



IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS

Black Sunday

The often imaginative and stylistically rich world of Italian horror has been enjoying a critical and popular renaissance in recent years, with several marginalised directors of the 1960s and 70s receiving the recognition once only afforded their art-cinema compatriots. One case in point is the pioneering gothic horror and *giallo* specialist Mario Bava (1914-1980). A quiet, reserved man who self-effacingly referred to himself as a mere 'romantic craftsman', Bava made a string of low-budget but nevertheless literate and aesthetically sophisticated horror and thriller B-movies in the 60s and 70s. With his monochrome debut *Black Sunday* (*La maschera del demonio*, 1960) and the murder mystery *Blood and Black Lace* (*Sei donne per l'assassino*, 1964), Bava defined the character and style of the Italian horror and *giallo* genres respectively. Other notable works include the gloriously florid colour movies *The Whip and the Body* (*La frusta e il corpo*, 1963), *Kill, Baby... Kill!* (*Operazione paura*, 1966) and the portmanteau film *Black Sabbath* (*I tre volti della paura*, 1963), starring Boris Karloff. Emulated en masse by his Cinecittà contemporaries, Bava's films also influenced American filmmakers working in the gothic horror and slasher genres.

Black Sunday was Bava's first film as director. Following in his father Eugenio Bava's footsteps he'd worked as a cameraman throughout the 30s and 40s and by the mid-50s had found himself completing several pictures for Galatea Film, including Riccardo Freda's *I vampiri* (1956), considered the first Italian horror film. By way of saying thank you, Lionello Santi, head of Galatea, invited Bava to make his directorial debut, affording him the freedom to choose whatever genre he wanted (so long as it didn't cost too much). Bava chose horror and Nikolai Gogol's gothic fairytale 'Viy' as his source material.

Black Sunday wound up bearing little resemblance to its Slavonic literary forebear save for its Carpathian locale and period setting. It opens with a prologue set in 17th-century Moldavia, where the beautiful Princess Asa (British actress Barbara Steele, in a career-defining role) is put to death along with her lover Igor Javutich (Arturo Dominici) for consorting with the devil. The mode of execution ordered by the Grand Inquisitor, Asa's brother Prince Vajda (Ivo Garrani), is particularly grisly – a spiked mask is to be hammered down on Asa's face – but before she is put to death the doomed princess swears revenge on her enemies, in the name of Satan. Two hundred years later, doctors Kruvajan (Andrea Checchi) and Gorobek (John Richardson) stumble across Asa's tomb; while exploring the ruins of her resting place, Kruvajan cuts himself and unwittingly drips blood on to the corpse. Asa and her fiendish lover Javutich are consequently resurrected and set about vengefully possessing the witch's beautiful descendant Katia (also played by Steele).

Italian horror cinema is known for its intense atmosphere, extravagant visual style and gory scenes, and *Black Sunday* is the film that first pioneered this approach. A supremely visual experience, Bava's style is an extension of the gothic aesthetic pioneered by Universal's horror films of the 1930s. The beautifully composed chiaroscuro cinematography, expressionistic set design and art direction and the grotesquely appealing makeup lend the film a

distinct atmosphere; this is cinema at its most grandiose and rich, brimful of high-flown imagery. Bava filmed almost all the exteriors on a stage at Titanus Studios in Rome so that he could exert complete control over the supposed natural environment he was creating. The result is a convincingly eerie and archaic world: a terrifying, foggy nightmare realm of castles, boggy marshes and ancient forests through which Bava's camera slowly prowls.

The story unfolds in a rather perfunctory manner and, as is usual with Italian genre films, the dialogue is post-synched, hampering the actors' performances, but Bava punctuates the narrative with lyrical and sometimes disturbing set pieces which set the film alight. These highlights include the bravura opening scene in which Asa is put to death; a rapidly edited bat attack; Javutich clawing himself out of his muddy grave (which makes terrifying use of thunderclaps and Dutch angles); and the ghostly slow-motion sequence of a phantom carriage coursing down a forest path.

Black Sunday's aesthetics are resolutely old-fashioned, but the film merges this approach with a strikingly modern depiction of violence. Taking his cue from the risqué horror fare that Hammer had been producing in the late 50s, Bava employs several grisly shocks, including a disturbing scene of eye-violence that pre-empts the assaultive cinema of fellow Italian horror director Lucio Fulci. Another groundbreaking aspect is the film's intertwining of sexual attraction and horror. Barbara Steele's disfigured witch Asa is undoubtedly the film's monster, but Bava depicts her as morbidly beautiful, her heaving bosom and clawing hands signifying her as a representation of unbridled female sexual desire, simultaneously repellent and attractive.

Made for a modest budget of around \$100,000, *Black Sunday* grossed millions worldwide, propelling Steele to international stardom and ushering in a craze for copycat Italian chillers. However, by 1973, when Bava came to direct his latter-day masterpiece *Lisa and the Devil*, the gothic had become unfashionable, with Italian audiences now in thrall to the metropolitan thrills of the *giallo* horror/mystery subgenre (which Bava also pioneered) and international audiences flocking to the modern-day horrors of Polanski and Romero.

James Blackford, *Sight and Sound*, April 2013

BLACK SUNDAY (LA MASCHERA DEL DEMONIO)

Director: Mario Bava
Production Companies: Galatea Film, Jolly Film (Rome)
Presented by [US version]: James H. Nicholson, Samuel Z. Arkoff
© *[US version]:* Alta Vista Productions
Producer: Massimo De Rita
Producer [US version]: Lou Rusoff
1st Production Assistant: Paolo Mercuri
2nd Production Assistant: Armando Govoni
Assistant Director: Vana Caruso
Script Girl: Bona Magrini
Screenplay: Ennio De Concini, Mario Serandrei
Screenplay: Mario Bava *
Screenplay/Adaptation: Marcello Coscia *
From the story 'Viy' by: Nikolaj Gogol
Photography: Mario Bava
Camera Operator: Ubaldo Terzano
Editor: Mario Serandrei
Editor [US version]: Salvatore Billitteri
Sets Designed by: Giorgio Giovannini
Wardrobe: Tina Loredio Grani
Music Composed by: Roberto Nicolosi
Conducted by: Pierluigi Urbini
Music [US version]: Les Baxter
Music Co-ordinator [US version]: Al Simms
Sound Recordist [US version]: Robert Sherwood
Sound Studio [US version]: Titra
Dubbing Director [US version]: Lee Kresel

Synchronization: NIS
English Dial Writer/Director: George Higgins III
Synchronizing Assistant: Gisella Mathews
Vocal Artists Furnished by: ELDA - English Language Dubbers Association
Negative: Dupont
Developing/Printing: Tecnostampa (Rome)
Studio: Titanus Studios

Cast

Barbara Steele (*Princess Katia/Princess Asa*)
John Richardson (*Dr Andrej Gorobek*)
Andrea Checchi (*Dr Choma Kruvajan*)
Ivo Garrani (*Prince Vajda*)
Arturo Dominici (*Javutich*)
Enrico Olivieri (*Constantin Vajda*)
Antonio Pierfederici (*the priest*)
Tino Bianchi (*Ivan*)
Clara Bindi (*innkeeper*)
Mario Passante (*Nikita*)
Renato Terra (*Boris*)
Germana Dominici (*innkeeper's daughter, peasant girl*)

Italy 1960
87 mins

* Uncredited

IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS

The Uninvited

Thu 1 Dec 18:05; Sat 17 Dec 14:30 (+ intro by broadcaster and writer, Louise Blain)

Kwaidan (Kaidan)

Thu 1 Dec 20:00; Tue 13 Dec 17:40

Night of the Eagle

Fri 2 Dec 21:00; Sat 10 Dec 12:10

Daughters of Darkness (Les lèvres rouges)

Sat 3 Dec 20:45; Tue 13 Dec 21:00

Transness in Horror

Tue 6 Dec 18:20

Let the Right One In (Låt den rätte komma in)

Tue 6 Dec 20:45; Thu 22 Dec 18:15

Philosophical Screens: The Lure

Wed 7 Dec 20:10 Blue Room

The Lure (Córki dancing)

Wed 7 Dec 18:15; Thu 22 Dec 20:45 (+ intro by Dr Catherine Wheatley, Reader in Film Studies at King's College London)

Cat People

Wed 7 Dec 20:50; Mon 19 Dec (+ intro by Clarisse Loughrey, chief film critic for The Independent)

Black Sunday (La maschera del demonio)

Fri 9 Dec 21:00; Sun 18 Dec 18:30

Ring (Ringu)

Sat 10 Dec 20:40; Tue 13 Dec 21:05;
Tue 20 Dec 21:00

Atlantics (Atlantique) + Atlantiques

Sun 11 Dec 14:50; Tue 27 Dec 18:20

Sugar Hill

Sun 11 Dec 18:00; Sat 17 Dec 20:40

Häxan

Mon 12 Dec 18:10 (+ live score by The Begotten); Sat 17 Dec 11:45 (with live piano accompaniment)

Sweetheart

Mon 12 Dec 21:00; Tue 27 Dec 12:40

Arrebato

Wed 14 Dec 20:30 (+ intro by writer and broadcaster Anna Bogutskaya);
Fri 23 Dec 18:05

The Final Girls LIVE

Thu 15 Dec 20:30

One Cut of the Dead (Kamera o tomeru na!)

Fri 16 Dec 18:15; Fri 30 Dec 20:45

The Fog

Fri 16 Dec 21:00; Wed 28 Dec 18:10

Being Human + Q&A with Toby Whithouse and guests (tbc)

Sat 17 Dec 18:00

Day of the Dead

Mon 19 Dec 20:40; Thu 29 Dec 18:20

Society

Tue 20 Dec 18:15; Wed 28 Dec 20:50

Interview with the Vampire

Wed 21 Dec 18:10; Thu 29 Dec 20:40

Ginger Snaps

Wed 21 Dec 20:50; Tue 27 Dec 15:10

A Dark Song

Fri 23 Dec 20:45; Fri 30 Dec 18:20

City Lit at BFI: Screen Horrors –

Screen Monsters

Thu 20 Oct – Thu 15 Dec 18:30–20:30 Studio

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

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