***Gothic Cinema* by Xavier Aldana Reyes**

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In the Acknowledgements for this timely and accessible study, Xavier Aldana Reyes explains that 'this is the book I have always wanted to write but only recently found the courage to tackle' (xii). We are lucky he did, since Aldana Reyes's enthusiastic and extensive knowledge not only of Gothic film but also the debates that surround it make him the perfect guide to help us navigate the mode's tangled, fascinating evolution. Aldana Reyes's main, persuasive claim is that Gothic cinema is best understood as a transhistorical and transnational 'aesthetic mode', defined by 'a film's use of a recognisable set of characters, settings, associated motifs and themes' (17). This focus on the 'look' of screen Gothic helps avoid the straightforward, though rather fuzzy, association of the genre with 'monstrosity' and 'psychological disturbance' (15), and sharpens the distinction between Gothic film and the horror genre more broadly defined.

Noting the dearth of serious full-length studies of Gothic cinema, Aldana Reyes begins his book by distinguishing his own work from existing trends in scholarship, ranging from encyclopaedic reference works such as Jonathan Rigby's *English Gothic: A Century of Horror Cinema* (2000), to 'monographs that have focused on specific national histories, Britain in particular, or in phases of Gothic filmmaking, such as the Female Gothics of the 1940s' (4). *Gothic Cinema*, by contrast, is much broader and more ambitious in scope, placing a dizzying range of examples in historical, cultural and filmic context. Aldana Reyes attends refreshingly to 'cycles and periods of intense activity over auteurs or case studies' (28); this breadth of focus is one of the great pleasures of the study, which takes in classics such as *Nosferatu* (1922), *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) and *Black Sunday* (1960), but also finds room to explore more obscure more dusty corners, including the neglected dark house films of Boris Karloff's midcareer, *The Strange Door* (1951) and *The Black Castle* (1952), and the neo-Victorian B-movie, *The Blood Beast Terror* (1968), starring Gothic horror stalwart Peter Cushing and featuring a monstrous were-moth.

In the book's substantial and frequently provocative Introduction, Aldana Reyes effectively puts the case for Gothic cinema as a distinctive mode in its own right. Moving beyond the common understanding of Gothic film as a sub-section of the more culturally-influential horror genre, Aldana Reyes does not over-simplify the complex relationship between Gothicism and the horrific. He notes, however, that horror 'is a genre premised on emotion' which travels across different time periods and settings (25), whereas Gothic cinema can be more easily 'fenced in aesthetically' (25), defined as it is in more focused fashion by 'pervasive' 'images, themes and effects' (17) and its distinctive mise-en-scène and settings. Aldana Reyes's theorisation of Gothic as a filmic mode also seeks to distance it from a straightforward, one-to-one association with Gothic literary classics. As *Gothic Cinema* rightly claims, 'adaptations are crucial to any discussion' of the genre (12), but should be treated as 'palimpsestic' works 'beyond direct allusion, often stitched together from the visual remnants of previous films' (13).

This sophisticated grasp of the highly adaptive, transformative nature of screen Gothic informs the central sections of Aldana Reyes's comprehensive genealogy of the genre. The approach throughout is a chronological, cultural-historical one, which 'centres on the particular industry changes and market mores that have fashioned specific series or types of Gothic films' (26). Each chapter of *Gothic Cinema* explores a decade or two of the genre's development, beginning with the pre-history of Gothic film in Chapter 1, 'Transitional Origins'. Focusing on the first narrative films, Aldana Reyes discusses féeries and literary adaptations of Gothic novels such as J. Searle Dawley's *Frankenstein* (1910). This phase of Gothic cinema's development is shown to be an accidental and interstitial affair; as Aldana Reyes concludes, 'this period did not produce anything remotely close to a self-avowed Gothic strand of cinema' (61). Chapter 2, 'Monstrous Shadows', moves on to consider the influence of German expressionism on the Gothic tradition. Here, Aldana Reyes covers some of the usual suspects, including *Nosferatu* and *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920), but also touches upon German expressionism's less familiar strain of portmanteau anthology films. Again, the era of expressionism may be said to pre-date the Gothic cinema proper, but nonetheless its 'mapping out of repressed desires and altered psychologies onto the settings themselves' (88) was influential for what would follow.

Aldana Reyes really begins to hit his stride with the middle sections of *Gothic Cinema*. Chapter 3, 'Franchise Gothic', delves into the foundational Universal films of the 1930s which created a 'blueprint for the Gothic in cinema' (99). Aldana Reyes argues cogently that films such as *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), and the many sequels which followed, 'would become as significant, if not more so, than the literary sources that inspired them' (100) for our understanding of the genre's history. Chapter 4, 'The Explained Supernatural', surveys two parallel sub-strands of screen Gothic, the old dark house mystery and the female Gothic film of the 1940s, which allowed viewers to 'indulge in the spectacle of the uncanny' while returning ultimately to the safety of 'the rational world' of domesticity (188).

Gothic Cinema's fifth, sixth and seventh chapters bring the narrative up to the present day. Chapter 5, 'Gothic in Technicolour', which opens with some effective paratextual analysis of the opening credits for Hammer's *Dracula* (1958), turns to the flourishing of Gothic horror in a new age of colour photography. This highpoint of Gothic film may have been spearheaded by the famous Hammer productions of the late 1950s and 1960s, but, as

Aldana Reyes explains, countless imitators and competitors soon followed, pumped out by studios such as Amicus and Tigon. Chapter 6, on 'Exploitation Gothic', shows how the colour Gothic of England and America spilled over into the continental, exploitation Gothics of Italy and Spain from the 1960s and 1970s, which appeared at a moment when transnational productions with mixed casts became the norm. The chief contribution of this 'varied corpus' (189) of films is, according to Aldana Reyes, their 'amplification and exploitation of sensuality and violence' (188). The closing chapter, 'Late Dispersions', traces the marked retreat of the Gothic tradition in the 1980s, before noting its return, in adapted form, since the 1990s; in this most recent period, Aldana Reyes argues, the Gothic becomes preoccupied with 'the surface' (224), and 'Gothic aesthetics mingle with other less threatening elements' (227) in examples such as the oeuvre of Tim Burton and films aimed at a younger audience like *Monster House* (2006) and *Coraline* (2009).

As even this short summary should show, *Gothic Cinema* covers a tremendous amount of cultural terrain, and Aldana Reyes is engaging and well-informed throughout. While this is mainly a rigorously-researched, historical account of the genre's development, there are also enjoyable moments of more pointed critical commentary, such as its contextual reading of the increasingly underwhelming, rather worn-out, nature of recent *Dracula, Frankenstein* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* adaptations. Another welcome feature of this volume is the extremely thorough set of Filmographies that accompany each chapter; these will direct students to the most important examples of Gothic film while also alerting more experienced scholars to intriguing, hidden gems. *Gothic Cinema*, then, provides an authoritative and defining history of the mode, and is sure to become an essential, affordable addition to module reading lists and a well-thumbed tome on scholars' bookshelves.