



BFI BLU-RAY LAUNCH

Short Sharp Shocks II

Celebrate BFI Flipside's second scintillating collection of strange, spooky British films lovingly remastered in 2K resolution from rare original archive materials. 'The Politician who reached beyond the Grave for the Power of Hell' emerges in *The Face of Darkness* (Ian F H Lloyd, 1976); a mysterious phone call provokes a knife-edge night of horror in *The Dumb Waiter* (Robert Bierman, 1979); and *The Mark of Lilith* (Polly Gladwin, Zachary Mack-Nataf, Bruna Fionda, 1986) dismantles the traditional image of the vampire when Black lesbian filmmaker Zena encounters Lillia, a white, undead wraith.

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Ian F H Lloyd on 'The Face of Darkness'

The newspaper in Market Drayton, Shropshire, headlined its story about my film *The Face of Darkness* with 'Local Boy Makes Evil'. One might think it wasn't the first time, Market Drayton being the childhood home of Oswald Mosley – though, in mitigation, the town is also thought to have been the template for P G Wodehouse's Market Blandings.

My first attempt at political fiction was written at Ballachulish, looking out over Loch Leven from Lagan nam Bann, the house of the widow of the Thane of Clan McColl. The name means 'hollow of the law-making', a natural amphitheatre next to the house where the clan would meet in formal assembly. When his house in Glen Coe burned down, the great mountaineer Hamish MacInnes came to live with us.

The closest friend of my youth in Market Drayton – we met playing cricket for the Market Drayton Sunday second 11 – read the novel and advised that I should put it in a drawer, move house and hope that nobody ever found it. Which of us had the better political instinct may be judged from the fact that 'The Levelling Machine' was never published – a victim of the shortage of paper in the economic crisis of the mid-1970s – and he became Sir Peter Housden, head of the civil service in Scotland.

Thus he never had to endure a crew call at 4am, in this case for the misty dawn sequence in which member of parliament Edward Langdon, played by Lennard Pearce, headed for the woods by Land Rover to raise The Undead from his crossroads grave. The shoot was painted with a certain irony when, the traffic briefly held for a take, one motorist objected, 'Some of us have work to do!'

During the resurrection sequence, written according to the ritual described in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, at the first signs of animation of The Undead the song of a solitary bird rises in crescendo. In the editing, we wondered if this might have appeared too melodramatic, and whether it would seem credible that it was not sound-edited in but, in the end, the bird survived to tell its tale.

In his *Lives of the Artists*, Vasari tells the story of how the Pope hoped to hire a fresco artist and sent a messenger to Giotto to ask for a sample drawing. With just paper and pen, Giotto flicked his wrist and drew a perfect circle. Vasari writes: 'The messenger, seeing that he could get nothing else, departed ill-pleased. However, sending the other drawings to the Pope with the names of those who had made them, he sent also Giotto's, relating how he had made the circle without moving his arm and without compasses; the Pope saw that Giotto must surpass greatly all the other painters of his time.'

Observe then David Allister, *The Undead*, draw such a circle in chalk on the school playground as part of the ritual he uses to ensnare the little girl, Angie, as his victim. Perhaps only one of the greatest artists of the early Renaissance, or one who has lain in the ground after being interred alive for a few hundred years, could achieve such precision.

A good number of our locations we simply stole. The one which resulted in the greatest nervousness was a spiral staircase up from the old London Docklands incarnation of Clink Street to the southern end of the railway bridge across the Thames to Cannon Street railway station. There was a wonderful background of a derelict building with every window broken, giving a fractured reflection of the river, for the pursuit of *The Undead* by the Fish Porter, Roger Bizley. My anonymous enquiry about how much it would cost to use for filming revealed that all railway property was billed at a flat rate, which would be equivalent to our using, say, Waterloo station. Occasionally, during pre-filming checks, the street door to the staircase would be locked but generally not. On filming day, a sigh of relief greeted the discovery that the door was open.

The market sequence where *The Undead* is following Gwyneth Powell's Eileen (the victim-to-be's mother) was in Clapham. As we prepared to film, cameraman Peter Harvey recalled that the last time he'd tried to shoot in a market, when one of the traders had obstructed the shot with the mantra, 'Ere I stays and 'ere I stands, 'til I 'as a fiver in me 'ands.' Fortunately, the stallholders of Northcote Road reacted with benign neglect, except for the occasional glance at the camera.

Another setting for that same sequence had the two walking past a car-breaker's yard, with neither they nor the crew going onto the property, which would have required permission. The camera was set up on the opposite side of the road, looking into the territory. When the yard operators realised what was going on, they parked a vehicle in the entrance to obstruct the view – too late: we had it in the can. In the end, the shot ended up on the cutting room floor.

The Dumb Waiter

Robert Bierman writes: 'After training as a cameraman, I moved into directing commercials and by 1978 I wanted to make a film that would engage a cinema audience. I wanted pure cinema, a noir suspense thriller: a simple story with complex emotions derived from an experience I had with my girlfriend when she was driving in her white Mini in central London and we became engaged in a pursuit by an unknown driver. It was pretty frightening. I added the location of my flat, a slightly spooky mansion block with a strange elevator device in the long hallway, used for disposing of rubbish. That was the story, with two characters (the third character Mike, the boyfriend, was played by me in my best suit, but you only see my back and my hand). After completing the film I sold it to Universal Pictures and they showed it, nationwide, with their 1979 release of *Dracula* (with Frank Langella and Laurence Olivier), and went on to show it with other Universal films before being acquired by Film4 and now for a BFI Blu-ray release.'

Caroline Champion writes: In *The Dumb Waiter*, Robert Bierman gives us what feels like a lost slasher piece from a portmanteau film. I initially came across it via a friend's suggestion on Twitter and it was such a punch-packed little oddity, full of grime and scares, that I became a bit obsessed with it.

Bierman had worked predominantly in commercials before this debut film outing and an extensive, illustrious (and ongoing) career in film and television followed. But *The Dumb Waiter* was made almost a decade before he directed the now-cult classic *Vampire's Kiss* – the film almost wholly responsible for creating the Nicolas Cage 'angry meme'.

Sally, a striking young woman (Geraldine James), is the victim of a sinister stalker in black gloves (John White) whose face we never see clearly. She receives a phone call from this *giallo*-esque villain, who menacingly asks, 'Haven't you seen me following you?' and threatens: 'Look out for me while you're driving... I'll be right behind you.' After a failed attempt to attack her in her car, the stalker follows her home and uses a dumb waiter to clamber into her flat as she waits for her boyfriend.

The atmospheric synth score, provided by Colin Towns (who played with Ian Gillan of Deep Purple and who went on to create music for many television series and adverts), really dictates the atmosphere throughout. It makes you think: the film could work without dialogue, as a silent film in some respects. The visual cues are all there.

The ambiguous ending – a more intelligent take on your typical slasher denouement – suggests something happening off camera that the viewer isn't allowed to see. It leaves you thinking about the piece longer than you normally would; letting you make up your own mind, and pick your own ending.

The Mark of Lilith

The directors write: Bruna Fionda and Polly Biswas Gladwin met at The London Film-Makers' Co-op and went on to film school together. We set up the group Women Challenge Film Education, which brought together women from a number of different colleges. This is how we met Zach Nataf. We were all part of a close-knit group of women film students in south London, exploring feminist and lesbian issues.

In 1985 we collaborated to make our graduation film, *The Mark of Lilith*. The idea germinated while on holiday in Italy. Zach had a thing for vampires; it turned out we all did. We had loved Tony Scott's *The Hunger* (1983) starring Catherine Deneuve, Susan Sarandon and David Bowie. We also paid homage to other vampire films, including *Daughters of Darkness* (1971), based on the prodigious 16th-century serial killer Countess Elizabeth Bathory.

The vampire genre felt open to lesbian feminist subversion, able to tackle and incorporate notions of the 'Other', and a great vehicle for looking at sexuality, race and gender issues. Barbara Creed's article 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', (*Screen*, 1986), was a strong influence. We explored the notion of patriarchy and the control of women's sexuality in film and mythology through demonising and marginalising the transgressive woman.

Lilith, in Jewish folklore, was the predecessor of Eve. She was Adam's first, very unsatisfactory and unsatisfied, wife who refused to lie beneath Adam during sexual intercourse. Lilith ended up as the Lamia demon-woman, entering men's dreams, sucking their lifeblood and sending them 'terrible' fantasies.

We aimed to deconstruct and rescue the vampire from the status of purely aberrant, shifting the onus back onto society and audience expectations. Only in a misogynist society could female power and sexuality be seen as a threat demanding repression. Our film portrays Lillia's journey to self-awareness.

We found the queer, erotic pleasure of horror enjoyable, but tired of seeing the female as victim and wanted our heroines to challenge that. Lillia had to define her own sexuality. We wanted our audience to feel empowered by our female protagonists. Subverting and challenging the rules of genre was crucial. We latched onto the idea of 'revamping' the vampire genre. 'ReVamp Productions' was born.

We had long conversations with our tutor Laura Mulvey regarding her work on the 'male gaze' and the 'mirror phase'. (see her 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative

Cinema', *Screen*, 1975). Mirrors are a familiar trope in the vampire genre. Lillia's journey to define her own needs and desires begins when she first glimpses her own reflection.

We borrowed ideas from Brecht and Godard, such as breaking the fourth wall for an alienation effect – to hinder the audience from identifying with underlying dominant ideologies and points of view of mainstream cinematic production.

Within the film the 'Man in the Mac' represents the male gaze and its drive to look at and fetishise. We visually stressed his voyeuristic threat to Lillia. We also hoped to give the female audience 'back their pleasure' (re: Sally Potter's *The Gold Diggers*, 1983) through our counter-storytelling while smashing that fourth wall. Zena, our intrepid researcher, speaks directly to camera to reveal how patriarchy informs the language of cinema. The viewer can actively choose to reject those ideologies on a conscious, critical, political level.

The film was made on a tiny budget but we brought in some decent film equipment by an extensive process of begging letters. We ran videomaking courses for women and used our income on the film. We also received a grant from Lambeth Council. Our main actors were paid! And we paid expenses and fed everyone on set.

We chose locations that resonated with us as filmmakers from the Brixton community. The Ritzy was a key location and owner Pat Foster gave us full access to the cinema. There was an amazing atmosphere when the film was shown there, with rapturous applause for Lillia's line in the taxi: 'Take me to The Ritzy.'

The classic vampire sequence was shot at Nunhead Cemetery, a Victorian burial ground with mostly old, unkempt graves. We were locked in for a night of shooting under a full moon, which proved too much for some of our crew who were so spooked that they escaped over the wall.

We are all listed as directors because we all made the decisions about the direction of the film. While we divided tasks on the shoot, decisions were made collectively. Collaborative working was based on our feminist ideals.

Making *The Mark of Lilith* was exciting. It was a learning process, including working with a budget and schedule that were too tight. Nevertheless, it was well received at the time. It won the Arts Council Student Film and Video Arts Prize, which meant the film toured nationally and internationally. Screenings were organised by our distributors, including at several film festivals. Academics have written, and continue to write, about the film. *Lilith* has a life of its own and a place in the history of feminist filmmaking.

Extracts from *Short Sharp Shocks II*, Blu-ray booklet, BFI 2021

THE FACE OF DARKNESS

Director: Ian F.H. Lloyd
Production Company: Cromdale Films
Producer: Ian F.H. Lloyd
Production Manager: Mark Heather
Assistant Director: Peter Van Praagh
Script: Ian F.H. Lloyd
Photography: Peter Harvey
Editor: Charles Lewis-Serreau
Art Director: Margaret Audsley
Mediaeval costumes: Lynda Cooper, Ian Sellar
Title Design: Ed Brennan
Music: Martin Jacklin
Sound Recording: Claire Bourne
Sound Editor: Charles Ware
Cast:
Lennard Pearce (*Edward Langdon*)
John Bennett (*inquisitor/psychiatrist*)
David Allister (*The Undead*)
Gwyneth Powell (*Eileen*)
Roger Bizley (*peasant/fish porter*)
Jonathan Elsom (*Philip*)
Susan Banahan (*Angie*)
UK 1976
57 mins

THE DUMB WAITER

Directed by: Robert Bierman
Production Company: Bierman and Randall
Produced by: Maggi Randall
Assistant Director: Jonathan Benson
Continuity: Jean Winter
Written by: Robert Bierman
Lighting Cameraman: Billy Williams
Camera Operator: Bob Boyle
Focus Puller: Roddy Barron
Clapper Loader: Richard Garland
Grip: Tony Cridlin
Editor: Maurice Hamblin
Assistant Editor: John Smith
Art Director: Evan Hercules
Prop Buyer: Belinda Edwards
Prop Mar: Bruce Vincent
Music: Colin Towns
Sound Mixer: Neil Kingsbury
Sound Dubbing: John Wood
Cast:
Geraldine James (*girl*)
John White (*man*)
David Casey, Hilary Gasson (*telephone voices*)
UK 1979
17 mins

THE MARK OF LILITH

Directors: Bruna Fionda, Polly Gladwin, Isiling Mack-Nataf
Production Company: Re-Vamp Productions, London College of Printing
Production Team: Paolo Bazzoni, Sara Chambers, Paul Clarke, Victoria Chapman, Paul Denby, Sheila Eaton, Jimmy Edmonds, Ohna Felby, Bruna Fionda, Linda Flint, Sandy Gilmour, Polly Gladwin, Rachel Gladwin, Sally Hall, Jane Harris, Rosalind Hewitt, Miriam Ludbrook, Zuni Luni, Isiling Mack-Nataf, Cassie McFarlane, Susan Morse, Barbara Nicholls, Claire Palmer, Ingrid Pollard, Paul Preece, Pauline Stride, Hrafnhildur Thorsteinsdottir, Sue Underwood, Wendy Williams, Veronica Wilson
Music: Miriam Ludbrook, Zuni Luni
Post-production: Paul Clarke, Bruna Fionda, Polly Gladwin, Miriam Ludbrook, Zuni Luni, Isiling Mack-Nataf, Paul Preece, Pauline Stride
Cast:
Pamela Lofton (*Zena*)
Susan Franklyn (*Lillia*)
Jeremy Peters (*Luke*)
Patricia St. Hilaire (*waitress*)
Michael Cudlip (*man in mac*)
Faye Chang
Nallia Chang-hilliman
Victoria Chapman
Nigel Court
Mick Dwyer
Sheila Eaton
Jimmy Edmonds
Bruna Fionda
Linda Flint
Steve Forster
Angi Friday
Patti Gibson
Polly Gladwin
Sally Hall
Jane Harris
Richard Humphries
Earlly Jennings
Isiling Mack-Nataf
Laura Mulvey
Claire Palmer
Ingrid Pollard
Hedra Sarid
Pauline Stride
Sue Taylor
Hrafnhildur Thorsteinsdottir
Wendy Williams
UK 1986
33 mins

The two-disc Blu-ray of *Short Sharp Shocks II* is available to buy from 25 October.

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Art in the Making: The Black Arts Movement on Film + discussion

Wed 27 Oct 20:40

Woman with a Movie Camera Preview: Anatomy of Wings

+ pre-recorded Q&A Thu 28 Oct 18:15

Silent Cinema: Body and Soul + intro Sun 31 Oct 14:20

20-22 Omega Sun 31 Oct 14:30; Thu 4 Nov 18:10

Member Picks: Moonlight Fri 5 Nov 18:10

African Odysseys: Black History Walks Presents: Cause for Concern:

Equal Before the Law Fri 5 Nov 18:30-21:30

African Odysseys: A Date with the Devil: Darcus Howe's Journey from Black Power to Broadcasting Sat 6 Nov 12:00-18:00

African Odysseys: Travels with my Camera: Is This My Country? +

White Tribe Tue 9 Nov 18:10

African Odysseys: Trouble in Paradise + Darcus Howe: Son of Mine

Sun 14 Nov 15:30

Terror Vision: Tales from the Hood Thu 25 Nov 20:40

Missing Believed Wiped Session 1: The London Palladium Show

Sat 27 Nov 13:00

Missing Believed Wiped Session 2:

Introducing 'The Precious Things': Holiday Startime

Sat 27 Nov 15:50

Seniors' Free Matinee, in partnership with African Odysseys: Once

Upon a Time... When We Were Colored + intro Mon 29 Nov 14:00

Relaxed Screening: Petite Maman Tue 30 Nov 18:15

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