

VOLUME TWO

AMERICAN HORROR PROJECT^x



Curated by Ewan Cant and Stephen Thrower



Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Dream No Evil Credits</i> | 6 |
| “I’m Thinking That You’re Not Even Here at All”: Exploring Loss, Grief and the American Gothic in <i>Dream No Evil</i> (2019) by Amanda Reyes | 9 |
| <i>Dark August Credits</i> | 20 |
| The Gods of the Hills: <i>Dark August</i> and Vermont Folk Horror (2019) by Stephen R. Bissette | 23 |
| <i>The Child Credits</i> | 42 |
| “I Don’t Have to Tell You Anything!”: Exploring the Enigmas of <i>The Child</i> (2019) by Travis Crawford | 45 |
| About the Restorations | 56 |

DREAM NO DEVIL

CAST

Edmond O'Brien as Timothy MacDonald

Brooke Mills as Grace MacDonald

Marc Lawrence as the Pimp/Undertaker

Michael Pataki as Rev. Jesse Bundy

Paul Prokop as Dr. Patrick Bundy

Arthur Franz as John, County Psychiatrist

Donna Anders (as "D.J. Anderson") as Shirley

CREW

Written and Directed by **John Hayes**

Produced by **Daniel Cady** and **John Hayes**

Director of Photography **Paul Hipp**

Film Editor **Luke Porano**

Music by **Jaime Mendoza-Nava**





“I’M THINKING THAT YOU’RE NOT EVEN HERE AT ALL”

EXPLORING LOSS, GRIEF AND THE AMERICAN GOTHIC IN *DREAM NO EVIL*

by Amanda Reyes

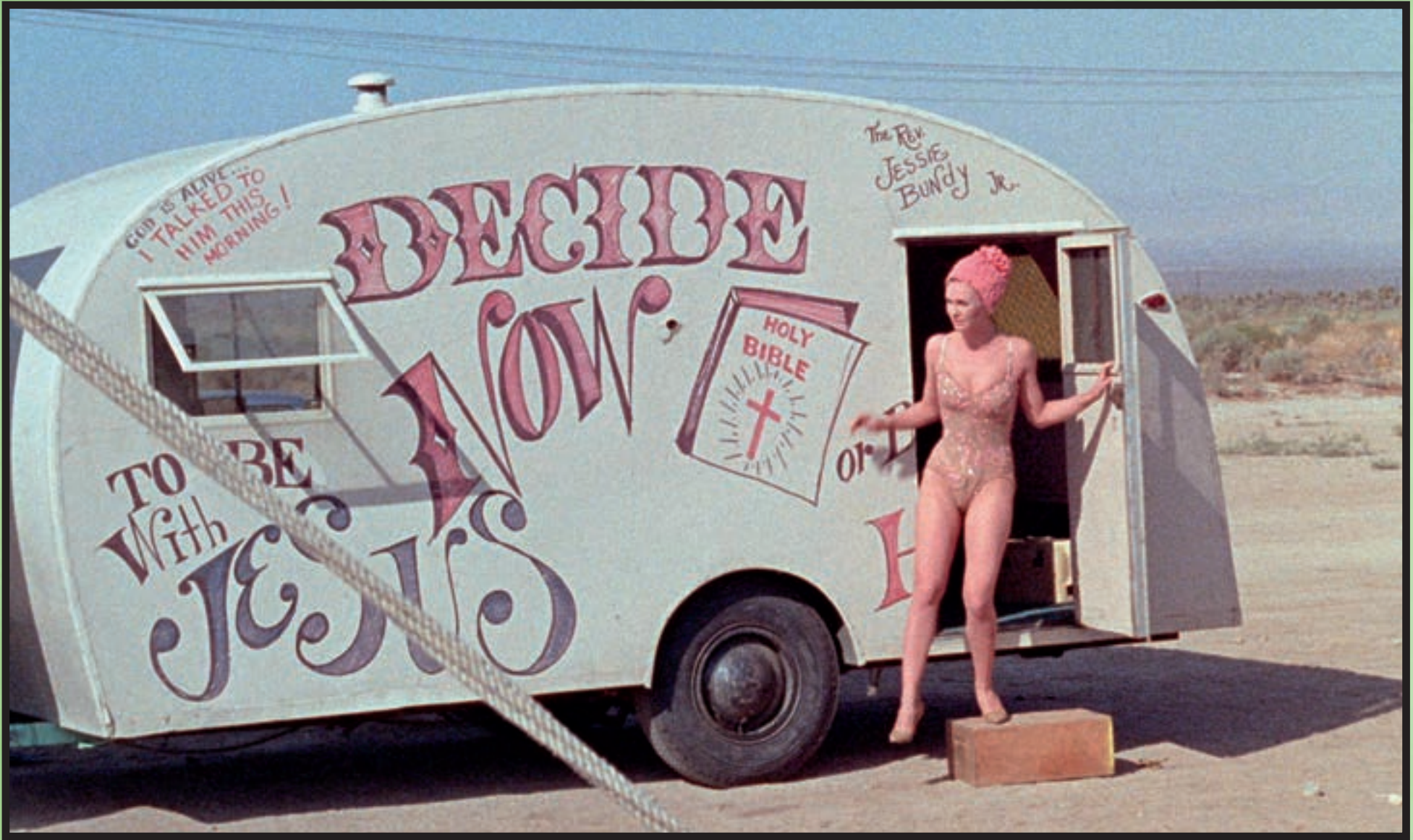
Once upon a time there was a little girl named Grace. Grace lived in an orphanage and was very lonely. Every night she dreamt that her father would come and save her from this terrible place. But the matrons were cold and cruel and told this pretty little girl that her dad was never coming back. Grace cried herself to sleep every night. Then, one day a religious family came to visit and took her in. Grace grew up under a strict religious doctrine, and when she matured into a beautiful young woman, that little girl would go on to work for her evangelist brother Jesse. She fell in love with her other adopted brother, Patrick. He was a hopeful student of medicine, and Grace wanted to marry him.

But Grace never forgot her father, and when she toured with her brother, healing the sick and aiding the poor, she continued to dream that they would be reunited. When she visited the small town she believed her father lived in, she went to an old hotel hoping to find him. But he wasn’t there. Instead, she found scary old men and women of the night. The women’s procurer sent Grace to the local morgue for he, who was also the town mortician, believed her father had died the day before.

At the morgue that little girl cried big and heavy tears for her dead father. Her grief and sadness cast a magical spell and he was brought back to life! Grace and her father moved into a beautiful house on the outskirts of town and she spent blissful days dancing, and watching him as he rode his favorite horse, Sultan. Grace was sure she’d found her Happily Ever After.

Or so she thought...

In 1974, four years after the release of *Dream No Evil* (1970), novelist Angela Carter proclaimed, “We live in Gothic times.” Carter was referring to the rise of the female voice in literary genre texts during this period. She questioned the limited scope of the male-driven canon and championed the rise of voices amongst marginalized populations. Her comments were solely directed at the literary world, and it is unlikely that the same sentiment could be applied to what was happening in cinema at the same time. Cultural



shifts in post-modern texts, both in the written word and cinematic universes don't always correspond with one another, and in the field of moviemaking, it was an unfortunate truth that, despite living in the heart of the second-wave feminist movement (which began in the sixties and ran until the early eighties), female filmmakers had quite a way to go before they could begin to make similar proclamations. But that's not say that women's issues weren't being addressed.

Carter was a well-recognized figure in literature. She was also a self-proclaimed feminist who concentrated on female-centric genre stories. Admittedly, perhaps it is a bit of a stretch to compare writer-director John Hayes' cinematic work along a similar spectrum. There's no evidence that he was a closeted feminist. He was, after all, the man who brought the world *Mama's Dirty Girls* (1974) and *Jailbait Babysitter* (1977), among many other such titles. But he often featured dynamic women in his films, and his quietly unsettling *Dream No Evil* is more than just a surreal fantasy/nightmare B-flick. It uses many of the same narrative Gothic fairy-tale techniques (or magical realism, as it is sometimes referred to) that Carter and many other female genre writers were using as a way to thoughtfully comment on the tension felt between antiquated cultural ideologies and the ever-changing world of the sixties and seventies. Hayes arrives at his examination of these issues through two compelling and wildly disparate female characters, and by letting his provocative story unfold like a dark fable.

The Gothic is a fluid term, and it can refer to a structure or narrative that fits into many different boxes, depending on how it is applied. *Dream No Evil* can easily check several of the most common themes very neatly off its list. Hayes' film explores isolation, lust and repression, tragedy and madness. Furthermore, much of the (melo)drama unfolds in a pastoral house that casts long shadows. And, while the audience understands that the father's ghostly apparition means it is Grace (Brooke Mills) who is haunted – not the house – like many great Gothic tales, the house becomes the keeper of dark and foreboding secrets.

One of the most prominent (and potent) Gothic elements in *Dream No Evil* can be found in the conjuring of Grace's father. Like so many patriarchal figures in these kinds of tales, Timothy MacDonald (Edmond O'Brien) is tyrannical and overpowering. He's brash, abusive and violent. He rules Grace's world under the guise that he is the protector of her innocence. She, believing her father is real and that he will help her maintain her virtue, aids him in the covering up of "his" crimes. She clings to his every word, and when she experiences a momentary break into reality, his visage is strong enough to pull her back into the fantasy.

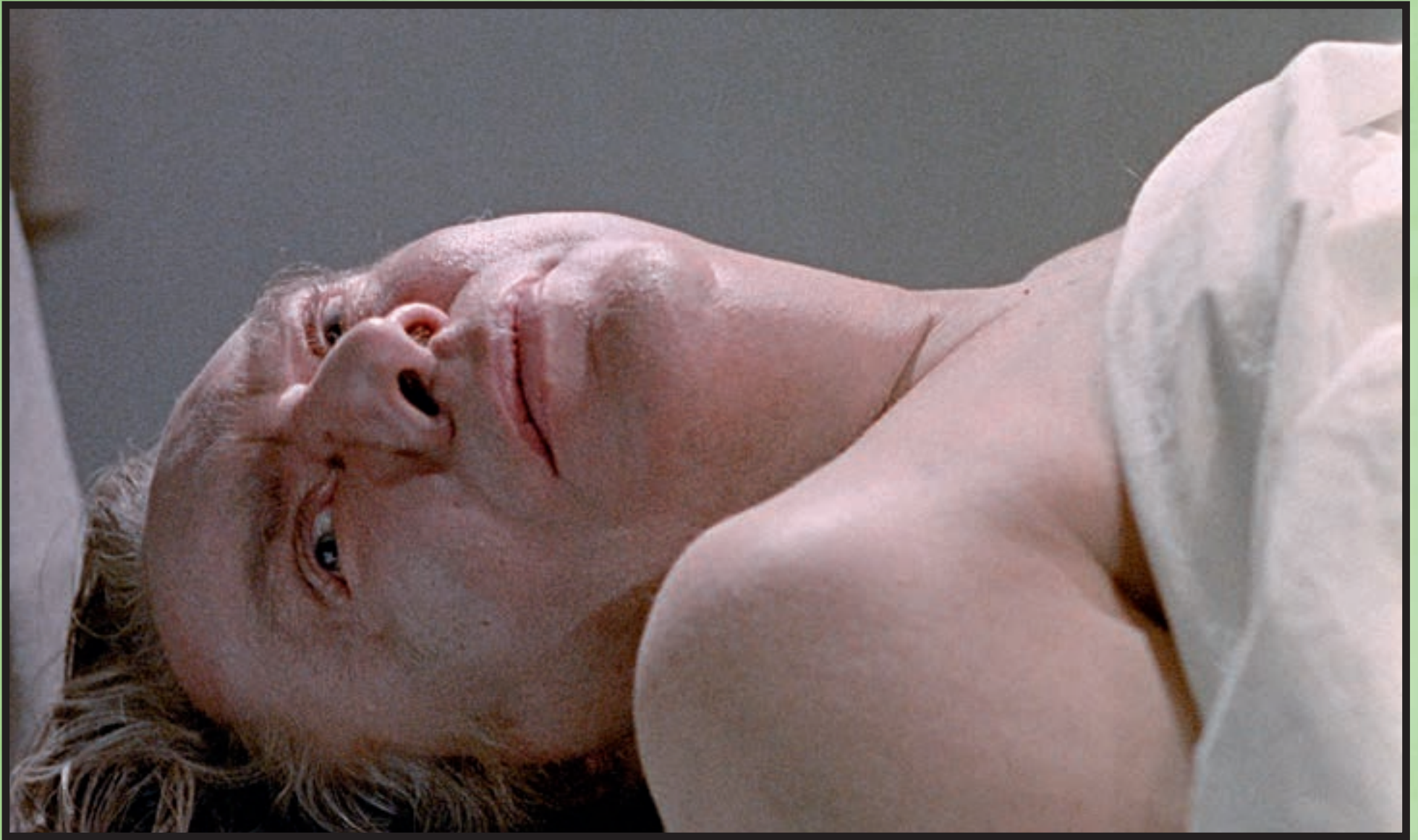
Also embedded in the father/daughter relationship is the commonly used Gothic trope of duality. The father is a part of Grace, but is also her opposite. He's overbearing and rough, whereas she is gentle and fragile. In fact, the duality aspect is used in several different ways. It's apparent in the relationship between Grace and Timothy, but it's also featured in the film's underlying theme of faith vs. science. Patrick (Paul Prokop) leaves the ministry to pursue medicine, while his brother Jesse (Hayes regular Michael Pataki) keeps the family business going through his traveling evangelist act. It would seem Hayes was commenting on the shyster aspect of evangelism, which preys on the weak. Jesse's fervent speeches and pious manner around Grace at the beginning of the film feed into her gullible spirit, and after her literal plunge from the heavens (into the fake fires of hell), she metaphorically jumps into this fantasy of faith healing, which puts her on the bizarre path to her father. Hayes may see this kind of backdoor religion espousal as damaging and dangerous.

However, the most intriguing use of duality in *Dream No Evil* is how Hayes employs it to root out the division of changing ideologies. Grace represents the cultural norms of a generation just recently gone by (the world that existed before the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Vietnam and the rise of the counterculture, etc.). She belongs to the generation that wants its women secured within the domestic space, and kept "innocent" until married. Her doppelganger, Shirley (Donna Anders credited as D.J. Anderson) is symbolic of the New Woman, the one that arose from the credo of second-wave feminism, and who exercises more agency.

Grace is a virgin who needs to belong to a man. If it's not her father, it's Patrick. If it's not Patrick, it's his brother Jesse. In her fantasies, she is adorned in neatly pressed dresses, one of them a startling white, which proclaims her purity. She sees herself as a good homemaker. The house of her dreams is well kept, with a place for everything and everything in its place. Her father protects her virginity, and he is her knight in shining armor, who literally rides a white horse.

On the other hand, Shirley is career driven (she's in med school). She studies very hard and household chores take a backseat. She can't cook. She isn't ashamed of her naked body, and she has sex on the first date. Her relationship with Patrick is built on a mutual admiration, and, most importantly in having a passion for healing the sick in a real way. Not in the fraudulent faith-healing way that Grace's adopted brother Jesse engages in.

Although it's unintentional, these themes of duality between the two main female characters correspond in such a harmonizing fashion, it's impossible not to see a correlation with the second wave feminist movement and the tension felt between a dogma that was dying out as options began opening up for women.



But, *Dream No Evil* is also not a demonization of those older family values. In fact, it looks back at them with wistful nostalgia, not scorn. It also recalls the loss of that tradition with pain. Grace's father figure is the character's rage at her abandonment and at being left behind. Her transgressions come from her feelings of lack, from never knowing what having a real family would look or feel like. She has to construct one for herself, and create her own boundaries. It's no wonder she's fallen back on fairy tales, and knights. Those stories are probably the only representation of kinship and family she was able to experience while in the orphanage. Grace is sympathetic because her sadness rests in a very relatable space. We all want to belong somewhere and to someone.

Many cultural theorists have suggested that the horror genre is a device to examine and scrutinize the repressed self. It condemns repression in its own way because we see how damaging the suppression of genuine emotions can be. Grace's acting out is based heavily in her sense of loss and grief. Sure, that's assuming there's a lot of metaphor nesting inside this bare-bones film, but it exists. And it's not the only horror film to survey the impact of trauma and its tension with societal expectations. In fact, the proto-slasher *Dream No Evil* sits nicely with the slasher films that would follow in the eighties in terms of how it expresses how traumatic events left untreated can be a bridge to devastating future events.

Looking at the film through that lens, one may see that *Dream No Evil* makes strange but ultimately satisfying bedfellows with 1978's controversial *The Toolbox Murders*. *The Toolbox Murders*, known mostly for its brutal opening segments, which feature a madman dispatching the female tenants of a Los Angeles apartment building, is notorious. Featured on *60 Minutes* and used as the poster/whipping boy of the "horror will make you violent" camp, many have forgotten about the second and third acts of the film. After the murder spree, the killer kidnaps a teenage girl, taking her back to his home. Here we find out that his daughter had died in a car accident, and the young woman he is holding hostage reminds him just enough of her that he's taken to calling her by his daughter's name.

Unlike Timothy MacDonald, the killer/father figure in *The Toolbox Murders* inhabits a very real space in the film. He's not a fantastical illusion. However, like Grace's father, he is a self-proclaimed keeper of innocence, killing any women who has grown up and discarded the traditional values of virginity and heteronormativity. But, much like Grace, he's also grieving so deeply that his reality collapses into fantasy. Both he and Grace are symbolic of how repressing loss and grief can lead to madness.

In 1972 Hayes co-wrote and directed a movie that shares many of the same themes as *Dream No Evil*, but through a male-centric point of view. *Grave of the Vampire* reuses the

Gothic milieu to tell the tale of a deadbeat vampire dad and his half-breed son. Again, the focus is on finding the father, and then realizing the dad you'd hope to find doesn't exist at all. However, *Dream No Evil* is a more successful venture in the way it (most likely) unintentionally opens itself up to the larger culture, as it surveys the world as it was changing around us. And through adopting a female point of view, the film is allowed to be more sensitive and resonates on a deeper level.

It's a shame that critics tend to denounce a movie based on its budget and screening locations (most likely *Dream No Evil* played in sleazy 42nd Street type venues or drive-ins), because the horror genre, even at the low end (and sometimes *especially* at the low end) offers audiences a space not just to exercise physical fear, but also to come to terms with their own emotional turmoil. And, Hayes' little opus stands as a unique confessional that in many unusual ways speaks to human nature. All of these components make *Dream No Evil* strange, but rewarding, and, in some ways, cathartic. It's horror, but it's also heavy and thoughtful. It is a very special film, indeed.

Amanda Reyes is a film historian, academic and the editor and co-author of Are You in the House Alone? A TV Movie Compendium: 1964-1999 (Headpress, 2017).



DARK AUGUST

CAST

J.J. Barry as Sal

Carolyn Barry (as "Carole Shelyne") as Jackie

Kim Hunter as Adrianna

Kate McKeown as Lesley

Frank Bongiorno as Theo

William Robertson as The Grandfather

Richard Alan Fay as Paul

Martin Harvey Friedberg as the Town Drunk

Kenneth W. Libby as the Sheriff

Karen Lewis as the Child

CREW

Directed by **Martin Goldman**

Produced by **Marianne Kanter** and **Martin Goldman**

Written by **J.J. Barry**, **Martin Goldman** and **Carole Shelyne**

Director of Photography **Richard E. Brooks**

Edited by **Dennis Hayes**

Music by **William S. Fischer**





THE GODS OF THE HILLS

DARK AUGUST

AND VERMONT FOLK HORROR

by Stephen R. Bissette

“The gods of the valley are not the gods of the hills, and you shall understand it.”

- Ethan Allen, Reply to the King’s attorney-general in June 1770, in response to a New York court case decided against him, prior to his armed resistance to claims of New York authority over Vermont; quoted in Curiosities of Human Nature (1844) by Samuel Griswold Goodrich (pg. 145).

After the slow-motion twilight imagery of a windblown, overcast autumnal sky and landscape beneath its opening credits, *Dark August* lays a stabbing electronic pulse and building percussion score over a long, slow, intimate pan over arcane debris strewn over a tabletop. We see resin and wax and what might be blood, amulets and bottles and jars and metal bracelet chains, herbs and dried sliced seed husks and spent matches. This stately camera movement is interrupted by a montage – a blonde little girl (Karen Lewis) running out of an unmowed field of grass onto a roadway, a squeal of brakes distorted into an aural amplification of trauma, a closeup of two photos in an open locket, a young soldier in uniform and a family portrait of a bearded old man with the same little girl seated on his lap, both smiling – intercut with a ritual: a match lit, a black and red candle alight, an old man (William Robertson) speaks. “I beseech thee, oh Baal... let this talisman draw the watchful power of thy demon cohort... I call with grim delight this victim I have chosen...” As the sun sets behind a picturesque cupping of clouds and mountains, we see a dour middle-aged man (J. J. Barry) standing in a doorway in profile – “him who hath tormented me” – looking haggard and exhausted.

In less than four minutes, *Dark August* presented itself as yet another 1970s pre-Satanic Panic artifact, another slice of post-*Rosemary’s Baby* occult horror that had become a lurid staple of theatrical feature film exploitation and the three network weekly made-for-TV movies (it was this fare which *Dark August* resembled more than anything, save for its brief nudity and the genuine Vermont locations and extras). Ira Levin’s best-selling



1967 novel and Roman Polanski's smash-hit 1968 film adaptation had sired coven upon coven of witches, warlocks, Satanists and Antichrists, and the subsequent shock waves generated by William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* and Blatty and William Friedkin's 1973 blockbuster movie version only escalated the tsunami of occult spectacles, high and (mostly) low. The collaborative *Dark August* script by director Martin Goldman and co-stars J. J. Barry and Carole Shelyne was, in its way, a variation on not just the post-1960s occult exploitation wave, but also a spin on M. R. James' classic short story "Casting the Runes" (1911). The film had and has its virtues, but precious few even noticed its fleeting existence. *Dark August* seemed to be just another bit of flotsam adrift in the cinematic sea of Satanic cinemania.

Independently produced under the working title *The Hant*, boasting a lone name star – Kim Hunter, at that time most associated in the public's mind with her popular simian role of Zira in the *Planet of the Apes* series – and barely released via upstart martial arts/exploitation sub-distributor Howard Mahler Films, *Dark August* hardly drew notice at the time of its tentative release. According to exploitation film expert Chris Poggiali, Mahler had its greatest success releasing Dario Argento's *Deep Red* (*Profondo Rosso*) stateside, and with its pickup of the Warner Bros-ditched release of the Amicus/Kevin Connor portmanteau gem *From Beyond the Grave*. Chris writes,

"[Mahler] handled the NYC releases for Dimension Pictures, Jack H. Harris Enterprises, Independent-International Pictures, United International Pictures and a few others. He partnered with Serafim Karalexis of United International for a few martial arts releases in the late '70s, most notably *Death Promise*. . . . He claimed 'the eastern corridor' but went through other sub-distributors in Philly, D.C., Boston, New Haven, so his territory was the NYC area. He probably just had U.S. rights to *Dark August* and not all of North America."¹

Given what little promotional material I've found over the decades, I suspect the film wasn't distributed domestically outside of Mahler's direct geographic reach. I have located Mexican lobby cards, so it did circulate theatrically outside the U.S. in some countries. *Dark August* reached its widest audience thanks to the ever-voracious early appetite of the international home video boom, released stateside by Lightning Video and in almost every corner of the globe.² Then the film vanished again into the limbo of bargain-sale bins and home video libraries, for the precious few who cared about such regional obscurities.

1 – Chris Poggiali, message to the author, March 10 and 11, 2019. For an online sampler of the films Howard Mahler Films handled, see http://www.criticononline.com/howard_mahler_newspaper_ad_mats.htm

2 – Howard Mahler most likely had nothing to do with the subsequent home video licensing. Chris Poggiali writes, "[Mahler] folded his company by the start of the '80s and was working for United Film Distribution in their theatrical department during the video boom so I doubt he was making video deals. The producers of *Dark August* either made those deals themselves or went through a company like Manson International that would've done worldwide theatrical and video" (Poggiali, message to the author, March 11, 2019; quoted with permission).

It was that regional aspect of *Dark August* that caught my eye and made the film an object of fascination. Filmed in the summer of 1975 in Stowe, Vermont – a mere ten miles north from where I'd grown up in and around Waterbury, and about 16 miles south from where I was going to college that very summer in Johnson – *The Hant* aka *Dark August* was part of a curious and quiet but very real bubble of cinematic genre activity in my home state. While *Dark August* could and would be chalked up to being just another low-budget occult thriller elsewhere, it was something much more than that alone. *Something* was busy in the hills of the Green Mountain state, and *Dark August* was part of that "something."

Another Ira Levin creation from the year his *Rosemary's Baby* novel became a bestseller – Levin's 1967 Broadway play *Dr. Cook's Garden*, about a small-town doctor "weeding out" the "unworthy" to keep his village of Greenfield healthy and evergreen – was being filmed by director Ted Post (*Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, *The Baby*, etc.) in and around Woodstock, Vermont in 1970. Boasting Bing Crosby playing his second-ever dramatic role as the titular doctor, the TV movie *Dr. Cook's Garden* debuted on ABC TV January 19, 1971.³ Soon afterwards, within a year or so, witches and demons danced and marched in woods less than an hour north of Woodstock, and were captured on film (*Solstice*, *Transformations*; see below); a year after that, a German-Polish neo-noir shot in English in and around North Bennington characterized Shirley Jackson's old stomping (and writing) turf as the dead-end armpit of the universe (Krzysztof Zanussi's *Pittsville: Ein Safe voll Blut / Lohngelder für / Zabostwo w Catamount / The Catamount Killing*, 1973/1974). The very winter of the year *The Hant* was filmed in Stowe, the tale of a woman's mysterious disappearance while cross-country skiing would be filmed only 20 miles away, in a house haunted by something the filmmaker wasn't aware of, but others were (Walter Ungerer's *The Animal*, 1976).

Despite the want of a term that didn't yet exist, for a few change of seasons it seemed that 'folk horror' was finding favor with the Gods of the Hills, Vermont's angry patron saint Ethan Allen had spoken of.

The term 'folk horror' wasn't codified until after the millennial change (via director Pier Haggard describing his dark jewel *Blood on Satan's Claw* as "a folk horror film" in a 2003 interview conducted by M. J. Simpson for *Fangoria* #230,⁴ and Mark Gatiss

3 – Another TV movie with an odd Vermont angle was George (Frogs) McGowan's 1973 CBS TV feature *Welcome Home, Johnny Bristol*, in which amnesiac Vietnam War vet Martin Landau searches for his apparently non-existent home town of "Charles, Vermont." This conundrum is resolved in a sweet final shot that lingers in the memory.

4 – *Fangoria* #230, March 2004 issue. Haggard said, "As this was a story about people subject to superstitions about living in the woods, the dark poetry of that appealed to me. I was trying to make a folk-horror film, I suppose," and so it began. You can read the complete interview at <http://mjsimpson-films.blogspot.com/2013/11/interview-piers-haggard.html>

popularizing that term in his BBC4 documentary *A History of Horror*), but it – whatever ‘it’ might be – was emerging simultaneously from New England soil in early-to-mid-1970s regional filmmaking.

At the time, some of us recognized this unnamed strain as a flavor, not yet a genre in and of itself. It could be seen, heard, felt even as it was materializing, but there was no word or terminology for it as yet, tied as it seemed to be with the land itself: an alchemy of rocks, soil, and celluloid.

There wasn’t a real tradition of Vermont horror to build upon, much less anything resembling folk horror. H.P. Lovecraft’s 1930 novella “The Whisperer in the Darkness” brought an alien invasion into the hills of southern Vermont; Lovecraft scribed the story after his 1921 visit to Guilford, Bellows Falls, and the area.⁵ Precious few recall (if they ever recognized) that Alfred Hitchcocks’ *Spellbound* (1945) was set (but not shot) in Vermont; in a plot point revealed only via a briefly visible letterhead, the film relocated the asylum from the French setting (“Chateau Landry, House of Rest... high up among the rocks and pines of Savoy, secluded at the end of a secret valley...”) of Francis Beeding’s source novel, *The House of Dr. Edwardes* (1927). A decade later, Hitchcock actually came to Vermont with the cast and crew of his dry pitch-black comedy *The Trouble with Harry* (1955) – in which the body of poor Harry just doesn’t stay buried – for a disastrous shoot, stymied for all but a few days by a rain-and-windblown autumn that discouraged filming and sent director, cast, and crew packing back to Hollywood to fabricate sets simulating the colorful Vermont fall Hitchcock had hoped to capture on film. Some primary shooting and deft second-unit filming made the most of the good weather, filming in and about Craftsbury Common and Morrisville while Hitchcock and his entourage roomed in the Stowe area. The production’s bad luck kept Hollywood away for almost a decade, until Walt Disney’s *Those Calloways* (1965) rehabilitated the state’s rep for location filming; though hardly a horror movie, Disney director Norman Tokar staged an absolutely terrifying sequence in which young Bucky (Brandon de Wilde) tracks the feral raider of his trap lines to a tangle of fallen logs, battling a cornered wolverine in unnervingly close quarters. The slow buildup to this sequence – Bucky’s father Cam (Brian Keith) evokes Native American legends concerning that very patch of cursed land before suffering a broken leg when he falls from the log stand – lends gravitas to the proceedings. The sense of dread prompted by Cam’s tale, his ill luck, and the aggressive ferocity of Bucky’s subsequent confrontation with nature “red in tooth and claw” offered a bracing cinematic taste of what was to come.

As in *Spellbound*, there was a hidden Vermont angle to the Italian *Lycanthropus* aka *Werewolf in a Girl’s Dormitory* (1962): though set in England, a quick peek at a personnel

5 – David C. Smith directed a silent 8mm adaptation of “The Whisperer in Darkness” that was filmed in Ohio in 1975, featuring Lovecraft pen pal J. Vernon Shea in a key role.

folder at the beginning of this film reveals that Dr. Julian Olcott (Carl Schell) was tried for homicide for the death of a young girl patient in Burlington, Vermont; he was acquitted but his medical license was revoked (Olcott relocates to the titular girls’ reformatory to teach just as a werewolf savages the young girls of the campus).⁶ Though shot in and outside Stanford, Connecticut, brutal campus murders also informed producer Del Tenney’s first feature *Psychomania* aka *Violent Midnight* (1963), allegedly based on the true story of an unsolved disappearance of a female student at Vermont’s Bennington College. Tenney’s wife Margot Hartman (who plays the killer in the movie) pitched the idea for the film, supposedly based upon her memories of a schoolmate’s disappearance turning into a murder investigation⁷; Tenney went on to produce *Curse of the Living Corpse* and direct *Horror of Party Beach* (both 1964) and *Zombie* aka *I Eat Your Skin* (1964/1971). More murders spiced Michael Findlay’s final black-and-white adults-only shocker *The Ultimate Degenerate* aka *The Degenerate* (1969); though shot in Massachusetts, the film was set in a remote Vermont “Pleasure Dome” lorded over by crippled sex fiend Mr. Spencer (played by director Findlay), who injects captive women with an aphrodisiac to fuel their sexual performances. Megadosing visiting exhibitionist Maria (Uta Erickson), Spencer drives her from nymphomania into a full-blown homicidal rampage (tasty trivia: the sadist’s sidekick was played by “Leo Heinz” aka Earl Hindman, who famously played next-door neighbor “Wilson” on *Home Improvement*).

All this bore unexpected cinematic fruit in the 1970s. Vermont Folk Horror emerged concurrent with British Folk Horror: in the year between Cannon Films opening Piers Haggard’s *Blood on Satan’s Claw* (1971) in local theaters and drive-ins, and *The Wicker Man* (1973) being completed but playing nowhere in the whole of North America, two Vermont short films – one male, one female – manifested occult offshoots from the countercultural outposts peppered throughout the Green Mountain state. The rural landscape had proven to be fertile ground for alternative living communities throughout the 20th century, and that was truer still in the 1960s and 1970s as hippie communes blossomed from southernmost Guilford, Vermont on up to the northernmost reaches of the shores of Lake Champlain to the west, on over to the kissing-Canada extremities of the Northeast Kingdom.⁸ Two of those alternative living outposts spawned the short films *Solstice* (1971) and *Transformations* (1972), in which witches and elemental spirits inhabiting the deep woods and remote stony fields were shown at work and at play. Barbara Hirschfeld’s *Transformations* was the creation of a radicalized feminist collective, expressing its power via cinematic ceremonial magic; *Solstice* was the work of a newly transplanted New York

6 – There’s another curious Vermont element in 1960s Italian exploitation films, specifically Antonio Margheriti’s ‘Gamma One’ science-fiction feature *La morte viene dal pianeta Aytin / Snow Devils* (1967), when the hero (Giacomo Rossi Stuart) says he is from White River Junction, Vermont.

7 – This disappearance was also key to the formation of what became the Vermont State Police department, and one in a series of disappearances in a region Joe Citro later named “The Bennington Triangle,” a term in constant use these days without due credit to Citro.

8 – For more on this phenomenon, see Kate Daloz, *We Are As Gods: Back to the Land in the 1970s on the Quest for a New America* (2016, PublicAffairs) and Yvonne Daley, *Going Up the Country: When the Hippies, Dreamers, Freaks, and Radicals Moved to Vermont* (2018, University Press of New England).



City underground filmmaker, mobilizing a newly transplanted New York City activist radical puppet troupe to conjure a very different form of backwoods sorcery.

In a little over eight minutes, *Transformations* (“A Tribal Film”) depicts the preparations by a contemporary coven of witches (one of whom quietly slips out of bed away from her sleeping male partner) for a celebratory ceremonial gathering. Accompanied by Julie Haines’ exquisite musical and choral score, this was white, not black, magic, sensually presented as a communal and personal act: the brushing of hair, donning of robes, painting of faces, the gathering of wood, water, a skull, a meeting, their dancing, the burning fire, the cleansing washing of faces.⁹ Walter Ungerer’s 35 minute *Solstice* – completed a year earlier – was also ceremonial and arguably celebratory in nature, but *Solstice* presented a more enigmatic tableau sans any participatory closeups or editing. It was instead an observational meditative experience, shot with a single stationary camera, its unflinching gaze fixed upon an empty path in the winter woods infiltrated by a marching procession of fantastical beings, dancing and playing music, towards and then away from the viewer in real time. These creatures were in reality the Bread and Puppet Theater troupe, a group founded (also in New York City, in 1963) by Silesia-born German sculptor, dancer, and puppeteer Peter Schumann. Goddard College had separately drawn Ungerer and Schumann from NYC to Vermont in 1970; by 1973, Schumann and Bread and Puppet had nestled into the hills of Glover, Vermont, where they still thrive.

Solstice and *Transformations* were shot on 16mm and were essentially secret films, self-distributed by the filmmakers themselves and/or via whatever underground film cooperatives they trusted; neither film kissed a single commercial indoor or outdoor theater screen. But they *were* seen, and the seed was planted.

Walter Ungerer continued tapping this vein, allowing the Vermont landscape to channel through his filmmaking in surprising ways. There are hints of the primal landscape informing the Theatre of the Absurd-like aspects of Ungerer’s *The Terrible Mother* (1972); like *Solstice*, this was another entry in Ungerer’s *Oobieland* series of experimental short films.¹⁰ Ungerer’s first narrative feature *The Animal* (1976) offered an even richer folk horror banquet than its almost immediate contemporary *Dark August*.

Had Ingmar Bergman made a horror film in Vermont, this might have been it. Filmed in 16mm in and about East Calais, Montpelier, and Goddard, *The Animal* is, essentially, a slice of New England Gothic stripped of obvious genre trappings, distilled to an enigmatic

9 – The Vermont Archive Movie Project (VAMP) rescued and restored *Transformations* in 2015; it can be screened at <https://vimeo.com/channels/vtarchiveproject/153425994>. For more about VAMP see <https://vtiff.org/vamp/>. Photos from the film were published in *Tilt: An Anthology of New England Women’s Writing and Art* (1978, New Victoria).

10 – For more on Walter Ungerer and his filmography, see my own book *Green Mountain Cinema I: Green Mountain Boys* (2004, Black Coat Press, at <http://www.blackcoatpress.com/nonfiction-green-mountain-cinema.html>).

essence. The film is leisurely paced, its orchestration of the sounds of winter is seductive: the crunching of snow under skis, the steady dripping from icicles, breezes through branches, the ticking of ancient clocks, the rustling of fabrics, breathing in the night. Sound is crucial to the film’s quiet revelations, wedded to Ungerer’s loving compositions of shadows on snow, reflected light by day and twilight, and figures moving across the landscapes. It’s a totally immersive experience, deceptively direct and succinct in effect. While remaining absolutely naturalistic in tenor, tone, and performances, it’s also a companion to *Solstice* and *The Terrible Mother* in suggesting that what might mangle in the rural landscape cannot be taken at face value – and what disappears there may remain present, even omnipresent, among the secrets the mountains and back roads keep.

A couple (Paul Ickovic, Jo Moore) sharing a seasonal rental in an old house in the deep winter woods drift apart emotionally, until the wife is apparently swallowed up by the very landscape. Has she indeed vanished – or has she become one with her abode? Embracing the evocative ambiguity traditional narrative filmmakers and audiences abhor, Ungerer ingeniously weaves a snow-blanketed nightmare that becomes steadily suffocating. *The Animal* seems comfortably anchored in the banalities of our shared day-to-day reality, but it is populated by spectral figures in the snow – a pair of children only the wife can see or interact with, the tracks of the titular ‘animal’ that is never found – and punctuated by mysterious events that defy rational analysis. A mesmerizing, moving, and truly haunting masterpiece in every sense of the word, *The Animal* is a “lost” film. Its negative was destroyed, and for decades only two worn 16mm prints and a rather murky video transfer remained. The Vermont Archive Movie Project (VAMP) just recently completed and premiered a long-overdue digital restoration, which may afford the rediscovery *The Animal* deserves.

Martin Goldman’s far more traditional commercial feature *Dark August* savors Vermont’s summer landscapes, and it presumes there are men and women practicing some form of elemental magic in the mountains of Vermont. As far as that goes, yes, I reckon that’s true. I was about five years old when I met my first ‘water witch,’ a local Duxbury farmer who was skilled with a dowsing stick. Locals used dowsers and diviners casually. Had to find a water pipe or unmarked septic tank? Bring in a dowser. That first dowser I met when I was a little tyke was a friendly old duffer who found a buried water pipe in short order; he encouraged me to take ahold of one of the two ends of the dowsing stick he was holding, to feel the ‘pull’ of the water underground myself. “Nuthin’ to it,” he said. Try as I might, I never again could get forked sticks to respond the same way – you *had* to have

the touch. I never met any old farmers versed in conjuring ‘thought forms’ or demons, to my knowledge, but we grew up knowing dowsers, and knowing they were the real thing.

Growing up with the counterculture in full swing in Vermont, Tarot card readings and healer women like Kim Hunter’s Adrianna were part of the communities of the 1970s and ‘80s I took for granted – and I’ve heard women talk the way Adrianna does when she meets Sal and Jackie – but they were nothing and no one to be afraid of, by my experience (then again, I wasn’t a flatlander, and I’d never killed one of their children or grandchildren). I’d heard tell of a witch’s coven at Johnson State College when I was in high school (from an assistant art teacher who was earning his degree at JSC), and later saw evidence of an active coven myself at the same college in 1974-76, when I was a student there. This didn’t worry us; most were like the hippie witches communing in Barbara Hirschfeld’s *Transformations*. That said, there were things that went on that we couldn’t explain and didn’t take at face value. As my pal Joseph Citro (novelist and folklorist extraordinaire) has chronicled in multiple books, on Vermont Public Radio, and in other media, Vermont history is peppered with inexplicable events and phenomenon, including ghosts, cryptids, UFO encounters and abductions, and all manner of weirdness.

Growing up working in and for my parents’ country store in Colbyville en route to Stowe, I also waited on hundreds of folks just like Sal. Locals called out-of-staters “flatlanders,” and *Dark August* is nothing but an ultimate flatlander’s nightmare. Wheeling around in his bone-white Jeep, with his German Shepherd Mona in the back seat, 39-year-old Italian-American Sal – the recently separated chain-smoking “thinkin’ and drinkin’” nominal hero of *Dark August* – embodies the worst of “flatlander” misbehavior and belligerence. We’re told early on he’s only been in the area for a year; his attractive young lover Jackie (Carole Shelyne) is a photographer who runs a gallery in town, and her kid brother Paul (Richard Alan Fay) is a lanky local contractor building Sal a new studio. Sal’s potter friend Theo (Frank Bongiorno) is also a city transplant, and it’s Theo’s partner Lesley (Kate McKeown) who gives Sal an unsettling Tarot card reading. When all else fails, it’s Lesley who connects Sal with Adrianna (Kim Hunter) whose local reputation “for being a witch” precedes her (“There’s a very good woman who is going to help you through this”). Together, they offer the only female ‘white magic’ that could possibly counter all the toxic masculinity at work (“According to Lesley and them bubble gum cards, I’m gonna need a priest”).

I cannot hide the fact that my affection and compulsion for *Dark August* involves the film being set and filmed in places I’ve been familiar with all my life: the streets, shops, and backroads of Stowe (I know and have driven in all weather that stretch of dirt road where Sal has his fateful accident). I hiked, fished, and swam in streams and rivers and waterfalls like the one Sal splashes around in (though I never saw the cowled phantom

he’s pursuing). I’ve rented, visited, spent days and nights in plenty of homes like the one Jackie and Sal share, futon-on-the-floor and against the bedroom wall, woodland view out the kitchen sink window. The film even makes use of Stowe’s fabled haunt Emily’s Bridge – a covered bridge in easy walking distance of downtown dubiously purported to be haunted by the ghost of a jilted young woman¹¹ – but there’s no mention of ol’ Emily (another creepy cowled figure waits instead). I knew this town well, and recognize every landmark, sidewalk, back road and public space herein. What’s weirder still is the film’s “inside-out” orientation: typical of most genre and borderline genre fare of the period, the locals are posited and positioned as the unwelcoming ‘Other’ throughout. But those ‘Others’ are, in life, my family, my friends, fellow Vermonters. Those two hitchhiking kids Sal and Jackie ignore on their drive out of the village might as well have been classmates of mine at Johnson State College.

We’re meant to empathize with Sal in *Dark August*, but me, I’m with the old man (consider for a moment that none other than Lance Henriksen plays essentially the same character in another rural locale in Stan Winston’s 1988 *Pumpkinhead*, losing his beloved child to another speeding city slicker and mobilizing another kind of malignant magical vengeance against the perps and their circle). This is how it plays, despite the fact that Sal is (like me) a freelance artist (this isn’t made explicit until over 45 minutes into the movie, though his handiwork is visible throughout). However you cut it, Sal just isn’t a likeable fellow.

The locals don’t think much of Sal, either. Though legally cleared of the little girl’s death as “accidental,” Sal suffers anxiety attacks in local shops. Sal finds or foments conflict everywhere in the village, at one point attracting the attention of almost the entire village; when he does as Adrianna instructs to counter the bad fuggums plaguing him, he attracts the attention of the Stowe Volunteer Fire Department (who are thoughtfully given an onscreen credit) and is arrested. During Sal’s first such near-blackout, locals young and old are shown staring impassively at Sal, with the ominous opacity of the hicks and yokels of *Two Thousand Maniacs!*, *Deliverance*, *Let’s Scare Jessica to Death*, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, *Race with the Devil*, or the decade’s bumper crops of made-for-TV rural horrors (like *Crowhaven Farm*, Steven Spielberg’s *Something Evil*, etc.). The only onscreen sympathy Sal seems to win from the townies is from the local drunk (Martin Harvey Friedberg): “Why don’t ya listen to him? Why don’tcha put your ears where your eyes are?” Sullen Sal’s mounting paranoia is fueled by glimpses of dark robed figures lurking in the woods, the omnipresent vengeful old man McDermott glaring from every rural patch. As already noted, the film confirms Sal’s fears in its opening minutes; thus,

¹¹ – It’s the same bridge in my cover painting for Joseph A. Citro’s and my *Vermont Ghost Guide* (originally published in 2000 by University Press of New England; Joe and I are currently working on an expanded revised edition for late 2019 publication).



Sal's mounting isolation, instability, and ill luck (and that of anyone close to him) come as no surprise. We're here to savor it.

Sal unraveling *is* the spectacle.

This 1970s blossoming of Vermont Folk horror was short-lived, but Vermont horror and folk horror did not end when the 1970s did.

The 1980s and 1990s brought a genuine boom in Vermont filmmaking, from regional filmmakers as well as outside independent and Hollywood studio filmmaking, including a steady stream of genre efforts; sometimes, Vermont only provided locations for second-unit footage, while other films were almost entirely filmed in-state. These included low-budget independents – Roger Spottiswoode's Jamie Lee Curtis vehicle *Terror Train* (1980, a sequence shot in Bellows Falls, VT's Steamtown), Robert Jiras's adaptation of Robert Cormier's *I Am the Cheese* (1983, Plainfield, Marshfield, Northfield, and Montpelier, VT), Larry Cohen's ingenious Stephen King sequel *A Return to Salem's Lot* (1987, Peacham, Newbury, St. Johnsbury, VT), David Giancola's *Time Chasers* (1991, Rutland, VT; aka *Tangents*, now a *MST3000* favorite), Larry Brand's Larry Drake psycho-killer opus *Paranoia* (1996, Wilmington, VT area)¹² – as well as major Hollywood studio productions – John Irvin's adaptation of Peter Straub's *Ghost Story* (1981, Woodstock and Sharon, VT), Jack Clayton's Disney adaptation of Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked this Way Comes* (1983, Lee Dyer's second-unit footage only), Tim Burton and Michael McDowell's marvelous *Beetlejuice* (1987, East Corinth, VT), and the Jack-Nicholson-bit-by-a-lycanthrope sequence in Mike Nichols' *Wolf* (1993; who knew we had werewolves in Waitsfield, VT?). Set-but-not-shot-in-Vermont genre efforts included Canadian-filmed thrillers like the Rod Steiger vehicle *The Neighbor* (1993) and Eric (Evilspeak) Weston's *Pressure Point* (1999).

Big-budget studio Vermont-filmed genre fare ended with a whimper, not another boom, with the Farrelly Brothers' black comedy *Me, Myself & Irene* and Robert Zemeckis's overblown thriller *What Lies Beneath* (both 2000). For whatever reason, the major studios abandoned Vermont, but independent and regional filmmakers kept at it. The same year then-teenage Anders Burrows played the Messiah in the Brattleboro Union High School production of *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, he also played the supernatural being harvesting the locals in Joshua Moyses's folk-horror curio *Blood Rites* (1999). Vermonter Michael Fisher launched his distinctive brand of polished, poetic short films with *Noir* (1997, with David Mamet), *Grieving* (1998), *Love of My Life* (1999), *The Last Monster* (1999), *Burgundy*

¹² – Some sources also claim Rutland, VT locations were used for Richard Cassidy's predominantly California-lensed psychothriller *Crazed* (1982, aka *Slipping into Darkness, Blood Shed*), along with Amityville, Long Island, NY and New York City.

(2001), *Stick Season* (2005), and the ghost tale *One Shot* (2006). Fantasy/SF filmmaker and old-school stop-motion animator Brett Piper brought ravenous giant spiders to life in his *Arachnia* (2003) in Rutland, and magical reality figured in Jay Craven's made-in-the-Northeast-Kingdom adaptation of VT author Howard Frank Mosher's *Disappearances* (2006). Vermont locations also figured in Caleb Emerson's antic *Die You Zombie Bastards!* (2005) and made-entirely-in-Vermont fare like David Giancola's *Lightning: Fire from the Sky* and *Peril* (both 2001), Travis VanAlstyne and Dylan Duncan's *Ghosts of Vermont* (2003), Neil Kinsella's *The Ice Queen* (2005), Jayson Argento's *Cthulu Chronicles* (2006), Mike Turner's prehistoric-man horror short *Primevil* (2007), and Damon Lemay's *Zombie Town* (2007). There's also been plenty of set-but-not-shot-in-Vermont fare like the faux-Vermont footage of Mick Garris and Stephen King's TV movie *Stephen King's The Shining* (1997), Michael Pleckaitis's *Trees* (2000) and *Trees 2: The Root of All Evil* (2005), Bobb Hopkins' *3 Below* (2005), Chris Mack's *Vampire Vermont* (2001), John Maybury's *The Jacket* (2005, Canada pretending to be VT), Francis Lawrence's adaptation of Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (2007, with West Amwell, NJ standing in for Bethel, VT for the coda), Leigh Scott's *Exorcism: The Possession of Gail Bowers* (2006), and Zack Snyder's absolutely bugfuck *Sucker Punch* (2011).

We did finally get not one but *two* independently-produced feature-length adaptations of H. P. Lovecraft's "The Whisperer in Darkness": Matt Hundley's Scott County, Tennessee-filmed 2007 adaptation, and Sean Branney and the H. P. Lovecraft Historical Society's partially-shot-in-Vermont gem *The Whisperer in the Darkness* (2011). Nevertheless, the greatest recent folk-horror jewel to be made in the Green Mountain state has been in production for well over a decade from filmmaker/artist/musician John DiGeorge (aka Mutsu Crispin), an exquisite adult fairy tale entitled *Redbelly* (2007-2017), a 'lost' film from birth. *Redbelly* is "a freakishly old-world fairy tale, featuring a princess trapped in a stone tower, bereft of human contact...[and] a prince with an external glass stomach, born unable to use his mouth to speak, cry, or eat, who was captured by an opportunistic moonshiner who uses the glass stomach as a still." DiGeorge/Crispin says *Redbelly* is "very particular to Vermont, but not set in Vermont. It all grew out of the landscape. The stone tower. . .there's stone walls everywhere. There's also a monster in the movie. What's the monster in the woods of Vermont? It's a bear that carries winter in its belly. The prince gets stuck in his belly, and it's the harshest winter imaginable. . .The mythology is definitely grown out of where we were when we conceived it."¹³

This all began in the 1970s when the rocky soil of Vermont spawned folk horrors like *The Animal* and *Dark August*. Thanks to Arrow Films, Stephen Thrower, and their team of caring resurrectionists, we can finally experience *Dark August* as it was always meant

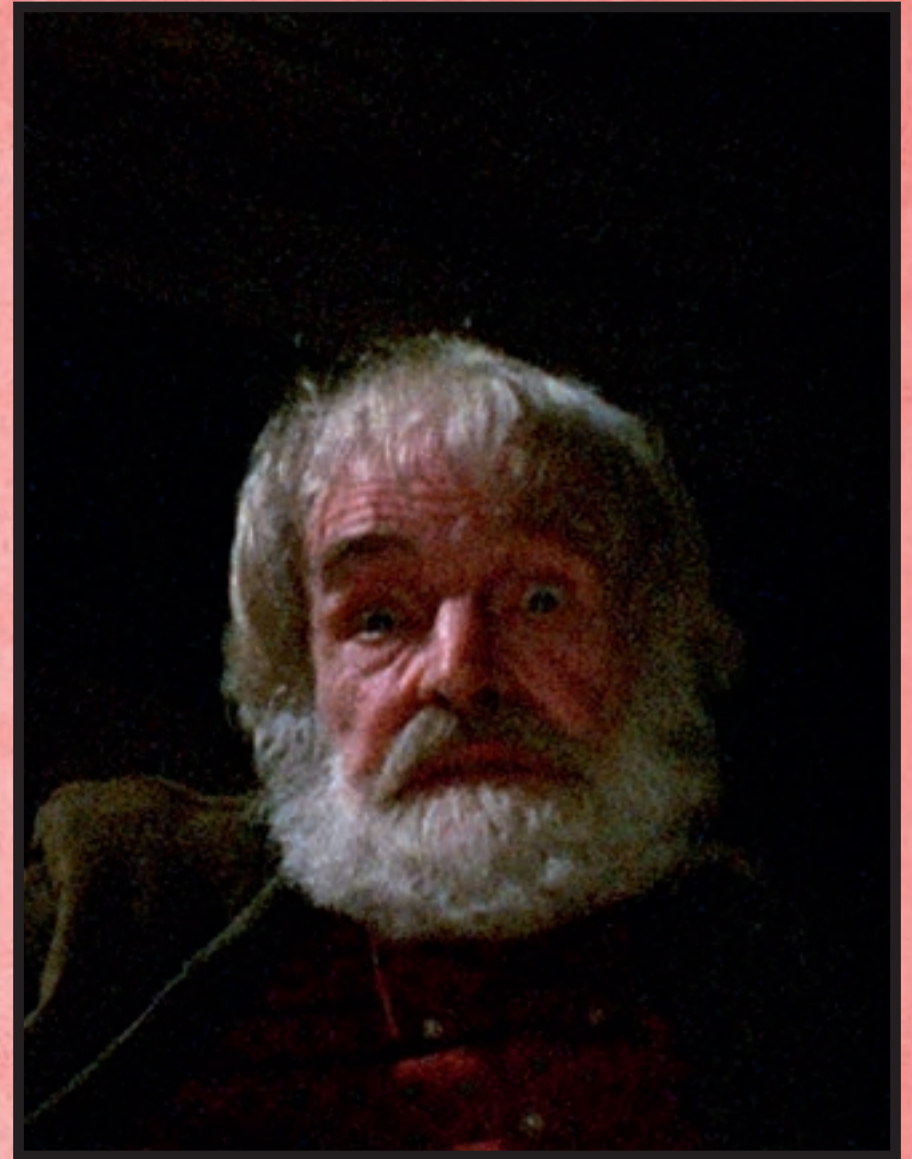
¹³ – David Nielsen, "How Do You Like Them Apples?," *The Take Magazine*, February 13, 2017, <https://thetakemagazine.com/how-do-you-like-them-apples/>

to be experienced. Along with Sal, you will discover the truth in Ethan Allen's words, "The gods of the valley are not the gods of the hills, and you shall understand it."

As Ethan Allen warned, the Gods of the Hills can be angry, savage gods when those who come up from the valleys and trespass do so without the proper respect. . .

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Stephen R. Bissette, a pioneer graduate of the Joe Kubert School, teaches at the Center for Cartoon Studies. Renowned for Swamp Thing, Taboo (launching From Hell and Lost Girls), '1963', S.R. Bissette's Tyrant®, co-creating John Constantine, and creating the world's second '24-Hour Comic' (invented by Scott McCloud for Bissette). Comics creator (recently in Spongebob Comics, Paleo, Awesome 'Possum), illustrator (Vermont Ghost Guide, Vermont Monster Guide), author (Teen Angels & New Mutants, short fiction in Hellboy: Odd Jobs, The New Dead, Mister October, co-author of Comic Book Rebels, Prince of Stories: The Many Worlds of Neil Gaiman, The Monster Book: Buffy the Vampire Slayer), Bissette's latest includes Cryptid Cinema™ and the Electric Dreamhouse 'Midnight Movie Monograph' David Cronenberg's The Brood.



THE CHILD

CAST

Laurel Barnett as Alicianne

Rosalie Cole as Rosalie

Frank Janson as Norden

Richard Hanners as Len

Ruth Ballen as Mrs. Whitfield

Slosson Bing Jong as the Gardener

CREW

Directed by **Robert Voskanian**

Produced by **Robert Dadashian**

Screenplay by **Ralph Lucas**

Director of Photography **Mori Alavi**

Edited by **Robert Dadashian** and **Robert Voskanian**

Music by **Rob Wallace**

Music Performed by **Michael Quatro**





“I DON’T HAVE TO TELL YOU ANYTHING!”

EXPLORING THE ENIGMAS OF *THE CHILD*

by Travis Crawford

It’s unlikely that a first-time viewer of a film will read a booklet essay prior to their initial experience with it, but if that’s what is occurring now, please continue for a couple more sentences and then stop reading further before you’ve seen *The Child*. Don’t misunderstand: it’s not that the film contains a plethora of unexpected plot twists that will be spoiled here – actually, the film *is* highly unpredictable, but only in the same way that a dream is unpredictable, in that it seems to be just perpetually evolving into new areas of strangeness as it progresses with its own crackpot internal logic. Rather, *The Child* is a *sui generis* horror oddity that’s best approached cold in the hopes that it might instill in the home viewer the same somnambulist sense of woozy, late night bafflement the film must have conjured in audiences who blindly stumbled across it in rural drive-ins and urban grindhouses upon its release in 1977: “This is definitely not a normal horror movie. Just what *is* this?” The only film directed by one-off wonder Robert Voskian, *The Child* is one of the sterling examples of a loosely categorized group of ethereal, oneiric mood pieces within American independent horror movies of the 1970s (we’ll return to those in a moment), offbeat and dreamlike genre films that demonstrated that some of the most haunting and memorable low-budget horror movies of that landmark decade weren’t *always* the ones that shattered taboos and shocked audiences. Whether the uniquely enigmatic tone of the films is the result of ambitious visions or happy accidents (or both), these off-kilter horror movies didn’t always find their audiences upon initial release, but they’ve often lingered in the minds of their viewers for decades, and in more recent years, they’ve been rediscovered and savored. *The Child* is among the most spare, minimalist stabs at gothic horror made within 1970s American independent horror – fog machines working in overdrive, a mysterious family living in a creepy house in the middle of the woods, its red velvet curtain-smothered interiors looking like they just leaped from the pages of *Funeral Home Decor Digest* – and its stark approach proves to be just as thoroughly hypnotic as it was budgetarily unavoidable. While its influences are obvious (the filmmakers themselves admit to being inspired by the successes of *Night of the Living Dead* and *The Exorcist*), and while it does ultimately settle into becoming a satisfyingly gory zombie attack yarn, much of *The Child* is truly idiosyncratic and wholly *odd*, like a kid’s half-recalled nightmare sprung to life. A modest success upon its release (though the



filmmakers reaped none of those rewards), *The Child* has continued to haunt viewers for decades, but still hasn't really received the attention it deserves.

Among the film's many disorienting faux-fairy-tale constructs is that it intentionally leaves unclear just when and where the story takes place. There are only a couple vehicles seen in the film, and they appear to be of 1940s vintage, and while the actors' clothes seem to be purposefully unidentifiable with any specific period, there are also occasional anachronistic flashes of then-contemporary wardrobe (the film is apparently intended to take place in the 1950s, although this is never specified, and indeed, the *entirety* of *The Child* seems to be taking place in some parallel universe). And while the film's rural locations and visible oil wells suggest that this might be another of America's great regional independent horror films, *The Child* was actually shot entirely in and around Los Angeles, largely in a city-owned 1920s estate on the eve of its impending demolition. The "plot," such as it is, centers on Alicianne (the alluring Laurel Barnett, who should've gone on to greater things than a couple TV series guest spots and a Larry Buchanan movie), traveling to the country to serve as governess to young Rosalie, whose *Bad Seed* brattiness is only a prelude to her pre-*Carrie* telekinetic abilities and the power to summon the walking dead. Alicianne also encounters Rosalie's stern father (whose dinner table conversation tale of oleander-poisoned boy scouts is representative of the film's streak of morbid humor) and Rosalie's brother Len, the comparatively normal member of the familial trio, who will eventually aid in Alicianne's escape from Rosalie's nearby graveyard friends. If that sounds like a fairly standard horror film storyline, it soon becomes clear that *The Child* is anything *but* routine genre fare. Voskanian and screenwriter Ralph Lucas have constructed a story that's rife with eccentricities (the barrel that inexplicably rolls out onto the road, forcing Alicianne to crash her car and seek temporary refuge with elderly Mrs. Whitfield) and bizarre detours (the fog-bathed flashback to Rosalie's mother's funeral), and sprinkled with hyper-enthusiastically delivered dialogue that borders on the poetically nonsensical ("When I get back, we'll play anagrams! Now eat your grapefruit!"), made all the more surreal by the fact that the film's dialogue was entirely dubbed in post-production, creating an alienating vacuum quality similar to that of Joseph Ellison's *Don't Go in the House* (1979), which was also largely shot MOS and dubbed in post. But if some of *The Child*'s most pleasingly enigmatic qualities could be considered inadvertent, there's no denying that the film's atmospheric visual style is quite resolute.

The work of Voskanian and cinematographer/art director Mori Alavi (like Voskanian, Alavi was also born in Iran) is striking on many levels. The canted compositions are consistently unconventional, and the camerawork effortlessly transitions from Milligan-maniac to surprisingly elegant (note the tracking shot around the dinner table with Alicianne and the Nordon clan). While the entire first hour of *The Child* is disquieting, there are a few

individual sequences that are standouts, most notably Alicianne's almost otherworldly walk through the woods following her car accident, and particularly the fantastic scene of Alicianne's fear intensifying as Rosalie's ominously flickering pumpkin provides the only illumination in an otherwise pitch black room. That moment also provides an example of the most distinctive visual motif in Voskanian and Alavi's aesthetic: *The Child* has to be one of the literally *darkest* horror films imaginable. The stark lighting of many low-budget genre productions is typically mostly due to limited resources, but Voskanian and Alavi created an aesthetic that makes those limitations seem like advantages, as many scenes are lit with a single dramatic swath of light cutting through the frame, highlighting only one select component of the scene and leaving the rest of the action in the shadows, a masterful translation of the visual language commonly associated with the black-and-white cinematography of German Expressionism and film noir into the color horror film. Nowhere is this motif more apparent than the sequence of Alicianne experiencing a nightmare, with her lonely figure lying in bed the only illuminated element within the frame, effectively casting Alicianne adrift in a surrounding pool of darkness.

That same spare aesthetic and that same moody tone of barren isolation run through many of the best subdued, ethereal, oneiric 1970s American independent horror films. *The Child*'s closest cinematic cousin is probably Richard Blackburn's justifiably praised *Lemora: A Child's Tale of the Supernatural* (1973), with its period-piece setting accomplished on threadbare means, its intertwining of nightmares and reality, its emphasis on the relationship between a woman and a young girl, and its vaguely similar visual slant, although *The Child* pushes its German expressionist influences to much greater chiaroscuro extremes than *Lemora* did. But *The Child* and *Lemora* are just two representations of the sort of ethereal "dreamlike horror" cinema that thrived in low-budget American genre filmmaking of the 70s and early 80s. This isn't to imply that this was any kind of cohesive, or even recognized, film movement during the era — it would be erroneous to compare this loose categorization with, say, post-*Halloween* American slasher movies of the late 70s/early 80s, or the confrontational "New French Extremity" horror films of the early 2000s. Rather, the poetic and surreal 70s horror films seemed to just occasionally materialize at random intervals to transfix some people in attendance, and merely confound others, before the films would then drift back into obscurity prior to being sporadically rediscovered on VHS and television syndication in the 80s and 90s, and then ultimately critically reappraised during the DVD explosion around the onset of the 21st century. Whether it was the drug-tinged culture of the decade, or the fact that many horror films were being made by young film students who had just been influenced more by European arthouse cinema than back issues of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, the 1970s produced a spate of trancelike, chimerical horror that has never been equaled in the U.S. Perhaps the greatest example of 70s American dream horror is Willard Hyuck and



Gloria Katz's remarkable *Messiah of Evil* (1973), a mesmerizing Techniscope widescreen study of 1950s "Main Street U.S.A." small town Americana in decay (like *The Child*, it was actually shot around L.A., and it also saves its zombie attack for the denouement). Virtually forgotten after its delayed and unsuccessful release, *Messiah* has, like *The Child*, thankfully been restored and reassessed. Other films that could be lumped into this grouping could include Texan auteur S.F. Brownrigg's genuinely unnerving *Don't Look in the Basement* (1973), Matt Cimber's startling *The Witch Who Came from the Sea* (1976; the film also makes similar widescreen use of California seaside locations as *Messiah*), Frederic Friedel's memorable North Carolina double header of *Axe* (1974) and *Kidnapped Coed* (1976), Christopher Speeth's endearingly peculiar *Malatesta's Carnival of Blood* (1973), Theodore Gershuny's suspenseful *Silent Night, Bloody Night* (1974), and two films shot in Florida and marketed as sexploitation endeavors, but they're in a horror class all their own: the hallucinatory head-trip *Pick-Up* (1975) and the only recently rediscovered gender-bending head-scratcher *Miss Leslie's Dolls* (1973). This is not to suggest that all of the 70s ethereal, poetic horror films were necessarily overlooked at the time of release – John Hancock's masterfully understated *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* (1971), Don Coscarelli's hugely enjoyable hit *Phantasm* (1979), David Schmoeller's delirious *Tourist Trap* (1979), and even George A. Romero's modern day vampire masterpiece *Martin* (1978) could all be considered to be part of the 70s American oneiric horror film grouping, and all were, to varying degrees, successful upon their initial theatrical rollouts.

As detailed in Stephen Thrower's essential book *Nightmare USA* (the definitive chronicle of *The Child*, as it is with so many other American independent horror films), Voskanian and his producer Robert Dadashian – the two became friends in film school after realizing they both had Armenian ancestry – were editing the film together when they had to accept the grim reality that they didn't have enough funds to fully complete the project. Screening their workprint to potential distributors, they received positive feedback from legendary exploitation producer/distributor Harry Novak, who agreed to finance completion of the post-production and give Voskanian and Dadashian a share of the profits when Novak distributed it. It would turn out to be a very small share indeed, and after Novak's creative box office reports, Voskanian and Dadashian were unable to even pay back their initial investors in full, let alone have any profit left over for themselves. Dadashian went on to work extensively in film post-production capacities, but Voskanian never made another film, abandoning the industry entirely to become a nightclub entrepreneur. Novak (1928-2014) began working for RKO Pictures in the 1940s, and upon the company's collapse in 1957, moved into the exploitation film market, eventually starting his own distribution firm, the modestly monikered Boxoffice International Pictures. His earliest releases were largely of the tame "nudie cutie" sexploitation variety – *The Touchables* (1961), *Kiss Me Quick!* (1964), *Artist Studio Secrets* (1964), etc. – but Boxoffice soon began expanding into other

genres, and the late 60s and 70s found the company working with a recurring roster of sexploitation directors (most notably *Mantis in Lace* helmer William Rostler, but also such talents as Gary Graver, Ronald Garcia, and "hicksploitation" specialist Bethel Buckalew), importing films by directors like Jean Rollin and Koji Wakamatsu, and picking up the odd horror obscurity like *The Child* for distribution (Boxoffice also released the aforementioned Friedel duo of *Axe* and *Kidnapped Coed*). Unfortunately, *The Child* was one of the very last films ever released by Boxoffice International Pictures, and within just a few months of its release, Novak ceased company operations. Whether or not the shuttering of Boxoffice was primarily responsible for Voskanian and Dadashian not receiving their fair share of profits from the release (comments made by other filmmakers suggest that the makers of *The Child* were not alone in their predicament), it's regrettable that Voskanian's initial foray into feature filmmaking may have been so financially discouraging that he opted not to return to directing again.

All of this is not necessarily to suggest that *The Child* is a neglected masterpiece awaiting a rediscovery that will change how the entire landscape of 1970s American horror cinema is viewed – I'm sure Voskanian, Dadashian, Lucas, and their collaborators would scoff at such a lofty claim. However, for anyone attuned to the type of ethereal, dreamlike 70s horror films cited earlier – or, for that matter, anyone who just savors the opportunity to sit in front of a screen for 83 minutes and be utterly, joyously baffled by the madness that unfolds – *The Child* is a very special treat indeed. Films like this only attest to the fact that low-budget horror moviemaking in 1970s America was a period of enormous creative freedom, giving birth to monsters which we are grateful to still treasure today.

Travis Crawford is a contributing writer for Filmmaker, Film Comment and The Calvert Journal. He was also formerly the Associate Program Director of the Philadelphia Film Festival.



ABOUT THE RESTORATIONS

DREAM NO EVIL

Dream No Evil has been exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with mono audio.

The original 35mm negative was scanned in 2K resolution at EFILM.

The film was graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master and restored at R3Store Studios in London.

The mono mix was remastered from the original optical negative at Deluxe Audio Services.

All materials provided by Kit Parker and UCLA Film and Television Archive.

Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films
R3Store Studios: Gerry Gedge, Jo Griffin, Rich Watson, Emily Kemp, Nathan Leaman-Hill
Deluxe Audio Services: Jordan Perry
EFILM: David Morales
UCLA Film and Television Archive: Todd Wiener

DARK AUGUST

Dark August has been exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with mono audio.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 2K resolution at OCN Digital Labs.

The film was graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master and restored at R3Store Studios in London.

The mono mix was remastered from the original optical negative at Deluxe Audio Services.

Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films
R3Store Studios: Gerry Gedge, Jo Griffin, Rich Watson, Andrew O'Hagan, Emily Kemp
Deluxe Audio Services: Jordan Perry
OCN Digital: Joe Rubin

THE CHILD

The Child has been exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in 1.37:1 and 1.78:1 with mono audio.

An original 35mm CRI was scanned in 2K resolution, graded and restored at OCN Digital Labs.

The soundtrack was sourced from the original optical negatives. Additional audio remastering was completed at Pinewood Studios.

All original materials used in this restoration were accessed from Valiant International Pictures.

Colourist: Lannie Lorence
OCN Digital: Joe Rubin
Pinewood Studios: Rebecca Budds, Jashesh Jhaveri

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and booklet produced by **Ewan Cant**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
QC **Nora Mehenni, Alan Simmons**
Blu-ray Mastering **David Mackenzie**
Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**
Design **Obviously Creative**
Artwork by **The Twins of Evil**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Stephen R. Bissette, Robert Dadashian, John A. Dalley, Martin Goldman, David Gregory,
Marianne Kanter, Carmen Novak, Kit Parker, Edwin Samuelson,
Walter Ungerer and Robert Voskanian.