



THE GORE MET

MENU: DOUBLE HELPING OF HOMEMADE GRUE STEW



This column is a feast of synchronicity, with two oddly titled underground films that complement both last month's look at *Disco-path* and tie-in with this issue's celebration of independent filmmaking. First served is rot made in Montreal, Éric Falardeau's *Thanatomorphose*.

The plot is a disturbing underground art house fusion of David Cronenberg-style body horror, informed by the necrotic sensibilities of Jörg Buttgereit. Laura (Kayden Rose) christens her new apartment by dispassionately fucking her brutish boyfriend, Antoine (Davyd Tousignant). Unable to sleep after he leaves, she futilely attempts to work on a clay sculpture before retiring to bed to masturbate out of frustration.

The following day, a weird bruise has appeared her on jaw line, and while she's showering, a couple of her fingernails snap off. After a party with friends that night and more gormless sex with Antoine, Laura's physical condition worsens considerably. Her hair starts coming out in clumps and hot glue won't keep her fingernails attached. When her fingers start breaking off, she desperately tries to sew them back on. She slips into a deep malaise once maggots start crawling out of her open sores, rousing only to commit acts of violent murder.

Thanatomorphose is languorously paced, and with a run time of 100 minutes, perhaps a little too long, but the revolting makeup effects — by David Scherer (*The Strange Colors of Your Body's Tears*), with an assist from Rémy Couture (*Disco-path*) — are superb. The minimalist, melancholy score by the Guild of Funerary Violinists suitably sustains the relentlessly morbid mood.

Unearthed Films vomited this out on DVD and included a making-of featurette, interview footage with Falardeau from the 2012 Sitges Film Festival premiere, and three of his short films (*Coming Home*, *La Petite Morte* and *Purgatory*).

The inherent freedom in underground filmmaking



Thanatomorphose

is that there isn't a producer to dictate what you can put in your film. The drawback is that there is also no one to advise you what you shouldn't put into your film, which applies to Adam Sotelo's directorial debut, *Perseveration*. It's an exquisitely shot parade of perversity and gore, with remarkable sound design, an incredible soundtrack, and brilliant locations and art direction. Unfortunately, upon this frame is hung a threadbare plots adorned with meaningless shock.

A young boy is kept in a dog cage in the bowels of an abandoned building by an insane Catholic priest who only takes him out to physically and sexually abuse him.

One day, the lad slips his bonds, bashes the priest's head in, cuts off his face and makes a mask out of it. Years later, Leatherface-in-a-cassock violently abuses and murders young women.

That's it. No twists or attempts at playing with or redefining slasher film conventions other than on an artistic level — just rote, formulaic filmmaking. I have to cop to a degree of curmudgeonliness here. Sotelo was only 21 years old when he made this; I've been watching transgressive films longer than he's been alive, so chalk up my reaction to generational disparity. While I disagree

with the cover quote that touts *Perseveration* as "the most vile indie flick of all time," he clearly intended this film to be that, and it is a technical achievement.

In terms of "vile," Sotelo goes for broke from the get-go. The film opens with an unborn child being crudely cut from a woman's womb and tossed in a garbage can, before a long shot of a room strewn with dead women and casually discarded babies, one of which is headless. Then it cuts to a backwoods rape scene, a boy being beaten and sodomized, and a priest burying a bag of dead babies in the woods. And that's just the first twenty of 74 similar minutes.

There's no room for conventional storytelling in this; it's an onslaught of what is meant to be disturbing and offensive imagery. Unfortunately, it's ridiculously over-the-top. Sotelo dwells so long on gore gags that they literally unravel before your eyes. In a near-interminable scene in which a woman is beaten on the back with a nail-studded baseball bat, you can clearly see the actor pulling his blows and the latex in the close-up shots breaking down.

Sotelo is self-distributing *Perseveration* under his Hellsgate Pictures banner. It's a thoroughly professional package that includes a behind-the-scenes feature, three trailers and a stills gallery. If only it supported a better film.

