

Transnationalism and Genre Hybridity in New British Horror Cinema

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The focus of Lindsey Decker's monograph is the relationship between three elements – transnationalism, genre hybridity, and middlebrow British film culture – examined through the prism of selected British horror films from the early 21st Century (the scope of the monograph covering examples between 2002 and 2013). She brings the first two elements together as one term to illustrate the interactions between both different national screen cultures and industries, and between the genre tropes and conventions particular to each nation, and how each sets of interactions interacts with each other. While both transnationalism and genre hybridity have seen blossoming corpuses of scholarship over the past 20 or so years, their relationship to each other has received far less attention and is still relatively unexplored.

Bringing these two vast areas of existing and potential scholarship together requires a robust focus to anchor discussion, and the focus Decker has chosen is British horror cinema of the early 21st Century. She is clear in her reasons for using this discrete set of texts: British horror represents a confluence of the horror genre, one marked arguably more than any other by generic hybridity, and British cinema, a notional framework that continues to be

contentious. As such, it is a point of convergence where transnational genre hybridity is especially common. The focus on early 21st Century British horror draws these two elements into contact with the third: middlebrow British film culture, which Decker defines as that which emphasises improvement through cultural advancement and elevates the ‘artier’ end of commercial cinema alongside art-house.

Decker argues that the early 21st Century is a time of transition with regards to the three prominent discourses within British middlebrow film culture: the denigration of horror as a reputable genre, except in offering opportunities to up-and-coming auteur directors; the binary discussion as to whether the British film industry is either doomed or saved; and the polemic against a perceived creeping and unwelcome Americanisation into the British film industry.

The opening chapter – “‘The bastard child of mainstream cinema’: Middlebrow British film culture, transnationalism and horror’ – maps the emergence and development of these three discourses in middlebrow British film culture in the nineties and noughties. Decker contends that in challenging these discourses, horror filmmakers of the early 21st Century embraced transnational generic hybridity, leading to a renaissance in British horror cinema. It is a tightly focused examination of the cultural context that, not only provides an invaluable context to how transnational genre hybridity was important to (and widely discussed within) middlebrow British film culture during the period, but also gives a much-needed account of British horror cinema that connects between its golden age and renaissance, two periods that have drawn the focus of scholarship.

The following three chapters address Decker’s definition of ‘transnationalism’, and argue how, and to what ends, the key texts use transnational genre hybridity to negotiate their relationship to these discourses, hybridise the narrative and formal tropes of foreign genres

with those of traditional/emergent British genres, and culturally legitimise the horror genre within British national cinema. Decker's approach explores three definitions of 'transnationalism': how generic tropes draw across national cinemas; how films can appropriate and thoroughly change generic tropes; and how generic tropes are taken beyond the national framework to the global or regional.

Decker uses the chapters, and the key texts they focus on, to propose a chronological development in how filmmakers used transnational genre hybridity in their films to challenge the prevalent discourses of middlebrow British film culture, moving from the employment of tropes across national film cultures and industries, to situating these tropes beyond national cultures and into a global tradition.

Chapter two – 'The golden age of British cinema is undead: British zombies and the social realist impulse' – examines the first of these definitions of transnationalism: how films can be situated across national cinemas. Decker focuses upon two films: *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002) and *Shaun of the Dead* (Edgar Wright, 2004) to examine the cross-pollination of tropes from George A. Romero's seminal zombie trilogy (*Night of the Living Dead*, 1968; *Dawn of the Dead*, 1978; *Day of the Dead*, 1985), heritage drama, Second World War drama, as well as British comedy forms including Ealing and Monty Python. Decker illustrates how transnational genre hybridity allows for both film industries – that borrowing and that being borrowed from – can be commented upon. In doing so, she demonstrates how the anti-Americanisation discourse of middlebrow film culture is explored and mediated through these films.

Chapter three – 'Hybrid hoodie horrors: Genre localisation and Britain's moral panic' – explores the emergence of the hoodie horror cycle, a grouping of texts also explored by Johnny Walker in chapter five of *Contemporary British Horror Cinema* (2016). Where

Walker's approach is a close textual analysis to illuminate the social context of the environment in which they were made, Decker considers how foreign genres were taken and thoroughly changed into an emergent domestic film cycle. In particular, she addresses the reworking of tropes from seventies US backwoods horror (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Tobe Hooper, 1974; *The Hills Have Eyes*, Wes Craven, 1977) and cult action films (*Assault on Precinct 13*, John Carpenter, 1976; *The Warriors*, Walter Hill, 1979) in *Eden Lake* (James Watkins, 2008) and *Attack the Block* (Joe Cornish, 2011). Decker examines how the use of tropes from these US genre films enable the British films to participate in, and potentially critique, the moral panic over youth hoodie culture in the UK at the time.

Chapter four – “‘A famous corpse’: resurrecting Hammer’s transnational appeal’ – turns our attention to the revival of Hammer Studio’s in the early 21st Century, and *The Woman in Black* (James Watkins, 2012) moved beyond national cinema and into a global framework. Decker compellingly argues how the use of tropes from foreign film cultures and industries – in particular, Japanese horror, which was at the time experiencing an explosion of popularity in Western markets – emphasised the film’s global appeal and contributed towards its international success.

In the conclusion – ‘British horror’s perpetual “dying light”’ – Decker offers a consideration of ‘art-house/horror’ hybrids, something she suggests is a natural extension of British horror’s move beyond the national and towards the global. She does this through an examination of two films from 2013, *A Field in England* (Ben Wheatley) and *Under the Skin* (Jonathan Glazer). In doing so Decker, illustrates how – at what she has described as the end of British horror’s formal employment of transnational genre hybridity – British horror played a significant role in the saved/doomed discourse as well as in the persistence of auteurism.

Written overtly for the non-British, transnational scholar, this is clearly and compellingly written. Decker's monograph is a valuable addition to the growing field of material contextualising the horror genre within the Russian dolls of British cinema and global cinema, as well as offering a fresh approach to the British horror renaissance of the noughties. Her work extends the existing scholarship by Johnny Walker, Linnie Blake and others, to evidence the impact made by transnational genre hybridity, and to add crucial linking chains between British horror cinema today and its 'golden age' heritage.