: 329). However, for reasons discussed in Chapter 1, my analysis does not read Jess Franco's films primarily as Spanish. Without wishing to reclaim the films from the valuable recent work on 'national' inflections of genre cinema², nor to lapse into false universalism, I take the slippery nationality of many of Franco's films to be a significant part of their character. Other than a small handful of musicals and comedies he made between 1959 and 1962³ and the 'S' certificate sex films he made for the Spanish market in the late 1970s and 1980s⁴ most of Franco's films were also made outside Spain, often in France or Germany, with an international cast, crew and money. The notional 'Spanishness' of his films also has to be read against the

¹ For these reasons I supplement my reading of the films with reference to the 'secondary' materials such as posters and contemporary reviews.

² Recent volumes on horror and exploitation cinema in nations other than the United States and Great Britain include Schneider (2003), McRoy (2005), Schneider and Williams (2005), and Ruétalo and Tierney (2009).

³ Franco's 'pre-horror' feature films are: *Tenemos 18 años* (1959), *Labios rojos* (1960), *La reina del Tabarín* (1960), and *Vampiresas 1930* (1961).

⁴ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Franco predominantly worked in Spain, taking advantage of the abolition of censorship and making a large number of sex-heavy, but not 'hardcore', 'S certificate' films. These were rarely marketed outside of Spain, but many (e.g. *The Sexual Story of O* (1981), *The Inconfessible Orgies of Emanuelle* (1982) have recently become available on DVD. Though sometimes interesting in their own right, these fall outside the main focus of this thesis. See Kowalsky (2004).

fact that not all of them were shown there, and of those that were, many were either cut by the censor or filmed in ‘clothed’ versions.

The Spanish political, cultural and discursive contexts of certain representations are discussed when to do so illuminates questions about the critical possibilities and ideological tensions of exploitation cinema. But nationality – an elusive concept in any case and not least where Spain is concerned – is not seen as determining or decisive. Rather, nationally particular contexts are seen as threads running through Franco’s multidetermined and hybrid practice.¹ Thus chapter 1 argues that some of the horror motifs in *The Awful Dr Orlof* can be read as adopting a critical stance towards Francisco Franco’s dictatorship. But the film also minimises ‘Spanish’ signifiers. This minimisation of ‘Spanishness’ ironically takes place partly for nationally specific reasons: Spanish censorship, the international market and contemporary debates about national cinema all produce and mark *Orlof* as a hybrid, trans-national film. *Orlof*’s ‘transgressive’ figuring of monstrosity and perversity is, then, constituted within material and ideological conditions that are at once culturally situated and mobile, as Franco occupies an unstable site between Spanish and wider international spaces. Franco can be legitimately described as a Spanish film maker, but this is not to suggest that his films uncomplicatedly correspond to an essential ‘Spanish culture’, or that the films emanate from discrete national or regional conditions. This is why, although references to other Spanish genre film-makers appear when instructive connections can be made, the Spanish horror boom of the late 1960s - mid 1970s does not loom large in my analysis.²

If Franco is most commonly classified as an exponent of exploitation cinema, this designation appears more widespread today than at the time of his films’ original theatrical release. Current constructions of Franco’s films as exploitation cinema, while not inaccurate, may be to some degree retrospective. Chapter 1 looks at *The Awful Dr Orlof* through the distinct but overlapping frames of both exploitation cinema and gothic horror, with a view to considering how these frames ascribe different meanings, affects and value to the film. *Orlof* is seen as an example of how current, limiting, notions of exploitation cinema often miss the significance of Franco’s connections to genre traditions, while dehistoricising and decontextualising the notion of exploitation cinema itself. Hence the chapter explores some of what is at stake in the ‘cultish’ use of the ‘exploitation’ label, with regard to notions of authorship, transgression and cultural value.

¹ For more on the problems involved in defining Spain and ‘Spanishness’ see Jordan (2000: 68-77) and Kinder (1993: 393). For more on the problem of defining national cinemas in general see Higson (1989, 2000), Hill (1992), Crofts (1993), Willemen (1994), Crofts (2006).

² The Spanish horror boom is discussed by Willis (2003, 2005) and Lázaro-Reboll (2002, 2004, 2011 (forthcoming)).

The second chapter discusses femme fatale stereotypes, formal experimentation and fantasy tropes in *Venus in Furs*. By the late 1960s, Franco's influences and references took in a wide cultural spectrum from the gothic, the fantastic, popular and post-classical Hollywood to the European arthouse and contemporary sex cinema. Mixing visual discourses of 'high' and 'low' culture in an evocation of male erotomania, the dramatisation of vision in *Venus* problematises the notion of the mastering, coherent gaze. In chapter 3 I look at *Vampyros Lesbos* (1970) and Franco's negotiation of the female vampire motif and its themes of seduction, obsession and cruelty. This film also provides an example of Franco's recurrent representations of (fantasies of) lesbianism. Although aspects of these fantasies and representations can be said to subvert dominant codes of sex and gender, they are nevertheless grounded in a number of well-established masculine myths, for as Ken Gelder puts it, "one can only comprehend 'deviancy' through the discourses of 'normal' sexual practices" (Gelder 1994: 58). Nevertheless, the film's address to that 'normal' look is not monolithic or hermetic; possibly masochistic and emasculating fantasies of surrender to the 'castrating' female vampire at least problematise notions of male mastery. Fantasies of the vampire and the 'avenging angel' in *Vampyros Lesbos* and *Venus in Furs*, though in no sense exceeding certain stereotypes, are fashioned in such a way that dichotomous structures of subject/object, self/other and active/passive desire are destabilised. The resulting ideological ambivalence of the fantasies in these films means that they are, contrary to Robin Wood's schema, neither inherently reactionary nor inherently transgressive.

Chapter 4 looks at one of Franco's most reflexive films, *Demoniac* (1974), and its negotiation of the 'captive woman' and 'witch-torture' imagery of contemporary exploitation cinema. *Demoniac* is a sort of grotesque self portrait which crystallises, summarises and to some degree auto-criticises Franco's career to that point. Much of Franco's more deviant imagery is often referred to as Sadeian, with Sade functioning in critical – or uncritical - writings as the apogee of transgression. I therefore discuss the political possibilities, contradictions and limitations of Franco's Sadeian representations. *Demoniac* thematises the dynamics of transgressive fantasy by partially satirising the very 'Sadeianism' in which Franco so often appears to participate. *Demoniac* therefore emblematises the ambivalence of transgression in Franco's 'cult', gothic, exploitation cinema, perhaps allowing the viewer "the double satisfaction of both rejecting dominant cultural values and remaining safely inscribed within them" (Grant 1991: 124).

1.

Exploiting the Gothic: Visions of Genre in *The Awful Dr Orlof*

This chapter looks at *The Awful Dr Orlof* (1961)¹, a ‘mad doctor’ film which can be seen as the prototype for several of the pulp gothic exploitation films that Franco made in the early-mid 1960s.² Tame by today’s standards but nevertheless fairly sordid, *Orlof* is both Franco’s first horror and first ‘horrotica’ venture, and is therefore his first to make a claim on notably perverse or transgressive territory. Through a discussion of how a film like *Orlof* can be framed as exploitation cinema and as gothic horror (and of what might be at stake in such definitions and framings), I consider some of the circumstances upon which Franco’s ‘author function’ is contingent and through which it is articulated. My reading of *Orlof* suggests that many current notions of exploitation cinema often miss the significance of Franco’s connections to genre traditions, while dehistoricising and decontextualising the notion of exploitation cinema itself. I argue instead that *Orlof*’s transgressions, or its representations of transgressions, need to be located beyond the eccentricities of the cult auteur and beyond the typecasting of exploitation as an innately subversive arena. But the film’s cultural contexts should not be construed as a matter of indelible and uncomplicated ‘Spanishness’: I suggest, rather, that Spanish censorship codes, the international exploitation market and contemporary debates about cinema’s role in forging national identity led Franco and his producers to reduce or play down the film’s ‘Spanish’ signifiers.

Tatjana Pavlović describes Franco’s films as “sexploitation/ exploitation/ horror/ B production cinema” (Pavlović 2004: 140). Carlos Aguilar’s book on Franco refers to ‘exploitation’ only twice, observing that the director’s work is known by followers of “psychotronic cinema...the *fantastique*...B-movies” (Aguilar 1999: 9). This suggests that ‘exploitation cinema’, like horror, is a culturally specific construct more than a universally recognised essence. Joan Hawkins uses the term ‘exploitation’ liberally in her book *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-garde*, but not in her chapter on Franco, which situates him as a maker of unusually

¹ There is some inconsistency over whether the character is called Orlof or Orloff. The 1961 film is often listed as *The Awful Dr Orloff*, but this is not used on the copies I have seen. The name Orloff seems to have been introduced with *El secreto del Dr. Orloff* (1964), the Spanish title of *Dr. Jeckyll’s Mistresses* (1964).

² Franco’s other monochrome pulp gothics are *The Sadistic Baron Von Klaus* (1962), *Dr. Jeckyll’s Mistresses* and *The Diabolical Dr. Z* (1965). Although many of Franco’s films can be categorised as ‘horror’, I often refer to them in this thesis as gothic exploitation films: this is partly to remove them from the expectation that they might be in any way frightening. I do not imply direct continuity between Franco’s films and gothic novels of the 18th and 19th centuries.

“demanding” low horror and “horrotica” (Hawkins 2000: 97); indeed, Hawkins describes Franco’s *Succubus* (1968) as a “mainstream horror film” (95). The differences between Hawkins’, Aguilar’s and Pavlović’s labels for Franco’s films illustrate something of the difficulty involved in defining and situating them. Franco has worked in crime cinema, espionage films, ‘straight’ pornography, and (rarely) westerns and musicals. Nevertheless, horror - or its attendant fantasies and desires – is the body genre to which he has most often returned. *The Awful Dr Orlof* is an instance of gothic exploitation cinema in which the two fields converge on the contentious terrain of ‘sex and violence’ bodily display.

Four scenes of abduction and murder provide *Orlof* with its crucial moments of ‘horror’ spectacle. Despite the film’s visibly modest budget and the director’s reputation for ham-fistedness, these scenes are proficiently assembled. I describe them below not out of a desire to frame Franco as a misunderstood or underrated cinematic artist, but to illustrate the resourcefulness with which his early works handled the codes and conventions of genre cinema. Although they do not present an always flawless diegesis and cannot be praised for subtlety, films like *Orlof* do not bear out the incoherence often ascribed to Franco, either by detractors or by the cultist ‘badfilm’ aficionados addressed later in this chapter.

Tohill and Tombs describe *Orlof* as a paradigm shift in world horror, claiming that prior to Franco’s intervention “horror films had opted for the poetic approach, only hinting at the dark recesses of the human psyche. With *Orlof* sex sizzled into the foreground, changing the face of Euro horror for the next twenty years” (Tohill and Tombs 1995: 77). Although it is true that *Orlof* highlights the psycho-sexual component of the gothic imagination, the narrative of originality in Tohill and Tombs’ heated prose misleadingly presents the film’s relationship to genre as one of revolution and breakthrough rather than affiliation or negotiation. Their account also implies that the ‘shocking’ elements of the film existed in all versions simultaneously, and that its supposed impact was instantaneous; yet the edit of the film seen in cinemas in Spain and Great Britain is likely to have been much tamer than that described by Tohill and Tombs, and it appears to have had no immediate influence on Spanish genre product. Joan Hawkins (2000) nevertheless buys into Tohill and Tombs’ cultist auteurism by deploying *Orlof* as an example of affinities between Franco and avant-garde cinema. While Tohill and Tombs celebrate the film’s “brazenly shocking” atmosphere of “perverted chemistry” (Tohill and Tombs: 77), Hawkins instead bases her assessment largely on the film’s wealth of intertextual references, its free jazz soundtrack and the rudimentary characterisation of its protagonists. While she is justified in seeing these aspects of the film as barriers to identification or emotional affect, her avant-gardist investment in these absences ignores the extent to which the film generally adheres to, rather than dispenses with, the norms of linear narration and continuity editing. These norms are visible in *Orlof*’s cinematography, mise-en-scène, narrative arc and thematic patterns. Whereas

both Hawkins and Tohill and Tombs find significance only in *Orlof*'s supposed breaking of rules, I see the film as an efficient, surefooted entry into some of the genre traditions of fantasy cinema.

The film's gothic and its narratorial conventionality are evident from the outset. Instantly legible connotators of 'terror' are presented in the first shot of the film. A long (one and a half minutes) take presents a street at night, filmed from an elevated camera, with a nineteenth-century gas-lit street lamp in the foreground. As the camera cranes down slightly, an already discordant 'horror' cue on the soundtrack promises a suspense-filled or thrilling incident. This is confirmed when an evidently drunk woman carrying a bottle of wine staggers across the street. In the lexicon of horror cinema, she is marked as a victim in waiting.

As the opening credits appear on screen, the camera tilts up to a window which locates the shot to follow. In an entirely orthodox transition, the film then cuts to an interior. Hawkins and Pavlović praise *Orlof* for its transgressive representation of disorderly women, but its murder victims adhere to the horror tradition's gendered moral standards: in another long take, the woman, still drinking, looks at herself in a large mirror. Since she is not only inebriated but also narcissistic, the viewer can be sure that this 'wanton' female is due to be attacked. (A police detective will later confirm that "women of doubtful reputation" are being murdered in the vicinity). Still swigging from the bottle, she opens a wardrobe. In a typical suggestion of the gothic equation of sex with horror, the scene takes place in a bedroom. The third shot delivers the first 'shock', as the film cuts to a facially disfigured male in the woman's closet, nestled among her hanging dresses. Attempting to generate heightened excitement, the sequence is now much more rapidly edited. The film cuts swiftly to the woman's screaming face, then to a medium long shot of the creature lunging at her, then again to him bundling her over to the window. Now the film cuts to an exterior shot which replicates the film's opening: once more we look up at the bedroom window and are afforded a view of the attack in silhouette. Throughout the scene a sense of 'derangement' is conveyed via the familiar expressionist contrivances of deep shadow, stark contrast, and tilted camera angles.

At this point the film begins to insert brief 'eye witness' shots. The first of these shows a young boy watching in terror through what we take to be an opposite upper-floor window; the second shows a moustachioed man's shocked reaction to the scene; the third shows a woman onlooker at ground-level watching the creature carry his victim across the street (in the reverse angle, Franco replicates the camera set-up of the film's opening shot). Inserted rather abruptly but in a succession of classically 'correct' eyeline matches, these witnesses can be taken as representatives of 'normality', standing in for the intended spectator who is invited to stare in similarly appalled fascination at the horrifying spectacle. The murderous deeds themselves are

shot and edited in a compact series of alternations between long, medium and close shots, interiors and exteriors, and canted and straight camera-angles, as the killer appears to bite the woman in the neck and carry her off screen.

The concision continues as the film introduces another character. The mysterious killer follows the sound of a walking stick, briefly shown in close-up, being tapped against a wall. By not revealing the cane's owner the film enhances the lure of its opening scene by adding enigma to the *mise-en-scène* of sexualised terror. Through economic means Franco also enables the viewer to infer that the killer is blind, that he acts under another's command, and perhaps that his master is an aristocrat. Led by the sound of the tapping cane – contrapuntally mixed into film's score – the hulking, sightless being bears his victim down a stepped back-street, his top-hatted master gradually but murkily coming into view at the bottom of the flight of steps.

Having thereby established in crisp visual shorthand the elementary terms of its horror agenda, the film now implies a standard pattern of contrasts and parallels by cutting predictably to daylight, police work and the setting out of its love interest. The gothic and noirish mannerisms through which the 'abnormal' is constructed give way to the interior of a carriage in which a courting couple, police inspector Tannner (Conrado San Martín) and Wanda Bronsky (Diana Lorys), discuss their future wedding plans: in a classic system of oppositions, the heteronormative relationship is in marked stylistic contrast to the unsettling perversity of the opening scene. The soundtrack now consists of stereotypically French accordion music, darkness is replaced by light, and Franco's camera is static and straight. The viewer can be sure that the transgressivity implied by the previous scene will soon come to pose a threat to the heterosexual union but that by the end of the film's final reel, marriage will banish evil and rationality will defeat madness; this is indeed how the film turns out to be plotted.

Orlof appears to have been widely shown. In North America it was exhibited spottily, on a double bill with Riccardo Freda's *The Horrible Dr. Hitchcock* (*L'orribile segreto del Dr. Hitchcock*, 1962) (Gay 1995: 106) before virtually disappearing, "with limited TV runs until the mid-70s" (Paxton 1994: 30). Aguilar optimistically claims that the film was "distributed all over the world with a positive critical and commercial response" (Aguilar 1999:40), but its review in *The Monthly Film Bulletin*¹ was at best ambivalent:

This film is at once appalling and unique, so bad as to be almost enjoyable for its ludicrous qualities, so singular that curiosity hunters are likely to look at it agog. An occasional shot or two is worthy of James Whale or Epstein...The ramshackle plot is

¹ *MFB* listed the film as "Gritos en la noche (The Demon Doctor)".

Les Yeux Sans Visage, plus a blend of Frankenstein and Dracula, represented by the demon doctor and his monster slave respectively; the brave heroine is worthy of the utmost admiration. A singular film....really most extraordinary. (Anon.1963: 86).

Terms like “(a)ppalling and unique” and “ludicrous...(and) extraordinary” encapsulate most subsequent views of the filmmaker. Since disagreement over the value of a filmmaker’s oeuvre is part and parcel of the creation and maintenance of cult status, Franco’s merits remain disputed. Though celebrated in some quarters as the delirious work of an “insatiable ‘filmador’” (Aguilar 1999: 11) and “flawed genius” (Tohill and Tombs 1995: 87), his films remain beyond the pale for most commentators. Even many texts by professed fans of ‘Eurotrash’ feel compelled to admit to the extreme patchiness of Franco’s work, and agree that his often “darkly lit, poorly paced” (Gay 1995: 185) output is of “extremely variable quality, usually ranging from bad to abysmal” (Walker 2003:175).

As the textual decription above suggests, any reading of *Orlof* might draw on the huge body of work on horror cinema as much as the rather smaller body of work on exploitation. But I would argue that neither frame proves adequate in itself. Many accounts of horror continue to conceive it in unnecessarily rigid and homogenising terms, while exploitation is too often merely celebrated. Taken separately, both gothic horror and exploitation cinema offer incomplete, partial points of reference. I do not argue for a ‘better’ classification than exploitation or horror, just that such designations are never watertight, value-free or unproblematic. This chapter shows that placing Franco’s films in either category has consequences for how they are understood in relation to ideas of authorship, nationality, style and affect.

Franco’s authorial identity and the textuality of his films are shaped within the broad and porous ambit of exploitation cinema as a field of production and consumption. But this is not enough to define the particularity of the films, whose horror genre affiliations are often more complex than is sometimes allowed by recent ‘cult’ notions of exploitation cinema; these often discuss Franco’s work through mystificatory forms of auteurism and cultism which stress originality and individuality over generic formula while celebrating exploitation cinema as inherently and unproblematically transgressive.¹ As Andrew Willis has argued, exploitation films are too often assumed to be “challenging and oppositional by their sheer existence” (2009: 136). Like ‘cult’, the exploitation label is too often applied unreflexively, uncritically and with little sense of

¹ Stallybrass and White (1986) engage in a Bakhtinian analysis of the role of the carnivalesque in capitalist society, stressing that the “licensed complicity” of carnival transgressivity is never without ideological problems: the “uncritical populism” involved in its iconoclastic representations often demonises disempowered social groups (Stallybrass and White 1986: 191). The jargon of transgression in cult film criticism tends to bypass the problematics forensically examined by Stallybrass and White. For further critique of the assumption that transgression subverts power structures see Wilson (1993).

context. This chapter also argues that reading *Orlof* in relation to the ideological and discursive circumstances of Spanish film culture under General Francisco Franco's dictatorship reveals that contestations are possible in particular contexts, but that these should not be confused with a notion of either horror or exploitation's universal transgressivity.¹ I do not argue that the nationally particular aspects of *Orlof*'s background provide a key to the film's 'real' meanings.

Genre Trouble

When genre theorists of the 1960s and 1970s searched for the unifying factor X which might define "what we collectively believe" a genre to be (Tudor 1976:122), 'B movies', poverty row productions and quota quickies were, if not excluded from the account, often relegated to the outskirts of genre definition. Where horror was concerned, low budget and independent pictures were often more central. Besides the revered RKO 'B' movies of Jacques Tourneur/Val Lewton, overviews such as Carlos Clarens' *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* (1967) or William K. Everson's *Classics of the Horror Film* (1974) took on board films like *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932) or *A Bucket of Blood* (Roger Corman, 1959) as instances of a refreshingly dynamic and resourceful approach to horror traditions. These are permitted into the canon because they are thought to encapsulate rather than deviate from what André Bazin had called (in relation to the Western of the late 1930s) the genre's stage of "perfection" (Bazin 1976: 151); in horror's case this golden age was normally associated with German expressionist films of the silent period and with Universal Studios' monster movies of the 1930s. Bazin had in 1952 praised unpretentious, low budget "B-Westerns" that avoided the "refuge in intellectual or aesthetic alibis" that he found in the self-conscious Hollywood "superwesterns" of John Ford and Fred Zinnemann (Bazin 1976: 154). Postwar superwesterns, according to Bazin, presented a "baroque embellishment" of the classical form as the genre prolonged its life by introducing "new elements", such as "erotic interest", which Bazin found extrinsic to the genre (Bazin 1976: 152). The idealist hunt for horror's intrinsic essence involved a conception of seriousness which automatically disqualified seemingly facetious or decadent contenders. Ivan Butler's need to prove the earnestness of the genre leads him to spend less time discussing Roger Corman than Ingmar Bergman, the latter's films presumably being less inclined to offer "ludicrous spectacle" in which "horror dissolves into derisive laughter" (Butler 1967: 15). Any trace of camp humour in the genre, for example, tended to be seen either as evidence of its 'descent' into self-parody, or merely as a way for audiences to make otherwise worthless items vaguely entertaining. As is implied by the *Monthly Film Bulletin*'s reference to *Orlof* as a film "so bad as to be almost enjoyable", these approaches to camp, usually informed by Susan Sontag's 1964 notes on the

¹ Detailed accounts of film-making under the Francoist regime include Besas (1985), Higginbotham (1988), Hopewell (1986), Kinder (1993), Evans (1999), Triana-Toribio (2003), Marsh (2006).

term and her observation that camp “converts the serious into the frivolous” (Sontag 1994 a: 276) were generally seen as improper and somewhat threadbare pleasures compared to the graver stuff that the genre was meant to offer. Given that horror films by definition “have in common the *intention* to horrify” (Tudor 1976: 120), the exclusion of any reactions which might puncture the supposedly definitive affects of fear, dread or suspense is understandable. But the policing of genre borders continued to involve a quite neurotic rejection of both humour and hybridity, while “erotic interest” was usually either roundly condemned, only furtively acknowledged or relegated to accompanying illustrations.

The supposition that there are pleasures proper and improper to the genre is updated in more recent phenomenological studies, which continue to idealise horror by replacing its cognitive ‘X factors’ (found in theme, iconography or mythic structure) with bodily or sensual affect. Freeland (2000), Pistors (2003), Powell (2005) and Peucker (2007) take off from Linda Williams’ (1996) description of the “jerk effect” of body genres to explore horror’s pleasures in terms of Deleuzian, deterritorialised sensations. The horror viewer becomes an ahistorical, asocial bundle of somatic responses, the “material aspects of embodied spectatorship” producing affects “deprived of association” (Peucker 2007: 158-9). These ‘embodied’ accounts are usually based quite narrowly on supposedly typical reactions to North American body horror and splatter subgenres, or forms of “cinema vomitif” (Brottman 1995, *passim*) which are thought to have “become ever more explicit in presenting images of raw flesh, bloody bones, and other monstrous bodily forms” (Pistors 2003: 47). This emphasis on bodily excess - in the audience and on the screen, as though the two are wired into each other without the mediation of cultural codes - leads Peucker and Powell to privilege ‘horrific’ modes of revulsion or “loathing” over ‘uncanny’ feelings of “awe and imaginative fear” (Praver 1980: 7). Disgust, repulsion and shock are, then, seen not only as definitive of the genre as a whole, but as effects so strong that they obliterate cultural conventions or competences.

Phenomenological descriptions of the genre’s buffet of tactile, haptic and gustatory effects usefully disturb classical aesthetic hierarchies, such as those of Praver, which assert the primacy of intellect over body. But they also underestimate the extent to which emotional and/or physiological responses of shock, disgust, suspense or having goosebumps may actually be spread very thinly over the course of a given film. As Sconce (2007) and Fujiwara (2007) point out, a more common experience for many exploitation horror consumers is boredom, to be endured in some ‘cult’ communities as a badge of honour. Promises of “safely terrifying shock” (Praver 1980: 9) are of course central to the marketing of horror films, but are usually less so to the viewing experience itself. *Orlof’s* attempted ‘shock’ moments follow conventionally structured (and conventionally gendered) lines: Morpho suddenly appears, through a cut to a ‘horrifying’ facial close-up, from a cupboard; Orlof applies the scalpel to a bared chest; a

woman is pursued through a dark, deserted house; a woman is suspended in a dungeon.¹ Moments like these chime with a contemporary shift in the genre towards modes of sensationalist or ‘exploitative’ horror, as opposed to the preferred, supposedly more cerebral and less meretricious, modes of suggestion and terror most famously associated with Jacques Tourneur’s films for RKO studios. Carlos Clarens’ disappointment with the development is representative: “the more jaded the public’s palate becomes, the ranker the banquet of effects” as vicariously ‘sadistic’ spectacles are “arbitrarily spliced into scenarios at the expense of characterisation and plot” (Clarens 1968: 176).

Tania Krzywinska describes Franco’s films of the later 1960s as “European-style horror and bizarre sexual fantasies...in conjunction with a kind of perverse Brechtian dimension that withholds from viewers the comforts of identifying and sympathising with the main protagonists” (Krzywinska 2006: 204). The reference to Brecht is perhaps misleading, but the emphasis on heterogeneity of moods and effects and absence of identification is apt. The rewards of reflexivity, humour and intertextuality mean that Sconce’s “trashophiles” and Aguilar’s followers of fantastic ‘B movies’ are far from “deprived of associations”, as Peucker has it. The pleasures of exploitation are as semiotic as they are somatic. As Clarens’ reference to the “arbitrary slicing” in of horror sequences suggests, the textuality of horror films is rarely consistent or homogeneous. Tonal consistency is unlikely to be the universal experience of horror. In hastily composed low budget exploitation films it may be even less so, with the result that, like Sontag-style camp, they fall outside the bounds of ‘real’ and ‘serious’ horror as defined by genre theorists from Tudor (1989) to Powell (2005).

Orlof’s Monthly Film Bulletin review implies that Franco’s adoption of a “low-rent approach to genre staples” (Wells 2000: 71) involves an appropriation and reworking of international genre conventions through pastiche, allusion and homage. How to define particular instances of such practices – whether to see a particular image as rip-off, homage or allusion, for example – is rarely a matter of certainty or objectivity. The cultural capital involved in asserting taste standards or hierarchies of quality are inevitably revealed. The fruitless search for canonical points of origin and authenticity has often meant that most genre studies have had little to say

¹ It should be noted that two versions of the film were reportedly made. The one released in France (as *L’Orrible Dr. Orlof*) contained a greater degree of nudity and violence than that shown in Great Britain and Spain (Aguilar 1999: 154). Franco has claimed that he had little choice but to make a milder Spanish version because “[i]f I hadn’t they’d have killed me, push me out of Spain or something” (Aguilar 1999: 154). Illustrating the impossibility of defining and locating ‘complete’ versions of films, it has also been suggested that the more ‘graphic’ shots in the film were interpolated by producers, or shot by Franco at their request (Lucas 2000).

about parodies, remakes, sequels, series or cycles, except in as much as these have been seen as evidence of the genre's "sorry story of decline" (Butler 1967: 45).

Focusing on films of the early 1970s, Pam Cook observes that exploitation cinema "is a derogatory term, implying a process of 'ripping off'...in the interests of making a fast buck" and that films of this kind therefore "offer schematic, minimal narratives, comic-book stereotypes....and brief film 'cycles' which disappear as soon as their audience appeal is exhausted" (Cook 1985: 367-368). Michael Koven points out succinctly that "exploitation cinema, by its very nature, is derivative" (Koven 2006:10). Here, too, Franco can be seen as more typical than extraordinary. Many, if not most, of his films take undisguised advantage of formulae and precedent. The title of his noirish thriller *Rififi en la Ciudad* (1963), like several other 'Rififi' films of the period, trades on the international success of the heist film *Du Rififi Chez les Hommes* (Jules Dassin, 1955) but Franco's film has little other connection to Dassin's.¹ *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* (1973) similarly has no noticeable connection to *Emmanuelle* (Just Jaeckin, 1972) or its numerous sequels and spin-offs.² *The Bloody Judge* (1970) is Franco's version of *Witchfinder General* (Michael Reeves, 1968). A number of Franco's films represent the final entries into declining series and cycles. *Blood of Fu Manchu* (1968) and *Castle of Fu Manchu* (1968) are the final instalments of a series (formerly directed by Don Sharp and Jeremy Summers) with Christopher Lee as Sax Rohmer's orientalist 'yellow peril' super-villain. *The Girl from Rio* (1968) is Franco's sequel to another Rohmer adaptation, this time featuring a female arch-criminal, *The Million Eyes of Sumuru* (Lindsay Shonteff, 1967). *The Vengeance of Dr Mabuse* (1972) is a late instalment in a long series of German 'Mabuse' titles produced mainly during the 1960s. The title of *Virgin Report* (1972) recalls the German *Schoolgirl Report* series of sex 'documentaries', but the film itself more closely resembles sex-based 'mondo movies' like *Nine Ages of Nakedness* (George Harrison Marks, 1969) or *On the Game* (Stanley Long, 1974). *Maciste and the Gluttons* (1973) is a typically tardy, more or less pornographic, entry into a long series of 'peplums'. *The Perverse Countess* (1973) remakes *The Most Dangerous Game* (Irving Pichel and Ernest P. Schoedsack, 1932) in pornographic style. The list goes on.

¹ Other films to cash in on the success of Dassin's film include *Rififi among the Women* (*Du Rififi chez les Femmes*, Alex Joffé, 1959), *Rififi in Amsterdam* (*Rififi ad Amsterdam*, Sergio Grieco, 1962), and *Rififi in Tokyo* (*Rififi à Tokyo*, Jacques Deray, 1963). Franco's film differs from most other 'Rififi' films in that it, like Dassin's, it features Jean Servais (though in a different role).

² Franco's use of the name 'Emanuelle' of course reflects the name as a signifier of erotica, rather than any 'official' connection to the series inaugurated by Jaeckin's film (hence the alternative spelling). For more on the *Emmanuelle* phenomenon see Austin (1996, pp.46-7), Chaffin-Quiray (2004), Mendik (2004) and Willemen (2004).

As Rick Altman points out, genre cycles are often created by small production companies borrowing ideas and icons from more successful and more highly budgeted films, disguising their influences in order to avoid copyright law infringements (Altman 1999: 113-21); this practice can be seen as central to the process of ‘genrification’ as much as a sign of exploitation cinema’s characteristic recuperation of more esteemed ‘originals’.¹ As most commentators remark, the former prison surgeon’s implicitly incestuous devotion to the daughter whose badly scarred face he aims to restore is clearly indebted to *Eyes without a Face* (*Les Yeux sans Visage*, Georges Franju, 1959). *Orlof* also works with stock situations, character types, devices and themes which many of Franco’s later films, particularly from the early 1970s on, were to rework in more disjointed and sometimes comic fashion. Sequences in which the doctor (Howard Vernon) watches his ‘showgirl’ victims perform on stage appear indebted to Karl Freund’s *Mad Love* (1935). The zombie-like form of Orlof’s sightless minion Morpho (Ricardo Valle) is a hybrid of Fisher’s Dracula (*Dracula*, Terence Fisher, 1958) with Whales’ Igor and Frankenstein’s monster (*Frankenstein*, James Whale, 1931). The relationship between the doctor and his robot-cum-zombie slave recalls that between Caligari and the somnambulist Cesare in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1919). The name ‘Orlof’ itself has the ring of classic expressionist horror, with its echoes of Orlac (*The Hands of Orlac*, Robert Wiene 1925) and Count Orlock (*Nosferatu*, F.W. Murnau 1922) though in fact he is inspired by the band of blind assassins in the British Edgar Wallace adaptation *The Dark Eyes of London* (Walter Summers, 1939), starring Bela Lugosi as one Doctor Orloff (Paxton 1994: 29). Where *The Monthly Film Bulletin* sees *Orlof* as a “ramshackle” affair constructed from the plot of *Eyes Without A Face* with “Dracula and Frankenstein” bolted on, and David Pirie similarly dismisses it as merely “a sub-Frankenstein monster picture” (Pirie 1977:153), Aguilar sees it as a fascinating aggregate of influences, and provides a long list of sources from which Franco had “swiped one thing or another”: as well as Franju, these include traces of Roger Corman’s Poe adaptations, *The Vampire Bat* (Frank Strayer 1932) *The Spiral Staircase* (Robert Siodmak 1946) and *The Curse of Frankenstein* (Terence Fisher 1957) (Aguilar 1999:39). Tim Lucas adds that this “handsomely crafted film” borrows its music-hall settings from *Hangover Square* (John Brahm 1944) and that the film’s “sadoerotic flashes of female nudity”, at least as seen in the

¹ Steven Kovács (1982) argues that low budget, independent exploitation films are by definition second rate copies of first run originals. He also argues that by the mid 1970s, the distinction between major North American studios and independents has become blurred, as blockbuster Hollywood films are really exploitation films with big budgets: hence *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1976) resembles a large scale Roger Corman monster movie (Kovács, 1982, 88-91). Kovács dismissal of exploitation only as formulaic, mechanical and mindless “kitsch” is not especially useful here, but his argument presents a reminder that exploitation cinema does not occupy a realm of creativity hermetically sealed off from the ‘mainstream’. Some of these issues are raised in Watson (1997).

French release and probably not in the print seen by the *Monthly Film Bulletin* reviewer, were inspired by *Jack the Ripper* (Robert S. Baker 1958) and *The Flesh and the Fiends* (John Gilling 1959) (Tim Lucas in Newman 1996: 121). Tohill and Tombs spot the pulp literature of Edgar Wallace and more generic “reworked staples of the popular horror film” in *Orlof*’s genetic makeup (1995: 77).

Tim Lucas’ description of *Orlof* as “a stylistic culmination of all that had come before” (in Balbo et al 1993: 16) might suggest that commercially successful cycles and other generic antecedents provided the conditions of possibility for Franco’s effort to be ‘thought’ and made and an intertextual arena in which Franco’s authorial identity could be forged. A degree of intertextuality might also have been both necessary and economically astute, with Franco and his backers calculating that an amalgam of tried and tested formulae had a greater chance of financial return for a low budget film aimed as much at the export as the domestic market. Yet Franco’s practice is habitually mythologised as that of a visionary with an insatiable appetite for film. Rather as films of the French New Wave can be seen as the work of cinéphiles educated in the Paris Cinémathèque, so the authorial agency behind *Orlof* is characterised as that of a film lover who “packs a lifetime’s knowledge of cinema... into a fevered 88 minutes” (Tohill and Tombs 1995: 77). The tone here is overly reverential, but the allusiveness of Franco’s films is significant because it suggests that making genre films comes hand-in-hand with consuming them. Nevertheless, as in Bazin’s ‘superwesterns’, the film demonstrates and revels in genre literacy, its mix-and-match approach to gothic conventions seeming to prefigure the notionally postmodernist forms of pastiche often held to be characteristic of contemporary horror cinema. Eclectic pastiche soon comes to the fore in Franco’s work, with *Dracula vs. Frankenstein* (1971) and *A Virgin among the Living Dead* (1971), among many others, constituting pick-and-mix collisions of free-floating horror and erotic signifiers barely held together by flimsy narrative threads.

Joan Hawkins’ chapter on *Orlof* is one of the most valuable texts so far published on Franco. Drawing on Jeffrey Sconce’s ‘Trashing the Academy’ essay (1995), Hawkins argues that Franco’s use of dissonant soundtracks and multi-layered citationality invites a paracinematic viewing practice that – in its distance from “mainstream” consumption – mirrors the “educated” mode of attention demanded by what she calls European arthouse cinema. In this respect, she argues, hierarchies of taste and genre are “blurred” as Franco occupies a “liminal” site between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture (Hawkins 2000: 113). Hawkins therefore analyses *Orlof* as an example of the “demanding” and “difficult” texts prized by what Sconce identifies as “paracinematic” and “trashophilic” taste communities. It is certainly the case that many of Franco’s films, particularly from the early 1970s on, test the viewer’s patience for reasons that will be discussed below. It is also true that ‘Francophile’ publications tend to wallow quite

masochistically in the unwieldiness (and, in many films, sheer tedium) of his output. Yet, for all that Hawkins insists on seeing the film as “truly subversive” (Hawkins 2000: 112), *Orlof* is a largely conventional, cogent genre piece. Seen in the light of the more parodic approaches produced elsewhere its bricolage of trans-national genre codes is for the most part respectful. Though *Orlof* dispenses with supernatural themes it studiously retains the gothic iconography of owls, black cats, castles, mists, candelabras and staircases; extensive use is made of chiaroscuro lighting; and its ‘monsters’ – the Jack-the-Ripper-meets-Frankenstein surgeon and Morpho, the minion-who-does-his-bidding – are more engaging screen presences than its police detective, Inspector Tanner. Arguably a low budget ‘superhorror’ in the vein of Bazin’s ‘superwesterns’, *Orlof*’s “baroque embellishments” consist mainly of exaggerating features already present in the genre’s transnational development. Indeed, while several of Franco’s macabre fantasy films of the 1960s – *Dr. Jeckyll’s Mistresses* (1964)¹, *The Diabolical Dr. Z* (1966)² and the *Sadistic Baron von Klaus* (1962)³ in particular – continued to tread similar stylistic and thematic territory, *Orlof* goes furthest in its embrace of horror’s mannered cinematography, discordant music and ‘creepy’ decor. (This certainly does not amount to the film being frightening).

Eric Schaefer points out that the economic conditions of exploitation cinema necessitate peculiar “production strategies” which generate particular textual qualities (Schaefer 1999: 43). As Cook puts it, “being so tightly tied to market forces has inevitable consequences for form: the elements which give big-budget films their coherence (stars, psychological realism, narrative development, expensive production values) are often absent” (Cook, 1985: 367). Seeing Franco’s work as entirely economically determined would perhaps leave inadequate space for agency – it might struggle to explain why Franco’s films are distinct from those of, say, Jacinto Molina or Jean Rollin – but the influence of financial and market factors on the films must be acknowledged and explored. *Orlof*’s modest budget is betrayed among other things by cheap-looking décor that resembles crudely painted theatrical flats, and by Morpho’s

¹ *Dr Jeckyll’s Mistresses* concerns a scientist (Marcelo Arroita Jauregui) driven insane by his wife’s infidelity. In a possible reference to *Viridiana*, (Luis Buñuel, 1961), the drama centres on the arrival of Fisherman’s niece, Melissa (Agnes Spaak). Fisherman had killed Melissa’s father (Hugo Blanco) in the film’s backstory and, in a reworking of *Orlof*, had electronically reanimated his corpse to transform him into an instrument through which the Doctor murders prostitutes and strippers.

² *The Diabolical Dr. Z* continues medical horror themes and imagery but increases the quantity and duration of on-stage numbers while re-gendering the villain. A medic (Mabel Karr) turns an erotic dancer (Estella Blain) into a killing machine to avenge the death of her father, a misunderstood scientist.

³ *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* is in some respects an ‘old dark house’ film, but its reputation rests mainly on a lengthy flagellation and torture sequence during its last 20 minutes. This scene significantly enlarges the eroticised violence in several of Franco’s films of the 1960s, and anticipates the sexualised torture scenarios of the Sadeain films discussed in Chapter 4.

rather rudimentary make-up. Franco and his cinematographer Godofredo Pacheco attempt to lend production value to the film's less than sumptuous staging through low key lighting and restless camera work, by using dolly shots, pans and canted angles during terror sequences. Though a by-product of the impecunious conditions in which the film was made, these techniques – far from being aberrant, as is generally expected of Franco - epitomize an expressionist style far from atypical within certain horror traditions. Something similar can be said of the free-jazz soundtrack by José Pagán, Antonio Ramírez Ángel and Franco. For Hawkins, this heavily foregrounded score has a disruptive, distancing relationship to the image track (Hawkins 2000: 100). But rather than a total departure from genre conventions, this can be heard as an inflated take on standard 'horror music', complete with the 'atmospheric' use of organ in certain scenes. Hence *Orlof* is in many ways styled more like classic horror than many forms of exploitation cinema; certainly its visual style contrasts starkly with the static tableau shots typical of both early classical exploitation and most '42nd Street' sexploitation features of the 1960s. The agitated and angular camerawork frequently deployed also departs from the more sedate camerawork used in *Eyes without a Face*.

The film was profitable enough to inspire a series of remakes and sequels. The Spanish *Face of Terror* (*La cara del terror*, Isidoro M. Ferry, 1963) concerns a Dr. Taylor (Fernando Rey), who sets about reconstructing the face of a woman disfigured in an accident only to discover that she has psychopathic tendencies (Gasca, 1964: 16). This film may have been directly influenced by Franco's or it might simply have been contributing to a plastic surgery subgenre dominated rather than initiated by Franju's film. The British *Circus of Horrors* (Sydney Hayers, 1959) had similarly played on plastic surgery as a topic for horror. Franco for his part returned on many occasions to the awful doctor. *Dr. Jeckyll's Mistresses* (1964), *The Diabolical Dr. Z* (1966), *The Sinister Eyes of Dr. Orloff* (1973), *Revenge in the house of Usher* (1983), *The Sinister Doctor Orloff* (1984) and *Faceless* (1988) are all sequels of sorts, several of them featuring Howard Vernon as the medic, though *Faceless* is often seen as a remake rather than a sequel. *Dr. Jeckyll's Mistresses* has nothing to do with Dr. Jeckyll and was released as *El secreto del Doctor Orloff* in Spain, complete with extra 'f' (Balbo et al 1993: 48). *Faceless* also includes a pleasing homage for genre buffs by starring Anton Diffring, who played the sadistic plastic surgeon in *Circus of Horrors*. As in Universal Studios' various 'sons of' and 'meets' monster rallies of the 1940s, the sequels are usually only tenuously connected to the original, the mad doctor simply offering a pretext for further medical horrors. Hence *The Diabolical Dr. Z* contains none of the same characters as *Orlof*, but its mad Dr. Zimmer claims to be a disciple of the late Dr. Orlof. As Butler disapprovingly puts it, apropos of the Frankenstein cycles of the 1940s and 1960s, there often "seems little point, apart from publicity value, in retaining the title name at all" (Butler 1967: 45). Illustrating the popularity of the character, *Orloff and the*

Invisible Man (*Le vie amoureuse de l'homme invisible*) was directed by the French Pierre Chevalier in 1971, while the Spanish Santos Alcocer shot *El enigma de ataud* (*Les orgies du Dr. Orloff*) in 1969, again with Vernon in the lead role.

As Schaefer points out, the reuse of characters and actors further illustrates how economic conditions produce particular modes of production; it reduces rehearsal time and enables filmmakers to incorporate footage from previous films (Schaefer 1999: 57). Plots, character names and sets can also be, to borrow Schaefer's term, recycled; the centrality of such recycling to Franco's *modus operandi* can be judged from the Table of Concordances in Appendix 1. Economic determination being no hindrance to connotation, recycling can produce peculiar effects, occasionally functioning as a metafictional device hovering uncertainly between parody and pastiche.¹ *Revenge in the House of Usher*, for example, includes a "Dr. Harker", a "Dr. Usher" and a "Morpho", implying a reflexive approach to genre seemingly intended to place the filmmaker's own creation (Morpho) in the same horror pantheon as Stoker's and Poe's copyright-free characters. In fact the film is more of a recycling of *Orlof/ Eyes without a Face* than an adaptation of Poe: a demented old professor tries to revive his comatose daughter with the blood of abducted women. The film contains fifteen minutes of re-edited kidnap/murder/surgery footage lifted directly from Franco's first horror venture. Franco himself has contributed to the contradictory models of the auteur's relationship to the industry by presenting conflicting accounts of this piece of self-cannibalisation. In one interview he claims that the material from *Orlof* was spliced in against his wishes by his French production company, Eurociné, a decision he describes as "just crazy! They want to say that this is a sequel to the other film, never mind that Vernon is more than twenty years older; that's just botching it" (Charles, undated: 27-8). Another interview reveals a different version of events:

once the film was finished, the idea of including scenes from [*Orlof*] turned me on. Vernon and I decided that the film was almost like a sequel. So I added in some scenes in flashback. I find the result very interesting. (In Balbo 1992: 242).

Either way, the material abducted from *Orlof* is injected into the film ostensibly to represent Usher's memories of his inglorious past but also (as Eurociné no doubt intended) to revive one of Franco's more soporific efforts. On the practical level a thrifty means of implanting some relatively artful spectacle into a listless feature, this sequence also offers a disorienting and even

¹ Stock material can be recycled from the director or producer's collection of 'spare' footage, either left over from or simply taken out of their own older films. Re-use of library footage is comparatively infrequent in Franco's films. Some shots of Istanbul and Rio in several films are of this type. Others are even more conspicuous. *The Castle of Fu Manchu* (1968) recycles colour-tinted stock footage of the sinking of the Titanic from *A Night to Remember* (1958). *Un capitán de quince años* (1972) unconvincingly incorporates footage of a storm at sea in one of its precious few action sequences.

uncanny experience. As Usher/Vernon voices over the re-edited clips of Orlof/Usher's past crimes, viewers familiar with the original film, if not simply feeling cheated, are left uncertain about which character they are meant to be watching and hearing: is 'Usher' really 'Orlof'? Or are we to read Usher as a stand-in for the rather elderly Vernon (or indeed Franco), looking back on the promising early days of his career?

The reiterative quality of recycling across films is echoed by the repetition of camera set-ups and scenes within them.¹ *Orlof*'s interior and exterior scenes are shot in a very limited number of locations which are reused at regular intervals throughout. This arguably lends a certain visual rhythm to the proceedings, and creates a nightmarish and anti-realist sense of the film's diegetic space as a hermetic fabulation. The film's opening abduction concludes on a descending flight of steps which reappears three times later in the film. In two cases the camera is moved to the opposite side of the street, possibly in order to disguise it; in the other, the camera set-up and lighting are identical to the opening sequence but for the fact that the heroine, Wanda Bronsky, stands to the left of the screen. While dismissible simply as cheapskate, the latter repetition, by echoing and having Wanda enter the scene of the initial crime – at once occupying the site of the original abductee and appropriating the villain's space – also marks her simultaneously as active agent and potential victim.

One of the potential gains of exploitation studies is that it welcomes hybrid or unstable cases, such as Franco's horrotica, in to the understanding of genre, in the process problematising and expanding 'what we believe' particular genres to be. Where "erotic interest" was, for Bazin, inessential to the Western, it would be hard to make the same claim of horror (Bazin 1976: 152); by the early 1960s, the erotic content of the genre was commonly recognised, if rarely discussed in anything other than pathologising or moralistic terms. Raymond Durgnat was one of the few critics to approach eroticism as a thematic and aesthetic component of the genre, observing in the pages of *Films and Filming* in 1962 that "the kingpin of the horror film is the rendezvous of eroticism and violence", a dimension of the genre that he says is familiar enough to be recognised by "even the yokellist yokel" (Durgnat 2000: 39).

Orlof marks Franco's first foray into themes of extreme and abject desire that many of his succeeding films explored repeatedly: vengeance, mad love, morbid and self-destructive fixations (often coded as female 'hysteria' and 'nymphomania'). These themes are frequently embodied in what Punter calls the "highly stereotyped" characters common in gothic fiction (Punter 1996: 1), boiled down to a gallery of masochistic or sadistic gothic subjectivities:

¹ Several of Franco's later films attempt to make create a hypnotic aesthetic out of repetition. I have in mind the minimal, repetitive structure of later sex-horror films such as *Shining Sex* (1975), *Voodoo Passion* (1976), *Devil Hunter* (1979), and *The Sinister Doctor Orloff* (1982).

monsters, lunatics, villains, brainwashed servants, femmes fatales, fallen women, and perverted aristocrats.¹ These characters perform in scenes that any Freudian would recognise as primal: seduction, cruelty, debasement, voyeurism and (usually symbolic) castration all feature in those films which can be said to have ‘cult’ reputations.

Orlof’s gothic horror affiliations can be said to exploit genre conventions and work with formula. But the need for product differentiation suggests that exploitation is never a matter only of replication. The genre’s “endless variations on *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*” (Durnat 1971: 32), for example, are forever surplus to the origination of gothic tropes in a handful of canonical texts, literary or cinematic. As Peter Hutchings notes, “so far as an understanding of genre history is concerned, the follow-up films are more important than the films that spawned them inasmuch as they reveal patterns of generic development not immediately apparent from just looking at the initial work” (Hutchings 2004: 16). For all that some recent accounts of exploitation cinema insist on seeing it as a world away from a presumed ‘mainstream’, the field’s endless revisiting and revising of iconographic, thematic and narrative formulae can be seen as simply a lower budget instance of how genres work in and address their fans in popular culture at large. *Orlof* and many more of Franco’s films undoubtedly display competence in genre codes. Referential density is, then, an important part of the films, and therefore of this thesis. Poring over intertextuality becomes problematic, however, when it serves as a badge of honour marking a supposedly fundamental distance from what Hawkins defines as mainstream mass culture (Hawkins 200: 113). Hawkins and others sideline the possibility that such intertextuality is common to the processes of popular cultural production and reception rather than a passport to an elite paracinematic constituency.

Franco Meets the Paracinemaniacs: Framing the Exploitation Auteur

Originally a pejorative term used by the North American film industry to describe “films made with little or no attention to quality or artistic merit but with an eye to a quick profit, usually via high-pressure sales and promotion techniques emphasizing some sensational aspect of the product” (Katz, 1979: 396), exploitation in its most elastic usage covers any low budget commercial film that trades on the promise of risqué materials through excessive and titillating advertising claims.² Roger Corman, the director/producer most closely associated with

¹ Many of Franco’s characters reflect the fictional gothic self, described as one which is disordered and destabilized by irrational, pathological, “lurching and unpredictable urges” (Hopkins 2005: 149).

² The possession of a ‘low’ budget is often valued as a condition of authenticity or inventiveness, but ‘lowness’ of budget can not be defined objectively. Films like *Oasis of the Zombies* (1981) or *X312: Flight to Hell* (1981) look pitifully cheap because they cannot meet the demands of their action and horror narratives, but the same cannot quite be said of *Lucky the*

1950s/60s American ‘drive-in’ pictures, observes that “[e]xploitation’ films were so named because you made a film about something wild with a great deal of action, a little sex, and possibly some sort of strange gimmick; they often came out of the day’s headlines” (Corman 1998: 34). Thomas Docherty, looking at youth-orientated genre films of Corman’s period, defines exploitation as a depreciatory term for films with a “substandard budget” and “controversial, bizarre or timely subject matter amenable to wild promotion” (Doherty 1988: 8). John Hamilton more bluntly remarks, apropos of British exploitation producers of the 1960s, that “their movies were cheaply made, nearly always contained gratuitous sex or horror, and frequently the only thing they had going for them was the poster” (Hamilton 2005: 7).

Pam Cook (1976; 1985; 2005) proposes that one or two auteurs in the exploitation field – for her the Roger Corman alumnus Stephanie Rothman is exemplary – can rise above the limitations of their inauspicious conditions. Cook also points out that “much of the pleasure – and success – of exploitation films derives from the way they play on audience expectations of authorship and genre” (Cook 1985: 367). Thus Rothman smuggles feminist discourse into the almost overwhelmingly sexist world of exploitation cinema. Cook’s several essays on Rothman assume that ‘standard’ genre pleasures form a static ground against which a handful of heroic individuals can stand out. However, her reference to the field’s ‘playing on’ expectations suggests that a productive tension between repetition and difference, or schema and variation, may be built in to popular genres rather than wrestled out of them by a few auteurs like Rothman.

In its classical form exploitation cinema capitalised on its independent status by making a spectacle of material more or less forbidden in Hollywood (Schaefer 1999: *passim*). Later variations continued this tradition by exhibiting “some degree of deviance from the production and subject matter of Hollywood films” (Fischer 1992: 18). Perhaps inspired by this apparent independence, some scholarship has gone considerably further than Cook’s readings of Rothman’s resistance, treating exploitation as a carnivalesque arena for maverick voices. Echoing Vale and Juno’s claim that low-budget films “can be transcendent expressions of a single person’s individual vision and quirky originality” (Morton 1986: 5), Carol Clover asserts that “the fiscal conditions of low-budget filmmaking are such that creativity and individual vision can prosper there in ways that they may not in mainstream environments” (Clover 1992: 5). The claim is nothing new. Roger Corman reflects on how he was given “outlaw” status: “a

Inscrutable or most of Franco’s films for Harry Alan Towers. *Lucky* includes a large cast of extras, multiple changes of location and costume, and action scenes involving parachutes, airplanes, and car chases – few of which appear to be assembled from stock footage.

new generation of film-makers, educated in the 1960s counterculture, saw me as an uncompromised artist/entrepreneur who got his movies made outside the Establishment” (Corman 1998: viii). Myths of authorial autonomy in these cases appear to rest on the assumption that the institutional marginality of the exploitation field facilitates the work of oddballs, misfits and visionaries, its ‘independence’ fostering a degree of creative freedom presumed to be impossible elsewhere. On this basis Franco is often portrayed as a wild card operating with fervour in an impoverished but liberating setting. Hence Tim Lucas conjectures that Franco parted company with one of his producers for “the greater artistic freedom of low-budget, independent filmmaking” (Lucas 2005: 47). Such assumptions also enable Krzywinska (2006), Wells (2000) and others to draw vague parallels between Franco’s films and an unexamined, context-less notion of auteurist ‘art cinema’.

Genre ‘clichés’, exploitation ‘rip-offs’ and the auteur’s ‘obsessions’ cannot be disentangled with certainty. Some of the more glorifying accounts of Franco deal with the apparent contradictions by downplaying the conventionality of the gothic elements present in many of his films, stressing their ‘outrageousness’ and overstating their uniqueness. Steve Chibnall proposes that much work on low budget exploitation films grows out of an early 1980s wave of “cinephiles” who valorised those films as a challenge to “dominant judgements of taste and aesthetics” (Chibnall 1997: 85). Chibnall’s timescale is myopic, but it can be argued that the desire to salvage ‘low’ entertainment forms became more urgent as a reaction to the pessimistic readings of popular cinema dominant in film theory of the 1970s and 1980s. Steve Neale’s view of genre as “a means of regulating memory and expectation” (Neale 1980: 55), for example, suggested that genres were inherently homogeneous and that they disciplined audiences: as in Adorno and Horkheimer’s view of the culture industry, apparent differences between texts merely masked underlying standardisation. Out of a desire to reclaim ‘low’ cinema as a significant and lively rather than standardised, degraded and derivative, realm of cultural production, exploitation studies has often replied with an inflated auteurism.

Kevin Heffernan observes that North American critics in horror and ‘cult’-friendly magazines like *Photon*, *Cinefantastique* and *Video Watchdog* perpetuate a model of auteurism based on the “missionary zeal of 1950s *Cahiers Du Cinéma*” (Heffernan 2007: 159). But the auteur policy was not embraced without circumspection by all the *Cahiers* critics: Bazin advised against any “aesthetic personality cult” which assumed that “the film-maker and his films are one” (Bazin 1985: 249; 257). Brushing Bazin’s caution aside, the more idolising studies of exploitation cinema read repeatedly reworked genre codes solely as the auteur’s signature obsessions, and Franco’s genre intertextuality only as the product of his well-rounded cinéphilia. Roland Barthes arguably used the idea of the text as “a tissue of quotations drawn

from the innumerable centres of culture” as a nail in the coffin of the author as supreme centre of meaning and value (Barthes 1977: 146). But cult film critics often use Franco’s quotes and references – and differentiate them from rip-offs and formulae – to prove that his sleaze has a sophisticated underpinning, or as evidence of the filmmaker’s genius rather than, to paraphrase André Bazin, the ‘genius’ of exploitation as an open-ended, multifarious popular cultural ‘system’ (Bazin 1985: 258). The sovereignty of the author and the knowledgeability of the cult consumer are exalted by seeing the economically necessary reworking of genre formulae exclusively as knowing citation. While commenting on the auteurism of what Sconce (1995) calls “paracinematic” taste communities, Hawkins admires the “cultural accumulation” of Franco’s films (Hawkins 200: 112), and uses the education purportedly required to appreciate them as evidence of the auteur’s unique erudition.

Returning to the themes of his 1995 ‘Trashing the Academy’ essay, Jeffrey Sconce has more recently seen in North American “badfilm” taste communities an increasingly cynical and alienated reading protocol removed from what he describes as the more affectionate badfilm cults of the 1970s and 1980s, whose practices of aberrant decoding may have been marked by traditions of camp: central here were the New York-based Midnight Movie cult of the 1970s, and ‘trash’ genre readings by film-makers such as George Kuchar, John Waters, Kurt McDowell and Paul Morrissey.¹ More sneering and despairing than Sontag’s (1994 a) notion of camp as “failed seriousness” the new “trashophiles” find that the only pleasure in watching exploitation films is that of “revelling in the chasm dividing expectation and execution” and “contemplating our embarrassingly insistent gullibility” once again (Sconce 2007: 284). A sign of shifting tastes in the field is that Sconce’s 2007 piece cites Franco and other Europeans in a way that his 1995 essay could not. Two volumes central to his 1995 account – *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* (Weldon 1983) and *Re/Search: Incredibly Strange Films* (Morton 1986) – are mainly concerned with North American practitioners. Franco is quite unfavourably mentioned in both. In 1983 Michael Weldon noted of *Orlof*: “(h)ere’s the hit that got Jesse [sic] Franco’s incredible career off the ground. Maybe you’ve heard how bad it is....A tranquilizing experience” (Weldon 1983: 31). It is indicative of Franco’s changing reception that by 1996 Weldon could now concede, albeit in less than glowing terms, that “this b/w film has some impressive atmospheric shots” (Weldon 1996: 32).²

Pavlović notes that Franco’s films are sometimes “beautifully photographed”, Hawkins that “some of Franco’s shot compositions are simply stunning” (Hawkins 2000: 88). Both authors appear to have had early-mid 1960s films like *Orlof* in mind. Although Franco’s work since the

¹ The key volume on the ‘Midnight Movie’ cult is Hoberman and Rosenbaum (1983).

² Weldon was here reviewing the 1993 VHS release of the film as one of Frank Hennenlotter’s ‘Sexy Shockers’ series on the Something Weird label.

latter third of that decade is almost universally seen as lacking an elementary grasp of the craft of narrative cinema (the rot often regarded as having set in with Franco's work for the British producer and impresario Harry Alan Towers, beginning in 1967), Weldon's grudging respect for *Orlof's* cinematography illustrates the common view that many of Franco's films are at some point "enlivened by a handful (a *small* handful) of arty/surreal moments" (Newman 1984: 30), and that "(a)ll that can really be said with certainty is that (Franco) has made some terrible films, some crazy films, and a number of unforgettable, special films" (Tim Lucas, in Balbo 1993: 13). Tohill and Tombs likewise note the variability of a corpus which they describe as "moving from feverish intensity to half-baked ordinariness and back again. ... Some sequences are great, others look thrown together, and seem jarringly dull compared to the good stuff" (Tohill and Tombs 1995:107).

"Failure" is embraced by Sconce's 'trashophiles' as a means of pre-empting and parodically mirroring the endemic "failure" of Hollywood. But while Sconce is right to pinpoint resistance to 'Hollywood' as a motivation for cult reclamation of exploitation cinema, the alienated disillusionment he detects in the cult discourse of "people (who) love to hate the movies" (Sconce 2007: 294) is usually absent in eulogies to Franco, such as those of Tohill and Tombs (1995), Lucas (2010) and Aguilar (1999), which persevere earnestly with seeking out the "underlying zest which makes (his films) perversely watchable" (Frank 1982: 159). This view seems to damn Franco with faint praise, but the effort required get to Newman's "arty/surreal moments" or Weldon's "impressive shots" often appears not so much as the price to be paid for the thrill of discovering hidden gems, as itself a perverse pleasure of 'cult' connoisseurship: the very transience of the moments of inspiration may intensify the rewards of finding them.

Such are the self-aggrandising protocols of the diligent cultist that toiling through the "dull" passages and the "terrible films" advertises his or her commitment to the "restless and unorthodox" cineaste (Aguilar 1999: 9). Where Sconce's consumers are jaded celebrants of ineptitude, Heffernan points out that many 'fan' and 'academic' publications champion "the cinematic 'art' of such previously invisible and/or disreputable filmmakers as (Mario) Bava, Jess Franco, Antonio Margheriti" (Heffernan 2007: 159). The lumping together of these three directors may be explained by the fact that they are often defined as 'Eurotrash' or 'Eurohorror'. But one hesitates to suggest that Franco will one day be reclaimed as a 'master' of his craft. His status is hardly comparable to that of Bava, who has long been considered a 'maestro' by the horror and *giallo* cognoscenti on the basis of his skills as a cinematographer and *metteur-en-scène*.¹ Illustrating Heffernan's remarks on the influence of a certain model of auteurism,

¹ See, for example, Ursini and Silver (2000).

cultish discourse on Franco instead constructs its object of fascination through the tracing of connections and continuities. Picking up on connections helps to produce an authorial identity around which cult competencies may congregate but it is also a scholarly activity; since this thesis in many ways constitutes an auteur study it would be disingenuous to claim that it has entirely escaped the logic of connoisseurship. There are differences, however, between cataloguing connections and reading them, and between auteur analysis and hagiography. Many accounts of Franco stress the benefits of having seen a large number of his films, to the degree that Tim Lucas makes the absurd gauntlet-throwing declaration that “(y)ou can’t see one Franco film until you’ve seen them all because, without that information, your set of references is incomplete” (in Balbo et al 1993: 29)¹, an assertion which enshrines the encyclopaedism of the cultist more than it reveals anything of the films he or she has accumulated.

Apparent conflicts between the desire to celebrate Franco’s “sexploitation/ exploitation/ horror/ B production cinema” (Pavlović) and to recognise his “art cinema eye to visual and auditory style” (Krzywinska) compound the ambiguity of his authorial status: tensions exist between Franco as autonomous maverick and Franco as ‘hack for hire’. Both Tohill and Tombs’ and Balbo’s books acknowledge the role of the producer in Franco’s films, distinguishing career phases on the basis of his various producers as much as on his “unique personality” (Aguilar 1999: 39). His films for Towers², for example, are often quite different in style (and evident budget), if not in theme, from those funded by Erwin C. Dietrich³ or Robert de Nesle.⁴ As in the contested authorship of Jacques Tourneur’s work with the producer Val Lewton, recognition of the producers’ contribution would seem to complicate notions of Franco as a self-sufficient creative spirit. Yet the belief that exploitation offers free-reign for the exploration of private obsessions often informs distinctions between ‘real’ Franco films and his mere ‘hack work’. Lucas sees Franco’s vision as diluted by his conditions of production, surfacing only occasionally in otherwise mundane productions, or more consistently in the more ‘personal’ and therefore ‘true’ Franco films. *Venus in Furs* (1968) is seen as compromised by the fact that Towers employed a small army of script doctors and editors who interfered with Franco’s

¹ Lucas first made this claim in the inaugural edition of his magazine *Video Watchdog* in 1990. He repeats it in Lucas (1993: 29) and Lucas (2010: 33).

² Most of his films for Towers take a fairly colourful and sexually ‘mild’ approach, in some cases aiming for a ‘family friendly’ audience. Sometimes made with North American financial backing (*Venus in Furs* was part funded by American International Pictures), some of these films are comparatively lavish.

³ The films for Dietrich are dominated by minimal narratives, usually revolving around images of women in captivity or in confined institutional environments (e.g *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, 1976; *Love Camp* 1976; *Sexy Sisters*, 1977).

⁴ The films for De Nesle (e.g *Lorna the Exorcist* (1974), *Virgin among the Living Dead* (1971), *Sinner* (1972)) resemble those for Eurociné in the same decade: downbeat erotic melodramas that often contain an element of the supernatural or fantastic.

‘personal vision’ (Lucas 2005: 47). However, my reading of *Venus* in chapter 2 suggests that the transcendent auteur is in this context at best elusive and at worst a fantasy, and that clear distinctions between authentically ‘personal’ projects and inauthentic, contractually obliged fodder cannot be reliably sustained.

Authorial intentionality is also a contradictory notion in cult discourse because the image of exploitation cinema in which the romanticised auteur is set is often equally mythologised. Stories of Franco’s money-saving antics often feed legends of his ingenuity and audacity rather than illustrate the entrenchment of his ‘vision’ in economic and industrial conditions. Distinct from the ‘underappreciated maestro’ discourse which now surrounds a Bava or an Argento¹, auteurs like Franco tend to be “valued more as ‘eccentrics’ than as artists” (Sconce 1995: 340), with anecdotes about the conditions of low budget filmmaking often cult currency. Stories abound of Franco’s frugal skills in making a little go a long way. One of his producers, Erwin C. Dietrich, may have been embroidering the truth when he claimed that “you send (Franco) to a location and he actually manages to shoot a second picture with the same budget, the same crew and without the actors knowing. He later sells the films on his own account” (Balbo et al 1993: 229) But it does seem to be the case that during the shooting of one film, Franco sometimes lensed extra material for use in as yet unknown future projects. With time on their hands while they waited to film carnival for *The Girl from Rio* in 1968 Franco and Towers composed a script for *99 Women*, which they then shot within a week. The carnival footage they eventually obtained in Brazil also appears in *Venus in Furs*. Several films of the same period similarly include footage of Istanbul filmed while on location for *Succubus* (Balbo 1993: 19; Gregory 2005 b). Franco waxes lyrical about “the beauty of Istanbul, its unlimited possibilities for cinematic art” (Franco 2004: 288) but a number of his films include establishing shots of the city² without story or dialogue making further significant use of the location, thus suggesting a practice of bricolage whereby creative decisions are based on available stock. That such production practices are acknowledged – and even feted – within cult discourse might suggest that Franco’s authorship is widely acknowledged as being contingent upon the discursive and economic conditions of the exploitation field: conditions that are often constructed in terms of red-in-tooth-and-claw market conditions. As the connotations of ‘exploitation’ in Marxist terminology suggest, exploitation cinema is as shaped by capitalism as any of the Hollywood product against which cultist discourse habitually pitches itself. As Dyer and Vincendeau remark, “there can be no understanding of popular film without reference to the market, because

¹ The construction of Argento as a cult auteur is discussed by Hutchings (2003).

² See Appendix: Table of Concordances. Franco recalls that Istanbul inspired him to make *Succubus* (1967). That city would, he observes, seem “an ideal place in the mind of a demented woman”. Franco originally intended Madrid to represent the “real world” and Istanbul the “unreal world” of the lead character’s imagination (Franco 2004: 188).

popular cinema has only existed in a market economy” (1992: 2). However, the primacy of the creator’s personality is often asserted over a context which merely provides a colourful backdrop for vignettes about misadventures in the screen trade.

In lieu of consensus on Franco’s mastery of the medium, claims about “cinematic ‘art’” are displaced onto claims about his energy, nerve and resourcefulness. This approach allows even – or especially – the patchiness of his output to be accommodated to the most mythologising forms of auteurism. The image of Franco’s creative intuition is commonly constructed through reference to his being a jazz musician and enthusiast; his filmmaking approach is often likened to jazz performance. The idea of ‘jazz’ in this discourse is at once vague, stereotyped, and idealising; which jazz paradigm the critic has in mind is rarely disclosed, though Hawkins is more specific than most, claiming that *Orlof* has a “bebop rhythm” (Hawkins 2000: 107). Jazz is a broad church, and its place in classed taste hierarchies is complex. As both metaphor for Franco’s film-making processes and as actual soundtrack, Hawkins opts for an elite, “demanding” model of jazz distinct from “easy-listening” (Hawkins 2000: 100), but this form of the music can be seen as having become thoroughly institutionalised and respectable, at some remove from Franco’s disreputable and ‘trashy’ status. Jazz also offers an ambiguous model for Franco’s authorship because musical performances in the idiom exists on a spectrum between grand-standing soloing (film as individual expression) and as teamwork/group improvisation (film as collaboration). In any case the jazz reference suggests a valorisation of the films as in some measure intuitive and spontaneous, with genre themes and motifs as springboards for free improvisation, and ‘mistakes’ as markers of authenticity and freedom. Stéphane du Mesnildot (2004) similarly offers Franco up as a crazed ‘amateur’. Mesnildot’s study usefully touches on a number of Franco’s cultural resources, including some iconographic, thematic and stylistic links between Franco, Wiene and Browning, while stressing the figure of the vampire as a key motif in Franco’s output. Mesnildot compares Franco’s visualisation of the body in extremes to surrealist artists such as Max Ernst and Hans Bellmer, using these references to locate Franco within what is presented as a timeless tradition of visionary and hallucinatory art; the situatedness of the films at specific cultural conjunctures is sidelined in favour of the artist as outsider. Hence Franco’s parallels with jazz and amateurism are appealing but limited, both being used to shore up the mystique of the exploitation auteur and his radical distance from ‘mass’ or popular culture.¹

¹ Franco encourages the association of his film-making with jazz performance through his regular cameo appearances as a jazz musician (e.g as a member of the band in *Venus in Furs*: see Appendix: Table of Concordances). Franco’s own jazz based compositions for his films cover a range of styles. *Death Whistles the Blues* works with the Afro-Cuban jazz rhythms popular in the early 1960s, *Silence of the Tomb* offers fairly straight-ahead freebop, while *Las*

The leaflet illustrated in fig. 1:1 advertises Franco's noirish crime film *Rififi en la ciudad* (1964) among a selection of popular Spanish films of the period released on DVD by the Spanish company Divisa (2008). The film is not framed as exploitation but – perhaps surprisingly, given Franco's reputation – as part of “the best of our cinema”, in recognition of its star, Fernando Fernán Gomez (it is presented alongside a number of other Fernán Gomez titles). Despite bearing Franco's name, the film is less well known in cult exploitation circles than his ‘sleazier’ works, and is at time of writing unavailable in English. Many of Franco's other non-horror films of the period are difficult to obtain, in spite – or perhaps because – of their merits as competently crafted entertainments. There may be pragmatic reasons for this unavailability, but these films also have a marginal place in most accounts of Franco's work because, despite a few fetishistic shots in *Attack of the Robots* (1966), *Death Whistles a Blues* (1962) and *Lucky the Inscrutable* (1967), they are less concerned with the perverse. Not ‘transgressive’ enough to be prized by exploitation or Eurotrash circles, *Rififi in the City* therefore fits currently prevailing constructions of neither the auteur nor his exploitation field, which play down the proficiency of many of his 1960s films while mystifying the hit-and-miss quality of other works as the price or even the sign of his restless energy: any weaknesses are the inevitable by-products of a prodigious creativity fuelled by a need to “continue ceaselessly filming” (Aguilar 1999: 11), or are amply compensated by outrageous imagery.



Fig.1:1: Advertising insert for DVDs sold by Divisa Home Video.

vampiras favours sitar-infused ‘exotica’. Franco's 1997 CD, *The Manacoa Experience*, reflects his usual eclecticism by featuring a mixture of styles from Big Band and Bossa Nova to what Franco describes as “acid jazz”, “trashy blues” and “pop” (Franco 1997: pages unnumbered).

A certain mystique of exploitation cinema has become the preferred construct through which Franco's films are discussed, often aligned with the aura of 'cult' cinema. The idea of exploitation cinema has become exploitable as part of self-consciously 'cult'-targeted marketing. Hence, in contrast to the more, or differently, canonising *Rififi* insert, the sleeve for a recent DVD release of Franco's racist cannibalistic jungle adventure *Devil Hunter* (1980) attempts to tick several 'politically incorrect' or 'trash' boxes at once by proclaiming that the film "Manages To Tap Into Race Exploitation, Sex Exploitation, Cannibal Exploitation and Shock Exploitation!"¹ The Sontag/Midnight Movie-style cult of knowingly 'bad taste' consumption appears in cases like this to have been shorn of oppositionality, wilfully blind to the film's dubious politics.

The Eye of Exploitation

The term 'exploitation cinema' is historically and culturally variable and its connotations are subject to slippage depending on whether it is conceived as a historically circumscribed genre (Schaefer 1999), a range of niche-marketed subgenres produced by a down-at-heel backwater of the film industry for certain 'grindhouse' exhibition sites (Cook, 1985; Morton 1986; Docherty 1988; Schaefer 1999; Hamilton 2005), or a 'salacious' mode of displaying and looking at bodies, close to but distinct from pornography, as in the adjective 'exploitative' which is often applied negatively to horror films (Hardy 1996; Clover, 1992; Fischer, 1992; Chibnall and Hunter 1995; Bowen, 1997; Williams, 2008). As *The Awful Dr Orlof* suggests, these different registers of the term feed into one another to the degree that exploitation cinema may be summarised as an institutional field (comprising particular circuits of production, distribution, exhibition and consumption) centred on sensationalistic approaches to 'genred' bodies.

The various inflections of the exploitation label are, then, not all mutually exclusive. If exploitation is understood as a style, it may be said to emerge from the industrial and market conditions of low-budget commercial filmmaking. Understood as a genre, it could reasonably be defined as that which exhibits an exploitative textuality. Clover (1992) posits exploitation as the lower depths of horror. For her, referring to slasher and rape-revenge films "at the bottom of the horror heap" (Clover 1995: 21), exploitation seems to constitute a realm of more or less desublimated libidinal appetites, presenting us "in startlingly direct terms" with "a clearer picture of current sexual attitudes...than do the legitimate products of the better studios" (Clover 1995: 22-3). In this implied system of differences, exploitation horror is more 'explicit' than 'legitimate' horror; hence graphic exploitation films of the 1970s are often described as 'pornography'. Unlike Clover, Hardy and his contributors do not see exploitation as instantly

¹Severin DVDs 2008. Some of the ideological implications of Franco's cannibal films, particularly in relation to colonialist fantasy, are touched on in Syder (2009).

commendable, but they do share the widely accepted view that its “unspeakable fantasies” can offer a “direct conduit to the unconscious” (Hardy 1996: ix). This belief is close to the idea that horror cinema should be valued primarily as symptomatic of psycho-sexual processes.

Eric Schaefer’s history of the emergence and decline of early American exploitation cinema outlines a more circumscribed object of study than do many current approaches, presenting a case for separating the semi-illicit exploitation industry of the first decades of the Twentieth Century from variants in a more elastic, post-1950s field. For Schaefer, the field in its “classical” form had its own circuits of funding, exhibition and distribution, independence from the Production Code of the major studios and a proud tradition of ballyhoo marketing techniques, which taken together mark it out from the material commonly and more sweepingly referred to as exploitation cinema today. Schaefer points out that classical North American exploitation films had a unique textuality grounded in the techniques of the roadshow and burlesque. The daring displays they offered were often presented through pseudo ‘documentary’ modes of address that couched their sensational content in educative terms as cautionary tales or exposés of truths that needed to be told. The degree of titillation offered by the films lay partly in their contradiction between on the one hand claiming to be instructive and on the other promising shocking and daring spectacle. Though rarely delivering the levels of excitement suggested by their over-heated promotional matter, the films did often succeed in showing more explicit images of supposedly ‘taboo-busting’ (usually partial and fleeting) nudity, violence or ‘vice’ than their more censorship-bound major studio counterparts (Schaefer 1999: 28).

Of course the industrial and ideological contexts of the USA from 1919 to 1959 (Schaefer’s timescale) and of Europe in the 1960s and 1970s are hardly commensurable. Generalisations about exploitation cinema in its most elastic sense should be balanced by attention to the discursive contexts in which specific forms emerge. This is not to say, however, that low budget European (and in *Orlof*’s case part-Spanish) horror films share nothing ideologically or aesthetically with the objects of Schaefer’s historiography. Like much of the horror genre, *Orlof* enters the domain of exploitation on three intersecting counts, each of which becomes much more pronounced in Franco’s later work.

First, it betrays a modest budget, particularly in its cheap-looking sets and its use of repeated shot set-ups. Second, it quite brazenly cashes in on contemporary genre trends, most obviously in its use of *Eyes without a Face* as a source. And third, it shows a predilection for bizarre or grotesque spectacle, laying its exploitation cards on the operating table during its central surgery scene since, as Pam Cook puts it, “in order to attract/exploit their audience, exploitation films

contain a high degree of sensationalised sex and /or violence” (Cook 1985: 368).¹ *Orlof*’s ‘gimmick’ is two-fold. It takes advantage of the sensationalist topic of plastic surgery, and it capitalises on the post-war drift within the genre outside Spain towards increasingly ‘sadistic’ horror, as evidenced by foreign products like the British *Horrors of the Black Museum* (Arthur Crabtree, 1959), the Italian *The Mask of Satan* (Mario Bava, 1960) and the North American *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960). Hardy suggests that *Orlof*’s “peculiarly Hispanic” mixture of eroticism and sadism places it within “traditions of Mexican horror and science fiction films” of the 1950s (Hardy 1996: 148). Franco’s possible links to Latin American cinema are a subject for further research, but *Orlof* may have been influenced by the predilection for gruesome surgical imagery in Mexican medical science fiction films like *The Revived Monster* (*El monstruo resucitado*, Chano Urueta, 1953). Carlos Clarens, hinting at a class discourse rarely acknowledged in the field, notes that Mexican horror films were “noticed in European circles”, where they appealed “either to very plebeian audiences which relish their frenzied pace and top-heavy ramifications or to connoisseurs” who relish their “vigour and conviction” (Clarens: 194-195).²

One handbill for *Orlof*, promoting its showing at the Victoria Cinema in Madrid in 1962, leaves no doubt about its main selling points, but unlike the film itself leaves the identity of the killer ambiguous (see fig. 1:3):

A mystery that shocked the world in the year 1912! Five women vanishing in bizarre circumstances. Amid scenes of terror, fear and suspense, you will meet Doctor Orlof, a surgeon... (and) young beauties, targets of the criminal schemes of the murderer.³

Created by the mad doctor through some surgery on the brain of a convicted murderer, the robotic Morpho somehow renders “young beauties” unconscious by biting their neck. As the front of the handbill suggests (fig. 1:2), certain shots of the cloaked minion are inspired by archetypal vampire imagery, and may be directly informed by Terence Fisher’s shooting of Christopher Lee in *Dracula* (1957). But where the Hammer film discreetly, though no less suggestively, fades to black early in each vamping scene, Franco builds on Fisher’s once-shockingly erotic physicality by briefly showing Morpho suspending women on chains and offering a fleeting close-up of him/it fondling their breasts.⁴ While arguing against simply

¹ Several seconds of this scene have been cut from one recent British DVD of the film (Arrow 2002) but are intact on the American DVD release (Image 2000).

² Clarens’ undeveloped reference to classed taste distinctions problematically overstates the difference between “plebeians” and “connoisseurs”, but it also anticipates more recent Bourdieu-influenced analyses of horror fandom and ‘cult’ viewing practices.

³ My translation.

⁴ These shots are not present in the UK DVD release of *Orlof* on the Arrow label (2002).

equating exploitation and pornography, Linda Williams has drawn on Carol Clover to claim that “low-budget exploitation violence and horror” shares pornography’s preoccupation with the “opened body”, and that it displaces porn’s drive towards visibility (particularly visual evidence of pleasure) on to images of violence and pain (Williams 1990: 191-192).

Franco’s gothic films of the period intermittently approach their genre tropes through an exploitation mode of visibility. By the time *Orlof’s* third victim, Irma Gold (Mara Laso), lies unconscious under Dr. Orlof’s scalpel, viewers have been primed to anticipate the spectacle of facial tissue being removed: earlier dialogue about Orlof’s daughter’s injuries – her face was burned when a lab experiment went wrong - and medium close-ups of Orlof fetishistically stroking female cheeks have certainly indicated as much. Viewers familiar with Franju’s film have extra reason to expect it, especially if they recall the camera set-up in *Eyes’* infamous facial heterograft scene: Franco’s shot has marked similarities. Orlof, however, slices into Irma’s right breast. Although this use of the scalpel seems unexpected for a face-reconstruction, a closer approximation of Franju’s famous operation scene may have been too obvious a steal, while the special effects may in any case have been too expensive: Franco’s replacement of face with breast is a cost-effective way of competing with Franju.

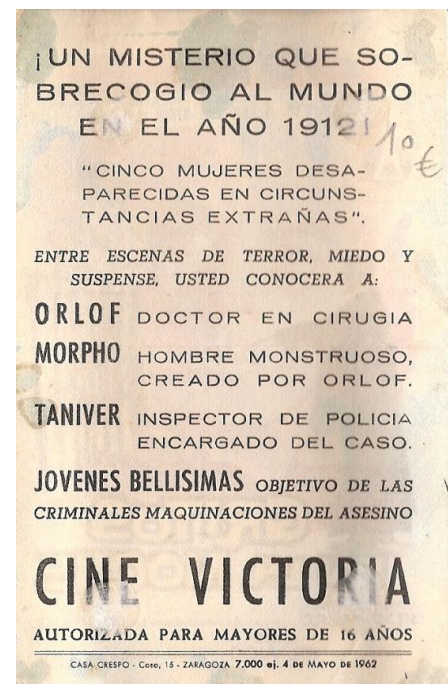
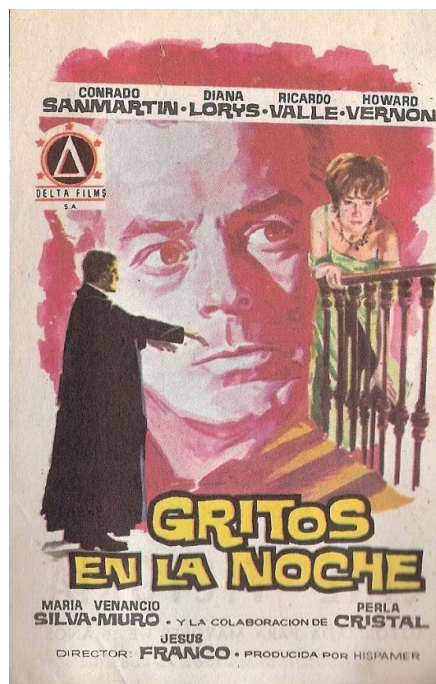


Fig. 1.2, fig. 1.3: Handbill for *The Awful Dr Orlof*, front and back

While this shift to more conspicuously exploitative visibility appears to blunt the poetic and political implications of Franju’s face transplant theme (see Ince 2005:100-107; Hawkins 2000: 65-85; Durnat 1967: 78-85), Franco’s and Orlof’s motivations seem more overtly libidinal, arguably pre-oedipal in their propensities, and more sadistic than those of Franju’s Dr.

Genessier (Pierre Brasseur). (The classed nature of the horror activity is such that the seemingly genteel and urbane surgeon, who after all owns a castle, commands the lumpen Morpho to carry out his wicked schemes, somehow communicating his requirements through the aristocratic medium of tapping a cane; while diabolical surgery is a delicate act of science, abducting women and chaining them up is clearly beneath him). Given that face tissue transplants had seemed until this point in the film to be the name of the game, it is reasonable to level a charge of 'gratuitousness' at Franco. Tohill and Tombs are impressed by the "brazenly shocking" nature of the scene's "sexual element" (1995: 77), and the 'shock' lies in the overtly sexualised nature of Orloff's deeds rather than the structural 'obscenity' of the shot: where Franju's camera fixes unflinchingly on the heterograft, Franco's cuts quickly away, so that Franju's can be seen as the more graphic, but less 'sensationalist', of the two. Despite its brevity, Franco's scene therefore seems excessive, and this underlines the excessiveness of Orloff's desires (they are surplus to both his declared scientific interests and his desire to restore Melissa's face), while delivering what Williams (1990) might call the exploitation 'money shot'. Perhaps this is one reason why the words 'poetic' and 'lyrical' are used rather more rarely in Franco's case than in Franju's, and why Franju's is much less often thought of as an exploitation film. Another reason is that the supposedly subversive *Orloff* spends a far greater portion of its running time on the pulp fiction niceties of police investigation, comic relief, and relationship subplots; Franju's film encourages a degree of 'art film' legitimisation by largely dispensing with such matter.

In much the same way as the film makes reiterative use of some locations, it presents two very similarly shot and edited scenes of Orloff and Morpho snatching their women victims before finally rewarding us, about two thirds of the way through the running time, with something approaching a "gruesome" mix of "sadism and surgery" (Hardy 1996: xiii). The second murder scene is a fleshed out repetition of the first. Having established the lineaments of the film's murder-and-detection narrative, Franco now fills in some of the gaps presented in the opening sequence. In a scene with perverse echoes of the courtship of Tanner and Bronsky, Dr. Orloff romances Dani, a cabaret singer, in a theatre box. The act of desirous looking is central to the scene. The first full shot of Orloff finds him half concealed in shadow, watching Dani through opera glasses as she performs on stage. When Dani later asks him "why do you stare at me so?" he replies "I'm fascinated by your skin...so soft, so fresh, so very smooth" and bemoans the fact that her youth will wane. As a suave gothic monster, Orloff's fetishism is grounded in morbidity: though he chases his victim's youth, he is really obsessed with decay and mutilation.



Fig. 1.4: The Attack on Dani

As inebriated as the film's first victim, Dani enters a carriage with Orlof - again the viewer recalls the first shot of Wanda and Tanner in their carriage - and is driven to an opulent but empty mansion. The doctor locks her in and abandons her to her fate. Locating her sonically under Orlof's remote control, Morpho clumsily follows Dani around the house in shots dominated by composition-in-depth and extreme perspectives which make the most of the mansion's deserted hallways and ballrooms (see fig. 1.4.). Again like the first victim, Dani surveys herself in a full-length mirror. Following a struggle that is more protracted than that at the film's beginning, Morpho again carries his prey towards, and beneath, the camera. Orlof and Morpho put the corpse in a coffin, then put the coffin in a boat which they row across a moonlit lake to Orlof's castle. As the boat arrives on shore and they disembark with their morbid cargo, Franco's tilted, off-centre camera angles transform the linear, horizontal forms of the boat and the stepped bank into strong diagonals (see fig. 1.5), this distortion of perspective functioning as a familiar sign of disorientation. Four horror motifs are then telegraphically presented in quick-fire succession - castle, coffin, black cat, owl - before Morpho carries Dani into the castle and onto an operating table. For the second time we are provided with close-up shots of blood on Dani's chest, a detail withheld in the inaugural murder. Thus the second killing contains more narrative information, but also begins to answer the 'tease' of the first: it allows more shots of blood, and Morpho's vampire-like attack is extended.



Fig. 1.5: Orlof and Morpho arrive ashore

The abduction of Irma takes place when the nightclub is abandoned, except for a piano player whom Morpho quickly and non-spectacularly kills. In shots reminiscent of Dani in the deserted mansion, Irma finds herself alone with his corpse. Orlof suddenly appears from behind a curtain on stage, he and Morpho approach Irma and take her away. Once again the film cuts to Orlof's castle and the telegraphic shots of the cat and the owl. A close-up of Irma with blood on her head cuts suddenly to an overhead shot of her on the operating table with her body wrapped in sheets: Orlof slowly removes the sheet to reveal Irma's naked breasts, to which Orlof promptly applies his scalpel (this scene is trimmed in the currently available British DVD). Notably shorter than the celebrated shot of face surgery in *Eyes Without a Face*, this scene cuts to Morpho, a repeat shot of the castle, and then back Morpho for the climax of the scene as he hauls Irma's corpse upstairs and suspends her on chains (some versions of the film at this point include a brief close-up of the creature handling Irma's breasts).

Partly out of an attempt to create suspense as well as an uncanny feeling of *déjà vu*, this repetitive 'mounting' structure embodies a striptease-like process of hinting, withholding and finally revealing. In doing so it serves exploitation cinema's mode of promise, curiosity and display (Schaefer 1999: 93). The fourth and final abduction, involving Wanda, aims at suspense by containing many visual echoes of (and music cues heard in) the second, except that a nude climax is replaced by a dramatic one, as the doughty Inspector Tanner arrives in time to save the day in the kind of ludicrously throwaway denouement that *Franju* is careful to avoid. *Orlof* is, then, no shot-for-shot remake of *Eyes without a Face*, but the superiority of one film over the

other is a moot point. Franco's manoeuvres in raising the game or lowering the tone show how gothic themes of exacerbated desire lend themselves to exploitation as a mode of seeing; but rather than being merely a faithful if inferior cover version of a better original, *Orlof* resourcefully assembles its references through a lively negotiation of the genre.

The kind of titillation offered by *Orlof* – like the use of sexual imagery in publicity materials – is no more unique to exploitation than is the demand to provide spectacle which might “fascinate the eye ... [or provoke] an immediate, affective response in the spectator” (Schaefer 1999: 76). What does perhaps distinguish exploitation films, and identify Franco's films as part of the exploitation field, is the degree to which this imperative is focused on ‘forbidden’ subject matter and can “impede or even obscure narrative” (Schaefer: 1999: 28). Schaefer points out that “padding”, or the incorporation of extra material in order to extend a film's running time, is another financially-led production strategy common to exploitation cinema. Classical exploitation films were often stretched to feature length by being padded out with “amateurish production numbers”, dance performances, stripteases or wrestling matches (Schaefer 1999: 75).¹ Franco can be said to have made a specialism of it. But ‘padding’ in this sense is by no means unique to exploitation cinema, the occasional song and/or dance number being an added attraction/ distraction in innumerable ‘mainstream’ features. Identifying a scene as padding – not unlike deciding that a particular shot is ‘gratuitous’ – therefore depends on how one identifies the essence of a film and its genre. Evidently the musical performance sequences in burlesque films or beach party musicals cannot be regarded as mere filler. When exploitation films include both horror and song and dance numbers, we might expect it to be apparent which are of the genre essence and which are not. In many of Franco's films, both sex and horror act as attractions since “spectacle can be beautiful or hideous” and can stir in the spectator “loathing or lust, anxiety or amazement” (Schaefer 199: 76).²

As examples of exploitation cinema, the textuality of most of Franco's films – or at least the moments in which his visual style is most distinctive – is structured around female bodily display. The most common convention for this display is the cabaret number/nightclub performance and/or striptease. From *Orlof* on, a great many of Franco's films include a cabaret or nightclub scene, usually featuring one or more of the central female characters – often they

¹The role of wrestling as ‘spectacle’ in Mexican exploitation cinema is discussed in Syder and Tierney (2005).

² One example outside of Schaefer's scope is the horror-musical *The Incredibly Strange People Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-up Zombies* (Ray Dennis Steckler, 1964) and its interminable on-stage dance routines. Another is the drive-in monster musical, *The Horror of Party Beach* (Del Tenney, 1964). In this quite gruesome interpretation of the beach party film, horror and music/dance sequences share similar amounts of screen time. In many of Franco's films, such as *Vampyros Lesbos* and *Demoniac*, the two types of body genre ‘number’ are similarly juxtaposed and are occasionally equated.

moonlight in the ‘transgressive’ role of strippers or prostitutes - performing an erotic routine.¹ This device, familiar in ‘mainstream’ as much as ‘exploitation’ representations of the criminal underworld, naturally provides a degree of motivation for scenes of disrobing. The isolated nature of the ‘numbers’ also in many cases allows them, like gore close-ups, to be excised with ease for different markets with no damage to continuity, while providing footage for trailers and other publicity materials. In some films, such as the otherwise rather subdued *Dr Jeckyll’s Mistresses*, on-stage strip sequences resemble ‘burlesque’ and ‘nude’ films, or the production numbers in North American vice racket exposés, in that they are flatly shot with one static camera. But such sequences are more often where Franco pulls out the stops, with framing more mobile even than that used for moments of sex and/or violence. Though one might hesitate to describe the more agitated camera-work in these scenes as examples of phallic specularity, their erotic intent certainly rouses Franco’s camera out of the stupor that often blights more workaday scenes.² In this respect the transgression of the everyday, as encoded in the motifs of the stripper and the ‘sleazy’ nightclub, is materialised in the film’s stylistic properties.

Schaefer observes that the shooting and assemblage of classical exploitation films was determined by a market-led requirement to provide lurid ‘attractions’, meaning that “mode of production and style were...mutually determining” (Schaefer 1999: 95). When a film’s primary purpose is to attract custom through proffering such ‘numbers’ it is probably truer to say that narrative exposition pads out the “good stuff” (Tohill and Tombs 1995: 107). By definition decidedly unspectacular, such passages may be as determined by prosaic contingency as may song and dance performances. As the actor Howard Vernon has described it:

Franco would frequently realize on the last day of shooting that the film was too short, and so he would shoot ‘fillers’ of guys driving down lonely streets for no special reason, or guys walking down a street for ten minutes just to stretch the film to 80 minutes. (In Balbo et al 1993: 201-2).

Such tactics betray the impact of economic factors on production methods while marking the films’ textuality. Though often inducing boredom or the sense of “failure” treasured by Sconce’s paracinemaniacs, even the kind of time-filling *longeurs* described by Vernon may be said to sometimes have particular effects; exploitation cinema appears to contain stretches of banality almost as a structural necessity. In common with many crime and horror features, *Orlof’s* expressionist abduction/murder sequences are intercut with comparatively flat and lifeless dialogue scenes of police procedure. Being shot in high key lighting and much less

¹ See Appendix: Table of Concordances.

² Franco’s most energetically filmed and dynamically edited on-stage musical interludes can be found in *Rifiñi en la ciudad*, *Vampyros Lesbos*, and *The Diabolical Dr. Z*. Films like *Succubus* and *Demoniac* replace dance numbers with sadomasochistic performances.

rapidly edited than the moments coded as spectacle, these are evidently meant to convey ‘ordinariness’ through contrast with the extraordinariness of both the horror and musical performance scenes; it is against the flatness of the everyday that the abduction/murders are received as eruptive.

In a dramatisation of fantasy as a transgression of the everyday, the tonal contrasts between these scenes implies that normality – or its agent, the law – is unrelentingly dull. Tedious passages of exposition, frequently set in offices, may be said to suspend, delay and space out – and thereby provoke desire for – the spectacle that exploitation promises. That spectacular ‘description’ in narrative cinema exceeds, freezes, or disrupts narrative flow, and is frequently coded as ‘feminine’, has been much commented upon (Mulvey 1975; Thompson 1999; Fischer 1992; Schaefer 1999). This principle is amply evidenced in many of Franco’s cabaret/nightclub sequences, which I discuss in a little more detail in chapter 3. But something like the reverse also happens here: punctuating spectacle with tedium can be seen as intrinsic to narrative cinema’s organisation of looking and showing.

Franco’s characteristic themes and imagery mean that most of the ‘horrorotica’ films he made after *Orlof* can be seen in terms of Linda Williams’ influential notion of “body genres”. Williams discusses how “different categories of excess” are articulated in relation to the gendered “structures of fantasy” offered by the seemingly diverse genres of horror, pornography and melodrama (Williams, 1996: 701). Williams proposes that these body genres have more in common than at first appears to be the case. Each has low cultural status because it trades on spectacles that exceed linear narrative structure, and because its focus on extreme states and sensational “effects on the bodies of spectators” is surplus to the requirements of disinterested aesthetic contemplation (Williams, 1996: 702). Williams also suggests that forms of “ecstasy” and “rapture”, usually focused on the female body, are central to these genres. Echoing Roland Barthes’ conception of *jouissance* and Georges Bataille’s approach to excess and expenditure as eclipses of the socially useful ‘productive’ self, these genres put the body – in the audience and onscreen – “beside itself” (Williams, 1996: 703). Joan Hawkins uses Williams’ insights to argue that Franco’s participation in body genres is the source of his films’ “transgressive” potential. For Hawkins, the “excess” and “affect” of Franco and others’ body genre films share common ground with “subversive” avant-garde treatments of bodily extremity, in an overlap which problematises cultural hierarchies (Hawkins 2000: 4-5), at least in as much as ‘low’ horror has affinities with aspects of the avant-garde.

Nation and contestation

As gothic exploitation films aiming to maximise profit through minimum expense, films like *Orlof* draw from an expanding repertoire of tropes in international cinema for presenting sensational bodily display and visualising the ‘perverse’. Strategies for showing and intimating sex and female flesh structure the majority of exploitation bandwagons upon which Franco has jumped, including ‘women in prison’ films, lesbian vampire films, sadomasochistic chic, ‘serious’ adult psychodramas, and zombie and cannibal cycles. As Franco’s ‘horrotica’ from *Orlof* on suggests, the genre codes of gothic horror appeal to, and to are to some extent coincident with, exploitation cinema because they involve (once) forbidden imagery and ‘primal scenes’ of seduction, sexual violence, voracious desire and (more or less implicit) incest, necrophilia and other deviant acts. Hence gothic texts are often seen as enacting the return of the repressed, offering a heady mix “of unconscious desire, a release of repressed energies and antisocial fantasies” (Botting 1996: 9). By making a spectacle of nefarious deeds, an attraction of that which it purports to condemn as evil or monstrous, the genre appears to blur “definitions of reason and morality” (Botting: 6).

Notions of transgression and subversion are therefore often central to the conferring of so-called cult status upon exploitation horror films, or to a taste community’s self-designation as a cult. The very idea of a cult implies something marginal, or outside the bounds of normality or acceptability. As J. P Telotte puts it, “(w)hat the film cultist embraces is a form that, in its very difference, transgresses, violates our sense of the reasonable. It crosses the boundaries of time, custom, form, and – many might add – good taste” (Telotte 1991: 6). Telotte’s view of the cult film as by definition a transgressor of cultural norms is perhaps informed by the (pre-VHS, pre-internet) 1970s phenomenon of the Midnight Movie, a key moment in the construction of the cult film myth (Hoberman and Rosenbaum 1993; Chibnall 1997), and a point at which film cults might be seen fairly straightforwardly as practices of “trash aesthetics in the service of subcultural opposition”¹ (Smith 2004: 255), pitching “a guerrilla band of cult viewers (against) an elite cadre of would-be taste makers” (Sconce 1995: 372). Cult exploitation discourse tends to assume that transgression is a timeless and inherently laudable value.

¹ Although the problem is beyond my immediate scope, it is worth remarking that there is some ambiguity over the extent to which ‘cult’ formations represents subcultural practices in their own right, or whether they constitute aspects of wider subcultural identity. The queer readings of the vampire film touched on in chapter 3 might be said to constitute a specific “subcultural opposition”; 1960s camp and university-educated Midnight Movie audiences in 1970s New York may similarly have particular links to ‘counter culture’. On the other hand, subcultures by definition gather round shared, adored texts: those texts can therefore be described as ‘cult’ objects. This suggests that ‘cult’ films are perhaps not as exceptional as is sometimes proposed.

But exploitation horror is no more essentially transgressive than it is self-evidently reactionary. Greater receptiveness to relationships between films, their modes of production and the discursive contexts in which they circulate can reveal points of resistance - as well as reaction - more complex and ambivalent than paeans to the general subversiveness of the field permit. Hence the nationally specific implications of the 'transgressive' figures and activities in Franco's films may be both shaped by and formed in opposition to industrial conditions (the Spanish film industry), ideological forces (e.g. censorship and debates around national cinema) and specific cultural traditions. Hawkins argues that Franco "nationalizes" genre by filtering it through uniquely "Spanish iconography" (Hawkins 2000: 93), and many of Franco's films certainly move the Northern gothic South. A brief consideration of *Orlof* in relation to these contexts illuminates both the usefulness and the limitations of reading the genre appropriations of exploitation cinema through a 'national' framework.

Although *Orlof* was Franco's second international co-production following the musical *Vampiras* 1930¹ it is also often cited as the first Spanish horror film. Aguilar remarks that before Franco's intervention in the field, "the fantastique had only made sporadic appearances in the world of Spanish cinema" (Aguilar 1999:39). Franco recalls that his Spanish producer, Sergio Newman, became "a little nervous" about the prospect of making *Orlof* "because making a terror movie in Spain, in 1961, sounded like a Surrealist provocation" (in Aguilar 1999: 154). As early as 1964, Luis Gasca, in an overview of "twenty years of Spanish fantastic cinema" for the Parisian periodical *Midi-Minuit Fantastique*, observed that Franco was Spain's sole "specialist terror filmmaker", the nearest example before him being "a parody of Frankenstein" in a short called *Una de miedo* (García Maroto, 1935) (Gasca, 1964: 17).² Other critics have pointed to *The Tower of the Seven Hunchbacks* (*La torre de los siete jorobados*, Edgar Neville, 1943) as another early instance (Lipinski 2007: 8).³ In any event *Orlof*'s competence in the codes of pulp gothic cinema is considerably removed from the dominant popular Spanish cinema of the period. The *Midi-Minuit* critic Michel Caen was surprised to find that such an "aggressively erotic" film should be produced by "a country where *Joselito* is commonplace" (Caen, 1963: 61).⁴ Putting aside the value judgements implied in Caen's use of the child-star Joselito Jimenez, the 'boy with the golden voice', as an emblem of regressive Spanish popular cinema it is clear that *Orlof* helped to lay the foundations for the Spanish horror boom of the

¹ Both films were French/Spanish co-productions.

² My translation.

³ Based on a Spanish novel by Emilio Carrere, Neville's film was set in 19th century Madrid and, like *Orlof*, recalled the visual style of Universal Studios horror films; the film features many genre archetypes including old dark houses, menacing hunchbacks, ghosts, underground societies and hypnotism and murder. Macabre or frightening elements were reportedly softened by comedy (Jones 2005: 245).

⁴ My translation.

late 1960s and early 1970s, even though Franco tends to appear rather peripheral to the boom itself.¹

Franco's relationship to the boom is tenuous and difficult to establish. While *Orlof* was exhibited in Spain it appears to have had little impact or influence there: the boom is generally regarded as having begun some time later, with *Mark of the Wolfman* (*La marca del hombre loco*, Enrique López Eguiluz, 1968), *La Residencia* (*The Finishing School*, Narciso Ibáñez Serrador, 1969), and *The Werewolf's Shadow* (*La noche de Walpurgis*, León Klimovsky, 1970) (Lázaro-Reboll 2004: 153; Willis 2003: 75). As John Hopewell points out with some dismay, "only a few forms of film-life survived and festered" in the dire economic climate of the period, Spanish horror being "able to undercut Hammer horror with cheap *tremendismo* (graphic violence) satiated by sado-masochism and myth grafts" (Hopewell 1986: 80). A peripapetic exploiteer dividing his time between France, Spain, Germany and Portugal and working with a variety of European low budget production companies, Franco seems to have remained marginal to the 'mainstream' of the boom; he made a number of horror films there between 1970 and 1974, interspersed with a large amount of French and German (often gothicised) erotica and occasional crime films, but these appear notably lower in budget than Ibáñez Serrador's and even Klimovsky's films.

Drawing on international sources was both necessary and financially astute. Hawkins notes, perhaps with some exaggeration, that "Spain didn't have the same literary tradition of horror that England, Germany, the United States and even France had", and Franco therefore looked overseas for inspiration (Hawkins 2000: 93). Indeed, a British horror film seems to have served as the immediate catalyst for *Orlof*. The censor having turned down Franco's original idea for a tale of medical terror (Franco has not elaborated on what this idea consisted of), a viewing of *Brides of Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1960) in France convinced Franco and his Spanish producer Serge Newman to couch his tale of medical terror in apparently apolitical foreign genre terms (Aguilar 1999: 154, Tohill and Tombs 1995: 80).

If the particular mixture of influences and references in Franco's films of the period make them stylistically distinct from, say, their more stolid British contemporaries, the differences may be understood via national artistic traditions as much as directorial peculiarities. Pavlović, Tohill

¹ Joselito, one of several Spanish child stars of the 1950s and 1960s, was associated with sentimental rural musicals that made the most of his angelic looks and voice. The most well known Joselito film is *El pequeño ruiseñor* (*The Little Nightingale*, Antonio del Amo, 1957). Films of its kind are often dismissed as *españoladas* offering homely Spanish stereotypes and reactionary nostalgia: they are the 'other' against which the New Spanish Cinema of the 1960s overtly reacted. Jess Franco's apparent appreciation of popular culture certainly did not stretch this far, his declared love of North American genre films and their auteurs arguably being bound up with revulsion towards *españoladas* and 'folkloric' films.

and Tombs and Mesnildot recognise the influence on Franco of cultural traditions while seeing these as quintessential to the unique personality of the exploitation auteur. Since *Orlof* effectively “brought about the birth of Spanish horror” (Aguilar 1999:39), national origins are sought for it outside of genre cinema: the dark comic theatrical tradition of *esperpento*, the paintings of Goya and Velasquez, and Spanish surrealism have all been invoked as influences on Franco’s ‘excessive’ and ‘perverse’ approaches to the body. Comparing his vision to what they call “outsiders and wild men” of Spanish cinema like Buñuel and Almodóvar, Tohill and Tombs place Franco at the juncture of a European, surrealism-informed tradition of erotic horror and a supposedly Spanish tendency to the more “visceral” and “grotesque” (Tohill and Tombs 1995: 93). Hawkins likewise condenses national character and transgressivity by aligning Franco with these “bad boys of Spanish cinema” (Hawkins 2000: 91).

In an essay arguing for the compatibility of psychoanalytic and socio-historical analyses of horror Steven Jay Schneider proposes that “although the metaphorical nature of horror film monsters is psychologically *necessary*, their surface heterogeneity is historically and culturally *contingent*” (Schneider 2000:169). Without entering a debate about the extent to which psychoanalytic models can account for cultural meanings, we can take from Schneider the possibility that horror’s monsters come in historically distinctive and situated guises and embody specific cultural anxieties. As Halberstam puts it, “the monster is a remarkably mobile, permeable, and infinitely interpretable body” (Halberstam 1995: 21), but it is also “historically conditioned rather than a psychological universal” (Halberstam 1995: 6). Despite Hopewell’s dismissal of low budget “myth grafts” (Hopewell 1986: 80), the appeal of international gothic conventions is that they are adaptable to different contexts and ripe for reinscription. Hence Hawkins argues that Franco’s “transgressive, revolutionary, and often illegal” representations of sex and violence have to be read against the backdrop of fascist Spain (Hawkins 2000: 91), and Pavlović (2004; 2003) agrees that Franco’s cinematic bodies oppose the disciplined and disciplinary body idealised within fascist discourse. However, to deduce from these claims that exploitation cinema is, as a matter of course, an agent of liberty in the face of oppression, or that Jess Franco fought a one-man war against censorship is to distort *Orlof*’s complex relationships to the ideological tensions of the period.

Conditions for a degree of oppositionality were already in place by the time Franco embarked on his film-making career. A dissenting intellectual milieu in 1950s Spain had been created through overlapping political, economic and cultural factors; these included the country’s gradual transition to a market economy, the 1953 Concordat with the Vatican¹, and a shift from

¹An example of the close connections between the post-civil war (1936-1939) Spanish State and Catholicism, the Concordat with the Vatican enabled the dictator to nominate bishops for Spanish dioceses (Lannon 1995: 277-278).

isolationist tendencies towards greater diplomatic and economic links to the international community, as evidenced in Spain's return to the United Nations (Jordan 1995: 245). These and other factors amounted to a relative, limited liberalisation of social, economic and cultural spheres sometimes known as the first period of *apertura* (Jordan 1995: 247, Triana-Toribio 2003: 71). While censorship remained strict, a degree of dissidence was by the late 1950s tolerated in 'minority interest' poetry and social realist novels. Mass-produced romances, adventures, newspapers and, of course, political tracts were much more stringently controlled (Labanyi 1995: 207).¹

By the beginning of the 1960s Spain's 'modernisation' – its urbanisation and industrialisation – had begun to involve the rise of consumerism, pop/ youth culture and "cultural massification" through which "demands for freedom of expression could be voiced" (Graham and Labanyi 1995: 257-8). At the same time limited liberalisation also resulted in the rise of independent film clubs showing foreign arthouse films, these circumstances presumably adding to Franco's pool of influences and resources (Tohill and Tombs, 1995: 63). Meanwhile, whereas Spanish-set American films like *The Barefoot Contessa* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz 1954) had in the past been filmed in Italy, the *aperturista* mood of early to mid-1960s coincided with an increase in the influx of foreign film professionals into the Spanish film industry: examples include Spanish-American and Spanish-British co-productions like *El Cid* (Anthony Mann, 1961), *Doctor Zhivago* (David Lean, 1965) and, importantly for the Jess Franco myth, *Chimes at Midnight* (Orson Welles, 1965), upon which he worked briefly as assistant director.² Against this backdrop, members of the Spanish Communist Party began, albeit covertly, to work in Spanish universities. Through university teaching posts and publications like the short-lived left-wing, avant-gardist film journal *Objetivo* (1953-55), this segment of the "dissident intelligentsia" (Jordan, 1995: 245) called upon General Franco's government to allow the more challenging kind of cinema seen in the arthouses of France and Italy, and brought oppositional aims to official cultural events such as the famed four-day Film Congress at the University of Salamanca in 1955 (Jordan 1995: 248). Held at what Jess Franco has called "a strange university...dominated by communists" (Franco 2004:271), and attended by film-makers such as Marco Ferrari, Carlos Saura, José Luis Borau, Vicente Aranda and Franco himself (Stone 2002 47; Franco 2004: 271), the Congress was a platform for Spanish filmmakers to criticise the state's overbearing influence on cinema, call for more transparent censorship guidelines, and

¹ That a number of Italian neorealist films were shown in 1951 during the Week of Italian Cinema at the Italian Institute of Culture demonstrates that a certain level of 'criticality' could be tolerated by the state, if only as part of its creation of a veneer of liberalisation.

² Franco's brief association with Orson Welles is presented as a key event by Hawkins (2000), Tohill and Tombs (1995), Aguilar (1999), and Franco (2004) and many others. (Franco is also fond of recalling that he worked as camera assistant on parts of *Solomon and Sheba* (King Vidor, 1959) and *55 Days at Peking* (Nicholas Ray, 1963).

make some proposals for an adventurous, non-insular national cinema. The event culminated in an oft-cited paper in which the film-maker Juan Antonio Bardem, fuelled by the success of his neorealism-influenced melodrama *Death of a Cyclist* (*Muerte de un ciclista*, 1955) at the Cannes film festival, denounced Spanish cinema of the previous sixty years as “politically ineffective, socially false, intellectually worthless, aesthetically non-existent, and industrially crippled” (Stone 2002: 47). The modernising impulses of the brief first period of *apertura*, bound up as it was with openness to foreign markets and a comparatively ‘relaxed’ approach to censorship, also enabled slightly ‘racy’ foreign films (such as Italian comedies) to be released with few or no cuts. In 1960, 1,000 intellectuals petitioned Manuel Fraga Iribarne, the Minister of Information and Tourism, to relax censorship (Labanyi, 1995: 211). In 1962, too late for *Orlof*’s Spanish release in May of that year, Fraga re-employed the slightly more reformist José María García Escudero as head of film censorship. It is indicative of the potential outrageousness of *Orlof* that, under Escudero’s regime, the first Spanish film to show a woman in a bikini was released that year (Labanyi 1995: 211). Escudero obtained clarification of censorship rules as called for by Salamanca and *Objetivo*. The strict yet open-to-interpretation guidelines, published in February 1963, prohibited films from “justifying” everything from suicide, mercy killing, “revenge and duelling”, divorce, adultery, “illicit sexual relations”, prostitution and anything else “harmful to the institution of matriarchy and the family”, to images and scenes which “may provoke base passions in the average spectator” (anon 1977a: 48). It can be safely assumed that the conditions of ‘liberalisation’ under which *Orlof* was made two years earlier were equally, if not more, draconian.

Jess Franco’s presence at the conference and resistance to the regime’s control over filmmaking is not in itself indicative of any particular political persuasion: Kinder points out that many participants, including Escudero, had “right-wing backgrounds” (Kinder 1993:29). Franco himself recalls that he spent much of his time at the conference trying to avoid Marxists.¹ At least two of Franco’s earliest films, the musicals *La Reina del Tabarín* (1960) and *Vampiresas 1930* (1961) had been distributed and part-produced by Cifesa.² Two of Franco’s earliest assignments in film were as writer on *Miedo* (1956) and assistant cameraman on *Viaje de novios* (1956), the first films made in Spain by the Argentine León Klimovsky, a director whose work has been read as largely reactionary (Willis 2009).³ Clearly, political leanings cannot be

¹ Correspondence with the author.

² *La Reina del Tabarin* involves a rags-to-riches story along the lines of the American musical. *Vampiresas 1930* was a zany comic musical. Most famous for “star-studded historical epics” which implicitly promoted Spanish nationalism through mythic fictions of the country’s glorious past, the Valencian studio Cifesa was until its demise in 1956 the centre of Spanish film production (Mira 2004: 60-61). For more on the studio and its output see Evans (1995).

³ Willis argues that many of Klimovsky’s Spanish films offer a reactionary worldview in accord with National-Catholic ideology; this is most apparent in the “repeated use of priests or

inferred from acquaintances alone. However, more of Franco's professional and social connections during this "first phase of the New Spanish Cinema" (Kinder 1993: 18) suggest exposure to debates about critique or opposition within the limitations imposed by censorship. Before specialising in horror, Franco had worked as assistant director (and one of the soundtrack composers) on a number of prestigious films including Juan Antonio Bardem's *Cómicos* (1954) (Pavlović: 108) and on *Death of a Cyclist* (*Muerte de un ciclista*, 1955). In 1959, Luis García Berlanga, renowned for his satire *Welcome, Mister Marshall!* (*¡Bienvenido Mister Marshall!* 1952) acted as associate producer for Franco's comic fantasy *We are 18 Years Old* (*Tenemos 18 años*, 1959). As practitioners of a cinema of disguised or allegorical dissent, Bardem and Berlanga may have influenced some of the more subversive elements within Franco's films. It seems likely that they, despite his proclamation of no interest in politics, had some bearing on the formation of his 'sensitivity'. In 1964, Franco had a major on-screen role as the childlike Venancio Vidal in *El extraño viaje* (*Strange Journey*), Fernando Fernán Gómez's now-acclaimed satirical comedy thriller set in a repressive Spanish village populated by dysfunctional families. Fernán Gómez describes this generically unstable film as "a horror story between country bumkins" (in Marsh 2006: 186); Steven Marsh sees it as a "queering" of the mythological Spanish village (*pueblo*) and its function as "utopian center of the Spanish national discourse" (Marsh 2006: 166).

Possibly influenced by the connections with Bardem and Berlanga, traces of camouflaged critique are visible in a number of Franco's films of the first, faltering *apertura* period. *Rififi en la ciudad* (1963) thinly veils elements of satire on authoritarian rule by setting its story of an investigation into the murder of a popular but corrupt politician, Maurice Leprince (Jean Servais) in a South American state. The opening shots of a street lined with election posters for the politician have a clear dictatorial resonance (some of the posters include the slogan "Leprince es justicia": "Leprince is justice") (see fig.1.6). *Lucky the Inscrutable* (1967) uses a similar geographical displacement in a short sequence set on a fictional South American island.¹ In a parody of a travelogue, we are told via voiceover that the island was first discovered by Spanish conquistadors and that its "official language is Spanish". Using an ironic juxtaposition of authoritative voiceover and image in the manner of *Welcome, Mister Marshall!*, the

religious figures in key roles" as heroes or representatives of "absolute goodness" (Willis 2009: 138-9). I discuss Franco's approach to clerical figures in chapter 4.

¹ *Lucky the Inscrutable* (1967) is a camp, spoofy spy/superhero caper pastiche, occupying similar territory as the 'Matt Helm' films, the 'Flint' series and *Danger: Diabolik* (Mario Bava, 1968). Several scenes also reflect the 1960s penchant for comic strip aesthetics, incorporating on-screen speech-bubbles. The film includes many 'Godardian' devices, such as Lucky's direct address to camera; at one point Lucky (Ray Danton) says to an interlocutor, "I've got a contract for 5 more adventures: you can't cut me off like that that", a reference to the popular series/franchises of the day.

monologue praises the island's "democratic government", "industrious population" (over a man playing guitar on a verandah) and "young but already flourishing tourist industry" (over a deserted and unfinished modern hotel). Made at a time when foreign holidaymakers represented a significant source of capital¹ for "an officially sanctioned tourist-friendly...1960s Spain" (Evans 2004: 128), the sequence lampoons the regime's promotion of tourism and recalls Roland Barthes' critique of the sightseer's Spain as presented in the French *Blue Guides* of the period.²



Fig. 1.6: Election posters in *Rififi en la ciudad* (1963)

The metaphorical richness of monsters also clearly had the potential for disguising social critique within genre formulae. Andrew Willis (2003) points out, in relation to a number of hitherto reputable 'non-horror' directors who joined the Spanish horror boom of the late 1960s and early 1970s, that oppositional film-makers were often attracted to horror because its fantastical and non-'serious' representations enabled it more successfully to evade the censor than did more 'realist' forms. Franco, perhaps under the influence of Berlanga, Bardem and Salamanca, arguably deployed genre "myth grafts" to subversive end some years earlier. Expanding on Marsha Kinder's claim that the graphic depiction of violence in 1970s Spanish

¹ In 1960 Spain had 6 million visitors; in 1975 it had 30 million, contributing \$3,000 million to the Spanish economy (Permanyer, 1995:260).

² Barthes notes that these travel guides supported General Franco through their references to the heroism of the Nationalists and the success of the country's new found "prosperity" (Barthes 1973: 81-85).

art-house films was “primarily associated with an anti-Francoist perspective” (Kinder 1993: 138), Hawkins argues that Franco’s films should be seen in relation to “the revolutionary implications of making ‘body genre’ films during the fascist era” (Hawkins 2000: 31). Pavlović agrees that the very existence of Spanish horror in general and Jess Franco’s films in particular are confrontational: even in the censored and ‘clothed’ versions released domestically they present bodies and practices designated by the National-Catholic regime as unacceptably other or perverse. Pavlović echoes Robin Wood’s claim that “the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilisation *represses* or *oppresses*” (Wood 1985: 201), arguing that Franco’s films “enact a return to Fascism’s repressed, the playing out of the delirium from which that political order drew its energy, but had to disavow in the name of normality, Catholic morality, and political and familial order” (Pavlović 2003: 120). The representation of gender is central. Botting notes that English gothic literature “presented different, more exciting, worlds in which heroines in particular could encounter not only frightening violence but also adventurous freedom” (Botting 1996: 7), and this tradition is taken up enthusiastically by some of Franco’s heroines. As Pavlović and Hawkins point out, *Orlof*’s Wanda Bronsky foils the doctor’s objectifying and sadistic gaze with an investigative and desiring gaze of her own. In a cinematic context where Spanish screens were “saturated by fascist male bonding films that focused mainly on the rites of passage from boyhood to manhood, marginalizing women to the domestic sphere so crucial to the Falangist ideological project” (Pavlović 2003: 109), Jess Franco offered the alternative of male characters who were either monstrous or ineffectual, and female characters who ventured outside the family and the norms of domesticity. The “brave heroine” praised in *The Monthly Film Bulletin* was evidently “worthy of the utmost admiration” (anon 1963: 86) not just for solving the case, but for threatening oppressive ideals of the ‘good’, family woman.

Insane doctors and scientists in post-war cinema also offer potent metaphors in the wake of the atom bomb and the Holocaust. Thus Genessier’s heterografts in the French *Eyes without a Face* might embody anxieties around vivisection, plastic surgery and Nazi surgeons, but also the Nazi occupation of France (Lowenstein 2005).¹ Read as Spanish, Franco’s borrowings from Franju can be said to respond to a different, or additional, set of historical traumas. One in a long line

¹ Lowenstein borrows the Freudian concept of repetition compulsion to suggest that historical traumas constitute psychic/social “wounds” which films may “work through” by processes of externalisation, or which they may pathologically and compulsively repeat through images and narratives of “self torment” (Lowenstein 2005: 4). While the concept of historical trauma might illuminate exploitation cinema’s mediation of historical realities, I have not found Lowenstein’s distinction between ‘healthy’ and ‘pathological’ processing of trauma in films helpful in relation to Franco. Linnie Blake (2008) provides a similar account of horror cinema’s relationship to historical trauma, again drawing on Freud’s notion of repetition compulsion.

of despotic authority figures in the genre and in the film-maker's output, the maniacal patriarch is legible as a personification of the Francoist dictatorship; his control over the blind and mute Morpho whom he gets to do his 'dirty work' and his obsessive desire to 'perfect' his daughter are easily seen as tropes for fascism. His hilltop castle – establishing shots of brooding castles appear innumerable times in Franco's films – can be taken as a symbol for what Kinder calls the hermetic isolation and monolithic control of a Castilian central state (Kinder 1993: 393). Meanwhile Botting notes how in gothic fictions "familial and sexual relations, power and suppression, turn on the roles and figures of father and daughter. In villains, masculine sovereignty is staged and scrutinised" (Botting 1996: 20). Set against the censor's abhorrence of any representation deemed "harmful to the institution of matriarchy and the family", the perversity of Orlof's relationship with his robotic 'son' and his comatose daughter (incestuous father-daughter relationships in particular are expanded on in many more of Franco's films) can be seen as a satire on or negation of the family 'ideal' promoted in the "Law-of-the-Father fixated", child-star films of the period (Evans 2004: 129). Patriarchal law is reconfigured in terms of a particularly unhealthy Freudian 'family romance', while the absence of a matriarch (mothers are nearly always absent in Franco's films)¹ can be taken as a politically provocative refusal.

There are caveats, however. Joan Hawkins argues that very existence of Franco's films is "extraordinary, given the social and political climate of the time. Even the tame, domestic versions of Franco's films hint at illicit sexuality, lesbianism, and other activities officially designated as perversions by General Franco's government" (Hawkins 2000: 136). Hawkins is right to rebut the supposition that exploitation horror is only reactionary, but celebrations of transgression should be balanced by attention to how images of monstrosity, perversity, and otherness function in specific films, through which contexts and in relation to which audiences. As Grant argues, 'cult' films are often 'cultish' because of their tendency to recoup their apparent violations, often achieving "this ideological manipulation through a particular inflection of the figure of the Other". It is on the grounds of this ideological "doublethink", as Grant calls it (Grant 1991: 124) that ciphers of otherness in 'cult', gothic horror and exploitation cinemas converge. Eric Schaefer argues that classical exploitation cinema is inherently contradictory, offering seductive images of transgression while condemning them in moralising terms. Gothic fictions are similarly ambivalent. As Robin Wood (1985) points out, the central ideological project of horror is to define normality in relation to monstrous forces which imperil

¹ An exception is the murder mystery film *Un silencio de tumba* (1972), which very unusually – for Franco – has a married couple with a young son as its central protagonists. After several of their friends are murdered and their son is kidnapped, the film ends with the family happily reunited. I discuss it briefly in chapter 4.

it. Gothic narratives present sensational tales of “vice, corruption and depravity (as)...examples of what happens when the rules of social behaviour are neglected”, thereby shoring up ‘normality’ by defining as monstrous or perverse that which is held to threatens it (Botting 1996: 7). The ambivalence lies, of course, in the fascination that the transgressive figure exerts. Thus Wanda Bronsky’s transgression of the limits of idealised femininity should be set against the fact that, as the heroine who survives, she does not belong to the world of sordid bars and cabarets from which Orlof takes his victims; and Franco’s supposed breaking of the gender rules can be seen as compromised by *Orlof*’s clear gender-coding of its exploitation ‘money shots’. Most importantly, both Hawkins and Pavlović choose their examples carefully and ignore the possibility that Franco’s images of incarceration and subjection might fetishise discipline, oppression and power as much as critique or parody it.

Attention to cultural contexts at the national level is a useful foil to globalising notions of generic meaning and adds particularity to broad claims about the auteur’s and the genre’s ‘deviance’. But it can also imply too mechanistically that horror’s attractions lie solely in decoding, and that ‘national’ meanings are uncontested and final. *Orlof*’s negotiation of international themes and icons may resonate in particular circumstances with connotations not immediately accessible to non-contemporary or non-domestic audiences. But the problem with the idea of the ‘domestic’ audience is that the film may have no ‘home’ in the first place. Hawkins argues that Franco nationalises genre by filtering it through uniquely Spanish iconography, but the ‘Spanishness’ of the film and its supposed transgressions should be weighed against the transnationalism of its genre appropriations. Nourishment by, references to and incorporation of North American, German, French, British, Italian and Mexican genre trends flow through *Orlof* and films like it to the extent that they may be seen, culturally as well as economically, as more international than Spanish. As Franco puts it,

I was never a director of Spanish movies, but of French ones, English ones and American ones. ... I’ve actually made very few films of Spanish nationality and even these are completely independent and do not correspond to Spanish cinema. (In Alexander 2005: 21).

Orlof’s on-screen ‘nationality’ reflects the film’s French-Spanish funding. Shot ten miles outside Madrid (Aguilar 1999: 40) the film’s ‘Spanish iconography’ might include Orlof’s castle and a few other locations. But most settings are dressed to look as ‘un-Spanish’ as the budget would allow: the *tricolore* hangs outside the police station; police uniforms are French, as are street signs. At one point an intertitle suggests that the action has moved to (the presumably Belgian or Dutch) town of Hartog, though this relocation is neither explained nor developed and the shooting locations appear identical. None of the characters’ names – Orlof,

Morpho, Wanda Bronsky, Tanner – strike a Hispanic note. The multi-lingual production practices of commercial European film-making result in two cabaret scenes having dual nationality: a ‘showgirl’ sings in Castilian but with a French accent, creating a sense of ventriloquism which suggests we are watching a French performance of ‘Spanishness’; her costume can be read as Madrilenian, similar to some of the dresses worn in Franco’s earlier *La Reina del Tabarín* and *Vamiresas* 1930, but the painted backdrop in the style of Toulouse-Lautrec is clearly meant to be evocative of the Moulin Rouge. Far from evidencing the inherent ‘Spanishness’ of Franco and his films, signs of ‘nationality’ are at these points effectively dislocated and rendered as artifice.¹

Censorship plays an equally important role. If, as Lázaro-Reboll suggest, Spanish censors before Escudero “would not allow a horror film to be set on Spanish soil” or “accept a Spanish monster”, (Lázaro-Reboll 2005: 131) genre filmmakers had little choice but to play down Spanish signifiers. As well as setting the action in a temporal and geographical elsewhere, *Orlof*’s censor-evading measures included trading in Northern gothic images and themes and using florid, expressionist mannerisms which emphasise its fanciful nature. As the 1963 guidelines were to spell out, the representation of “sexual perversions as central to the plot” was forbidden unless it “entails a clear and predominant moral consequence” (Anon. 1977b: 49); in this context, Orlof’s comeuppance, Tanner’s saving of the day and his clinch with Wanda, his fiancée, in the finale are clear concessions to the censor, though the absurd speed with which Franco closes the narrative ensures the risibility of the ‘moral consequence’. Such apparent compliance may, however, have let potential critique sneak in under the censor’s nose.

The discursive context of the production of Franco’s films of the early 1960s is also formed by debates on national cinema that were then taking place in segments of the Spanish intelligentsia. As Triana-Toribio explains, two conflicting hegemonic models of ‘national cinema’ appeared to plug the leaky borders exploited by low budget co-productions, and they conflicted on grounds of taste. Defining, creating and promoting a truly Spanish cinema were seen as important across Left and Right political positions. In the 1940s and 1950s, popular Spanish rural comedies, musicals, romances and historical epics, particularly those produced by Cifesa had, received state approval – being widely exhibited and barely censored - because, at least on the face of it and according to dominant historiography, they contributed to the mythology of the harmonious

¹ In displaying signs of ‘Spanishness’ as artificial and superficial, *Orlof* may have been influenced by Berlanga’s *Welcome Mister Marshall!* Berlanga’s film concerns the efforts of a group of Castilian villagers to welcome/impress North American delegates for the Marshall plan: they do so through an elaborate, tourist-friendly charade of ‘Spanishness’, complete with Andalucian costumes and false village ‘sets’, “as if they had all become participants in an Andalucian *meta-españolada*” (Rolph 1999: 12).

nation-state by asserting pride in ‘timeless’ national traditions and triumphs. The construction of a national cinema in this sense had been “a deliberate project undertaken by the dictatorship, at least on paper”, as part of an attempt to create the image of a country unified under the Nationalist regime (Triana-Toribio 2003: 51). To play its part in the ‘imagined community’ of a nationalist state with “impregnable cultural boundaries”, popular cinema was in effect “sealed off from foreign influence and input” (Triana-Toribio 2003: 52). By the early days of cultural *apertura* many of the film-makers and critics associated with *Objetivo* and the Salamanca conference were also anxious (if with a different agenda) about the contamination of popular Spanish screens by co-productions, genre imports and mass consumerism (Permanyer 1995). In response, they sought a cinema that articulated authentic ‘national’ concerns through the influence of contemporary European ‘new waves’: a ‘national cinema’ distinct from popular Spanish genres which they saw as insular, static and stereotypically ‘folkloric’.¹ Hence Escudero claimed in 1962 that truly Spanish cinema did not yet exist, and that those ‘Spanish’ films which did exist were commercialised and deficient (Triana-Toribio 2003: 66). Echoing the terms of *Midi Minuit*’s 1963 review, Aguilar sees Spanish film production of the period as dominated on the one hand by ‘Nuevo Cine Español’ and on the other by “a rather old-fashioned fashioned populism (...one Joselito too many)” (Aguilar 1999: 152). Franco himself has remarked that without the influence of his friends Bardem and Berlanga, Spanish cinema would have followed in the retrograde footsteps of the Joselito-starring musical religious melodrama *The Little Nightingale* (*El pequeño ruiseñor*, Antonio del Amo, 1956) for much longer than it did, and that directing Joselito films was an error of judgement and “moral ruin” on del Amo’s part (Franco 2004: 206).

The case of Spain in the late 1950s and 1960s illustrates Stephen Crofts’ argument that the concept of ‘national cinema’ is linked to an “elitist” European arthouse tradition which promotes notions of “quality”, indigenous cultural traditions, “national pride and the assertion...of national cultural identity” (Crofts 2006: 45). The Salamanca congress concluded, for example, that “our cinema should acquire a national character, producing films reflecting the social condition of the Spaniard, his conflicts and his reality” and that “economic aid must be concentrated on films of artistic quality and national interest” (in Molina-Foix 1977: 45). From 1962, the newly branded ‘New Spanish Cinema’ was consolidated and effectively sponsored by Fraga and Escudero through the establishment of prizes and financial incentives. Government policies of relative openness to foreign investment necessitated overtures towards democratic Europe; at a time of expanding tourism into Spain, exportably progressive ‘quality films’ were

¹ Commonly assumed only to be supportive of Francoism’s brand of nationalist Catholicism, Spanish folkloric films of the period have been reappraised by Labanyi (1997) and Triana-Toribio (2003: 62-65).

selected for screening at foreign festivals with a view to advertising Spain's modernity and throwing a favourable light on the country in its export markets. Seen as international in reach but national in concerns, the New Spanish Cinema promoted social realism as the natural vehicle for 'serious', 'quality' expressions of national identity (Triana-Toribio 2003: 57). Precisely what such realism should entail was a matter of dispute (it was embraced, for different reasons, by film-makers of the Left and the Right), and was by no means universally accepted (Marsh 2006 argues that Spanish comedies were as influential as neo-realism). No definitions, however, would accept the kind of genre films epitomised by Jess Franco. By failing to deliver 'realism' in either 'social realism' or 'folkloric' moulds, Franco's wilfully disreputable films courted the disdain of legitimate culture: if official taste rejected Jess Franco then Jess Franco rejected official taste.¹

Potentially critical subtexts in films like *Orlof* were nationally situated but these subtexts were nevertheless submerged in 'low' or 'mass', and frequently 'Americanized' genre forms cited as "non-Spanish" by champions of New Spanish Cinema. Since the desire for national authenticity is frequently caught up with "bourgeois" notions of taste and quality (Crofts 2006: 45), popular genre films are rarely found to satisfy it. It should be noted that a binaristic account of 1950s and 1960s Spanish cinema, pitching elite realist 'art cinema' against populist and reactionary, nationalist pictures, would be too simplistic: as Marsh argues, films like *Strange Journey* and *Welcome Mister Marshall!* problematise such bifurcations by using farce as a medium for social satire (Marsh 2006, *passim*). Toriana-Toribio quotes one oppositional critic as stating in 1967 that "a Spanish cinema that deserves the name...would not be built upon a production of Westerns" (Carlos Rodríguez Sanz, in Triana-Toribio 2003: 78). Franco was involved in a small number of Westerns² and made one of his own, *El llanero* (*The Jaguar*) in 1963. As Franco notes, perhaps under the influence of *Cahiers'* reverence for North American genre auteurs like Howard Hawks and John Ford, this "was a time when it was not elegant to say the American movies were good" (Daniel 1999: 44). If Spanish-made Westerns posed problems for

¹ Franco has appeared quite resistant to the institution of art cinema at various points throughout his career. In the 1980s, while busy with low budget 'sexy' spy romps and other erotic 'S' certificate escapades, Franco asserted that "I'm not interested in doing films like Carlos Saura, I'm not interested in filming the gypsies dancing for the fourth time. ... Personally, I like Carlos very much, he is very intelligent, very lucid. He decided to make upmarket cinema, that's what interested him. He's very clever with that, he organises his circus perfectly. It's what he decided on, I didn't. I love cinema, and all my interest is in making movies, not in going to Cannes" (Balbo 1989: 7). Yet Franco's contradictoriness is evident in the fact that he liberally scatters many of his films and interviews (as well as his 2004 book *Memorias del Tío Jess*) with references to his 'art cinema' colleagues and other respectable associates, particularly those linked to Parisian cinephilia - and Henri Langlois' cinémathèque - in the 1960s.

² *Antes llega la muerte*, (Pedro Lazaga, 1958); *El Coyote* (Joaquin Romero Marchent, 1954); *La justicia del Coyote* (Joaquin Romero Marchent, 1954); *La venganza del Zorro* (Joaquin Romero Marchent, 1962).

defenders of cinema's cultural roots¹, clearly the same could be said of the horror codes that Spanish filmmakers borrowed in *Orlof*'s wake.

As a genre without local origins, horror would have fallen short of demands for a national cinema with impermeable cultural boundaries. Hence any identifiably Spanish inflections in *Orlof*'s genre negotiations do not add up to a version of Spanishness that Spain's "cultural gatekeepers" (Triana-Toribio, 2003: 65) would wish to promote or export. If we add to the elusive and contested concept of a national cinema the idea that it addresses national preoccupations and concerns (Hill 1992: 10-12), Franco's films may be found wanting in all of these respects. This may not be due only to their perceived failings as cinema craft. While some recent work in exploitation studies is confident that Franco and other exploitation film-makers blur boundaries between 'high' and 'low' culture, specific institutional structures may work hard to maintain such divisions. Franco's connections to 'low' genre cinema remained strong enough to render them illegitimate in the eyes of official taste, hence the fact that while Franco made "popular terror films designed to cater to a Spanish audience", they remained "virtually unknown to Spanish audiences" (D'Lugo 1997: 158). Triana-Toribio notes that Spanish musicals of the 1960s often borrowed plots, scenes and other elements from Hollywood, a move condemned by some critics as evidence of American cultural imperialism (Triana-Toribio 2003: 77). Traces of this internationalising tendency can be found earlier: Aguilar points out that Franco's French-Spanish co-productions *La Reina del Tabarín* and *Vampiresas 1930* merge elements of Madrilenian farce (*sainete*) with citations from Hollywood musicals.²

The 'poor taste' of *The Awful Dr Orlof* and Franco's other horror films of the early 1960s can therefore be seen as an intervention in contemporary debates about the role of cinema in defining the nation. Franco's "myth grafts" are necessarily plurally coded, potentially providing resources for the creation of resistant - as well as possibly conservative - readings and pleasures by differently located audiences, including Spanish ones. Like the New Spanish Cinema, Franco's film rejected patriotic 'folkloric' traditions and aimed at exportability to an international audience. But its enthusiasm for 'bad taste' and fantasy entail a rejection of a social realism, which - given the contradictory circumstances of state censorship on the one hand and state sponsorship on the other - may have been seen as hopelessly compromised and even complicit; Franco observes that only "deluded" filmmakers believed that "they could filter through some scenes, ideas or dialogue without the junta noticing", and that the films of the

¹ The question of the 'cultural identity' of the Spanish western echoes that of Italian genre products. See the discussion of the "'cultural roots' controversy" surrounding the Italian Western in Frayling (1981: 121-140).

² The Busby Berkeley film *Gold Diggers of 1935* had been titled *Vampiresas 1936* for its Spanish release (Aguilar 1999: 31).

New Spanish Cinema were “destined for festivals” as flagships for Spain’s supposed commitment to a “free cinema” (Franco 2004: 190). Hence Franco’s favouring of ‘bad taste’ and fantasy over both social realism and ‘traditionalism’ is politically suggestive in relation to its sociohistorical moment; the very internationalism of his generic scavenging produces a nationally specific resistance to “quests for national specificity” (Pavlović 2003: 119). Jo Labanyi observes that popular audiences often ignored the demands of the official arbiters of taste by continuing to watch despised, excessive and inauthentic folkloric musicals in which “everything becomes a self-conscious performance” (Labanyi 1997: 229). Something similar can be said of the dislocated Castilian/Parisian cabaret in *The Awful Dr Orlof*, and of the film as a whole. On-screen traces of ‘Spanishness’ in the film merge into a chaotic text which is deaf to calls for ‘seriousness’ and ‘authenticity’, suggesting that Spanish audiences for insufficiently ‘national’ genre films voted with their box office tickets for a multivocal site which rejected nationalist discourse.

Although Franco soon abandoned the monochrome expressionist cinematography seen in parts of *Orlof*, the film sets the template for much of Franco’s output. Many of his subsequent films develop variations on its mixture of gothic rhetoric and exploitation ‘sensibility’. Its central themes and conflicts – sexual ‘deviance’, the sadistic gaze of an authority figure, the desire of a protagonist to transgress the prohibitions of ‘normality’ and law, the foregrounding of artifice, the haphazard yet knowing assemblage of genre conventions - are reworked and recombined in the rest of the films discussed in this thesis. As I have suggested, the ‘deviant’ aspects of *Orlof* were in part enabled by the transnational nature of its production and distribution, and by Franco’s immersion in cross-national genre codes. The film discussed in the following chapter accentuates these features but focuses them on a masochistically romantic male subjectivity.

2

The Uncanny Eye: Visual Uncertainty in *Venus in Furs*

The semantic slipperiness of the term ‘exploitation cinema’, as discussed in the previous chapter, ensues from its mobilisation in systems of difference: in other words, what it is defined against and what it is affiliated with. Paul Wells, Joan Hawkins, Xavier Mendik and other commentators note that the mixture of ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultural registers in Franco’s work makes it difficult to classify. Yet they proceed to put problems of classification aside by attempting to assimilate Franco’s films into an unexamined, dehistoricised notion of ‘art cinema’, largely by dint of the films’ assumed distance from ‘mainstream’ cinema or ‘mass culture’. This distance is measured partly through the extent to which exploitation cinema eschews verisimilitude. Wells, for example, disregards the fact that Franco makes narrative films and aligns him with a certain formalist model of modernism by claiming that Franco is “utterly preoccupied with the possibilities of the medium rather than the demands of a particular story” (Wells 2000:71). Joan Hawkins suggests on similar grounds that Franco’s interest in “affect over meaning and story” makes his films too demanding “to be classed as mass culture” (Hawkins 2000:112). This is to imply that ‘mass culture’ is exclusively concerned with story, that story is conveyed solely through the illusion of reality, and that it is passively consumed by undemanding spectators. By this largely discredited reckoning, exploitation cinema is supposed, as is avant-garde cinema, to do the opposite. The following reading of *Venus in Furs* (1968) demonstrates the inadequacy of this cultural topography.

My analysis of *Venus* considers its use of certain optical and narrative conceits and devices as analogues for the male protagonist’s erotomaniacal, desiring but disintegrating subjectivity as he pursues an obscure female object of desire. *Venus* revises expressionist stylings of the sort deployed in *Orlof* through a range of optical effects which attempt to merge the representation of uncanny experience with what we can justifiably describe as ‘trippy’ representations of doomed desire. Yet many passages in the film involve uses of montage, camera and lens that do exceed narrative motivation. The film can then be said to involve a degree of abstraction consonant with how “the art film solicits a particular viewing procedure” (Bordwell et al 1985: 374). Mendik therefore infers, like Wells, that Franco’s films foreground ‘form’ over ‘content’, and sees this as sufficient to align them with “art cinema” (Mendik 1998: 20). But such attempts to flag *Venus*’ explorations of the medium as evidence that it could be comfortably absorbed

into the history of ‘art cinema’ ignore the complexity of the film’s cultural location.¹ As I will elaborate below, Franco’s excessive use of certain conventions and devices is informed by the requirements of sex-horror exploitation cinema, as well as by a large bank of resources across visual culture. *Venus* updates the gothicism of films like *Orlof* through mythologies of sexual ‘sophistication’, rendered via influences as diverse as *nouvelle roman*-style fractured narration, contemporary pornography, *film noir*, post-classical Hollywood, the French New Wave and psychedelia. The following analysis therefore makes reference to, among other intertexts, Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958). It would perhaps be possible to deduce from this connection that I see *Venus* as a poor imitation of a superior original, or conversely that I seek to legitimise Franco by comparing his work to that of a canonical filmmaker. The former deduction would simply condemn Franco for unoriginality, while the latter would appear to rescue him from the realms of exploitation cinema. In fact the *Vertigo* intertext is used here simply as an example of *Venus*’ eclectic use of cultural resources, part of the practice of free-wheeling, ad hoc pastiche through which Franco assembles his ‘horrotica’. As such, the citation of *Vertigo* – along with other films – is part of a wider discussion of the place of exploitation cinema within cartographies of quality and taste. In short, I see *Venus* as a gothic exploitation film drawing from a reservoir of codes that spills over institutional and generic borders. Far from the seamless fusion of ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultural registers that Wells and Mendik see in Franco’s work, a large part of the fascination of *Venus* lies in how it wavers between being an earnest rumination on cinematic desire, time and space, and a frankly silly sex fantasy whose mannerisms were probably out-dated even at the time of release.

Baroque Despair

A meditation on self-destructively obsessive desire, *Venus* crystallises many of Franco’s ongoing concerns, influences and themes. Its morbid approach to eroticism is a departure from neither the predominant concerns of Franco’s ‘horrotica’ nor those of many of his contemporaries. Within the European sex-horror field, the film has thematic parallels with, for example, Mario Bava’s *The Whip and the Flesh* (*La frusta e il corpo*, 1963), while the inspiration for several scenes as well as the theme of a man’s fascination with a chimeric, probably dead woman has more in common with Hitchcock’s fantasia on necrophiliac *amour fou*, *Vertigo* (1958) than with Leopold Van Sacher-Masoch’s 1870 novel, *Venus in Furs*. Its Italian release title, *Può una morta rivivere per amore?* (‘Can a corpse live for love?’), hints neatly at the film’s premise; its German title (*Paroxysmus*) indicates something of the attempted

¹ Like ‘avant-garde’, the term ‘art cinema’ tends to be used in cult film criticism either as a kind of seal of approval, or as a bourgeois institution of good taste to be attacked. The term’s referents are not at all clear-cut. This thesis adopts an ‘agnostic’ view of art cinema as a culturally elite field of production and consumption formed around a specific but not unique set of formal procedures. See Bordwell (1999) and Wollen (1982).

mood. The tale begins with a jazz trumpeter, Jimmy Logan (James Darren) discovering washed ashore what he calls the “beautiful...dead” body of a woman whom we immediately take to be the Venus of the title¹; it gradually becomes clear that the body belongs to Wanda Reed (Maria Rohm) a woman seemingly murdered at the climax of a sadistic orgy Jimmy had witnessed at a temporally ambiguous point in the story’s past. Echoing many of Franco’s ‘avenging angel’ films² Wanda’s ghost revisits her murderers and brings about their demise.

In what starts out as something like a supernatural revision of film noir, the tale begins with Jimmy’s search for information about the mysterious corpse on the beach. His curiosity is fuelled by fascination with Wanda and her social world, and by guilt for having watched her abuse at the hands of Percival Kapp (Dennis Price), Olga (Margaret Lee) and Prince Ahmed Kortobawi (Klaus Kinski), a “millionaire playboy” as Jimmy describes him. A long flashback sequence suggests inconclusively that Ahmed may be a reincarnation, or descendant, of a masochist killed in a sex game by Wanda, so that the fatal orgy Jimmy witnesses may be Ahmed’s revenge on her. (This scene may, on the other hand, be a flashforward to Wanda’s revenge on Ahmed). In many noir films, a male protagonist is caught between conflicting desires for a good woman and a femme fatale; in *Venus*, Jimmy spurns the love of the ‘good’, definitely real and alive, woman (a cabaret dancer, Rita (Barbara McNair)) in favour of the ‘bad’, possibly dead or imagined, Wanda. Although Jimmy and the phantasmatic femme fatale form a sexual relationship, Wanda maintains an emotional detachment from him. Unsure of whom or what exactly he is sleeping with, Jimmy finds his grip on reality slipping away. Wanda’s detachment, which at once stokes Jimmy’s desire and plunges him further into maddening despair (in Franco’s universe desire and insanity are often close neighbours), is ‘explained’ by the fact that she wants him dead too: as voyeuristic witness, Jimmy was complicit in the deeds that lead to her death.

The story unfolds mainly through an elaborate system of flashbacks. As Maureen Turim points out in her study of the device, flashbacks are often associated with “a quest for the answer to an enigma posed in the beginning of a narrative through a return to the past” (Turim 1989: 11). Classically, a “frame-tale” (usually the present, as in *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944) or *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*) opens with a consequence the cause of which will be revealed through the accumulation of information given in the flashback mode. As Turim argues, the flashback structure as used in Hollywood *noirs* and melodramas adopts a psychoanalytic model “of how memories are stored, how they are repressed, how they return from the repressed”, and how they are interpreted as clues to the present (Turim 1989: 19). Flashbacks are, then, “hermeneutically

¹ Franco’s original title had been *Black Angel*, in honour of the black character, Rita, with whom Jimmy was – in the first script of the film – obsessed.

² See ‘avenging angels’ in Appendix: Table of Concordances.

determined”, the solution to the narrative mystery often being discovered by a detective, investigator or psychiatrist/psychoanalyst, who holds the key to the hermeneutic code (Turim 1989: 11).

The flashback structure of *Venus* only partially illuminates its ‘present’. The film begins, like *Laura*, as a story about an investigation into a female enigma: as the over-blown American trailer describes the puzzle, Jimmy’s “vision is real, his Venus in furs is alive. ...Who is this elusive Venus? Is she a symbol or a wild fantasy?” Interest in Jimmy’s search for answers quickly ebbs away in preference for the evocation of erotic compulsion, with Jimmy’s delirium given form through a near collapse of cause-effect logic and frequently visualised through fashionably hallucinatory optical effects, often applied to long takes representing Jimmy’s point of view. Towards the end of the film, the action briefly shifts to the enquiries of one Inspector Kaplan (Adolfo Lastretti), on the trail of the mysterious Wanda, but even by Franco’s standards of indifference where detection scenes are concerned this is negligible. The film also remembers, in a cursory acknowledgement of the conventions of suspense, to include a (sped-up) car-chase near the finale, complete with up-tempo ‘chase’ music. Typical of Franco’s tonal lurches, the scene is so comically incongruous that it appears to have strayed in to *Venus* from one of Franco’s crime caper movies; it can be taken as a kind of joke at the expense of the desire for narrative closure. The film’s reluctance to supply hermeneutic satisfaction is stressed by its coda. It appears that, like William Holden in *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950), Jimmy has told his tale from beyond the grave: in a near-repeat of the opening sequence and in an apparent nod to *Vampyr* (Karl T. Dreyer, 1931) Jimmy finds his own body washed up on shore: as in *Vampyr*, there is a shot of the protagonist from his corpse’s point of view.

As Jimmy tries and fails to establish whether Wanda is ‘real’ – and, if she is real, whether she is ghost, double or fake – the film provides no godlike viewpoint from which the viewer might assess the situation. If suspense relies on viewers feeling that they know more than do the protagonists, *Venus* refuses such a privileged spectatorial position by almost constantly focalizing the story via Jimmy’s bewitched, bothered and bewildered subjectivity. The narrative begins more or less *in medias res*; there is no accumulation of information which might assure us that Jimmy is simply hallucinating. Hence we might conclude that Wanda ‘really’ is a ghostly avenger. That the story appears to end with the ‘fact’ that Jimmy has been dead all along might be taken to support a supernatural reading, except that the possibility of his madness lingers. His finding of his own body washed ashore hardly assures us of his sanity. Whichever interpretation we err towards, something remains in excess that insists upon the text’s undecidability.

Thus viewers expecting conformity to classical mechanisms of narrative propulsion or suspense – as they may, in light of the references to *noir* and Hitchcock – are likely to be disappointed. Elizabeth Cowie has discussed how processes of narration in thrillers and suspense films engage viewers through tactics of delayed resolution and postponed satisfaction of the “wish to know” (Cowie 1997: 45). *Venus* frustrates and finally abandons the desire for knowledge through the figure of the irrelevant Inspector, and also through its staggered and deferred conclusion. In the first apparent ending, Jimmy finds Wanda’s grave, thus ‘proving’ that he has been conducting an affair with a ghost; in the next ending (the circular climax of the story), Jimmy finds his own corpse on the beach; in the third ending Rita sings the film’s theme directly to camera; finally the film terminates with Wanda descending a flight of stairs, dragging her fur coat behind her (this is a recycling of a shot that follows the death of Kapp earlier in the film). The viewer who has not some time ago given up the “wish to know” is deserted, as the film fails to arrive at any particular destination.

If these are shortcomings, they may have arisen in part from what Tim Lucas (2005: 47) has described as the compromised circumstances of the film’s production, with different intentions (those of Franco, the producer Harry Alan Towers and the co-screenwriter Malvin Wald) failing to mesh together. Though possessing relatively high production values for a Franco film, *Venus* is a far from flawless assemblage. Its downmarket origins are evident in scenes representing Jimmy wandering the streets of Rio, created by superimposing his face over stock Carnival footage. The recycling of ‘travelogue’ shots, including Franco’s original (as opposed to library) footage of Istanbul, though apparently used as a concise and convenient way of locating the action and creating an ‘exotic’ mood, actually makes the film’s spatio-temporal coordinates baffling. As well as being convenient (since he or Towers already had some footage) the use of Istanbul may have been influenced by Alain Robbe Grillet’s use of the same city as an impenetrably labyrinthine site of mystery in *The Immortal* (*L’Immortelle*, 1963): the link to Robbe-Grillet makes sense in light of Franco’s nod to *Last Year at Marienbad*, as discussed below. Uncertainties arising from the story’s shifts between Istanbul and Rio are compounded by use of the same set as an interior location in both cities. Early in the film Jimmy’s voiceover and an accompanying montage of shots of Istanbul tell us that his performance at a cocktail party takes place there. Jimmy later informs us that he and Wanda have relocated to Rio: this is visually ‘authenticated’ in low-budget shorthand by footage of an aeroplane taking off, followed by shots of Carnival. We now see Jimmy playing trumpet again, clearly filmed on the same set as before. Such features might be said to fall short of the demands of cogent, or at least impressive, storytelling. But they also contribute to the sense of “formlessness [that] refuses to obey our assumptions about narrative as a meaningful sequence of action” that can be seen as part of the gothic sensibility (Day 1985: 49). The geographical ambiguity can also read as part

of the representation of Jimmy's ontological insecurity, producing an ambiguous cinematic space wherein "[t]he closure and logic essential to the realistic or romance form are avoided to create a narrative whose order appears arbitrary or chaotic" (Day 1985: 49). As Jimmy says early in the film, "when you don't know where you're at...time is like the ocean: you can't hold on to it".

The North American trailer describes *Venus in Furs* as "a masterpiece of supernatural sex". While the collaging of Sacher-Masoch's erotic fiction to the paranormal indicates generic mixture, *Venus* contains a number of stock features that place it within a world of renovated gothicism. As in many of Franco's films, northern European gothic traditions are transplanted to warmer climes. Unlike *The Awful Dr Orlof*, the film has few of the locales found in classical horror texts. Misty wildernesses, fog-shrouded castles and ruins are absent. But Wanda is abused in a dungeon-like cellar reminiscent of gothic's "dark subterranean vaults" (Botting 1996: 44) by a genre character-type in the form of Kinski's decadent aristocrat. Wanda serves briefly as persecuted heroine before becoming ghostly avenger. Jimmy, as he is sucked into a vortex of thwarted desire, fits the mould of agonised romanticism defined by David Pirie, via Mario Praz, as central to the gothic genre (Pirie 1973, 1977, 2008).¹ Attempting to reconstruct the events surrounding Wanda's death, and to understand (or perhaps to repress) his own involvement in it, Jimmy's 'memory' is contaminated by fantasy as he attempts to fill in the gaps in his recall. The narrator's doomed struggle to get the facts straight and put the story in order is endemic to the structure of many gothic narratives; the pursuit of truth is literally maddening: "engaged in a ceaseless but often hopeless attempt to sort out the past through reconstructing it in story" (Punter 1996: 55), the hero is plunged into a vertiginous and claustrophobic condition characterised by "neurotic, psychotic and paranoid proclivities" (Cavallaro 2002: 21). As Jimmy says, "where was I going? Why was this happening to me? Why couldn't I fight it?" In his intoxication, Jimmy finds himself in a state of enthrallment that William Patrick Day identifies as a defining trait of the gothic protagonist, for whom "(t)he line between self and the Other begins to waver, and the wholeness and integrity of the self begins to collapse" (Day 1985: 21-22).

Narrative indeterminacy is produced in part through the intersection and overlapping of two main narrative axes. One axis follows Wanda visiting revenge upon her torturers in scenes which we may be inclined to take as diegetically 'real', in as much as they appear to represent

¹Gothic romanticism - as described in Pirie's reading of the British horror film, itself indebted to Praz' *The Romantic Agony* (1933) - is particularly clear in the vampire films I discuss in chapter 3. Jimmy's obsession with the "beautiful, dead" Wanda is one of many gothic forms of eroticism visible in Franco's work. For more on the links between gothicism and romanticism - including the romantic protagonist as necrophile and as tormented hero - see Sevastakis (1993).

events outside and independent of Jimmy's perception: the deaths of Olga, Kapp and Ahmed are among the few in which Jimmy does not appear. The other axis concerns Jimmy's obsession with Wanda, and this is presented in terms which foreground his subjective perception, most obviously via the use of what turns out to be posthumous voiceover. *Venus* is often criticised for being badly written and this charge is levelled mainly at the "constant irritant" (Hardy 1996: 213) of Jimmy's voiceover. This "stream of unconsciousness narration" (anon. 1970: 24) is used unsparingly, as though the film were a too-faithful adaptation of a novel narrated in first person.

The film combines (what turns out to be) posthumous narration with a tortuous flashback structure; Jimmy's confused oral account of his descent into a maelstrom of desire recalls *film noir*'s frequent narration by male characters who fall fatalistically 'victim' to feminine wiles. As an aural form of focalisation, seemingly designed to guide the viewer's comprehension of the images, Jimmy's voiceover is as unfocussed as Franco's visuals often are, with Franco and Towers' scriptwriters making the most of the ambiguity and fallibility of the 'invisible storyteller' device (Kozloff 1988). It must be admitted that Jimmy's voiceover is a blunt instrument for conveying interiority, and that his 'hip' dialect is risibly dated. Tim Lucas' view of the film's post-production circumstances suggests that the voiceover was a desperate editorial after-thought aimed at rescuing the material in post-production from the chaos created by a compromised situation as American International and Towers foisted their own ideas on Franco's 'original' (Lucas 2005: 47).

The visual evidence suggests, however, that voiceover (in principle if not in content) was conceived from the outset as an intrinsic part of the film. As in many of Franco's films, long passages appear to have been shot without sound, and there are few shots of moving mouths. The first of the film's few dialogue scenes does not occur until almost sixteen minutes into the running time. Franco's apparent enthusiasm for this technique may be attributed to the practicalities of low budget international film making. *Venus* is an Italian/British/West German co-production, and minimum dialogue facilitates dubbing for different markets. In other words, Franco once again attempts to turn the limitations imposed by low-budget production to the film's advantage. Whatever its practical determinants, the use of voiceover can be seen, as in many *films noirs*, as an attempt to "naturalize" the film's "temporal manipulations" by "locating them in the psyche or the storytelling capacity of a character within the fiction" (Turim 1989: 16).

That we are not to take Jimmy's account as reliable is underscored by an allusion early in the film to the *nouvelle vague*/Left Bank modernism of Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (*L'année dernière à Marienbad*, 1961). As Jimmy's voice-off tells us that "I don't remember if it was last week, last month, or last year" that he witnessed Wanda's death, his words are

accompanied by a flashback, signalled by four brief establishing shots of what Jimmy describes as a “jet-set party”, showing formally dressed “yachting” types in frozen postures imitative of Resnais’ equally voiceover-heavy film. Locating “the recovery of memory as the resurging of images” (Turim 1989: 19), the flashback structure’s capacity for destabilising the linearity of classical narrative structure had been exploited by modernist art films like Resnais’ because “vision back in time coincided with the European avant-garde’s dynamism and fluidity of structures of time and space”. What Turim terms the “modernist flashback” severs its connection (as made in *noir* and melodrama) to the “hermeneutically determined” decoding of the past (Turim 1989: 61). Though it does not simply place *Venus in Furs* within the élite cultural space of the ‘art film’, the *Marienbad* moment does ask us to leave expectations of naturalism, suspense or ‘deep’ character motivation at the door. As in Resnais’ film, image and voice do not always gel or support one another. Further disorienting effect is produced by the interpenetration of the diegetically real and Jimmy’s subjectivity, a mixing of ‘realities’ that accords with the gothic tendency to destabilise “the boundaries between psyche and reality, opening up an indeterminate zone in which the differences between fantasy and actuality were no longer secure” (Botting 1996: 11-12).

The Jet-Set Party and the Wild Scene

Venus is laden with looking. Wanda and Kapp are employed in visual business, as an art dealer and as a fashion photographer respectively. The film is replete with close-up shots of eyes, paintings and mirrors, and one drama of looking follows another. Possibly as an economically determined result of the shooting methods noted above, the film is full of characters peering, glancing and staring, at one another and into space. Though subtlety is not, then, one of the film’s strongest features, several scenes offer quite intricate, if melodramatic, orchestrations of vision and visuality. But this visual style is not as detached from theme or “story” as Hawkins, Wells and Mendik imply: the film’s exploration of relationships between vision and desire go beyond experimenting with “the possibilities of the medium” for its own sake. The previous chapter suggested that *Orlof* had a tantalising, strip-tease-like structure of promise and (restricted) revelation typical of exploitation horror. *Venus* goes further, maximising the tendency of both gothic and erotic cinema to enact tensions between seeing and not seeing, being shown and being prevented from seeing.

Contrary to claims for the deviance of cult and exploitation cinema, this visual dynamic is gendered in predictable terms. Jimmy’s fascination with Wanda, and Franco’s visual analogies for that fascination, clearly connect scopophilic (desire to look) and epistemophilic (desire to know) forms of curiosity. The subject position most often invited in *Venus* by narrative,

voiceover and lens is one that produces Wanda as a spectacular object of Jimmy's fascination. The tale of tortured male romanticism, linked to a fruitless and ultimately destructive search for knowledge about a mysterious femme fatale, is frequently represented through a fetishising gaze at the endless enigma of woman. As usual with Franco, the organisation and disorganisation of looks in *Venus* articulate themes of desire and subjectivity that are largely centred upon fantasies of the female body and sexuality.

If we take 'fetish' in its broadest sense to mean any object that is overvalued or mystified Wanda clearly fits the bill. This is signalled as early as the credit sequence. The film begins with a close-up vertical pan from Rohm's feet to her face. To drive the fetishism home, she is adorned with archetypal *fatale* accessories: high-heeled shoes, stockings, fur coat, long fingernails and cigarette. As the title appears, her face is freeze-framed and solarised, abstracted into a haze of 'acid' or 'pop art' colours popular during the period: similar effects are used in *Girl on a Motorcycle* (Jack Cardiff, 1968), *The Trip* (Roger Corman, 1967) and *The Swimmer* (Frank Perry, 1968) (see fig. 2.1). The 'hallucinogenic' emulsions used, while perhaps preparing the contemporary viewer for a 'trippy' experience, effectively flatten this Venus on to the screen's picture plane, merging her with the screen and inscribing her role as an iconic, derealised "illusion cut to the measure of desire" (Mulvey 1989: 25). Of course, that desire is – or will become – a mixture of fear and attraction very much in keeping with the codes of both exploitation and gothic horror. Supporting the *fatale* connotations, the acid colours suggest that something is off-key or amiss. As the trailer puts it, Wanda wears a "coat that covers paradise, uncovers hell". Yet while the image fixes her as a spectacular if dangerous female icon, it also presents her as unstable or mercurial, its mutating colour scheme hinting at her mirage-like role to come.

Wanda's fetish function is reiterated throughout the film by shots which isolate fragments of her body. Starting from the pre-credit close-up, her legs and feet in particular constitute a motif, recurring most notably in two erotic scenes: Kapp's death at Wanda's hands, and Jimmy and Wanda's first liaison. In the former, Kapp holds Wanda's ankle, and we catch sight of it in one of numerous mirrors before he dies. The sex scene with Jimmy and Wanda is segued in via an image whose composition echoes the film's opening shot: an extremely blurred close-up of a painting of a young girl gradually comes in to focus to reveal her booted feet and legs, the camera then panning up to her face.



Fig 2.1: *Venus in Furs* credit sequence.

Wanda's role as icon for a certain type of Venus is confirmed by the fact that, while the film is inundated with Jimmy's sub-beatnik verbiage, she is granted just one line of dialogue, a rejection of or warning to her pursuer: "no Jimmy, go back". Her virtual silence, perhaps intended during the shooting stage to allow for greater freedom in post-shoot scripting and dubbing, complements her role as elusive apparition. It also confirms the influence of *Vertigo*, which had similarly delayed the moment at which its object of desire spoke: for much of Hitchcock's 'first act' Madeleine/Judy, like Wanda, is "the mute, only half-seen object of man's romantic quest: the eternal feminine" (Modleski 1989: 92). The difference is that *Vertigo* gradually reveals Madeleine's/Judy's point of view, thoughts and feelings and offers, according to Modleski, a subversive switch in agency and a space for female spectatorial identification (Modleski 1989:100). Keeping her silent might not in itself deny Wanda agency, but it reinforces (despite her acts of revenge) the fact that she is framed within the feverish consciousness of, as the trailer puts it, "a strange young man blowing hard on a lonely trumpet".

Jimmy's discovery of Wanda's corpse leads him into a reverie as the film flashes back to the *Marienbad*-style "jet-set party". There now unfolds a miniature – under 2 minutes and fabricated from 25 shots - but resonant and complex drama of looks. Wanda enters the party and

is soon ushered away by Ahmed under Jimmy's, Kapp's, and Olga's watchful eyes. No mastering shot is provided to show Jimmy and his band playing in the same space as the jet-setters. No doubt as a result of the vagaries of shooting, the stage and the rest of the room are rather differently shot and lit. Despite all participants maintaining inscrutable countenances which can barely be said to convey anticipation, it becomes apparent retrospectively that the scene has begun with Olga, Kapp and Ahmed waiting for Wanda's arrival. Wanda seems to have come to the party expecting a rendezvous with Ahmed. Subsequent scenes suggest not only that they are all acquainted, but that the group constitutes a vaguely defined sado-masochistic 'swinging set' with Ahmed as its ringleader. These events are, meanwhile, watched over by Jimmy from two vantage points at once: the on-screen, onstage Jimmy of the film's past and the off-screen, narrating Jimmy of what we take to be the present. Jimmy's narration guides the interpretative process but the connection between what he says and what we see is not always straightforward. The drama of looking staged around the jet-set party is barely accompanied by diegetic sound: the music played by Jimmy's band is asynchronous, and there is no dialogue. The remainder of the soundtrack is occupied by Jimmy's rambling voiceover. As Wanda enters the scene, the dubbed jazz fades away to be replaced by non-diegetic 'eerie' music, effectively coating the visuals in the miasma of Jimmy's subjective perception, while framing Wanda as a projection of his "determining male gaze" (Mulvey 1989: 19).



shot 1



shot 2



shot 3



shot 4



shot 5



shot 6



shot 7



shot 8



shot 9



shot 10



shot 11



shot 12



shot 13



shot 14



shot 15



shot 16



shot 17



shot 18



shot 19



shot 20



shot 21



shot 22



shot 23



shot 24



shot 25

Fig. 2.2: The ‘jet set party’ from *Venus in Furs*

Shots 5,6,7 and 9 (see fig 2.2) show the isolated heads of Kapp, Olga and Ahmed staring off screen. Each of these medium shots is answered not, as one might expect, by the object of each character’s look, but by another staring head. Shot 8, showing Jimmy on stage, momentarily implies that they are watching his performance, but this impression is instantly replaced by Wanda’s appearance at the threshold of the venue in shot 10, where she is introduced in a classical shot/reverse shot formation via Ahmed’s gaze. Shot 11 represents a more close-up ‘return’ back from Wanda to a wide-eyed Ahmed, connoting an intensity of vision or emotional heightening that we assume is induced by desire; this is supported by a shift in the camera’s perspective to accommodate a deep red backdrop that henceforth provides the dominant colour motif of the scene, and of the whole film. After the Ahmed-Wanda-Ahmed series the entry of Wanda into the party triggers a circular chain of shot/reverse shots: the next four shots of her are bracketed in turn by Ahmed and Kapp (11 and 13), Kapp and Olga (13, 5), Olga and Jimmy (15, 17), Jimmy and Ahmed (17, 19). Thus in each case the reverse field is occupied by a different character. While the image of Wanda in shots 10 and 12 can be seen straightforwardly as ‘belonging’ to Ahmed, the viewing positions supplied by the subsequent relay of looks are harder to identify because the angle of vision on Wanda remains constant across the chain of looking heads. Each shot of Wanda in this chain (10, 12, 14, 16, and 18) is identical (or imperceptibly different), a repetition which has the effect of presenting this Venus as Jimmy’s *idée fixe*. The scene’s visual coding makes it unnecessary for Jimmy to rhapsodise at length over Wanda’s beauty; his voiceover is at any rate more concerned to convey mystery and confusion. Hence while Jimmy merely recounts at this point that he “really dug that chick”, the

scene seems to play out as an instance of the classic entry of the female beauty: all eyes seem to be on Wanda's auratic manifestation of "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 1989: 19).

Jimmy's voiceover, along with the visual conventions surrounding spectacular femininity, would indicate a rigidly and conventionally gendered coding of subject/object relations of looking. A reading of these codes needs, however, to be set against the scene's specific, slippery patterning of shots. Although it is tempting to see Ahmed, Olga, Kapp and Jimmy's lines of vision as forming a web of looks trapping Wanda somewhere near the centre, the spatial decentring produced by the setting out of looks makes this impossible. If Wanda is the object, repeated images of her are seen to be swapped from one subject to the next. But even this is open to doubt. Olga, Kapp's and even Jimmy's looks may be directed at Ahmed rather than, as we may have been led to assume, Wanda. Meanwhile each shot of Wanda in the series can be said to represent her place within Ahmed's field of vision rather than Jimmy's, in spite of the seeming mastery and privilege of Jimmy's position as both narrator and onstage witness. That Ahmed's is the prevailing gaze here is suggested by the fact that it is he who escorts Wanda out of the room at the end of the scene. Despite her construction as quintessential female spectacle or 'eternal feminine', Wanda's entry into the party brings about a noticeable reaction in neither Olga nor Kapp, who continue to stare blankly into the middle distance: this is partly because they are waiting for her and know what to expect, and partly because they are somehow (it is never explained) under Ahmed's spell. Ironically, given their sight-based professions, Olga and Kapp's looks register as impassive or impenetrable.¹ Moreover, each link in the chain of looking heads could equally be said to represent the object of Wanda's gaze as she surveys the room, so that we see Kapp, Olga, Jimmy and Ahmed enter her field of vision rather than the other way around.

Trailed in POV by a transfixed but now off-screen Jimmy, who has left the stage mid-performance to follow them out of the room, Ahmed leads Wanda into a dungeon-like basement, where she gets rather more than the tryst she was presumably expecting. Where Sacher-Masoch's heroine brandished the whip, in Franco's film Kapp and Olga emerge suddenly out of the gloom, strip Wanda to her underwear and subject her to flagellation. Though the whip is administered by Olga with Kapp's assistance, they seem to do Ahmed's bidding: rather like Morpho in *The Awful Dr Orlof*, they act as agents of a suave monster's diabolical desires. Looking on and apparently directing the activities, Ahmed is clearly the truer sadist, concluding the evening's entertainments by plunging a knife into Wanda's shoulder and (in a faint echo of Morpho's attacks in *Orlof*) supping vampirically at the wound. Catching sight of the action mid-flow as Kapp and Olga paw at Wanda's prostrate body, the narrator observes

¹ This effect is enhanced by Dennis Price's somewhat distracted performance.

what he calls this “wild scene” from a safe vantage point several feet away. The jet-set party had presented a montage of viewpoints whose construction left us in doubt about what had happened and why. Proceeding with virtually no dialogue, the wild scene contains 56 cuts within its 3 minutes and is assembled from 10 camera set-ups in an accelerating montage that makes the precise nature and sequence of events similarly difficult to establish. The rapid editing also intensifies the theatre of looking presented in the jet-set party, exacerbating the dynamics implicit in the latter’s multi-perspectival arrangement. The scene ends with a cut back to the ‘present’, with a blurred subjective close-up of Wanda’s naked corpse on the shore. Thus has the film attempted to submerge us in Jimmy’s gothic “circles of fear and desire” (Day 1985: 50).

Of course, Jimmy’s perception can be said often to frame the fiction through a phallogentric gaze that aligns voyeurism with sadism. As he observes the murder of Wanda, Jimmy seems to literalise the association of scopophilia with sadism, an association magnified in the murderous personage of Ahmed, who holds the most powerful look in the scene. Their diegetic looks – along with those of Olga and Kapp – appear to act as alibis for the extracinematic look of the implied spectator, licensing the image of Wanda to fulfil the requirements of sexploitation cinema for a ‘female’ spectacle as object of a punishing gaze. On this account Wanda serves as erotic object punished for the very desire she ‘provokes’. The ownership, agency and direction of looks in these two scenes is nonetheless complicated by the narrative’s unfolding within Jimmy’s ‘present’ reverie: all looks are mediated through his gothicised desiring subjectivity, even when the viewer is given an angle of vision or point of view unavailable to the ‘past’ Jimmy. In the jet-set party Jimmy’s onscreen gaze joins the action relatively late on: since the story is recounted in past tense, his voiceover can begin to describe his emotions several shots before the onscreen Jimmy looks up from his performance to observe events. Only two shots in the scene are unequivocally presented as his point of view, but the voiceover asks us to read everything the camera shows us as Jimmy’s recollection/perception, regardless of his restricted position on stage. Jimmy’s account of the wild scene might likewise give the impression that we are watching what Jimmy remembers. The visual evidence says otherwise. The action begins before Jimmy arrives and continues after he leaves, with Ahmed as master of ceremonies, and master of the gaze, overseeing and finally completing the attack on Wanda. Jimmy’s gothic state of horrified and curious enthrallment briefly introduces another line of vision into the drama, his point of view jostling with that of the other characters and ‘third person’ shots.

Fetishes and Fishtanks: The Obscured Look

Two scenes show Jimmy following his elusive object of curiosity. Here, too, the influence of *Vertigo* is in evidence. The echo is not accidental: Franco highlights it by filming the

‘following’ scenes in a cloistered courtyard similar to the one used by Hitchcock for Scottie’s stalking of Madeleine/Judy (see fig. 2.3). Franco’s two scenes closely resemble one another, though in the first Wanda turns Jimmy away and in the second she does not. In Hitchcock’s film the ‘ghostly’ form of Madeleine/Judy is, like Wanda, frequently “photographed through diffusion filters, shot in soft light, dressed in white coat, and accompanied by haunting music on the soundtrack” (Modleski 1989: 92). As in Hitchcock’s film, both scenes make continual use of subjective camera, but *Venus* goes further than *Vertigo* in obscuring the shots through ripples and gauzes. Franco has said that these effects were imposed on the film by the producers (Aguilar 1999: 58), and it is fair to say that they appear overwrought. This prompts Tim Lucas to surmise that the panoply of opticals was the result of post-production meddling and that they therefore compromise Franco’s intentions (Lucas 2005: 47). However, Franco frequently uses focus-pulling and other in-camera distortions, partly to create an other-worldly mood and to connote Jimmy’s increasing lack of clarity. In this respect the ‘imposed’ effects can seem redundant, but they are not out of place in the context of a film where vision constantly makes a show of itself. In scenes where Jimmy follows Wanda, Franco’s blurred focus accentuates her distance; she literally recedes from view, and this naturally stokes Jimmy’s masochistic fascination.

Wanda is, like Madeleine/Judy, thus constructed as a fantasised figure of “woman, who is posited as she whom man must know and possess in order to guarantee his truth and identity” (Modleski 1989: 91), but she is also unknowable and unpossessable. Much as *Vertigo* has been seen to destabilise the male spectator by revealing “a fascination with femininity that throws masculine identity into question and crisis” (Modleski 1989: 87), so Jimmy’s gaze is repeatedly problematised and degraded as he questions the nature of his object of desire, and the nature of his investment in it. His projective and ‘investigative’ gaze vacillates, like Scottie’s, “between a passive mode and an active mode, between a hypnotic and masochistic fascination with the woman’s desire and a sadistic attempt to gain control over her, to possess her” (Modleski 1989: 99).





Fig. 2.3: Jimmy follows Wanda in *Venus in Furs*

Jimmy watches the “wild scene” under the cover of darkness, concealed behind a wrought-iron screen, his voyeuristic regard bound up with fascinated curiosity about what he watches. The screen beyond which he peers has a similar function to the stage in the jet-set party: in an apparent reflexive metaphor for the film’s intended viewer, Jimmy is able to observe and vicariously ‘join in’ from a safe distance. If the viewer is interpellated as well as represented by Jimmy’s voyeurism, this is underlined in the *mise-en-scène* by the use of an onset but off-screen lamp, which plunges the torture of Wanda alternately into darkness and light, inviting both Jimmy and the spectator to peer into the gloom to see what is going on. The alternation of blocking and showing, soliciting and frustrating Jimmy and the viewer’s look, echoes similarly ‘teasing’ structures of looking elsewhere in the film and is typical of Franco’s tendency to simultaneously draw attention to and capitalise on exploitation cinema’s tantalising mode of address.

In several films Franco expands upon this visual oscillation by filming erotic scenes through fish tanks. Since the aquarium in these scenes tends to fill the foreground, in focus, with its edges corresponding to those of the screen, while intercourse or undressing occupy the out-of-focus background, it might be more accurate to say that Franco films fish tanks with sex behind them, rather than sex with aquariums blocking the view. In several examples – most notably *Blue Rita* (1977) (see fig 2.4) - the fish tank occupies so much of the film’s running time that it exceeds any normal titillating and titivating approach to eroticism, to the extent that the viewer is likely to be at first bored and then amused by Franco’s withholding of sexploitation spectacle. Franco can be said to parody a prettifying convention of erotic photography – a clichéd sign of good taste - by taking it to absurd lengths. This is a crude display of ‘subtlety’ in which codes of decorous erotica ironically become gratuitous. As we wonder how long Franco is going to sustain the shot, the spectatorial desire for either bodily spectacle or plot progression is thwarted. Practices of looking, showing and being shown are again put centre-stage, in a shot set-up that teases the viewer while reflexively drawing attention to the act of teasing.

The dynamics of looking implied in different ways by the swinging lamp and the aquarium shot are comparable to Franco's lensing of Wanda and Jimmy's sexual liaisons. In these the camera is often focused, not on the bodies, but on an ornate bedstead in the foreground: a 'looking through' arrangement, recalling Jimmy's position behind the wrought-iron screen, in which the uncanny and the voyeuristic coincide. Franco's voyeuristic shooting of both the cellar and the bedroom scenarios inhabits a pause between visibility and invisibility, and between the tangible and the imagined. Wanda and Jimmy's sex scenes proceed in a series of lap dissolves and blurrings. It is not unusual for love-making scenes in Franco's films to begin with protracted reductions of focus, a practice no doubt partly determined by a wish to circumvent censorship by simultaneously showing and concealing reasonably prolonged sex scenes, and by a wish to impart an air of supposedly respectable eroticism by softening the edges. Where the aquarium shot in *Blue Rita* was partly self-parodying, *Venus* imbricates the erotics of suggestion with gothic mystery and dread by suggesting that the flickering and half seen images appear to us as they emerge within Jimmy's erotomaniacal consciousness.



Fig. 2.4: Aquarium shot in *Blue Rita*.

The same can be said of the extravagant use of first person shots treated to visual effects that, like the voiceover, are suggestive of haunted consciousness. The arsenal of solarisation, reflections, dyes, slow motion, focus-pulling, superimposition and diffusion which Wanda's

appearances tend to unleash have as much to do with the “over-ornamentation” of gothic literature (Botting 1996: 3) as they do with 1960s psychedelia. The unrestrained use of such effects is unusual within Franco’s output. Most of Franco’s later films were to take a more subdued approach to ‘fantasy’ optics, or at least to spread them more thinly, usually in the form of colour filters used to lend a sheen of dream-like eroticism to on-stage numbers. The imposed effects are credited by Lucas to one of the editors, Michael Pozen, who had just made similar contributions to the Monkees vehicle, *Head* (Bob Rafelson, 1968). Given *Head*’s montage-heavy semi-coherent reflexivity, it is apparent that Pozen had a decisive impact on the final structure of *Venus*.¹ The film itself credits Howard A. Anderson for special effects. Anderson had previously contributed to science fiction films like *Invasion of the Saucer Men* (Edward L. Cahn, 1957), and (appropriately, in view of *Venus*’ temporal slipperiness and James Darren’s then-recent starring role in the time-travelling TV series *The Time Tunnel* (1966-1967)), *The Time Machine* (George Pal, 1960). Whatever their authorship, the visual bag of tricks serves up a glut of tropes for Jimmy’s fascination, this baroque specularly enabling his object of desire to be both fetishised and obscured before our eyes.

The Doubting Eye

By providing sights (close-ups and camera angles) unavailable to Jimmy as he watches the wild scene, Franco and his editors appear to grant the viewer an ‘ideal’ position both inside and outside of Jimmy’s consciousness. This enables the diegetically ‘real’ to be mixed with his confused reflections. The difficulty of peeling these layers apart is further complicated by the fact that this position of apparent omniscience is itself destabilised by a tension between what we see and what Jimmy says. While the voiceover during the wild scene informs us that Jimmy looks away in shame and disgust, the camera proceeds to do the opposite. Mendik cautiously notes that Jimmy “recalls Wanda having been killed at the party”, rather than that he saw her being killed (Mendik 1998: 15). The caution is warranted: the sequence is edited in such a way that we see Jimmy look away before we are shown Wanda murdered. Several interpretations are possible; none are definitive. Jimmy witnessed the murder, but feels guilt over his own voyeuristic complicity. Acknowledging that he is implicated by his voyeurism, the narrating Jimmy says “man, it was a wild scene. Like, if they wanted to go that rough, it was their bag. I told myself it was none of my business. But maybe I stood because I was as sick as they were, but couldn’t face up to it”. Hence Jimmy, recognising that he has something in common with the others, fantasises that he turns away from the sight as a cover for (and symptom of) his guilt. Or Jimmy never saw the murder, but finds out about it later, after discovering Wanda’s body on

¹ Another of its editors, Nicholas Wentworth, had previously worked for Towers on Franco’s *Justine* (1968), a far more ‘classical’ Sade adaptation that I briefly discuss in chapter 4.

the beach. In both cases, we are shown Jimmy's imaginative secondary elaboration as he embellishes the facts and fills in the gaps in his 'memory', though the elaboration produces a different fiction in either instance. A third possibility is that the entire scenario is the product of Jimmy's febrile imagination, dreamed up during one of his trumpet solos. (Franco's original idea for the film had reportedly come to him from a conversation with the jazz musician Chet Baker, who had likened his mental state during performances to a kind of drowning (Aguilar 1999: 58). Depending on how one reconstructs the story from its fragmentary plotting, Jimmy's fantasy of Wanda's murder might begin at the beginning of the film with the discovery of the corpse, at the end of the film with the discovery of her grave, or 'earlier' at the jet-set party, as Jimmy watches Wanda being led away by Ahmed.

Much of the film's fascinating ambiguity, or annoying irresolution, therefore stems from the fact that the narrative pivots on a visual uncertainty. If Jimmy did not see the murder, then how does he 'know', or why does he believe, that it took place? If this question makes the epistemological assumption that there is a positive link between seeing, believing and knowing, the film also stretches that link to breaking point. In this respect Franco can be said to explore the capacity within gothic and fantastic modes to manipulate and deconstruct the relationship between vision, knowledge and belief. As Mark Nash remarks, the fantastic is not modernist, but, like modernist cinema, "it is progressive in that... the category of the real is at least under scrutiny" (Nash 1976: 67). In short, you cannot believe your eyes.

According to Todorov, fantastic narratives centre upon extraordinary, unsettling events that enter the 'normal', real world, forcing the protagonist to choose between two explanations. One solution, defined by Todorov as the marvellous, is worldly and rational: hence the protagonist is victim to "an illusion of the senses" (Todorov 1975: 25). Franco's cast of aristocratic debauchees, mad scientists, and robotic minions might all fit Todorov's category of the marvellous as a phenomenon that can be explained according to natural or scientific laws, no matter how far-fetched. That Jimmy is simply mad would at least provide assurance that, beneath its delirious surface, the text still believes (or wants the viewer to believe) in the existence of a real world that adheres to the division between the actual and the imaginary. The other solution, defined by Todorov as 'uncanny' but not to be confused with Freud's use of the same term, is that the disquieting events – in this case a series of fatal encounters with a vengeful revenant – did happen. Hence Wanda cannot be taken only as a metaphor for the characters' being haunted by their guilty pasts. This solution suggests that the supernatural is an "integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us" (Todorov 1975: 25). In Todorov's terms, the fantastic, as experience and as genre, is the hesitation between these two explanatory poles.

James Donald points out that these moments of hovering uncertainty “play on the ‘reality status’ of what we...see” in a way which enables the “instability of the character’s perception” to coalesce with that of the audience, since “if a story is to achieve its fantastic effect, the reader too has to be kept in the dark” (Donald 1989: 13). This concurs with Todorov’s view that the fantastic world “is defined by the reader’s own ambiguous perception of the events narrated” (Todorov 1975: 31), and with Mark Nash’s claim that the “cinefantastic” depends upon the viewer’s identification with an equivocating character and/or narrator (Nash 1976: 30). *Vertigo* shows Scottie’s points of view to have been “deceptive” (Modelski 1989: 96), implying the existence of a position of knowledge that *Venus*, in its commitment to the fantastic, largely foregoes. While *Venus* attempts to represent Jimmy’s consciousness, it does not bother with psychological ‘causes’ in quite the way Hitchcock does.

Kapp’s death demonstrates some of the means by which *Venus* invites the viewer to occupy the fantastic moment of hesitation. As in Jimmy’s first sex scene with Wanda, the scene opens on a close-up of a painting of a standing woman (it is in focus this time). The camera then pans to another painting, now of a seated woman. We cut to Kapp, who looks as though he has seen something, then to Wanda standing between the door jamb and a pillar. This is a repeat of the shot of Wanda used in the credit sequence: an example of the repetition that runs through the film. To add to the tautological, hall-of-mirrors-structure of the scene (and of the entire film), the composition of the shot almost duplicates that of the painting at the scene’s beginning: Wanda adopts virtually the same stance as the woman in the painting, and occupies a similar position within the frame. The next shot of Wanda finds her seated, in apparent imitation of the second painting that introduced the scene. Following another reaction shot of a confused Kapp, the reverse first person camera now shows the room minus Wanda. Has she disappeared, or did Kapp imagine her? The scene continues in this vein until its climax, with Wanda/Kapp alternations interspersed with Wanda-less shots of Kapp’s bedroom. The pace of cutting accelerates as Kapp becomes increasingly agitated by Wanda’s (and the film’s) continuing play of absence/presence, visibility/invisibility. Kapp’s climactic death is then represented through an alternating montage in which close-ups of his sweatily terrified features are intercut with repeats of the familiar shot of Wanda’s dead face.

Todorov’s fantastic hesitation lies partly in a withholding of information; we do not see what, if anything, Wanda does to Kapp. He dies of a heart attack, or so we assume. But the gap in ‘knowledge’ allows us to suspect that he is somehow killed, not by her, but by his own inner demons, so that the ghost merely stands for the guilty return of his past crimes. That the ambiguity of Wanda’s ontological status can be temporarily resolved by seeing her only as a reflection of Kapp’s pathology may be inferred from her fractured and fleeting appearance in

the many mirrors that adorn his bedroom. A common motif in gothic and fantastic fictions, mirror images figure an uncanny “strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality” (Royle 2003: 2) by appearing to exist in a limbo that blurs the oppositions of reality/perception, corporeal/incorporeal, present/absent.

Unusually committed to the uncertainty and indeterminacy of the fantastic, *Venus* finally refuses to restore such binaries. As doubles of both Wanda and her mirror image, the shots of paintings imply that Wanda exists only in the imaginary, or as an image in the text. Redolent of gothic fiction’s eerily life-like portrait, this motif of the uncanny work of art recurs and is extended during Wanda and Jimmy’s first sexual encounter, which is intercut with a number of different paintings, each featuring young women (the camera pays particular attention to their eyes) who appear to stare at the action; as Botting notes of the uncanny effects of representation in gothic writing, “[t]he world of artifice and representation is seen to possess mysterious powers in the stimulation of fantasy and hallucination” (Botting 1996: 119). Kapp’s death scene proceeds to undermine any ‘marvellous’ explanation by closing with a now seemingly real Wanda - since Kapp is dead, he can no longer be hallucinating or dreaming - lighting candles as the soundtrack sings the first line of the theme song: “Venus in furs will be smiling”.

Mark Nash’s description of Dreyer’s *Vampyr* as a system seems out of step with Franco’s loose, wayward textuality, but his account of how fantastic effects can be produced by the manipulation of subjective narration is useful in relation to how *Venus* deploys point of view. For Nash, this mode of narration lends itself particularly well to the fantastic as a genre that explores “themes of the self” through a dual concern with imagination and vision (Nash 1976: 31). Hence *Vampyr* makes use of deceptive and displaced point of view shots as part of a “play of pronoun functions” that Nash sees as a “privileged element of the cinefantastic” (Nash 1976: 37). Adopting much the same linguistically based methodology as Nash for a reading of Jack Clayton’s *The Innocents* (1961), Steven Seidman has argued that a characteristic device of the cinefantastic is the disruption of *histoire* by “authorial marks” whose motivation is equivocal or polysemic: certain sightings of the vampire in Dreyer’s film and the ghost in *The Innocents* “vacillate between *histoire* and *discours*” as the films’ narrational ‘voice’ shifts from “personal to impersonal” (Seidman 1979: 206). Todorov’s fantastic hesitation, that is, hovers over whether the sightings are attributable to the character or to the implied author and/or narrator.

Several sequences in *Venus* bear out Nash’s and Seidman’s claims that fantastic cinema produces and relies upon techniques for producing doubt about the ownership or origin of shots (Nash 1976: 40). During the build-up to Kapp’s death, for example, we are presented with several possible points of view aimed at Kapp from Wanda’s absent field. In the story’s climax, we see Jimmy from the perspective of his own corpse. While this point of view is only

approximate (the eyeline match is not exact), the cinefantastic impact is doubled by the fact that the scene is a virtual repeat of the story's beginning: the camera set-up is the same as that used for Jimmy's earlier discovery of Wanda's dead body. Here our visual placement is split over four incompatible sites: the impossible subject positions of the two corpses, the seemingly living Jimmy who discovers the bodies, and the objective or third person perspective offered to the implied viewer who tries to make sense of the other three.

The oscillation between personal and impersonal narration continues in the wild scene through a rapid intercutting of what Nash calls "descriptive" (framing all of the performers, from a site outside of Jimmy's field of vision) and "personal" shots, such that it becomes difficult to distinguish one from the other, and to decide which apparently subjective shot belongs to which character (Nash 1976: 39-40). The ambivalence is exacerbated by Jimmy's presence as partial on-screen spectator and unreliable narrator. Seen in relation to aspects of mise-en-scène elsewhere in the film and in conjunction with the film's subject matter, the shooting and editing of Wanda's death also appears as a variation on a technique of fantastic polysemy described by Nash as "marking the shots as if they pertained to a character in the diegesis and then revealing (by the articulation of surrounding shots) the absence of any such character" (Nash 1976: 38). Although early in the film we are inclined to see Wanda as 'real' (in spite of some 'eerie' connotative codings and the possible hint provided by the *Marienbad* allusion), her murder falls into Seidman's category of vacillation because after Jimmy looks shamefully away the camera's perspectives on the action do not change. One response to this is that what we had taken to be Jimmy's first person view of the act was actually "the impersonal stance, *histoire*" (Seidman 1979: 205). In this case Jimmy's perspective is presented deceptively, demonstrating how first person narration "facilitates the identification of the [viewer] with the character of the narrator...whose discourse can then be used by the author to lie" (Nash 1976: 30). How this moment of hesitation is read leads to different, incomplete, understandings of the whole film.

One of the ways in which *Venus* differs from both *Vampyr* and *The Innocents* is in its histrionic treatment of the relationships between vision and desire. According to Nash, visual distortions that mark sequences as dream or delusion are largely shunned by Dreyer (Nash: 32). For Seidman, "authorial marks which can no longer be attributed to character" are superior to the use of ripples, gauzes and other techniques to signify subjectivity (Seidman 1979: 205). From this perspective the representation of Jimmy's pursuit of the chimeric Wanda through a battery of 'fantasy' effects might be seen as kitschily manipulative, much as 'graphic' horror was often seen as inferior to 'suggestive' terror, hence the film's less than favourable reviews. Despite over-egging the cinefantastic pudding at some points, *Venus* resists using such effects for other scenes and shots that might have seemed ripe for obviously 'uncanny' styling (Olga and Wanda's deaths), while treating some more innocuous moments (Jimmy following Wanda

through a courtyard, their sex scenes) with a variety of deformations. In this respect *Venus* may be seen as more rather than less fantastic. The fantastic mode has been seen by Sedgwick (1986), Botting (1996), Royle (2003) and others as a critique of enlightenment epistemology, or of modernity's desire to make all phenomena transparent to the 'positivist' eye of scientific inquiry.¹ On this account, modernity, as part of the project of enlightenment reason, is seen to include the use of monocular optical equipment like cameras as instruments of truth. Modernism in the arts often involves challenging such 'ocularcentric' rationality by rendering sight defective and opaque. It is perhaps ironic that exploitation and fantastic cinema often take part in a similar crisis of representation or "visual skepticism" (Turvey 2008: 99) by embracing 'kitsch' gothic and uncanny modes that modernist high culture tends to discredit. Jimmy's and Franco's blocked, blurred, diffused, rippled and solarised looks dramatise - and to some extent pathologise - acts of looking, rejecting the equation of 'male' rationality with "the law of representation and verisimilitude" (Modleski 1989: 94). The cinefantastic methods used in *Venus* undermine 'positivist' models of vision as Jimmy, like *Vertigo*'s Scottie, fails "to perform his proper role in relation to the Symbolic order and the Law" (Modleski 1989: 90).

In a gloss on Mark Nash's (1979) and Rosemary Jackson's (1981) readings of the genre, Carol Clover has noted that fantastic effects depend on an uncertainty of vision arising from a profusion of perspectives and a confusion of subjective and objective" (Clover: 1992 56n). For Raymond Bellour, the films of Jacques Tourneur comprise a 'theory' of "fascination (that is, of belief and its manifestations)" through "frames, gazes; camera distances; lighting; the calculated play of the actors seized up as if they were sorts of figures; ellipses and durations". For Bellour, the spectacular elements of fantastic cinema, combined with its interest in the nature of fascination and belief, constitute a meditation on "the power of cinema" itself (Bellour 1990: 98). Though *Venus in Furs* perhaps has little in common with the subtle forms of terror evoked in a film like *Cat People* (1942), the ostentatious manner in which Franco and Jimmy frame bodies and desires - approaching and withdrawing, revealing and concealing, displaying and obstructing - are not just a formal exercise in aesthetics, but an exploration of relationships between seeing, believing and desiring.² Thus the cinematic techniques through which a troubled, male masochistic fixation is represented effectively menace any supposed scopophilic

¹ Archeologies of vision and visibility in relation to modernity and modernism are discussed in Jay (1993), Brennan and Jay (1996), Crary (1990), and Foster (1988). Modernist "distrust of sight" is discussed in Turvey (2008). Franco problematises vision by simultaneously idealising it (through the zoom lens, for example) and undermining its truth claims (through Jimmy's blurred and defracted perception, for instance, or through the use of blind characters like the sightless doctor in *Female Vampire*).

² Some of this visibility is further explored in the following chapter, particularly in relation to the credit sequences of *Vampyros Lesbos* and *Female Vampire*.

‘mastery’; whether despite or because of the film’s lapses and lurches, these uncanny and decentred representations of vision amount to an “extensive vocabulary of ‘visuality’” (Jenks 1995: 3) that goes beyond restrictive notions of ‘the gaze’.

The Performance of Sight: Franco’s Zoom

A major role in the visuality of many of Franco’s films of the late 1960s and 1970s is played by the zoom lens. This is also widely seen as a key factor in the air of carelessness prevailing in those films. The *Monthly Film Bulletin*’s review of *Plaisir à Trois* (1974) observes that “with a persistence that makes Michael Winner look sluggardly, [Franco] bestows a pan or a zoom on the least detail and tiniest gesture.... Perhaps the likeliest explanation is that the cameraman was merely afflicted by the same fidgety boredom likely to overcome any but the most comatose audience” (Richard Combs 1975: 159). Reviewing a screening of the “clumsily-constructed terror exploitation item” *Count Dracula* (1970) at Cine Mola in Madrid, *Variety* similarly reprimanded Franco for going “wild with zoom shots” (anon. 1983b: 18). Franco’s dependence on the lens proves irksome to reviewers in ostensibly sympathetic horror and ‘paracinema’ publications, where many of his films are commonly described, not inaccurately, as being “riddled with meaningless zoom shots” (Hogan 1988: 152). In horror constituencies, Franco’s unrestrained zoom is either condemned or politely tolerated in favour of his films’ bodily spectacle and sordid subject matter. Most of the Franco films positively received within horror-centred taste communities tend to be those in which the zoom is least prominent. Allan Bryce, the editor of *The Dark Side* (the British “magazine of the macabre and fantastic”) cites the virtually zoomless *The Awful Dr. Orlof* and *The Diabolical Z* as “pretty good” films (Bryce 1993: 4), while *DVD Delirium Volume 3* notes approvingly that in Franco’s “atypical” splatter film *Faceless* (1988) “there’s hardly a crash zoom in sight” (Thompson 2006: 201). According to Bryce, “(t)he legendary Harry Alan Towers once said to me that ... Jess Franco was a jazz musician who played the trombone until he discovered the zoom lens. ... I’m a classical music man myself” (Bryce 1993: 4). This comment suggests that Franco’s improvisations with the camera deviate from the norms of ‘classical’ filmmaking.¹ The hostility in the horror press to Franco’s persistent zooming suggests that it is a visual nuisance, perhaps like the aquarium shot, a hindrance to spectatorial pleasures. This deviation from the norms of ‘good’ filmmaking might make aspects of Franco’s films comparable to certain formalist models of avant-garde film-making, as Mendik and Hawkins suggest. Bryce goes on, somewhat apologetically, to

¹ Bryce’s and others’ resistance to the device predates its current acceptance in documentaries and fiction films aiming to create a ‘reality effect’ or what David Bordwell calls “accelerated continuity” (Bordwell 2002).

justify his publication of a 'Jess Franco Special' on the grounds that while Franco "makes lousy films...the posters and stills from them are great" (Bryce 1993: 4).

The comparatively scant critical attention that the zoom lens has received is a measure of the low esteem in which has been held; it has long had the reputation of being a device whose expressive possibilities should be handled with care. In an essay written during the height of the zoom's popularity in post-classical Hollywood, Paul Joannides argued that the lens' potential for transformations of visual space had to be used sparingly, since its "denial of perspective" created an effect not "of moving *through* space, but of space warping towards or away from the camera" (Joannides 1970: 41). These distortions of the visual field mean that attempts by directors like Franco to use zoom shots as substitutes for travelling, tracking or dolly shots tend to appear as feeble and cheap approximations of movement in depth.

Responding in a 1994 interview to the question, "what would you say to critics who say you've used too much zoom in your films?" Franco replied,

I think they were right. The problem is, when you have such a reputation, you shoot a complete film without a zoom....In the last ten years I made ten shots with a zoom, and I made much more with the crab dolly, but still they say I use the zoom. It's something from the past. The problem is, when I made very cheap films, you had no time to put the travelling in, I wanted to approach the actors. I realised that I used it too much and I said, no more zoom. No more. (Tohill, 1994: 8-9).

Franco's reference to his tight shooting schedules acknowledges that his dependence on the zoom was dictated by practicality. Franco's films were shot in haste and the zoom lens provided a means of visually relocating the shot without the time-consuming effort of moving the camera from one place to the other and later editing the separate shots together: it is an expedient ploy for conveying information, producing spatial and temporal shifts, and creating visual incident as economically as possible. That Franco's dependence on the zoom is economically determined is evident from the fact that between 1961 and 1965 he made an average of about 1.6 films per year and in these years his zoom lens is restrained.¹ *The Awful Dr Orlof* contains only two, inconspicuous slow zooms. *Lucky the Inscrutable*, *Attack of the Robots* and *Rifi in the City* restrict its use, conventionally enough, to action and fight sequences. Between 1971 and 1975 Franco made an average of 7.2 films per year, and these films are particularly zoom-heavy. In *The Rites of Frankenstein* (1972) around 170 separate shots contain at least one zoom (many shots contain three or four zooms in and out).

¹ These figures are approximate.

As Bryce's comments on Franco's "pretty good" films suggests, Franco's zoom was not always used indiscriminately, and may have been a matter of stylistic choice as much as expediency. Though as financially determined as the 'recycling' and 'padding' discussed in the previous chapter, Franco's zooming has a range of uses within his distinctive and diverse repertoire of looks. It may be used 'syntactically' to provide basic information and help to maintain narrative continuity: typically, a zoom in prior to a cut – towards a castle window or a point on the horizon – will indicate the location of the shot to come. A zoom on either side of a cut has the rudimentary role of signalling that we are entering one scene and leaving another. Another highly conventional shot much favoured by Franco involves zooming in to a significant object or lending it significance by directing the viewer's attention to it. Other zooms into details are more concerned with displaying spectacle, or are motivated by the need to create a sense of dynamism or excitement. The zoom lens was enthusiastically adopted by horror cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, fast zooms accompanied by shock cuts quickly becoming a standard technique for startling audiences, revealing danger or connoting 'disturbed' states of mind or intense emotions. Several of Franco's films make rapid zooms into the faces of 'hysterical' female characters, while abject terror is often suggested by crash zooms into staring eyes. Franco takes even these elementary functions of the lens to unusual extremes.

The lens often features heavily in scenes involving sex, dancing or violence. Hence Franco will typically home in on writhing buttocks, an 'orgasmic' facial expression, or a fetish-object. Here the zoom tends to be associated with an 'ideal' construction of subjective vision: it acts as a 'hyper' point-of-view shot, attached to a diegetic onlooker, as though his or her eyes are disembodied and thrown towards the object of the look. Hence a contemporary review of *The Demons* (1972) remarks that Franco is inclined to "zoom into female crotches with some abandon" (Meek 1974: 173). In a film like this, the bionic voyeurism of a sudden visual crash into a woman's pubis and/or to the infliction of a wound (in Franco's films the two are not always unconnected), is an extension of exploitation cinema's drive towards hyper-visibility (Williams 1990: 191-192).

Franco's "wild" zooming often appears sloppy and monotonous but it cannot be explained solely by the director's supposed ineptitude. Like the expressionist camerawork in *Orlof*, the very ubiquity of the zoom in many of Franco's films creates the impression of a constantly agitated camera. His seemingly aberrant approach to the lens may be an attempt to make a virtue of a necessity, with the 'surface' incident supplied by incessant zooming distracting the eye from impoverished set decoration or listless performances. In this respect the hyperactive lens echoes Franco's fondness for creating disorientation and 'atmosphere' through the use of wide-angle lenses in cramped interior shots. Films like *Venus in Furs* and *The Rites of*

Frankenstein (1972) repeatedly use short lenses for shooting interior scenes; the consequent deformation of perspective – creating horizontal squashing and vertical stretching – can be seen, like the zoom, as a cost-effective form of in-camera expressionism.

The flattening and warping of visual space produced by the zoom lens is often regarded as disorienting and “strangely distancing” (Monaco 1981: 166). Because “the eye cannot zoom”, the lens’ break-up of spatial continuity tends to appear especially incongruous in dialogue scenes (Joannides 1970: 41). Many shots begin and end with a zoom towards or away from an object of doubtful significance. Many of Franco’s zoom-laden dialogue scenes constitute perplexing variations on classical shot/reverse-shot exchanges, presenting conversations through “a benumbing metronome rhythm” (Combs 1975: 159). Depending on such factors as the speed, abruptness, duration and repetitiveness of the zoom shot – as well as the nature of the ‘object’ towards which it is directed – such moments seem surplus to narrative and thematic signification, becoming, like the aquarium shot or the blur, part of what Kristin Thompson (1999) has called narrative cinema’s ‘system of excess’.

The “fidgety” cameraman observed by *The New York Times* was most likely Franco himself: by the late 1960s, Franco was the camera operator on most of his films. Franco’s approach to the apparatus suggests that Towers’ likening of Franco’s zoom lens to a jazz trombone (Franco can be spotted playing a jazz trombonist behind Jimmy in *Venus*) was fitting. Possibly under the influence of the notion of the ‘caméra-stylo’ in French New Wave filmmaking, Franco effectively ‘plays’ the lens, visually soloing or riffing on the optical instrument. Going beyond mere emotional emphasis or atmosphere to become a kind of restless presence in its own right, such moments can be said to declare the ‘hand’ of the filmmaker and the ‘eye’ of the narrator. Hence Franco’s zoom, incompetent or not, can fit comfortably into some constructions of the auteur’s style as a personification of “both the resistance of the radical ‘amateur’ and the eccentric bravura of a self-styled showman” (Wells 2000: 71). Those who would wish to rescue Franco as a ‘serious’ filmmaker might link the zoom to what is often defined as his semi-improvised ‘jazz’ approach to shooting, perhaps incorporating the romantic assumption that ‘mistakes’ are more authentic than adherence to dominant conventions of quality, skill or classical narration (Balbo et al 1993; Tohill and Tombs 1995; Aguilar 1999; Mesnildot 2004).

In a suggestive essay on the use of the zoom in popular cinema, Paul Willemen notes that the zoom was “a constant and rhetorical feature in films by the likes of Jesús Franco and Mario Bava” (Willemen 2003: unpaginated). Distantly echoing Towers’ musical analogy, and Wells’ description of Franco as an amateur showman, Willemen sees the zoom as a “gestural marker of narratorial performance” (Willemen 2003). Bordwell and Staiger similarly see conspicuous use of the device as a gesture of “authorial commentary”. Franco’s zoom is to this degree at home in

Bordwell and Staiger's list of art-film signifiers: "an unusual angle, a stressed bit of cutting, a prohibited camera movement, an unmotivated shift in lighting or setting, indeed any failure to motivate cinematic space and time by cause-effect logic" (Bordwell et al 1985: 374). For "authorial commentary", Willemen substitutes "apparently interruptive intrusions of narratorial agency", and suggests that the 'obviousness' of the zoom breaks the illusion of invisible narration "required for suspension of disbelief". Rather than prevent spectatorial involvement in terms of Brechtian alienation, this visual intrusion embodies a nostalgia for pre-industrial, face-to-face modes of storytelling. An earlier comment by Franco on his own camerawork suggests that, at least from the vantage point of the 1970s, he also saw it as an index of authorial presence, and as an anthropomorphic extension of sight:

I love *classical* films. I consider that I shoot straightforward classical films myself. Certainly not avant-garde ones. But I admit I don't follow textbooks. I hate rules. ... If I use a lot of zoom it's because I cannot afford expensive travelling cameras but also because I like zoom, I like out of focus shots too, that's why I do them. ... The camera is an eye for me ... and if I zoom around it is because I am using it as an eye. (In Van Doon 1977: 45).

The excess of the zoom can, then, be seen as a quirk indulged for its own sake or as an authorial mark blocking supposedly 'identificatory' pleasures. But a brief comment by Mendik during an interview with the director hints at some of the problems of taking a purely formalist approach to Franco's zoom. Mendik notes that Franco's zoom shots are often used to "explore different areas of on-screen space" (Mendik 1998: 20). Thanks to its tendency to exceed narrative causality, the zoom serves as an authorial signature through which Mendik can confidently establish Franco's ability to "cross the art cinema divide" (Mendik 1998: 19). Three linked suggestions are embedded here: Franco's zoom is distinctive enough to represent his uniqueness; it foregrounds "style" over "content"; therefore Franco's films can be aligned with "art cinema" (Mendik 1998: 20). These implications are reasonable in as much as various references to "art cinema" pepper Franco's films of the period¹, and Franco's self-conscious highlighting of the optical apparatus is clearly informed by contemporary cinematic discourse. But Mendik seems needlessly keen to liberate Franco from the exploitation field, citing the zooms in *Female Vampire* (1973) and *Doriana Grey* (1975) as examples of Franco's abstract aesthetic concerns. In each of these films Lina Romay plays what we might stereotypically but not inappropriately describe as a 'sex crazed nymphomaniac' enslaved to her passions. And in each film the area of on-screen "space" most unremittingly explored is Romay's vagina. While

¹ One example occurs in *Attack of the Robots* (1966) when a voice is heard on a loudspeaker advertising the latest Godard film.

Franco's zoom towards Romay's vagina is not lacking in expressiveness or style, Mendik's formalism around it unnecessarily detaches Franco and his variable focal length from the conditions and concerns of exploitation cinema.¹

Like Mendik's, Willemsen's sympathetic approach to the zoom comes at the cost of dissociating it from its economic and generic contexts. Franco's zoom lens cannot be understood outside the conditions of low budget exploitation, but it should also be seen, contrary to Willemsen's claims about nostalgia for the story-teller, in relation to the display of contemporaneity. According to Bordwell and Staiger, the zoom shot was one of a range of "technical tics" used in the 1960s for departing from "the classical canon" (Bordwell et al 1985: 377). The lens had actually been in use since the 1930s, but the compositional possibilities of telephoto flattening and distortion were more widely exploited in the 1960s in such European films as *Red Desert* (*Deserto Rosso*, Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964) and *A Man and a Woman* (*Un homme et une femme*, Claude Lelouch, 1966). The long lens' ability to suggest "either a documentary immediacy or a stylised flattening" encouraged the "self-conscious rack-focusing" that became popular in the period, a technique whose capacity for "marking the presence of a commenting narration" (Bordwell 2002: 377) Franco clearly took to heart. By the time Franco took up the zoom, it had been absorbed, so Bordwell argues, into New Hollywood narration. And, we might add, pornography, horror and exploitation. The ability of the long lens to enlarge distant action "proved advantageous in shooting exteriors on location" (Bordwell 2002: 3). As Bordwell points out, in films where characters are not watched by other characters in the diegesis, this capability enables the zoom to serve the voyeuristic fantasy of watching without being seen: a potential that might be welcomed by pornographers and documentarists alike. But it can also have the opposite effect. Franco's excessive 'playing' of the lens often undermines the supposed 'unseen' subject position of voyeurism by self-consciously drawing attention to the performance of mechanised looking.

Bordwell and Staiger employ a trickle-down model of cultural dissemination to explain the widespread use of the zoom in mainstream cinema, suggesting that art cinema had paved the way for its acceptance. From this perspective, Franco's zoom is not an instance of avant-gardism, as Mendik and Hawkins would suppose, but of the 'kitsch' co-optation of avant-gardist

¹ Franco plays the irrepressible, voyeuristic auteur in his 1977 interview for the adult film magazine *Cinema Blue*, explaining that "the camera is an eye for me...and if I zoom it around it is because I am using it as an eye. And if it zooms straight down to a girl's pussy – as it always does – it is because when a girl strips naked before us what do we look at straight away, as soon as she has her panties are down? Her pubic triangle of course...so my camera-eye does the same" (Van Roon 1977: 45).

technique.¹ In fact the zoom belongs nowhere in particular. Contextualised within popularly disseminated notions of “artiness” (Newman 2007) in the late 1960s, Franco’s restless zoom is as informed by (New or ‘post-classical’) Hollywood narration, exploitation and art-house concerns. Indeed, Bordwell (2002) notes that the technique was already familiar from television commercials, news programmes, documentaries and sports reports by the time the art-house got hold of it, suggesting that the device carried ‘verité’ connotations as much as ‘abstracting’ ones. Joannides confirms that by the 1960s, the zoom was familiar from television as a “reportorial device” (1970: 41). Hence Franco’s zoom is shaped by a wide range of cultural influences as much as by his idiosyncratic sense of vision.

The Cartography of Sex

The supposed transgressivity of exploitation cinema occupies an even less secure place in cultural cartography when notions of ‘explicit’ or ‘obscene’ visibility are at stake. In the field of sex cinema, the term exploitation (or ‘sex exploitation’ or ‘sexploitation’) often designates something adjacent to but distinct from pornography. Williams (1990; 2008) and Schaefer (1999) both distinguish between exploitation and pornography on the bases of relative explicitness and different sites of exhibition. On this account, pornography is defined as that which is hardcore or genitally explicit. Exploitation’s distinction from hardcore pornography allows the former term to function as more or less synonymous with ‘softcore’ or even ‘erotic’ cinema. European sex films of the late 1960s like *Venus in Furs* might be referred to as exploitation films in this sense.²

The rise of ‘wall-to-wall’ hardcore enables Schaefer and Williams to erect a firmer divide between exploitation and pornography than may have existed in the period under discussion here. *The New York Times* was content to call *Venus* an “R-rated exploitation film”, a “skin flick” and “pornography” (anon. 1970: 61). *Variety* suggested the year before that *99 Women* might do well in the “first-run ‘sex-art’ market” rather than the “sexploitation sub-trade” (anon. 1983a: 43). *The Monthly Film Bulletin* simply called *Barbed Wire Dolls* a “tatty piece of porn” (Milne 1977: 69). In other words, the lexicon of the sex film is historically more fluid than some exploitation/pornography disputes may lead us to believe. Several critics have in recent years taken a historical approach to the traffic between art and exploitation. Mark Betz argues in

¹ In referring to ‘kitsch’ here I am not making the judgment that *Venus* simply provides a ‘downgraded’ version of ‘serious’ art. I am making the point that its textual strategies for the presentation of eroticism could have been read as kitsch – rather than camp – in the critical discourse of the late 1960s and 1970s. See for example the discussion of the “euphemistic techniques” of “pornokitsch” in Volli (1968: 224), and of the “middle-class devitalised quality” of “masturbator’s magazines” in Nutall and Carmichael (1977: 49).

² For more on sexploitation see Lithgow and Heard (1965), Chibnall and Hunter (1995), Dennison (2005), Slade (1982) Stevenson (2002), Schaefer (2007).

relation to the programming of New York City cinema of the 1940s - 1960s that “clear-cut distinctions between high and low are difficult to establish” (Betz 2003: 210). Italian neorealist and French New Wave films were often publicised in this context through reference to their ‘candid’ and ‘adult’ representations of sex and the female body, European ‘art’ films often sharing press-book, advertising and theatrical space with North American sexploitation films (Betz 2003: 204). Schaefer similarly looks at how publicity materials for ‘adult’ and ‘art’ films of the period often shared means of address, while Ernest Mathijs has examined supplementary discourses around the Belgian ‘lesbian vampire’ film *Daughters of Darkness* (Harry Kumel, 1971), a film whose oscillation between “exploitation and art” taste registers meant that it “fell between the commercial/exploitation and auteurist/culturally relevant frameworks” (Mathijs 2005: 454).

For Williams, Schaefer and others, sexploitation is usurped by hardcore pornography by the early 1970s (Williams 1990: 96-9; Schaefer 1999: 6-7).¹ This widely accepted periodisation might lead to the supposition that exploitation cinema had withered away or ceased to have a reason for being by the time *Deep Throat* (Gerard Damiano) and *Last Tango in Paris* were released in 1972, forced out by the three-pronged attack of an increasingly sexually ‘frank’ mainstream, the popularity of ‘adults only’ art-house fare, and hardcore’s burgeoning fashionability, at least within the United States, Scandinavia, and the less censorious parts of Europe. This narrative is too simple. Exploitation cinema not only continues but proliferates in many and varied guises.

Venus in Furs can be seen as an exploitation film which navigates the landscape of contemporary sexual representation by borrowing thematic and stylistic concerns liberally from across the broad compass of ‘low-brow’, prestigious and popular cinemas. As an exploitation film positioning itself in relation to then-current notions of sexual and cinematic modernity, it draws on visual and thematic tropes associated with ‘serious’, elite taste formations as well as ‘mainstream’ and ‘underground’ influences. An erotic ghost story veering towards the ‘sex exploitation’ end of the horror spectrum, the film was described by *Variety* as an “exploitation on the psychedelic nether-world between life and death, dreams and realities” and a “softcore vehicle of sex, sadism, and lesser aberrations and fetishes” (Anon. 1983a: 24). With ‘kinky’ intent declared by the rather misleading title, and delivered graphically enough in the pivotal scene of Wanda’s death, it was certainly marketable as a sexploitation picture. The *New York Times* review reported that the film’s release through American International Pictures as part of an “R-rated” double bill which opened at “neighbourhood theatres” (Greenspun 1971: 210), and

¹ See also Muller and Farris 1997: 117-149; O’Toole 1999: 66-70; Hebditch and Anning 1988: 188-92; Lewis 2000: 195-215; Williams 2008.

Variety confirms that, while its “bewildering ambiguity...should mystify general run audiences”, its more sensationalistic features would make it “a good programmer in multiple release” (Anon. 1983a: 24). ‘Arty’ or not, *Variety* and AIP were clearly in little doubt about its status as a sexploitation film: its billing with the British ‘exposé’ of suburban swingers, Derek Ford’s *The Swappers* (1970)¹ suggests none of the ‘high/low’ crossovers identified by Betz, despite the film’s mixture of sensationalism and “bewildering ambiguity”.

Venus’ generically unstable attempt to forge an oneiric form of gothicised erotica builds on the techniques of his earlier *Succubus* (1967), whose then-fashionable free-form dream/reality confusions it echoes. It is worth pausing on *Succubus* for a moment, because it anticipates the themes and some of the devices of much of Franco’s subsequent work, and because it can be seen as Franco’s decisive step towards a mixture of eroticism and gothic horror.² Described by *Castle of Frankenstein* magazine as “perversely funny and incredibly pretentious” (cited in Weldon 1983: 667), *Succubus* exemplifies both the generic hybridity of Franco’s films and the influence of ‘arthouse’ cinema on some of his work of the time. Picking up on the stylistic eclecticism of the film, the *New York Times* review described it as “a German sex fantasy that aspires to a kind of crazy, sophomoric surreal literacy”, but goes on to despair that it “never makes up its mind whether it wants to be a bare-breasted exploitation movie or a nice, erotic horror story about a demented lady with bizarre sexual tastes” (Canby 1971: pages unnumbered). Reviewing the film for its belated British release in December 1973, David McGillivray noted with relief Franco’s “subdued” avoidance of his usual “zooming and fast cutting”, but described it as “an unappetising froth of surrealistic dream iconography” and made no mention of any other generic aspects (McGillivray 1973: 254). Kim Newman’s remarks are even more accurate and equally applicable to *Venus*: the film “is hard to position in any genre: its macabre elements are too slight for horror, its sexuality too peculiar for porno (even as a limited-market ‘kink’ film it doesn’t deliver) and its artiness is couched in exploitation terms” (Newman 2007: 194). Hardy unambiguously situates *Succubus* within gothic traditions, referring to its “nightmarish but also romantic visions of castles by the sea”, and Reynaud’s condensation of “desire and death into a single figure” (Hardy, 1986:191). Perhaps on the basis of its title alone, Joan Hawkins unexpectedly refers to *Succubus* simply as a “mainstream horror film” (Hawkins 2000: 95).

¹ Released in Britain as *The Wife Swappers*.

² The free-form, confusing plot circles around the sadomasochistic deeds and gothic fantasies of a nightclub performer, Lorna (Janine Reynaud) and her lover (Jack Taylor). Howard Vernon plays a mysterious, Orlof-like, figure who may have somehow created Lorna, and compels her to commit several sexualised acts of murder. According to Hardy, *Succubus* “completely blurs the borderlines between the various levels of the narrative and succeeds in making Reynaud an oneiric creature condensing desire and death in a single figure” (Hardy 1996: 191).

In fact *Succubus*, like *Venus*, would be more precisely described as a sex film dressed in horror references and filtered through surrealist-cum-*nouvelle vague* stylistics. Franco's strategy of 'artiness' clearly paid off: following a screening at the Berlin film festival of 1967, *Succubus* was described by Fritz Lang as a beautiful piece of erotica. Lang's approval is repeatedly and gratefully cited by critics keen to assert the legitimacy of Franco's output (Hardy 1996: 191; Balbo 1993: 58).¹ In spite of the supernatural connotations of its titles (it was also released, with Lovecraftian overtones, as *Necronomicon*), press advertising stressed its erotic rather than fantastic credentials. Its 1969 American advertising campaign capitalised on the newly created 'X' certificate it had been granted and on the continuing vogue for continental European 'adults only' imports.² The advertising copy, as with much X-rated product of the period, placed the film between soft-core sexploitation, and an exotic notion of 'European', 'artistic' explorations of sexual desire; one American ad (reproduced in Weldon 1983: 668), promised both "sophisticated subject matter" and "THE sensual experience of '69". As part of its promise, it also invoked then-current notions of sexual 'naturalness': "rated 'X' – adults only, naturally", it declared. The ad features a quote from one critic – "weird and way out, erotic – sexy" – which seems to locate the film within contemporary discourses of sexual freedom and psychedelia. Again, no mention is made of fantastic genres. One American trailer has its bread buttered on both sides, making the European arthouse link through the slogan "First, *La Dolce Vita*...now, *Succubus*!" while festooning the screen with silhouettes of Satan.

An early 1970s British variation on the *Succubus* poster seems to have a similarly 'mature', 'sophisticated' intended audience in mind. Its images of the star, Janine Reynaud, recall the femme fatale of the 'B' film noir more than the mythical female demon of the title. The poster's sober, *sans serif* fonts are far removed from gothic script, and the overall design seems intended to distance the film from the more 'schlocky' end of the exploitation range. What American exploiters call ballyhoo evidently could not be resisted though: the text is both coy and titillating in its promise of "unusual sexual content", and reveals its gimmicky hand by suggesting that prospective viewers telephone the cinema "for the full meaning" of its "unusual" title. As was the case with *Venus in Furs*' New York billing alongside *The Swappers*, any attempted chic aura is also rather compromised by the film's placing on a double bill with "David Grant's notorious sex cartoon *SINderella*" (1972). (Grant's next film was *Snow White and the Seven Perverts* (1973)).

¹ Franco himself participates in this legitimation in interviews. Franco (2004) also contains numerous references to Lang's approval of *Succubus*.

² The 'Fellini-esque' sex masquerade was something of a convention in erotic cinema of the period: Joe Sarno's *Sex in the Suburbs* (1964) includes a good example.

Venus in Furs' erotica-horror hybridisation is confirmed by its welding of supernatural and gothic elements to certain, cavalierly handled aspects of Sacher-Masoch's novel. Described by Hardy as the best of three "versions" of *Venus in Furs* that appeared in the late 1960s (Hardy 1996: 339) - the others being directed by the North American Joseph Marzalo (1967) and the Italian Massimo Dallamano (1968) - direct links between Franco's film and Sacher-Masoch's book are few, beyond the title, the 'heroine' in both texts being called Wanda, and her regular appearances in a fur coat. The director himself has referred to *Venus in Furs* as a "totally idiotic title" chosen by AIP to "bother the Italian company who shot another film with the same title" (Charles, undated: 26), while Tim Lucas (2005: 48) confirms that the film was renamed from Franco's preferred *Black Angel* at the insistence of the producer, Harry Alan Towers. Indeed, Franco has stated that he originally drafted the film as the lyrical tale of a jazz musician, modelled on Chet Baker, obsessed with a hallucinated black female apparition who visits during performances, and that the more overtly supernatural themes, as well as the nods to Sacher-Masoch and the casting of the white Rohm (Towers' wife) were included at the producer's behest. Franco's account suggests that while he wrote the first treatment, Towers passed it on to his writers for revision before shooting began (in Aguilar 1999: 158).¹ Though perhaps unusual in Franco's work as a whole, this practice was standard for his work with Towers.

Whether or not one agrees with Lucas that this represents a damaging compromise of the auteur's vision, Franco himself has referred to *Venus* as "probably one of the two or three films I like the most" (Charles, undated: 26) suggesting a willingness to embrace the collective nature of authorship that seems rare among fans. Whatever the case, it is probable that *Venus in Furs* would have been considered the more exploitable title. Towers' choice was timely. As Gillian Freeman pointed out in her contemporary book *The Undergrowth of Literature* (billed as a sympathetic appraisal of "the cult-literature of sexual minorities"), *Venus in Furs* was an "archetypal" but sexually mild and somewhat inaccessible novel compared to the "semi-literate...pornographic brutality" of many illustrated men's magazines of the day (Freeman 1967: 103). Though not as familiar a signifier to cinema-goers of the 1960s as the more commonly invoked - because more monstrous and, perhaps, more 'phallic' - Marquis de Sade, the allusion to Sacher-Masoch would have conjured up appealing notions of the 'bizarre' activities of the sexual underground, while lending those activities the mantle of literature. Unlike Freeman's brutal "semi-literate" pulp magazines, Towers' opportunistic title promises pleasures at once forbidden and élite.

¹ Another version is that the original story involved a black musician, modelled on Miles Davis, and his obsession with a spectral white woman. Either way 'race' was clearly at stake.

Exploitation, Transgression and Cultural Space

In addition to the interruptive formal qualities that it sometimes possesses, exploitation cinema is often seen as transgressive because it deals in taboo/risqué subject matter and/or bodies in extremes. Hence Mendik claims that “Franco’s libertines retain an ability to transcend established body barriers through an ability to organise regimes of torture and sexual punishment” (Mendik 1998: 12), and Pavlović notes that “Franco’s transgressive bodies upset notions of order and hierarchy” (Pavlović 2003: 118). It would be interesting to speculate on how the fatal flagellation of Wanda, or the uncanny ability of her ghost to use sex as a weapon of revenge, challenges social, corporeal and sexual limits. But the key issue here is how notions of transgression operate in exploitation cinema studies. Tanya Krzywinska’s *Sex and the Cinema* appears at first glance to offer an antidote to the polarisation of subversive (transgressive) and conservative (normative) films implied by Mendik’s, Hawkins’ and Pavlović’s readings of Franco’s work. Pointing to “the ways in which different sexual transgressions are formularised and conventionalised within the context of cinema” (Krzywinska 2006: 109), Krzywinska reminds us that representations of transgression are not necessarily in themselves transgressive. In fact, “sexual themes that in some way cross boundaries or challenge prohibitions, limits or norms” (she includes bestiality, sadomasochism and even adultery under this large umbrella), far from guaranteeing oppositionality, may serve to bolster heteronormative ideology (Krzywinska 2006: 108). Observing that “the meanings of sexual transgression in cinema are...diverse and extremely sensitive to a gamut of textual and contextual factors”, Krzywinska usefully suggests that transgression is not an absolute: it comes in various ideological shades (Krzywinska 2006: 116).

Yet simplistic ‘transgressive vs. normative’ antinomies are displaced in Krzywinska’s scheme of things by an equally crude spectrum of transgressiveness. One short passage places *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987) at the normative, “negative” end of this spectrum on the grounds that the adulterous affair it portrays “leads the central male character to appreciate family values”. *Last Tango in Paris* is placed somewhere in the middle, while “the more permissive context of European exploitation cinema” resides in the “positive”, authentically transgressive end of the scale (Krzywinska 2006: 116).¹ As an example of positive and permissive European exploitation, Krzywinska cites Walerian Borowczyk’s contribution to the ‘nunsplotation’ cycle of the 1970s, *Behind Convent Walls* (1977).² The “positive” transgressiveness of *Behind Convent Walls* is based on the fact that its erotic scenario takes

¹ The influence of *Last Tango in Paris* on European exploitation cinema is discussed briefly in chapter 4.

² *The Demons* (1972) and *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (1976) are Franco’s takes on this subgenre.

place “within the confines of a celibate order [and] represents a challenge to what is seen as the ‘unnatural’ repressive regime under which the nuns live” (Krzywinska 2006: 116). Though Krzywinska does not elaborate, the authenticity of transgression in Borowczyk’s film – as opposed to the lip service paid to it by Adrian Lyne’s – seems to lie in the disruptive power of the fictional nuns’ desire (and of exploitation cinema’s general ‘permissiveness’) to resist “repression”, and in the fact that *Behind Convent Walls* somehow undermines the very ‘naturalness’ of the patriarchal order upon which *Fatal Attraction* depends.

Krzywinska’s choice of examples in this passage is perhaps telling. What we might call each film’s transgression rating seems to correspond to cultural rank. The “positive” end of the spectrum is reserved for relatively marginal or obscure areas of commercial cinema. The middle ground, occupied by Bertolucci’s one-time *cause celebre*, can be characterised as ‘middle brow’, or perhaps as ‘middlebrow arthouse’: earlier in the book Krzywinska refers to *Last Tango* as a film “that embraces Hollywood norms as well as European art cinema” (Krzywinska 2006: 44). Meanwhile, fully “negative” ideological shading belongs to the Hollywood blockbuster. It is, then, tempting to wonder whether cultural position determines the degree of ‘transgressiveness’ perceived, or whether ‘transgressiveness’ determines cultural position.

Despite Hawkins’ and Krzywinska’s investment in hierarchy-busting liminality, their “mass culture” and “Hollywood norms” seem to be taken as monolithic sites for the reproduction of ideologically dangerous identifications. The mass/Hollywood Other is therefore imbued with the very pernicious effects traditionally ascribed to the exploitation genres they valorise. Mendik and Mathijs generate further slippage by conflating exploitation and avant-gardism. In many ways exemplifying the discourse of paracinema as Sconce (1995, 2007) describes it, Mendik and Mathijs’ introduction to their book *Alternative Europe* sees “nasty and trashy European cinema” as the sleazy “underbelly” of commercial cinema, and deploys transgression as the wedge which separates exploitation from the popular (Mendik and Mathijs 2004: 3-4). Mendik and Mathijs’ position recalls Hawkins’ alignment of exploitation with avant-garde or experimental forms of ‘underground’ cinema, and Wood’s assertion that the spirit of negativity in North American ‘low’ horror often had the “force of authentic art” (Wood 1985: 214): “horror and trash” represents a “fusion of the aesthetic sensibilities associated with the avant-garde and the visceral/erotic thrills associated with the world of exploitation” (Mendik and Mathijs 2004: 10).

Such views of Franco’s ‘Eurotrash’ field edge towards a ‘more transgressive than thou’ stance which, as I. Q Hunter and Heidi Kaye have pointed out, “can lead to a romanticisation of certain audiences, while other, insufficiently marginal audiences... are ignored or demonised” (Hunter and Kaye 1997: 5-6). Since many critics in this field feel the need to confess to being ‘fans’ of

their objects of enquiry, jostling for subversive or marginal standing smacks of self-congratulation. Perhaps more damagingly, as Joanne Hollows has argued, cultish resistance to the ‘mainstream’ often speaks from an unexamined classed and gendered position whereby “mainstream cinema is imagined as feminized mass culture and cult as a heroic and masculinized subculture”, with the result that “existing power structures” may be reproduced rather than (as one might expect) challenged (Hollows 2003: 37). Thus, much as Krzywinska appeals to the ‘permissiveness’ of European exploitation, Mendik and Mathijs regard the field as “almost anarchically” presenting “a call for liberty” and a “capacity to *reconstruct cultural frameworks*” (Mendik and Mathijs 2004: 2-4. Italics in original). Taking issue with critics who “often consider only the popular as an alternative to the highbrow canon”, Mendik and Mathijs confer upon exploitation (and, presumably, cultural commentators like themselves) a marginal status as “alternative” to both mainstream and “highbrow” tastes. Just as ‘mass culture’ functions in Hawkins’ argument as an edifice against which the “very difference” of the marginal, cult film (Telotte 1991:6) can be measured, so hazy notions of “the popular, the artistic or the morally acceptable” and “the usual confinements of film culture” form a kind of background hum which throws the “resistance, rebellion and liberation” of exploitation into relief.

Violation of norms or “challenge[s] to cultural order” (Mendik and Mathijs 2004: 10) need not always be a prerequisite for ‘cultishness’. But celebrating the transgressiveness of exploitation is a strategy which serves to distance supposedly more genuine, alternative cult (or paracinematic, psychotronic or trash) consumption from other fan practices based on popular cinema; the cult exploitation critic works hard to differentiate the fanaticism implied by ‘cult’ consumption from ‘mainstream’ film fandom. Harper and Mendik, for instance, present their version of cult cinema as a defence against “simply popular....directionless entertainment-seeking” (Harper and Mendik 2000: 7). Hawkins’ emphasis on the formalist mode of attention required by Franco’s manipulations of the medium suggests a similar suspicion of ‘mainstream’ enjoyment. The entertainment/exploitation distinction implied here is of course unworkable: it would seem to suggest that a film like *Venus in Furs* is indisputably a product of something other than popular culture, as though none of its possible pleasures could be classed as ‘entertainment’, and as though collecting cult exploitation DVDs is inherently more empowering and purposeful than any other consumer activity. The idea of transgression makes the difference – it sorts the proper cult wheat from the popular fan chaff. It is difficult to see how this might subvert the “modernist taste economy” (Mendik and Mathijs 2004: 3) declared anathema.

The consecration of exploitation cinema’s supposed challenge to dominant norms of taste is often mounted in terms which leave intact the two-tier model of cultural space it is intended to

subvert. As Sconce (1995) argues, the knowing display of poor taste as a means of spiking the canon is central to the “reading protocol” of paracinematic “badfilm” communities. Here the formerly privileged sites of ‘high culture’ or the ‘avant-garde’ (the two are not necessarily synonymous) are replaced by a realm of self conscious ‘low culture’ or ‘bad taste’ that acts as a supposedly radical alternative to an Other against which it defines itself (Sconce 1995). Unlike the American paracinematic fan texts to which Sconce refers, most academic work on European exploitation – in spite of its frequent use of terms like ‘Eurotrash’ and ‘sleaze’ – rarely adopts a ‘so bad it’s good’ rhetoric. Nevertheless the two areas share an antipathy towards what they construct as ‘mainstream’, ‘popular’ or ‘middle class’ taste; these terms are not interchangeable, but are often used as though they are. While there may be a satisfyingly perverse charge to having ‘trash’ play the oppositional role previously allotted to avant-garde or high culture, this gambit relies on a binary image of conservative (mainstream) versus transgressive (cult exploitation) taste formations that over-simplifies the pleasures and ideological processes on either side of the divide.

Given *Venus in Furs*’ complex textual organisation we might agree that it is an example of exploitation cinema’s resistance to ‘dominant’ modes of representation, its obliquity leading us to concur with Joan Hawkins that Franco’s films command a level of concentration that “removes the director’s work from the arena of what Adorno would call true ‘mass culture’” (Hawkins 2000: 112-113). One problem is that Hawkins does not explain what the presumably deleterious pleasures of ‘mass culture’ might entail. Since the critical reclamation of ‘trash culture’ arguably arose in reaction against the pessimism of mass culture critics like those of the Frankfurt School, Hawkins’ appeal to Adorno in defence of exploitation films also seems less than apt: Adorno would more likely dismiss *Venus in Furs* as an example of a degraded and kitsch culture industry than admire its negative dialectics. Another problem is that, in a demonstration of the ideology of the pure aesthetic, Wells’ and Mendik’s approaches to Franco’s form shift attention from his films’ participation in popular cultural trends and from the more contentious aspects of their representations. The cultist view of Franco’s films only as salvoes against bourgeois taste is further complicated by the fact that, like the later *Last Tango*, *Venus* incorporates references to both “Hollywood norms” and “European art cinema”, a combination seen by Krzywinska as inferior to truly “challenging” European exploitation cinema (Krzywinska 2006: 44).

Venus mounts something of a taste crash. Tongue-in-cheek or otherwise, the allusion to *Marienbad* can be said to prick the pretensions of Resnais’ iconic arthouse film while attempting to borrow its cultural status, a hint to the cognoscenti that there is more to Franco than meets the eye and an attempt to lend a touch of cachet to the exploitation proceedings. Meanwhile the ‘climactic’ car chase and the doings of Inspector Kaplan seem at odds with the

fantastic obliquity of the structure and the uncanny opacity of its imagery. This is not just a matter of ‘realist’ modes being submerged under preferred ‘abstract’ or avant-garde ones. Nor is it a case of exploitation cinema “fusing” with avant-garde experimentation in a way that is unavailable to the despised “popular”, as Mendik and Mathijs have it (Mendik and Mathijs 2004:10), or of Franco’s preoccupation “with the possibilities of the medium rather than the demands of a particular story” (Wells 2000:71). *The New York Times* referred to the “inept fancy moviemaking” exhibited in *Venus* (Anon.1970: 60), *Variety* to its “arresting visual flair” (anon. 1983a: 24). These features, whether inept, arresting or both, filter the film’s pulp gothicness through an array of sources and references; its inconclusive flashback system and gratuitous optical effects draw from a wide cultural compass. The influence of, among others, the French New Wave, *noir*, Hitchcock and the ‘head trip’ movie may have given Franco and Towers licence to leave the incoherence of the filmed materials intact at the editing stage, letting his “chaotic film style” (Mendik 1998: 8) appear as up-to-the-minute as Jimmy’s hipster jargon, the use of music by Manfred Mann, and the casting of the TV actor and minor pop star James Darren.¹ In the words of *Variety*, the film’s special effects and editing “work well together to create a suspension of time, reality and illusion” (Anon 1983a: 24). All of this is in keeping with what the *Succubus* poster called the “weird, way out” mood of a gothicised space in which we are unsure whether the narrative describes “psychological disturbance or wider upheavals within formations of reality and normality” (Botting 1996: 11). My reading of *Venus in Furs* has therefore shown that the simple, hopeful assimilation of Franco’s work into a reified ‘art cinema’ distorts the genre connections, visual strategies and taste collisions involved in its evocation of the male protagonist’s experience of maddening erotomania. Franco was soon to pick up on and explore related themes of sublime seduction and morbid desire in a group of vampire films: diverging in significant ways from the optical style of *Venus*, and highlighting the ‘problem’ of female desire, these are the focus of the following chapter.

¹ Best known for his roles in *Gidget* (Paul Wendkos, 1959) and the 1980s TV series *T.J. Hooker*, Darren made a number of albums in the 1960s and 1970s, and continues to make CDs and perform in Las Vegas. His 1961 single “Goodbye Cruel World” was a minor hit in the British pop charts (see www.jamesdarren.com).

3

Strange Desires: Sexuality and Power in *Vampyros Lesbos*

As I pointed out in Chapter 1, Tatjana Pavlović's (2003) claims for the subversive possibilities of Franco's films hinge on the argument that his cast of fatal women characters, heroine and monster alike, represents a counter-hegemonic impulse which resists the body ideology of fascist discourse. The celebration of Franco's deadly women as wholly resistant to the gender discourses of *franquismo* overlooks the substantial body of criticism that has attended to cultural constructions of what Creed (1993) calls the 'monstrous feminine'. Whilst much of this body of work is not, as I will argue, without major problems of its own, Pavlović's lack of engagement with it (she substantiates her claims largely through reference to Carol Clover's (1992) notion of the 'Final Girl') perhaps suggests a refusal to acknowledge the less obviously disruptive elements in Franco's output.

This chapter discusses Franco's contributions to the female vampire subgenre, using *Vampyros Lesbos* (1970) as its central example. As will become clear, any trumpeting of the female vampire as a purely subversive entity – like any condemnation of it as only reactionary – glosses over the particularities of how the subject matter is worked on in specific texts. Many accounts of the subgenre either pay scant attention to the visual means through which the vampire is presented, or reduce visibility to a crudely mechanistic application of notions of fetishism and objectification. While fetishistic and objectifying modes of looking may be identified in most, if not all, of Franco's films, they often have complex, multifarious functions within specific sequences and shots. Fredric Jameson has claimed that the "archetypal figures of the Other" include the "woman, whose biological difference stimulates fantasies of castration and devoration" (cited in Gelder 1994: 42), and it is clear that the female - and often 'lesbian' - vampire motif in many ways embodies horror and exploitation cinema's fascination with 'otherness'. Robin Wood has argued that Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* offers "a remarkably comprehensive amalgam of our culture's sexual dreads" (Wood 1996: 369), and that recent film adaptations of the novel still fail to resolve "a deep-seated Victorian unease about womanhood" (Wood 1996: 366). Franco's female vampire films negotiate gothic forms of anxious romanticism, particularly in relation to how female vampire fantasies articulate heteronormative cultural anxieties about female desire; but I also argue that although the films cannot be read as subversive, they can provide sites for multiple and competing fantasy investments. The viewing and fantasising positions offered by the films may not transcend or escape conventional gender

codes, but in their ambivalent and contradictory approach to the female vampire, they do exemplify how such figures of ‘otherness’ can be polysemic and contested.

This subgenre is often said to pander to a salacious, fetishising gaze, and in certain ways Franco’s films do little to refute this charge. Indeed, in many respects they can be said to confirm orthodox claims about the gendered division of labour between who looks and who is looked at. Much of *Female Vampire* (1973), for example, consists of protracted sequences in which the camera either roves over or simply fixes on the body (more often than not the vagina) of the naked Countess Irina Karlstein (Lina Romay). Though less ‘graphic’ than *Female Vampire*, *Vampyros Lesbos* features the vampiric Countess Nadine Carody (Soledad Miranda) performing on-stage stripteases. Of course male characters are not afforded a similarly spectacular role. The analysis should not stop there though. As discussed in chapter 2 in relation to *Venus in Furs*, Franco’s films often convey romantic torment through a repertoire of perverse looks, and through a self-conscious thematisation of relations of looking as a figure for desire. And since the films concern female vampirism, the diegetic desiring look does not belong only to male characters. Equally importantly, the visual construction of the female vampire’s body as object of fascination and curiosity conveys an anxious gaze bound up with fantasies of male emasculation. Hence Franco’s films make problematic any reading of the subgenre which would assume a set of binary oppositions between woman as passive spectacle and man as active driver of narrative.

Freeland (2000) argues that horror films can present an accessible body of resources for philosophical reflection on the nature of evil. Genre viewers are assumed by Freeland to think and make judgements as they follow a film’s emotional and affective cues: contrary to Shaviro’s claim that the vividness of the cinematic image is “prereflective” (Shaviro 1993: vii), viewers *reflect on* as well as *have* reactions. Many of Franco’s films prove awkward in relation to what Freeland sees as a ‘successful’ or ‘good’ horror film; while Freeland stresses the importance of plot alongside the modes of emotional and corporeal affect typically attributed to horror (nail-biting fear, trembling, anxiety), Franco’s work may be seen as wanting in both of these respects. Moreover, the films discussed here seem intended to elicit an erotic reaction as much as a horrified or fearful one. This mixture of apparently distinct affects may create an uncertainty of reaction which contributes to the sense that many of Franco’s films think about desire, just as for Freeland more ‘legitimate’ horror thinks about evil. This chapter looks at how the specific forms of visuality through which Franco addresses and ‘genderises’ the erotic vampire theme invite us to *reflect on* as well as *have* reactions.

Psychoanalytic theory has had much to say about horror in general and the vampire motif in particular. This may be because the vampire is one of the forms of monstrosity most commonly associated with erotic desire, or which most clearly represents desire in terms of danger; in

Franco's work, desire is usually in one way or another a threat to the self. Fantasies of vampire seduction, complete with their sense of oral fixation, often also seem redolent of classical psychoanalytic accounts of the Freudian 'family romance', with the vampire frequently functioning as representative of the Oedipal father, the pre-Oedipal mother, or a condensation of the two.

Since the spectre of castration is never far away in these scenarios, Franco's female vampire films at various points represent what Creed calls "phallic panic" (Creed 2005, *passim*). But I do not see the films as symbolic codifications of a putatively universal unconscious 'owned' by a gendered viewer, or suggest that unconscious motivations make up a bed-rock of meanings beneath the films and their potential pleasures. There are also moments in which *Vampyros Lesbos* and *Female Vampire* can be said to exemplify some of the links between looking and castration fantasies posited by Freud's 1919 essay on the uncanny; however, I make no claim that these moments evidence general truths about the nature of film spectatorship. That castration fantasy scenarios are touched on as part of Franco's bricolage of 'Freudian' and gothic desires in no sense provides a definitive 'decoding' of the films.

The Sex Life of Vampires

While much of the horror genre can be said to deal with sex in some measure, vampire cinema is commonly seen as the subgenre which by definition puts eroticism in the spot-light. Yet the centrality that sex, sexuality and gender should be granted in the analysis of fantastic forms of cinematic monstrosity has been disputed. Ken Gelder (1994) points out, for example, that Lacanian theory – in particular work by Žižek (1993), Dolar (1991/2) and Copjec (1991/2) – tends to bypass questions of gender entirely by using vampire mythology as a platform for theorising the supposedly timeless dynamics of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real in the constitution of subjectivity. For Gelder, this work too blithely ignores the fact that fantasies of vampiric eroticism are patently gendered. Freeland's cognitivist approach to horror adopts an apparently contradictory position by presenting a "feminist framework" for the content-analysis of gendered images of evil in the genre (Freeland 2000: 4), while proposing that it is possible to construct a phenomenology of horror without "genderizing" it (Freeland 2000: 21). Taking issue with psychoanalytic feminist gaze theory, and citing the anti-essentialist gender-as-simulation theories of Judith Butler in support, Freeland argues that the presence of gender-coded images on screen should not lead to reified distinctions between male and female or heterosexual and homosexual spectatorship in the 'real world' (Freeland 2000: 20). Sexed and gendered responses cannot simply be deduced from sexed and gendered images. Although more eclectic than Freeland, my analysis of Franco's female vampires echoes some of the pragmatic aspects

of her analysis by stressing what I take the texts to invite, offer and propose rather than hypostatizing a viewer who is *either* in full unreflective identification with ‘the’ gaze *or* whose gendered and sexed identity can only produce sheer disidentification from ‘the’ scopic regime. Nina Auerbach historicises the issue by pointing out that many literary female vampires of the pre-Dracula Romantic period were as often as not friends or companions more than “demon lovers or snarling aliens”, characterised by “honor and reciprocity” rather than the mesmeric coercive powers conferred on the patriarchal vampire by Bram Stoker and which became standard in Dracula’s wake (Auerbach 1995: 13-14).

It is true that all vampire fictions are not necessarily concerned only with sex. Judith Halberstam’s Foucauldian analysis of horror sees sexual desire as only one strand in a knot of otherness within late nineteenth century gothic fictions, and that it is entangled with discourses of nation, race and class. Halberstam argues that partly as a result of the broad cultural absorption of psychoanalytic views of the unconscious as the seat of anxiety, and partly as a result of the proliferation and implantation of ‘perversions’ produced by sexology, discourses of sexual pathology came to colonise the genre’s “disciplinary” economy of fear and desire (Halberstam 1995: 13). Indeed, Halberstam sees Freud’s case histories as themselves gothic narratives, and it may not be accidental that sexology and the gothic coincide historically. Thus the modern horror film focuses on perverse subjectivities to the extent that the class and race concerns of foundational literary works like *Dracula* tend to be suppressed as anxieties over sexual difference are prioritised over other constructions of ‘foreignness’ and ‘abnormality’. Hence in Franco’s films class relations are often gothically sexualised: doctors and aristocratic libertines prey on prostitutes and strippers¹; Jimmy in *Venus in Furs* is obsessed with a jet-setting group of upper-crust degenerates. Constructions of ethnicity are similarly presented in erotic terms. Examples include the use of Istanbul as an exotic meeting of ‘East’ and ‘West’ in *Venus*, *Golden Horn* (1966), *Vampyros Lesbos* and others, and the black ‘monsters’ of *Voodoo Passion* (1976), *Macumba Sexual* (1981), *Devil Hunter* (1979) and *Cannibals* (1979). For Halberstam horror cinema expands on popular Freudianism by offering an almost totally sexualised understanding of both the ‘private’ and the ‘social’ self, with sex as the beast devouring – or at least dominating – all other ideological implications. In other words, vampire cinema is a key example of how the genre has participated in the production of particular, psychoanalytic and sexological/medical ideas of subjectivity.

In Ornella Volta’s oft-cited words, “first and foremost the vampire is an erotic creation. To the enslaved ‘victim’ ... he appears as an irresistible monster. ... Blood and death, eroticism and fear, are the main elements in the universe of the vampire. ... The vampire can violate all taboos and

¹ See Appendix: Table of Concordances.

achieve what is most forbidden" (Volta 1965: 7). The quote from Volta's 1962 book (a mixture of Jungian, Freudian, Sadeian, surrealist and sexological reflections on the appeal of the vampire motif) stresses the vampire's transgressive credentials but also hints that sex itself is vampiric. Following Halberstam it can be argued that the idea of intercourse as a form of vampirism may be grounded in modern perceptions of violence and cruelty as intrinsic dimensions of the sexual subject. Prefiguring Freudian accounts of sadistic orality, the late-nineteenth century sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing described sadism as "lust and cruelty occurring together [when] individuals of very excitable natures bite or scratch the companion in intercourse" (Krafft-Ebing 1998: 55); demonstrating the links between gothicism and sexology, much of Volta's book consists of a Krafft-Ebing-like list of vampiric (oral, necrophiliac and so on) paraphilias. Surrealism's explorations of delirium and mad love, often based on Sade as much as Freud, similarly stressed the destructive qualities of love, desire and erotic intoxication, as the surrealist philosopher of eroticism, Georges Bataille repeatedly explored.¹ Psychoanalytic accounts of the fantasy of sex-vampirism might make reference among other things to Melanie Klein's vision of the sadistic pre-Oedipal infant at its mother's breast, or to Freud's description of the primal scene in which the child construes the parents' sexual intercourse as an act of violence. In terms drawn from Freud's later revision of his concept of the pleasure principle, the scene of vampire seduction might be said to represent the incursion into eros of the 'death drive'. Thus most versions of post-Stoker vampirism manifest historically specific notions of sexuality and subjectivity.

It has been proposed that narrative cinema's visual economy inclines towards reductiveness in the representation of monstrosity: Halberstam and Auerbach suggest, in different ways, that horror cinema's sexual monsters lack the complexity and subtlety of their literary ancestors. This 'literature-centric' suggestion may be based on the fact that cinematic monsters are constructed through a visuality that includes the supposedly obvious and superficial pleasures of spectacle, voyeurism, fetishism and so forth. As a field oriented to the marketing of body images as objects of fascination, exploitation cinema's investment in (the promise of) sexual monsters and monstrous sex appears so self-evident as to be beyond analysis. Halberstam claims, then, that in the horror genre "multiple otherness is subsumed by the unitary otherness of sexuality" (Halberstam 1995: 8). Sexuality is clearly the chief locus and determinant of

¹ Many of Bataille's writings recall gothic eroticism. Although to do so would be beyond the immediate boundaries of this thesis, deeper explorations could be made of links between Bataille's writings on transgressive experience and erotic horror films. His notions of eroticism as an experience of the 'void' in which the self is eclipsed certainly echo aspects of vampire fantasy. His accounts of desire as anguish also seem reflected in films like *Venus in Furs*. See Hegarty (2000), Richardson (1998a), Richardson (1998b).

characters and events in Franco's gothic exploitation universe, and this may be seen as indicative of the field's market-led commodification of sex and implantation of perversions. It is less clear why sex should be understood by Halberstam as in any way "unitary". In fact, my analysis of the complexities of the textual construction and implied address of Franco's female – and 'lesbian' – vampire films shows that this is far from the case. Refusing to accept that gothic cinematic sex is unitary does not equate to seeing Franco's work as an orgiastic space in which anything goes. Mendik claims in carnivalesque terms that Franco's films "transcend established body barriers" (Mendik 1998: 12) but the orgy is not without its exclusions. In a similarly Bakhtinian mood, Pavlović notes that Franco's cinematic bodies "upset notions of order and hierarchy" (Pavlović 2003: 118), but Franco's carnival of desire is rarely all-inclusive. Hence fantasies of 'lesbianism' feature very prominently throughout Franco's career while gay male sexuality is conspicuous by its absence¹: the omission does not in itself detract from the interest of the films but it does cast doubt on some of the hyperbole surrounding the transgressivity of exploitation cinema. Franco's female vampire films can be seen as fascinating explorations of fantasy without presenting them as models of utterly deterritorialised desire.

Grave Expectations: The Erotic Vampire Subgenre

Vampires proliferated in the international cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. In Britain, Hammer Studios' influential costume gothics, from *Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1958) on, took an increasingly risqué approach to the undead. In Italy, Mario Bava (*The Mask of Satan/La maschera del demonio*, 1960), Riccardo Freda (*The Vampires/ I vampiri*, 1957) and Antonio Margheriti (*Castle of Blood/ La danza macabra*, 1963) responded to Hammer's influence by venturing further into necrophiliac resonances and sadomasochistic set-decorations. The French vampire specialist Jean Rollin upped the ante later in the decade with pulp-surrealist, fetishistic explorations of vampiric sexuality in films like *The Rape of the Vampire (Le viol du vampire*, 1967) and *The Naked Vampire (Le vampire nue*, 1969).²

On most accounts, Hammer's influence on the genre continued into the early 1970s, but was terminally weakened by the impact of more gruesome horrors set in the present, such as *Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1968) and *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) (Newman, 1989: 13). As we noted in Chapter 1, gothic horror cinema is often portrayed as descending from classicism to decadence by the end of the 1960s, 'reduced' to pastiche,

¹ Two or three police officers and other peripheral characters are coded in terms of standard gay stereotypes. Franco plays a gay brothel keeper in *Sadomania*. In this lacuna Franco's work contrasts with the more critically engaged exploration of male sexuality in some of the contemporary horror and exploitation work of the Spanish communist film-maker Eloy de la Iglesia; the pertinent film here is *La semana del asesino (Cannibal Man*, 1971). See Tropiano (1997), Smith (1998) and Willis (2005).

² For more on Rollin, see Austin (1996).

caricature and gimmickry (Newman 1989; Skal 1993). Peter Hutchings notes, for example, that *The Horror of Frankenstein* (Jimmy Sangster 1970) is “marred aesthetically by an unevenness of tone and attitude, which lurches from horror to the characteristic camp humour of much British horror of this period” (cited in Benschoff 1997: 187), and David Pirie similarly excoriated *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* (Robert Fuest 1971) because it replaced the genre’s authentic heritage with camp humour and self mockery (Pirie 1973: 175). Certainly many exploitation filmmakers took an irreverent approach to paradigmatic figures like Count Dracula, Baron Frankenstein and the werewolf. David Pirie noted of the Mexican *El ataúd del vampiro* (*The Vampire’s Coffin*, Fernando Méndez, 1958) that “the presence of a mad scientist and a wax museum reflects the picaresque but frequently baffling abandon with which Mexican film-makers mix their plot and styles” (Pirie 1977: 151), an approach to cinematic archetypes that may well have had an influence on Franco’s monster mash.¹

But the vampire films of this period need not be evaluated only against a small canon of supposedly foundational (usually seen as Hammer or Universal) ‘originals’. The classicism-decline schema tends to underestimate the resourcefulness of exploitation cinema, while overstating the importance of the authentic original as wellspring of genre iconography. More significantly, the narrative of the genre’s terminal slide into pastiche and self-parody may also contain a certain defensive nationalism, since the genre’s supposed qualitative deterioration seems to coincide with its international flowering. Vampire motifs were, for example, taken up enthusiastically by Hispanic exploitation film-makers of the period. Although Universal had shot a Spanish language version of *Dracula* on the sets of the Tod Browning’s original in 1931 (directed by George Melford and starring Carlos Villarias rather than Bela Lugosi as Dracula) (Pirie 1977: 150), the vampire became a significant theme in Spanish popular cinema with the Spanish horror ‘boom’ of the early 1970s. If it can be classed as ‘Spanish’, Franco’s *Count Dracula* (*El conde Dracula*, 1969) paved the way, followed by a varied collection of vampire films, among them *Dracula’s Great Love* (*El gran amor del Conde Dracula*, Javier Aguirre, 1972), *The Vampire’s Night Orgy* (*La orgía nocturna de las vampiras*, León Klimovsky 1972), and *Curse of the Devil* (*El retorno de Walpurgis*, Carlos Aured, 1973).

It is not difficult to see why the vampire would be an attractive choice for low budget film-makers like Franco and his peers. The vampire may have had an economic appeal because its human features minimise the need for expensive monster make-up; Franco was particularly resourceful in finding ways of suggesting vampirism through a minimum of genre props and surprisingly little spillage of blood. Moreover, as a readymade, copyright-free icon the vampire

¹ As noted in Chapter 1, connections between Franco and Latin American cinema require further investigation. Franco worked early in his career as assistant to the Mexican directors Chanu Urueta and Emilio Fernandez (Balbo et al 1993: 239).

is effectively 'pre-sold' to audiences, its erotic connotations being so well established that any sexploitation treatment of the subject merely draws attention to what audiences already know about it. The vampire theme of course offers clear opportunities for supplying spectacles of simultaneous sex and horror; but its ready recognisability also provides an instant range of narrative conceits and situations which can be grasped without the need for elaborate backstories or explanations. Any maker of a vampire film can assume a certain amount of competence in the reading of genre codes, and this familiarity allows greater screen time for the provision of sexploitative display.

The possibilities for exploring the sensual aspects of the gothic mode are also connected to a trend for inverting the gender of iconic horror figures. Hence sexploitation horror film-makers were quick to seize upon the eroticism of the relationship between the specifically female - often, but not exclusively, 'lesbian' or 'bisexual' - vampire and her victim.¹ Capitalising on what could only be subtextual in a film like *Dracula's Daughter* (Lambert Hillyer, 1936), Hammer's "X-rated" sexploitation flicks" (Weiss 1992: 88) popularised the trend with *The Vampire Lovers* (Roy Ward Baker, 1970), *Twins of Evil* (John Hough, 1971) and *Lust for a Vampire* (Jimmy Sangster, 1971). Much less restrained in its demonstration of the degree to which female vampire films of the day could hover between "standard softcore sexploitation and more fantastic subjects" (Pirie 1977: 153) is José Larraz' *Vampyres, Daughters of Dracula* (1974), in which two aristocratic succubi resident in an English country house voraciously drain their intoxicated male victim in an extremely gory naked ménage-a-trois.

Most of the films within the subgenre are loosely based on J. Sheridan Le Fanu's short pot-boiler *Carmilla* (1871), about one Countess Millarca Karnstein who has 'lived' for centuries by feeding off young women. Reincarnated as Carmilla, her blood-lust compels her to carry on the family tradition, but she falls tragically in love with her victims. The Carmilla tale also forms the basis of *Blood and Roses* (*Et mourir de plaisir*, Roger Vadim, 1960), *Daughters of Darkness* (*Les lèvres rouges*, Harry Kümel, 1971), and *The Blood Spattered Bride* (*La novia ensangrentada*, Vicente Aranda, 1972) and seems to have informed the 'doomed romance' aspects of Franco's *Female Vampire* and *Vampyros Lesbos*. Although many lesbian vampire novels were published in the early twentieth century (Dyer 2002: 73), *Carmilla* is regarded as the chief source of the theme, along with the lesbian implications of Mina and Lucy in *Dracula*, and the enduring legend of Erzabet Bathory, a sixteenth century Hungarian noblewoman

¹ Examples of 'gender reversed' horror include *The She Wolf* (*La Loba*, Rafael Baledón 1965); *Frankenstein Created Woman* (Terence Fisher 1997); *Lady Frankenstein* (*La figlia di Frankenstein*, Mel Welles and Aureliano Luppi, 1972) and *Naked Werewolf Woman* (*La lupa mannara*, Rino di Silvestro, 1976).

accused of bathing in the blood of virgins to retain her youth and beauty. Films inspired by the Bathory myth include *Countess Dracula* (Peter Sasdy, 1971); one episode in the portmanteau sex film *Immoral Tales* (*Contes immoraux*, Walerian Borowczyk, 1974); *Werewolf Shadow*, in which a Bathory character acts as foil to Paul Naschy's werewolf; and, again, in its extended sequences of Lina Romay writhing in blood-red bathwater, Franco's *Female Vampire*. Any conventional horror plotting in the latter is subordinate to Franco's attempts to meld the traditional 'tragic romance' theme, the sexually graphic exploration of the vampire's body, and a moody sense of otherworldliness. I return to this attempted fusion below, in relation to the film's credit sequence.

Though much less bloody than Larraz' or Aranda's films, *Vampyros Lesbos* makes the most of its sexploitation opportunities. The film delivers on its sexploitation promise from the outset by placing an erotic cabaret number at the beginning of the narrative. This sequence forms the basis of many of the film's publicity materials while acting as a kind of overture. The 'Carmilla' character, the as-yet unnamed Nadine Carody, performs an erotico-gothic striptease number which establishes some key motifs (candelabra, veils), colours (black for night and red for blood) and themes (sexual awakening, vampirism, lesbianism) in a sequence which encapsulates three body genres at once: horror, ('soft') pornography and the musical.

Revamps

Franco's mixed genre output before 1969 had tended towards worldly rather than supernatural horrors. The major exception is *Venus in Furs* but even here the supernatural elements played an ambiguous part in the film's perverse scenarios and mind games. Another exception is a werewolf-like version of Morpho (Michel Lemoine) in *Sadisterotica* (1967), but he is marginal to that film's crime romp plot. Franco's sexual monsters had been throughout the 1960s decidedly earthly. As a consequence vampiric themes and motifs had only been infrequently and indirectly present in Franco's films. One character fleetingly becomes Count Dracula during a horror parody in the comic fantasy *Tenemos 18 años* (*We are 18*, 1959).¹ Neck-biting activities in *The Awful Dr Orlof* and *Venus* recall but are not identical to vampirisation.² As one of many 'fatal women' in Franco's work, the female demon referred to in the title of *Succubus* (1967) is similar to a vampire but no such creature materialises on screen, although a plastic Dracula model does appear during a close-up pan on a row of horror figurines alongside Godzilla and a Phantom of the opera. With her poisonous finger nails, 'spider woman' stage act and webbed

¹ *Tenemos 18 años* (1959) is an episodic, cross-genre comic road movie. Among various short adventures, its two leads (Isana Medel and Tírelé Pávez) dine with the Dracula-like Lord Mariano (Antonio Ochores) in his gothic castle.

² The musical comedy *Vampiresas 1930* (1961) concerns a dance troupe, and a 'vamp' (played by the Spanish singer Mikeala Wood), rather than a group of vampires.

outfit, the murderous femme fatale of *The Diabolical Doctor Z* (1965) has clear affinities with the female vampire. *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (1968) features a more oral form of death, as evidenced in its North American title, *Kiss and Kill*. As a feature preview for this film in the *ABC Film Review* summarised it, “a poison, fatal to men but not to women who are thus able to act as carriers, transmit the poison to the unsuspecting male by a kiss on the lips - the kiss of death” (Bentley, 1969: 9).

Between 1969 and 1973 Franco made five vampire films. Of these, two were ‘male’ (*Count Dracula* and *Dracula, Prisoner of Frankenstein* (1971) and three ‘female’ (*Vampyros Lesbos*, *Dracula’s Daughter* (1972), and *Female Vampire*).¹ These form not so much a coherent series as a thematically linked group of films dispersed through Franco’s output. Although they do not constitute an intensive meditation on the implications of vampirism or follow a rational step-by-step development (*Dracula’s Daughter*, for example, is in many ways more stylistically and ideologically conventional than the earlier *Vampyros Lesbos*) each of Franco’s entries into the subgenre offers a distinctive variation on the subject, with *Vampyros Lesbos* and *Female Vampire* being his most ambitious interventions in the field.

In the light of his reputation as a sex-horror film-maker, it seems surprising that for his first ‘pure’ vampire, and first unambiguously supernatural, film Franco should have attempted a straight adaptation of Stoker’s *Dracula*. Compared to then-recent films like *Venus in Furs*, *Succubus* or *Lucky, the Inscrutable* (1967) this seems an uncharacteristically safe choice, but perhaps this very safeness was seen as a guarantee of box office returns. As much as the ideal ‘cult’ Franco is an eccentric working on outrageous material at the cultural fringes, many of his 1960s films had, in fact, been directed at a less ‘specialised’ audience; this is demonstrated for example by his entries into Towers’ tried and tested Fu Manchu series (*The Blood of Fu Manchu* and *The Castle of Fu Manchu* (1968), again starring Christopher Lee), and his Eddie Constantine vehicles, *Attack of The Robots* (1966) and *Golden Horn* (1967). Unusually for Franco, whose literary links (to the Marquis de Sade, Sax Rohmer, Edgar Wallace, Sacher-Masoch and others) had until then been extremely loose, *Count Dracula* opens with the slightly pompous claim that it is the first film true to the spirit and letter of Stoker’s novel: “Now, for the first time, we retell, exactly as he wrote, one of the first – and still the best – tales of the macabre”.² Hutchings points out that in spite of declining audiences and foreign competition Britain’s Hammer films remained at this time the “market-leader” in European horror (Hutchings 2003: 95), and in this context both the claim to literary fidelity and the employment

¹ Vampires returned to Franco’s work in the 1990s in the ‘straight to DVD’ productions *Vampire Blues* (1999) and *Vampire Junction* (2001). *Doriana Gray* (1975) is obliquely a vampire tale.

² The film’s main innovation seems to be that the moustachioed Count (Christopher Lee) appears to grow younger over the course of the narrative.

of Christopher Lee seem part of an attempt to compete with Hammer on its own turf. The film's traditional subject may also represent a bid for more mainstream distribution than would have been available to 'surrealist' erotica like *Succubus* and *Venus*. Atypically, in view of Franco's usual interests and genre developments elsewhere, *Count Dracula* even tones down the titillating potential of the topic.¹

The context of supposed decline in the genre may also account for Franco and Towers' decision to go 'back to basics' with *Count Dracula*. By the time Franco made this film, traditional genre conventions had long been being mixed and matched at will. Doubtless impelled by the need for product differentiation in a crowded market, *Count Dracula* attempts to challenge Hammer by rescuing the Count from parody and restoring him to his more earnest origins. Thus Christopher Lee, clearly exasperated by Hammer's recent reduction of Stoker's character (and, perhaps, himself) to a "pantomime figure" was impressed by the seriousness of Franco's ambitions and judged them "a damn good try at doing the Count as Stoker had meant him to be" (Lee 2004: 362). For his part, Franco has sought in interview to distance himself even further from the influence of the British company:

all that shit from the English school – Christopher Lee and company which in my opinion is real shit. Terence Fisher is one of the worst film-makers that ever was. ... His films are cold, there's a sort of distance ... Terence Fisher hated making fantasy film. (In Balbo et al 1993: 244).

But declaring itself the genuine article made the film a hostage to critical fortune. David Pirie commended Franco for shooting certain scenes in an "authentic castle", but noted that Van Helsing's clinic in Victorian England was "obviously modern Spain", and saw Franco's adaptation as a "terribly static working out of the story's most elementary aspects" (Pirie 1977: 154). *Variety* berated its "very un-Victorian-looking heroes", its use of German Shepherds instead of wolves, and other errors (anon. 1970b: 20). Another review following a screening at the Cine Mola in Madrid was horrified to discover that this "clumsily constructed terror exploitation item" included "not a string of garlic", as though this were in itself an inexcusable offence, and observed that "by the last reel even Spanish audiences were howling with laughter", a not unreasonable response to the film's unconvincing special effects and impoverished production values (anon. 1971: 18). Franco's evidently low budget did not help matters but was not the culprit: noting that Fisher's ground-breaking production of *Dracula* itself had hardly been awash with money, *Cinefantastique* remarked that blame for the film

¹ According to the BBFC's website, on its British theatrical release in 1971 the film was granted an 'X' certificate, while the 1998 VHS video was released with a '12' certificate.

“must be placed squarely on writer Welbeck (alias Towers) and director Jesús Franco. Wellbeck’s script is full of trite dialogue (most of which doesn’t come from the original text, as ballyhooed) and inconsistencies” (cited in Frank 1982: 34).

In tandem with Franco’s film and in collaboration with the Catalan playwright and poet Joan Brossa, the ‘Barcelona School’ director Pere Portabella made what is best described as an avant-garde parallel to *Count Dracula*. First shown at the Cannes film festival in 1971, Portabella’s *Cuadecuc, vampir* (1969) was shot on set while Franco directed his Stoker adaptation.¹ (Molina-Fox 1977:41, D’Lugo 1997: 191; Torreiro1998: 308; Galt 2006-7: 27). *Cuadecuc* opens with a title card explaining that it is based on Franco’s “Hammer” film, this error perhaps illustrating the extent to which Franco’s film could not escape the shadow of a Hammer paradigm so entrenched that it could be taken as a style in its own right. Though not exactly a documentary, *Cuadecuc* contains shots of Soledad Miranda having make-up applied and relaxing between takes, and Christopher Lee reading out from a copy of *Dracula* (apparently demonstrating in the process that the film was indeed closely based on Stoker). But on the whole the high contrast black and white, virtually dialogue-free film plays as a radical re-imagining both of Franco’s film and the horror genre: narrative is largely supplanted by sustained shots of *Count Dracula*’s locations, props and so on. Accompanied by a droning, abstract electronic soundtrack, Portabella’s film presents an unlikely amalgam of uncanny atmospherics, deconstructive strategies and the ‘making of’ film. Despite claims that are sometimes made for exploitation cinema as a branch of the avant-garde, or for Franco as a filmmaker whose work sometimes “flout(s) orthodox aesthetic standards” (Lázaro-Reboll 2002: 84), if anything Portabella’s film highlights the comparative conventionality of many of Franco’s horror ventures.²

Appearing the following year, *Vampyros Lesbos* declares its modernity by flouting much of *Count Dracula*’s linearity and adherence to literary precedent, and returning to the loose, fractured narrative form contrived for *Venus*. Like *Venus*, its temporal structure tends to unravel on inspection. Interested viewers may reassemble the film’s story outline into an only

¹ A left-wing activist in Catalan politics, Portabella is a significant figure in Spanish cinema because he set up the production company Films 59, which most famously produced *Viridiana* (Luis Buñuel, 1961). As a member of the Barcelona School of avant-garde film-makers, Portabella’s most well-known films are *Cuadecuc* and *Umbracle* (*Umbrage*, 1971) (Molina-Fox 1977: 40-41). For more on the Barcelona School, see Galt (2006-7, 2007).

² However, *Cuadecuc* also illustrates the occasional complexity of Franco’s relation to oppositional and experimental cinema, and to national cinemas. In as much as Franco must have shot *Count Dracula* while constantly ‘marked’ by Portabella, the film can be seen as a collaboration; indeed Franco remarks that he agreed “from the beginning to collaborate on the Vampire film” with his friend Portabella (correspondance with the author, 2010).

provisionally cogent whole. In Istanbul¹ Linda Westinghouse (Ewa Strömberg) has dreams and/or premonitions about the star performer of a fetishistic lesbian cabaret show she has watched alongside her boyfriend, Omar (Viktor Feldmann). The performer turns out to be an aristocratic vampire descended from the Eastern European Dracula family. Sent out by her firm of solicitors to arrange an inheritance of property, Linda visits the Countess at her beachside house² on a small island where she resides with her mute manservant, Morpho (José Martínez Blanco). Over supper and with the aid of drugged red wine, Nadine seduces Linda and begins taking possession of her soul. In the mould of *Carmilla* and the gothic romanticism of *Venus*, Nadine falls agonisingly in love with Linda, while Linda is drawn almost irresistibly away from Omar and towards the beautiful Nadine. Finally resisting Nadine's pull, Linda kills her by stabbing her in the eye with a long needle. As in *Venus*, this outline remains less than sequentially watertight; for example, the cabaret number that opens the film may take place after Linda has been seduced over supper, so that it is her subsequent obsession with/possession by Nadine that leads her to visit the nightclub and witness the show.

Vampyros Lesbos illustrates how Spanish editions of films often diverged from those released elsewhere. This is usually a matter of 'hot' and 'cold' versions with varying degrees of nudity and/ or gore, distinct from censor-imposed cuts, prepared for different markets. Lázaro-Reboll notes that the Spanish version released in 1973 as *Las vampiras* is "a squeaky-clean censored version whilst another more explicit version was designated for international consumption" (Lázaro-Reboll 2002: 158). Like the reference to lesbianism in the better known title, most nudity is excised from *Las vampiras* and even the protracted striptease number which opens the film is absent. All the same, this 'clean' version is not quite the same film *sans* the more torrid material. Although it is tempting to see *Las vampiras* merely as a bastardised and diminished version of the authentic *Vampyros Lesbos*, it is a distinct artefact, with a more sombre mood in keeping with Franco's contemporary, morose, female-centred sex dramas like *She Kills in Ecstasy* (1970) and *Sinner* (1972). (I touch on these in the next chapter). Rather than simply removing 'offensive' elements, Franco negotiated the limitations imposed by Spanish censorship by toning down the lesbian sexploitation aspects of the material and further exploring the pathos of the vampire story. The difference is amplified by the two soundtracks. *Vampyros Lesbos* features a 'groovy' psychedelic jazz-dance score by Manfred Hübler and Siegfried Schwab. Though lending the film a pleasing rhythm in which certain sequences 'gel'

¹ See 'Istanbul' in Appendix: Table of Concordances. The Istanbul setting may be more appropriate than it first appears. The connections of the vampire/Dracula myth to Vlad the Impaler suggest an 'Eastern' link played on in *Vampyros Lesbos*' evocation of the 'mysterious orient'. More specifically, as Hopkins (2005) explains, Vlad the Impaler, as represented in Coppola's 1992 version of *Dracula*, spent his youth in Istanbul (Hopkins 2005: 107).

² See 'beachside residences' in Appendix: Table of Concordances.

in the manner of music videos, this score, in a collision of moods common in Franco's work, often overwhelms the tragic romanticism of doomed desire and loss presented in the dialogue. Apart from a brief excerpt from the *Vampyros Lesbos* score, that of *Las vampiras* consists almost entirely of unique material, credited this time to Manfred Hübler and David Khune (a well-known pseudonym for Franco)¹. Expanding on the more free-form electronic passages in Hübler and Schwab's compositions, Franco now opts for a much less melodic piece of *musique concrète*, closer in style to the score for Portabella's *Cuadecuc* and the pared down, pulsing electronics heard in Franco's *Virgin Among the Living Dead* (1971).

As in much of Franco's work of the period, budgetary constraints are perhaps betrayed in the camera work by an absence of pans or tracking shots and, as discussed in chapter 3, a consequent, sometimes monotonous reliance on zooms and extreme close-ups for emphasis. However, the film compensates for these lacks through a self-conscious modernity evidenced in some striking, angular and spatially ambiguous compositions, particularly (and characteristically) in the shooting of Nadine's striptease set-pieces. A strong sense of late '60s styling is also provided by Franco's decorating of the minimalist set with contemporary furniture, fixtures and fittings. This sense of modernity is also apparent in the film's use of montage; whereas *Venus* had overindulged in relatively expensive optical treatments, *Vampyros Lesbos* makes extended use of semi-abstract montage sequences which are readable as dream, a mixture of flash-forwards and flashbacks, or simply as stream-of-consciousness 'mood pieces'.² Occupying some of the same stylistic territory as *Venus* and *Succubus*, Franco's fashionably experimental approach to vampire fiction may also have been more immediately influenced by his close-at-hand experience of Portabella's "reworking of the syntax of the Gothic genre" with *Cuadecuc* (Molina-Fox 1977: 41), or by contact with his younger co-writer Jaime Chavarri.³ Ursini and Silver describe the film as a transitional point between "baroque" and "minimalist" periods in the director's career (Silver and Ursini 1993: 189) and the description is apposite. Returning after the rather static *Count Dracula* to the more free-wheeling quality of much of Franco's 1960s work, the film's 'pop' mannerisms and jaunty score act as a veneer over a sombre, pessimistic view of desire that is of a piece with the often bleak, slowly paced sex dramas which make up the majority of Franco's output in the 1970s.

¹ Several of Franco's films purport to be based on novels by 'David Khune'.

² In line with the 'dream-like' ambience often used in vampire films, *Vampyros Lesbos* presents 'stream of consciousness' iconography in a series of red images: the setting sun in the opening shots leads to the red light and scarf of the first cabaret number, which are echoed in repeat shots of a red parasol...and so forth.

³ Jaime Chavarri was at this point a young maker of short films; his *El desencanto* (*Disenchantment*) (1976), a documentary study of a Francoist poet, was once seen as "one of the major works of the post-war cinema" (Molina-Fox 1977: 32).

Bending the Lore: Franco's Monster Rally

According to Hardy, *Vampyros Lesbos* “mixes familiar Countess Dracula motifs with aspects of *Carmilla* and Bram Stoker’s short story, *Dracula’s Guest*” (Hardy 1996: 227). But while *Carmilla*’s influence may be felt in Nadine’s doomed love for Lucy, the film bears virtually no relation to Stoker’s text (1919) in location, characters or plot. The narrative is for the most part a re-gendered update of *Dracula* and of Franco’s recent adaptation of it. The German trailer specifically calls it “a version of *Dracula*”; besides Nadine’s vampiric ancestry, the film also includes a Dr. Alwin Seward (Dennis Price) in reference to Stoker’s character. But as so often with Franco’s self-ransacking and recycling methods – and in line with the exploitation field’s and the horror genre’s tendency to repeatedly resurrect marketable monsters – it also has connections to *The Awful Dr Orlof*. Countess Nadine’s mute assistant is inevitably named Morpho¹ and its incarnation as *Las vampiras* reflects the relative international success of Franco’s first horror film (see chapter 1) by giving the Countess the name Nadina Orloff.² Although certain shots in Franco’s first horror film had a vampiric resonance, the combination of blood-sucking Countess and ‘mad scientist’ suggests an eclectic (or, as detractors might see it, slapdash) approach to genre motifs. In this respect *Vampyros Lesbos* typifies Franco’s plural pastiche and prefigures a ‘monster rally’ approach adopted with film like *Rites of Frankenstein* (1972), *Dracula Versus Frankenstein* (1971) and *Virgin among the Living Dead* (1971).

Though in many ways idiosyncratic, Franco’s re-fashioning of the vampire did not take place single-handedly. Vampire cinema was considerably revised throughout the 1960s and 1970s; as well as an increasing emphasis on erotic spectacle, this often meant eschewing the tradition of setting vampire stories against nineteenth century décor, and in many cases transferring the story to the modern day, such a transplant befitting an ‘undead’ monster. Perhaps partly as a result of financial constraints, Franco opted for ‘real’ present day locations, modern outfits, and a limited number of cheap, instantly recognisable gothic props and events: candelabras and winding staircases feature prominently, Nadine appears at Linda’s window by night, and so on. Many more aspects of the gothic lexicon are refreshed, remixed and disguised. Despite its apparent gender inversion and increased sexual ‘explicitness’, Franco’s earlier female vampire foray, *Dracula’s Daughter*, had closely followed genre protocol, with Louisa (Britt Nichols) entering a dark, cobweb-filled crypt and finding Count Dracula (Howard Vernon) recumbent in his coffin; in *Vampyros Lesbos* Linda first encounters Nadine reclining on a wickerwork sun lounger and wearing a white bikini. Spider’s webs are replaced by fishing nets. Linda’s boat journey to Nadine’s beachside house reworks Jonathan Harker’s visit to Dracula’s castle by

¹ See ‘Morpho’ in Appendix: Table of Concordances.

² In *Rites of Frankenstein* Britt Nichols plays a Madame Orloff.

coach and horses. The convention that vampires have no reflection is dispensed with: Nadine's stage routine involves gazing at herself in a large mirror. Many contemporary reviews berate Franco's films for failing to grasp the genre's 'rules'. A screening of his *Dracula versus Frankenstein* (1971)¹ at the Sitges festival of fantastic cinema in October 1973 was condemned by *Cinefantastique* for

mix(ing) together all the standard ingredients, and latch(ing) on to every conceivable cliché of the genre. Not only are we presented with Count Dracula and Dr Frankenstein (who looks like an Anglican bishop) with his monster (rather badly made up), but we even get a bit of the werewolf thrown in as well. ...In the Abbott and Costello end the monster kills the seedy werewolf, while the fabled Swiss doctor himself puts an end to the vampires and his monster. (Morlot 1973a.: 37).

Despite occasional exceptions like *Count Dracula*, Franco's playing fast and loose with the horror mythos can be seen as typical of the pastiche and bricolage practices of exploitation cinema and its hurried attempts to capitalise on popular or topical trends.² As Lázaro-Reboll put it, *Vampyros Lesbos* exemplifies how Spanish exploitation films of the period simultaneously modelled themselves on and misunderstood American and British genre successes: as "cheap imitation(s) of foreign models", such films suffered from a "makeshift script which (took) liberties with many a sacred tradition". Lázaro-Reboll therefore characterises *Vampyros Lesbos* as an instance of Spanish exploitation cinema's "mimetic relationship with other cinemas" (Lázaro-Reboll 2002: 90). Lázaro-Reboll defends Franco because his films subvert taste norms, and because "Spanish horror movies with their medley of monsters, hybridism, and their inflection of traditional themes, disrupt unified considerations of genre" (Lázaro-Reboll: 91).³ In this respect his discussion recalls David Pirie's view that "the Latin cinema may be at present more prepared than its English counterparts to break away from the mundane repetition of overworked themes" (Pirie 1977: 169). Yet Lázaro-Reboll's description of *Vampyros Lesbos* as an ersatz copy of original sources seems to miss the possibility that 'misunderstanding' might

¹ Under the title *Dracula, Prisoner of Frankenstein*.

² In fact the compellingly uneven *Dracula versus Frankenstein* does take this pastiche to Abbott and Costello levels of absurdity. In an apparent gesture towards the Spanish horror boom that Franco often keeps at arm's length, the sudden appearance of a werewolf at the climax (this creature is rare in Franco's films) seems to pay a back-handed compliment to the internationally successful wolfman films of Paul Naschy/Jacinto Molina. The film is also full of anachronisms, the most obvious of which is the arrival of Frankenstein by motor-car while Dracula uses a coach and horses.

³ That the literary sources of vampire films exist to be manipulated or 'misunderstood' is borne out by the name changes in F.W Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and John Badham's version of *Dracula* (1979). Robin Wood explains that Murnau's version changes Mina to Nina, and "reduces Lucy to insignificance"; while Badham's "reverses the two names" (Wood 1996: 366).

be a matter of wilfully reinscribing and refreshing the genre rather than badly imitating it.¹ Here Lázaro-Reboll inadvertently echoes Rob Stone's despairing account of how in the 1970s serious, respectable Spanish filmmakers like Bardem and Vicente Aranda became involved in "hackneyed genres" and "kitsch" (Stone 2002: 47), a view that has since been refuted by Galt (2007) and Willis (2003, 2005). For Stone, this drift into a supposedly undemanding genre merely evinces a lapse in creativity and originality, and a relinquishment of artistic responsibility in the face of market forces. Stone's evident mistrust of the genre means that he is has no purchase on the extent to which genre codes may be negotiated, deviated from or subverted, and ignores the possibility that 'kitsch' may be a perfectly valid creative arena.

The Devil in Miss Romy: Containing the Female Vampire

Most critical attention paid to the female vampire subgenre has focused on how lesbian and/or feminist readings might be extracted from its fantasy scenarios, and in particular from its representation of the fatally seductive 'monster'. As has often been pointed out, horror's shift of interest from woman as passive object to equivocal subject of desire coincides with the burgeoning cultural upheavals of feminism and the 'sexual revolution'. Robin Wood argues that because "the woman" (*Dracula's* Mina and Lucy) is central to Stoker's novel and many film versions of it², the vampire story is fundamentally about the "possibility of the arousal of female sexuality"; contemporary versions of *Dracula* struggle to come to terms with feminism because they are grounded in a repressive Victorian ideology in which women could be conceived of women only as "either asexual, passive, and pure, or sexual and degraded" (Wood 1996: 373). The female vampire is a conflicted response to this context. The comparatively graphic portrayal of vamping scenes in some films of this period suggests that contemporary discourses of sexual revolution were simultaneously threatening and arousing for dominant masculinity, provoking one of its periodic crises. Mediating a volatile period in the history of sexuality, male fantasies of eviscerating seduction by a female vampire has a cultural resonance as patriarchy's confused reaction to women's increasing empowerment in the social sphere. Visualised as a desiring and powerful agent, she is also usually punished for the havoc she wreaks on dominant gender definitions.

¹ It is possible that Franco's generic negotiations in *Vampyros Lesbos* influenced Vicente Aranda, whose *Blood Spattered Bride* rejected all "expressionist stylization in favour of modern day settings and naturalistic backgrounds": Aranda's montage-heavy film relocates the vampire narrative to "the Spanish countryside, filled with blinding sunshine and adjacent beaches" (Silver and Ursini 1993: 178). Franco appears to return the compliment in *Female Vampire*, the first vamping scene in which (it takes place with the male victim's back against the chain-linked fence of a bird enclosure) can be read as a gender-reversed nod to Aranda's *Bride*, which begins with a husband sexually attacking his wife in an aviary (see Willis 2003: 71 for a discussion of Aranda and of this scene).

² Wood looks at Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and John Badham's *Dracula* (1979).

To summarise the archetypal outline of these self-contradicting fantasies: the ‘sexually active’ daughters of Dracula create chaos and destruction by tempting normally rational men and women away from the path of righteousness, which is to say marriage; only by a thorough and dramatic staking at the film’s finale can equilibrium be regained. From a psychoanalytic perspective, shutting down repressed fantasies that are briefly permitted to return in the form of monsters is (or was) a necessary condition for making horror a ‘safe’ arena in which those fantasies could be aired. As many critics have argued, the climactic destruction of the female vampire has particular implications for the gender politics of the genre. As Christopher Craft argues, the female vampire tale typically begins by disrupting the status quo and provoking anxiety in protagonists and assumed viewers, proceeds to offer an entertaining transgressive fantasy in its long middle section, and swiftly ends in symbolic repression as the undead woman is put emphatically back in her proper place and the institution of patriarchy is thankfully restored (Craft 1984: 107-108). Franco’s films do not jettison these narrative conventions. *Count Dracula* relishes the destruction of the Count’s Brides (see fig 3.1), while *Dracula’s Daughter* and *Vampyros Lesbos* both conclude with a staking scene and the apparent (though, as we shall see, ambiguous) reinstatement of patriarchal authority.

Female vampire fantasies can, then, easily be seen to manifest heterosexual male anxiety about sexual and gender difference, and consequently to exemplify the horror genre’s reactionary tendency to create monsters out of anything which might counter the ‘natural’ (normative) order. In *Vampyros Lesbos* Linda and Nadine’s first sex scene is overburdened with signs for the threat of female desire. Morpho carries the drugged Linda to bed, to be nocturnally visited by Nadine. She arrives at the window, a trail of blood already on her lip. As Linda and Nadine approach each other and make love the film cuts repeatedly to unsubtle metaphors for predation and entrapment: a scorpion as Nadine removes Linda’s skirt; a moth trapped in a net as she kisses Linda’s neck. *Female Vampire* takes a less metaphorical approach to devouring and deadly female desire. Dr. Roberts (Franco) pronounces on the “evil presence” of “Countess Irina of Karlstein”; to emphasise the point, the blind young Dr. Orloff digitally examines the vagina of one of the Countess’ dead victims, and announces to Dr. Roberts’ horror that Irina has “pierced the clitoris”. Dr. Roberts responds that “the demons must be killed”. The denouement of *Female Vampire* hedges its bets by first seeming to show its ‘bare breasted countess’ (one of the film’s many alternate titles) commit suicide by drowning,¹ but having her return to the forest in its closing shots.

¹ See ‘suicide’ in Appendix: Table of Concordances.



Fig 3.1: Patriarchy restored: British lobby card for *Count Dracula*.

In different ways, both films make plain that the dread of demonic female sexuality is bound to, or symptomatic of, the “male fear of heterosexual inadequacy” (Zimmerman 1996: 385). If such fears for male potency ask to be read as expressions of castration anxiety, *Female Vampire* makes no secret of it: any supposedly unconscious fantasies to that effect are in this film barely sublimated. The film’s first vampiric encounter shows Countess Irina (Lina Romay) apparently fellating her anonymous victim to death in a woodland clearing, rather as Jimmy in *Venus* had his life drained out of him. Why such a blow should be fatal is far from obvious, not least because the decisive action is filmed from behind the victim’s back and not a drop of blood appears to be spilled. (One German ‘hardcore’ version of the film obtrusively inserts some extreme close-up shots of fellatio into the sequence, seemingly borrowed from another source, but these do nothing to clarify matters). As an exasperated David McGillivray remarked in his review of the film, “what exactly is going on, and what exactly Irina is doing to her victims, remains a mind-boggling conundrum” (McGillivray 1978: 217). Dr. Roberts does little to clear the mystery up by later explaining that “he was bitten, in the middle of an orgasm, and the vampire sucked his semen and his life away”, but the film’s apparent semen = life equation is not without mythological precedent.

To compare the extraction of semen to the draining of life is to perpetuate an archaic belief in semen as a – if not *the* – ‘vital essence’. No doubt rooted in the reproductive nature of man’s ‘seed’, improper seminal loss is catastrophic for masculine power. Giving extra weight to Halberstam’s analysis of gothic monsters as a technology producing “modern” forms of pathologically sexualised subjectivities (Halberstam 1995: 24), Dijkstra discusses how in the

nineteenth century notions of life-giving fluids in medical discourse often fed into beliefs about the intrinsically vampiric nature of female lust.¹ All men have only a limited supply of the essential ‘energies’ contained within their generative liquid. Thus upstanding citizens are to be vigilant against temptations that might lead to wasteful discharge, and in particular must defend themselves (through intellectual, spiritual or rugged, non-sexual physical pursuits) against women’s carnal demands for their “vital energy” (Dijkstra 1996: 50). As *Female Vampire* demonstrates, links between female desire and vampirism were connected to the view that men’s ‘generative fluid’ was distilled, condensed or otherwise drawn within the human ‘machine’ from their blood (Dijkstra 1996: 57). Hence non-reproductive ejaculation is debilitating, emasculating and, as *Female Vampire* suggests, deadly. Within this logic, to spend or be spent is to lose, however temporarily, one’s potency – to become docile, immobile and ‘feminine’ - and from this post-orgasmic exhaustion emanate any number of myths.

The notion that male vigour could be preserved through seminal continence found ample support in medical discourses of ‘self abuse’. Eighteenth century anti-masturbation tracts specifically connected surplus ejaculation to the shrivelling of virility. Masturbation and non-voluntary nocturnal emissions resulted in unnecessary expenditure of the source of robust masculinity and needed to be resisted at all costs. Stengers and Van Neck cite the work of the eighteenth-century Swiss physician Samuel-August Tissot as exemplary. Tissot proposed that the functioning of the bodily apparatus depended on the role of ‘humours’ with varying degrees of importance; paramount among these were, of course, semen and blood, with semen at the very pinnacle of the hierarchy of essences and blood a close second (Stengers and Van Neck 2001: 68): excessive semen loss was therefore a “true catastrophe for the overall functioning of the human body” (Stengers and Van Neck 2001: 70).²

The female vampire, like her associate the succubus, therefore embodied the fear that “the sexualised woman would become an erotomaniacal monster who was out to suck the marrow from men’s bones” (Theweleit 1987: 349). Dijkstra describes the ‘cruel woman’ of early masochist fiction as “a veritable siphon of regression ready to gorge herself on that great clot of ‘seminal fluid’ of man’s brain” (Dijkstra 1998: 166). *Female Vampire*’s Dr. Roberts makes a comparable claim, declaring that Irina feeds herself on male “hormones”; her lethal lust echoes Tissot’s assertion that losing one ounce of the “directing spirit” was “more debilitating than that of forty ounces of blood” (Stengers and Van Neck 2001: 69). From a Freudian perspective,

¹Of course, medical and religious discourses around semen and its wasteful loss have a much longer pedigree than this; the nineteenth century is significant for Dijkstra’s analysis because it is at this point that vampire literature entwines with the dread of ‘unnatural’ and unproductive expenditure.

² For more on the 18th century horror of, and campaign against, ‘self pollution’, see Rosario (1997:13-44).

Ernest Jones made a similar connection by proposing that in vampire narratives blood substitutes for semen; the vampire's erotic yet frightening night-time visit to her victim represents adolescent anxiety over wet dreams (Twitchell 1981: 58). Dijkstra observes that "the ghosts of poorly considered scientific theorems tends to float through our fantasies long after they have been formally discredited" (Dijkstra 1998: 5), and Freud saw the uncanny as by definition a repository of discarded beliefs. Seen in this light, *Female Vampire*'s otherwise irrational death-by-fellatio scenario is at least ideologically consistent.

If feminine vampirism therefore suggests that female desire is troublesome for male potency, the specifically lesbian vampire is double the trouble. As a result of its search for tantalising new topics through which it might compete with higher budget and more respectable fare, gothic exploitation cinema of the 1960s and 1970s provided one of the few sites in which lesbianism was represented with any frequency: "outside of male pornography, the lesbian vampire is the most persistent lesbian image in the history of the cinema" (Weiss 1992: 84). Of course, as Zimmerman puts it, "the heterosexual context of the film must be very clear; lesbianism must be presented as an aberration" (Zimmerman 1996: 385). Thus it has often been argued that the terms in which the female vampire image presented are usually too silly, salacious and transparently misogynistic to merit serious attention, the vampiric act standing not just for frighteningly insatiable, devouring female desire, but for the deadliness traditionally associated with lesbianism (Creed 1993: 59) and the uncanniness of homosexuality for the 'straight' imagination (Halberstam 1995: 17). Only a tiny number of instances "outside of the low budget horror/exploitation genre" are held to provide space for "alternative viewing strategies" (Weiss 1992: 104). Not wanting to damn the entire female/lesbian vampire subgenre, *Daughters of Darkness* (Harry Kümel, 1971) is canonised on the grounds of its 'art cinema' credentials, class critique, participation of Delphine Seyrig, excessive masquerade of femininity, resistance to 'narrative closure', avoidance of 'unnecessary' nudity, and denigration of heterosexual masculinity (Graham 1995: 174; Weiss 1992: 104; Zimmerman 1996: 385; Auerbach 1995: 57). The rest are assumed to be simply too shoddy and male in their address to merit attention.¹

There are several textual operations for dealing with the notion of a consensual relationship between two women. The endemic generic 'solution' is of course to show it as impossible – a 'monster' appears to corrupt a seemingly unwitting victim. This trope may enforce the idea that same-sex desire is at once depraved and (because non-reproductive) tragic. In *Female Vampire*, Irina pays a night-time visit to a female journalist. The scene includes many close ups of eyes (the evil eye of the woman who looks), underscored by electronically distorted bird sound

¹*The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983) is also sometimes singled out, in part thanks to the presence of Susan Sarandon and Catherine Deneuve.

effects similar to those in Hitchcock's *The Birds*. The journalist is horrified by the sight of Irina licking her lips and masturbating at the end of her bed. Spurned once, Irina returns later in the evening, this time more suitably attired in a black 'vamping' outfit. Suddenly the journalist 'submits' to her passions. The scene proceeds with the arguably pre-Oedipal image of close-up teeth on nipples, and culminates in cunnilingus. The lengthy scene begins with the accompaniment of conventional 'porn' music; however, this abruptly falls away as the journalist appears to die, of course, in orgasm. In accord with the image of sex as masturbation that Franco persists with into the 1970s, Irina's slurps and pants are noisily audible as she continues insatiably to lap between the journalist's thighs, in a representation of desperate female insatiability that recalls the gloomy climax of the American hardcore porn film *The Devil in Miss Jones* (Gerard Damiano, 1972). Vaginal fluid rather than blood drips from her lips. At odds with what we shall see of the exuberance in parts of *Vampyros Lesbos*, the necrophiliac implications of this and later scenes reinforce the film's view of the depravity and tragedy of lesbianism. Of course, the journalist hasn't really died but become one of the vampires' number: the scene cuts to Irina leading her seductee through a misty forest.

As Dyer (2002: 72) points out, lesbianism and vampirism have traditionally often been described coterminously as matters of predation upon the innocent and easily led. Having encoded non-'straight' sexualities as monstrous, the central problem of vampire films is then whether they offer "attractive and subversive visions of a new polymorphously perverse sexuality" or whether they "condemn such sexuality as perverse by showing it belongs only to undead monsters" (Freeland 200: 21). Without necessarily resolving this problem or eliding their contradictions, films within the subgenre usually work hard to contain any subversive potential that might be found in the lesbian vampire's deadliness. Most obviously, as Zimmerman and Weiss point out, framing the plot through the perspective of an ultimately triumphant male vampire hunter reasserts conventional gender roles.

Dracula's Daughter frequently presents point-of-view shots from the perspective of Britt Nichols' vampire. *Female Vampire* is narrated by Lina Romay's tragic character. But lest we should imagine the queens of the night as autonomous agents, we are also reminded that they ultimately act under Count Dracula's influence. In Franco's *Dracula's Daughter* Louisa retires by day beside the Count in a neighbouring coffin; in *Vampyros Lesbos* Nadine explains how in the distant past Dracula came to her "night after night ... to take my blood ... and shared with me the secrets of the vampires. It was he who initiated me". *Dracula's Daughter* uses this male perspective most conventionally, as male agents of enlightenment reason investigate and track down the female vampire; of all Franco's interventions in the subgenre, this film perhaps comes closest to a 'mystery and suspense' structure, with its heroes gradually coming to understand and eliminate the malignant force in their midst, and in the process underlining the message that

“if you value your neck, stick with men” (Zimmerman 1996: 382). Zimmerman and Weiss’ analyses also remind us that Franco’s female vampire excursions struggle to ‘think’ lesbian desire outside of a heterosexist, phallogocentric vocabulary: much as in *Female Vampire* a clitoris is “pierced” by Irina, in *Vampyros Lesbos* another victim describes Nadine as being “inside” her. Being pierced and penetrated by another can of course also describe emotional states, but the phallic implications are unmistakable.

A further taming tactic is to perpetuate the notion of lesbian sexuality as an intensified form of women’s general narcissism (Zimmerman 1996: 381). This idea is particularly favoured by Jean Rollin, with his recurrent imagery of nubile vampire twins and doubles. Franco stages it quite literally in *Vampyros Lesbos*’ opening cabaret number, when Nadine Carody is shown enraptured by her own mirror-image (see fig 3.2). The notion of female narcissism bolsters the containment strategy of stressing to the intended viewer that the vampire remains reassuringly ‘feminine’ despite her fearsomely masculine penetrative appetites (Weiss 1992: 69). *Vampyros Lesbos* does so also by casting the rather birdlike, delicately featured Soledad Miranda in the vampire role, and by adorning her with veils and lace, apparently in deference to the idea of feminine mystery as well as to the gothic fascination with cloaks, veils, surfaces and secrets (Sedgwick 1986: 140).

As the vampire’s performance of feminine signifiers attests, a further containment strategy is to ensure that the ‘active’ and desirous looks of women characters take place under a watchful male eye. Auerbach argues that LeFanu’s female vampire offers a reciprocal, “interpenetrative” relationship with her enthralled victim that is not granted her male counterpart. Here, for Auerbach, lies the feminist potential of the female vampire motif. But the female vampire’s license comes at a price: “the women perform for the men” (Auerbach 1995: 39), while modern adaptations of the story replace “friendship” with “voyeurism” by structuring the woman’s story “around the response of a male watcher, explicit or implied” (Auerbach 1995: 53). Many sequences in *Vampyros Lesbos* appear to illustrate Auerbach’s claim that cinematic “female vampires spring to life only under men’s eyes” (Auerbach 1995: 53). Hence Linda and Nadine rarely frolic with or vampirise one another out of the vigilant Morpho’s view. (In a typical instance of how Franco re-shuffles ideas from one film to the next, this Morpho, unlike his original in *The Awful Dr Orloff*, is sighted, while Dr. Orloff in *Female Vampire* is blind.) As discussed below, however, this does not reveal the whole picture.

Reclaiming the Countess

Vampyros Lesbos is loosely fabricated out of three main narrative strands: a) Linda’s story of struggle with her conflicting desires, torn between Nadine and Omar and all that they embody, b) Nadine’s story of enticing and then falling in love with Linda and c) the men’s story of trying

to destroy Nadine and recoup Linda. If any sort of ‘identification’ can take place in relation to Franco’s film, Weiss, Zimmerman and Creed’s accounts of textual engagements in the subgenre would imply that c) represents the film’s preferred subject position, while fantasies of power may with effort – and as an alternative to outright rejection of the films – be salvaged for women from selected parts of a) and b). Feminist and/or lesbian pleasures may be reclaimable by ignoring the denouement in favour of selected aspects of the mise-en-scène, laughing at the absurdity of their sexist and homophobic constructions, or by choosing the empowering dimension of the figure’s seductive monstrosity as a point of fantasy investment.



Fig. 3.2: The vampire admires her reflection in *Vampyros Lesbos*.

Turning a blind eye to the films’ objectifying, fetishising and ‘victimising’ tendencies enables selective identification with the vampire’s closeted “secret, forbidden sexuality” (Weiss 1992: 107), realising the female vampire as an active agent of the look, and reclaiming her dangerousness as a position of power. As Creed argues in her reading of Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* (1982) the appeal of the female vampire for women lies in reappropriating her embodiment of abjection. The female vampire’s blood-lust leads her to disturb order and identity by transgressing the “rules of proper sexual conduct” and threatening to “seduce the daughters of patriarchy away from their proper gender roles” (Creed 1993: 61). The films imply moreover that “in turning to each other, women triumph over and destroy men themselves”, and this exclusion of men may be salvaged as a “feminist message” that exceeds the films’ desperate attempts to restore order (Zimmerman 1996: 284). Thus can the position of ‘abjected object’ be taken on board as a site of unruly pleasure.

Freeland proposes that one of the attractions of the seductive vampire is its ability to violate gender norms, as they are “allegedly directed through heterosexual desire to marriage and procreation”, by finding intimacy with *anyone* in their search for an alternative form of reproduction (Freeland 2000: 124). Sue-Ellen Case (2000) likewise takes the view that the feminist potential of the ‘ideal’ female vampire (as opposed to her disappointing actual manifestation in most genre films) lies in her liminal, queer refusal of the dominant categories of straight sexuality. Robin Wood not dissimilarly proposes that the vampire offers images of ‘abnormal’, promiscuous, “nonprocreative sexuality” simultaneously arousing and threatening to normativity (Wood, 1996: 370). Echoing Richard Dyer’s acknowledgement of the vampire-as-homosexual (Dyer 1998; 2002), Case celebrates the disruptive potential of the vampire by suggesting that the creature’s smudging of “the line between living and dead” threatens the heteronormative dichotomy of heterosexual fertility versus homosexual sterility (Case 2000: 199). On this reading, the orality of both nominally male and female vampires represent a “distortion” of the breast and of breast-feeding in which the “familiar activity of breast-feeding is now rendered radically unfamiliar” and non-nurturing (Gelder 1994: 51). Such a refusal produces an illicit *jouissance* surplus to narrative closure. The very ‘unnaturalness’ of the vampire is for Case the source of its attraction, since “(t)he queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny” who refuses reproductive and maternal models of female sexuality (Case 2000: 200). The theoretical problem posed by the “pseudo soft porn” aesthetic of many female vampire films (Auerbach 1995: 56) is that this potential transgression or destabilisation of sex and gender norms tends to be rendered in inescapably sexed and gendered imagery.

Weiss presents the effortful reclamation of lesbian vampire imagery as a feminist form of “camp” reading strategy (Weiss 1992: 104). Graham responds that the practice of retrieving “positive subject positions and...same-sex desires suppressed in the text” is distinct from the parodic performance of camp spectatorship (Graham 1995: 180). Whether or not feminist textual poaching from the subgenre is strictly speaking camp, the point is that the films’ perspective is “firmly and unambiguously male” (Zimmerman 1996: 385), with the result that these empowering pleasures have to be read against the overwhelmingly heterosexist grain of most actual vampire texts. This assumes that the heterosexist grain runs one way, so that outside canonised exceptions like *Daughters of Darkness*, the salacious nature of exploitation cinema is too blatant to analyse and forecloses any further meaning. Ken Gelder remarks that if patriarchal figures tend finally to be triumphant in vampire narratives, we do not need to “surrender” to this “narrativized response” in our reception of the films’ “‘queer’ scenes”. Pleasure can derive from “giving the scenes a ‘significance’ they do not appear to have in the text itself” (Gelder 1994: 58). Zimmerman observes in relation to *Daughters of Darkness* that “it is when the viewer is herself a lesbian and feminist that the film takes on a kaleidoscope of meaning” (Zimmerman

1996: 386), as though the film is for all other viewers merely monosemically obvious. Auerbach similarly remarks that the vampire predations depicted in films like *The Vampire Lovers* exude a “cheerful semi-pornographic opulence” that is addressed solely to “drooling adolescent” males in the audience (Auerbach 1995: 56). Of course, as Weiss, Whatling and others illustrate, female vampire films may be enjoyed by more than the stereotypical slavering juveniles invoked by Auerbach. But even for these critics the subgenre’s potential can be excavated only besides and not from its salaciousness.

Zimmerman’s assumption that “a kaleidoscope of meaning” is available to some audiences and not others ignores the fact that vampires, as part of gothic fiction’s “free zone of interpretive mayhem” (Halberstam 1995: 85), are richly metaphoric. As Freeland (1996) points out, most critiques of the female vampire, sometimes through doctrinaire applications of Freud, see any variations in the figure’s treatment less as sources of diverse possible meanings and pleasures and more as superficial heterogeneity masking deep homogeneity. Freeland criticises Creed’s *The Monstrous Feminine* for neglecting the specifically cinematic construction of monsters, an oversight which leads Creed to reduce all varieties of monstrosity to mere “illustrations” of the Kristevan process of abjection (Freeland 2000: 20). Creed – in some ways as ‘literature-centric’ as Case and Auerbach – subsumes textual particularities into generalisations about narrative archetypes, so that *all* vampires represent the timeless archaic mother. But it seems likely that the fascination, longevity and seemingly endless adaptability of the vampire lie in its plural coding, multivalence and contradictoriness rather than in its underlying identity. As Whatling puts it, “it is precisely in her ambiguity, her on-the-edginess, that the lesbian vampire operates as an interesting, and productive, trope” (Whatling 1997: 95). I would add that Franco’s female vampire films are constructed around the contradictory myths that the lascivious undead woman might represent for the heteronormative male imaginary, including on the one hand a fantasy of unlimited sexual ‘availability’, and on the other a degree of potency up to which no phallus can measure. The very instability of the films’ address to theme and viewer may provide for the possibility of multiple and shifting fantasmatic investments in Auerbach’s “drooling” male as well as the poaching female viewer: in other words they might be invited by the texts as much as stolen strategically from them.

Zimmerman, Creed and Weiss assume that the salivating male spectators’ interest lies solely in the violent and/or titillating aspects of the fanged creature’s predations. But while certainly deadly, and only very occasionally frightening, the vampire (male or female) is often portrayed as a sympathetic monster. In fact, Linda and Nadine appear to condense several stereotypical guises of the cinematic lesbian as Creed defines them: Linda plays “virginal victim” and “child-woman” but also at times “chic femme beauty”; Nadine certainly plays “chic femme beauty”, “fanged vampire” and “sophisticated seducer” but also, as she recounts her tragic past (she

explains later that she was raped by soldiers in her youth and that Dracula ‘saved’ her at cost to her own identity), “virginal victim” and “depressed loner”. The “depressed loner” type is intrinsic to the romantic agony of many gothic texts, including tales of the melancholic male vampire (as in Aguirre’s *Dracula’s Great Love*), and is developed as the film progresses until love for Linda forces Nadine into the “suicidal depressive” stereotype that Franco expands upon in *Female Vampire* and elsewhere (Creed 1993: 86). Thus the image of the vampire may present the willing viewer with numerous prospects for selective, partial ‘identification’.

Being on the receiving end of the vampire’s kiss is, for example, rarely presented as a thoroughly disagreeable situation in which to find oneself. The predator is usually a tragic victim of the contagion herself, while her prey walks at least half-knowingly into the net. Yet fantasies that might in some way involve seeing oneself as an object of vampiric attentions – as opposed to appropriating the vampire as an ‘empowered’ agent – appear to be deemed by Zimmerman, Creed and Weiss as too suspect to credit, possibly because such fantasies imply a masochistic subjectivity still often regarded within feminist theory as politically sensitive. But the power-plays within Franco’s vampiric scenarios are arguably resistant to the polarised models of ‘positive’/ ‘negative’ fantasy – usually based on antinomies between active/passive and subject/object relations – that often underlie these readings of the subgenre. Whatling contends that the alignment of lesbian spectatorial positions only with “the masculine-identified or butch lesbian” excludes “femme lesbian identification and desire from the specular equation” (Whatling 1997: 60). While agreeing on the necessity of appropriative strategies, Whatling argues that Weiss’ reification of certain images as authentically or “definitively lesbian” leads her to miss a broader range of attractions: for Weiss, the ‘feminine’ lesbian image in the vampire film functions merely to alleviate male fear of female desire and can offer nothing to lesbian spectators (Whatling 1997: 85). Arguing for the “femme” possibilities of the genre when read through a knowing relationship to its now obsolete conventions, Whatling challenges Weiss’ assumption that eroticised ‘feminine’ images can only be seen in terms of passive objectification, and proposes that the subgenre’s undoubted address to voyeuristic heteropatriarchy does not necessarily inhibit “the articulation of either lesbian identification or desire” (Whatling 1997: 69). Whatling’s arguments fruitfully problematise some of the more essentialist and mechanistic accounts of the subgenre’s possible pleasures. However, she leaves voyeurism intact as cinema’s dominant mode of looking: she reasons that since voyeurism is innately male and therefore objectifying, lesbian identification and desire can (or should) only be articulated outside of its supposed logic. Only ironic distance from outmoded cinematic conventions enables Whatling’s ideal spectators – like Weiss and Zimmerman’s – to make the films relevant.

Despite their declared investment in fluidity, disorder and transgression, some ‘empowering appropriation’ approaches can therefore seem unexpectedly proper and carefully policed, acknowledging only a parsimonious array of pleasures to be taken from under the nose of a dominant and undifferentiated male imaginary. Weiss’ view that “lesbians can derive vicarious enjoyment from the vampire’s dangerous powers” (Weiss 1992: 103) appears to focus on the ideal vampire woman as active subject - as opposed to a fetishised object - of desire, and in so doing may take too static a view of how the vampire, her victim and their relationship are negotiated in specific films. Weiss’ approach may also be in danger of positivising identities as essences that pre-exist and determine how fantasies, desires and pleasures (and displeasures) may operate when we watch films. This approach to enjoyment seems needlessly territorial, and supposes that spectatorial engagements during specific acts of viewing are strictly apportioned according to one’s gender and sexuality. The possibility of, for example, cross-gender identification is often skirted around, as though objectification of the female vampire (and never any sort of allegiance with her) is the only pleasure available to male viewers.

By articulating fascination with female desire as a threat to male potency, female and ‘lesbian’ vampire films appear to suggest that heterosexual masculinity is “abnormal and ineffectual” (Zimmerman 1996: 386). Zimmerman supposes that the sense of inadequacy provoked in the male viewer by visions of the female vampire’s desire must be intolerable, and solves the problem of why an intolerable desire should be visualised in the first place via the claim that the enjoyment experienced by male viewers derives only from consolatory sadism, containment and closure. In view of more recent work on the various and shifting ‘positionalities’ of film spectatorship, this seems simplistic. Although he focuses on ‘ideal’ – which is to say generically stable and supposedly ‘frightening’ – horror, Peter Hutchings rejects the claim that horror’s pleasures for men reside in the use of sadistic imagery as compensation for their sense of lack (Hutchings 1993: 84). Hutchings draws on Clover (1992) and Studlar (1985) to argue that rather than the sadism usually assumed by gaze theory – which tends to align spectatorship with voyeurism, voyeurism with fetishism, and fetishism with sadism – horror has a masochistic “affect” on male viewers, who may feel terrorised by the onscreen action, ‘identify’ with the monster when it is violently destroyed, or imaginatively experience subjection and victimisation. Out of his wish to valorise the genre’s masochistic delights, Hutchings assumes that, where images of subjection are concerned, the putative male viewer must instead “empathize pleasurably with another’s disempowerment” (Hutchings 1993: 86-7).¹ ‘Identification’, in other words, is on the victim’s and never the perpetrator’s side. Like Clover, Zimmerman, Williams and others, Hutchings therefore seems to presuppose that the ‘visual

¹ For further discussion of the masochistic affect of horror, but from a more Deleuzian than psychoanalytic perspective, see Shaviro (1993) and MacCormack (2004).

pleasure' of the genre can exist in only one of just two, masochistic or sadistic, registers, thus giving the impression that viewers' experiences are reducible to one or two modes of intensity. Hutchings' analysis is nonetheless useful because it implies that the female vampire subgenre might pleasurably mediate, as opposed to mask or repress, the failings of heterosexual masculinity.

Invitations to the Netherworld

How *Female Vampire* and *Vampyros Lesbos* deploy particular ways of looking at and fantasising female sexuality and the female body is condensed in their respective credit sequences. As in *Venus*' oscillations between clarity and obscurity, both sequences foreground the acts of looking and of being shown in ways that draw attention to the work of the cinematic apparatus in producing an alluring spectacle as 'invitation' to the film. Vision and the technology of visibility are addressed in both sequences as part of the films' updating of the genre. I see this self-consciousness not in terms of 'Brechtian' distanciation but as part of the films' intended production of erotic affect. Both sequences, using quite different means, announce the act of making visible as part of the putting on of the film's 'show', while, like *Venus*, attempting to marry sexploitation's 'tease' with fantastic hesitation.

As in many other Franco works, these two films open on an initially anonymous female who, as yet unattached to narrative, emerges in non-specific space. *Female Vampire* begins with Lina Romay isolated in dense fog; *Vampyros Lesbos* frames Soledad Miranda against darkness. *Venus* had displayed Maria Rohm as an auratic surface by freeze-framing her and flattening her into Warholian blocks of colour; *Vampyros Lesbos* does something similar through the use of red arc lights which reduce the appearance of volume and mass in certain parts of the screen (see fig 3.3). Signs of location become apparent only after several shots, *Female Vampire* revealing a forest setting, *Vampyros Lesbos* a stage. The non-specific framings lend the images an iconic quality which is reinforced by the relationship between on-screen body and title: again as in *Venus*, the title card provides anchorage while the female icons reciprocally illustrate the titles. The titular body declares the film's intent by presenting a female figure which both delivers on some of the expectations engendered by phrases like *Vampyros Lesbos* or *The Bare-Breasted Countess*, and promises more to come.

These opening shots might be described quite straightforwardly as proffering a fetishistic and objectifying spectacle. But how the sequences proceed - how they give way to their narratives proper, and how they 'come on to' the implied viewer - demands more than a mechanistic application of these traditional terms of analysis. The credit sequence for *Vampyros Lesbos* trades on the erotic principle of veiling in such a way as to attempt interpellation through the

form of 'striptease'. But the sequence also explores and eroticises the dynamics of the screen, replacing *Venus*' static flattening with a more kinetic play of surface and depth. The sequence frames Soledad Miranda (credited in some prints as Susann Korda) through a play of verticality and horizontality whose abstracting tendency resembles a minimalist version of a Busby Berkeley dance sequence. This visual style differs drastically from the prosaic 'tableau' presentation of, say, nudist films, North American burlesque films (Schaefer 1999: 303-23) and 'primitive' stag movies (Williams 1990: 76-80). My language here may be formalist, but I am not making a stake on the film simply as modernist or avant-garde. Nor am I seeing the sequence as deconstructive of narrative cinema. Rather, the credit sequence declares the film as a 'modern' take on gothic eroticism, this modernity supported by the distinctly non-gothic exotica of Hübler and Schwab's soundtrack and the unadorned yellow font of the credits. The formal properties of the sequence also matter because they have implications for the understanding of how 'the gaze' operates in horror and exploitation films.

The previous chapter discussed Franco's use of blocking and obscuring compositions which oscillated between showing and withholding. Shaped by the demands of censorship and notions of erotic decorum (and often contrasting starkly with the 'perverse' activities recounted elsewhere in the films), these techniques enabled the look of the viewer to be simultaneously solicited and thwarted. This ludic visuality constitutes an erotics of the cinematic apparatus which takes a form distinct from hardcore pornography's "frenzy of visibility" (Williams 1990, *passim*), but is not necessarily alien to it: many of Franco's veiled compositions here are the opposite of 'explicit' but can be said to take vision to excess through their baroque preoccupation with surface effects. In *Vampiros Lesbos* and many other films Franco carries 'softcore' eroticism to a kind of extreme through a system of suggestions, glimpses, hints and delays often juxtaposed with more graphic passages.

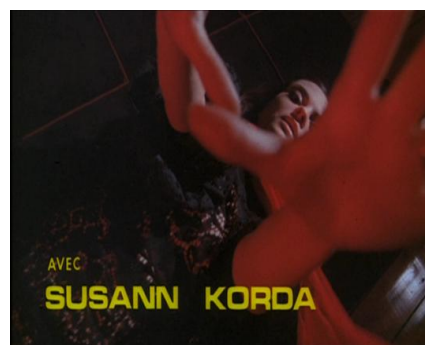




Fig 3.3: Credit sequence from *Vampyros Lesbos*.

The 'seductress' looks into the lens as an 'invitation' into the film. The composition of this long take embodies the vampiric relationship between seductress and seductee: her hands reach in extreme close-up into the camera (which remains focused on the background) and close in, in a scissoring or 'strangling' movement. On the face of it Miranda appears to be slightly leaning forward into the camera, which seems to be tilted up at a slightly oblique angle beneath her. In a 'premonition' of blood dripping from a jugular vein, her diaphanous red scarf also appears to hang down into the lens and is blown (presumably by an on-set fan) across her face. The implied viewer's position in this set-up appears to be the 'receptive' or 'masochistic' one of seductee/victim. But a closer inspection of the sequence reveals that Miranda is in fact lying on the floor; the camera is above her and her scarf, rather than tumbling down, is held up off camera. The vacillating subject position implied here encapsulates that of the entire film and its equivocations in the face of 'female desire'. At this stage these viewing positions 'belong' to no one on screen. The film then gives the shots ownership by cutting to an audience in a night-club, watching Miranda on stage. The diegetic look is now doubly gendered, but not equally

distributed, as Linda and Omar look on. Omar's anxious glances from the stage to his fiancée can be seen as reflexively representing the addressed male viewer's own look, jealously attempting to comprehend the very female desire he fantasises, and appearing inadequate in comparison with the film's construction of lesbian desire.

In contrast with *Vampyros Lesbos*' kinetic spatial play and *Venus in Furs*' pop abstraction, *Female Vampire*'s three-minute credit sequence opts for naturalistic lighting but constitutes a memorable configuring of fascination and desire as it surveys the vampire's body (see fig. 3.4). The film opens on a white 'void', which appears momentarily as a blank screen, but turns out to be a horror film mist from which, in a long take accompanied by the doleful strains of Daniel White's piano theme, emerges the female vampire of the title. Immobile at this stage, the camera is placed close to eye level several metres from the advancing figure, who comes into focus as she approaches the lens. The thick mist surrounding her, by eliminating any horizon line and obscuring details of location, lends her a spectral quality in keeping with the vampire theme. Just under a minute into the sequence, the slowly approaching woman threatens to bump into the camera. Her inability to penetrate the 'fourth wall' provokes the camera to back off and reveal her body in full length, showing that she is naked except for an open cloak, thigh-high boots and a wide leather belt. (In view of the vampire theme and the 'castration' scene that soon follows the shot recalls Maria Rohm's coat that, as the trailer for *Venus in Furs* had it, "covers paradise, uncovers hell"). As the now retreating camera briefly travels at approximately the same speed as the advancing woman, she appears momentarily to float against the mist, again emphasising her otherworldly, liminal existence. At this stage the film seems intent on presenting her quite literally as an apparition. Yet the camera halts again, enabling her to advance further into the frame, then moves forward so that she can fill it all the more quickly. A figure that initially seemed visualised as a wraith is now presented far less ambiguously as flesh. The Countess stands still to allow the camera to train on her eyes in extreme close-up for a few seconds, before withdrawing by several centimetres and tilting down to her breasts, then groin. The camera zooms slowly into the darkly shadowed region beneath her belt, in what is effectively a negative of the misty 'void' which opened the film. The camera moves back up the torso and returns to the eyes – it is tempting to say that it has pored over or scoured the body, but these characterisations do not capture the restless nature of the camera's movements.

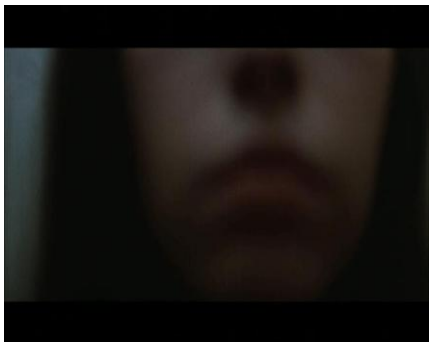
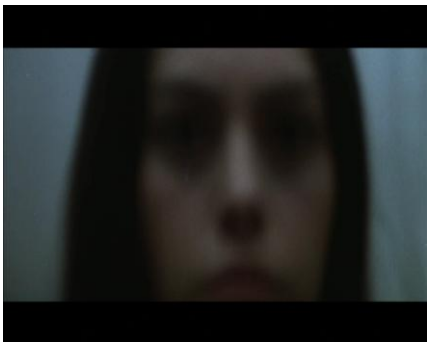
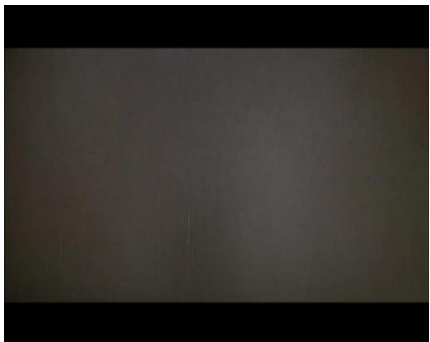
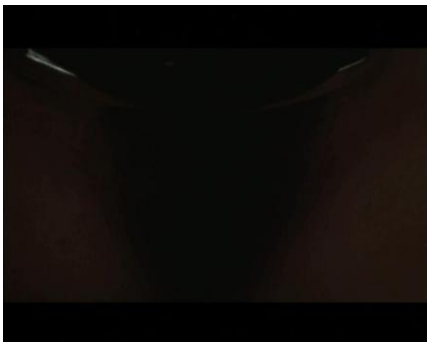
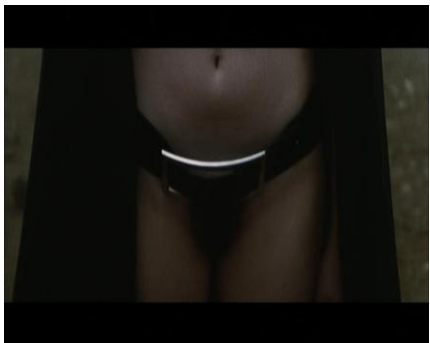
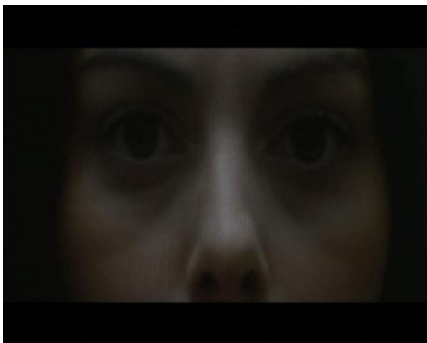




Fig 3.4: Credit sequence from *Female Vampire*.

Like Miranda in *Vampyros Lesbos*, Romay stares quite directly ‘through’ and ‘beyond’ the lens, before the camera beats another retreat to provide more space for her forward motion. (A fraction of a second before the film cuts, Lina Romay’s chin finally hits the lens). This motion is not matched by a pull of focus, so she becomes indistinct, her edges partially dissolving back into the mist as her face engulfs the screen. As though unable to continue in the same manner, the sequence now cuts to a second long shot of the Countess walking towards camera/viewer and repeats the push-and-pull of vision that had occupied the film’s first two minutes.

The compulsiveness of the camera in this sequence enacts a tension between two versions of the screen, which vacillates between appearing as a ‘window’ offering privileged access to the body, and as an opaque surface denying that visual access. The cat-and-mouse game of vision creates shifts across different forms of visual ‘possession’, from long-shot to extreme close-up. Yet because Franco only sometimes adjusts focus, the woman dissolves a little as she fills the screen, the slight breakdown of mass and volume softening the very ‘obscene’ visibility that the camera seemed to proffer. Hence the sequence is structured around a frisson between showing and concealing, distance from and proximity to, the onscreen body. This visual (and ideological) tension can be seen as Franco’s attempt to find an optical analogy for the interstitial, uncanny nature of the living dead while making a film that would be marketable (and re-editable) as both horror and pornography. The oscillation between presenting the female vampire as vaporously otherworldly and presenting her as corporeal can be seen not only as typical of exploitation cinema’s gendered address, but as a metaphor for the viewing and fantasising position of the (male) hero of gothic romanticism, as he dreams (like Jimmy in *Venus in Furs*) of sublime submission to the all-engulfing ‘void’: this submission is of course shortly to be rendered – in homage both to castration anxiety and *Deep Throat* – as a deadly act of oral sex.

‘It’s a Long Time since I Sunbathed’: Power, Ambivalence and Vampire Seduction

Franco may have entered the female vampire arena not just for its profitability but because of its ambiguous treatment of agency in desire. Although Dyer (2002) and others have noted that lesbianism and vampirism have both traditionally been represented in terms of a victim being preyed upon by a more powerful force, it is rare in vampire narratives for relationships purely to be a matter of coercion. *Vampyros Lesbos* handles seduction in contradictory ways which reveal the film's indecision over the representation of desirous women, while possibly leaving space for the kinds of appropriation discussed above. What we might call Linda's priming or grooming begins during the dreams/premonitions about Nadine that she recounts to her psychoanalyst. (*Las vampiras* emphasises female 'madness' by bypassing the erotic curtain raiser of *Vampyros Lesbos*, and beginning with Linda - now called Alice - on Dr. Steiner's couch). Confused by her desires, Linda tells Dr. Steiner that "the strange thing is that the dream arouses me. More than once I've reached orgasm". Failing to comment on the dream's foreboding imagery of scorpions and trapped insects (the same shots of which are later intercut into Nadine's first vamping of Linda) the psychoanalyst doodles distractedly in his notepad before offering the sage advice, "you mustn't think your problem is unique. Many women are sexually frustrated. Let me tell you the best cure. Find yourself a lover...a better lover". The woman's search for a better lover is of course a classic motor for amorous adventures in erotic narratives, but the point is that Linda's sexual frustration, and therefore Omar's inadequacy, leads her willingly into Nadine's arms. Although she acts under the vampire's spell and on a man's advice, Linda's "strange" desires, much to Omar's chagrin, lead her to seek Nadine out. So strong are her uncanny yearnings that Linda fails to notice the portents that Franco throws into the film: blood sliding down a window pane, a disturbing basement encounter with the demented hotel porter, Memmet (Franco), and the ominous presence of red objects in virtually every frame in which Linda appears.

Depending on the sequence in which one places the film's narrative events, Linda's introduction to the 'other side' begins during the striptease number that immediately follows the credit sequence but prefaces the story proper. In an Istanbul nightclub on a dark stage furnished only with a mirror and a candlestick, Nadine, wearing black nylon lingerie as well as red scarf, puts on a show that involves animating a naked 'mannequin' (a woman standing still) through kisses. (A reprise of the act later in the film shows Nadine putting underwear on the mannequin as part of this animation). This lesbian erotico-gothic variation on the Pygmalion tale echoes the trope of dormant desires being stirred by a more experienced other: it can be seen as a variant of the sexual initiation theme common in erotic fictions as well as to the 'deflowering' fantasies hinted at by vampire titles like *The Blood Spattered Bride* and *Blood of the Virgins*. Watching Nadine's on-stage lesbian kiss of life also 'awakens' Linda's desires. Shots of the performance are inter-cut at regular intervals with close-ups of her gazing avidly at the performance, biting

her bottom lip and becoming increasingly agitated while her discomfited boyfriend casts suspicious sideways glances in her direction.

Linda's real initiation begins when she pays a visit to Nadine's island home. Having already shown his queen of the night flouting vampire convention by relaxing outdoors in a white bikini, Franco continues his wilful 'misunderstanding' of Dracula/vampire mythology by having Nadine and her intended seductee sunbathing by, and nude bathing in, the Black Sea. Doubtless motivated mainly by the obligation to show maximum female skin on the merest pretext, this unusually joyous (for a Franco film) scene also provides euphoric images of liberated desire, with Linda's disrobing suggesting a temporary release from men, or at least from the unsatisfactory Omar. In this context it seems clear that Linda's comment to Nadine, "it's a long time since I sunbathed", suggests pleasures beyond mere tanning. The less ambiguously anti-lesbian *Las vampiras* cuts out the beach scene entirely, presumably because the implied preference for lesbianism over heterosexuality was unacceptable to the Spanish censor. The 'emancipated' quality of the beach scene could be taken as implicitly oppositional, with Linda's escape from men allegorising an escape from despotic rule. However, the difference between the *Las Vampiras* and *Vampyros Lesbos* also illustrates how any potentially 'subversive' meanings that may have existed in Franco's films for Spanish audiences at this time were likely to have been compromised or distorted.

In any event the beach scene in *Vampyros Lesbos* underlines the attractions of lesbianism for Linda and undermines the idea that she is simply led astray by the predatory vampire. But the conflicted and confused Linda continues to seek male advice, telling Dr. Seward "I find myself in strange situations and do inexplicable things. It's like a call from nowhere", and confessing her fears and desires to Omar. If dread is here constructed from a heteronormative perspective, it is not so much of women being stolen away from men, but of women harbouring desires that men cannot satisfy. As Creed puts it, apropos of *The Vampire Lovers* (Roy Ward Baker, 1970) "the implication is that – given a choice – women might prefer the embrace of their own sex" (Creed, 1993: 60).

Hence the feared inadequacies of the phallus play a key role in the fantasy. From Weiss, Auerbach, Creed and Zimmerman's perspectives the fear of impotence is ameliorated through the conventions of patriarchal containment. In keeping with Auerbach's description of a scene in *Blood and Roses* (Roger Vadim, 1960) in which "a blond and a dark woman...parade erotically before the ambivalent eyes of a male watcher" (Auerbach 115: 55), the skinny-dipping shots cut twice to an impassively staring Morpho. On one hand the cutaways serve to contain the rapturous or emancipating aspects of the scene, reminding viewers that the al fresco delights are merely part of the vampire's snare; on the other hand, Morpho is Nadine's minion

and like the film's other male characters lacks any persuasive degree of self-motivation. If it is possible to say that one look is more active than another, Morpho does not possess it. Watching from a distance, this masculine cipher is one of a great many diegetic spectators in Franco's body of work; perhaps like the implied male consumer of the female vampire "masturbatory fantasy" (Twitchell 1981: 73), Morpho is an outsider impotently alienated from the very same-sex desires about which the film fantasises.

The next seduction expands on the more baleful and underhand aspects of vampiric lesbian initiation, being in most respects a quite conventional entrapment scene depicting an attractive young target lured into the dark side. Recalling the trapped insect imagery of Linda's dream, the dining room in which Nadine pours her narcotic wine is draped in fishing nets. To hammer home the message of the *mise-en-scène*, Franco colour-codes seducer and seductee in instantly legible terms of good and evil: Linda is blond and blue-eyed and wears white, while Nadine's hair and eyes are deep brown and she wears the same short black lace dress that she does in the film's credit sequence. As Whatling points out, "the problem of sexual sameness" in the cinema's representation of lesbian desire has often been dealt with through 'butch' and 'femme' types which serve to approximate the heterosexist dichotomy of dominant 'masculine' and passive 'feminine' (Whatling 1997: 67). Franco seems to fabricate difference (and power imbalance) through this colour-coding. Whatling explains that "the visual display of sex/gender positioning is often complemented by a difference in hair colour, dark for the butch and blonde for the femme" (Whatling 1997: 67), with the latter embodying the "heterosexual cinematic ideal" (Whatling 1997: 68).

Yet Franco's coding of the *mise-en-scène* also brings a characteristic degree of uncertainty into the active/passive, masculine/feminine and butch/femme dichotomies that Whatling finds inscribed in heterosexist genre cinema, and visualises the complex dynamics of seduction which make vampire narratives appealing. More specifically, the vocabulary of dress in the scene reiterates the question of the volition of desire within the vampire scenario. Though Nadine here takes on the traditionally 'masculine' role of power and dominance, she is readable as the more visually 'feminine' of the two characters (Weiss would see this as a form of reassurance for the male viewer). Moreover, Nadine's past and her tragic surrender to compulsion (and gradually to doomed love) mitigate notions of inherent female 'evil' and would problematise the interpretation that she simply wields power over Linda. Meanwhile Linda, the victim whose 'blondness' seems in the context to connote innocence and purity, might be seen to occupy horror's classically 'feminine' or passive position, except that her passivity is already in doubt.

Intent as she is on finding a "better lover" (though admittedly following a man's advice), Linda is no wilting flower. The rather inexpressive manner in which Franco's performers often deliver

their lines also make them a blank sheet onto which interpretations may be projected: Linda might be naively oblivious to the menace that surrounds her, or she may be more knowingly drawn, like *The Awful Dr Orlof*'s Wanda Bronsky, to the thrill of danger. As Dr. Seward later explains, Linda very nearly crosses the threshold to "their world", and since vampirisation works by seduction rather than ambush, the 'virginal victim' signifiers tell only a fraction of her tale. The discursive construction of sexual awakening being distinct from that of implantation or infection, Linda is no more a passive target than she is in the end saved by men. *Vampyros Lesbos* sticks to narrative convention by having its seduction scenes lead to a bisexual tug of love between an increasingly estranged mortal man and his undead female rival. But if Linda's choice is between vampirism and straight monogamy, the film suggests that Linda finds neither especially alluring, one offering the melancholic half-life of the undead, the other the tedious half-life of heterosexual marriage.

Putting the Lid on it

The film ends with Linda's desires at war. First she applies a little vampirism to Nadine and tells her "I want to belong to you". Nadine confirms, "you're one of us now" but Linda replies "no, I don't want to be like you" and, in an apparently successful expulsion of her "strange" desires, kills Nadine. Thus Linda, acting not unlike Clover's Final Girl (Clover 1992: 65-114, *passim*) has made three escapes. As emblematised by the beach scene, she briefly escapes from the dreary Omar and into the arms of Nadine. She escapes the murderous Memmet by resourcefully beheading him with a rusty hacksaw. And she succeeds where her male 'protectors' failed, in destroying the vampire. The mise-en-scène of the beach-house seduction perhaps makes the point: Linda wears the trousers. (In a previous scene she had worn a lilac trouser-suit to work). The comparatively masculine dress-code (within the context of the scene's system of differences) also reminds us that at this point Linda is effectively a re-gendering of Stoker's Jonathan Harker. Following Weiss' logic, we might argue that this 'cross-dressing' serves on some level to reassure Auerbach's salivating adolescent viewer of the 'straightness' of Nadine's desire for Linda by compromising its 'same-sex-ness', and providing an alibi for any possible male 'identification' with the soon-to-be-penetrated prey.

For all her self-sufficiency Linda appears in the end to have aided the restoration of patriarchy. But Franco's flip treatment of the denouement echoes the perfunctory climax of *The Awful Dr Orlof*: in both cases the sudden late arrival of men at the scene fails to convince us of their authority or that female desire has been successfully contained.¹ Linda Williams points out that

¹ Franco's clearest parody of the conventions of narrative closure occurs at the end of *Lucky the Inscrutable* while making a joke at the expense of low-budget film-making. As Lucky's car

“it is a truism of the horror genre that sexual interest resides most often in the monster and not in the bland ostensible heroes...who often prove powerless at the crucial moment” (Williams 1996: 20) and *Vampyros Lesbos* is no exception. The need to fill the screen with a certain sort of spectacle means that it has shown considerably more interest in Linda and Nadine than it has in the male investigation and search for a cure; Franco’s band of inspectors, doctors and other male authorities resemble the unimpressive ‘heroes’ of Franco’s first horror film and *Venus in Furs*’ blink-and-you-will-miss-him Inspector. The presence of a Morpho in *Vampyros Lesbos* suggests a link to Franco’s first horror film; that *Las vampiras* names the Soledad Miranda character Nadina Orloff confirms the connection. Nadine is parallel to Orloff (she is the other to which the heroine is drawn) and Linda to Wanda (she is tempted away from her non-entity of a fiancé).

The cast of hapless men in *Vampyros Lesbos* makes plain that the dread of devouring female sexuality is bound to, or symptomatic of, the “male fear of heterosexual inadequacy” (Zimmerman 1996: 385). These mediocre specimens certainly dent the phallogocentric frame in which the lesbian vampire theme is mounted. Omar is to all intents and purposes impotent. Memmet and not Nadine is by far the most monstrous ‘monster’ in the film. Vampiologist-cum-psychologist Dr. Seward expounds throughout upon the necessity of killing these “spirits” through a blow to the head with a pickaxe, but achieves nothing: Linda comes to her senses of her own accord and inflicts a different fatal wound on her seductress.

Nadine is restored to the grave and Linda to the faithful Omar; she leaves the island in his arms as he reliably reassures her that “it was a bad dream”. Yet despite all-round relief that the ordeal is over, it is by no means certain that her weird cravings have died along with the vampire. Linda remains mystified by her experiences and closure has at best been partial: “the pain will fade in time...but the memory will remain...for as long as I live”, she says in voiceover. Masculine heterosexuality has ostensibly got its way, but there is little to suggest that Linda has made the right choice. No triumphant music underscores the denouement, and the “pain” to which she refers may be that of having lost Nadine as much as of having nearly lost Omar. This is not to say that phallogocentric discourse, though ridiculed, has been dismantled. Linda’s search for a more potent partner can be seen as an example of the homophobic belief that lesbians are merely dissatisfied heterosexuals. In a critique of Lacanian accounts of female fetishism, Anne McClintock argues that this myth “has meaning only in relation to a prior belief in the normative telos of heterosexual desire, in which one is first ‘disappointed’ and then turns to lesbianism” (McClintock 1993: 8). Unable to grasp the possibility that a woman might “choose

explodes, Ray Danton (in voiceover) informs us that “the film company ran out of money and we couldn’t think of a better ending”.

other women to celebrate and expand her sexuality”, Freudian orthodoxy insists on exalting the phallus as the norm against which the fetishistic lesbian turns (McClintock 1993: 8). *Vampyros Lesbos* partially adheres to the same logic: that Linda goes to “their world” out of disappointment with Omar perhaps makes the phallus uncomfortable but it does not knock it off its throne.

Linda’s killing of Nadine, rather than Seward’s ineffectual ministrations, finally relieves the insane ‘Renfield’ figure, Agra (Heidrun Kussin), of her agony. Incarcerated in an asylum, Agra has been seduced and abandoned by Nadine and is thus unable to complete her vampiric transformation. Scenes of Agra thrashing in her cell in agonised frustration are readable as stereotypical images of female hysteria which confirm myths of pathological lesbian desire and demonstrate the subgenre’s anti-lesbian misogyny. Yet one element in these scenes seems irritating for phallic power: Agra has only a clown-shaped dildo (or vice versa) for company, this plastic phallus often lying uselessly on the floor, at the edge of the frame. The object provides the film with one of Franco’s most mischievous, startling juxtapositions. Agra’s clown ‘toy’ appears in shot several times but is focused upon only once, extremely briefly, when it rears its head jarringly at the close of a particularly elegiac moment. A languorously paced love-making/vamping scene between Linda and Nadine, beautifully put together through a combination of ‘dreamy’ dissolves and very slow zooms from medium to close ups shots on the women’s bodies, jump-cuts to a fast zoom out from close to medium shot on this grinning object (see fig 3.5.).



Fig 3.5: The clown dildo/dildo clown in *Vampyros Lesbos*.

The collision of shot-styles accentuates the already jolting break-off of Nadine and Linda's pensive eroticism, bringing us immediately back down to earth. Disturbing narrative continuity and rudely interrupting any erotic spell the preceding shots may have spun, the clown-dildo shot also acts as a dramatic transition to Agra's hysterical performance of repressed desire. The object makes a laughing stock of the previous scene's eroticism, undercutting the customary pleasures one might associate with sexploitation or soft pornography, while unmasking and making mockery of the phallus, and of the male fantasy of entering the lesbian scene, "to take over when the situation has reached the appropriate level of sexual arousal" and stop the lesbian situation "potentially spiralling out of [male] control" (Zimmerman 1996: 385).¹ Thus the clown dildo shot exemplifies how gendered fantasies of seduction by, and subjection to, the female vampire may begin to destabilise dominant fictions of masculinity and their supposed address to the 'objectifying' and 'fetishistic' eye.

To claim that *Vampyros Lesbos*, despite its directorial crudity, offers a self-conscious, complex exploration of vision and desire is not to claim that it is somehow 'radical'. It is, though, to suggest that the film builds on some of the implications of *Venus in Furs* - as discussed in the previous chapter - by offering gendered fantasies about the destabilisation of gendered fantasy. Weiss, Creed and others argue that alternative pleasures may be seized from the subgenre's phallocentric imagination. In overstressing the extent to which that imagination is untroubled and monolithic, this argument misses the complexity of the terms in which the 'dominant' subject position can be addressed in specific films. Franco's vampire films stereotype, fantasise and play upon the mythic otherness of female/ 'lesbian' desire. In other words they embody the dialectical economy of transgression in gothic, 'cult' and exploitation cinema by simultaneously articulating and estranging heteronormative male fantasies of sublime surrender to the vampire's clutches. The following chapter examines the representation of a different, and in many ways more troubling, cluster of fantasies.

¹ As Raymond Bellour observes, lesbianism is frequently represented in terms that are deeply compromised by male fantasy: "the masculine subject can accept the image of woman's pleasure only in the condition that, having constructed it, he must inscribe himself within it, and thus reappropriate it even at the cost of its (or her) destruction" (in Weiss 1992: 103).

4

Last Exorcism in Paris: *Demoniac*, Captive Women and Genre Mixture

My readings of *Venus in Furs* and *Vampyros Lesbos* emphasised their representations of gothic forms of fatal ‘femaleness’, and of the male protagonists fascinated with and seduced by them. Images of sexual cruelty in those films were touched upon as part of a discussion of how an ostensibly transgressive implantation of perversions functions in Franco’s films of the period. This chapter shifts the focus of my analysis towards less apparently active female figures, using the French-Belgian co-production *Demoniac* (1974) as an example of Franco’s images of women in captivity. Through a consideration of this imagery and its deployment in narratives and scenarios often described as Sadeian, I discuss possibilities for ideological contestation in some of Franco’s more ‘perverse’ representations. I argue that *Demoniac* self-consciously problematises, while not eschewing, the ‘logic’ of fascination through the figure of its psychotic male ‘monster’ and his diabolical activities. And I demonstrate that the collision of heterogeneous perspectives and modes of visibility through which the film is constructed may have destabilising implications for how the supposed visual pleasures of ‘cult’, exploitation and ‘body genre’ film are construed by critics like Joan Hawkins and Linda Williams. Central to the film’s Sadeian qualities is its combination of eroticism and disgust. However, whereas critics such as Tanya Krzywinska approvingly cite Franco’s connections to Sade as evidence of politically radical transgressivity, I conclude that this is irreducibly ideologically ambivalent: the film’s attempts to make the viewer feel revulsion – including reflexive revulsion at his or own pleasure – can themselves be seen an example of the ‘cult’ exploitation film’s duplicity.

Citing Franco’s assortment of female spies, detectives and avengers as evidence, Pavlović sees Franco’s films as a “women’s space” full of plural “gender possibilities” (Pavlović 2003:109-110). While her focus is primarily on Franco’s ‘pop art’ films of the 1960s (such as *The Diabolical Dr. Z*, *Sadisterotica* and *Tenemos 18 años*), Pavlović also briefly mentions his numerous contributions to the ‘women in prison’ cycle of the 1970s, finding in them “a legacy of sadistic wardresses (the root of all evil), dictators with strong sexual appetites, innocent young women that end up in jail for the first time by mistake, corrupt lesbian guards, and so on. Thus he offers women spectators the pleasure of seeing hard, mean, and uncontrollable women” (Pavlović 2003: 119). Some of Franco’s “uncontrollable” women have already been discussed in relation to the female vampire and the spectral femme fatale motifs; as the analyses of *Venus in Furs* and *Vampyros Lesbos* suggested, these particular manifestations of monstrous

femininity are often framed within forms of gothic romanticism that effectively soften the ‘hardness’ venerated by Pavlović. The remorselessly cruel ‘lesbian’ guards of ‘women in prison’ films such as Franco’s *Barbed Wire Dolls* (1975) and *Sadomania* (1981) are devoid of such romanticism. To this extent it can be argued that they parallel the “cult configurations of femininity”, described by Gaylyn Studlar as a central feature of North American ‘midnight movies’, whose obsession with ‘perversity’ arguably demonstrates the “precariousness of ‘normality’” (Studlar 1991:139). Hence Bev Zalcovick proposes in similar terms to Pavlović that Franco’s ‘women in prison’ films are the place to look for “dangerous, sexually active and socially deviant groups of women” (Zalcovick 1998:19).

Informed in many cases by the crossover of sadomasochistic iconography from underground publications into more mainstream as well as ‘cult’ sites, such ‘deviant’ and ‘dangerous’ stereotypes of femininity and femaleness are not to be discounted as a source of pleasure for viewers of Franco’s films. But this does not mean that their more compliant and therefore perhaps less congenial flip-side should be ignored. By making only passing reference to “innocent young” jailbirds within a panoply of more happily appropriated irrepressible females, Pavlović pushes Franco’s large gallery of incarcerated and tortured women characters to the edges of her argument, where they can do less harm to her claim that his representation of bodies plays havoc with all “notions of order and hierarchy” (Pavlović 2004: 118). It could be argued by the same token that “notions of order and hierarchy” are, at least in some of the ‘Sadeian’ films touched on in this chapter, more fetishised than transgressed. While the desire to ignore Franco’s more passive and persecuted women characters is understandable, this chapter follows James Donald’s proposal that readings of fantasy texts should be “responsive both to the fragmentation and mobility of identities and also to their historical and cultural specificity” (Donald 1989: 6), advice that applies equally to both sides of Franco’s supposedly deviant and dangerous stereotypes of femininity.

This chapter uses *Demoniac* as an opportunity to relate some of the claims made about the transgressive or subversive qualities of “nasty and trashy European cinema” (Mendik and Mathijs 2004: 3-4) to Franco’s ‘captive women’ imagery. The previous chapters saw *Vampyros Lesbos*, *Venus in Furs* and *The Awful Dr Orlof* as enterprising engagements with currents in contemporary cinema and with long-established genre traditions. This chapter proposes that *Demoniac* offers a similar intervention by both distilling and commenting upon the Sadeian scenarios present in so much of Franco’s work. The contemporary trends in exploitation cinema that *Demoniac* negotiates - in particular ‘women in prison’, witch-hunt and possession subgenres - are often described as Sadeian. Some critics have gone further by making use of a highly selective reading of Sade in order to support their assertions that Franco’s films are incontrovertibly oppositional or unproblematically transgressive and that his (and by extension

exploitation cinema's) fixation on 'perversity' automatically qualifies as a celebration of sexual deviance and diversity. On this reading, the compendium of sexual 'abnormalities' found in many of Franco's films constitutes a shocking outbreak of bourgeois society's repressed desires. The fact that many of Franco's films have fallen foul of censorship laws in various territories gives succour to these claims, while encouraging fans to hunt down uncensored versions. Possibly routed through the implicit influence of philosophers of desire like Herbert Marcuse, Georges Bataille and Deleuze and Guattari, such readings of Franco's Sadeian sensibility borrow from a mystificatory and gender-neutralised account of surrealism as a revolutionary eruption of the transgressively profane. In their enthusiasm for exploitation cinema as a vital cultural practice, such responses bypass the caveats presented in critical pieces on the field by Studlar (1991), Grant (1991), Willis (2009) and others.

Part of my argument is that *Demoniac* and the 'women in prison', possession and witch-hunt films to which it is connected explore transgression through what Studlar describes as a masculine fascination with "mysteries and pleasures of s/excess" that are projected onto the female body (Studlar 1991: 139; 142). Rather than propose that the films should be simply condemned for regressive sexism or objectification, or that their spectatorial engagements can be divided clearly into progressive or reactionary fantasies, I suggest that, as Studlar notes of midnight movies, "despite [their] subcultural associations...[their] sexual politics...are full of the contradictions of patriarchal ideology" (Studlar 1991: 142). Studlar's account of 'excessive' female bodies in cult films opts for a pre-Oedipal psychoanalytic model in order to present masochistic elements in the films as rooted in fantasies about the primordial mother. As in the work of Neale (1980), Creed (1983, 1986, 2005), Williams (1996) Clover (1992), Schneider (2000) and many others, a model of primary identification is assumed whereby, as Williams puts it, the experience of viewing film bodies "brings about a state of regression and narcissism in the spectator" (1986: 508). Rather than discard these readings, this chapter suggests that films like *Demoniac* knowingly draw on Freudian discourse in their understanding of sex, gender and monstrosity. The notion of a 'fit' between spectatorial and textual unconscious is also probematised by the fact that identification, in the sense assumed by psychoanalytic readings, is at variance with Franco's use of distancing effects and techniques. Both the so-called Brechtian and the Sadeian aspects of exploitation cinema tend to work against such accounts of textual inscription or interpellation. Many of Franco's films contain reflexive elements by means of which the text draws attention to its constructedness or the representation exposes its codes. *Demoniac* develops this aspect of his films in order to offer something approaching a critical commentary on the Sadeian representation of sex and violence. A degree of critical self-reflection can, for example, be seen in Franco's 'starring' role in the film as a porn-writing psychopathic voyeur. In a possible indication of the influence of the works of Sade on Franco, a

certain distancing effect enables the critical, satirical possibilities of *Demoniac*'s sadistic spectacle to become visible. But I see such self-criticism as a complication rather than an eradication of horror and sexploitation cinema's preoccupation with otherness.

The Many Lives of *Demoniac*

Originally released under Franco's pseudonym 'J.P. Johnson', *Demoniac* stars Franco as Paul Vogel¹, a former Catholic priest barred from the Church for unspecified crimes (the script merely informs us that he was expelled from the Church for being "too severe"), who has escaped from an asylum and makes a living writing erotic fiction for *The Dagger and Garter Weekly*, a magazine issued by a Parisian publishing company called Venus Editions and operated by Raymond Franval² (Pierre Taylou) and his secretary Anna (Lina Romay). Anna and Raymond also make their living by staging sadomasochistic-cum-satanic "black masses" for Venus' "millionaire" readers. In the interests of literary research, Vogel witnesses one such performance, a bloodier all-female update of the S/M stage act that opens *Succubus* (1967). This 'mass', involving four women in a scenario of bondage and vaginal stabbing, is a gorier version of one that opens the film. In the first, two 'lesbian' performers in a crypt enact the sacrificial killing of a dove. The 'dominatrix' (Monica Swinn) smears the bird's blood over her naked (in most prints) body, and that of her captive (Lina Romay), who is chained to a cruciform prop. As in the opening sequences of *Vampyros Lesbos* and *Succubus*, the situations are only gradually shown to be staged: like those earlier examples, the film cuts away to reveal a bourgeois audience of what we take to be contemporary sexual adventurers. Romay utters such lines as "you're a monster, the devil has possessed you", possibly leading the viewer to suppose that the cruel 'domme' is the film's titular agent of evil or monstrosity. Swinn proceeds to stab Romay in the torso, the diegetic audience applauds, and the performers take a bow. While this first ceremony cuts away to an unremarkable dialogue scene in an office, the second, watched in rapt disgust by Vogel, concludes with the on-screen audience enjoying a non-genitally explicit orgy.

Describing himself as "an honest, god fearing man", Vogel fails to distinguish reality from theatre and believes that the performers are not only degenerate but possessed by the devil; he captures the women and, in appropriate priestly vestments, tries to exorcise their demons by subjecting them to torturous, deadly rituals of his own, in scenes that have been described as "some of the most macabre and vicious scenes of eroticism available in mainstream cinema" (Hardy 1986: 339). Vogel bases his art on his experiences and, perhaps to highlight the possibility of seeing his tyrannical activities as a metaphor for oppression under *franquismo* and National-Catholicism, his resulting work of 'fiction' is titled *Torture Chambers of the*

¹ In some prints he is named Mathis Vogel.

² In some prints he is named Pierre de Franval.

Inquisition. Deputy Inspector Malou (Roger Germanes, complete with ‘detective’ magnifying glass), later confirms that the murders resemble “the exorcism ritual of the early inquisition”, and declares that the killer must be a modern day Tomás de Torquemada.¹

Vogel delivers his manuscript to Venus before continuing his moral crusade: in the words of the Spanish press book for a later incarnation of the film, “his mission is the extermination of perverted women”². Regarding murder as an act of salvation in which women’s natural purity is freed from their “dirtily indulgent sexual bodies” (Prothero 1992: 326), Vogel claims that “you have to know evil in order to fight it”. Hence, having overheard Anna and Robert plan what they call a “real black mass” that will “conjure up the devil”, his one-man inquisition leads him to infiltrate the château of an aristocratic Count (Claude Sendron), where he furtively observes another gory lesbian sacrificial show, performed before its upper class audience as an appetiser for an orgy. Taking the deadly violence to be real (the ‘sacrificed’ victim takes a bow at the end), Vogel seizes the show’s central performer – another horror convention endlessly recycled throughout Franco’s career – and takes her to his apartment. Denouncing her as a “whore” and proclaiming that she is “possessed by the devil”, Vogel ‘purifies’ his victim through a murderous act of ‘exorcism’ which resembles the orchestration of the on-stage rituals. In a typically cursory gesture towards crime film plotting, the ever-ready Inspector Tanner (Olivier Mathot) and Deputy Inspector Malou are in pursuit. Vogel has left a vital clue in his manuscript, the police swoop, a brief car chase ensues and order is reinstated as Tanner shoots Vogel.

While the following discussion focuses on *Demoniac*, it also makes reference to two other versions of the same film, *Sexorcismes* (1974) and *The Sadist of Notre Dame* (1979). Some filmographies list *Demoniac* and *Sadist* as separate entries, but include *Sexorcismes* simply as an alternate title. Others list all titles (and several further alternatives) under their entry for 1979. *Demoniac* has become the most widely distributed of the three versions on home viewing formats, and is the least genitally explicit. *Sexorcismes* is the more anatomically graphic version – it shows Vogel molesting and raping his victims before killing them - and was released in response to the “very limited commercial success” of *Demoniac* (Lesoeur in Hood and Fukuda 2000: 34).

The Sadist of Notre Dame (1979) appears to have been the most widely exhibited version of Franco’s film before the advent of home VCR ownership, enjoying a Spanish release (as *El sadico de Notre Dame*, in 1981) denied to the earlier titles. According to Franco, *Demoniac* and

¹ The detective could not have made such a deduction from the evidence at hand, but this is of secondary importance to the point: Torquemada was the notorious Spanish Inquisitor General, comparable in notoriety to the British witch-hunters Judge Jeffries and Matthew Hopkins (cinematic representations of whom are discussed below).

² My translation.

Sexorcismes had been “forbidden” in Spain, while *Sadist* proved “popular” there because of its attack on National Catholicism (in Collins 2007). The Spanish release coincides with another of Franco’s periodic returns to Spain in the later 1970s; Franco was at this point working mainly in Madrid, making low budget horror films with erotic elements and a large number of rarely exported ‘S certificate’ sex romps with crime and/or horror elements. Franco explains that one of his Spanish producers bought *Demoniac* from Eurociné, and decided to “develop the character of Vogel” (in Collins 2007). The film therefore slips, in different versions, across the heterogeneous production and consumption contexts of 1974 (the first and second versions), 1979 (the third) and 1981 (release in Spain). It is difficult to map historically, geographically, culturally and ideologically. Made mainly in France, its first version used transnational tropes of exploitation cinema, including popular anticlerical themes, to offer potential critique of the dominant ideologies of General Franco’s Spain, but it was not exhibited there until long after the General’s death in 1975, the official end of censorship¹ and the period of ‘transition’ to democracy. *The Sadist of Notre Dame* was exhibited in Spain for audiences over 18 rather than with an ‘S’ certificate, this decision perhaps signalling the film’s market positioning as more of a horror than a sex picture; despite the large amount of nudity and simulated sex in the film, these are mounted in gothic, and sometimes bloody, terms.² *Sadist* comprises a longer, re-edited version of *Demoniac*, minus some footage but with much added. Most of the major differences between *Sadist*, *Demoniac* and *Sexorcismes* occur in the first half of each film. *Sadist* opens not on the pseudo-satanic ‘lesbian’ performances of *Demoniac* and *Sexorcismes*, but on a scene which sets the lugubrious tone by showing an elderly man urinating in the street. *Sadist* also introduces the police investigation narrative much earlier and follows it more closely throughout. Judging by changes in the quality of film stock and in the physical appearance of the lead actors, some of the ‘new’ material seems to have been shot for but was unused in the 1974 film(s); other sequences show a slightly stockier and greyer (presumably 1979) Franco as Vogel stalking the streets of Paris in search of victims.

¹ Speaking in 1986, Franco argued that upon his return to Spain soon after the death of Franco, he found the transition to ‘democracy’ to have been a façade, and that censorship persisted through other means: “They washed up the façade, but behind it’s still the same. Here people are not used to democracy ... I had big hopes for the new socialist government, but they are sort of a new Franco, people who just want to get rich. Now, only friends of the government get money to make films. There is a commission to decide which projects get subsidised, and up to 80% of the subsidised films have been produced by members of the commission. ...The only importance is having a prestigious release. ...they restored censorship by disguising it as a ‘qualification commission’ ... It doesn’t please me at all and I think that I will leave again” (in Balbo, 1989: 6).

² Kowalsky points out that while many S certificate films were “nearly hardcore”, a small number were low on sexual content, but were deemed “potentially offensive on account of extreme violence or incendiary politics” (2004: 190-191).



Fig. 4.1: Spanish press-book for *El sadico de Notre Dame*.

The existence of *Demoniac*'s multiple versions makes any search for the definitive one at best quixotic, and makes it difficult to circumscribe the limits of the text with any certainty. As suggested in the previous chapter's discussion of differences between *Las vampiras* and *Vampyros Lesbos*, the possibility that heterogeneity may have been part of the conception and execution of certain films from the outset complicates the notion that authentic editions of those films exist. The problem of defining the essential filmic text in the face of its many reworkings is by no means unique to Franco, though it may be particularly pronounced in the exploitation field. Dreyer's *Vampyr* may also lack a universally agreed-upon archival object, but it is generally assumed that there once *was* one, and that this object corresponded to authorial intent. If the notional integrity of the self-contained work has been repeatedly dismantled by post-structuralist critical theory, the practices of exploitation cinema have much the same deconstructive effect: textual analysis has to acknowledge the provisionality of the analysed text. This chapter takes the view that *Demoniac*, *The Sadist of Notre Dame* and *Sexorcismes* name three releases which diverge from one another in significant ways while having much material in common; inclusion or exclusion of certain sequences and shots from one version to

the next produces variations in narrative focus rather than radical changes to shared themes. Hence this chapter takes the three releases together as a kind of collective, if unstable, text, but observes differences between them when these throw light on specific textual strategies or concerns.

The piecemeal, makeshift quality of many of Franco's films is exacerbated both by censor-imposed cuts that tend to vary from one country to another and exploitation cinema's practice of simultaneously producing different versions for different territories. Hence the Spanish theatrical release of *Rites of Frankenstein* (1972) includes 'clothed' versions of scenes which are 'unclothed' in other markets. The sado-satanic performance which opens one 'clothed' version of *Demoniac* includes all the bloody ritual but excludes the nudity: the set-ups are identical except that the performers wear lingerie. Milder fare such as *The Girl from Rio* (1969) or *Blood of Fu Manchu* (1967) also exist in theatrical edits containing more salacious footage and TV edits containing much less. If these instances imply a cutting of the filmic cloth to suit the needs of differing exhibition contexts, other practices involve the maximisation of profit by extensively recycling stock. Films could be cheaply re-edited and re-released with a sensational new title and poster for a presumably unsuspecting audience. Eurociné seems to have mastered the art of modifying its property for changing circumstances. Its many alterations to *Female Vampire* (1973) and *Virgin among the Living Dead* (1971) echo the vicissitudes of *Demoniac*, with elements being removed from or added to each according to the supposed demands of different audiences. Both come with varying mixtures and degrees of horror or sex, depending on market expectations and shifts in genre tastes. The fragmented nature of the exploitation text is compounded by further changes imposed by distributors, in some cases including hardcore material often arbitrarily slotted in to films in order to secure exhibition at sex cinemas. Presumably in deference to the needs of these outlets, several hardcore shots appear to have been transported into *Sexorcismes* from other porn shoots. Some inserts are too close-up to enable identification of the performers. Other scenes offer grimly unforgettable instances of authorial self abasement by showing Vogel in anatomically graphic action, sexually assaulting Anna and Gina (Caroline Riviere). (Riviere was Franco's step-daughter, daughter of Franco's second wife and frequent collaborator on scripts, Nicole Guettard).

The presence of multiple variants encourages the cultist practice of seeking the longest or least censored prints of films. But tracking down the holy grail of the most complete edit of a given title is not without problems: the longest and most explicit versions are not necessarily closest either to what was 'originally' shown in cinemas, or to what is supposed in cultist discourse to be the auteur's 'original vision'. Unofficial copies of films available on the grey market are often described by online sellers as composites assembled by collectors from various sources. One recent North American 'Special Edition' DVD of *Demoniac* (under the title *Exorcism*)

proudly proclaims on its sleeve that the creation of the disc was overseen by Eurociné. This should not be confused with the mythologising concept of the definitive director's cut. Franco states on the disc's 'Director Commentary' that certain gore shots were interpolated years later by the producers. The commentary's mediator, Kevin Collins, is then audibly surprised to learn that Franco finds the less gruesome *The Sadist of Notre Dame* "better" than the disc under discussion because it is the more "commercial" of the two (Collins 2007). Other recent DVD editions of Franco's work have professed to offer the director's cut, and Franco has at times been happy to play guardian of his legacy by authorising these editions as 'official'.¹ Textual integrity, if not illusory, is as likely to be a retrospective construction as an accurate reconstruction of a work.

Demoniac's less than smooth texture is further roughened in *Sexorcismes*. One graphic sexual abuse scene involving Franco and Romy is shot at an extremely oblique, off-centre angle; in contrast to scenes of consenting sex elsewhere in the film, the shot would have been difficult to seamlessly incorporate into the classic patterns of continuity editing. No attempt is made to do so. In an unsettling welding of form and content, the filming of the attack is as brutally 'primitive' as its clumsy editing into the film. Given Franco's participation in this abuse scene it is clear that not all hardcore material was simply distributor or producer imposed, though its throwaway quality might be indicative of reluctance or acquiescence on Franco's part. In any case the textural disjointedness both contributes to the film's air of psychic disintegration and challenges the myth of supreme authorial vision. While the stark materiality of the grafts might, like Franco's obsessive rack-focusing and zooming, be taken as signifiers of the film-maker's presence, any notion that the film emerged fully formed from a transcendent agency is tested by the ad hoc nature of its assembly. Seen in relation to Franco's appearance in the diegesis these moments of disjuncture certainly foreground the marks of 'enunciation' but these are matters of expedient bricolage more than of commanding intentionality.

Whips, Ropes and Sadeian Tropes: *Demoniac*'s Genre Connections

Perhaps more than any other decade, attempting to grasp Franco's career in the 1970s must deal with an enormous number of films of wildly varying quality. The first years of the decade are peppered with throwaway but amusing entries into the German tradition of the *krimi* or Edgar Wallace film. Mainly directed under the auspices of the *krimi* specialist Artur Brauner², films like *Death Packs his Bags* (1972) and *The Devil Came from Akasava* (1970) follow the

¹ For example, the 2004 release of *Daughter of Dracula* on the German "X-Rated Kult Video" label.

² For more on German Edgar Wallace films and the *krimi* genre, see Hanke (2003).

footloose style of Franco's 1960s crime and espionage capers like *Attack of the Robots* (1966) and *Golden Horn* (1966) but lack even their comparative lavishness. While budgets for such films permitted the occasional token car chase, they clearly could not stretch to the action film's requirements for dynamism and spectacle. The attempted family entertainment of the Jules Verne adaptation *Un capitán de quince años* (1971) is similarly defeated by resources visibly unable to meet the demands of a nautical adventure.

Sex in sparsely furnished rooms being considerably cheaper to film, *Demoniac* is one of a large number of Franco's films of the period which concern the psychosexual activities of a small number of characters in a limited number of mainly interior locations. Franco's films of this type can be broken down roughly into two large categories: on one hand, 'hardcore' pornography; on the other, 'erotic' or 'softcore' cinema with varying degrees of sexual explicitness combined with horror or supernatural content. Though it cannot be rigorously maintained, particularly in relation to some of the 'sex and violence' exploitation films of the 1970s, a pragmatic distinction between sexploitation and hardcore might be that the 'wall to wall' nature of sexual display in the latter makes it impossible to edit the film down to a 'softer' product. Besides *Demoniac*, many of Franco's films of the time - such as *The Perverse Countess* (1973), *Lorna the Exorcist* (1974), and *Doriana Gray* (1975) - contain any number of 'hardcore' sequences that could be easily expurgated without major loss to whatever coherence Franco might muster. Less explicit sex-based films such as *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* (1973), *Sinner* (1972), *Two Female Spies in Flowered Panties* (1978) could, conversely, readily be 'sexed up'. *Demoniac* is a morbid sex drama of this type, containing many gothicised sex scenes (broadly defined) with an uncertain relationship to both horror and erotica (and, even in its more 'hardcore' cuts, pornography).

Some of the discursive conditions of Franco's authorship and the ideological tensions of his films can be traced by looking at how *Demoniac*'s tentacles reach into several genre contexts, in particular those subgenres that have been seen in one way or another as Sadeian. In a piece on British exploitation films of the 1970s, Leon Hunt notes that "quantifying generic outputs is a perilous and contentious project" where this field of production is concerned, and cites the bleak 'house of correction' feature *House of Whipcord* (Peter Walker, 1974) as an example of a film that refuses to sit securely within the categories of horror and sexploitation (Hunt 1998: 142). Such difficulties of classification may account for David Pirie's marginalising of Walker's films in both editions of his pioneering account of English gothic cinema (Pirie 1973, 2008). The classificatory problems may arise not just because the large quantity of flagellation scenes in Walker's film, as in several of Franco's, is in inverse proportion to any 'terror' or 'fear' affect but because inflexible genre taxonomies struggle to contain exploitation cinema's endless search for opportunistic new permutations of sex and violence.



Fig 4.2: French poster for *The Rites of Frankenstein*.

Many of Franco's films of the 1970s continue to seek out ways of combining sex, nudity and the fantastic; yet, although supernatural elements are often present they tend to be peripheral to story and plot. *Demoniac* quotes some of the conventions of supernatural horror through iconographic and dialogue references to Satanic possession but these are debunked by making them part of a fictional 'black mass' staged in an underground club, and by having them re-staged by Vogel in what he considers to be acts of exorcism and absolution. Other films of the period reflected the tendency of sexploitation and pornography to take up popular generic narrative forms. *Shining Sex* (1975), for example, participated in a vogue for mixing sex and science fiction¹, while Franco's genre combinations took him as far as something like a porn parody of the Italian peplum with *Maciste and the Gluttons* (1973). For reasons that will be noted later, this hybridisation of peplum and pornography is less attractive than it sounds. While Franco's cult reputation is such that an uninterrupted slide towards greater degrees of 'sleaze' and/or explicitness might be expected, ideas and images develop unevenly through the decade. Several films in the gothic horror mode, such as *Night of the Skull* (1973), refer to sexual 'perversion' through dialogue and a smattering of torture dungeon props rather than through

¹ Contemporary examples of this mixture include *Flesh Gordon* (Michael Benvensite and Howard Ziehm, 1974) and *Spermula* (Charles Matton, 1976).

explicit bodily display; others, like *Rites of Frankenstein* (1972) (see fig 4.2), take a far more outré approach to sex-horror and genre pastiche but still steer clear of genital exhibition.

The Sadist of Notre Dame is an exemplary exploitation horror title, promising to combine images of sexual cruelty with the kind of gothicism presented by the 1923 and 1939 film adaptations of Victor Hugo's novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831). Javier Aguirre had played on a similarly suggestive combination with his title *Hunchback of the Morgue* (*El jorobado de la morgue*, 1973); Franco maintains the Quasimodo reference through several shots of the Notre Dame de Paris, though - as with his shooting of Istanbul locations in several previous films - he is content (or required) to shoot the cathedral from a distance. Perhaps it is the Hugo/Chaney/Laughton allusion that leads the *Aurum Encyclopedia* of horror cinema to mistakenly describe Vogel as "deformed" (Hardy 1996: 339). Unlike Quasimodo, however, Vogel has no heart of gold. Where Hugo's Esmeralda was a righteous Gypsy dancer, Vogel's less virtuous prey provide more threatening entertainments and, as so often in the horror genre, are duly punished for their lack of restraint. Vogel declares that he "loves" Anna before proceeding to torture her, but in his subterranean Paris there is no beauty, only beast.

In terms of thematic and narrative structuration, *Demoniac* follows the same template as that of *The Awful Dr. Orlof*. Scenes in which female prostitutes and performers are abducted and murdered alternate with 'everyday' scenes of police work, conversations in offices, cafés and so on. As in the escalating structure of *Orlof's* 'thrills', each successive murder is effectively an expanded repetition of the one preceding it. The exception to this rule provides the film's dramatic climax: the villain delays killing his chained woman, the film cross-cuts in a race against time between scenes of detection and torture, and the captive is finally rescued.

Despite these parallels, the differences between *Demoniac* and *Orlof* are equally significant, reflecting shifts in the agendas of low budget sex and horror cinema between the early 1960s and 1970s. *Orlof's* accentuation of the libidinal motivations of its demonic doctor becomes in *Demoniac* a graphic spectacle of perverse desire; the former's fleeting glimpses of female nudity come in most versions of the latter to take up over half of the film's running time. Like *Demoniac*, *Orlof* exemplified the propensity of gothic fantasy to explore "boundaries between good and evil, health and perversity, crime and punishment, truth and deception, inside and outside" (Halberstam 1995: 2), but in general its mise-en-scène upheld firm demarcations between transgressivity and normativity. Franco's first horror film invited comparisons between Inspector Tanner's courting of Wanda Bronsky and the awful Doctor's diabolical obsessions, but it maintained the gulf between normality and otherness by ensuring that the courtship was filmed free of dark shadows or oblique camera-angles.

In *Demoniac*, the barriers are much less rigorously policed as gore, violence and sex are repeatedly combined. For example, the film follows in the footsteps of *Succubus* and *Vampyros Lesbos* by having its on-stage ‘numbers’ as gory and/or erotically violent as its off-stage murders. Conventional distinctions between narrative and spectacle, or between ‘essential’ and ‘gratuitous’ footage, break down as these four kinds of set-piece (off-stage sex, on-stage sex, off-stage violence, on-stage violence) are played off against each other and begin to overlap. Hence *Orlof*’s romantic subplot is replaced in *Demoniac* with ‘promiscuous’ sex, and one lesbian lovemaking scene replicates the sado-satanic stage act with which the film begins: as part of their foreplay the two lovers, previously seen in bloody action in front of an audience, plan and begin to rehearse their upcoming performance of a ‘black mass’, saying “I’ll kill you”, and “I’ll surrender”. Although this scene takes place off-stage (watched, unbeknown to the participants, by Vogel), ontological distinctions between real and performed sex are blurred: their in-bed rehearsal presents sex precisely as an ‘act’ involving the adoption of roles.

Demoniac’s preference for ‘horror’ modes in its display of bloody sexual violence over the ‘terror’ modes of mystery or fear places it within the genre elasticity of the exploitation field of the 1960s and 1970s while revealing the film’s place in an intricate network of genre echoes, influences and references. The genre connections are personified in the mongrel nature of Vogel himself. As an (ex) priest, psychopath and pornographer, Vogel is a cocktail of post-*Psycho* killer, exorcist, witch-hunter and vigilante. The slight narrative refocusing from *Demoniac* to *Sadist* may have been informed by the popularity of the serial killer theme in genre cinema of the period. Scenes of Vogel wandering the streets, “hungry for sex and blood... wait[ing] in the darkest alleys of Montmartre”¹, as the press book slightly misleadingly puts it, stress the lone psychopath’s monstrous compulsiveness, making him in some respects closer to a Jack the Ripper figure.² Advertising materials for the film which highlight the image of Notre Dame cathedral and Vogel’s bloody knife alongside the SM action (see figs.4.1 and 4.3) associate the film with then-current international trends in “psycho-shocker” cinema (Schoell 1998: 1-2), and with the genre’s shift in the decade towards the ‘horror of personality’.³

¹ My translation.

² Franco made a version of the Jack the Ripper story, starring Klaus Kinski, in 1976.

³ These genre shifts are discussed at length in Derry (1977), Freeland (2000) and Tudor (1980).



Fig. 4.3: Spanish press book for *El sadico de Notre Dame*, interior.

The use of the horror motif of the prowling asylum escapee may also suggest the more specific influence of the slasher hit *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), though the motif was not new to Franco and was a mainstay of the genre throughout the 1970s. With its slightly greater emphasis on detection plotting, *Sadist* also contains more structural echoes of the Italian *giallo* murder mystery than does its 1974 ‘original’. The *giallo* – once critically overlooked but now prized for its high production values and the often elaborate staging of its murder set pieces – was only faintly influential on a small number of Franco’s films. Indeed, *Sadist*’s static camerawork, sometimes murky cinematography and inelegant editing might be seen as a rejection of the *giallo*’s glossy surfaces in favour of a more ‘realist’ aesthetic.¹ Aside from an orgy scene in *Sexorcismes* bathed in hellish red light, no version of the film indulges in the kind of virtuoso

¹ The *giallo* is examined in some depth in Koven (2006). See also Hunt (1992), Hutchings (2003), Needham (2003) and Fujiwara (2007).

display seen in *Venus in Furs* or *Vampyros Lesbos*. A fish-eye lens is used for several cramped interiors, but dream sequences and optical filters are avoided and even the zoom lens is used sparingly. Locations are limited, and camera set-ups tend towards the flat and immobile. Where many of Franco's films intersperse statically lensed exposition with quite florid on-stage numbers, the sado-satanic performances in *Demoniac* are filmed without the self-consciously 'artful' camerawork or editing seen in a film like *Vampyros Lesbos*.

Traces of the Italian whodunit are visible in a handful of Franco's 1970s films. Made the year before *Demoniac*, *Night of the Skull*, for example, claims to be based on *The Cat and the Canary*, a well-worn horror-melodrama erroneously attributed by the Spanish press book to Edgar Allen Poe, presumably in an attempt to capitalise on Poe's macabre connotations (see fig. 4.4). Publicity material for *Night of the Skull* also recalls the graphic style of the typical *giallo* poster, while its animal imagery is reminiscent of the creature-based titles popular in Italy at the time (*Cat O'Nine Tails*, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, *The Black Belly of Tarantula* and so on). The film also contains several murderous compositions that recall those of Bava.¹ Although the squalid tenor of *Sadist* is relatively constant, the film's conventionally nonsensical exchanges between bungling cops (familiar too from the *krimi* and Hitchcock) echo the *giallo*'s representation of the law. The theme of the amateur or accidental detective is also by no means exclusive to the *giallo* but is frequently revisited there. Franco's many recyclings of Inspector Tanner belong to this category.² Unlike the *giallo*, however, and more in keeping with many 'sex and violence' exploitation films of the 1970s, Franco's cutaways to police procedure betray lack of interest in it. Since Vogel's identity as the killer is never in doubt, police action only exists as a pretext for Franco's usual swift denouement. The presence of the law may, however, be ideologically necessary as a concession to censors and as a reminder of normativity through which to measure and contain both Vogel's and his victim's transgressions.

Demoniac picks up on a number of Sadeian threads in the horror and exploitation field of the period, particularly the witch-hunt films popular in the wake of *Witchfinder General* (Michael Reeves, 1968) and the 'women in prison' cycle to which Franco made several contributions. Like *Demoniac*, both cycles stage scenes in which male emblems of despotic authority violently extract 'confessions' from (semi-) naked women. Both can be dismissed as sadistically

¹ *Un silenzio de tumba* (1972) has many affinities with the *Cat and the Canary/Ten Little Indians* structure of *Night of the Assassins*; the same narrative model was used in Bava's *Five Dolls for an August Moon* (1970). In an evident attempt to capitalise on the success of Dario Argento's *Suspria* (1977), *Night of the Assassins* was released in Italy as *Sospiri*, the title font and heightened colour scheme on the posters imitating those on some posters for Argento's film.

² See 'Inspector Tanner' in Appendix: Table of Concordances.

misogynistic but, as with psychoanalytic and feminist analyses of the lesbian vampire film, while the criticism is not without justification it does not close the case.

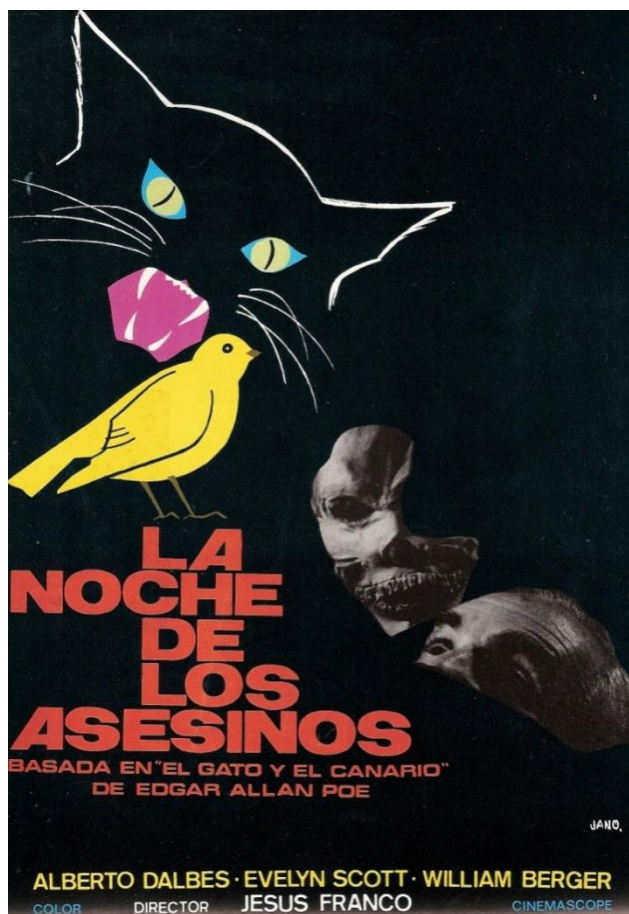


Fig 4.4: Spanish press book for *Night of the Skull*.

Franco's performance in *Demoniac* as a demented punisher of 'perverse' female hedonists also has strong echoes of what Hunt describes as a strain of British "'anti-authoritarian' generation-gap" films that enjoyed some success during the late 1960s and '70s (Hunt 1998: 150). In films of this type, a puritanical older generation is presented as "insane and oppressive, cut off from a world they no longer understand or control" (Chibnall and Hunter 1995: 17). The puritanism of the elders, like that of Vogel, fails to conceal their libidinal investment in that which they condemn. In *Night After Night After Night* (Lewis J. Force, 1970) a stern but porn-loving judge "turns out to be a Jack the Ripper figure in his spare time" (Hardy 1986: 209). In *House of Mortal Sin* (Peter Walker, 1975) a "sex-mad, homicidal priest", like Franco's Vogel, uses the "traditional paraphernalia of salvation" as instruments for blackmail and murder (Hardy 1986: 302). In Walker's *The Flesh and Blood Show* (1972) a deranged actor jealously murders promiscuous female members of a theatre troupe, just as Vogel picks off sex-show performers; the same director's *House of Whipcord* (1974) concerns a secret house of correction specifically established for the severe chastisement of permissive young women. In Michael Reeves' *The*

Sorcerers (1967) an elderly couple invent an electronic mind-control device that enables them to project their lurid fantasies of youthful corruption into the minds of hippies while experiencing vicarious thrills through their projections. In Reeves' more influential *Witchfinder General* the religious fanatic Matthew Hopkins (Vincent Price) terrorises the 17th Century English countryside in the name of reason as he searches for witches to 'purge' through torture and execution, much as Vogel in the 1970s stalks the banks of the Seine in search of lesbian performers from S/M nightclubs. As Halligan (2003) and Hunt (1996) suggest, Reeves' film was legible at its time of release as an allegory of contemporary generational conflict, with Hopkins personifying the state's repression of sexual freedom. Franco appears to have had something similar in mind when he wrote *Demoniac*. Following the success of *Witchfinder General*, psychotically fundamentalist judges and religious maniacs briefly became stock cinematic representatives of enmity towards a purportedly permissive society (Hunt, 1998: 147). Franco has said that, had finances permitted, he would have liked Vincent Price to have played the part of Vogel, and perhaps this was in recognition of Price's performance as the tyrannical Hopkins (Franco in Collins 2007).

Given that *House of Whiplash*'s screen-writer, David McGillivray, had reviewed a number of Franco's works in *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, it is possible that the latter's women's penitentiary drama *99 Women* (1968) provided some inspiration for Walker's 'strict discipline' film. Hunt argues that where Reeves' films railed angrily at the forces of oppression later films of this type tended to wallow in a mood of dreary defeatism, rarely allowing their representatives of youthful *joie de vivre* to escape the clutches of their oppressors. The 1970s mood of disillusionment described by Hunt – perhaps readable as a pessimistic or repressive reaction to the supposed 'permissiveness' of the 1960s – is certainly present in *Demoniac* and many more of the psycho-dramatic sex films Franco made in the decade. In this respect neither Franco's film nor the subgenre at large departs drastically from the predominant sexual politics of *giallo* and slasher films in which the monstrous threat can be read as a kind of superego determined to quash the burgeoning adolescent libido.¹ However, although Vogel is summarily killed at the close of *Demoniac*, the film, unlike *The Awful Dr Orlof* and unlike many of Franco's 'women in prison' films (the inmates often destroy their captors and flee) includes no equivalent of the 'Final Girl' who struggles against, overcomes or takes revenge on her tormentor (Clover 1992). The absence of this genre archetype is in part explained by the fact that while the Final Girl of the period tended to be sexually inactive, the same cannot be said of Franco's array of (albeit dissatisfied) lesbians, strippers and prostitutes.

¹ For more readings of monsters as representatives of id and superego see for example Tarrat (1977), Evans (1984), Dadoun (1989), and Durgnat (2000).

Many ‘revenge on youth’ films arguably partook of what Foucault (1978) defined as the “repressive hypothesis”, using the language of popularised Freudianism, via Marcuse, Reich and neo-surrealism, to equate all dominant social institutions with the draconian repression of sexual freedom. All institutions, that is, except exploitation cinema itself. The counter-cultural representation of authority as the ‘power trip’ of sexually repressed (hence, in the jargon of popular Freudianism, repressive) perverts, porn-addicts, pornographers and priests can be seen as the exploitation film’s self-serving strategy for presenting itself as sexually liberated while appearing to put itself at a necessary distance from the (in many countries) prosecutable ‘obscenity’ or ‘indecentcy’ of pornography. The discourse of sexual revolution also allowed exploitation cinema to veil the more problematic aspects of its representations behind notions of liberalism, on the one hand by condemning the ‘Vogels’ who might censor or censure the films as prudish hypocrites, and on the other by lampooning the ‘Vogels’ who produce and consume pornography. This twin strategy is doubly ironic because, in as much as the supposed critique of oppression is expressed through the staging of torture fantasies, the films themselves may be as duplicitous as the ‘judges’ they condemn.

What’s Inside a Girl? Possession and Exorcism Narratives

The success of *Witchfinder General* exerted a considerable influence on developments in horror and exploitation, spawning a vogue for witch-persecution films in which torturers extract ‘confessions’ from ‘sinful’ or ‘possessed’ women (Hunt 1996: 124; Halligan 2003: 202). Examples include *Blood on Satan’s Claw*, *Mark of the Devil* (Michael Armstrong, 1969, produced by Franco associate Adrian Hoven), and *Inquisición* (Jacinto Molina, 1976). Franco and Harry Alan Towers’ immediate response was *The Bloody Judge* (1969), starring Christopher Lee as the infamous witch-hunter Judge Jeffreys, a character who returned (played this time by John Foster) in *The Demons* (1972), Franco’s ‘possessed nun’ reply to Ken Russell’s uproarious *The Devils* (1971). Tanya Krzywinska has argued that the genre’s “fundamental” dread is not for the body of the female victim or her sadistic persecutor, but for the “demon daddy” who has invaded her body: the Satanic intruder stands for the anarchic “primordial masculine energy” of the “primal father”. On this analysis, the frenzy of the possessed female offers a “transgression...of sanctity, order and puritanical religious discipline”, but is really a projection of “masculine anarchic force” (Krzywinska 2000: 247-250).¹ I would add that after the fashion of the “doublethink” of cult movies (Grant 1991:124), the witch-hunt film trades on the idea that its women are innocent victims of a corrupt system which accuses them of being cursed or possessed, making the most of the opportunity to display various

¹ The gender politics of the possession film has also been discussed by Clover (1992: 65-113) and Kinder and Houston (1987).

degrees of nudity and various forms of torture while claiming to condemn the forces of authority in whose name the torture is administered.

Echoes of the sinful witch and the frenzied nun could be found in a cycle of satanic possession films that began with the international success of *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968) and reached a peak with *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973). The archaic notion of female sexual desire as a form of bedevilment repeatedly exercises Franco. Combining references to his own cast of characters and to Friedkin's hit, Franco made his sex-horror drama *Lorna the Exorcist* in 1974. The elliptical and fractured narrative of *Succubus* (1967) occasionally toys with the possibility that its S/M club dominatrix, Lorna Green (Janine Reynaud), is in some way supernaturally possessed, but this is just one inconsequential and unexplored possibility among many others touched upon in the film. Picking up on some of the sexploitation possibilities suggested by *The Devils*, *The Demons* combines captive women and possession motifs through the figures of the hysterically frustrated nun and the tyrannical judge/exorcist.

Witch-hunt, 'revenge-of-the-establishment', and possession films all represent despotic men for whom female sexual desire is the work of the devil. The mythological problem of female desire is visualised through images of hysterical excess, its containment in the form of incarceration and torture. As in the case of the seduced and abandoned Agra in *Vampyros Lesbos*, Franco's recurrent images of women in cells, asylums and other forms of confinement are often connected to notions of sexual frustration or insatiability. *Witchfinder General* suggested that Matthew Hopkins' personal obsession with female 'sin' was inseparable from patriarchal neurosis; the film is also careful to place Hopkins within social contexts, so that he is read as just one example of more pervasive classed, gendered and generational power structures. 'Sin' is presented as authority's hypocritical projection on to the youthful female other. Most witch-hunt films make it clear that the female victims are neither possessed by the devil nor sinners, but their judges, as on-screen viewers as well as participants, relish the spectacle of torture none the less. *Vampyros Lesbos* staged male fascination with female interiority by making Agra the object of medical investigation, and by juxtaposing the rational disciplinary/clinical gaze under which she is supervised with Seward's masochistically romanticist desire to over cross into the lesbian vampire's netherworld. *Demoniac* dramatises similar fascinations to the point of demonising them. Like Judge Jeffries, Matthew Hopkins and any number of autocrats, Vogel is clearly a "malignant misogynist who feels compelled to destroy whatever provokes desire in him" (Hunt 1996: 150). Like some of Sade's libertines – especially those who organise the orgies according to mathematical principles in *The 120 Days of Sodom* – the witch-hunter typically exhibits a 'fascist' combination of cruelty and rationality.

Hunt remarks that Hopkins' sadism in Reeves' film is implicitly 'explained' in terms that echo Klaus Theweleit's (1987) study of the German Freikorps in *Male Fantasies* (Hunt 1996: 129). Theweleit's (1987) reading has much in common with Mary Douglas' anthropology of bodily pollution, and with Kristeva's (1982) analysis of the female body as the abject object *par excellence* for the patriarchal imagination. Franco's rogue's gallery of bloody judges and diabolical doctors ostensibly represent the forces of utility, homogeneity, and law; but the sadistic rationality of their fascist imagination is presented as a paranoid reactions to the intolerable threat of female 'dirt' and 'floods' (Theweleit 1987). As Hutchings puts it, this is a form of "violence which seeks to preserve a certain masculine stability and power" (Hutchings 1993: 81). Franco resists using too many of the frothing-at-the-mouth shots of psychopaths that are a staple of serial killer exploitation films and no psychoanalytic explanations are given in the film's dialogue, which, as usual with Franco, largely steers clear of back-story. But Vogel's rage against the desires that the women 'provoke' in him is clearly constructed as a matter of projection; as is suggested by his work for *The Dagger and Garter*, his Canute-like attempt to halt the tide of corruption asks to be read as an excessive denial of his own perverse desires.

Like the fascist witch-hunter, Vogel only partly succeeds in sealing himself off from the temptations and fascinations of female flesh. As Hutchings puts it, "it is the prospect of a woman actively desiring rather than being the desired object that [horror cinema] finds alternately so appalling and so enthralling" (Hutchings 1993: 143), and Vogel embodies this ambivalence. For Mendik, Krzywinska and others, Franco's films transgress normative gender codes. But in many of Franco's Sadeian films of the 1970s transgressive curiosity about otherness is represented through a discourse of fascination and disgust that converges on the female body, and frequently the vagina. For Bataille, "men are swayed by two simultaneous emotions: they are driven away by terror and drawn by an awed fascination" (Bataille 1998: 58). Thus Vogel stands as one of the more monstrous manifestations of the fact that in Franco's films (as perhaps in Bataille's writings), the sublimely compelling object is always female, while the sublimely awed viewing subject is more often than not male.¹ Creed and others exhume Freud's account of the uncanny in order to read the horror film as symptomatic of the Oedipally determined "phallic panic" of a primal masculine imaginary (Creed 2005, *passim*), but many of Franco's Sadeian films show a knowing grasp of Freudian monster theory. In Theweleit's and Kristeva's analyses, the projected other of female 'perversity' serves as a fascistic defence against masculine fallibility and permeability. The very threat of feminine filth assures normative masculinity of its own cleanliness and rectitude.

¹ The lesbian vampire narrative is in some respects an exception to this rule, though as we saw in the previous chapter, Franco hedges about the theme in ideologically conflicted ways.

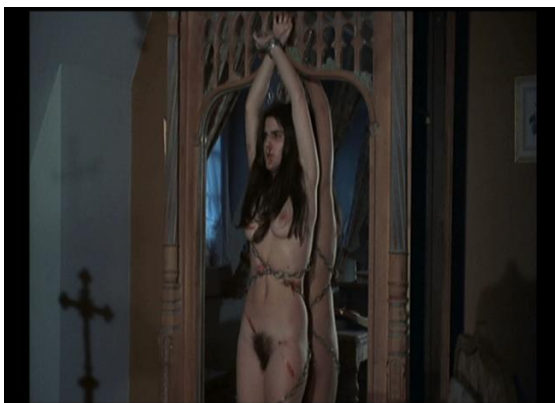


Fig. 4.5: One of Vogel's captives



Fig. 4.6: On-stage blood rites

The witch-torture film, the possession film and *Demoniac* propose a similar analysis of monsterisation; rather than only unconsciously demonising the notion of female desire with which they are so fascinated, representations of generic bloody judges and fanatical priests reflexively emblematised those processes. Thus *Demoniac* offers up numerous parallels between Vogel and the ‘perverts’ he seeks to suppress. Both he and the nightclub performers use knives. The chaining up of his victims rhymes with that of the theatrical satanic rites (see figs. 4.5 and 4.6). More pertinently for the film’s (dis)organisation of visibility, Vogel’s scopophilic investment in the ‘moral decay’ he strives to exorcise is reiterated throughout, with several scenes inviting comparison between his repressive voyeurism and other forms of viewing or spectatorship; in each case Vogel’s subjective line of sight is effectively over-extended by appearing to coincide with Franco’s wandering, probing lens. During the second on-stage blood ceremony, for example, Vogel appears inexplicably at the Count’s château; his exact position is no clearer than how he learnt of the Count’s secret ‘party’, but a variety of shots of the ceremony seem to grant him omniscience. In a reworking of Linda and/or Pauls’ watching of Nadine’s vampire ‘number’ in *Vampyros Lesbos*, Vogel’s apparently all-seeing eye enables subjective shots to oscillate from long-shot to close-up and back again, to view the stage from a position in the audience, and then to observe the increasingly aroused spectators in a similar alternation of privileged vantage points. Close-ups of his face are cut in at regular intervals, perhaps to imply that these are Vogel’s (or possibly Franco’s) sights rather than the viewers. Identical shots of his transfixed stare are likewise interpolated during several sex scenes: Vogel often peers through his net curtains at intercourse taking place in the opposite apartment (see figs. 4.7 and 4.8). Again, Franco’s camera slips readily from ‘first person’ to third; recurring shots of Vogel’s face may remind us that what we are watching ‘belongs’ to him. This is of course impossible. The consequent ambiguity of viewing position here embodies both the instability of the film’s optical imagination and its unsettling mixture of eroticism and horror. Vogel’s expression at these moments is as difficult to gauge as the film’s intended affect: when

he closes his eyes (without turning away), does he do so in revulsion, ecstasy, or a combination of the two?



Figs. 4.7 and 4.8: Vogel's voyeurism

Sadesploitation

Structured – in some ways like Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* – around scenes of on-stage/theatrical and off-stage/real sexual cruelty, *Demoniac* evinces, like Sade's attempts to write 'philosophy in the boudoir', a tension between the critique of tyranny and its fetishisation. In this respect Vogel and his activities typify the problems of seeing exploitation cinema as an arena for subversion. In common with much 'sex and violence' exploitation cinema during the period of the so-called 'sexual revolution', the Marquis de Sade, or, rather, the idea of Sade in its cultural circulation, represented a significant strand in Franco's practice. Sadeian as well as sadistic traces are apparent in several of the titles given to Franco's films in some territories: *The Sadistic Baron Von Klaus* (1962); *Sadisterotica* (1967); *The Sadist of Notre Dame*; *Sadomania* (1981) and so on. *Demoniac* contains a direct reference to the Marquis De Sade in the surname of the publisher of *The Dagger and Garter* magazine, Franval (from Sade's *Eugénie de Franval*). The manner of Vogel's 'exorcisms' recall Franco's Sade adaptation *Justine* (1968), in which four hedonistic priests tie the eponymous heroine (Romina Power) to a cross and torture her with pins.

To cite Sade is, in exploitation terms, to promise an outrageous but disturbing spectacle. As Krzywinska points out, Franco's films typify "'euro-sleaze' (low budget exploitation cinema), which suits well the sexual sensationalism component of de Sade's work" (Krzywinska 2006: 204). The figure of Sade both enabled the depiction of risqué subjects and was a risqué subject in its own right; the Sadeian possibility of merging perversity and politics enabled European exploitation cinema to capitalise on Sade (or the myth of Sade) as a signifier in which dread, titillation and social critique collided. Some earlier horror outings drew on the idea of Sade simply as a monstrous embodiment of unconscionable depravity (*The Skull*, Freddie Francis

1965); the idea of Sade as ‘evil’ was borne out by reports that the Moors Murderers had owned copies of his novels. The British Harry Alan Towers is unlikely to have been ignorant of this element of ‘topicality’ when he wrote his scripts for *Justine* and *Eugénie*. Others made suggestive use of the Sade name as a titillating signifier. In Italy, the claim of the *Bloody Pit of Horror* (Massimo Pupillo, 1965) to be ‘based’ on Sade’s writings was part of an apparent Sade craze that took place there long before Pasolini explored its possibilities for political allegory with *Salò* (1975); serialised paperback editions of the ‘black novels’ appeared in the late 1960s, along with an Italian edition of Gilbert Lely’s widely read biography of the Marquis and a *Justine* adult comic (Piselli and Morrocchi 2000: 78).¹ At the same time, Sade’s surrealist associations, as confirmed by the work of Luis Buñuel, and the sponsorship of influential contemporary French thinkers like Bataille, Klossowski, de Beauvoir, Barthes, Deleuze, Paulhan and Blanchot, meant that Sade was available to exploitation filmmakers as an icon for the “transgressions of sex...envisioned by a sexual revolutionary counterculture” (Williams 2008: 236). The high cultural and countercultural anti-repressive associations that Sade had accrued, especially in French intellectual and artistic contexts, had by the late 1960s been sufficiently absorbed for Sade’s name to legitimise the spectacles of exploitation horror. McGillivray’s script for *House of Whipcord* perhaps makes a humorous reference to this absorption by including a character called Mark E. Dessart. But because Sade functioned as both sexual monster and sexual revolutionary, any licence that Sadeianism provided tended towards the mixed messages characteristic of exploitation cinema.

The term Sadeian can be taken as a sign for a range of themes and concerns epitomised by rather than originating in Sade’s writings, or as a certain trend within the gothic. The connections between Sade and the gothic are not uncontested: he can be seen *as* a gothic writer, as a *parodist* of the genre, and as an influence on the genre’s development (Frappier-Mazur 1996: 137). David Pirie notes that the macabre sensuality of M.G Lewis’ gothic novel, *The Monk* (1796) was directly influenced by some of Sade’s writings (Pirie 1973: 15).² Sadeianism makes its mark on the whips, chains, torture devices and dungeons that litter a great many of

¹ The marketability of the name Sade is also demonstrated by the fact that the French poster for Franco’s *Pleasure for the Three* (1973) claims that the film is based on Sade’s writings.

² Pirie’s analysis of English Gothic is informed by Mario Praz’ reading of romanticism in “the shadow of the divine Marquis” (Praz 1933: 95-157). Illustrating the popularity of the theme, Raymond Durgnat’s *Eros in the Cinema* (1966) also includes a section on “The Shadow of the Divine Marquis”. Durgnat notes that many popular films “are goldmines, or hotbeds, of sadomasochistic images”, and goes on to discuss Buñuel (1966, 41-55). Perhaps influenced by Coulteray’s *Sadism in the Movies* (discussed below), Durgnat’s book can be seen as an early example of fetishistic, cultish ‘paracinema’ (Sconce 1995). Durgnat’s chapter “Skinematics and the Sadistic Vision” (in Durgnat 1972) includes discussions of the ‘roughie’ sexploitation films *White Slaves of China Town* and *Olga’s Girls* (both Joseph P. Mawra, 1964).

Franco's films from *The Awful Dr Orlof* to the 'women in prison' cycle. Sadeian set-dressing in this sense visualises themes of power and exacerbated desire embedded in gothic horror. The gothic nature of sex in Sade's writing makes his work – or at least its reputation – a reference point for both horror and pornography. Much exploitation horror cinema can be loosely described as Sadeian in as much as it stages scenarios of sexualised violence while minimising narrative development, character psychology and identification. Franco has therefore been seen in exploitation studies as one of the most Sadeian of filmmakers, and has himself claimed Sade as a central influence:

De Sade fascinates and grips me. I keep going back to him, although it would be more correct to say that he never leaves me. He is an excellent source of inspiration. He was probably a raving madman, but he got over his madness by writing these stories, solving difficult situations, exaggerating, provoking and digressing in the most unusual manner. I love his morality plays, very moral may I say. (In Aguilar et al 1999: 80).

Sadeian situations also abound. The 'women in prison' films discussed below can be seen as approximations of Sadeian orgies, with their cruel governesses posing as equivalents to Sade's libertine Juliette, their captives as virtuous but victimised Eugénies, and the prison setting as a Sadeian remote estate or isolated castle. Sade's voluptuaries are often aristocratic enlightenment thinkers, enacting their beliefs on the flesh of the lower orders; many of Franco's monsters are similarly high ranking, and often represent the forces of discipline and order. Torture, medical experimentation and religious ceremonies are shown to be libidinally motivated. As Krzywinska points out, there is rarely if ever in the Sade or the Franco universe any notion of reciprocity. (The female vampire films may be an exception). The majority of Franco's Sadeian situations and their apparatuses visualise sex and desire as a "power game" stripped of "intimacy or complementarity" (Krzywinska 2006: 205).

Demoniac's Vogel is not precisely a Sadeian libertine because he makes appeals to God and morality – he says that he "prays before everything I do" - while Sade's debauchees constantly rage against any notion of divine law. Nor does Vogel believe himself to be driven by lust. When carnal feelings arise (he begins to kiss one of his victims), his response is murderous. Murder may arouse Sade's libertines because they celebrate crime as the fount of the most exquisite pleasures, but Vogel wages a self-deluding moral crusade against what he perceives to be crime. Vogel's very religiosity nevertheless suggests that the film partly constitutes a Sadeian, and Buñuelian, attack on religion. Its aggressive atheism is underlined by Andre Benichou's funereal organ being played on the soundtrack over a 'blood rites' sex-show which takes place in a building that (as the dialogue points out) "used to be a church once" and that

incorporates ‘crucifixion’ on the BDSM¹ dungeon prop of a St. Andrew’s cross. As well as parodying the Christian iconography of many satanically themed horror films, *Demoniac* appears at this point to acknowledge the Batailleian and Sadeian connection between religious and sexual ecstasy. As Timo Airaksinen puts it, the Christian flagellant is a close neighbour of the Sadeian libertine because “both reach for personal transcendence through pain and blood” (Airaksinen 1995: 160).² Moreover, the view that Sade’s orgies amount to a satire on the *ancien regime* is echoed in *Demoniac*’s lampooning of censorship, the ‘women in prison’ films’ representation of penal institutions as corrupt and excessively cruel, and Franco’s endless mocking of the law through his cast of hopeless police inspectors.³

Several of Franco’s films claim to be based directly on Sade’s work, beginning in the late 1960s under the aegis of Towers. The first, *Justine* (1968), is an erotic costume drama redolent of bawdy period films of the day like *Tom Jones* (Tony Richardson, 1963). The film features Klaus Kinski in a non-speaking role, in inserts not directly related to the main narrative, as an imprisoned Sade, feverishly writing *Justine* – the novel, and in a sense the film – in his windowless cell, surrounded by the products of his fervent and presumably masturbatory imagination. Kinski unrestrainedly plays the author as a deranged artist, or “raving madman” as Franco has it, tormented by his visions. Franco’s fascination with images of captivity is demonstrated in the cutaways to Kinski in his cell: visions of enchained women are bathed in non-naturalistic, anachronistic gel lighting which connotes their status as incarnations of fantasy while drawing attention to their ‘staginess’. This theatricality, although of a piece with the foregrounded artifice in many of Franco’s films, may have been influenced by Peter Weiss’ play *Marat/Sade* (1963) or its film adaptation (*Marat/Sade*, Peter Brook 1966).⁴

Also released as *Philosophy in the Boudoir* and *De Sade 70*, Franco and Towers’ next Sade adaptation was *Eugenie...The Story of her Journey into Perversion* (1969), based on Sade’s dialogue novel *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (1795). Anticipating *Vampyros Lesbos*’ reworking of Stoker, *Eugenie* transfers its nominal source to a contemporary setting. As so often in Franco’s films the action centres on a beachside house⁵ and, like *Demoniac*, *Venus in Furs* and very many others it follows the sexual antics of a modern ‘swinging’ set. In this case the interests of

¹BDSM: bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism.

² Although exploring links between religion and sexual ‘deviance’ are beyond the purview of this thesis, it is worth noting Hopewell’s argument that many Spanish film-makers of the 1960s and 1970s had been “obsessed” with religion due to its “pervasive influence on their early education” at church schools. Hopewell’s description of the “mental legacy of Buñuel: the inescapable association of sexuality, sin, and religion” and a “fascination with religion” could be applied to some of the sado-gothic ceremonies in Franco’s films (Hopewell 1986: 32).

³ Sade as socio-political critic is discussed in Hunt (1991) and Frappier-Mazur (1991, 1996).

⁴ Weiss is mentioned in one of the word-association sequences in *Succubus*.

⁵ See ‘beachside residencies’ in Appendix: Table of Concordances.

the sexual modernists are focused on the youthful Eugenie (Marie Liljedahl), whom they subject to an assortment of pseudo-saturnalian indignities. Carrying gothic horror connotations into the film, Christopher Lee features as the libertine Dolmancé, a patrician on-screen narrator to whom we cut at several points as he proffers quotes from and condensed approximations of Sade's philosophical ruminations. Lee's opening monologue ("be heedless of all that contradicts pleasure's divine laws" and so on) is drawn from Sade's preface to *Philosophy in the Bedroom* (Sade 1991:185). Replete in a deep red smoking jacket previously worn by Lee in a Sherlock Holmes movie, Dolmancé acts as a master of ceremonies in the mould of Klaus Kinski's Ahmed in *Venus in Furs*, arranging would-be-orgiastic set-pieces without getting physically involved in them. *Eugenie* strives for a more nightmarish version of Sadeianism than that proposed by *Justine*, ending with a dream/reality blurring that, like *Venus*, repeats the film's opening.

Following his colourful nine-film collaboration with Towers, Franco (among numerous other projects) returned to Sade for *Eugenie de Sade* (1970). The themes resemble those of the earlier Lee film, but the story is extensively re-imagined. This *Eugenie* is worth dwelling on for a moment because it is typical of the dour, fatalistic outlook of many of Franco's films of the 1970s. The tale is again set in the present, though the locations are primarily contemporary Berlin, and again concerns the kind of representatives of contemporary sexual sophistication which Vogel attempts to annul. Where *Justine* and the first *Eugenie* concerned a sexually experimental milieu, *Eugenie de Sade* follows the homicidal and more or less incestuous deeds of Albert Radeck de Franval (Paul Müller), a historian of pornography with special interest in Sade, and his young step-daughter, Eugénie (Soledad Miranda).¹ Franco plays the part of the writer-turned-amateur-sleuth on their tail, Attila Tanner.²

Under Albert's watchful eye, and in another reprise of the erotic narrative convention of the ingénue's sexual education, Eugénie reads Sade in her step-father's study; this gives rise to what she describes as "bizarre feelings" of "well-being and apprehension". Thus bonded by power-imbalanced convulsive desire, Radeck and Eugénie attempt to live Sade's philosophy by embarking on a series of sexual murders. Eugenie's involvement in the murders leads Pavlović to see the film as an example of one of Franco's counter-hegemonic representation of deviant women. It is true that Eugénie's experience momentarily echoes that of Sade's libertines; in terms that Georges Bataille might recognise, perpetrating the transgressions produces an ecstatic sense of sovereignty. Yet Eugénie's libertinage is submissive and compliant: "father, I promise

¹ At some points the script refers to them as "father and daughter".

² See Appendix: Table of Concordances. In Sade's *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, Eugenie's mother brings her up 'well', and she is corrupted/educated by a libertine woman, her brother and Dolmancé.

to obey you”, she coos, “your will, will be mine”. And prior to the killing spree Franco films the physically slight Miranda to look as small and vulnerable as possible, framing her in one of her father’s oversized armchairs. As in *Sade*, the thrill of criminality intensifies their love-making, as Radeck charms Eugénie with the words “your body is just like your mother’s”. Their final target is Paul (André Montcall) a naive but posturing jazz trumpeter.¹ Announcing that Paul “lives like a fool and will die a fool”, Radeck urges Eugénie to seduce the trumpeter – to “bewitch him right out of his life” – but to spurn him when she is sure he loves her; given Paul’s sensitive artist demeanour, Radeck is sure that the trumpeter will commit suicide in response to the rejection. Eugénie’s attempt to play the praying mantis part so often given to Franco’s female characters fails when she falls in love with her intended victim. Though Eugénie’s femme fatale role is not unusual for a Franco film, the cause of her failure is: the film is rare in that it talks about love at all. Evidently taking to heart the Sadeian doctrine that virtue is a sign of weakness for which the good will suffer, while only vice leads to prosperity, Radeck attempts vengefully to rape and murder his step-daughter, stabs her (seemingly between her legs, though this is not shown) with a pair of scissors, and kills himself.²

Justine (1979) has little in common with either the 1968 film or Sade’s novel but distils the themes and motifs of Franco’s sex dramas of the period. This film was, according to the credits on the Italian print, “supervised” by Joe D’Amato, but comprises re-edited material from Franco’s *Shining Sex* (1975), *Midnight Party* (1975) and another, unfinished, adaptation of *Justine*. The result is a fragmentary collage of scenes from an angst-ridden sex life. Romy plays a depressed nightclub performer who also works as a prostitute; since she is a lesbian she is strongly averse to her male clients. Echoing Countess Irina’s implicitly necrophile moments in *Female Vampire*, *Justine* fellates a hanging corpse before shooting herself (off screen) in the crotch.

In spite of Pavlović’s exalting of Franco’s “hard, mean” female characters, Sade’s tale of the virtuous young lady corrupted by her elders has been particularly favoured by the filmmaker. His third version of *Eugénie* is the ‘S’ certificated *Erotismo* (*Eugénie, Historia de una Perversión*, 1980). Alba and Alberto de Rosa (Mabel Escaño and Antonio Mayans) are a decadent couple who keep a literally barking Romy, like a dog, in chains. In a plot closer to Franco’s first version of the story than his second, Alba seduces Eugénie Tanner’s (Katja Bienert) father (Antonio Rebollo) into ‘lending’ them his virginal daughter for sexual initiation: they introduce her to a drug-fuelled world of finally fatal sex-games.

¹ See ‘jazz’ in Appendix: Table of Concordances.

² See ‘Suicide’ in Appendix: Table of Concordances.

Ideas of Sade and the Sadeian have, then, been a recurring theme in discussions of Franco, with Mendik (1998), Coniam (2001), Krzywinska (2006) and Hallam (2004) concurring that Sade is Franco's central source. Pete Tombs (1992) places Franco's *Succubus* in the mixed company of *L'Age d'Or* (Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, 1930), *Frustration* (José Bénazéraf, 1971) and *Sálo* (Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1975), films which he insists are as "explosive and subversive" as Sade's *Justine* (1791) and *The 120 Days of Sodom* (1785) in their examination of desire as a transgression of bourgeois repression. Each of these films has a "sensibility" which puts films them "in a direct line with Sade himself" (Tombs 1992: 13). Lucas sees Franco's *Justine* as "uncommonly faithful to its source" (Lucas 2005: 34). Krzywinska follows Tombs and Lucas in describing *Succubus* as a film in which Franco makes "a strong attempt to capture something of the essence of de Sade", and notes that the Spanish filmmaker and the French writer are "kindred spirits" (Krzywinska 2006: 204). Whether or not these are adequate accounts either of Sade or of a diverse selection of films, Tombs and Krzywinska draw on the surrealist appropriation of the 'Divine Marquis' as a paradigm of libidinal revolution.

Positing Sade as the foundation of Franco's "scandalizing" films (Lucas 2005: 35) implies that the French author's significance is unchangingly present throughout the film-maker's oeuvre, and this enables the corralling of Sade (and thereby of Franco) into a decontextualised, ahistorical notion of transgression. But the participation of Franco's films in the cultural circulation of Sadeianism during the late 1960s and 1970s, despite his own account of the "inspiration" he finds in the works of the French "madman", does not imply that Sade is univalent. The supposed translation of the 18th Century writer into the work of the modern Spanish film maker is more mediated than might be inferred from claims about "kindred spirits" and "direct lines" from one to the other. Franco's films no more originate in a foundational Sade than Bram Stoker lies at the bottom of his vampire fantasies. Different, sometimes competing readings of Sade are processed through Franco's films.

Rather than depart from the timeless Sadeian "essence" detected by Krzywinska, Franco's Sadeianisms take place in relation to the circulation of Sade across a range of cultural formations. The readings offered by Tombs, Krzywinska, Mendik and Hallam are informed by the dissemination of Sadeianism within surrealism-influenced film criticism of the 1960s. Tombs cites the French periodical *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* as exemplary of an approach which sought a Sadeian aesthetic in popular cinema. Critics in the pages of *Midi-Minuit* and, to a lesser extent, *Positif* – among them Durnat and Adonis Kyrou – adopted the view that fantastique films could serve as a desublimated arena for what André Breton called 'convulsive desire', with the films of Bava, Fisher, Corman, and Tourneur being particularly favoured, and with Barbara Steele as the favourite pin-up. This approach was inspired by the surrealists' view of commercial cinema as an unwitting repository of delirium: hence the famous Ado Kyrou quote

used by Tombs and Tohill as epigram for their book *Immoral Tales*: “I urge you: look at ‘bad’ films. They are so often sublime”.

The *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* tradition of finding Sadeian delirium in ‘low’ cinema often amounts to a fetishistic, not to say cultish, form of aberrant decoding or textual poaching. Its Sadesploitation correlate is found in Georges de Coulteray’s bizarre volume *Sadism in the Movies* (1965). With a back-cover blurb promising that “this powerfully detailed description of movie sadism will provoke in the reader a strong emotional state”, the North American edition of Coulteray’s book is reassuringly “published by arrangement with Medical Press”, and juxtaposes almost two hundred pages of semi-scholarly film criticism with over two hundred “exhibits”. Described, after the disingenuous fashion of classic exploitation cinema and 1960s sex instruction manuals, as a dossier of “documentary verification”, these “exhibits” constitute a vast gallery of sadistic and/or Sadeian stills from a multitude of uncaptioned and unnamed genre films, organised under such headings as “Burning”, “Crushing”, “Chained” and “Whips”. Plundering the popular genre archive much as Franco’s films do, Coulteray frames his exploitation images within a surrealist critical exercise that draws on anthropological, psychoanalytic and literary discourses.

Krzywinska notes that Franco’s Sadeian sensibility involves “inverted polarities” and “sado-masochism as a form of transgression” (Krzywinska 2006: 206). This can be seen as wishful thinking. Faithfully reproducing Sade’s catalogue of sexual extremities on screen is not a possibility for Franco or Towers. Yet even if we put aside the more unrepresentable practices described in *The 120 Days of Sodom* or *Juliette* it is notable that the majority of Franco’s films even suppress the anality of many of Sade’s fantasies. The surrealism-influenced Bataille reads Sade largely as a revolutionary ode to erotic anarchy: in the Sadeian orgy, genitals lose their dominance as centres of erotic interest and the body is liberatingly deterritorialised (male and female, anus and vagina, old and young, for example, are interchangeable parts of the libertine’s orgiastic ‘machinery’). Bataille’s analysis informs Angela Carter’s reading of the feminist possibilities of the Sadeian woman,¹ and perhaps Mendik’s account of the heroically boundary-defying transgressivity of Franco’s Sadeian fantasies. Unlike the Sade of Carter’s, Mendik’s or Krzywinska’s readings, in Franco’s films of the late 1960s and early 1970s tableaux in which young female bodies serve as the chief signifiers of Sadeian excess focus on a very limited repertoire of breast and vagina centred activities. These are of course supplemented by a degree of object fetishism and variously cruel and explicit degrees of punishment. Thus Franco’s *Justine* represents Sade’s torrid, shocking imaginings through soft-core shots of semi-naked

¹ Carter’s reading is based primarily on the female libertine of Sade’s *Juliette*, where Franco favours *Justine* and *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, texts which focus on the misfortunes that befall their virtuous heroines.

shackled women, and an unflinching, close-up pin-torture sequence.¹ Franco's later prison films do hint at a wider array of outrages. *Sadomania* gestures towards Sade's bestial as well as anal imagery by including the unedifying (but non-graphic) sight of rape by dog. *Wanda the Wicked Warden* (1977) hints at Sade's coprophagy while perhaps alluding to Pasolini's 'Circle of Shit' episode when Lina Romay commands a reporter to lick her anus clean after suffering from diarrhoea. Father/daughter incest is touched on in a number of films.² In spite of these examples, Franco uses a rather more restricted palette of transgressions than does Sade; this does not tell us that Franco is not shocking or disturbing enough, but that the invocation of Sade as purveyor of boundless sexual free-for-alls tends to overstate what is actually on screen.

Prisoners of the Flesh: Captive Women and Fantasy Space

What Grant (1991) calls the transgressive and recuperative possibilities of 'cult' cinema can be further addressed through reference to Franco's interventions in the 'women in prison' subgenre. The cultural conditions for Franco's "hard, mean" women were firmly in place by the time Franco entered the women's prison narrative. Indeed, Franco's renown as a voracious consumer of popular culture implies that, far from emerging uniquely from the mind of a singularly transgressive exploitation genius, his Sadeian or deviant women were produced from engagement in and absorption of a range of intertextual resources. The pneumatically fetishised comic-book version of the 'phallic' woman made her presence felt in glossy products ranging from *Barbarella* (Roger Vadim, 1968) and its original comic to James Bond, *Modesty Blaise* (Joseph Losey, 1966) and TV's *The Avengers*. As appropriated by the women-as-furniture sculptures of Allen Jones, and as decried by Mulvey's attack on Jones as an uncomprehending objectifier of women (Mulvey 1973), the 'kinky' female body of some late 1960s popular culture, including that of 'underground' sex publications, arguably prefigured the posthuman or post-'natural' body as a playful assemblage of hyperreal part-objects. Franco's films present her down-market, less polished, counterpart. The 'Juliettes' of the Red Lips Detective Agency in *Sadisterotica* (1967) and *Kiss Me, Monster* (1967), and the PVC-clad Amazonians from *The Girl from Rio* (1968) offered 'kinky' glimpses of *bande dessinée* bondage within matinee-style entertainments. *Succubus* (1967) and *99 Women* (1968) began to take the female libertine into darker and frequently more violent waters.

Hardy suggests that *Demoniac* "exudes a genuinely chilling sense of dementia" compared to Franco's more routine and interchangeable "captive-women movies" (Hardy 1996: 339). Hardy's reference to Franco's numerous 'women in prison' films suggests a link, even while

¹ See 'needles' in Appendix: Table of Concordances.

² See 'incest' in Appendix: Table of Concordances.

insisting on distance between, them and *Demoniac*. Yet reading Franco's work must reckon with its "captive-women" imagery, and this is perhaps most condensed in his 'women in prison' films.¹ Many fan publications, often lavishly illustrated with publicity stills from these films, nevertheless attempt, like Hardy and Pavlović, to marginalise or maintain a critical distance from them - a striking assertion of a hierarchy of taste in a field that prides itself on taste contestation and disreputability.² As sordid as they often are, Franco's 'women in prison' films largely do away with the angst of his desolate sex dramas of the early to mid 1970s; standard Sadeian situations are played out with few intimations of existential crisis or moody 'European' alienation.

Yet it seems disingenuous to cordon them off on grounds of taste, theme or typical imagery. Franco's 'women in prison' films merely offer a more squalid recycling of the captive women situations and props repeated elsewhere. The BDSM fantasies implied by the 'lesbian' incarceration and torture scenarios of films like *99 Women*, *Barbed Wire Dolls* and *Sadomania* offer a grimy distillation of gothic sexualities that is far from foreign to much of the rest of Franco's career. The claustrophobic cells and dungeons correspond closely to the gothic castle and the remote Sadeian château, its instruments of torture to gothic paraphernalia, its tortured captive to the gothic persecuted heroine: in these respects the mise-en-scène of the 'women in prison' film distils rather than abandons the excessive gothic staging of "inner warfare, inner spaces, inner dimensions" (Sedgewick 1986: 140).

While many of Franco's films of the 1960s contain lengthy shots of shackled and caged women, *99 Women* was Franco's first direct venture into the women's prison drama. The 'women in prison' exploitation formula long pre-dates this film, while the subgenre is closely connected to the motif of the all-female community that, with its obvious potential for exploitation, Franco has returned to many times.³ In many respects the subgenre offers a 'backlash' reaction to feminism, attempting, like aspects of the female vampire film, to put women back 'in the box'; as an image of an S/M matriarchy, the 'women in prison' film may be no more subversive than the Two Ronnies' futuristic satire on feminism, *The Worm That Turned* (1980). (This serial

¹ Franco's direct entries into this subgenre are: *99 Women* (1968); *Lovers of Devil's Island* (1972); *Barbed Wire Dolls* (1975); *Women Behind Bars* (1975); *Love Camp* (1976); *Wanda, the Wicked Warden* (1977); *Women in Cellblock 9* (1977); *Sadomania* (1981).

² Walter L. Gay, for example, remarks that they are "guaranteed to churn the stomachs of the most jaded fans everywhere" (Gay 2000: 115). The subgenre naturally has something of a cult following - see for example Morton (1986), O'Hara (1991), and Koven (2004).

³ For example, *The Girl from Rio* (1969) - a sequel to *The Million Eyes of Sumuru* (Lindsay Shonteff, 1967) - concerns the attempts of Sumuru (Shirley Eaton) to lead the all-female inhabitants of the city of Femina to world domination. It is perhaps indicative of the appeal of this motif that Franco's short-lived production company, Manacoa P.C., was reportedly named after a Spanish comic that "featured a paradisiac town entirely filled with women" (Tohill and Tombs 1995: 120).

represented a dystopian feminist future similar to that envisaged in Franco's *The Girl from Rio*, with Diana Dors playing a dominatrix leader of an army of hotpants-wearing female guards). Described by Franco as a film about "defenceless women at the mercy of a group of bastards" (Gregory 2005b), *99 Women* seems to have established the template for expanding upon the erotic potential of the subgenre's stock situations and iconography. As *Monthly Film Bulletin* summarised this "tame and unremittingly tedious" story of "a women's prison in an old Spanish fortress": "the inmates wear low-cut smocks and suffer untold indignities at the hands of their sadistic superintendent" (anon. 1970: 83). *Variety*'s review of the film draws attention to the potential appeal of the sexploitation material and casting to more than one taste constituency, while offering a summary of the formula. Although "[f]ew pix, if any, have combined elements in the manner of *99 Women*",

[n]o "potboiler element is left out....Dogfights among the femmes, torture, drug-withdrawal 'fits', escape attempts through snake-infested jungles, rape of one gal prisoner by a gang of sex-starved men, perhaps most of all the sadistic Naziesque warden played with all 'camp' stops pulled by [Mercedes] McCambridge. (Anon. 1983c: 43)

Few films in the 'women in prison' cycle, least of all those directed by Franco, have deviated from the blueprint. A pictorial preview of *Barbed Wire Dolls*, (here titled *Caged Women*) in *Continental Film Review* demonstrates that the same elements were being recycled even by the mid 1970s:

[O]n an isolated island off the Coast of a South American State, there is a women's prison surrounded by a dense tropical forest. The governess of the prison has virtually a free hand to impose her authority which takes on an almost Nazi-like style accentuated by the monocle she wears in her right eye. (Anon. 1976: 20).

Contrary to the contemporary cultist's assumption that Franco's on-screen transgressions were in their day scandalising, most reviewers saw the film's erotica as wearingly predictable. For A. H. Weiler of the *New York Times*, there was "little that is hot in *99 Women*, even though these women wear the shortest shifts ever seen in any movie prison" (Weiler 1969: 59). *Variety* acknowledged that the film's script was "turgid", direction "schematic" and acting "exaggerated" but was so impressed by its "beautiful footage of female nudity, most of it in connection with lesbian lovemaking" that the film – "by far the most commercially promising feature yet released under corporate monicker of Commonwealth United Entertainment" – merited "a chance for the first-run 'sex-art' market and deserves consideration as a top-of-the-bill 'showcase entry'" (*Variety* 1983: 43).

If Franco's angels of vengeance, femmes fatales and sadistic lesbian warders are to be construed as agents of gender subversion, it should also be acknowledged that they usually have a female object too, and that she rarely escapes unharmed. In spite of the presence of Sadeian and monstrous women in Franco's films, it is surprising that Pavlović finds Franco "imagining women as killers and not victims" (Pavlović 2003:115): from *The Awful Dr Orlof* on, the constrained and victimised female body has most often constituted the centre of Franco's moments of spectacle. The most commonly reproduced publicity stills in fan publications on Franco are those which feature women in cages, manacles or bondage. Indeed, it seems no coincidence that many of the least celebrated (or illustrated) Franco films within cult exploitation cinema circles are those (besides long out-of-circulation hardcore titles) which offer the least fetishism of this kind. Where Franco's male characters are often at the mercy of fatal women, male bodily ordeals seldom form the centre of the mise-en-scène. In the garish spy/sci-fi sub-dom fantasy *Blue Rita* (1977), for example, humiliation scenes frequently adopt the worm's eye view of the caged male looking up at his imperious rubber-wearing female tormentors, potentially affording a masochistic presentation of spectacular, in this case sadistic, womanliness.

This possibly masochistic, or at least "reactive" or "penetrated" viewing position (Clover 1992: 191) has significant implications for how the gendered 'objectifying' visuality of sexploitation might be understood; it might also problematise any supposed links between fetishism and sadism. Partly in reaction against the perceived limitations of 'one size fits all' psycho-semiotic gaze theory and influenced by postmodernist and postfeminist theories of sexed and gendered identity, many critics have discussed the possibility of cinematic fantasy scenarios as arenas for fluid desires and subjectivity games. Clover (1992), Williams (1990), Silverman (1992), Hutchings (1993), and Shaviro (1993) stress the possibility of cross-gender multi-positionality. Clover finds that "gender is less a wall than a permeable membrane" (Clover 1992: 4) and argues that male viewers of North American rape-revenge and slasher films of the 1970s and 1980s can "identify" masochistically with female victims and sadistically with female avengers: this process is aided by shifts in subjective camera position, meaning that the Final Girl can be used by the male viewer "as a vehicle for his own sadomasochistic fantasies" (Clover 1992: 153). Clover argues that such displacements of gender "can provide a kind of identificatory buffer...that permits the majority audience to explore taboo subjects" (Clover 1992: 241). Hutchings' reading of the horror film as a barrage of masochistic experiences goes a little further: like Shaviro, Hutchings overstates the genre's affects, and assumes that masochism "feminises" the spectator in "a series of pleasurable subjections, as multiple fantasies of disempowerment" (Hutchings 1993: 91).

These possibilities complicate any assumption that viewing positions ('masochistic', 'sadistic' or any other kind) automatically correspond to pre-formed, immutable gendered identities. The viewpoint adopted by Franco's camera does not necessarily preclude fantasy engagement in the imagined agency of an 'objectified' or 'fetishised' character, whether dominatrix, victim or both. Although this thesis has had much to say about Franco's use of the shooting apparatus, the camera does not necessarily determine all such interpretations or responses. Hence Gwendoline Audrey Foster sees bondage imagery in jungle films, Betty Page/Irving Klaw shorts and 1940s women's prison dramas as a "performative vehicle to explore the spaces in which we may transgress against normative values" (Foster 1999: 141). Foster searches for resistant stares and other hints of agency in images of women in captivity, arguing for the need to find "a new unfixed way of looking at female subjectivity" which refuses what she sees as the patriarchal assumption that the bound woman is "a victim" (Foster 1999: 29). Foster suggests that viewers of any gender or sexual preference "might consume light bondage images in mainstream films like *Modesty Blaise*...in a transgressive manner" by "identifying" with the captive woman (Foster 1999: 30). For Foster any search for "'positive' images of Queer and bisexual practice" should be replaced by the reclamation of "'perversion' as a tool that operates to open nomadic celluloid zones, and encourages gender fluidity" (Foster 1999: 136).

Despite this fluidity, Hutchings, Clover and others make 'identification' central to their analyses; in the case of the heteronormative male viewer this textual inscription is taken to be governed by regression to infantile castration fantasies. But if we accept that 'identification' of some sort could take place when watching one of Franco's films, it would be better, as Sharon Willis puts it, "to think of viewer identifications as scenarios, rather than fixations" (Willis 1993: 121). For example, the possibility of Sontag-style camp, as noted in the *Variety* review of *99 Women*, implies just one avenue of enjoyment distinct from supposed interpellation by a notional sadistic (or for that matter masochistic) gaze. There is no space here for a detailed consideration of the politics of camp, but it should be acknowledged that camp possibilities may be less pronounced in the crueller torture scenarios of Franco's later entries in the cycle, even though some of the riper performances – such as that of Dyanne Thorne in *Wanda the Wicked Warden* – perhaps bear comparison with McCambridge's scenery-chewing in *99 Women*. Foster observes in relation to Thorne's performance in *Ilsa, She wolf of the SS* (Don Edmonds, 1975) that it "revels in sadomasochistic treatment of the male body, and is generally relegated to the world of 'camp'". However, Foster does not clarify who has so 'relegated' this notorious film.

Cook's analysis of Stephanie Rothman's captive-women film *Terminal Island* (1973) draws on the fact that the film was directed by a self-proclaimed feminist filmmaker, and was produced by Roger Corman's New World Pictures, often seen as a more 'progressive' exploitation outfit, to argue that the film simultaneously played to heteronormative male fantasies and denaturalised

the gaze through which the fantasies were constructed. The female captives in *Terminal Island* are, Cook observes, double-edged – both a softcore fantasy and a nightmare for the intended male spectator (in Freudian terms the two are not mutually exclusive), their doubleness echoing that of femmes fatales and female vampires. Following Cook's lead, it can also be argued that Franco's 'women in prison' films offer a metaphor for feminism, with the 'cage' as symbol for patriarchy. As Zalcock and by implication Pavlović suggest, the subgenre can be seen as potentially subversive for its focus on 'woman's space' or a world without men. But in keeping with the characteristic mixed messages of exploitation cinema, the subgenre can also be charged – again like the female vampire film - with debasing and demonising the women's movement, its gynocratic scenarios travestying feminism while its various erotic conventions (shower scenes, cat-fights, and the rest) present ample pretexts for fantasies of 'lesbianism'.

But the 'caged women' also appeal to more recent notions of gender performativity. The performances of both the skimpily dressed prisoners and their 'phallic' captors can be seen as deconstructive same-sex impersonations or ironic gender masquerades. Foster argues that the extravagant femininity and "hypersexuality" of the imprisoned women in films like *Girls in Chains* (Edgar G. Ulmer 1943) stages an ironic "performance of obeisance" (Foster 1999: 21). Thus, for Foster, Betty Page's bondage movies offer "a haptic model of the performing female body that exists outside the regulation of desire and fantasy" (Foster 1999: 90). Foster suggests that the presence of Page as a cultural worker or 'author' of her own performance in Klaw's bondage films transcends fantasies of subjugation. She also implies, recalling Sontag's notion of 'camp' and Cook's reading of *Terminal Island* as well as the notion of gender as masquerade, that the patent artifice of the situations and costumes in which Page and her co-stars are presented constitutes a denaturalisation of sex and gender roles. These kinds of sartorial excess can be found throughout Franco's career. One of the inmates in *99 women* arrives in a 'show girl' dress similar to those worn in *The Awful Dr Orlof* and *La reina del Tabarín*. In *Eugenie de Sade*, father and daughter perform a dress rehearsal for murder. The partygoers in *Eugenie, the Story of her Journey into Perversion* dress up for their orgies as Dolmancé announces that "we are disciples...of the divine Marquis...to whom in homage we wear the very costumes of his time". The denim cut-offs, "short shifts" and stockings held up with string worn by many of Franco's female prisoners appear as absurd burlesques of gendered sexuality. Their cells, not unlike the melodramatic set-ups that Sade's libertines devise in their castle in *The 120 Days of Sodom*, are stage-like spaces for sadomasochistic histrionics.

Aspects of Franco's 'captive women' films may therefore be marshalled in support of the claim that "within the liminoid setting of commercial popular entertainment sexual transgressions can become the basis for a re-ordination of power relations" (Robert C. Allen, cited in Schaefer 1999: 322). But the cross-gendered and sexually mercurial fantasising apparently encouraged by

sexploitation cinema's fetishistic and sadomasochistic situations cannot escape the fact that perversity in Franco's films is not limitlessly polymorphous. Foster sees the exaggerated performance of obedience in bondage scenarios as "outside the regulation of desire and fantasy", but many theorists of transgression point out that regulation is not so easily bypassed: as Jonathan Dollimore summarises the dialectic of transgression and containment, "dissidence may not only be repressed by the dominant (coercively and ideologically), but in a sense actually produced by it, hence consolidating the powers which it ostensibly challenges" (Dollimore 1991: 26-7). Thus the subversive possibilities of Hutchings' "multiple fantasies of disempowerment" have to be read against the onscreen gender imbalances of Franco's fixation on lesbians, close-ups of female masturbation and so on. Whatever the element of masquerade, even the masochistic situations in which many of Franco's characters, male and female, find themselves are always organised to enable optimal display of dominating and dominated female bodies. In making this point I am not assuming that all 'female spectacle' is somehow objectifying. Studlar points out in relation to the *Midnight Movie* that few such images simply "subvert oppressive norms" (Studlar 1991: 141), but to recognise this is not to reduce those images to the orthodoxies of 'apparatus', 'suture' or 'gaze' theory.

While a range of pleasures are possible for those who enjoy the subgenre, the textual evidence suggests that the fantasies to which the women's prison drama play involve friction between the notion of the 'highly sexed' female and that of her incarceration; ambivalent fantasies lie in the representation of the prisoner's desire and its resistance to control. The discursive construction of the highly sexed woman is encapsulated in the tag-line of the much earlier American International exploitation film, *Reform School Girl* (Edward Bernds, 1957): "Caged Boy-Hungry Wild-Cats Gone Mad" (cited in Zalcock 1998: 24). The tag-line binds together several of the fantasies that Franco and other practitioners of the subgenre came to address. Female desire is coded as "wild", and is duly "caged". The phrase 'prisoners of the flesh', one of *Sadomania*'s alternate titles, involves a similar idea, suggesting that erotic fantasies revolve around the dialectic of containment and transgression: any interest the subgenre may hold is as likely to derive from tension between these two 'extremities' as it is from the triumph of one over the other.

As in the 'witch-hunt' film, the 'women in prison' subgenre therefore presents desire and regulation as interdependent rather than antinomic. If there is a central fantasy here, it involves knotting together signifiers of female 'insatiability' and constraint, with the iconography of captivity acting as a reassuringly constant reminder of the (not always supremely successful) inhibition of female 'excess'. Bataille states that "transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends and completes it" and that "the taboo would forbid the transgression but the fascination compels it" (Bataille 1998: 55, 58). Franco's 'women in prison' films present

transgression in similar terms, as an experience of limits or “interrogation of boundaries” (Foucault, cited in Stallybrass and White 1986: 200) and not, as some cult discourse would have it, a mere shattering of all prohibitions. Carceral images and wicked wardens serve much the same purpose as the witch-hunter, the vampire-hunter, the bloody judge and the homicidal priest: all attempt to reabsorb the ‘excess’ that they appear to find so fascinating. Yet in the ‘women in prison’ film not only does incarceration fail to tame desire, it drives the “cats” “mad”. The metaphorical possibilities for feminism are, as Cook points out in relation to *Terminal Island*, obvious. Yet the phallogentric logic is also clear. The absence of men leaves the “boy-hungry” women frustrated; they go “mad” in much the same way as Countess Nadine Carody in *Vampyros Lesbos* made Linda Westinghouse feel “strange”. The phallus is, then, present even in its absence. The subgenre therefore bears out the argument that patriarchy’s constructions of lesbian desire merely serve its fantasies of ‘joining in’ or ‘curing’ the lesbian. Like all of Franco’s whip-wielding women, the sadistic wardress condenses ‘castrating’ and ‘castrated’ models of the ‘phallic woman’, with the whip predictably playing the role of substituting for the absent phallus. One dominant reading within Freudian/Lacanian paradigms would argue that such a fetish (like the fangs in the female vampire film) substitutes for the absent phallus of the fantasised castrated mother. The more apparent textual suggestion is that the penile objects in Franco’s ‘women in prison’ films (whips, boots and so on) act as knowing substitutes for the absent male, rather than symbolically complete the castrated maternal body of repressed infantile fantasy. Much as the imprisoned Agra in *Vampyros Lesbos* resorts to the dildo, so the ‘women in prison’ cycle goes to some lengths to reinsert the phallus into the situation.

The pantomime of imprisonment dramatises the dynamics of transgression by making its “women’s space”, not an arena for the liberation of the libido, but a theatre for the struggle between desire and repression. In visualising this struggle, Franco demonstrates that “transgression is not intrinsically progressive, nor is it intrinsically conservative” (Stallybrass and White 1986: 201): like the witch-hunt, nunsplotation and possession films, the ‘women in prison’ film typifies exploitation cinema’s mixed messages by eroticising institutional oppression while purporting to criticise it. In all cases characters are heard to denounce institutional cruelty, draconian sentencing and the corruption of power. Many ‘women in prison’ films contain short speeches on injustice and mistreatment which are followed by lengthier stretches in which power and corruption provide the basis for BDSM display. *Lovers of Devil’s Island* (1972) is unusual in Franco’s career in that it starts out as a relatively earnest drama about a men’s prison (female prisoners become the centre of attention half an hour into the film); male inmates, one of whom is described as a revolutionary, are executed on the whim of the guards for “rebellion against state security”. As in the witch-torture subgenre courts are

corrupt and ‘justice’ is summary.¹ As in the lengthier philosophical digressions punctuating Sade’s novels, the question is raised of how the critique and eroticisation of despotic rule can coexist in the same text.

Politics and Prurience

Frappier-Mazur (1996) argues in relation to Sade’s fictions, and Kinder (1993) argues in relation to sexualised violence in prestigious Spanish ‘art’ cinema, that the representation of orgiastic rituals can stand as a subversive theatricalisation of socio-political power structures. But it is an ideologically perilous enterprise. Although Zalcock praises the “pornographic offerings” of the ‘women in prison’ subgenre for representing unruly women, she asserts that they lack “even a hint of the social concerns” of North American prison dramas of the 1940s/50s or of Corman’s productions in the same vein. Nor were contemporary observers convinced by the subgenre’s hints at social concern. The British censor failed to find any redeeming hint of satire or critique in *99 Women*. John Trevelyan, the Secretary of the British Board of Film Censors, described it as a “singularly nasty sadistic film...which exploited nudity, lesbianism and torture of women”; the BBFC rejected the film in its uncut form, but later passed a “much modified version” (Trevelyan 1973: 160).

Without endorsing Trevelyan’s condemnation of the film or his censorship of it, it is, as we have seen, necessary to treat social critique within women’s prison exploitation films cautiously. Further research is required on precisely what censor cuts and compulsory dubbing may have been imposed on those of Franco’s films which were released in Spain.² Moments of ‘insurgent’ dialogue in films like *Lovers of Devil’s Island* may, for example, have been lost through Spanish dubbing, but again this requires further investigation. Whatever the facts, *99 Women*, as distributed by Paramount, was shown in three Madrid cinemas, and three in Barcelona in its year of production.³ Interiors were shot in Rome and, taking advantage of the “freer mentality” of the city, Barcelona (Franco, in Gregory 2005 b).⁴ As was the case with

¹ The image of the despotic judge recalls the election posters for the corrupt politician Leprince in *Rifi en la ciudad*, with their slogan “Leprince es justicia”.

² Given the oppressive conditions in which it was released as *El proceso de la brujas* in Spain in 1970, the Sadeian scenes in *The Bloody Judge* might have had particular political resonances for audiences in that country. But any such possibility would need to be assessed in relation to the original Spanish theatrical release, an undertaking beyond the reach of this thesis. In light of the British version’s unstable mixture of romance, historical battle scenes and sporadic torture it is likely that censorship in Spain ensured the release of an even less ‘political’ version there.

³ Spanish Ministry of Culture film database: <http://www.mcu.es/cine/CE/BBDDPelículas>.

⁴ Franco has said that some striptease scenes (cut from many versions of the film) were shot in Barcelona because that city had a more “liberal” character than Madrid; he explains that the Barcelona police were simply more easily “bought off” (Gregory 2005 b). This revelation may

Lovers of Devil's Island, exteriors were shot on location in Alicante. *Variety* notes that the film concerns the “familiar story of the repressive women’s prison on a remote island (country left unnamed but likely Spain)” (Anon 1983c: 24). It is plausible then that even with the probable loss of ‘anti-authority’ dialogue the mise-en-scène and narrative of oppression might have proved politically suggestive for contemporary Spanish audiences.



Fig. 4.5: Spanish press-book for *99 Women*.

It is possible that political parallels, however facile, caused Spanish censors as much concern as sexual content. Franco recalls watching the film at a cinema in Madrid, horrified to find that it had been cut by 20 minutes, with “changed dialogue” and the removal of “the devastating last shots” (Franco 2004: 290).¹ The version that Franco had expected to see ends with an uprising by the inmates being successfully quashed by the regime, while the more liberal governor Leonie Carroll (Maria Schell) is forced by “the Ministry” to resign in order for “unremitting discipline” to return. Commenting that she suffers from “an excess of humanity”, Carroll exits the penitentiary watched by her newly suppressed former prisoners. Franco does not specify at what point this “devastating” denouement was cut, but remarks that the film had now become “incomprehensible, and was shit” (Franco 2004: 290).² According to Franco, he stormed, enraged, into the Ministry of Culture “convinced that the film was destroyed...with the

illuminate how Franco managed to film a nude torture scene for *Justine* (1968) beneath Gaudi’s mosaic seating area in Park Guell.

¹ My translation.

² My translation.

intention of cutting out the tiny possibility of my being a famous, rebellious, anti-establishment film director” (Franco 2004: 290). Franco was surprised to find that the secretary of the censor’s committee was Marcelo Arroita¹, who accused him of making “cheap pornography” that only just escaped being banned altogether (Franco 2004: 291). In contrast to most contemporary views of the film, Franco remarks that “*99 Women* wasn’t a ‘porno’ film at all, neither was it erotic, it was a serious and adult film” (Franco 2004: 290).²

In her analysis of the cultural specificity of violence in Spanish cinema of the 1970s Marsha Kinder makes clear that the representations she discusses are “*not* from cheap exploitation films but from works by highly respected auteurs which were partly financed by the ministry of culture” (Kinder 1993: 137. *Italics in original*). (One of her examples is *Pasquale Duarte* (1976), directed by Franco’s nephew, Ricardo Franco). Kinder appears surprised by the often sexualised violence she finds in some state-supported art-house films but recognises no possibility of traffic between ‘auteur’ and ‘exploitation’ cinemas (or indeed the possibility that exploitation may harbour ‘auteurs’ of its own). The implication is that ‘cheap exploitation films’ have nothing to say. It is certainly the case that by articulating potential critique through subgeneric tropes of persecuted women and their murderous captors, *Demoniac* remains, like the witch-torture film and perhaps like Sade’s most famous novels, provocatively suspended between politics and prurience. However, although exploitation cinema’s sensationalism might compromise or deeply submerge critique, it does not necessarily foreclose it. Kinder draws upon Luis Buñuel’s references to Sade as an example of transgression within “respected”, “auteur” Spanish cinema of the period. But the influence of Sade (or the myth of Sade) circulates in many discursive spaces across any putative high/low culture or art-house/exploitation cinema divide. By the time the Italian Pasolini presented the resolutely non-erotic sadism-fascism allegory of *Salò*, the uses of Sade for a degree of satire had long been recognised within European exploitation circuits. In making this connection, I do not imply congruity between Pasolini and Franco. But Kinder argues that cinematic violence can articulate a political discourse capable of exposing “the legacy of brutality and torture that lay hidden behind the surface beauty of Fascist and neo-Catholic aesthetics” (Kinder 1993: 138), and it is not outlandish to make similar claims for *Demoniac*. Its murky photography and grubby, starkly

¹ This “writer, poet, journalist and critic” seems to be the same Marcelo Arroita who performed in a number of Franco’s films, among them *Dr. Jeckyll’s Mistresses*, *Sadisterotica* and *Attack of the Robots*.

² In an interview conducted in 1986 Franco stated that *99 Women* was cut by “3 minutes”, suggesting that later exaggerations are part of Franco’s self-mythologisation (Balbo 1989: 8). The confusion is not cleared up by the presence of three different endings (available as ‘extras’ on the Blue Underground DVD of the film, 2005); in the ‘extended’ ending taken from a Spanish VHS tape, a doctor, first seen at the beginning of the film promising to file a report on the prison, returns with a group of officials, one of whom is played by Franco.

furnished sets reject the artful tracking shots and appealing gel lighting deployed for the captive-women imagery of Franco's films for Towers, and this may be seen as part of an attempt to keep the 'surface beauty' of 'Fascist aesthetics' at bay.

In interview Franco has recalled once being arrested in Spain for staging a play based on Kafka's *The Trial* (he does not supply further details but says he was held for three days for showing the "work of a communist", and had to explain to the police that neither he nor Kafka were communists). Whether or not the story is true (I am yet to find it repeated elsewhere), *The Trial* is a significant reference point because the novel constitutes an allegory of (frustrated) resistance to authority and a satire on law and judiciary, themes to which Franco returns in *Demoniac* and the 'women in prison' films. Franco implies that both his bumbling cops and despotic prison guards are responses to this "memory from the Franco period" (Collins 2007). Thus although the presence of Sadeianism in Franco's films does not comprise a fully cogent or persuasive contestation, contestation is not absent. Kinder notes that Spain's censorship of cinematic sex, violence, blasphemy and politics had the result of making the representation of "eroticized violence" an effective vehicle for "anti-Francoist opposition to speak a political discourse" (Kinder 1993: 166). There is a danger of supposing that censorship of a text proves that text to be subversive. But the "eroticized violence" of *Demoniac* amounts to more than just a desire to shock or disgust the audience. The influence of Franco's loose association with the tradition of allegorically 'disguised' opposition in Spanish popular cinema may be apparent in the fact that Vogel's psychopathic deeds are quite clearly signalled as analogous to totalitarian tyranny. As in *Witchfinder General*, the implication is that the purifying agent of righteousness is more perverse than his victims.

Although Robin Wood's (1985) analysis of the ideology of horror is perhaps too schematic, it serves as a reminder that the representation of transgression, in the form of monsters and other threats, is not inherently subversive. Horror's concern with otherness does not necessarily undermine the forces of reaction. Employing the Freudian notion of horror as a symbolic return of the repressed, Wood sees the genre's threats as scapegoats for the unacceptable, or what Kristeva (1982) would term the abject parts of the social 'self', monstrous otherness defining the rightness of "normality" through the projection of difference. In possession films, for example, the figure of the exorcist is often portrayed, as in Friedkin's film, as suffering a crisis of belief which is overcome as he triumphs over the Devil. The Spanish *Exorcismo* (León Klimovsky, 1975) fuses possession and exorcism themes with the 'revenge on youth' narrative: a possessed young woman stands for wayward, promiscuous youth (evil) and Paul Naschy's victorious Catholic priest for law, order and decency (good). Seen against the context of Spain during the transition to democracy, such a Manichean world view appears reactionary in

Wood's terms. *Demoniac*'s triumphant exorcist, like the Christian vampire hunter, takes on added ideological baggage when seen in relation to the official discourse of National-Catholicism.

Radical or progressive horror films are, for Wood, those which reverse the relationship between normativity and monstrosity, for example by locating threat within and not outside of the family and the capitalist/patriarchal system. Franco's *Un silencio de tumba* (1972) provides an interesting case study in horror's ideology of the family. A group of film industry 'types' stay for the weekend at Valerie's (Montserrat Prous) island home, where she lives with her small family and staff. Soon after the guests arrive her four-year-old son is kidnapped and possibly killed (there is a pool of blood in his cot); one by one the guests are murdered too. The already emotionally unstable Valerie appears at first to be a suspect. However, the mystery is solved, one of the 'outsiders' fortunately proves to be the killer, the boy is found alive and well and the family are reunited in the denouement. The restoration of order here appears to support Wood's view that horror constructs, confronts and contains 'threats' in order to support the hegemonic institutions of 'normality'. That the film was wholly Spanish financed (produced by Franco's own short-lived company, Manacoa P.C) in 1972 may bolster the sense of the film's conservatism. Despite Tohill and Tombs' view that the film is "low grade and of little interest" (Tohill and Tombs 1995: 120), there are signs of excess and resistance: the isolated family home is represented as cramped and claustrophobic (Valerie's mental fragility seems connected to this, meaning that the 'happy' ending is not fully convincing). And the theme of the missing child may possibly have chimed with stories of how children were taken from left wing families and placed in orphanages in the early years of the Francoist dictatorship.¹

Through the figure of Vogel *Demoniac* proposes that the institutions of normativity themselves, and not their repressed others, are agents of terror, thereby inverting what Wood sees as the genre's usual ideological equation. Reeves' *Witchfinder General* had sought to remind viewers that Matthew Hopkins belonged to, and was a product of, a particular milieu in a specific time and place, and stressed the collective nature of the witch-hunter's deeds (Halligan 2003: 176). Whereas Franco's villains often act under a controlling agent's will, either through some sort mind-control device or a more existential dependence, Vogel acts on his own volition. But *Demoniac* also sporadically attempts to contextualise Vogel's deeds through repeated shots of Notre Dame Cathedral, and in his condensation of priest, witch-hunter, vampirologist and bloody judge Vogel clearly represents the state apparatuses of Church and censor, with Franco's

¹ The topic of children orphaned by the civil war and mothers who "search for, mourn and avenge their lost boys" (Delgado 2008) is explicitly revisited in *The Orphanage* (*El Orfanato*, J.A Bayona, 2007) (Derry 2009: 329).

images of incarceration and torture functioning within a commentary on oppressive social institutions.

However, *Demoniac*'s political critique may be blunted by its resort to the 'escaped lunatic' convention and its presentation of Vogel's actions as those of a dysfunctional loner. Halberstam argues that post-Freudian gothic narratives tend to displace ideological issues onto psycho-sexual ones, and in many respects *Demoniac* follows suit by embodying crime "within a specifically deviant form - the monster" (Halberstam 1995: 2). Particularly in its incarnation as *The Sadist of Notre Dame*, the film undermines socio-historical specificity by stressing the private nature of Vogel's crusade against the modern world and its wanton women, as promised with advertising slogans such as "the obsession of a sadistic rapist of women in a diabolical succession of sex and blood".¹ As a feature-length extension of Memmet, the psychotic hotel porter played by Franco in *Vampyros Lesbos*², Vogel's very abnormality – and he is after all, an *ex-priest* – can be seen as reactionary in Wood's terms. By presenting Vogel through the discourse of insanity, the film runs the risk of making the personification otherness "a caricature that makes what it represents less threatening to the viewer" (Grant 1991: 124).

Demoniac's attack on state patriarchal authority as a site of institutional oppression is, as in the 'women in prison' and witch-hunt subgenres, overwhelmed by its exhibition of 'aberrant' sexuality and sadomasochistic fantasy. Steve Chibnall argues in relation to the films of Pete Walker that the challenge to censorship posed by nudity and gore "could be regarded as culturally transgressive, and even politically progressive, by spectators who identified with ideas and lifestyles of the counter-culture" (Chibnall 1997:87). Chibnall appears to take for granted that transgression is intrinsically radical, but *Demoniac* shows that, as in so many of Franco's fantasies of otherness, it is double-edged. For all that Franco's denunciation of censorship and Catholicism can be read as oppositional, *Demoniac*'s investments in the 'deviance' of the sexual underground are hardly affirmative. Mediating its horror through Vogel's self-righteously outraged curiosity, *Demoniac* typifies exploitation cinema's combination of fascination and dread where sexual 'aberration' is concerned. This fearful fantasising is part of the gothicism of Franco's approach to cinematic sex, which simultaneously presents 'perverse' sexual desire as a force which threatens social norms and constructs "deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known" (Halberstam 1995: 2). In *Demoniac* everything is in effect grotesque; Vogel and the 'libertines' he wishes to destroy are equally perverse. Part of the ideological tension of the film therefore resides in the

¹ Spanish press-book. My translation.

² Franco has a very similar role in *Virgin among the Living Dead* (1971).

fact that Vogel's perspective on the deeds he seeks to suppress is shown as monstrously deformed.

Kinder illustrates the difference between exploitation and art cinema through reference to *Matador* (Pedro Almodóvar, 1986), in which "a former bullfighter, with a VCR positioned between his legs, masturbates to images of women being impaled, drowned and decapitated" (Kinder 1993: 137). The decapitation scene is from Franco's *Bloody Moon* (1980). Kinder's point is that Almodóvar frames the images in a suitably mediated fashion which enables them to be read as part of a reflexive comment on the sexualised representation of violence. We may infer from Kinder that exploitation cinema is incapable of commentative distancing; market driven sensationalism is assumed to preclude any possibility of reflexivity, opposition or critique. Perhaps more than any other film discussed in this thesis, *Demoniac* demonstrates that this is not the case; but it also shows that exploitation cinema's reflexive critique is rarely unambiguous.

If anyone was in 1974 led by the title of *Exorcisme* to expect a confrontation with Satan in the mould of Friedkin's blockbuster, they are likely to have been disappointed, and this failure of genre delivery may help account for its poor market performance. Not only does Franco dispense with the Devil – and perhaps with the concept of evil – but he depicts its representative of faith in terms so far from heroic that the film could be read as a satire on the genre's Satanic/exorcist conventions. The film's on-stage 'black mass' sequences effectively parody the 'Satanic rites' sequences seen in films like *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968) or *To the Devil a Daughter* (Peter Sykes 1976). Following one gruesome staged sacrifice, the Count discloses to the (diegetic as well as actual) audience that the knife employed was a false, theatrical one, while the 'dead' performer takes a bow and receives a round of applause. As part of the film's debunking strategy, this 'revealing of the hand'¹ encapsulates *Demoniac*'s meta-gothic compendium of reflexive devices, many of which Franco had used elsewhere. A similar revelation of a retractable dagger had been used as early as *Vamiresas 1930* (1961), a film with an equally strong interest in staging. Versions of *Demoniac*'s Sadeian ceremonies are also seen *Eugenie...The Story of her Journey into Perversion* and *Succubus*, among many others. *Demoniac* also reprises the play of real versus fictional sexual performance in *Vampyros Lesbos*: having arranged "a real black mass", Romay and Swinn "rehearse" in bed, putting on "our own show" and discussing the performance as part of their 'real' sex game.

Demoniac uses such metafictional devices as sources of enjoyment – often accompanying the film's sense of repugnance – which interrupt and complicate rather than bar 'inscription' into a sadistic look. Many of Franco's films include shots of diegetic spectators as alibis for or

¹ The same device is used in the giallo *Tenebrae* (Dario Argento, 1982).

displacements of the assumed real world viewer. In *Demoniac*, as in *Vampyros Lesbos*, stage shows are shown through a mixture of medium and long shots (roughly from the vantage point of an audience member) and impossible close-ups, before cutting to a diegetic audience which often looks bored or uninterested. More than simply a matter of exposing cinematic artifice or suspending disbelief, these textual viewers and spectators emblemise fantasy cinema's fascinated curiosity with images of 'otherness'. Vogel constantly spies on 'jet-setters' and 'wild scenes' of the type that Jimmy guiltily wished to join in *Venus in Furs*: both men stare with non-participatory fascination at the 'transgressive' scenes which repel them. As with Jimmy's spying on the sadomasochistic orgy and Vogel's voyeuristic watching of 'depraved' acts, Franco's audience shots emphasise the distance between the on-screen (and by implication the real) viewer and the objects of their fantasy. 'Depraved' sequences are frequently intercut with close ups of Vogel's transfixed face. One lesbian sex scene, for example, is framed, after the fashion of *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954), from the 'ideal' point of view of the scopophiliac in an opposite window. Any potential spectatorial primary identification with 'the gaze' is, then, filtered through a 'perverse' character who may represent the State, the filmmaker, or the viewer.¹ Such moments tend to waver between reflexively criticising the viewer's fantasmatic investments and offering an alibi for them.

However these displacements and decentrings of looking are interpreted, they are indicative of the film's self-conscious commentary on the genre's projection of 'perversity'. By representing the dynamics of abjection, transgression and fascination through the figure of Vogel and his ceremonial murders, *Demoniac* turns a self-critical spotlight on exploitation cinema's fascination with the female as object of threat and attraction. But the ambivalence of transgression is such that Franco also offers little to counter Vogel's disgust, simply adding the ex-priest to the film's catalogue of 'perverts'.

The Dystopian Orgy

While Franco's films are routinely described as Sadeian, they are also about Sadeian characters and their Sadeian beliefs. In short they are about Sadeianism. In Franco's Sade adaptations Christopher Lee, Paul Müller, Jack Taylor and others play characters who fancy themselves Sadeians of an intellectual and decorous kind. They espouse Sade's libertine philosophy, but Franco maintains an ironic distance from the philosophy by making it clear that the debauchee's

¹ The dialogue contains some similarly self-reflective humour. In a comment on the 'independent' sexploitation industry, Franval says to Anna, "talent? What matters to me is the box office", and remarks to Vogel "the readers eat up these sadomasochistic stories of yours". Reflexive portrayals of the sex-film business are not unusual, and go far beyond *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960). See for example the less than flattering representation of pornographic film-makers in *Eskimo Nell* (Martin Campbell, 1975) and *Cool It Carol* (Pete Walker, 1970).

sexual ‘freedom’ is entirely mediated through their blind devotion to texts. In *Eugenie, the Story of her Journey into Perversion*, Lee intones, “let us again turn to the words of Sade himself...and be guided by pleasure only”. Lilledhal reads Sade at Rohm’s island home, and Rohm and Taylor are part of a clique of Sade cultists; as Jack Taylor says, “no modern home is complete without the works of the marquis...For the young and inexperienced there is no better guide to life”. Franco’s Sade-based films often appear to take the mystique of transgression less seriously than do Franco’s champions. Sade created philosophical justifications for libertinage; *Demoniac* simultaneously trades on and deflates the Sadeian activities and beliefs it represents.

Given that many of Franco’s films seem to agree with Sade, Freud and surrealism on the ubiquity of desire, we might expect to find in them levels of Bataille-like excess and expenditure capable of evading power and control. The ‘adult’ European sex film (of German, Italian, Scandinavian and especially French origin) was often praised in the 1970s via a discourse of sexual liberty that might appear to apply to Franco. One contributor to Thomas R. Atkins’ anthology *Sexuality in the Movies* (1975), for example, congratulated European cinema for its critique of “repressed sexuality and a drive for more liberated relationships as an emblem of a similar political quest” (Keyser 1975: 181). Dusan Makavejev’s ode to Wilhelm Reich, *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (1971) was similarly commended as a call for “freedom and a liberated sexuality” (Keyser 1975: 186). But when Sade is invoked in Franco’s films it is not only in the service of the liberatory discourse of what Foucault (1978) called the “repressive hypothesis”, but in terms of quite unrelenting pessimism.

Sade’s libertines argue in their disquisitions that sexual gratification is an expression of sovereignty achievable only at the cost of the subjectivity of the other. Jouissance, if it is attained at all, is always at another’s expense and, as in Franco’s ‘women in prison’ and witch-torture films, can only be achieved through (not against) the ordering forces of disciplinary reason (Frappier-Mazur 1996). They assert that only by the transcendence of all social (and, as they see it, therefore false or unnatural) norms can they gain an authentically “divine” form of intoxicated power capable of living according to nature’s laws and rivalling the false divinity of religion (Bataille 1985; Heumakers 1989). As Franco’s Radeck and Dolmancé pronounce, those who are not sexually free are to be despised; virtue is a sign of weakness rather than strength. The virtuous exist only for the exploitation of libertines or to be trained in the rewards of crime. Many of Franco’s monsters and libertines take a similarly instrumental view of their victim’s bodies. But the fate of Sadeian desire is to never be satisfied. Each potentially gratified desire leads to greater excess, each new transgression inevitably pales, and the libertine’s escalating demands and multiplying perversions become increasingly improbable (Heumakers 1989). Despite their best efforts and prolific ejaculations, Sade’s libertines never find ecstasy; indeed, pleasure in the “hedonist or psychological sense” is barely the point of Sade, since the novels

concern pain and disgust and their hero/monsters usually experience ejaculation as an excruciating, self-destructive “experience of the void” (Airaksinen 1991: 179). To this extent their sadism is also experienced as masochistic. Likewise, in Franco’s morbid sex films of the 1970s, orgiastic bliss is rare. Sex implies no communication between isolated and dejected protagonists. Desire is a destructive compulsion, more often than not leading to death.

The discourse of sexual modernity in many of these films – in particular those made for French producers like Robert de Nesle – present despondency and cruelty as part of eroticism. This may be part of an attempt by Franco to draw attention to the ‘seriousness’ of his films’ eroticism, and this apparent seriousness can be seen in relation to the construction of a certain ‘Frenchness’ in European sex cinema of the period. I am not claiming that these films are simply ‘French’. But his position as an exploitation filmmaker working in that country may have required him to negotiate French cinema’s reputation as market leader in European erotica. Hawkins and other critics hail Franco’s intertextuality as a mark of his erudition; the references to Sade can correspondingly be seen as part of his films’ wearing of their cultural capital on their sleeves. Hackneyed signifiers of elite culture are often deployed in the films’ attempts to convey the milieu of their Sadeian libertines. In *Eugenie de Sade*, *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle* and many others the erotic misadventures of the upper classes take place in the privileged spaces of châteaux and country houses. Tuxedos and cocktail dresses are worn, pianos are played and oil paintings hang on the walls. As if to underline the literary pretensions, sex sometimes takes place in book-lined studies. In *Eugenie* and *Erotismo* the exclusive space of the high class sexual adventurer becomes a modernist beach-side house and their epicurean debauches are surrounded by ‘space age’ furniture. As in Franco’s allusions to Sade, the connotators of ‘high culture’ seem intended to lend an aura of respectability to the disreputable sex: examples include the baroque paintings behind the credits in *Succubus* and the name-checks in the same film’s stream-of-consciousness dialogue (“Godard ... Charlie Mingus ... *Justine*”; “Stockhausen ... Calder ... Buñuel”, and so on).

How far Franco’s tongue was embedded in his cheek is difficult to assess, but the particular forms that transgressivity takes in these films can be said to appeal, despite the fearsomeness of Sade in many quarters, to ‘respectable’ notions of ‘adult’ cinema. Solemn psycho-sexual melodramas had been a mainstay of the European, and especially the French, exploitation circuit for some time. Shots of Vogel wandering the streets of the French capital in his overcoat are also liable to have reminded contemporary viewers of Marlon Brando disconsolately stalking Maria Schneider in *Last Tango in Paris*. The popularity of Bertolucci’s film is illustrated by the fact that, as John Hopewell notes, “thousands of frustrated [Spanish] film enthusiasts hopped the French border to see the latest sex or political films. In an article entitled ‘the Blue Pilgrims’, *Time* magazine marvelled that in 1973 110,000 people had seen *Last Tango*

in Perpignan when its population was only 100,000” (Hopewell 1996: 81). Bertolucci’s film both epitomised and exerted an influence on the ‘serious’ European sex film of the 1970s, making heavy weather of its literary references through scenes of Bataille-inspired sexual experimentation which presented a “stylized dance of life and death” (Williams 2008: 113).

Krzywinska attempts to maintain a firm division between “permissive” European exploitation cinema and Bertolucci’s film (Krzywinska 2006: 116).¹ But the cultural flows may be more complex. In seeming to side with the *Last Tango* approach to eroticism, sombre sex dramas like *Demoniac* and *Tender and Perverse Emmanuelle* may have set out to rebut the soft-focus amorous escapades of the *Emmanuelle* cycle and the majority of its many imitators. Williams argues that *Last Tango* represented European cinema’s more sophisticated advance on what she describes as Hollywood’s romanticised approach to sex and hardcore pornography’s obsession with visible orgasm. For Williams the tradition of the ‘grown up’, ‘literate’ European sex film begins with the *nouvelle vague* and with Buñuel’s *Belle de Jour* (1967) (Williams 2008: 116). For Keyser, *Last Tango* “led European filmmakers into even bleaker visions of dominance and submission as the key elements in human sexuality”, a tradition that for him had begun with *Last year at Marienbad* and *Hiroshima mon Amour* (Keyser 1975: 180), key examples of the alienated and detached protagonist of European art cinema with which Franco was certainly familiar.² Unlike *Belle de Jour*, *Last Tango* insisted on equating seriousness with portentous disaffection. Williams asserts that in *Last Tango*, “for the first time in movies ... complex emotional relations of ecstasy, alienation, and humiliation are enacted in the performance of the sex act itself” (Williams 2008: 117). We might quibble with Williams’ sense of ‘firstness’ and we might debate the merits of Bertolucci’s lumbering sexistism, but the film’s influence was felt in the European ‘blue’ cinema of which Franco’s films of the decade partook.

Williams observes that *Last Tango* was indebted to Bataille’s vision of non-reproductive eroticism as an ecstatic surplus in defiance of instrumentality, reason and law, a “systematic transgression of the sexual taboos of bourgeois life” (Williams 2008: 115). Williams echoes Susan Sontag’s 1967 essay “The Pornographic Imagination” by suggesting that these qualities make *Last Tango* a work of erotic modern art, but its fascination with ideas of transgression and excess may make it just as close to the exploitation field. Like Bertolucci, but with more reflexivity, Franco trades on the exacerbated visions of eroticism described by Sontag. Concerned mainly with Bataille’s *Story of the Eye* (1928) and Pauline Réage’s *The Story of O* (1954), Sontag’s essay typifies the late-1960s view of sexual modernity that Williams finds in *Last Tango*. For Sontag, serious pornography was that which exposed the artist’s extreme state

¹ This argument is discussed in chapter 1.

² See the discussion of Franco’s references to Resnais in *Venus in Furs* in Chapter 2.

of consciousness; similar notions of art as self-confession may have given intellectual weight to Franco's partly economically-driven decision to play Vogel himself.

Whatever their wide-ranging influences and interventions, Franco's morbid sex dramas offer "pornotopian" fantasy only in as much as they are populated by frustrated/'nymphomaniac' women who moonlight as strippers and/or prostitutes¹ and in that sex can therefore happen suddenly, anywhere (Williams 2008: 142). But many of Franco's more explicit sex-centred films have an awkward relationship with 'hardcore'. Williams notes that the deportment of performers' bodies, camera-work and lighting in hardcore pornography in the wake of *Deep Throat* are orchestrated so as to allow a "view" for which we are supposed to be "grateful" (Williams 2008: 129). Seldom does Franco make us thankful for the view. The close-ups of his penetrating penis, tongue and fingers in *Sexorcismes* provide rudimentary hypervisibility but seem contrived, in line with the film's parading of the auteur's self-loathing, to look as unsavoury as possible. If we accept Williams' definition of pornography as "the display of graphic sex for purposes of arousal" (Williams 2008: 132), Franco's primitive 'meat shots' could be seen only as bad or failed pornography in much the same way as many of his other films could be seen as bad or failed horror.

The film's sense of wretchedness, however, is so distinct from the discourse of sexual euphoria in films like *Emmanuelle* and its many sequels and imitations that it can be described as anti-erotic. Hence the orgy over which *Demoniac*'s Count presides (like Ahmed in *Venus* and Dolmancé in *Eugenie: The Story of her Journey into Perversion*, he organises and supervises, but does not directly participate) is a miserable affair. Despite its relatively ambitious aerial lensing, its unenthusiastically writhing bodies could hardly be less arousing, while a monotonously strummed electric guitar on the soundtrack lends the action a sombre, even sinister air. In an apparent rebuttal of both the pornotopian myth of sexual freedom and the Sadeian appeal to orgiastic excess, one participant in the orgy later tells his wife that he dislikes seeing her make love to "just about anything" and no longer wants them to attend the Count's "stupid parties". Meanwhile the Count finds erotic fulfilment, not in the "stupid parties", but by being verbally and physically humiliated by his partner: the Sadeian exercise of libidinal power is less gratifying to this libertine than pathetic submission.²

Franco's morose and often fairly repellent sex-based films of the period also coincide with, and seem to contest, the more comedic or farcical approaches to sex in German, French, British,

¹ See Appendix: Table of Concordances.

² In *Sexorcismes* this sequence is intercut with the orgy scene but they are separated in *Demoniac*. Franco has expressed hatred for this scene, describing it as "very old fashioned" and coy in its obstruction of the participants' genitals.

Italian and Spanish popular cinema of the early 1970s. According to Hopewell the “sexy Spanish comedy” was one of the most popular genres in the country at the time, taking advantage of some relaxation of censorship and the consequent rise of the *destape* film.¹ According to Hopewell, official censorship codes at this time nevertheless made it impossible to represent unredeemed extra-marital sex. “All roads lead to the altar” in the subgenre as oversexed male characters discover the joys of “playing at home” (Hopewell 1986: 81). In this context it is not difficult to see how Franco’s bleak revision of the supposedly Sadeian carnivalesque could be read as implicitly critical: there are precious few joys at home or away, and “the altar” in *Demoniac* is a site of oppression.

Hopewell observes that Spanish sex comedies suggested that “any Iberian male worth his salt is uncommonly horny” (Hopewell 1986: 81). Even Franco’s horniest male protagonists cannot match up to Sadeian myths of phallic prowess. Unlike most hardcore pornography of the time, and unlike Sade’s fiction, penetration and ejaculation, if achieved at all, are seldom a transport of delight. *Maciste and the Gluttons* (1973), for instance, uses the classic erotic framing device of following the daydreams of a masturbating woman as she reads a book (in this case ‘sword and sandal’ fantasy fiction), the idea being that we may enter her inner-most fantasies. Sex with men in the real world is so profoundly unsatisfying to her that rather than visions of ecstasy constructed through close-ups of the woman’s orgasmic face, Franco portrays sex as an act of desperation climaxing with the woman in tears.² One of Franco’s most interesting examples of grotesque self-portraiture occurs in *Justine* (1979). In a vivid synthesis of masochistic voyeurism, narcissism and impotence, Franco – playing a client of the prostitute Justine (Lina Romay) – is seen on a bed reading a French magazine called *Cinema*. The illustrated cover story concerns Franco’s film *Lorna the Exorcist* (1974). Franco lovingly caresses the magazine, but hides it under his pillow when Romay arrives. She obliges her client’s preference for non-penetrative, voyeuristic/fetishistic sex by providing him with a show of her underwear. Presumably indulging the fantasy that prostitutes normally enjoy their work, Justine is left sexually frustrated by the encounter; she cries out for a man who can satisfy her, desultorily fellates Franco then leaves him alone to caress his magazine. Thus Franco’s films make an issue of pleasure and the male’s inability to provide it.³

¹ *Destape* is the term given to ‘topless’ Spanish films of the early 1970s, featuring a certain amount of nudity these preceded the death of General Franco in 1975 and the official abolition of censorship in 1977, from which emerged the ‘S’ certificate film (see Kowalsky 2004, and Monterde, 1993).

² Williams points out that the quest for the female orgasm was a “typical product of the 1960s sexual revolution”, which, while ideologically problematic, at least considered sexual pleasure as important to women’s “self-fulfilment” (Williams 2008: 131).

³ Although it is not my intention to argue that Franco’s potential critique of dominant forms of masculinity make ‘sense’ only in relation to a Spanish context, the enfeebled and perverse men

These self-reflective moments do not, in and of themselves, signal political engagement, and they are unlikely to awaken the viewer's revolutionary consciousness. Reflexivity does not constitute irrefutable evidence of oppositionality. Like intertextuality, reflexive devices are a familiar part of signifying practices across many sites of cultural production; 'art' and/or 'avant-garde' practices can no more claim ownership of them than can any other cultural field. In contradistinction to many 'Brechtian' formulations, I would point out that reflexivity does not always block pleasure,¹ but would argue that Franco's use of reflexive devices often interrupts and complicates the 'enjoyable' consumption of sadistic spectacle. In films like *Demoniac* or in Franco's contributions to the 'women in prison' subgenre, metafictional techniques and textual excesses may offer forms of enjoyment that sit alongside, overlay or replace those of identificatory investment in the attractions of transgressive fantasy or sadistic display.

Much as Kinder dismisses the reflexive possibilities of exploitation cinema, so Grant argues that viewers of the cult film "nowhere see themselves" (Grant 1991:135). Kristevan accounts of abjection in the horror film similarly assume that male protagonists stand in for a successfully addressed male spectator who is unself-consciously inscribed within the film's 'abjecting' gaze at the female other (Creed 1986, 1993). Creed has more recently argued that contemporary Jack the Ripper films question 'masculine' qualities of control and rationality and has suggested that male monsters in horror films undermine the idea of maleness as a "coherent, stable, civilised" identity (Creed 2005: 201). This chapter has used *Demoniac* as an example of how both spectatorial positioning and the ideological processes of demonization can be presented in self-referential and even interrogative terms. In typically ambivalent and contradictory fashion, *Demoniac* develops the reflexive elements of the subgenres discussed throughout this thesis by thematising Vogel's 'othering' processes and pathologising the very heteronormative male fantasies and desires that Franco's films help to define and exploit. As all of the films discussed in this thesis illustrate, many of Franco's men are abject too. And the excessive behaviour of his cast of mad scientists, doctors, judges and libertines often serves to parody the pathological measures by which dominant notions of masculinity might shore themselves up; in the process Franco's gothic exploitation films express incredulity towards 'adult' cinema's – and therefore their own – rhetoric of ecstasy and transgression.

in his sex dramas of the 1970s may have been readable as rejections of what Hopewell refers to as "the demand on the Spanish male to be *macho*" (Hopewell 1986: 31). Willis (2003) makes a similar point regarding the critique of masculinity in Aranda's female vampire film *The Blood Spattered Bride*.

¹ For more on reflexivity as a source of pleasure in the horror film see for example Telotte (1987) Sconce (1993), Willis (2002).

Conclusion

The body of work on exploitation films, along with the study of many formerly 'low' genres, has helped to expand the horizons of popular cinema studies by showing that disposable, down-at-heel and disreputable forms can be aesthetically and politically engaging. My reading of a small number of Jess Franco's films has grown out of and benefited from much of this work, but I have questioned the assumption that Franco and his 'Eurotrash' field radically breach all prohibitions or that their 'bad taste' subverts all the orthodoxies of film criticism. It is perhaps understandable that academic fans and collectors might try to validate their tastes by claiming that Franco's representations of perverse, erotomaniacal and monstrous desires are intrinsically transgressive. I cannot claim that my own buying and viewing habits, or indeed this thesis, exist on an elevated plane utterly immune to such special pleading. But rather than take transgression as a self-evident and universal value, as some writings on 'cult' exploitation cinema do, I have tried to demonstrate that discussion of its uses and resonances should be sensitive to textual and contextual particularities; discussion of transgressivity in the field should also be sensitive to the possibility that its valences can be at least as reactionary as subversive.

Exploitation cinema can be condemned as a site of degraded and derivative spectacle or ideological inscription. It can be treasured as a privileged space for the creativity of maverick individuals. It can be exalted as a site for the subversion of dominant representational codes and the undermining of normativity. And it can be prized as an area of 'badfilm' from which to launch grenades against the bourgeois citadels of good taste. None of these positions adequately describes the complexity of the cultural cross-currents in which Franco and his films are located: each position implies a static model in which a typecast mainstream cinema remains as much the enemy as stereotyped middlebrow taste. While this thesis has not been chiefly concerned with the construction and management of 'cult' reputations, Franco's career demonstrates how exploitation films can accrue forms of cultural capital and prestige unavailable to them during their original theatrical runs. This process of 'cultification' implies the mobility of value and meaning, yet the celebration of exploitation cinema's alterity and difference too often reproduces an inflexible, binary account of cultural activity. The result is that although exploitation cinema studies branch out from the study of popular genre films, they also break away from the popular and re-entrench their object in an elite taste formation. Both Hawkins and Mendik, for example, claim to situate Franco in a liminal space between so-called mass and high cultures, but much of their analyses pitch difficult (actively engaged with) against easy (passively consumed) films; they thereby invert rather than deconstruct static hierarchies of taste.

Franco's eclectic films of the 1960s and 1970s operate within a more multifarious network of cultural resources than is allowed by such two-tier models of cultural location. Several of them draw, sometimes in an admittedly desultory fashion, on 'art film' as well as 'popular' genre sources. This is not a matter of low budget cinema simply leeching off the dominant; nor do I present the exploitation field as a matchless site for the appropriation and reinscription of signs that are merely univalent and immobile in 'mainstream' cinema. Rather than being only parasitic, Franco's films involve sometimes playful approaches to genre codes and conventions; but that is because genre codes and conventions are already as likely to be ludic as they are to be rigid, and not because the 'freedom' of exploitation cinema allows a uniquely experimental approach to them. Franco's attempts to jump on exploitation bandwagons from Sadesploitation to 'women in prison' to zombie films can be said to participate in how ideas and themes circulate in *all* of cinema, which is to say that exploitation may be a typical rather than unusual instance of the general practices of 'pastiche culture'. Hence chapters 1 and 3 respectively saw how *The Awful Dr Orlof* and *Vampyros Lesbos* negotiated contemporary trends in international gothic cinema; chapter 2 discussed how *Venus in Furs* borrowed from and made reference to visual constructions of the uncanny and fantastic that flowed across, without simply eradicating, the institutional borders of European and North American, 'high' and 'low', 'mainstream' and 'alternative', 'art' and 'popular' cinemas. The reading of *Demoniac* in chapter 4 considered how Franco's references to the (idea of) the Marquis de Sade were mediated and shaped by conflicted discourses of Sadeianism; Franco's films were seen to both participate in and contest the notion of the Sadeain as it circulated in the heterogeneous, intertextual spaces of 'sexual revolution' culture. This thesis has, then, seen Franco's exploitation field as a multiply-determined, fluid site of operations rather than a generic essence.

I have assumed throughout that if Franco's films are worth writing about, this ought to be demonstrable through reasonably close attention to the films themselves. I have made this assumption not out of a belief that meanings are textually immanent, but in order to counter the vagueness and generalisation too often found in writings on 'cult' cinema. Genre essentialism can be loosened through textual analysis, as my readings of *The Awful Dr Orlof* and *Venus in Furs* in particular tried to show. It is possible to focus on textuality without ignoring context, and without presenting context merely as a colourful backdrop to text. I have sought to demonstrate that any potential meanings and pleasures - or for that matter unpleasures - in Franco's films are shaped within the dynamic interaction of the material and ideological conditions of exploitation cinema, the genre codes upon which the field draws, and Franco's position as a historically situated practitioner within that field. Partly as a result of their sometimes careless assembly, and partly as a result of their cavalier way with genre traditions,

meanings in Franco's films are fugitive and ideological positions resist being pinned down. Nevertheless I have argued, in place of the mythology of transgression and alterity, that elements of contestation and critique can be found. Quite close reading also enables attention to some of the ambiguities and contradictions of Franco's representation of gothic subjectivities, while getting inside some of the intricacies of his film's visual address. If there is an implied formalism here, its point has been to describe how the complexities of visuality exceed and problematise the reductive certainties of conventional gaze theory.

The market-driven forms of sensationalism frequently offered by Franco's films are in many ways true to exploitation cinema's "playing on the retrograde, sadistic/voyeuristic fantasies" of heteronormative male viewers (Cook 1985: 368). Yet this is not all they do. Some feminist readings of the female vampire films discussed in chapter 3 or of the 'women in prison' films discussed in chapter 4 reify a male imaginary which is universally gratified by having its deep-seated anxieties displaced onto images of sadistic fetishism. On these accounts the intended viewer is assumed to be 'successfully' and fully inscribed into the text through the process of primary identification with a uniform male gaze. But I have argued that the films discussed in this thesis filter the genre conventions of gothic and fantastic cinema through an eccentric optical imagination and narrative style which may put the dominant fictions of normative or hegemonic male subjectivity into play. Although there is no clear distinction between Franco films that are comfortably 'in' genre and those that play with or comment upon genre conventions, Franco has various methods for displaying self-consciousness around cultural codes. These include the juxtaposition of different taste discourses - as seen in *Venus in Furs*' passing references to Resnais, Hitchcock and Sacher-Masoch - and tonal registers, as in *Vampyros Lesbos*' shots of the grinning dildo-clown. Apparent stabs at lyricism or sublimity are frequently undermined by banal and jarring elements. Franco's self-conscious methods also include the use of on-stage 'numbers', and shots of their diegetic audiences, to foreground the role of spectacular display and gendered erotic address: since Franco's on-screen audiences often look more bored or impassive than engrossed in the performance, this device reflects ironically on the films' staging of erotic attractions. On a more stylistic level, Franco's reflexive techniques include the use of zoom lenses, colour filters, blurs and obstructed views which constitute a system of excess simultaneously abstracting and dramatising the acts of looking and being shown. Franco often performs 'perverse' and self-ridiculing authorial identity through grotesque, abject or absurd cameos; *Demoniac* extends this to the point of reverse hubris in a film which, in however compromised and contradictory a fashion, demonises normativity and draws attention to the processes of projection involved in 'transgressive' fantasies of otherness.

Many of the critical aspects of *Demoniac* operate through its negotiation of Sadeian cinema, but I have argued that this negotiation is also part of the “structural doublethink of cult movies” (Grant 1991:124). The several versions of *Demoniac* combined disgust at sexual difference with incredulity towards pornography and sexploitation’s mythology of sexual euphoria. Sexual disgust might be seen by critics like Robin Wood only as repressive, but as it is played out in the text it appears both “transgressive *and* recuperative” (Grant 1991:124). In a mockery of Sadeianism that is conveyed partly through the representation of sexual disappointment and impotence, films like *Demoniac* appear sceptical about the ‘repressive hypothesis’ of contemporary counter-cultural sexual politics: while in some respects benefiting from relaxations in censorship and capitalising on the mystique of sexual freedom, they problematise the mythology of sexual liberation by insisting, along with certain aspects of Sade, Foucault, Masters and Johnson and (perhaps perversely) anti-pornography feminism, that power is everywhere and not least in the bedroom. Rather than exceeding ideology, as the more romanticised accounts of exploitation cinema suppose, all forms of ‘pleasure’ are in many of Franco’s films instruments rather than subversions of ideology and control. Valid as it may be to describe the erotic nihilism of these films as Sadeian, it is not the version of Sadeianism preferred by neo-surrealist accounts of exploitation cinema, in which all transgression is tantamount to transcendent freedom or the revolutionary overthrowing of the symbolic order.

The contradictory economy of transgression is such that fascination with the other both supports and implies an attack on the norm. Hence Barbara Creed notes that “the threat that the monster offers is ultimately designed to recuperate or reinforce the symbolic” but also that the male monster arouses “dread and horror in order to raise questions about the symbolic order” (Creed 20005: xix). Thus transgressive fantasy and fascination can both demonise and eroticise the ‘other’, but it can also destabilise the ‘self’. The fascination with otherness in many of Franco’s sex-horror films of the 1960s and 1970s constitutes an ambivalent exploration of ‘aberrant’ fantasies and desires. The images of incarceration and subjection discussed in chapter 4 can, for example, be said to fetishise – more than subvert or confront – discipline, oppression and power. But the sadistic and masochistic scenarios as well as the carceral atmosphere of Franco’s ‘women in prison’ films, like the clinical investigative gaze of the patriarchal medics in the female vampire film, may not offer airtight assurance for the patriarchal viewer. The female vampire films discussed in chapter 3, with all their dangers of exoticisation and demonisation, and in spite of their many ‘containing’ devices, may present the fantasised non-‘normal’ subjectivity of the vampire as a seductive threat to normality. In these respects, Franco’s films dramatise the perversity of fantasy genres and their potential to estrange heteronormative desire by inserting otherness into selfhood and abnormality into the norm.

Franco's scenarios of gothic subjectivity, fascination, obsession and cruelty may operate in the fractures and marginalities of the 'dominant' male imaginary. Lacanian theorists such as Kaja Silverman (1992) and Jacqueline Rose (2005) tend to propose that fetishism disavows a traumatic 'lack' that is seen as constitutive of male subjectivity. Yet rather than disavow it, popular culture can also use fetishism and other 'transgressive' practices to acknowledge and address the precariousness of heteronormative identity, and do so as a source of various kinds of pleasurable engagement rather than trauma. Many of Franco's exploitation sex-horror films of the 1960s and 1970s, despite or because of an often scrappy, contradictory and bewildering textuality that tends to forestall 'identification', may foreground the tensions and ambivalences of spectatorial desire. As 'sleazy' exploitation films *and* explorations of the workings of desire in that field, the texts discussed in this thesis can be seen as fantasy *about* fantasy, or perverse films *about* perversity. In these ways the sometimes uncanny, destabilising and incoherent viewing positions offered by Franco's films may exemplify popular culture's capacity to exploit chinks in the armour of the male imaginary. Ideologically conflicted, never seamless, and not reducible to a generalised mystique of transgression, Franco's journeys into perversion have the potential to problematise relations of looking and fantasising in the cinema, whether disreputable, popular, 'cult' or otherwise.

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Appendix: Films Cited and Table of Concordances

I have not attempted a complete Jess Franco filmography; several can be found online and in various publications, though they do not agree on all of the facts. This is simply an as-accurate-as-possible list of the Franco films I have referred to in the text or consulted as part of my research. For ease of reference I have, wherever applicable, listed them firstly by the title given on their most recent English-language video or DVD release (in some cases unofficial releases), whether British or North American. Most of the exceptions to this rule are Spanish films which do not appear to have received an English-language release in any format. The only alternate titles included are those, as far as can be ascertained, given in the country/ies of origin in the year of first release. The remaining information concerns: country/ies of production; production company/ies; year of first release.

- 1) *Tenemos 18 años* (Sp) Auster Films.1959
- 2) *Labios rojos* (Sp) Álamo Films/Procines.1960
- 3) *La reina del Tabarín* (Sp) Hispamer Films/Cifesa/Eurociné. 1960
- 4) *Vampiresas 1930/ Certains Préferent les Noires* (Sp/ Fr) Hispamer/ Cifesa/ Eurociné.1961
- 5) *The Awful Dr Orlof/Gritos en la noche/ L'horrible Dr. Orlof* (Sp/Fr) Hispamer/ Eurociné. 1961
- 6) *Death Whistles the Blues/La muerte silba un blues/ 077: Opération Sexy* (Sp/ Fr) Naga / Inter Laga. 1962
- 7) *The Sadistic Baron Von Klaus/ La mano de un hombre muerto/ Le Sadique Baron von Klaus* (Sp/ Fr) Albatros/Eurociné.1962
- 8) *El llanero/ Le jaguar* (Sp/ Fr) Big-4. 1963
- 9) *Rififi en la ciudad/ Chasse à la maffia* (Sp/Fr) Albatros/CPF. 1964
- 10) *Dr. Jekyll's Mistresses/ El secreto del Dr. Orloff/Les Maitresses du Dr Jeckyll* (Sp/Fr) Leo Films/ Eurociné. 1964
- 11) *Diabolical Dr. Z/Miss muerte/Dans les Griffes du Maniaque* (Sp/Fr) Hesperia/Ciné-Alliance/ Spéva. 1965
- 12) *Attack of the Robots /Cartas boca arriba/ Cartes sur Table* (Sp/ Fr) Hesperia /Spéva/Ciné-Alliance. 1966
- 13) *Golden Horn/Residencia para espías/Ca Barde chez les Mignonnes* (Sp/ Fr) Hesperia/ Elysée. 1966
- 14) *Lucky the Inscrutable/ Lucky el entrépido/Agente Speciale L.K/ Lucky M, fullt alle Sarge* (Sp/Fr/Ger)Atlantida /Fono Roma/ Explorer Film '58.1967

- 15) *Succubus/ Necronomicon - Geträumte Sünden* (Ger) Aquila. 1967
- 16) *Sadisterotica/ El caso de las dos bellezas* (Sp/ Ger) Montana/Aquila. 1967
- 17) *Kiss Me, Monster/ Besame, monstruo/ Kuss mich, Monster* (Sp/Ger) Montana/Aquila. 1967
- 18) *The Blood of Fu Manchu/Fu Manchu y el beso de la muerta/ Der Todeskuss des der Dr Fu Manchu/ Against All Odds* (Sp./ Ger/GB/US) Ada Film/Terra/Udastex/Towers of London. 1967
- 19) *99 Women/99 mujeres/99 Frauen/99 Donne* (Sp/Ger/It/GB) Hesperia/ Corona/ Cineprodzioni/ Towers of London. 1968
- 20) *The castle of Fu Manchu/ El castillo de Fu-Manchu/ Assignment: Istanbul* (Sp/ Ger/ GB/US) Terra Filmkunst/Tilma/Italian International Film/Atlantida Film/Amalgamated. 1968
- 21) *Justine/Marquis de Sade's Justine/Justine, le disaventure della vertu* (GB/It/Ger) Corona Aica Cinematografica/Towers of London. 1968
- 22) *The Girl from Rio/ La ciudad sin hombres/ Die sieben männer der Sumuru/Future Women* (Sp/Ger/US/GB) Ada Film/Terra Filmkunst/Udastex. 1969
- 23) *Venus in Furs/ Puo una morta revivere per amore?/ Paroxismus* (GB/It/Ger/US) Commonwealth United/ AIP/Terra Filmkunst/ Cineprodudzioni. 1969
- 24) *The Bloody Judge/El proceso de las brujas/Der Hexentoter von Blackmoor/Il trono du fuco* (Sp/Ger/It/GB) Terra Filmkunst/Fenix /ProdimeX. 1969
- 25) *Count Dracula/ El conde Drácula/Il conte Dracula/Verenhiminen Dracula* (Sp/GB/It/Ger) Fénix/ Filmar Cinematografica/Corona. 1969
- 26) *Eugenie...The Story of her Journey into Perversion/ De Sade 70/Die Jungfrau un die Peitsche* (GB/Ger) Sangan/Towers of London/Alpha Film. 1969
- 27) *Vampyros Lesbos/ Las vampiras/ Vampiros Lesbos – Die Erbin des Dracula/* (Sp/Ger) Teleciné/Fénix films. 1970
- 28) *She Kills in Ecstasy/ Sie Totete in Ekstase* (Ger) Teleciné/Fénix films. 1970
- 29) *Sex Charade* (Liech) Prodif. 1970
- 30) *The Devil Came From Akasava/ El Diablo que vino de Akasawa/ Der Teufel kam aus Akasawa/* (Sp/Ger) CCC Filmkunst/Fénix. 1970
- 31) *Eugenie de Sade/Eugenie de Franval* (Liech/ Ger/Can) Prodif/Cinepix .1970
- 32) *Nightmares Come at Night/ Les cauchemars naissent la nuit/Les yeux de la nuit* (Leich/Be) Prodif. 1970
- 33) *Virgin among the Living Dead/Christina, Princesse de l'erotisme /Una Virgine tra I Morti Viventi* (Liech/It/Fr) Prodif /J.K.K Films/CFFP. 1971
- 34) *The Sexy Darlings/ Robinson Crusoe und Seine Wilden Sklavinnen/ Trois filles nues dans l'île de Robinson* (Ger/Fr) Teleciné/CFFP. 1971
- 35) *X 312 – Flight to Hell /X 312 – Flug Zur Holle* (Ger/Fr) CCC Filmkunst/ Fénix. 1971

- 36) *Dracula vs. Frankenstein/ Dracula contra el. Dr Frankenstein/Dracula prisonnier de Frankenstein* (Sp/Fr/Liech/Port) Fénix/Prodif/ Interfilm/ CFFP. 1971
- 37) *La venganza del doctor Mabuse/ Dr. M schlägt zu* (Sp/Ger) Copercines/Telecine. 1971
- 38) *Virgin Report/ Jungfrauen Report* (Ger) Telecine. 1971
- 39) *Daughter of Dracula/ La Fille de Dracula/ A filha de Dracula/* (Fr/Por) CFFP/ Interfilm. 1972
- 40) *The Demons/Les demons/Os demonios* (Fr/Por) CFFP/Interfilm. 1972.
- 41) *Un capitán de quince años/ Un capitaine de 15 ans/* (Sp/Fr) Fénix /CFFP.1972
- 42) *The Rites of Frankenstein/ La maldición de Frankenstein/ Les experiences erotiques de Frankenstein* (Fr/Sp) Fénix /CFFP. 1972
- 43) *Lovers of Devil's Island /Quartier des femmes/Los amantes de la isla del Diablo* (Fr/Sp/Por/Liech) Fénix Films/CFF/Interfilm/Prodif. 1972
- 44) *Un silencio de tumbo* (Sp) Manacoa P.C. 1972
- 45) *Les ebranlees/ Dolls for Sale* (Fr) CFFP. 1972
- 46) *Death Packs his Bags /El muerto hace las maletas/ Der Todesrächer von Soho* (Ger/Fr) Telecine/ Fénix. 1972
- 47) *Sinner/Le Journal Intime d'une Nymphomane/ Diario íntimo de una ninfómana* (Fr) CFFP.1972
- 48) *Ojos siniestros del Doctor Orloff* (Sp) Manacoa P.C. 1972
- 49) *Pleasure for Three/Plaisir a trois* (Fr) CFFP. 1973
- 50) *Female Vampire/ La comtesse noir/Les avaleuses* (Fr/Bel) Eurocine/Brux International. 1973
- 51) *Maciste and the gluttons/Maciste et les Glouttones* (Fr) CFFP. 1973
- 52) *Night of the Skull/La noche de los asesinos* (Sp) Fénix. 1973
- 53) *Al otro lado del espejo* (Sp/Fr) CFFP/Orfeo. 1973
- 54) *Tango au clair de lune/ Kiss Me Killer* (Fr) Eurociné. 1973
- 55) *Tender and Perverse Emanuelle/ Le Chemin Solitaire* (Fr/Bel) Eurociné. 1973
- 56) *The Perverse Countess/ La comtesse perverse* (Fr) CFFP. 1973
- 57) *Linda/Mais qui donc a viole Linda* (Fr/It) Eurociné/Parva Cinematografica. 1973
- 58) *Demoniac/ Exorcisme/Exorcisme et messes noires/* (Fr/Bel) Eurociné/Cetelci/Brussels. 1974
- 59) *Celestine, Maid at your service/ Celestine, bonne a tout faire* (Fr) CFFP. 1974
- 60) *Lorna the Exorcist/Les Possésées du Diable* (Fr) CFFP. 1974

- 61) *Shining Sex/ La Fille au Sexe Brillant* (Fr) Eurociné. 1975
- 62) *Midnight Party/La Partouse de Minuit* (Fr/Sp/Bel) BelFilm/Eurociné/Elite. 1975
- 63) *Downtown/ Die nackten Puppen der Unterwelt* 1975 (Ger/Swi) Elite. 1975
- 64) *Barbed Wire Dolls /Frauengefängnis/Caged Women* (Swi/Ger) Elite. 1975
- 65) *Women Behind Bars/ Les Diamants pour L'Enfer* (Fr/Bel) Eurociné/Brux International. 1975
- 66) *Doriana Grey /Das Bildnis der Doriana Grey* (Swi/Ger) Elite/Cinemac. 1975
- 67) *Jack the Ripper /Der Dirnenmörder von London* (Swi/Ger). Elite/Ascot/Cinemac. 1976
- 68) *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun/ Liebesbriefe Einer Portugiesischen Nonne* (Swi/Ger) Elite/Ascot/Cinemac. 1976
- 69) *Voodoo Passion/Der Ruf der Blonden Göttin/Die Sklavinnen* (Ger) Elite. 1976
- 70) *Love Camp/ Frauen im Liebeslager* (Ger) Elite. 1976
- 71) *Blue Rita/Das Frauenhaus* (Swi/Ger) Elite. 1977
- 72) *Sexy Sisters/ Teuflischen Schwestern* (Swi/Ger) Elite. 1977
- 73) *Wanda, the Wicked Warden/ Greta - Haus ohne Männer* (Swi/Ger) Elite. 1977
- 74) *Women in Cellblock 9/Frauen für Zellenblock 9* (Swi/Ger) Elite. 1977
- 75) *Sinfonía erótica* (Sp/Por) Barcino/Estudio 8/Tritón. 1978
- 76) *Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties/ Ópalo de fuego: Mercaderes del sexo* (Fr/Sp/Por) Tritón/Eurociné/Estudio 8. 1978
- 77) *The Cannibals/Mondo Cannibale* (Fra/Ger/It) Eurociné/J.E Films. 1979
- 78) *Devil Hunter / Sexo cannibal* (Fr/Ger) J.E Films/Eurociné. 1979
- 79) *The Sadist of Notre Dame /El sádico de Notre-Dame/L'Éventreur de Notre Dame* (Fr/Sp/Bel) Eurociné/Cetelci/Tritón. 1979
- 80) *Justine/Justine de Sade* (It) Dany Film. 1979
- 81) *Eugenie (Historía de una perversión/Erotismo)* (Sp) J.E Films. 1980
- 82) *Bloody Moon/ Die Säge des Todes* (Ger) Lisa-Film/Metro/Rapid. 1980
- 83) *Pick-Up Girls/The Girl with the transparent panties/ La Chica de las bragas transparentes* (Sp) Luz International. 1980
- 84) *El sexo está loco* (Sp) Tritón. 1980
- 85) *Linda/ Die Nackten Superhexen von Rio Amore* (Ger/Sp) Golden Films Internacional/ Lisa-Film/ Plata. 1981

- 86) *Sadomania/Sadomanía Hölle der Lust* (Sp/Ger) Golden Films Internacional/Lisa-Film/Plata. 1981
- 87) *Macumba sexual* (Sp) Golden Films Internacional. 1981
- 88) *The Sexual Story of O/ Historia sexual de O* (Sp) Golden Films Internacional. 1981
- 89) *Oasis of the Zombies/ Abîme des morts vivants* (Sp/Fr) Marte/Eurociné. 1981
- 90) *The Inconfessible orgies of Emanuelle/Las orgías inconfesables de Emanuelle* (Sp) Golden Films Internacional. 1982
- 91) *The Sinister Dr. Orloff/ El Siniestro doctor Orloff/Experimentos macabros* (Sp) Golden Films Internacional. 1982
- 92) *Mansion of the Living Dead/ La Mansión de los Muertos Vivientes* (Sp) Golden Films Internacional. 1982
- 93) *Revenge in the House of Usher/Chute de la maison Usher/El hundimiento de la casa Usher* (Sp/Fr) Elite. 1983
- 94) *Confesiones íntimas de una exhibicionista* (Sp) Golden Films Internacional. 1983
- 95) *Lilian, the Perverted Virgin/ Lilian, la virgen pervertida* (Sp) Golden Films Internacional. 1983
- 96) *Diamonds of Killimanjaro/ Tesoro de la diosa blanca.* (Sp) Elite/Eurociné. 1983
- 97) *Dark Mission/Operacion cocaine* (Sp/Fr) Siodmak/Eurociné. 1987
- 98) *Faceless/ Prédateurs de la nuit* (Fr) René Chateau. 1988
- 99) *Downtown Heat/Ciudad baja* (Sp) Cinepaq. 1992
- 100) *Killer Barbys/Vampire KillerBarbys* (Sp) Civic. 1996
- 101) *Tender Flesh* (USA) One Shot Productions. 1997
- 102) *Lust for Frankenstein* (USA) One Shot. 1998
- 103) *Mari-Cookie and the Killer Tarantula/8 Legs to Love You* (USA) One Shot. 1998
- 104) *Vampire Blues* (USA) One Shot. 1999
- 105) *Blind Target* (USA) One Shot Prod. 2000
- 106) *Vampire Junction* (USA) One Shot Prod. 2001
- 107) *Snakewoman* (Sp/USA) One Shot Prod. 2005
- 108) *Paula-Paula: An Audiovisual Experience* (Sp) CBF. 2010

Table of concordances

Indicative rather than comprehensive, this is intended to demonstrate the degree of recycling and cross-referencing in Franco's films. The numbers correspond to films listed above. Some of the concordances I have identified (e.g character names) will not be present in all versions of all films. Many more could be added.

Characters/Character Names

Al Pareira: 12, 45, 62, 63, 67, 86, 95
 Cagliostro: 42, 44, 51, 53,
 Orlof/f: 2, 5, 10, 37, 48, 50, 52, 66, 67, 75, 91
 Dr. Seward: 25, 36, 44, 61
 Inspector Tanner: 5, 42, 44, 71, 79
 Linda: 14, 28, 34, 47, 49, 60, 63, 85, 97
 Lorna: 15, 60, 63
 Moroni: 2, 6, 11, 54
 Morpho: 5, 16, 28, 36, 38, 42
 Radeck: 2, 6, 16, 31, 45, 54, 62, 69
 Rita: 23, 63, 71, 82
 Wanda: 5, 23, 37, 73, 75

Themes, Situations, Iconography and Devices

Asylum escapes/ former inmates: 49, 58, 75, 79, 82
 All-female communities/organisations (other than prisons or convents): 22, 71, 67, 71, 72, 76
 Appearances by Jess Franco: 7, 11, 16, 20, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 56, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 67, 69, 72, 73, 81, 83, 87, 88, 92, 96
 Aquarium shots: 71, 15, 98
 Avenging angels: 11, 23, 28, 47, 53, 55, 60
 Beachside residences: 15, 26, 27, 37, 44, 50, 61, 66, 81, 85, 87, 101
 Blindness: 11, 18, 24, 37, 52, 81
 Cannibals: 33, 73, 77, 78
 Car chases: 14, 23, 58
 Criminal masterminds/overlords: 12, 14, 18, 20, 22, 71
 Death at point of orgasm: 50, 61, 66
 Face surgery: 5, 10, 11, 91, 98

Female night-club/cabaret performers (dancers, singers and strippers): 3, 5, 7, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 36, 46, 47, 49, 54, 58, 61, 62, 63, 67, 71, 72, 76, 83, 85, 101, 103, 104

Female vampires: 25, 27, 28, 39, 50, 52, 66, 100, 104, 102

Impotent/ sexually inadequate men: 31, 27, 58, 80

Incest: 31, 60, 64, 66, 72, 102

Istanbul: 13, 20, 23, 27, 28

Jazz and other musicians: 4, 11, 15, 14, 31, 44, 55, 99,

Mad doctors/scientists: 5, 10, 19, 11, 12, 16, 28, 37, 42, 91

Male vampires: 1, 4, 25, 36, 38

Mannequins, waxwork figures, dolls: 11, 15, 27, 49, 52, 81

The Marquis de Sade: 19, 21, 26, 32, 59, 65, 81

Mind control: 5, 10, 15, 12, 17, 18, 32, 37, 42, 44, 61, 66, 67, 76, 84, 87

Mute slaves and minions (other than Morpho and excluding women in captivity): 10, 37, 57, 61, 83, 81, 87, 91

Needles or similar torture/death instruments: 11, 15, 21, 40, 64, 73

Nuns: 40, 69, 75, 77, 85

Large scale orgies/ depraved parties: 14, 15, 31, 58, 80, 91,

Pair of female adventurers: 1, 2, 16, 17, 23, 76

Photographers/filmmakers: 16, 23, 31, 44, 47, 63, 83

Prostitution: 5, 10, 14, 19, 21, 45, 58, 59, 67, 71, 76, 80, 82, 83, 86

Serial killers: 7, 44, 46, 48, 76

Spies: 6, 13, 14, 16, 17, 30, 62, 71, 76

Suicide: 28, 31, 50, 53, 80

Whips and flagellation: 7, 12, 14, 15, 23, 26, 42, 61, 77, 85

Witch trials/torture: 24, 40, 43

Women in prisons, dungeons or cells: 1, 5, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 27, 37, 39, 42, 43, 48, 50, 58, 61, 64, 65, 66, 69, 70, 72, 73, 74, 76, 78, 81, 82, 83, 86, 87

Zombies (and zombie-like robots): 5, 12, 22, 30, 33, 69, 78, 89