

JESS FRANCO, or THE MISFORTUNES OF VIRTUE

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El sueño de la razon produce monstruos

(The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters)

Francisco Goya y Lucientes, *Los Caprichos*, plate 43, (1797-1798)

In his book, *Jess Franco: El sexo del horror*, the Spanish film historian Carlos Aguilar closes a chapter with the following remark: “It is really true that, in his own way, Jesus Franco represents a damn peculiar case . . .” (1) That Jess Franco can produce such a perplexed (and exasperated) response in a compatriot who was, after all, engaged in writing a book-length biographical and critical overview goes some way to illustrate the difficulties encountered in trying to come to grips with Jesús Franco Manera, a director whose staggering output of something like 180 films in forty-five years contrives to make words like ‘maverick’, ‘obsessive’, ‘enigma’, or even ‘deranged’, seem sadly inadequate.

Some might question whether it is worth “coming to grips” with Franco at all. His detractors are legion, and, despite the publication of three serious studies (2) and a veritable host of admiring magazine articles, it is fair to say that Franco and his films still fly well below the radar of respectable critical attention; considered, when considered at all, to be beneath both notice and contempt.

In part, of course, this attitude is simply a hangover from what might be termed ‘*La Plus longue nuit des auteurs*’, the Cahiers du Cinéma-inspired revolution which, having done sterling work in elevating the importance of the Seventh Art, then proceeded, like an earlier French Revolution, to overstay its welcome, descending into a kind of intellectual Terror in which certain directors of genre films were elevated to the Pantheon (particularly if they laboured in the more obscure depths of the Hollywood system) while others (mainly European) were simply ignored. It is only relatively recently, after all, that mainstream critics on both sides of the Atlantic have been forced to concede, albeit grudgingly and with reservations, the importance of such genre directors as Sergio Leone, Mario Bava, and Dario Argento, despite the fact that their films are often self-evidently as much about cinema itself – what Leone called “cinema cinema” – as any homage-laden chef d’œuvre of the *nouvelle vague*.

To a substantial degree, however – and there is no way of riding around this – Franco’s reputation and critical neglect also stem from the fact, freely admitted by both his admirers and the man himself, that many of his films are simply awful. And yet even the most stringent and fastidious proponent of the auteur theory would find it difficult to deny that Franco meets all the requirements of authorship: in addition to directing, he also writes, edits, and acts; he is frequently his own cameraman, and often composes or co-composes the scores. Franco’s universe is distinctly his own, to put it mildly – an

oneiric witches' brew of eroticism, fetishism, voyeurism, and Sadean impulses, all stirred together with recurring motifs of vampires, mind control, morbidity and decay, before being presented for consumption with a true jazz aficionado's disregard for the niceties of linear development and narrative convention. Some might reply that much the same could be said of Edward D. Wood, Jr., whose mastery of *mise-en-scène* in *Plan 9 from Outer Space* is certainly unique to him and unlikely to be confused with that of, say, Ingmar Bergman in *The Seventh Seal*. And while this may be true, it perhaps says more about the shortcomings of the auteur theory than it does about the validity of any claims to authorship made on Franco's behalf.

For anyone raised to regard Universal and Hammer films (by-and-large shot in a classical style, with well-defined heroes, villains, and monsters) as the horror film norm, Franco's movies can prove quite a shock to the system, and it cannot be over-emphasised how necessary it is to adjust one's expectations if one is derive any enjoyment or meaning from his work. Many reviewers, over the years and up to today, have proved either incapable or unwilling to make this adjustment. Franco has been derided as talentless and unimaginative, his films as lurid, incoherent potboilers distinguished only by a combination of shoddiness and salaciousness. The director's over-fondness for zoom shots during the international phase of his career has resulted in more brickbats than even Michael Winner has had to sustain on that account. Not all of this criticism is unjust, at least where the films themselves are concerned, but at the same time it is clear that Franco is a film-maker possessed of many virtues, of which independence, tenacity, loyalty, consistency of vision, a love of cinema, and a stubborn anti-authoritarianism are not the least admirable. These virtues have not always stood to Franco's advantage – his marginality in terms of European genre film-making is a direct consequence of his own desire for independence – but they suggest that, at his best, he deserves to be considered as a serious voice in the tradition of European horror and the fantastique.

Franco's film career proper may be said to have begun with his fifth feature film, *Gritos en la noche* ('Screams in the Night', henceforward referred to by its best-known title, *The Awful Doctor Orlof*, itself derived from the French title, *L' horrible Dr. Orlof*), made in 1961. Not only was it Franco's first horror film, it was also Spain's first horror film; and in making it Franco paved the way for future directors such as Amando de Ossorio, José Larraz, Jorge Grau, and Eloy de la Iglesia, in much the same way as Riccardo Freda did in Italy for Bava, Argento, et al., when he made that country's first horror film, *I vampiri* (*The Devil's Commandment*) in 1956.

Shot in black-and-white and set in France in 1912, *The Awful Doctor Orlof* tells the story of the eponymous surgeon's quest to restore his daughter's beauty with skin drafts taken from the faces of various unwilling members of the demi-monde. In this he is assisted by his blind and mute servant, Morpho. Opposed to him is one of the thickest policemen on celluloid, whose fiancée, fortunately, is very bright and brings about the doctor's undoing. (N.B. All the nominal heroes, policemen or otherwise, in Franco's films are irredeemably stupid and virtually peripheral to events.)

The film, a co-production with France, was also Franco's first to receive widespread distribution, and it is worth considering the reaction it provoked abroad. The British Film Institute's Monthly Film Bulletin reported that, "This film is at once appalling and unique, so bad as to be almost enjoyable for its ludicrous qualities, so singular that curiosity hunters are likely to look at it agog. An occasional shot or two is worthy of James Whale or Epstein, but it is the soundtrack which provides the film's most bewildering aspect, containing as it does the weirdest collection of quasi-musical noises. The ramshackle plot is *Les Yeux Sans Visage*, plus a blend of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, represented by the demon doctor and his monster slave respectively; the brave heroine is worthy of the utmost admiration. A singular film . . . really most extraordinary." (3)

The sense of bafflement expressed by the reviewer would remain a constant in critical reactions to Franco's films (and finds a later echo in Aguilar's "damned peculiar case" phrase), as would Franco's employment of unusual soundtrack devices and frequent referencing of earlier works in the horror genre. The assumption that Franco helped himself to the plot of Georges Franju's 1959 classic, *Les yeux sans visage* (*Eyes Without a Face/The Horror Chamber of Dr. Faustus*) is widespread, though interestingly, Franco himself denies he had seen it before making his film.

Franco's veracity generally has been called into question, most notably by Aguilar (who also cites the Franju film as a source) and who writes bluntly that Franco, "from his earliest interviews has loved to lie and contradict himself, to invent and misinterpret." (4) This may well be true, but it seems worth noting that in the interviews included on the U.S. DVD releases of Franco's films, the director comes across as both honest and self-critical. Perhaps in the past, Franco tended to follow the example of his hero, Orson Welles (whom, it will be recalled, liked to tell people he knew Bram Stoker, despite being born three years after the author's death), but, with regard to Franju's film, one feels obliged to take his word, not least because, apart from the basic plotline common to both, the handling of the material could hardly be more different.

Where Franju's film is a Gothic parable for modern times, cold and detached in its depiction of Dr. Génessier, lyrical in its treatment of his daughter's plight, Franco's is a riotous mélange of over-ripe clichés in which the director is clearly having a whale of a time riffing on his favourite themes from earlier works. The doctor's name is taken from the 1939 British adaptation of Edgar Wallace's *Dark Eyes of London* in which Bela Lugosi played the sinister Dr. Orloff, complete with blind henchman. Franco uses tilted camera angles both for aesthetic reasons and as a reference, via the character of Morpho, to Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) and other Expressionist classics, while the "mad doctor" storyline recalls any number of Hollywood horror movies. To all this, Franco adds his own visual motifs: nightclub scenes, women in chains, nudity, and cats and owls (which tend to crop up quite a bit in his early films). There are some beautifully filmed night scenes on a river, and a memorable long shot of Orloff and Morpho in silhouette, carrying a coffin. And, as the Monthly Film Bulletin noted, Franco's unusual choice of soundtrack only adds to the unsettling effect of many of the visuals.

The use of nudity may well be a first in the horror genre as well as one of the earliest examples in post-war European film. Although topless scenes seem to have been included in export versions of certain Italian films in the 1950s, the real significance of Franco's inclusion of nudity is not the nudity per se, but how he utilises it. According to Tohill and Tombs (5), as Orlof prepares to begin operating on an unconscious chanteuse, he allows himself a brief moment of what would now be termed "inappropriate contact" with his victim's breasts. The scene, with all its unhealthy, necrophiliac overtones, must have caused apoplexy throughout the censorship offices of the world, and it seems safe to assume it was not included in the domestic Spanish print. In the context of Franco's career, however, it is absolutely central, a demonstration from the outset of Franco's determination to place the sex urge, in all its forms, at the very heart of his cinema. Not only was this a daring step for a young director to take, but his use of nudity, not as cheap titillation, but as an illustration of Orlof's psychological make-up, undercuts the charge, so often leveled against him later, of being merely a purveyor of "smut". At his best, Jess Franco was always much more than that.

Franco's handling of his actors is (and would continue to be) wildly erratic. On the one hand, Howard Vernon is outstanding as Orlof, his gaunt features and aloof, sinister mien perfectly suited to the role, and Diana Lorys is fine as the intrepid Wanda; on the other, Conrado San Martín, an otherwise accomplished actor, deals with the thankless part of the policeman as best he can, while the background cast can most accurately be described as enthusiastic.

The Awful Doctor Orlof is still considered by some to be Franco's best film, but while it is certainly entertaining and often impressively staged, it is perhaps too derivative to be considered a genuine classic. Franco may have been having fun when he made it, but there are not enough original twists on the old themes and conventions to mark it out as a decisively original or revolutionary work, in the sense that Sergio Leone's *Fistful of Dollars* (1964) may be said to have redefined the Western. Its importance, however – apart from launching the Spanish horror film, and the international careers of Vernon and Franco himself – lies in it being one of the first genre films to consciously cite earlier works, a post-modernist trend which up till 1961 had largely been the preserve of the *enfants terribles* of the *nouvelle vague*. And, consciously or not, Franco was also placing himself at the heart of the European tradition of horror and the fantastique, a lineage stretching back, in cinematic terms, to Georges Méliès and on through Wiene, Paul Wegener, F.W. Murnau, Fritz Lang, Benjamin Christensen, Paul Leni, Rex Ingram, G.W. Pabst, Carl Theodor Dreyer, and Terence Fisher. (6)

Franco's next excursion into the horror realm was *The Sadistic Baron Von Klaus* (*La mano de un hombre muerto/Le sadique Baron Von Klaus*, 1962), another Spanish-French co-production shot in black-and-white. After a spate of killings in a small German town, suspicion falls on the present Baron von Klaus (played by Howard Vernon), whose progenitor had apparently been rather partial to a spot of recreational butchery. The story appropriated many of the elements of the then hugely popular German series of Edgar Wallace adaptations known as *krimi* – black-garbed and hatted

killers silhouetted in windows, characters isolated and stalked in empty spaces, crazy plot twists and improbable dénouements – which would, two years later, in Mario Bava's *Blood and Black Lace* (*Sei donne per l'assassino*), give rise to the Italian giallo thriller. Indeed, while it is impossible to know whether or not Bava saw Franco's film, it is worth noting that the Germanic town setting and the torture chamber both prefigure Bava's own *Baron Blood* (*Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga*), made in 1972.

Surprisingly leisurely paced, *The Sadistic Baron von Klaus* is an effective chiller, shot in a classical style. Franco's decision not to focus on any one particular character makes the Gothic potboiler plot seem more interesting than it really is, even though the characters are strictly stock. The most original scene, perhaps unsurprisingly, occurs in the torture chamber. Having overpowered a girl, the villain places her on a bed before heating up an assortment of sharp implements in a brazier. He then begins to kiss and undress his still-unconscious victim. When she wakes, they exchange a few words before he begins to perform an act still not legal in certain American states. Then, without warning, he gets up, grabs a whip and begins to flog her. When she has passed out, he suspends her from the ceiling and begins applying the red-hot treatment. The sex act aside, there would seem to be nothing too remarkable going on here, but it is only when the villain begins whipping the girl that we realize that Franco has cut all sound from the scene, bar the music. We are left to imagine the sound of the whip on skin, the girl's screams, the clanking chains, and the hiss of burning flesh. It's a remarkably original and effective device, one which adds an uncomfortable intensity and nightmarish quality to a scene which would otherwise be merely gruesome or even unintentionally funny.

Franco's next horror project, *Dr. Jekyll's Mistresses* (*El secreto del Dr. Orloff/Les maîtresses du Dr. Jekyll*, 1964), had nothing to do with Robert Louis Stevenson and not much more to do with Dr. Orloff, who (not played by Howard Vernon) expires in the first few minutes, leaving the responsibility to be fiendish in the hands of an inadequate substitute named Fisherman. It's another story of mind control and murder, with Hugo Blanco giving his best Conrad Veidt impression, but the film is hampered by numerous plot deficiencies. As these may be due to cuts (the current DVD runs for 85 minutes but Aguilar lists the original running time as 99 minutes), it would perhaps be best to refrain from further comment until a fuller print becomes available.

The Diabolical Dr. Z (*Miss Muerte/Dans les griffes du maniaque*), made in 1965, marks the end of what can be called the first horror phase in Franco's career. With a larger budget than his previous features and a first-rate cameraman in Alejandro Ulloa, the film looks wonderful, and is, on the whole, an entertaining variant on the mind control theme. When the title character dies after having his scientific experiments on personality change denounced in public by the medical council, his daughter plots her revenge on those responsible. After faking her own death, she uses her father's 'personality machine' to gain control over a slinky nightclub performer, who, her long nails dipped in poison, is sent to eliminate the offending members. Although most of Franco's fixations are on view, there is something pedestrian in his handling of the story, which plods along its generic course to its expected conclusion. Even his handling of Estella Blain's exotic nightclub routine with a mannequin

lacks the voyeuristic intensity Franco would later achieve in *Vampyros Lesbos*, and the revenge plot, borrowed from Cornell Woolrich's 1940 novel, *The Bride Wore Black*, would also find more powerful expression in his later *She Killed in Ecstasy*.

In 1967, Franco embarked on a three-film deal with the German company, Aquila, which resulted in one of his most personal and unusual films, *Succubus*, as well as two supposedly light-hearted but relentlessly heavy-handed spy capers, which, despite the appearance of a vaguely wolfman-like creature in one of them (*Rote Lippen – Sadisterotica/El caso de las dos bellezas*) need not detain us here. *Succubus* (*Necronomicon – Geträumte Sünden*) focuses on a nightclub entertainer named Lorna (Janine Reynaud) whose act involves sado-masochism and feigned death. Haunted by memories of a possible previous existence as well as visions of a future one, she appears to be controlled by a demonic figure. In what we assume is a dream, but may not be, Lorna meets a character called 'the Admiral' (Howard Vernon) in a club. They play a word association game which turns out not to be a game (or is it?) when Lorna stabs the Admiral in the eye with a hatpin. On returning to 'real life', she sees a funeral cortège; in the coffin is the Admiral. Later she attends a party where tabs of acid are passed out as if they were communion wafers. In a fantasy castle (which may be real), mannequins come to life and threaten Lorna's female lover, whom Lorna then stabs to death. As Lorna slips between one level of fantasy (or reality?) and another, she apparently kills her nightclub partners during a rehearsal. After killing her male lover (Jack Taylor), who appears to have been in league with the demonic figure, she is united with the latter, who brings her to the castle where he will watch over her while she sleeps. A voice-over reference identifying Lorna with Faustine suggests some unspecified pact with the devilish stranger.

Succubus is an astonishing piece of work. Whether one finds it convincing, pretentious, or ridiculous is entirely beside the point (it is quite possibly all three), but there is no denying the skill with which Franco handles his material, blending the fantasy/reality threads of his narrative in a way that is both utterly confusing, yet strangely satisfying. More importantly, it marked the complete abandonment of traditional genre film-making in favour of an oneiric, jazz-inspired, improvisational approach that would come to characterise his best work. At the same time, however, Franco managed to retain and incorporate, and even expand, the visual and thematic motifs which were already his trademark. And yet, for all its apparent aspirations to an art-house style, it seems quite clear that Franco is also having a sly dig at the likes of Antonioni, Fellini, and Godard – it's not every film that includes references to alienation and *La dolce vita* together with images of Dracula, the Phantom of the Opera, Godzilla, and the Frankenstein monster – as if he's saying, "You people at the Cahiers du Cinéma want narrative experimentation? I'll show you narrative experimentation!"

There would, however, be precious little room for experimentation in the next phase of Franco's career, which saw him join forces with the ex-patriate British producer, Harry Alan Towers, in a disastrous partnership from which Franco's reputation never recovered. Their first was *The Blood of Fu Manchu* (*Fu-Manchu y el beso de la muerte/Der Todesküss des Dr. Fu Manchu/Kiss & Kill/Against All Odds*, 1968), which, on the face of it, should have suited Franco down to the ground. An avid reader of lurid fiction, he was already a fan of Sax Rohmer's books, and the opportunity to film the original *Devil Doctor*, an arch-fiend much given to mind control and the employment of slinky female killers, must have seemed like a dream come true. Towers had begun his series of *Fu Manchu* films in 1965, with the excellent *The Face of Fu Manchu*, directed by Don Sharp and starring Christopher Lee and Nigel Green as *Fu Manchu* and Sir Denis Nayland Smith respectively, but after Green's (in particular) and then Sharp's departures, it had declined appreciably.

All in all, *The Blood of Fu Manchu* proved an acceptable effort which, despite a certain crudity of style, is still reasonably entertaining (in, it must be noted, its complete form; it was originally released in Britain minus a full thirty minutes of its 91-minute running time). Lee and Tsai Chin (as *Fu Manchu's* daughter, Lin Tang) give it their best, and there is a robust comic performance by Ricardo Palacios as the bandit chief, Sancho López, which somewhat offsets the miscasting of the visibly creaking and portly Richard Greene as *Nayland Smith*. The same cannot be said for *The Castle of Fu Manchu* (*El castillo de Fu-Manchu/Die Folterkammer des Dr. Fu Manchu/Il castello di Fu Manchu*, also 1968), which is an unmitigated disaster from start to finish. Franco himself is not immune to criticism in this instance, as we shall see, but the real problem with this and other films of the partnership is Towers himself, or rather his work methods. As far as can be determined, his (Faustian?) pact with Franco went something like this – “I will give you exotic casts and locations, plus worldwide distribution, and you can film the works of some of your favourite authors. But, you have to do it all on a budget of twenty-five pounds. Just sign here; in blood, if you please.”

Towers' penny-pinching approach meant that while Franco's movies were indeed widely distributed, they were usually received with howls of derision. The principal responsibility of a producer is to produce an adequate budget, but Towers' penchant for complex co-production deals (which involved basing his company in Liechtenstein for tax purposes) resulted in erratic cash flow and the need for Franco to make do as best as he could. It is no coincidence that Franco's reputation as an incorrigible zoom-hound can be traced back to the Towers partnership; if one doesn't have the time or money for basic camera set-ups, then zooming is a cheap (in both senses of the word) way of cutting costs.

Towers' shortcomings as a producer are not intended as an excuse for the poor quality of Franco's work in their films, merely as a reason for it. For instance, it is hard to imagine that it was Franco's bright idea to insert stock footage (from Roy Ward Baker's *A Night to Remember* and what appears to be Ralph Thomas' *Campbell's Kingdom*) into *The Castle of Fu Manchu* in order to pad out its running time, to say nothing of saving money. Even allowing for the budgetary limitations, however, this is still a shoddily-constructed film, for which Towers, as scriptwriter 'Peter Welbeck', is also to blame. Continuity and logic are frequently absent; for example, in one scene Dr. Petrie (Howard

Marion Crawford) announces that the missing Dr. Herakles is in Turkey, then in his next scene both he and Nayland Smith are amazed to hear from another character that Dr. Herakles is . . . in Turkey! And then there is the scene in which the Turkish gangster, Omar Pasha, is surprised to learn that Fu Manchu is in the governor's castle, when earlier he and his men had helped him capture it. But the worst thing about *The Castle of Fu Manchu* is that, with even a smaller degree of professionalism (and someone other than Greene as Nayland Smith), it could at least have been a perfectly acceptable entry in the series, rather than sounding its death knell.

As for Franco's direction, it frequently appears amateurish. *Fu Manchu's* attack on the castle is a prime example: guns are fired but none of the other guards seem to hear them, despite the fact that Franco's spatial direction gives us every reason to suppose they are within earshot. He seems to have no grasp of how to shoot action scenes involving more than three people, let alone a band of Turkish extras dressed up as dacoits. And there appears to be a 'civilian' wandering through the back of the reverse-angle shot down the staircase. Even if these infelicities might be excused by budgetary shortcomings and the resultant need for speed, his own entrance scene (he plays a Turkish copper), is particularly ineptly composed and shot. By placing the camera behind himself, he gives a mysterious import to his character that is totally unjustified by his entirely peripheral and expository contribution to the narrative.

This seems as good a place as any to deal, briefly, with Franco's own appearances in his films, of which the most polite thing that can be said is that they are frequent. It's hard to know whether his predilection for playing grotesques is simply a case of amusing himself or a desire to save a few hundred pesetas on a supporting actor's fee; quite possibly both. But whatever the reason, it is hard to escape the feeling that Franco's films would have been better served, especially given his restrictive budgets, if he had busied himself more behind the camera than in front of it. On the other hand, of course, this would have deprived Franco and world cinema of what one can state with some confidence must be another 'first' (and hopefully, 'last'): the spectacle of the director himself being buggered by a large black man in his 1981 women-in-prison opus, *Sadomania*.

As alluded to previously, *The Castle of Fu Manchu* marked the end of Towers' Devil Doctor series (it should also be noted that Franco and Towers managed to terminate, with extreme prejudice, Sax Rohmer's other creation, the female mastermind, Sumuru, with the execrable *The Girl from Rio/La ciudad sin hombres/Die sieben Männer der Sumuru*, also 1968). Bearing in mind Towers' greater responsibility for these disasters, as outlined above, one can only marvel at the following anecdote from the producer himself: "I hate to put it this way but the project deteriorated with the remakes, and when we made the fifth one, that was the last one. And I think I said to Jesús when I'd viewed the print, I said, oh, you've done something that was impossible: you've successfully killed Fu Manchu." (7) If Towers really had the nerve to say that, one can only assume that Franco's presumably poor grasp of English at the time saved Towers from a richly deserved death of Fu Manchu-like fiendishness.

One of the happier outcomes of the Franco-Towers partnership was the opportunity for the director to finally bring to the screen the writings of the Marquis de Sade, an author whose presence can be said to lurk in most of Franco's films, if sometimes only in the iconography of chained and whipped women that abounds from *The Awful Doctor Orlof* onwards. Whereas the Sadean references in earlier works often seemed imposed and artificial (there because Franco wanted them there rather than to forward the narrative in any meaningful way), in the Marquis de Sade's "Justine"/*Justine and Juliet/Justine*, ovvero "Le disavventure della virtù" (1968, again), one really gets a sense of a meshing of director and subject. Given the fact that de Sade, as written, is virtually unfilmable (some would say unreadable as well), Franco can be said to have captured more or less the right tone in his adaptation (for which Towers, as scriptwriter, also deserves credit): that slightly kitsch, fetid atmosphere with provocative underpinnings that one gets from even the most nominal attempt to read de Sade.

Indeed, Franco and de Sade are very obviously kindred spirits: both push the boundaries of acceptability to the breaking point and beyond, for which they can and should be admired, while both, due to the sheer relentlessness and chaos of their narratives, are often difficult to approach. Franco's thoughts on the Marquis are both instructive and revealing: "The fact is that De Sade [sic] fascinates and grips me. I keep going back to him, although it would be more correct to say that he never leaves me. He is an excellent source of inspiration. He was probably a raving madman, but he got over his madness by writing these stories, solving difficult situations, exaggerating, provoking and digressing in the most unusual manner. I love his morality plays, very moral may I say. [. . .] His way of being lubricious and evil was simply fantastic." (8)

Alas, however, such identification does not mean that Marquis de Sade's "Justine" is a good film. Despite having a large budget for once (by Towers' standards, at any rate), Franco had to contend with the imposition of Romina Power (daughter of Tyrone, Jr.) as Justine; when it became clear that the reluctant actress was not capable of playing the role as he intended, Franco was forced to adapt it. In a bizarre way, though, Power's non-performance works quite well, in that the audience is forced to impose its own interpretation on the blank canvas of her personality. The outstanding performance in the film (in a positive sense) is that of Klaus Kinski as the Marquis – one fevered genius playing another – who is absolutely riveting in his few silent scenes as the imprisoned author. The other guest stars are quite a different matter: Mercedes McCambridge, while less obviously under the influence than in her previous Franco-Towers appearance (as the power-crazed prison warden in *99 Women/99 mujeres*, also, would you believe, 1968) still turns in another scenery-chewing turn, while Akim Tamiroff seems just plain drunk. But the outstanding performance in the film (in a negative sense) is that of Jack Palance as Brother Antonin, a display so jaw-droppingly deranged – Palance doesn't just deliver his lines, he howls them – so far beyond the power of any mere intoxicant, as to be worth the price of admission by itself. Apt to be lost in the background of such epic gurning is the film's only other positive aspect, the beautiful score by Bruno Nicolai.

Undeterred, Franco and Towers returned to de Sade the following year with Marquis de Sade's "Philosophy in the Boudoir"/*Die Jungfrau und die Peitsche*, better known as *Eugénie...the Story of Her Journey Into Perversion and De Sade* '70. While Franco acknowledges that de Sade's story could not be filmed as written even today (or perhaps that should read, in these politically correct times, "especially today"), let alone in 1969, that does not alter the fact that Towers took rather too many liberties in his adaptation. The point of de Sade's story is that, through her suffering, Eugénie is liberated from the conventions of her matriarchal upbringing – not, as in Towers' version, merely abused to no end and turned into a "monster". The satirical element – indeed the whole point of the original, is entirely absent from the film. Marie Liljedahl, as the put-upon heroine, displays a rather weak screen presence, while Christopher Lee, drafted in for box-office purposes, may be said to have rather too much, in what is essentially a minor role as on-screen narrator. In the other parts, Maria Röhm is effective as Mme. de Saint-Ange, while Jack Taylor, as Mirval, is his usual creepy and effete self. Nonetheless, despite its shortcomings, the film does capture much of the nightmarish and repetitive nature of de Sade's writing, and may be considered a more successful attempt at conveying the spirit of his work than its predecessor.

Venus in Furs (*Venus im Pelz/Paroxismus*, 1969) was perhaps the most satisfying result of the Franco-Towers partnership, an oneiric journey of discovery by a young jazz musician who finds the body of a woman he believes to have been murdered in Rio de Janeiro washed up on a beach in Turkey. Is he being haunted by his past? Is he, in fact, dying? Has the woman, Wanda, returned from the dead to wreak vengeance on her killers? Or is it all just a dream or metaphorical nightmare? While Franco likes to recall a conversation he had with the jazz trumpeter, Chet Baker, as the inspiration for this story, its original title, *Black Angel*, reveals it to have been an unofficial adaptation of Cornell Woolrich's 1943 novel, *The Black Angel*, in which a very-much-alive woman hunts down those responsible for framing her husband for murder. Interference from the American distributors led to the title change (despite Franco's protests that his story had nothing to do with the 1870 novel of that name by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch), as well as the casting of baby-faced James Darren as the protagonist. While nobody's idea of a tortured artist, Darren was an accomplished trumpeter, and his blandness can be said to work in much the same way as that of Romina Power, mentioned previously. Maria Röhm is unconvincingly cast as the angel of death, while Klaus Kinski as an Arab is different – but not a success. The glossy, lurid look of the film is a distraction, as are some of the more gimmicky optical effects, and Franco's composition occasionally leaves a lot to be desired. Overall, though, the film remains the most personal of Franco's pictures for Towers, and for that reason the most interesting.

The Bloody Judge (*El proceso de las brujas/Der Hexentöter von Blackmoor/Il trono di fuoco*, 1969), on the other hand, was a blatant attempt to cash in on the success of Michael Reeves' *Witchfinder General* (1968), and as such is of only passing interest. The main strength of the film, and also its weakness, is the casting of Christopher Lee as Judge Jeffreys, the seventeenth-century British judge notorious for his brutal condemnation of prisoners in the aftermath of the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685. On the one hand, Lee is in fine form, dominating every scene; on the other, he is left to act in a

vacuum. Unlike Reeves' film, in which Vincent Price's Matthew Hopkins is balanced out by his henchman, John Stearne (Robert Russell), Lee has no one to oppose him, except perhaps Leo Genn, but the latter's character is too vaguely drawn to be effective in this regard. Maria Schell appears, for no discernable good reason, as a benevolent witch, but Howard Vernon has fun as the chief executioner, his costume designed to evoke memories of Boris Karloff in Rowland V. Lee's *Tower of London* (1939). The battle scene (a double charge of cavalry through trees towards an artillery position) is competent, but nothing more (the suggestion in the U.S. DVD's liner notes that this scene proves that Franco was responsible for the glorious mud-and-blood battle in Orson Welles' *Chimes at Midnight/Campanadas a medianoche*, 1965, on which the Spaniard was second-unit director, seems unfeasible, as any comparison will quickly demonstrate).

“Over fifty years ago Bram Stoker wrote the greatest of all horror stories. Now, for the first time, we retell, exactly as he wrote, one of the first – and still the best – tales of the macabre.” (Prologue to *Count Dracula*, 1969) And so we come to *Count Dracula* (*El conde Drácula/Nachts, wenn Dracula erwacht/Il conte Dracula*, also known as *Bram Stoker's Count Dracula*), the film which probably did more harm to Franco's reputation than any other, being the most widely publicised and widely seen. Whatever the intentions of faithfully adapting Stoker prior to shooting, it staggers belief that, once the film was completed, Franco and Towers would choose to pretend that they had, “for the first time, [retold the story], exactly as he wrote . . .” (the claim appears, if anything, even stronger in the Spanish print – “con absoluta fidelidad”). Indeed, it is impossible to believe any such intentions ever existed, given the wholesale mangling to which Stoker's book is subjected. In many ways, then, this is possibly the worst of the Franco-Towers efforts because the disappointment occasioned by the end result is all the greater when taking into account not only that preposterous claim but also the fact that, as with the *Fu Manchu* movies, all the elements were in place to make a much better film. The top-line cast is perfect (Christopher Lee as Dracula, Herbert Lom as Van Helsing, and Klaus Kinski as Renfield), the locations, if not authentic, were potentially interesting, and Bruno Nicolai's score, though perhaps more appropriate for an Italian Western, could have effectively counterpointed the unusual atmosphere. All the elements, it seems, except an adequate budget and a sense of professionalism.

As it stands, the final result is an insult not only to the source material and the cast, but to the intelligence of the audience as well. Is anyone meant to be convinced by Dr. Seward and Co. being menaced by a roomful of stuffed animals? Towers must take most of the blame, both for his adaptation and for putting the production together in such a way as to give Franco neither the time nor the money to do anything good with it. As for Franco himself, even if he was forced to cheat on reaction shots (and one can often get the sense that the actors are mouthing their dialogue solely to the camera), that does not explain or excuse his inept handling of Herbert Lom's frankly laughable exposition scenes. And it is presumably his fault that Lom seems so uncomfortable in a role for which, even if he was not the first choice, he should have been well-suited (mind you, the idea of flabby Dennis Price as Van Helsing is even worse than the reality of Lom's discomfort). Lee, of course, does his best, but it's clear after the opening scenes that he's fighting a losing battle. Yet

again in a Franco film, the best performance comes from Klaus Kinski in a virtually non-speaking role. The movie is also a curiously bloodless affair, with even the stakings appearing slapdash and absurd. And whose bright idea was it to kill Dracula by setting him on fire and shoving him over a wall . . . ?

The only positive outcome from *Count Dracula* was the reunion between Franco and actress Soledad Miranda, who had played an uncredited role in the director's third film, *La reina del Tabarín/Mariquita, la belle de Tabarin*, made in 1960. Her part as Lucy in *Count Dracula* required her to do little other than look wan and blood-drained, which she did perfectly adequately and without giving the slightest indication of the transcendental effect she was about to have on Franco's cinema. Up till this point, it would be hard to single out any great performances in Franco's films, with the exception of Howard Vernon's career-defining Dr. Orlof. Christopher Lee came close on a couple of occasions but was undermined by extraneous factors, while Klaus Kinski's own genius, rather than anything likely to have been inherent in either script or direction, probably explains the manic intensity and depth he was able to convey in his essentially silent roles as de Sade and Renfield. But with Soledad Miranda everything was to change, if only briefly.

Not the least remarkable fact of the Franco-Miranda collaboration is how Miranda appears to have arrived fully formed in Franco's films, the ultimate embodiment of his erotic and morbid obsessions. To describe their relationship in standard terms of "artist and muse" would be a mistake; theirs was a symbiotic relationship in which the creative and interpretive roles were mutually rewarding, the benefits to each self-evident. There seems to have been no obvious period of adjustment for either actor or director; the camera rolled and Miranda breathed life into parts that could not be accused of being overwritten, that on paper must have seemed no different from Franco's earlier fusions of desire and death in such characters as Estella Blain's Nadia in *The Diabolical Dr. Z* or Janine Reynaud's Lorna in *Succubus*. But where those parts were largely emblematic – remote, even robotic, icons controlled by others – Miranda was able, through a combination of intelligence, intensity, and sheer belief in what she was doing, to invest very similar characters with an emotional depth that previously had been absent from Franco's work. Such happy alchemy cannot be explained, nor perhaps should it, though a pertinent parallel may be drawn with the example of G.W. Pabst and Louise Brooks in *Pandora's Box* (*Die Büchse der Pandora*, 1929) and, to a lesser extent, *Diary of a Lost Girl* (*Das Tagebuch einer Verlorenen*, also 1929), in which the director's vision was stunningly realised by an actress who, up till then, had largely been seen as romantic decoration.

Franco's filmography has proved a well-known source of despair to anyone trying to unravel it (different titles and different versions being only the most obvious difficulty), and there seems to be no agreement among those who might know as to the order, either of production or release, of Franco's seven films with Miranda, all of which, *Count Dracula* excepted, are dated 1970. That being so, we shall consider them mainly in order of their achievement.

Sex Charade is, according to Tohill and Tombs, a portmanteau film of erotic episodes “pieced together using left-overs from other projects” (9), presumably similar in type to those so popular in Italy, but which, according to Aguilar, “is practically impossible to find” (10). Nightmares Come at Night (*Les Cauchemars naissent la nuit*) tells the story of Anna, a stripper in “a sleazy Zagreb nightclub” who falls under the control of a woman called Cynthia. Installed in the latter’s villa, she starts to suffer nightmares in which she kills people. Is she really a murderess or is it all a highly improbable plot by Cynthia, in cahoots with a Dr. Lucas (Paul Müller), to divert attention away from their own crimes? A rather dreary effort, with shades of Henri-Georges Clouzot’s *Les Diaboliques* (1954), the film provided a starring role for Diana Lorys, whose last significant work for Franco had been in *The Awful Dr. Orlof*. Lorys emotes well enough, but there is just too much of it, and far too much use of voice-overs; it’s all very French, and not in a good way. The plot, such as it is, is poorly executed, and Müller’s volte-face at the end is only one of many implausibilities. Miranda shines briefly as the girlfriend of one of the co-conspirators, a remarkably well-nuanced performance, achieved largely through attitude and gesture, in what is essentially a “nothing part” (and a small “nothing part” at that). And indeed, her character gets to deliver the verdict on the film when she observes, “This is boring.”

Eugénie (*Eugénie de Sade/De Sade 2000*) saw Franco return to the Marquis de Sade, this time without the distractions of unnecessary or drunken guest stars, and it proved to be his most satisfying adaptation, or rather interpretation, of the author’s works. The film opens with a writer, the splendidly named Attila Tanner (played by Franco himself in what must be considered, in his terms, a normal role), watching a home movie of what appears to be standard soft-core frolics between two young women but which abruptly turns into a vicious murder. Tanner then visits the seriously-injured Eugénie in hospital. She agrees to tell him her story on condition that he will kill her when it is told. Tanner agrees.

Brought up in a large, lakeside house outside Berlin by Albert Radeck (Paul Müller), a man she has believed to be her father but who is actually her stepfather, Eugénie has developed what she calls “an almost obsessive admiration” for Radeck, an author who supports himself by writing book reviews, etc., but whose real interest is “focused mainly on eroticism.” Left to her own devices for much of the time, Eugénie discovers a work of erotica in Radeck’s library. When he notices it has been moved, he tells her it is time she read such books. She agrees, telling him that she enjoyed it, “More than anything I’ve read in my whole life.” The intimacy between them grows, and Eugénie attempts to seduce her stepfather. While he rejects the invitation, he leaves her a copy of de Sade’s *Eugénie de Franval* in which she reads of that Eugénie’s incestuous relationship with her father; later on, they take to acting out the scene, though only verbally. Radeck then announces that he is going to a conference in Paris, during which he and Eugénie will take the opportunity to commit “the perfect crime”.

They fly to Paris, unaware that they are being followed by Tanner. That night they attend a rather tame show at The Taboo club, but leave unobserved and board a flight to Brussels, after first changing into the most conspicuous clothing imaginable (red leather stocking-boots, matching hat, red cape and outsize white-framed shades for her; red jumper, tartan cap and scarf, black gloves and red shades for him). Having hired a photo-model, Albert agrees to pay extra for “some sadistic twists”. The model duly brings out the requisite props and paints fake blood on herself. Eugénie chains her up and then proceeds to throttle her to death with a large pair of pincers while Albert takes photographs. After taking the last flight back to Paris, they return to The Taboo in time to catch an unfunny comic, their absence unnoticed.

The next day, they attend a cocktail party at the offices of Albert’s French publishers. Eugénie finds herself jealous of the female attention Albert is receiving, but when Tanner introduces himself and asks her to arrange an interview, she gladly obliges. At his apartment, Tanner expresses his admiration for Radeck’s writing on eroticism and questions him about his philosophy, which proves to be a disagreeable blend of Sadean and sub-Nietzschian elements. Tanner voices his impression that “father and daughter” are lovers, which they do not deny. The tension between Radeck and Tanner is aggravated by the latter’s stated determination to “keep a close watch on you and what you do. I’m very much interested in your progress.” On their drive back to Germany, Radeck dismisses Tanner but Eugénie is worried by his curiosity. Needless to say, the Belgian police are making no progress in their search for a sartorially-challenged couple. But Eugénie is haunted by the face of their victim; when she cannot sleep, she cuddles up naked with Albert.

One day, Eugénie, whose mother died shortly after her birth, asks Albert how her mother died. Albert tells her that, after waiting for her to give birth to Eugénie, he had killed her, and asks Eugénie, “Does that horrify you?” Faced with that almost impossible line, Miranda shows a maturity beyond her years in her playing of the response, replying after a perfectly timed pause, “I just wanted to know. Had I known her it might have been different.” Albert explains that she had been unfaithful to him and that he “can’t bear treason.” Eugénie asks him, “If I was unfaithful to you, would you kill me?” “I would do worse. But then I would kill myself because nothing would matter to me anymore.” Sensing the conversation has become a tad sombre, Albert starts to talk about their next escapade. “Let’s do something different this time, and have fun doing it,” he suggests brightly.

They pick up a hitch-hiker named Kitty (“She was Austrian, a student and very stupid.”) and bring her to the house. Eugénie creates a bond with the girl by lending her clothes for dinner, after which Albert proposes a drinking game. When that has run its course, he suggests “playing dead”. Eugénie demonstrates, lying still while the others try to make her laugh, and then paying the penalty, suggested by Kitty, of a striptease when she loses. Next, it is the inebriated student’s turn. Albert and Eugénie start to caress and undress her, then Albert places a handkerchief over her face and pours whiskey over it. Eugénie holds her down while she suffocates. Afterwards, still aroused by the

murder, Eugénie falls into Albert's arms and they kiss, before going to her bedroom where she fellates him before they make love.

In voice-over, we are told that the hapless Kitty was dumped into the lake, followed by eight others, five girls and three boys. On a rare trip to Berlin, Eugénie and Albert are approached by Tanner, who says he knows they are responsible for two murders, and warns Albert that one day he will outwit himself. Naturally, the couple admit nothing, but later Eugénie reflects that, "Tanner's words had made an impact on me. Had we gone too far? How was it all going to end?" Albert, who clearly doesn't consider eleven murders to be "going too far", tells her not to worry; they will try "a brand new game", which he will film while Eugénie acts as bait.

Albert proceeds to target Paul (André Montchall), "a mediocre musician who plays the trumpet in a trendy club band", because he appears to be unattached and naïve. He will be, "Our masterpiece. He lives as a fool and will die a fool." Albert is becoming more fascistic with every murder while Eugénie is beginning to have her doubts. But she will continue to do as he asks. The pair go to the club where they make sure that Paul sees Eugénie. The next night, she allows him to pick her up, and then seduces him. As they continue seeing each other, Eugénie comes to realise that, behind his "tough guy attitudes", Paul is "highly sensitive". He begins to fall in love with Eugénie, who is also changing. Nonetheless, she keeps to Albert's plan and engineers a break-up with Paul. Albert intends her to keep away from Paul for a few weeks but Eugénie misses him, and realises that she is in love with him. One night, she sneaks out to meet Paul – "For the first time, I went against my father's wishes. The first time I felt I was betraying him."

But the next day, Albert happens to see them. Eugénie tells Paul how she was meant to keep away from him but not why. She tells him she loves him and asks for his help. Later, after making love, she tells Paul, "I lived in a void, all because of him. But now I feel free and liberated." They make plans to go away, unaware that Albert has come into the flat. He hears her tell Paul that she loves him. After she has left, Albert approaches the dozing Paul and slashes his throat with a penknife. As he hurries back to his car, he is once again accosted and taunted by Tanner. Eugénie is understandably nervous about telling Albert of her decision to leave. She goes home, followed shortly by Albert. He throws her onto the bed, tries to rape her, then stabs and slashes her with a scissors (the final blow, we can assume, being thrust into her vagina). He then dons evening dress and commits hara-kiri, as he had earlier said he would do. Having finished her story, Eugénie reminds Tanner of his promise. He tells her she is dying anyway, and shortly thereafter she passes away.

Eugénie is one of Franco's best films, with outstanding performances from both Miranda and Müller, and a groovy score by Bruno Nicolai. Under no obvious budgetary constraints, Franco is able to let the story unfold at its natural pace; presumably the small cast and intimate nature of the story helped in this regard. The bleak, wintry setting of the exteriors is an effective visual counterpoint to the increasingly unhealthy, hothouse atmosphere of the Radeck household, and even Franco's use of zooms are acceptable, being employed with restraint both normally and in reverse. Miranda's playing

is both subtle and intense, and one need only compare it to that of the unfortunate Romina Power to see that this is an actress who fully understands, and is in tune with, both the spirit of de Sade and that of his cinematic adaptor and equivalent, Jess Franco. Müller, too, gives an impressively understated performance, only gradually allowing the fascist underpinnings of Radeck's "philosophy" to become apparent; indeed, it is by some way his finest performance for the director.

Perhaps the most important things to consider when looking at Franco's adaptations of de Sade is, firstly, the context and, second, the intent. De Sade had become something of a cinematic flavour-of-the-month in the late 1960s, with one attempted biopic and two adaptations following on from Peter Brook's adaptation of Peter Weiss's play, *Marat/Sade* in 1966 (11). But Franco's interest in, and admiration for, the works of de Sade was long-standing and sincere, not some passing fancy dictated by fashion. If the Towers' adaptations were less than successful, it was inevitable that Franco would return to the Marquis as soon as circumstances permitted (which, as it happened, was within a year of the end of his partnership with Towers). When one watches *Eugénie* today it is important to ask who else was making films like this in 1970? What other films were dealing openly with subjects such as sadism, incest (practical if not biological) and thrill-killing? The nearest equivalent might be Leonard Kastle's independently-made *The Honeymoon Killers* in 1970, although the real-life murderers in that film were killing for profit rather than pleasure. There may be other examples before John McNaughton's *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* in 1990 (in which the killers film their crimes) or Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* in 1994 (which features thrill-killing as public spectacle rather than private pleasure), but none that immediately come to mind. (The Italian gialli, though liberally infused with sex and violence, never pretended to be saying anything significant about the darker aspects of the human condition.)

As to intent, if one accepts, as one must, that Franco is sincere in his interest in de Sade, and that, as suggested earlier, the centrality of the sex urge is essential for any understanding of Franco's cinema, then it becomes clear that Franco can, to a significant extent and in his best work, be absolved of the charge of prurience or salaciousness that is often levelled against him. If one intends to make a film centred on the sex urge then it follows that said film will contain nudity and sex. This self-evident fact never seems to have bothered Franco (quite the opposite, in fact), but it has certainly bothered his critics, whose reactions to his films have often betrayed a puritanical objection to the whole idea of making sex the mainspring of a film. In this regard, it may be said that whereas Hollywood has often rightly been accused of selling sex in a blatantly dishonest (and prurient) fashion, Franco's attitude has been refreshingly honest and, paradoxically (given his interest in the more outré aspects of human sexuality), healthy. His sincerity is on display in a film like *Eugénie* which, for all its fevered eroticism derived from its source material, is not shot in an exploitative way. Indeed, Franco rarely includes nude or sex scenes gratuitously; they nearly always make a point about the characters' psychology (as in the above-mentioned example from *The Awful Dr. Orlof*) or serve to advance the narrative (as in *Eugénie*), unlike the too-many-to-mention Hollywood films of relatively recent times in which a heavy-breathing scene, with perhaps a soupcon of nipple or a dash of pubic hair, is

included for no good reason other than to reinforce the masculinity of a lead actor or to market (i.e., exploit) the desirability of a female one.

Present-day viewers of Franco's films, particularly those of a feminist bent, may well look at a film like *Eugénie* or others in the Franco-Miranda canon, and see only that Miranda spends a large amount of screen time wearing very little. This is undeniable, and it would be wrong to suppose that Franco does not intend us to find her desirable (being Franco, he would expect both men and women to do so), but that it not to say that she is being exploited, unless one follows the hard-line feminist approach which decrees that any display of female nudity is tantamount to exploitation, and little short of rape. Indeed, in Miranda's case, where her entire being may be said to inhabit the character she is playing, it is quite clear, both from the internal evidence of the films, and from one's own responses to them, that Miranda's nakedness and what it embodies is not just there, as the joke has it, because it is "essential to the plot" – it is the plot, the very core of Franco's best films, and what makes them distinct from, say, the lamentable work he produced in collaboration with Erwin C. Dietrich in the mid-1970s. In fact, it is possible to make the case that Franco himself, though doubtless knowingly, has been exploited by producers and distributors who market his films solely on the sex content (as an illustration of this, it is instructive to watch *Eugénie* and then compare it to the trailer included on the DVD). In any event, and whatever one's views on the matter, one still returns to the question, how does one make a film about sex without sex?

She Killed in Ecstasy (*Sie tötete in Ekstase*/Mrs. Hyde) opens with several shots of Mrs. Johnson (Soledad Miranda) running down steps from a large, multi-level modern house to the seafront. She is wearing a black dress and a flowing, purple woolen wrap. At the water's edge, she stops and, in voice-over, laments the death of her husband and the short time (two years) which they had together. In flashback we see their wedding and hear her say: "How can I ever forget you? Your love, your caresses. You are inside me, my darling. In me, you live on. Nothing will destroy your memory." Then we see Dr. Johnson (Fred Williams) telling his wife about the expected decision of the Medical Council, due in a week, which, he fondly believes, will endorse the validity of his research. He then takes her on a tour of his laboratory, well-stocked with feti in jars of formaldehyde: "At first, I used animals but in the final phase, I used human embryos. Human and animal hormones are injected, resulting in revolutionary changes. You get viable organisms. The hormones make them more resistant to cancer, heart failure and physical and mental decline." We then see them making love (not, one hastens to add, in the laboratory).

Dr. Johnson is attending a preliminary hearing of the Medical Council. He is aghast to hear his research condemned as "inhuman" and himself denounced as a "charlatan". Donen (Jess Franco) tells him, "Your plan to alter the human organism with the aid of hormones is, in our view, a crime." Professor Walker (Howard Vernon) adds that his research is a violation of the Hippocratic oath and that the Council will be recommended to stop him practicing medicine. "Don't you understand? It's

not about the Hippocratic oath. It's about mankind, a better existence," Johnson protests. The female member of the board, named Crawford (Ewa Strömberg), then says, "Dr. Johnson, I have here reports about your embryo experiments. You have denied human embryos the possibility of life. I would call that a criminal act, and a blasphemy." "Blasphemy? What kind of a world do you live in? Only one thing counts: to help people, regardless of morals." The last member of the Council, Dr. Huston, tells him that he is ordered to discontinue his experiments, and finally, Dönen tells him to burn his research papers.

Johnson returns to his laboratory to find it destroyed, and his wife huddled in a daze on the floor. She tells him an angry mob broke in, threatening to kill him. Johnson stares round at his destroyed life's work and breaks down. After that, he begins to lose his grip on his sanity, ranting and raving in the night. His wife calls Dr. Huston, but he refuses to come to Johnson's aid. Mrs. Johnson, in voice-over, then tells us how she took him from the city to their house on an isolated island. "The house [the same one as seen in the opening shots] was like a dream. A labyrinth where the steps echo, where words rebound and return, again and again." But Johnson's condition does not improve, and he alternates between lying in a stupor or rambling on about the Council's decision.

Mrs. Johnson attends an open meeting of the Medical Council, where Prof. Walker is haranguing the audience on the need for the medical profession to protect itself from "dreamers", "charlatans", and "unscrupulous criminals". The chairman thanks Walker and refers to the "damnable actions" of Dr. Johnson. "At our request, the Medical Council has struck him off the register." (Note: it is never entirely clear which body actually constitutes the Medical Council.) Mrs. Johnson gets up and leaves, watched by Dr. Huston. Outside, she runs into a police inspector (Horst Tappert), whom she met after the destruction of the laboratory. When she suggests angrily that he finds the men who destroyed her husband's life, the inspector is unaccountably jaunty: "Who knows? I might just do that." He goes into the meeting, where now Dönen is busily denouncing Johnson, and exchanges pleasantries with Huston, who is surprised he knows him.

Johnson, now out of his mind, is oblivious to his wife's words and her attempt to arouse him. Later, when she is asleep, he wakes, still haunted by the Council's words. He goes into the bathroom and cuts his wrists with a razor. When his wife finds him, he is dead.

We then see her on the seafront, as at the beginning. She says she cannot live without him nor without avenging him. "My revenge will be cruel. The price for our destroyed lives can only be death."

Mrs. Johnson waits for Prof. Walker in a bar, where he is busy propounding his disagreeable views on "the young" to an interviewer. ("They have their reservations and don't want to carry out orders.") When he has finished, he comes over and starts to chat her up. She lets him believe she is a prostitute and suggests they go to his hotel. In his room, Walker reveals himself to be even more unpleasant than he is in public. He stops Mrs. Johnson kissing him, saying he cannot stand that kind of thing, which makes him nervous. In bed, he pauses for a brief prayer (presumably along the lines of St.

Augustine's "Give me chastity and continency – but not yet!") before telling her to degrade and abuse him: "I need that." "Yes, because you are impotent," observes Mrs. Johnson, before obliging him with a few slaps in the face. She then pulls out a knife, slashes his throat and stabs him in the groin. Across the hall, Donen, hearing a noise, wakes up and opens his door. He sees Mrs. Johnson outside Walker's room. She hurries away. Donen goes into Walker's room. There is an abrupt cut to:

Dr. Huston waiting by a coin-operated telescope on the seafront. He is joined by Crawford; both have them have received letters from Donen. When he arrives, he tells them about Walker, whose throat had been cut and his penis severed, and about seeing (though not recognising) Mrs. Johnson. He then hands them a note which he had removed from Walker's room before the police arrive. It reads: "This was the first. There'll be three more. J."

Crawford is at a coastal resort complex. In the bar is Mrs. Johnson, disguised with a short blonde wig. Crawford initiates conversation and Mrs. Johnson offers to lend her some books. They go to her apartment, where Mrs. Johnson gives her to understand that she is a painter. Crawford begins to seduce Mrs. Johnson on the floor. There is a brief cut to the Dr. and Mrs. Johnson embracing on a sofa. Then Mrs. Johnson leads Crawford into the bedroom. They undress each other and embrace for some presumed Sapphic frolics, which are rudely terminated when Mrs. Johnson presses an inflatable black-and-white cushion over Crawford's face and smothers her. She then pins a note on her chest which reads: "You are the second pig. J."

Mrs. Johnson approaches the corpse of her husband, laid out on the bed in their island house, saying that she has killed two of his murderers.

Mrs. Johnson is in a church (the one where she and Johnson were married), wearing widow's weeds and a different wig. She is watched by Dr. Huston, who follows her outside when she leaves. When he approaches her, she tearfully tells him that her husband is terminally ill. Huston offers to help, but when he mentions his name she runs away.

Huston is telling Donen of the incident in a restaurant: "When I said my name, she was as scared as if I was the devil." He says he is certain it was Johnson's wife, but Donen tells him to stop talking nonsense. Mrs. Johnson appears, sans disguise, and sits at the next table. Donen says that she looks familiar and goes to ask the waiter who she is, but when he turns to point her out, she has gone.

Dr. Huston visits the inspector and, having outlined his fears of being a revenge target, demands police protection. The inspector is polite but firm – not until he is in serious danger.

Huston walks into Donen's hotel and tries to relax in the lobby. Mrs. Johnson appears, again without disguise, and Huston becomes agitated, finally getting up to confront her. She asks for a light. He tells her to leave him alone, and walks out. She follows him into a bar – "Do you have a light now?"

With shaking hands, he lights her cigarette. When she asks, “Don’t you want to talk to me?” he says no and again tells her to leave him alone before rushing out of the bar. As Huston walks up the flights of stairs to his apartment, he realises he is being followed by Mrs. Johnson. He starts to run, and she gives chase.

Inside his darkened apartment, the light is suddenly switched on to reveal Mrs. Johnson lying on the bed, wearing a black bra, suspenders and tights, blue fishnet knickers, and the blonde wig she wore for Crawford. She tries to allay Huston’s fears, and kisses him. There is a brief cut to the Johnsons kissing, then back to her and Huston, then another cut to the Johnsons and back. As Huston slavers over her, Mrs. Johnson stares glassily at the ceiling. This is paralleled with a shot of the dead Dr. Johnson’s eyes staring upwards. Then Mrs. Johnson stabs Huston in the base of his neck, before opening his trousers and cutting off his penis.

Mrs. Johnson is sitting in the dark on a sofa, naked except for her purple wrap, staring at her husband’s body on the bed, remembering when they were together. Drawing the wrap around her, she approaches the bed, lets the wrap fall, and embraces her dead husband, saying that it is all over now, and that they will go away together. Then she bites his chest.

Donen leaves his hotel and gets into a taxi. Much later, back in his apartment, he finds his wife lying in the hallway, her throat cut. As he passes out, Mrs. Johnson descends the stairs, crosses over to him and lifts his head up.

In a hospital room, the inspector pulls back a sheet from Crawford’s body. A medic tells him that she was suffocated and her body scratched. Then an orderly announces that the professor’s body has been brought in – “He has multiple stab wounds. The body’s a mess.” The inspector remarks, “Now only Dr. Huston survives. We’ll have to watch him closely.”

Donen is tied to a chair in the apartment in which Crawford was killed, his pink shirt torn open. Mrs. Johnson watches him from the bed. As he regains consciousness, she gets up, and approaches him. “You will have to suffer.” She caresses him and then starts slicing his chest with a knife. She drops her wrap, slides up his body, then slaps him, saying, “My husband will rest easier after your death.” She then kills him with a thrust to the groin.

Mrs. Johnson gets into a car, her husband’s body in the passenger seat. She tells him they will be reunited, and then drives the car over a precipice. The inspector arrives and solemnly intones, “A dead man was held responsible for these crimes. I believe it to be the truth. Mrs. Johnson was a normal woman. If it wasn’t for her husband’s death she wouldn’t have committed these crimes.”

Despite good photography, a great score, and another standout performance by Miranda, *She Killed in Ecstasy*, another reworking of *The Bride Wore Black*, proves a disappointment in comparison with either *Eugénie* or *Vampyros Lesbos*, though still much better than the ridiculous *The Devil Came*

from Akasava. As can be seen from the above synopsis, there are far too many holes in the plot and it seems clear that the script was put together hurriedly and with little concern for logic. How, one wonders, does Mrs. Johnson get into Huston's apartment, and when did she effect her disguise? And why did she run away from him at the church if her purpose (deduced from her disguise) was to get close to him? The scene with the inspector in the hospital makes absolutely no sense; when Huston visited him he was told that the policeman was working on the Walker and Crawford cases, yet in this scene he's acting as if the murders had only just happened. And why does the orderly come in and pronounce on the state of the professor's body? It's two murders ago since Donen called the police, and even if the inspector does not yet know of Huston's demise, this hardly qualifies as news. And why does the inspector assume that only Huston is still alive? Surely he must know of Donen, who initially contacted the police and who has not, in fact and as far as the inspector is aware, been killed at that point.

All of this might be less of a problem if Franco was experimenting with narrative structure again, or constructing an oneiric revenge story like *Venus in Furs*, but there is nothing in the film to suggest that the events are unfolding in anything but a straightforward manner and in 'real time'. Indeed, *She Killed in Ecstasy* may be said to perfectly demonstrate two of Franco's shortcomings: the tendency to rush into production before a script is finalised, and his reported enthusiasm for completely rewriting scenes overnight or improvising on set (12). The jazz-inspired, improvisational approach alluded to earlier is not best suited to genre subjects such as the revenge thriller, which of course, insists on rules and internal logic for much of its effect. In fact, *She Killed in Ecstasy* would have been much more effective if Franco had adopted the oneiric or supernatural approach; perhaps having the inspector reveal at the end that Mrs. Johnson, on discovering her husband's death, had also committed suicide, and that, as far as he was concerned, the murders must be the work of an unknown maniac.

Furthermore, and in contrast to *Eugénie*, the characters are all too sketchily-drawn, the only paradoxical advantage of this being the illustration it provides of Miranda's ability to yet again convincingly create a character from next to nothing. Dr. Johnson, whatever sympathy one feels for his plight, quickly loses it once he begins to crack up. Why doesn't he just move to a country where work on a forerunner of stem-cell research is welcomed? Prof. Walker is splendidly unpleasant, though one regrets Franco's habit, previously seen in *The Diabolical Dr. Z* and *Succubus*, of killing off Vernon too early in proceedings. Dr. Huston provides Müller with little to do beyond looking nervous, and the role of Crawford is so under-developed that Ewa Strömberg can make nothing of it. The most preposterous character of all, though, is the inspector, a curiously repellent characterisation by Horst Tappert who seems to spend his time either smiling like a lunatic or mouthing incomprehensible platitudes.

Franco's direction seems rushed and often unsure; he may be amusing himself showing Mrs. Johnson and Crawford distorted through a glass of sherry, but why is there a sequence of erotic paintings shown at the start of Prof. Walker's scene in the bar? Are we supposed to believe that they are

hanging in what otherwise seems a perfectly run-of-the-mill establishment? And if not that, then what? Franco's use of the zoom lens is also particularly ham-fisted in this film. In the scene where Dr. Huston approaches Mrs. Johnson outside the church, Franco begins with a beautiful, classically composed shot of the pair framed by an archway; he then performs a horrible double-zoom movement which not only destroys the composition but breaks the mood and makes one aware of the camera. Nor can it be excused on the grounds that Franco was saving time on another set-up because towards the end of the scene he moves the camera closer to the actors anyway.

For all its faults, however, *She Killed in Ecstasy* remains one of Franco's most popular films, and is certainly more entertaining than François Truffaut's conspicuously flaccid version of Woolrich's novel, *La Mariée était en noir*, made in 1968. The spaced-out soundtrack by the German composers, Manfred Hübler and Siegfried Schwab, is a great asset, and Franco displays some nice touches in handling the murder scenes, in particular the smothering of Crawford, whose contorted face can be seen through the plastic cushion. Miranda not only brings style and substance to the film, but manages to infuse even her most bloodthirsty scenes with an eroticism that is not easily forgotten.

Vampyros Lesbos (*Las vampiras*) begins with the titles playing over an image of the sun with a ship in the foreground, accompanied by what sounds like a radio broadcast being played backwards. This is intercut with shots of a beautiful dark-haired woman, her hands reaching out to the camera, a long red scarf fluttering from her neck. After some brief shots of Istanbul in daylight, the film begins in a Turkish nightclub, where the same woman is performing. On the stage is a female mannequin, a silver candelabra, and a full-length mirror. The woman, who is wearing a black negligee over black bra and panties, black fishnet stockings and suspender, offset by a long red scarf and red garters, begins by caressing her own image in the mirror. After discreetly stripping, the woman approaches the mannequin and begins to caress it. The "mannequin" comes to life, and at the act's finale is vampirised by the woman. The performance is being watched by Linda Westinghouse (Ewa Strömberg) and her boyfriend, Omar (André Montchall). Linda is fascinated, aroused, and disturbed by the act, and totally oblivious to Omar's presence.

Linda is woken by the woman apparently calling to her; a kite jinks and twists across the sky; Linda is taking a boat to an island. In a succession of cuts, we see a modern, single-level house with red pyramid-shaped roofing, a fishing net, and a wicker chair. The woman from the nightclub, bare-breasted now but still wearing the long red scarf, looks to camera. We see blood on a windowpane, a butterfly in a fishing net, a scorpion, the blood drops on the window merging into a stream, the woman again as before. Next, we see a different shot of her reclining. Suddenly, Linda's head enters the frame in front of the woman's legs. She is wearing a heavy, ornate necklace.

Linda is recounting her dream to a psychiatrist, Dr. Steiner (Paul Müller), who is more interested in his doodles than his patient. Linda tells him she has this recurrent dream featuring the woman from

the nightclub, but that she did not know who the woman in the dream was until she saw her performing in the club the night before. Dr. Steiner, eager to end the consultation, tells her she is sexually frustrated and should find a better lover.

Linda is at work in the offices of Simpson & Simpson. She is told that her boss wants to raise the company's profile in Turkey. Linda announces that she is going to Anatolia, "to see Countess Carody about an inheritance."

Linda returns to Omar at the Istanbul Hilton. She does not tell him what Steiner said, but admits she is scared. As they look out over the swimming pool, she suggests they spend a few days together.

We see the kite, and the same boat as in Linda's dream. Linda is now on a ferry to Anatolia. She is wearing a rust-red leather coat, an orange patterned hair tie, and carrying a bright red leather handbag. She seems nervous. We see the kite again, and the woman from the nightclub calling her name. Linda walks up a deserted street to the Plaj hotel, where she announces herself and asks to be taken to the Kadidados Islands. She is told she is too late and has missed the boat. When she asks where she can stay, she is informed that the Countess Carody has reserved her a room at the Plaj. In the background, the hotel janitor, Memmet, sits, counting off a rosary. He takes Linda up the faded, red-painted stairway to her room.

Linda, wearing a short brown dress, wakes up suddenly after a nightmare. She finds there is no water in the room and goes downstairs, where she is startled by Memmet grabbing her elbow. He tells her not to go to the island because, "Death lives there. Madness and death rule the island." He says she should come to the wine-cellar later, then he is called away.

Linda looks down into the wine-cellar and sees Memmet standing over a woman's corpse, trussed up, bloody, and with a noose around its neck. She runs away. Memmet makes a half-hearted effort to follow her before returning to his gruesome business.

Linda arrives by boat on the island. We see the kite, and hear the woman calling Linda's name. We see the woman's mute servant, Morpho, watching Linda through the fishing nets. We see Linda walking, from through the nets. We see the scorpion. The camera zooms from in-focus on Linda to out-of-focus and then into focus again. Inside the house, Linda 'sees' blood running down the windowpane. She panics and runs but is halted by the woman calling her name. The woman is reclining in the wicker chair, wearing a white bikini and large shades. She is the Countess Nadine Carody. Linda approaches, announcing she is from Simpson & Simpson. The Countess watches her appraisingly. Linda confesses she feels she has been here before. The Countess says that is quite common, then invites her for a swim.

The Countess encourages Linda to swim au naturel, assuring her no one can see them. Except Morpho, who is watching. Afterwards, the Countess also strips off, creating a sense of intimacy and relaxation between them.

The Countess is sitting at an outside table decorated with red candles on a salmon-pink cloth. Behind the table hang the fishing nets. Linda joins her, now in a white trouser suit and wearing the ornate necklace seen in her dream. She remarks on the unusual will and asks about Count Dracula. The Countess says he was, like her, from Hungary. He left everything “to the woman who made his life worth living,” adding that “It is wonderful how much he had to give me.” When Linda remarks that not everyone is so generous, the Countess, touching her wedding ring, says, “One day, I will pass it on to somebody who deserves it.” Linda admits to a headache. The Countess, after remarking that “I love this red wine”, tells her to rest. Linda, obviously drugged, passes out, watched calmly but intently by the Countess, who then caresses her neck, her nostrils dilating. She calls for Morpho.

Morpho puts Linda to bed. We see a black dog in the sea, the butterfly, the scorpion, and hear the distorted voice that played over the opening credits. The Countess pulls aside a curtain leading into Linda’s room. She is wearing the long red scarf, and there is blood on her lower lip. Linda awakes, and walks hesitantly towards her. We see the scorpion, as the Countess approaches. Linda looks apprehensive as the Countess caresses then kisses her. The Countess then tilts her head back briefly, establishing her power before sitting Linda on the bed and removing her top. She kisses her again. Dissolve to the Countess lying Linda on the floor and removing her trousers. Dissolve to the scorpion. Dissolve to the Countess standing over the now naked Linda and starting to remove her dress. Dissolve to the kite. Dissolve to the Countess, still wearing her scarf, caressing Linda’s neck with her lips. Dissolve to the butterfly in the fishing net. Dissolve to the Countess biting Linda’s neck. Cut to blood running down windowpane. Cut to the Countess biting, then raising her head, a goblet of blood hanging from her mouth, before biting again as Linda moans.

The camera zooms back from an open window, gauze curtains billowing in the breeze. Linda lies naked on the floor, She wakes with a start, calls for “Nadine”, then finds her brown dress. She goes downstairs, through a room with red and black furniture and a heavy, red-tasselled ceiling drape, then outside. In the swimming pool, she sees Nadine, floating in a crucifixion pose. The camera pans the length of the red scarf to Nadine’s face, her eyes staring wide as in a trance, blood on her chin. Linda passes out beside the pool.

In the private clinic of Dr. Aldon Seward, a female patient called Agra is having a fit. After being slapped back to reality by Melnik, Dr. Seward’s assistant, she babbles on about the Countess returning to her: “She will take hold of me again. I’m so happy.” Downstairs, Dr. Seward (Dennis Price) is reading – “The moon will be red as blood, and the undead will step from the dark, looking for victims, ruthless and cruel.” Melnik comes in and reports Agra’s latest fit. After ordering that she be given an injection, Dr. Seward visits her. Agra tells him about her latest visitation: “I lost myself

completely in her. She was me, and I was her.” When Seward asks who she means, she replies, “My friend is the Queen of the Night.”

Linda wakes up in Seward’s clinic. She is unable to remember who she is, and has been there for a number of days. Omar arrives, in response to a notice run by Seward. We see Linda and Omar on a boat, then walking around Istanbul while, Linda, in voice-over, tells him that, apart from being on a boat at sea, and the Countess in the pool (“All I can see is a woman, a naked woman lying dead in a pool.”), she can remember nothing. She wonders if it is all a dream. Cut to a shot of the Countess staring out a window. Cut back to Linda and Omar, reflected and distorted in a window. Omar suggests they go on holiday. The camera pulls back to reveal an airline company’s window display.

A slow reverse zoom from the sun and the ship seen in the title sequence is followed by a fast zoom to a big house on a mountain. Inside the Countess is lying on a black combination seat, watched by Morpho. She is recounting how, a hundred or was it two hundred years ago, she was raped by a soldier before being rescued by Count Dracula, who killed the soldier. Dracula then took her blood before sharing with her “the secrets of the vampires.” “Why did he do it?” she wonders. “Men still disgust me. I hate them all! Many were captivated by me. Many women. I bewitched them. They lost their identity. I became them. But then I met Linda. Now I’m under her spell. I have to initiate her into our circle.”

Cut to Linda and Omar in bed (the same as earlier, so presumably they did not go on holiday), the sea reflected in the window. We see the Countess, with Morpho behind her, “watching” them. Linda and Omar start to make love. The camera zooms into Nadine’s face as, in voice-over, she calls Linda’s name. Cut to waves breaking. Cut to Linda and Omar, now asleep. Cut to a close-up of Nadine’s eyes as she calls Linda a third time. Linda wakes, then gets up and fetches a long, black dress. Nadine appears on the balcony outside their room, apparently closing in on Omar. Linda walks down the hallway, and is next seen walking up the steps to the house on the mountain.

Cut to Linda walking up a spiral staircase bathed in red light, then along a corridor, the shot ending in a close-up of Nadine’s face. Nadine sits on the combination seat, also dressed in black, waiting for Linda and appearing somewhat nervous. When Linda comes in, Nadine welcomes her, then drinks from a crystal chalice filled with blood, which she then offers to Linda, who also drinks from it. Nadine tells her that she is now “one of us” and that “The Queen of the Night will bear you up on her black wings. Kovec nihe trekatsch.” Linda repeats the incantation, then kisses Nadine hungrily. Nadine lies down, “Save me,” she says to Linda, giving herself to her. Now it is Linda who is the aggressor. Cut to Agra having an erotic dream and fondling a phallic-shaped children’s toy. Cut back to Nadine now vampirising Linda, then back to Agra screaming for Nadine.

Omar is sitting listlessly in a chair in Dr. Seward’s consulting room. The doctor tells Linda, who is now dressed in a shorter black dress with a red patterned neck scarf and black boots, that Omar has lost a lot of blood but that it is not serious. When Linda suggests it may have been her fault, Seward

replies patronisingly that she is a charming girl but understands nothing about occultism, adding that, “You can’t influence the supernatural.” Melnik announces that Agra is having another attack. “I’ve spent a lot of time studying vampires,” Seward informs Linda before inviting her to visit Agra with him. They pass through Seward’s study, which is decorated with a rug with blood-red patterning. Seward then says that while Omar is in no danger, Linda is. Linda explains how she finds herself doing inexplicable things. Seward tells her she can protect herself from “the Spirits of the Night,” while admitting he is frightened of them: “It depends on the desire to live and to free yourself.” He then advises her on how to kill a vampire with a deadly blow to the brain, either by splitting the skull with an axe or piercing it with a bar (both of which items he happens to have handy), adding that, “If you succeed in killing a vampire, the body will vanish into nothing.”

When Seward (but not Linda) enters Agra’s room she is writhing on the floor: “She was inside me. And now she’s gone! Nobody can save me!” When Seward tries to get more information, she suddenly says that Nadine will be coming back, because she wants to meet Seward.

Omar expresses his concerns that Linda is getting weaker and will not survive another attack, but Seward reassures him that he has told her what to do and that she will be all right providing she has the strength to do it. As Omar leaves, he is approached by Agra, who tells him must go to the Countess’s house (“The old house of Uskalan, up on the mountain.”) to get Nadine to help her. They are interrupted by Seward and Melnik, the latter having spotted Agra from an open window. Seward tells Omar to leave in no uncertain terms.

Omar returns to the hotel, looking for Linda. When he cannot find her, he asks at the reception and is told that she checked out the day before.

Linda is apprehensively climbing an outside staircase. A green door at the top opens to reveal Memmet. Linda screams but he overpowers her and she loses consciousness.

Omar arrives at the nightclub, where Nadine is beginning her performance. He leaves before the end, unaware that Morpho has seen him. As Nadine reaches the climax of her routine, we hear the distorted voice on the soundtrack as she starts to vampirise her “mannequin”, this time killing her in the process.

After a quick cut to the image of the sun and the ship (from the opening titles), we cut to Dr. Seward’s clinic. In his consulting room, the doctor confides in his diary: “The more I study the phenomenon of the vampires the more I’m drawn to their world. Its powers stem from unknown depths, powers that are inaccessible to most of us. I can barely resist the temptation to cross over into the dark world of the supernatural.” Melnik comes in to report that Agra is asleep and to ask if he is needed. Seward dismisses him before crossing to the stairs and starting up them, pausing as the hall clock strikes midnight. Half-way up, Seward turns and looks down. The Countess is in the hall. “Who are you?” he asks. “You know, so why ask?” Nadine replies. Seward tells her he wants to enter

her world, “Only with your help can I enter this world and contact the supernatural.” But Nadine refuses, “You want to take Linda from me. That’s why I won’t aid you.” Seward again asks for her help, before uttering the “Kovec nihe trekatsch” incantation. “Shut up!” Nadine tells him, “Our words have no power when you say them. He who is our enemy will lose the battle and will never join our empire.” Seward asks why she has come. “Because this is the hour of your death.” Seward makes the sign of the cross, intoning “Sanctus spiritus benedictus aberatio aberni mandati nolet.” Nadine backs away, shielding her face, then calls Morpho who grabs Steward and strangles him to death. The Countess approaches his body before exchanging a glance with Morpho.

As Agra writhes bare-breasted on the floor, Nadine materializes through the door. Agra reaches up to her. “I’ve come to say goodbye. I have to leave you forever,” Nadine tells her. She dematerialises, leaving Agra clutching at thin air.

Dr. Steiner arrives at his practice and reads in the paper that, “The famous scientist Aldon Seward was killed last night. Two people dressed in black were seen leaving the scene.” Omar comes in and asks if he’s seen the paper. Steiner, as sympathetic as ever, answers, “Yes. They killed the old charlatan who studied vampires. What’s it to you?” Omar says that Linda has disappeared and must be in the hands of the killers. Steiner tells him his imagination is running wild and that she is probably with another man. Then Omar tells him of the death in the nightclub and that he believes the dancer will lead him to Linda. He has managed to find out that the dancer lives, “In an old house in Uskalan.” Steiner tells him he should not go on his own, and that he will accompany him.

Linda is trussed up in the wine-cellar. “You are here to meet Dracula’s heirs. You will be mine in this night of darkness,” mutters Memmet, threatening her with a saw. It transpires that he is Agra’s husband and that she went out to the Countess’s island. She came back deranged and was locked up by Seward. He babbles on about blood, saying he will untie Linda so she will be free to enjoy her pain. He again shows her the woman he killed by hanging. Linda plays along with him. He unties her and then she kills him by smashing the saw blade into his neck.

Omar and Steiner arrive at the house in Uskalan. Nadine, dressed in a white fur-lined coat and matching Cossack hat, hears them coming upstairs. She calls Morpho, who fires off a shot at the two men as he and the Countess make their escape.

Nadine leaves Istanbul by boat. She looks tired and ill.

We see Nadine’s pool, in which the scorpion is drowning. Cut to Linda running along the beach, calling for Nadine. The house appears to be locked up, but Linda forces open the French window. She finds Nadine draped over the combination seat, obviously dying. Cut to the scorpion. Linda asks what has happened. “The end has come . . . for me,” replies Nadine, weakly. Linda asks if there is anything she can do. “Yes. Only you can help me. Only through your blood will my strength return.” But Linda refuses, saying, “No, I don’t want to belong to you.” “You . . . you want to leave me?” asks

Nadine in disbelief. Linda strokes her gently as she turns over. “This is the end. It has to be the end,” she says before biting Nadine’s neck. Cut to Morpho outside. Cut to Nadine, as she dies. Cut to Agra. Cut to Linda pulling out a steel hatpin. “No,” she says, “I don’t want to be like you. That’s why I have to do it.” She then stabs Nadine in her left eye. A spurt of blood hits Linda in the face. Cut to Agra collapsing, now freed from Nadine’s influence. Cut to scorpion. Cut to Morpho, running. He hauls Linda off Nadine’s body and hurls her to the floor. He kisses Nadine tenderly, then removes the pin from her eye and stabs himself in the heart. Omar and Steiner arrive by boat. They see the drowned scorpion in the pool. Inside, they find Linda hunched up against the wall. There is no sign of Nadine’s body or that of Morpho. But beside her is the Countess’s long red scarf.

As they travel back from the island by boat, Omar, in voice-over, tells her, “It was a bad dream, Linda. Nothing more.” She replies, “No, it wasn’t a dream, unbelievable as it may seem. Even if there is no explanation. The pain will fade in time but the memory will remain for as long as I live.” The final shot shows the kite falling to earth.

* * * * *

There can be little doubt that *Vampyros Lesbos* (13) is the best film of Franco’s long and erratic career. For once, nearly all the elements that have fascinated him – sex, eroticism, fetishism, voyeurism, mind control, the shifting boundary between dreams and reality, the conjunction of death and desire, the rejection of logic, non-linear story-telling – came together to create a pulsating acid trip of a movie, an outrageous, psychedelic blend of pop-art, poetry, and pulp which audaciously inverts the conventions of the traditional vampire film while at the same time respecting and reinforcing them. Indeed, with *Vampyros Lesbos* Franco may be said to have successfully redefined the genre in the Leone-esque sense of the term (alluded to previously), even if the film had no obvious impact or influence on contemporary or future trends.

Critical analysis of *Vampyros Lesbos*, as with Franco himself, has been pretty minimal. It is not mentioned in any of the early, pictorial studies of the horror genre (by Denis Gifford, and Alan Frank); the first references to it would appear to be in Donald F. Glut’s *The Dracula Book* and Barrie Pattison’s *The Seal of Dracula* (both 1975). The former described it as being, ‘reputedly based on “Dracula’s Guest,” by Stoker. The film is about a girl dreaming that she is being menaced by a lesbian vampire’ (14), while the latter notes only that it concerns “a young American [sic] girl ... confronted by a Countess, whose face has appeared in her hallucinations and who is discovered to be a descendant of Dracula.” (15) David Pirie’s otherwise excellent *The Vampire Cinema* (1977) basically repeats Pattison’s summation (16). The first intelligent assessment of the film in a book not specifically about Franco would appear to be that of Alain Silver and James Ursini in the second (but not the first) edition of *The Vampire Film*, published in 1993. (17) As recently as the late 1990s, however, even specialist horror publications could be found to be inaccurate in describing the film, or ignoring it altogether (while confidently stating that Jess Franco is Italian!) The fact that *Vampyros*

Lesbos was not released in Britain (nor Ireland, presumably) of course explains its absence from the early works while, as can be seen, the first authors to mention it had clearly not seen it.

Nonetheless, it is fair to say that *Vampyros Lesbos* is not universally loved or admired (one on-line review facetiously suggests it is about a girl being menaced by a kite), though it will be shown that such views betray a lack of understanding of the film (and of Franco) and the context in which it was made. And *Vampyros Lesbos* is, perhaps, not an easy film to appreciate on a first viewing, especially if one has been brought up on the Universal and Hammer models. Franco's film is a visual and aural assault on the senses which can quite easily leave a viewer saying, "Jesus! (or even Jesús!) What the hell was that?" It can seem like a crazy-quilt film of weird shots, crazy sounds, and far-out music (courtesy, once again of Manfred Hübler and Siegfried Schwab). And, oh yes, two hot babes doing the wild thing on the floor . . .

Franco's Countess Nadine Carody was one of the earliest cinematic female vampires, and arguably the first one who is not only central to the story, but from whom the story stems. The first female vampire, to all intents and purposes, was the old hag in Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1931). It may be considered heretical to mention Franco in the same sentence as the sainted Dreyer, but there is much in common between their two films. Both were shot in impecunious conditions; both claimed an entirely spurious derivation from Anglo-Irish sources: Bram Stoker's *Dracula's Guest* and J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, respectively; both films are highly distinctive, aurally as well as visually; both seek to establish a poetic, other-worldly atmosphere; and both may be said, to similar degrees, to fall short of perfection in an artistic sense. The following quote is from the *Aurum Horror Encyclopedia*: ". . . the entire film is riddled with disjunctive editing, impossible point-of-view shots and seemingly incoherent events . . . which make it impossible for the viewer to settle on any particular 'view' with any certainty. . . . the repeated use of a voice off and an eerie soundtrack . . . and the spatial dislocations provoked by the editing style combine to make an abstract movie proceed with the movement of dream logic. Many images remain engraved on the mind . . ." (18) Were it not for the reference to point-of-view shots (not employed by Franco) it would be hard to tell that this is, in fact, a review of Dreyer's film.

In *The Vampire Cinema*, David Pirie convincingly suggests that early Hollywood never felt entirely at ease with the vampire in general, the female vampire in particular, and the supernatural as a whole. *Dracula* itself (1931) was considerably toned down, among its other shortcomings, while *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) actively backed away from the sexual implications of its story. Hammer's *Dracula* had his 'Brides', of course, but they were secondary characters. Jean Rollin was the first director to actively engage with what would be termed "the sex-vampire" (always female, pointedly enough). His stiflingly obscure, surrealist dreamscapes have their admirers, though many regret that his films are never as interesting as the posters promoting them. Rollin's female vampires tend to be remote, totemic figures rather than active protagonists. Hammer's later female vampires, derived mainly from *Carmilla*, though central to the plot, are not necessarily the focus of it, while the films themselves betray an unease with notions of female sexuality and transgression that is often embarrassing.

Franco, on the other hand, took Nadine Carody and made her both the source and focus of his film in a way that had not been attempted before. It is yet another example of his inclination (or obsession) to place women at the very centre of his cinema, for reasons already examined, not all of which might necessarily lead him to be retrospectively hailed as an icon of feminism. Nonetheless, Franco may be said to have acted both sooner and with considerably more honesty and conviction in this regard than others in the same field.

In stark contrast to *She Killed in Ecstasy*, *Vampyros Lesbos* gives every indication of having been properly thought out. Structurally, it is assembled with a deftness and precision all too often lacking in Franco's films, while visually it is extremely rich and complex. Events and images are foreshadowed and paralleled with extraordinary skill, and Franco's control of space and his camerawork are extremely disciplined while at the same time quite recognisably his own. His use of décor, design, and costume, not always his strong suit, is wonderfully consistent and greatly enhances the impact of the film.

One of the things evidently missed by those unimpressed by *Vampyros Lesbos* is the fact that it is such a fascinating – and amusing – inversion of the Dracula story. Following the basic storyline of Stoker's novel, Franco allows himself some new riffs on the familiar theme. Linda Westinghouse is a feminised version of Jonathan Harker, travelling to Nadine's island to conduct some business on behalf of a mysterious client, just as Harker travels to Dracula's castle in the novel. The Countess Nadine Carody is a vampire unlike any we have seen before: the first part of her act takes place in front of a mirror in which she caresses her own reflection; she sun-bathes and swims (perhaps not in "running water", but if Count Dracula had a penchant for skinny-dipping, Stoker kept it to himself); and she loves wine. Her "castle", instead of being shrouded in gloom is wide open to the bright Mediterranean light; spiders' webs are 'replaced' by draped fishing nets; and the mysterious kite stands in for the traditional bat. The character of Renfield is split in two, feminised as the raving Agra in Dr. Seward's clinic, and ranting on about blood in the character of Memmet, who also stands in for the peasants and coach-driver who utter dire warnings to Harker on his journey. And Dr. Seward himself, in this case an amalgamation of the original and Professor Van Helsing, far from being the voice of reason as would be expected, wants nothing more than to become a vampire himself! (He also has his own take on vampire killing, involving neither garlic nor heart-staking.)

Neither Seward, Omar (who himself shares some of Harker's characteristics in the latter part of the film), nor the egregious Dr. Steiner play any useful part in rescuing Linda from Nadine's control; indeed, the latter two are reduced to the Franco norm for male protagonists, secondary buffoons forever one or more steps behind the action, useful only for mumbling platitudes at the close of the film. Linda, in fact, does not require rescuing; she disposes of the murderous Memmet through her own wits, and delivers the requisite deadly blow to the brain herself. Indeed, her character is the complete antithesis of the usual whey-faced virgin or blushing bride common to the vampire tradition; she is presented instead as a grown-up, sexually active adult.

The Countess, too, is not, in the final analysis, a true monster; her relationship with Linda is neither parasitic nor defined in terms of personal antagonism, as is the case with Dracula and Harker, fighting for control of Mina's soul. She admits to being under Linda's spell, and her sudden decline, never explicitly explained, seems if anything due to a realisation that she and Linda cannot be together than for any concrete cause. Their final words sound more like the ending of a human love relationship than a vengeful release, and Linda only stabs her once she is dead.

A possible explanation for Nadine's decline may be found in the German lobby cards for the film, one of which shows Nadine on the hotel bed with Omar, stroking his hair and presumably about to vampirise him. This scene must have followed that of Linda waking, after making love with Omar, and the Countess approaching their room from the balcony. The fact that Linda returned to Omar after her experience with Nadine on the island may have caused the Countess to see Omar as more of a rival for Linda's affections than is apparent in the final cut, hence her intention to remove him, or more likely, reduce his potency, by vampirising him. Later, when Omar is being examined at Seward's clinic, Linda suggests it may have been her fault, and we assume she means this in the sense of having become involved with the Countess in the first place, thus leading her to Omar. However, by removing the scene of Nadine vampirising Omar, Franco may have intended us to suppose that Linda believes herself responsible for vampirising him after her return from the initiation ceremony in Uskalan. If this speculation is correct, then Franco would have needed a scene demonstrating a deeper bond between Linda and Omar than is apparent, in order to explain the Countess's fear of losing Linda and her subsequent decline – in a literal sense, dying for love. Such a strong fear of losing Linda to Omar would also explain Nadine's otherwise uncharacteristic anxiety as she waits for Linda prior to the ceremony in Uskalan.

Franco achieves an unsettling atmosphere from the very beginning, with the distorted voice playing over the image of what one assumes is a setting, rather than a rising, sun, intercut with the disorientating posture of Nadine as she reaches towards the camera. He then inserts a couple of brief shots of Istanbul, not at night, as we might expect, but in the full glare of day, before cutting to the nightclub and the beginning of the Countess's performance, which (obviously) is taking place at night. Her interaction with the "mannequin" clearly prefigures her seduction of Linda, while also playing on the life-death theme of traditional vampire storytelling (Nadine can bring the "mannequin" to life, but her attempt to give Linda immortal life will lead to her death).

The images we see in what turns out to be Linda's dream will make more sense later when Linda actually visits the island, though the scorpion and the butterfly already convey their metaphorical message of predator and prey. The combination of these images in the editing, combined with the soundtrack, achieve an hallucinatory effect that reawakens the sense of unease felt during the credit sequence, which is then increased by the disturbing image of Linda's head lurching into the frame.

When Linda returns after seeing Dr. Steiner, she and Omar lean on the balcony. Franco includes a quick view of the hotel swimming pool below, foreshadowing the pool scene on the island. Linda's

predominately red outfit, worn on her trip to Anatolia, contrasts with those of the Countess, which are predominantly black, while perhaps also suggesting her future role as blood victim. Her hair tie, fluttering in the breeze, specifically links her with the butterfly.

Franco isolates Linda in long shot as she walks to the hotel, underlining her vulnerability. This is reinforced by a quick hand-held shot from on top of a building, suggesting she is being observed. The faded red paint on the hotel stairs prefigures the décor in the Countess's house, while Linda's brown dress may be intended as visual metaphor for her current state, halfway between life (represented by red) and death (black). Her first encounter with Memmet leads us to suppose he is simply a grotesque and amusing harbinger of doom, familiar from so many vampire films, but when Franco then cuts immediately, with no time lapse, to Linda entering the wine-cellar and seeing the body, our shock is as great as hers.

In a traditional film, we might now expect a scene where Linda reports her discovery to the authorities, either to be disbelieved or to return with them to find there is no longer a body in the cellar. Franco, however, has never been impressed by authority and it seems Linda isn't either, because the next we see of her is her arrival on the island. This unexpected transition is unsettling in retrospect, though we have no time to dwell on it at the time.

Franco's repetition of the imagery we saw in Linda's dream now carries a definite threat, increased by our first, unexpected view of the sinister Morpho. When Linda sees the blood on the windowpane we believe she is only imagining or remembering it, but we cannot be sure. Our grim forebodings are then undercut, if only momentarily, by our first sight of the Countess in her own environment, reclining gracefully in her wicker chair like an elegant model on a photo-shoot. We, along with Linda, are then invited to relax during the swimming and sunbathing scene, but this too is undermined by the Countess's lie that nobody can see them, while we can see Morpho watching them.

The scene at the dining table may be the best individual scene of Franco's career. The setting is both intimate and ominous, the refined simplicity of the table contrasting with the threat of ensnarement represented by the draped fishing nets in the background. The two women have established a bond but we know that it is the Countess who is controlling every aspect of the situation. The dialogue is largely unimportant, but the emotional undercurrent, conveyed by gesture and eye-contact, is remarkably powerful and seductive. This is great screen acting, and Franco's subtle camerawork and editing perfectly captures and enhances the understated, yet intense, eroticism flowing beneath the surface.

Such is the strength of the scene, in fact, that it rather undercuts the effectiveness of the actual seduction and vampirising of Linda that follows. When Morpho places Linda on the bed, Franco, perhaps unwisely, cuts to a shot of a black dog in the sea, a rather unnecessary metaphor for Morpho's doglike devotion (and one which also recalls the traditional vampire's control over "the

children of the night” as well as their shape-shifting abilities), or at any rate, one that could have been included at a different point. Similarly, the intercutting of the scorpion and the butterfly in the net (not in themselves a model of metaphorical subtlety) with the vampirising of Linda, while perhaps adding to the delirium of the scene, also fractures it and reduces its power. Such reservations, however, are quickly forgotten by the shock of seeing the Countess lying in the pool, apparently in a catatonic state. In the traditional vampire film, if we see the vampire at all once he has drunk his fill, he is lying sated in his coffin. This is exactly what Franco replicates here, but in such a simple yet starkly original way as to make us unaware of the parallel until later.

While much of the original appeal of Bram Stoker’s novel came from switching the action from Transylvania (where, it being foreign, anything could happen) to contemporary Victorian England (where such things definitely didn’t happen), for most modern-day readers the passages that remain etched in the mind are those set in Transylvania; after that, the Count rather fades into the background and we are introduced to a lot of secondary characters we don’t really care about. Much the same problem affects *Vampyros Lesbos* at this point. Agra does not engage our sympathy, Omar is a dullard, and Dr. Seward, though we initially suppose him to be just the man to restore Reason to her throne, later proves to be several garlic cloves short of a bulb.

Still, while Franco does his best to keep us intrigued, one can almost sense his interest starting to wander. There is a most peculiar and unnecessary zoom into Dr. Seward as he is about to go up to see Agra. He stops at the foot of the stairs and suddenly throws out his arm dramatically, like Moses about to part the Red Sea. The camera zooms in, and Dr. Seward says, “We’d better give her an injection” – a perfectly commonplace utterance for a doctor to make, one would have thought, warranting neither the gesture nor the exclamatory zoom.

The Countess’s soliloquy regains our attention. It is also noticeable from this point on that Linda is dressed in black, having, as it were, crossed over to the dark side. Her arrival at the house in Uskalan ends with a wonderful close-up of Nadine’s face, followed by a rather pointless zoom into a naked light. The ceremony scene is rather uneven, as is the lighting. The Countess becomes rather less fascinating the more she is required to utter lines about black wings and the Queen of the Night. However, the scene ends strongly, with Linda, for the first time, the aggressor, and Nadine allowing herself to be vampirised. In the final shot, the Countess has reversed their positions and reclaimed her dominance.

After Dr. Seward has shown Linda his weaponry, she mysteriously disappears. He has invited her to visit Agra, but when we see him with the latter, Linda is not with him. After Omar has been ordered off the premises, he returns to the hotel where he is told that Linda checked out the previous day. As Linda accompanied him to Seward’s clinic, and as there was no bridging scene indicating a passage of time between his leaving the clinic and then learning of Linda’s departure, nor anything to indicate that Omar’s visit is at a later date than when he was accompanied by Linda, we are entitled to wonder what is going on. Is this just another example of Franco fracturing the narrative, as when Linda ran

away from Memmet, or is he losing the plot? It's difficult to tell, but having gone along with him this far, and got used to his narrative leaps, one is inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Even harder to fathom is Linda's return to what we assume is the hotel and the grim embrace of Memmet. What on earth is she doing there? Possibly to stop us worrying about such things, Franco cuts to Omar arriving at the nightclub and the beginning of Nadine's final performance. Omar may leave before the end, but Franco has no intention of letting us do so, or of doing so himself. We are treated to a spellbinding display of Nadine's sinuous and erotically-charged talents, fully five minutes in length, at the end of which we are not remotely concerned about Linda's predicament or Omar's, nor for that matter Dr. Seward's demise, which follows on from it. (The Countess's reaction in the latter scene is disappointingly 'traditional'; one would imagine that a reflecting, all-dancing, all-swimming, all-sunbathing, wine-imbibing vampire would be thoroughly unmoved by such ecclesiastical mumbo-jumbo). Nadine's materialisation through Agra's door is a surprise, largely because Franco has not before resorted to such trickery. In the same puckish mood, he frames a shot of Agra through the loose, black lace sleeve of Nadine's dress as she approaches the demented woman, a little nod to similar shots of Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee obscuring their victims with their cloaks.

Nadine's death, or rather the manner of it, is also a surprise. As has been suggested before, the scene is played very tenderly, with none of the 'death before sundown' dramatics of Dracula's demise, and one feels a sympathy for Nadine which, combined with Linda's reluctance to deliver the final blow, bestows a poignancy and sense of loss on what, after all, and no matter how it is played, is the traditional and expected end of a vampire film.

Despite the inconsistencies of tone and treatment which are apparent in the latter part of *Vampyros Lesbos*, they prove less problematical when actually viewing the film than in reading about it. The strength of the two female characters, and our involvement with them, so skillfully built up in the first part of the film, carries us through to the end, past the occasional absurdity and lapse in logic (intentional or otherwise). Soledad Miranda, it goes without saying, is simply sensational as the Countess, but she is equally matched by Ewa Strömberg as Linda, making one wish Franco had made better use of her cool voluptuousness in their previous collaboration. The other members of the cast do not fare so well. There is something off-kilter about Dennis Price's playing of Dr. Seward, as if the actor's thoughts were not in synch with the dubbed dialogue we hear from his lips. André Montchall is his usual charmless self, while Paul Müller, though quite amusing, has not enough screen time to be really effective. The actress playing Agra can scream and writhe with the best of them, and the chap playing Morpho, looking like a grim-faced refugee from the Manfred Mann Band, makes a welcome change from the other Morphos in Franco's films, in which the character is usually depicted as a gibbering wreck with eyes like fried eggs. As for Franco himself, well, what can one say?

Vampyros Lesbos is not a perfect film, but neither is Dreyer's *Vampyr*. Some of its faults can be said to be inherent in its unacknowledged source, some from the circumstances of its production (it was completed in one month); and some from Franco himself. And yet its qualities far outweigh its defects. It is bold, original, crazy, erotic, disturbing and highly entertaining all at the same time, while also containing an emotional truth and intensity that mark it out as a unique contribution to the horror genre. Within the narrow boundaries of the vampire film, it proposed something new, both in theme and technique, and, by and large, delivered it successfully, and for this it deserves far greater recognition than it has hitherto received.

Soledad Miranda died from injuries sustained in a car crash on the 18th of August, 1970. Many pieces written about her, while lamenting her tragic death, also observe that cinema was robbed of a potentially great actress. That is true, but only up to a point. She was already a great screen actress, in the films of Jess Franco, and happily, the evidence is still before us.

Jess Franco, of course, went on to make more, if not better, horror films (19), and is still doing so today. It's unlikely that he will ever be asked to sit at the high table of High Culture, but even more unlikely that he would want to do so. By concentrating on his best work up till 1970 (while not ignoring or excusing his worst), it can hopefully be seen that with Franco it is always worth taking the rough with the smooth. His career path has been unique, to say the least, making comparisons with his contemporaries either difficult or redundant, but it should be evident that he is a distinctive and original voice within the tradition of European horror and the fantastique, an outsider certainly, but one who has chosen his position and never deviated from it. No doubt he could have made bigger and "better" films with more established producers and worked with more prestigious colleagues, but in the process he would have stopped being Jess Franco. Such, it seems, are the "misfortunes of virtue."

1. Aguliar, Carlos; Piselli, Stefano & Morrocchi, Riccardo (eds.) – *Jess Franco: El sexo del horror*. (Glittering Images: Florence, 1999) p. 133.

2. Balbo, Lucas; Blumenstock, Peter; Kessler, Christian & Lucas, Tim – *Obsession: The Films of Jess Franco*. (F. Trebbin: Berlin, 1993).

Tohill, Cathal & Tombs, Pete – *Immoral tales: Sex and Horror Cinema in Europe 1956-1984*. Chapter: *The Labyrinth of Sex: the Films of Jess Franco*. (Primitive Press: London, 1994), and (Titan Books: London, 1995).

Aguliar, Carlos; Piselli, Stefano & Morrocchi, Riccardo (eds.) – *Jess Franco: El sexo del horror*. (Glittering Images: Florence, 1999)

3. Monthly Film Bulletin. (BFI: London, June 1963).

4. Aguliar, Carlos; Piselli, Stefano & Morrocchi, Riccardo (eds.) – *Jess Franco: El sexo del horror*. (Glittering Images: Florence, 1999) p. 9.

5. Tohill, Cathal & Tombs, Pete – *Immoral tales: Sex and Horror Cinema in Europe 1956-1984*. Chapter: *The Labyrinth of Sex: the Films of Jess Franco*. (Primitive Press: London, 1994), and (Titan Books, London, 1995) p. 77. We are forced to rely on a secondary source in this instance, thanks to the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), whose notion of “classification” is apparently no different (though considerably less honest) than what used to be called “censorship”. According to the strangely-named Melon Farmers anti-censorship website (www.melonfarmers.co.uk; an obscure homage to Charles Bronson in *Mr. Majestyk*, one would like to think), the BBFC have removed 37 seconds from the Arrow Region 2 print of *The Awful Dr. Orlof*. Anyone wishing to explore Franco’s career on DVD is strongly advised to buy Region 1 releases (for which www.xploitedcinema.com can be highly recommended). Indeed, anyone contemplating buying any dvd should run the title through a site like Melon Farmers; it’s amazing (and appalling) how many films, not all of them in the sex and horror range, have fallen victim to the BBFC’s seemingly elastic “guidelines” (at present, they appear to be chopping out any horse falls in which an animal may have been harmed, presumably to discourage anyone from trying this at home). While one has a certain sympathy with the plight of distributors, the fact remains that many of Franco’s films (in particular the Erwin C. Dietrich collaborations contained in *The Official Jess Franco Collection*) are sold to an unsuspecting public as Director’s Cuts, when they should more accurately be labeled “BBFC Cuts” (the worst instance being *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* which has been cut, on the most spurious grounds, by a massive six minutes and fifteen seconds). Why there is no legal obligation on either the BBFC or the distributors to clearly indicate whether or not a film is complete is a mystery. But then that might mean admitting, despite its cuddly and unthreatening new name, that the BBFC is still a censorship body, and as Margaret Thatcher once put it, “In our societies, we don’t believe in constraining the media, still less in censorship.” So there.

6. Indeed, it is possible to project the European tradition, with regard to early Hollywood and the Universal pictures, in such a way as to seriously question whether there was an indigenous American horror film tradition at all, prior to the arrival of Roger Corman’s adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe in the late 1950s. While ‘Hollywood’ may have provided the money and opportunity, even a cursory glance at the most important films reveals the creative input to have been overwhelmingly European. *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Old Dark House* (1932), *The Invisible Man* (1933), and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) were all directed by the Englishman, James Whale. *Rouben Mamoulian* (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, 1931) was Russian; *Robert Florey* (*Murders in the Rue Morgue*, 1932) was French; *Michael Curtiz* (*Dr. X*, 1931, and *The Mystery of the Wax Museum*, 1933) was Hungarian; while *Karl Freund* (director of photography on *Dracula*, 1931, director of *The Mummy*, 1932, and *Mad Love*, 1935) was German, and *Edgar G. Ulmer* (*The Black Cat*, 1934), Austrian. Universal itself was founded by the German émigré, Carl Laemmle, whose American-born son, Carl, Jr., oversaw the

studio's horror heyday. The actors most identified with the genre in the early 1930s were all European or of European background: Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Colin Clive, Ernest Thesiger, Basil Rathbone, Claude Rains, Lionel Atwill, and Peter Lorre. Left flying the flag for Uncle Sam, so to speak, were Tod Browning and Lon Chaney, but their interests were in the grotesque rather than the supernatural (Browning's lack of interest in Dracula is self-evident; cameraman Freund and English-born art director Charles D. Hall are widely credited for the film's mood and look). As if to further underline the point, Val Lewton, the famed producer of the 1940s, was Russian, while the most talented director associated with him, Jacques Tourneur, was French.

7. Interview in *The Fall of Fu Manchu*, included on the Blue Underground release of *The Castle of Fu Manchu*, 2003.

8. Aguliar, Carlos; Piselli, Stefano & Morrocchi, Riccardo (eds.) – *Jess Franco: El sexo del horror*. (Glittering Images: Florence, 1999) p.80.

9. Tohill, Cathal & Tombs, Pete – *Immoral tales: Sex and Horror Cinema in Europe 1956-1984*. Chapter: *The Labyrinth of Sex: the Films of Jess Franco*. (Primitive Press: London, 1994) , and (Titan Books: London, 1995) p.103.

10. Aguliar, Carlos; Piselli, Stefano & Morrocchi, Riccardo (eds.) – *Jess Franco: El sexo del horror*. (Glittering Images: Florence, 1999)p. 89. (Amazon.com lists it as “currently unavailable”, which at least indicates it is not a “lost” film.)

11. All three non-Franco efforts were dismissed as “pretentious” in the review of Franco's *Marquis de Sade's Philosophy in the Boudoir* in *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror*, ed. Phil Hardy, (Aurum Press: London, 1985) p. 220.

12. One actor (who shall remain nameless) recently told me how he arrived on the set of a later Franco production, lines learned, to be informed by the director that not only was his scene now gone, but would he mind doing a little song-and-dance routine instead, an idea which had come to Franco overnight.

13. The film was a Spanish-German co-production, and the title on the German print reads *Vampiros Lesbos*. German lobby cards and press ads, however, use the ‘y’ variant (followed by a subtitle: *Die Erbin des Dracula*) which has since become the standard spelling.

14. Glut, Donald F. – *The Dracula Book*. (The Scarecrow Press: New Jersey, 1975) p.220.

15. Pattison, Barrie – *The Seal of Dracula*. (Lorrimer: London, 1975) p. 70.

16. Pirie, David – *The Vampire Cinema*. (Quarto: London, 1977), and (Galley Press: Leicester, 1984).
17. Silver, Alain & Ursini, James – *The Vampire Film: From Nosferatu to Bram Stoker's Dracula*, revised and updated, (Limelight Editions: New York, 1993) pp. 189-190.
18. Hardy, Phil (ed.) – *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror*. (Aurum Press: London, 1985) p. 50.
19. For an excellent and well-written analysis of Vampyros Lesbos and four of his later films, see Maximilian Le Cain's *The Frontiers of Genre and Trance: Five Films by Jess Franco* at www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/27/jess_franco.html.

Appendix

Franco's films released theatrically in Britain.

Key: Original British title/Principal original title/Current title on dvd or video, if different (Year of release/date of review in the Monthly Film Bulletin/Running times, including cuts, as listed in the MFB)

The Demon Doctor/Gritos en la noche/The Awful Dr. Orlof (1961/June, 1963/86m.)

The Diabolical Dr. Z/Miss Muerte (1965/October, 1967/79m., cut from 86m.)

The Blood of Fu Manchu/Fu-Manchu y el beso de la muerte (1968/March, 1969/61m., cut from 91m.)

99 Women/99 mujeres (1968/April, 1970/70m., cut from 90m.)

The Castle of Fu Manchu/El Castillo de Fu-Manchu (1968/February, 1972/92m.)

Marquis de Sade: Justine/Justine and Juliet (1968/May, 1972/104m.)

Count Dracula/El conde Dracula/Bram Stoker's Count Dracula (1969/July, 1973/98m.)

Succubus/Necronomicon – Geträumte Sünden (1967/December, 1973/81m., cut from 82m.)

Diary of a Nymphomaniac/Le Journal intime d'une nymphomane (1972/April, 1974/76m., cut from 86m.)

The Sexy Darlings/Robinson und seine wilden Sklavinnen (1971/May, 1974/81m.)

The Demons/Les démons (1972/August, 1974/97m., cut from 116m.)

The Lustful Amazon/Maciste contre la Reine des Amazones (1973/August, 1974/61m., cut from 65m.)

Celestine, Maid at Your Service/Célestine, bonne à tout faire (1974/February, 1975/79m., cut from 84m.)

How to Seduce a Virgin/Plaisir à trios (1973/July, 1975/64m., cut from 80m.)

Caged Women/Frauengefängnis/Barbed Wire Dolls (1975/April, 1977/No rt. listed)

The Bare Breasted Countess/La Comtesse aux seins nus/Female Vampire (1973/November, 1978/59m., cut from 101m.)

Swedish Nympho Slaves/Die teuflischen Schwestern/Sexy Sisters (1977/November, 1980/74m.)

Bloody Moon/Die Säge des Todes (1980/May, 1982/83m., cut from 85m.)

Pick-Up Girls/La chica de las bragas transparentes (1980/July, 1983/92m., cut from 97m.)

The Story of Linda/Orgia de ninfomanas (1980/April, 1984/80m., cut from 91m.)