

## Michael Guarneri. Vampires in Italian Cinema, 1956–1975

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**Michael Guarneri. *Vampires in Italian Cinema, 1956–1975*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. Pp. 224. British Pounds 75. ISBN 9781474458115.**

As the title suggests, Michael Guarneri's book concerns the widespread presence of vampires in Italian cinema between 1956 and 1975. These years are the crucial period of development and success of the gothic genre in the Italian film industry, and Guarneri's work is a timely and significant addition to the growing field of academic research on the Italian gothic at large.

*Vampires in Italian Cinema, 1956–1975* consists of an Introduction and three parts, each one divided into two chapters. In the Introduction, Guarneri sums up recent criticism on vampires as literary and cinematic figures, taking into account the most common and influential readings (psychoanalytic, Marxist, feminist) of the topic. The author also reminds the readers of the long-standing diffidence towards the gothic as a critical concept in Italy, and provides an account of his methodologies, including his archival research.

Part I outlines the national, international and transnational industrial context of 1956–1975 Italian vampire cinema. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the Italian film industry 'from crisis to crisis' (17), i.e. from the postwar years to the crisis of 1985. The chapter details the boom of historical-mythological productions from 1958 to 1964 as an emblematic case study for "a state-subsidised system mostly based on a constellation of medium, small and minuscule business ventures piggy-backing on popular genres/trends in the local and/or global film market" (17). Chapter 2 explains how the success of the *Dracula* series by the British Hammer Film Productions in late-1950s and early-1960s Italy was one of the reasons leading to the diffusion of vampires in Italian cinema and to a 'vampire craze' in Italian culture as a whole (44).

Part II employs the critical instruments laid out in the Introduction to discuss the corpus of thirty-three Italian vampire movies, focusing respectively on female (Chapter 3) and male (Chapter 4) vampires. In particular, Guarneri analyses female and male vampires as symptoms of the changes of gender roles in Italy after the war and the economic boom. Italian vampire films, especially in the 1960s, present a complex and nuanced portrayal of female vampires, whose sterile and non-normative sexuality is seen by the protagonist (usually a young bachelor) as an alternative to traditional and socially-prescribed, but less inviting, relationships. At the same time, far from being utterly transgressive, Italian female vampires appear to dream of monogamous relationships with the protagonists,

and to be helpless without their male servants or lovers. Italian male vampires, on the contrary, appear far less nuanced and more coherent with the portrayal of vampires as sex predators, and their supernatural powers reassuringly enhance traditional traits of Italian masculinity.

Part III turns to the political and socio-economic implications of Italian vampire cinema. Chapter 5 is focused on the 1959–1965 period, and its main case study is Steno's horror parody *Tempi duri per i vampiri* (1959), read as a testimony of the country's class struggles at the time of the economic boom. The chapter also discusses the presence of issues concerning the memory of the Fascist regime and Nazi occupation in vampire-themed peplum movies. Chapter 6 focuses on a series of vampire movies produced between 1970 and 1975 with strong Marxist undertones, reappropriating the traditional interpretation of vampires as a metaphor for the capitalist ruling classes.

Guarneri's critical tools are well-rooted into the most significant contemporary readings of the vampire as a literary figure and a cultural phenomenon, and his analysis of the movies in part II and III testifies it. This analysis, however, is never purely theoretical, but is deeply concerned with historical circumstances, to which specific sections of each chapter are dedicated. Guarneri's study of Italian vampire films reinforces an understanding of genre cinema as a product reflecting dominant ideologies while at the same time attempting to subvert them.

Beside the critical inquiry, one of the main qualities of Guarneri's book is the careful reconstruction of the material circumstances surrounding the production of the movies being examined. Far from limiting himself to a theoretical approach, Guarneri is well aware that, when it comes to genre cinema, its interpretation is bound to the material conditions in which it was produced. While most criticism on Italian gothic and horror films is limited to the discussion of a few celebrated *maestri* (especially Mario Bava, Dario Argento, and Lucio Fulci) and omits the industrial dimension of the genre (coherently with the diffused attitude in Italian film studies to focus on *cinema d'autore*), Guarneri alternates an analysis of historical and material details with critical insights into selected case studies.

Guarneri's extensive archival work is testified by the two appendixes, containing a summary of the notes for three Italian vampire films that were never made (appendix A), and the Ministero del Turismo e dello Spettacolo's certificates attesting that all the movies discussed were actually produced in Italy (Appendix B). These documents are not a superfluous exhibition of zeal, but rather a necessary part of Guarneri's effort of defining the specific *national* traits of the movies. As the author argues in the introduction, the first step of any research into the Italian

film industry is “an engagement with the notion of national cinema” in the context of an industry heavily relying “on international capital, artistic personnel and distribution channels” (5). In remarking the national and industrial dimension of Italian vampire films, Guarneri’s work is an essential contribution to the definition of an Italian gothic genre as a widespread cultural phenomenon.

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**Antonio Montefusco e Giuliano Milani, eds. *Le lettere di Dante: Ambienti culturali, contesti storici e circolazione dei saperi*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2020. Pp. 626. USD 114.99, ISBN 9783110590654.**

I ventisei saggi raccolti in questo volume offrono una panoramica interdisciplinare degli ambienti storici in cui le *Epistole* di Dante vennero composte. I contributi che si susseguono nel volume agiscono in maniera complementare tra loro, ponendo il lettore di fronte ad una visione completa delle lettere esaminate in ogni loro aspetto. Rileggendo in chiave storica questo patrimonio documentario, il volume offre una profonda analisi del contesto in cui le epistole furono composte.

L’opera si colloca all’interno del progetto Bifolco (*Bilingualism in Florentine and Tuscan Works*, 1260–1430) che nella sua prima fase, 2015–2018, si è concentrato sul *dictamen*, prendendo in esame proprio le lettere dantesche, considerate un ottimo *case study* per il forte intreccio che lega volgarizzamenti, bilinguismo e questa pratica scrittoria. Il nucleo principale dei saggi che compongono il volume, al quale si sono aggiunti ulteriori contributi, è ricavato dagli interventi e dalle discussioni che hanno animato due seminari tenutisi all’Università degli studi di Venezia Ca’ Foscari rispettivamente nell’ottobre del 2016 (Dante attraverso i documenti III. Contesti culturali e storici delle epistole dantesche) e nel giugno del 2017 (Dante attraverso i documenti IV). I due eventi richiamano l’omonimo manifesto uscito su Reti Medievali nel 2014, sempre a cura di Montefusco e Milani, e ne proseguono le istanze metodologiche, vale a dire la contestualizzazione storiografica della figura di Dante e della sua produzione letteraria.

Il volume si apre con un’interessante prefazione firmata da Montefusco che traccia un breve *status questionis* sulle lettere dantesche ed il loro studio. Montefusco sottolinea come le epistole dantesche, spesso considerate dalla critica dantesca come materiale ancillare, siano state relegate per molto tempo ad un