



HALLOWEEN SCREENINGS

Eyes without a Face (Les Yeux sans visage)

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Director: Georges Franju

Production Companies:

Champs-Élysées Productions, Lux Film (Rome)

Producer: Jules Borkon

Production Manager: Pierre Laurent

Unit Production Manager: Margot Capelier

1st Assistant Director: Claude Sautet

Script Girl: Ginette Diamant-Berger

Adaptation: Pierre Boileau, Thomas Narcejac,

Jean Redon, Claude Sautet

Dialogue: Pierre Gascar

Original Novel: Jean Redon

Director of Photography: Eugen Shuftan

Cameraman: Robert Schneider

1st Assistant Operator: Pierre Brard

Stills Photography: Jean-Louis Castelli

Special Effects: Henri Assola

Editor: Gilbert Natot

Assistant Editor: Denise Natot

Art Director: Auguste Capelier

Assistant Art Directors: Jacques Mély,

Claude Moesching

Set Decorator: Robert Volper

Gowns: Marie-Martine

Make-up: Georges Klein

Hairstyles: Marcelle Testard

Opticals: Lax

Music Composed/Orchestra Directed by:

Maurice Jarre

Sound: Antoine Archimbaud

Animals: Marcel LeSourd

Cast:

Pierre Brasseur (*Dr Génessier*)

Alida Valli (*Louise*)

Juliette Mayniel (*Edna Gruberg*)

Alexandre Rignault (*Inspector Parot*)

Béatrice Altariba (*Paulette Merodon*)

Charles Blavette (*kennel employee*)

Claude Brasseur (*police inspector*)

Michel Etcheverry (*Dr Lherminier*)

Yvette Etiévent (*mother of sick child*)

René Génin (*Henri Tessot*)

Lucien Hubert (*2nd man at cemetery*)

Marcel Pérès (*1st man at cemetery*)

François Guérin (*Dr Jacques Vernon*)

Édith Scob (*Christiane Génessier*)

Birgitta Juslin (*Juliette*)*

Gabrielle Doucet (*Dr Génessier's admirer*)*

France/Italy 1960

90 mins

* Uncredited

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SIGHT AND SOUND

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away the film's ending.

Contains moderate bloody medical horror and violence.

A plastic surgeon becomes obsessed with trying to restore his daughter's face after a car accident leaves her disfigured. It's a deadly mission, involving disturbing and experimental methods.

Georges Franju's chilling horror is a nightmarish, yet lyrical, fable of identity, guilt and obsession, in which visceral frights blend with atmospheric cinematography. This unforgettable classic has influenced countless filmmakers, from John Carpenter to Pedro Almodóvar.

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The deathly hinterlands of 'Eyes without a Face'

Over sixty years on, one of the chilliest things about Georges Franju's landmark of surgical horror, *Eyes without a Face*, is its setting in colourless hinterlands on the edge of Paris.

Few opening shots set the tone for a film more perfectly than those of Georges Franju's *Eyes without a Face*. The viewer first follows a dark road littered with trees stripped of their leaves by winter. The scene is from the perspective of the window of a Citroën 2CV. The road is part country, part urban, but with no one else in sight. It's a hopeless landscape that Franju opens with, but also an unsettling one.

In only his second feature, following *La Tête contre les murs* (1959) and a succession of eye-grabbing shorts, Franju perfectly conveyed the nihilistic atmosphere still pent up in France after the years of the Second World War. Unlike his energetic contemporaries of the unfolding French New Wave, the director sought colder brutalities. In *Eyes without a Face* we're far from the sunny boulevards of Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960) or Agnès Varda's *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962). It tended to be in crime fiction and cinema, such as Franju's, that the repressed traumas of a country still coming to terms with the occupation seemed to manifest, particularly through their unforgiving settings.

Eyes without a Face tells an unnerving tale of gothic melodrama. Dr Génessier (Pierre Brasseur) is a noted practitioner in skin grafts who lives in a large mansion just outside of Paris. In the opening scenes, he is sent for by the police. A corpse has been fished out of the Seine, which he identifies as the body of his daughter, Christiane (Edith Scobb). He is, however, lying. Instead, his daughter lives in isolation in his mansion, forced to wear a mask to hide the horrific injuries she received in a car accident. In the daytime, Génessier sends out his assistant Louise (Alida Valli) in search of prospective women to kidnap in order to steal their faces in the hope of grafting a new one for his daughter. But how long will the deception last before their macabre scheme comes undone?

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Wed 1 Nov 20:45

23 Seconds to Eternity + BFI DVD & Blu-ray launch + Q&A with director **Bill Butt**

Mon 6 Nov 18:10

Preview: The Eternal Daughter + Q&A with writer-director Joanna Hogg and actor Tilda Swinton

Fri 10 Nov 19:00

Exhibition: The Red Shoes: Beyond the Mirror
From Fri 10 Nov to Sun 7 Jan

Matthew Bourne's production of The Red Shoes + Q&A with Matthew Bourne and Ashley Shaw

Sat 11 Nov 15:00

Preview: Is There Anybody Out There? + Q&A with director Ella Glendining, hosted by Jack Thorne

Sat 11 Nov 17:45

Preview: The Red Shoes

Sun 12 Nov 15:30

Preview: Typist Artist Pirate King + Q&A with director **Carol Morley**, cast **Monica Dolan**, **Gina McKee** and **Kieran Bew**, producer **Cairo Cannon**, composer **Carly Paradis** and editor **Alex Mackie**

Mon 13 Nov 17:55

Journey to Italy Viaggio in Italia + extended introduction by Jeremy Cooper and Ben Rivers

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Joanna Hogg in Conversation

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Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 20 Nov 18:30

Talk: The Creative Worlds of Powell + Pressburger

Sat 25 Nov 12:00-17:00

TV Preview: Vigil + Q&A with cast **Suranne Jones**, **Romola Garai**, **Dougray Scott** and writer **Tom Edge**

Mon 27 Nov 18:15

HALLOWEEN SCREENINGS

Eyes without a Face Les yeux sans visage

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The Shining

Tue 31 Oct 20:15

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Franju's film is often coupled with Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1955), as thrillers that helped rejuvenate France's darker cinema with their unforgiving narratives and stark, deathly settings. The pair share their mixture of crime and horror thanks to the scriptwriting of Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac, the crime writers whose work also formed the basis for Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). In this case, however, the duo were adapting Jean Redon's novel rather than their own.

More so than in Clouzot's film, Franju's has a sense of a bourgeois society that simply cannot accept the horror of its past and will hurt others in order to – quite literally in this case – save face. Still, the trauma underneath cannot but reject this attempt at concealment, and the veneer of the stolen faces begins to degrade and bruise.

Even if still effectively within reach of the capital, the home of Génessier feels distinctly isolated and far from Paris. The city is portrayed as cold and indifferent when seen in its brief scenes, largely because it's watched through the eyes of either the doctor or his assistant, both there to enact their plan. Although Louise ventures there on the prowl in search of the right face to steal, the journey back from the city to Génessier's house is distinct in the film, separated from normal life like a bad memory shunned but regained. As one girl says nervously on the way to her death at the house: 'It seems a very long way...'

The dead trees from the opening sequence litter the roads and look more like contorted bodies than bark. There's a darkness that seems to fall when just a few minutes out of the capital's streets. As in the novels of Georges Simenon and Léo Malet, a sense of journeying to the outskirts is essential in creating tension. That the mansion sits in a dark forest away from the bright lights of the city is a norm in French cinema, which regularly situates crime and misdeeds as festering in forgotten houses and roads, from the grim house at the heart of Alain Corneau's *Série noire* (1979) to the out-of-town barn where unseen horrors occur in Claire Denis' *Bastards* (2013).

If the brittle, frosty realms of outer Paris are a common setting for the darker end of French film, then Franju's is certainly one of their most macabre, horrific depictions. Perhaps it's due to the director's straight rendering of the narrative, far from the fantastical aspects of similar horror stories. The desperation – not to say the humanity – of the characters makes the film (and its occasional gory set-pieces) deeply disturbing, and the isolation of the mansion house is absolutely essential in concealing these horrors from society.

In the final scene, after much turmoil has occurred and several characters have met a particularly grim fate, Christiane walks dreamily into the gloom of the forest, surrounded by doves taking flight like ghosts of her lost freedom. How revealing that even she, whose trauma spread like a disease all around her, feels the need to walk away from this cold, deathly place as night falls.

Adam Scovell, bfi.org.uk, 5 February 2020