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Bliss Cua Lim

Over a span of nearly two decades, Eddie Romero served as director, producer, or writer for over twenty low-budget films made in the Philippines for distribution in the U.S. These films ranged from war and action films made in the fifties for general distribution in indoor theaters, to exploitation horror films made in the sixties with drive-ins in mind, to women-in-prison films with blaxploitation elements (notably, *Black Mama, White Mama*, 1973) in the seventies, as well as occasional forays back to the horror genre. This paper focuses on Romero's horror exploitation fare intended for U.S. distribution in drive-ins and second-rate indoor theaters.²

In this study, I situate the low-budget horror output of Eddie Romero (in collaboration with Kane Lynn, John Ashley and Gerry de Leon), made in the Philippines and intended for American distribution, within a matrix of intersecting discourses. In interviews, Romero refuses to characterize his B-film output as Filipino-American co-productions, asserting instead that they are wholly American films (in ethos, in audience address) which happen to be made by Filipinos (who have successfully "left out" their "Filipino-ness" during filmmaking). I begin by unpacking the neocolonial underpinnings of Romero's fantasy of making "American" films in the Philippines, then go on to consider historiographic approaches to the exploitation film.

The texts I explore in this study are the early *Terror is a Man* (1959), directed by Gerry de Leon for Lynn-Romero Productions in the fifties; and the first two of three Blood Island films produced by Hemisphere Pictures: *Brides of Blood* (1968) and *Mad Doctor of Blood Island* (1968), both co-directed by de Leon and Romero, and *Beast of Blood* (Four Associates/Hemisphere, 1970), written and directed by Romero.

The Blood Island films are strongly indebted to the generic legacy of other jungle-horror films: the colonialist nightmare embodied in the *Dr. Moreau* narrative; and the beauty-desired-by-the-beast premise of *King Kong*. Drawing from these two intertextual axes, the Blood Island films figuratively engage anxieties over miscegenation and colonialism, anxieties which are the enduring province of jungle-horror films. The centerpiece of my analysis is a delineation of several recurring motifs of the Blood Island films, themselves longstanding tropes of the genre: in an anonymous jungle island, an interstitial white heroine is menaced by a monstrous, human-but-bestial "mimic man" created by a mad scientist. Though not every Blood Island film plot hews exactly to this formula, each involves most of these elements to a greater or lesser degree.

My analysis of Romero's B-film work is not confined to narrative analysis. In terms of production decisions, I discuss the role of "whiteface" in casting, that is, the casting of mestizo Filipino actors to play the recurring role of the monstrous mad scientist. The last sections of the paper also depart from textual analysis and explore the promotional strategies surrounding the films (ranging from print advertising to in-theater gimmicks and film prologues) and the question of exploitation film audiences (from teenagers at drive-ins to the lowbrow rural audiences of what Romero calls the U.S. "exploitation belt").

1. An earlier version of this paper, entitled "Monstrous Makers, Bestial Brides: Situating Eddie Romero's B-Horror films in an Intricate Web of Histories" was published in the Philippines in the *Journal of English Studies and Comparative Literature* 1.2 (January 1998): 37-61. My thanks to Jason Sanders and Joel David for their invaluable help in tracking down these films and the scant material on them; and for companionably watching these films with me.
2. This excludes the Gerry de Leon vampire films originally made for the Philippines which were then dubbed and distributed in the U.S. years later.

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Adjusting the Frame

Any consideration of Filipino director Eddie Romero's exploitation and B-film output, geared primarily for the U.S. audience, must begin by adjusting the frame: several historical ironies pervade his work, and we must begin by acknowledging them. Perhaps the most obvious irony is the fact that Eddie Romero, a director whose mature work establishes him as a nationalist art filmmaker, also produced American movie fare for drive-ins and rural and second-run theaters, films in which the quality of the direction was not the primary concern (in his war films, location shooting and action rather than dialogue were noted favorably by *Variety*;³ in his Blood Island horror films, co-directed with Gerry de Leon, the sensational combination of "blood, beasts, and breasts" called for only perfunctory direction). Romero, recipient of an Urlian award for outstanding achievement in film, is hailed by Filipino film historian Agustin Sotto as "a filmmaker of substance," based mostly on his post-World War II work as writer and director (under the mentorship of acclaimed National Artist and film pioneer Gerry de Leon), first for the major Philippine film studio Sampaguita Pictures (1946-1953), and then as an independent.

Romero's work in the American exploitation film industry is far less well-known. Following Romero's initiation into the possibilities of serious filmmaking through a trip to London,⁴ Romero's decision to make films on his own as an independent led, by 1957, to his

"American Pictures Made by Filipinos":

Jungle Horror Exploitation Films¹

by Bliss Cua Lim

As a filmmaker, Romero serves as director, producer, or writer of his own films, which are then distributed in the U.S. through independent distributors for general distribution in indoor theaters. He has also been in the Philippines in mind, to women-in-prison films like *Mad Mama* (1973) in the seventies, as well as the *Mad Doctor of Blood Island* (1968) on Romero's horror exploitation films. The *Brides of Blood* (1968) and *Beast of Blood* (1970) were distributed in drive-in theaters.

The text explores the work of filmmaker Eddie Romero (in collaboration with Gerry de Leon) on the *Brides of Blood* (1968) and *Mad Doctor of Blood Island* (1968) made in the Philippines and intended for general distribution in the U.S. through independent distributors. In interviews, Romero refuses to identify his films as "Filipino" productions, asserting instead that they are "American" (in the sense of the word "American" which happen to be made by Filipinos) or "Filipino" (in the sense of the word "Filipino" which happen to be made by Filipinos). I begin by unpacking the complex and often contradictory discourses of making "American" films in the Philippines, then go on to explore the specific discourses related to the exploitation film.

The texts I explore in this study are the early *Terror is a Man* (1959), directed by Gerry de Leon for Lynn-Romero Productions in the fifties; and the first two of three *Blood Island* films produced by Hemisphere Pictures: *Brides of Blood* (1968) and *Mad Doctor of Blood Island* (1968), both co-directed by de Leon and Romero, and *Beast of Blood* (Four Associates/Hemisphere, 1970), written and directed by Romero.

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Romero's work in the American exploitation film industry is far less well-known. Following Romero's initiation into the possibilities of serious filmmaking through a trip to London,⁴ Romero's decision to make films on his own as an independent led, by 1957, to his thinking, "why can't I make...that variety which Republic and Monogram were making...That's easy, that's within my competence. And what difference does it make who makes them?" (Romero 1995, interview)

"What difference does it make who makes them?"

At second glance, the seemingly paradoxical elements of this story can be explained—in an interview, Romero remarks that being a B-film director in America paid better than working for a first-rate Filipino studio. "You think any American director would work for the kind of salary a Filipino director makes?" he asks rhetorically (Romero 1995, interview). Romero also ascribes his decision to work in what Fred Olen Ray has called the New Poverty Row of the late fifties to the mid-seventies to personal preference:

I would rather make them [the Blood Island films] than the alternative—Filipino films that were fashionable in that period, which was very heavy soap...The only way to describe this is that I despised them...It's the kind of melodrama, it's the cultural level you have to work out on, it was to me oppressive, shameful, for me personally. I'm not preempting the audience. If that's what they like, that's what they like, they have a perfect right. But it wasn't for me. (Romero 1995, interview)

What on closer inspection calls for a complex historical exegesis is not so much the oxymoronic circumstances of the Third world auteur-turned-New Poverty Row hack, that is, not so much what Romero was doing, but how he understood what he was doing in the U.S. He maintains that the majority of his work, "pictures made-to-order for American distribution prior to production," could not really be understood as Philippine-American co-productions (notwithstanding the fact that he began this work under the aegis of Lynn-Romero productions, named for his American partner and himself.) He says of himself: "I think I was the first one who wanted to initiate production here [the Philippines] in association with American groups," so that "in effect they were American pictures made by Filipinos, financed entirely by Americans, later" (Romero 1995, interview; emphasis mine). In another interview, Romero remarks, "I was able to break into the American scene by leaving out my Filipino-ness." (quoted in del Mundo 49).

Such statements echo Romero's rhetorical question: as he puts it, "what difference does it make" that the people responsible for a set of low-budget American film fare should not be Americans? Romero insists that it makes no difference at all. If "Filipino-ness" can be put aside,

then national-cultural identity is merely a question of volition: one can decide to put it on or take it off. Romero's casual dismissal of these films' conditions of possibility naturalizes the neocolonial underpinnings of his fantasy: how did it become possible for a Filipino filmmaker to imagine that he might easily pass as American, or to imagine that no passing was even necessary? Romero's casual and commonsensical denial of difference is underwritten by his own acknowledgement of the material effects of that difference. Speaking about one of his long-time collaborators in low-budget film production, John Ashley, with whom he parted ways in the seventies, Romero says: "I sensed, this is as far as we can go, we're not really going to get into major film production. Ashley hasn't made it into major film production yet. *And with a Filipino partner he wouldn't even have got this far*" (Romero 1995, interview; my emphasis).

How is it, then, that despite the very real differences in the conditions of film production between the Philippines and the U.S., Romero could maintain that Filipinos made American films as though they themselves were Americans?

Ray, in his book *The New Poverty Row: Independent Filmmakers as Distributors*, acknowledges the specificity of the Lynn-Romero production team that later evolved into Hemisphere Productions, which made the three Blood Island films that are at the core of this study. Ray writes

Hemisphere Pictures, Inc., was a company unlike any of the others featured in this book. It was diverse in its product, [and] relied on a solid base connection with a foreign country (the Philippines). (Ray 62)

The "solid base connection" with the Philippines which distinguishes Hemisphere Productions from other low-budget production companies, a liaison accomplished through Eddie Romero, is no mere historical accident. The series of events that led to the collaboration of Romero with first Kane Lynn, and then actor-turned-producer John Ashley, arise out of a particular insertion into postcolonial history. In most accounts of the story of this Filipino-American collaboration, mention is made of Lynn's past as a naval officer stationed in the Philippines; his love of the "warmth and hospitality" of the ex-colonials, a liking shared by Ashley after his first stint as an actor there.⁵ The other half of the story relies on the presence of a Filipino who could play the role of a gifted bilingual "native": Eddie Romero had been writing short stories in English from his teens ("the P.G. Wodehouse of the Philippines: that was his ambition") and had continued to write and direct for Filipino film studios in English, with assistants translating his words to the vernacular (Sotto 17). My sense is that Eddie Romero was particularly well-suited as the crucial liaison between U.S. independents and the Filipino film scene of the late fifties to the mid-seventies. By his own admission, having grown up in a Philippines that had yet to be "granted" independence by America in the 1940s, he possessed the hybridized culture of his milieu: to wit, his practice of directing in English, recalling the practices of the earliest American filmmakers in the Philippines, prior to the beginnings of indigenous production;⁶ and his familiarity with the themes and preoccupations of American culture, which allowed him to make films for U.S. audiences which were never popular when released in the Philippines because, in his words, "they were not intended for here [the Philippines]. The whole culture of those films was not Filipino...To be as good at giving American audiences what they wanted as any American producer—that was the idea" (Romero 1995, interview).



Fig. 1 *Brides of Blood* (Eddie Romero and Gerry de Leon, Hemisphere, 1968)

To his credit, Romero exemplifies the self-irony necessary to any effort to unpack the contradictions of postcolonial culture: In "My Work and Myself," a public address delivered in 1982, he writes:

I began to dream about making some modest films, using some American acting talent, for American distribution. My hope was that even if I would be obliged to continue trafficking in stereotyped product, at least there would be more time and money to work with, a greater opportunity offered thereby to polish what skills I had. Perhaps I was still a willing victim of old colonialist myths, and secretly longed to be part of the mainstream of American culture, to be in fact an American. I would have denied it then, and I am not sure this is untrue even now. That was at once the boon and the bane of the predominant influence of America in the evolution of our young and impressionable national culture. (Romero 1983: 223-224)

What such a self-reflexive statement as this gestures towards is the inappropriateness of both an accusatory critique directed at Romero for the certain objectionable neocolonial aspects of the B-films he directed and/or produced, and of the pitfalls of an auteurist approach to this body of films, especially since that would necessitate papering over the ideological differences between his American work and, for example, his highly accomplished "comeback films," made in the Philippines at the end of his New Poverty Row days. Romero's later films, particularly *Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?* [*This Is The Way It Was... How Is It Today?*], a historical epic made in 1976, have justly been hailed for their contributions to a filmic discourse of Philippine nationalism. Clearly then, the persona of Romero serves as an entry-point to the films we wish to consider, but we must go further than the auteur if we are to forge a nuanced consideration of his (Filipino) American exploitation work.

The Exploitation Film and the Perils of Linearity and Binarism

The exploitation film takes its name from its exploitation of, first, subjects considered taboo by the mainstream film industry (Schaefer 1992: 45); and second, from its exploitation of the tastes of a specialized audience not addressed by Hollywood. Yet another definition of the exploitation film spatializes it as the "middle ground" between a conservative mainstream and the illicit province of hardcore pornography.⁷ The existence of exploitation films almost from the inception of the industrial mode of film production in America serves as a powerful reminder that there is not one American cinema, one Hollywood product, one market (Langer 147). Instead, we need to come to terms with a range of modes of film production, a split and contradictory body of texts, and diverse and fragmented audiences. Our response, therefore, as film scholars, is to craft an understanding of not one unified but many heterogeneous and related film histories.

The recognition of these films' tendency to exploit both content and audience has led, in both popular and academic accounts, to the theme of the exploitation film as Hollywood's unassimilable and diametrically opposed Other; and to the pejorative dismissal of these films as capitalizing on the "lowest common denominator" of viewers' tastes, via a "substandard budget" and "controversial, bizarre, or timely subject matter amenable to wild promotion."⁸ The reality of budget constraints meant that exploitation producers often made use of alternative distribution through the states' rights systems. Since the only way to make a profit through the states' rights system would be to lower costs as much as possible, exploitation films were characterized by their low production value and the flexibility of their small-scale production outfits (Seale 80, 81 and 90).

The absence of exploitation films from archives, film journals, and preservation lists has been attributed to their marginal status in the hierarchy of cultural texts (Langer 147). Such circumstances make the writing of a history of exploitation films crucially different from studies on

better-documented and preserved motion pictures. I have managed to screen only two of the Blood Island films, *Brides of Blood* and *Mad Doctor of Blood Island*. I have attempted to reconstruct a more complete picture of these films by recourse to reviews, genre encyclopedia entries, promotional trailers and copy, and by viewing the films immediately preceding and following the Blood Island productions (*Terror is a Man*, *Beast of the Yellow Night* [(Four Associates, 1970)], and *Twilight People* [Dimension, 1972]).⁹ The fact that scholarship on exploitation often has to contend with objects of study that are no longer available for screening raises the question of writing a history compiled from the fragments and echoes of the original films, in texts and advertising which have already imposed a frame upon the object of study. I remain convinced, though, that refusing to grapple with already under-explored areas of research only confines them further to the dustbins of the periphery.

Whenever motion picture historians do rest their gaze on this independent film practice, some end by unwittingly reinforcing the existing devaluations of the exploitation film. Paul Seale, writing on Poverty Row producers in the early sound era, cautions against linear historiographic assumptions because these hinder a nuanced understanding of Poverty Row by further marginalizing and reducing its historical importance. For instance, a "teleological" argument maintains that because Poverty Row filmmakers were "economically marginal": they exerted no influence over the big studios and were entirely at the mercy of the majors and the Hays Code (Seale 76-77). Eric Schaefer has shown that exploitation films exerted as much pressure on the big mainstream producers as vice-versa, contributing to Hollywood's espousal of self-regulation over state censorship, and never completely abiding by the Code's stipulations.¹⁰

Linear historiography is evident in studies which approach Poverty Row independents as a unified entity and posit a reductive one-to-one causality (Poverty Row is created by the double bill and destroyed by sound). What is needed, rather, is a scholarly awareness of the

individuated characteristics of low-budget independent production outfits. Their heterogeneity accounts for their resiliency in the face of industry crises on the one hand, and their refusal of linear paradigms on the other (Seale 77). The heterogeneity to which Seale refers is particularly germane for an analysis of the low-budget American films of Eddie Romero, which is spread across several production companies and markets, does not fall neatly into generic categories, and survived due to the producers' flexibility regarding the suggestions of exhibitors and current exploitation trends. Moreover, our conceptualization of exploitation films cannot remain centered around representation, narrative, and production value; it must also include issues of distribution, exhibition, and promotion.

The distribution pattern of New Poverty Row films like Romero's output in the fifties to



Fig. 2 *Twilight People* (Eddie Romero, Dimension, 1972)

the seventies (in second- or third-run theaters, rural venues and drive-ins) can be traced to similar strategies of Poverty Row independents in the studio era (which recalls Romero's comment that he aspired to the work of Monogram or Republic.) Whereas major studios' films were distributed by their own vertically-integrated theaters, thus assuring these features of national distribution, Poverty Row films were marketed through the states' rights system.

Having the "advantage of no overhead cost at all," the states' rights system referred to a practice whereby the production company sold off "territorial distribution rights for a film to a number of film exchanges around the country," who took charge of having positive prints made and arranging theatrical releases. Poverty Row films were usually booked into independent theaters, affiliated theaters (as the bottom half of the double bill), and rural movie houses where the audiences often preferred low-budget fare to polished studio product (Seale 78-79). The distribution and exhibition of Romero's Blood Island films appear to have conformed to these broad patterns. As we will see later in this essay, Romero himself was aware of the popularity of his exploitation output with rural American and drive-in audiences who favored B-films to the sophisticated, big budget movies of the major Hollywood studios.

Recent scholarship has shown that the attempted expulsion of the exploitation film through the Hays Code (and before that, through the MPPDA's "Don'ts and Be Carefuls") was finally unsuccessful. This is because the independents "were out to carve their own niche," and as such had no interest in the imprimatur of the Hays Code at the cost of sacrificing their appeal to their own specialized viewership.¹¹ Such an account, then, renders inaccurate any assumptions that exploitation films were just failed copies of more sophisticated and expensive Hollywood models; instead, they were oriented in a completely different direction, and adopted practices which suited that orientation. This is an important consideration in the study of Romero's Blood Island films, which were tailored to the tastes of American drive-in audiences.

Linearity is not the only pitfall to be avoided in writing histories of exploitation films. Jane Gaines writes, "Etymologically, 'exploitation' has affiliations with two contradictory poles of meaning, one having to do with crowning achievements and the other with selfish overreaching that often entails the exhaustion of natural resources and labor power (31)." Gaines' telling insight into the semantic tension between the noun form of "exploit," which suggests a triumph worthy of acclaim, and the verb form, which connotes an oppressive activity that calls for censure, is useful in undoing the binaries to which criticism of the exploitation film still adheres. The reception of exploitation films, both academic and popular, has often been structured around the very etymological polarities of which Gaines spoke: either celebrating the exploitation auteur who did much with little, or denouncing the film for its shameless pursuit of profit at the expense of the audience it corrupts and the film workers it underpays.¹²

This binarism is paralleled by another: the conception of independent exploitation and mainstream Hollywood films as wholly exclusive opposites. Such a perspective can be radicalized by recognizing the extent to which low-budget independent fare and glossy Hollywood commodities are mutually defining. As often happens when we look into the relation between one object and its other, what we find is not complete alterity but a constitutive co-dependence. For example, in the context of early exploitation history, Schaefer has shown that Hollywood denounced exploitation films but was crucially dependent on them for constructing its own identity as wholesome for the censors. Faced with a widespread audience inability, in the twenties and thirties, to differentiate between Poverty Row flicks and major studio features, the majors launched an aggressive moralistic campaign to throw their own supposed positive attributes versus the exploitation films' negative ones into "sharp relief".¹³

In another vein, the legacy of low-brow forms of folk entertainment—the circus, the carnival fairground, and the roadshow—can be traced not only to the exploitation film but to its more gentrified counterpart, the big-budget Hollywood film. In the thirties, the exploitation film was linked to the circus via the practices of the traveling exhibitor whose product, banned from legitimate theaters, would be projected on bed sheets outside city limits and would be carried

from town to town on the routes used by road shows (Ray ix-xi; Morton 162). Gaines' work on early exploitation promotion suggests to me that the rhetoric of the circus barker persists in the hyperbole and exaggeration characteristic of the promotion surrounding exploitation films even up to recent decades, while promotional techniques in major studio films took a different turn—testimonials, product placements, and commercial tie-ins.¹⁴

I am not arguing that there are no differences between exploitation films and mainstream motion pictures. I hope merely to show that a history of the exploitation film and its cousin, the low-budget independent B-film, can only be debilitated by linear paradigms and the persistence of binarisms which pronounce either total resistance or collusion by overlooking significant similarities as well as contrasts between Hollywood and low-budget independents. As I hope to have demonstrated, a sensitive and sensible understanding of the exploitation film cannot arise out of such frameworks.

Bride and Beast: The Interstitial White Heroine and her "Darkest Leading Man"

Some time in the fifties, Eddie Romero made the acquaintance of Lynn, a former U.S. naval pilot stationed in Southeast Asia who opted to stay on in the Philippines at the close of the war. Lynn-Romero productions began with low-budget war films shot entirely in the Philippines and meant for general distribution in America (*The Last Battalion* and *The Scavengers*). Their first horror film, *Terror is a Man*, represented an "attempt to bring internationally-known stars to the Philippines to better reach the world marketplace, since their Filipino productions, while doing well in the foreign marketplace, did very poorly in America and other English speaking territories" (Ray 64). It is relevant to note that many of the Filipino actors in the Romero B-films were respected players in the Philippine studio system. Some, like Leopoldo Salcedo, were matinee idols of legendary status. That top stars in the Filipino film firmament would agree to work in low-budget American films attests not only to Romero's considerable influence in the Philippine movie industry but also to the economic inequalities between nations that made U.S. B-film wages an attractive prospect to third world studio stars.

The "internationally known talent" which *Terror* was meant to showcase turned out to be Frances Lederer, a leading man who had seen more popular days, and Greta Thyssen, "a pin-up girl." Directed by Gerry de Leon, Romero's mentor and one of Philippine cinema's most respected pioneers, the film, moodily lit and carefully framed, is said to have done very well within its minimal release (Ray 64).

Under the newly-formed Hemisphere Pictures, Lynn, Romero, and Irwin Pizor continued to offer war-action films, and here our historical sources seem to conflict. Ray maintains that these pictures did well abroad but not in the U.S., where some were doing a dismal "\$35-a-date-booking-return." Hemisphere thus decided to take up distributor Sam Sherman's suggestion that they put aside war films in favor of horror. They re-released *Terror* as *Blood Creature*, which, paired with a war film with a suitably chilling title, *Walls of Hell*, supposedly brought Hemisphere their first U.S. dollar profits (Ray 64-44).

Ray's explanation for the company's turn to horror films is discounted by Romero, who points out that "*Walls of Hell* made more money in Scandinavia than any other war film except *The Longest Day*. And think of the difference in budget!" (Romero 1995, interview). Romero surmised that the reason for the stress later laid by B-film historians on his horror output rather than on the war films is that the horror films "made a tremendous impression in the exploitation belt, whereas the appeal of the war pictures was spread out" (Romero 1995, interview). A glance at the trade papers of the time would seem to second Romero's insistence that the war films were economically viable—both *Walls of Hell* and *Raiders of Leyte Gulf* were favorably endorsed by *Variety* for their effective use of location shooting and of action sequences; the only marketing limitation of these films, according to *Variety*, was their lack of name stars.¹⁵

Terror is paradigmatic of the Blood Island films that were to follow, both in its generic

and narrative elements, and in its having originated out of the urgings of film distributors and exhibitors (Sam Sherman, and later, for the Blood Island films, Bev Miller, a Kansas-based drive-in owner; Romero 1995, interview).

Loosely adapted from H.G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), *Terror* literalizes the perils of scientific hubris. A shipwrecked man finds himself on a tropical island where a European scientist bent on improving upon natural evolution is genetically altering a panther in the hopes of transforming it into a new, superior kind of man. The doctor's buxom wife, a nurse, is repelled by the aims of the doctor's research and feels sympathy for the hapless creature, no longer a beast but yet not wholly human. As expected, the panther-man attacks the scientist and escapes with the lovely wife in tow. In the film's closing moments, monster and maker grapple with each other at the edge of a cliff and the beast succeeds in hurling the doctor to his death. The lovely wife is saved from the panther-man's clutches by the handsome shipwreck, who shoots the beast. With the help of a native boy, however, the wounded monster climbs onto a boat and pushes out for the open sea.

The "beast who wants to mate with human women," a formula "which combines sex and horror into one neat package," is an established monster film convention (Chute 29). In the Romero horror films, this trope persistently recurs, which might be why critics have seen these films as tending "more toward jungle adventure than toward insane medicine."¹⁶

Rhona J. Berenstein, in her insightful study of early thirties jungle films, clarifies the link between the jungle and horror film genres. She writes that, like jungle films, "horror cinema, too, explores the spectacular and terrifying repercussions of physical differences, and exploits the relationship between seeing and not seeing" (Berenstein 316). If, in jungle movies and horror flicks, physical differences are

conceived along the axes of race and gender, then the dreaded otherness of both sex and skin color are alluded to by the figure of the white heroine—in *Terror*, by the demented doctor's comely wife.¹⁷ Berenstein argues that the white jungle heroine

serves a contradictory racial function. On the one hand, she is an icon of white womanhood and, on the other, she is a partner to, and double for, jungle creatures. She invokes, and warns against, the monstrous possibility of miscegenation. (Berenstein 315)

The presence of the interstitial white heroine who stands unsteadily at the borders of white civilization and dark bestiality testifies to an anxiety that "white characters may pass as white, but often possess hearts of darkness." That her whiteness does not preclude an association with the monstrous reveals the constructedness of these ideologically naturalized hierarchies. In order to foreclose against the possibility that prevailing hierarchies of race might finally be destabilized, jungle-horror narratives resort to a denouement in which a white man saves the captive (but complicit?) heroine from the clutches of the monster, though such a conclusion never really convincingly allays the anxieties the story has brought up (Berenstein 319-320).

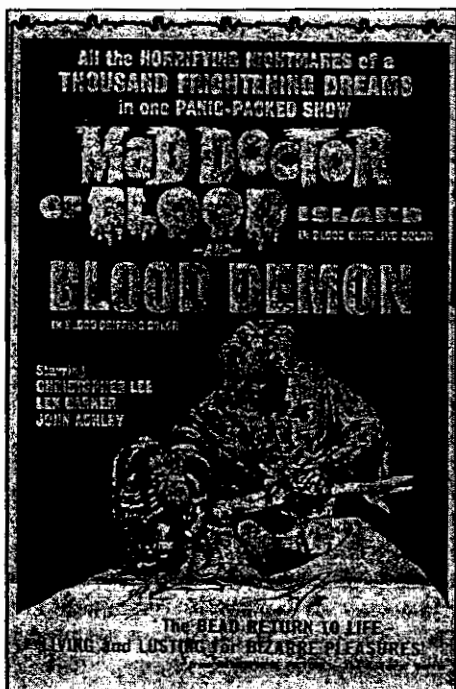


Fig. 3 *Mad Doctor of Blood Island* (Eddie Romero/Gerry de Leon, Hemisphere, 1968)

The American heroine of *Terror*, who is married to the doctor but is desired by the beast, occupies an interstitial position, both civilized (by virtue of her whiteness) and bestial/other (by virtue of her femininity.) The dissolution of racial boundaries is already accomplished in part by her contradictory subject alignment, making her the locus of concerns over miscegenation. The interstitiality of the white heroine in such monster movies epitomizes what Fatimah Tobing Rony calls "the double-edged representation of the White Woman—[she is a] pillar of the white family, superior to non-white indigenous peoples, but also [is] a possibly Savage creature, inferior to white men" (Rony 174). To be certain, the white nurse/wife is disgusted and fearful of the monster to some degree, and is complicit with the scientific/civilizing project that is systematically maiming and metamorphosing it: she assists at the doctor's series of painful operations, and laments the loss of "civilized manners" on the jungle island. Yet she is also tender and apologetic to the pantherman, representing as she does more noble emotional priorities (she is kind and nurturing) over her husband's callously self-serving medical ravings. Her kinship with the (m)animal stems from a recognition that they are both trapped and oppressed by the same man in this isolated corner of the world.¹⁸

The intertextual heritage of *Terror* and the Blood Island films is not confined to the figure of Dr. Moreau but to the emblematic jungle-horror motif of beauty (femininity/whiteness) menaced by the Beast (a not-quite-human blackness), the thematic of *King Kong* (Cooper and Schoedsack, 1933). According to Rony, the fantasy of miscegenation in *King Kong* was a function of directorial intent: "As [Merian] Cooper told Fay Wray, he wanted Ann to be a blonde beauty in order to highlight the contrast with Kong (Cooper referred to Kong as the darkest leading man she would ever have)" (Rony 172). In *King Kong* and many jungle-horror films since, the beast serves as the "blonde beauty's" "darkest leading man", a cipher for a sexually threatening black masculinity that is as powerful as it is inhuman. This coded reference to black masculinity is also present in *Terror*. In that film, the scientist refers to the mut(il)ated panther as a "black devil", ostensibly referring only to the sleek black coat of the cat that it was.

The figurative treatment of miscegenation in jungle-horror films mobilizes the nearly-human monster as a placeholder for black male threat without ever having to identify that threat.¹⁹ The same ideological feint is at work in *King Kong* and the Blood Island films: these films thematize a racism which will not speak its name.

The first of the Blood Island films, *Brides of Blood* returned to the basic outlines of *Terror's* plot after nearly a decade of more war films by Hemisphere and some Filipino vampire film imports.²⁰ The protagonist is played by Ashley, who would become the mainstay of the succeeding Romero/de Leon horror films made under various production companies. Ashley, an AIP-beach party kid grown too old for his previous roles with Annette Funicello, is cast as a peace corps-worker in *Brides*. Ashley's character arrives at Blood Island accompanied by an American doctor and his lascivious wife (played by an actress called Beverly Hills). The doctor is there to find out whether the atomic testing conducted near the island has had any adverse effects on the native population. It soon becomes apparent that things are amiss on Blood Island. Stephen Powers (played by a Caucasian-looking Filipino, Mario Montenegro), the richest man in the place, invites the three Americans to stay at his mansion. The visitors soon discover that radioactive mutation does indeed abound on Blood Island, perhaps most spectacularly in a large mutant tree that feasts on human flesh and waves captive natives around in its branches. But the most menacing mutant of all turns out to be their own host. Stephen Powers mutates into a beast by night and the natives sacrifice naked virgin women to appease him. The doctor's promiscuous wife unwittingly attempts to seduce their bestial host, resulting in her ghastly dismemberment. By movie's end nearly all the principals have died, except of course Ashley, who has successfully saved his native sweetheart from the beast's clutches. The villain perishes by fire in the course of their struggle.

With *Brides* the scandalous possibility of intercourse between woman and monster has taken center stage, edging out the narrative's concern with scientific overreaching (the consequences of atomic radiation are of course a science fiction staple) that was still arguably the

focus of *Terror*. The narrative's horrific center is no longer an experiment gone awry, for by the time the story begins that is a *fait accompli*; rather, it is the mutated creature's appetite for feminine flesh and the white female protagonist's desire for the monster that the film foregrounds.

In *Brides* we see young female islanders tied to stakes, sacrifices meant to placate the monstrous mutant; leaving nothing to the imagination, the village elders tear off the women's bandeaux, and moments later, we are treated to shaky camera shots of a large, black, hairy creature setting upon the topless, hapless women. The narrative exposition that follows, a conversation between the white hero, Jim Farell (John Ashley), and his native girlfriend, Alma (Eva Darren), underscores the film's formula of gruesome titillation:

JIM. Can anyone here be happy, or, okay, even resigned to the idea of having himself and his entire family just wiped off the face of the earth?

ALMA. The men will survive this because it needs only women.

JIM. What do you mean? What the devil do you mean?

ALMA. He does not devour his victims. He merely satisfies himself on them.

JIM. (Shocked.) But they get torn to pieces!

ALMA. It is his way of satisfying himself.

This generic conflation of sexploitation and jungle-horror would become the hallmark of the Blood Island films. The mingling of horror with soft-core pornography may well have been a canny means of avoiding adult ratings while titillating teen audiences at drive-ins. As one historian puts it, "The sight of these bare-breasted women would have normally rocketed this picture into the "adults only" realm (and it might still get an "R" rating today), but because of its horror themes it was most likely overlooked, if looked at at all by the MPAA [Motion Picture Association of America] ratings board" (Ray 71).

In 1968, Hemisphere's second Blood Island film, *Mad Doctor of Blood Island*, featured Ashley again in the starring role of a U.S. government physician, Dr. Bill Foster, investigating allegations that some of the islanders had green blood. Ashley discovers that the culprit, Dr. Lorca, has been treating the islanders with a chlorophyll solution in the hopes of gaining a means to eternal youth. Don Ramon, one of his experimental subjects, has become a green-skinned ghoul who goes on a murderous rampage and eventually destroys Dr. Lorca's laboratory.

Foster seems successful in killing Dr. Lorca, but Don Ramon, the green monster, returns in the opening scene of *Beast of Blood*. Don Ramon sabotages Ashley's ship and then falls victim once more to Dr. Lorca, who has survived, scarred past recognition (he is now played by a different actor, Eddie Garcia). Lorca's new experiments now involve human head transplants using the green-contaminated populace as subjects. Ashley, who lost his American girlfriend of the last film to Don Ramon's ambush in the beginning of this one, now has to try to save his new girlfriend (Celeste Yarnall) from the clutches of the mad doctor. But it is not Ashley but Don Ramon's dismembered-but-still-animate corpse that finally destroys the evil doctor once and for all, while Ashley and company make their escape.

Colonial Ambivalence: Mimic Men and the Politics of Casting

As was the case in *Terror*, in these last two Blood Island films the monster is as much the demented Dr. Lorca as it is the hapless, chlorophyll-disfigured Don Ramon. Much more than the earlier film, these films encourage the viewers' condemnation of the mad scientist figure. The monster-destroys-maker climax shared by *Terror*, *Mad Doctor*, and *Beast*, becomes, in the last two films, the maimed monster's act of visiting symbolic retribution upon the story's real, and more repulsive, culprit.²¹ The figure of the maker-as-monster epitomizes these films' (admittedly cartoonish) acknowledgement of the violence entailed by a scientific view of nature as a passive

resource existing only to be appropriated by man. The parallel of this instrumentalist logic to a colonialist agenda in which scientific racism played an invaluable role is clear. Of course, the monstrous scientist whose hubris is matched by knowledge-power is a stock character of science fiction and art-horror. In the context of the Blood Island films, though, the monstrous maker also comes to allude unmistakably to the colonizer whose attempt to remake the other into an ideal self is a project as brutal as it is doomed.

The central drama of the mad white scientist's attempt to better nature by creating a superior race of men from animals and natives is central to both *Terror* and *Mad Doctor*. That animals and natives are interchangeable terms in the generic formula proceeds from the positioning of the islanders as less human (because not white) than the scientist to begin with. Of course, the monsters only ever become half-men, half-beast, exemplifying Noel Carroll's definition of the monster as both "threatening and impure" —inspiring terror at their destructiveness, and disgust at their interstitiality (they are at once human and bestial).²²

The monstrous interstitiality of such (m)animals is a fictionalized projection and displacement of the failure of the colonizer's civilizing project, of the attempt to work upon the "savage" and make him a (white) man. But the savage only ever becomes, in Homi Bhabha's famous parlance, almost, but not quite, white, and is thus capable of turning on his master. The tragic end of the Dr. Moreau narrative—the maker overpowered by monsters of his own making—has been called "a perfect enactment of the colonialist nightmare" (Rony 169).

The Dr. Moreau figures of *Terror* and *Mad Doctor* are forging a race of what Bhabha might call "mimic men." This neo/colonial subjectivity is possessed of a perpetual torque, an "ambivalence" and "uncertainty" arising from the two antithetical tendencies to which the mimic man's identity turns: toward likeness to the White Man and toward the intractable difference of the Other. "Colonial mimicry", writes Bhabha, "is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (86), "almost the same, but not white" (89). For Bhabha, the reformed colonial subjects envisioned by T. B. Macaulay's "Minute on education" (1835)—"persons Indian blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect"—are "stricken by an indeterminacy" (Bhabha 86-87). While "being Anglicized" comes very close to "being English", this coming-close of mimicry never succeeds in obliterating difference entirely (90).

Similarly, the not-quite-human, not-quite-bestial creatures made by Dr. Moreau figures are man-like but never truly men. It is the simultaneous failure and success of this asymptotic project of mimicry that makes the mad doctor perverse and his creation terrifying. The trope of the jungle animal or native islander exacting vengeance from the western/ized scientist (who presumed to "improve" upon a perceived state of

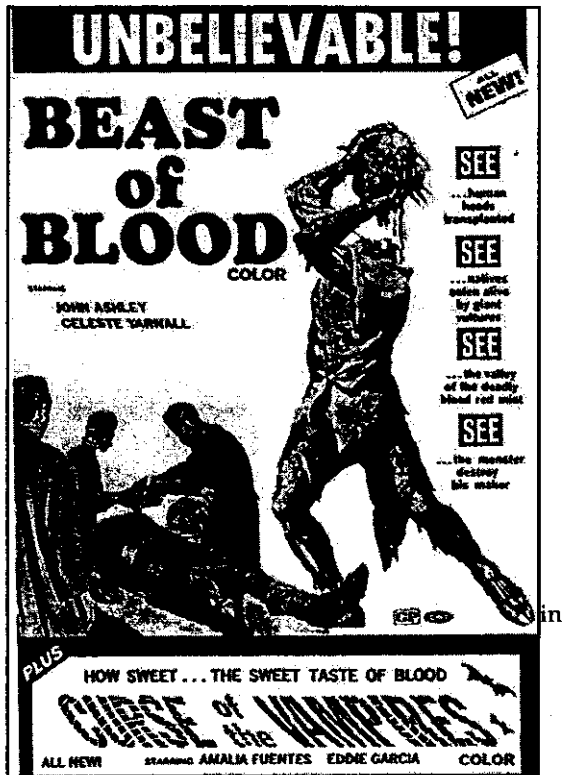


Fig. 4 *Beast of Blood* (Eddie Romero, Hemisphere, 1970)

"natural inferiority") can be read as the nightmare that disturbs the imperialist's uneasy slumber. As fantasies these fictions contain a critique of that colonial project (it is cruel and bound to fail) as well as a reiteration of its racist fears and assumptions (the victims are inhuman and dangerous).

The trope of the "mad doctor" in science fiction and horror films is shorthand for these genres' formulaic critique of scientific overreaching. The Blood Island films consistently thematize the perversion of science to irrational ends and the catastrophic effects of western technology on remote third-world locales which become testing-grounds for new weapons. In science fiction, the unforeseen consequences of progress are depicted as life-threatening; in horror, rationality is revealed to be inadequate and, in the end, overcome by the forces of superstition and mysticism that modernity was thought to eclipse. But in the Blood Island films, set as they are against the backdrop of a third-world jungle, this science fiction/horror formula is mingled with the racially-charged politics of the jungle film, so that the cautionary fable on scientific overreaching becomes inflected with racial and neocolonial overtones, joining its misgivings regarding science to its depiction of imperialist projects that end in ruin.

The colonialist underpinnings of the monstrous-maker-as-mad-scientist is clearest in *Terror*, in which the character of the mad white scientist is played by an American actor. Yet in the Blood Island films which followed, perhaps for reasons of thrift, American actors were kept to a maximum of two lead characters: the hero played by Ashley and a blonde bombshell, though one or more bit players might also be American. This meant that the figure of monstrous white privilege would be played by a European-looking Filipino actor: Mario Montenegro in *Brides*, Ronald Remy in *Mad Doctor*, and Eddie Garcia in *Beast*. In *Brides*, screenplay and direction work hard to make the mestizo actor, Mario Montenegro, pass for an American tycoon, Stephen Powers. Powers is not a mad scientist like the Dr. Lorca figure of the next two Blood Island films. Like them, however, he is a Euroamerican man of means (half American, half Spanish), the most powerful person on the island who turns out to be a monster and is implicated with science gone awry. In the scene in *Brides* where Powers first introduces himself to the other American characters in the film, he is seated at a piano playing classical music, dressed in an immaculate white suit. He greets them with the words, "Fellow Americans, I'm Stephen Powers." Ironically, the narrative depiction of colonial mimicry as monstrous is belied by a casting policy premised upon Filipinos' successful impersonation of whiteness.

Did the audiences perceive Stephen Powers and Dr. Lorca to be Filipino? American? European? The practice of casting Filipinos to pose as Euroamerican brings up questions of whiteface in a narrative where race (brown-skinned Southeast Asians) becomes collapsed with cultural backwardness (primitive islanders). The white male monster as played by a Filipino is placed uneasily within the cultural/racial dichotomies established by these films. The opening shots of *Brides* and *Mad Doctor* explicitly position their narratives as stories of cultural contact: a boat bears white doctors to an island where 'natives' in classic Hawaii-by-Hollywood dress ('South Seas islanders' in tropical print bandeaux, sarongs, and leis) stand motionless on the beach, awaiting their arrival. Ashley and his party are borne by the powerful ship on the water, signifying mobility and modernity; in contrast, the islanders are standing in passive anticipation on the sandy beach, static and bemused. In such a signifying economy, Stephen Powers and Dr. Lorca are interstitial figures of mimicry themselves: by class privilege, speech (English), garb (suits, cravats, safari-wear), and profession, they are allied to the heroic Ashley and his party of "fellow Americans"; yet by casting and by characterization, these longtime residents of Blood Island are also pulled in the direction of non-white monstrosity. The interstitiality of the diegetic mimic men and the white heroine find their counterpart in the casting of the terrorizing (not-quite) white man.

The Anonymous Jungle Island and the Displacement of Colonial History

That profitable horror, *Brides*, is important not only for being the first of the Blood Island trilogy, but also for finally giving the anonymous jungle backdrop (shot on location in

the Philippines) a name—Blood Island, an appellation derived from its vivid sunsets—a name which evokes a place of dangerous goings-on. Nonetheless, the attempt to erase the specificity of the Philippines in order to evoke a generic orientalist landscape is continually undermined by unsubtitled dialogue between minor players in Filipino. (This is once again reminiscent of *King Kong*, whose anonymous jungle setting, Skull Island, continually betrays its singularity: without explicitly identifying Indonesia and its people as the denizens of Kong's land, the narrative makes reference to an island off the coast of Sumatra, and the actors "speak a few heavily American-accented phrases" of the Nias language; Rony 177).

For Romero, the renaming of the Philippine locale as Blood Island is a purely pragmatic decision that takes into consideration the film's assumed spectators, who "wouldn't know where the Philippines was." Romero is here helping to clarify a decision he did not make: the screenplay was penned by two Filipinos, Cesar Amigo and Ruben Canoy, and Romero has remarked that he "didn't particularly enjoy" working on the Blood Island films, because "they were so primitive," referring in particular to the films' "cardboard characters" (Romero 1995, interview).

In her study of early jungle films, Berenstein has remarked on the stylistic decision to represent the jungle as dark and impervious to vision. Clearly, the obstruction of the viewer's gaze, which is accompanied by low lighting amid dense foliage, is analogous to the shadowy world of most horror films, in which the tensions between the seen and the unseen are emphasized (Berenstein 316). Berenstein's reading of jungle films within a framework sensitive to representations of race, especially in the context of the history of slavery in the U.S., regards the darkness of the jungle as bound up with the darkness of the monster, and with the monstrosity associated with dark races:

Connotations of monstrosity inhere in darkness as a visual trope, an already-coded racial category and a description of the uncivilized forces that crawl through the jungle and threaten to dislodge white supremacy. The menace of racial Otherness is diffused beyond blacks so that the jungle itself takes on a threatening demeanor as a repository for white racial and sexual anxieties. (Berenstein 317)

The importance of Blood Island's geographical anonymity has been noted by Berenstein, who suggests that jungle films, which play out racist fears that black men (coded as monsters) might attack white women (the interstitial heroine), actually reverse real U.S. historical relations where the rape of black women slaves by white male slave-owners was far more common. This inverted fantasy was always set far from American shores, however, displaced onto third world jungle terrain.

If jungle films are, as Berenstein puts it, "products of displacement and projection," then one can argue that, in the Romero/de Leon horror films, a fantastic representation of colonial history is also accomplished within the anonymity of Blood Island, where the drama unfolds.

The island is contradictorily represented—on the one hand, it is a remote place to which a wicked white male flees, and it is his arrival which introduces evil to that place—witness the mad scientists of *Terror* and the Blood Island trilogy, as well as Langdon, the undead American protagonist played by Ashley in *Beast of the Yellow Night*, who preys upon the indigenous population. The narratives of these films contain an implicit acknowledgement of the havoc caused by the penetration of western modernity into the third world, especially since the roots of destruction lie in the scientific project (genetic alteration, the atomic bomb), which, when wedded to a "civilizing mission," (the attempt to fashion a superior race of men) can only result in devastation.

At the same time, however, the islands themselves are "bloody," monstrous places whose abject bestiality either contaminates the white man, or serves as the breeding-ground for Euroamerican villains. The "small town in Southeast Asia" which an intertitle informs us is the setting for *Beast of the Yellow Night* is arguably, in the imagination of the American audience of its time, resonant of Vietnam, a cautionary fable that suggests that when an American has stayed too long in the jungle, as Langdon has, he starts to lose his humanity and become a beast. In *Brides* the

slippage between the two opposed conceptions of the jungle island is accomplished through the monstrous Stephen Powers, who feasts on natives and does battle with the American peace corps representative, but is himself a mutant created by the explosion of the atomic bomb.

The tropes of the interstitial heroine, the mimic man, the monstrous scientist, and the anonymous jungle island together articulate a contradictory stance toward a scientific project subtended by imperialist aims. On the one hand, the demented doctor fosters an acknowledgement of historical injustice and irrational domination; on the other, the interstitial heroine, the mimic man, and the anonymous jungle island betray colonialist anxieties regarding racial and sexual difference, positioning women and non-white natives as needing to be either rescued or contained.

The Genealogy of Exploitation Promotion

The promotional strategy for *Brides* aggressively capitalized on the monster-mates-with-women angle of the film. The movie poster foregrounds a naked blonde woman bound to stakes while a huge black beast towers menacingly above her, brandishing a torn limb (hers?) (fig. 1). The tag line on the upper left shouts, "SACRIFICED TO THE NON-HUMAN CREATURE!", referring not only to dismemberment, but also to a sexualized "fate worse than death," so that the caption is an obvious *double entendre*. The poster confirms this reading by continuing with an offer of "FREE FREE BEAUTIFUL RING SET TO EVERY WOMAN ATTENDING THE SHOWING OF THESE TWO ATTRACTIONS," thus projecting the film's title past the screen, and interpellating the female members of the audience as potential "brides" of the creature as well.

The poster art for *Twilight*, which rehearses many of the older film's concerns over a decade later, is far more direct in its declaration of the risks of miscegenation between white heroine and bestial monster (fig. 2). "ANIMAL DESIRES... HUMAN LUST" is the caption for an illustration of a dark bear-man carrying off a scantily-clothed and seductively posed white woman on his shoulders. Another doubled enunciation, the tag line refers to both the half-human, half-bestial character of the twilight people and the complicity of the heroine in her abduction—her human lust parallels the animal's desire.

The publicity image for *Mad Doctor* employs a strikingly gory typeface to accentuate the pitch: filmed in "blood-curdling color" (fig. 3). The uppercase text and title fill the top half of the ad, giving one the sense that the image is blaring. The bottom half depicts a nubile blonde woman pinned down from behind by a monster in a tattered laboratory gown. Naked in the foreground with her panic-stricken face turned toward the viewer, her body is starkly contrasted with the Mad Doctor's disfigured face and hands. The sensibility of sci-fi horror ("the DEAD RETURN TO LIFE") is combined with that of sexploitation ("LUSTING for BIZARRE PLEASURES").

Gaines' study of early promotional practices links modern product tie-ups with stars and films to exploitation publicity gimmicks rooted in circus traditions. The shift in advertising practices across this "continuum" points to a gradual transmutation of folk culture (the practical joke, the stunt, and the hoax) into urban popular culture (the cooperative tie-up). Her work suggests that the "flamboyance" of circus exploitation largely disappears once the U.S. film industry is firmly under monopoly hands in the 1930s (Gaines 29-32).

Gaines' analysis helps explain why the rhetoric of "ballyhoo" survives so manifestly in the promotional copy of *New Poverty Row*: the lowbrow carnival cry, while disavowed by the standardized mainstream, continues to be utilized by exploitation films, since they have no such pretensions to gentrification. The cry of the circus barker is mimed by visual design in the poster for *Beast* (fig. 4). Along the right side of the image, a vigorous refrain reads: "SEE...human heads transplanted/SEE...natives eaten alive by giant vultures". Direct address and emphatic phrasing accomplish a visual evocation of auditory ballyhoo.

If early publicists found circus discourse particularly suited to movie advertising because of its capacity to "stimulate and fascinate" the public via a "hyperbolic form" of "excess and abandon" (Gaines 35), then so did the promoters of *Brides* and *Twilight*. Like the typical circus poster,

these print ads are also “gorged with meaning”: note the “screaming typeface” of the text, all in uppercase letters in the *Brides* poster, the visual impact of “images bulging with connotations,” and the use of line drawings or high-contrast photography in order to elide detail and amplify the force of the visual sign. Gaines’ exegesis of exploitation hyperbole has demonstrated that the very “literalness” and “transparency” of hyperbolic rhetoric is wedded to the duplicity of the exaggerated promise (Gaines 35).

In Hemisphere’s horror promotion, the element of deception embedded in P.T. Barnum-style hoaxes and stunts persists in promotional gimmicks and overblown publicity claims. To cite the most obvious example, the poster for *Brides* promises the spectacle of blonde women as captive offerings to the monster, but in the actual film such scenes are not forthcoming: only native island women are sacrificed to the monster. Promotional gags and gimmicks—wedding rings for women viewers and the blood-red haze that off-screen smoke machines produced in the course of the movie—heighten and underscore the film’s capacity to frighten by extending the horror past the off-screen fiction and onto the audience.

This observation also seems borne out by the gimmicks that accompanied the other Romero/de Leon horror films. In *Terror*, the shrill and unexpected ringing of an alarm warned the timid viewer that the scariest part was imminent. (fig. 5) One reviewer writes, “if the climax doesn’t curl your hair, the bell will” (Thompson 158). For the last of the Blood Island films, *Beast*, survival kits containing air sickness bags were distributed to spectators as a kind of morbid warning to the queasy (Weldon 42). The warning bell and survival kit gag are especially reminiscent of the stunt, borrowed from circus routine, of parking an ambulance outside the movie theater. This ruse, widely used in the 1896 to 1927 period, alluded to the possibility that the audience of a horror film might die of fright, or that the viewers of a comedy would go

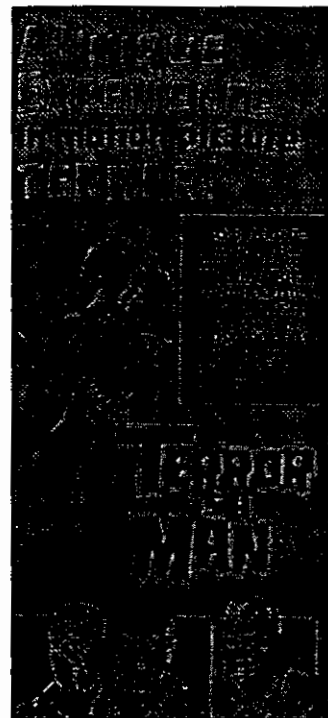


Fig. 5 *Beast of Blood* (Eddie Romero, Hemisphere, 1970)

to their graves from laughing (Gaines 36).

Whether successful or not, such gimmicks aimed to extend the horrific diegetic experiences of the characters outwards to the viewers in the theater hall. This suggestive gesture towards audience participation is also combined with a second use, which hinges on the element of titillating novelty that accompanies the curiosities of the carnival booth. Like William Castle’s famous array of publicity ploys (from Percept-O to Emerg-O), the ploys that distributors thought up for the Romero/de Leon horrors relied on arousing audience interest in something besides the formulaic story—if the narrative was predictable, the gags were imaginative.

The promotional strategy for *Mad Doctor* takes a particularly interesting turn: a prologue was appended to the film, inviting audiences to participate in a ritual, “The Oath of Green Blood.” Audience members were asked to drink packets of aqua-colored gel (“green blood”) in solidarity with the mutant natives the Mad Doctor infected (Ray 73-74). In the prologue, the words of the “Oath” scroll across the screen while a voice-over reads the words aloud with hyperbolic seriousness:

NOW
The MAD DOCTOR of BLOOD ISLAND
invites YOU to join him
in taking the
oath of GREEN BLOOD—

We see a close shot of a scientist's hand pouring a vial of green liquid into a test tube, then cut to different shots of American teenagers kissing, some lying supine on a bed of hay. To the strains of organ music, the narrator intones: "The green blood potion has been known to passionately affect some people after drinking it; others experience a feeling of the supernatural conscience entering their beings. Get your samples of the green blood potion ready and recite the oath of Dr. Lorca aloud with me before drinking of the green blood." These directives are accompanied by a close-up of green liquid in test tubes, a medium shot of seated teenagers (four boy-girl couples) being handed vials of green blood, and finally a close-up of a teenage girl's face against the hay, moments before she takes a sip. This last image is frozen as the words of the Oath scroll upwards in the foreground:

I, a living breathing creature of the cosmic entity,

Am now ready to enter the realm of those chosen to be allowed to drink of the Mystic Emerald fluids herein offered.

I join the order of green blood with an open mind and through this liquid's powers am now prepared to safely view the unnatural green-blooded ones without fear of contamination.

The Oath concluded, the image onscreen unfreezes. The girl lifts the vial to her lips and drinks, as do several other couples. The voice-over ends on a note of reassurance: "now, drink your sample of green blood and it is guaranteed that you can never turn into a green-blooded monster."

This campy and illogical "Oath" sequence is clearly not interested in eliciting a willing suspension of disbelief: this prelude does not aspire to chilling realism. Rather, the various shots of white boys and girls locked in passionate embraces set the stage for another generic expectation: the spectatorial experience of a horror-film-cum-"date movie" at a drive-in. Between the lines, the "Oath of Green Blood" directly acknowledges and arouses the expectation that sexual activity among spectators will be tangentially inspired by the horror depicted on screen. This explains why sound-image relations in this prologue are not illustrative of the literal content of the voice-over: when the narrator talks about the "supernatural conscience" aroused by green blood (a reference to the film's diegesis and generic affect), this dialogue is matched with footage of non-diegetic ideal spectators "making out." Unlike the typical promotional trailer, the "Oath" prologue does not cue spectatorial expectations regarding the film footage but rather makes reference to the film-going experience as a possible ground for sexual encounters.

The various promotional practices surrounding the Romero jungle-horror films adapt circus ballyhoo and hoax to the visual register of film publicity. A central preoccupation of exploitation promotion is its attempt to leap off the page or screen, as it were, in order to forcefully address the viewer. Onscreen prologues and in-theater gimmickry are zealous attempts at closing the gap between text and audience by integrating the spectator into the concerns of the diegesis or by calling attention to the movie-going experience.

Not A "Neanderthal" Audience

According to Ray, who remembers having seen the Blood Island films as an adolescent in Sarasota, Florida drive-ins, the audience of such films were primarily teenagers. Through films like these, teenage audiences gained access to the "unrestricted sex and gratuitous violence" which went unnoticed by ratings boards because of the films' genre (Ray 71). The Blood Island films were box office successes—*Brides*, which top-billed a Christopher Lee film, *Blood Fiend* (Ray 71, fig. 1), was so profitable that a sub-distributor and drive-in owner from Kansas, Bev Miller, was, in Romero's words, "very, very high on *Brides of Blood*" and "wanted to make a whole bunch of films like that" (Romero 1995, interview). Miller became associate producer for *Mad Doctor*, and even played a small role in *Beast*. Another Christopher Lee film, *Blood Demon*, originally intended

as a single-bill picture, was released as the lower half of the more lucrative *Mad Doctor* (Ray 74, fig. 3). *Beast* was co-billed with a Filipino import, Gerry de Leon's *Curse of the Vampires* (fig. 4). *Beast* garnered a New York release in RKO theaters, and "business went through the roof," but a money dispute led to a parting of ways between Lynn and Pizor.

The last issue I would like to discuss in relation to exploitation promotional strategies has to do with the difficult question of the exploitation film's so-called "low-brow" rural audience, whose specificities are mapped on vertices not only of class but also of taste and perceived provinciality.

Gaines' historiography has demonstrated that, prior to World War I, the battle between the independents and the big studios who would finally succeed in consolidating most of the American film industry under their control was a battle waged in advertising—whether in print or in street and theater lobby promotion. By the 1930s, coincident with the establishment of market control by the big production companies, the street stunt had given way to the merchandise tie-up, and exploitation no longer referred to men on stilts but to celebrity endorsements. Gaines asks why the "full-bellied discourse of circus ballyhoo" would finally prove incompatible with mainstream monopoly interests. Her work proposes two hypotheses: first, that the film industry at that point was engaged in "dissociating itself from all entertainment forms that had been historically popular with working-class audiences" in its bid for bourgeois respectability. Second, censorship pressures of the twenties may have had a hand in muffling the circus barker's booming spiel (Gaines 32-33).

Seale has also described the twenties as the decade in which the majors, in their effort to solidify their theater affiliations, opted for urban first-run theaters, and passed over the small rural theaters which, in the thirties, lacked the wherewithal to convert to sound. Seale's sources maintain that the audiences of many of these rural theaters liked the westerns which independents were continuing to produce (long after the big studios abandoned westerns as unprofitable) far more than the majors' sound films. One of Seale's sources shows that "by 1931, long after the majors had stopped producing silent prints, there were still almost 8,000 unwired theaters in the country." Ray Art and other Poverty Row outfits filled those still-silent screens with non-talkie westerns. The same Ray Art would be absorbed into Monogram (Seale 94), the studio whose products Romero, in the fifties, wished to emulate.

In their focus on higher budget films intended for the movie palaces of large cities, the majors relinquished their hold on a segment of the audience for whom such products and exhibition opportunities were less preferable or inaccessible. In the fifties and sixties, the period in which the bulk of Romero's B-film work was made, this specialized audience was inherited by the drive-in circuits for which Romero made most of his horror films. Kerry Segrave's history of drive-in theaters depicts drive-in audiences as decidedly more low-brow than the viewers at indoor theaters. Market researchers in the fifties and sixties as well as conventional wisdom tended to agree that spectators at the "ozoners" were less likely to visit indoor movie halls, for various reasons—they were elderly or disabled, had very young children, or did not fit comfortably into regular-sized chairs. When asked, members of this rural blue and pink collar audience replied that their reasons for preferring drive-ins were the relative inexpensiveness, convenience and privacy of watching films outdoors. The films shown were among the last reasons cited by audience members for their preference for drive-ins (Segrave 142-147).

In my conversation with Romero in 1995 he touched on the same subject—non-mainstream audience preference—from a different perspective. He spoke of the "tremendous impression" the Blood Island films made in what he called the "exploitation belt, which is South or Southwest U.S.A., drive-ins" (Romero 1995, interview). In another context during the same interview, while I was trying to sum up the ways in which exploitation films had been studied in the academe and in the popular press, Romero interjected:

ER. ... Actually what you are researching is Hollywood and the Neanderthal aspect of American culture. That's what it is and I'm not saying this in a derogatory sense. Neanderthal is Neanderthal. It has its own areas of wealth, which I've forgotten.

BCL. What do you mean the Neanderthal aspect?

ER. The primitive. There are American primitives. There are millions of them. That's a subculture. And there are subcultures and subcultures. The primitives of Utah are not that close to the primitives of Appalachia.

BCL. Can you elaborate? Do you mean in terms of audience taste, the narratives they go for, the style?

ER. All those things are manifestations of a more basic culture. But of course what is basic? Blood, violence, sex, on very primitive lines. None of the frills of Glenn Close. Get down to brass tacks like Kim Basinger. And then of course America has all that. There is a Neanderthal element in the Harvard culture, just like here. So when you get into that, you have to link all these together. (Romero 1995, interview)

Certainly, as Romero suggests, generic formulas (themes, styles, and tropes) and the preferences of each genre's specific audiences need to be considered in tandem. Less instructive, though, is Romero's unmistakably patronizing portrayal of the very audience that so many of his films so successfully addressed. Such a view is problematic because it equates box-office receipts with the viewers' acquiescence of the politics and "primitivism" of what they watch. Moreover, a stereotypical understanding of rural Americans as "Neanderthals" is doubtless at work in such remarks, pointing to an unquestioning acceptance of the cultural hierarchies Hollywood "worked to perpetuate" via the category of B-films, for example (Jacobs 12).

Given mainstream cinema's attempt to address all classes with the values of only one class, making its bid for gentrified respectability while hoping to keep a mass appeal, exploitation films provide alternative fare for a specialized audience which resists universalizing interpellation. The exploitation film caters to the heterogeneous tastes of a market which the more expensive and polite mainstream film abdicated in its drive towards lucrative homogeneity.

Rather than a Conclusion

This study has taken the persona of director Eddie Romero as the contradictory entry-point to American low-budget horror films made in collaboration with Filipinos. The ironic circumstances which constitute this oeuvre (a Filipino auteur turned American B-film hack) are linked to a history of neocolonial relations that persist between the two nations. But a historiographic account of Romero's exploitation films must necessarily go beyond the figure of the director-producer to consider a dense web of other issues. Rather than replicating the conventional linear and binaristic historiographic paradigms that have been used to dismiss exploitation films as unworthy of scholarly concern, I have attempted to unpack the overdetermined relations between production, distribution, exhibition and promotion. From *Terror* to *Twilight*, a series of narrative tropes recur, borrowed from jungle, science fiction, and horror films: the interstitial white heroine and the half-human/half-bestial mimic man bring up issues of racial and sexual boundary crossing and colonial ambivalence; the mad scientist foregrounds the dehumanizing aspects of scientific overreaching; and the anonymous jungle setting, *Blood Island*, links the mad scientist to a colonialist civilizing project, a fictionalized reworking which both critiques and reinscribes the assumptions of that endeavor. Yet meaning in the *Blood Island* films extends beyond the frame: the politics of casting as well as promotional strategies for the Romero jungle-horror pictures add another dimension to the audience's experience of these films. The low-brow audiences for whom these exploitation films were intended must be understood as specialized audiences whose very existence belies mainstream cinema's attempt at a standardized universal appeal to a supposedly homogeneous public.

As I hope I have shown, no one thread of argument is sufficient to consider the various aspects of the films that were the object of this study. An orchestrated conversation between

auteur, narrative, publicity, exhibition, distribution, and audience is one way to begin a scholarly consideration of Romero's profitable and provocative horror films.

Author's note:

Since the writing of the first version of this paper in 1995 and its Philippine publication in the *Journal of English Studies and Comparative Literature* in 1998, scholarly discourse on what I fondly refer to as "cinema detritus"—culturally disparaged film genres and audience practices which encompass distinct but collocated elements of camp, cult, and trash spectatorship—has changed a great deal.¹ The key authors I cite in my paper have since published important books on classical exploitation, classical horror, and film censorship.² In addition, the last few years have witnessed sustained and vigorous research on film cultures which espouse what Sontag called "a good taste of bad taste,"³ "connoisseurships of trash"⁴ which uphold, redeem, or re-read critically disparaged films, enacting the subcultural reading protocol Jeffrey Sconce has dubbed "paracinematic."⁵ Thus, since the early nineties when I first began research into Eddie Romero's American B-films, the disciplinary context for such a study has improved immeasurably.

The publication of Eric Schaefer's groundbreaking and painstakingly researched study of classical exploitation films, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959*, has done a great deal to redress the dearth of historiographic resources on the exploitation film. Schaefer points out that the term exploitation film has itself undergone a historical shift: from pertaining to "cheaply made pictures" on "forbidden" topics "distributed by roadshowmen...or states' righters" from the 1920s to the 1950s,⁶ the term later acquired a wider meaning, including drive-in movies, teenpics, and B-films.⁷ In its original form, my paper does not distinguish between exploitation in the classical and post-classical sense; it remains for others to tease out the continuities and discontinuities between Romero's B-film output and the heritage of classical exploitation cinema to which I think it is nonetheless indebted, especially in the area of exploitation promotion.

In brief, this essay is possessed of several shortcomings, due in part to the scant resources available at the time of writing. No doubt other scholars writing on Romero will improve upon my conclusions here. If I support its reprinting it is only because there is still, to my knowledge, no published scholarly study in the U.S. on Romero's American film output, a situation which I hope the republication of this essay will help to amend; and more crucially, because this study emphasizes the dovetailing of postcolonial concerns and B-horror film scholarship, a critical intervention which continues to be germane and which this subset of Romero's oeuvre—"American pictures made by Filipinos"—remains perfectly positioned to provoke. Exploitation films and B-pictures, shadowy counterparts to Hollywood hegemony, are usually the province of Americanists and genre specialists; but in the context of *Spectator's* special issue on Asian Cinema, the peculiar transnational, postcolonial exigencies of Romero's Philippine productions, made explicitly for release in the U.S. market, can be brought into conversation with scholarship on Asian national and transnational cinemas. A last caveat: at the time when I conducted this research, none of the Blood Island films were available for viewing, even by videocassette. However, late last year two of the Blood Island films came into my hands, thanks to the impressive sleuthing of the media Staff at UC Irvine,⁸ both were imported by Midnight Video. The only major content revisions I've made to this essay are those which incorporate my recent viewing of the two films, *Brides of Blood* (1968) and *Mad Doctor of Blood Island* (1969), which has altered somewhat my understanding of two motifs—the interstitial heroine and the monstrous maker—and has allowed me to evaluate the promotional strategy for *Mad Doctor* (The "Oath of Green Blood" prologue) firsthand.

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Endnotes

1. An earlier version of this paper, entitled "Monstrous Makers, Bestial Brides: Situating Eddie Romero's B-Horror films in an Intricate Web of Histories" was published in the Philippines in the *Journal of English Studies and Comparative Literature* 1.2 (January 1998): 37-61. My thanks to Jason Sanders and Joel David for their invaluable help in tracking down these films and the scant material on them; and for companionably watching these films with me.

2. This excludes the Gerry de Leon vampire films originally made for the Philippines which were then dubbed and distributed in the U.S. years later.

3. In the review for *Intramuros (Walls of Hell)*, the setting—the historic Filipino fort—is considered "the film's greatest asset and its greatest economy." *Variety* (29 July 1964): 8. The only review I've come across which comments positively on direction in the war films is for *Raiders of Leyte Gulf*, which is "nicely tailored for the action program" (28 August 1963): 6. *Moro Witch Doctor*, an action-adventure film, received the most searing criticism—it was described as "lower class in every department. For least discriminating tastes only." *Variety* (2 December 1964): 6.

4. His father had just been appointed Ambassador to the Court of St. James. During Romero's stay in London he met the likes of David Lean and Roberto Rosellini, and viewed *Battleship Potemkin* for the first time. (Sotto 18).

5. See, for example, Ray, "Hemisphere," 63 and 69; and John Ashley's interview with Tom Weaver, in *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers: Writers, Producers, Directors, Actors, Moguls, and Makeup* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland and Co., Inc., 1988), 40-42.

6. Romero writes: "...hailing as I did from one of the Visayan islands in the center of our archipelago I did not speak more than a few words of Tagalog, now called Pilipino, the language spoken in the films I was making. I wrote my scripts in English, trusted my assistants for the accuracy and dramatic effectiveness of their translations, and directed by ear. Fortunately there had been some precedent for this particular anomaly, as a number of foreigners, notably Americans, had directed Filipino films before me, and most of the people in the industry did speak English. But I was probably the first native to fall into such an embarrassing predicament." See Romero 1983: 222.

7. Schaefer 1992: 34; and Craig Fischer, "Beyond the Valley of the Dolls and the Exploitation Genre," *Velvet Light Trap* 30 (Fall 1992): 20. Jim Morton distinguishes between exploitation and pornography by saying that there is "no true continuum" between "non-anatomically-graphic" films meant for theatrical exhibition, and those meant for backrooms, firehouses, and fraternity parties. See Jim Morton, 165.

8. Thomas Doherty, qtd. in Fischer, 20.

9. The summary of *Beast of Blood*, which I have been unable to screen, is based on *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film*, ed. Michael Weldon (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983). For the other films, I consulted entries in the following works: Fred Olen Ray's in *New Poverty Row, The Overlook Encyclopedia of Horror*, ed. Phil Hardy (New York: Overlook Press, 1986), and the *Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film*.

10. Eric Schaefer 1994: 294 and 300. Seale's work corroborates Schaefer's views. Seale counters the idea, promoted by received histories, that the double bill, adopted by the majors "as a lure to Depression audiences", made it possible for Poverty Row independents to survive. Instead, Seale asserts that the double bill, already a pervasive practice by 1927, originated in the twenties, when pressure from Poverty Row producers offering paired features to exhibitors compelled the majors to adopt the double bill out of competitiveness. See Seale, 79.

11. Schaefer 1994: 300. The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association's (MPPDA) list of "Don'ts and Be Carefuls" (1927) preceded the Production Code (1930), also known as the Hays Code, named

for William Hays, whose office promulgated the Code.

12. For examples of these binarisms in approaching the work of Roger Corman, see Patrick Goldstein, "Roger to Rookies: Make it Cheap," *American Film* (Jan-Feb 1985): 36-43, for a positive appraisal; for a negative one, see David Chute, "The New World of Roger Corman," *Film Comment* 18.2 (March-April 1982): 26-32.

13. Schaefer 1994: 293-294. Schaefer points out that the profit motive, for which exploitation films have been denounced in reference to their formulaic narratives and skinflint production costs, is the self-same reason that underlies the majors' self-righteous condemnation of Poverty Row. By the twenties, the industry was concerned to cast the battle with the independents in the form of moral high-mindedness as opposed to crass commercialism, when in fact neither could be attributed solely to either side. It has been shown that the industry's preference for self-regulation over state censorship, under the leadership of Will Hays, had less to do with moral conviction than with a desire to avoid costly customized prints for state censorship boards, and to preserve a universal audience appeal.

14. Gaines 31. Gaines' discussion of exploitation film promotion's debts to the fairground also invites comparisons between Gunning's "cinema of attractions" and exploitation films. In Gunning's influential essay on the "cinema of attractions," film's historical roots in the fairground bring to mind not the exploitation promotion of the low-budget film, but the avant garde's modernist utilization of "exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption." The cinema of attractions, which is characterized by its "direct solicitation" of the viewer, offering pleasure through spectacle, and concentrating on stimulation rather than narrative interest, itself takes its name from the attractions of the fairground—the circus, the amusement park, and vaudeville. Gunning links this roadshow orientation to the hope, in modernist art, of counteracting the passive absorption of the spectator in the interest of effecting more active engagement with films. That the legacy of the carnival informs both the exploitation film and the modernist art film frustrates both teleological and serial linear models, since no one-to-one relationship can be found between the influence of the fairground to either high or low art forms. See Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," *Early Cinema: Space-Frame-Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI Publishing, 1990), 58-60.

15. *Variety* (29 July 1964): 8; and *Variety* (28 August 1963): 6.

16. Rev. of *Beast of Blood*, *Filmfacts*, ed. Ernest Pamentier (1971), 188.

17. The analogous positioning of women and monsters in the horror cinema has been argued convincingly, along different lines, by Linda Williams: "The male look [in the horror film] expresses conventional fear at that which differs from itself. The female look—a look given preeminent position in the horror film - shares the male fear of the monster's freakishness, but also recognizes the sense in which this freakishness is similar to her own difference." Linda Williams, 568.

18. Romero's *Twilight People* is yet another adaptation of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. The most interesting part of this otherwise tedious film finds Neva, the mad scientist's daughter, alone with the animal-people she is attempting to lead to freedom. She is clearly both sympathetic towards and frightened by her mobile menagerie. At one point, one of the (m)animals tries to ravish her, and it takes some time before the other creatures decide to rally to her aid. The moment is a tense one, because Ashley (the film's hero) is far off, awaiting her at their rendezvous, so no help is forthcoming from anyone but these twilight people.

Neva's hybridized positioning, aligned on the one hand to Ashley and her father, and on the other, to the creatures which she feels responsible for and akin to, makes her perhaps the most manifestly interstitial of all the Romero/de Leon horror heroines. Given her discovery that her father has turned her mother into a moss-woman (her mother did not die, as her Father claimed, but vegetated), she is allied via patriarchal relations to humanity, and, via maternal ones, to monstrosity.

19. This is reminiscent of P.T. Barnum's exhibition of William Henry Johnson, an African American man suffering from microcephaly, under the title, "What Is It?" a reference to the performer's possible status as a "missing link" between men and apes. Though the exhibit clearly aligned blackness with only-partial humanity, the issues of race/racism which underpinned Johnson's exhibition were never explicitly acknowledged. Instead, Barnum called Johnson a "nondescript." James Cook proffers an acute analysis of this reticence around naming the racial other: rather than enunciating the word "Negro", Barnum resorted to a "categorical stand-in: a racially undefined persona that included clear physical signifiers of blackness,

but allowed public discussion of this "blackness" to take place in a kind of abstract, liminal space...[B]y positioning his dark skinned Museum character as "nondescript" rather than "Negro," Barnum provided white mid-century New Yorkers with an arena in which to talk openly about black people, often in brutally dehumanizing ways...without ever acknowledging who, exactly, they were talking about" (Cook 148-149).

20. Namely, *The Blood Drinkers/ Vampire People* (1966), dir. Gerry de Leon for Cirio H. Santiago Productions; and *Curse of the Vampires/ Creatures of Evil* (1970), directed by Gerry de Leon for Sceptre Industries. Both films were made with an all-Filipino cast for Philippine distribution, and were later dubbed in English and picked up for the American market.

21. This theme of the scientist as monster (or more precisely, as the monster's double) is clearly a staple of this particular horror formula, most obviously in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), whose title refers both to the monster and to its creator.

22. For a discussion of interstitiality and boundary-crossing as the kernel of the horrific, see Noel Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 28-32.

Author's Note Endnotes

1. While sharing an emphasis on creative spectatorship, these three film cultures differ in important ways. My students and I explored their points of convergence and departure in my course "Cinema Detritus: Camp, Cult, Trash", which I taught in Fall 2001 at the University of California, Irvine, Program in Film Studies.

2. Rhona Berenstein, whose work on jungle-horror I draw upon in this article, is the author of *Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality, and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Lea Jacobs, whose essay on B-films I cite in this paper, penned *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928-1942* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); and Eric Schaefer, a pioneering scholar of classical exploitation, published *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999).

3. Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," *Against Interpretation* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967) 291. (pagination of whole essay is 274-292.)

4. See Greg Taylor, *Artists in the Audience: Cults, Camp, and American Film Criticism* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 3-18.

5. Jeffrey Sconce, "'Trashing' the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style", *Screen* 36. 4 (1995 Winter): 372. (complete pagination of essay is 371-393.)

6. David F. Friedman's definition of what Schaefer calls "classical exploitation", quoted in Schaefer, 3.

7. Schaefer 2-3.

8. My thanks to Vikki Duncan, Janet Chen, and Paulette Shubin.

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