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Dual Auteurs? : The Case Study of Gordon Hessler and Christopher Wicking

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the four American International Pictures horror movies, *The Oblong Box* (1969), *Scream and Scream Again* (1970), *Cry of the Banshee* (1970) and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1971), directed by Gordon Hessler and written by Christopher Wicking between 1969 and 1971, in an effort to discover whether the director and writer were the dual auteurs of these works. The study adopts the philosophy and methodology of the auteur theory as described by Andrew Sarris in his essay, "Some Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962" (Sarris 2008: 35-45) and modified by Richard Corliss to include his "Synthesis: The Multiple Auteur" in his 1974 book, *Talking Pictures* (Corliss 1972: xxvii-xxviii). Various drafts of the screenplays for the four movies by Hessler and Wicking have been studied and compared, along with various cuts of the films, interviews, contemporary reviews and critical evaluations. In this way, the author discovers the commercial and artistic evolution of each project in the context of the themes and concerns of the creative team of Hessler and Wicking, discerning whether the writer and director were indeed equal authors of the finished products. This thesis asserts that the movies were not only unique works signalling the end of the world-wide resurgence of gothic cinema in the 1950s and 60s, but personal responses to the genre and the era. The four movies are analysed as the body of work of the writer and director team and compared and contrasted to the films of the other artists who influenced them. The study examines the genre conventions as well as the original innovations of each movie. The author concludes that, despite the comparative critical neglect of these films, they emerge as an important achievement distinguished by an original cinematic style and a unifying vision of the genre and the turbulent times in which they were made.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The year is 1968, and Samuel Z. Arkoff and James H. Nicholson of American International Pictures (AIP) are excited about the new young director who will replace Roger Corman on their Edgar Allan Poe horror movies. Michael Reeves, only twenty-four years-old, breathes new life into the series with his brutally realistic historic thriller, *Witchfinder General* (1968). Co-financier AIP retitles the movie *The Conqueror Worm* after Edgar Allan Poe's poem, and the moribund Vincent Price-Poe series is reborn. Reeves' mini-epic garners positive reviews, stirs controversy over its gut wrenching violence, gives Price one of his most chilling roles and outgrosses all of Corman's Poe films except *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961) (Hamilton 2005: 113-114).

In response to the success of *The Conqueror Worm,* executive for American International in England, Louis M. Heyward, hands Reeves an original screenplay by 68 year-old English filmmaker Lawrence Huntington called *Man in a Crimson Hood*. But even as Reeves works with young writer Christopher Wicking to turn Huntington's underwritten gothic into something more interesting, complications ensue. The title changes from *Man in a Crimson Hood* to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Oblong Box* (1969) to once again star Price, but Reeves hates the story (Del Valle 2003: 45). And despite their successful collaboration, Reeves dreads having to hold down Price from what he considers his theatrical tendencies. Most damaging to the prospects of the project, Reeves is in therapy for severe emotional problems and chronic depression (Murray 2002: 292-293).

Reeves and Wicking transform Huntington's poorly structured, episodic yarn into a dark and serious chamber gothic about colonialism, betrayal and revenge. Reeves consults with Price on wardrobe, expertly casts the supporting characters and picks locations in Ireland. But the weekend before shooting begins, the brooding director overdoses on alcohol and barbiturates. Reeves lives, but AIP loses confidence in their wunderkind and quickly replaces him as director with the film's producer, Gordon Hessler (Murray 2002: 295).

Hessler has directed only one released feature, a modest but effective *Diabolique* (1955) style thriller called *Catacombs* (1965). His most impressive qualification is a long association with Alfred Hitchcock as story editor, producer and eventually director on his two television series, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955-1962) and *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* (1962-1965) (Weaver 1991: 142). AIP gives Hessler two days to reorganise *The Oblong Box* and start shooting (Weaver 1991: 173). Despite its chaotic inception, the eventual financial success of this first collaboration will result in three more stylish and original horror movies from Hessler and Wicking in the next two years: *Scream and Scream Again* (1970)*, Cry of the Banshee* (1970) and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1971).

These four works from Hessler and Wicking have been undervalued and little explored by most film critics and historians. Yet, they represent artistic extensions of, and in some cases reactions against, the traditions of gothic cinema that had become prevalent in the previous decade. They also work as metaphors about the turbulent times in which they were made. Their neglect seems even more puzzling since the first three starring Price received wider distribution and grossed more at the box-office than almost any other low-budget genre efforts of their time. Most critics and historians consider them only in comparison to the works by Corman and Reeves that have genre similarities, instead of appreciating the quite different approaches to this material introduced by Hessler and Wicking.

This thesis uses the four horror movies of Hessler and Wicking as a case study in an investigation into the validity of the theory of "multiple auteurs" as introduced by Richard Corliss in his 1974 book, *Talking Pictures.* More specifically, it explores the possibility of dual auteurs, a screenwriter and a director, who have worked consistently and in concert to shape existing material into movies with a vision and style created and shared by both. So, the single and over-riding research question guiding this project is, are Gordon Hessler and Christopher Wicking the dual auteurs of their four horror films for American International Pictures?

GORDON HESSLER

Their lives, unique experiences and serious dedication to cinema made Hessler and Wicking unusually well qualified to expand the horror genre at the end of the 1960s, one of its most creative periods. Director Hessler was born on 12 December 1925 in Berlin to an English mother and a Danish father. After his father died when the boy was three, Hessler's mother took her son to England. He studied aeronautical engineering at school and was drafted into the British Army at the end of World War II. Fortunately, the war ended before Hessler saw combat (Bowie 2014).

Hessler sought employment simultaneously with the mass of British veterans returning from the war. As he later said, "There was a depression in England in the film business. It was pretty tough – you couldn't get financing" (quoted in Bowie 2014). Feeling that he seemed too old to be embarking on a film career, he subtracted four years from his age, but he still could not find a job. Hessler emigrated to the United States instead, looking for his chance to make movies there.

In New York, Warner-Pathe News hired him as a driver. This job, he later said, "was perfect for me. I took the film to all the editors, and each editor I met, [I'd ask], 'Could you hire me?' Finally I got hired in the documentary business" (quoted in Bowie 2014). Despite having, "no formal education on editing," as he said, Hessler first started cutting documentaries for Films For Industry (quoted in Bowie 2014). After that, he edited for Fordel Films. His first assignment was to cut a documentary helmed by Jack Arnold, the man who would become one of the great science fiction filmmakers of the 1950s, directing classics for Universal International like *The Creature From the Black Lagoon* (1954) and *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957). For Hessler, it was a daunting experience. "I couldn't put the thing together!" Hessler complained.

> The film looked awful. I went to the optical lab and said, 'You've got to help me. It's my first picture.' They said, 'Jack Arnold shot the whole thing incorrectly. He didn't know what he was doing.' All the pieces were facing the wrong way. All I could do to make it work was flip the film (quoted in Bowie 2014).

Hessler advanced quickly at Fordel Films. Finally, he remembered, he was, "running the company, (as) sort of a vice president of directing pictures" (quoted Bowie 2014). Hessler's 1956 documentary, *The Child Behind the Wall*, examined emotionally disturbed children in a Philadelphia hospital and was shown on NBC on the *March of Medicine* program. Hessler recalled:

> I was making really a tremendous amount of money at that time for a young guy, and I gave it all up to come to Los Angeles. I'd had awards with my documentaries. I thought, 'God, this is going to be easy, taking these pictures and showing them to [executives].' Nobody was the slightest bit interested in even looking at them! No matter what awards I'd won (quoted in Bowie 2014).

After an entire year of unemployment, Hessler was hired in June, 1958 by MCA, an entertainment conglomerate that had just acquired Universal Studios. He started as an assistant to story editor Mae Livingston. Hessler became one of four or five people assigned to various producers to create concepts for series to pitch to the networks. MCA eventually assigned Hessler to Shamley Productions, the unit producing *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. Hessler said,

> Joan Harrison, who wrote some of the scripts and was Hitchcock's personal assistant, was the actual producer of the show. Norman Lloyd, who was an actor in his own right - he was in Hitch's *Saboteur* [1942] - was also a producer, and was sort of my boss (quoted in Weaver 1991: 142).

Hessler started as "story editor." He did not get a regular screen credit until 1962 when the series expanded into *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*. His job, as he said, was:

> to locate stories, work with writers, develop new stories and then present them to management - that would be Joan Harrison and Hitchcock. Hitch was very, very tough on stories; there were some stories you'd be angry that he wouldn't use, but he was adamant. It was a very tough job (quoted in Weaver 1991: 142).

Norman Lloyd, the show's producer and Hessler's boss, told the author in a 2017 interview,

> Gordon was a strange one … He was very competent … He was impervious to insult. Not that I ever insulted him. But I would grow impatient. And I really had no reason. But he would come in with a story … And he was very good. He had good taste, and he found a lot of good stuff. But there was something hard to describe that he contained within himself, something very self-contained. And you felt that, within that, was judgement … So he would come in with a very retiring style, very retiring, and say, 'Yeah, I like this story,' and look at you, and expect a reaction. Well, I'd read it, and I'd call him. If I liked it, I'd compliment him. If I didn't like it, I'd say, 'Nooooo, Gordon.' And he'd give me a little smile and [a reticent little laugh] … there was something strange about it, and I can't tell you what it is (interview with the author: 4 May, 2017).

Even in this early assignment, Hessler revealed his confidence in knowing good story material for filming. Undoubtedly, this was the job that prepared Hessler to later work with AIP: to take badly structured scripts with intriguing ideas and shape them into material worth directing. Hessler would do exactly that with such later AIP projects as *The Oblong Box* and *Cry of the Banshee*.

Hessler managed to talk his way into directing a single *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* episode in 1961, "Final Arrangements," starring Martin Balsam (McCarty 1985:212-213), as well as actors' screen tests for Universal. In what little time he had between searching for Hitchcock stories, Hessler also directed theatre productions (Bowie 2014).

Following Harrison's departure in 1963, Hessler was promoted to producer. Hessler explained, "When Norman Lloyd moved up from associate producer to producer, I became the associate, then when he moved to executive producer, I became producer. He was always one step ahead of me" (quoted in Weaver 1991: 142). Universal valued reliable producers more than directors, so the studio blocked Hessler's attempts to direct. However, during the second season of *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*, Hessler returned to England to direct a modest thriller based on a novel, Jay Bennett's *Catacombs* (1965)*,* rejected for *Hitchcock.* Determined to get the script perfect as he had learned from the Master, Hessler hired Joel Murcott, who had regularly contributed writing to his Hitchcock shows, to do an uncredited rewrite of the *Catacombs* script by Daniel Mainwaring (Bowie 2014).

Universal still had Hessler under contract when *Hitchcock* went off the air in 1965. Hessler produced the first season of *Run For Your Life* under Roy Huggins and did the same on a few segments of *The Chrysler Theatre* in 1966 and 1967 under executive producer Gordon Oliver. Hessler even directed a Chrysler episode, "Blind Man's Bluff," his second television directing credit for Universal, six years after his first.

"I hated the studio system," Hessler confessed. "I was not cut out for it. I liked to freelance" (quoted in Bowie 2014.) Hessler finally left Universal after his *Chrysler Theatre* assignment and secured a directing job from producer Steve Broidy for a Western feature called *God's High Table* to star Clint Walker and Suzanne Pleshette. Unfortunately, the movie was cancelled just prior to shooting. Hessler quickly found another independent feature, *The Last Shot You Hear* (1969), an adaptation of a British play reminiscent of the Hitchcock shows Hessler knew so well (Bowie 2014). Twentieth Century Fox released the film in New York two years after Hessler made it so that it opened in theatres around the same time as *The Oblong Box*. By then, Hessler was firmly established at American International Pictures. Hessler described his first association with AIP this way:

> Louis “Deke” Heyward, who executive produced these films, was an extraordinary character, an American who I had met at Universal Studios. He got a job with [Samuel Z.] Arkoff, as his right-hand man, and then he opened up AIP offices in London. He ran the whole company in a marvellous and very creative way, and we had a wonderful time there … I was producing a film called *DeSade* [1969] for AIP. *DeSade* was a film that was going to be the biggest production that they had ever made; they asked me to produce it, and Michael Reeves was going to direct it … Michael was not able to do *DeSade* because he was getting mental treatment … They put another director, Cy Endfield, on it. I got fired, virtually, on that picture … But they came to me and said, ‘Look, there’s another film, *The Oblong Box*, which we’d like you to produce in Ireland.’ Michael Reeves was going to direct it, but again, he was not up to it, so I took the film from Ireland, put it into Shepperton Studios and directed it myself … We just made the film we wanted to make, they were very happy with it and we got a contract to make another three pictures after that: [*Scream and Scream Again, Cry of the Banshee* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue*] (quoted in Weaver 1991: 144).

Working with screenwriter Wicking on the four horror movies for AIP allowed Hessler to reveal his political sympathies allegorically. The forty-three year-old Hessler and the twenty-five year-old Wicking bonded on *The Oblong Box* when the younger writer introduced the theme of colonial oppression and guilt into the script. After that, Hessler insisted on Wicking revising all three of the followup projects, even though they were initiated with screenplays by others writers. And in each one, Hessler worked with Wicking to introduce contemporary left leaning ideology metaphorically as a subtext to the narratives. Wicking, as a part of the young generation actively changing the culture through politics and the arts, liberated Hessler’s sympathies, and Hessler, as a pioneer in the techniques of post-studio narrative filmmaking, gave the films an edgy, immediate aura despite their traditional genre foundations. Hessler also

allowed Wicking to introduce him to the current traditions of the horror film genre, mostly so that the team could subvert them. Hessler said,

> Chris Wicking was always onto me to go and see some of these films. Eventually, he and I went to the midnight cinemas that literally showed one film after another until dawn, and this was the way I finally saw some of these horror pictures (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 47).

CHRISTOPHER WICKING

Hessler always credited Wicking with the deep understanding of genre history and aesthetics that triggered their innovative approach to horror. Of Wicking, Hessler said,

> Chris was an absolute life-saver on projects … He is a real film buff and understands the mechanics of the horror film. He can tell you about every actor and even the technicians that have worked on horror movies (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 46).

Screenwriter Wicking was born on 10 January 1943 in London, England and began his education at Coopers' Company's School. While studying at St Martin's School of Art in London, he realised that he had a passion for film. His career began as a film booking clerk for Anglo-Amalgamated Film Distributors. Wicking loved westerns (Jeremy 2008). He wrote his first published article on the genre for *Motion* magazine. In 1962, he wrote a western homage screenplay, *Last Train to Horsted Keynes*, but he was unable to find a producer.

While working as an assistant film editor on documentaries in London, he began to write profiles of directors for the influential French movie magazine *Cahiers du cinéma*. He admired genre directors such as Anthony Mann, Delmer Daves and Budd Boetticher, all of whom he interviewed. Later, after success as a screenwriter, he even organised and curated a William Wellman retrospective at the National Film Theatre (Jeremy 2008). Wicking wrote movie articles and interviews for various British magazines including the *Monthly Film Bulletin* and *Time Out*.

He also continued to write for French magazines like *Positif* and *Midi Minuit Fantastique*. Also in the early sixties, he helped organise the Magic Eye Film Society which met in the private theatre of the Estonian embassy in London. Wicking often booked Saturday afternoon double bills of genre fare that had yet to become critically fashionable such as horror movies, science fiction and, of course, westerns (Jeremy 2008). About his first film with Hessler, *The Oblong Box*, Wicking said,

> For me, the best thing about working on the film was the beginning of my association with Gordon Hessler - and both of us really wanted to reinvigorate the horror film. We may not have achieved our aims, but nobody can say that we didn't try. And we had great fun while doing it - although battling with the studio suits was not exactly the most pleasant of experiences (quoted in Forshaw 2013: 201).

Wicking defined his approach to horror:

> It's true to say that I was almost always trying to change the boundaries of the genre with my work, but this wasn't simply because I felt that cliche reigned (although, inevitably, it did most of the time); my reasons were twofold: I love the horror/ fantasy/ science-fiction genre and wanted to replicate the success of those films which, for me, had achieved something new. Also, it was a way of personally keeping fresh in a creative sense - I was always attempting to think of unorthodox approaches, new angles and new ways of telling stories. And I like to think that I never forgot the key role for a dramatist: keep your character real, however unlikely the situation (quoted in Forshaw 2013: 200).

By the time they began working together, Hessler and Wicking were both skilled professionals. However, were they truly the "auteurs" of their projects for AIP, all of which started as assignments from the studio? The question of authorship can only be determined by carefully examining the creative progressions of the projects as they developed in the trenches during the battle that is studio film-making. As a veteran of those battles, penning several productions for

and with actor-producer-director Mel Brooks, this writer has much personal experience with the questions of authorship and with the emergence of the ultimate creative vision on a movie. In the case of this writer, both of the filmed features, *Life Stinks* (1991) and *Dracula Dead and Loving It* (1995), became manifestations of the vision of Brooks, even though the author worked closely with him through all phases of pre-production, production and post production. Though this author pitched the story of *Life Stinks* to Brooks and wrote the script with him, and though he also presented Brooks with a completed first-draft screenplay of *Dracula, Dead and Loving It* written without any input from the director, Brooks guided the progressions to the final shooting scripts of both projects, changing and adding elements, and making the final versions products of his own personal and unique views. This writer was always aware that the productions were Mel Brooks movies, first and foremost. The author sublimated his own vision and ideas to those of Brooks, knowing that the reason the movies were being made was that Brooks wanted to make them. So, there was no question of dual authorship on those projects. Brooks was the ultimate auteur of both films.

Of course, there is a great difference between the type of auteur represented by Brooks and the elevation to auteur status of journeymen professional moviemakers like Hessler and Wicking. With the eminence of an Academy Award winning screenplay for *The Producers* (1968), his very first effort as writer and director, and the huge box-office successes of two consecutive movies he co-wrote and directed, *Blazing Saddles* (1973) and *Young Frankenstein* (1974), Brooks became a creative star in the New Hollywood of the 1970s, effectively presenting his own style of Jewish comedy to a mass international audience. He became a mercantile brand-name that was used to sell his movies, following in the traditions of Charles Chaplin and Jerry Lewis. Critics at the time usually considered his collaborators as functionaries assisting Brooks to realise his personal and very commercial vision. Marshall Brickman, co-writer of some of Woody Allen's best early films such as *Annie Hall* (1977) and *Manhattan*

(1979), found himself in a similar position to Brooks' creative collaborators. On the other hand, the names of Hessler and Wicking did not contribute to the box-office or critical prestige of the movies they made together, three of which were sold on the popularity of their star, Vincent Price, and three of which were advertised as part of the successful series from American International Pictures based on the works of Edgar Allan Poe. Hessler and Wicking were employed filmmakers, working surreptitiously to fold their own concerns into projects propelled by the requirements of the theatrical horror genre in the late 1960s. There is a distinction, then, between a powerful and famous auteur like Brooks and two hired guns working together to make something different within a profit-driven genre not necessarily designed for auteur statements. This study seeks to determine whether, despite all of these impediments, Hessler and Wicking can, indeed, be considered the dual auteurs of their films together.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

While Hessler and Wicking have received some attention in books devoted to Reeves, AIP and Price, no single work has exclusively examined their four horror films. Since Peter Hutchings' *Hammer and Beyond* was published in 1993, academics and historians have written extensively on British horror cinema, especially dealing with the films between 1955 and 1976, but have largely overlooked the oeuvre of Hessler and Wicking, with the exception of *Scream and Scream Again.* In surveys of the genre, such as David Pirie's *A Heritage of Horror* (Pirie 1973: 156-160), Jonathan Rigby's *English Gothic* (Rigby 2015: 181-183, 190-194), Don G. Smith's *The Poe Cinema* (Smith 1999: 200-206, 209-213, 215-220) and Bryan Senn's *Drums of Terror* (Senn 1998:146-151), the authors devote space to the Hessler and Wicking titles only in relation to a broader examination of their topics. Encyclopaedias such as *The Encyclopaedia of Horror Movies*, edited by Phil Hardy (Hardy 1986: 210-211, 219, 237) offer short articles on the titles. No treatment of any length has presented the four movies as related expressions of the personal themes, world-views and techniques of Hessler and Wicking.

BRITISH HORROR

Just as British production companies were slow to adapt their native literary genre of gothic horror into cinema, so too were film critics and historians, particularly British ones, late to recognise and analyse the often fascinating results. American Carlos Clarens was first to assess the burgeoning British horror film industry about midway through its initial cycle, in 1967, in his ground-breaking study, *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film,* the book that pioneered seriously surveying the entire international genre (Clarens 1967: 141-147). In analysing Hammer Films, Clarens dismisses most of the British output of the time, writing,

> the common denominator of their product is not really horror but sadism. The more jaded the public's palate becomes, the ranker the banquet of effects … The story told in a

> Hammer film has become an utterly predictable and mechanical narration … What can be said for director Terence Fisher except that his style (or lack of it) has neither softened, strengthened, nor sharpened from *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) to *The Gorgon* (1964) (Clarens 1967: 143).

In 1973, Denis Gifford in his similar survey, this time published in England as *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies,* wrote, even more brutally, “In quantity Hammer films are fast approaching Universal, but in quality they have yet to reach Monogram” (Gifford 1973: 208). The opinions of both Clarens and Gifford mirrored the attitudes toward Hammer Films by most academic and critics at the time.

That same year finally saw publication of an intelligent, insightful examination of the horror genre in England with Pirie’s *A Heritage of Horror,* originally released in 1973 by Gordon Fraser Gallery in London (Pirie, 1973: 155-160) and revised in 2008 and republished by I. B. Taurus and Company (Pirie, 2008: 175-179). Any examination of works on the British horror film needs to begin with Pirie’s ground-breaking book. Not only did he treat auteurs of the movement such as Fisher with the respect and perception they deserved, but he noted themes emerging from the cycle that revealed many of the films as sensitive to their origins and the times in which they were made. Pirie rightfully heaps praise on Reeves’ *Witchfinder General* and examines the films of Hessler and Wicking in some detail as extensions of Reeves’ revitalisation of the genre in 1968. Unfortunately, Pirie limits his observations to the remarkable structural and visual style of such Hessler and Wicking films as *The Oblong Box* without regarding their consistent and personal take on the content.

Pirie, in his 2008 revision of the book called *A New Heritage of Horror,* re-evaluates his regard for *The Oblong Box*. In his rewrite, he dismisses it entirely by stating merely that, “The film’s pointless story, in which Price has a deformed mad brother, has been obviously strung together as a series of episodes with little thought for the whole. And Wicking’s contribution was

confined to additional dialogue" (Pirie 2008:176). Without the benefit of comparing the five drafts of *The Oblong Box,* from Huntington's first version through revisions by Wicking for both Reeves and Hessler, Pirie could not know of the meticulous restructuring and rewriting that resulted in the finished film. His opinion of the movie might not have changed, but his erroneous comments regarding "little thought for the whole" and Wicking's contributions being "confined to additional dialogue" might have been corrected.

Pirie shows much more appreciation for *Scream and Scream Again,* both in his original book and in his extended rewrite on the movie in the 2008 revision. Pirie is also the only author to mention Wicking's un-filmed follow-up to *Scream and Scream Again,* perhaps because he collaborated with Wicking on later script drafts of it. Wicking called the story *Killer Trip.* Fortunately, Wicking's original treatment and two drafts of the script for *Killer Trip* have been made available for this study, and they will be examined in the appendix.

Missing the film's powerful statement of the personal concerns of Hessler and Wicking as well as its political metaphors, Pirie dismisses *Cry of the Banshee* in both versions of his book, describing it in the first publication as "characterised by the same unmistakeable and spectacular style, but its plot was far less interesting" (Pirie 1973: 158). Pirie's enthusiasm returns when assessing *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* calling it,

> another extraordinary Wicking script, designed like *Scream and Scream Again*, to disorient the viewer for a specific purpose… It systematically interlocks … three levels of … consciousness and the result is an extraordinary triple layered structure which was shot by Hessler with great lushness and colour (Pirie 1973: 158-159).

Hutchings' survey of the British horror movie, *Hammer and Beyond,* published by Manchester University Press in 1993, only mentions Hessler in the context of Reeves, citing that Hessler took over directing chores on *The Oblong Box* when Reeves became incapacitated (Hutchings 1993: 136). However, Hutchings interprets British horror films in terms of auteurism, psychology,

feminism, Marxism and generational conflicts in both *Hammer and Beyond* and in his critical examination of the entire genre, *The Horror Film* (Hutchings 2004), and many of his explorations deepen the subject with fascinating insight.

In 2000, McFarland published *Uneasy Dreams: The Golden Age of British Horror Films, 1956-1976,* Gary A. Smith's serious but superficial critical catalogue of every British movie in the genre made during the most prolific period. Content to give facts and his brief personal assessments of each movie, Smith shows none of the incisive insights of Hutchings, and his effort would be supplanted by Jonathan Rigby's more detailed and thoughtful study of the same subject, published in the same year. Smith's sections on the four Hessler and Wicking films add nothing to the critical discourse on the movies or their makers. The author does, however, include short interviews with Hammer producer Aida Young, and, helpful to this study, Max Rosenberg, Heyward and Hessler. Smith asks pertinent questions, uncoloured by his feelings about the films, and obtains useful, fact-based answers.

Rigby, in his survey of the British horror film, *English Gothic,* originally published in 2000 by Reynolds and Hearn, makes some factual errors such as assuming that *The Oblong Box, "* bore its bogus Poe title right from the start*,"* and stating that, "The depressive Reeves was dismayed by Huntington's script and soon backed out of the project" (Rigby 2015: 181). Actually, Huntington's original title for his script was not *The Oblong Box*, and Reeves never backed out of directing the film. He overdosed the weekend before the Monday he was to start shooting and was replaced by Hessler while he recovered (Murray 2002: 293-295). But Rigby does realise the importance of the theme of "sin and retribution," at least in relation to *The Oblong Box*, if not to the rest of the Hessler and Wicking oeuvre.

By the time of Rigby's writings, many critics and academics such as Hutchings noted that the younger directors and screenwriters of the late sixties and early seventies were reacting against the conservative Fisher-style gothics and were presenting the same subject matter

through the perspective of the generational conflicts of their own time. Rigby recognises Wicking's morally ambiguous, anti-authoritarian stance when he writes,

> When unveiled in 1970, *Scream and Scream Again* offers a twisted view of contemporary youth culture by depicting London's discotheques as a breeding ground for humanoid, serial killing vampires. But, of course, it's all the work of nasty, manipulative old men (Rigby 2015: 190).

Rigby also echoes a common complaint by many critics contemporary to the release of *Scream and Scream Again:* that Wicking's scripts seemed crowded with sub-plots and characters and short on explanatory exposition. Rigby finds no appreciation for Wicking's innovative intercutting of seemingly unrelated stories that converge at the climax, but he does admire Hessler's direction of the horror set-piece scenes.

Amicus: The Studio That Dripped Blood edited by Allan Bryce, published in Cornwall by Stray Cat Publishing in 2000, is a profusely illustrated survey of the output of Subotsky and Rosenberg's production company. It contains a chapter called "The Disorientated Man: Scream and Scream Again" that gives a fairly detailed but superficial history of the inception and making of the movie, containing some interview quotes from the participants (Bryce 2000: 56-62).

A deeper but largely negative assessment of the movie can be found in the book *Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing and Horror Cinema* by Mark A. Miller and published by McFarland and Company in 1995. The chapter on *Scream and Scream Again* contains an extremely detailed description of the original Peter Saxon novel on which the screenplay was based (Miller 1995: 206-226). Strangely, Miller believes that Wicking confused the narrative by removing the space alien villains, an opinion not shared by any other source. However, Miller does praise the work of Hessler on *Scream and Scream Again:*

> It is stylishly and painstakingly directed, and the quality of his work seems all the more impressive when one considers he had to shoot the film in only four weeks. Hessler uses

> lots of smooth camera arcs, pans, and dollies in conjunction with his characters' movement and dialogue to shift the focus of characters and ideas without cutting (Miller 1995: 218-219).

In 2001, the year following the first publication of Rigby's work, Harvey Fenton and David Flint edited *Ten Years of Terror: British Horror Films of the 1970s,* published by FAB Press, a yearly critical assessment of British horror movies from the 1970s by the two editors, Kim Newman, Eric McNaughton and fifteen others. Critic Tim Greaves dismisses *Scream and Scream Again,* writing, "In spite of its excellent cast, *Scream and Scream Again* sadly lacks polish, its disjointed story wallowing in sordid presentations of murder, rape and torture, all delivered with an unsettling degree of credibility" (Fenton 2001: 50), while Fenton says of the team's next movie, "While typical of the decidedly average Hessler's output … *Cry of the Banshee* is one of Vincent Price's most undistinguished appearances" (Fenton 2001: 26).

After Hutchings and others revived academic interest in British horror, more focused and penetrating looks at the Hessler and Wicking team appeared. Two articles in *British Horror Cinema*, a genre overview consisting of papers collected by Steve Chibnall and Julian Petley and published in 2002 in London by Routledge, provide insight. Both Leon Hunt's "Necromancy in the UK: Witchcraft and the Occult in British Horror" (Hunt 2002: 82-98) and Chibnall's "A Heritage of Evil: Pete Walker and the Politics of Gothic Revisionism" (Chibnall 2002: 156-171) mention *Cry of the Banshee* in the context of the political metaphor and moral ambiguity intended by Wicking and Hessler. Hunt compares *Cry of the Banshee* to Reeves' earlier *Witchfinder General,* writing that,

> *Cry of the Banshee …* [retains] the vicious witchfinder, but [brings] witches back into the frame, so that the (film) plays more as a conflict between the 'old' (pagan) religions and the 'new' (Christian) one. Again, end-credits are particularly telling, with *Banshee's*

> demarcating the protagonists as 'The Establishment,' 'Witches' and 'Villagers' (Hunt 2002: 84).

Later he points out the feminist counter-culture nature of the witches in *Cry of the Banshee,* stating that,

> 'originary matriarchy' … underpins *Cry of the Banshee,* as witch-mother Oona (Elizabeth Bergner) laments the massacre of her 'children' by witch-persecuting magistrate Edward Whitman (Vincent Price). Oona's sect gives the impression of frolicking, harmless flower-children until the new (masculine) order intervenes, whereupon it is time for avenging demons to be summoned (Hunt 2002: 86).

Hunt was one of the first historians to finally discern the subtext and unity in the works of the Hessler and Wicking team.

In 2005, FAB Press published *Beasts in the Cellar,* John Hamilton's well researched and written history of the film career of producer Tony Tenser, who enabled Reeves to make both *The Sorcerers* and *Witchfinder General.* Hamilton's work presents the most complete and accurate account of the making of those two movies, with many insights about Reeves who would play such an important part in the eventual teaming of Hessler and Wicking on *The Oblong Box.*

Barry Forshaw's study, *British Gothic Cinema*, published in 2013 by Palsgrave MacMillan, quickly dismisses *The Oblong Box* in its extended discussion of Reeves (Forshaw 2013: 101), but the author confesses a personal fascination for *Scream and Scream Again* that started when he first encountered it as a young cinema-goer (Forshaw 2013: 154-156). He briefly examines the theme of corrupt authority in *Scream and Scream Again,* but neglects to relate it to the other collaborations of Hessler and Wicking. Foreshaw does include his brief but revealing interview with Wicking in the appendix of the book (Foreshaw 2013: 200-201).

Ian Cooper's book-length examination of *Witchfinder General,* published by Auteur Publishing in their *Devil's Advocates* series, does have a brief section on *Cry of the Banshee* (Cooper 2011: 87-89), but is most valuable in describing the pessimism and social critique in horror movies influenced by Reeves' film (Cooper 2011: 84-86). Of course, the first British horror movies to be so influenced were the works of Hessler and Wicking, since most, if not all of them, were designed by AIP to be directed by Reeves.

Cooper accurately describes the sense of meaninglessness and despair from *Witchfinder General* that carried over into *The Oblong Box* without once mentioning the latter movie. Cooper could be describing *The Oblong Box* when he mentions the nihilistic ending of another, later, Wicking scripted British horror for Hammer Films, *Demons of the Mind.* Cooper writes, "*Demons of the Mind* (1972) would end, not with the studio's traditional restoration of order but abruptly … on a still image of an hysterical young woman screaming" (Cooper 2011: 84). Wicking and Hessler got there first with the ending of *The Oblong Box* in 1969 that abruptly concludes with the failure of the protagonist's efforts to escape his guilt and the aforementioned freeze-frame of a look of shock on the face of his young wife. Cooper goes on to list the American horror films of the early 1970's, such as Wes Craven's *Last House on the Left* (1972) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977)*,* as well as Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), that have similarly bleak endings, sometimes even featuring a screaming woman (Cooper 2011: 84-85). Granted that the nihilism can be directly traced back to *Witchfinder General*, but the films of Hessler and Wicking predated all of Cooper's American examples in presenting a tragic, hopeless and chaotic ending to their horrors.

Cooper writes, "In addition, Reeves' film … inspired a number of horror films that reflect contemporary social concerns: the Mansonish cults of *Cry of the Banshee, …* the clash of moralities in *The Wicker Man* (1973) … and the corrupt old people who feed off the young in the work of Pete Walker" (Cooper 2011: 85). Again, without naming any of them except *Cry of the*

Banshee, Cooper could be talking about *Witchfinder General's* other immediate spawn at American International: *The Oblong Box, Scream and Scream Again* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* In fact, some of the consistent personal concerns of the Hessler and Wicking team found their first expression in *Witchfinder General*. Reeves himself found a kindred collaborator in Christopher Wicking while he struggled with the rewrites of *The Oblong Box.*

While critically dismissing both *The Oblong Box* and *Cry of the Banshee*, Cooper calls *Scream and Scream Again* a, "far-out, sci-fi, horror film, … one of the best British horror films of the 1960's, which earned praise from, among others, Fritz Lang" (Cooper 2011: 87). Unfortunately, Cooper never explores the themes of nihilism and social criticism initiated by *Witchfinder General* in any of the Hessler and Wicking films except *Cry of the Banshee,* and then only to compare it unfavourably to Reeves' movie.

Cooper is even more dismissive of most of the Hessler and Wicking output in *Frightmares: A History of the British Horror Film,* published in 2016 by Auteur. He neglects to even mention *The Oblong Box,* and reviews *Cry of the Banshee* with the single word, "dull," and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* with the single word, "flawed" (Cooper 2016: 105). But he does write a lengthy section praising *Scream and Scream Again,* calling it,

> a startling blend of Swinging London, mad science and totalitarianism which feels remarkably fresh, especially when compared to late 60s gothics, from the ambitious structure to the breathless pace, emphasised by hand-held camera, rapid zooms and whip-pan edits" (Cooper 2016: 105).

Adam Scovell's 2017 study, *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange,* also published by Auteur, includes a thoughtful, though largely negative analysis of *Cry of the Banshee,* musing on the dated quality of its exploitive portrayal of women in Hessler's director's cut. Scovell writes, "no matter how detailed the period trappings are within the diegesis of the film, *Cry* is arguably a summation of its production era's attitudes towards women, albeit unconsciously; where such

violence is treated as potentially titillating" (Scovell 2017: 136). However, Scovell does not compare Hessler's director's cut with AIP's theatrical release version in which all of the nudity and some of the abuse of women were removed. Also, he does not engage with the effort of Hessler and Wicking to portray the mistreatment of women of all classes in the extremely patriarchal society of Elizabethan England as a metaphor for the plight of women in the 1960s.

In 2018, Allan Bryce edited a history of the British horror film written by himself, John Hamilton, Christopher Koetting, Denis Meikle and several others, called *British Horror Films: Beyond Hammer and Amicus* and published by *The Dark Side* magazine's Ghoulish Publishing. Chapter 8, called "American International Pictures in the UK," written by Christopher Koetting, contains a fairly detailed history of the making of Hessler and Wicking's four horror films with valuable quotes from interviews with Hessler, Wicking and Executive Producer Heyward. The chapter attempts little or no critical analysis of the films, but it does accurately chronicle their creation, often related by the three most influential creators.

HORROR FILM ENCYCLOPAEDIAS

Most film encyclopaedias of any completeness, especially those dealing with the horror genre, have entries for the four Hessler and Wicking films, but few of their brief articles review the movies with any critical or historical incisiveness. In fact, the only one that adds to the discussion of the accomplishments of Hessler and Wicking is *The Encyclopaedia of Horror Movies*, edited by Hardy and published in New York by Harper and Row in 1986 (Hardy 1986: 210-211, 219, 237). Hardy's massive tome, a ground-breaking effort for its completeness and critical acuity, deals with the movies in four separate entries, but regards them as a single body of work by a talented director. Before 1986, the Hessler and Wicking films had rarely been treated as a discrete entity except by Pirie in *A Heritage of Horror*. In his *Encyclopaedia*, Hardy takes British horror seriously along with genre cinema generally, and the book adopts a

predominantly auteurist perspective influenced by Pirie. The assessments of the individual films of Hessler and Wicking are debatable, but even with different contributors writing about each movie, the *Encyclopaedia* attempts to understand them as works of a guiding artistic vision. Seen together and not merely as part of the prevailing tendencies of the genre at the time of their releases, their value as different aspects of a single world-view becomes much more apparent.

Of *The Oblong Box,* the *Encyclopaedia* observes*,* “The most interesting aspect is that … like a guilty conscience, the evils of British colonialism come home to haunt and destroy its perpetrators … The film … is surprisingly effective, though over-elaborate” (Hardy 1986: 210). British horror had previously dealt with supernatural revenge exacted on England for its territorial transgressions in Terence Fisher’s *The Mummy* (1959) and John Gilling’s *Plague of the Zombies* and *The Reptile* (both 1966), but not in the morally nuanced style of Hessler and Wicking’s *The Oblong Box.* Neither the Fisher film nor the two by Gilling criticise the British exploitation of occupied indigenous people as does *The Oblong Box,* a distinction not mentioned by the *Encyclopaedia.* Of *Scream and Scream Again*, the volume offers these insights:

> Hessler’s picture works more like a patchwork of motifs derived from different genres, as if the tendency towards disintegration also affected the generic framework at a time when the Hammer horror style seemed to have run its course, and the body-in-pieces fantasy of gore movies hadn’t yet caught hold of the genre (Hardy 1986: 211).

The *Encyclopaedia’s* entry for *Cry of the Banshee* describes it this way:

> Only in the location scenes does Hessler create a sense of haunting evil. Elsewhere, the film exploits whatever opportunities for violence are provided by its theme: women are stripped, one is burnt alive, a head is blown off, there is a massacre, and so on (Hardy 1986: 219).

Since the writers of the *Encyclopaedia* have not discerned the recurring obsessions with sin and retribution and the sixties counter-culture metaphors in the four movies by Hessler and Wicking, they fail to realise that *Cry of the Banshee* is perhaps the clearest and most complete presentation of those themes.

SURVEYS OF SUB-GENRES WITHIN HORROR

Two overviews from the 1990s of sub-genres within the horror film treat the Hessler and Wicking movies with much more depth: Bryan Senn's 1998 book, *Drums of Terror,* published in Baltimore by Midnight Marquee Press (Senn 1998:146-151), and Don G. Smith's 1999 study, *The Poe Cinema,* published in Jefferson by McFarland and Company (Smith 1999: 200-206, 209-213, 215-220).

Drums of Terror, a perceptive and well researched exploration of voodoo in the horror film, devotes an entire chapter to *The Oblong Box.* First, Senn quickly and accurately tells the story of the film's inception and Reeves' involvement and replacement by Hessler. Often quoting interviews with Wicking, Hessler, Price and Heyward, Senn praises the movie and backs up his assertions with the most detailed and incisive analysis of the film written up until the year of his book's publication. Unfortunately, he does not relate *The Oblong Box* in terms of themes or style to the other movies by Hessler and Wicking, so he does not discern the concerns of the two filmmakers that first appear in the film. He does argue that *Scream and Scream Again,*

> sinks beneath the weight of a hopelessly uncertain and confusing screenplay (a charge which is, ironically, often unfairly levelled at *The Oblong Box*), and neither *Banshee* nor *Rue Morgue* possesses near the verisimilitude or intensity of *The Oblong Box* (Senn 1998: 147).

The other genre overview from the 1990s with chapters devoted to Hessler and Wicking films, Smith's *The Poe Cinema,* is far less appreciative of *The Oblong Box*, even less so of *Cry of the*

Banshee, but calls *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* "one of the best horror films of the 1970's" (Smith 1999: 219). Smith does an admirable job of researching the making, release and reception of the movies, but assesses them only in relation to Poe's original stories and the successful cinematic approach of Corman's AIP adaptations. Missing the innovations and thematic connections of the movies, Smith dismisses *The Oblong Box* by concluding that the movie, "is what it is because AIP no longer cared to make quality Poe pictures …Unfortunately, the magic would become more scarce with every film" (Smith 1999: 206). Similarly, Smith sums up *Cry of the Banshee*, Hessler and Wicking's most pointed and nuanced personal statement about their own chaotic age, by stating,

> The film does manage a certain amount of formulaic suspense and an occasional chill when the wind picks up and the banshees howl, but the mood usually falls short of what the production requires. A Poe adaptation in name only, *Cry of the Banshee* is a mediocre, forgettable film (Smith 1999: 213).

Smith's appreciation of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* owes less to its success as a unique vision by Hessler and Wicking and more to its echoes of Corman and Poe. He writes, "Hessler, as Corman before him, adds … touches to the film reminiscent of Poe's writing."

Michael H. Price's *Forgotten Horrors Vol. 8: The Resurrection of Edgar Allan Poe,* published in 2015 by Cremo Studios, centres on American International's Poe series of the sixties and early seventies and its influence on the movies of that era (Price, 2015: 42-90). Of course, the three Poe titles by Hessler and Wicking receive coverage. The author greatly admires *The Oblong Box* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, but calls *Cry of the Banshee,* "Least of the American International Poes … Gordon Hessler's *Cry of the Banshee* places Vincent Price once again in the service of witch-hunting, though without the splendid results-under-hardship of *Witchfinder General"* (Price 2015: 80). Michael Price's analysis of the movies concentrates on his personal reactions and research from earlier sources, but he includes an

interview with his distant relative, Vincent Price, in which the actor speaks with more acid humour and much less sentiment about Reeves than in other conversations.

AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL PICTURES

Mark Thomas McGee's 1996 history of American International Pictures, called *Faster and Furiouser* and published in North Carolina by MacFarlane and Company, may have been the source for many of the misconceptions surrounding the films of Hessler and Wicking (McGee 1996: 277-281). For example, while describing the genesis of *The Oblong Box,* like Rigby after him, McGee states that, "Reeves thought the script was terrible and bowed out of the project" (McGee 1996: 278), and as is now known, that is not true.

Two books by Steven A. Smith deal exclusively with American International Pictures. Smith's first book on the subject, *The American International Pictures Video Guide,* published in 2009 by McFarland and Company, lists every AIP movie alphabetically with abbreviated credits, running times, home video sources, critical reaction and review samples (Smith 2009: 119-120, 137-138, 45-46, 115). Smith dismisses *The Oblong Box, Cry of the Banshee* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* as convoluted hodgepodges of ideas from better movies but thinks that *Scream and Scream Again* improves on its source novel and emerges, "frightening and disturbing" (Smith 2009: 137-138). Smith acknowledges the two different versions of *Cry of the Banshee,* writing, "In AIP's defence, sometimes their tampering improved the movie. *Cry of the Banshee* is an example of this, although it still isn't a very good film" (Smith 2009: 45). Smith's second book on AIP, *American International Pictures: The Golden Years,* published by BearManor Media in 2013, collects press releases and advertising material for every AIP project, realised or not, and presents them chronologically (Smith 2013: 365-366, 385-387, 398, 432-433). It also includes brief and selected critical reactions to the films.

In 2019, MacFarland and Company published Rob Craig's massive critical survey, *American International Pictures: A Comprehensive Filmography.* While approaching AIP's cinematic product from a sympathetic and informed viewpoint, Craig can be unpredictable in his assessments of some of the generally revered titles, giving negative critiques to Mario Bava's *Black Sabbath* (1963), Sidney Salkow's *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), the Vadim, Malle, Fellini *Spirits of the Dead* (1969) and Brian De Palma's *Dressed to Kill* (1980). But Craig writes very positive and perceptive reviews of all four of the Hessler and Wicking horror films for AIP.

BIOGRAPHIES

In the case of *The Oblong Box*, the best sources of information on the production are the five script drafts and two biographies of Reeves. With a great deal of factual detail and avoiding psychological speculation, John B. Murray's 2002 biography, *The Remarkable Michael Reeves,* published in London by Cinematics, proves extremely useful (Murray 2002: 292-298). Unfortunately, Murray lacked screenplay drafts of *The Oblong Box*, so he bases most of his descriptions of its development on interviews with Wicking and friends of the late director. In addition, he reports unsubstantiated rumours not borne out by the screenplays, such as Price biographer Lucy Chase Williams' assertion that an early plan was to have Price play both brothers (Murray 2002: 292). Murray also sources the rumour of Reeves' idea for the West Africans to chant, "Namroc", which is the name, "Corman," backwards, and which appears in none of the scripts:

> [Reeves' friend] Ernest Harris commented: 'I recall talking to both [film critic] David Austen and Mike about Mike's planned version of *The Oblong Box …* Mike … had included lots of in-jokes, such as the witchdoctor chanting an incantation which invoked the name 'Namroc, Namroc' … and one of Christopher Lee's entrances being preceded by the line, 'Give me another faggot for the fire' (Murray 2002: 293).

For the record, that line announcing Lee's entrance is also not present in any of the five script drafts. However, Murray gives precise dates for Price's arrival in England, the projected start of production, Reeves' overdose and Hessler's actual beginning of principle photography (Murray 2002: 293). Instead of speculating on Reeves' reasons for the overdose, Murray merely states that, "Mike was now in a downward spiral, possibly due to taking too many prescribed pills, and could not cope" (Murray 2002: 293). Murray quotes Ernest Harris who gives fascinating details about his two visits to the set of *The Oblong Box*, the first of which coincided with Reeves' visit (Murray 2002: 296-297). So although Murray never dissects the themes or personal preoccupations in *The Oblong Box,* his precise reporting based on eye-witness interviews and dates remains extremely helpful in assessing the development of the project, especially when comparing them to the five script drafts.

Benjamin Halligan's 2003 biography, *Michael Reeves,* published by Manchester University Press, offers a well-researched history of Reeves' involvement on the project while speculating in imaginative detail on Reeves' attitude towards it (Halligan 2003: 209-216). Also without the benefit of the pre-production script drafts of *The Oblong Box*, Halligan cannot be specific about what the screenplay originally contained or how Reeves and Wicking altered it. Intriguingly, he mentions a letter that Reeves supposedly sent to *Cry of the Banshee* author Tim Kelly, "to say how eager he was to get started on the film" (Halligan 2003: 216). Halligan's source for that assertion is a letter from Kelly to Tim Hodgson dated 2 December 1991.

Of course, the many biographers of Price always mention the first three Hessler and Wicking collaborations, but their assessments usually follow the superficial, press-release and second-hand critique methods of show business chroniclers. Denis Meikle writes more thoughtfully about Price's output in *Vincent Price: The Art of Fear,* published in 2006 by Reynolds and Hearn (Meikle 2006: 154-167). Unfortunately, Meikle rarely explores subtext or artistic intentions and either loves or loathes the movies he surveys. His prickly sensibilities

prevent him from looking past his initial reactions to films, and so he is left to justify his feelings by pointing out superficialities that please or repulse him. Meikle finds *The Oblong Box, Scream and Scream Again* and *Cry of the Banshee* beneath his contempt and makes no effort to explore their connecting themes or the unique style of Hessler and Wicking.

Jonathan Malcolm Lampley has more interesting things to say about the films in his study, *Women in the Horror Films of Vincent Price,* published in 2011 by McFarland and Company (Lampley 2011: 131-146). In fact, Lampley devotes an entire chapter to *Scream and Scream Again.* While he does not detect the thematic or even stylistic links with the other Hessler and Wicking titles, he does make some cogent points about the movie itself. For example, he detects an irony in *Scream and Scream Again* directly related to the Hessler and Wicking theme of the corruption of the powerful:

> What finally becomes clear … is that the composites are nowhere near as perfect as they claim to be … the composites are just as imperfect as humans. This conclusion reveals a level of ironic horror to the conspiracy at the root of *Scream and Scream Again* - even if the composites did succeed in taking over the world, it is impossible for the dream of order and perfection Browning espouses to ever come true (Lampley 2011: 143).

In a chapter about Reeves' *Witchfinder General*, Lampley calls *The Oblong Box*, "a confused hodgepodge of various genre cliches" (Lampley 2011: 132). And of *Cry of the Banshee,* Lampley writes, "As ineffective as *The Oblong Box* may be, it is considerably better than *Cry of the Banshee"* (Lampley 2011: 134). Lampley takes offence that neither project is actually based on a work by Poe, as if that negates any value they might have as original narratives. Claiming that *Cry of the Banshee* simply steals from better entries in the AIP Poe franchise, Lampley cites parallels to Corman's *Masque of the Red Death* and *House of Usher* as well as the obvious similarities with Reeves' *Witchfinder General* (Lampley 2011: 134-135). Lampley does make a

very acute observation when he writes that *Cry of the Banshee* illustrates, "that the decay of the family unit is one of the most pervasive thematic developments to emerge in the Vietnam era fantasy film" (Lampley 2011: 136). He goes on to observe that in this turbulent era, "the family … becomes the agent of destruction, not salvation, for traditional values and the 'normal' social order" (Lampley 2011: 136).

Roger Corman's autobiography, *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime,* published in 1990 by Random House, never mentions Hessler and Wicking since he never had a professional relationship with them. He does, however, provide a personal and detailed account of American International Pictures and the two men who built and ran it: Arkoff and Nicholson. A very intellectual and self-conscious artist, Corman also provides insights into his Freudian approach to horror, especially in his Poe series. His vision for the Poe films contrasts starkly with the moral and political perspectives of Hessler and Wicking. His detailed description of his approach helps to highlight the very different priorities of Hessler and Wicking when they tackled the same type of subjects.

The most complete biographies of Hessler and Wicking are in their obituaries. Stephen Bowie writes a very impressive remembrance of Hessler, utilising his long interview with the director, called "Obituary: Gordon Hessler (1926-2014)" in his *Classic TV History Blog* in 2014 (Bowie 2014). Concentrating more on the progression of Hessler's life and career and less on his individual movies, Bowie gets many personal stories from Hessler about the people and opportunities he encountered in his rise to feature film-maker. Similarly, John Jeremy contributes a great deal of well-researched life history about writer Wicking upon his death in the article, "Christopher Wicking: Screenwriter and Critic Who Wrote for Hammer and Worked on the Adaptation of 'Absolute Beginners'," for the Friday, 24 October 2008 issue of *The Independent* (Jeremy 2008). Jeremy includes personal remembrances of Wicking as a teacher and a friend, as well as his rise in the motion picture business.

INTERVIEWS

Tom Weaver's collection of interviews, *Science Fiction Stars and Horror Heroes*, published in 1991 by McFarland and Company, contains conversations between Weaver and both Hessler and Heyward (Weaver 1991: 142-184). Writing from the perspective of a fan, Weaver often asks leading questions based on his prejudices about the movies. However, Weaver also manages to solicit factually informative answers from his subjects. Of course, he never strays into the areas of artistic intention or style, but at least his questions allow the subjects to go on record as to their recollections.

For example, Weaver asks Hessler, "Would you agree that *The Oblong Box* had a story that was hard to follow?" (Weaver 1991: 144). Hessler, perhaps just to be polite, does agree, but then goes on to talk about Wicking's participation, the budget and the schedule. Instead of asking Hessler about his anti-authoritarian stance in *Scream and Scream Again*, Weaver flatly states, "Fans' complaint with *Scream and Scream Again* is that, except for one short moment with Price and Lee, none of the horror stars have scenes together" (Weaver 1991: 146), as if this somehow negates the achievement of this unique and intricately plotted film.

Later, Weaver opens the discussion about *Cry of the Banshee* by stating, "*Cry of the Banshee* turned out to be a pretty unpleasant and kinky movie, and it isn't well-liked by the fans" (Weaver 1991: 146), hardly a basis on which Hessler can discuss his intentions and achievements relating to the title. However, Hessler does answer by revealing the genesis and development of the material as well as his relationship with the studio over the rewrite undertaken by Wicking. Like many other genre writers of the time, Weaver also dismisses the films for presenting original stories despite the studio's use of Poe's name to sell them. He asks Hessler, "What is there in *The Oblong Box* and *Banshee* that makes them Edgar Allan Poe films?" (Weaver 1991: 148) Hessler, of course, answers honestly with, "There isn't anything; that

was a pure and absolute lie," (quoted in Weaver 1991: 148) but given Weaver's dismissive attitude, Hessler does not go on to defend the stories as original and personally revealing narratives.

Contradicting Price's public statements at the time, Weaver tells Heyward, "Price was pretty disgruntled about the quality of some of the later AIP scripts, and in fact he feuded with Arkoff about it" (Weaver 1991: 174). Giving Weaver a lesson in professional studio politics, Heyward answers, "If Vincent did not like the scripts, he either had to tell me, 'I would like a rewrite on it,' and I would have obliged him; or, he could have told Arkoff, 'I don't want to do it.' You can't bitch about a script after it's made" (quoted in Weaver 1991: 174). Undaunted, Weaver later asks, "Where in the world did all these half-assed scripts come from?" (Weaver 1991: 175) In one question, Weaver dismisses several professional Hollywood writers, such as Tim Kelly and Hitchcock favourite, Henry Slesar, each with dozens of television and movie credits. Needless to say, Weaver's interviews never plumb the depths of the artists' intentions or achievements, but, despite his ignorance of the filmmaking process, he manages to solicit a great deal of useful information on the actual making of the movies.

Issue 98 of the magazine *Video Watchdog,* published in 2003 by Tim and Donna Lucas in Cincinnati, features a perceptive interview of Hessler by David Del Valle called, "Return to the Rue Morgue: A Conversation with Gordon Hessler" (Del Valle 2003: 42-49). Del Valle's comments and questions show much more depth and respect than those of Weaver, even if they yield basically the same information. For example, Del Valle tells the director, "You made these films in the early 70's, which many people remember as a period of great cynicism and disillusionment after the optimism of the 1960s" (Del Valle 2003: 49). Hessler responds less defensively and with more trust than he did with Weaver, detailing to Del Valle the warmth of his relationship with Wicking.

Writer Phillip Nutman interviewed Wicking about his entire screenwriting career for the July, 1989 issue #84 of *Fangoria* magazine (Nutman 1989: 50-54, 67). Nutman, in the article called "Dream and Scream Again," asks extremely thoughtful, well-researched questions, and Wicking responds with perhaps his most revealing answers. Wicking discusses not only the inception and challenges of each movie, but also his observations about Hessler, Reeves, AIP and other collaborators. He even mentions his thematic inspirations and the personal forces from his life that shaped his artistic vision.

Eyeball magazine, issue 5 from 1998, contains a revealing Wicking interview done by Max Decharne in 1989. Wicking talks about each of the Hessler movies, revealing his thoughts about the politics of *Scream and Scream Again,* his story of composer Bernard Herrmann's screening of *Cry of the Banshee* when Hessler asked him to score it, and his regrets about the casting of Lilly Palmer in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Decharne 1998: 123).

JOURNAL ARTICLES

The most comprehensive journal article about the Hessler and Wicking films appears in the same issue of *Video Watchdog* as Del Valle's interview of Hessler. Lucas writes a well-researched and well-reasoned overview of the four movies called "AIP and Pillage: The Cries and Screams of Gordon Hessler" on the occasion of their first release on DVD (Lucas 2003: 22-41). Despite perpetuating the common misconception that Hessler took over *The Oblong Box* only after Reeves' death on 11 February 1969, Lucas writes an accurate and probing examination of Hessler and Wicking's work. Lucas begins his article by flatly stating, "From the time of their initial release, the four horror films directed by Gordon Hessler for American International Pictures … have been unjustly criticised, misunderstood and disregarded by genre enthusiasts" (Lucas 2003: 22). About Hessler's three Poe films, Lucas writes, "they could not be further removed from the style of the Roger Corman films which launched the franchise a

decade earlier" (Lucas 2003: 22). Accurately comparing Hessler's movies to the three by Reeves, especially *Witchfinder General,* Lucas perceptively states,

> While Reeves' three-picture filmography repeatedly chronicles a battle between young and old to tell a story of innocence lost, culminating in a mature statement that climaxes in a resounding scream of despair, Hessler's films speak from a pit of disillusionment - which may have been the next logical step, but, to an audience, is not so pleasant or romantic a place to spend 90 minutes on the edge of one's seat (Lucas 2003: 22).

Lucas adds, "Despite the compromises that Hessler was made to suffer in all facets of production, the essential personality of his work remained more or less discernible" (Lucas 2003: 22). Lucas goes on to meticulously detail the cuts, rearrangements and revisions that AIP wrought on three of the four Hessler and Wicking movies, comparing the then newly discovered director's cuts to the AIP release versions.

By far the most useful source for the making of *Scream and Scream Again* is issue 20 of a magazine devoted to Hammer Films and other British horror called, appropriately, *Little Shoppe of Horrors*, published in June 2008 by Richard Klemensen and the Elmer Valo Appreciation Society. The article itself, "Scream and Scream Again: The Uncensored History of Amicus Productions," was written by Phillip Nutman and covers every Amicus project in detail, including extensive interviews with Subotsky and other key players (Nutman 2008: 67-71). Though it barely attempts a critical analysis of the finished movie, the article provides insight into its inception and development and the parts various creative and financial powers played in its outcome. Particularly telling are the first-hand descriptions of the collaboration on the screenplay, told by both the original adapter, Subotsky, and the final writer, Wicking. Both screenwriters make clear that Hessler guided the effort with the backing of Executive Producer Heyward and that Subotsky was completely squeezed out of the rewriting by Heyward at the insistence of Hessler, reinforcing the fact that Hessler, along with Wicking, was the film's auteur.

Three issues of *Cinefantastique* contain articles valuable to understanding the movies of Hessler and Wicking. The summer 1973 issue, published and edited by Frederick S. Clarke, contains a long interview of Subotsky by Chris Knight called "The Amicus Empire" in which the original screenwriter of *Scream and Scream Again* briefly discusses the movie and reveals his surprise at its financial success (Knight 1973: 15-16). Another article from 1973, in Volume 3, Issue 2 contains a long, detailed interview with writer Richard Matheson by Mick Martin, entitled, "Matheson: A Name to Conjure With!" (Martin 1973: 17). In it, Matheson talks about a largely forgotten horror novel from 1965 by Leslie H. Whitten called *Progeny of the Adder.* Matheson candidly admits that Whitten's powerful book probably inspired the contemporary, violent portrayal of modern vampires in later movies such as *Scream and Scream Again, Count Yorga, Vampire* (1970) and his own teleplay, *The Night Stalker* (1972). Matheson expresses surprise and regret that the novel itself was never adapted into a movie despite his best efforts to initiate one.

Even more useful is the January 1989 double issue of *Cinefantastique* devoted to the career of Price (Biodrowski 1989: 40-84). In a forty-four page article entitled "Vincent Price: Horror's Crown Prince," writers Steve Biodrowski, David Del Valle and Lawrence French collaborate on a well-researched and reasoned survey of Price's movies, offering interview quotes and critical assessments. Although the Hessler and Wicking movies do not receive either the space or respect they deserve, the authors provide some valuable reactions from Price and his co-workers about their creation.

THE AUTEUR THEORY

Although none of them mention Hessler and Wicking, key texts dealing with the auteur theory have been consulted to define the writing and directing team as dual auteurs of their four works. Editor Barry Keith Grant, in his very complete critical anthology, *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film*

Reader, published by Blackwell in 2008, has assembled classic writings on the theory ranging from Francois Truffaut's "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" (1954) to Jerome Christensen's "Studio Authorship, Corporate Art" (2006). Especially pertinent to this study was Andrew Sarris's "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962" (Sarris 1962: 35-45), Peter Wollen's "The Auteur Theory" (Wollen 1969: 55-64), Robin Wood's "Ideology, Genre, Auteur" (Wood 1977: 84-92) and Richard Corliss's "Notes on a Screenwriter's Theory 1973" (Colliss 1973: 140-147).

Corliss wrote an entire book called *Talking Pictures, Screenwriters in the American Cinema*, published by Overlook Press in 1974, on his position that the screenwriter often deserves status as the author-auteur, examining the careers of such influential writers as Ben Hecht, Preston Sturges, Robert Riskin and Dudley Nichols. In 2006, critic David Kipen continued to advocate Corliss's position in his book *The Schreiber Theory: A Radical Rewrite of American Film History*, published by Melville House. "Schreiber" means "writer" in Yiddish, and Kipen explains titling his rival to the "auteur theory" this way: "What language could better christen a script-based theory of film criticism than the mother tongue of many of America's first screenwriters?" (Kipen 2006: 37) Like Corliss before him, Kipen examines the works of several American screenwriters and advocates for their positions as the true authors of the films on which they wrote. Even more revisionist than Corliss, Kipen insists, "it's the contention of this book that, despite the shifting tides of critical theory, film has always been a writer's medium" (Kipen 2006: 79).

Grant also edited *Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews,* published in 2018 by Wayne State University Press, which traces the critic's blending of auteurism with the interests of genre and ideology into a synthesis appropriate to the examination of the horror film. Wood opened up auteurism to examine, not only artists' themes and techniques, but their particular use of horror to comment on humanity, society and politics. Wood wrote two book length studies that still stand as guides for any close readings of

individual films by great film auteurs: *Hitchcock's Films,* published in revised form by A. S. Barnes in 1977 and *Howard Hawks,* published in revised form by the British Film Institute in 1981.

Grant's other edited collection of essays on the horror film, *Planks of Reason,* published by Scarecrow Press in 1996, includes Wood's influential 1979 treatise, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film" (Wood 1979: 164-200), as well as interesting readings on the genre from the perspective of auteurism such as Mary B. Campbell's "Biological Alchemy and the Films of David Cronenberg" (Campbell 1996: 307-320). In 2000, Alain Silver and James Ursini edited a compendium of articles published by Limelight Editions called *Horror Film Reader* that includes, not only "Neglected Nightmares," Wood's 1980 examination of horror auteurs Wes Craven, Stephanie Rothman, Bob Clark and George Romero (Wood 1980: 111-128), but a long and detailed article on his work by auteur Terence Fisher called "Horror is My Business" (Fisher 1964: 67-76) from 1964.

Two critical studies on Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, the greatest dual auteurs of British cinema, were consulted to compare and contrast their working relationship with that of Hessler and Wicking. Both Ian Christie's *Arrows of Desire*, published by Faber and Faber in 1994, and Andrew Moor's *Powell and Pressburger: A Cinema of Magic Spaces,* published by I. B. Tauris in 2012, examine the movies of Powell and Pressburger in the context of their unique themes and styles and their special positions in the history of British film. Powell, in his autobiography from 1987, *A Life in Movies* published by Alfred A. Knopf, goes into great detail about the directing of each of his films and his working relationship with Pressburger who wrote the movies they produced together. It is a very revealing chronicle of the creative input of each of the partners as they forged their shared visions.

Alan Burton and Tim O'Sullivan's *The Cinema of Basil Dearden and Michael Relph*, published by Edinburgh University Press in 2009, is one of the few sources examining these

British dual auteurs in detail. Burton also wrote a very helpful article on another of England's creative filmmaking teams, the Boulting Brothers, called, "From Adolescence Into Maturity: The Film Comedy of the Boulting Brothers," which can be found in the collection, *British Comedy Cinema,* edited by I. Q. Hunter and Laraine Porter and published by Routledge in 2012.

In *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers,* published by the University Press of Kentucky in 2009, editor Mark T. Conrad collects papers written by film historians and philosophic scholars on the meanings and moralities of the sibling dual auteurs. Revealing not only the consistent cinematic style of the Coens, the writers also discover the philosophic underpinnings of the films of the two brothers, unifying their consistent world view despite the contrasting genres and emotional tones in which they chose to tell their stories. The scholars reveal the Coens as the most artistically successful dual auteurs of their time and one of the most conspicuous examples of this unique form of film authors in cinematic history.

In 2013, editors Kate Egan and Sarah Thomas, in their book *Cult Stardom: Offbeat Attractions and Processes of Cultification,* published by Palgrave Macmillan, collected essays on the impact of actors elevated to cult status in genres that have devoted fan followings such as horror. The papers examine the cult stars' effect, both positive and negative, on films that create and cast them. Especially useful for this study were Matt Hills' "Cult Movies With and Without Cult Stars: Differentiating Discourses of Stardom" (Hills 2013:21-36) and Justin Smith's "Vincent Price and Cult Performance: The Case of *Witchfinder General"* (Smith 2013: 109-125).

CONCLUSION

In 1973, Pirie in *A Heritage of Horror* was the first film historian to recognise the four horror movies of Hessler and Wicking as a unique cinematic body of work. As scholarship progressed on the British horror film, from Hardy's *Encyclopaedia of Horror Movies* in 1986 to Hutchings' *Hammer and Beyond* in 1993 to Rigby's *English Gothic* in 2000 to Forshaw's *British Gothic*

Cinema in 2013, study of the genre deepened, applying the theories of Wood and concepts from auteurism, genre and ideology. But the AIP movies of Hessler and Wicking were only regarded in passing, if at all, while historians examined the works of Fisher, Corman and Reeves.

With the release of Hessler's director's cuts of the films, the time seems right to place them in critical perspective, not merely as further examples of the AIP horror franchise, but as unusually personal examples of the genre, the special qualities of which come directly from the creative efforts of their makers. With their actual-location filming, hand-held camera coverage, increased bloodshed and nudity, and nihilistic and politically rebellious philosophy, the Hessler and Wicking movies not only separated themselves from the gothics they followed, but looked forward to the new sensibilities of the genre in the seventies. And they did all this while, for the most part, being successful commercial examples of that genre themselves. By using the priorities of the auteur theory, as revealed in the works of Sarris, Wood and others, and revised to include the screenwriter as an auteur partner along with the director as suggested by Corliss in his 1974 book *Talking Pictures*, this study will probe the works of Hessler and Wicking as dual auteurs, revealing their consistent themes, concerns and style in the larger context of the progression of the commercial horror film in the late sixties and early seventies.

CHAPTER 3 - DUAL AUTEURS

This study contends that director Hessler and writer Wicking were the dual auteurs of their four horror movies for American International Pictures. To prove this, the verity of the original auteur theory itself must be examined. According to auteurism, as it developed in film criticism from the 1950s and 60s, film directors, supervising every artistic aspect of their productions, are the real creators, or “authors,” of their movies, even more so than the writers of their screenplays. In his essay “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962,” Sarris offered three premises of the auteur theory:

> the first premise … is the technical competence of a director as a criterion of value … if a director has no technical competence, no elementary flair for cinema, he is automatically cast out from the pantheon of directors … The second premise … is the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value. Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurring characteristics of style, which serve as his signature … The third and ultimate premise … is concerned with interior meaning … Interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a director’s personality and his material … The corresponding roles of the director may be designated as those of a technician, a stylist and an *auteur*” (Sarris 1962: 43).

Almost from its inception, critics eager to point out its limitations attacked the auteur theory. These detractors challenged the notion that motion picture directors infused their works of entertainment with personal meanings and styles, even while employed in the profit-driven industrial conditions of a movie studio. In her 1963 *Film Quarterly* essay, “Circles and Squares,” anti-auteurist critic Pauline Kael wrote of Sarris’s first standard, technical competence:

> sometimes the greatest artists in a medium bypass or violate the simple technical competence that is so necessary for hacks … An artist who is not a good technician can indeed create new standards, because standards of technical competence are based on comparisons with work already done” (Kael 1963: 48-49).

Kael does not take into account that, in the short history of the medium, the catalogue of film technique has never been static. Technical competence has never been a matter of following

set rules or standards. What Sarris means by "technical competence" is that a great director, at minimum, must be able to use the mechanical and stylistic tools at his disposal to communicate a story clearly and effectively, thereby arousing the emotions and thoughts of an audience without distraction, or, as Sarris himself writes, "Technique is simply the ability to put a film together with some clarity and coherence" (Sarris 1962: 44). When Griffith made use of close-ups and inserts, when Eisenstein developed complex strategies of editing, when Murnau moved the camera while following characters or emulating their subjective states, when Welles blocked actors in deep focus, even when Godard disregarded all conventions and filmed shots with a hand-held camera and cut them without regard for spacial or temporal continuity, film technique was not being bypassed or violated through ignorance but expanded by directors looking for more effective ways to tell a story and move an audience. About Sarris's second standard for an *auteur*, individual style, Kael writes:

> Often the works in which we are most aware of the personality of the director are his worst films - when he falls back on the devices he has already done to death. When a famous director makes a good movie, we look at the movie, we don't think about the director's personality; when he makes a stinker we notice his familiar touches because there's not much else to watch (Kael 1963: 49).

Here, Kael reveals her criteria for evaluating a film's worth: in the absence of recognising and exploring directors' personalities and the realisation of their intentions, she must fall back on her subjective responses to the film. To Kael, a director's work is either "a good movie" or "a stinker," depending on her personal tastes and preferences. André Bazin, no auteurist himself, reacts to this type of evaluation based on individual impressions when he writes in his 1957 essay, "De la Politique des Auteurs" :

> It is far from being my intention to deny the positive attitude and methodological qualities of [the *auteur* theory]. First of all, it has the great merit of … reacting against the impressionistic relativism that still reigns over the majority of film reviews. I admit that the explicit or admitted pretension of a critic to reconsider the production of a film-maker with

> every new film in the light of his judgement has something presumptuous about it … What I like about the *politique des auteurs* is that … it has to discern the contribution of the artist as such, quite apart from the qualities of the subject or the technique: i.e. the man behind the style (Bazin 1957: 25-26).

"The man behind the style," is another way of defining "the personality" of the auteur, certainly a more exacting starting point for analysing the choices made by a film's director than the subjective impressions of the critic. Kael writes of Sarris's third standard, interior meaning expressed by the tension between the auteur's personality and the material:

> Their ideal *auteur* is the man who signs a long-term contract, directs any script that's handed to him, and expresses himself by shoving bits of style up the crevasses of the plots. If his "style" is in conflict with the story line or subject matter, so much the better - more chance for tension … a routine, commercial movie can sure use a little 'personality' (Kael 1963: 51).

Kael creates a "straw man argument" by mischaracterising Sarris's theory. In the first place, most of the great auteurs, while not the writers of their screenplays, chose their stories and supervised their adaptations into cinematic form. John Ford, Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang and many others were involved in their projects from inception, often producing the films they directed, but even when acting as employees, working closely with their screenwriters. Sarris does not advocate that the auteur's themes and style must be "in conflict" with the story material. He simply posits that the the film-maker's concerns broaden and transform the narratives into something personal and original, even when outside of their genres' traditional thematic requirements. It is not a matter of "conflict," but of addition. For example, Hawks, the producer of *The Thing from Another World* (1951), the director-producer of *Rio Bravo* (1959), and the auteur of both, augmented the expected science-fiction horror tropes of the first and the western themes of the second with his concerns about achieving self-respect and meaning in human relationships through professionalism in team efforts.

Although the story material and tone are very different in the two projects, they are unmistakably the products of one artist who not only crafted them into effective examples of their genres but expanded them into works expressing his philosophy. Blinded by her sense of superiority to the content of what she calls, "routine, commercial movies," Kael ignores the styles and personalities of the directors, missing their comments on humanity in their works within entertainment genres. Well aware of this prejudice in critics evaluating his own films, Hitchcock, a much more self-conscious auteur than Hawks, told Richard Schickel in a 1972 interview,

> When I say I'm not interested in content, it's the same as a painter [not] worrying about the apples that he's painting - whether they're sweet or sour. Who cares? It's his style, his manner of painting them - that's where the emotion comes from, same as in sculpture. Any art form is there for the artist to interpret it in his own way and thus create an emotion … But sometimes you find that a film is looked at solely for its content without any regard to the style or manner in which the story is told and, after all, that basically is the art of the cinema (quoted in Schickel 1975: 287-288).

Critics sensitive to sociology point out that auteurism fails to give proper emphasis to the effects of society on film. Writers such as Bazin insist that historical and contemporary social forces shape movies more profoundly than the efforts of their directors, since those same forces are acting on the filmmakers as well as the narrative materials. Bazin writes that,

> The individual transcends society, but society is also, and above all, *within* him. So there can be no definitive criticism of genius or talent which does not first take into consideration the social determinism, the historical combination of circumstances, and the technical background which to a large extent determine it (Bazin 1957: 22).

Bazin does not deny the role of the artist in the work of art. At the same time, unlike his acolytes at *Cahiers du cinema,* the magazine he co-founded, he is reluctant to give directors all of the credit for the shaping of their films. He writes,

> The evolution of Western art towards greater personalisation should definitely be considered as a step forward, as a refinement of culture, but only as long as this individualisation remains only a final perfection and does not claim to *define* culture (Bazin 1957: 22).

Since the artist carries his society "within him," as Bazin admits, his take on that society becomes part of his vision, and his talent shapes that societal view into a factor, consciously or unconsciously, which affects his philosophy. A particular artist's vision may not define culture, but it certainly becomes a part of that definition. While not completely agreeing with the enshrining of the film director by Truffaut, Chabrol and others of his colleagues, Bazin attempts to define such an artist of cinema: "the *auteur* is a subject to himself; whatever the scenario … he has the same attitude and passes the same moral judgements on the action and on the characters" (Bazin 1957: 25). Bazin describes his main problem with this approach:

> But once one has made this distinction, this kind of criticism is doomed to beg the question, for it assumes at the start of its analysis that the film is automatically good as it has been made by an *auteur.* And so the yardstick applied to the film is the aesthetic portrait of the film-maker deduced from his previous films (Bazin 1957: 26).

Again, subjective measures of quality for works of art prevent critics and historians from exploring the intentions and accomplishments of the artists. In their works, artists set standards for themselves that do not always agree with those of the critics of their times or of the historians of later times. Evaluations of the merit of works by informed audiences are not irrelevant to the assessment of an artist's efforts, but they are not the only, or even the most important, criteria. Is it possible for a great artist to create a work that disappoints the audience? Of course. But for a complete evaluation of the place of the work in culture, in history and in the life of the artist, it must be examined in light of the creator as well as of the audience. And if a director has communicated a vision that is consistent and profound in other efforts, the lesser

work probably has merit beyond the immediate response, positively or negatively, from its spectators. Hitchcock's *Under Capricorn* (1949), Welles' *Mr. Arkadin* (1955), Ford's *Two Rode Together* (1961) and Hawks' *Red Line 7000* (1965) all met with scorn from most critics as well as indifference at the box office, but all contain the unmistakeable world views of their auteurs, however imperfectly presented. That makes each of these arguably misfired projects fascinating and important to cineasts, well beyond their standing as failed entertainments.

Theorists such as Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey, influenced by Freud, emphasise a psychoanalytic approach to films. They argue that, like all human beings, artists are subject to their own unconscious impulses, fears and desires, and that these emerge in their works more often than formal self-conscious messages. In *The Imaginary Signifier, Psychoanalysis and the Cinema,* Metz writes that this approach, "would treat films as symptoms or as secondary manifestations that have been partially symptomised, from which it is possible to 'work back' to the neurosis of the film-maker" (Metz 1977: 25-26). The psychoanalytic theorist insists that artists reveal themes and obsessions of which they may not have been completely aware, even while intending an entirely different response to their work. Instead of directors controlling their films, the neurosis revealed in their films control the directors. Psychoanalytic cineasts could point to the moment when early French auteurists and later directors themselves, Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, took Hitchcock somewhat by surprise by detailing his unconscious fascination with Catholic guilt in their first book-length study of the director, *Hitchcock, The First Forty-four Films* (Rohmer 1979). To Metz, film is not an art but connotations of reality, and should be studied from the point of view of the individual's response to film, not the intentions of the film-maker. In *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema,* Peter Wollen quotes Metz: "In the final analysis, it is on account of its wealth of connotations that a novel of Proust can be distinguished from a cookbook or a film of Visconti from a medical documentary" (quoted in Wollen 1987: 141). Wollen goes on to clarify and criticise Metz's position:

> Connotations however are uncoded, imprecise and nebulous: [Metz] does not believe that it would be possible to dissolve them into a rhetoric. In the last resort, the problem of art is the problem of style, of the author, of an idiolect. For Metz aesthetic value is purely a matter of 'expressiveness'; it has nothing to do with conceptual thought (Wollen 1987: 141).

Removing the importance of the artist from his work even further, Roland Barthes, in his 1967 essay, "The Death of the Author" (Barthes 1977: 142-148), introduces the theory that the intentions of the writer of any literary work are insignificant compared to the experiences of the reader when receiving them. In other words, the author vanishes once the text is interpreted in the mind of the reader. This theory can be extended to the experience of the viewer of cinema as well. Once the director's images are on the screen, the audience members will give them meaning based on their individual references. Barthes felt that the text itself had its own voice, independent of the author. The author, or director in the cinema, then becomes the fiction, only discerned by the reader, or viewer, through hints in the text.

However, to state the obvious, no work of art would exist to be interpreted without the efforts of the artist. Each artistic entity comes into being when the creator attempts to communicate something, at some level, whether it is received or not, or whether it is changed into another communication by the person receiving it based on their own personality and references. None of this transaction would occur without artists with the ego and talent to craft works that would not exist without them. Since the artist initiates this complicated system of feelings, messages and interpretations, their original aesthetic objective is always relevant. In his 1977 essay, "Ideology, Genre, Auteur," Robin Wood writes:

> It seems probable that artistic value has always been dependent on the presence - somewhere, at some stage - of an individual artist, whatever the function of art in the particular society and even when (as with the Chartres cathedral) one no longer knows

> who the individual artists were. It is only through the medium of the individual that ideological tensions come into particular focus, hence become of aesthetic as well as sociological interest (Wood 1977: 87).

Cinema critics influenced by Karl Marx such as Noël Carroll find the auteur theory completely irrelevant to their approach. To these theorists, cinema is less an art containing a creator's message than it is a means of comprehending how a culture's ideology, such as the consumer values of capitalism or the race and gender attitudes of the patriarchy, are portrayed and reinforced through forms of mass communications. As Sergei Eisenstein writes in his essay, "Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today:" "We know how production, art and literature reflect the capitalist breadth and construction of the United States of America. And we also know that American capitalism finds its sharpest and most expressive reflection in the American cinema" (Eisenstein 1949: 96). Unconcerned with the style or themes of a director, Leftist critics study the ways in which filmmakers reinforce the status quo by their approval of what the reviewers consider oppressive ideologies. They accuse directors of justifying society's power structure by portraying it as the norm. Carroll writes: "Capitalism, through its mass popular art industry - the movies, TV, radio, popular music, and so on - confuses, mystifies, and manipulates our minds in such a way as to impede the development of emancipatory consciousness" (Carroll 1996: 43). Similarly, critics concerned with race and gender largely ignore the intentions of film artists, exposing movies that celebrate the patriarchy and its means of dominance over women, gays and racial minorities. These may be valid critiques of society, but they often say more about the political positions of the critics than they do about the films and directors under review. Unless an artist is making a political point in their work, the detected tendency is more important to the time and place in which the art is made than to the piece itself. Like the unconscious neurosis of the artist unearthed by the psychoanalytic commentator, the political position of the artist in regards to class, race and gender might be an interesting

observation of the underlying sociological conditions behind the creation, but may also be irrelevant to the artistic thrust of the work. Radical political analysis and auteurism are not mutually exclusive, however. Auteur, theorist and dedicated Leftist Eisenstein writes,

> a director's 'iron heel' is not only justified but absolutely necessary … unity of style, both in visualising and producing a film, is an indispensable condition … The importance of this condition is all the greater if a film is to be stylistically *distingue …* it is the director who is responsible for the organic unity of style of the film (Eisenstein 1970: 112-113).

Feminist and auteurist Molly Haskell takes her colleagues to task in her ground-breaking book *From Reverence to Rape* for their idealogical attacks on film-makers without proper regard for the nuances of their directorial world-views:

> We need more of a sense of film history, and of the context in which films were released and images were formed. Gloria Steinem can write an intelligent and sympathetic article on Marilyn Monroe, and yet miss the satirical point of Howard Hawks' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953), which consciously exposes Monroe's ooh-la-la image and the men who collaborate to maintain it … A soapbox feminist can excoriate Hitchcock in *The New York Times* for the rape in *Frenzy,* ignoring point of view, context, style, the complex interplay of misogyny and sympathy in Hitchcock, and the equally complex interplay of fear and desire by which women respond to the image of rape … The plots in five movies may be identical, may all show women degraded and humiliated and chained to stereotype, and we will react differently to each one, depending on the woman, and the director's treatment of her (Haskell 1974:32-33).

In the end, as Wollen observes: "the *auteur* theory has survived despite all the hallucinating critical extravaganzas which it has fathered. It has survived because it is indispensable" (Wollen 1987: 79-80). The theory's emphasis on a director's personal themes and style is an excellent entry point for a close analyses of a movie as a movie. Auteurists must often examine a

director's sequences minutely, shot by shot, attempting to discern the subtleties of style, scrutinising the details in the same way as its creator when constructing it. Using the literary scholar's similar close attention to a line in a poem or a paragraph in a novel, the auteurist finds, not only style, but often meaning in a director's use of cinematic techniques such as blocking, camera movement and montage. Wood writes,

> it is my contention that … a work of art … at its heart (if it is alive) is individual creativity, and it is with the nature of the creative impulses embodied in it that we must ultimately be concerned. This is not to talk naively about 'genius' in a way that suggests that works of art spring spontaneously out of the artist's head via some process of immaculate conception … a complete account of any one of the great Hitchcock films would have to see it as the product of an intricate network of influences, circumstances of production, collaborations, happy confluences. But at the centre of that network is - must be - a particular creative personality (Wood 1989: 216-217).

As Wood indicates, the limitations of the auteur theory raise interesting questions, opening other paths of approach. These can be amended into an auteurist methodology without contradicting it. As Wood writes:

> The past two decades have seen … the elaboration of auteur theory in its various manifestations; the interest in genre; the interest in ideology… these disparate approaches … might interpenetrate, producing the kind of synthetic criticism I have suggested might now be practicable (Wood 1977: 85).

Following that thought, the original narrow view of the director as the ultimate auteur in cinema was expanded in 1974 when Corliss introduced the idea of "The Multiple Auteur" in his book *Talking Pictures* (Corliss 1974: xxvii). Including the screenwriter with the director as a film's auteur, Corliss writes, "Perhaps a synthesis of these presumably antithetical functions is in order. The films that receive highest praise … are those whose writers and directors - in creative

association with the actors and technicians - worked together toward a collaborative vision" (Corliss 1974: xxviii). Corliss, a student of Sarris, challenged his mentor's assertion of the creative supremacy of a film's director, labelling directors as interpretive artists unless they also wrote the screenplays. According to Corliss:

> William Wyler was absolutely right to hold the director responsible for "a picture's quality" - just as a conductor is responsible for the composer's symphony, or a contractor for the architect's plans. But he must be responsible *to* something: the screenplay. With it, he can do one of three things: ruin it, shoot it, or improve it (Corliss 1974: xx).

Corliss traces thematic patterns and consistencies in the works of major screenwriters Ben Hecht, Preston Sturges, Norman Krasna, Frank Tashlin, George Axelrod, Peter Stone, Howard Koch, Borden Chase, Abraham Polonsky and Billy Wilder, and proclaims them the true auteurs of the movies written by them. Corliss claims that the writer's thematic structure constitutes the key contribution of a film's true author, relegating the director's visual style to the interpretation of the original creator's vision. Corliss insists that his auteur writers imposed their consistent and profound world views on a wide range of directors, making the writers the prime creative forces despite the effectiveness of the directors' contributions. But Corliss does not deny the possibly of the director as auteur. He writes:

> Realising a screenplay is a director's job; transcending it is his glory. Despite the Writers Guild's immemorial gripes, directing is a fine art, not a lead pipe cinch (as too many screenwriters have proved when they tried to direct a picture). It's no coincidence that most of the films selected for praise … were directed by Hollywood's finest auteurs - no more of a coincidence than that these same films were scripted by Hollywood's finest authors (Corliss 1974: xx).

Corliss admits the limitations of even the finest screenwriters to control the final film. He writes,

> But such has been the factory nature of the Hollywood movie that writers can still do *only* so much. A screenwriter is, as often as not, the middleman between the author of the original property and the director - and the man who gets his hands on the flypaper last is the one whose fingerprints will show up first (Corliss 1974: xxvii).

Corliss calls for film historians and critics to make much more precise and detailed assessments of the relative contributions of directors, writers, producers, cinematographers, designers and actors before determining a film's real auteur. He also advocates a more accurate consideration of the contributions of the writers and director to each project. Finally, Corliss declares that, unless the director also writes the script, either the writer is the sole auteur or at least a dual auteur with the director.

In his 2006 book, *The Schreiber Theory,* critic David Kipen also details the problems with Corliss's argument, ironically while vociferously supporting his position. Mourning the fact that Corliss's revolution never managed to supplant the original auteur theory, Kipen writes,

> there's the confounding question of credit…a writer may get screen credit for work he didn't do (as with Sydney Buchman on the Cary Grant picture *Holiday* [1938]) or go without credit for work he did (as with Buchman on another Grant classic, *The Awful Truth* [1937]) … In addition to the conundrum of misaligned credits, any screenwriter-based theory has to contend with the challenge of multiple credits … How can anyone ever hope to take screenwriters seriously as the authors of their work when half the time … scripts have more than one writer? (Kipen 2006: 28-29)

Kipen's solution is identical to that of Corliss. He writes,

> Collaboration doesn't preclude analysis; it compels analysis … So between source material and shared credits and adaptation credits and story credits and uncredited rewrites and on-set improvisation, how's anybody supposed to give credit where credit is due?… Careful scholarship has yielded credible approximations of how the screenplays

> for such contested classics as *Casablanca* [1942], *Double Indemnity* [1944] and *Gone with the Wind* [1939] all came to be … By sifting the drafts and interviewing the surviving principals and recognising their style … the nut could be cracked (Kipen 2006: 29-30).

By examining the various script drafts, interviews with the artists and the creative progression of their projects from inception to release as recommended by Corliss and Kipen, this study reveals the director-writer team of Hessler and Wicking as the dual auteurs of their four movies, each project initiated with story material from a different hand but ultimately refashioned by writer and director in concert to express their shared, consistent vision within the horror genre. And that vision is informed by their theme of sin and retribution and their reactions to the political turmoil of the late 1960s.

Hessler and Wicking follow in the tradition of other British writer and director teams who, together, could be regarded as the dual auteurs of their films. Powell and Pressburger, Dearden and Relph and the Boulting Brothers are the prime examples in the cinema of England. Powell and Pressburger, creators of such idiosyncratic classics as *Black Narcissus* (1947), *The Red Shoes* (1948), and *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951), took the combined credit of "Written, Produced and Directed by," even though, as Jeffrey Richards writes in his introduction to Andrew Moor's book, *Powell & Pressburger: A Cinema of Magic Spaces,* "it was generally recognised that Pressburger provided the scripts and Powell directed" (quoted in Moor 2012: ix). As Moor observes, the films of Powell and Pressburger, "emphasise collaboration, and the famous credit 'Written, Produced and Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger' slaps a gauntlet at the feet of the auteur-critic. It also promotes the role of the writer" (Moor 2012: 5). That gauntlet was picked up by Corliss in 1974 when he formulated his concept of "Multiple Auteurs" which did, indeed, promote the role of the writer while still acknowledging a film's possible co-authorship by the director.

Dearden and Relph enjoyed a successful creative partnership and certainly could be considered as dual auteurs of their projects, but to what degree on each film would need to be investigated in detail. Basil Dearden directed over thirty-five British films between 1942 and 1970, beginning by co-directing with star Will Hay on his comedies at Ealing Studios. While still at Ealing in the forties, he teamed with producer Michael Relph, and by the end of that decade, Relph was producing almost all of Dearden's films. Relph co-wrote eight of the movies directed by Dearden between 1952 and 1970, and even did the production design on five of them between 1947 and 1969 (Katz 2012: 370). Alan Burton and Tim O'Sullivan, in their book *The Cinema of Basil Dearden and Michael Relph,* state,

> Significantly, the dispersal of talents within the team did not fall into a simple and typical director-artist and producer-manager division: producer Michael Ralph was clearly the more artistically accomplished of the two, having headed up the art direction at Ealing for several years; while director Basil Dearden held a lifelong respect for the operational side of filmmaking, in the process developing an unsurpassed reputation for professionalism and budgetary reliability (Burton 2009: 5).

The pair specialised in stories about England's adjustment after suffering through World War II such as *Frieda* (1947), *Cage of Gold* (1950), and *The Blue Lamp* (1950). On their last Ealing movie, *Davy,* in 1957, they swapped positions, with Dearden producing and Relph directing. Returning to their original arrangement, they concentrated on "social problem" films, starting with *Violent Playground* in 1958, about the scourge of juvenile delinquency. They also tackled race relations in *Sapphire* (1959) and homosexuality in *Victim* (1961)(Katz 2012: 370). Burton and O'Sullivan quote Raymond Durgnat's at the time radical assertion in 1966 that the Dearden-Relph team, "constitutes an auteur, in every sense as distinctive and interesting as many of the American directors currently enjoying rediscovery" (Burton 2009: 3).

John and Roy Boulting not only created their films together, they shared their parents and their birthdays as well. Born as twins on 21 November 1913, they alternately produced and directed their films and often co-wrote their scripts. They founded Charter Films in 1937, each acting as producer of the films the other directed (Katz 2012: 171). Many of their thirty-five movies together, such as *Pastor Hall* (1940)*, Thunder Rock* (1942)*, Seven Days to Noon* (1950) and *The Magic Box* (1951) were critically well received in England and abroad, with Durgnat calling the Boultings, "earnest evangelicals" (Burton 2012: 77). Both brothers were socialist, and John actually drove an ambulance for the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. Their cinema reflected their politics, and they preferred presenting realism in films (Katz 2012: 171). In 1955, the brothers declared, "we're in the mood for comedy" (quoted in Burton 2012: 77), and from that year until 1974, they made thirteen comedies, such as *Private's Progress* (1956), *I'm All Right Jack* (1959) and *Rotten to the Core* (1965) (Burton 2012: 79). The brothers declared:

> We have sung our films 'songs of social significance' with a dreadful seriousness and, in the process, discovered, with Bernard Shaw, that the force most destructive of injustice and ignorance and pomp, is wit (quoted in Burton 2012: 77).

When John died of cancer in 1985, Roy stopped making films (Katz 2012: 171). The brothers were truly dual auteurs of their work, their passions and world-view shared throughout their careers.

The studio system that dominated Hollywood from the 1920s to the 1970s mostly prevented consistent creative partnerships that might have resulted in dual auteurs. Studio-contracted producers often controlled the development of projects, assigning multiple writers to a single story and hiring directors, usually after much of the scriptwriting had been done. By contrast, Austrian-born screenwriter Billy Wilder became the director and often producer of his projects in America from the 1940s to the 1980s, partnering on his scripts with Charles Brackett

on thirteen movies and later, with I. A. L. Diamond on twelve movies. But as Corliss attests, Wilder's vision dominated, despite the number of times he collaborated with a single writer. Corliss states,

> the films Charles Brackett and I. A. L. Diamond … have written on their own enforces the belief that their role has been that of the resourceful private secretary to an immigrant never completely confident in his grasp of English. Thus, though he may have used other men as mediums, Wilder's message comes through loud and clear - from the avant-garde *People on Sunday* [1929] in pre-Hitler Germany to the backward-glancing *Avanti!* [1972] of forty-three years later (Corliss 1974: 143).

With the growing frequency of independently financed low-budget productions at the end of the twentieth century, the emergence of dual auteur siblings, reminiscent of the Boulting Brothers, became a surprising development in American feature filmmaking. For example, the two Coen Brothers wrote, produced and directed their films together, alternating top credit for their screenplays. In 1984, the Coens wrote and directed their first low-budget independent feature, *Blood Simple*. The crime thriller introduced styles and themes expanded in their later films such as *Miller's Crossing* (1990), *Fargo* (1996) and *No Country for Old Men* (2007), including homages to genre movies, the combining of genres, startling plot surprises and pitch-black humour (Katz 2012: 293). Until *The Ladykillers* (2004), Ethan Coen took sole producing credit while Joel Coen was designated as director, even though they collaborated in both capacities. The brothers shared editing credit on their films under the alias Roderick Jaynes (Katz 2012: 293). As Mark T. Conard writes in the introduction to his book, *The Philosophy of the Coen Brothers:*

> Their highly original works include both comedies and dramas and cover various genres (neo-noir, the romantic comedy, the western, the gangster film) … much of the Coen's work can be categorised as neo-noir, whatever other styles or genres the brothers are

> working in … that share certain visual features, such as stark contrasts of light and shadow and oblique camera angles meant to disorient the viewer, as well as particular themes, such as alienation, pessimism, and moral ambiguity (Conrad 2009: 1).

The Zucker brothers, David and Jerry, teaming with Jim Abrahams, were an American filmmaking trio who worked together as multiple auteurs, writing, producing and directing comedies in the 1980s. Growing up in Shorewood, Wisconsin and attending Shorewood High School, the three were friends from an early age. They even enrolled at the University of Wisconsin at Madison together, inaugurating their own small playhouse in 1971 which they called The Kentucky Fried Theatre (Katz 2012: 1601). This led to their first low-budget feature film, a sketch comedy, *The Kentucky Fried Movie* (1971), written by the trio and directed by John Landis. In 1980, inspired by the tremendous success of the elaborate Mel Brooks parodies, *Blazing Saddles* (1973),*Young Frankenstein* (1974) and *High Anxiety* (1977), the team wrote and directed *Airplane!*, a satire of aviation disaster movies, which became their first commercial triumph. They followed it with more parodies, such as *Top Secret!* (1984) and *The Naked Gun* (1988) which was written by the team and directed by David Zucker (Katz 2012: 1601). Like Brooks' satires, their movies relied on visual and verbal humour and breaking the fourth wall, but the team's comedy was less obvious than Brooks', and they cast actors who had appeared in straight examples of the parodied genres such as Leslie Nielsen, Lloyd Bridges and Robert Stack, instead of the comic actors employed by Brooks. The trio also directed *Ruthless People*, a more traditional farce, not written by them. Some of their later projects were directed by David Zucker, with Jerry Zucker and Abrahams credited as producers and writers. Each member of the trio also made movies alone (Katz 2012: 1601). Though influenced by Brooks' parodies, their style of approaching satire was uniquely their own, unmistakably identifying their films as the works of a team of multiple auteurs.

Born on 1 April 1972, African-Americans Albert and Allen Hughes were, like the Boulting Brothers, twins. Between 1993 and 2010, they became a dual auteur directing and producing team, creating exciting, shocking and violent movies such as *Menace II Society*, *Dead Presidents*, *From Hell* and *The Book of Eli* (Katz 2012: 700). The twins dropped out of high school after eighteen year-old Allen fathered a child, and they began directing music videos for rap artists like Tone Loc and Tupac Shakur. At the age of twenty, the two directed their first feature, 1993's *Menace II Society*, telling a crime story created by the brothers and Tyger Williams of black, disenfranchised youth in urban America. During shooting, Allen worked with the actors while Albert handled the technical aspects, having studied production at Los Angeles City College's film school. Because of their previous experience directing music videos, the Hughes brothers became the first pair of brothers since Jerry and David Zucker to receive a waiver from the Directors Guild of America allowing them to take co-credit as directors on a feature (Katz 2012: 700). Their second film was another crime drama, *Dead Presidents* (1995), and like their debut movie, it examined the African-American underclass society and also starred Larenz Tate. This time, the Hughes brothers told a tale of racial conflict involving veterans of the Vietnam War forced to break the law on returning to the States. The twins turned their attention in 2001 to another example of urban decay, social disparities and crime when they directed a film of Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell's graphic novel *From Hell* about the impact of the Jack the Ripper murders on London's upper and lower classes in 1888. Since 2004, the two have only directed one film together, *The Book of Eli* in 2010, but have been involved in directing and producing film and television projects separately (Katz 2012: 700). Their movies together stylishly explore the danger and inequity of lives of poverty and desperation, in urban settings both contemporary and historic.

Lana Wachowski was born on 21 June 1965 as Lawrence Wachowski, and Lilly Wachowski was born on 29 December 1967 as Andrew Paul Wachowski (Katz 2012:1518). The

brothers worked together as American film and television directors, writers and producers, and also both became transgender women. They made their directing debut in 1996 with the low-budget independent thriller *Bound* about a young lesbian couple involved in crime. The two created a critical and box-office sensation with their second effort, the science fiction action film, *The Matrix* (1999), which also won the dual auteurs the Saturn Award for Best Direction. The Wachowski's wrote and directed its two sequels: *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*, both in 2003, and were involved in writing and producing other works in that franchise. Following *The Matrix* series, they wrote and produced the 2005 political revolution fantasy, *V for Vendetta*, directed by James McTeigue from the graphic novel by Alan Moore and David Lloyd. In 2008, they wrote and directed the critical and commercial failure, *Speed Racer*, a live-action adaptation of the Japanese anime television series (Katz 2012: 1518). Their next film, *Cloud Atlas* (2012), a time-jumping, multi-story science fiction drama, based on the novel by David Mitchell and co-written and co-directed by Tom Tykwer, divided critics, many of whom thought it was a masterpiece while others felt it was quite the opposite. In 2015, they presented their space opera, *Jupiter Ascending*, and the Netflix science fiction series *Sense8*, which they co-created. The second season of *Sense8*, on which Lana worked without Lilly for the first time, ended the series in 2018. Whether the Wachowski's re-unite creatively or not, they certainly were the dual auteurs of their films together, presenting works that questioned authority and the patriarchy, politically and sexually, and doing it in a unique and personal style that combined influences from genres as wide-ranging as noir, science fiction, graphic novels, anime and martial arts movies (Bordwell 2020: 337).

While not as prolific as the others, with only five completed collaborations to their credit, Hessler and Wicking are also dual auteurs in terms of consistency of style and philosophy. Fifty-eight years after Sarris coined the phrase, "auteur theory," and after such obscure cinematic auteurs as Robert Florey and Edgar G. Ulmer have received book-length career examinations,

no such study exists on the very distinct, accomplished and personal horror films of Hessler and Wicking. Echoing Wood's question from his 1966 book *Hitchcock's Films, "*Why should we take Hitchcock seriously?" (Wood 1977: 29) this study must ask in 2020, "Why should we take Hessler and Wicking seriously?"

In the case of director Hessler, he certainly qualifies as an auteur in Sarris's first two premises. In terms of technical competence, starting as a film editor, a story reader and then a producer, Hessler learned the craft of directing from the bottom up. Editing is the foundation of cinema and the aspect of filmmaking that separates it from the other arts that inform it, such as literature, theatre, painting and photography. Hessler mastered editing by cutting documentaries and then narrative shorts. His directed features are immaculately designed, blocked and shot to be assembled in cinematically sophisticated ways. As a producer, Hessler perfected professional scheduling, budgeting and set management, which taught him the practical priorities of directing. And as story editor for no less an auteur than Hitchcock, Hessler learned to choose material with cinematic potential and to adapt it to the medium for maximum emotional impact. In short, Hessler's professional background insured that he was a very good director, if only in terms of craft.

As for Sarris's second premise, Hessler used his skill to develop a personal style that was both expressive and unique, especially for its time. Using a constantly moving camera, often hand held, he created the feeling of immediate realism and almost documentary-like intimacy that contrasted with the fantastic plots and nineteenth century period formality of most of his settings. It grounded his grand gothic tales in a real world, however remote from modernity. Pirie noticed this audacious approach as early as 1973, when he wrote in *A Heritage of Horror: "*Hessler is one of the few British directors who could be said to have evolved an unmistakable style in the course of his first two major films," [*The Oblong Box* and *Scream and Scream Again*] (Pirie 1973:158).

In the case of the third premise, Hessler chose to collaborate with Wicking to rewrite every one of their four projects, working together to consistently express their shared cinematic, moral and political universe. Although he only received credit for additional dialogue, Wicking's personal themes clearly emerge in the very first collaboration with Hessler, *The Oblong Box*, themes that will reappear and develop in the next three Hessler and Wicking films. Hessler stated that Wicking added not only dialogue but the context of British colonial exploitation to the plot of *The Oblong Box* (Del Valle 2003: 46). Wicking would continue to present authority figures as corrupt exploiters of youth and the common man. Wicking's ageing representatives of the establishment consistently experience what Price's character in *The Oblong Box* calls, "sin and retribution." That sin originates from the decadence of a family's older generation in three of the Hessler and Wicking films: *The Oblong Box*, *Cry of the Banshee* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. In *Scream and Scream Again,* the character's sins result from his secret efforts on behalf of a military-industrial complex to create compliant soldiers out of the body parts of the young in order to forcefully grab political power. In all four movies, the transgressions of the older, patriarchal protagonist are punished by a cruel retribution, not from God, but resulting from the sinner's own tragic moral flaws.

In his 1989 interview with Wicking for *Fangoria* magazine, writer Phillip Nutman perceptively told Wicking, "Madness seems to be a recurring theme in your work, as does the past cursing the present to influence what happens in the current time frame." Wicking responded with,

> my father wanted to be a painter yet lived an ordinary life, my mother was a pianist who had to give up her career when the Second World War came along, and my maternal grandfather had been involved with music but had never fulfilled his dreams there, either. So in one respect, I was a repository for their wishes, and I had a strong sense of the past working through my life. But I never wanted to deal with that in a typical domestic

> drama framework. It's boring. Most of the drama produced in England is boring because it allows no room for imagination. Fantasy gives you a great opportunity to explore things (quoted in Nutman 1989: 54).

In stories examining how past sins cause horror and retribution for those in the present, Hessler and Wicking also gave symbolic voice to the revolutionary youth movement of the late sixties, a movement fuelled by anger over the older generation's positions on the Vietnam War and the fight for civil rights. After all, both of those national tragedies resulted from un-redressed historic transgressions from the past. Like the counter-culture of the late sixties, the horror films of Hessler and Wicking challenged the moral superiority of family, church and state. Along with Englishman Reeves and American filmmakers like George Romero, Hessler and Wicking deliberately went against the conservative strain in gothic horror films represented by the works of previous directors like Fisher, reversing the moral polarity of the genre.

METHODOLOGY

Were Hessler and Wicking actually the dual auteurs of their four movies for AIP? The best approach to finding the ultimate answer regarding these very commercial horror films is to trace the genesis and shaping of each project by the writer and director from story ideas to script drafts to director's cut to the finished release version to its critical and commercial reception. This is the only way to deduce the contributions of each artist individually and in concert. Following the suggestions of Corliss and Kipen, this study argues for using actual evidence of a film's creation such as scripts, memoirs, letters and interviews to give a more accurate account of the contributions, intentions, developments and compromises of their two creators as well as the final results. This study will also takes into account the economic, as well as the artistic, challenges and realities facing the team. After all, filmmakers must concentrate on creating a

product that makes a profit and enhances their careers as well as communicating artistically to an audience in an entertaining fashion.

The author secured five different drafts of the screenplay of *The Oblong Box* from the best two sources to insure their authenticity. The three earliest drafts came directly from the American International Pictures files housed at MGM (Huntington 22 March 1968; 22 March 1968 revised; 13 November 1968), and two later drafts came directly from Lily Todd, the widow of Wicking (Huntington undated; undated revised). Todd also sent the author the original screenplay for *Scream and Scream Again* by Milton Subotsky with Wicking's handwritten notes (Subotsky undated). The original paperback novel of *Scream and Scream Again* by Peter Saxon (Saxon 1966) has also been consulted. For *Cry of the Banshee*, the author has been able to secure a copy of Tim Kelly's original screenplay directly from the Tim J. Kelly papers at the American Heritage Centre of the University of Wyoming (Kelly undated). Todd sent the author the May 1970 draft of Wicking's rewrite of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* on floppy disc (Wicking May 1970). As a screenwriter himself, this author is aware that a script draft is the most accurate source to determine the shape of a project at any given moment in the pre-production process. Changes in the script chart the changes in thinking of the key creative and production personnel and determine the decisions made in transferring it to the screen. This author is aware of no other drafts of the scripts of the four projects other than the ones secured. Carefully comparing them to each other and to the finished films provided considerable insight into the contributions of the various collaborators and their priorities in bringing the stories to cinematic reality. Determining which artist or production personnel provided which new idea is almost impossible to prove unless they have noted it in an interview or other communication, but the general evolution of the narrative and themes become evident as the drafts are reviewed chronologically.

Todd sent the author the original treatment of Wicking's un-filmed story *Killer Trip* (Wicking 1971) as well as two drafts of the screenplay by Wicking and David Pirie (Wicking 1973) (Wicking 1976), originally designed to be a semi-sequel to AIP's *Scream and Scream Again*. De Montfort University secured Wicking's revised screenplay for the aborted Hammer Films project, *Vampirella,* originally to be directed by Hessler for American International Pictures (Wicking 1975). The author has synopsised and analysed the script as an un-realised fifth collaboration of Wicking, Hessler and AIP in the horror genre.

In addition, the author consulted as much production information as he could access from the American International Pictures files housed at MGM. The company prohibits direct examination of the files, but Gary Teetzel of MGM has provided dates and information in emails to the author from archived intra-company communications that he feels do not violate their confidentiality rules.

There exist two different versions of each of the Hessler and Wicking films: Hessler's original director's cuts and the final revisions by American International for theatrical release. AIP removed a scene from the middle of *The Oblong Box* and rearranged some scenes around it. The company made very minor cuts to *Scream and Scream Again,* removing a few shots, a brief exchange between Price and Lee and replacing the music and image under the end credits. The two versions of *Cry of the Banshee* are quite different, with the theatrical cut removing four minutes from Hessler's film, as well as moving key scenes and using different sound effects and a completely different background score from a different composer. AIP also shortened *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and recut the twist ending, giving it a totally different meaning. This study obtained both versions of each movie, enabling the author to compare and contrast their effectiveness and determine the final authorship of the compromised works. The various rewrites and re-cuttings reveal the intentions of and the challenges facing the Hessler and Wicking team as well as their creative solutions, individually and together.

Published interviews with the principal forces behind the making of the films, including Hessler and Wicking, have been used to chronicle the creative shaping of the projects. All of the subjects are dead, and this thesis largely takes them at their words in terms of the accuracy of their accounts. In his many filmed and published interviews, Hessler appears humble and often self-deprecating. In fact, he seems sometimes to think less of his work than the author of this study. Wicking, too, is modest about his art, readily revealing conflicts with later directors and producers, but always effusive in his praise for Hessler. He is also very articulate about his inspirations and themes, making it unnecessary to second guess the intentions in his screenplays. Even so, this study keeps in mind the wise words of D. H. Lawrence who warned, “Never trust the teller, trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it.”

CHAPTER 4 - COMPARISONS: FISHER, CORMAN AND REEVES

The horror films of Hessler and Wicking resulted from the critical and financial success of Corman's eight Poe adaptations, as well as AIP's selling of Reeves' *Witchfinder General* as yet another Poe movie starring Price. The Corman films competed at the time of their release with the colour gothic literature adaptations from Hammer Films directed by Fisher. Hessler and Wicking would follow in the genre traditions of the films of Fisher, Corman and Reeves while completely changing the cinematic style and approach to the subject matter. Comparing the four horror films of Hessler and Wicking with the previous works in the genre from Fisher, Corman and Reeves reveals the superficial similarities while highlighting the more profound contrasts in meaning and technique in the Hessler and Wicking oeuvre.

TERENCE FISHER

The filmmaking cycle that spawned, not only the Hessler and Wicking collaborations, but the movies of Corman and Reeves as well, dates back to the colour period gothics from Hammer Films directed by Fisher and initiated with *The Curse of Frankenstein* in 1957. The works of Reeves and of the Hessler and Wicking team, with their challenges to the older patriarchy's exploitation of women and youth, could be seen as reactions against the conservative Christian morality of many Fisher films, such as *Dracula* (1958)*, Brides of Dracula* (1960) *Dracula Prince of Darkness* (1966) and *The Devil Rides Out* (1968). All of these Fisher titles tell stories of the corruption of weak women by spiritual evil, eventually vanquished by the moral, intellectual and physical strength of the Christian patriarchy. As Hutchings clarifies in his study, *Terence Fisher,*

> the most appalling thing that Dracula does to Victorian women is to make them sexual … with Dracula's attempt to replace the 'bride' staked by Harker involving the transformation of Lucy (and the threatened transformation of Mina) into a highly

> sexualised, predatory female. So far as Fisher's film is concerned, such a threat clearly has to be contained and the narrative concludes with an appropriately ferocious fight to the death between its two authority figures, Van Helsing and Dracula (Hutchings 2001: 93).

A telling contrast in philosophy can be seen in the opposite portrayals of British colonialism in Hessler and Wicking's *The Oblong* Box as against Fisher's two films, *The Mummy* (1959) and *The Stranglers of Bombay* (1959). In all three movies, people indigenous to colonised countries take revenge on the British occupiers of the nineteenth century. In Fisher's *The Mummy* and the Hessler and Wicking *The Oblong Box*, the vengeance involves the supernatural. In Fisher's *The Stranglers of Bombay*, it takes the form of violent resistance, torture and murder. The difference in the filmmakers' philosophies lies in the nature of the British actions for which the native forces take revenge, and whether that retribution is proportionate to the perceived crimes.

In the Fisher films, the occupied Egyptians in *The Mummy* and the Indians in *The Stranglers of Bombay* take exception to the very presence of British interests on their soil. The Egyptians resent the British archeologists in *The Mummy,* men presented by Fisher as earnest and educated professionals, for disturbing their ancient dead to preserve and study artefacts from the distant past. They send an undead mummy to England years after the British archeologists have left Egypt to brutally murder them for their perceived desecrations. In Fisher's *The Stranglers of Bombay,* an ancient, fanatical and cruel Hindu sect viciously kills not only the agents of the British East India Company, but also the English soldiers who try to protect them and the other Indians who ally with them. Fisher portrays a variety of British colonial characters, some pompous, some greedy, and some well-meaning and kind. But the vengeance wreaked on both sets of Fisher's imperialists feels like an incredible and ultimately evil over-reaction to their presence. Fisher acknowledges the moral ambiguity of occupying a foreign land for power and profit but does not necessarily condemn the professional men who

did it as a part of their jobs. In the end of both movies, the British colonists defeat the unbalanced indigenous revengers sent against them, a conclusion seemingly endorsed by Fisher and satisfying his sense of morality. As Hutchings writes,

> *The Stranglers of Bombay* offers a half-hearted, qualified … defence of certain aspects of British rule in India … both [*The Stranglers of Bombay* and *The Mummy*] share similar views on foreigners, be these Indians or Egyptians; these other cultures are consistently presented as involving a savage and ritualistic set of beliefs lurking beneath a deceptive veneer of civilised behaviour (Hutchings 2001: 103).

On the other hand, Hessler and Wicking in *The Oblong Box* openly oppose the moral position of British imperialist Julian Markham (Vincent Price), whose thoughtless trampling of a West African boy with his horse on his Ghana plantation initiates the horrible vengeance on his brother Edward (Alastair Williamson) by the locals. As in *The Mummy,* the curse follows Julian back to the civilised order of his home in England, this time in the form of his disfigured and insane brother. Tragically, Julian is very aware of his guilt and tries to ignore it, but the past literally cannot be buried. Although chastened and penitent, he realises, as does the audience, that he deserves the hideous retribution from the West Africans for his imperious, imperial ways. Hessler and Wicking's endorsement of this outcome is signalled throughout the film by much of the dialogue of Julian himself in which he condemns his own actions against the people of Ghana and expresses his regret for the entire enterprise of colonisation. Hessler and Wicking, unlike Fisher, unashamedly challenge the morality of their western culture's superior attitude to other races and religions, adopting counter-culture attitudes of the late 1960s toward nineteenth century gothic characters and settings.

As well as rebelling against the patriarchal and imperialist morality of Fisher's films, Hessler completely rejects the older director's measured and conservative cinematic style. Talking about a scene in *Scream and Scream Again,* Hessler told director Jeff Burr in a filmed

interview used in the 2015 documentary *Gentleman Gothic: Gordon Hessler at American International Pictures:* "We did the whole thing in one take. And that was so different from the old, classical Hammer films where you make a shot here and a static shot there." Hessler also embraced the new freedoms of the hand-held camera, a technique Fisher very seldom used.

In contrast to their questioning of the moral superiority of Fisher's masculine savants and colonists, the Hessler and Wicking films are also an extension of the cynicism and ultimate nihilism of Fisher's concurrent cycle of Hammer horrors concerning Baron Frankenstein, as played by Peter Cushing in *The Curse of Frankenstein, Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958)*, Frankenstein Created Woman* (1967), *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* (1969) and *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell* (1973)*.* Fisher and screenwriters Jimmy Sangster and John Elder portray Baron Frankenstein as a witty, arrogant, sociopathic anti-hero, ignoring or warring against the Christian establishment of his time and single-mindedly fighting his own one-man revolution against society. His contempt for and isolation from his fellow man would predate the similar attitudes of Corman's Poe protagonists, all but one played by Price, such as Roderick Usher in *House of Usher* (1960), Nicholas Medina in *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), Prince Prospero in *Masque of the Red Death* (1964) and Verden Fell in *Tomb of Ligeia* (1965). And Baron Frankenstein would also prefigure the corrupt iconoclasts of the Hessler and Wicking films, such as the Markham brothers in *The Oblong Box*, Dr. Browning (Vincent Price) in *Scream and Scream Again*, Lord Edward Whitman (Vincent Price) in *Cry of the Banshee* and Rene Marot (Herbert Lom) in *Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

Fisher's Hammer movies were certainly not immune to the creeping nihilism of the late sixties and early seventies, a nihilism that the films of Hessler and Wicking would embrace. Hutchings writes of Fisher:

> The conclusion of *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* - with Anna dead, Karl either dead or unconscious and the Baron carried screaming into a burning house by his own creation -

> exhibits a nihilism which … signals simultaneously a recognition of the destructiveness of a particular type of masculinity … and an inability to find a credible alternative within the cycle's terms of reference (Hutchings 1993: 113).

Two of Fisher's earlier works, *The Gorgon* (1964) and *Frankenstein Created Woman,* feature equally bleak and hopeless finales in which the romantic couples in both films die. In addition, the goals of the protagonists in both movies prove futile and meaningless. In *The Gorgon,* Paul (Richard Pasco) fights desperately to save his lover, Carla (Barbara Shelley), from becoming the deadly Gorgon that possesses her, but he ends up her victim, living just long enough to see her beheaded. In *Frankenstein Created Woman,* Baron Frankenstein corrects the physical defects of a crippled dead girl and brings her to life by transferring the soul of her beheaded lover into her new body. She becomes a vengeful femme fatale, killing the men responsible for her lover's execution. Despite his efforts, Frankenstein is unable to prevent her from murdering her late lover's tormentors or from throwing herself off a cliff to her destruction.

Like Fisher and his writers at their most bleak, Hessler and Wicking also created nihilistic endings for their protagonists with Wicking's scripts portraying their worlds as meaningless and cruel. In *The Oblong Box,* Julian Markham fails in his attempts to literally bury the sins of his past and start a new life with his young bride. He ends up self-imprisoned in the attic room in which he kept his enchained brother and inherits his brother's disfiguring curse, to the horror of his new wife. Dr. Browning in *Scream and Scream Again* becomes the victim of the new fascist society created by his composite humans, a society that has no place for him or his imperfect works. In *Cry of the Banshee,* Lord Edward Whitman watches helplessly as his family and political power are destroyed by the witches in whom he did not believe. And in *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* Rene Marot is rejected and killed by the woman for whom he rose from the dead and took vengeance.

This is not to say that Fisher shares as dark a vision of mankind as that displayed in the films of Hessler and Wicking. In Fisher, romantic love is still possible, if ultimately doomed, in *Curse of the Werewolf* (1961)*, The Gorgon* and *Frankenstein Created Woman.* In fact, love actually flourishes and survives in Fisher's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1962) and *The Devil Rides Out.* No such sincere, passionate romance exists in Hessler and Wicking's films. Del Valle told Hessler in an interview, "your films seem … cynical, … despairing - your characters are all damned from the beginning. Even the eroticism in your films is joyless" (Del Valle 2003: 49).

In *The Oblong Box,* for example, the upcoming marriage of Sir Julian Markham and his finance Elizabeth (Hilary Dwyer) is introduced in their first scene together as the joining of an ageing aristocrat and a spoiled, much younger beauty, eager to become Lady Markham. Their relationship is already blighted by Julian's secret guilt as he hides his brother and the truth about his past from his future wife. Cursed, disfigured and insane, his brother, Sir Edward, pursues an obsessive sexual relationship with a village serving girl who is known for her promiscuity with the gentry. Obviously, both couples are doomed, and their tragedy is certain from the start. In Hessler's *Cry of the Banshee,* Lord Edward Whitman emotionally abuses his much younger wife to the point where she descends into sullen madness. His daughter, Maureen (Hilary Dwyer), indulges in a sexual relationship with her stud groom, as much to defy her father and privileged class as to satisfy her obvious prurient cravings. In *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* Cesar Charron (Jason Robards) marries the much younger daughter of the woman he murdered after losing her love to another man. His romantic rival, Marot, returns from the grave, disfigured and insane, to take Charron's young wife as a substitute for her murdered mother. Obviously, none of these relationships can survive the past sins of their partners, sins committed before the stories even begin.

Hessler and Wicking's movies abound in prostitutes, mechanically providing sex for money, as in *The Oblong Box* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* as well as young men and

women looking for sex without emotion. For example, the vampire Keith (Michael Gothard) solicits girls for one-night stands, then drinks their blood in *Scream and Scream Again,* and Sean Whitman (Stephen Chase) harasses and gropes the young women in the village presided over by his father in *Cry of the Banshee.* There seems no possibility for an emotionally mature romantic relationship in the Hessler and Wicking movies, and the filmmakers only portray sex as an empty physical act.

ROGER CORMAN

Corman, the first auteur of the AIP Poe films, and the inventor of that sub-genre, also communicates a philosophy of pessimism, but with themes and techniques entirely different from those of Hessler and Wicking. Even though three of the four Hessler and Wicking films are nominally adaptations of Poe stories, they approach the subjects in a manner almost the opposite of the concerns of Corman. However, both Corman and the Hessler and Wicking team remain true and consistent to their own interests, even, in the case of *Scream and Scream Again,* in a non-Poe inspired format.

In his Poe films, Corman presents protagonists who are completely obsessed with death. In *House of Usher,* Roderick Usher buries his sister alive to finally end the evil of his decadent family and his own impure sexual impulses. Her fiancee, Phillip Winthrop (Mark Damon), must race against time to bring her back from the trappings of death. In *Pit and the Pendulum*, Nicolas Medina fears punishment from his dead wife for accidentally interring her prematurely as his evil father intentionally did to his mother. Prince Prospero in *Masque of the Red Death* attempts to thwart the inevitability of death by locking contagion from his castle and by gaining power over mortality in his worship of Satan. And in *Tomb of Ligeia,* Verden Fell's wife controls him through hypnosis even after her death, willing him to sleep with her corpse.

By contrast, the protagonists in the Hessler and Wicking films try to put their sins and thoughts of death behind them, vainly attempting to escape from their inevitable reckonings. For instance, in *The Oblong Box,* Julian Markham shuts his cursed brother Edward away in a locked attic and refuses to acknowledge his condition to his fiancé Elizabeth and the people of his village. Dr. Browning, in *Scream and Scream Again,* hides his secret lab and lies to the police about his failed experiment, the inhumanly strong vampire, Keith. Dr. Browning is shocked by the sociopathic murders of another experiment gone wrong, Konratz (Marshall Jones), and his fascist regime of composites. While explaining them to police physician, Dr. David Sorel (Christopher Mathews), Dr. Browning adamantly refuses to acknowledge his homicidal experiments as "evil." Lord Edward Whitman, in *Cry of the Banshee,* denies that the unearthly howls interrupting his banquet of debauched nobles is a banshee warning that death is near. He lifts a drink to his guests, inviting them to "banish thoughts of death with this." In *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* Charron, who killed a woman for spurning his love and blamed his friend Marot for the crime, refuses to believe that Marot is not dead and buried, despite evidence of his vengeful presence.

In Corman's Poe films, his protagonists often expire in a self-destructive search for understanding or metaphysical enlightenment. Roderick Usher wants to purge the world of the spiritual evil he believes resides, not only in his family, but in the very stones of his house. "The house itself is evil," he tells Phillip Winthrop. This results in his own death along with that of his innocent sister in a fire caused by his madness that consumes their supposedly sentient home. In *Pit and the Pendulum,* Nicholas Medina seeks the spectre of his dead wife whom he believes haunts him for accidentally burying her alive. His transcendental obsession results in revealing her very earthly sexual betrayal of him and ends in his own psychological possession and death. Prince Prospero, in *Masque of the Red Death,* tries to obtain power and enlightenment through worshipping Satan but finds that Death is the only source of understanding. In *Tomb of*

Ligeia, Verden Fell tries to comprehend the supernatural power of his dead wife only to find that she hypnotised him before she died to care for her corpse and spend every night in a marriage bed with her. When he finally realises the evil of her spiritual power, he tries to kill the cat she possesses which results in his eyes being clawed out and his body consumed in flames.

Conversely, as part of their efforts to believe they can escape the consequences of their past sins, the Hessler and Wicking protagonists deny any metaphysical aspects to life. When Sir Julian tells his lawyer Trench (Peter Arne) in *The Oblong Box* that he thinks his brother's fate is his punishment for their transgressions against the natives of West Africa, the attorney says, "God's vengeance? You were never impressed by the Christian myths." In *Scream and Scream Again,* Dr. Sorel accuses Dr. Browning of playing God. Dr. Browning tells him, "God is dying all over the world. Man invented Him, but doesn't need Him anymore. Man is God now. As a matter of fact, he always was." Following his massacre of her pagan worshippers in *Cry of the Banshee,* Lord Edward dismisses witch Oona's (Elisabeth Bergner) curse by asking her, "If your sorcery was so strong, Oona, why didn't you use it to save your children, as you call them?" He offers a reward to anyone in the village who kills the mad dog that is savaging the local sheep to prove "that there is no witchery." When the dog is finally slain, Lord Edward displays its head at a celebration to show everyone that there is not "any kind of sorcery." And in *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* Charron repeatedly disregards his young wife's prophetic dream. When he tells her the dream will stop, she answers, "I don't think it will - until I know its meaning." Charron could be speaking for all of the protagonists of Hessler and Wicking when he casually tells her, "There is no meaning." And like those other tragic sinners, he is ultimately very wrong, since her dreams reveal both the past he is trying to hide and the future that will destroy him.

Roderick Usher in Corman's *House of Usher* and Verden Fell in his *Tomb of Ligeia* both possess extremely acute senses that remove them from their fellow creatures and propel them towards darkness and death. These hyper sensitive souls must reject society in favour of an

isolation that puts them in closer touch with their own mortality and the futility of their existence. Their self-created world might even involve the temporary suspension of nature, including the finality of death. Corman often personifies reality as a sexually aggressive woman who causes the defeat of the brilliant but weak male knowledge-seeker. Corman tells this story over and over, in *House of Usher, Pit and the Pendulum, The Premature Burial* (1962), *Tales of Terror* (1962), *Tomb of Ligeia* and even in the first half of the uncharacteristically optimistic and life-affirming comedy, *The Raven* (1963). And when the protagonist self-destructs in his quest, his world dies with him, often literally burning to the ground.

By contrast, the protagonists of Hessler and Wicking ignore their senses, especially their sense of guilt, preferring to forget the past and build a new life for the future. That brighter destiny requires them to camouflage their transgressions by engaging with society. In *The Oblong Box,* for example, Julian Markham reopens the family manor house after the supposed death of his brother, engages new servants, marries, gives a celebratory party, and hires an artist to capture his new wife's beauty on canvas. Charron, in *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* produces and stars in elaborate Grand Guignol plays for the amusement of his audience, cheats on his wife with a prostitute and celebrates along with the revellers at a Parisian carnival outside of his theatre.

The obsession of the corrupt protagonists to start over is symbolised by their marriage to much younger, beautiful women, not only in *The Oblong Box,* but in *Cry of the Banshee* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* In the latter film, Charron even has the insensitivity to wed the young daughter of the woman he murdered for spurning him. Taking a novel approach, Dr. Browning in *Scream and Scream Again* actually creates young, beautiful and compliant women, using body parts from living but merely mortal human subjects. But instead of embarking on new beginnings, Hessler and Wicking's protagonists only succeed in dragging their young wives into the horrors of their fated retributions. Lady Patricia (Essy Persson) descends into

depression and madness and is finally killed by the agent of the vengeance against Lord Edward in *Cry of the Banshee.* Madeleine (Christine Kaufmann), the young wife of Charron in *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* wakes up screaming from recurring dreams that warn her of the horrors of the past and future.

Corman always maintained that Poe's settings were landscapes of the mind: that his stories took place in what Freud would later call the unconscious, and not in the real world. He wrote:

> it was an emanation of the unconscious mind of Poe himself. There are no eyes in the unconscious and so I thought the films should be all interiors or, if exteriors were necessary, they should be set at night … I never wanted to see 'reality' in any of these scenes … I shot the exteriors … on a soundstage and it, indeed, looked unreal, just a little bit off (Corman 1990: 81).

Preferring stylisation that reflected the troubled psyches of his characters, Corman avoided showing actual location exteriors except when they could be used as Freudian symbols, such as the churning seascapes in *Pit and the Pendulum* or the dead, charred woods surrounding the *House of Usher.* Taking an opposite approach, Hessler and Wicking's movies are set in a very real, objective world which eventually cannot hide the past crimes committed by their protagonists. Hessler chose actual manor houses and grounds in which to stage his stories, such as Surrey's Foxhill Estates for *The Oblong Box,* Grims Dyke just outside of London for *Cry of the Banshee* and the centuries-old streets and buildings of Toledo, Spain for *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* The locations are enhanced by the falling leaves and frosty breath of late fall, the season in which Hessler shot all three gothics. Their solid reality contrasts with the evil past crimes of the characters, not symbolically reflecting their twisted natures, but seeming to shield them behind the facade of civilisation. The realistic worlds of Hessler and Wicking bring to mind Hamlet's last line in Act 1, Scene 2 of Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet: "* Foul deeds will

rise, Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes." And when retribution overtakes the protagonists at the end of Hessler and Wicking's films, the world is not destroyed with them because it is not of their own making, as in Corman. The Hessler and Wicking characters act as anomalies in the worlds they inhabit, too guilty to participate in the present, and hoping the reality around them will hide the secret crimes of their pasts.

Whereas Corman emphasised a Freudian approach to Poe in both narrative and cinematic terms, Hessler and Wicking saw their gothic tales as political allegories for their own times. For example, Corman used the exploration of the castle or house in his films, a recurring motif, as a way of interpreting the genre as a Freudian nightmare. In his autobiography, he wrote:

> I was … using what I knew of Freud's dream interpretations and my own analysis to make the pictures work on an unconscious, symbolic plane … In dealing with suspense, … the house can be seen as a woman's body, with its openings - windows, doors, arches. The corridor becomes a woman's vagina. The deeper you go into the dark hallways, then, the deeper you are delving into, say, an adolescent boy's first sexual stirrings. These are contradictory urges - an irresistible attraction and desire for sex and the fear of the unknown and the illicit. The very ambivalence builds tension. Put together correctly, the classic horror sequence is the equivalent of the sexual act. The sharp, shocking event at the end that releases the tension is the equivalent of the orgasmic climax (Corman, 1990: 80).

Wicking and Hessler would later have little or no interest in the psychoanalytic interpretations of their Gothic films. But they would use the subject matter to comment on the stark conflicts and changes going on around the world in the late sixties and early seventies of the twentieth century. Their parables about an older, entrenched establishment oppressing the indigenous people of an undeveloped continent in *The Oblong Box*, youth and women in *Scream and*

Scream Again, and other religions and cultures in *Cry of the Banshee* mirrored the civil rights movement, protests against the war in Viet Nam, the rise of the military industrial complex, the fight for women's rights and the contentious generation gap raging in the streets and homes of every major city. And the colourful, oblique, slow-motion dreams that surrealistically take place in a recognisably real world in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* replicate the drug experiences of the youth of their own times, at once nightmares, escapes and perhaps coded messages of truth. The blurred lines between reality, theatre and dreams in the same film replicate the consciousness of the seventies with its overload of media, drugs and societal upheaval.

By the time he started on his Poe films in 1960, Corman had developed an incredibly expressive and cinematic visual style, utilising elegant camera moves, saturated colour contrasts, blocking in deep space and rhythmic editing. Corman encouraged the viewer to experience the dream-like quality of his Poe movies by calling attention to their visual stylisation. For example, he emphasised his graceful camera moves by placing stationary objects such as dead tree branches, columns, candelabras and furniture in the foreground so that the camera could pass them, highlighting its constant mobility. He saved quick-cut bursts of montage for moments of emotional stress, such as the rapidly edited shots of the portraits of the decadent Usher ancestors when Phillip Winthrop angrily accuses Roderick Usher of perpetuating his family's madness in *House of Usher*. In *Pit and the Pendulum,* Corman rhythmically cuts successive inserts of the working parts of the killer pendulum as it noisily descends on its shackled victim.

Hessler evidences little of the pre-planned, carefully designed visual richness of Corman. However, his movies have an immediate realism and almost documentary-like intimacy lacking in Corman's more formal presentations. As early as 1973, Pirie noticed this abrupt switch in the visual style of the Poe films when he wrote of Hessler's direction of *The Oblong Box:*

> His audacious technique, evolved in documentary and newsreel work, resulted in a camera-style which probed his characters and sets as though they were under some kind of visual interrogation. For the first ten minutes his fluid journalistic camera prowled through Julian Markham's (Vincent Price) sombre mansion, using subjective effects to convey the alienated and animal-like existence of strange (and unseen) Sir Edward - a deformed nobleman imprisoned by his brother. By keeping Sir Edward behind the camera for so long Hessler exaggerated his evil presence enormously, giving him a kind of sub-human aura long after the device had been discontinued (Pirie 1973: 157-158).

MICHAEL REEVES

Like Corman, Reeves expressed a consistent worldview in his work. But unlike Corman, Reeves was only able to explore his themes in three completed features. *Witchfinder General 1968)*, Reeves' last finished project, turned gothic horror away from the more stylised presentations of Fisher and Corman into something realistic and brutal. Price plays the historical seventeenth century English witch hunter, Matthew Hopkins, riding with his sadistic assistant, John Stearne (Robert Russell), from village to village, accusing, torturing and executing innocent men and women for the crime of witchcraft during the British civil war. Reeves was only twenty-four years old when he co-wrote and directed it, but many critics and historians now consider it one of the greatest horror films produced in Britain. Reeves' movie powerfully communicates the impossibility of behaving morally in a society in which conventions have shattered into chaos.

As in Reeves' other two features, especially *The Sorcerers* (1967), actor Ian Ogilvy plays an essentially innocent character corrupted by his proximity to the evil of an older generation. In *Witchfinder General,* Ogilvy's character, Richard Marshall, is described in the beginning of the film as a "plough boy into soldier." Reeves dramatises Marshall's first kill when the young private saves his commanding officer from a sniper by blowing the gunman's face off. Marshall actually

smiles as he glances at the weapon in his hand after receiving the gratitude of his superior. Later, Marshall encounters the extreme, almost abstract, evil of Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins, who tortures and hangs Marshall's future father-in-law and blackmails his fiancee into a sexual relationship. When Hopkins finishes with the young woman, his brutal assistant John Stearne rapes her. Marshall turns his back on his duties as a soldier in Cromwell's army and obsessively seeks bloody revenge on Hopkins and Stearne. Like Ogilvy's character, Mike Roscoe, in *The Sorcerers,* Richard Marshall in *Witchfinder General* has a potential for violence that is fanned into a flame of sociopathic madness by the evil of an older, corrupt character. The contagious nature of evil and its infection of the innocent is the theme that runs throughout Reeves' small body of work. This theme distinguishes Reeves' films from the four later movies of Hessler and Wicking which concern themselves with the punishment of evil in an already corrupt world.

In his 1979 essay, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," Robin Wood outlined his influential theory of the genre, applying it to the American cinema of the late 1960s and 70s (Wood 1979: 164-200). He expressed his key formula by observing that horror most often presents a story of normality threatened by the monster (Wood 1979: 175). Wood's theory achieves much more complexity when he defines the monster as the "return of the repressed" elements in normal society. The rampage of the monster, whether human or supernatural, symbolises the struggle for recognition of all that civilisation oppresses. The re-emergence of those forces becomes an object of horror, and when elements of society vanquish the monster, order, in the form of repression, is restored. Wood specifically sees the restoration of order as repressing economic and psychological freedom by the forces of capitalism, patriarchy and heterosexuality.

Ambivalence results from the presentation of a sympathetic monster, and Wood suggests that few monsters are not sympathetic on some level. He writes: "Central to the effect

and fascination of horror films is their fulfilment of our nightmare wish to smash the norms that oppress us and to which our moral conditioning teaches us to revere" (Wood 1979: 177). Wood defines films that end with the destruction of the monster and the return of the oppressive elements of society as "reactionary," while movies that end with the survival of the monster or at least its lingering effects on society as "radical." Wood's theory that the monster results from the repressive norms of civilisation is a brilliant conception that has influenced analytical thinking on the genre ever since. In 1980, in an essay called "Neglected Nightmares," Wood concludes that the horror film is "an important phenomenon within our culture, since the genre, and particularly its finest specimens offer … the material for a radical and diagnostic reading of the culture itself" (Wood 1980: 111).

Wood's theory of American horror can certainly apply to the British examples of that genre as well, the reactionary strain represented by the Hammer films of director Fisher and the radical form by Reeves' *Witchfinder General* and by the movies of Hessler and Wicking. Fisher's vampire films can be interpreted as presenting monsters such as *Dracula* (1958), who represent the return of the repressed sexuality denied a place in the Christian Victorian world. Fisher's monster in *The Mummy* (1959) could be seen as symbolising the largely extinct pagan non-white civilisations of the countries colonised by nineteenth century Christian societies. In the cases of both creatures, Fisher's films side with Christian patriarchy, violently victimised by the return of the forces they oppressed and taking justifiable steps to vanquish these threats to established society. In the end of Fisher's films, sexual and societal order are restored by the defeat of the monsters.

The opposite dynamic occurs in Reeves' *Witchfinder General.* That film introduces the intolerant hypocritical Puritan Hopkins, a monster emerging when the order of seventeenth century British society is fractured by Civil War. This superstitious throwback to an earlier, unenlightened time wreaks havoc on the sexual, religious and moral precepts of society. But

although he is destroyed in the end by a representative of that society in the form of an avenging soldier, his evil has corrupted that order, liberating its most violent, irrational, sociopathic elements in individuals, in the Church and in the State. At the end of *Witchfinder General,* the viewer gets the impression that order will never again be truly established and that the worst traits of humanity will be free to cause further chaos.

Like *Witchfinder General,* the four horror films of Hessler and Wicking can certainly be interpreted as falling rather neatly into the “radical” paradigm of Leftist and Freudian analysis as outlined by Wood. Indicating progressive sympathies, Hessler and Wicking consciously criticise capitalism and its destruction of indigenous people in *The Oblong Box* and also the exploitation of youth by the military-industrial complex in *Scream and Scream Again*. In a nod to Freudian and feminist interpretations, Hessler and Wicking present an overbearing patriarchy in all four films, physically and psychologically oppressing the emotional, instinctive and natural impulses of the other characters. In both *The Oblong Box* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, the patriarch literally buries his guilt alive in the form of characters who symbolise wronged innocence. In both these movies, the buried characters, Wood’s “repressed,” actually return from the grave as vengeful monsters to destroy the patriarchs by exposing their guilt. Hessler and Wicking not only dramatise their theme of sin and retribution, but in so doing, they make a political statement. In *Cry of the Banshee*, the patriarch oppresses a decidedly feminine nature-worshipping cult that follows the teachings of an equally powerful matriarchal earth mother. The repressed feminine force “returns,” using Wood’s term, conjuring a monster to destroy the patriarchy. Showing their allegiance to “the Other,” Hessler and Wicking typically allow their repressed monsters and witches to rise up and triumph in the end. Each of the films tell a story of the sin of unchecked and privileged power vanquished by the retribution of the revolutionary monster - a monster created by the patriarch’s own transgressions.

The emergence of the counter-culture in the homes, streets and colleges of Britain and around the world in the late 1960s powerfully informed the personal themes and concerns that Hessler and Wicking presented in their films. Wicking admitted the impact that the violent protests by young radicals at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1968 had on his screenplays with Hessler (Decharne 1998: 21). He stated that Hessler and he were using their tales of sin and retribution as cautionary metaphors for the political conflicts and consequences of their own times (Forshaw 2013:201). But the two filmmakers structured their horror stories to do more than symbolically criticise abuses of authority by the patriarchy of privilege, church and state in the era of Viet Nam and Watts. They also exposed the moral ambiguities of the political revolution of the late 1960s by portraying their counter-culture surrogates as fanatics warped into acts of hatred and evil by their self-righteous missions to exact justice on the powerful. Hessler and Wicking worked this nuanced metaphor for the conflicts of the 1960s into all four of their films.

CONCLUSION

Although their subject matter was similar, namely period gothic horror stories, the personal concerns and styles of Fisher, Corman, and Reeves were quite distinct. A vivid illustration of the auteur theory, the different emphases of the three, and also of the Hessler and Wicking team for that matter, could not be more apparent. And in all of the cases, it was the auteur more than the material that determined the approach. Fisher's Hammer horror films were written by a small group of the company's favourite scribes, mostly Jimmy Sangster, Peter Bryan and John Elder, which was the pen name for Hammer producer Anthony Hinds, with single film contributions from Wolf Mankowitz, John Gilling, Bert Batt, Richard Matheson and others. But Fisher's cinematic techniques and stark morality emerged from his concentration on personal interests within the scenarios, despite the range of writers. Corman, as producer of the gothics he

directed, completely controlled the creation of his screenplays whether they were penned by Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, Robert Towne or other of his chosen writers, insuring that they fit his narrative interests and unique style. Reeves participated in the writing of all of his completed films himself, treating his subjects in a personal way from their inception. And as it turned out, director Hessler would insist on writer Wicking refashioning the original story material from AIP, working in concert with him on the style, construction and thematic concerns of all four of their horror films together. Their teaming was quite fortuitous: Hessler was originally assigned as line producer on *The Oblong Box* with Reeves directing, and Wicking was hired by the company to rewrite it because he "knew [original director Michael Reeves] vaguely," as he said (quoted in Murray 2002: 294), and both he and Reeves were represented by Andrew Mann from the William Morris Agency (Halligan 2003: 211). But the pairing of Hessler and Wicking turned out to be a meeting of the minds that crystallised into collaborative works of horror quite distinct from those that proceeded them.

CHAPTER 5 - THE OBLONG BOX - A KIND OF RETRIBUTION

Of their four films for AIP, *The Oblong Box* was the most important for the Hessler and Wicking team. That may sound like a strange claim considering that their next two movies were more conventionally successful. Although *The Oblong Box* definitely did well at the box-office, *Scream and Scream Again* and *Cry of the Banshee* did even better. And *The Oblong Box* is not their most satisfying artistic collaboration. That honour goes to their next movie, *Scream and Scream Again.* But *The Oblong Box* did set out the recurring themes and techniques of the team, fully realised, and, despite a few missteps, powerfully presented. And this, despite the fact that the major work of script development was done, not between Wicking and Hessler, but by Wicking and the project's first director, Reeves.

Reeves' *Witchfinder General* stunned both the public and critics when released in Britain. Letters of complaint about the film's violence appeared in newspapers, and many reviewers dismissed the picture for being sadistically prurient. Even after cuts imposed by the British Board of Censors, the degree of violence outraged many viewers but kept cinemas packed. Tigon, the British production company that financed it with AIP, feared that local authorities might ban the film. In the US, with its title changed to *The Conqueror Worm* to attract fans of AIP's Poe series, the movie earned rentals of 1.5 million dollars according to *Variety's* "Big Rental Films of 1968," a tremendous profit for AIP's modest production investment (*Variety* January 8, 1969: 15). Even Price had to admit that Reeves had succeeded in making a stunning film. He later told *Cinefantastique* magazine:

> Reeves hated me. He didn't want me at all. I didn't like him either. It was one of the first times in my life that I've been in a picture where the director and I just clashed … Afterwards, I realised what he wanted was a low-key, very laid back performance. He did get it, but I was fighting with him almost every step of the way. Had I known what he

> wanted, I would have co-operated. I think it's one of the best performances I've ever given (quoted in Biodrowski 1989: 69-70).

After AIP screened the movie for Price in America, he generously wrote a letter to Reeves:

> I saw *The Conqueror Worm* or whatever it's called and I must say it is a very impressive, moving, and exciting picture! Congratulations! The contrasts of the superb scenery and the brutality, the action of the hero forces against the inexorable almost pedantic inaction of the forces of evil make for a suspense I've rarely experienced. I'm sure you have a big success and a long feather in your cap … So, my dear Michael, in spite of the fact that we didn't get along too well … I do think you have made a very fine picture, and what's more, I liked what you gave me to do! (quoted in Murray 2002: 247).

AIP sought to capitalise on the talents of their new star director. They assigned him to helm their big budget biography film, *De Sade,* written by Corman's frequent collaborator on the Poe movies, Richard Matheson. Reeves' deepening depression and reliance on medically prescribed drugs caused the company to remove him from that project and reassign him along with his line producer, Hessler, to a smaller movie: the next Price gothic horror film, eventually entitled *The Oblong Box* (Murray 2002: 290). According to Hessler, "I was to produce *The Oblong Box* and Michael was signed to do four pictures for AIP." (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 45) Unfortunately, the young director took his personal problems with him. Hessler said,

> There was one occasion when we were sharing a taxi, and he revealed to me that he was undergoing electroshock treatments and was having bouts of severe depression. As his producer, this was very alarming. I sensed that he might not be able to work, but I didn't feel comfortable discussing it with anyone at the time (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 45).

According to Hessler and Wicking, Reeves was never happy with the script, even with the shooting draft that he guided up through the last weeks of pre-production. Hessler said,

> There were a couple of meetings that were basically script conferences. I remember, at one of the meetings, Michael picked up the script and threw it across the room, announcing that … it was rubbish (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 45).

According to Wicking:

> Michael only agreed to do the picture because AIP used it as a carrot on a stick. They said he could do his pet project, a film about Jesus returning in modern times, if he did this one first … Anyway, he was very worried. AIP wanted a strangeness that could be brought in on a certain budget with certain requirements, which Michael was trying to do … In all the meetings we had, Michael was clearly uncomfortable with the material. He had allowed himself to be railroaded into making it (quoted in Nutman 1989: 51-52).

Perhaps Reeves resisted the material for the very reasons that it was perfect for Wicking and Hessler. As finally realised, the themes of *The Oblong Box* actually contradict the world view of Reeves' three completed features. At the same time, *The Oblong Box* perfectly sets out the particular concerns of the entire oeuvre of Hessler and Wicking.

Reeves revealed his vision in the first few shots of *Witchfinder General:* a bucolic rural landscape in which the sunshine gleaming through the autumn leaves of the trees forms a cross of glimmering light, in which sheep graze peacefully on rolling hills of grass, and in which man's evil, in the form of the sounds of a gallows being built and the screams of an innocent woman being dragged to her death, violates the innocent beauty of nature. Reeves consistently told the story of the natural love of friends, families and romantic couples shattered and corrupted by the intrusion of mankind's dark side. One can imagine his unrealised dream project of Jesus returning in modern times, not as a story of the redemption of humanity, but as the corruption of the Lamb of God.

Perhaps Reeves would have been more excited about *The Oblong Box* if he would have chosen to tell it from the point of view of Julian Markham's fiancee Elizabeth, a privileged

but basically good young woman whose life is blighted by marrying into a corrupt family with shocking secrets. Hessler's mentor, Hitchcock, would probably have approached the story this way, as he did in his masterpiece *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), gradually allowing the innocent niece, young Charlie (Teresa Wright) , to realise the evil of her beloved Uncle Charlie (Joseph Cotten) and harden her heart to him to the point where she threatens his life. But Hessler and Wicking start their movies from the proposition that the world and its people are already corrupt. If they had told the story of *Shadow of a Doubt,* it probably would have been from the point of view of the sociopathic serial killer, Uncle Charlie, who calls the world "a foul sty" and avoids punishment for as long as possible, even while aware of its inevitability. Thus, Hessler and Wicking were comfortable, and indeed inspired, by a story structure for *The Oblong Box* that presented its events from the perspectives of guilty characters such as the Markham brothers and Dr. Neuhartt (Christopher Lee). Despite all the efforts of Sir Edward to seek answers and justice, despite all of Julian's attempts to forget the mistakes of his past and start a new life, and despite all of Dr. Neuhartt's good intentions to advance medical science, these characters instinctively know that a harsh retribution awaits them for their sins. And this is the position of every protagonist in the four gothics of Hessler and Wicking, starting with the prototype of *The Oblong Box.*

SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

The Oblong Box began as an original screenplay by Lawrence Huntington titled *Man in a Crimson Hood* and dated 22 March 1968. Huntington was born in London on 9 March 1900. He was hardly a novice to film-making by the time he wrote *Man in a Crimson Hood*. In addition to screenwriting and producing, he had directed over thirty drama and comedy features, mostly programmers, as well as a great deal of television. In fact, Huntington began his film career at the dawn of talking pictures, and his first credit was actually a silent. Huntington's last directed

movie was a poorly reviewed British horror movie called *The Vulture* starring Akim Tamiroff and Broderick Crawford in 1966. (Botting 2014).

By comparing the five drafts of the script to *The Oblong Box*, the contributions of original writer Huntington, original director Reeves, and final writer and director Wicking and Hessler can be assessed. In his 2002 biography of the director, *The Remarkable Michael Reeves*, Murray provides the essential dates, including the day of Price's arrival in London and meeting with Reeves about wardrobe, 12 November (Murray 2002: 293), the scheduled start of shooting, 18 November (Murray 2002: 293), and the actual beginning of production, delayed due to Reeves' dismissal, 20 November (Murray 2002: 295). By factoring in the date on Reeves' final screenplay, 13 November, a fact unknown to both Murray and later Reeves biographer Halligan, this study was able to deduce Reeves' contributions to the project. Two undated drafts written after the 13 November version contain changes initiated by new director Hessler during production.

Huntington's first draft, *Man in a Crimson Hood,* describes the story's time period as 1820. Reeves and Wicking in subsequent drafts will move the date forward to 1850 then to 1860, perhaps to avoid the Regency era costumes, setting the story in the more familiar Victorian era. The West African prologue that begins the finished film does not exist in Huntington's first draft. In fact, Huntington's original script contains no scenes set in Africa. Reeves and Wicking created the prologue in the 13 November draft, and in that version, Reeves as director first called for subjective shots from the point of view of Edward Markham in both the African scene and the first scene in England in the Markham manor.

Huntington's first draft starts with a scene labeled, EXT. BLACKWELL STREET LONDON NIGHT (Huntington, 22 March 1968: 1). In the finished film, this is the second scene after the African prologue and credits. It involves the lawyer Trench and his younger cousin Norton visiting a cheap lodging in London, encountering the landlord Hackett and having a

private meeting with the African sorcerer in London attire, N'Galo. Huntington's first draft dialogue in this scene is basically the same as in the finished film, except that N'Galo speaks in broken English in the Huntington version, very much like lines written for Native Americans in Westerns. Wicking's rewrites give N'Galo a more polished mode of speaking. For example, Wicking changed Huntington's version of N'Galo's last line in the scene from, "White man know many things black man not … but black man know Ju-Ju" (Huntington, 22 March 1968: 6), to "You have seen what another man of my power has done already. … We have knowledge of things that you people never discover" (Huntington, 13 November 1968: 14). Wicking's more dignified characterisation of N'Galo may have contributed to the banning of the finished movie in Texas. Wicking said,

> I made the theme of imperial exploitation of the natives the subtext, the cause of the curse. The film was banned in Texas for being too 'pro-Negro' at the time, a minor joy I didn't expect to get from a horror movie (quoted in Nutman 1989: 52).

In Huntington's first two drafts, both called *Man in a Crimson Hood*, Julian Markham, the part eventually played by Price, is a brooding romantic figure, aged thirty, whose wicked brother, Sir Edward, bears a cursed face because he whipped a witch doctor in Africa. Julian at first postpones his marriage to Elizabeth because he must secretly care for his disfigured and enchained brother. After Sir Edward's faked death and his own wedding, Julian does not realise that his brother has been buried alive and resurrected until the very end.

In Huntington's first draft, Sir Edward, the real protagonist of the story, has no clear goal once freed from his coffin. He pursues no revenge against Trench and Norton for their betrayal. He knows perfectly well why he bears a cursed face, so he does not seek answers for his fate. He does fall obsessively in love with Dr. Arnott's maid, Sally, and tries to find her in London after Dr. Arnott fires her, killing a prostitute in his search.

The prostitute's murder and its investigation become the basis for the second act of the first draft, moving too far away from the original story of Julian and Edward. In the end, Edward unsuccessfully tries to get N'Galo to restore his face and traces Sally to Julian's home. Since Edward really did whip a sorcerer resulting in his own disfigurement, there is no last minute revelation of Julian's guilt. Edward prepares to shoot Julian rather than allowing himself to be imprisoned again, but at the last moment, shoots himself instead. Julian removes the red hood to reveal that Edward's face is half misshapen human and half orang-utan. Sadder but wiser, Julian starts a new life with his new bride, Elizabeth.

In order to propel the second act, the protagonist, Sir Edward, needed a mission not provided for his character in Huntington's first draft. Edward's faked death, his entombment in the coffin, Julian blackmailing Trench into finding another body, N'Galo's murder of Hackett, and Hackett's delivery to Julian, are all in Huntington's initial script. Huntington's Act 1, in fact, is quite intriguing and eventful.

It is in Act 2, after Edward's resurrection at the home of Dr. Arnott, that Huntington's structure falls apart. When the Huntington draft was sent to Price in America, he was not impressed. "The script was terrible," he said, "filled with cliches and lackluster ideas." (quoted in Lucas 2003: 27) Since Sir Edward had no clear goal in Huntington's version, events pile on each other with nothing to propel them. Trench, Norton and Dr. Arnott do not even die. Edward only murders the prostitute he imagines in his madness as Sally when she and her pimp try to blackmail him.

Instead, in his first draft Act 2, Huntington writes non sequitur scenes that lead to little or nothing. In one such scene, a woman who once loved Edward visits Julian to give him a bouquet of flowers for Edward's grave. When Julian delivers the flowers to the cemetery, he is confronted by a silent man in a crimson hood who points a pistol at him and backs away into the

night. Edward's lady admirer never plays a part in the story again, and Julian disregards the figure in the hood, thinking him a highwayman.

Eliminating such scenes in their first rewrite, Wicking and Reeves build on Huntington's fascinating first act. It is impossible to determine exactly who contributed what, but as in *Witchfinder General*, the new writer and director give their wronged protagonist, in this case Sir Edward, the obsessive drive for revenge. This makes Edward's betrayers, Norton and especially the lawyer Trent, much more important to the story.

As with *Witchfinder General*, Reeves' and Wicking's rewrites of *The Oblong Box* bear a resemblance to Jacobean revenge tragedy. After Elizabeth I died in 1603 and James of Scotland succeeded, calling himself James I, sensationalism became the new tendency in theatre. Playwrights no longer questioned or condemned violence, but portrayed brutality for its own sake without intellectual or emotional qualifications. From 1607 to shortly after 1620, the obsessed avenger dominated the stage. As Janet Clare describes in her 2006 study of the genre, *Revenge Tragedies of the Renaissance:*

> While these tragedies of revenge engage the audience at moral, psychological, emotional and political levels, arguably their most immediate impact lies in the ritualistic and spectacular quality they possess. … Revenge tragedy is a theatre of cruelty and a theatre of blood … Whatever their exploration of ethical and political issues, revenge tragedies are visceral in their displays of horror and violence. Unlike the extreme acts of classical tragedy, Renaissance playwrights did not report the atrocity, but represented it on the stage (Clare 2006:8).

The audiences' fascination with these horror tragedies resulted from the intrigues of the avengers against their victims. The common moral lesson of the plays seemed to be simply that God had allowed retribution against sin, even if the innocent had to die with the guilty. The genre reached its artistic peak with *The White Devil* (1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613) by

John Webster and Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607), *The Changeling* (1622) and *Women Beware Women* (1623) (Kaye 1992: *vii - xiii*).

Even with the revenge motif added, Reeves' draft includes Edward's relationship with Dr. Arnott's maid and his murder of the blackmailing prostitute. In the end of Reeves' first revision, still called *Man in a Crimson Hood,* Julian remains the innocent hero, strangling the animal-faced Edward. But Reeves added an epilogue in which N'Galo, blinded in a fight with Edward, brings Edward's corpse back to life in his grave to suffer the agonies of premature burial.

The name of the body snatching doctor in every pre-production draft of the script is Dr. Arnott. Some time during production, after Reeves left the project, the name changed to Dr. Neuhartt. Christopher Lee eventually played Dr. Neuhartt in the finished film, but Reeves' pre-production rewrites hint that he had another actor in mind. In Reeves' first rewrite, the director changed Huntington's description of Dr. Arnott, as he was called, from: "a striking-looking man of about 40" (Huntington, 22 March 1968: 35) to "an evil-looking little man of about 50" (Huntington, 22 March 1968 revised: 35). Could Reeves have been thinking of Donald Pleasance for the role, the actor Reeves preferred to play Mathew Hopkins over Price in *Witchfinder General?* Reeves' note, quoted above and hand-written in the first revision, could certainly be a description of the actor. In Reeves' final shooting script, dated 13 November, Wicking simply describes the doctor as "a man of about 50" (Huntington, 13 November 1968: 40). At that point, production was scheduled to commence in five days with Lee in the role. Lee, a brilliant casting idea from a marketing perspective, plays the doctor with his trademark chilly authority, a far cry from the cringing back-stabber in the earlier drafts. He makes a worthy foil for the equally cold and commanding Sir Edward. An extra scene introducing Dr. Neuhartt appears for the first time in Reeves final shooting script, indicating that the doctor's part had been expanded to accommodate Lee's star status.

Even after his first revision, Reeves was still not satisfied with the script. He continued to work with Wicking on another draft, now called *The Oblong Box* and dated 13 November 1968. This is the version that essentially became the film, with the structure and much of the dialogue matching the finished production.

Naturally, since the genesis of the movie *The Oblong Box* was really an original screenplay called *Man in a Crimson Hood*, there is nothing of Poe's story in the completed film. Several Poe themes appear, but most of them are present in Huntington's first draft. Madness, the gothic house as correlative for a doomed family, premature burial and resurrection figure prominently in *Man in a Crimson Hood*. Wicking added themes of betrayal, guilt and revenge which also echo some of Poe's concerns. Even besides *The Conqueror Worm (aka. Witchfinder General),* AIP had a long precedent of using original stories and giving them Poe titles. Half of Corman's Poe movies are actually originals. Of Corman's films, *House of Usher, Tales of Terror, Masque of the Red Death* and *Tomb of Ligeia* directly adapt Poe's tales. *Pit and the Pendulum, Premature Burial, The Raven* and *The Haunted Palace* (1963) are based on works by other hands, but they contain scenes or themes from Poe.

The main literary inspiration for Huntington's *Man in a Crimson Hood* seems to be Rudyard Kipling's 1890 story of British imperialism, "Mark of the Beast." A British soldier serving in colonial India gets roaringly drunk on New Year's Eve and acts disrespectfully toward the statue of a Hindu god. A leprous Hindu priest bites the soldier on the chest. The next day, the soldier begins to act like a wild animal, eating raw meat, walking on all fours, spooking the horses, howling and foaming at the mouth. His army friends abduct the Hindu priest and torture him into taking off the curse. The soldier regains his personality and remembers nothing of the affair (Kipling: 2000: 70-80).

Perhaps revealing his inspiration, Huntington writes in his first draft of *Man in a Crimson Hood* that Sir Edward kills the prostitute by tearing out her throat with his teeth. Edward's face

when revealed has the fangs and features of an orang-utan. An informed deduction might indicate that Huntington combined the basic premise of “Mark of the Beast” with some of Poe’s themes such as the gothic manor and premature burial. No wonder the story editors at AIP saw it as an opportunity for another Price-Poe film. Everywhere but in Britain, the company successfully marketed *Witchfinder General,* the fact-based story of Matthew Hopkins, as a Poe movie based on his poem *The Conqueror Worm,* so why not do the same with something slightly closer to the author’s work?

Purists such as film historian Don G. Smith complain that movies inspired by Poe, or Lovecraft for that matter, often barely resemble their sources. As Smith writes in *The Poe Cinema,* “Just throw a premature burial into the script, put Vincent Price’s name on the marquee, and presto! A new Edgar Allan Poe film magically appears” (Smith 1999:206). Of course, a feature motion picture is a very different art form from a short story. And many of the stories of Poe are very short indeed, mood pieces to be experienced in one sitting, often filtered through the perspective of a delusional narrator. Yet, most of AIPs Poe films, while not accurate to their sources, work extremely well as motion pictures.

Poe’s actual 1844 story, “The Oblong Box,” involves a narrator on a sea voyage noticing the peculiar habits of an artist who is sailing with the titular oblong box in his cabin. The box contains the remains of his beautiful dead wife, and when the ship sinks in a storm, the artist chooses to go down with his cargo. That tale, one of Poe’s more obscure exercises in necrophilic musing, really does not lend itself to feature length adaptation (Mabbott 1978: 919-934). Huntington’s story, on the other hand, its characters deepened and its structure tightened by Wicking, made a suspenseful and event-filled period gothic. And if AIP used Poe’s name and title to sell it, that did not diminish its effectiveness as a movie.

At least Huntington devised a way for Edward to seem dead without reverting to the Poe movie favourite, catalepsy. N’Galo’s pellet that puts Edward in a death-like trance is one of

Huntington's best ideas, suggested perhaps by the potion at the end of *Romeo and Juliet* or perhaps by the actual voodoo drugs used to turn the living into zombies. It enables the premature burial theme that gives the story its Poe flavour without going back to the same cause as Corman's *House of Usher, Pit and the Pendulum* and *The Premature Burial*. These fresh approaches to traditional themes give *The Oblong Box* much of its edge and separate it from the previous entries in AIP's Poe series.

In the 13 November draft, Reeves and Wicking not only added the West African prologue but greatly strengthened Price's character. As the film's star, Price had communicated his thoughts about the script from America and would continue to do so during filming. The actor was rightfully confused when he read the first draft since Julian was an almost completely innocent and passive character. "I assumed I would play both roles," he said, referring to the two Markham brothers (quoted in Lucas 2003:26-27).

In the 13 November version, Reeves and Wicking, on the insistence of their star, reworked Julian into a complex Gothic creation, a guilt-ridden, ageing aristocrat with a much younger fiancee to continue his line. Julian must desperately hide his innocent brother, who payed with his face and his sanity for Julian's own crime against the indigenous West Africans. It was actually Julian, in this new draft, who outraged the locals by thoughtlessly trampling one of their children with his horse as he rode it swiftly down a narrow West African path. The locals blame Edward for the crime and punish him instead of the true sinner. An intelligent and not immoral man, Julian realises the implications of his behaviour toward the West Africans and wants to try to erase his sin with a new bride and a simpler life in England. But his brother constantly haunts Julian, even after his supposed death, like Britain's retribution for its selfish colonialism. Reeves and Wicking had turned Huntington's stock brooding hero into a morally ambiguous character and a metaphor for England's own historic tragedy. Price said, "I liked the

concept of English guilt over their colonialism and the idea of one brother taking on the sins of the other” (quoted in Lucas 2003; 26-27).

Adding an almost Biblical morality, Wicking writes that the West Africans nail Sir Edward’s hands to a cross before disfiguring his face. The Christ metaphor is most appropriate, since we later find that Sir Edward is being punished for the sins of his brother in the same way that Jesus died for the sins of mankind. And like Christians since the crucifixion, Julian is haunted by the innocence of his sacrificed saviour, Sir Edward, and tries to renounce his sins and live a blameless life. However, Wicking insists on a cruel reckoning for his sinner, and to extend the Biblical morality is to believe that Julian’s retribution is the act of an Old Testament God.

Not in any pre-production script draft, so obviously in a late rewrite during shooting after Reeves had left the project, Wicking has Price’s Julian articulate the theme that will reappear in all four of Hessler and Wicking collaborations. When the corrupt lawyer Trench asks Julian what happened to Edward in West Africa, Julian answers enigmatically, “Sin and retribution. We sinned out there in Africa, all right, plundering their land. And we’re still stealing their wealth, though they’re too innocent to know it. Yes, Edward’s fate can only be our punishment - a kind of retribution.” Unlike Reeves’ three films which tell stories of innocence lost, Hessler’s collaborations with Wicking invariably depict corruption punished with little or no innocence to be seen.

Making Julian responsible for Edward’s curse also allows Wicking to give depth to Edward. In Huntington’s original version, Edward is simply a wicked man who becomes a monstrous killer. In Wicking’s rewrite, Edward is quite a complex character, a psychotic revenger who also chooses to pay money to Dr. Neuhartt, the man he is blackmailing, to hide him for his secret room and board. It hints at the type of man Edward was before he was wrongfully cursed, chained, betrayed and buried alive.

Edward's affair with the maid Sally was the basis of Huntington's second act, along with Edward's murder of the prostitute and its investigation. In the final version, the affair works as a subplot with the main action being Edward's revenge, which was not present in Huntington's first draft at all. In Wicking's new draft, Edward's affair with Sally humanises him, giving emotional depth to a character who could easily have been a cliched monster. We get the idea that Edward was once a normal man with the need for love and companionship. That makes the final revelation of his innocence even more tragic. In fact, every character in *The Oblong Box* is sympathetic, even the eventual villain, Julian. That is one of the strengths that gives the movie its power, especially at the end.

Wicking wisely changed the "Mark of the Beast" inspired half-man, half-animal description of Edward from Huntington's drafts. In the new version, Wicking wrote, "Without benefit of hood, his face is a disgusting, pustule-covered, oozing mess" (Huntington 13 November: 96). Wicking seems to be calling for the results of some type of tropical disease or leprosy. Perhaps the disfigurement is meant to mirror the wounds on the face of the trampled West African boy as seen in Julian's flashback vision. Unfortunately, in the finished film, make-up man Jimmy Evan's execution of Edward's face does not do full justice to Wicking's description. Evan might have used more pustules and ooze to achieve the effect demanded by the story. Wicking said,

> in the massive build-up to the appearance of Vincent Price's facially mutilated brother … The innocuous make-up that was finally used was so inadequate that I remember feeling [on seeing the film] that not since Terence Fisher's devil dog in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* [1959] had there been such a disappointing revelation - it just looked like a few boils (quoted in Foreshaw 2013: 200).

Edward definitely needed to be a bit uglier to justify the reactions of the characters that see him. The same complaint has been levelled at the makeups in the Claude Rains, Herbert Lom and

Gerard Butler remakes of *The Phantom of the Opera*. As he revealed in the silent version of *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), makeup master Lon Chaney realised that it takes more than scars to create a frightening visage.

Refashioning Huntington's shapeless screenplay, Reeves brought some of the structure of his favourite Don Siegel crime thriller, the 1964 adaptation of Hemingway's *The Killers.* Reeves gives Sir Edward, a homicidal sociopath, a goal similar to that of the two curious guns for hire in Siegel's film. Sir Edward, like the hit men played by Lee Marvin and Clu Gulager, pieces together truth about the past while taking homicidal revenge. As in *The Killers*, almost all of the characters in *The Oblong Box* are guilty of something. And as in *The Killers*, the final confrontation in *The Oblong Box* reveals the hidden truth about the past and the real cause of the tragedy. In the case of *The Killers*, the true betrayer is the femme fatale played by Angie Dickinson. In *The Oblong Box*, it is Sir Edward's brother Julian played by Price. In both movies, the betrayer is finally punished by the avenger just before his own death. In both movies, the protagonist himself is also punished at the end because in both movies, no one is innocent.

Actor Ian Ogilvy and many of Reeves' other friends tell stories of being forced by Reeves to watch a 16mm print of *The Killers* projected in Reeves' flat over and over again. In his biography of Reeves, Murray quotes Ogilvy as saying, "He just loved that picture and he used to run it all the time" (quoted in Murray 2002: 97). Actor Nicky Henson also told Murray, "He was always showing the bloody *Killers!"* (quoted in Murray 2002: 98). And Ogilvy's wife Diane told Murray, "He certainly always showed anyone involved with a movie *The Killers …* I must have seen it four or five times" (quoted in Murray 2002: 99). The structural similarities between *The Killers* and Reeves' rewrite of *The Oblong Box* may be intentional or subconscious. But Reeves brought the same qualities of nihilism, guilt and betrayal to *The Oblong Box* that he loved in *The Killers*.

In Wicking's 13 November rewrite for Reeves, he devises the first of the four twist endings he would create for his AIP gothics. Both previous drafts end with Julian still the innocent hero, allowed to live, sadder but wiser ever after with his new bride Elizabeth. In the second of the two previous versions, the blinded N'Galo awakens Edward in his coffin using voodoo, a very effective sting in the tail. An even more powerfully tragic ending would be written for Reeves' final draft after the director decided to make Julian the perpetrator of the original crime. Wicking has Edward bite Julian's hand just after Julian shoots him. After Edward's final burial, Elizabeth goes up to the attic room to find Julian. He stands at the window, his back to Elizabeth. The wound on his hand has still not healed. In the final film, after some dialogue rewrites during production, Elizabeth says, "This is Edward's room, isn't it?" Julian answer, "No, Elizabeth, this is my room." He turns to reveal that his face has started to disintegrate in the same manner as that of his brother. This ending is so perfectly prepared and so organic to the characters and themes of *The Oblong Box* that it is probably the best one devised for the four films of Hessler and Wicking. In fact, it is one of the best in the entire AIP Poe series, especially considering that four out of the eight Corman Poe films conclude with the protagonist's house burning down.

In the final film, Julian is a classic tragic hero, a basically noble and powerful man undone by a fatal character flaw. And that flaw is both psychological and political: he refuses to take responsibility for the injustice he did to his brother and also to his fellow man, vainly attempting to preserve his position through pride and privilege. Wicking's final ending is that combination of pity and terror to which all great tragedy aspires. It also indicates that, even in the guise of a genre film made for commercial purposes as part of a studio's profitable series, a movie can reach for the insights and emotional stirrings of art.

In his biography of Reeves, Halligan includes some intriguing details about the development of *The Oblong Box* that never made it to the pages of the various drafts. He

quotes Wicking telling him, “I remember [Reeves] talked about printing some of the murders in negative, which was just a gimmick and a sure sign of fear on his own part” (quoted in Halligan, 2003, p.211). Halligan also writes that, “Mike inserted a voodoo chant of ‘Namroc, Namroc, Namroc’ (Corman backwards)” (Halligan 2003: 211). Halligan theorizes about Reeves’ state of mind at this point:

> The old arrogance had fled, leaving him battered by a sense of betraying the kind of films to which he had committed himself, terrorised by fears of inabilities, feeling that *The Oblong Box* was going to be the film that prematurely ended his career (Halligan 2003: 213).

Halligan gives the impression that Reeves felt he was better than the material, but he also reveals another reason, based not on speculation, but on the memories of Reeves’ friends. Halligan writes, “Such insecurity became a theme of his increasingly self-obsessed conversations with friends during this dark period - continually putting himself down, claiming he was not up to the job. It was as if *Witchfinder General* had not happened” (Halligan 2003: 212-213).

Price arrived from America on 12 November (Murray 2002: 293), the day before the third draft was dated, and met with Reeves on his costumes. Filming would start on 18 November in Ireland (Murray 2002: 293). According to Heyward, the new trust between star and director immediately soured. Heyward said,

> Initially, Vincent and Michael were looking forward to working with each other again, but then they had some kind of falling out. After that, all of Michael’s communications to Vincent, and Vincent’s replies, had to go through me. This greatly contributed to Michael’s anxiety about doing the picture (quoted in Koetting 2018: 95).

That weekend, severely depressed, Reeves took four or five nembutal capsules with alcohol. His housekeeper found him unconscious in his flat. He was rushed to the hospital where he

recovered. Dr. Blaikie, his physician, said, “These gestures were made to draw attention to himself because he was unable to cope” (quoted in Murray 2002: 294). Believing that Reeves may have deliberately attempted suicide, American International replaced him as director on the film with producer Hessler. Price said,

> That poor boy … He was going to direct [*The Oblong Box*] and *Scream and Scream Again*. But he had this terrible problem of suicide. He tried it about four times and finally they thought they had him cured … When we got together on *The Oblong Box*, I said, ‘Well, I think you were wonderful. You made a marvellous picture. Now let’s get along on this one.’ … We got along very well on the preparation. But when we started to do the costume tests, he tried it again - I was told - and the company couldn’t afford to take the chance. They just said, ‘He’s too unstable.’ … He couldn’t control himself. He was on the flip, and then his girlfriend ditched him because she couldn’t put up with him. He was just completely determined to destroy himself (quoted in Biodrowski 1989: 70).

PRODUCTION

Replacement director Hessler quickly dropped the idea of filming in Ireland and planned the entire production to be shot in and around Shepperton Studios in Middlesex starting on 20 November. Heyward said,

> We had a deal to co-produce the film in Dublin with Harry Alan Towers, but I had mixed feelings about doing it that way. Gordon told me that we wouldn’t be able to do the picture for what we had budgeted if it was shot in Ireland. If, however, we moved the production to Shepperton Studios, he could keep the costs down and the schedule manageable. So I agreed (quoted in Koetting 2018: 95).

Hessler also continued working on the script with Wicking, mostly at the insistence of Price. The actor told *Films and Filming* in August, 1969, “Gordon did a very good job with it because he

only took on the film a couple of days before we started shooting" (quoted in Williams 1995: 218). Heyward said,

> I realised how good Gordon was … In trying to get this picture in on budget and on schedule, knowing Gordon as a quick director, I propositioned him to do it for an infinitely small sum. He accepted it. Gordon is a little more than a director, he also happens to be a tremendous producer and a tremendous respecter of budgets. Once you tell him a budget, he will keep it inviolate. Gordon saved my ass on that picture because we didn't have the money to do it. Gordon pulled that picture through (quoted in Weaver 1991:174).

Hessler himself put it this way, "Chris Wicking, who is an absolute horror buff, rewrote the script. We only had three weeks to shoot it, and the budget was very small - we're talking about $175,000, maybe a little bit more. An incredibly small amount" (quoted in Weaver 1991: 144). Hessler used his position as the film's producer to allow him to shoot it as he wanted in his position as the film's director. He said,

> The advantage of producing and directing a movie is you have much more control over how the money is spent. When you are working as a director, a producer is constantly worried that you are spending too much on a scene and somehow you are not going to make the schedule. He doesn't understand that some scenes are throwaways and some scenes are key. You want to spend more time on important scenes, such as the climax for instance. You may prepare a very complicated scene that could take a whole morning to prepare, but when you start filming, you have five minutes in the can in five minutes. If you have not turned the camera for a whole morning, it appears as a disaster in the production office. The producer is only looking at the amount of time per day it takes to complete so many minutes of finished film. If you know you can complete the schedule without supervision, you don't need the producer (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 49).

Hessler chose the nineteenth century manor house at the four-hundred acre Foxhills estate in Surrey just outside of Heathrow and London to serve as the exterior of the Markham mansion. The architect Basevi conceived the Manor House as a symbol of the restrained elegance of the new Victorian age (Foxhills). The estate had gradually declined by the time Hessler chose it as a location for *The Oblong Box,* so it provided the perfect background of fading Victorian grandeur at which to enact this revenge tragedy of British colonialism.

The script of *The Oblong Box* as revised by Reeves and Wicking is essentially the film. But Price, the most powerful player on the creative team, urged Hessler and Wicking to keep improving it. He said,

> My biggest complaint was that there was little for me to do or say, and I realised this would be, yet again, another attempt to profit on my reputation with this kind of film … There were endless rewrites as I insisted on more to do as an actor (quoted in Lucas 2003: 27).

Wicking continued to deepen Price's role even during shooting. For example, the first scene in the film between Price's Julian and Elizabeth, played by Hilary Dwyer, came very late in the writing process while Hessler was filming. It is an expansion of the beginning of a later already-scripted scene that shows Julian and Elizabeth happening upon a churchyard that has been victimised by body snatchers. The final rewrite by Wicking focuses the new scene on Price's brooding Julian and Elizabeth's disappointment at his preoccupation with some secret problem.

Hessler and director of photography John Coquillon enhance the mood with their inventive use of the lovely location, a small bridge just southwest of Shepperton Studios crossing the River Ash. Harry Robinson's score, his first for a horror movie, and the delicate playing of the April-September romance by Price and Dwyer, help make both characters sympathetic. Dwyer's Elizabeth, beautiful, intelligent and charming, betrays some complexity herself, revealing her slightly spoiled, privileged qualities and her need to have her way.

Also during shooting, in a later scene, Wicking added the character of the grave watcher who tries to prevent Dr. Neuhartt's body snatchers from digging up Sir Edward. The grave watcher actually makes the scene more believable than Huntington's original version without him. We have already seen Julian become aware that graves are being plundered. It would be implausible to think that he, as the local aristocrat, would neglect to pay to have his brother's resting place guarded. This was a common practice for those who could afford it in the age of body snatching. That era largely ended with the Anatomy Act of 1832 which allowed teachers, doctors and students to dissect donated bodies. Of course, Huntington's original draft set the events in 1820, which would be historically accurate. Some body snatching did continue throughout the century, especially in small villages, so this is not inconceivable even in the decade of Wicking's final rewrite, the 1860's (Adams 2002: 113). The addition of the grave watcher also allows for an exciting fight and his brutal murder by the resurrectionists.

Hessler told producer Greg Carson in his 2003 documentary for MGM Home Entertainment, *A Devilish Tale of Poe,* that AIP executives Arkoff and Nicholson, "looked at the rushes and said, 'Look, why don't you spend another week on the picture and make it even bigger.' So … they were very happy with what they got." Hessler asked Wicking to expand the party scene of Julian and Elizabeth's wedding announcement. Wicking's 13 November rewrite for Reeves set the announcement scene during a modestly attended dinner gathering. During production, Wicking and Hessler added costumed extras, an orchestra and dancing. Wicking also made the party more integral to the story by having Elizabeth glimpse Sir Edward in his crimson hood through a window while she dances. In Huntington's original version, it is Julian who first glimpses the man in the crimson hood at Edward's grave as Julian lays a wreath of flowers from Edward's lady friend. Wicking's rewrite works much better, eliminating the implausible coincidence of both brothers being in the churchyard at night. Edward returning home to get his hidden money makes perfect sense. And having Elizabeth

glimpse Julian's guilty secret involves her more directly in his deception. Price greatly enhances the finished scene as he tries to make light of Elizabeth's shock, especially when he dances with her and furtively looks back at the window in confused concern.

The scenes with Edward, the prostitute and her pimp in her room existed in Huntington's very first draft but without the tavern scenes. Those were also added by Wicking during production to give the film scope. Edward's killing of the prostitute was his only murder in Huntington's first version, and the rest of act two concerned the investigation. In the second draft, Reeves and Wicking restructured act two, adding the revenge motif. Once Reeves and Wicking wisely propelled the second act with Edward's obsession for vengeance, his murder of the prostitute and especially its investigation could have been cut out or at least, cut down. The investigation leads nowhere, takes ten minutes away from the main action and introduces characters who do not pertain to the rest of the story. Of course, the scenes do increase the movie's scope as designed, especially in the production rewrite that adds the tavern with extras, music and gypsy dancing. They also increase sympathy for Edward, revealing his desperate need for Sally and his growing delusional insanity, but the claustrophobic intensity of the structure suffers. About his writing experience on *The Oblong Box*, Wicking said:

> It was delightful - and, in retrospect, an inhibiting factor why I never pushed to direct … Working with Gordon was easy, very stimulating. We shared a lot of ideas, and for the most part he directed my scripts the way I wanted to see them made (quoted in Nutman 1989: 53).

Surprisingly, Reeves visited the set during the early days of filming. His friend Ernest Harris, another visitor on the same day, said,

> Mike turned up and took us onto the sound stage where he introduced us to Gordon Hessler, who was kind enough to invite us to stay and watch the shooting … My impression of Mike on that day was that he was relaxed and happy and certainly not

> sorry to be off *The Oblong Box*. My girlfriend, Jean, however, tells me that her most vivid memory of Mike on that day was that when she shook his hand, he felt terribly weak and ill - 'like a twig.' At the time Mike was talking about future, more personal projects (quoted in Murray 2002: 296-297).

In an interview for *Penthouse* magazine, Reeves said,

> I worked with Don Siegel in Hollywood, and I guess he's my great god. Followed by Roger Corman. I admit I'm all for commercial films. If you don't make money you can't make your next film. But there's no reason why successful films shouldn't be good ones (quoted in Murray 2002: 299).

But Reeves would never make another movie. By the time *The Oblong Box* began its successful release in June 1969, Reeves had been dead for four months. At age twenty-five, he overdosed again on barbiturates on 11 February, this time fatally (Murray 2002: 324). Heyward said,

> He was a brilliant kid, but tortured. It's very painful to me that he (may have) killed himself. He saw me as a father figure: he would come into my office while I was conducting business and just sit quietly in the corner - I realise now it was a cry for help. I asked him not to come around anymore which, in retrospect, was cruel. Could I have been more understanding? More attentive? You bet I could've. Would that have saved his life? I don't know. But he needed a friend and I don't think I was there to the degree I should've been (quoted in Koetting 2018: 96).

In a 1986 interview with author Michael H. Price, Vincent Price, from the perspective of time, described Reeves as, "Just a regular little tyrant, hellbent upon intimidation as a motivating tool. But then, one must speak only good of the dead. He's dead. Good" (quoted in Price 2015: 79).

Was it an accident or suicide? The formally recorded verdict was "accidental death" (Halligan 2003: 222), but the truth will probably never be known. In any event, Reeves left behind three completed features: the uneven but promising *The She Beast* (1966), the very

well-made and disturbing *The Sorcerers* and his masterpiece, *Witchfinder General*. And with his impeccable story sense, he guided the rewriting of Huntington's poorly structured *Man in a Crimson Hood* into the blueprint for *The Oblong Box*, the first of the four collaborations between writer Wicking and director Hessler.

Surprisingly, on 29 November, less than two weeks into production of *The Oblong Box*, original writer Huntington died. Heyward had originally mooted Huntington as the director of *The Oblong Box* and informed Price of this in a letter to him as late as 16 October 1968 (Williams 1995: 216). Fortunately, Heyward changed his mind and hired Reeves after the young director bowed out of *De Sade.*

Because of Reeves' early participation in *The Oblong Box*, Hessler inherited some of the key cast and crew members from *Witchfinder General.* Reeves' main collaborator while shooting his last feature was young Director of Photography Coquillon. Praised even in reviews that criticised the ferocity of *Witchfinder General*, Coquillon was again invited to shoot Reeves' supposed followup, *The Oblong Box.* Hessler wisely kept Coquillon on after Reeves' departure. Most of the exteriors in *The Oblong Box* take place at night. Coquillon's day for night scenes in *The Oblong Box* have the quality of dusk, giving the impression that they take place at magic hour just as the sun is disappearing. Coquillon's high contrast lighting often makes these night scenes appear like black and white etchings. The back-lit bare branches and clouds of frosty breath from the actors create an authentic sense of late fall in the English countryside. Unlike Corman's Poe cinematographers, Floyd Crosby, Nicolas Roeg and Arthur Grant, Coquillon often favoured hand-held shots. Using a wide angle lens to enlarge the look of practical locations, Coquillon's operator hand-held extended moving shots in all three of his movies for Hessler. Most obviously in *The Oblong Box*, the many scenes from Edward's point of view feature a very avant-garde use of hand-held camera and wide-angle lens.

Like Corman, Hessler preferred moving shots, choreographing the camera with the blocking of the actors. For example, Hessler stages the first scene of Trench (Peter Arne) and Norton (Carl Rigg) visiting N'Galo (Harry Baird) in his lodging room in one carefully planned shot, moving the camera and actors to emphasise dialogue. It is an incredibly skilled and elaborate blocking, raising it way above the cinematic standard for a low budget horror movie. Even the fleeting glimpse of a boom shadow cannot take away from the bravura handling of what is essentially a standard dialogue scene. It ends as N'Galo, played with sinister dignity by Baird, steps into an impressive close shot to deliver his last line. This particular moving shot utilises a crab dolly, but other extended scenes, including several in practical interiors, involve long hand-held moves. Hessler said:

> What I was trying to achieve in camera style was something that was different to the traditional fixed static approach of the typical Hammer horror films of the time … John Coquillon had a very young camera operator who was exceptional in handholding the camera … it is much easier to have fixed shots for the lighting … He can light each shot to perfection. Once you start moving the camera, lights and reflections would come into camera view … For the cameraman, there is a huge compromise on the quality of the lighting. Actually, it is that drop of quality that gives my films this 'documentary look.' … As I rehearsed the scene with actors moving from one room to another, I saw that the scene could continue without a cut, so I entreated John to keep extending the scene (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 48).

This radical use of the camera by Hessler and Coquillon may have been one of the reasons their films met with less critical acceptance in the late sixties and early seventies than those of Reeves and Corman. As Tim Lucas writes in *Video Watchdog:*

> Yet another factor working against Hessler's popular acceptance was the fact that he was perhaps the most experimental filmmaker under contract to AIP since Curtis

> Harrington (*Queen of Blood,* 1966), and working at a time when the hothouse environment of the late 1960's seemed to encourage a Dionysian abandon to all manner of cinematic excess in matters of violence, eroticism and technique (Lucas 2003: 22).

After Coquillon's three collaborations with Hessler, director Don Siegel, Reeves' hero and friend, showed *Witchfinder General* to his colleague, director Sam Peckinpah, who hired Coquillon to shoot his violent masterpiece, *Straw Dogs* (1971) in England. Coquillon went on to film three more Peckinpah movies: *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973), *Cross of Iron* (1977) and Peckinpah's last feature, *The Osterman Weekend* (1983). Coquillon won the Academy of Canadian Cinema's Best Cinematography Genie Award in 1980 for his work on the chilling ghost movie, *The Changeling,* starring George C. Scott. In early 1987, after shooting the TV movies *Mandella* and *Independence,* Coquillon committed suicide just outside of London. He was fifty-six years old (IEC 2018). Hessler later said,

> He was a brilliant cameraman and was starting to work on very important films, and his career was moving into the stratosphere. I couldn't imagine why he would take his own life … except later on, someone told me that he was homosexual and was having problems coping with it, and that this led to his suicide (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 47).

Unlike Reeves on *Witchfinder General,* Hessler quickly learned to respect his star, Price, during shooting. Hessler said,

> Vincent was a wonderful person. Unique. Although he was trapped in these B-pictures, he worked hard to make them believable … When I was living in England, I always invited Vincent to my home before each picture to have cocktails and discuss the upcoming film. He was an extraordinary man (quoted in Smith 2000: 26).

Hessler elicits a very low-key and realistic performance from Price in *The Oblong Box,* as naturalistic but far more layered and sympathetic than the one he gives for Reeves in *Witchfinder General.* As in the earlier film, Price is very introspective and contained in *The*

Oblong Box, but unlike in Reeves' film, the audience is aware in Hessler's movie that Price's character suffers from a dark, undoubtedly guilty secret that he must hide at all costs to prevent some kind of horrible retribution.

In addition to Price, Hessler inherited two other key members from the cast of *Witchfinder General.* Unlike his important supporting role of Father Lowes in Reeves' film*,* veteran character actor and television star Rupert Davies performs the small part of Joshua Kemp, the painter, in *The Oblong Box*. Dwyer, who was the female lead Sara in *Witchfinder General,* and also plays Julian's fiancee Elizabeth in Hessler's film, brings a fierce intelligence and absolute commitment to all of her performances, and she is never reluctant to foreground unsympathetic qualities in her characters. This made her ideal for both *The Oblong Box* and the later *Cry of the Banshee* because Hessler preferred characters with at least a touch of corruption even when hidden by an attractive appearance and manner. Hessler may have spotted this quality in Dwyer's earlier performance for Reeves. In *Witchfinder General,* Dwyer plays the unworldly country-girl niece of a Catholic priest, but her character is not ashamed to have pre-marital sex with her soldier fiancee, and she is also quick to use her sexuality to try to save her uncle from execution by seducing the Puritan Witchfinder. In both *The Oblong Box* and *Cry of the Banshee*, Dwyer plays basically good women who are also spoiled by wealth and position and ruthlessly wilful in getting their way. Dwyer's intelligence and beauty allow her to remain sympathetic, and the negative qualities of her characters' personalities give her performances surprising depth and complexity.

Second billed to Price, and appearing with him for the first time in *The Oblong Box,* was Lee. In the eleven years since *The Curse of Frankenstein*, Lee had become a star in the horror genre, mostly for his Hammer Films output such as *Dracula, Hound of the Baskervilles* (1959)*, The Mummy, Rasputin the Mad Monk* (1966) and *The Gorgon*. By 1969, his name was still not as recognised in the United States as that of Price, but he did have enough cachet to rate a co-

starring credit in *The Oblong Box*. The previous year, he had starred for the third time as Dracula in *Dracula Has Risen From the Grave* (1968), released by Warner Brothers and Hammer's highest grossing gothic ever. This undoubtedly influenced his last minute casting as Dr. Neuhartt.

The real protagonist of *The Oblong Box* is Sir Edward Markham which leads to the question as to why Lee was not cast in that part. Price told Del Valle in an interview at the 1984 San Francisco Film Festival: "I wish Christopher had played my brother … It would have been more honest for the fans than to promote us as a team and yet only have one moment together as Christopher lay there with his throat cut!" (quoted in Lucas 2003: 27) But Dr. Neuhartt is certainly the more visible part since Sir Edward plays all but one of his scenes either behind the camera or with his face completely hooded. Regardless, Lee's impressive personality makes Dr. Neuhartt a welcome presence. His eventual murder at the hands of Sir Edward is the most moving and tragic in the film. According to a letter dated 11 December 1968 to Gloria Lillibridge, the president of his fan club, Lee immediately appreciated the talents of director Hessler on *The Oblong Box*. He wrote,

> I am glad to say that I actually received direction of an intelligent and thinking kind for the first time in many moons. He impressed me, and I hope that we shall work again together in the future (quoted in Johnson 2004: 192).

Instead of Lee, Alister Williamson played the key role of Sir Edward Markham, the only lead in the actor's long career in movies and television. He usually performed in small parts as policemen, inspectors or henchmen in English adventure series or police dramas. He appeared in bit parts, some uncredited, in many horror movies from Hammer, Amicus and AIP, such as *Curse of the Werewolf, The Evil of Frankenstein* (1964), *The Gorgon, The Deadly Bees* (1966), and after *The Oblong Box,* in *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* (1971). It is very difficult to judge his performance in *The Oblong Box* since he is behind the camera or wearing a red hood over his

face for all but his last scene and because AIP chose to have his lines completely re-voiced by another actor (Meikle 2003:158). However, the combination of his body movements, his formal black attire and the readings of his voice-replacement convincingly creates the character of an intelligent, articulate, determined and surprisingly sympathetic homicidal madman. His scenes powerfully present an unreasonable monster who is also a confused and tragic victim.

Hessler's use of suspense in *The Oblong Box* shows the influence of Hitchcock on his former protege. Hitchcock's prime recipe for suspense is giving the cinema audience information that the characters on screen lack. In *Sabotage* (1936) for example, Hitchcock shows the audience that Oscar Homolka's anarchist character, Verloc, has planted a bomb in the package of film cans he gives to his wife's little brother to take across town. Hitchcock carefully informs the audience of the exact time at which the bomb is to go off. Then, his camera follows the boy as he unwittingly carries the deadly package through the streets, stopping to watch a parade, pausing to listen to a vendor and climbing aboard a crowded bus.

Hessler uses Hitchcock's suspense formula to great effect, especially in the scene in which Edward's unearthed coffin is delivered to Dr. Neuhartt by the resurrectionists. We know that a disfigured madman is alive inside the oblong box, but Dr. Neuhartt does not. Hessler, like Hitchcock, now makes his viewers wait and anticipate the inevitable. Trapped in real time, the audience expects the worst. Hessler shows every blow of the doctor's hammer on the chisel prying up the coffin's sealed lid. The viewer endures every squeak as the lid swings open. In *Sabotage,* Hitchcock obsessively cuts to the package in the boy's hands, to a bus passenger's puppy that plays with the boy, to the clock on a tower that ticks closer to the detonation time and even to the hidden gears of the bomb. Similarly, Hessler cuts to close inserts of the Doctor's hands and his hammer and chisel to force audience identification with him. We pity the Doctor's ignorance as he reacts to the unseen face of Sir Edward. In *Sabotage*, shockingly, the bomb

explodes, killing the boy, the puppy and everyone around them. In *The Oblong Box*, Edward's hands suddenly shoot up from the casket and grab the doctor by the throat.

Hitchcock featured his own oblong box as a suspense prop in *Rope* (1948). He begins the movie by showing two psychopathic murderers strangle a friend and deposit his body inside a chest in their apartment living room. As the killers' guests arrive at the flat for a dinner party, Hitchcock's constantly moving camera reminds the audience that the chest containing the corpse is in plain view and is even being used as a table from which to serve food. Hessler's oblong box is exactly analogous to the one in *Rope,* except that its occupant only appears dead but is actually dangerously alive.

In *The Oblong Box,* Hessler again shows the influence of his former employer in the scene in which a coach carries Sir Edward's betrayer, Norton, into the dark woods at night. Norton expects to be taken to the docks so that he can board a ship for the United States. We know that Edward is alive and seeking revenge, but Norton does not. We also know that Norton violently objected when his cousin Trench decided to leave Edward buried alive, but Edward, now resurrected, is unaware of this. When the coach stops in the middle of the countryside, the audience realises that Edward must be the driver. Now, Hessler traps the audience in Norton's point of view so that we experience his confusion while at same time, we anticipate his shock.

Hitchcock in *Psycho* (1960) uses the same strategy. Detective Arbogast (Martin Balsam) returns to the Bates Motel at night to question Mrs. Bates about the missing Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) whom we think we saw savagely knifed to death by the old woman. Arbogast has no idea that the sick, ageing mother is actually a demented murderer. Using inserts and shots from the detective's point of view, Hitchcock forces the audience to identify with Arbogast as he steps into the house of Mrs. Bates, looks around the entryway and starts up the stairs to her bedroom. In a cinematic parallel, Norton, in *The Oblong Box,* steps from the coach and glances up at the driver's seat. Hessler, who has already cut to several shots of the black trees and

branches from Norton's viewpoint, now cuts to his point of view of the empty seat. When and from where will Edward emerge? In *Psycho,* Mrs. Bates runs from her upstairs bedroom and knifes Arbogast in the face as he step onto the second floor landing. In *The Oblong Box*, Edward, a black-clad figure in a crimson hood, suddenly emerges out of the darkness and confronts the shocked Norton with a serrated knife, eventually cutting his throat.

Wicking, premiering his structural strategy of intercutting subplots, also reveals his cinephile's knowledge of Hitchcock. As in Hitchcock's films, Wicking's entire architecture of *The Oblong Box* hinges on the characters being unaware of the agendas of their antagonists. To name only one example from his large body of work, in Hitchcock's *Rope,* none of the killers' guests know that there is a dead body in the chest during the party and that the killers are secretly using the social gathering as a way to prove their own superiority. The victim's father innocently waits for his son to arrive, the victim's ex-girlfriend dreads his appearance and the killers' college professor begins to suspect that his two clever pupils have some kind of hidden plan. None of the guests have the slightest idea that their educated and privileged hosts are capable of senseless murder. In *The Oblong Box,* Julian, Trench and Norton have no idea that Edward is alive and seeking revenge. Edward is unaware of Julian's guilt, and Elizabeth does not know the kind of man she has married. The audience becomes aware of all of the facts and anticipates the reactions of the characters when they find out, as in *Rope.*

Hessler and Wicking also draw visual and thematic parallels between their two male antagonists in *The Oblong Box,* much as Hitchcock does in *Strangers on a Train, I Confess,* and *Frenzy.* In *Strangers on a Train,* Guy (Farley Granger) is guilty of wishing for the murder of his shrewish wife, but Bruno (Robert Walker) actually commits the crime for him. In *I Confess,* Father Logan (Montgomery Clift) knows the identity of the murderer because the man told him in confession. But because he cannot divulge anything heard in confession, the priest must hide the killer's guilt even though the priest himself is suspected of the crime. And in *Frenzy,* the

charming, successful sex killer, Rusk (Barry Foster), rapes and murders women close to his friend, Blaney (Jon Finch), because Blaney is known to have a violent temper under stress, and his life is falling apart. In Wicking script of *The Oblong Box,* Sir Edward is cursed with madness and disfigurement for a thoughtless crime committed by his brother, Julian, an act of which Sir Edward is unaware. Julian is guilty but remorseful, while Sir Edward is innocent but vengeful. Wicking and Hessler balance the brothers structurally and visually as they portray the characters' intertwining moral confusion.

Hessler visually presents two flashbacks of the crime, one from each of the brothers. The first occurs when Julian thinks his brother has died. He sits next to Edward's beautifully studded leather-wrapped coffin and remembers the crime in a burst of inconclusive images showing the West African mother and child, the jungle path as seen from the saddle of a moving horse, the boy running and an impressionistic image of the boy staring at him innocently with wounds on his face. Julian jumps to his feet next to the coffin, his expression one of intense terror, as if he has accused himself of something he does not wish to acknowledge. The second flashback is seen by Sir Edward after being hypnotised by the sorcerer N'Galo. Edward also views the black boy and the white man approaching him on his horse. But his vision includes the boy running from the horse and his eventual trampling by the animal and its white rider. Edward sees the whole truth in his hypnotic state, a callous act of violence at which he knows he was not present. The rider could only have been his brother, Julian, the Markham for whom Edward's punishment was meant. Julian cannot confront the truth in his flashback because his peace of mind is based on denying it. By contrast, the same incident, fully revealed in Edward's vision, sets him free from his confusion and focuses his mission to unmask the guilt of his brother. Tellingly, the truth does not cure Edward's disfigurement as he had hoped because his brother's guilt has tainted him as well, turning him into a vengeful murderer.

Julian's guilt has transferred to Edward, branding them both as imperialistic exploiters of the innocent, trusting West Africans. Of course, this transference is complete when the dying Edward, shot by his brother, bites Julian's hand, spreading the sin like a communicable disease back to the original carrier. Hessler and Wicking dramatise the tragic justice of the transference by next placing Julian in Edward's attic room, his face beginning to deteriorate in the same way.

In the course of the story, Hessler and Wicking mirror the actions and placement of the brothers in the story structure and cinematic compositions, hinting at the moral connection of the brothers. For example, on the night of the celebration of Julian's wedding to Elizabeth, presumably the night the couple physically become man and wife, Sir Edward returns from secretly watching the party at the Markham mansion and goes to the bed of Sally, the young, promiscuous maid of Dr. Neuhartt. Edward and Sally have sex on Julian's wedding night, and Sally is dismissed the next morning by Dr. Neuhartt for the indiscretion. In his madness, Edward becomes obsessed with Sally after their one encounter, confusing a prostitute in London for her and dying at the hands of his brother in an attempt to abduct the real Sally from the Markham mansion. Edward's need to duplicate his brother's marriage, at any cost, dramatises his tragic attempt to take Julian's place as the righteous inheritor of the noble Markham title, a position that Edward would naturally possess if the true guilty Markham had received his punishment. Julian's need to marry Elizabeth after the supposed death of Edward arises from his desperate attempt to erase his very real guilt and lead a life that rightfully should have gone to his brother.

Hessler's blocking of the final confrontation of Julian and Edward reveals their reverse mirror image moral positions. In the crepuscular forest surrounding the Markham mansion, Edward, standing in the foreground of his shot, with Sally behind him in the woods, faces off against Julian. In an exact reverse angle, Julian stands in the foreground of his shot holding a gun on Edward while Elizabeth stands behind him in the woods. The two brothers are looking at reflections of their lives, distorted by Julian's sin. Julian, the guilty man, stands with the authority

of privilege and position, symbolised by the shotgun, his lawfully wedded wife behind him to complete the false image of righteousness. Edward faces him, his disfigured features revealed, a visage unjustly ravaged for his brother's sin and now branding Edward for his own madness and murder. The terrified and promiscuous serving maid stands behind Edward, sadly taking the place of Edward's own possible wife if the true sinner, Julian, had rightfully been punished. Edward accuses Julian, and Julian confesses. But justice still cannot be done, for Julian blasts Edward with both barrels when his brother attacks him.

Both brothers later receive retribution for their sins. The sorcerer N'Galo causes Edward to come back to life in his coffin and suffer the horrors of being buried alive. And Julian takes Edward's place in his brother's attic prison, his face distorting to "mark him" as the actual perpetrator of the family crime. Their last name, Markham, sounds exactly like the method used by the West African sorcerer to reveal their sins to the world. Like the picture of Dorian Gray, their faces are "marked" by the ravages of their evil. As Lampley writes in *Women in the Horror Films of Vincent Price,* "Julian observes that 'we' (his family in particular and Europe in general) … must deal with 'sin and retribution' - a peculiarly Poesque line that underscores Wicking's take on the proceedings" (Lampley 2011: 133). Later, Lampley adds, "Thus do the Markham brothers both pay for their avarice and inhumanity; in doing so, they represent the liability shared collectively by Western civilisation for the exploitation of the Third World" (Lampley 2011: 133).

POST PRODUCTION

As was their practice, AIP recut *The Oblong Box* from Hessler and editor Max Benedict's original version in order to remove some nudity and violence and to speed the story along, sometimes at the expense of a fuller portrayal of characters and themes. In the United States, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) had initiated a rating system in November 1968 to

prevent censors from dictating cuts to their pictures (Lewis 2000: 135-138). Some of the eliminations made by AIP to *The Oblong Box* were designed to prevent the film from receiving the R rating, restricting children under seventeen from seeing the movie unless accompanied by an adult. A large portion of AIP's American audience traditionally consisted of children and adolescents at matinees and drive-ins. Most horror movies were rated X in England, preventing anyone under sixteen from viewing them even after cuts made for America's youth, and *The Oblong Box* was no exception.

Hessler's ninety-six minute director's cut became a ninety-one minute theatrical release at the hands of AIP's editors. Not only did they remove some violence and nudity, but they also cut an entire scene between Price and Dwyer, necessitating a rearrangement of five scenes that followed it. AIP's surgery begins in the very first moments of the very first scene set in West Africa. In the director's cut, the ceremonial drumming and dancing goes on for almost a full minute after the American International logo fades out. In the theatrical cut, it ends immediately after the logo, and Edward is quickly dragged into the hut to be crucified and disfigured. At Edward's funeral, about thirty minutes into the movie, AIP eliminated one of Price's lines, "He has found some peace, too, as he never could have while he was alive," as well as a low angle shot of the coffin descending from the perspective of the bottom of the grave and a shot of Edward inside the coffin, his face hidden from the camera. Both of these cuts seem designed to simply shorten the scene, to "get to the good parts."

AIP eliminated the dialogue scene between Price and Dwyer that followed Edward's resurrection in Dr. Neuhartt's laboratory. In the cut scene, Julian and Elizabeth walk the grounds of the mansion in daylight. When Elizabeth suggests honeymooning in Africa, Julian answers that he does not want to return to the dark continent since Edward's death. In fact, he plans to relinquish all of the family holdings there. He explains that they would still retain their titles as Sir Julian and Lady Markham, but "there would no longer be anything to go with the title."

Obviously, AIP felt that cutting this exposition would speed the movie toward its revenge subplot. Unfortunately, it also sacrifices depth to Julian's character, eliminating the desperate measures he is willing to endure in order to assuage his guilt and start a new, if more humble, life.[1]

To avoid the R rating from the Motion Picture Association of America, AIP cut the number of stabbings Edward inflicts on Norton from eleven to a mere five (Lucas 2003: 29-30). Also, in the tavern scene, AIP editors removed several seconds of partial nudity from the carousing. In the room of Heidi the prostitute (Uta Levka), AIP cut the glimpse of her nipple when Edward rips her blouse open. The cut also removed her line, "That will cost you extra." They also eliminated her bare breast from a later shot showing her dressing in the background after having sex with Edward. AIP allowed only the first knife slash across Heidi's throat, eliminating the second, less convincing, stroke of the practical-effects "blood knife." Finally, AIP cut a glimpse of the nipple of the prostitute who is lying on a sofa after having sex with the drunken Trench just prior to Edward's murder of him.

The musical score for *The Oblong Box* was the first for many horror movies by Harry Robinson. In 1968, Robinson wrote the haunting whistling main theme for the supernatural TV series, *Journey to the Unknown,* produced by Hammer Films. While AIP's *The Oblong Box* was his first score for a horror feature, Robinson followed it with several scores for Hammer Films such as *The Vampire Lovers* in 1970, *Countess Dracula, Lust for a Vampire* and *Fright,* all in 1971, and *Demons of the Mind* and *Twins of Evil* in 1972. He scored the horror spoof, *The*

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[1] Because of this removal, AIP rearranged the scenes that followed. In the original director's cut, the talk about Africa between Julian and Elizabeth is followed by 1. Edward donning his red hood for the first time in the home of Dr. Neuhartt; 2. the artist Kemp discovering the landlord Hackett's corpse in the lake; 3. Dr. Neuhartt revealing to Edward that his servants have returned; 4. Hackett's body dragged from the lake by the police, and 5. detectives questioning Kemp in his artist's studio. After eliminating the Julian and Elizabeth scene, AIP reordered the following scenes as 2, 1, 4, 5, and 3. Obviously, AIP's editor did not want to cut from Edward rising from his coffin to grab Dr. Neuhartt by the throat directly to Edward donning his red hood as Dr. Neuhartt calmly converses with him. This required moving up Kemp finding the dead Hackett which precipitated the rest of the reordering.

House in Nightmare Park starring Ray Milland in 1973, as well as the two Hammer-like movies produced by Kevin Francis's company, Tyburn, *Legend of the Werewolf* and *The Ghoul,* both starring Cushing and both in 1975 (Larson 1985: 156-158).

Robinson's score for *The Oblong Box* is much less romantic than his later scores for Hammer. He does create a lovely pastoral work for the first scene between Julian and Elizabeth, but the rest of the music in the film is dominated by nervous suspense cues and clashing chords for shock and violence. He utilises a full orchestra with a characteristic reliance on brass and woodwinds. Even so, like Wicking and Hessler, Robinson sought to present traditional genre material in a different way. For example, instead of appropriating Bernard Herrmann's famous screeching violins from *Psycho* (1960) for Sir Edward's knife attack, Robinson responded to a similar situation with a different musical interpretation. He said,

> I heard a sound in … Lutoslawsky; … the woodwind (made) a sort of a yelp; and it sounded to me to be so much like a knife cutting … and it was a film called *The Oblong Box,* and poor old Christopher Lee gets his throat cut … I remembered this Lutoslawsky sound and I wrote it in (Huckvale 2008: 90).

RECEPTION

Many critics dismissed *The Oblong Box* on its release as a routine entry in the Vincent Price-Poe series. Typical of most press reviews, A. H. Weiler, writing in the *New York Times* on 24 July 1969, said,

> The British and American producers, who have been mining Edgar Allan Poe's seemingly inexhaustible literary lode like mad, now have unearthed *The Oblong Box* to illustrate once again that horror can be made to be quaint, laughable, and unconvincing at modest prices.

Variety of 31 December 1968 was a bit more kind:

> Price as usual overacts, but it is an art here to fit the mood and piece and as usual Price is good in his part. Alastair Williamson as the brother is called upon for some strange goings-on but acquits himself well, and Christopher Lee likewise scores as a doctor who becomes involved with Williamson.

For the British opening, which actually followed the February 1970 release of the second Hessler and Wicking effort, *Scream and Scream Again*, the *Monthly Film Bulletin* of July, 1970 ignored the contributions of Wicking to both films, but in typical early auteurist style, said*:*

> [*The Oblong Box*] is firmly stamped with the vigour and assurance that one is coming to associate with the horror films of Gordon Hessler … Vincent Price manages to suggest unnameable horrors as [the] tormented brother.

In 1973, Pirie offered a serious assessment of *The Oblong Box* in the context of the history of the British horror film in *A Heritage of Horror.* He wrote:

> Both Hessler and Wicking were representative of the new breed of commercial British film-makers … they were ardent *cineastes* with a fascination for the American cinema and brought a vivacity to the business of making horror movies which at that time contrasted vividly with the more sober approach of Hammer whose style remained comparatively restrained. *The Oblong Box* was seriously weakened by its script … but it demonstrated at once that Hessler was determined to bring a new stimulus to British horror movies (Pirie 1973: 157).

By dismissing the script and concentrating on the visual style, Pirie misses the essence of *The Oblong Box* which, despite a dispensable fifteen minutes or so toward the end of the second act, became a blueprint for the approach and concerns of the Wicking and Hessler team. In fact, the two filmmakers used most of the same story points such as betrayal, disfigurement, premature burial, resurrection and revenge, for the underpinning structure of another of their works, the experimental *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* And in *The Oblong Box,* they vividly

introduced their themes of sin and retribution and the decadence of the old order, themes that would reappear and expand in the next three movies.

With the release of the director's cut on home video, the movie's reputation has greatly improved. In his book *Drums of Terror: Voodoo in the Cinema*, Bryan Senn writes,

> Conventional fan 'wisdom' has it that *The Oblong Box* is a dull, weak, disappointing entry in AIP's Poe series. Nothing could be further from the truth. Thanks to excellent acting, a lively storyline, convincing period settings and costumes, and some involving direction from Hessler, it remains one of AIP's better non-Corman films from the 1960s - and definitely Gordon Hessler's best directorial effort (Senn 1998: 147).

Of the complaint that the story is "convoluted" and "sloppy," Senn counters that,

> The storyline is actually rather straightforward and unfolds (with one flashback - which is appropriately denoted as such) in a smooth, linear fashion. Granted, an occasional subplot … branches out from the story's main trunk, but these only add further interest to the film and ultimately tie together quite nicely (Senn 1998: 147-148).

Senn detects the tragic quality in Wicking's deepening of Huntington's originally one-dimensional characters :

> One of the most intriguing aspects of *The Oblong Box* is the fact that none of the main characters are completely villainous - and none are completely pure either. Edward, of course, is as much sinned against as he is sinner … his obvious pain at his affliction even inspires sympathy at times. Dr. Neuhartt is cast in the vein of Dr. Knox, and Christopher Lee effectively characterises him as a man driven by his work to overlook his own morality … Julian knows what is right and wrong but cannot break free of the comfortable status quo. In the end, he pays the ultimate price for his amoral complacency (Senn 1998: 149-150).

Rob Craig, in his massive survey from 2019, *American International Pictures,* writes,

> Gordon Hessler's first film for AIP is in some ways his best, as he had (relative) freedom to experiment with a wholly new cinematic language for the Poe horror films - and the genre in general … a refreshing change of pace from the relatively staid stage-bound Roger Corman productions … With films such as this, AIP effortlessly surpassed Hammer Films … attempts to create a post-modern Gothic horror film mythos (Craig 2019: 275).

With a striking poster inspired by Harry Clarke's 1919 illustration for Poe's tale, "The Premature Burial," *The Oblong Box* did very well at the box office. According to *Variety* magazine's "Big Rental Films of 1969," *The Oblong Box* returned 1.02 million dollars in rentals from the United States and Canada alone on its first release, over five times its budget (*Variety 7* January 1970: 15). Part of that take may have been from the high expectations created from the previous year's popular Poe-Price offering, *The Conqueror Worm* (aka *Witchfinder General*). Whatever the cause, AIP was so delighted with the results, especially given the production's troubled genesis, that they offered Hessler a three-picture producing and directing contract and promptly assigned him to film the properties the studio had been developing for their most valuable asset, Price.

Of course, none of the critics writing about *The Oblong Box* at the time of its release could know that it was the movie that initiated Hessler and Wicking's very personal vision of the horror film. Surprisingly, no scholar or film historian in the intervening decades has written of this either. The theme of sin and retribution, though it was added into Huntington's script in preproduction while Reeves was still the director, became the most dominant concern in every one of Hessler and Wicking's movies. True, Reeves participated in turning the character of Julian Markham into a tragic protagonist, aware of his terrible sin and its unjust impact on his brother and attempting to avoid retribution by starting a new life. But Reeves also ultimately reacted against this story because it strayed so far from his own personal obsessions as

revealed in all three of his completed features. Reeves was fascinated by innocence and how it could be corrupted into violence by its contact with evil, while Hessler and Wicking preferred telling stories of already corrupt characters struggling against their inevitable reckoning in a world that operated like an ever-tightening trap. Therefore, *The Oblong Box* became a guide for the journeys of the three protagonists created by the budding dual auteurs that followed: Dr. Browning in *Scream and Scream Again*, Lord Edward Whitman in *Cry of the Banshee* and Cesar Charron in *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Each one tries to avoid the consequences of their sins even while their retributions relentlessly approach.

CHAPTER 6 - SCREAM AND SCREAM AGAIN - MAN IS GOD NOW

On 17 January 1961, in his farewell address as President of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower warned, "we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military–industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists, and will persist" (Eisenhower 1961). Eisenhower spoke of the danger of the wedding of politics, science, money and the military to the future of freedom and democracy. Using the wild imaginings from a disposable pulp novel as his jumping-off point, Wicking issued the same dire warning in his next collaboration with Hessler, *Scream and Scream Again.* As in their previous effort, the team created a violent and complicated horror movie with mature musings about power and responsibility and the corruption of the old order. And they stretched their theme of sin and retribution to include the dire consequences of the misuse of political power, no matter how noble the intentions.

Before embarking on *Scream and Scream Again,* Wicking took his turn trying to adapt Poe's short story "The Gold Bug" into a feature screenplay for AIP to follow up the box-office hits of *The Conqueror Worm* and *The Oblong Box.* In the mid sixties, AIP and Corman had tried to turn "The Gold Bug" into a comedy along the lines of Corman's *The Raven,* but Charles B. Griffith's script never pleased the director, and he abandoned the attempt (Nasr 2011: 18). Wicking said,

> I was then asked to work on an adaptation of Poe's "The Gold Bug," which was AIP's problem picture. Every writer they employed had worked on it at some point, but you can't adapt that story into a 90 minute picture. My version had Aztecs in it, like Larry Cohen's *Q.* It was about someone obsessed with them. Then there was a version of *Dante's Inferno,* which they wanted to shoot in Germany. Nothing came of that, either (Nutman 1989: 52).

Unfortunately, neither the AIP files currently housed at MGM nor Wicking's widow have copies of Wicking's scripts to *The Gold Bug* or *Dante's Inferno.*

SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

The source novel for *Scream and Scream Again* was originally titled *The Disorientated Man* and was credited to Peter Saxon. Actually, *The Disorientated Man was* written as a paperback publication in 1966 for Mayflower/Dell by Stephen D. Frances from an idea by editor W. Howard Baker and heavily revised by Baker writing as Saxon (Holland 2004: 237). Before partnering with Mayflower Books, Baker first used the name to pen novels about fictional detective Sexton Blake for Amalgamated Press. Saxon became a publishing house pseudonym used by many writers in the 1960s and early 70s. Saxon got the credit for writing several pulps including the 'Guardians' series, featuring, in imitation of Dennis Wheatley's black magic novels, wealthy heroes fighting the evil supernatural in Britain. Baker was the actual author of two entries in the Guardians series, *The Killing Bone* (1968) and *Vampire's Moon* (1972). Saxon's *The Disorientated Man* was retitled *Scream and Scream Again* for the book's two rereleases. Co-author Frances also wrote *Black Honey* (1968) and the novelisation of the horror film *Corruption* (1968) (Flint, 2013). He was most famous for creating and writing the very popular British crime novels of the pseudonymous Hank Janson, also the name of the American crime reporter in the stories, and being convicted of obscenity along with the publisher and distributor of them in a notorious 1954 trial at London's Old Bailey (Holland 2004: 9-11).

Of little or no literary value, *The Disorientated Man* is nevertheless surprisingly cinematic with its vivid murders, chases and fights. Like the movie, it features the intercutting of separate stories that converge at the end, as well as all the same characters but with different names. The only major difference between the book and the finished film is that, in the novel, the villains are shapeless space aliens that have assumed human form to create flesh and blood robot

slaves out of earthling body parts. In the movie, the menace turns out to be the race of artificially created human composites themselves, still using dissected people for raw materials but with no hint of space alien involvement (Saxon 1966).

The novel, like the movie, features a malfunctioning composite that becomes a vampire in modern London, picking up young women, raping them, killing them and drinking their blood. The metropolitan police attempt to capture the killer, only to find that it possesses enormous strength and speed, resulting in exciting chases and realistically violent battles. At the time of the novel's publication, and indeed even four years later when the movie was released, this was a thrillingly innovative way of presenting a vampire in fiction.

The authors of *The Disorientated Man* may have been influenced by the success of an American novel from the previous year, 1965, called *Progeny of the Adder* by Leslie H. Whitten. It tells a similar story of a homicide detective and his police force in modern Washington D.C. investigating the brutal murders of women whose throats have been slashed, whose bodies have been drained of blood and whose corpses have been thrown into the Potomac River. The detective and his force engage in chases and bloody fights with the vampire in an urban setting, resembling the scenes in *The Disorientated Man* (Whitten 1965).

Surprisingly, *Progeny of the Adder* never became a film, so *Scream and Scream Again* was the first movie to present a vampire in such an up-to-date setting and engaging in such brutal mayhem. *Scream and Scream Again* and Whitten's well-reviewed novel signalled an explosion of contemporary, more realistic vampires, resulting in such films as *Count Yorga, Vampire* (1970), *House of Dark Shadows* (1970), *Blacula* (1972) and the TV movie, *The Night Stalker* (1972). All of these movies present the vampire violence with the same kind of hand-held documentary realism pioneered by Hessler in *Scream and Scream Again.* Richard Matheson, who adapted Jeff Rice's unpublished novel, *The Night Stalker,* into the extremely popular TV movie, admitted,

> I'm very familiar with [*Progeny of the Adder*]*.* I thought I was going to make it into a movie several times. I actually did an outline on it once on my own. It is similar to *The Night Stalker …* If *The Night Stalker* had been my original story I would be feeling very guilty about it … It's a pity *Progeny of the Adder* was never made, it would have made an absolutely fantastic film (quoted in Martin 1974: 17).

American writer-producer Milton Subotsky along with his partner, fellow American Max Rosenberg, created Amicus Films in the 1960s and 70s, a British company rivalling horror and science fiction specialists Hammer Films. Amicus made their reputation producing such financially successful genre fare as *Dr. Terror's House of Horrors* (1965)*, The Skull* (1965) and *Torture Garden* (1967)*,* all three directed by the celebrated British cinematographer Freddie Francis. Subotsky, a horror literature enthusiast, said,

> I came across the book [*The Disorientated Man*] and immediately decided Amicus should turn it into a movie. What I liked in the book were the various ideas that I believed could make it a different type of picture. It has a very interesting structure. No scene directly relates to another. Each builds up to some sort of cliffhanger and then you move on to another. So there are about five different stories which run parallel to each other. Bit by bit they come together, and the reader is kept guessing right until the end. That's what fascinated me (quoted in Nutman 2008: 67).

Heyward called Subotsky to ask if he had any material that would be right for AIP's contract horror star, Price. Subotsky sent Heyward the book*,* and the executive saw the possibilities. Subotsky said,

> I did an adaptation of the novel, sticking very close to the material. Deke [Heyward] assigned Gordon Hessler to direct. I liked Gordon, but he never said he didn't like my script. It wasn't until much later this came to light … Without my knowledge, he had

> Chris [Wicking] write a draft of the screenplay, and Gordon began working with Chris at Deke's suggestion (quoted in Nutman 2008: 67-68).

Directors such as Freddie Francis and Jim Clark, who worked for producer Subotsky at Amicus, complained that Subotsky would edit their films down to the bare bones in post production, removing any dialogue or characterisation that he felt slowed the story. Clark, who directed Price in *Madhouse* (1974) for Amicus, wrote a letter to Price during post production in which he stated that Subotsky,

> has bulldozed his way into the cutting room and is at this very moment cutting a swath through the film … They are retaining all the action of course - but every time anyone opens their mouth, Milton tries to cut the line - for no other reason than, 'it bores me,' or, 'we don't need it.' It is pure butchery … (quoted in Williams 1995: 242).

Francis, who directed several Amicus productions, said,

> Milton, apart from wanting to be a writer, wanted to be an editor. And Milton cannot resist joining any two pieces of film together … If Milton's walking down the street and treads on a piece of film, he'll pick it up and try and join it to something (quoted in Dixon 1991: 101).

Judging from Subotsky's script for *Scream and Scream Again,* he not only edited movies to the bone in post production, but he wrote bare bones as well. Subotsky's undated screenplay in the author's possession runs a mere 73 pages whereas the average feature-length script numbers between 90 and 120 pages. Subotsky's script indicates only 86 scene changes in a story that includes at least five distinct subplots and spans two continents. Subotsky gives very little attention to behaviour or relationships for his characters, writing mostly expository dialogue and action. For example, there is no indication of the weary and sarcastic attitude of the police detective eventually played by Alfred Marks. Also, Subotsky simply describes the vampire killer

as a “handsome young man” with no hint of his trendy clothes, looks or manners, as in the movie (Subotsky 1968: 14).

Subotsky shuffles the subplots in a completely different order than the finished film, starting with Konratz’s murder of a suspicious official in East Germany, cutting to the knife murder of an innocent girl in England, moving to the runner waking up in a mysterious hospital, then showing a young American doctor finding the dead girl and calling the police, switching back to the runner waking up to find his leg missing, then following the police detective and the young doctor at the murder site and questioning the mad scientist at his nearby home. All of this takes place in the first 12 pages, which gives some idea of the brevity of the scenes.

Of course, Subotsky never rises above the pulp nature of the novel, never explores themes of power and corruption, except as presented in the skeleton of the plot, and ends the script revealing the villains as monsters from space in human form as in the novel. After revealing the head of British security as another alien, Subotsky even resorts to the cliche of calling for a question mark after THE END credit (Subotsky 1968: 73).

Hessler said, “I liked Milton Subotsky personally, but his script for the movie was just awful. So I got Chris Wicking, who was introduced to me through Michael Reeves, to rewrite it entirely, fresh” (quoted in Bryce 2000: 57). Wicking added,

> I got a call from Gordon requesting I read the book and then Milton’s screenplay. The book gave me goose bumps. Then I read Milton’s script, which was totally flat; it was like watching a souffle dying, it just caved in after a while. Gordon and I discussed it at length … The one radical thing we did … was take out the blobs from space. Blobs from space are great, but we didn’t want it to be that kind of picture (quoted in Nutman 1989: 52).

Wicking and Hessler came up with a narrative solution that not only removed the cliche of space blobs, but also explored the immorality of the modern military-industrial complex. Wicking said,

> We took the aliens away and implied that Vincent Price's mad doctor character was responsible for the superhuman creatures. … We wanted to investigate science and politics, so we used a lot of material from news headlines, material about transplants and genetic experimentation (quoted in Nutman 1989: 53).

Like President Eisenhower, Wicking and Hessler were sounding an alarm for the future. According to Wicking:

> I think, in an odd sort of way, we were trying to make a kind of warning movie. There was a sort of subversion we were trying to suggest existed. We were saying, alright, it might be the swinging sixties … but wait a minute, the institutions are still in control. There isn't anybody in that picture who is trying to break out of anything. You've got a whole series of institutional figures who, in a sense, are at war with each other, just because their systems are different … Vincent is the only person in that picture who thinks he's doing the right thing. He is the individualist (quoted in Decharne 1998: 20-21).

Wicking also changed the location of the repressive regime, from the communist East Germany of the novel and Subotsky's script to a fictional European country with a swastika-like insignia. About original screenwriter Subotsky, Wicking said,

> Milton is a real fantasy fan; his films are real little labours of love. But he's a bit old-fashioned, tied to the Val Lewton school. He tidied up the book too much. I tried to put the book's intercutting structure back in and keep the aliens out. So the supermen became the result of scientific advances. That was new then; I wanted to get more topical than Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* [1956] and Gordon was out to beat *Coogan's Bluff* [1968] for fast-paced police-work. Both of us, unbeknownst to the other, bouncing off Don Siegel. Milton was still doing rewrites of his version, and I was hidden away in Gordon's cupboard as his insurance. I wrote the first draft in two weeks (quoted in Nutman 2008: 69).

According to Heyward, “Gordon and Chris Wicking … basically wrote the thing together, even though Chris gets the credit” (quoted in Koetting 2018: 96).

At this point, Rosenberg confessed to his partner Subotsky that Amicus had not yet bothered to option the rights to the original novel (Nutman 2008: 68). Rosenberg wanted AIP to buy the option themselves since the price was cheap, around one-hundred and fifty pounds, but Subotsky felt that having no rights to the property put Amicus in a vulnerable position (Nutman 2008: 68). Heyward could easily cut them out of the deal or reduce their involvement if AIP negotiated only with the book’s author. In the end, Heyward was very angry when Subosky told him, but agreed to keep Amicus as a partner, even after securing the rights himself for AIP.

Heyward took out his displeasure on Subotsky by showing him Wicking’s version of the script. Subotsky was not happy and felt much of Wicking’s script did not work (Nutman 2008: 68). Heyward insisted Subotsky meet with Hessler and Wicking at the AIP London offices and work together on the screenplay. Subotsky said, “This was sensible, but what was bad was Deke wanted us to work there, in his office, with him present. We should have gone off together elsewhere to work” (quoted in Nutman 2008: 68). According to Wicking:

> Milton, Gordon, Deke and I spent three days in AIP’s boardroom, comparing and arguing, line by line. My assigned task was to stop Milton getting one page in because once one scene gets in, you have to take the build-up and the consequences and the contrasts, the lot. What a role, me versus the producer, whom I admired! After three days, Deke suddenly said, ‘Oh, for Christ’s sake, Milton, can’t you get it through your head, we’re never going to make your script! Nobody likes it, why don’t you just shut up and go home and just produce the picture!’ (quoted in Nutman 2008: 69)

Ironically, according to Subotsky, the suggestion that prompted his dismissal from script conferences ended up in the finished movie:

> By the third day we had reached the part of the script where Peter Cushing's character is discovered by the superman Konratz and is killed. Chris had written about a ten page buildup to this scene. This involved several sets, an enormous number of television screens, each showing a different view of the European intelligence complex. That material would have taken two weeks to shoot because of the logistics involved. We would have had to film each insert for the television sets and project them onto the screens so they would register right. This is what we were arguing about on that day, the cost of their proposed sequence. I felt it was not necessary to show the whole process of discovery, it was sufficient to show Konratz walking into the office and saying he'd found out. They insisted on that. That's when Deke blew up. Gordon is a nice guy, but it was hell working with him as he wanted the entire script rewritten. Chris seemed to be thinking along the same lines, so that's why they got along. But as far as that scene was concerned, I was right and they were wrong. If they shot it, it would have been taken out in the editing. Anyway, we finally came up with a script we all agreed on (quoted in Nutman 2008: 69).

In the finished film, Konratz does indeed enter Cushing's office and kill him, all in one scene, Cushing's only appearance in the movie. In this particular case, Subotsky seems to have gotten his way.

PREPRODUCTION

The casting of Cushing and Lee, along with Price, was a brilliant marketing decision, even if the brief appearances of the two Hammer stars disappointed their fans. In his interview of Hessler in *Video Watchdog no. 98,* Del Valle said to the director, "well-liked as the film is, the fans always complain about one thing: it stars Vincent Price, Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing - yet there are no scenes featuring them together." (Del Valle 2003: 47) Hessler explained: "It was a last

minute Deke Heyward decision to try and get all three stars together in one picture, and we hadn't designed *Scream and Scream Again* for anything like that" (quoted in Weaver 1991:146). In retrospect, Heyward realised that top billing Lee and Cushing, along with Price, may have been a cheat:

> It was interesting to have them all in the same film, but they should have contretemps between them, utilising all three in one scene in a face-to-face showdown. But there was no way of doing it. We just brought them in to take advantage of the names, for marquee value (quoted in Weaver 1991 176).

A seasoned line producer on his own low-budget horror films, Subotsky cleverly created the financial arrangement that allowed AIP to afford three stars in one project. Realising that they only needed Price for two weeks, Subotsky negotiated with his agent to drop Price's usual AIP salary from $75,000 plus expenses to a total of $40,000. Since Subotsky arranged the deal through Amicus, AIP could still have Price for one more film on his contract. This pleased both AIP and Price. By saving on Price's salary, Subotsky could afford to hire Lee for three days and Cushing for one (Nutman 2008: 69).

Price was confused by the avant-garde nature of the narrative construction of *Scream and Scream Again* but did not insist on changes as he had on *The Oblong Box*, perhaps because of his newfound trust in Hessler and Wicking. He later admitted, "I never knew what it was about … It was a strange story, a strange movie" (quoted in Biodrowski 1989: 73). Lee also participated on faith. He said, "Playing some of those scenes, shot out of sequence and with no clue to how well they'd be edited, was maddening" (quoted in Biodrowski 1989: 73). As for Cushing, whose third-billed part became a one-day cameo, he faced his fate philosophically, saying, "I will accept any part, big or small, if I feel my contribution will mean something, and not be a disappointment to those who go to see my performances in particular." (quoted in Bryce 2000:58).

In 1970, all three actors, Price, Lee and Cushing, were in the process of becoming what has come to be known as "cult stars." The term "cult star" has become a prevalent, but somewhat imprecise, term in popular journalism since at least the last decades of the twentieth century. But journalists rarely define the distinction between cult actors and other film stars, and they attribute the status to particular actors in an arbitrary way. In his essay, "Cult Movies With and Without Cult Stars: Differentiating Discourses of Stardom," Matt Hills writes: "stars can … be cultified by their repeated appearances in well-loved cult titles, e.g. Christopher Lee in *Star Wars, The Lord of the Rings* movies, Hammer horror, and *The Wicker Man"* (Hill 2013: 21). Of Vincent Price, Justin Smith writes in his essay, "Vincent Price and Cult Performance,"

> Vincent Price's cult following is indisputable, on the evidence of a host of fan-made websites and special issue tributes, in depth interviews in cult journals such as *Cinefantastique, Fangoria* and *Starburst,* and latter-day "celebrity" appearances in Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (1983) and Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) … there seems to be broad consensus that Price's cult star reputation rests upon his low-budget horrors made for American International Pictures … between 1960 and 1973 … a star's performance style (especially in the case of genre actors like Price), can be seen as supra-textual, existing as an agglomeration of a number of similar performances condensed and abstracted from the particularities of his different film roles. This, indeed, may be a caricature, or an iconic manifestation, of his actual, varied performances (Smith 2013: 110-111).

Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke describe the relationship of the caricatured cult star with their audience in the 2008 book, *Reframing Screen Performances,* when they write, "with the cultural image of the celebrity or genre star defined well in advance, fans enjoy a particular performance because it meets their expectations" (Baron and Carnicke 2008: 67).

But the four horror films of Hessler and Wicking are primarily auteur works made by two artists who are simultaneously exploring the boundaries of gothic cinema and communicating their own morality and political perspective. One of the particular aspects of their films is a disregard for the genre stardom of their casts and a refusal to tailor the characters and narrative to satisfy the expectations of fans of their stars. The resulting disappointment from that very vocal group of viewers, both at the time of the films' releases and in subsequent re-evaluations, has often blinded them to the unique value of the Hessler and Wicking oeuvre beyond its function as a genre commodity. Many reviews of *Scream and Screams Again,* from 1970 to current assessments, complain that Cushing has but one scene, that Lee has very limited screen time as a dull government bureaucrat and that Price, though well cast as a mad scientist, has only slightly more screen time than Lee.

Why do the horror films of Hessler and Wicking work poorly as showcases for stars that specialise in the very genre in which they are appearing for the two auteurs? For one thing, Hessler and Wicking design narratives that fracture the story so that it is told from the actions of many inter-related characters. They do not construct the story solely around a single protagonist with a problem to be solved and antagonists to block him. There is never such a dominating character to satisfy the expectations of fans of their cult star. Performances in Hessler and Wicking films, even by the stars, are merely stitches in the tapestry of plots lines, themes and set pieces that finally come together into an artistic whole.

Actually, Hessler and Wicking, the two creators themselves, could be regarded as the protagonists of their films. They, and not the protagonists of the stories, propel the movies, leading their audience through the inter-connected subplots and characters to a single narrative trajectory at the story's climax. Their films are auteur pieces, not showcases for the cult stars, and so Hessler and Wicking themselves can be seen as taking the role of the guiding point of view as the story's tellers. Hessler and Wicking prove, like other auteurs, that cinema is the

storytellers' medium. The chroniclers in cinema, the writer and director, use the ingredients of performance, narrative and style to create a synthesis that communicates their vision.

In *The Oblong Box*, Hessler and Wicking broke up the narrative by following the actions of several related characters, mostly the two Markam brothers and Dr. Neuhartt, but also including the stories of lesser participants such as Trench, Norton, Kemp and Inspector Hawthorne. Even though they all had scenes to themselves, the relationships of these characters to the main narrative was always obvious. This is not the case in *Scream and Scream Again*, which is told through a much more complex intercutting of subplots and is the next logical stylistic step from the story telling experiments of *The Oblong Box. Scream and Scream Again* builds its major narrative from other narratives, not obviously related until the very end. The following year, in *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Hessler and Wicking will attempt to do the same thing, not just with seemingly unrelated subplots, but with different perceptions of reality, utilising dreams, memories, theatrical presentations and even premonitions. This was a story-telling strategy unique to Hessler and Wicking at the time, and more important to the two auteurs than building complex characters for genre stars.

In fact, in the baroque structures of Hessler and Wicking, secondary characters often attain dominance in the narrative. Because the subplots are not built around the characters of the star performers, these supporting parts gain prominence as the audience is asked to follow plot lines through their actions. In *Scream and Scream Again*, the major role of Konratz, the murderous replicant from the repressive Eastern European country, might have gone to one of the three stars. A perfect fit for Lee, the part went instead to Marshall Jones. After *Scream and Scream Again,* Jones would become a prominent member of Hessler's unofficial stock company, with large roles as Father Tom, the new parish priest who battles witchcraft in *Cry of the Banshee,* and then as Luigi Orsini, a carnival performer who has himself buried alive for the

amusement of the crowd in *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. His resonant voice, large stature and commanding delivery made him perfect for Hessler's horror movies.

Also in *Scream and Scream Again,* Hessler and Wicking build several scenes around Keith, the rogue replicant who escapes from Dr. Browning's compound to commit the brutal rapes and vampire murders of young women he picks up at a sixties-era dance club. Tall, lean, deep voiced, with long blonde hair and the face of a dissipated Mick Jagger, thirty-year old Michael Gothard made a tremendous impression in the role. Dressed in a purple silk shirt with ruffled collar, he truly looks like the Rolling Stone from Hell. Heyward said of him,

> I felt Michael Gothard was going to be the biggest thing that ever happened. He had that insane look and that drive, and he was wonderful. Here is a kid who really threw himself into the picture wholeheartedly. Do you remember the scene where he appears to be walking up the cliff? That's a stunt that, as an actor, I would not have agreed to. I'd say, 'Hey, get a double or get a dummy. I ain't either one.' But the kid agreed to do it, without a double - he was that driven … Gordon came up with the idea of using an overhead cable to give that illusion of his walking up the cliff (quoted in Weaver 1991: 176).

Actor and comedian Alfred Marks gives the most dynamic performance in *Scream and Scream Again,* playing the professionally confident and sarcastic Detective Superintendent Bellaver, investigating the vampire murders in London. Again, Hessler and Wicking build several scenes from his point of view, allowing his character to dominate the police investigation sub-plot. He barks orders at his officers, questions suspects, dismisses the nosy press and complains about the stale sandwiches at headquarters, always completely believable and in command. His murder at the hands of Konratz is by far the most shocking and moving in the film. In the cinema, Marks most often performed in comedies such as the wartime farce, *Desert Mice* (1959), but occasionally he proved his talent in more serious roles as in *The Frightened City* (1961) with Herbert Lom and Sean Connery. In *Scream and Scream Again,* aside from his

toughness and believability in the role, Marks brings expert comic timing from his years of radio and television variety shows. Hessler said,

> He played millions of police parts and played them very well. Also, he had a great sense of humour and was a professional comedian. He threw a lot of lines in, which were very good. I was very lucky to have him as the actor (quoted in Miller 1995: 214).

Hessler and Wicking are never afraid to allow these supporting characters to take over the narrative for long periods, following their actions and dramatising their goals and frustrations, without regard to time taken away from the cult actors advertised as the film's stars. They employed this unique strategy consistently in all four films for AIP, and as much as it frustrated many fans, it became a signature story-telling style that differentiated their movies from any other genre efforts of the era.

PRODUCTION

Hessler chose locations for *Scream and Scream Again* in London, including Trafalgar Square, and also in Chertsey, Surrey. For the film's Busted Pot dance club scenes, Hessler picked Hatchetts Playground at 67a Piccadilly, a trendy club that presented performers such as Edwin Starr and *Status Quo*. The Welsh group *The Amen Corner*, who performed at Hatchetts and had a UK No1 hit with "(If Paradise Is) Half as Nice," composed two tracks as source music for the dance scenes: "Scream and Scream Again" and "When We Make Love" (Fuller 2017).

Shooting on *Scream and Scream Again* commenced at Shepperton studios on 5 May 1969 (Nutman 2008: 69). Unfortunately, Subotsky still resented the changes from his version of the script and challenged Hessler constantly while he was trying to direct the movie. Hessler said:

> I asked Deke to put a stop to that, because obviously we had a completely different concept from Milton Subotsky's. Now, he might have thought he had a better script, but

> we didn't think so. We thought his was old-fashioned and had nothing to do with what we were trying to tell. So he never had any creative say. AIP was paying the bill, so they called the shots … [Subotsky and Rosenberg] were difficult for me to work with. They tried to take control (quoted in Bryce 2000: 59).

According to Heyward:

> If I recall correctly, I had Subotsky thrown off the set, and Rosenberg allowed to come on. I felt there was too much interference going on. They were earnest, they were well-meaning, but they got in the way of production. I didn't have that much traffic with them, but it was very difficult. I don't bar people from sets too frequently, but when you're trying to protect time and a budget, you have no recourse. You can't fight about the little things (quoted in Weaver 1991: 175).

Of course, while all of this was going on, Hessler was making his movie. Shooting *Scream and Scream Again,* Hessler's moving camera is even more audacious and impressive than it was in *The Oblong* Box. For example, he uses a single long crane shot to introduce Alfred Marks' Inspector Bellaver, following him as he walks with his detective associates and news reporters from the murdered body of the first female victim, past work lights and officers searching for clues, finally stopping at his car which he enters and drives away, all as the morning sun seems to be coming up in the background. Wicking recalled the genesis of that extraordinary shot, reinforcing their positions as dual auteurs:

> Gordon and I were a team …I remember there's a scene where the police find a body on the common, and I said, 'wouldn't it be great if that was all done in one long tracking shot.' It definitely didn't say that in the script, it was Gordon and I talking (quoted in Decharne 1998: 20).

In the police station scenes, a smooth hand-held camera, long before the invention of the Steadicam, pulls back, pans and follows from behind as Bellaver walks through the cramped

rooms and halls, all without a single cut. These shots emphasise the crowded, busy nature of the station, with overlapping conversations and the constant sound of typing and ringing of phones. Praising Coquillon's operator, Les Young, Hessler said,

> That camera operator was so talented. I never knew what became of him. He's sort of disappeared off the map. He was just 19 or 20 years old, but he could hand-hold a camera and move it around in the most impossible shots to do. These were the days when they didn't have a Steadicam or anything like that. He was an extraordinary cameraman (quoted in Miller 1995: 219).

In the post mortem scene, Hessler's camera shoots up through a glass table top to show the severed hand of the vampire killer in the foreground with the two faces of the medical examiners looking down at it. The shot highlights the uncanny and powerful nature of the synthetic hand which dominates the frame, a very important prop in the unfolding story.

In the celebrated chase scene, Bellaver and his police cruisers speed after the vampire killer in his red convertible in a tour de force of staging and editing. The chase continues on foot at a chalk quarry and finally ends up at the estate of Price's Dr. Browning. Hessler's use of cinematic rhythm, cutting and movement rivals the action highlights of Don Siegel and other specialists in the genre. In fact, in terms of sustained movement and suspense, Hessler's scene is actually groundbreaking. The first part of the chase, ending with Keith falling from the cliff, lasts for ten minutes of screen time. But Keith escapes from the police again when he tears off his own hand which is handcuffed to the bumper of a police car. The chase continues on foot for another eight minutes of screen time until Keith jumps into a vat of acid in the outbuilding of Dr. Browning's estate. The entire sequence of cinematic excitement lasts for a total of eighteen minutes of screen time, almost two full reels of thirty-five millimetre film, one quarter of the length of the entire feature. By comparison, the celebrated Odessa Steps sequence in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* lasts seven minutes, the crop duster attack on Cary Grant in

Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* lasts four minutes, the car chase in Peter Yates' *Bullitt* lasts seven minutes and the chase in William Friedkin's *The French Connection* lasts six minutes. Constantly inventive and technically breath-taking, Hessler's accomplishment in *Scream and Scream Again* can, without apology, be mentioned alongside these other legendary action scenes of film history. If it were contained in a higher budget film in a more respected genre from a major studio, it would have already joined their ranks.

POST PRODUCTION

Subotsky continued to plague Hessler in post production. Well known for closely supervising the editing of his Amicus films, Subotsky tried to do the same on *Scream and Scream Again*. Hessler would have none of that, and he had the backing of Executive Producer Heyward to prevent it. Hessler said,

> [Subotsky] loved editing, but we didn't permit him to edit the picture. We put a freelance editor on it instead [Peter Elliot who had edited *Torture Garden* for Subotsky] because Subotsky would argue for frame upon frame upon frame. It was very tedious. But he was childlike, an infant in the cinema, and he loved movies. On that point, as a filmmaker you have to respect him (quoted in Nutman 2008: 68).

As on *The Oblong Box*, Hessler took a chance on a composer who had never written the score for a horror movie. David Whitaker had previously written music for four non-horror features such as *Don't Raise the Bridge, Lower the River* with Jerry Lewis, and before that, had worked with pop performers such as Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones, and Marianne Faithfull (Larson 1996: 115). Whitaker's score for *Scream and Scream Again* mixes aggressive jazz with atonal futuristic soundscapes. The rock group, *The Amen Corner,* performs their songs, "Scream and Scream Again" and "When We Make Love," for the dance club scenes. Together, their music gives the movie a very contemporary urban feeling of the late

sixties, unlike most horror films of the time. Whitaker would write more traditional scores for the later Hammer movies, *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (1971) and *Vampire Circus* (1972) (Larson 1996: 115).

Unlike on *The Oblong Box,* AIP made only very minor changes to Hessler's final director's cut. According to Hessler:

> Nobody seemed to understand it. They just thought we were all mad or something. But since they had liked my previous film [*The Oblong Box*], on the strength of that they wrapped up *Scream and Scream Again,* and shipped it out exactly as it was (quoted in Bryce 2000: 60).

According to Wicking: "They did try to take out one of the three strands of the *Scream and Scream Again* story and found the film didn't work without it" (quoted in Nutman 1989: 53).

The British release prints of *Scream and Scream Again* did not contain AIP's few changes, so they have preserved the film as Hessler delivered it. The AIP version removed several shots of an old drunk in the bushes watching as the vampire Keith, played by Gothard, begins to kiss Judy Huxtable's Sylvia while the couple sit in Keith's red convertible. Much later, as Keith tries to evade the police by climbing up the sheer cliff of the chalk quarry, AIP removed two instances of Mark's Inspector Bellaver throwing a rock at him. The only regrettable edit occurs just before Lee as Fremont forces Price's Dr. Browning to back into the vat of acid in his lab. Pleading his cause, Dr. Browning asks, "But - the dream?" Fremont answers in Lee's portentous baritone, "There is only time for nightmare." Dr. Browning nods reluctantly. The final shots of Hessler's cut are also different. In the director's version, after Lee, sitting in the passenger's side of his Rolls Royce, says, "It is only beginning," the car pulls away, and the camera pans it as it moves down the road. This fades to AIP's single card credit over a long shot of Dr. Browning's empty lab, the light over the operating table still swinging from the fight. The soundtrack music continues with the sinister jazz heard over Lee's car driving away. In AIP's cut,

the image freezes on Lee in the stationary car after he says his final line. This fades to a black screen while The Amen Corner's 'Scream and Scream Again' plays over, and the credits roll.

Without benefit of production notes, one can only speculate on the reasons for AIP's cuts. In the case of the old drunk watching Keith and Sylvia, AIP may not have wanted to dilute the suspense of the expected attack and intense sexual situation with the comedy of an intoxicated lecher. Bellaver throwing two rocks that hit the side of the cliff next to Keith when he is at least fifty feet above the police is simply implausible, and AIP was right to cut it. Rolling the credits over the Amen Corner's screeching rock song "Scream and Scream Again" was probably AIP's attempt to appeal to their core audience of teenagers and young adults, leaving them with a counter-culture anthem that would make them feel that the movie spoke to them in their own terms. As for cutting the exchange between Price and Lee, this seems regrettable if not seriously damaging and may have been done based on whim or taste: perhaps AIP felt the dialogue was pretentious or too literary for its audience.

RECEPTION

Neither AIP, nor Price, nor Subotsky were prepared for the surprising critical reception to *Scream and Scream Again.* In the 11 February 1970 issue of *Variety,* reviewer 'Rick' wrote,

> Price is once again effective as the rock generation's Boris Karloff, not a bad guy really but a misunderstood mad scientist a little ahead of his time … The logic of Christopher Wicking's screenplay … has almost as many holes in it as the assorted victims of the action. However, such criticism is completely irrelevant to the film's gripping momentum of horror. Director Gordon Hessler is a low-budget, sadomasochistic Hitchcock. Long after *Scream and Scream Again* has emitted its last shrill screech, disquieting nightmare images remain … very effective, suspensefully developed and gory horror story with spy and sci-fi overtones … Look for *Scream and Scream Again.*

In Britain, *Today's Cinema* reviewer said,

> Suspense begins even as the opening credits roll and seldom lets up. There are many gruesome touches, but crisp editing and the director's skilful changes of mood prevent these from becoming repulsive … A first-rate horror thriller with shock piling on shock in rapid succession and adroitly punctuated with humour. A real treat for the fans.

According to *The Hollywood Reporter* of 10 February 1970,

> AIP's *Scream and Scream Again* seems destined to a fairly profitable run … It has the successful touch of the vampire, the scientist perfecting the perfect race of beings, dismembering, some lovely nude bodies, and a continuous guessing game as to what's going on throughout its 94 minutes … Though Cushing appears only in a single scene and Lee in slightly more, leaving Price to fully uphold the reputation of the three, the initial work will be done out front with the beckoning talons of the three pulling their fans to the box office.

Motion Picture Herald on 4 August 1970 told its readers that *Scream and Scream Again, "* offers surprisingly more sophistication and style than its title would have you expect … Vincent Price lends his familiar dignity and class to the production."

Veteran movie reviewer Kevin Thomas, a good friend of legendary director Fritz Lang, reported that the ageing filmmaker was very impressed with *Scream and Scream Again* and wrote in his review for Hollywood's hometown newspaper, the *Los Angeles Times,* on 21 February 1970 that *Scream and Scream Again* was,

> a superb piece of contemporary horror, a science fiction tale possessed of a credibility infinitely more terrifying than any of the Gothic witchery of *Rosemary's Baby* … Above all, it is a minor masterwork of style and suspense so unusual and so all-of-a-piece that it really can't be reviewed at length without spoiling its impact.

Thomas's review probably describes the contemporary appeal of *Scream and Scream Again* most accurately. Following fifteen years of gothic cinema from Britain, America, Italy and several other countries, Hessler and Wicking offered a film so novel in its structural approach and documentary-like modernity that it glimmered like glass in a pile of grey stones. Reviewers of the time were quick to forgive the early confusion of intercutting narratives if their patience was rewarded by something unique. And *Scream and Scream Again* is nothing if not unique, even today, combining traditional, even cliched horror tropes such as the vampire, sex killer and man-made monster themes with the action of a modern political thriller and the philosophy of paranoid science fiction. Added to that, the suspense and shock set-pieces were skilfully presented with the latest techniques of hand-held camera, naturalistic acting and modern urban ambience. In short, as a horror thriller, the movie worked, despite its very non-traditional narrative structure.

Lang's endorsement continues to intrigue film scholars. In his book, *Caligari's Children,* author S. S. Prawer writes that, "Fritz Lang described (*Scream and Scream Again*) as the first adult horror-film he had ever seen" (Prawer 1980: 247). And in Phil Hardy's massive *Encyclopaedia of Horror Movies*, the contributor writes of *Scream and Scream Again:*

> Fritz Lang praised Hessler's third, but first major, horror movie, possibly because the depiction of an impersonal, highly technological Big Brother state is reminiscent of Lang's own *Spione* (1927), *Metropolis* (1926) and Mabuse films, and the persistent cop who finds but can't defeat the evil at the top is familiar from *The Big Heat* (1953). (Hardy 1986: 211).

In fact, in Germany, *Scream and Scream Again* was released as *Die lebenden Leichen des Dr Mabuse,* renaming Price's Dr. Browning after the eponymous character created by Norbert Jacques and made famous in the three movies directed by Lang.

With *Scream and Scream Again,* Hessler and Wicking continued their winning streak at the box-office, increasing their take from the previous year's hit, *The Oblong Box.* In *Variety's* "Big Rental Films of 1970," the magazine reported that *Scream and Scream Again* returned $1,217,000. in rentals in the United States and Canada alone on its first release (*Variety* 6 January 1971: 11). When asked to comment on the film's success, Subotsky, either still bitter or genuinely confused, said,

> Strangely enough, *Scream and Scream Again* made a lot of money, and that was different from any other film we've ever done. I don't know why; it wasn't all that good. It might have been because we used three top horror stars, and it had a good title (quoted in Knight 1973: 15).

The ever-witty Price put it this way: "I really don't know what *Scream and Scream Again* was about - which Scream I was playing. … But Fritz really loved it" (quoted in Bryce 2000: 60).

Only three years after its release, in 1973, Pirie recognised the audacity and game-changing innovations of *Scream and Scream Again* in *A Heritage of Horror.* In the 1973 edition, Pirie calls it,

> certainly one of the finest SF movies ever written, quite on a par with the work of Nigel Kneale and Richard Matheson … The intricate construction … finally emerges as a political parable of some power and Hessler responded to it superbly, delivering a film which combined the verve of a Don Siegel police thriller … with the disciplined incongruity of a nightmare. The sequence in which the police track down a humanoid … is an absolute tour de force of directorial excitement (Pirie 1973: 158).

In his revised edition, Pirie gets closer to revealing the consistent themes of the Hessler and Wicking team when he observes of Wicking:

> Most of all he liked to try new ideas, and many of his scripts, like the extraordinary *Scream and Scream Again*, are structured in a remarkably complex way. Wicking would

> often use two or three story-lines, adding some blackly humorous or brutal twists and constantly subverting any figures of authority (Pirie 2008: 176).

Pirie captures the ground-breaking clinical attitude toward modern horror introduced by Hessler and Wicking when he writes of *Scream and Scream Again,*

> It looked forward to the serial killer movies of years later and even preempted Matheson's innovative TV franchise *The Night Stalker*, not merely by having a hard-bitten policeman chasing a quasi-supernatural villain but by the casualness with which its sex killings are established (Pirie 2008: 176).

Conversely, in his book *English Gothic,* Rigby complains that:

> The film provided audiences … with their first full taste of Christopher Wicking's 'what the hell's going on?' approach to screenplay construction. Initially intriguing, the fragmented narrative turns out to be as much of a patchwork as any of Dr. Browning's composites … As a result, Hessler has to rely on his set-pieces to get him through, and fortunately they're of a very high standard indeed (Rigby 2015: 191).

Rigby goes so far as to assert that the finale, "does little to resolve the numerous enigmas that have gone before" (Rigby 2015: 191). This is not born out by the actual film which spends the last ten minutes joining the subplots through a long speech by Price's character: dialogue that is remarkably expository for a Wicking script.

Actually, in the case of *Scream and Scream Again,* the idea of a fragmented structure mirroring the fragmented nature of the humanoid creations is brilliantly organic. Few genre efforts, even in this age of post-modernist storytelling, attempt such a complex pattern of interweaving plot-lines, though some mainstream movies such as the Academy Award winning *Crash* (2005) and many works by auteur Robert Altman, like *Nashville* (1975) and *Short Cuts* (1993)*,* have successfully navigated the difficult structure. Certainly, *Scream and Scream Again* is still the only Cold War spy thriller, serial killer, police procedural, vampire thriller, medical

science fiction-horror movie ever made, and it foreshadowed the genre-blending that resulted in pictures as disparate as *Lifeforce* (1985), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992), *Cowboys and Aliens* (2011) and *Abraham Lincoln - Vampire Hunter* (2012).

In his 2013 study, *British Gothic Cinema*, film historian Barry Forshaw detects one of the recurring themes of Wicking and Hessler in *Scream and Scream Again*:

> the duo were keen to transplant the central engine of the plot some distance away from the alien invasion theme of the original Peter Saxon novel, hence the grim picture of a totalitarian regime which - by extension - the film represents as corrupt authoritarian figures (and the film has more than its share of those). There is also an element of corrupt science (led by Price) … Writer and director find time for discussions of notions of power and responsibility (there is an interesting conversation between Price's character and that played by Christopher Lee on the human inability to resist the blandishments of power) (Forshaw 2013: 155-156).

Wicking and Hessler again use the genre material as a political parable, this time mirroring the corruption of the military-industrial complex about which President Eisenhower warned. When Price's scientist, Dr. Browning, tells Dr. Sorel (Christopher Matthews) that, "The keynote is control," the young medical examiner answers, "Surely that's the province of politicians, not scientists," revealing the sinister modern marriage of science, politics and the military. Jones's Konratz, the fascist replicant, tells Dr. Browning, "all positions of power must be consolidated," to which the doctor replies, "You've turned every scientific advance into a weapon." Later, Dr. Browning tells Lee's British Intelligence agent, Fremont, that the fascist Konratz has, "made me realise … that we could be corrupted by too much power."

Wicking and Hessler represent Eisenhower's nightmare with the science-fiction scheme of building a race of composites from body-parts of the young to act as soldiers for the repressive regimes of the old. The parallels to America's conscription of its young men to serve

in Vietnam are obvious, down to the psychotic crimes of a defective soldier terrorising the civilisation he is created to defend. Wicking and Hessler even use form to comment on content by borrowing the novel's technique of stitching together seemingly unrelated stories into a mad but working narrative, much like the film's various body parts are stitched together into the soulless but functional human composites.

The politics of *Scream and Scream Again* come into focus when analysed using Wood's theory of the horror film. Wood observed that horror most often presents a story of normality threatened by the monster (Wood 1979: 175). Wood went on to define the monster as the "return of the repressed" elements in normal society. The monster's destructive actions symbolise the struggle for recognition of all that society oppresses. The re-emergence of those repressed forces becomes an object of horror, a monster, and when elements of society defeat that monster, order, in the form of oppression, is restored. When film-makers present a sympathetic monster, one with which audiences are encouraged to identify on some level, Wood theorises that horror films function to grant the viewers' subconscious desire to destroy the revered norms that oppress them as individuals (Wood 1979: 177). Wood defines films that end with society killing the monster and returning to the norm of oppression as "reactionary," while movies that end with the survival of the monster or its lasting effects on society as "radical."

So who is the monster in *Scream and Scream Again*, and what does the movie's attitude about the monster reveal about the film's political position in Wood's theoretical paradigm? Actually, *Scream and Scream Again* features several monsters, at least one for every story thread. The most prominent monster, the one that crosses into every subplot, is Konratz, the fascist composite played by Jones. Konratz is a completely unsympathetic creature, mercilessly killing with his artery blocking neck squeeze. Konratz is eventually destroyed, thrown into a vat of powerful acid, by a more sympathetic character, the creator of the composites, Dr. Browning.

According to Wood, this would indicate that *Scream and Scream Again* is a work of reactionary horror, reinforcing the elements in society that destroy the "return of the repressed" authoritarianism represented by Konratz.

Hutchings notes that "Wood is too astute a critic to allow the progressive/reactionary distinction to become schematic, and his analysis of individual horror films are always sensitive to ambiguity and contradiction" (Hutchings 2004: 184). In fact, the political symbolism involving the character of Konratz is much more nuanced than a simple reading based on Wood's theory would indicate. For one thing, most of Konratz's victims are also oppressive fascists or soulless composites. Konratz himself is certainly an unsubtle figure of oppression. Therefore, he is an oppressive force eliminating other oppressive forces in society.

Since Konratz is eliminating fascists, is *Scream and Scream Again* really a radical horror film? Actually, Konratz's murders of the more innocent victims, the two young defectors he tortures to death and Superintendent Bellaver, the symbol of law and order, would again indicate that *Scream and Scream Again* is indeed a reactionary horror film. If so, the death of Konratz at the hands of Dr. Browning would signal that the film is meant to reinforce the acceptance of social repressiveness.

A second monster from *Scream and Scream Again* is the vampiric sex killer Keith, another composite who rapes, murders and drinks the blood of young girls he picks up at a sleazy dance club. Again, the film portrays him as a brutal, sociopathic pervert with no sympathetic qualities. The police, including Superintendent Bellaver, are hard-working professionals whose sarcastic joking barely hides their moral outrage at the horrors from which they must protect society. After heavy losses in their fight with Keith, the police eventually corner the vampire killer in Dr. Browning's barn, and he commits suicide by jumping into another vat of incredibly potent acid. Again, and without moral ambiguity, this subplot would point to *Scream and Scream Again* being a horror film in the reactionary category as outlined by Wood. The

oppressive society, represented by the London Police Force, represses liberated sexual deviance as symbolised in nightmare form by Keith the vampire killer.

Hutchings could be talking about *Scream and Scream Again* when he writes, using Wood's theories to analyse David Cronenberg's *The Brood* (1979), "there is an ambiguity here, an interpretive room for manoeuvre, which makes it hard to fix the film once and for all within any particular evaluative category" (Hutchings 2004: 188). Obviously, based on the film's critiques of the military industrial complex and on the political leanings of the film-makers revealed in their other works, *Scream and Scream Again* is not a reactionary horror film. But its true political allegiance can only be discerned with Wood's formula by analysing the main story thread, that of Dr. Browning.

The monster in these scenes turns out to be Dr. Browning himself, a misguided idealist who surgically creates composites using body parts from other living humans. Hessler and Wicking present Dr. Browning as quite a sympathetic character as he outlines his mad scheme of populating the world with incredibly strong beings who can reason and rule better than mankind. He claims that they will not be evil, but will save the world from "overpopulation, pollution, famine, nuclear holocaust and war." In short, the new society will follow the priorities of the left in the late 1960s. Showing his revolutionary attitude toward his society, Dr. Browning states, "This civilisation is driving us into the sea of extinction." Sounding like an activist for the New Left, Dr. Browning declares, "We're the only ones who are trying to combat the problem now. In twenty years time, we will be in positions of power, and then we'll be ready to act for the good of humanity."

According to Wood, progressive horror requires a sympathetic monster that represents some forbidden element that is repressed by society. In Dr. Browning's case, it would be progressivism itself, the idea of a superior society built on the failed social order that exists. Dr. Browning dreams of a utopian future with politically correct people literally created from the

parts of humans who perpetuated the social injustices of modern times. "We are for the future," he says, sounding like a leftist sloganeer.

Unfortunately, Keith the vampire killer is one of Dr. Browning's failed experiments. And the murderous nurse who kills a policewoman and steals Keith's disembodied hand is another. In fact, all of the mayhem in the London scenes is a direct result of Dr. Browning's plot to improve the social structure. Dr. Browning's tragedy is the calamity of such ambitious but failed leftist experiments as China, Southeast Asia, Cuba, the Soviet Union and its Eastern block satellite countries. In fact, one of those countries produces Konratz, a murderous fascist and also a composite. The symbolism becomes more complex when Dr. Browning reveals that he too is a composite. He has been created from parts of people in the society he plans to improve, like the rebellious youth who sprang from the loins of the World War 2 generation and rioted against their parents at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago.

And Dr. Browning himself is destroyed by Lee's Fremont, the head of British Intelligence. Hessler and Wicking portray Fremont as a high ranking bureaucrat, cooly playing with the lives and deaths of the citizens of the world to achieve a desired political outcome. Ironically, Fremont is also a composite, and he has the power to will Dr. Browning into backing into his own acid vat because he has calculated that the world is not ready for the revolution yet. But Fremont's words to Dr. Sorel, "It's only just beginning," indicate that the rebels will be waiting in the shadows for the right time to overthrow the Establishment. The oppressive forces of society have again put down the progressive future but not forever, especially since elements of the revolution such as Fremont are already in power and waiting to strike.

So is *Scream and Scream Again* a progressive horror movie that demonises elements of the left? Actually, part of its power is in depicting with clear-eyed objectivity the failures of the revolution in the twentieth century through the actions of the Eastern European Konratz while at the same time subtly endorsing the progressive world-view and its aims through the more sane

proclamations of Dr. Browning. Society needs a radical revolution, the film tells us, just not this revolution.

Hessler and Wicking use their theme of sin and retribution to explore the self-righteous evil of moral over-reach in the cause of improving the world. Dr. Browning is a tragic character who believes that achieving his noble vision of utopia is worth the lives and limbs of innocent citizens. His sin is in rejecting God, setting himself up as the moral arbiter of life and death and assuming that his ends justify the means. Ironically, his retribution comes at the hands of Fremont, another revolutionary composite like himself, who has deemed that Dr. Browning's atrocities in the service of their shared goals have damaged their political position. Fremont causes Dr. Browning to destroy himself before the government bureaucrat obliterates everything the scientist has achieved. As in the Reign of Terror following the French Revolution, in *Scream and Scream Again,* the radicals destroy their own.

Of the four AIP horror films made by Hessler and Wicking, *Scream and Scream Again* is the least typical and the most artistically successful. Hessler said,

> That particular film worked very well mainly because, once again, Chris Wicking took the pulp novel it was based on and created an interesting premise that was really ahead of its time. The idea of transplants is not a new one, but combining it with political intrigue and vampirism made it unique (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 46-47).

Hessler and Wicking would make two more horror films for AIP, both quite personal and expressive, but neither as unforgettably disturbing as *Scream and Scream Again.* With only their second collaboration, the dual auteurs had created their masterpiece, a film both unique and influential.

CHAPTER 7 - CRY OF THE BANSHEE - AGAINST GOD AND THE CROWN

In August 1968, the Youth International Party and the National Mobilisation Committee to End the War in Viet Nam planned a rally in Chicago to purposely occur at exactly the same time as the city's Democratic National Convention. Once word was out, other leftist groups such as Students for a Democratic Society also showed up. Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley stated to the press that, "No thousands will come to our city and take over our streets, our city, our convention" (quoted in Little 1996). But as the DNC met to nominate Hubert Humphrey as their Presidential candidate, ten thousand demonstrators gathered in Chicago confronting twenty-three thousand police and National Guardsmen. At 3:30 in the afternoon on 28 August, as anti-war protesters chanted, "Hell no, we won't go," one of the demonstrators pulled down the American flag from a pole in Grant Park. Waiting for just such a moment, the police forcefully charged through the throng of young people and beat the man. Now chanting, "Pigs are whores," the demonstrators threw food and rocks at the police (Little 1996). The protest spilled out of the park and spread through the streets of Chicago. The police tear gassed the violent demonstrators, and Hubert Humphrey even noticed the smell as he showered in his room at the Hilton Hotel. As protesters chanted, "Kill, kill, kill!" the TV news broadcast the entire event live for seventeen minutes. When they saw the TV cameras, the mob started shouting, "The whole world is watching" (quoted in Little 1996).

In England, Wicking and Hessler could not help but notice Britain's own counter-culture, known primarily as the underground, and its growing political radicalisation in 1968 and 1969. English writer and member of the underground, Barry Miles, described the scene in one of his many *Guardian* articles on the subject in the 30 January 2011 piece called "Spirit of the Underground: the 60s Rebel":

> What we consider the British counter-culture began in the mid-60s … Full employment had enabled the growth of youth culture – Mary Quant, the Beatles – but many young

> people wanted to be more than the youth section of the establishment … The underground was a catch-all sobriquet for a community of like-minded anti-establishment, anti-war, pro-rock'n'roll individuals, most of whom had a common interest in recreational drugs. They saw peace, exploring a widened area of consciousness, love and sexual experimentation as more worthy of their attention than entering the rat race … The counterculture was apolitical, as far as party politics was concerned because most politicians were seen as lying hypocrites, serving vested interests, not the people. However, it was active in issue-based campaigns: CND [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament], which many of them were involved in during the early 60s, and the anti-Vietnam war campaign which grew out of that. After 1967 came environmental issues, the gay liberation front and the women's movement (Miles 2011: 1).

It was in this atmosphere of often violent rebellion that Wicking undertook his next screenwriting assignment for AIP and Hessler, a rewrite of Tim Kelly's period witchcraft script *Cry of the Banshee,* a project that AIP's Hollywood office sent to Heyward in London in August, 1969 (Koetting 2018: 97).

SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

Hessler said of Kelly's original draft of *Cry of the Banshee*:

> Again, we were sent the script from Hollywood, we read it and we were all unhappy with it. It was a dreadful script - what we got from AIP was something unbelievable - and so I asked if I would be allowed to change it (quoted in Weaver 1991:146).

Author of the story and first draft, Kelly began writing when he was twelve years old. He graduated from Emerson College with a bachelor's degree and received a master's degree in play-writing from Yale University. Kelly was one of the most prolific American writers of all time, with more than three hundred plays to his credit. His works, which include comedies, dramas,

one-acts, mysteries, melodramas, children's shows and musicals, have been produced by countless professional and amateur theatres around the world. He especially enjoyed writing plays for high-school students to perform. Kelly's plays for amateur theatre are still being produced (Jones 1998). Kelly also wrote for television, penning episodes of *The High Chaparral, The Name of the Game* and *Here Come the Brides*, as well as acting as story consultant and story editor on *The High Chaparral.* After his first feature, *Cry of the Banshee*, he wrote the movies, *The Brothers O'Toole* (1973)*, Bogard* (1974) and *Sugar Hill* (1974) (Jones 1998). Kelly's films as screenwriter after *Cry of the Banshee*, the first a Western farce and the last two in the melodramatic "blacksploitation" action genre of the 1970s, reveal little of Kelly's politics beyond a vaguely anti-authoritarian attitude common to most movies of the era. None of them make an effort to allegorise the political situations of their times or contain an authentic sense of commitment or dedication to a cause. They function as minor works of entertainment, revealing no moral ambiguity or attempts at subtext.

Based on his research, the first things Wicking changed from Kelly's version of *Cry of the Banshee* were the location and the time period. Kelly's professionally written but badly structured 126 page draft describes the setting as IRELAND IN THE EARLY 1820's (Kelly 1969: 1), about a hundred years after the end of the witch hunting craze in Great Britain and about two hundred and twenty years after the time period in Wicking's rewrite. Wicking said:

> Tim Kelly wrote the original script. Again, we used the basic framework, the witches' revenge idea, but it was a very American vision of Ireland. Checking back, we found there's no real tradition of Irish witch-hunting, which is extraordinary, really. Everything Tim had written about was Scottish, in essence. So we took a trip to Scotland to do additional research and revise the idea, being the blue-eyed boys at AIP, but it's also an example of how limiting that freedom was, and we did have a lot of freedom at that point (quoted in Nutman 1989: 53).

Hessler described the process this way:

> Chris Wicking and I went to Scotland and we were planning to do a completely different, very, very interesting movie. We wanted to shoot *Cry of the Banshee* there; all the witchcraft seemed to emanate from Scotland, "The Land of Witches," and we thought that would be a wonderful place to film it. As a matter of fact, we met a number of witches, Chris and I, while we were doing the research in Scotland! We were trying to get inspiration to do something very different … (quoted in Weaver 1991: 146-148).

Heyward only allowed two weeks for research in Scotland, so the pair split up. Wicking did interviews and scouted locations in the east while Hessler did the same in the west (Koetting 2018:97). As Wicking bluntly described it: "We came back with quite a few ideas to radically change the story, which Deke Heyward then squashed" (quoted in Nutman 1989: 53). According to Hessler:

> We would have to change the script so much that the AIP people in London got worried. They felt that the original script had been approved and pre-sold, and if we changed it very drastically we might be cutting our own throats … What Chris wanted to add into it was that those of the 'old religion,' the people that everyone thought were so terrible, were actually the good witches … But … Deke got a little worried and said, 'Look, this is not the story that everybody's bought' (quoted in Weaver 1991: 148).

Wicking and Hessler made a practical and artistic calculation. Wicking said,

> We were given the option to write our version in a fortnight; then, if they liked it, that's what we would shoot. If they didn't, then we would have to make theirs anyway. I knew that if we worked on a new, exciting script that was then thrown out, I wouldn't be able to go back to Tim Kelly's. Our ideas were really crazy, involving all kinds of wonderful material, but might not have been practical in AIP's eyes. Finally, we decided to do our

> version of the Kelly screenplay, trying to make the most of it. I liked the end result, though. Gordon did a fine job (quoted in Nutman 1989: 53).

Wicking completely restructured Kelly's original screenplay, as he did for *The Oblong Box*, focusing the story, dropping subplots, deepening characters and skilfully building the tension. He said of his new version of Kelly's script:

> Gordon and I had to learn to guard our tongues. We had a notion of drawing modern political parallels with the *Banshee* script, but we realised we would have to keep that quiet (quoted in Forshaw 2013: 201).

Wicking and Hessler decided to make *Cry of the Banshee* a true work of counter-culture, portraying the witches in the story as tragic revolutionaries and the authorities as repressive fascists. According to Wicking,

> films should be about something. On *Cry of the Banshee,* for example, we tried to take something that we could relate to, and we took Mayor Daley and the 1968 Siege of Chicago. Witches, in our mind, were the hippies, and Vincent Price was Mayor Daley. At that time, in the late sixties and early seventies, there was a whole collision between the new freedoms and this repression, and that seemed to be what the story was about (quoted in Decharne 1998: 21).

AIP had pioneered counter-culture cinema by producing Corman's two high-grossing, nihilistic works of rebellion, *The Wild Angels* (1966) and *The Trip* (1967), both of which blatantly criticised American society and portrayed youthful recreational drug use. Arkoff stated, "We started looking for our audience by removing elements of authority in our films. We saw the rebellion coming, but we couldn't predict the extent of it" (quoted in McGee 1996: 242), and Nicholson concurred: "My daughters have been offered LSD on the grounds of their high school. This is a fact of life, and we'd damned well better start discussing it out in the open" (quoted in McGee 1996: 242).

Unfortunately for AIP, Arkoff and Nicholson passed when Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper combined the themes of motorcycle drop-outs from *The Wild Angels* and drug use from *The Trip* for their project, *Easy Rider* (1969), the movie that brought the counter-culture to the mainstream. Corman agreed to finance if AIP would distribute, but Arkoff insisted on the right to take over the picture if director Hopper went over budget. AIP lost the enormous hit to Columbia's Bob Rafelson and Bert Schneider and seemed determined to introduce elements of counter-culture in every project they produced thereafter (McGee 1996: 259). And this, despite the fact that one of the two executives in charge of AIP was becoming increasingly unsympathetic to the revolution as the era proceeded. According to Corman:

> Jim Nicholson, AIP's president, had become a true - and increasingly conservative - pillar of Hollywood's professional and civic community. Arkoff remained liberal. Always a good and decent man, Jim had grown conservative (Corman 1990: 166-167).

In the short time Heyward allowed, Wicking and Hessler worked frantically to transform Kelly's *Cry of the Banshee* into the political metaphor they wanted to make. Wicking wrote of the process in his 1975 diary, "every week we'd do a new script and have a squad of typists in at the weekend, with takeaway meals and Xerox breakdowns. AIP didn't know any better as it goes" (Wicking 2019: 94).

Hessler and Wicking decided to set *Cry of the Banshee* in the Elizabethan England of the late 1500's, the most brutal period of witch persecution in the British Isles and much more interesting in terms of costumes and atmosphere than Ireland in the 1820s. Witch persecution in the sixteenth century resulted from Queen Elizabeth's Witchcraft Act of 1563. The Queen's soldiers discovered some rebellious noblemen casting a spell against her using a wax effigy. Elizabeth's Witchcraft Act demanded death by hanging for "employing or exercising witchcraft with the intent to kill or destroy" and imprisonment for one year for "hurting persons in body or to waste and destroy goods." Any suspected witch could be put in the stocks once a quarter for

“the space of six hours” to deter anyone else contemplating sorcery. More people were tried for witchcraft in the forty-five year reign of Queen Elizabeth than during the following seventeenth century. And the seventeenth century included such notorious witch hunters as King James 1 and Matthew Hopkins (Haining 1972: 36). Wicking and Hessler were using the iniquities and intolerance of the reign of Elizabeth the first in the late sixteenth century to mirror and comment on the conditions during the reign of Elizabeth the second in their own time.

Kelly’s original screenplay begins with Lord Edward Whitman’s massacre of Oona’s witch cult. Kelly describes his witches as “all women, middle-aged and older. Their clothing is threads and patches” (Kelly 1969: 1). Elsewhere in the scene, he describes them as “crones.” In his rewrite, Wicking eschews this cliche, portraying his witches as young and vibrant villagers, both women and men, secretly worshipping nature according to the pre-Christian old religion of the Druids.

In Wicking’s version, Lord Edward in an early scene declares that, “authority is the main point of government, and maintaining authority is the main purpose of the law.” Wicking and Hessler saw this fascistic credo as a description of the actions of Mayor Daley who ordered his police force to brutally beat back the young demonstrators at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. That would mean that the witches as rewritten by Wicking represented the counter-culture at the convention. But the portrayal of the youth movement by Wicking and Hessler is not entirely sympathetic. Their view of the counter-culture is less politically partisan and more realistic, thus more morally ambiguous, than some reviewers assume. Perhaps mindful of the 1969 murders by Charles Manson’s hippie cult, Wicking and Hessler allow Oona (Elisabeth Bergner) to call on Satan for her revenge. The Manson arrest and trial, highly publicised, took place in 1969 and 1970, the years of the rewriting and filming of *Cry of the Banshee.*

The contemporary metaphor of Hessler and Wicking harkens back to its historic source. Originally shown as a benign pagan group, Oona’s worshippers become what Lord Edward

thinks they are because of his cruelty and intolerance, in much the same way that the old religion became the witch cult because of the Church's need to define them as such. In Kelly's original script, Oona never calls on Satan. She buries her murdered followers by intoning, "I give you, now, my children, to the nether world where you will be protected always in death by the mysterious deities of mountain and river and wood" (Kelly 1969: 14). And when she asks for revenge from her gods, she says, "Help me … help me, powerful spirits of the nether world … Send me an avenger" (Kelly 1969: 15). Perhaps mirroring Manson's warping of the hippie culture into an instrument for his own personal revenge or perhaps as a compact lesson in the evolution of witchcraft, Wicking portrays Oona as forsaking her ways of peace, as she later calls them, to evoke the Christian symbol of evil to grant her power. The Christian church redefined the pagan horned god of nature as Satan in order to demonise it and prevent its worship. Oona, in her anger, accepts that redefinition as, arguably, some pagan worshippers did in the sixteenth century. She seeks to fight evil with evil. Oona only realises at her death that, as she says, "Hatred and revenge have brought us nothing but hatred and revenge." Jeffrey B. Russell, in his 1980 book, *A History of Witchcraft,* writes,

> In every area, bits and pieces of pagan beliefs and practices survived the conversion [of Constantine to Christianity] and persisted through the Middle Ages … Not until about 1300 … does a substantial body of evidence about witchcraft appear, and this evidence shows witchcraft not as a fertility religion but as a Christian heresy based upon diabolism (Russell 1980: 41).

And Kurt Seligmann writes in his 1948 study, *The Mirror of Magic, A History of Magic in the Western World,* "The Sabbat became sinister when the old pagan rites were no longer considered the revival of a decayed past but an evil activity born of heresy" (Seligmann 1948: 244). The pagan God of the Hunt, a male worshipper clad in the skins and horns of a stag, transformed in the Middle Ages into a figure of rebellion against Christianity. Seligmann writes,

> The nightly gatherings in the open air, against which the defenders of the faith had fought so vigorously, were remnants of the *religio paganorum,* the religion of the country people. But the animals' hides and horns were now considered as the devil's attributes. Often the disguise was mistaken for the original and before long the fur-clad master or president of the sabbath was believed to be Satan in person (Seligman 1948: 246).

Some contemporary historians miss the morally nuanced approach Wicking and Hessler take for their Satan-summoning nature worshippers. Rigby, in his book *English Gothic,* writes,

> though they're presented as inoffensive, gambolling flower children in filmy Grecian robes, their elderly leader, Oona, explicitly calls on Satan in her incantations … This makes it difficult to accept pronouncements like Margaret's that 'Oona is good, Oona is peace, Oona heals, Oona is love.' Is this an anti-hippy film? … having the witches sway to the tune of a satanic guru muddies the issue completely (Rigby 2015: 192-193).

It muddies the issue only if Wicking and Hessler were attempting a simple good versus evil allegorical presentation of their own time rather than the more accurate and morally ambiguous vision they present. After all, at Manson's trial, his followers claimed, not only that he was the embodiment of peace and love, but that he was Jesus Christ reborn.

The year following *Cry of the Banshee,* in *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971), director Piers Haggard presented a more conservative portrayal of the evil of witchcraft vanquished by the power of good represented by church and state. Leon Hunt in his article "Necromancy in the UK: Witchcraft and the Occult in British Horror" quotes the writer of *Blood on Satan's Claw,* Robert Wynne-Simmons, as saying that his film is about, "the inherent evil of children and the overt sexuality of evil" (quoted in Hunt 2002: 93), citing youthful violence at the Altamont rock concert in 1969, the massacres by the Manson family, and the brutal murder of two younger children by ten year-old Mary Bell in 1968 as evidence for his theory. In their film, Haggard and Wynne-Simmons provide an actual hairy, taloned demon to whom the wicked children offer

blood sacrifices. The forces of good are represented by a middle-aged Judge who initially embraces the philosophy of the dawning Enlightenment of the early eighteenth century, stating that "witchcraft is dead and discredited." The horrendous crimes of the children are not presented as a rebellion against the authority of this patriarch, but more as an orgiastic embrace of seductive evil. As Hunt states in his article, "They are shown to be ecstatically nihilistic rather than directly engaged in generational struggle, as though the film is keen to deter any potential identification with them" (Hunt 2002: 94). This is quite different from the generational struggles within the Whitman family and the depiction of Lord Edward's cruel persecution of villagers and witches in *Cry of the Banshee.*

In *Blood on Satan's Claw,* when the Judge finally accepts the reality of the supernatural evil victimising the innocent farmers, he takes a traditionally conservative position, stating that, "Only the most strict discipline will save us." This "discipline" results in spearing the demon with a giant, phallic sword, symbolising the power and righteousness of the Judge's established patriarchy. As Ian Cooper observes about the Judge in *Blood on Satan's Claw:*

> any qualms one has about the methods of the Judge are tempered by the fact he is up against fur-sprouting evil teens possessed by a demon that incites them to rape and kill … when the Minister in Haggard's film speaks of the 'ungodliness' of the feral village children, it's very hard to disagree with him (Cooper 2011: 91).

Wicking avoids this kind of moral absolutism in *Cry of the Banshee,* and, indeed, in all four of his scripts for Hessler, preferring to reveal the imperfect human complexity of his sinners and victims. Wicking said,

> I never realised before doing research for this picture that people genuinely believed in 1600 … that there was a God, that there was a soul and a spirit, and if you in some way had sold your soul to the Devil, you would not go to heaven. Therefore, they had to make you confess, then you would go to heaven. They tortured you because they

> wanted you to go to heaven. That's some weird, warped thinking (quoted in Decharne 1998: 21).

Recounting his favourite scene in *Cry of the Banshee,* Wicking describes the tragedy of conflicting world views, unable to communicate and reconcile their beliefs and moralities:

> One of my favourite scenes of things I've written is a scene where Vincent Price has been torturing this woman, not because he particularly believes in witchcraft, just because that's what you do - because he wants to put down the hippies, basically. Now however, he realises there is a banshee out there, and he is in danger, so he rushes to the only person he's got, this witch down in the torture chamber. He knows she can genuinely work wonders, so to speak, and wants her to tell him the truth, but she's cracked because they've been ripping her to pieces, and she says, 'At night, I flew with Satan' - which of course is madness. He's saying, 'No, tell me' … but … it's too late now. I think it's a wonderful scene because they're completely at odds with each other (quoted in Decahrne 1998: 21).

In his original draft of *Cry of the Banshee*, Kelly's opening massacre takes place ten years before the events that follow, with Edward's two sons both around twelve years old. In Kelly's version, Oona's curse does not take effect for a decade, blunting the unity of time and the urgency of the narrative. In his rewrite, Wicking describes Edward's raid as taking place at the time of the story, keeping his characters the same age throughout the screenplay. His script moves the massacre of Oona's coven to the end of Act 1, allowing him to set up the characters and relationships of the Whitmans and the villagers first.

Some film historians such as Rigby have noted that, as Rigby writes, "*Cry of the Banshee* derives its chief inspiration from *Witchfinder General"* (Rigby 2015: 192). While Reeves' film may have been the commercial impetus, Price's role of Lord Edward Whitman in *Cry of the Banshee* is actually quite different from his character of Matthew Hopkins in

Witchfinder General. The events of *Witchfinder General* take place about fifty years after those in *Cry of the Banshee*, so the setting is not quite the same. But beyond that, Price's Hopkins is an enigma, a cold hypocritical exploiter who seems to also sincerely believe in the religious foundations of witchcraft. We never really get to see into the mind of Hopkins, and he becomes almost an abstract of evil. On the other hand, Lord Edward in *Cry of the Banshee* is a man of complex feelings and motivations. Under stress, Lord Edward displays his humanity, however buried by power and privilege. Unlike Hopkins, Lord Edward is a vulnerable character. He evidences lust and cruelty, but also fear, self-doubt and bluster. He feels hereditary superiority to his subjects, but he is wary of them as well. He later admits to his henchman Burke that he must never show his vulnerability, even though he feels it intensely, or he would lose his power over the villagers. At the beginning of the story, Lord Edward doubts the reality of witchcraft, calling it, " just toys to these simple people. But it's still a crime against God and the Crown." He punishes followers of the old religion because it is his duty as Magistrate to discourage others from straying from the Church of England. Lord Edward only begins to believe in the power of the supernatural after the deaths of his son Sean and his wife Patricia in fulfilment of Oona's curse.

In Kelly's first draft, the two young villagers dragged into Lord Edward's banquet are Kitty and Tyrone, the daughter and son of Oona, the witch. Kelly has Lord Edward force Tyrone to play a tune on his fiddle instead of the much more believable pipes as in Wicking's rewrite. Scenes of the dining nobility abusing commoners appear in British horror at least as far back as Fisher's eighteenth century prologue to *Hound of the Baskervilles*. Fisher repeated the situation with Anthony Dawson and Richard Wordsworth in his prologue to *Curse of the Werewolf*. Corman directed perhaps the most memorable of such scenes in *Masque of the Red Death* when Prince Prospero, played with sadistic relish by Price, forces the father and lover of Jane Asher's peasant girl to play a primitive version of Russian roulette with daggers, one of which is impregnated with poison. In *Cry of the Banshee,* the wail of the titular creature lends the

banquet scene an echo from Poe, analogous to the sobering knell of the ebony clock in his original story, “The Masque of the Red Death,” reminding the hedonistic revellers of their inevitable doom.[2]

Wicking and Hessler in *Cry of the Banshee* add a healthy dash of Tudor era bawdiness to the banquet when Edward’s men rip at the bodice of the young villager, as they will do in later scenes of the harassment of common women. Wicking and Hessler, inspired by the violence and social clashes of their own era, paint an ugly portrait of the Renaissance which may be closer to the truth than we know. Carol J. Clover, in her book, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, argues that such scenes, “authorize impulses towards violence in males and encourage impulses towards victimisation in females” (Clover 1992: 43). That seems unlikely in the case of *Cry of the Banshee* since the violent males are so obviously despicable while the females are completely innocent citizens trying to survive in an extreme patriarchal society. Neither group encourages identification, and they certainly do not work as sexual fantasy figures unless the viewer is already into sadomasochism.

In fact, in *Cry of the Banshee*, scenes such as these starkly portray the sexual and social unbalance of Tudor era England. In addition, Wicking and Hessler use them to criticise the injustice of unbridled authority, a metaphor for the abuse they saw in their own times toward the antiwar and civil rights movements of the late sixties. In this, they were not alone at the time. Horror films in both Britain and America had started regularly taking a rebellious attitude toward authority in such films as George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) in the US and

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[2] In the first banquet scene of *Cry of the Banshee,* the stabbing of the village boy again echoes Roger Corman’s similar moment in *Masque of the Red Death*, in which Price’s Prince Prospero stabs Jane Asher’s father when he tries to come across the dining table at the abusive nobleman. In Kelly’s first draft of *Cry of the Banshee*, the abused village girl bites off Lord Edward’s ear. When the story resumes ten years later in Kelly’s version, a much greyer Lord Edward still has only the remnants of the ear, an idea that may not have appealed to star Vincent Price. In Wicking’s final version, the village girl stabs Lord Edward’s cheek with a meat fork, and his ear remains intact.

Witchfinder General and even Hammer's *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (1969) in the UK. In more mainstream movies, such as John Frankenheimer's two paranoid conspiracy thrillers, *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *Seven Days in May* (1964), the American military and political establishments had already been exposed for their hypocrisy and abuse of power.

Wicking deepens and enlarges the character of Lord Edward's wife, Lady Patricia, from Kelly's original conception. In Kelly's version, Patricia is a middle-aged woman with raven black hair, the actual mother of Sean and Harry. She is withdrawn and possibly mad as a result of decades of abuse by Kelly's more one-dimensionally cruel Lord Edward. Wicking's rewrite makes Lady Patricia the second wife of Lord Edward, much younger and still sexually desirable. She has not so much retreated into madness as into chronic depression. Insanity seems to be descending on her as the story progresses. Her behaviour becomes more and more erratic as the horrors of her life increase. She is close to the breaking point, but she has not yet reached it. Sometimes, as in the early banquet scene, Edward is callous and dismissive of her. At other times, as when Roderick brings her home from her afternoon of landscape painting, Edward can be protective and gentle. At Sean's funeral, he even urges her to be strong like him despite her growing fear.

Since Sean and Harry are really her sons in Kelly's version, there is no equivalent in his draft to Wicking's powerful and complex scene in which Sean leads her away from the violence of the banquet, only to rape her. Wicking shows great sensitivity to her position in this scene. Lady Patricia tries to understand Sean, but he can only respond to her questions with anger and sexual aggression. The scene unflinchingly portrays the role of certain women in sixteenth century England. Patricia lives at the behest of the family into which she has married, a victim of the whims and desires of its men. She accepts Sean's slap with resignation and a cynical laugh. Although she struggles away from his incestuous advances, she eventually gives in from

emotional and physical exhaustion. With no way to earn a living on her own, she must take whatever abuse is given to her. Her only alternatives are death, poverty or madness.

Cry of the Banshee is one of the first of many 1970's horror movies to show the disintegration of the family from within. Stephen King would go on to make a career of such metaphorical horror stories with novels like *Carrie* (1974)*, Salem's Lot* (1975) and *The Shining* (1977). The 1970s questioned the strength of the American family after the generation-gap-producing national crises of the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, Watergate and the drug culture. As Hutchings states, this cinematic generation gap also flourished in England:

> Dissatisfaction with some of the older forms of horror can also be found within the British horror of the late 1960s and early 1970s where, as was the case in America, younger film-makers produced horror films that combined sympathy for the young with hostility to the authority embodied in older people … all of which depicted young men and women being assaulted, tortured and killed by monstrous older figures (Hutchings 2004: 175).

In *Cry of the Banshee,* Lord Edward brings doom to his wife and children because of his overbearing patriarchy built on traditions and assumptions not shared by all of his family. What could be a clearer metaphor for the Depression-and-World War II-generation's imposition of their values on the spawn of Vietnam and Watts? Hutchings writes, "The generational theme that undoubtedly runs through much of post-1968 horror involved stressing and exaggerating 'the sins of the father' in order to underline the suffering of the young" (Hutchings 2004: 177). Hessler and Wicking again explore their theme of sin and retribution with Lord Edward's repressive allegiance to the establishment of church and state punished by the youth he attempts to control. And as in their previous two collaborations, the filmmakers portray human depth and complexity in their presentation.

In Kelly's original script, Maureen, played in the film by AIP favourite Dwyer, is a barmaid who loves Lord Edward's groom, Roderick, especially after he saves her from the advances of a

drunken lout in the tavern. Interested in mirroring the shattering of the family in their own times, Wicking and Hessler wisely change Maureen to Lord Edward's daughter. This adds a class distinction to her romance with Roderick and the necessity for Maureen to keep their sex life a secret from her father and brothers. Wicking writes a very telling scene between Lord Edward, Maureen and her sibling, Harry, illustrating the family disintegration. Lord Edward catches Maureen sneaking back into the house at night after a clandestine sexual rendezvous with Roderick. When Lord Edward slaps her for refusing to tell him where she has been, Harry steps in to fight his father over her. Edward mocks him for not being a real Whitman: in other words, not being cruel and strong like his brother Sean. When Harry attacks him, Edward physically overpowers the young man but ends up kissing his two children as soon as they submit to his strength and authority. He cynically laughs as he leaves them, and then Maureen, who is more like Lord Edward than she wants to admit, also laughs. And finally, even Harry, the most moral and progressive son, laughs. Does he realise that he too has the potential to be his father, or does he laugh because he loves Lord Edward despite his repressive patriarchy?

It is a wonderfully written and performed scene with unexpected yet seemingly spontaneous reactions from each of the three characters. For example, Lord Edward's kissing of Harry as he holds him in a headlock communicates both his love for and his power over the young man with one telling gesture. His subsequent laugh comes as no surprise since he is the clear victor in the confrontation, but the fact that Maureen and then even Harry cannot resist joining in the mirth speaks volumes about their true characters and their reluctant ties to the Whitman dynasty through their father. The scene portrays a very complex relationship for a gothic horror movie, and it communicates it in the cinematic terms of gesture and behaviour.

Wicking's portrayal of the Whitman clan is reminiscent of David Cooper's radical critique of the the family in Western culture in his 1971 book, *The Death of the Family.* David Graham Cooper was a psychiatrist, born in South Africa in 1931, who coined the term anti-psychiatry and

became a prominent advocate of that movement. A colleagues of psychiatrist R. D. Laing, Cooper believed that psychosis resulted from the difference between a patient's "true" identity and the identity imposed on the patient by society. An existential Leftist, Cooper believed that only revolution could eliminate the patient's internalised social identity. He ran an experimental unit for young schizophrenics from 1961 to 1965 which he deemed a revolutionary "anti-hospital." Cooper describes the destructive influence of the traditional roles of father, mother and child as a metaphor for the corrosive power of patriarchal capitalism on modern society. He finds that the family is a dangerous ideological conditioning device for Western society's continuation of their imperialist world domination. The family creates unbreakable boundaries for its members in relation to the world around them. Family members re-enact their positions as father, mother and child in society, triggering the family's tragedies and failures in the world outside the home (Cooper 1971: 5-11). This could also describe the powerful Whitman clan's patriarchal domination of their village. Lord Whitman's intolerance and iron hand controls his wife and children exactly as they do the peasants and pagan worshippers. His unbending authority causes cruelty, unhappiness, depression and even madness within his home that spreads to the villagers who live in fear and sometimes rebellion against his overbearing control.

Family values trap members in what Cooper considers the insanities of bourgeois life (Cooper 1971:27). Fathers, mothers and children are only allowed to behave in the roles assigned them by the traditions of the nuclear family (Cooper 1971: 25). Cooper believes that people should be free to explore every possible kind of behaviour and relationship without the repression and guilt generated by the family. To end this tyranny, Cooper suggests raising children communally to defuse their emotional dependency on parents (Cooper 1971: 46). He also advocates love and sex with multiple partners outside of the family. There should be no hierarchy of authority inside or outside of the home. All structured education of the children should be abandoned (Cooper 1971: 80-81). This might be a description of Oona's pagan

worshippers who reject traditional family, church and state to gather in the woods and caves to live communally as they see fit.

Cooper believes that there is only so much love in a nuclear family, so competition for it exists between the members. What love one member gets, another must lose. Since love is exchanged like money in family relationships, with emotions saved, bargained for and spent to increase a member's own share, the family trains its members to docilely work for it and willingly consume it as if it were goods and services in the marketplace. Thus, the traditional family implicitly conditions its members to be the next generation of capitalists (Cooper 1971: 55-56). Lord Edward's two sons respond in opposite ways when their father forces them to compete for his love. Sean mimics Edward's cruelty and licentiousness to gain his father's approval, and Harry rejects his father's lifestyle, preferring to generate his self-esteem through education and a sense of justice. Lord Edward's wife loses all sense of self because of her husband's inability to show her the love she needs, retreating into depression and madness. His daughter Maureen looks for love outside of the family, indulging in a sexual relationship with her stud groom.

According to Cooper, family relations provide the model for the structure of every other institution. Family teaches conformity and cooperation with society which psychologically destroys the self as well as economically destroying the Third World. Cooper thinks the other oppressive institutions of society can be overturned only after the oppressive institution of the family is ended. That model must be destroyed before any social or political revolution can take place (Cooper 1971: 206-109). Oona literally destroys the Whitman family by sending her Sidhe to murder them, liberating her worshippers from their tyranny. Fittingly, the last to go is the ultimate symbol of authority, the patriarch to both the family and the village, Lord Edward. Cooper prefers a radical Dionysian society based on unique individual experiences fuelled by drugs, sex and even madness. Although she dies in the effort, Oona creates the possibility for her worshippers to create this free lifestyle, unhampered by the bounds of traditional family roles.

Wicking writes Maureen as a surprisingly modern woman, not only by sixteenth century standards, but also by the standards of the burgeoning feminism of 1970. Maureen can be stubborn and arrogant, but she is also a young woman who acts on her convictions even when they contradict those of her father. In the first banquet scene, she boldly leaves the table despite Lord Edward's disapproving stare, rather than passively watch him and his henchmen abuse a boy and girl from the village. Maureen often behaves more like a man than a woman of her time. During her affair with Roderick, a menial in her father's house, she tells him, half in jest but more in earnest, "I can do whatever I like with my groom." Roderick perceptively answers, "You have too much of your father in you." Maureen again takes a male role in the relationship, playfully driving the coach with Roderick inside and even opening the coach door for him and bowing to him when he steps out. She boldly sneaks out of her father's house at night to meet Roderick in the stables and reacts without shame when her brother Harry catches her creeping out the front door.

In fact, Maureen often seems stronger than her brother. When Harry insists on avenging the death of their cruel sibling, Sean, she chides him, saying, "Oh don't be such a hypocrite. You'd have killed him many times, if you'd been strong enough." And, like Sean and her father, Maureen is extremely sexual. She carries on an obviously carnal relationship with her father's groom despite her position as a noblewoman. She is not dissuaded by either her gender or her social position but acts freely on her feelings, exercising her will over her society. But she proves her bond with her father in the end when she kills her lover rather than let him murder Lord Edward.

Maureen even challenges the new parish priest, Father Tom, who in Kelly's draft acts as the savant figure fighting the evil of witchcraft. In Wicking's rewrite, Father Tom represents the Christianity of the aristocracy pitted against the old religion of the villagers. When Father Tom tells Maureen about Roderick's seemingly supernatural power over animals, Maureen

progresses from insouciant amusement to concern for Roderick to suspicion of Father Tom to actually threatening the priest. Unlike Kelly's loving Irish barmaid Maureen, Wicking's Maureen is well aware of her position and privilege. Kelly's barmaid Maureen would never angrily threaten Father Tom for daring to suspect Roderick of witchcraft. Wicking, although keeping his Maureen a basically sympathetic character, is not afraid to show her pampered side. Wicking even hints that she maintains her sexual relationship with Roderick, the stable hand, more to rebel against her father and her class than out of love. Kelly's Maureen is also sexual, but her love for Roderick is quite sincere since he is, after all, in her same lower working class. But Wicking turns Kelly's sweet, cliched Irish barmaid into a prototype for the young feminists of the late sixties: strong, intelligent, wilful and capable of rebelling against the patriarchy of her times.

Strength is a major theme for Wicking in *Cry of the Banshee.* At Sean's funeral, Lord Edward tells Lady Patricia that her dependence on Roderick is making her weak. "Be strong," he commands her. And Lord Edward fights with Oona to determine who is stronger in power, faith and conviction. Like Maureen, Oona is a free-thinking, domineering woman. She threatens Lord Edward to his face after the massacre of her coven, telling him, "You'd better kill me too, Edward Whitman, than let me live with this memory." But whereas Maureen, despite her deception of Lord Edward with Roderick, is still part of his privileged patriarchy, Oona is a classic earth-mother, gathering her "children," as she calls them, to worship the gods of nature in peace and harmony. Only when she tries to fight Lord Edward by his own rules of violence and oppression does she call on another patriarch, Satan, for vengeance. Lord Edward dismisses Oona's strength until he realises that Lady Patricia's madness may be the work of witchcraft. He understands that his own strength and power are threatened by Oona, telling his henchman Burke, "Oona … I showed her mercy once. I should have killed her. If those fools believe she still has power … if I should lose my authority."

Father Tom also plays a part in Wicking's theme of the battle for dominance. Gathering his own strength from Christianity, Father Tom interrupts Oona's coven, brandishing a cross and challenging her faith with his own. Oona dismisses the supremacy of Christianity, asking the priest, "Why pray to a powerless god?" Father Tom angrily takes up the test of strength, telling Oona that he will fight her for Roderick. "You cannot fight me," she confidently answers. "Then I'll fight for his soul," Father Tom says. Oona answers, "His soul? He has no soul … Roderick will kill and kill and kill. And there is nothing you can do about it." The exchange is like a philosophical boxing match with Christianity and paganism exchanging blows of belief and power.

Building on Kelly's script, Wicking develops and enlarges the character of Mickey, an ageing grave robber and follower of the old religion. Mickey has only two scenes in Kelly's original draft as the eccentric tour guide of the Druid cemetery who helps Father Tom discover the secrets of Oona's ancient beliefs. Wicking makes Mickey a much more important and interesting character, a Shakespearean fool who voices the common sense morality of the audience. He is a survivor in this fatal clash of faiths between the Christian nobility of the Whitmans and the traditional local beliefs of the villagers. Like Old Mose (Hank Worden) in John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), he knows how to play both sides in order to make his home amid their battleground while pretending to be a simple, harmless bystander.

A master constructionist, Wicking constantly constricts the time, setting, characters and action from Kelly's sprawling original, focusing the drama on the fall of the house of Whitman. He even cuts a completely irrelevant subplot from Kelly's script involving the physical emasculation and hanging of a handsome young highwayman who stole from Lord Edward. The highwayman episode in Kelly's script seems designed merely to demonstrate the extreme cruelty of Edward's son Sean and his henchmen, character traits that Wicking reveals more organically through their savage treatment of the followers of the old religion in the village.

In his researches, Wicking found an actual old English folksong for his strolling minstrel character that might really have been sung in a Tudor era tavern. It is called “The Baffled Knight or Blow Away the Morning Dew,” and it exists with various lyrics. Thomas Ravenscroft set down a version in 1609 with a matching tune, making it one of the few early ballads with extant original music (Nelson-Burns 1609). The bawdy lyrics of the version in *Cry of the Banshee* perfectly match the vision of Renaissance England presented by Wicking and Hessler.

The last act of Kelly’s original screenplay for *Cry of the Banshee* is completely different from Wicking’s rewrite. Obviously not designing it as a vehicle for Price, Kelly has the demon Sidhe kill Lord Edward twenty pages before the end. After Edward’s death, Oona and her crones bewitch villagers and kill their cattle, causing the rustics to go to the new magistrate, Edward’s son Harry, for help. Kelly’s protagonist, Father Tom, openly challenges Oona for Roderick’s soul. Roderick and the village barmaid Maureen plan to meet on a foggy moor. But the tavern bully finds Maureen first and tries to rape her. When Roderick arrives, he turns into the Sidhe and kills the bully. Maureen, unaware that Roderick is the Sidhe, runs to Father Tom’s rectory for help. Father Tom leaves her there and goes to the Whitman estate to save Harry, the last Whitman, from the rampaging Sidhe.

Meanwhile, Roderick, in his human form, invites Harry to share a drink in the stable. He turns into the Sidhe and attacks Harry. When Father Tom arrives, Harry is unconscious, bloodied but alive. Roderick, confused in his human state, does not remember attacking him. Father Tom pulls Harry out of the stable and throws a lighted lantern into the hay, setting it ablaze. “Born in fire, dies in fire.” Maureen arrives in time to see Roderick voluntarily back into the inferno. At the same time, in her hut, Oona’s skirt ignites when she steps too close to her fireplace. She and Roderick both burn at the same time. Father Tom tries to comfort Maureen who starts to snarl like Roderick. She looks up at him with the expression of an animal and says in Roderick’s voice, “What do you want of me?” The end.

By changing the action to centre around Lord Edward and the Whitman estate, Wicking's rewritten last act increases the claustrophobic tension, eliminates the episodic structure and avoids the monster movie cliches. And it is much more suspenseful and ironic to have the Sidhe menace Maureen, both Roderick's lover and intended victim, rather than Harry. Since Wicking considers Lord Edward and not the Sidhe as the main villain, Edward must be the last to meet his fate. And of course, Wicking was well aware that the main reason for the movie itself was its star, Price, who would certainly insist on living until the end. Wicking makes sure that the cat and mouse game that ensues is filled with twists and turns. Who will survive, Lord Edward or the demon sent to destroy him? And will the comparatively innocent Harry and Maureen be spared, especially after Oona's death?

Wicking's rewritten version of *Cry of the Banshee* begins with Lord Edward exercising his control over the followers of the old religion and ends with him completely out of control, his fate at the hands of a faith he both denied and punished. Consistent with their theme, Hessler and Wicking dramatise Lord Edward's sin of cruel repression and its retribution by the awakened power of the younger generation. Wicking uses the triumph of the old religion as a fantasy projection of a future time when the establishment of the late 1960's would be destroyed by the youth revolution and be replaced by an age of tolerance and enlightenment: the age of Aquarius. None of these qualities were present in Kelly's original predictable monster movie script. Despite the fact that Kelly told author Bryan Senn that, for him, *Cry of the Banshee* was, "a painful experience" (Senn 1998: 185), his original screenplay was enormously improved and deepened by the themes and metaphors of Hessler and Wicking.

PREPRODUCTION

Hessler decided to shoot *Cry of the Banshee* in and around Grim's Dyke, the estate of renown dramatist W. S. Gilbert, located in Harrow Weald in northwest London. Gilbert was the writing

partner of Arthur Sullivan, and together they created delightful comic operas such as *H.M.S. Pinafore, The Pirates of Pinzance*, and *The Mikado*. Gilbert and Sullivan, like Hessler and Wicking, were also social critics who attacked authority in their art. Gilbert purchased the property in 1890 and lived there for the last two decades of his life. Hessler planned one scene involving Lady Patricia painting a landscape to take place next to Gilbert's famous lake on the grounds of Grim's Dyke. Digging on the lake began in 1899 with Gilbert himself assisting. Twelve years later, Gilbert died in the lake and sank to the bottom after suffering a heart attack while trying to save a seventeen year-old girl from drowning (Grim's Dyke 2018).

Lord Edward's manor is actually Grim's Dyke itself, built from 1870 to 1872 in a late Elizabethan style with touches of Gothic revivalism, perfect for the era of *Cry of the Banshee*. Tigon productions such as *The Blood Beast Terror* (1967) and *Curse of the Crimson Altar* (1968) were also filmed at the house and grounds. Later features shot there included the Agatha Christie adaptation, *Endless Night* (1971). *Cry of the Banshee* is probably its most effective use in movies. It was converted into a hotel in 1970 right after filming of *Cry of the Banshee*, and the hotel was refurbished in 1996 at a cost of three million pounds (Grim's Dyke 2018). The impressive cinematography of Grim's Dyke in *Cry of the Banshee* is again by Coquillon who gives some of the exteriors the ravishing autumnal look of landscape paintings by Jan Bruegel. Hessler relished shooting a sixteenth century period piece around London with its vast resources of costumes and props available for film and theatrical productions. He said,

> London in the late 60s was absolutely glorious! … In *Cry of the Banshee*, we had access to magnificent costumes. They were beautifully made, really works of art. Remember, the film industry in England was in full flood. All the studios were busy. We were able to make these films look far more expensive than they really were. I'm very proud of the look of these films (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 49).

In a 9 November 1969 interview for the British Film Institute's John Player Celebrity Series at the National Film Theatre, concurrent with production on *Cry of the Banshee,* Price praised Hessler's skill in casting:

> I think the actor can contribute a tremendous amount. On *Cry of the Banshee*, now, we, you know, we have really some pretty extraordinary people in this. We have Elizabeth Bergner who was one of the great stars of all time, and we have Essy Persson from Sweden who was in *Teresa and Isabelle* … Hilary Dwyer who I have done a lot of these pictures with. And really, the young people are absolutely extraordinary - young men and character actors and things. And that is Gordon's talent, getting these extraordinary people who are willing to become involved in this because it is almost an improvisation - but you have to make them real. I mean, that's part of the job (9 November 1969 audio recording of the event in the possession of the author).

For the emotionally challenging role of Lady Patricia, Hessler cast Essy Persson who gives a brave and sensitive performance. Persson made her film debut as the lead in Mac Ahlberg's Danish-Swedish erotic film, *I, a Woman* in 1966 for Radley Metzger, which became a surprise box-office hit in the United States. Persson was then hired by Metzger for a title character in his 1968 French film, *Therese and Isabelle,* about a lesbian affair between two schoolgirls. This was another box-office hit in the adult market and led to her casting in *Cry of the Banshee* (Smith 1999: 212).

Seventy-two year-old Elizabeth Bergner gives an unforgettable performance as Oona, a far cry from the cliched crone originally envisioned by Kelly in his first draft screenplay. Bergner makes witch Oona a very believable character: not a wicked demon, but an Old World earth mother, her ageing beauty and strange continental accent emphasising her exotic difference from the superstitious English rustics around her. Enduring hard work, class oppression and no hope for the future, the bored youth of rural sixteenth century England could quite conceivably

gravitate to such an intriguing creature in search of power and spiritual enlightenment. Oona preaches peace and love and offers supernatural strength to her young converts in a Darwinian world dominated by privileged and heartless nobility. A respected star of stage and screen in both Europe and America since the 1920s, Bergner naturally brings an etherial gravitas to the role. Hessler said, “Her scenes were all filmed in a very short amount of time - probably about three days” (quoted in Smith 2000: 25).

As the ageing grave digger Mickey, Hessler cast Academy Award winner Hugh Griffith who is unforgettable in the role. Griffith won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor for his performance in William Wyler’s massive version of *Ben Hur* in 1959 and received another nomination for his role in *Tom Jones* in 1963 (Katz 2012: 603-604). Unfortunately, his chronic alcoholism limited the number and size of his parts later in the sixties and throughout the seventies. Hessler said,

> Hugh was a terrific guy, and he was in a number of big pictures, like *Tom Jones* (1963). But at the time of filming he was an alcoholic, and a person would have to assist him on the set and make sure that he didn’t receive any alcohol, otherwise he’d be drinking the whole time. A great shame (Iveson 2020: 134).

As Price mentioned in his interview, Hessler assembled an impressive cast of younger British actors, many of whom had classical theatre backgrounds. As the despicable Sean Whitman, brutal son of Lord Edward, Hessler cast Stephen Chase. His blonde hair and boyishly handsome face contrast effectively with Sean Whitman’s sadistic sexual cruelty. One of the most satisfying scenes in the film depicts this spoiled, baby-faced sociopath cringing in fear as he hears the approach of Oona’s avenging demon in the forest at night. Carl Rigg, who plays Harry, one of the only completely sympathetic Whitmans, appeared with Price and Dwyer the year before *Cry of the Banshee* in *The Oblong Box* as Norton, cousin of the corrupt lawyer Trench and his reluctant ally in freeing and betraying Sir Edward. Harry Whitman is a

considerably larger role for Rigg. In fact, in *Cry of the Banshee,* Harry is the closest thing to a hero. Rigg plays Harry as a tortured soul, trying to maintain his dignity and morality despite the corruption of his own family. His repressed anger finally erupts when he unsuccessfully attacks his father for slapping his sister and when he actually drowns his father's henchman, Burke, for torturing a young female follower of Oona. Ironically, it is Harry who coldly slits Oona's throat for destroying his family, finally learning to kill as Lord Edward taunted him earlier. Patrick Mower has the key role of Roderick, Oona's unwitting avenger. With his thin face, sinewy body and mop of unruly long hair, Mower brings a feral quality to Roderick even in his guise of a gentle animal-loving stud groom. His kindness to the mad Lady Patricia and his romance with the wilful Maureen make him a sympathetic character in his human form. And his wolf-like features allow us to believe that he hides an avenging animal inside, just waiting for Oona to call on him to rip apart the members of the House of Whitman.

PRODUCTION

Hessler started shooting *Cry of the Banshee* on 20 October 1969, taking full advantage of the orange and yellow autumn leaves blowing through the windswept wooded grounds of Grim's Dyke. (Rigby 2015: 193) In terms of style, the director wisely chose to present the attacks of the avenging Sidhe in the manner of the Val Lewton thrillers of the 1940s, suggesting its presence through sound, shadows, camera moves and veiled glimpses. And like Lewton, he also provided a rational, non-supernatural possibility in the form of a mad dog, carefully set up in the first act. Publicity photos from the shoot reveal the curiously designed and unconvincing Sidhe mask, but fortunately, it is never seen in the movie until the end when it is completely obscured by blood. Hessler never planned to show it, and it was only created for that climactic moment when Maureen shoots it in the face. Like Lewton, Hessler realised that the most frightening moments result, not from the sight of the monster, but from the fear of the victim. He said, "I chose not to

show the [Sidhe] to any great extent because I feel you should never show the object of horror as it will always be a disappointment. It can never live up to the imagination" (quoted in Smith 2000: 26).

Wicking wrote the eventual ending for *Cry of the Banshee* the night before it was shot. In his 1969 National Film Theatre interview, Price said that he felt, "we didn't have an ending" (9 November 1969 audio recording in the possession of the author). Wicking's script had closed on Lord Edward alone in the mansion, waiting for his appointment with the Sidhe as the banshee howls outside. As chilling and existential as that might sound, Hessler felt it was anti-climactic. He wanted some movement and excitement. On the last morning of production, the final ending, celebrated even by detractors of the movie, was worked out. Unlike the grim stillness of Wicking's original conception, the filmed version has shock and excitement. And unlike Kelly's original script in which Lord Edward dies twenty pages before the climax, the final ending gives the impression of a fate worse than death for Lord Edward: an eternal supernatural punishment far more ghastly than the earthly horrors he meted out to his villagers.

On the morning after Maureen saves her father from Roderick by shooting the Sidhe in the face, Lord Edward and his two remaining children leave their home for good. But Lord Edward insists on stopping their coach at the graveyard so that he can see Roderick's dead body in its coffin before old Mickey buries it. He forces Mickey to open the rude wooden box, and to his shock, he finds it empty. Father Tom tells him that Roderick is not dead. A Sidhe can only be killed by fire: "Born in fire, dies in fire." Lord Edward hurries back to his coach and gets in with Harry and Maureen. He tries to tell them that Roderick still lives, but they only stare at him blankly. Then, they both fall forward, dead. At that moment, the coach lurches off with Lord Edward and the corpses of his children. Bully Boy, Lord Edward's henchman, lies across the coachman's seat, his throat torn out, and Roderick maniacally whips the horses carrying Lord Edward to his fate.

After their brilliant conclusion to *The Oblong Box*, this is the second best climax devised by Wicking and Hessler. Again, it vividly and surprisingly dramatises their theme of sin and retribution. And like so much of *Cry of the Banshee*, it works as an allegory for the social revolution Wicking and Hessler longed for in their own turbulent times: a future in which cruelty and prejudice are spirited away to give place to a simpler, more peaceful life, so old that it is new again.

POST PRODUCTION

AIP planned to promote *Cry of the Banshee* as Price's one hundredth movie, which it was not. It was closer to his eighty-first. Nevertheless, AIP threw a wrap party at the conclusion of filming, honouring their star. Hessler tells what happened next:

> We had an incredible party, everybody dressed in costumes from the movie … Vincent was very upset at the time for some reason to do with his contract, and he was having a fight with Arkoff - I don't really know what the details were. And Vincent didn't want to come to the party. I said, 'Vincent, you've got to come, this is a party in your honour.' He refused and refused, but finally I persuaded him to come. But by the time he arrived, he had drunk too much. What we had done, we'd got a big cake and there was a naked girl supposed to pop out of it. And Vincent was supposed to cut the cake. I had told Arkoff he had to make a speech, to present the cake and all that sort of thing, but when Vincent found out that Arkoff was going to make a speech, he said, 'If he does, I won't be there to cut the cake.' So we had to rush back to Arkoff and tell him not to make the speech. I remember also that we couldn't find a knife to cut the cake, and Vincent, who was roaring drunk, said, 'Use the knife that's in my back' (quoted in Weaver 1991: 149).

Since Price was involved in a contentious negotiation with AIP about his future involvement with the company during the making of *Cry of the Banshee*, several film historians including Weaver

(Weaver 1991: 174), Meikle (Meikle 2003: 166-167) and Rigby (Rigby 2015: 194) have surmised that the actor was unhappy with the films he made with Hessler. According to the 1969 interview Price did at the National Film Theatre, nothing could be further from the truth. He told the audience,

> With Gordon Hessler, who's doing this one, and who did *The Oblong Box*, which opens next week, and *Scream and Scream Again*, Gordon really deserves all the credit for those films because they were lousy scripts to start with, and he took them and made them into something and gave them an element and a breadth that was not there, believe me, it was not there (9 November 1969 audio recording in the possession of the author).

Hessler originally wanted the great Bernard Herrmann, music composer for *Citizen Kane* (1941)*, The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942)*, Vertigo* (1958)*, North by Northwest* (1959) and *Psycho* (1960)*,* to write the score for *Cry of the Banshee.* According to Wicking,

> they'd known each other from the Hitchcock days. Bernie looked at it and said, 'Gordon, what you've got here is a Jacobean revenge picture.' … It was a seventy, eighty minute movie, and he said, 'You need 64 minutes of music,' and we had this editor who'd cut *The Third Man,* a guy called Ossie Hafenrichter, who was Seth Holt's editor too, and to him, film was pure editing - you shouldn't have any music anyway, because the music was in the cuts - and Bernie Herrmann says, 'We have to have music.' So Ossie walked out, they had to go and get him, and he says, 'What the fuck does he know, crazy American. Music, who wants fucking music?' But Bernie was right … but they couldn't afford it (quoted in Decharne 1998: 21).

Instead, Hessler secured the respected and prolific British classical composer Wilfred Josephs who would ultimately create twelve symphonies, twenty-two concertos, overtures, chamber music, operas, ballets, vocal works, almost all written to commission. Josephs also composed

music for television, including the score for the multi-part dramatisation of Robert Graves' *I, Claudius* (1976). Besides *Cry of the Banshee*, his film scores include *Cash on Demand*, (1961) *Fanatic*, (1965) *The Deadly Bees*, (1966) *Dark Places*, (1973) *The Uncanny* (1977) and many others (Eve 1997).

AIP decided to promote *Cry of the Banshee* as the latest in their series of Poe adaptations starring Price, despite the fact that Poe never wrote anything called *Cry of the Banshee.* AIP executives must have felt that they had run out of Poe titles with a commercial ring. Poe had also never written anything involving the witchcraft hysteria in Europe, but that had not stopped AIP from retitling Reeves' *Witchfinder General* as Poe's *The Conqueror Worm.* AIP took the next logical step in deception and simply dispensed with a Poe title altogether for *Cry of the Banshee.* As they had with *The Conqueror Worm*, AIP tried to tie their new gothic to a Poe poem, claiming in the 3 November 1969 issue of *Boxoffice,* "Among … films in various stages of production and being readied for release in the next fiscal year … [is] *Cry of the Banshee*, from an Edgar Allan Poe story 'Valley of Unrest,' starring Vincent Price" (Smith 2013: 376). Poe's 1831 work is actually a darkly beautiful poem written in his youth that contained neither a title nor subject matter that could be useful in selling *Cry of the Banshee.* Quickly abandoning this tactic, AIP had to be content with quoting some lines from Poe's last poem, "The Bells," at the beginning of the film: "In the startled ear of night, How they scream out their affright. Too much horrified to speak, They can only shriek, shriek."

Heyward became aware of the talented young American animator, Terry Gilliam, and hired him to do a credit sequence for the beginning of *Cry of the Banshee.* Terence Vance Gilliam eventually became an internationally celebrated animator, screenwriter, film director, actor, comedian and member of the famous Monty Python comedy troupe. When Wicking saw Hessler's finished director's cut, he was very pleased. He said,

> So they got Wilfred Josephs, and he wrote a wonderful score, and then Terry Gilliam did the titles, which was Vincent's head opening and all these demons coming out, and we're watching this picture at the cast and crew screening, and it was great, you know. Given the fact that it was all cobbled together, it really worked (quoted in Decharne 1998: 21).

Despite the fact that the horror genre began regularly exploiting glimpses of blood and bare breasts in other contemporary movies like *Curse of the Crimson Altar* (1968), *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (1970), *The Vampire Lovers* (1970) and *Blood on Satan's Claw* (!970), AIP still felt that a large part of the American audience for their Poe films consisted of children and families, many of whom saw the movies in drive-ins. As with *The Oblong Box,* AIP wanted the MPAA in America to grant *Cry of the* Banshee a GP (later called a PG) rating so that all ages could see it. In order to do that, AIP cut four minutes of nudity and gore from the film. For reasons of story structure, the company also decided to put Lord Edward's massacre of Oona's witch cult at the beginning of the movie as a pre-credit sequence, as it had been in Kelly's original screenplay.

All of this recutting required a new score. Josephs' music for *Cry of the Banshee* seemed emotionally removed despite its skilful orchestrations, more illustrative of the lovely autumn landscapes than the eerie threat of supernatural encroachment and vengeance. The project needed a specialist in period-horror such as Hammer's James Bernard to foreground the threat of witchcraft in the fall of the house of Whitman. AIP replaced Josephs' score with another by their period-horror music specialist, Les Baxter. The American composer often rescored the music on foreign films purchased for distribution by AIP such as Mario Bava's *Black Sunday* (1961) and *Black Sabbath* (1964). Baxter already had a great deal of experience scoring films in AIP's Poe series, having composed the music for Corman's *House of Usher, Pit and the Pendulum, Tales of Terror,* and *The Raven.* Baxter wrote cues for *Cry of the Banshee* quite unlike Josephs' original music. In contrast to Josephs' rather conventional orchestral work,

Baxter's score uses an unusual arrangement to contribute to the suspense and the supernatural atmosphere. Baxter said,

> I did [*Cry of the Banshee*] … in six to eight, which is kind of based on the voodoo rhythm … It was a very daring and different thing. I used piano, strings and percussion. Bartok did that on one of his concert pieces, and this was somewhat Bartokian … We got in the dubbing room and [James] Nicholson was sitting behind me, and he tapped me on the shoulder and he said, 'Les … you *didn't* do what I wanted. It was *better!'* So I was *very* happy (quoted in Weaver 1996: 27).

According to film music historian and critic, Tony Thomas:

> Through it all, Baxter's music pulsates, punctuates and sizzles, underlining the weird, frightening and occasionally romantic visuals. The Baxter score is, in fact, a textbook example of this particular kind - the kind in which the music is a greatly important factor in manipulating the sensibilities of the viewer … [The score] enables the listener to appreciate the range of Baxter's skill in this regard and his considerable talent as an inventor of original musical concepts. His penchant for sound colours finds enormous opportunity in *Banshee* (Thomas 1996: 3).

AIP also enhanced the sound effects in *Cry of the Banshee.* They added the subtle whisper of wind to most exterior shots, used the actual sounds of a barking canine rather than a man-made and not always convincing imitation for the mad dog, added the sound of a tolling bell to the last scene around Roderick's coffin and replaced the echoing howl of a wolf with a disturbing electronic wailing for the cry of the banshee itself. AIP's reworked *Cry of the Banshee* became the version released in theatres around the world, including the United Kingdom. Even AIP's GP version was given an X rating in Britain for its violence and horror. Hessler's original uncut print with the Wilfred Josephs score went unseen until the video tape release in the late 1990s and the DVD release in 2003.

AIP's cut of *Cry of the Banshee* actually plays better than Hessler's original version. Most noticeably, Baxter's score adds more atmosphere and excitement than Josephs' rather dull effort. Also, beginning the movie with the massacre of Oona's cult allows the audience to experience the first act's exposition and character relationships in an ambience of conflict and dread. By trimming the nudity and repeated abuse of women, AIP's version no longer feels exploitively prurient but still reveals the oppressed position of women in sixteenth century England. However, the recutting and rescoring greatly displeased Hessler, who said, "I thought that the original background score by Wilfred Josephs elevated the movie to a higher level … but then AIP replaced it with one by Les Baxter … I felt his was too modern for the film" (quoted in Smith 2000: 26).

Hessler's director's cut begins with an AIP logo and the Poe quotation from his poem, "The Bells." Gilliam's impressive animated titles follow with a cut-out head of Price rising from the English landscape, splitting open and disgorging demons which fly into the air. Credits appear amid the various flying creatures. AIP's theatrical cut begins with a different AIP logo and the same Poe quotation. It then fades directly into Lord Edward and his men massacring Oona's coven and the scene in which Oona curses the Whitmans, summoning Roderick as her avenger. These scenes do not occur in Hessler's cut until thirty-three minutes into the movie. Hessler's original version also contains more shots of the nude girl lying on the altar, including two of her lying on the ground with her breasts exposed. The director also has Mickey observing the massacre with expressions of shock and sadness. Mickey is not seen at all in the theatrical version of the scene. Hessler's uncut version times out as twenty-five seconds longer than AIP's theatrical edit.

In AIP's version, the opening credits follow the massacre and Oona cursing the Whitmans. They appear over still shots of Gilliam's creatures without any attempt to animate the monsters. Baxter's main title theme in the AIP cut is both more exciting and more contemporary

than Josephs' traditionally orchestrated work. The font used for the names of the cast and crew is much larger in the theatrical version. Why did AIP replace Gilliam's elaborate and colourful animation with still frames of his demons? Perhaps they felt that the slightly comic tone of Gilliam's work clashed with the stark and realistic presentation of sixteenth century England that followed. Gilliam's titles certainly feel like the introduction to a different kind of movie, even with Josephs' portentous chords playing over them. And at one minute, thirty-two seconds, the theatrical credits are about forty seconds shorter than those in the director's cut. The AIP titles may be less artistic, but they also serve their purpose more efficiently without violating the tone of the movie. For a detailed further comparison of Hessler's cut to AIP's theatrical release version, see Appendix A.

Author and critic Tim Lucas agrees that the shortened and rearranged version of *Cry of the Banshee* plays better than the director's cut. In his magazine, *Video Watchdog,* Lucas writes,

> after comparing the two versions afresh, the AIP recut may well be more watchable (Baxter's vivid re-scoring is a great help) and dramatically satisfying (ditto the decision to introduce Oona at the outset). By curtailing the leering prurience of the original, the film is also made somewhat less gruelling and offensive (Lucas 2003: 36).

Despite the recutting and rescoring, everything in AIP's theatrical version of *Cry of the Banshee* was written by Wicking and guided "on the floor" by Hessler. Like many studio controlled movies directed by filmmakers favoured by proponents of the auteur theory, including almost every Hollywood work by Orson Welles, the company cut of *Cry of the Banshee* still displays the techniques and almost all of the intentions of its creators. Hessler and Wicking are still the true authors of the work, and AIP's tampering removed none of their themes or personal touches. Hessler complained about the replaced score for *Cry of the Banshee* but never voiced concern when AIP trimmed nudity and violence from either that film or *The Oblong Box* for identical

commercial reasons. Hessler was a veteran of the studio system at Universal when he worked for Hitchcock, who also had his movies altered by his employers on occasion, and realised that the companies had priorities that sometimes clashed with those of their filmmakers. But both versions of *Cry of the Banshee* are primarily the works of its dual auteurs, Hessler and Wicking, though presented somewhat differently.

RECEPTION

When AIP released their recut version of *Cry of the Banshee* on 22 July 1970 in America, some of the press reviews were predictably dismissive. After all, this was the tenth Price horror movie promoted by AIP as adapted from the works of Poe. And since it did not even bear a Poe title, that claim could easily be disproved. But other reviewers of the time saw the film for what it was, an effective period gothic with an interesting metaphorical look at contemporary conflicts. The *Box Office* review of 10 August 1970 called it, “One of the better in the long, long line of Price-Poe AIP British horror films.” And the 30 July 1970 *Variety* review said,

> Vincent Price is again the medieval evil … it is a measure of Price’s image that he can enjoin a banquet room full of guests, ‘Drink, dance, be merry.’ and the line comes out ominous … a very believable look of the Middle Ages, with … outdoor scenes particularly having the rich earthy red and brown hues of early Dutch paintings.

Also in 1970, *Films in London* said,

> As the American horror film accelerates, the British potion, bred deep in buckets of blood and village girls with plunging necklines, continues to weaken. Meanwhile, *Cry of the Banshee* holds up the side with some excellent scenes, particularly the glorious ending … That director Gordon Hessler has profited from the lessons of *The Oblong Box* and S*cream and Scream Again* … is plain (cited in Rigby 2015: 193).

With both the release cut and the original director's cut available in different formats today, the movie is often re-evaluated by contemporary reviewers. In his 2019 book *American International Pictures,* Rob Craig writes of the now more widely circulated Hessler endorsed version,

> *Cry of the Banshee* is one of the most successful, and certainly the most memorable, of the films which AIP created in their long-running Edgar Allan Poe series of modern Gothic horrors. … Gordon Hessler … managed to channel some of Roger Corman's traditionalist sensibilities while bringing in some new and exciting aesthetics and narrative techniques, and the Hessler horror films look strikingly modern when viewed today (Craig 2019: 103).

Again, Hessler and Wicking's counter-culture horror movie attracted a large audience. The director said, "Banshee cost maybe $450,000, $500,000 maximum, with perhaps four weeks shooting" (quoted in Weaver 1991: 148). That was over twice the budget of the pair's first gothic, *The Oblong Box*, which Hessler said cost $175,000 (Weaver 1991: 144). With its tight and tense rewrite, its skilful direction, and AIP's shameless use of Poe's name in advertising, *Cry of the Banshee* became the biggest box-office hit for the Hessler and Wicking team, even out-grossing the same year's critical and commercial success, *Scream and Scream Again*. In its

first year of release, *Cry of the Banshee* took in $1,306,000 in rentals from the United States and Canada alone (*Variety* January 6, 1971: 11).[3]

Cry of the Banshee is perhaps the clearest and most complete presentation by Hessler and Wicking of their recurring obsession with sin and retribution. The theme is presented in its most simple form, without the complications of conscience and regret on the part of the sinners. Unlike the more self-aware transgressors in *The Oblong Box* and even *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* Lord Edward Whitman is an unrepentant reprobate. He violently oppresses the pagans, the villagers and even the members of his own family to satisfy his lust for political, sexual and emotional power. Wicking gives us no back story for Lord Edward that might allow us to understand his need to control those around him, even to the point of torturing and killing them. In that, Wicking repeats the strategy of Jacobean dramatists of the seventeenth century such as John Webster and Thomas Middleton.

Upon his first viewing of *Cry of the Banshee,* composer Herrmann was literately astute when he told Hessler that the director had made a Jacobean revenge drama. Thomas Middleton's early example of the genre, *The Revenger's Tragedy* from 1607*,* presents a noble family with degrees of degeneracy similar to the Whitmans. Middleton's patriarch character, the old Duke, has poisoned a young woman for rebuking his sexual advances. Her fiancee vows

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[3] In 1977, after the movie's successful release, Tim Kelly wrote a play, published by the Pioneer Drama Service of Denver, Colorado, called *Cry of the Banshee.* A real curiosity, the play is actually a sequel to Hessler's film and takes place in contemporary times in the Whitman manor, transported and rebuilt in the mountains of Southern California (Kelly 1977). Although the play unfolds in the present, the names of many of the characters are the same as in the movie. The descendants of Lord Edward Whitman, whose household was decimated by the Sidhe in sixteenth century England, gather at the manor on the one night each century that witch Oona's curse is supposed to claim more Whitmans. Modern characters named Maureen, Roderick, Sean and Harry must confront Oona's wailing banshee and murderous Sidhe once again, just as they did in the movie. Kelly follows Wicking's rewrite in making Maureen a Whitman descendent instead of an interested barmaid. A parapsychologist and ghost hunter named Dr. Hessler, presumably after director Gordon Hessler, helps them to understand their dilemma. A competent and professional drawing room thriller, this *Cry of the Banshee* cannot hope to replicate the movie's atmosphere, themes of corrupt power and authority, or political metaphors for the late 1960's, but it does provide some suspense and shock with a supernatural chill.

revenge against the Duke. The Duke's second, much younger wife, lusts after the Duke's bastard son, adding incest to the mix. The Duchess's son from an earlier marriage has raped a married woman, and the Duke's other son is trying to force the virgin sister of the revenger to have sex with him. None of the sinners are given any psychological reasons for their crimes against morality beyond their own selfish desires. The revenger gleefully participates in retribution against all of the sinners, causing their deaths in a mass slaughter before he and his accomplice brother are arrested to be executed for their crimes in the name of revenge. This mirrors Wicking's presentation of the retribution against the house of Whitman for their violent and sexual sins. To make the parallel complete, all that is missing from Middleton's climax of carnage in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is old Mickey's cynical roar of laughter from the similarly blood-soaked finale in *Cry of the Banshee.* In her book *Revenge Tragedies of the Renaissance,* Janet Clare analyses the pleasures in watching Jacobean revenge tragedy:

> Audiences enjoy fantasies of violence and if the violence can be construed as just, pleasure in shocking entertainment can be rationalised … Such fictive explorations of vengeance are cathartic, as they cleanse but also warn against violence. Revenge plays reveal and acknowledge the human capacity for acts of savagery and counteractive violence and hence they release the spectator from the burden of repression (Clare 2006:132-133).

In *Cry of the Banshee,* Hessler and Wicking also make their most obvious and specific comparisons to the politics of the 1960s. The team disguises their concerns in the setting of Tudor-era witchcraft, and it is a very fitting context, with two completely different cultures existing under the repressive influence of an old, embedded order. The final cast credits for *Cry of the Banshee* make literal the comparison, dividing the characters into the Establishment, the Witches and the Villagers. Obviously, the Whitmans, their soldiers and Father Tom represent the 1960's repressive ruling order of state, military and church, while the witches act as the

rebellious counter culture. The villagers in the movie, as opposed to in Kelly's original screenplay, are much more victimised by the Establishment than by the witches and harbour a natural sympathy for the counter-culture while enjoying the spectacle of the Establishment's oppression of it. They could be President Richard Nixon's silent majority, trying to make moral sense of the culture clash in their midst, some siding with church and state and others drawn to the simplicity and freedom of nature worship. Wicking and Hessler, though clearly more sympathetic to the witches, are not afraid to show their pagans' dark side, conjuring images of Manson's murdering flower children by allowing witch-priestess Oona to use black magic to control her bloody avenger. Seen now from decades of historical perspective, *Cry of the Banshee* is clearly the dual auteurs most pointed and nuanced expression about their own unstable era.

CHAPTER 8 - MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE - MUST A MAN DIE TWICE

Murders in the Rue Morgue was the last movie made for American International Pictures by the writing and directing team of Wicking and Hessler. It is also the last movie in the eleven year series of Poe adaptations from AIP, a unique group of films starting with eight Poe titles from Corman and concluding with a very different approach in the three movies from the dual auteurs, Hessler and Wicking.

By 1971, Poe's 1841 short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" had already been adapted twice to the screen since the advent of talking pictures. The first and most influential version was the third classic horror property made by Universal studios in the early thirties, following Tod Browning's *Dracula* and James Whale's *Frankenstein*. In 1932, the studio released their *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* directed by Robert Florey. He was fresh from being passed over as the director of *Frankenstein*, despite the fact that his draft of the screenplay strongly influenced the storyline of director Whale's adaptation. Eschewing mystery, Florey's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* is designed as a horror movie with a mad scientist played by Bela Lugosi, his killer ape, twisted Expressionistic sets and a gallery of grotesque supporting characters. Its sadistic and sexually transgressive tone put off audiences of the time, and the film failed to find the success of its two hit predecessors.

In 1954, Warner Brothers chose to follow their 3D, colour, stereophonic sound horror blockbuster, *House of Wax,* with a similarly presented adaptation of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," called *Phantom of the Rue Morgue*. Following the lead of the Universal version of the thirties, Warners presented *Phantom of the Rue Morgue* as the story of a mad zoologist, played by Karl Malden, who uses his killer ape to dispatch women who reject his romantic advances. In both movie versions, Poe's main character of the amateur detective Dupin is changed to a young doctor: in the first, still a medical student, and in the second, a university professor. Unlike Poe's protagonist, they are both initially accused of the crimes, and they both arrive at a

solution already known to the audience. Hessler wisely abstained from attempting a third version of this approach, and, as the 1986 television adaptation starring George C. Scott proved, not trying to make a more faithful rendering of the dated Poe classic.

SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT

As was the practice with AIP at the time, the company handed the title and story material to Hessler, penned by incredibly prolific mystery and soap opera writer, Henry Slesar. Slesar was published, not only under his own name, but under several pseudonyms, particularly on his early short stories. He wrote, on average, one story per week, having forty stories published in 1957 alone. He wrote detective tales, science fiction, crime stories, mysteries, and thrillers and found publication in *Playboy*, *Imaginative Tales*, and *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* (Hobbs 2002). After reading Slesar's "M Is for the Many" in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, Hitchcock bought it for his weekly television series, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. The filmmaker then hired Slesar to write several episodes of the show over its ten year run. In 1960, Slesar's first original novel, *The Grey Flannel Shroud*, a murder story set in an advertising agency, earned the Edgar Allan Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America. Slesar also penned the original screenplay for the 1965 film, *Two on a Guillotine* (Hobbs 2002). Before *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* Hessler had worked with Slesar when the writer scripted several episodes of Hitchcock's television show which Hessler produced. According to Slesar, Hessler began developing *Murders in the Rue Morgue* with him. Slesar said,

> Gordon Hessler … was impossibly cordial, with a boyish enthusiasm … which made him smile even when discussing axe murders … I was to meet Gordon at his mews home in London, and work on a screenplay with him. It was *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* and contained a few axe murders (Slesar 1985: 4).

Of Slesar's adaptation of *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* Hessler said,

> The problem was that the Poe story, which is a mystery where the monkey did it, was not the kind of story you could do anymore. So we used *Murders in the Rue Morgue* as a play-within-a-play; the Poe story was being done on the stage, and we developed a mystery that was going on around the Poe play (quoted in Weaver 1991: 149).

Slesar had already used a theatrical background and some of the story elements he introduced into *Murders in the Rue Morgue* in his story and screenplay for *Two on a Guillotine.* That earlier film begins with a middle-aged man played by Caesar Romero threatening a young woman played by Connie Stevens who is hanging by her bound wrists. He suddenly unsheathes a sword and stabs her twice in the stomach with it as she screams in pain. The murder is then revealed as part of the act of a magician and his assistant-wife on stage in a large, ornate theatre. The audience gasps, then applauds. This is very similar to the opening of Hessler's *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* In *Two on a Guillotine,* Slesar reveals that the magician and his wife have a daughter backstage. The mother dies accidentally during rehearsal for the act when a trick guillotine malfunctions and beheads her. This story element, slightly disguised, also appears in Hessler's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* when the mother in that story disfigures her lover onstage by accidentally throwing real, instead of fake, acid in his face as part of a play. Subsequently, the mother is murdered on an empty stage. In *Two on a Guillotine,* the daughter grows up to look exactly like her dead mother, both played by Stevens. This was the scripted version of the relationship of the two characters in *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* although Hessler ignored the resemblance plot point when he eventually cast two different actresses to play the mother and daughter. Also in *Two on a Guillotine,* Slesar has the magician-father die and be buried in a coffin. However, he has actually faked his death, and he returns to his daughter because he is obsessed with her and her resemblance to the mother he accidentally killed. In Hessler's *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* the actor disfigured by his lover on stage also fakes his death and returns after his burial because he is similarly obsessed with his now murdered

lover's daughter, who was also originally scripted to look like her mother. Slesar also writes one dream scene for the daughter in *Two on a Guillotine* that features her chased by frightening characters and encountering her dead father. Hessler's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* has many such dream scenes with similar events but extends the daughter's dream motif and uses it as a structural device. As with *The Oblong Box, Scream and Scream Again* and *Cry of the Banshee*, Hessler was ultimately dissatisfied with the original writer's drafts, and the director assigned the further rewrites to Wicking, who later said,

> Although there was very little of the Poe story in the script, it dealt with strong Poe themes: the eternal recurrence, men obsessed with a dead woman, the will that conquers death. The original story was too familiar, yet there were aspects of Poe's works that hadn't yet been properly explored in other pictures based on his writings (quoted in Nutman 1989: 53).

Although every one of the scripts written for Hessler's horror films by Wicking were adaptations of the works of other screenwriters, Wicking's unique structural style and way with dialogue made these projects his own. Not in quality but in the degree of authorship, Wicking was very much like Shakespeare, who borrowed plots, down to fine details, from classical authors such as Ovid and Seneca as well as from English historians like Holinshed (Ackroyd 2005: 428). In fact, only *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Tempest* were completely original stories by Shakespeare (Ackroyd 2005: 254). Along with the collaboration of director Hessler, Wicking also transformed material written by others into a vision that was unique and personal. Hessler said,

> Chris took certain elements - like the gorilla that carries off the girl and the premature burial … and combined them with the *Theatre Du Grand Guignol*, thereby bringing elements of Poe together with some clarity (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 46).

After delivering three hit movies in a row for AIP, Wicking felt emboldened to experiment. Comparing AIP to its British horror rival, Hammer Films, for which he later wrote three movies and worked as story editor, Wicking said, "AIP was much more forward-looking than Hammer, not just in terms of the material, but also in their attitude toward the material" (quoted in Nutman 1989: 52). Of his new story for *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* Wicking said,

> The main character is the daughter of a woman who was loved my two men, and they are still alive. They think she is the reincarnation of the mother. The story concerns her attempts at combatting the battle between the two men and discovering who she really is, putting right in the present wrongs from the past. We structured it to have three time periods - present, past and dream fast-forwards (quoted in Nutman 1989: 53).

Hessler was equally excited by this avant-garde approach to the script. He said,

> I was trying a different approach from using flashbacks. Christopher Wicking and I came up with the idea of 'flash-forwards,' to give the film a fresh and unique angle. The [Madeleine] … character keeps having hallucinations of events that are explained with [Madeleine's Mother] … in the end (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 44).

Wicking and Hessler crafted another saga of generational sin and retribution, told in a fragmented narrative reminiscent of *Scream and Scream Again*. However, instead of telling the story by intercutting separate narratives, this time Wicking and Hessler break the action up into scenes of theatrical fantasy, dreams, premonitions and waking horror. The core story resembles *The Oblong Box* with an innocent character, Marot, disfigured and buried alive, only to return from the grave seeking revenge while hiding his hideous features behind a mask. As in *The Oblong Box,* the drama ends with the avenger, Marot, confronting the real guilty character, Charron, and a final retribution. This time, the guilty party's sin is romantic jealousy leading to his murder of the object of his love, Madeleine's Mother, and even his marriage to her much younger daughter: again, the old order corrupting the lives of the young. In this case, the

degeneracy of the elder husband, Charron, results in recurring nightmares and premonitions of doom for his youthful wife, Madeleine. Wicking and Hessler play all of this against the backdrop of a Grand Guignol theatre in late nineteenth century Paris as they present a play based on Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." This allows Wicking and Hessler to toy with the shifting realities of a play within a play, Madeleine's dreams, her mysterious visions of the future and the activities of Marot, the avenger.

As he developed the script with Hessler, Wicking encountered misgivings from the AIP executives who worried that the story was becoming confusing and straying from their goal of making a frightening horror movie. Arkoff said,

> Horror aficionados get very angry if you advertise horror and don't give it to 'em. They're the ones that show up at the cinema the first day, and brother, if they get pissed off, you get bad word-of-mouth and that's the end of it (quoted in Koetting 2018: 100).

Wicking, describing AIP's script requirements, said,

> It was set in a Grand Guignol theatre, but I wanted more to do with the mechanics of the stage, and fantasy infringing on reality. I didn't get very far down the line with that. AIP didn't like the way the script was going, and it slowly became more like a *Phantom of the Opera* - type project (quoted in Koetting 2018: 99).

Wicking's opening scene is the only one that duplicates any aspects of the previous two sound adaptations of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," or really, any aspects of Poe's original story. We seem to be thrust into the climax of a variation on Florey's 1932 version and Del Ruth's 1954 remake of it. In both, a middle-aged madman kidnaps a beautiful young woman who is saved by the intervention of the madman's homicidal trained ape. In the 1932 original, Lugosi's Dr. Miracle tries to inject the blood of Eric the ape into the innocent girl to prove his theories of evolution. Eric becomes protective of the woman and kills the doctor. The slight variation in the 1954 remake has Malden's Dr. Marais inciting Sultan the ape to attack another trapped woman,

this time because she rejected the doctor's amorous advances like all of the victims before her. That seems to be what is going on in Wicking's first scene, with Charron beginning to torture Madeleine for spurning his sexual advances.

This first scene in Hessler's finished movie, unlike the beautifully designed and shot previous versions, appears over-lit and hand held. In addition, the ape costume is most unconvincing and threadbare, even revealing glimpses of the actor's bare neck when the animal raises its head to scream. All of these deficits will soon be explained as Hessler and Wicking shift realities, first to the dream of the Axe Man from Madeleine's point of view, and then to the reality that the scene is from a play being shown to an audience in the nineteenth century Parisian theatre. Reality becomes dream, dream becomes fantasy and fantasy becomes reality. Hessler and Wicking begin as they intend to go on, fracturing their story of sin and retribution with alternating degrees of theatrical and psychological filters.

Wicking obviously based the Rue Morgue theatre after the famous Grand Guignol. In the spring of 1897, Oscar Metenier opened the 285 seat Theatre du Grand Guignol in Paris after being secretary to the Police Commissioner, a tabloid journalist and a master writer of rossee, or "crass," one act plays about the low lives of the lowlifes of Paris. He took the curious name for the theatre from "Guignol," a character in the popular "Punch and Judy" puppet shows of Lyons. "Guignol" had become the standard name for all puppet entertainment in France, so the theatre was designated as a "Grand," or large, "Guignol," or puppet show. However, the intended audience was to be decidedly adult and the performers, not puppets, but flesh and blood people. The insane behaviour and extreme violence that caused children to laugh in the "Punch and Judy" shows would be intensified and made gruesomely realistic for the sadistic pleasure of the grown-ups (Gordon 1997: 14). A typical Grand Guignol evening consisted of five or six one-act plays, alternating between sexy farce and blood-drenched horror (Gordon 1997: 18). Madness provided the motivation for most of the stabbings, stranglings and mutilations, with

unhealthy doses of rape and revenge mixed in. Often, the theatre adapted Poe stories for its plays, the favourite being a gory version of "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Feather" (Gordon 1997: 120-141). The theatre became a major tourist attraction in Paris from its inception until 1962 when its novelty finally wore out (Gordon 1997: 33).

Obviously aware of the origins of the Grand Guignol, Wicking works an actual "Punch and Judy Show" into the plot of *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Marot's dwarf assistant, Triboulet, performs a puppet show in a small booth outside of the Rue Morgue Theatre. After Charron supposedly murders Marot with Madeleine's help, the couple sees an exact re-enactment of their crime right down to the use of a pillow to smother the victim, staged as a puppet show for laughing, squealing children on a sunny afternoon during a carnival. Not realising that Triboulet is the puppeteer and that he knows of the supposed murder, Charron dismisses the show as a coincidence, but it terrifies Madeleine, adding to her neurotic fear.

Wicking also reveals the extent of his research when he gives the name Vidocq to the Paris police Inspector investigating the murders of Charron's company. Francois Eugene Vidocq was actually a French detective and author of crime books in the early nineteenth century. He also founded the Police de Surete, the French law-keeping force. Imprisoned for several crimes as a young man, he was released in 1809 and worked as an informer for Napoleon before becoming the first chief of the French police. He opened a private detective agency when he was forced to retire because of the actions of some of his agents who were actually former prisoners themselves (Mabbott 1978: 572). Poe mentions Vidocq in his story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Poe calls him, "a good guesser, and a persevering man. But without educated thought, he erred continually by the very intensity of his investigations. He impaired his vision by holding the object too close" (Mabbott 1978: 545). Hessler cast Sicilian born Adolfo Celi as Vidocq, a large, hook-nosed actor who certainly looks more like an ex-prisoner than a police

Inspector. Celi's most famous previous role was as the hulking but elegant Bond villain, Largo, in Terence Young's *Thunderball* (1965).

Wicking's flashbacks that explain the truth of the past in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* parallel the ones in Hessler and Wicking's first collaboration, *The Oblong Box*. In that film, Price's brother is blamed for riding over and killing a small local boy on their African plantation. The West Africans take revenge by disfiguring Price's brother through voodoo. The brother supposedly dies but is buried alive and returns from the grave. He must don a crimson hood to hide his hideous features while he pieces together the truth and takes revenge on the real guilty parties. Price himself turns out to be the one who rode over and killed the boy, and his brother makes him pay for his crime in the end. This almost exactly mirrors the situation in *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, in which Marot is blamed for killing his lover, Madeleine's Mother, with an axe. He is disfigured when she throws acid in his face during a performance. He supposedly kills Madeleine's Mother, apparently commits suicide, is buried alive and rises from the grave, donning a mask and insanely seeking revenge. And again, it is actually Charron who put acid in the beaker, causing Madeleine's Mother to accidentally disfigure Marot. And Charron really killed Madeleine's Mother with an axe out of romantic jealousy.

Wicking, as was done by Hitchcock in *Stage Fright* (1950), presents a flashback that lies in his first draft of *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* (Wicking, May 1970: 87-88) Along with the plays on the stage and Madeleine's dreams and premonitions, this lying flashback is another of Wicking's dramatisations of life's alternate realities. In Wicking's first draft of the script, Charron tells his knowingly false version of Madeleine's Mother's murder to her daughter, and we see it enacted as he erroneously describes it. In Charron's lie, it is Marot, his face disfigured by acid, who hides in the Iron Maiden on the stage of Madeleine's Mother's theatre and kills her with an axe as she investigates sounds on the stage at night. This scene does not appear in any finished version of the film, but a photograph of the acid scarred Marot hiding in the Iron Maiden

next to the unknowing Madeleine's Mother exists as an American lobby card for the movie, suggesting that the scene was shot and then cut out. The finished movie does present the later flashback from the point of view of a hypnotised Madeleine in which she remembers seeing Charron hiding in the Iron Maiden and emerging to axe her Mother. Perhaps Wicking and Hessler felt that dramatising the lie earlier would confuse an already complicated mix of alternating objective, subjective and theatrical realities. Or perhaps they did not want to repeat what Hitchcock eventually considered a mistake when he filmed the lie in his 1950 melodrama, *Stage Fright.* He told Francois Truffaut in the French director's famous book-length interview with Hitchcock:

> I did one thing in that picture that I never should have done; I put in a flashback that was a lie … Strangely enough, in movies, people never object if a man is shown telling a lie. And it's also acceptable, when a character tells a story about the past, for the flashback to show it as if it were taking place in the present. So why is it that we can't tell a lie through a flashback? (quoted in Truffaut 1967: 139)

Wicking does demonstrate the oblique approach to violence preferred by Hitchcock when the Inspector's assistant, played in the film by Peter Arne from *The Oblong Box*, chases Marot onto a merry-go-round. The use of the merry-go-round as a setting for violence recalls the climactic fight in Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* (1951). In *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* both Marot and the Inspector's Assistant disappear from view as the wheel makes its turn. And when it comes around again, Marot is gone, and the Inspector's Assistant lies dead across the moving merry-go-round, his throat slit. This simple but effective murder in the finished film replaces the much more elaborate one scripted in Wicking's May 1970 draft of *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* In this earlier version, the Inspector and his Assistant chase Marot into a carnival ride called the Tunnel of Horrors. Inside, dummy ghosts, goblins and demons pop out at the pursuers and pursued as they run along the railway that takes customers through the ride. Eventually, Marot finds the

Assistant alone in the dark and forces his head between two gears of the machinery. He pulls the lever for the machine, crushing the Assistant's skull (Wicking, May 1970: 50-52).

Another scene inspired by Hitchcock, Hessler's former employer, is the clumsy attempted murder of Marot by Charron and Madeleine. The approach in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* recalls the frantic and brutal killing of the Russian security agent Gromek (Wolfgang Kieling) by the American professor played by Paul Newman and the farmer's wife played by Carolyn Conwell in Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain* (1966). Renouncing the clean, quick deaths in James Bond thrillers, Hitchcock wanted to show what a difficult, long and maladroit process is murder. In his May 1970 draft, Wicking describes the similar fight in *Murders in the Rue Morgue:* "It is a messy, furious, desperate battle, played for shocking realism as MADELEINE & CHARRON try to kill MAROT" (Wicking 1970: 79). In *Torn Curtain,* Newman and Conwell grapple awkwardly with the Russian and use household items such as a pot of stew, a bread knife, a shovel and the kitchen oven as weapons. In *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* Wicking has Madeleine and Charron use a bedroom pillow as the method to smother Marot. In this early draft, Wicking makes Madeleine much more active in the killing of Marot than in the final film. When Charron convinces her that Marot murdered Madeleine's Mother, the daughter screams, "Kill him, Cesar! Kill him" (Wicking 1970: 79)! Madeleine herself holds the pillow over Marot's face as Charron pins him to the bed. Wicking writes, "MADELEINE is like a wild woman, her hair tumbling about, her eyes brilliant, glistening, almost as insane and uncontrolled as MAROT'S own thrashing" (Wicking 1970: 79). In the finished movie, Madeleine stands back as Charron does the murder. Why this change was made is unknown. Perhaps Jason Robards, as the top billed star, wanted to kill the perceived villain himself, or perhaps, given the fragile, passive nature of Christine Kaufmann's performance, Hessler felt Madeleine's character change would be too abrupt to be plausible.

As with *Cry of the Banshee*, Wicking was uncertain how to end *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. In the May 1970 draft of the script, after he kills Charron, Marot kidnaps Madeleine from the theatre and, with the police in pursuit, makes his way through the carnival to the Eiffel Tower. A note in the script informs the reader that the tower was built for the Paris Exposition of 1889 (Wicking 1970: 114). Marot, dressed as the ape, drags Madeleine to the top like King Kong. But at the summit of the tower, Madeleine cooly tells Marot that she has realised why she dreams of a man and a rope falling from the flies of the theatre. As a small child, she saw Marot cut the rope holding her father up so that he fell to his death. Marot has avenged the murder of Madeleine's Mother by Charron, and now Madeleine will avenge her father's murder by Marot. She tries to push Marot over the edge of the Eiffel tower. This draft remains unfinished, ending with the police watching the two struggle from below (Wicking, May 1970: 117). By eventually cutting Marot's past murder of Madeleine's father in the final draft, Wicking makes Marot a much more innocent and sympathetic character. But by keeping the falling body and rope in Madeleine's dreams, Wicking adds premonition to her visions since she is foreseeing the manner of her own killing of Marot.

Wicking's structural problem was that, with the death of Charron the story had reached its climax. The movie should have ended in the home theatre of Madeleine's mother, but Wicking extends it for another long sequence back at the Rue Morgue theatre with a spectacular chase during the performance and out into the carnival and another lengthy sequence of Madeleine alone in the theatre after finding the dead body of her protector. Her final confrontation with Marot in Wicking's last draft seems too little, much too late, long after interest has flagged. Had Price played Charron, as planned, he certainly would never have allowed the movie to continue for fifteen minutes after his death. Wicking had always been able to supply a powerfully dark twist ending to his previous films with Hessler. His conclusion to *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, while unpredictable, also lacks the impact of his previous efforts.

The dwarf Triboulet's entrance into Madeleine's bedroom after the death of Marot is neither a twist nor threatening. And the brief dissolve to Marot's face over Triboulet suggests that he is now possessing the dwarf, but that seems like a non sequitur of no consequence.

PRE-PRODUCTION

According to a 13 December 2015 email to the author from Gary Teetzel who had access to the AIP files at MGM, as early as the 2 September 1970 Wicking draft of *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, AIP President Arkoff expressed concern in his notes that the dream scenes might confuse audiences. Obviously, Arkoff found the approach by Wicking and Hessler too arty for AIP. Arkoff always blamed the relative box-office failure of Corman's final Poe film, *Tomb of Ligeia,* on the director's aesthetic pretensions (Iveson 2020: 87). Intriguingly, Arkoff may have considered a way of making *Murders in the Rue Morgue* more accessible to his traditional target audience of adolescents and young adults. Teetzel also reported to the author that a 20 September 1970 AIP memo mentioned that Allan Silliphant of Magnavision suggested using *Murders in the Rue Morgue* as a test title to demonstrate his new process for converting films shot flat into 3D. Arkoff should have taken Silliphant up on his offer since Magnavision would release a modest soft-core adult movie written and directed by Alf Silliman Jr. called *The Stewardesses* in 3D in September 1970 in a few independent theatres, and the feature would go on to become an enormous financial bonanza. It became the most successful independent film made up to that time, outgrossing the former top earner, Russ Meyer's *Vixen* (1968), by several million dollars (Hayes 1989: 68-69). Perhaps Arkoff felt that one 3D version of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Warner Brothers' 1954 *Phantom of the Rue Morgue,* was enough.

After the success of his previous three horror movies, Hessler received a larger budget for *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, around $700,000, a longer schedule of eight weeks and location shooting (Weaver 1991: 150). Originally planning to shoot at the Victorine Studio in France,

Hessler said, “I originally went to Nice, where we were going to use the sets from *Les Enfants Du Paradis* (1945), which were still standing. AIP couldn’t get French financial participation, so we ended up filming in Spain” (quoted in Smith 2000: 26). Because they were suffering massive losses in the early 1970s, almost every American studio pulled out of Europe. Britain lost nearly ninety per-cent of its film financing, and English companies such as EMI and the Rank Organisation struggled to make up the loss. AIP was one of the few American companies to stay. (Koetting 2018: 98). Heyward said,

> We were about the only game left in town, but even I couldn’t help hold up what was falling down around me. If I asked Hollywood for money for a picture, I would be told to get European participation, which I couldn’t get anymore. It was getting very difficult to mount pictures in Europe (quoted in Koetting 2018: 99).

Explaining the move from France to Spain for *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* Heyward said,

> Victorine would’ve been the ideal place to shoot it. They had a reconstructed Paris street which I had surveyed and found eminently usable. We had the use of the old theatre in Cannes for the opera house; we had everything there. But our French partner, BIS, just couldn’t come up with the money (quoted in Koetting 2018: 99).

Hessler happily switched to Toledo when he found that the Spanish city contained large sections that were virtually unchanged since the 1800’s, with buildings, cobble stone streets and even a theatre that had existed for at least a hundred years.

About the casting of *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* Hessler said, “Vincent (Price) was having problems with Arkoff and wasn’t asked to be in *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* Had Vincent played either of those parts, the film might have been a classic! ” (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 44). Unfortunately, Price refused to sign another long term contract with American International, and the company could only lure him back on a picture-by-picture basis with an original project tailored for his talents, *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*, directed by former production designer

Robert Fuest (Weaver 1991: 178-179). American International secured Jason Robards to replace Price in *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Robards' realistic underplaying of the part clashed with the exaggerated theatrical setting, seriously weakening the impact of the finished film. Surrounded by actors such as Herbert Lom, Lilly Palmer and Michael Dunn, who could calibrate their performances for the heightened gothic melodrama of the genre and still remain believable, Robards' delivery of lines such as, "Prepare, my darling, for pain - *exquisite* pain," sound like first-time table readings or script-in-hand rehearsals. Hessler said, "He had none of the flamboyant attributes Vincent Price would have brought to such a role" (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 44). As Hessler explained, he had no choice in Price's replacement:

> You see, I was brought on *Murders* after the major talent was secured. Jason Robards and Herbert Lom were set. Jason was a huge Broadway star, getting top money and great perks on that film. Halfway through, Jason said to me, 'I should be playing Herbert's part and he should have mine!' I said, 'It's too late. At the onset, they would have given you whatever part you wanted.' He was a pro and finished the film, but I know his heart wasn't in it (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 44).

On paper, Robards replacing Price must have seemed ideal. After all, both were middle-aged American leading men with extensive stage backgrounds who specialised in bitter, cynical, morally ambiguous characters. Robards became a familiar face to movie audiences during the 1960s, notably for repeating his stage performance in the film version of *A Thousand Clowns* in 1965. He also appeared in *The Night They Raided Minsky's* and in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West,* both in 1968. For his Broadway work, Robards received eight Tony Award nominations, more than any other actor. He won the Tony for Best Performance by a Leading Actor in a Play for *The Disenchanted* in 1959 (Katz 2012: 1238-1239). But his low-key naturalistic style and brash strength failed him in the dark, haunted world of Hessler and Wicking, and his central performance in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* badly damaged the film.

AIP cast Lom as the tragic Marot, fighting for Madeleine's love with Robards' Charron, even from beyond the grave. *Murders in the Rue Morgue* was the second gothic horror movie in which a character played by Lom was disfigured by acid, the first time being Hammer Film's 1962 remake of *The Phantom of the Opera* directed by Fisher. Lom reacts very similarly in both movies when acid splashes his face, beating his burning head against a wall.

Michael Dunn, who had medical dwarfism, played Triboulet. Dunn only reached the height of 3'10" as an adult and weighed about seventy-eight pounds. Of Dunn on *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Hessler said,

> He was a brilliant fellow - very bright, but totally alcoholic. He consumed two bottles of hard liquor a day, maybe more. He was desperately unhappy, yet his drinking never interfered with the shoot. But bear in mind, he didn't have that much dialogue (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 44).

Nevertheless, Dunn gives a very moving performance, aware of his physical condition yet articulately gallant and dignified in his pursuit of Madeleine. He stands up to Charron, and one cannot help but sympathise with his reckless challenge of Charron to a duel just before the larger man grabs the dwarf's own sword and stabs him with it.

Heyward insisted on Lilli Palmer, the internationally celebrated actress, to play the small but pivotal role of Madeleine's Mother because her name was approved by the financiers (Koetting 2018: 99). And indeed, she gives a perfectly calibrated performance. Her scene in the hospital with Lom, both actors delivering the melodrama with moving sincerity, is the best acted in the film. Fifty-six years old at the time of shooting, Palmer's mature beauty and intelligence make completely believable her three middle-aged admirers' obsessive love for her. Hessler said,

> I drove to her home in Switzerland and convinced her to appear in the film. She was a great actress, and the film was better for her participation in it (quoted in Del Valle 2003: 44).

Unfortunately, the casting of Palmer as Madeleine's Mother confused the themes of sexual obsession and reincarnation that Wicking rightfully felt were key to the movie's impact. Wicking said,

> Now, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* has got two men who are in love with the heroine's mother. It's Christine Kaufmann who plays the daughter, and she was also supposed to play her mother because they are supposed to look exactly alike, which is why the two men are in love with her. I got this phone call from the director one day because they were making it in Spain, and he said we'd like some new scenes for Lilli Palmer. I said … 'what is she going to play in this picture because there's no part for her' … They said, 'Oh, she's going to be the mother.' I said it's supposed to be played by the girl who's the daughter. They're meant to look alike. He said, 'Yes, I know, but we need Lilli Palmer to sell the film in Germany.' This woman is supposed to be an icon for the men, like an object almost, and she's having all these dreams and memories that she has become her mother, somehow, and she doesn't look at all like her mother. So lots of people were confused by this picture (quoted in Decharne 1998: 21).

Kaufmann gives a very restrained, almost blank, performance as Madeleine, carried mostly by her great beauty. In post production, her dialogue was completely re-voiced by a British actress. Kaufmann's Madeleine comes across as very fragile, physically and emotionally, and in need of paternal protection. It seems very plausible that the three main male characters, Charron, Marot, and the dwarf Triboulet, would rush to her aid and just as plausible that she would passively accept it. If she had played the scenes as Madeleine's Mother with Lom, there is no evidence from her performance as Madeleine that Kaufmann could have had the same

emotional depth and verisimilitude as Palmer. Perhaps that is another reason Hessler insisted on Palmer as Madeleine's Mother against the wishes of Wicking. Even in an auteur partnership as close as that of Wicking and Hessler, the director generally controls casting. Similarly, Hessler was forced to bow to the production company, AIP, which had final say about financial matters such as insisting on hiring Palmer to sell the movie in Germany. Whatever the chemistry of the decision, this was the only time on record that Hessler was compelled to contradict the wishes of his creative partner.

PRODUCTION

Hessler began shooting *Murders in the Rue Morgue* in Toledo, Spain on 26 October 1970 in and around the Teatro Rojas, representing the Rue Morgue Theatre. The director, with the help of skilled veterans such as director of photography Manuel Berenguer and editor Max Benedict, as well as impressive Spanish locations, made both reality and the dream scenes visually beautiful and intriguing. In addition, he staged a colourful carnival for the exterior Parisian scenes with spinning ferris wheels and merry-go-rounds and hundreds of extras in period costumes. Heyward said,

> Gordon Hessler filled the opera house … with a group of gypsy-extras, and he got them all to work for free by giving away a refrigerator. He called me and said, 'I'm giving away a refrigerator,' and I said, 'But there's no electricity in the gypsy caves!' He said, 'It makes no difference. This one has no motor' (quoted in Weaver 1991: 177).

Director of photographer Berenguer came to the attention of American International from his work on the 1969 Spanish period gothic *La Residencia*, released by AIP in 1971 as *The House That Screamed.* Berenguer shot over sixty Spanish features throughout the 1940s and 50s before being hired by American producer Samuel Bronston as director of photography on his epic life of Jesus, *King of Kings* (1961), directed by Nicholas Ray. Berenguer became a member

of the American Society of Cinematographers and supervised second unit cinematography on other Bronston epics shot in Spain such as *El Cid* (1961) and *55 Days at Peking* (1963), as well as serving as second unit cameraman on such epics for other producers as *Doctor Zhivago* (1965) and *Nicholas and Alexandria* (1971). After working as director of photography on *Krakatoa, East of Java* (1968), Berenguer shot *La Residencia* (Hallenbeck 2020: 125). Since AIP picked up the beautifully appointed gothic for distribution, it is no wonder that they would hire the director of photography, music composer and star for their own Spanish period horror film, *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. The film starred Palmer as the sadistic headmistress of a French boarding school for young women in the nineteenth century. Hessler later complained about aspects of Berenguer's lighting technique. He told director Jeff Burr in an interview used in the 2015 Ballyhoo Motion Pictures documentary *Gentleman Gothic: Gordon Hessler at AIP:*

> You had the old craftsmen who were doing all the big horrible pictures in Spain. They'd use huge arc lights. And once you put one arc light in, it's just disaster. You can't move the camera, and you had no hand-held camera because they didn't have that kind of technique of picture making. So it became an old-fashioned Hollywood film, and it didn't have pace.

Hessler had a point, especially in the bright lighting of the scenes onstage and in the Paris brothel that robbed them of any effective expressionistic chiaroscuro. The director felt that Berenguer gave *Murders in the Rue Morgue* the traditional look that he always tried to avoid. He preferred the shadowy interiors and dusky exteriors of Canadian director of photography Coquillon on his previous three horror movies for American International.

POST PRODUCTION

As he did for *La Residencia*, Argentinian composer, conductor and arranger, Waldo de los Rios, wrote the distinctive score for *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. He varies his unusual orchestrations,

transforming a haunting main title melody with a keening chorus into a lovely bucolic background for Madeleine's walk through a Parisian park and later altering it into a dreamy, slow-motion wail for her dreams and visions.

Benedict, Hessler's editor on *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, had also cut *The Oblong Box* in 1969 for the director. The same year, he served as an editor on AIP's troubled production, *De Sade*, cutting the release version for the United States. According to Teetzel's email to the author, on 19 March 1971, AIP informed Benedict that they were sending him the AIP logo and that they expected the negative, final mix and answer print of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* by 24 April. By late May, Benedict still had not delivered the original negative causing a concerned Nicholson to write to Heyward. Nicholson already wanted to redo the titles and remix the sound. Multiple memos from this period referred to two endings for the film. Benedict blamed the delay in the delivery of the negative on the lab. When AIP finally received Benedict and Hessler's version of *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, they were not happy with it. They immediately set about cutting it down from Hessler's 98 minutes to around 87 minutes. Wicking said, "AIP hated it and added … [red] filters optically laid over the dream sequences to spell it out to the audience. Gordon was upset. He felt his version was strange and wonderful" (quoted in Nutman 1989: 53). Heyward contended, "It was Nicholson's decision. He wanted the security of what he knew rather than something avant- grade. But I didn't know what had been done until it was a fait accompli" (quoted in Koetting 2018: 99). Hessler lamented,

> I was very disappointed when that was sort of re-edited in Hollywood. When James Nicholson came to Spain and looked at the final cut, he was very, very excited about it. But apparently when it went back to California, they didn't like it. Now I must say that it was a very different film from anything they'd ever done, and to me it was one of the best films I had ever made. But they took out a whole end sequence and made the film unintelligible. I almost begged them just to put back that end sequence, but they never

> did it. Our original finish was a wonderful twist ending, but they took it all out, and I was very unhappy (quoted in Weaver 1991: 150).

Later, Wicking had regrets about his avant-garde approach to the script:

> We went much too far with that picture. Our idea was too radical. The audience would never be sure what time period certain events were taking place in. Although we were using certain distorting lenses like you often see in a flashback, perhaps the scene would take place in the present (quoted in Nutman 1989: 53).

Despite AIP's misgivings, Hessler was proud of his cinematic manipulation of dreams and reality, saying,

> The whole mystery centred on the notion that, if you're dreaming and you immediately wake up, you don't quite know if you're awake or still in the dream. That was what we wanted to tease the audience with. But when you do things like tint the dream sequences, you destroy that ambiguity and mystery. It also underestimates the audience - if you go with the whole idea of theatre, it's amazing what people will accept. In my mind, there's no question that the film I shot worked (quoted in Koetting 2018: 100).

AIP's changes begin in the first, pre-credit scene with Madeleine fainting onstage during a performance of the play. AIP tinted her dream, and all subsequent visions and premonitions, red, telling the audience explicitly that they are not real. This seriously weakened Hessler's efforts to blend fantasy and reality, dream and waking in a sort of endless nightmare of uncertainty. But Arkoff insisted on tinting these dreams even though the slow motion, the music and the surreal action made the scenes quite obviously the products of Madeleine's sleeping unconscious. For a detailed comparison of the director's cut to AIP's theatrical release version, see Appendix B.

Along with the ending, Hessler most regretted AIP's removal of the hospital scene with Marot and Madeleine's Mother. AIP cut out of the scene right after the young nurse, played by

an uncredited Brooke Adams in her first film, tells Charron, “Oh yes, sir. He can speak alright.” AIP immediately returns to Charron telling the back story to Madeleine, saying, “Shortly after, he committed suicide.” Hessler and his editor were completely correct in wanting the hospital scene in the movie, since it shows the sincere and selfless love of Madeleine’s Mother for Marot and the equally unselfish rejection of that love by him. The characters become complex and sympathetic instead of mere puppets in a complicated melodrama. In addition, the performances by Lom and especially Palmer are realistic, mature and moving. The scene edges the contrivances of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* closer to something like tragedy. Hessler said,

> Lilli Palmer had a marvellous role in the picture - she was the catalyst for the film to shift into a new gear, and her role made the whole story make sense - but it was almost all cut out. Incredible. They cut it down so she was almost like an extra. I don’t know what she must have thought when she saw the film (quoted in Weaver 1991: 151).

At the climax, when Madeleine tries to get away from the unseen Marot in the empty theatre, AIP added the sounds of footsteps following her. When Marot confronts her on the catwalk high above the stage, AIP cut his lines, “I’ve had my revenge, but it’s not enough. I need love.” After Marot falls, AIP cut his dying words: “The will. The will lives on after death.” But AIP did use this line in the ending that they cobbled together to replace the one created by Hessler.

AIP was so displeased with the twist denouement that they completely restructured it. Their dissatisfaction with Wicking and Hessler’s preferred ending is understandable. Triboulet bringing flowers to Madeleine’s bedroom is neither threatening nor ironic. Its placement at the very end seems to indicate that Wicking and Hessler thought it would have much more impact than it does. In their recut, AIP retained the shots of someone approaching Madeleine’s home as she sleeps. But when the door starts to open and Madeleine sits up in bed, AIP removes the entrance of the dwarf and freezes the frame on Madeleine’s terrified face. The audience never gets to see who enters the bedroom. Over the frozen close-up of Madeleine, AIP plays Marot’s

line, cut from his death scene in the theatre, “The will - the will lives on.” And then AIP runs credits over Madeleine’s terrified face, much like the ending of *The Oblong Box*. Confused, the audience can only assume that Marot has cheated death again and has returned to Madeleine. But Marot’s resurrections in the middle of the movie had somewhat plausible natural explanations based on his mastery of shallow breathing learned from the Great Orsini. In contrast, we have seen Marot’s fatal fall from the flies of the theatre and must deduce that he has risen from the grave by supernatural means this time. Madeleine’s premonitions that come true are not sufficient for us to believe that Marot, too, has unearthly powers.

According to the 13 December 2015 email to the author from Teetzel of MGM, on 1 August 1971, original editor Benedict wrote to Heyward to report his and Hessler's unhappiness about the AIP recut. Their main complaints were the tinting of the dream sequences, the recutting of the Can Can sequence, the removal of the hospital scene between the bandaged Lom and Palmer, and the redubbing of the effects of the chase in the final reel.

Again, according to the same email from Teetzel, the AIP files at MGM contain an 24 August 1971 letter from Nicholson to Benedict defending the changes and citing negative test audience reactions. Nicholson recounted that Marot's dying line about the will lasting forever sent the audience into "gales of laughter." In the letter, he suggested that Benedict and Hessler had lost perspective and were too close to the project. Hessler sent a seven page letter to Arkoff protesting their decision and begging him to, at least, reinstate the original twist ending. Hessler often said later that this letter undoubtedly ended his association with AIP (Del Valle 2003: 44).

Unlike Hessler’s *Cry of the Banshee*, in which AIP’s recut, remix and rescore benefited the film, the company’s tampering with *Murders in the Rue Morgue* blunted many of its good qualities while only exacerbating the confusion they sought to remedy. It also gave the film a ragged, unprofessional quality, with abrupt jumps sometimes in the middle of dialogue or music.

Hessler and Benedict may have lost the battle, in that it was AIP's cut of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* that played in theatres around the world in 1971. But they ultimately won the war, in that it is their cut of the movie which circulates on DVD and Blu-Ray today. Hessler was very fortunate to live long enough to see this one print discovered in the AIP vaults and made available at last as his approved version. MGM Home Entertainment scheduled Hessler's AIP films for restorations in 2000 and discovered that they had more than one version of every title except *Scream and Scream Again.* Deciding to work with the elements closest to the camera negatives, they chose Hessler's director's cuts for *The Oblong Box, Cry of the Banshee* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* No one at MGM seemed to know the difference until Morgan Alexander posted on the Mobius Home Video Forum on 9 February 2002 that the Encore Mystery Channel was broadcasting Hessler's long lost version of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* which had never been seen in public before (Lucas 2003: 24). Tim Lucas, writer and editor of the magazine *Video Watchdog*, saw an airing, found Hessler's phone number and called to ask him if he was aware of the discovery. Lucas writes,

> Hessler was so shocked by the news, he almost couldn't accept it. He kept asking me, 'But how do you know it was my version? … B - But how could this be? Where did they find the materials?' … I sensed that he had been so hurt by AIP's thwarting of his original vision … that he literally couldn't permit himself to believe that his version had survived and prevailed … until he could see the proof with his own eyes (Lucas 2003: 24).

When Lucas informed MGM of Hessler's reaction, the company sent the director VHS video tapes of his cuts of both *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *Cry of the Banshee* (Lucas 2003: 24).

RECEPTION

When AIP's version of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* opened in New York City on a double bill with another of their horror films, *The Return of Count Yorga* (1971), Howard Thompson in the 3 February 1972 *New York Times* gave it a glowing review, writing,

> catch—if you've a penchant for imaginative horror—*Murders in the Rue Morgue* …This is the third go at this Poe we know of. And … it's the most interesting, at least artistically … The punctuation is thick Freud, moored to the scary nightmares of Christine Kauffmann, as Robards' jittery actress wife. Both the plot and the trickery mesh well until the last reel. But a tacked-on, drawn-out postscript almost flattens the fun. However, the entire film is a gorgeous eyeful in excellent colour, with lavish period decor and costumes and some perfectly beautiful dream montages. And under Gordon Hessler's intelligent direction, the suspense deepens, as do some enigmatic characters.

Despite some other good notices, the film grossed the least of the four Hessler and Wicking chillers from AIP, making less than a million dollars in rentals from the United States and Canada. Without Price, the film fared poorly worldwide, ending the relationship of Hessler and Wicking with American International, and, in fact, concluding the eleven year-old series of Poe-inspired films.

The movie's reputation has considerably risen over the years. Hardy's *The Encyclopaedia of Horror Movies,* reviewing it when only AIP's theatrical cut was available, states,

> After their interesting collaboration of *Scream and Scream Again …* Wicking and Hessler appear to have their complex narrative games better under control in this film … the story is told in an intriguingly layered form which ultimately comes to represent the movement of fantasy itself, with its constant shifts from one level to another … In this way, the boundaries of fantasy and reality are totally blurred, suggesting they cannot be distinguished since each is shaped under the determining pressures of the other.

> Perhaps the film's greatest achievement is that it manages to convey this fundamental insight without falling into the paranoid delirium of *Scream and Scream Again*. This allows the film's final sequences to be lifted to the level of surrealistic poetry … The result is Hessler's finest achievement to date (Hardy 1986: 237).

And Smith, in his book, *The Poe Cinema*, also writes of AIP's version,

> I consider Hessler's *Murders in the Rue Morgue* one of the best horror films of the 1970's … During the murder of Genevre, the camera cuts from the screaming, acid-scarred woman to a colourful performance of the can-can … juxtaposing entertainment and death much as Poe does in "The Cask of Amontillado" … Hessler tips his hat to Poe's recurrent theme of premature burial three times in the film … In addition, Lom's "The will - the will lives on!" echoes Poe's "Ligeia" … The greatest strength of the film is its exploration of dream and reality. In fact, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* thematically most resembles the last lines of Poe's poem : "ALL that we see or seem, Is but a dream within a dream" (Smith 1999: 219).

Craig, in his 2019 critical filmography, *American International Pictures,* writes of Hessler's now available original director's cut,

> Gordon Hessler's singular screen adaptation eschews linear narrative for a dream-like string of psychologically infused horror tropes, very much in keeping with the contemporary European horror scenes of the day … Hessler's *Murders* is by far the most visually beautiful AIP Poe film, even surpassing the … art-film aesthetics of the Corman series (Craig 2019: 264).

The glowing reviews, both from the time of the original release and later, seem to be reacting to the innovation and ambition of Hessler and Wicking rather than the impact of the finished film. *Murders in the Rue Morgue* falls flat as an emotional experience, not merely because of the miscalculation of Wicking's twist ending in which the dwarf Triboulet appears in Madeleine's

bedroom, possibly possessed by the will of the dead Marot. The failure of the last scene is merely the final mistake made by the team that ultimately proves the film's undoing. Robards' listless performance removes all charm and dark humour from Charron, and it is this character that Wicking writes as the active investigator of the deaths connected to the theatre. Since Wicking assumed that Price would bring his panache to the role, he naturally wrote Charron as a character as active in his pursuits as the obsessive antagonist, Marot. But Robards' performance unbalances the film, draining sympathy and interest from the protagonist.

Wicking revealed the origin of his structural mistake when he described the story by saying that, "The main character is the daughter of a woman who was loved by two men, and they are still alive" (quoted in Nutman 1989:53). In the finished film, Madeleine is far too passive and unaware to be the "main character" driving the narrative. However, his description also explains the other miscalculation of killing the tragic Charron fifteen minutes before the end of the movie and then placing the unassertive Madeleine in a repetitious series of situations in which she is chased by Marot. Despite the spectacular stunts of the ape onstage and in the crowded and colourful carnival, and despite the well-directed chase of Madeleine by Marot on the catwalks of the dark and deserted theatre, the story of Charron's secret sin and retribution as told for the previous hour has already ended, and interest has peaked long before Marot's final fall to his death.

Wicking and Hessler seem to be abandoning their appeal to the counter-culture in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* until one examines the form of the film over its content. Perhaps more than its story, the film relies on cinematic presentation to create its impression. The movie features brightly coloured settings, especially in its carnival and theatre scenes, preferring to stage them in broad daylight. It also fractures time, using flash-backs and flash-forwards. Hessler gives theatrical events, dreams and reality the same wide-angled distortion, often using slow motion and extreme camera positions. He presents many scenes from the disorienting

subjective viewpoint of a character. What is the sum total of Hessler's technique? The fact is that, without mentioning it, the film often seems to be telling the story as seen through the filter of a drug experience. Recreational drugs were as much a part of the counter-culture in the early seventies as demonstrating for civil rights, paranoia of the military, protesting the establishment and attending rock concerts. Either intentionally or as a "contact high," Wicking and Hessler give *Murders in the Rue Morgue* a trippy but sickly surface that definitely harkens back to the drug-laced, often sinister 1960s and 70s, despite its nineteenth century period setting.

In fact, Madeleine's dreams in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* recall some of the less psychedelic visions of Peter Fonda in Corman's seminal drug movie, *The Trip* (1967). Madeleine's visions in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* take place in actual locations such as Charron's and her Mother's theatres, and the interiors and grounds of her Mother's mansion. Similarly, Fonda's LSD induced hallucinations in *The Trip* are often set amidst the sun-dappled woods of California's Big Sur, Bronson Canyon and Griffith Park. In both movies, these actual places are populated by symbolic characters, such as the Axeman and Madeleine's corpse in *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* and the Dark Riders on horseback, and various dwarfs and cowled figures in medieval costumes in *The Trip.* Characters from their waking lives confront the visionaries in their dreams in both films, often presented looking straight into the camera from the point of view of the dreamer. Madeleine encounters the dwarf Triboulet, bowing and doffing his hat to her in the park, Marot opening his arms to her at the entrance of her Mother's mausoleum and her Mother gliding towards her in slow motion down the aisle of her theatre. Similarly, Fonda finds his estranged wife, his local drug dealer, the blonde young woman he just met and various other real people populating his LSD trip. Both directors, Corman and Hessler, distort their protagonists' visions using wide-angled lenses and slow-motion. And both directors emphasise the Gothic nature of their dreamers' surroundings. In *The Trip,* Corman actually uses a shot of the sinister mansion from his earlier Poe film, *House of Usher,* and has Fonda

hallucinate himself as Poe, descending into a torch-lit dungeon, trapped by cowled torturers and hung by the neck dressed as the famous author. In *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* Madeleine's dreams replay scenes from her husband's Gothic play of Poe's story, complete with a rampaging ape. She flees from a masked Axeman dressed in top hat and cape and sees her own grey-faced corpse rise and beckon her from her Mother's tomb.

However, despite being a counter-cultural nod to escape from reality through altered subjective states, as well as another auteurist rumination on personal themes such as sin and retribution and the crimes of the old visited on the young, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* fails to maintain the same genre excitement as the three previous Hessler and Wicking collaborations. Casting and structural problems undo the impact of a story that, at its core, is extremely similar to the team's more successful key work, *The Oblong Box.* Unfortunately, even though the reviews for *Murders in the Rue Morgue* rivalled those for *Scream and Scream Again,* audiences rejected the flawed genre piece and stayed away. The movie remains today what it was at release: an intriguing curate's egg that has a specialised but limited appeal.

CHAPTER 9 - AFTER AIP

In 1973, Wicking and Hessler worked together on one last completed movie, but not in the horror genre and not for AIP. *Medusa* was a crime thriller with some gruesome killings that was directed in Rhodes, Greece by Hessler, written by Wicking, and produced by the American actor, George Hamilton, who also starred. Lucianna Puluzzi and Hamilton play a privileged and amoral brother and sister who kill anyone who might have possession of a secret document that disinherits them from their late father's fortune. No American or British distributor would finance a theatrical release, but according to the Internet Movie Database, the film did open in Italy in 1973 and in Mexico in 1982. A vanity project for Hamilton, *Medusa* is clearly structured around the Hessler and Wicking theme of sin and retribution, but it falls outside the bounds of this study in terms of genre and production company. Well directed with an amusingly sinister character turn by Cameron Mitchell as a frustrated gangster, *Medusa* suffers from a low budget, an un-involving story, unsympathetic characters and a charmless performance by Hamilton. Some elements display similarities to Hessler and Wicking's movies for AIP such as the scene of a man attacking a beautiful woman intercut with other characters enjoying live music as in *The Oblong Box* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* a handsome but disturbed young murderer as in *Scream and Scream Again* and *Cry of the Banshee*, and a professionally determined police inspector as in *The Oblong Box, Scream and Scream Again* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* The first sequence also features a virtuoso hand-held moving shot from the deck of an empty yacht bobbing in the sea, down to the corridor below where a fully dressed couple is glimpsed on a bed through the swinging door of a cabin, through the door and up to a close shot of the couple's hands clenched together in death. Wicking mirrors the cynical opening of Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1951) by having Hamilton narrate the scene as one of the corpses on the bed. The film's low budget precluded any further examples of Hessler's favoured long camera moves. No attempt is made to hint at a political subtext or explore the concerns of the counter-

culture of the time. *Medusa* has neither the polish nor the conceptual originality of the team's four AIP films, and it is easy to see why it never achieved theatrical distribution in major markets.

After his collaborations with Wicking, Hessler directed the Ray Harryhausen stop-motion classic, *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* (1973). He also helmed several American movies of the week and series episodes. His best known TV movies are in the horror genre: 1973's *Scream, Pretty Peggy* with Bette Davis and co-written by Hammer Films veteran Sangster, and 1977's *The Strange Possession of Mrs. Oliver* with Karen Black and scripted by Matheson. He directed episodes of *Lucas Tanner*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *Chips* and one story for *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* called "The Spanish Moss Murders" that many consider the best of its twenty episodes. Hessler died in his sleep on 19 January 2014 in London (Bowie 2014).

After his collaborations with Hessler, Wicking wrote three Hammer horror movies, *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb* (1971), *Demons of the Mind* (1972) and *To the Devil a Daughter* (1976), as well as co-writing *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1981) and *Absolute Beginners* (1986). His last produced credit was, appropriately, a British horror film called *Dream Demon* in 1988. Wicking also wrote episodes for British TV series *The Professionals* from 1979 to 1982, *Jemima Shore Investigates* in 1983, and the TV dramas *The Way to Dusty Death* in 1995, *On Dangerous Ground* in 1996, and *Powers* in 2004 (Jeremy 2008).

Wicking also taught screenwriting at many schools in England, including the Royal College of Art; and, in Ireland, at University College Dublin, among others. He promoted what film critic Manny Farber called "termite art" (Farber 2009: 533-542)): low budget genre movies that featured personal vision and singularity rather than expensive studio "white elephant art" that lacked economy of expression and an artist's philosophy and style (Jeremy 2008). In other words, in addition to being an auteur himself, Wicking was an ardent advocate of auteurism. John Jeremy wrote of Wicking in the Friday, 24 October 2008 *The Independent*:

> Students were quickly agog at his sparky erudition. Nor was it only film talk. To friends, he would discourse for an hour on new-kid-on-the-block Bob Dylan, and later in the evening, for a further hour, on the then controversial Richard Strauss (Jeremy 2008).

At the end of his life, Wicking divided his time between his production company in Ireland and his home in Toulouse, France with his second wife, the stage director Lily Susan Todd. He died there on 13 October 2008 of a heart attack at the age of 65 (Jeremy 2008).

Hessler and Wicking realised their potentials as artists in the film medium far better together than they did separately. Wicking's expressions of youthful rebellion in his adaptations of existing literary material unleashed the political sympathies in the middle-aged Hessler. And the confident abandon with which Hessler used cinematic technique, even experimenting with then avant-garde elements such as hand-held cameras, zooms, and extreme wide angle lenses, perfectly captured Wicking's defiant transforming of genre conventions into radical political metaphors. Since both contributed to the writing and filming of each project, their partnership was a a true synthesis of artists into one personal style and philosophy. Never again would either man have such sympathetic conditions with which to reveal themselves or a collaborator who not only aided in their individual self-expression but expanded it.

Both filmmakers fit the descriptions of auteurs set down by the definers of the term. Hessler was a master craftsman, had a distinguishable and unique directorial style and communicated a personal and profound interior meaning with consistent themes, attitudes and subtexts interpreted cinematically from the narrative material. The last premise was very much the result of Hessler working with Wicking, who helped the director shape the narrative in a literary sense to reveal his artistic personality. Because of his mastery of Sarris's first two premises for an auteur, namely craft and style, Hessler became a "gun for hire" after his partnership with Wicking, bringing his skills to the projects of others, sometimes with rewarding results as in the case of Charles H. Schneer and Harryhausen's *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad,*

but more often for far less worthy endeavours such as *Pray for Death* (1985), *Journey of Honor* (1991) and the various TV movies and episodes he directed.

In the case of Wicking, he fit the criteria set out by Richard Corliss for the screenwriter as auteur. Corliss wrote, "If a writer has been associated with a number of favourite films, if he has received sole writing credit on some of these films, and if we can decipher a common style in films with different directors and actors, an authorial personality begins to appear" (Corliss 1974: xxv). After his association with Hessler, Wicking did receive sole screenwriting credit on two of the three interesting Hammer Films to which he contributed: *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb* (1971) and *Demons of the Mind* (1971). On the third film for Hammer, *To the Devil a Daughter* (1976), Wicking got sole screenwriting credit, but John Peacock also received a credit for adaptation for an unsatisfactory discarded first draft, and an uncredited Gerald Vaughan-Hughes made changes to Wicking's script for the director, Peter Sykes, during production (Maxford 2019: 800).

In all three of Wicking's Hammer projects, many of the writer's themes and personal concerns from the earlier Hessler films appear, but only *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb* approaches the synthesis of subject and style as seen in the AIP efforts. Wicking adapted Bram Stoker's 1903 novel, *The Jewel of Seven Stars* into *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb,* emphasising the theme of "the sins of the fathers." In this case, the sin occurs when British archeologists desecrate the burial place and remove the perfectly preserved body of an ancient Egyptian sorceress. Retribution is visited on the young in the form of the dead sorceress's possession of the daughter of the leader of the expedition. The daughter is born at the moment of the tomb's opening, and she grows up to look exactly like the beautiful ancient Egyptian. The young woman visits the vengeance of the sorceress on all of the tomb's raiders, an element added to Stoker's story by Wicking. Wicking also emphasises the generational conflict between the young daughter and the older associates she dispatches when possessed by the sorceress.

As in *The Oblong Box,* Wicking shows no sympathy for the British colonisers, characterising them as mad, or eccentric or blindly obsessed. Wicking sides with the sexy sorceress and the possessed daughter who rebel against both the science of the present and the religious orders of ancient Egypt.

When Hessler was unavailable, Wicking recommended Seth Holt to direct on the strength of his outstanding work on two Hammer psychological suspense movies, *Taste of Fear* (1961) and *The Nanny* (1965). But unlike his relationship with Hessler, Wicking had problems with his collaborators, even falling out with producer Howard Brandy and being barred from the set (Maxford 2019: 60). Of director Holt, Wicking said, “his personal problems, notably his alcoholism, meant that the film was already in trouble, even before Holt’s death during the making - the producer Michael Carreras finished it” (quoted in Forshaw 2013: 201). Because the director died of a heart attack during production and the filming was completed and edited by other hands, the movie has a certain patchwork quality and an uncertain visual style. It also lacks Hessler’s documentary-like realism, filming mostly on sets instead of locations, even for exteriors, and using stylised lighting and camera angles. Holt allows many of his actors, such as James Villiers, George Coulouris, Rosilie Crutchley, Aubrey Morris, and James Cossins, to indulge in melodramatic theatrical excess, constantly calling attention to the artifice of their performances. Holt’s stylisation robs Wicking’s supernatural narrative of any sense of reality and diminishes its plausibility and effectiveness. Nevertheless, the film does fitfully work as a suspenseful and even frightening new take on the cliched mummy story. Wicking described it as “the only mummy movie without a figure stumbling around in bandages. Again, it was a chance to try something different” (quoted in Nutman 1989: 53-54).

Wicking’s themes also appear in his script for *Demons of the Mind,* but despite, Wicking’s presence during filming, Peter Sykes’ direction and lack of guidance on the screenplay severely blunt the impact of the movie. The psychological tale of the fall of a corrupt

family in nineteenth century Bavaria, this unique gothic from Hammer resembles *Cry of the Banshee* in its exploration of the effects of religion, superstition and reason on a disintegrating clan. Wicking criticises the authority figures from every belief system: the discredited Mesmerist played by Patrick McGee, the insane priest played by Micheal Hordern and the superstitious family patriarch played by Robert Hardy. Their misguided influences doom Hardy's children and drive them to madness, incest and murder. Unfortunately, Sykes presents the proceedings as a serious period drama, directing dialogue to be delivered earnestly and sedately and editing scenes to proceed slowly. This decelerates Wicking's characteristic intercutting of subplots to build the narrative until all interest vanishes in the events. Sharing some of the blame, Wicking attempts to add too many ideas into the story, including nightmares, curses, paganism, incest, sexual repression and early psychoanalysis. A more involved director like Hessler might have been able to organise and prune some of Wicking's notions into a more coherent and entertaining whole.

The same director, Sykes, insisted on scenes being rewritten by Gerald Vaughan-Hughes during shooting of Wicking's script for *To the Devil a Daughter*, further confirmation of the incompatibility of the two filmmakers. Very freely adapted from Dennis Wheatley's novel, the finished film shows little evidence of Wicking's interest in political metaphors and only shares with the sixties counter-culture its exploration of the occult and alternative religions. Wheatley's story does provide the themes of the exploitation of the young by the corrupt systems of the older generation and a very Christian portrayal of sin and retribution, but without Wicking's usual context of rebellion against the social establishment. In fact, the movie is quite reactionary in its Old Testament insistence on punishing transgressions against western religious orthodoxy. Characteristically, Wicking wanted to change the context of the story from religion to science. He said,

> Now the character in the book … What he's doing is creating homunculi. Reading it I thought, 'Oh, what Wheatley's done here is he has pre-thought the whole concept of DNA and the idea of the genetic code.' I thought that's the way to tell the story … if there is anything at all in magic, basically it's science in a way that we don't comprehend … They said no you can't do it, so we were stuck trying to remake *Rosemary's Baby* without remaking *Rosemary's Baby* (Decharne 1998: 23-24).

Again, the incompatibility of the director's style and vision with that of Wicking prevented the kind of profound and personal collaboration that could communicate a shared "inner meaning." Only with Hessler did Wicking feel that his concepts were fully envisioned, just as only with Wicking did Hessler feel that the material was provided that could be interpreted in a way meaningful to him.

The four AIP films of Hessler and Wicking confirm the utility of the auteurist partnership of writer and director as defined by Corliss. Hessler and Wicking were never able to attain the clout in the industry to guide the material in personal ways from its writing to its final form after their work for AIP. Both certainly had the talent and the vision, but only when they worked together with the relative freedom afforded them by American International were they able to fulfil their promise as artists, and their four collaborations need to be regarded as works by dual auteurs that were never duplicated because the circumstances of creation were never repeated.

CHAPTER 10 - CONCLUSION

Hessler and Wicking worked together to fashion a distinctive cinematic approach, following in the tradition of British dual auteurs who preceded them such as Powell and Pressburger, Deardon and Relph and the Boulting Brothers. Although their careers were neither as prolific nor as enduring as their predecessors, Hessler and Wicking managed to design a technique and viewpoint that was original and profound. This study has followed the advice of Corliss and Kipen in investigating the primary documents used to create the works as well as the words of the creators themselves in describing their process. Utilising this author's experiences as a screenwriter and cinematic collaborator, this thesis has detailed and analysed the specific contributions of Hessler and Wicking to each of their films, validating their positions as the driving and equal forces behind their body of work.

Without doing the intense investigations into the making of the movies necessary to fully understand their creation, most cineasts might have difficulty coming to the conclusion that Hessler and Wicking were indeed the dual auteurs of the horror films they made together. Reviews at the time of their releases and the assessments in historic surveys until the present day generally dismiss the movies as inferior literary adaptations, convoluted collages of story ideas and pandering exploitation. Even critics who found something to admire in one or two of the titles, usually *Scream and Scream Again* or *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* could not see their relation to the styles and themes of the other films by the team or detect a unifying personality behind all four.

The unique style and viewpoint of the dual auteurs emerged in *The Oblong Box,* their very first collaboration. By changing original writer Huntington's character, Sir Edward Whitman, from a stock villain who incurs the wrath of an evil West African sorcerer into the victim of his own brother's thoughtless treatment of innocent locals on their plantation, Wicking transformed a cliched supernatural melodrama into the personal tragedy of a repentant sinner and, by

extension, colonial Britain itself. And Hessler matched the innovative narrative of Wicking with an invigorating visual sensibility, utilising vanguard techniques in actual locations to consciously challenge the standard cinematic coverage of Fisher, the stage-bound settings of Corman and even the picturesque compositions of Reeves. Hessler and Wicking combined their talents to create a single vision, even sharing writing and directing duties such as writer Wicking suggesting the crane shot that introduced Superintendent Bellaver in *Scream and Scream Again* or director Hessler accompanying Wicking to Scotland to find story ideas for *Cry of the Banshee.* And after the rewarding experience of *The Oblong Box,* Hessler insisted on having Wicking rewrite every one of the director's AIP assignments into their cooperative ventures.

AIP only allowed the team to make one horror movie with a contemporary setting, *Scream and Scream Again,* but Hessler and Wicking responded with their most direct critique of the modern military-industrial establishment as well as the New Left's attempts to remake society into a utopian paradise, all without any need for historical metaphor. Wicking's bold intercutting of seemingly unrelated stories and Hessler's skill at creating exciting cinematic set-pieces combined to energise a movie that would have been hailed as ground-breaking in any other genre besides low-budget horror. Indeed, the avant-garde structure predicted the emerging interest in non-linear story-telling in later mainstream movies as disparate as *Nashville* (1975) and *Crash* (2004).

Taking the riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago as their inspiration, Hessler and Wicking presented their most direct metaphor for the gap between generations, classes, genders and cultures in their own time by framing them in the setting of rural Elizabethan England in the sixteenth century in *Cry of the Banshee.* Pitting youth against age, rich against poor, men against women and Christian against pagan, the narrative reflects the struggle around the world in the late 1960s in the mirror of the very real conflicts caused by church and state during the Renaissance. Hessler and Wicking present the historic

"establishment" of the 1500s as oppressive patriarchs but also question the emerging savagery of the pagan resistance, the filmmakers responding to the shockingly gruesome Manson hippie-cult murders of 1969. As in *Scream and Scream Again,* Hessler and Wicking use the genre material as a sobering warning against the violent brutality barely disguised under the surface of the institutions of civilisation, victimising anyone who does not conform to the ruling patriarchy. They also criticise the violent reactions from society's underclass, rendering them no better, morally, than their oppressors.

Hessler and Wicking abandoned political parable in their last AIP collaboration, *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* their most expensive and stylistically ambitious work but also their least successful commercially and artistically. While still exploring personal themes such as sin and retribution and the abuse of youth and women by the patriarchy, Hessler and Wicking fracture the narrative into different states of reality such as dream, theatre and premonition, and cinematically present it like a drug hallucination. AIP was not confident with the results and drastically changed it before release to prevent audience confusion. Uncharacteristically, Hessler's casting and Wicking's avant-garde structure further blunted the effect, muddling what, at its core, was a reworking of the story elements of their more impressive first effort, *The Oblong Box.* Despite some reviews that admired the film's novelty and flamboyance, its commercial failure ended the relationship of Hessler and Wicking with AIP, separating one of the most effective dual auteurs in horror film history.

Unfortunately, after their split, Hessler and Wicker could never again fully communicate their themes alone. Because of his facility with technique and his discipline with budget, Hessler found work as a jobbing director but was not given the opportunity to guide the shaping of the narratives as he did at AIP. Wicking introduced some of his themes in scripts for other companies, especially in two of the three scripts he did for Hammer Films, but his directors were not sympathetic or collaborative, and the writer was barred from one set and rewritten on

another. The most potent proof of the dual authorship of Hessler and Wicking is the comparison of the films they did alone with those they did together.

Their four horror movies for AIP were very idiosyncratic reactions to a very specific and unique period in the genre. By the end of the sixties, younger directors attempted to expand the scope of the gothic to include issues that contradicted the earlier works of the decade. Extending this renaissance were the films of Hessler and Wicking, which were both more cinematically daring and more politically explicit than even the earlier examples of this new approach. But critically and historically, the four movies seem to have fallen between the cracks. They signal the end of period gothics without sharing their specific feeling or technique, at the same time announcing the beginning of more real, violent, and nihilistic modern horrors such as *The Exorcist* (1973), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Halloween* (1978), again without being one of their number. With the exception of *Scream and Scream Again*, they take place in a distant past but with decidedly modern views of violence, sex, power and protest. The Hessler and Wicking movies are warnings about corruption and power instead of melancholy musings or scare machines.

By demonstrating through close analysis of the screenplays of their four movies exactly how this kind of collaboration works in practice, this study presents the creative partnership of Hessler and Wicking as an obvious example of Corliss's "multiple auteurs." The script drafts and the remembrances of the two creators illustrate the thematic and stylistic development of the projects through many rewrites and changes all through production. The conditions of the British horror film industry in the late sixties and early seventies were ideal for professional filmmakers with sympathetic attitudes, working in concert, to make radical, metaphorically political statements reflecting the societal upheavals of the time and get the projects approved by producers and distributors to reach compatible audiences. And because these four AIP horror

films were created by the dual auteur team of Hessler and Wicking, they were like no movies before or since, even by the same two artists working individually.

APPENDIX A - HESSLER'S CUT AND AIP'S CUT OF CRY OF THE BANSHEE

Hessler's director's cut of *Cry of the Banshee* begins with an AIP logo and the Poe quotation from his poem, "The Bells." Gilliam's impressive animated titles follow with a cut-out head of Price rising from the English landscape, splitting open and disgorging demons which fly into the air. Credits appear amid the various flying creatures.

AIP's theatrical cut begins with a different AIP logo and the same Poe quotation. It then fades directly into Lord Edward and his men massacring Oona's coven and the scene in which Oona curses the Whitmans, summoning Roderick as her avenger. These scenes do not occur in Hessler's cut until thirty-three minutes into the movie. Hessler's original version also contains more shots of the nude girl lying on the altar, including two of her lying on the ground with her breasts exposed. The director also has Mickey observing the massacre with expressions of shock and sadness. Mickey is not seen at all in the theatrical version of the scene. Hessler's uncut version times out as twenty-five seconds longer than AIP's theatrical edit.

In AIP's version, the opening credits follow the massacre and Oona cursing the Whitmans. They appear over still shots of Gilliam's creatures without any attempt to animate the monsters. Baxter's main title theme in the AIP cut is both more exciting and more contemporary than Josephs' traditionally orchestrated work. The font used for the names of the cast and crew is much larger in the theatrical version.

Following the opening credits, both versions resume with the scene in which a suspected young witch is branded while being tried by Lord Edward. The AIP version cuts three seconds from the woman's scream while being branded and another five seconds from the beginning of the later shot of her crying before she says "Nothing, nothing."

AIP's theatrical version removes seventeen seconds from the beginning of the next scene in which soldiers drag the branded woman to a cart, rip open the back of her blouse, and a villager whips her. The theatrical version starts the scene with the woman already tied to the

moving cart. AIP also omits four seconds of whipping as the cart drags her. Another five seconds of whipping is removed because the woman's open blouse clearly reveals her breasts. A twelve second close shot of the woman being placed on the stocks has been eliminated because, again, her exposed breasts are visible. The theatrical version cuts away to Lord Edward and his men watching from the courthouse door to bridge the deleted action, a shot taken from slightly earlier in the scene in Hessler's cut. Again, after the woman's feet are secured in the stocks, the AIP version cuts away from her before another reveal of her nipples. All of these cuts are skilfully and seamlessly done by AIP, speeding up the gruelling scene while removing any sense of gratuitous exploitation.

After a villager on horseback dumps his murdered sheep in the street in front of Lord Edward, a shot of Edward and his men looking down at it and a close shot of the villager saying, "I've never seen anything like it. It's as if the hound's possessed," have been cut, along with a bloody close shot of the sheep's throat.

AIP cut the end of the incestuous bedroom scene between Lady Patricia and her stepson, Sean. In the theatrical cut, the scene ends just after Sean kisses her on the bed. AIP removed one minute of Sean violently stripping his stepmother, revealing her nipples. After struggling with him, she capitulates and even seems to be aroused. It is surprising that AIP left any of this obviously incestuous encounter and equally surprising that the newly created ratings board gave the film a GP rating, allowing all ages to see it.

In the AIP theatrical cut, the shot of a hanged man being cut down is abridged by four seconds, removing Mickey's line "We'll be more gentle to him than those who strung him up there," possibly to eliminate a slight movement of the supposed corpse's fingers. This sudden view of a hanged man is scored by Baxter in the AIP version with a jarring electronic crash that is very sobering. Josephs chooses to let it play without music in the director's cut.

In the uncut version, the long scene in the tavern occurs after Maureen and Father Tom's walk in the garden. It appears about ten minutes later in the AIP cut, after the scene in which Lord Edward argues with Harry and Maureen when she sneaks into the house at night and before the sequence in which the Sidhe kills Sean. The theatrical version cuts from the garden scene to Roderick lying in the barn and bridges the two by inserting a brief shot of howling wolves from later in the film.

In Hessler's original edit, the tavern scene leads directly to the attack on Oona's coven because the witch in the tavern tells Sean of Oona's powers. Of course, the massacre has already occurred in AIP's version as the pre-credits sequence. In the AIP version, the tavern scene leads to Sean's death, with Sean and his two henchmen fortunately still singing the bawdy song heard in the tavern as they ride into the dark forest carrying torches.

The version of the tavern scene in AIP's theatrical print eliminates the entire 54 second harassment and violent bodice-ripping of the new barmaid. AIP efficiently hides the deletion by cutting to the reaction shot of a laughing villager and then cutting back to Maggie dropping her basket containing "charms for the old folks." When Sean forces Maggie to reveal Oona's name, AIP optically reframes several shots of her to eliminate her exposed breasts below the bottom frame.

AIP tinted red all the scenes in the cave showing Oona and her coven in the theatrical version. Hessler's version uses no colour alterations in these scenes.

After the Sidhe kills Sean, Hessler cuts to his funeral. AIP, on the other hand, inserts the scene of Oona burning Sean's doll effigy, a moment that appears after the funeral in Hessler's version.

During the fight between Burke and Harry, AIP removed two brief reaction shots of the young witch hanging over the burning coals. When Bully Boy cuts her down and Lord Edward

questions her, several shots were reframed by AIP so her exposed nipples disappear below the bottom frame. In Hessler's uncut version, her breasts are clearly visible.

When Oona stabs a pin into the doll effigy of Lady Patricia, AIP removed the next shot of Patricia screaming at the Sidhe's attack and another shot of Patricia's blood squirting across the wall. Also, AIP deleted four seconds of the 180 degree camera move that opens the shot of Lady Patricia lying dead. In the theatrical version, Oona throws the effigy into the fire right after Lady Patricia's murder. That scene does not appear in the uncut version until after Lady Patricia's funeral.

In the town square, after Lord Edward tells Bully Boy, "Carry out my plan," AIP removed a seven second shot of a wagon wheel being rolled to the crowd so that the barmaid can be tied to it and burned.

Two shots of Lord Edward whipping Roderick in Maureen's bedroom were deleted by AIP, shortening the whipping by six seconds. The theatrical version also eliminates Bully Boy punching Roderick in the stomach after he has been chained to the wall, along with Bully Boy's line, "I would pray for that if I were you."

APPENDIX B: HESSLER'S CUT AND AIP'S CUT OF MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE

AIP's changes to Hessler's cut of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* begin in the first, pre-credit scene with Madeleine fainting onstage during a performance of the play. AIP tinted her dream, and all subsequent visions and premonitions, red, telling the audience explicitly that they are not real. This seriously weakened Hessler's efforts to blend fantasy and reality, dream and waking in a sort of endless nightmare of uncertainty. But Arkoff insisted on tinting these dreams even though the slow motion, the music and the surreal action made the scenes quite obviously the products of Madeleine's sleeping unconscious.

AIP cut the action of the entrance of the gendarmes and the attempted escape of the ape to a minimum. In AIP's version, after the sound of the gendarmes entering the room off-screen, one of them is first seen already pointing his pistol up at the ape on the stairway. This fortunately removes the shot of the ape throwing back his head and screaming, revealing a glimpse of the human neck under the mask. AIP also moved the main titles up by cutting into a line of Madeleine's dialogue while she stands with Charron to take their curtain call. After Charron warns her, "You must learn not to fall asleep on the stage," AIP cut the second sentence of her response, "Oh, Cesar, don't joke. It was horrible," making the edit very obvious and ragged. They cut to a very close shot of the actor in the ape costume watching from the wings and place a credit over it that reads, "Samuel Z. Arkoff and James H. Nicholson Presents" before abruptly cutting to the interior of the auditorium with Jason Robards' credit over it. This jumps to the theatre exterior where the billboard announces the play's title, *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, which also serves as the title card for the film. All of these edits seem jarring and obvious, giving the movie, in its first moments, a very unpolished and arbitrary feeling, especially after the over-lit, handheld, and unconvincing presentation of the play scene.

Following the credits, AIP cuts back to Hessler's pre-credit sequence, showing the actor in the ape costume walking calmly to his dressing room. After the stagehand finds Eric's acid-

scarred body in the wardrobe, AIP shortened his search for the police as well as the officers' pursuit of Marot through the cobble-stoned alleys.

AIP removes the dialogue before Inspector Vidocq's exit in a coach from the exterior shot of the theatre after the first scene between Vidocq and Charron in the auditorium. They also remove a short moment when children laugh at a "Punch and Judy" show, so that the audience has no idea that the colourful box from which Triboulet exits is his little puppet theatre. Because of this omission, we also have no idea that Triboulet is the puppeteer, and later, when Madeleine and Charron see the "Punch and Judy" show that exactly replicates their supposed murder of Marot, we cannot know that Triboulet is performing it to spark their guilt.

AIP cuts a brief scene, less than a minute long, in which two actresses walk by a flirting couple in the wings and hit the sheet of metal used to create thunder, making a loud noise. The stage manager blames the romancing couple and docks them part of their salaries. At the end of the movie, Madeleine backs into the metal sheet while trying to avoid Marot. While the set-up may have not have been necessary, its removal also seems arbitrary and without benefit. The dialogue scene that follows between Charron and Madeleine in their dressing room was also jettisoned by AIP. In the cut scene, Madeleine wonders what her dreams mean, and Charron complacently tells her that they have no meaning.

The company eliminated the first appearances of Madame Adolphe, the proprietress of the high-class brothel in which Charron meets with Genevre. Both her initial conversation with Charron and a later moment when she watches a man drinking champagne from the shoe of a prostitute hit the cutting room floor. The entire exchange between Charron and Madeleine the next morning in their home in which they discuss Genevre's murder was deleted. AIP shortens the Great Orsini's live burial scene, removing the sound of the intentionally fake weeping of his costumed assistant as she throws herself on the casket.

Along with the ending, Hessler most regretted AIP's removal of the hospital scene with Marot and Madeleine's Mother. AIP cuts out of the scene right after the young nurse, played by an uncredited Brooke Adams in her first film, tells Charron, "Oh yes, sir. He can speak alright." AIP immediately returns to Charron telling the back story to Madeleine, saying, "Shortly after, he committed suicide." Hessler and his editor, Max Benedict, were completely correct in wanting the hospital scene in the movie, since it shows the sincere and selfless love of Madeleine's Mother for Marot and the equally unselfish rejection of that love by him. The characters become complex and sympathetic instead of mere puppets in a complicated melodrama. In addition, the performances by Lom and especially Palmer are realistic, mature and moving. The scene edges the contrivances of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* closer to something like tragedy. Hessler said,

> Lilli Palmer had a marvellous role in the picture - she was the catalyst for the film to shift into a new gear, and her role made the whole story make sense - but it was almost all cut out. Incredible. They cut it down so she was almost like an extra. I don't know what she must have thought when she saw the film (quoted in Weaver 1991: 151).

At the climax, when Madeleine tries to get away from the unseen Marot in the empty theatre, AIP adds the sounds of footsteps following her. When Marot confronts her on the catwalk high above the stage, AIP cuts his lines, "I've had my revenge, but it's not enough. I need love." After Marot falls, AIP cuts his dying words: "The will. The will lives on after death." But AIP does use this line in the ending that they cobbled together to replace the one created by Hessler.

AIP was so displeased with the twist denouement that they completely restructured it. Their dissatisfaction with Wicking and Hessler's preferred ending is understandable. Triboulet bringing flowers to Madeleine's bedroom is neither threatening nor ironic. Its placement at the very end seems to indicate that Wicking and Hessler thought it would have much more impact than it does. In their recut, AIP retains the shots of someone approaching Madeleine's home as she sleeps. But when the door starts to open and Madeleine sits up in bed, AIP removes the

entrance of the dwarf and freezes the frame on Madeleine's terrified face. The audience never gets to see who enters the bedroom. Over the frozen close-up of Madeleine, AIP plays Marot's line, cut from his death scene in the theatre, "The will - the will lives on." And then AIP runs credits over Madeleine's terrified face, much like the ending of *The Oblong Box*.

Confused, the audience can only assume that Marot has cheated death again and has returned to Madeleine. But Marot's resurrections in the middle of the movie has somewhat plausible natural explanations based on his mastery of shallow breathing learned from the Great Orsini. In contrast, we have seen Marot's fatal fall from the flies of the theatre and must deduce that he has risen from the grave by supernatural means this time. Madeleine's premonitions that come true are not sufficient for us to believe that Marot, too, has unearthly powers.

APPENDIX C - UNREALISED PROJECTS

In the 2008 update of his seminal work on British horror, *A New Heritage of Horror*, Pirie writes of *Scream and Scream Again:*

> The film did very well on release so it certainly seemed there was a niche for modern subversive British horror thrillers of this kind, and Hessler and Wicking would have been the perfect pair to make them. Wicking in fact wrote a kind of unofficial sequel called *Killer Trip* - about a teenager programmed to kill via a sensory implant in his brain - but there were no takers and AIP never picked up on the franchise they had created. In this respect it is a great pity *Scream and Scream Again* was not made by Hammer. James Carerras had many faults, but myopia about success was not one of them. There certainly would have been more. Instead, having proved how hungry and successful they were for the present, Hessler and Wicking were shunted back by AIP into the past. And they would never work together again on a contemporary UK subject (Pirie 2008: 177).

KILLER TRIP

The original 44 page screen story for *Killer Trip* by Wicking bears the copyright date of 1971 on its title page, and the rights holder as Frank Godwin Productions Ltd of London. Godwin had produced the award winning domestic drama *Woman in a Dressing Gown*, directed by J. Lee Thompson in 1957, and would go on to produce *Demons of the Mind* (1972) for Hammer Films from a screenplay by Wicking. Wicking must have finished the story outline for *Killer Trip* right after his duties on *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* undoubtedly with the idea of selling it to AIP for Hessler to direct.

The story of *Killer Trip* does harken back to some of the themes and plot points of *Scream and Scream Again* but without the complex narrative intercutting. Wicking writes a brief preface to the outline stating:

> Much about our modern society, the creeping advances in technology, the manipulation of man by science, by the machine, gives pause to the concerned and the aware. We have gained, but what? We have lost, but what? The beast within us continues to fight with the intellect. *Killer Trip* is deeply ambiguous in shape and story, fuses horror with Hitchcock, is a science-fiction *Psycho.* But it's the battle between man, his own nature and the machines he has built to control him which propels the picture, gives it its compulsion and tragedy (Wicking 1971: intro).

Wicking tells the story of Steve McCorley, a young man who has been programmed by a government-affiliated scientist named Dr. Pagett. The doctor works under the command of Leander, a high police official. At his university, Dr. Pagett has surgically placed an implant in Steve's brain that allows the scientist's computer to stimulate his natural impulses. Dr. Pagett is interested in death and the violent instincts in man, and he causes Steve to murder women during sex. The doctor employs a squad of plain clothes-men who arrive at the murder scenes, remove the bodies and clean up the traces. Steve experiences violent hallucinations during the murders called killer trips: combinations of bad LSD visions and flurries of violent images. However, Steve is not aware of his bloody actions.

The scientist sends a young woman assistant named Elaine to escort Steve back to the university after one of his murders. But Elaine, attracted to the brooding Steve, gets involved in his murder of Teresa, the young man's sexually aggressive landlady. Elaine becomes aroused by the violence and helps Steve when he confronts Dr. Pagett at the university. Dr. Pagett tries to prevent Steve from destroying the computer that sends impulses to his brain, and Steve kills the doctor. He and Elaine try to escape as Leander and the police chase them, first in cars and

finally, up a heap of coal slag at an abandoned mine. Steve shoots Leander to death and turns the gun on himself to blow the implant out of his brain. But he has run out of bullets, and the police capture him and Elaine. The last scene sees Steve and Elaine wandering with other experimental subjects around the grounds of the university asylum, completely unaware of their past or of each other.

Writing an unusually bleak and hopeless story, Wicking does not clearly indicate what Dr. Pagett hopes to learn from his deadly experiments. In addition, Wicking gives the reader no characters with whom to identify. Even Elaine is voluntarily complicit in Steve's murder of innocent women, and Steve's suffering is mitigated by his brutality. Wicking even has him laugh maniacally at the destruction he causes trying to escape from Leander and the police after the computer has stopped controlling his mind.

Despite the superficial similarities to *Scream and Scream Again,* including the car chase after the young sex killer by the police that ends up on foot at a quarry, AIP undoubtedly felt that *Killer Trip* suffered by comparison and had no chance to top their star-studded science-fiction horror hit. Undaunted, in 1973, Wicking expanded his story into a 99 page screenplay co-written by none other than Pirie, who had just completed *A Heritage of Horror*. Their screenplay follows the outline fairly closely but allows the villains, Dr. Pagett and Leander, to live at the end. Wicking and Pirie try to give some depth to Dr. Pagett's obsession with death and human aggression but still fail to believably motivate him in forcing Steve to commit senseless murders. Even in these early drafts, the project dramatises Wicking's familiar theme of sin and retribution in the actions and fate of Steve, and even Dr. Pagett and Leander in Wicking's early treatment. In addition, it clearly presents ageing authority, due to their own degeneracy, corrupting and destroying the lives of the young. In fact, the two themes intertwine since the authority figures literally implant the sin into their young victim.

As late as 1975, while Wicking was finishing his final writing chores on Hammer's *To the Devil, A Daughter* and struggling with rewrites on Hammer's unmade *Vampirella,* he and Pirie sought to set up *Killer Trip.* On Friday, 29 August 1975, Wicking wrote in his diary,

> Lunch with David Pirie … we brood on the fact that Martin Scorsese is in Edinburgh for the Film Fest. He likes *Killer Trip* … and was going to show it to Roger Corman to recommend its presence on New World's schedule … I'm sure I could get Michael [Carreras] and Hammer involved … Gordon Hessler doesn't any longer show any intent - I'd plan to put myself for the megaphone and jodhpurs (Wicking 2019: 94).

Of course, nothing came of these plans, and *Killer Trip* was never made.

VAMPIRELLA

In 1975, Wicking wrote a screenplay for Michael Carreras's then-struggling Hammer Films based on the Warren Publishing comic book, *Vampirella,* and Hessler was signed by Carreras to direct. In April 2018, De Montfort University secured the Revised Screenplay by Wicking for the un-filmed project, dated 27 October 1975, as part of their Hammer Films collection. This would have been the fifth horror movie collaboration for Hessler and Wicking, but, based on the screenplay, it could not have been more different from the four that preceded it. Without the theme of sin and retribution or an attempt to create a metaphor for his own times, Wicking's *Vampirella* is a badly structured, episodic conglomeration of too many barely related ideas. Juggling science fiction, gothic horror and comic book camp, the script fails to find a consistent tone and is neither funny nor compelling. It does evince a counter-cultural contempt for the government, military and authority, but only in the most superficial terms. Of Michael Carreras, Hammer Films' Managing Director, Wicking said,

> The unspoken relationship we had was that, as and when some funding turned up, I would be put in charge of a second-string, low-budget department … trying to make the

> equivalent of the Corman movies of the sixties. I had all sorts of ideas - including comic books (quoted in Meikle 2009: 215).

Inspired by Marvel comics creator, Stan Lee, Wicking advocated asking Hammer fans what they wanted to see. Wicking said,

> Stan Lee had this correspondence thing in the comics - the reader was the most important person in the world to Stan Lee, and it seemed to me that the viewer was the most important person for Hammer (quoted in Meikle 2009: 215).

Following that thought, Carreras put a full-page advertisement in the August 1975 issue of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine, the publication by editor Forest J. Ackerman that catered to horror movie enthusiasts around the world. In the ad, Carreras asked his fans, "What Will Hammer Do Next?" The answer was a movie about the eponymous character from another Warren Publishing magazine, *Vampirella.* Carreras secured the rights, but only to the movie. He said,

> I never had the rights to *Vampirella* directly because I had not familiarised myself with *Vampirella* at all. So when it came to me, unfortunately, it didn't come clean to me from James Warren, the publisher … It came to me through an American company that had the film rights, and we developed it over here with Christopher Wicking doing a screenplay (quoted in Kinsey 2007: 413).

For a detailed synopsis of Christopher Wicking's 27 October 1975 screenplay of *Vampirella,* see Appendix D. Wicking explained, "At first, Gordon Hessler was going to direct" (quoted in Nutman 1989: 54). Wicking probably suggested Hessler, since the director had never worked for Hammer Films or Carreras before. With Wicking's October draft in hand, Carreras brought actress Barbara Leigh, his choice to play Vampirella, and Peter Cushing, cast as her alcoholic magician friend, Pendragon, to New York in the first week of November to attend the Famous Monsters Convention and generate interest. Carreras emphasised sex in trying to sell it to the horror fans. His notes describe Vampirella as,

> a swinger in the Chelsea late-night disco set - she has a bachelor pad that is … 'out of this world' … For a living she works as the 'sexy' half of a top class mind reading act. The other half is her 'father figure' known simply as Pendragon … They work only the plush living rooms of the very rich … the very influential … their West End homes, their country mansions, their yachts and occasionally, at special invitation, the top casinos of the world … the act is 'mind blowing'… for the illusions Pendragon creates are real magic - because Vampirella herself is 'out of this world' … (cited in Hearn 1997: 168).

Describing a scene not in Wicking's script, Carreras revealed his soft-core vision for the project:

> We watch with interest as her … houseboy fixes her a 'blood plasma' highball … she steps from her 'costume' and her body is oiled by her twin Burmese body servants … This is followed … if you can still bear to watch - by a quick 'karate-kung fu-judo' work-out with the Japanese chauffeur bodyguard … her varied positions are almost 'mind blowing' … whatever else is blown is your own business (cited in Hearn 1997: 168).

Fifty-seven years old at the time, Carreras revealed the middle-aged attitude towards youth that characterised such late Hammer projects as *Dracula AD 1972.* He described his intended audience for *Vampirella* this way*:*

> It was really going to be geared for the college kids and young marrieds and have all the tongue-in-cheek you could get away with. They were the people who would've been in tune with what we were trying to do anyway; it would've been marvellous and been playing everywhere forever (quoted in Hearn 1997: 169).

After Columbia Pictures passed on the project, Carreras took it to Arkoff at AIP. Perhaps because of the past bitterness over *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* director Hessler was replaced by Hammer veteran John Hough. Carreras explained:

> We had a super script by Chris Wicking. John Hough was going to direct it. I was making the film in conjunction with Sam Arkoff and AIP. The budget was approved. We had

> everything going for us. Unfortunately, AIP had a production executive who could never cast the picture to Sam's satisfaction (quoted in Kinsey 2007: 414).

Wicking added:

> It was cancelled two weeks before we were due to shoot … AIP killed it by making stupid suggestions. For example, they wanted Marty Feldman as Pendragon, her sidekick. We wanted Peter Cushing. No one could agree. At one point, AIP wanted Fred Astaire, then Rex Harrison. Finally, they pulled out (quoted in Nutman 1989: 54).

Carreras blamed his limited rights to the character for the failure to come to a consensus with AIP:

> And as we - Hammer - did not directly own the rights, we were not able to get directly to the publisher, Jim [Warren], and decide on a policy between us for an image. We had these American people in the middle … I had spent quite a bit of Hammer money on it. Eventually, I realised everyone had gone away and was working on other projects. Sam and I mutually agreed that we couldn't get it together (quoted in Kinsey 2007: 414).

APPENDIX D: SYNOPSIS OF CHRISTOPHER WICKING'S VAMPIRELLA

Wicking's 27 October 1975 screenplay begins with a main title sequence that takes place on the planet of Draculon. Vampirella, beautiful, shapely and dressed in her skimpy red outfit, lays next to a lake of blood. We get glimpses of the tranquil, lyrical life on Draculon before the planet suddenly explodes. A tiny bat soars away from the explosion and into space.

On earth, an old Fisherman bicycles to his favourite fishing spot at the yacht marina in Georgetown, Bermuda. A handsome, mysterious Blue Eyed Man watches the fisherman from a super-yacht. The Fisherman sits on a rock on the beach and prepares his line. Suddenly, there is a sound of pure energy, and the Fisherman disappears without a trace.

In London, at the Mayfair Casino, Jabez Kruger, a bloated, bald, bearded billionaire in a wheelchair, goads a handsome, well-dressed young man into betting the last vestige of his inheritance on one more turn of the roulette wheel. Losing the turn, the young man signs his two and a quarter million dollars over to Kruger, then jumps from the casino balcony, landing on the spikes of an iron fence outside. Bored, Kruger orders his ageing but beautiful female companion, Droga, to wheel him away.

A British Airways 747 suddenly disappears from the sky over Bermuda as someone adjusts a dial in the control room of a secret base. In the control tower of the Bermuda Airport, air traffic controllers panic when they see the flight's blip disappear from their radar screens. The plane flies, getting nowhere, within an enormous black void in the teleportation area of the secret base. The word EXAMINE is illuminated over the void as a strange ray scans the plane. The word RETURN lights up, and the plane disappears from the void. It reappears in the sky above Bermuda. Air traffic control tells the pilot that the clocks on his plane have lost five minutes, the exact length of time that the blip was missing from the radar in the control tower.

At the Mayflower Casino in London, ageing alcoholic illusionist, Pendragon, entertains the crowd. In the audience are Kruger and Droga, Dr. Allan Spruce, a handsome and charming American, Conrad Van Helsing and his son Adam, descendants of the great vampire

hunter who defeated Dracula, and the mysterious Man with Blue Eyes. For his first trick, Pendragon makes everyone's watch stop at midnight.

In the Devil's Sea, off Bermuda, the 160 foot tugboat, "Dirty Harry," suddenly disappears after the manipulation of dials in the secret base. The tug appears in the great void of the secret base's globe. After the ray scans the boat while the word EXAMINE glows, the word, DESTRUCT, appears, and the tug becomes particles of matter, then is totally destroyed.

In the Mayfair Casino, Pendragon introduces his beautiful assistant, Vampirella, who appears in a gilded cage and transforms into a bat in clouds of pink mist as the cage rapidly revolves. The bat flies over the heads of the audience and back to the stage, perching on Pendragon's wrist like a trained falcon. They exit the stage to wild applause.

Dr. Allan Spruce visits Vampirella backstage in her dressing room, and the two kiss. Allan gives her a small phial of red liquid, and she drinks it, voraciously, showing her fangs.

As Vampirella joins Pendragon at the bar, Kruger invites her to play a game with him at the roulette table. Pendragon tells Vampirella that it was Kruger who cruelly taunted the young man into losing his fortune and killing himself earlier. Vampirella eagerly takes up Kruger's challenge. Kruger orders Droga to give Vampirella her seat, and the gorgeous vampire sits down to beat Kruger at his own game.

Meanwhile, Honda, a beautiful young Japanese chauffeur, drives Dr. Allan Spruce to a seedy London street at night. Allan goes into a house that fronts for the Organisation. Allan enters the board room and meets with the Chief, a distinguished, elderly man, Brigadier Sparkington, a burly officer in military uniform, and other Operatives. The Chief tells Allan that they have a major crisis.

In the Mayflower Casino, Vampirella uses her supernatural powers to beat Kruger at the roulette wheel as a crowd forms to watch, including the Blue Eyed Man.

International operatives in the board room of the Organisation report that hundreds of human remains have recently been found all over the world that show signs that diabolical experiments have been done on their minds and bodies.

In the secret base, a conveyor belt moves glass containers containing human brains.

Vampirella uses the power of her will at the roulette table to completely wipe out Kruger's fortune. In desperation, Kruger wagers Droga for his last spin. Vampirella wins again. Ruined, Kruger vows revenge, but Droga pushes him in his wheelchair to the open window from which the young man jumped earlier in the evening. When no one is looking, Droga wheels Kruger out the window. He falls, screaming, and is impaled on the same spiked fence outside. Vampirella drives Pendragon away from the casino in her blood-red Jenson as the old magician informs her that Kruger's IOU to her is now worthless since he is dead. The Blue Eyed Man watches them speed off.

In the offices of the Organisation, which include departments for UFOs, ESP, PARANORMAL PHENOMENA, TELEKINESIS and PARAPSYCHOLOGY, the Chief shows Allan their new supercomputer named Big Mother. Fingers and his assistant, Cutie, run the computer, which has the voice and attitude of a metallic Mae West. They ask Big Mother who or what could be responsible for the world-wide atrocities.

Vampirella gets out of her car outside of Allan's apartment on Harley Street, and Pendragon gets behind the wheel and drives away. The Blue Eyed Man watches from his parked car as Vampirella turns into a bat and flies up to Allan's window.

In his apartment, Allan encourages Vampirella to bite his neck instead of kissing him. Vampirella has to stop herself from drinking too much of his blood, even though he clearly enjoys it. Vampirella asks him about his tests on her. He tells her that her blood is compatible with every known type. Her body is tougher and more hardened than any other woman, and she has incredible powers over her physical being. Vampirella has no memory of her past or from where she came. She also cannot explain her compulsion to drink blood, but she desperately wants answers to all of these mysteries.

Allan puts some modules on her head that are attached to some kind of machine. He adjusts the dials, and Vampirella goes into a trance, remembering her origin planet of Draculon. She remembers lying by the lake of blood and drinking from it. She embraces her lover, Tristan, by the lake. The sound of pure energy. Four figures in space-suits emerge from the trees around the lake. Tristan pushes Vampirella away, and the figures converge on him. A blinding light, and Vampirella screams. She wakes up in Allan's apartment. Vampirella tearfully tells him her vision. She says that creatures came to devour and destroy Draculon. She had to leave, to escape Draculon.

When Vampirella wakes up in Allan's apartment the next morning, he is gone. She finds a thick dossier marked, "Top Secret," with a note that reads, VAMPI - READ THIS. URGENT.

In the Organisation computer room, Big Mother tells the Chief, Sparkington and Allan about the planet Draculon. It was outside of the solar system with twin suns and was destroyed long ago. Big Mother thinks that the recent atrocities must have been committed by aliens doing sophisticated experimentation on human life forms. Allan wants to use Vampirella to try to help them, but he warns that she cannot be an official operative because she rejects all rules, authority and discipline.

The Organisation sends Allan to the Hampstead Girls' School where one hundred and thirty pupils between the ages of sixteen and twenty have suddenly become pregnant. The growth rate of each foetus is only nine weeks maximum.

In a nearby park, a young mother reads a novel on a bench as her baby lies quietly in its pram. A pigeon lands on the pram's hood. When the mother looks over, the pigeon is gone, except for some feathers and blood on the baby's coverlet. And the baby burps.

In Vampirella's pad, she tells Pendragon that their apartment, their car and everything else was arranged for them by the Organisation. She angrily blames Allan for trying to use her when she thought he loved her. She stole enough blood substitute from Allan's lab

to last her for awhile. Pendragon suggests that they visit the Mirabelles. Vampirella leaves a note for Allan that says, “Up your Organisation.”

Vampirella and Pendragon drive to a gothic mansion in the countryside owned by the Mirabelle sisters, an ageing stage act that retired into seclusion when vaudeville died. Each year, they give a costume party on this night, but attendance has fallen off as the participants have died over time. Pendragon puts false fangs in his mouth and powders his face to appear like Dracula. Josef the butler admits them to the huge, lonely mansion and the party attended only by Constance and Gloria Mirabelle and a masked dance combo.

In the computer room of the Organisation, Big Mother tells Allan and Fingers that the two hundred and sixty-seven mutilated bodies found in Peru were the passengers and crew of a chartered plane that disappeared off Miami in 1964.

A host of Hell’s Angels bikers, led by Zymer and his girl, Baby, burst into the Mirabelle mansion, uninvited. They begin terrorising Josef, the band and the Mirabelle sisters. Pendragon tries to calm her, but Vampirella grows furious. She concentrates her will. Suddenly, a host of guests sweep in, masked and dressed in gowns, uniforms and dazzling jewellery. As the new guests begin to waltz, Zymer and the bikers try to cut in. Zymer pulls the mask off of his elegant dancing partner and screams. She is actually the corpse of one of the past guests of the Mirabelles’ costume parties. All of the newly arrived guests are animated corpses of past guests. Zymer grabs a pistol from Josef the butler, but Vampirella attacks Zymer and drains him of blood. The rest of the Hell’s Angels flee from the mansion. Ashamed of herself for murdering Zymer, Vampirella begs Pendragon to take her away. The Mirabelles happily continue dancing with their dead friends, but from Josef’s point of view, the guests all fade away, leaving the swaying sisters alone once more.

As they drive away, Vampirella and Pendragon are pulled over by two policemen. One of them asks Vampirella to breath into the breathalyser. But when she complies, a gas is sprayed on her that renders her unconscious. The second officer does the same to Pendragon. Both officers have small scars beneath their left ears. They remove

Vampirella and carry her to their car. The Blue Eyed Man follows the police car in his Porsche. When Pendragon awakens, he calls Allan from a nearby phone box. He asks Allan to help him find Vampirella because he fears for her life.

Vampirella, semi-conscious, finds herself in the globular void of the secret base. The ray scans her body as the word EXAMINE flashes. Vampirella is only able to move her eyes. She sees human heads, their scalps pulled back to expose their brains. A conveyor belt transports the headless bodies towards a pulping machine for disposal. The machine examining Vampirella flashes the word DESTRUCT, and she vaporises into particles and molecules.

On the roadway, Pendragon tells Allan over the phone that he will wait patiently by the box. Unseen by Pendragon, on another part of the roadway, removal men drag the bodies of the two policemen who drugged Vampirella and Pendragon into a van with the legend ACME REMOVAL on the side. This is watched by the Blue Eyed Man from his Porsche. Surprisingly, Vampirella, unconscious, is in the seat beside him. He drives away. Vampirella wakes up briefly, and the Blue Eyed Man tells her that she has been drained of all energy but that she is safe with him. She passes out again.

A helicopter lands by Pendragon, and Sparkington emerges. He suspects Vampirella of being an alien who is involved in the world-wide atrocities. Pendragon tells him that after the war, his divorce and alcoholism, he met Vampirella. Her kindness and talent gave him a new life. He worships her, and she may be the only one who can save them.

In the computer room of the Organisation, Big Mother tells the Chief, Fingers and Cutie that the disappearances are actually probes, and that the atrocities are experiments. Suddenly, Big Mother short circuits. Cutie thinks that another powerful computer has attacked Big Mother with electrical impulses. If they can find the other computer, they can find who is responsible.

As Allan opens his garage to get his car, an old Tweedy Lady approaches him. She asks his name, and when he answers, she slits his throat with a blade that shoots from her walking stick.

When Pendragon and Sparkington get back to Vampirella's pad, they are shocked to find her in bed, asleep. She comes out of it long enough to tell them that the Blue Eyed Man told her that she had had an accident. Sparkington calls the Chief who tells him that Allan Spruce is dead but that he will send another doctor for Vampirella. She stirs again and guesses that Allan is dead. Pendragon remarks that she does not seem upset, yet he thought she loved Allan. Vampirella tells him that she will see Allan again.

Trying to repair Big Mother, Fingers leaves Cutie in the computer room alone to take a break. A throbbing light flashes around Cutie with the sound of pure energy. Fingers returns to the room to find Cutie nothing but a burnt corpse on the floor. He calls the Chief in panic.

Honda drops a mysterious man off in front of Vampirella's apartment block. He carries a black bag and stays in the shadows as he goes into Vampirella's pad. She still lies in bed, dreaming of walking hand in hand with Tristan on her planet of Draculon. But she suddenly awakens, her wrists and ankles manacled to the bed posts. Adam Van Helsing stands over her with a hammer and stake in his hands. He introduces himself as the son of Conrad Van Helsing, descendent of the most celebrated vampire killer of the nineteenth century. When Vampirella does not react to the crucifix around his neck, she explains that she is not undead like the vampires Van Helsing hunts. She also cannot infect others with her bite like an undead vampire. On her planet, blood flowed in rivers, streams and lakes, and everyone drank it naturally. Here, she drinks a blood-substitute serum. Adam confesses that he has always lusted to be bitten. He drops his hammer and stake and offers his neck to her. She bites him, hungrily.

Conrad Van Helsing visits the grave of Bram Stoker in Highgate Cemetery. Adam runs to him and proudly shows him the bite marks on his neck. Adam tells his father that he will do it again and again. Conrad answers that he will ensure that Adam never does it again.

Honda arrives at Vampirella's pad to take her to the offices of the Organisation to meet with the Chief. On the way, she tells Vampirella that her orders last night were to take Adam Van Helsing to her apartment and to give him the keys. Vampirella becomes suspicious.

In the Chief's office, he and Sparkington play a board game called World War 3. Again, the Chief beats him. After Sparkington leaves, Vampirella arrives. Vampirella sees the tiny scar beneath the Chief's ear and knows that he is one of them. The Chief tries his intercom, but Vampirella disables it with her will. She also wills the door locked so that the Chief cannot escape. She tells him that she knows he had her kidnapped and Allan killed. When Vampirella was saved, the Chief sent Van Helsing to drive a stake through her. And he arranged to have Big Mother jammed. Vampirella is unable to read the Chief's mind to find out who ordered him to do these things. The Chief says that he is ready to die and takes Vampirella in his arms, offering her his neck. An aide finds the Chief's dead body on the floor as Vampirella, as a bat, soars out the open window and over London.

In her pad, Vampirella asks Pendragon to hypnotise her and continue Allan's experiments in trying to get her to remember her past. Under Pendragon's spell, she returns to the moment when the figures in space suits converged on Tristan and Vampirella on the planet Draculon. One of the figures becomes a living ball of energy and consumes Tristan. Vampirella runs into a strange space craft. As the Energy Creature approaches, Vampirella tries to work the craft's panel. A rumbling from inside the planet shakes the craft, throwing Vampirella against the instruments. A strange beam envelops her, and she vanishes. As Draculon explodes, Vampirella, in the form of a tiny bat, rides the beam through space, past asteroids and solar systems, until she lies among the trees on a sparkling Bermuda beach. Pendragon, a drunken beach bum, finds the wounded bat and picks it up. The bat's claw draws blood on his hand, and he allows the creature to lick the droplet. Suddenly, the bat falls to the sand and metamorphoses into the beautiful Vampirella. Pendragon is amazed.

Back in her pad, Vampirella awakens from her trance with the answers. She landed in Bermuda because of the tear in the curtain of time called the Bermuda Triangle. And that is why the aliens arrived in Bermuda as well.

In the offices of the Organisation, Big Mother is still dead, but everyone is trying to locate Vampirella. Sparkington watches as the Pathologists in the morgue autopsy the dead Chief. When they open his cranium, they find, not brains and blood, but wires, transistors and impulse units. The Chief was a computer, and it was he who jammed Big Mother. A technician rushes into the morgue and informs Sparkington that Big Mother has reactivated herself. Sparkington sends for Fingers, the only one who can communicate with Big Mother.

At that moment, Fingers emerges from his apartment on Camden Lock. He is confronted by a little boy wearing a Lone Rangers costume. When Fingers pretends to draw a gun, the little Lone Ranger pulls a Magnum and blows Fingers into the canal, dead.

Vampirella and Pendragon take an airplane to Bermuda to revisit the spot at which Pendragon first found Vampirella in the form of a bat.

In the computer room, Big Mother keeps repeating, "Icarvs 7 - 4 - 3 - 1- 9 - 6 - 3. Sparkington suddenly realises that it is a year, Icarvs 743, 1963. He gets a call informing him that Vampirella and Pendragon have gone to Bermuda. He orders his operatives to get him on the next plane there.

Vampirella and Pendragon arrive on the beach where he first found her. It is also the beach from where the Old Fisherman disappeared. Accompanied by the familiar sound of energy, Vampirella and Pendragon suddenly disappear. Particle by particle, they reappear in the black void of the teleport equipment in the secret base. They find themselves surrounded by robot-like Vassals and masked Surgeons checking the respiration and temperature of human guinea pigs. A conveyor belt sends headless human bodies to a pulping machine that delivers little blocks of square flesh that proceed down the line to be packaged.

The Blue Eyed Man speaks to Vampirella, staring down at him. He is gigantic compared to Vampirella and Pendragon because they have been miniaturised. The Blue Eyed

Man tells her to step onto a platform, and her molecules will be transported and reassembled to normal size aboard his satellite.

Vampirella does as she is told, and reappears in one of the satellite's teleportation machines. The Blue Eyed Man leads her out, a bit groggy from the experience.

The Blue Eyed Man tells her that he is from the planet Akron. The Akrons visited earth, Draculon and countless other planets and helped their lifeforms move more quickly up the evolutionary ladder. Vampirella accuses Akron of destroying her planet of Draculon. The Blue Eyed Man tells her that Draculon destroyed itself rather than be ruled by the Akrons. The current atrocities on earth are another effort by the Akrons to advance the humans species. The Blue Eyed Man envies humans because he and the other Akrons have no art, no beauty, no joy and no love. But he wants a female to rule with him, and he has chosen Vampirella because of her superior powers and her human qualities. Vampirella attacks his neck with her fangs, but recoils from him because he does not bleed.

Vampirella asks about Pendragon, and the Blue Eyed Man shows him the tiny magician, miniaturised inside the globe. She begs him to send him back to earth, and he agrees. The Blue Eyed Man pushes a button marked RETURN, and Pendragon finds himself back on the Bermuda beach at normal size. Sparkington and various military vehicles surround him. Sparkington tells him that Icarvs 743 is a defunct observation satellite that was sent up in 1963 and is now abandoned and forgotten. But it is hovering over the Bermuda triangle. In a matter of minutes, two rockets, one American and one Russian, will blow it out of the sky. Pendragon tells him that Vampirella is aboard that satellite.

The Blue Eyed Man tries to persuade Vampirella to teleport to Akron with him. But she sees another teleportation machine marked EARTH. She demands to know what the Blue Eyed Man really looks like, and he transforms into a blinding ball of energy just like the one that attacked her on Draculon. Then he transforms into Pendragon and says that he can become anyone she wants.

Both Russia and America fire their rockets at the satellite. On the satellite, the Blue Eyed Man turns into Dr. Allan Spruce and tries to kiss her. She tells him that he must become Tristan. The Blue Eyed Man transforms into Tristan, and Vampirella runs into the teleportation machine to earth. She vanishes. The satellite, with the Blue Eyed Man as Tristan, suddenly explodes.

Vampirella appears on the beach next to Pendragon and Sparkington. She tells Pendragon that she gambled on the fact that the Blue Eyed Man would become Tristan in every detail. Tristan was blind, and that gave her the chance to escape.

But the energy ball that was the Blue Eyed Man appears in space and hurtles away from the explosion.

As they walk along the Bermuda road at night, Vampirella and Pendragon are approached by a well-dressed hunchback carrying a gold-topped cane. He invites them to perform for his master, who awaits them in a carriage. “I’m sure you’ll find the Count a remarkable man,” the Hunchback says. “And you have friends in common. The Van Helsings.” The coach is a hearse drawn by six black horses. The coffin in back slides open, and a hand reaches out wearing a ring with the initial D on it (Wicking 1975: 1-117).

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