



LUCIANO CURRERI E MICHEL DELVILLE, *IL GRANDE 'INCUBO CHE MI SON SCELTO.'* *PROVE DI AVVICINAMENTO* *A PROFONDO ROSSO (1975–2015)*

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Il grande 'Incubo che mi son scelto' is a collection of essays written in three different languages by a group of international scholars to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of *Profondo Rosso*, the cult movie by Dario Argento. The book contributes to the canonization of an Italian classic long neglected by those critics who still consider horror movies a low-rated subgenre, comparable to B-movies.

Written in the informal and conversational style typical of scholars never afraid to be Argento's fans, this volume explores the innovative aspects of a thriller whose visual and sonic impact remains quite extraordinary. Daniele Comberiati recalls its generative role in establishing the new Italian thriller style that emerged in the form of fiction and comics in the 1990s. However, most contributors interestingly situate their arguments at the intersection of the American and the Italian cultures, in a time in which Tarantino's adaptation of Sergio Leone's spaghetti western has highlighted the crosscurrent dynamics that relate the Hollywood classics to their Italian remakes. A similar transnational concern has also inspired the recent recovery of Dario Argento's horror movies in both Canada and the US.

Keeping this dialogue going, the two editors of *Il grande 'Incubo che mi son scelto'* (the Belgian-based Luciano Curreri and Michel Delville) offer a convincing reassessment of Argento's memorable movie within a popular genre that has a long tradition in America. Furthermore, *Profondo Rosso* can indeed claim an important literary genealogy aptly reconstructed by Michel Delville, given

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Argento's declared passion for Edgar Allan Poe, the master of horror, and his sensational erotization of the female corpse, as well as for the literary genius of H. P. Lovecraft, who transformed the nineteenth-century Gothic tales into pre-Freudian narratives of disturbed personalities. Starting from this background, Michel Delville considers the movie a hyperbolic response to *Psycho*, Hitchcock's most famous thriller.

Along more autobiographical lines, Curreri historically situates *Profondo Rosso* in the mid-1970s, recalling his first appreciation of *Profondo Rosso* in the cultural context that developed a new camp and kitsch sensibility due to the wide circulation of B-movies, and the diffused sentiment of excess and provocation aroused by the political turbulence that followed the events of 1968. The modernization of the Italian society produced by those rebellious years was also associated with a revolutionary rhetoric paralleled by political violence that, according to Delville, is visually displayed in Argento's slaughters, with their gallons of blood and severed body parts that, in this historical light, may be less gratuitous and grand-guignolesque than they seem.

The attention of the feminist, gay, and student movements to marginal subjectivities and to a social perception of "otherness" in the 1970s was also one of Argento's thematic concerns. According to Marco Giori, even though in that subversive era the Italian imagination was still very heterosexual, the Roman director did not hesitate to dramatize the unexplored torments of homosexual characters as uncanny. Léopold Dubois stresses the centrality of the theme of crossdressing since *Profondo Rosso*, long before *Dressed to Kill* by Brian DePalma, features a dénouement culminating in a transgender masquerade that, by means of a skillful mirroring reflection, reveals in a few, breathless instants, the identity of the assassin in male attire. In representing the *unheimlich*, Argento's movie conveys all the transgressions and repressed turbulences that animated that decade, illuminating a crowd of ill-adjusted maniacs, neurotics, and mentally deranged types, badly damaged by domestic dysfunctions and family traumas. After all, the 1970s was the time in which the Basaglia law was approved, asylums became less-segregating institutions, and mental disease stopped being a social taboo. In his radically lurid style, Argento

records on screen the sudden irruption of intemperance and psychopathologies in the quotidian reality and provides a compelling portrayal of home violence.

In particular, Alexandra Heller-Nicholas and Craig Martin insist on the importance of the representation of children in Argento's movie, studying it in response to William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* and Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*. *Profondo Rosso* indeed features the innocent witness of a domestic murder, candidly depicting all the distress and vexation in a series of juvenile drawings that include the terrifying image of an assassination experienced in early childhood—pictures, which the murderer's son paints in the attempt to protect his mother from the charge of that patent crime.

One of the central themes in *Profondo Rosso* is indeed the Oedipal obsession that the Roman director adopted to recreate the psychotic model of the murderer established by Alfred Hitchcock in *Psycho*. In its violent irruption of frenzy in a defamiliarized domesticity, which Mark Duffett reads as an overt homage of Argento to Antonioni's *Blow-Up*, *Profondo Rosso* becomes a scary descent into the unconscious that stylistically radicalizes Hitchcock's penetrating exploration of psychopathologies and ill-repressed violence. Argento depicts these psychopathologies and the violence in a more visceral fashion through his graphic treatment of domestic wounds and disorderly conduct. In this respect, the homicidal mania that lurks in the twisted personality of Norman Bates in *Psycho* spectacularly erupts in a more sensational and chaotic form in Argento's movie, whose method notably followed Ingmar Bergman's in giving vent to his nightmares and personal obsessions. In *Il grande 'Incubo che mi son scelto'*, Duffett argues that the "gore and splatter" style that became a distinctive cinematographic feature in the 1980s was indeed anticipated by Argento's horror movies, which expressed and liberated all the subversive energy of a rebellious decade that aimed to break the rational order and question the given ethos, and which found expression in the relentless brutality of Argento's and Mario Bava's special effects. .

The psychopathological implications of Argento's movies are also conveyed by the chromatic connotations of the very title

of *Profondo Rosso* (*Deep Red*), which actually refers to the red-blood intensity of a dark journey into a political unconscious that, in Argento's radical style, is conveyed in a destructive escalation of fright scenes.

Another relevant aspect raised in this long-due recovery of this Italian horror classic is the impact of the innovative soundtrack by the Goblins that succeeds in boosting the pathological climate. In *Profondo Rosso* Peter Hutchings juxtaposes their musical performance with jazz music embodied by Marc, the character who arrives in Turin to teach this musical genre: a genre which, as the movie's script makes clear, was historically inaugurated in warehouses, and is quite alien to the miraculous mixture of electronic and pop sounds achieved by the Italian band.

A final bibliography on this remarkable cult movie would have been a useful complement to Curreri's and Delville's generous initiative.