



Catholicism, Unification and Liminal Landscape in Italian Folk Horror Cinema

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THE RELATIVELY RECENTLY coined concept of folk horror most often refers to British and American cinema and, to a lesser extent, literature. In this chapter, I argue that the conceptual framework of folk horror can be fruitfully applied to Italian horror cinema, especially that of the 1970s. I examine Pupi Avati's *The House with the Laughing Windows* (1976)¹ as a case study to illustrate that Italy actually has a long tradition of folk horror.² Italian folk horror shares similar traits with its British and American counterparts, such as an insistence on archaic landscapes and isolated communities. Most importantly (especially in relation to Avati), Italian folk horror contests traditional sources of power – in particular the Catholic Church – in a decade of harsh political conflicts for the country.

National and Provincial: An Overview of Italian Folk Horror

Between the late 1950s and the 1980s, the horror genre flourished in the Italian film industry.³ Italian horror cinema is often studied through some

of its most renowned *maestri* (Mario Bava, Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci, etc.), but this approach risks isolating these figures and neglecting the wider framework of the industry in which they worked. Horror cinema in Italy took various forms – first and foremost, the gothic subgenre, which developed between 1957 and 1969, and, later, a series of distinct but interconnected subgenres dealing more or less explicitly with horror, including *giallo* (detective movies and thrillers), slasher, rape-revenge, zombie, exploitation and *cannibale* (movies focusing on cannibalism, often set in locations perceived as exotic by the audience). Italian horror cinema and its manifestations can be better understood if we employ the more ambiguous, yet more nuanced, concept of *filone*. This word, which in Italian means ‘mining vein’, as in ‘a vein of gold’, highlights the imitative and re-mediating processes in the industry; it suggests that Italian horror cinema is underpinned by a series of auteurs who, ‘digging’ independently but in the same ‘vein’, worked within a defined set of similar sources, models, tropes, narrative situations, themes and atmospheres. The movies of the gothic *filone* often share the same actors, for instance Barbara Steele (an *ante litteram* scream queen), and writers, most notably Ernesto Gastaldi.⁴

While the gothic tradition in Italian cinema has yet to be studied with the critical tools of folk horror, there is a significant group of Italian horror and *giallo* movies that do indeed feature the typical characteristics of this mode as outlined by Adam Scovell, including attention to the landscape, the portrayal of isolated communities and the representation of skewed belief systems.⁵ The Italian gothic’s insistence on foreign settings makes it difficult to find examples of markedly Italian folk horror created in the 1960s: while some of the movies produced in that decade contain elements of folk horror, none of them engage with specifically Italian landscapes and traditions. Giorgio Ferroni’s *Mill of the Stone Women* (1960), Antonio Margheriti’s *The Long Hair of Death* (1964), Luigi Bazzoni and Franco Rossellini’s *The Possessed* (1965) and Mario Bava’s *Kill, Baby, Kill* (1966) could be labelled folk horror due to the attention they pay to landscape and community, but they do not constitute strong examples. Ferroni, Margheriti and Bava set their movies in other European countries: the Netherlands, an unspecified German-speaking country and the Carpathian mountains, respectively. Despite depicting eerie landscapes and uncanny communities, these movies could hardly be considered ruminations on Italian traditions and territorial issues, unlike the movies made in the following decades. While it is not a gothic movie, Brunello Rondi’s *The Devil* (1963) is arguably the best example of a folk horror film

from the 1960s. A story of witchcraft and exorcism set in the profoundly underdeveloped and archaic Lucania region, *The Devil* makes great use of contemporary ethnographic knowledge, mixing a melodramatic plot (unreciprocated love, sexual obsession and a passionate homicide) with a reconstruction of the magic and Catholic rites of Southern Italy, which are portrayed in scenes, apparently for documentary interest, that are unnecessary to the plot.

Most Italian folk horror movies can be traced to the 1970s and 1980s. Besides Avati's *The House with the Laughing Windows*, a provisional list of these movies includes Lucio Fulci's *Don't Torture a Duckling* (1972), Armando Crispino's *The Dead Are Alive* (1972), Renato Polselli's *Black Magic Rites* (1973), Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977), Antonio Bido's *Watch Me When I Kill* (1977) and *The Bloodstained Shadow* (1978), Ugo Libertatore's *Damned in Venice* (1978), Joe D'Amato's *Beyond the Darkness* (1979) and Sergio Martino's *The Scorpion with Two Tails* (1982). After the 1980s, most production companies gradually abandoned the genre, and, in general, the number of horror productions in Italy in the 1990s and the 2000s cannot be compared with the horror movie production of the previous two decades. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions (Avati is among them), such as Michele Soavi's noteworthy *Cemetery Man* (1994) and Federico Greco and Roberto Leggio's mockumentary *Road to L.* (2005). The chronological range of these movies demonstrates that Italian folk horror has developed independently and is not an imitation of the British interpretation of the genre. In this context, it is worth noting that Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* has never been released in Italian cinemas. Italian folk horror, in short, explores and develops peculiar themes and traits that are connected to the specific historical and contemporary traumas of Italian culture and the Italian landscape.

The local setting of the vast majority of these movies is probably the most distinctive characteristic of Italian folk horror. From the late eighteenth century, Italian intellectuals and writers refused to see Italy as a potential location for supernatural tales and did not seem to consider the gothic a suitable form for Italian authors.⁶ It was, on the contrary, perceived as a style and genre that was specific to Northern Europe, in particular, Germany and Britain. Alessandro Manzoni, arguably the father of modern Italian literature, famously described the gothic as 'an unimaginable muddle of witches, spectres, systemic disorder, extravagant quests, and abuses of common sense'.⁷ Furthermore, when it came to adopting foreign models for his novels, he opted for a form of Romanticism completely

devoid of supernatural elements. The claim that the supernatural and the gothic do not belong in Italian literature, however, is not accurate, as there has actually been a consistent production of gothic texts in Italy throughout the centuries, especially popular forms such as short stories for magazines, pulp novels, comics and movies.⁸ Nevertheless, while foreign countries such as Germany and Britain were perceived as suitable locations for gothic tales, there has been a long-standing prejudice among intellectuals and artists against Italy being employed as a setting for this genre. On the contrary, Italy has traditionally been portrayed as the *Belpaese* – a sunny, joyful country filled with the vestiges of Classicism.⁹ Thus, when horror movies started to be produced in Italy, they were predominantly set in other countries. The horrifying adventures of Riccardo Freda's *The Vampires* (1957), for instance, which is considered to be the first Italian horror movie, take place in Paris.

Post-1966 cinema, however, began employing specific places in Italy as settings for horror movies. Instead of focusing on Italy's famous sites or most important cities, such as Milan or Rome, the settings of Italian folk horror are 'intentionally national . . . and deliberately provincial'¹⁰ in order to 'topographically and ethnographically enquire into national horrors', as Simone Venturini argues.¹¹ To mention a few examples: *Don't Torture a Duckling*, like Rondi's *The Devil*, is set in the archaic, underdeveloped Lucania region; *The Dead Are Alive* and *The Scorpion with Two Tails* are set in the Tuscan countryside amid the remnants of the Etruscan civilisation; *Watch Me When I Kill* takes place in Padua; *The Bloodstained Shadow* and *Damned in Venice* are set in decadent Venice; *Beyond the Darkness* is located in the mountains of Trentino; and *Cemetery Man* and *Road to L.*, like Avati's work, take place in forgotten provincial corners of the Po Valley.

These post-1960s films explore those parts of Italy that modernity left behind. Significantly, most Italian folk horror was produced after the 1950s and 1960s, decades in which Italy experienced unprecedented economic and technological development, with the result that underdeveloped and inaccessible parts of the country (in particular Southern Italy) became more connected and accessible to the rest of the population and underwent significant cultural and ecological changes. These new connections with previously marginalised parts of Italy were created as a consequence of the development of the motorway network and the popularity of automobiles, which also led to an increase in tourism. The new interest in forgotten corners of Italy is also evident in the diffusion of tourist guides

to the mysteries, legends and superstitions of Italy.¹² Some movies, likewise, contain archaic superstitions and beliefs, such as the *maciara* ('peasant witch') in *Don't Torture a Duckling*, as well as historical sites that are less famous and thus more mysterious than those of ancient Rome, such as the Etruscan tombs.

At the same time, the focus on lesser-known and pre-modern parts of Italy facilitates a reflection on the inequalities of the unification process. Formally (though incompletely) unified in 1861, Italy remained a profoundly divided country, both culturally (as it had been separated into several different states for centuries) and economically (as resources were mostly used to enhance the industrialisation of the great cities of Northern Italy). It was not until the economic boom following the Second World War almost a century later and the consequent development of national transport networks, as well as the improvement of the national school system and the creation of a national television network, that the cultural unification of the country was truly completed.

Another distinctive characteristic of Italian folk horror is its polemical attitude towards traditional institutions. Italian cinema often contains a perverted version of Catholicism (e.g. Fulci, Avati, Rondi), merging it with pre-modern beliefs, magic and occulture. This representation of Catholicism constitutes a polemical stance against the power of the Church in Italian politics and culture. The villains in these movies tend not to be marginalised individuals and communities but, rather, to belong to the ruling classes of the country – priests and the bourgeoisie, as well as artists and parents and sometimes members of secret societies. This attitude towards power reflects Italy's profound diffidence towards the deep state and the ruling class during the so-called 'years of lead' (the late 1960s to the early 1980s), two decades of socio-political turmoil during which many died at the hands of both far-right and far-left terrorists. During this period, hundreds of people were killed in political acts of violence (terrorist bombings, political assassinations, riots), which culminated in the kidnapping and killing of Italian prime minister Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades in 1978 and the Bologna railway station massacre by far-right terrorists in 1980, in which eighty-five people were killed. Most of the terrorist attacks were carried out by far-right extremists and it was long suspected that these groups were aided by the secret service in order to discourage left-wing forces and favour the Christian-Democracy party that ruled Italy from 1948 to 1992. Consequently, Italian folk horror tends to represent traditional institutions and especially the Catholic Church as corrupted and conniving.

Furthermore, it is important to note that these movies insist on a rural, pre-modern setting at a time when Italian agriculture was becoming increasingly mechanised and was therefore practised by only a small minority of people. Between the 1950s and the 1980s, the number of workers employed in agriculture declined from 8,261,000 in 1951 to 4,023,000 in 1969 and less than 3,000,000 in the early 1980s.¹³ The use of rural settings also coincided with the depopulation of rural and mountain areas and the rapid growth of urban communities. This coincidence is significant as it indicates that folk horror became, in Italy, a way of reflecting on the disappearance of past ways of life and the emergence of a more uniform modern existence, a common trope in Italian mainstream cinema from the 1950s onward, especially in Neorealist movies. In this sense, much like highbrow culture in general, Italian folk horror polemically addresses the consequences of what writer and director Pier Paolo Pasolini famously defined as the ‘anthropological mutation’ that occurred in the country in those years at all levels of society.¹⁴

Po Valley Gothic: Pupi Avati’s *The House with the Laughing Windows*

There are several reasons why Pupi Avati (b. 1938) is the perfect case study for a detailed exploration of Italian folk horror. Although not strictly a horror director – since 1968, Avati has directed forty movies, only a few of which are horror – those horror movies he has directed, which span six decades, could certainly be considered folk horror. Avati’s poetics is significantly more coherent than that of more renowned horror directors, such as Fulci or Argento, whose work can only occasionally be labelled folk horror. Avati’s first movies – *Balsamus*, *The Man of Satan* (1968), *Thomas/ The Possessed* (1970), *All Deceased . . . Except for the Dead* (1977) and *The Stars in the Ditch* (1978) – are all concerned with weird and uncanny events occurring in the Po Valley. Avati returns to this setting in *Zeder* (1983) and *His Excellence the Devil* (2019), with the latter taking place in the Venetian Lagoon. *The Mysterious Enchanter* (1996), on the contrary, is set in the central Italy region of Umbria and makes use of its spectacular mountain landscape. Even Avati’s mainstream production is strongly connected to the Po Valley, with several movies set either on its periphery or in the director’s native Bologna. The largest plain in Southern Europe, the Po Valley is the most distinctive geographical feature of Northern Italy

and comprises the Po basin and the plains of western Veneto and Friuli. Italy's wealthiest regions (Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna) and cities (Milano, Torino, Bologna) are located in the valley. Between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, and especially after the Second World War, the Po Valley underwent a transformation from an agricultural economy to an industrial one. This process involved significant changes in natural landscapes and the disruption of traditional ways of life, as portrayed in Avati's movies.

Among Avati's movies, *The House with the Laughing Windows* is arguably the most famous. It is Avati's fifth film and came after four movies that dealt with the uncanniness of the local landscape and the grotesqueries of provincial life.¹⁵ *The House with the Laughing Windows* encapsulates the distinctive features of Italian folk horror – that is, a focus on landscapes that evoke the conflict between modernity and tradition and a critique of traditional powers, especially the Catholic Church. These two features are intertwined, because by representing a rural landscape, Avati is also representing an archaic system in which the clergy possess excessive power. Indeed, in contrast to the British interpretation of the genre, the 'skewed belief system' (part of Scovell's 'folk horror chain')¹⁶ in *The House with the Laughing Windows* is not connected to pagan cults or witch covens, but rather to Catholicism. While British folk horror deals with the pagan roots of its national past (as in *Penda's Fen*, 1974), sometimes mixed with neo-pagan beliefs (as in *The Wicker Man*) or secret cults opposing the authority of the Church (as in *The Blood on Satan's Claw*), in Avati's movies the plot against the protagonist is orchestrated by the priest.¹⁷ Avati thus attempts to highlight the ambiguous role of the Catholic Church in the private, as well as the public, sphere. This polemical attitude towards the Church, embodied in the figure of a murderous priest, can also be found in other Italian folk horror movies, from Lucio Fulci's *Don't Torture a Duckling* and Antonio Bido's *The Bloodstained Shadow* to Avati's own *Zeder*. In *The House with the Laughing Windows*, the Catholic Church is represented as a social power, and all the town authorities, from the mayor to the police, attempt to protect the priest and hide his secret. The Catholic Church, in short, is presented as the source of moral corruption and sexual perversion.

The House with the Laughing Windows is set a few years after the Second World War in the vast and gloomy lagoon at the outlet of the Po River, between Veneto and Emilia. The movie is about the misadventures of Stefano, an art restorer hired to renovate a macabre fresco depicting the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian in a small town near Ferrara. The painter, Buono

Legnani, killed himself twenty years earlier during a bout of insanity. Stefano is soon disturbed by anonymous phone calls intended to intimidate him into leaving, and he begins to understand that the villagers are trying to hide a secret about the painter. While Stefano continues to work on the fresco, becoming increasingly entangled in Legnani's life and work, his colleague Antonio is killed after telling him that he had urgent revelations to make about the painter's secrets. The police, however, quickly rule that he died by suicide. After further research, Stefano finally discovers the truth about Legnani: Legnani's two sisters, who are still alive, used to help him find models for his paintings, models whom they would later torture and kill. Their bodies were buried near a house with two huge smiling mouths painted on the windows (hence the title of the movie). Stefano tries to tell the police about his discovery, but they refuse to believe him. Finally, Stefano is lured into an abandoned villa, where he finds Legnani's sisters (one of whom is his landlady) torturing a young man in front of their brother's corpse, preserved in formalin. Stefano manages to escape back to the town, where the inhabitants hide in their houses, pretending not to hear his screams. In a final attempt to get help, Stefano reaches the church, looking for the priest, who, in the final shots of the movie, is revealed to be one of Legnani's sisters in disguise.

Due to the shared setting of many of his movies, Avati later labelled his style 'Po Valley Gothic' ('gotico padano').¹⁸ On the motorway that connects Padua to Bologna (the A13, built between 1966 and 1968), there is a sign announcing that one is entering Polesine, very close to the area depicted in the film. 'Natura e ingegno' ('nature and intelligence'), the sign reads. Indeed, these two elements are central to *The House with the Laughing Windows*, in which the protagonist has to face the twinned perils of a treacherous landscape and an isolated community. The opening scene of the movie shows a ferry transporting the protagonist, along with a few other passengers and a car. At the pier, he is met by the man who hired him, a dwarf who is also the mayor of the town, accompanied by his factotum, an absent-minded alcoholic. In a sequence reminiscent of the first few minutes of *The Wicker Man*, during which Sergeant Howie flies over the desolate Scottish archipelago, the camera focuses for several minutes on the ferry and the placid, muddy waters of the lagoon while the opening credits roll. Avati is trying to convey, from the very beginning, a sense of distance from civilisation. When Avati was directing the movie, most families in Italy owned a car and all corners of the country were becoming easily accessible: to reach the town, however, Stefano is forced to

move slowly due to the constraints imposed by the terrain. In other words, when he leaves Ferrara, Stefano has to conform to pre-modern rules and rhythms that no longer characterise contemporary, industrialised Italy. The lagoon, moreover, represents a liminal landscape because it straddles the border between two regions (Veneto and Emilia) that have been separate for centuries; it is also an amphibious territory in a precarious equilibrium of land and water. Interestingly, even though the film is set two decades earlier, Avati drew attention to the lagoon ecosystem at a time when the pollution of Italian waters and coastlines was worsening faster than ever; the area where the movie is set became one of the most polluted in the whole country.¹⁹ Once again, we can see how, by representing spaces and communities that have somehow escaped modernisation, Italian folk horror invites us to reflect on ongoing sociological and ecological processes in Italy: the lagoon town stands, both geographically and symbolically, at the threshold between modernity and tradition.

As Roberto Curti argues, in *The House with the Laughing Windows* the traditional stereotypes of the gothic genre are 'revisited not from an aristocratic perspective, but from a rural, peasant-like one'.²⁰ The movie is set not in the nineteenth century, but after the Second World War, and the haunted manor is replaced by humble country houses lost in the mists of the lagoon, while the suspicious peasants and the plotting ruling class of the small town substitute for the rich, aristocratic families of gothic movies. And in contrast to the vampires and monsters that populate gothic movies, the crimes committed in *The House with the Laughing Windows* have nothing supernatural about them, which demonstrates the influence of the *giallo* tradition and its insistence on serial killings.²¹ Like several other Italian folk horror movies, Avati's film, with its emphasis on rural atmospheres and its refusal of the supernatural, hovers between the gothic and the *giallo*. Another important aspect of *The House of the Laughing Windows* that contributes to conveying a sense of uncanniness and that emphasises the archaic nature of the community is the grotesque physical features of most of its inhabitants, which is enhanced by the final plot twist.

The separation of the lagoon town of *The House with the Laughing Windows* from richer and more developed parts of the country is also underscored by the theme of migration: Legnani and his sisters emigrated to Brazil, where they allegedly began to develop a taste for blood. This plot turn reinforces the provinciality of the movie. The reference to Brazil is not intended to locate the source of evil in a foreign, exotic country, as was typical, for instance, of the Victorian gothic. On the contrary, Legnani's

stay in Brazil is yet another reminder of the poverty of the region of Italy depicted in the movie: a vast number of the population was forced to emigrate to the Americas due to the lack of work and economic opportunities at home. Significantly, moreover, the townsfolk are either middle-aged or old; as the police chief says to Stefano, all the young people have left as there is no work and nothing to do except drink alcohol. The only young character is the priest's assistant, Lidio, who is evidently simple-minded and deranged and helps Legnani's sisters to find victims. By stressing the necessity of emigration, Avati highlights the underdevelopment of the region and thus its isolation from its wealthier surroundings.

It is precisely the town's isolation and poverty that allow the priest's plot to unfold and Legnani's secrets to remain hidden. Profoundly embedded in the eerie landscape between Veneto and Emilia, *The House with the Laughing Windows* does not merely employ the strange atmosphere of the Italian countryside as a source of curiosity and amusement; on the contrary, it offers a disturbing reading of Italian sociocultural reality, filtered through a peripheral, oblique perspective. Modernity's increased mobilisation and urbanisation reveal remnants of archaic traditions and superstitions – symbolically embodied here by a perversion of Catholicism – that were supposed to have disappeared; the film thus depicts a literal return of the repressed that represents a resistance to modernity.

Like the rest of Avati's movies, and in keeping with the pre-eminence of morbid sexuality in Italian gothic cinema,²² *The House with the Laughing Windows* portrays sexuality as a source of unease and creepiness. Visually, the extreme morbidity of Legnani's paintings hints at the repressive influence of the Church and its attempt to control public and private lives by depicting, in words and images, the sufferings of Hell, while at the same time glorifying physical pain. It is interesting, however, that the uncanniness of sexuality is embodied by the Catholic priest, who, in the final scene of the movie, is revealed to be a woman. The movie's plot twist is suggestive of both the unreliability of the Church as an institution and the role of the Church in sexual repression. Through this plot twist, Avati satirises the obligatory vow of chastity taken by Catholic priests, which makes them androgynous figures in the director's eyes. At the same time, the cross-dressing priest is suggestive of the sexually repressive role of the Catholic Church. As a predominantly Catholic country, Italy in the 1970s was still very much under the influence of the Church in public affairs, especially in terms of the education of children. The movie represents the effects of sexual repression in the private sphere, projected onto the youth in the character of Lidio, the priest's

assistant whose frustrated interest in women manifests in rape. Thus, Avati suggests that the clergy's excessive control of the youth's sexuality results not only in repression but also in violence, a point that is underlined by the priest's own madness and deviance.

From a broader perspective, however, Avati's satirical gaze is directed towards Catholicism not just as a spiritual institution, but as a secular one too, during a decade when both the Church and Italy's ruling party, Christian Democracy, made consistent attempts to oppose the sexual liberation movements of the second half of the twentieth century. Christian Democrats and the Church campaigned intensely in 1974 and 1981 against the two referendums on the rights to divorce and abortion. Avati's polemical attitude towards the Church and its role in the sexual lives of Italians, then, is not gratuitous, but is, rather, reflective of the political debate that was occurring in Italy at that time.

Folk horror elements, as I have shown, pervade *The House with the Laughing Windows*. As the name suggests, folk horror deals in the folkloric (that is, the survival of ancestral beliefs in the modern world) and folk atmospheres (which here means isolated communities). I have noted how much attention Avati pays to delineating the separateness and the strangeness of his community, their reliance on an untrustworthy institution (the Church) and how important the liminal landscape is. What we have called folk horror has, in Italy, been given different and sometimes synonymous labels. The writer Eraldo Baldini, whose horror stories are set in Avati's Emilia, has called his style 'rural gothic',²³ a term that borders folk horror and recalls a similar definition in the Anglo-American context.²⁴ Pupi Avati, as we have seen, has defined his works as Po Valley gothic. Both of these categories emphasise the rural and provincial dimension of this phenomenon, but fail to intercept the folkloric (i.e. traditional) nature of folk horror as a genre. Recently, critics Fabio Camilletti and Fabrizio Foni have coined the definition 'orrore popolare' to describe the peculiarities of *Italian-style* folk horror. 'Popolare', in Italian, translates as both 'folkloric' and 'popular'. Through this ambiguous meaning, the term aims to complicate the concept of folk horror and adapt it to the variety of popular media and occultural practices that characterise Italian culture, as well as the sarcastic and desecrating attitude with which Italian culture engages with them.²⁵ Italian folk horror, as exemplified by Avati's *The House with the Laughing Windows*, fits into this category as a subgenre concerned with the re-emergence of the repressed in a changing and modernising country that is simultaneously attempting to process these changes and contest them.

Notes

1. To avoid confusion, the original titles of the movies are only listed in the filmography.
2. Although most pre-eminent in the film industry, Italy has a well-established tradition of folk horror fiction too. I discuss it in ‘Ecogothic and Folk Horror’, in Marco Malvestio and Stefano Serafini (eds), *Italian Gothic. An Edinburgh Companion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), pp. 225–40, which also reprises some of the concepts outlined in this paper.
3. For further details on the dynamics of the Italian film industry, see Michael Guarneri, *Vampires in Italian Cinema, 1956–1975* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), pp. 23–41. See also, more generally, Stefano Baschiera and Russ Hunter (eds), *Italian Horror Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).
4. For further details on the concept of *filone*, see chapter III of Simone Venturini, *Horror italiano* (Roma: Donzelli, 2014, Kindle ed.), and Roberto Curti, *Italian Gothic Horror Films, 1957–1969* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015), pp. 4–6.
5. Adam Scovell, *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange* (Leighton Buzzard, UK: Auteur, 2017), pp. 17–18.
6. Fabio Camilletti, “‘Timore’ e “terrore” nella polemica classico-romantica: l’Italia e il ripudio del gotico’, *Italian Studies*, 69/2 (2014), 231–45.
7. Alessandro Manzoni, *Opere*, edited by Lanfranco Caretti (Milano: Mursia, 1965), p. 886 (‘non so qual guazzabuglio di streghe, di spettri, un disordine sistematico, una ricerca stravagante, una abiura in termini dei senso comune’).
8. On these artistic forms, see Fabrizio Foni, *Alla fiera dei mostri. Racconti pulp, orrori e arcane fantasticherie nelle riviste italiane 1899–1932* (Latina: Tunué, 2007); Claudio Gallo and Fabrizio Foni (eds), *Ottocento nero italiano. Narrativa fantastica e crudele* (Milano: Nino Aragno Editore, 2009). Venturini (*Horror italiano*, ch. II) lists several pre-1957 Italian movies with elements of gothic and horror imagery.
9. On the myth of the *Belpaese*, see Alessandra Aloisi and Fabio Camilletti, ‘Introduction’, in Alessandra Aloisi and Fabio Camilletti (eds), *Archaeology of the Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 1–12.
10. Fabio Camilletti, *Italia lunare: Gli anni Sessanta e l’occulto* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2018), p. 131 (‘Volutamente nazionale . . . e deliberatamente provinciale’).
11. Venturini, *Horror italiano*, ch. IV (‘Ciò che sembra essere in atto è un’indagine “etnografica” e una topografia dell’orrore nazionale’).

12. Among these guides, see, for instance, Mario Spagnol and Giovenale Santi (eds), *Guida all'Italia leggendaria misteriosa insolita fantastica*, 2 vols (Milano: Sugar, 1966–7), and Dino Buzzati, *I misteri d'Italia* (Mondadori: Milano, 1978). Buzzati's volume is a posthumous collection of articles published in the newspaper *Corriere della sera* in 1965.
13. These figures can be found in Gabriella Corona, *Breve storia dell'ambiente in Italia* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2015, Kindle ed.), ch. II.
14. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Scritti corsari* (Milano: Garzanti, 1975).
15. Besides the aforementioned *Balsamus*, *The Man of Satan* (1968) and *Thomas/ The Possessed* (1970), there are the comedies *The Mazurka of the Baron*, *the Saint and the Early Fig Tree* (1975) and *House of Pleasure for Women* (1976). As the titles of these movies suggest – and we might also add to this list Avati's subsequent film, *All Deceased . . . Except for the Dead* – not only does Avati demonstrate an interest in the macabre and the overtly sexual, which would not be new in the *filone* of the Italian Gothic, but he is also concerned with the grotesque, the unlikely and the excessive.
16. Scovell, *Folk Horror*, p. 18.
17. It is worth noting, however, that Avati reprises the image of the 'woman priest' from a folk tale heard as a child, thereby linking his critique of the Catholic Church to a wider folkloric belief system; see Roberto Curti, *Italian Gothic Horror Films, 1970–1979* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017), p. 159.
18. The definition appears in many of Avati's interviews. See Ruggero Adamovitz and Claudio Bartolini (eds), *Il gotico padano. Dialogo con Pupi Avati* (Recco: Le mani, 2010).
19. On pollution, Venice and its lagoon, see Corona, *Breve storia*, ch. III, and Serenella Iovino, *Ecocriticism and Italy: Ecology, Resistance, Liberation* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 46–82.
20. Curti, *Italian Gothic Horror Films, 1970–1979*, p. 159.
21. Folk horror elements often appear also in *giallo* movies – a *filone* to which *The House with the Laughing Windows* is often connected. Xavier Mendik coined the definition 'mezzogiorno giallo', Italian *giallo* films set in Southern Italy that address the Southern Question and the economic and social gap between the North and the South of the country. See his 'The Return of the Rural Repressed: Italian Horror and the *Mezzogiorno Giallo*', in Harry M. Benshoff (ed.), *A Companion to the Horror Film* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 390–405. Curiously enough, Mendik also lists among *Mezzogiorno Giallo* movies Avati's *The House with the Laughing Windows*, which is set in Ferrara. On the rural element in *giallo* movies, see Austin Fisher, 'Political Memory in the Italian Hinterland: Locating the Rural *Giallo*', in Stefano Baschiera and

- Russ Hunter (eds), *Italian Horror Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 160–74.
22. On sexuality in Italian gothic cinema, see Curti, *Italian Gothic Horror Films, 1957–1969*, pp. 4–6.
23. Eraldo Baldini uses this term as the title for his collection of short stories, *Gotico rurale 2000–2012* (Torino: Einaudi, 2012).
24. On the American rural gothic, see Bernice M. Murphy, *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
25. For more on this topic, see Camilletti, *Italia lunare*, and Fabio Camilletti and Fabrizio Foni (eds), *Orrore popolare* (Bologna: Odoia, 2021).

Filmography

- All Deceased . . . Except for the Dead* [*Tutti defunti . . . tranne i morti*], dir. Pupi Avati, 1977.
- Balsamus, The Man of Satan* [*Balsamus, l'uomo di Satana*], dir. Pupi Avati, 1968.
- Beyond the Darkness* [*Buio omega*], dir. Joe D'Amato, 1979.
- Black Magic Rites* [*Riti, magie nere e segrete orge nel Trecento*], dir. Renato Polselli, 1973.
- The Blood on Satan's Claw*, dir. Piers Haggard, 1971.
- The Bloodstained Shadow* [*Solamente nero*], dir. Antonio Bido, 1978.
- Cemetery Man* [*Dellamorte Dellamore*], dir. Michele Soavi, 1994.
- Damned in Venice* [*Nero veneziano*], dir. Ugo Liberatore, 1978.
- The Dead Are Alive* [*L'etrusco uccide ancora*], dir. Armando Crispino, 1972.
- The Devil* [*Il demonio*], dir. Brunello Rondi, 1963.
- Don't Torture a Duckling* [*Non si sevizia un paperino*], dir. Lucio Fulci, 1972.
- His Excellence the Devil* [*Il signor diavolo*], dir. Pupi Avati, 2019.
- House of Pleasure for Women* [*Bordella*], dir. Pupi Avati, 1976.
- The House with the Laughing Windows* [*La casa dalle finestre che ridono*], Pupi Avati, 1976.
- Kill, Baby, Kill* [*Operazione paura*], dir. Mario Bava, 1966.
- The Long Hair of Death* [*I lunghi capelli della morte*], dir. Antonio Margheriti, 1964.
- The Mazurka of the Baron, the Saint and the Early Fig Tree* [*La mazurka del barone, della santa e del fico fiorone*], dir. Pupi Avati, 1975.
- Mill of the Stone Women* [*Il mulino delle donne di pietra*], dir. Giorgio Ferroni, 1960.
- The Mysterious Enchanter* [*L'arcano incantatore*], dir. Pupi Avati, 1996.
- Penda's Fen*, dir. David Rudkin, 1974.

- The Possessed* [*La donna del lago*], dir. Luigi Bazzoni and Franco Rossellini, 1965.
- Road to L.*, dir. Federico Greco and Roberto Leggio, 2005.
- The Scorpion with Two Tails* [*Assassinio al cimitero etrusco*], dir. Sergio Martino, 1982.
- The Stars in the Ditch* [*Le stelle nel fosso*], dir. Pupi Avati, 1978.
- Suspiria*, dir. Dario Argento, 1977.
- Thomas/The Possessed* [*Thomas (gli indemoniati)*], dir. Pupi Avati, 1970.
- The Vampires* [*I vampiri*], dir. Riccardo Freda, 1957.
- Watch Me When I Kill* [*Il gatto dagli occhi di giada*], dir. Antonio Bido, 1977.
- The Wicker Man*, dir. Robin Hardy, 1973.
- Witchfinder General*, dir. Michael Reeves, 1968.
- Zeder*, dir. Pupi Avati, 1983.

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