

‘Unsettling the men’: the representation of transgressive female desire in

***Daughter of Darkness* (Lance Comfort, 1948)**

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The British film *Daughter of Darkness* (1948) is remarkable in the way it depicts its female protagonist. Not only is she presented as a psychologically complex character who is both a serial killer and a victim of her own dark desires, but her unbridled sexuality is expressed in a surprisingly forthright manner. In a break with the traditions of 1940s British Gothic melodrama films, she is neither an innocent young girl used by powerful men, in the manner of Caroline (Jean Simmons) in *Uncle Silas* (1947), nor is she a villainous woman who, in the pursuit of pleasure and comfort, scandalises the conventions of the period, as Barbara (Margaret Lockwood) does in *The Wicked Lady* (1945). With the added immediacy of a contemporary time-frame, *Daughter of Darkness* presents an exploration of the repression and desire of its lead character with recourse to the modes of Gothic melodrama and Gothic horror.

‘Melodrama’ and ‘Gothic’ both evade clear definition as cinematic terms owing to their varied evolution through literary and theatrical traditions. As a theatrical form, melodrama is characterised by ‘a structure based on moral polarities, an appeal to excitement and the emotions’ (Barefoot 1994: 95). In cinema, the wider usage of the term has distilled primarily into a description of forms that prioritise feelings and emotion, typically in films aimed at a female audience, with female protagonists and concerns (Gledhill 1987: 33). When considering the problem of defining the Gothic, David Punter notes that, in literature, elements of a Gothic style emerge in a range of literary traditions (1980: 403). In film, Heidi Kaye similarly finds that Gothic elements have both ‘crept into filmic genres’ and ‘spawned a brood of side genres’ that embrace ‘anything dealing with the supernatural or nightmarish fears’ (2012: 180). Broadly, scholars agree that the Gothic in film is characterised by a *mise-en-scène* ‘based around archetypal settings and characters, familiar visual signifiers and narrative codes’ (Carver 2013: 237). Drawing on the iconography established in Gothic fiction of the 18th and 19th centuries, these encompass ‘dank crypts, rugged landscapes and forbidding castles populated by persecuted heroines, satanic villains, madmen, fatal women,

vampires, doppelgängers and werewolves' (Rigby 2015: 13). Characters tend to be haunted by secrets, and tension may arise from a play between competing rational and irrational explanations of narrative events (Hogle 2002: 2; Carver 2013: 237). A further distinction exists between Gothic and horror, although there is much overlap between the two. Gothic is essentially a mode of suggestion, of potentially irrational fear, whereas horror depicts onscreen what is feared, makes it explicit and renders our fear of it rational (Kavka 2002: 226–27; Van Elferen 2012: 36). With their historical antecedents in literary and theatrical forms, both melodrama and the Gothic may be understood in cinema as cultural styles or modes not limited to specific generic categories.

In this article, I will examine how *Daughter of Darkness* combines elements drawn from both Gothic melodrama and Gothic horror modes to paint a picture of transgressive female sexuality and to complicate the straightforward categorisation of the film's protagonist. Through a close textual analysis of the film's narrative elements, its cinematography, and its musical score, I will explore how the film draws together diverse elements to create its unsettling effects. In particular, I will demonstrate how these elements work to draw the film's eponymous anti-heroine away from the conventions of female-centred Gothic melodrama and towards Gothic horror.

The hybrid nature of *Daughter of Darkness* is evident in its narrative. The film's plot suggests Gothic melodrama in its focus on the disturbed servant girl Emmy Baudine (Siobhán McKenna) while its darker events draw in the trappings of Gothic horror. Emmy is driven to murder the men she seduces and then, in order to restore her equilibrium, she plays the church organ in the dead of night. She is ostracised by the women in her village in Ireland, who complain to the priest that she is peculiar and that she unsettles the men. After a travelling carnival boxer, Dan (Maxwell Reed), tries to seduce her, Emmy scars his face with her nails. The priest bows to local pressure to send Emmy away and arranges a job for her on a farm in Yorkshire. Here she is popular with the men although her employer Bess (Anne Crawford) instinctively mistrusts her. When the carnival arrives in Yorkshire, Dan pursues her again and becomes her first victim. When the murders continue, Bess becomes increasingly suspicious of Emmy and her nocturnal activities. Emmy seduces and kills two further men before she is killed violently by Dan's abandoned Alsatian dog, who has been stalking the moors. Although the denouement brings poetic justice, it does not offer an

uncomplicated case of villainy punished, as the film endows Emmy with an affecting sense of human frailty, and of being a victim herself.

Siobhán McKenna's performance resists melodramatic excess and consequently she imbues her character with a complex psychology that inspires sympathy. *Daughter of Darkness* was McKenna's first principal role and only her second film, after a brief appearance in the adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's novel *Hungry Hill* (1947). Primarily a respected stage actress, she went on to appear in several more films, notably as the Virgin Mary in the biblical epic *King of Kings* (1961), and as Anna in *Doctor Zhivago* (1965). Her casting in *Daughter of Darkness* was facilitated in screenwriter Max Catto's adaptation of his own successful 1938 play, *They Walk Alone*, by a change in Emmy's origin from Cornwall to Ireland. This alteration heightens the sense of Emmy as an outsider, distanced from her English employers both by her nationality and by her implied Catholicism. McKenna's detailed and nuanced performance contributes to the believability of Emmy as a character and promotes sympathy for her troubled existence. The actress brings a brooding intensity to her portrayal which renders Emmy as much a victim of her dark desires and darker actions as her hapless suitors. 'She certainly can act' was the verdict of the *Monthly Film Bulletin* reviewer in 1948, and the film's pressbook provides a range of similarly positive reviews for McKenna's contribution, which is clearly regarded as a strong selling point for the film. McKenna's performance is in a completely different register to the brisk energy of the wicked women in the period Gothic melodramas from Gainsborough who, in contrast, seems to take such pleasure in their amoral behaviour, at a safe remove from the contemporary frame. The tone and subtlety of McKenna's performance in *Daughter of Darkness* sets the film apart from the melodramas of the time.

As the film moves away from Gothic melodrama, it moves towards Gothic horror. Its titles appear over a sequence of highly stylised pencil drawings in which Brian MacFarlane finds a 'visual promise of Gothic excess' (1999: 84). This succession of images previews the darker aspects of the film, and it maintains its focus on Emmy's experience. It begins with dramatic cloudscapes streaking night skies, progressively closer views of a church with gravestone crosses rising on the horizon alongside silhouetted leafless trees, then the image of Emmy behind McKenna's credit with her face covered by curls of hair against a swirling seascape. Next, a sharply canted image of skeletal hands at an organ keyboard, the head of a dog, carnival lights and tents, then a swirling vortex of gravestone crosses, hands, a face and an

eye. These graphic images engage with the ‘distinct visual codes’ that for Kavka typify the Gothic film, notably the ‘dark cemetery dotted with crosses and gnarled, bare branches’ (2002: 210). The images also foreshadow the static frames that were a recurring feature in the titles of Hammer films, each depicting an isolated hilltop castle set in a rugged landscape. These were often model or effects shots, although an early example for *The Brides of Dracula* (1960), which makes use of a painted scene with stylised dark clouds, spindly black branches in the foreground and a near monochrome colour palette, bears close comparison with the opening images of the earlier film. The title sequence in *Daughter of Darkness* is accompanied by pulsing orchestral music, in which agitated string figures are interrupted by the strike of a gong before the music grows increasingly jagged with percussive elements, pizzicato strings, and low brass, as though mirroring the disturbed state of Emmy’s mind. The music calms as choral voices accompany drawings of the columns and the arched stained-glass window of a church, and as the titles end and the scene opens on a church interior, the choral singing continues, which is now understood as diegetic. The images and the music of the title sequence evoke a Gothic atmosphere and establish the tone of what will follow. They offer a preview of the Gothic elements and motifs that will be developed in the narrative, as well as on the soundtrack and in the visual presentation of the film.

The Gothic atmosphere conjured in the title sequence is echoed in the chiaroscuro lighting of the director of photography Stanley Pavey. Pavey had worked his way up at Ealing Studios, and had assisted Douglas Slocombe with the lighting for their classic 1945 horror anthology *Dead of Night*. In the opening scenes of *Daughter of Darkness*, Pavey turns the church into a shadowy space with stark contrasts between light and dark areas of the screen. Not only is Father Corcoran (Liam Redmond) surrounded by religious symbols—crosses, carvings, and plaster statues—but these are lit in a way that makes them stand out within the image. As he sits at his desk, for example, the left third of the screen is dominated by an ornate carved cross placed in front of him, almost silhouetted against the pale wall behind, while on the right of the screen stands a figure of St. Christopher holding the infant Christ, whose fair hair and white clothing shine against the dark background. In the next shot he is filmed from below in a tighter framing. High on the wall behind him is a plaster statue of Christ with arms outstretched, placed at an angle and lit so that it casts a dark shadow against the pale wall which doubles the amount of space it occupies in the image. In this way, Father Corcoran is hemmed in by religious symbols. These symbols act as a visual metaphor for the religious righteousness, which is usurped by the women who order him to send Emmy away. They also

accentuate his impotence in the face of the moral propriety with which they justify their demands. A Catholic cross on the mantelpiece and a statue on a wall shelf are similarly magnified and thrown into relief by careful lighting. The framing and cinematography accentuate the presence of the abundant religious symbols, and contribute to a Gothic ambience by representing visually the oppressive nature of the constraints imposed by the Church.

The overbearing Gothic atmosphere of the church is compounded by the organ music which enters the soundtrack and is quickly associated with Emmy. Father Corcoran hears the ominous strains of the organ that increase in volume as, filmed from above, he makes his way through the empty church, now in near obscurity. A side light casts long shadows of the high pew ends and Father Corcoran's robed figure on the stone floor as he strides towards the organ loft. The image cuts to Emmy's hands at the organ keyboard, and the camera slowly moves up her gently swaying body to reveal her expression of complete absorption (Fig. 1). She leans back slightly, her head tilted to one side, and dark shadows fall over her face as she gazes straight ahead of her. For the female musician in melodrama films, Heather Laing has distinguished between what she terms 'conventional performance' and 'personal performance'. These two types of performance tend to be filmed differently. Conventional performances place an emphasis on the technical accomplishment of the female musician, with shots that illustrate her concentration on the instrument and the technical dexterity of her hands as they move across the keyboard. In personal performances, the camera moves to a closer framing of the woman's 'fixed, apparently unseeing stare into the middle distance', and in doing so may remove the instrument from the frame (2007: 106). This focuses attention on the emotional experience of the female musician. Emmy's playing is clearly conveyed as a personal performance, and the intensity of her engagement in the music hints at her psychological disturbance. Although she is not presented as a melodrama heroine, Emmy's apparent loss of herself while playing music connects her to such typical examples of personal performances as Phyllis Calvert in *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1944), whose split personality is prompted by musical stimuli, and Margaret Lockwood in *A Place of One's Own* (1945), who is the victim of a ghostly possession while at the keyboard. Like Emmy, both of these characters are particularly sensitive to music. However, Emmy's musicianship complicates the straightforward notions of female gentility and respectability that musical accomplishment often connotes in melodramas of this era. Although her playing is similarly framed to foreground her personal experience of it, Emmy is further separated from the

domestic piano-playing melodrama heroines by the significant religious associations and Gothic potential of her instrument—the organ.



Fig. 1: Emmy (Siobhán McKenna) at the organ keyboard in *Daughter of Darkness*

The association of the organ with the church amplifies the transgressive nature of Emmy's behaviour. As the sequence described above continues, Father Corcoran enters the organ loft and, clearly disapproving, asks Emmy what has got into her. 'I'm always like this when the organ plays', she replies, indicating her own detachment from her actions, as though someone else were playing the music. She becomes more distressed and intense and exclaims 'something terrible rises up in me and I can't breathe, I can't breathe!' Both MacFarlane (1999: 83) and Jonathan Rigby (2015: 38) note that this line is a remarkably frank acknowledgement of female sexual desire for a film of this era. It is the more transgressive for being spoken to the priest, whose demeanour suggests he may be one of the men unsettled by her. Emmy's organ playing is not only replete with Freudian undertones, in that it satisfies a desire in her that the men she seduces fail to, but it also renders her actions doubly transgressive because of the instrument's association with the church. Emmy's use of the organ to calm herself after her murderous episodes is as sacrilegious as its use in Hammer's *Twins of Evil* (1971) to accompany a quasi-satanic rite. As in the later film, the organ brings to Emmy's behaviour a ritualistic quality, and suggests a blasphemous parody of a religious ceremony. For Emmy, the church represents both a repressive force that dictates a moral code she is unable to adhere to, and a restorative sanctuary in which she seeks absolution for her crimes. Her organ-playing ritual resembles a twisted confessional. As a musical signifier for the church, the organ represents the guardian of the moral codes which Emmy's episodes of

murderous nymphomania violate, and her use of the church organ to restore her equilibrium profanes its sacred association, and thus compounds the transgressive nature of her crimes.

Furthermore, Emmy is a rare example in film of a female organist whose playing is more than incidental to her character. While the organ itself is something of a cliché in horror film music (Donnelly 2005: 91; McEvoy 2013: 460), perhaps owing to the eerily Gothic ambience its sound can conjure,¹ Julie Brown (2010: 5) identifies the usual horror film organist as a ‘weird male loner’ figure with megalomaniac tendencies, typified by the title character in adaptations of Gaston Leroux’s *The Phantom of the Opera*. This convention is subverted in the main subject of Brown’s article, *Carnival of Souls* (1962), an independent American production which has similarities to *Daughter of Darkness* in that both feature young and attractive female organists. Both films additionally include organ music in the contrasting settings of the church and the fairground, an aspect highlighted in *Daughter of Darkness* by the repeated image of the carnival organ, with its carved and painted figures of scantily clad women, decorative features, and funnel-ended pipes garishly lit by bare lightbulbs. The significance of the organ, and its connection to Emmy, is confirmed when this image bookends the scenes of her at the fair with Dan in Ireland. The sequence begins with a montage of the couple enjoying the rides and attractions, and ends when Dan, having walked Emmy away to the seclusion of a neighbouring field, forces himself on her. After Emmy scratches his face, his confused cries fade into the music of the fairground organ, mingled with the sounds of the carnival, as the camera whip pans back to its image. When the fair arrives in Yorkshire, and Emmy encounters Dan again, the incident is recalled solely by the music of the organ on the soundtrack. *Daughter of Darkness* and *Carnival of Souls* differ in the way that organ music is used on their soundtracks. Whereas it is the only instrument in Gene Moore’s score for *Carnival of Souls*, in *Daughter of Darkness* the organ remains a purely diegetic presence, alongside a nondiegetic orchestral score composed by Clifton Parker.

The score for *Daughter of Darkness* had originally been commissioned from film composer William Alwyn, who was drawn to projects that enabled him to use his knowledge of Irish music. Ian Johnson notes that Alwyn had ‘passed on the contract’, along with one for a documentary film, to Clifton Parker (2005: 172). Parker, a prolific composer for theatre and film during the 1940s and 1950s, was most associated with the more masculine territory of thrillers, war films and adventure subjects. He provided scores for Walt Disney’s live-action

Treasure Island and the prisoner-of-war film *The Wooden Horse*, both in 1950. He also went on to work in Gothic horror with his music for Jacques Tourneur's 1957 film *Night of the Demon*, and the 1961 Hammer thriller *Taste of Fear*. It is significant that even when Parker works within the area of melodrama, for instance, in his scores for *When the Bough Breaks* (1947), a Gainsborough production concerning illegitimacy and adoption, and *Blanche Fury* (1948), a Technicolor Gothic melodrama in the Gainsborough mould, he does not use music in what might be termed a melodramatic mode, that is, music which acts as a barometer for the emotions of the main female character, that grants us a privileged access to her subjectivity or stands in for an excess of restrained emotion. In his score for *Daughter of Darkness*, Parker similarly resists using music in a way which might promote identification and empathy with the film's female protagonist. Audience sympathy may rest with the troubled Emmy, although the score does not encourage this response. The music does not enter the melodramatic mode, and instead Parker adopts musical techniques that are more associated with the horror film.

Music in the horror film frequently operates in particularly straightforward ways. K. J. Donnelly notes that horror film music is often based on a small number of stylistic devices (2005: 90). These include the use of slow and untuneful melodic lines in the lower ranges of instruments, the tension ostinato ('a loop of music that provides tension through cumulative effects'), and string tremolos ('the rapid alternation between two pitches'), which create a feeling of suspense (2005: 90–91). A further device 'central to the horror film score' is the stinger, a loud blast of music that also imparts a physical impact (2005: 93). The way these elements are exploited in *Daughter of Darkness* may be demonstrated in the sequence in which Emmy is pursued by the carnival boxer Dan. Urgent musical figures are repeated over low string tremolos as Emmy runs from the fairground, with the fading sound of Dan's tethered dog barking. The tempo of the music slows as she approaches and hides in a barn, which Dan reaches a moment later, their distance from the fairground confirmed by the now faint cries of the carnival crowds. Low chords accompany Emmy as she enters the barn and drops the wooden latch to close the door. The sound alerts Dan to her whereabouts and his steady approach is signalled by a renewed urgency in the repeated musical figure, now given on menacing low brass. The image cuts to the inside of the barn, where Emmy backs into the shadows, and the music ends with the creak of the door as Dan enters. Pavey's chiaroscuro lighting gives prominence to the facial scars Emmy has inflicted on Dan at their previous meeting. The only sound is the crunch of his footsteps on the ground, until Emmy gives away

her hiding place by disturbing a chicken. The low brass figure resumes as Dan steps purposefully towards her, its beats almost matching his steady movement. String tremolos join the mix, rising in pitch and intensity as a close-up of Emmy, her eyes in a pool of light, reveals her transfixed expression. The music reaches a climax and breaks off in a reverse sting to leave a moment's silence before Emmy's brow furrows and her scream delivers a final jolting stinger before the scene cuts back to the image and diegetic screams, noise, and music of the fairground. The use of sound in this sequence recalls the first fairground encounter between Dan and Emmy, described above, in which it is Dan's screams that dissolve into the noise of the fairground as, significantly, the image pans to a shot of the carnival organ. Both sequences paradoxically amplify the sound and impact of the screams, and the events which lead to them, by cutting to louder sounds that mask them. In the second sequence, music is used as a series of sonic effects that heighten the shocks and create suspense in tandem with Stanley Pavey's atmospheric cinematography. The careful spotting of the music and its alternation with silence increases the effect of both. This sequence illustrates how the combination of music, sound, and cinematography create an atmosphere of Gothic horror.

However, although its shadowy cinematography and use of sound and music tend to align the film with Gothic horror, the suggestion of Gothic melodrama remains in two key areas. The first of these is the film's narrative, which in many respects conforms to a melodramatic model. It mirrors specifically many of the narrative components identified by Sue Harper in the Gainsborough costume films of the 1940s, which

have a rich visual texture and evince a preoccupation with the sexual mores and lifestyle of the upper reaches of the landed classes; they all contain female protagonists (usually visually or diegetically coloured by 'gypsy-ness') who actively seek sexual pleasure and whom the plot ritually excises by the end. (1987: 167)

Although *Daughter of Darkness* is not set among the landed gentry, and Emmy is not marked by 'gypsy-ness', Jonathan Rigby notes that she is distanced from the other women at the farm by both her class (she is their servant) and her nationality (2015: 38). In addition, the suggestion of 'gypsy-ness' in the female characters in Gainsborough films frequently signals their freedom from the constraints of polite society, particularly in relation to sexual desire: an aspect which has from the beginning of the film highlighted Emmy's 'otherness'. Her

rampant sexuality is marked as not simply dangerous but fatal for her lovers and, in common with the Gainsborough heroines, Emmy is punished for her inability to live within the rules imposed by a patriarchal society. Together with its emotionally-heightened atmosphere, it is the emphasis on its female protagonists that most aligns the narrative of *Daughter of Darkness* with Gothic melodrama.

In addition to the shared narrative lines and focus on the female experience, the second factor that links the film with melodrama is the experience of two significant members of its personnel. Both the director, Lance Comfort, and the top-billed star, Anne Crawford, were associated with melodrama subjects at this time. Although Comfort had enjoyed earlier success with the melodramatic form in the more histrionic *Hatter's Castle* (1941), MacFarlane regards the six melodrama films Comfort made between 1945 and 1950 as his 'most sustained achievement' (1999: 66), and he praises the director's particular grasp of the 'melodrama of obsession' (1998: 132). As well as *Daughter of Darkness*, this group of films includes *Bedelia* (1946), the story of a woman who poisons her husbands for profit, with Margaret Lockwood in the wicked title role. In *Bedelia*, the part of the 'appropriate' woman, in contrast to Lockwood's unsuitable wife, is taken by Anne Crawford, who would subsequently play Bess Stanforth in *Daughter of Darkness*. Crawford, who receives top billing in the film and in its publicity material, would have been familiar to contemporary audiences from her roles in the Gainsborough melodramas *They Were Sisters* (1945) and *Caravan* (1946). Both the leading actress and the director of *Daughter of Darkness* were known for their work in melodrama films. Therefore, both the film's narrative focus on its female characters and the associations of its director and top billed actress are further aspects which align it with the earlier flamboyant Gainsborough Gothic melodrama films.

The film consistently brings together Gothic melodrama and Gothic horror by presenting its female-centred narrative in a way which creates a Gothic atmosphere. This combination of elements is illustrated in a series of four scenes in which Bess directly challenges Emmy. These sequences constitute the film's dramatic highlights. They signal melodrama in the way they prioritise the experience of the female characters and sideline the men, who are marked as ineffectual and incapable of dealing with the 'problem' of Emmy. Each confrontation gains in intensity as Bess becomes increasingly convinced that Emmy is behind the unexplained murders and the mysterious organ playing. The third confrontation exemplifies how the film's soundtrack and visual approach emphasise Gothic horror, as a closer analysis

will reveal. The sequence takes place on the staircase of the farmhouse at night, while outside a thunderstorm rages. String tremolos create a sense of tension and anticipation as Emmy returns from the church and Bess lies in wait for her at the top of the stairs. Filmed from above, ground level lighting casts long shadows that radiate outwards from the chairs around a large circular table and the distorted shadows of bannister spindles are thrown against the staircase wall. On the soundtrack, string tremolos quickly build in intensity as Emmy rushes up the stairs, only to break off in an abrupt reverse sting a moment before the image cuts to Bess, who, shot at a canted angle from Emmy's point-of-view below her, tells her sharply to 'Go down!' A crash of thunder, a staple effect in Gothic horror, sounds at the end of the line to lend it a fearsome authority. Bess descends steadily while Emmy backs away from her, and here the composition visually accentuates the unequal status of the two women as Bess towers over the serving girl. The thunder continues to underscore their exchange as it becomes more heated, and lightning briefly illuminates the background darkness. The framing of the women closes into a two-shot as Bess accuses Emmy of playing the organ, and when she grasps Emmy's arms and threatens to shake out of her the truth about 'this filthy thing', the image cuts to an extreme close-up of Bess, her face half in shadow. This is matched by an extreme close-up of Emmy, who tells Bess that she is hurting her, then an eerie calm comes over her as she threateningly tells her: 'I wish I could make you suffer for that'. The thunder that has intensified the scene has quietened to a gentle rumble, and now the soundtrack is filled with the howling of Dan's dog, in an aural foreshadowing of the fate that awaits Emmy. Although the narrative here echoes a familiar trope in the Gothic horror film, in that the one who realises the truth of the situation is then disbelieved by the other characters, this and the other scenes of confrontation between the two women align the film narratively with the Gothic melodramas of the time in their focus on the experience of the female characters. Equally, while the film's narrative may indicate Gothic melodrama, its cinematography and use of music and sound amplify its expression of Gothic horror.

The atmosphere of Gothic horror established in the images and music of the title sequence is systematically heightened as the film progresses, and its use of sound is a key factor in this mounting tension. This is illustrated in the depiction of Dan's unnamed dog² as an increasingly menacing presence on the film's soundtrack as well as on screen, and particularly in respect of the unsettling effect its constant proximity has on Emmy. The Alsatian dog is introduced on screen at the same time as his owner, sitting in the driver's compartment of the carnival lorry as Dan arrives in Emmy's village in Ireland. It is not until

half way through the film's running time that the dog is made to appear threatening by barking aggressively at Emmy, who is clearly intimidated by him. The dog's barking is heard as Emmy runs from the fair in Yorkshire, when Dan's pursuit of her ends in his murder. The dog retraces his owner's steps, discovers the body and alerts the farmer's wife with his whining and barking. When she approaches the body in the barn, the dog bares his teeth in a close-up shot that momentarily transforms his otherwise rather friendly demeanour. From this point, the dog is filmed so as to emphasise the threat he represents to Emmy, and, through the use of a similar iconography, he is aligned with the figure of the werewolf and of the wolf associated with the vampire in the Gothic horror film. When Emmy plays the organ at night the dog seems to be listening as he is shot from below, appearing wolf-like on the moors, his outline haloed in light, the vapour of his breath lit against the dark sky. Later, he slopes through the churchyard and his shadow falls across the gravestones as he stalks his victim. More significantly, the dog's barking, howling, and whining on the soundtrack renders him a constantly menacing aural presence when he is not on screen, and he is heard more often than he is seen. The film's pressbook reports that the editor Lito Carruthers and sound recordist John Mitchell had spent a day recording the hounds of the Berkeley Hunt in Chipperfield, Hertfordshire, who provide the howls and barks heard on the soundtrack. In Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, Jonathan Harker hears 'the howling of many wolves' and the Count tells him: 'Listen to them—the children of the night. What music they make!' (2003 [1897]: 25). The line is used verbatim in Tod Browning's 1931 film, where it draws attention to the film's soundtrack. In *Daughter of Darkness*, the dog's presence is initially established visually, and it is similarly emphasised in the dialogue. Emmy complains that the 'great dog [with] yellow eyes' has followed her over the moors, and that he never leaves her alone. She is clearly unnerved to be literally hounded by him. Following Dan's murder, the dog's proximity to the farm is confirmed at regular (approximately 5-minute) intervals on the soundtrack. In this way, his presence is reinforced aurally in a way that conveys the ominous and claustrophobic environment Emmy finds herself in.

The example of the dog demonstrates how the Gothic motifs introduced in the pencil drawings of the film's title sequence are emphasised on the soundtrack of the film. Equally in its visual presentation, much of the film seems to aspire to the look of the stylised drawings with their distorted perspectives and expressionistic shadows. The Gothic ambience evoked by the film's visual presentation is matched by its music, with the Gothic potential of the highly dramatic organ music bolstered by Clifton Parker's nondiegetic score. The composer's

resistance to music in a melodramatic mode and his use of stylistic devices typical of the horror film emphasise the film's atmosphere of Gothic horror.

Daughter of Darkness blends elements of Gothic melodrama and Gothic horror to produce an unusually powerful examination of transgressive female sexuality in a film whose forthright tone sets it apart from its British contemporaries. Robert Murphy (1989: 171) draws it into his discussion of a group of wartime and post-war films that reflect the growing interest in spiritualism and the supernatural, although as it lacks a supernatural dimension it sits uneasily in the company of such films as *Dead of Night* and *The Halfway House* (1944). In its narrative focus on the experience of the women, its presentation of complex female characters, and its evocation of an atmosphere of Gothic horror, it both looks back to the cycle of Gainsborough Gothic melodramas and forward to the Hammer successes of the following decades. As a Gothic heroine, the character of Emmy embodies this combination and she foreshadows some of the dangerous female characters brought to life in the Hammer films. In *The Gorgon* (1964), for example, Carla (Barbara Shelley) is unaware that she transforms into Megaera, the snake-haired gorgon, when the moon is full and turns anyone who sees her to stone and she is thus as much a victim as those who gaze at her. Similarly, Anna (Jacqueline Pearce) in *The Reptile* (1966) is the victim of a Malaysian curse that causes her to transform and administer a venomous and fatal bite. Like Carla and Anna, Emmy inspires audience sympathy in the first part of the film, in which she seems unjustly banished from her home by the matrons who are the town's self-appointed moral guardians. She acts in self-defence when she scars Dan's face with her nails and, until her final act of revenge, she is presented as disturbed and unbalanced rather than scheming. Emmy differs from the protagonists of *The Gorgon* and *The Reptile* in the sexual component of her murderous episodes and, in this respect, she is perhaps more closely aligned with Anna (Angharad Rees), the troubled daughter of Jack the Ripper in *Hands of the Ripper* (1971). When Anna is kissed she is possessed by her father's spirit and commits murder, although she has no recollection of the acts later. The female killers of Gothic horror are variously absolved of the intention to murder with their behaviour attributed to factors beyond their control. Emmy, though, is denied a backstory that might explain her psychological disturbance. Neither is she positioned, either historically or by recourse to mythology or folklore, at a comfortable distance from a contemporary frame. As a consequence, the character of Emmy is altogether more troubling as both the locus of audience sympathy and, ultimately, a vengeful serial murderess. By turns pitiable and chilling, Siobhán McKenna portrays Emmy as a tortured

woman with a complex psychological makeup. McKenna's performance demands to be taken seriously. It grounds the film and works to hold together its combination of Gothic melodrama and Gothic horror elements. Above all, it endows Emmy with an uncannily modern blend of vulnerability and volatility, while making her a Gothic heroine to be both pitied and feared.

¹ Although the organ is associated with horror film music, Randall D. Larson, in his assessment of music in Hammer films, notes that only three of the studio's horror films 'emphasise the traditional spookery of the church organ' (1996: 117).

² The dog on screen is unnamed, although Thorne, a six-year old Alsatian, is credited in the film's title sequence. According to the film's pressbook, Thorne had received an animal V.C. for his work finding casualties during the London blitz.

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