
KITCHEN SINK CREEPS

WEEK 6.

Public Information Films (PIF) and the Central Office of Information (COI)

- The Central Office of Information (COI) was essentially the government's communication and marketing agency.
- Public Information Films (PIF) are a series of government-commissioned short films, shown during television advertising breaks in the United Kingdom.

The Golden Age of Public Information Films (1969-1979)

- Many of the PIFs from this era are particularly memorable because of the use of the 'New Realism' – on location shooting, regional accents etc.
- Censorship for film and TV was also relaxed in this era
- Added to this, PFI films were largely exempt from classification

“With the relaxation of censorship came a lot more rule-breaking on television. But as far as the PIF director was concerned, he wasn't breaking the rules. Because there were no rules. Anything went.”

Scarred For Life: Volume One

Apaches (1977)

- Directed by John Mackenzie
- Written by Neville Smith
- Produced by John Arnold and Leon Clore
- Cinematography by Phil Meheux
- Edited by Barney Greenwood

The Plot

- Six children are playing on a farm
- There 'innocent' games lead to each of them bar one, dying in a horrific accident

The Deaths

- Run over by a tractor
- Drowning in a slurry pit
- Chemical poisoning
- Crushed by a falling gate
- Tractor falls into a ditch

The 70s: A Weird Time for British Cinema

- The late sixties and early seventies saw the release of a seemingly endless run of successful and not so successful distinctly British horror efforts. Slightly eccentric and occasionally totally barmy titles such as *The Abominable Doctor Phibes* (1971), *The Asphyx* (1973), *The Sorcerers* (1967), *Psychomania* (1973) and *The Wicker Man* (1973) fed into the collective nightmares of post war, pre-Thatcher Gen Xers, becoming regular staples of late night telly.

The 70s: A Weird Time for British Cinema CONT...

- Though the likes of Hammer and Amicus had established themselves as the two most recognisable houses of horror, the latter with its anthology tales of terror and the former with its brand of technicolour gore, other studios and filmmakers were also adept when it came to early 70s British chills.
- The beginning of the decade was awash with low budget, home-grown scares.
- To many aficionados, it's an era of gritty kitchen sink nightmares, where Brit-based thespians were constantly at play in a world of psychopaths and screaming female victims.
- Movies like Robert Fuest's *And Soon the Darkness* (1970), or Sidney Hayer's exploitation pic *Revenge* (1971) all eschewed the more traditional supernatural approach, instead focussing on the psychological thriller and the murky domain of the serial killer.
- Hammer, who by then was struggling when met with bigger budget American horrors like *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), also tried flexing its muscles on the deranged killer circuit.
- Their *Peeping Tom* (1960) inspired efforts like *Straight on Till Morning* (1972) and *Demons of the Mind* (1972) were as unsettling as they were unappreciated.
- There was something about that time, about the movies that crawled out from under the closing door of the sixties that seemed to sum up the best and worst of this rainy little island.
- These were horrors that played out like salacious News of the World headlines
- They were scored by tinkling, off-kilter xylophones, murderous trumpet stabs and the sound of lonely Foley footsteps.
- Populated by character actors like Susan George, Ralph Bates and Shane Bryant these little-praised oddities seemed to exist between the psychedelic and the ordinary, a woozy, shadowy place of peeling wallpaper hell.
- This was a claustrophobic world where go-go boot wearing miniskirts might get dragged into an alley at a moment's notice to have their throats slit or be strangled by their American tan tights.
- Their fates dealt out by mother-fixated sex maniacs and dead-eyed kinky killers.

Pete Walker

- Began his working life as a stand-up comic (he was son of musical comedy performer Syd Walker)
- Went on to appear in several movies as a bit player
- He began to make short 'glamour' films before graduating to full blown pornographic features in the late 60s

The House of Whiplash (1974)

- Directed by Pete Walker
- Written by David McGillivray
- Story by Pete Walker
- Produced by Pete Walker
- Cinematography by Peter Jessop
- Edited by John Black
- Music by Stanley Myers

Martin (1977)

- Directed by George A Romero
- Produced by George A Romero and Richard Rubenstein
- Written by George A Romero
- Cinematography by Michael Gornick
- Edited by George A Romero
- Music by Donald Rubenstein

***Martin* (1977) CONT...**

“Martin is designed to show that all those supernatural monsters that are part of our literary tradition are, in essence, expurgations of ourselves. They are beasts we've created in order to exorcise the monster from within us... I tried to show in Martin that you can't just slice off this evil part of ourselves and throw it away. It's a permanent part of us, and we'd better try and understand it.”

George A Romero

- The production was very low budget – Romero cast mainly friends and family members as characters
- The film has an intense grittiness, often it more resembles *Mean Streets* (1973) by Martin Scorsese
- Though a low budget production, Romero utilizes his skills to present us with an interesting film of some technical merit
- Though a horror movie, the tone, locations and performances within the film present something much closer to social realism than other genre films
- However, Romero's interesting use of camera angles and lighting (both created and natural) also offer us something which resembles German Expressionism and Film Noir
- Romero had wanted to make the whole film in black and white but was made mostly using colour stock after a dispute with fellow producer Richard Rubenstein
- Apparently, a full length black and white version exists but has never been released
- There is also an Italian (re-edited) version called *Wampyr*, replete with Goblin soundtrack
- The radio interviews on the show appear to be making a satirical stab at our obsession with celebrity/fame and the exploitative nature of the media and its 'if it bleeds it leads' mentality
- The film also seems to question our unhealthy obsession with the 'serial killer' – Ted Bundy, Ed Gein, Jeffrey Dahmer have all gone on to be household names – hundreds of books, films and TV shows have been made and will continue to be made
- The downbeat, tragic twist ending chimes into the ironic climax of his earlier film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)
- It plays on themes which Romero would return to again and again – the fear of not 'monsters' but the actions of our fellow human beings
- If *Blacula* sought to use the vampire as a black wish-fulfilment revenge trope, the low-budget George Romero flick *Martin* (1976) provided us with a blue-collar, kitchen sink killer who would expose the fiscal inequalities at large in the supposed land of the free.
- Though it is always in doubt whether *Martin*, is an actual vampire, with his memories possibly playing out like bloody delusions, what is not in doubt is Romero's onscreen criticism of his home country.
- Shot in Pittsburgh, the working-class experience is writ large upon the screen, with its industrial landscape, poverty and failing infrastructure.
- Even the Catholic church, presented here as a crumbling and ineffective relic, is mocked mercilessly.
- But just as *Blacula* had sought to get even, *Martin* too symbolically seeks to lay waste to his more prosperous fellow Americans.
- Choosing to find his victims in the suburbs, *Martin* even uses the trappings of their privileged lifestyles as weapons against them.
- The only way he gets access to their homes is because he poses as a delivery boy – a service, that less wealthy citizens are denied.
- Not only this but their huge houses and possessions – built far away from the realities of the more down at heel, become no less than prisons of their own making, allowing *Martin* the space and time to carry out his violent acts undisturbed.