

Danza Macabra: The Reevaluation of Antonio Margheriti through His Film Castle of Blood

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction.....	1
Genre/Vernacular Films	3
A History of Margheriti / A History of Italian Vernacular Cinema.....	5
Sci-fi, Italian Style	7
Italy’s First Horror Cycle.....	8
Peplums.....	11
Eurospy	13
Mondo Films.....	14
Giallos	15
Spaghetti Westerns	17
Italy’s Second Wave of Horror.....	18
Action Films.....	20
The Last Few Years	20
International Arena.....	21
Literature Review.....	24
Margheriti, <i>Auteur</i> Theory, and His Hallmarks.....	28
Hallmarks	31
<i>Castle of Blood</i>	35
Plot	36
Italian Sexual Cinema Before 1960	38
Italian Sexual Cinema in the Later 1960s and Afterward	43
<i>Castle of Blood</i> – Transition of Italian Sexual Cinematics	46
Conclusion	51
Bibliography.....	53

Introduction

Italian cinema is a distinctly rich and multifaceted national cinema with a legacy reaching back to the origins of cinema itself. The most visible component of Italian cinema has always been its international, A-list *auteurs*, with such renowned and influential figures as Federico Fellini, Bernardo Bertolucci, Luchino Visconti, and Roberto Rossellini. These directors have left a profound impact on cinema with such renown films as *8 ½* (Fellini, 1963), *Last Tango in Paris* (Bertolucci, 1972), *The Leopard* (Visconti, 1963), and *Rome, Open City* (Rossellini, 1945).

There exists a second tier of Italian cinema discourse that may not be as revered, studied, or even acknowledged, but it is as important in its contributions and influence to Italian cinema discourse as its *auteurs*. Genre, popular, exploitation, or B films: these are all labels that refer to a type of cinema that has been a staple of the Italian film canon just as long as the *auteurs* have been. The past twenty years have witnessed a reconsideration of these types of filmmakers and their films. For example, the works of Sir Christopher Frayling such as *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans from Karl May to Sergio Leone* catapulted Leone and his spaghetti westerns into essential cinema knowledge. Non-academicians and generalists have also contributed authoritative texts to the subject matter, such as British musician Stephen Thrower and his focus on Italian horror director Lucio Fulci with his book *Beyond Terror: The Films of Lucio Fulci*. The proliferation of home media through the advent of specialty labels such as Anchor Bay, Cult Epics, Severin Films, and Media Blasters, has made possible the resurgence of films not viewed since their original theatrical run (which in many cases has been decades). This has provided the opportunity for many genre directors, such as Dario Argento, Mario Bava, and Lucio Fulci, to receive reconsideration that originally eluded them.

Even though some genre directors have managed to rise from obscurity, there is a pantheon of directors that remain elusive to critical reassessment. Italian director Antonio Margheriti is one such genre director whose work is still more obscure than known. A director for over 40 years, with more than 50 features to his credit, Margheriti's contributions to Italian film discourse are unmistakable and profound. For example, Margheriti single handedly carved out the sci-fi genre in Italy in the 1960s with no fewer than six films: *Assignment Outer Space* (1960), *Battle of the Worlds* (1961), *Wild, Wild Planet* (1965), *The War of the Planets* (1966), *The War Between the Planets* (1966) and *Snow Devils* (1967). In addition, Margheriti was the first Italian filmmaker to make movies critical about the Vietnam War with *The Last Hunter* (1980), followed by *Cannibal Apocalypse* (1980), *Tiger Joe* (1982) and *Tornado* (1983). Margheriti was also instrumental in influencing many Italian productions to move to the Philippines during the 1980s, allowing many directors such as Umberto Lenzi and Bruno Mattei to film many action films there. These are mammoth contributions to Italian cinema history, but they are rarely acknowledged.

The purpose of this thesis is to make an initial foray into rectifying this gap in this discourse by illustrating that Margheriti was an important filmmaker. To try to redefine Margheriti from an obscure genre director to someone worthy of academic study may be too much for one thesis to accomplish; hence this thesis will focus on one of his films, *Castle of Blood*. The importance of *Castle of Blood* is that it was pivotal in evolving the depiction of sex and sexuality from the conservative 1950s to the less restrictive late 1960s. By examining this film, we can lay the foundation to redefine Margheriti as a worthwhile director in Italian film discourse.

To accomplish this, this thesis will first provide a definition of genre and vernacular films as they will be essential in evaluating Margheriti. Secondly, this thesis will not just provide a history of Italian

genre cinema but also place Margheriti within it so his contributions become obvious. This will also provide detailed definitions of the different genre cycles that are important to Italian film genre history. Third, this thesis will define what type of director Margheriti was. Was he an unsung *auteur* or something else? It is important to define what type of director Margheriti was since it influences how one can view him, his films, and his contributions. Finally this thesis will analyze Margheriti's *Castle of Blood* as to how it was influential in transforming the sexual landscape in Italian films and how he was able to create such a subversive film.

Genre/Vernacular Films

Before diving into an analysis of Margheriti and his films one needs an understanding of the type of discourses he operated in. Margheriti created films in a realm of exploitation, popular, and genre filmmaking. His contemporaries included other genre filmmakers such as Mario Bava, Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci, Umberto Lenzi, Enzo G. Castellari, Riccardo Freda, Ruggero Deodato, and many others. These filmmakers worked with low budgets and short shooting schedules, producing films considered as knock offs and derivatives, full of graphic violence or sex. No doubt such labels detour scholars who perceive greener pastures with art house drama created by the Italian auteurs, disdaining this province of filmmaking as euro trash, incompetently made, unsophisticated, existing solely for capitalization purposes or worse, uninteresting. Various reviewers and scholars on vernacular cinema have labeled the material as “blandly undistinguished material.”¹ However in a three-part article published in *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Kim Newman rushes to defend these exploitation films:

¹ Mikel J. Koven, *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film*, (Oxford, Scarecrow Press: 2006), 31.

While undoubtedly [sic] true that many Italian genre films are simply worthless carbon copies with a few baroque trimmings, the best examples [of most cycles] are surprisingly sophisticated mixes of imitation, pastiche, parody, deconstruction, reinterpretation and operatic inflation.²

This thesis agrees with such a stance, and furthermore that Margheriti's films fall into this category of worthwhile genre films. However, this still in no way elevates these genre films, let alone Margheriti's, into the same plateau occupied by the *auteurs*. Italian genre and popular films were created for different reasons and for a different audience than the films made by the internationally recognized Italian *auteur*.

In *La Dolce Morte*, Mikel J. Koven tackles the issue of this discrepancy. For Koven, to view Italian genre and popular films with the same lenses as one would the *auteurs* is not only foolhardy, but completely erroneous, leading to what Koven describes as fitting “square pegs into round (modernist) holes.”³ Koven calls for examining the genre films at their own level, a term he defines as “vernacular cinema.”⁴ Koven's use of *vernacular* encompasses several key concepts. The first concept addresses the localized cinematic language.⁵ The cinematic language of these films would be aimed at *terza visione* (third run) theaters in Italy, and grindhouse theaters in the states (comparable to today's cinemas that specialize in revival movies or dollar theaters). The audiences for these theaters would be blue-collar workers, gathering in a public place with other friends and members of their community, to socialize as well as get a bit of cinematic excitement. This viewing practice contrasts with the *prima visione* (first

² Kim Newman, “Thirty Years in Another Town.” *Monthly Film Bulletin* LII, no. 625 (1986): 51.

³ Mikel J. Koven, *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film*, (Oxford, Scarecrow Press: 2006), 22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

run) theaters, which are synonymous with normal, more serious theater viewing practices: a dark, silent theater with attention on the screen. The second concept explores the contrast between “high art” architecture and folk and common architecture.⁶ In this regard, vernacular cinema makes a clear distinction between the popular and genre films versus the *auteur* A-list director's films. Thirdly, vernacular cinema is in intentional opposition to the “high style.”⁷ In essence, vernacular cinema has a distinct type of audience: the folk element. The films wallow in their own acknowledgment of not being high art and do not care if an outsider views or understands them.⁸ The benefit of approaching these films as vernacular is that it provides the means of analysis without relying on the “bourgeois criteria of classical narrative, intellectual abstraction, and elitist notions of the artistic.”⁹ For this thesis Margheriti's films will be approached as vernacular films, and the word *vernacular* will replace instances where terms such as exploitation, genre, and popular films would be used.

A History of Margheriti / A History of Italian Vernacular Cinema

To provide a biography about Margheriti would be futile without contextualizing him within the very cinematic cycles he contributed to. Thus so entwined are Margheriti and the history of Italian vernacular cinema that the most advantageous method to describe both is to trace their histories in unison.

Prior to discussing the historical accounts, a clarification of terms is required. As with any cultural medium, Italian vernacular cinema is at the mercy of various socio-political-cultural forces. As popular culture shifts from era to era, and since vernacular cinema is derivative from what is popular, there

⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁷ Ibid., 29.

⁸ Ibid., iv

⁹ Ibid., 33.

have been many cycles of different styles, themes, and narratives of film. Instead of understanding these cycles as trends in genre, it is more fruitful to view them as *filone*. In Italian, *filone* roughly means “in the vein of” and is similar to what would be considered as subgenres. However with *filones*, there is an implied linkage from one cycle of films to the next. A crude, but sufficient example of a *filone* would be as follows: the overall genre would be the horror genre, with a *filone* branching off to zombie films. From the zombie films, other *filones* would branch off to zombie movies with voodoo themes or zombie movies with radiation-gone-awry themes.

Unless otherwise noted, the biography of Margheriti is drawn heavily from <http://www.antoniomargheriti.com>, a website that is maintained by his son Edoardo Margheriti.

Antonio Margheriti was born on September 19 1930 in Rome to Pierina and Luigi Margheriti. His father was a railroad engineer that no doubt influenced Margheriti's future fascination with model work, which would become readily apparent in his special effects. Although born in Rome, Margheriti and his family spent the war years in Verona, returning to Rome later in the decade. Margheriti would attempt pursuing engineering at a university, but would abandon it after a year to instead pursue filmmaking, a career choice that was not wholly endorsed by his family.

In 1950 Margheriti joined the Centro Sperimentale Centrale (C.S.C.) film school. Three years later he would meet and marry Miranda Bonardi, and father two children: Antonella in 1954 and Edoardo in 1959. Both children would later go on to assist their father in many capacities of filmmaking, such as special effects work, acting, and assistant directing. After completing his education, Margheriti began his foray into filmmaking as an assistant, later transitioning into editing, screen writing, special effects, and assistant directing.

Margheriti's break did not occur until 1955 when he befriended Gilberto Carbone of Titanus Studios. With this connection, Margheriti was able to break into the industry by contributing to screenplays, assistant directing, and special effects at Titanus. It was Margheriti's proficiency at special effects that so impressed his colleagues that he was given complete directorial duties on his next project.

Sci-fi, Italian Style

Margheriti's first movie as a director was *Assignment Outer Space* (1960). This was an unusual project in that it was a sci-fi/space movie, a genre that was still in its infancy in Italy during this time period.

Tim Lucas proposes that the first serious attempt in Italy for a sci-fi movie was Paolo Heusch's *The Day the Sky Exploded* in 1958, but the movie failed to establish the genre proper.¹⁰ *Assignment Outer Space* would be the first film to accomplish this feat. It was the first Italian science fiction film in color and Margheriti's first movie: not only in his professional repertoire, but also the first in a slew of other science fiction movies he would direct, nearly single handedly fleshing out the entire *filone*. These included *Battle of the Worlds* in 1961, *Wild, Wild Planet* (1965), *The War of the Planets* (1966), *The War Between the Planets* (1966), and *Snow Devils* (1967).

There is some discrepancy about how successful the *filone* was, both financially and critically. Lucas hypothesizes that *Assignment Outer Space* was a commercial failure, earning only a fourth of the box office that *The Day the Sky Exploded* did¹¹ and that the film was not well received.¹² However Margheriti's son Edoardo remarks in his biography about his father that the film was quite successful, both theatrically and against its budget, and it was because of this success that another production

¹⁰ Tim Lucas, *Mario Bava: All the Colors of the Dark* (Cincinnati: Video Watchdog, 2007), 599.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 599-600.

¹² *Ibid.*, 600.

company, Lux Film, commissioned *Battle of the Worlds*.¹³ Margheriti's next four science fiction films (*Wild, Wild Planet*, *The War of the Planets*, *The War Between the Planets*, and *Snow Devils*, affectionately known as the "Gamma I Quartet") were intended for Italian television, but were instead released to theaters,¹⁴ further providing credence to the cycle's theatrical viability.

It was this period that saw another interesting quirk in the biography of Margheriti: the use of the Anglo-friendly pseudonym Anthony Dawson, which Margheriti would faithfully adhere to for the rest of his career, modifying it once by adding the middle initial "M" to create Anthony M. Dawson so as to differentiate him from British actor Anthony Dawson.¹⁵

Despite the output, the sci-fi/space *filone* was short lived, effectively ending in the latter half of the 1960s. This was perhaps due in part to two other fantasy-related genres that were gaining momentum at the same time, genres that would find far greater success and influence than the sci-fi cycle ever would and genres where Margheriti would find much success: the Italian gothic horror and peplum films.

Italy's First Horror Cycle

During the 1950s and 1960s, horror films were gripping both sides of the Atlantic. In the states, American International Pictures and infamous budget filmmaker Roger Corman were churning out gothic tales of the macabre, such as the critically and commercially acclaimed Edgar Allen Poe movies: *House of Usher* (1960), *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), and *The Tomb of Ligeia* (1964), all starring the prolific Vincent Price. In Britain, Hammer Film Productions successfully crafted its own brand of gothic horror, utilizing stars such as Sir Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing in a variety of films based on Frankenstein and Dracula, such as *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), and *Dracula has Risen from*

¹³ Edoardo Margheriti, *Biography*, http://www.antoniomargheriti.com/english_version/biography/Page2.htm.

¹⁴ Tim Lucas, "Margheriti: The Third Man of Italian Fantasy," Video Watchdog, no. 28 (1995): 36.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

the Grave (1968). With such a high demand by moviegoers, it would only be natural for Italian vernacular cinema to partake in the genre as well.

Though the cycle lacks a formal name as compared to other cycles, for this thesis it shall be called Italy's First Horror Cycle. Italy had not made a horror movie since *Il mostro di Frankenstein* (1920) due to censorship and regulations posited by the Mussolini period,¹⁶ so acknowledging this cycle as such is apropos. This label is inclusive to the Italian gothic horror movies and excludes later *filones* that would branch from it, specifically the *giallo* which will be elaborated on in its own section. Hallmarks of the Italian horror films of this era include low budget movies, emphasis on mood and atmosphere, both accomplished with stark black and white photography (and later color), as period pieces, exploring supernatural elements of witches, vampires, and apparitions. Barbara Steele, scream queen actress made famous for her contributions to the Italy's First Horror Cycle, sums up the films of the time perfectly:

The Italian horror films of the sixties were both baroque and romantic, always steeped in a deep ancestral past of depth, family secrets, images of power, loss, forbidden cravings and desires. They addressed our unexpressed side. They were metaphors for our repressed fears and the forbidden, bestiality, necrophilia, and incest. They carried with them a sense of fate. They moved in a private dreamscape. They filled you with a psychic dread rooted in the past. And finally they addressed the soul.¹⁷

Riccardo Freda's *I Vampiri* (1957) is usually recognized as the first Italian horror film of Italy's First

¹⁶ Tim Lucas, *Mario Bava: All the Colors of the Dark* (Cincinnati: Video Watchdog, 2007), 172-173.

¹⁷ Barbara Steele, *Horror all'italiana 1957-1979*, ed. Stefano Piselli and Riccardo Morrocchi (Italy: Glittering Images, 1996), 7.

Horror Cycle. Though not a commercial success,¹⁸ the film did set the groundwork for future horror films to follow for the next few decades. Both Freda and his friend, Mario Bava, would go on to become famous for their gothic horror movies: Freda for *Caltiki, the Immortal Monster* (1959) and *The Horrible Dr. Hitchcock* (1962), and Bava for *Black Sabbath* (1963), *Kill, Baby, Kill* (1966), but most importantly *Black Sunday* (1960), for making the aforementioned Barbara Steele famous.

Margheriti is often identified to be the third great director after Freda and Bava in terms of contribution to this wave of Italian horror *filones*, a descriptor perpetuated with Tim Lucas' article in his own *Video Watchdog* magazine *Margheriti: The Third Man of Italian Fantasy*.¹⁹ His first movie for the cycle was *The Virgin of Nuremberg* (1964) starring Hammer's own Sir Christopher Lee. Margheriti followed this film with two other gothic thrillers, *The Long Hair of Death* (1964) and *Castle of Blood* (1964), both starring Barbara Steele.

In many ways, *Castle of Blood* is typical of the Italian horror movies at that time: the use of Barbara Steele capitalizes on her other horror output (especially *Black Sunday*), the black and white photography, the presence of Edgar Allen Poe as a character, and a haunted castle where every year on All Soul's Day the ghosts who died inside must re-enact their deaths. In other ways, the movie was well ahead of its time, showcasing both nudity and lesbian intercourse, a first for its time.²⁰ These scenes would of course be cut by Italian censors, but found their way into international prints. So successful was the film that Margheriti would do a virtual shot-by-shot remake in color in 1971 entitled *The Web of the Spider*, this time sans Barbara Steele but with renowned German actor Klaus Kinski in the role of Edgar Allen Poe.

¹⁸ Tim Lucas, *Mario Bava: All the Colors of the Dark* (Cincinnati: Video Watchdog, 2007), 187.

¹⁹ Tim Lucas, "Margheriti: The Third Man of Italian Fantasy," *Video Watchdog*, no. 28 (1995): 28.

²⁰ Antonio Bruschini, *Horror all'italiana 1957-1979*, ed. Stefano Piselli and Riccardo Morrocchi (Italy: Glittering Images, 1996), 78.

Margheriti, along with his contemporaries, found success with these films both in Italy and abroad. Many Italian production companies maintained business relations with American companies, with Samuel Z. Arkoff's American International Pictures (AIP) purchasing the bulk of the output, re-cutting, re-dubbing, and in some cases, re-shooting the films, and then releasing them to American audiences. But the Italian gothic horror genre was not the only type of film that audiences both local and abroad were demanding during this period.

Peplums

In 1948 the Christian Democrats came into power, ushering in an era of right-wing Catholic morality and censorship. True to its derivative nature, Italian vernacular cinema was able to capitalize on the hegemony of the political climate to create a series of "sword and sandal" films, affectionately called the "peplum"²¹ after the type of clothing worn by the characters in the films. The peplums were low-to-moderate budget movies, drawing from Italy's own historic repertoire, both mythological and Biblical. Staples of the *filone* include men with Herculean builds, playing such characters as Hercules and Maciste, women in elaborate, exotic costumes (with frequent scenes of belly dancing to stand in as the erotic surrogate²²), playing both princesses and wicked queens, and adaptations of popular or familiar stories, such as Jason and the Argonauts. As the third-run cinemas were making their way into the rural areas, the subject matter of the peplums that were screened allowed them to be more accessible to the populace.²³ Advances in film technology, such as color and the widescreen process, made these epic films even more epic.²⁴

²¹ Mary P. Wood, *Italian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 70.

²² *Ibid.*, 71-72.

²³ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

The idea of using historic epics as subject matter for Italian films had been around since the silent era, with such movies as *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914), and *Quo vadis?* (Enrico Guazzoni, 1913). The peplums *filone* cycle began with *Hercules* (Pietro Francisci, 1958), starring American body builder Steve Reeves as the titular character in an extremely loose adaptation of the tale of Jason and the Argonauts. The formula was a huge success, both local and worldwide, and the derivatives, copy-cats, and sequels soon flooded in. Notable examples include *Hercules Unchained* (Francisci, 1959) also starring Reeves, *The Colossus of Rhodes* (Sergio Leone, 1961), *Hercules and the Captive Women* (Vittorio Cottafavi, 1961), and the absurd *Hercules Against the Moon Men* (Giacomo Gentilomo, 1964).

Much like the gothic horror movies for the first wave of Italian horror, the peplums were purchased by American companies, and re-worked to cater to an American audience. In many instances, peplums were re-worked in such a fashion as to create a loose continuity between them for packaging purposes, usually by renaming the main protagonist as the son of Hercules, regardless if the character was originally a Maciste (*Maciste, The Strongest Man in the World* [Antonio Leonviola, 1961] became *Mole Men vs. the Son of Hercules*), Perseus (*Perseus the Invincible* [Alberto De Martino, 1963] became *Medusa vs. The Son of Hercules*), or Ursus (*Ursus in the Land of Fire* [Giorgio Simonelli, 1963] became *Son of Hercules in the Land of Fire*).

Margheriti himself was no stranger to the peplum *filone*, having contributed a few films himself, including *The Fall of Rome* (1962), *The Giants of Rome* (1964), *Devil of the Desert Against the Son of Hercules* (1964), *Hercules Prisoner of Evil* (1964), and *The Golden Arrow* (1962). *The Golden Arrow* is especially critical in Margheriti's biography because it was the first time he worked with Metro

Goldwyn Mayer via Titanus Studios. The special effects used by Margheriti in the film greatly impressed the producers, which further solidified Margheriti's abilities within his own industry.²⁵

The momentum of the peplum *filone* would soon diminish as the 1960s progressed. The practices established by the cycle would carry over to the next generation of cycles, including the critically lauded, highly influential, and most revered spaghetti western cycle. However, prior to discussing the spaghetti western genre and Margheriti's involvement within it, three other genres that chronologically precede it need to be addressed first: the Eurospy, the mondo films and the *giallos*.

Eurospy

In 1964 *Goldfinger* was released, becoming the highest grossing James Bond movie up to that time. The impact of the movie was profound. It carried classic Bond staples from previous Bond films (gorgeous girls, outlandish gadgets, sporty cars, exotic locales, and maniacal villains with quirky henchmen), along with setting new ones, such as the use of music from pop artists over the opening credits. Matt Blake and David Deal quip in their introduction to *The Eurospy Guide* that *Goldfinger* "seemed to strike a cord with filmmakers across Europe. From this film they drew their markers."²⁶

Italy and other countries soon followed suit, each contributing their own unique take on the spy genre by culling from their indigenous sources of pulpy spy and detective fiction for suitable cinematic fodder, in effect creating a meta-, cross-country genre called the Eurospy genre. The French had their *OSS-117* series based on the Jean Bruce character, the Italians had their *Secret Agent 077* series, and the German's had the *Kommissar X* series. Margheriti's contribution to Italy's take on the Eurospy films

²⁵ Edoardo Margheriti, *Biography*, http://www.antoniomargheriti.com/english_version/biography/Page2.htm.

²⁶ Matt Blake and David Deal, *The Eurospy Guide* (Baltimore: Luminary Press, 2004), 9.

would be *The Killers Are Challenged* (1966), and *Lightning Bolt* (1966).

The Eurospy was short lived, with its glory days ending by the 1970s.²⁷ But the genre was not without its contribution as hallmarks of the Eurospy movie could be found in other genres. *The Eurospy Guide* traces linkage between the Eurospy film and the spaghetti western, drawing parallels between the cunning of the western hero and the spy, associated music (guitars versus psychedelic tunes), concealed weapons and gadgets, and brawls in bars or nightclubs.²⁸

Mondo Films

The mondo film cycle had its heyday during the 1960s, beginning with *Mondo Cane* (Paolo Cavara, 1962), a “documentary” of sorts that aimed to showcase bizarre, shocking, and strange behaviors, customs, rituals, and practices that normal Western theater-going audiences were not privy to. These included scenes of women washing church stairs with their tongues, restaurants where patrons select the dogs that they will dine on, jewelry made of insects, and various other vignettes, usually involving animals and death.²⁹ The formula was a great success (the film was nominated for the prestigious Palme d’Or at Cannes and the movie’s theme song was nominated for an Academy Award), and soon the floodgates were opened for other mondo films.

The irony is that as more mondo films were churned out - be it movies made to fall into a loose mondo canon, or other movies with the word “mondo” attached to their monikers in order to capitalize on the success of the cycle - the vignettes became more staged. The movies would contain mixes of varying quantities of both real footage of exotic practices in conjunction with shocking, albeit staged or outright

²⁷ Ibid., 13.

²⁸ Ibid., 12.

²⁹ Boyd Rice, “Mondo Films,” *Incredibly Strange Films*, (1986): 153.

fabricated sequences. The practices got quite ludicrous after the cycle had ended, but had a spiritual resurgence with the *Faces of Death* series of movies that started in 1978. These movies featured staged acts of violence and death, peppered with just enough genuine stock footage of real acts of death to give the movies some credibility.

Aside from the aforementioned original *Mondo Cane*, other notable entries in the cycle include the sequel *Mondo Cane 2* (Gualtiero Jacopetti, 1963), *Taboos of the World* (Romolo Marcellini, 1963), and *Mondo Balordo* (Roberto Bianchi Montero, 1964). Margheriti's contribution to the mondo canon would be *Mondo Inferno* (1964). In *Spaghetti Nightmares*, Margheriti elaborated that his involvement with the movie was with researching and shooting a few of the vignettes, but the movie actually being completed by Marco Vicario.³⁰

Although the cycle lasted a decade it had an effect on later Italian films. The realist qualities of the mondo films echo the Italian sentiments for actuality and realism in their arts and cinema. The use of stock footage had been a staple component of cinema since its inception, but the shocking footage used in the mondo films had a visceral effect on audiences who demanded new titillation in their movie-going experiences. Stock footage use would contribute to the movements in cinema to further push the boundaries of what extreme images could be depicted.

Giallos

As the Italian gothic horror cycle started to lose momentum, a new *filone* grew from its influence: the *giallo*. The *giallo* is a unique style of film that is exclusive to Italy, which combines elements of suspense thrillers and detective fiction, juxtaposed against horrific scenes of graphic violence. The term *giallo* itself simply means *yellow* in the Italian language, but the origin of this name is derived from the

³⁰ Luca M Palmerini and Gaetano Mistretta, *Spaghetti Nightmares* (Key West: Fantasma Books, 1996), 73.

yellow colored pulp novels published by the Mondadori Publishing House whose popularity was mimicked by other companies that released similar pulp stories.

The origins of the *giallo* film cannot be traced to one specific film. In *La Dolce Morte*, Koven illustrates that the *giallo* originated from two movies, both by Mario Bava. The first, *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (1962) provided the narrative foundation of the *giallo*: the foreigner who witnesses a murder and assumes the role of an amateur detective. The second is *Blood and Black Lace* (1964) which established the visual foundations of the *giallo*, specifically the disguise of the killer: black-gloved hands that perform the murderous acts, trench coats, masked face, and a wide-brimmed hat. The first film to combine both of these elements into one package was Dario Argento's *Bird With the Crystal Plumage* (1970), which became the de facto *giallo* that most succeeding *giallos* followed.³¹

While this *filone* was at its zenith in the 1960s and 1970s, the influence of the *giallo* can be seen in future Italian cycles, such as the *poliziotteschi* (police procedurals movies) and horror cycles in the 1970s. Most importantly, the tropes that distinguish the *giallo* from traditional horror movies became the foundation of the slasher movies from the early 1980s onward. These films were popularized with the likes of the *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchises, as well as the many carbon copies of those films that followed. In these movies, one cannot help but notice the staggering body count of individuals (primarily nubile, attractive teens) that are murdered in creative as well as gruesome ways, traits popularized by the *giallos*.

Margheriti made two forays into the *giallo* with *Naked You Die* (1968) and *Seven Deaths in the Cat's Eye* (1973). *Naked You Die* became available to Margheriti when Bava passed on the opportunity to

³¹ Mikel J. Koven, *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film*, (Oxford, Scarecrow Press: 2006), 3-4.

direct after completing *Danger: Diabolik* (1968), even though he had contributed to the screenplay during its infancy.³² Although his contributions to both the gothic horror movies and the *giallos* helped cement Margheriti as adept with horror movie making, his contributions to the spaghetti western were just as prolific.

Spaghetti Westerns

As the name, in a more or less derogatory manner implies, the spaghetti western is a term referring to the Italian take on the western genre. Popularized by Sergio Leone, these movies were fundamentally different than the westerns done in America for many decades prior. Grittier, more violent, lower budgeted; the films explored motifs differently than their American counterparts. Gone were the genre staples of fighting Indians and conquering the frontier, with clear-cut villains and good guys. Instead there was ambiguous morality and visceral violence. The genre would make Clint Eastwood a star from his appearances as the Man with No Name in Leone's "Dollar's Trilogy" which consisted of *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *For a Few Dollars More* (1965), and *The Good, the Bad, and The Ugly* (1966).

The genre was a hotbed of activity, with almost every Italian genre filmmaker contributing to its canon, including Argento, Fulci, Lenzi, Castellari, and Corbucci. Like the peplum with its Hercules and similar ilk, the spaghetti western had its Man with No Name and other anti-heroes, such as Django and Sartana. The genre would not just catapult Italian directors into recognition, but also actors such as Clint Eastwood and Lee van Cleef, and composers such as Ennio Morricone as well.

Margheriti's contributions to the genre included *Dynamite Joe* (1967), *Vengeance* (1968), *And God Said to Cain* (1969), *Whisky and Ghosts* (1974), *Blood Money* (1974), and *Take a Hard Ride* (1975). The period of the spaghetti western was important to Margheriti because many of the faces that would grace

³² Tim Lucas, "Margheriti: The Third Man of Italian Fantasy," *Video Watchdog*, no. 28 (1995): 39.

his future movies originated in this period. In 1971 Margheriti contributed special effects to Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dynamite*. It was during this production that Margheriti would meet English actor David Warbeck, who at the time was still early in his acting career. Although Lucio Fulci would make Warbeck a cult sensation with *The Beyond* (1981), it would be with Margheriti that Warbeck would enjoy no less than five collaborations, becoming one of his favorite actors. Warbeck would state in *Spaghetti Nightmares* that Margheriti was the "one I adore and admire more than any man I've ever met in the business."³³ *And God Said to Cain* marked the first time Margheriti worked with volatile German actor Klaus Kinski, noted for his hatred of directors. Something must have clicked between the two, for Kinski would appear in three more Margheriti movies, a feat topped only by German director Werner Herzog who worked with Kinski for five movies. Other actors such as John Steiner, Alan Collins, Lewis Collins, and even retired boxer "Marvelous" Marvin Hagler would join Margheriti's ensemble over the years, each appearing in a plethora of his movies.

Italy's Second Wave of Horror

In 1978 American filmmaker George Romero created *Dawn of the Dead*, the sequel to his infamous *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), which received much acclaim. His friend, Italian director Dario Argento, had the rights to re-cut the movie for the overseas market. Argento's cut, retitled *Zombi*, was also successful, and in no time consideration for a similar movie was underway. The task would be undertaken by veteran genre director Lucio Fulci with his movie *Zombi 2* (1979). The film was nothing like any Italian horror before it: extremely graphic, gory, and gruesome. It was an international success, ushering in an era of Italian gore movies with notable titles such as *Zombie Holocaust* (1980), *Contamination* (1980), *City of the Living Dead* (1980), and *The Beyond* (1981).

Exploring avenues to present gore and mutilation, different *filones* spun off, such as the zombie movie

³³ Luca M Palmerini and Gaetano Mistretta, *Spaghetti Nightmares* (Key West: Fantasma Books, 1996), 73.

and more notoriously, the cannibal movie. The archetype of visceral filmmaking, the cannibal movies were particularly nasty in their portrayal of animals, people and other cultures, often depicted as savage, primitive, and, well, cannibalistic. Typically the films followed an expeditionary force into the exotic rain forest, with much rape, torture, violence, and cannibalism, while showing real animal cruelty. The first Italian cannibal film was Umberto Lenzi's *The Man from Deep River* (1972), but the genre gained most of its notoriety and popularity from the famous and oft-banned *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) by Ruggero Deodato. Many of the tricks employed by these films to show such cruelty took cues from its ancestor genre, the mondo films and its used of stock footage. Margheriti would make one contribution to this specific *filone* with *Cannibal Apocalypse* (1980) starring John Saxon, famous for starring opposite of Bruce Lee in *Enter the Dragon* (1973). *Cannibal Apocalypse* would provide a rare instance for Margheriti to film in the United States.

Two other Margheriti projects during the 1970s that deserves mentioning are *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1975) and *Blood for Dracula* (1975). Bearing the name of Andy Warhol but “directed” by Warhol acolyte Paul Morrissey, both movies were sexually charged horror films filmed back to back with the same cast and crew. The controversy arises over directing credit. In an interview with *Video Watchdog* Margheriti claims that Morrissey and crew arrived in Italy with only four pages of script, and the intent to shoot *Flesh for Frankenstein* in 3D in 10-minute increments with no cuts. Producer Carlo Ponti introduced Margheriti to Morrissey, and Margheriti would go on to rewrite many scenes for the script and shoot many of the special effects and additional footage in post.³⁴ Some of the contributions would carry on to *Blood for Dracula* as well. However Udo Kier, star of both movies, would state in an interview also in *Video Watchdog*³⁵ that Morrissey was the true director and that Margheriti was never on set. In most non-Italian versions of the film, Margheriti's name is missing from the credits,

³⁴ Blumenstock, Peter. “Margheriti the Wild, Wild Interview.” *Video Watchdog*, 1995, 48.

³⁵ Talbot, Paul. “Monsters for Morrissey: The Making of Andy Warhol's *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*.” *Video Watchdog*, 1995, 25.

suggesting that either his contributions were real but uncredited, or non-existent as Kier claims.

Action Films

In the 1980s, action films became en vogue, made popular by characters such as Stallone's *Rambo* and almost any movie with Arnold Schwarzenegger in it. The advent of VHS and the video industry helped find outlets for cheap action movies for the Italian industry, who churned out many movies involving mercenaries, soldiers, and adventurers. Prolific filmmakers during this time included Bruno Mattei with *Strike Commando* (1987) and *Robowar* (1988), and futuristic, post-apocalyptic action movies from Enzo G. Castellari, such as *1990: Bronx Warriors* (1982) and *Escape 2000* (1982).

During this period Margheriti began to film more movies in the Philippines, ushering in many productions involving a jungle setting, in effect carving a niche for himself. One of Margheriti's earliest forays into the world of action filmmaking would be *Deer Hunter/Apocalypse Now*-inspired *The Last Hunter* (1980). Margheriti's jungle movies would continue well into the 1980s, with the *Tiger Joe* (1981), *Hunters of the Golden Cobra* (1981), *Yor: The Hunter from the Future* (1983), *Tornado* (1983), *Codename: Wildgeese* (1984), *Jungle Raiders* (1985), *Commando Leopard* (1985), *The Commander* (1987), *Indio* (1988), *Alien from the Deep* (1989), and *Indio 2: The Revolt* (1990). Margheriti's early movies from the 1980s tended to be most influenced by *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and the latter half of the 1980s the focus was primarily on men-on-a-mission stories.

The Last Few Years

After 1990, Margheriti's output became nearly nonexistent. The only productions to bear his namesake were the unfinished TV series *Genghis Kahn* (1992), and *Virtual Weapon* (1996). The explanations for the decline in output are many. The film production industry had been in decline in Italy for many years, with many directors turning to television, as is evidenced with *Genghis Kahn*. Another

explanation is due to Margheriti's declining health. Long time Margheriti collaborator David Warbeck would remark in an interview in *Warbeck: The Man and His Films* that Margheriti's deteriorating health was readily apparent during the filming of *Treasure Island* in 1987.³⁶ Margheriti would pass away on November 4th, 2002 from a heart attack.

International Arena

Prior to analyzing Margheriti's films, it is important to recognize that Margheriti's films exist in many versions. This is due to the international quality of vernacular films and it becomes important when a film is being analyzed that the specific version needs to be clarified to avoid any misconceptions.

Cinema that enters the international arena must be able to negotiate obstacles of foreignness.

Depending on the national market, a particular foreign film could be subtitled, dubbed, edited and even censored to accommodate local tastes or to conform to social/cultural norms. Due to the myriad number of alterations that could be exercised during a film's distribution, multiple versions of a film can be said to exist in tandem with each other. Italian vernacular cinema has wholly embraced this concept since its earliest period.

During the filming of an Italian vernacular film, any given production will usually see personnel, both on and off screen, made up of various language groups. The reasons include using a stock company the director and producers were familiar and using locals in the area the production would be filmed in.

The stars often have some international recognition, usually a Hollywood star that has waned in popularity in America, but deemed bankable in Europe. Thus any given shot in a film may be composed of actors who each speak their own native tongue while performing. An example of this

³⁶ Jason J. Slater, *David Warbeck: The Man and his Movies*, (Godalming: FAB Press, 1996), 16.

would be the Italian-German joint production of Margheriti's *Codename: Wildgeese*, where one could witness interactions between a German speaker (Klaus Kinski), an English speaker (Lewis Collins), an Italian speaker (Luciano Pigozzi) and numerous Filipino-speaking extras. For an American production this would seem like a curse, but for an Italian production this would be of no hindrance at all. With an international market in mind, all of the dialogue would be re-dubbed prior to distribution to other markets (with or without the original actor's voice).

Outside of production, these films existed in multiple forms on a country by country basis. Aside from the standard practice of re-titling (*Fuga dall'archipelago Maledetto* becomes *Tiger Joe*) and re-dubbing (German-English becomes French) these films saw particular edits or additions exercised on their prints.

In the realm of sexploitation Italian filmmaking, for example, a particular production may spend some time filming "hard core" inserts. These would be instances of close ups of sexual activity and penetration performed by stand-ins that a distributor could edit into the movie to give the impression that the main stars are performing more explicit activities. Examples of this splicing in hardcore scenes is evident in movies such as Joe D'Amato's *Emanuelle Around the World* (1977) and Andrea Bianchi's *Malabimba* (1979).

Content in these films are also altered at the whim of the international distributors who can change even fundamental plot lines of a film to what they feel will be able to sell in their locality. Mario Bava's *Black Sabbath* (1963) is a fine example of such editing liberties. *Black Sabbath* is a compilation of three separate short stories: *The Telephone*, *The Wurdalak*, and *The Drop of Water*. When American International Pictures released the film in America, the order of the stories presented in the movie was

rearranged to *The Drop of Water*, *The Telephone*, and then *The Wurdalak*.

Changes in the film may also occur during the dubbing process. It may be assumed that dubbing of any dialogue within a film is more or less in alignment with the original script, or as close to a literal translation as possible. While this certainly can be adhered to while dubbing, in many instances it is not. Continuing with the example of Bava's *Black Sabbath*, the segment of *The Telephone* contains an instance of dubbing liberties that best illustrate this point. In his commentary for *The Telephone* segment, Bava biographer Tim Lucas points out that:

[The protagonist holds] different occupations depending on the version you happen to be watching. In *Black Sabbath* [the Italian version] she's a single girl returning from a date. In the French version, she's returning from an assignation with a wealthy executive. And this version [the AIP version] implies that she's a high class, pardon the pun, call girl.³⁷

In essence, the nature of Italian vernacular filmmaking creates a variety of versions of a particular film, which in turn creates a problem in analysis. The cultural background of the person interpreting (watching) the film combined with the variety of versions of a film create multiple viewing and interpreting experiences: a German watching an Italian cut will interpret the movie differently than an American watching the same or even different cut of the same movie. Because of this dynamic, a standpoint must be selected when it comes to addressing the films of Margheriti.

This thesis will approach the films of Margheriti from the American-centric perspective while watching the cuts Margheriti intended for the American audience. There are three reasons for this rationale.

³⁷ *Black Sabbath*, DVD, 2007.

Firstly, the English cuts of Margheriti's films are more easily obtained than other cuts. Secondly, the barrier of translation for interpretation is done away with when watching the English versions. And thirdly, the immediate audience reading this thesis will be primarily English speakers in America themselves, and can identify with the perspectives.

Literature Review

If one were to peruse texts that cover general Italian film history, such as Bondanella's *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present*, Landy's *Italian Film*, and Nowell-Smith's *The Companion to Italian Cinema*, one will find very few references to Italian vernacular cinema and its filmmakers, and even fewer references to Margheriti.

Bondanella's *Italian Film: From Neorealism to the Present* is one of the oldest and continually updating general texts on Italian films (written in 1983, it saw its third edition in 2000). A look to the index of the third edition shows 47 pages devoted to Bertolucci and his films, 53 for De Sica, and Fellini with an incredible 88 pages. Contrast this to the godfather of Italian Gothic Horror movies, Mario Bava, who has only one page devoted to him. Dario Argento, internationally recognized for his visual horror films, fares slightly better with 6 pages.

The lack of discussion of Margheriti in these sources forces one to seek textual sources elsewhere, such as in reviews (*Variety* reviewed many Margheriti's movies in the 1980s), books on Margheriti's contemporaries (such as Stephen Thrower's book on Lucio Fulci, *Beyond Terror*, or Tim Lucas' book on Mario Bava, *All the Colors of the Dark*), cult and horror magazines (such as *Video Watchdog* and *Rue Morgue*), DVD commentaries, supplements and linear notes, and genre compilation books (such as *Italian Horror Films of the 1960s* which catalogs and describes various Italian horror films of the decade). In these sources, Margheriti fares better, however nothing definitive about him or his movies

has been written. While Argento, Bava, and Fulci have biographies or analytical books written about them, Margheriti has none. The primary texts that do acknowledge Margheriti concentrate on his horror output, specifically *Castle of Blood*. Margheriti's other contributions, from the spaghetti westerns to the action films of the 80's, remain elusive.

Regardless of the source, perspectives on Margheriti are quite opinionated. For example, in *Tough to Kill Volume 1: The Italian Action Explosion*, authors Cooke and Zuzelo provide an interview with Edoardo Margheriti who laments about his father's career. Preceding the interview are no less than 82 reviews of Italian action movies from the 1980s, all rated on a four-point exploding hut scale. Margheriti has 10 films reviewed in the compendium in which the authors, obvious fans of the genre (and therefore favorably biased toward its directors) hold Margheriti's movies in high regard with such descriptors as "never fails to entertain"³⁸, "stylish and well made"³⁹, "dynamic"⁴⁰, "reliable"⁴¹, and "recognized gusto."⁴² Reviewers from the trades and journals tend to be less than favorable, with such adjectives from both *Variety* and *Monthly Film Bulletin* being, "lazily slung together"⁴³, "dull"⁴⁴, and "repetitious."⁴⁵

The more informative writing about Margheriti is found in texts on his contemporaries where the authors reference Margheriti in a variety of ways. Sometimes they reference Margheriti's movies to provide additional examples for their own points. An example can be found in Thrower's book *Beyond Terror*, where he states Lucio Fulci's work was put on England's Video Nasty list (a list of banned films in the early 1980s). He proceeds to lists other filmmakers and their works that were on the list,

³⁸ Paul Cooke and David Zuzelo, *Tough to Kill Volume 1: The Italian Action Explosion* (Raleigh: Lulu, 2008), 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴³ Kim Newman, "Kommando Leopard." *Monthly Film Bulletin* LIII, no. 628 (1986): 149.

⁴⁴ Lor, "The Last Hunter." *Variety* CCCXIV, no. 4 (1984): 18.

⁴⁵ Lor, "Indo 2 – The Revolt." *Variety* CCCXLIII, no. 8 (1991): 53.

including Margheriti's.⁴⁶ Sometimes a reference is used in a comparative fashion, comparing the work of one director to a similar film of Margheriti. Sometimes a writer becomes overzealous in their subject matter, and in an attempt to bolster their interests, it comes at the expense of others. A prime example of this occurs in Tim Lucas' book on Mario Bava, *All the Colors of the Dark*. The rivalry between Bava and Margheriti must have surely seeped into Lucas' writing, for he takes every opportunity to belittle Margheriti to strengthen Bava. In a chapter devoted to Margheriti's *giallo* *Naked You Die* (1968) in which an uncredited Bava contributed to the screenplay, Lucas suggests that all the faults of the film, such as flat direction, uninteresting *mise en scene*,⁴⁷ are the results of Margheriti, while all the strengths of the film, such as particular effective shots, can be attributed to "conceptual guiding hand of Bava"⁴⁸ through the strength of his screenplay contributions. The irony is, Lucas states that the Bava screenplay must have been followed to the letter, however some of the very elements that Lucas critiques unfavorably, such as dull hero, a heroine running around scantily clad, and a two-dimensional love story,⁴⁹ would no doubt be more of a product of a screenplay than direction. Regardless, such bias does nothing to foster a positive image of Margheriti.

One of the more interesting observations about Margheriti is the polarity of his style. Most writers that reference Margheriti usually acknowledge his style in a positive light. For example, in the afterword of Troy Howarth's *The Haunted World of Mario Bava*, Roberto Curti writes:

Bava and other filmmakers of the period, like Margheriti and Freda, had a lot in common, at least regarding their visual style: the portentous Gothic flavor exuding from *Danza Macabra* / *Castle of Blood* (1963) must imply a deep knowledge of the monochrome

⁴⁶ Stephen Thrower, *Beyond Terror: The Films of Lucio Fulci* (Godalming: FAB Press, 2002), 215.

⁴⁷ Tim Lucas, *Mario Bava: All the Colors of the Dark* (Cincinnati: Video Watchdog, 2007), 717.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 717.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 717.

visuals of *Black Sunday*.⁵⁰

However, Stephen Thrower's opinion of Margheriti differs greatly:

When looking at the commercial Italian cinema, it's possible to distinguish productions that aim to mimic the style of American films, and those that take sustenance from their own visual traditions. Films in the former category can be fun (such as the Dardano Sacchetti co-scripted *Cannibal Apocalypse* directed by Antonio Margheriti in 1980) but the latter, as exemplified by the best work of Fulci, Argento, and Bava, are of greater interest.⁵¹

There is no use in denying that Margheriti's movies and style are certainly derivative of other styles and films; such is the foundations of Italian vernacular cinema, and such is the reality of many of its directors, including the ones in Thrower's quote. An issue in the above quotation is the assumption that Margheriti's films are not as interesting as the directors Thrower lists who have had reconsideration of their films. It is the proliferation of such ideas that holds back scholarly analysis of Margheriti, robbing him of the reevaluation that he is due. To reiterate the claim of this thesis, despite the prevailing notions of Margheriti being not interesting and relegated to the shadows of his contemporaries who have benefited from reevaluation, is the proposal that Margheriti was important. The way his film *Castle of Blood* transitioned sexual depictions in Italian cinema is proof positive of this.

⁵⁰ Troy Howarth, *The Haunted World of Mario Bava* (Godalming: FAB Press, 2002), 325.

⁵¹ Stephen Thrower, *Beyond Terror: The Films of Lucio Fulci* (Godalming: FAB Press, 2002), 145.

Margheriti, *Auteur* Theory, and His Hallmarks

When it comes to dialogue about directors, a thin line must be tread in regards to what type of director they are. Many scholars take the avenue of describing their subjects as *auteurs*. As *auteurs*, directors have a personal stamp or vision on the films they make that survives changes created by editors and producers. Andrew Sarris attempts to flesh out the concept of *auteur* theory with three characteristics: presence of technical competence, a director's personal style as criterion of value, and interior meaning derived from the tension between a director and his film.⁵² In other words, the film demonstrates proficiency in its composition, has key elements in the *mise en scene* that are indicative of the director, and the film holds a particular agenda that the director wants to convey. *Auteur* theory provides an easy framework to identify what is significant in a film and ties it back to its director, such as reoccurring characters, themes, visual cues, repeating styles, and revisiting the same subject matter in multiple films.

It becomes easy to label a director as an *auteur*, but the problem arises of giving credit where credit is not due. As cited previously by Koven, vernacular films must be studied with a different set of expectations,⁵³ and *auteur* theory is not the best method. This thesis takes the stance that Margheriti was not an *auteur*. Many of his hallmarks and styles could be construed to make him out as an *auteur*, but this would be untrue and would create problems when analyzing *Castle of Blood*.

In the essay "Alternatives to *Auteurs*" Graham Petrie states, "the flaw in *auteur* theory is not so much its assumption that the director's role is of primary importance as its naive and often arrogant corollary

⁵² Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 42-43.

⁵³ Mikel J. Koven, *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film*, (Oxford, Scarecrow Press: 2006), 22

that it is *only* the director who matters.”⁵⁴ This mindset doesn’t do justice to the various editors, scriptwriters, producers, actors and other individuals that play a part in creating a movie. In essence, this mindset shifts the contributions of these entities erroneously to the director. One can say that a director’s movie is indicative of his particular visual style, but that facet may actually be due in part to the cinematographer and not the director, and thus undue credit is given to the director.

The exploitation and genre filmmaking industry of Italy was communal work. With multilingual crews and production companies, the collaborative nature of filmmakers, postproduction editing, dubbing and altering, it becomes nearly impossible to isolate a director’s signature, if one even exists. The amount of influence from other individuals on any given production is just too great to be consolidated into a vision of just the director.

In his book on Lucio Fulci, Stephen Thrower firmly states that Fulci is not an *auteur*, and his reasons given are applicable to Margheriti. Thrower argued how *auteur* theory does not work with Fulci. Firstly, he states that Fulci’s work “varies too wildly in subject matter, scope, temperament, and artistic success”⁵⁵ to allow a development of ideas and styles through a body of work.⁵⁶ This description is fitting for Margheriti, who worked in so many genres and *filones*, with different production companies, and directed from scripts with varied subject matter. This runs contrary to Sarris’ second point in his definition of *auteur* theory which calls for a director exhibiting “recurring characteristics of style which serves as his signature.”⁵⁷ While Margheriti may have used reoccurring actors in the same way *auteurs* David Lynch used Jack Nance and Kyle MacLachlan or David Cronenberg used Viggo Mortensen, this

⁵⁴ Graham Petrie, “Alternatives to Auteurs,” in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 112.

⁵⁵ Stephen Thrower, *Beyond Terror: The Films of Lucio Fulci* (Guildford: Fab Press, 2002), 266.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁵⁷ Andrew Sarris, “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962,” in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 43.

is not enough to label him as such.

Secondly, Thrower suspects that many leapt to calling Fulci and his contemporaries *auteurs* as it offers a way of categorizing Italian exploitation films and by extension, it is a way to “corral” the various collaborators under one moniker.⁵⁸ He suggests that as more is learned about a director, the more is unraveled about his capacities in productions, that “they are more like superintendents, journeymen, supervisors, sometimes of a lax and disorganized sort.”⁵⁹ An example of this in relation to Margheriti’s is with the film *Hercules, Prisoner of Evil* (1964) that Margheriti gets directing credit for. However according Margheriti, he only directed 50% of the film and switched his focus to doing the special effects and allowed his assistant director, Ruggero Deodato, to finish the movie.⁶⁰

On the subject of Deodato, in an interview he did for the book *Cannibal Holocaust and the Savage Cinema of Ruggero Deodato* he speaks of Margheriti as follows:

In terms of the other fantasy directors I worked with, Antonio Margheriti also has imagination, clearly, but I admired Margheriti more as a fine technical director, as a craftsman of the profession. He as a director who loved the technical challenge of shooting, but perhaps he was not so attentive to the narratives or the actors. So his influence on me was more technical, not so much one that inspired imagination.⁶¹

Deodato’s quote definitely highlights the technical aspect of Margheriti which is in alignment with Sarris’ first point of an *auteur*, but does not bolster the second or third point. Deodato had worked with

⁵⁸ Ibid., 267.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 267.

⁶⁰ Blumenstock, Peter. “Margheriti: The Wild, Wild Interview.” *Video Watchdog*, May/June 1995, 48.

⁶¹ Gian Luca Castoldi and others, *Cannibal Holocaust and the Savage Cinema of Ruggero Deodato* (Guildford: Fab Press, 2011), 115.

Margheriti on many projects and his assessment of his colleague and friend are valid points to take into consideration in defining the type of director Margheriti was.

One way to describe Margheriti would be as a “paycheck director”, one who ultimately must answer to the studios’ demands over his own. This claim is affirmed by Margheriti himself in an interview he did with *Video Watchdog* where he proclaimed “I’m a slave to my producers. A prostitute. If it’s for money, my answer is yes; and of course, for the fun of it all.”⁶² Such an admission on Margheriti’s part prevents us from applying the *auteur* label to him, and at a cursory glance may seem to cast him in a negative light. Yet there is nothing preventing a paycheck director from occasionally creating a film that is interesting, complex, or even important.

Hallmarks

Even though Margheriti may not be an *auteur*, he does exhibit his own personal interests and ideas. Despite his idiosyncratic filmography of different genres and topics, many of his “hallmarks” can be visibly discerned. There are three distinct nuances of Margheriti that can be found in many of the films he has helmed. The first is his inclination to collaborate with the same professionals in his movies. The second is his interest in what the French would call the *fantastique*, films with heavy emphasis on horror, the surreal, and sci-fi. The third is Margheriti’s usage of special effects, typically realized with models.

In regards to collaborations, Margheriti worked with many of the same individuals again and again both in front of and behind the camera. Having familiar faces in Margheriti’s movies certainly adds a visual dimension that unifies his movies while behind the camera collaborators provide uniformity in regards to music and production work. David Warbeck, Allan Collins, Barbara Steele, Georges Rivière,

⁶² Ibid., 45.

Umberto Raho, Klaus Kinski, and “Marvelous” Marvin Hagler all appeared on screen in many of Margheriti’s movies. Director Ruggero Deodato, composer Angelo Francesco Lavagino, and German producer Erwin C. Dietrich all collaborated with Margheriti behind the scenes on many productions.

These collaborations demonstrate Margheriti’s affinity for working with the same professionals over and over again while at the same time paints a positive image of the relationships and camaraderie of the subaltern Italian film industry. For example, with *Castle of Blood*, Margheriti was not intended to be the original director. Instead Sergio Corbucci, director of the infamous Italian western/hero, *Django* (1966), was slated to direct. However, he was hired to do a peplum for another company so he asked Margheriti to direct in his stead due to their mutual friendship and prior collaborations on each other’s projects.⁶³ Using the same crew over and over in his productions fosters a better sense of comradeship while at the same time bolsters the efficiency of movie making since he has formed a crew who knows how to work with each other. This can be illustrated with the American Roger Corman who states in his commentary on the DVD of *The House of Usher* that he would form a specialized crew that was noted for getting things done and that other studios would reach out to him to borrow his crew.⁶⁴ The exchange with Corbucci, coupled with his reuse of actors and crew, paints a specific picture that Margheriti was a dependable rock within the Italian vernacular film industry.

Margheriti second nuance lies with his interest in the sci-fi and horror themes, which is a dominating influence in the vast majority of his work. In fact, very few of Margheriti’s movies take place in a contemporary setting without elements of sci-fi, horror, or fantasy. Only Margheriti’s spaghetti westerns, his two crime films (*The Squeeze*, (1978) and *Death Rage* (1976)), and his men on a mission combat-oriented movies made during the 1980s display any sort of adherence to real world normality.

⁶³ Ibid., 48.

⁶⁴ *The Fall of the House of Usher*, DVD, 2001.

The rest of the movies in his repertoire are rife with spaceships, robots, ghosts, mystical powers from artifacts, weird science, invisibility potions, mythology, vampire ghosts, witches, and even viruses that spread cannibalism.

Because of Margheriti's fascination with the *fantastique*, it comes as no surprise that his third hallmark is his proficiency at realizing special effects. Much of Margheriti's horror output used liberal instances of makeup and prosthetic special effects. One noteworthy example is in *Cannibal Apocalypse* (1980), with a scene in which Giovanni Lombardo Radice's character is shot right through the midsection, creating a rather large hole.

Miniatures and models make up the vast majority of Margheriti's special effects. His early space movies from his *Gamma I Quadrilogy* showcased futuristic space ports and spaceships that would have been on par with the models Toho was using during the same era as their *tokusatsu* movies, such as *Godzilla* (1954), *Rodan* (1956) and *Prince of Space* (1958). When Margheriti's interests changed to the action-oriented fare of the 1980s, so too did his models. Instead of using models to depict a setting, they were instead used for realizing complex and otherwise expensive action sequences (i.e. they were generally blown up). The exploding train yard at the beginning of *The Last Hunter*, the crashing airplane during *Commando Leopard* (1985), the flamethrower-wielding helicopters in *The Commander* (1988), and the collapsing dam that releases a school of piranhas in *Killer Fish* (1979) were all executed quite convincingly with the aid of lower budget models. In some cases, Margheriti was able to anticipate an action sequence years before digital technology would become the norm. The sequence near the end of *Men in Black* (1997) where agents K and J traverse the heavily congested tunnel in their 1987 Ford LTD Crown Victoria by using alien technology to drive on the ceiling was executed thirteen years earlier in *Codename: Wildgeese* (1984), during a chase sequence where a car drives up the sides

inside a tunnel to negotiate an obstruction in the road.

The use of miniatures became a staple for Margheriti as the years went on, and he himself not only helped design and construct them, but he passed on his trade to his son Edoardo, influencing him from an early age with gifts of models of spaceships and cars.⁶⁵ Edoardo would become integral not only by helping his father in constructing miniatures for movies like *Tornado* (1983) and *Treasure Island* (1987), but for other directors as well, such as Sergio Martino's film *2019: After the Fall of New York* (1983). Margheriti's craftsmanship at constructing and visualizing models, as well as his forte in the sci-fi genre, got him the attention from the production team of *2001 A Space Odyssey*. He was flown to London and met with Stanley Kubrick and special photographic effects supervisor Douglas Trumbull to speak about the project. Nothing came to fruition however, as Margheriti was whisked off to other obligations.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Paul Cooke and David Zuzelo, *Tough to Kill Volume 1: The Italian Action Explosion* (Raleigh: Lulu, 2008), 106.

⁶⁶ Blumenstock, Peter. "Margheriti: The Wild, Wild Interview!" *Video Watchdog*, May/June 1995,

Castle of Blood

This chapter will focus on Margheriti's film *Castle of Blood* (also known as *Danza Macabra*). In the book, *Italian Sexy Comedy*, authors Raffio and Serio make the proposal that Italian sex comedies came about due to the erotic nature of the Italian gothic horror movies from the 1950s and 1960s.⁶⁷ The idea is only mentioned in passing in the book without mentioning any specific films to illustrate the point, but the point is quite important as it hints at a significant transition in Italian film history.

It is the claim of this thesis that Margheriti's *Castle of Blood* is the key film that fills the gap that Raffio and Serio allude to. *Castle of Blood* shifts the erotic hues from Italian gothic horror films into the Italian sex comedies. By extension, *Castle of Blood* also provides the missing link in Italian film history proper that bridges the gap of sexuality in Italian films of the early 1960s and before, to the more open and liberal Italian film sexuality of the late 1960s and beyond.

This chapter will be broken down as follows: first, a plot synopsis will be given on *Castle of Blood*. This will textually anchor future points in this chapter while providing a frame of reference if a copy of the film is not readily available. Secondly, this chapter will illustrate the importance of *Castle of Blood* to Italian cinema by showing how it bridges the sexual gap to influence subsequent genres, including the aforementioned Italian sex comedy genre. This will be accomplished by illustrating how sexuality was depicted in Italian cinema before and after the 1960s, then provide examples of how *Castle of Blood* challenged the prevailing notions of sexuality in Italian films during that time.

⁶⁷ Livio Raffio and Max Serio, *Italian Sexy Comedy*, trans. Pat Scalabrino (Milano: Mediane, 2007), xi.

Plot

Edgar Allen Poe (Silvano Tranquilli) is finishing up his excursion to London by relaxing in a pub, telling a rendition of his tale “Never Bet the Devil Your Head” to his friend Lord Blackwood (Umberto Raho). Alan Foster (Georges Rivière), a reporter who has been attempting many times to contact Poe during his English trip for an interview, joins the conversation. While showing his respect and admiration for Poe and his stories, Alan rebuffs the notion that Poe’s fantastic stories are based on truth. Blackwood, in defense of Poe, proposes a wager with Alan: if he can spend the night in Blackwood’s castle he’ll win a sum of money. Seeing an opportunity to use the bet as an attempt to interview Poe, Alan agrees immediately and the trio depart in a stagecoach to Blackwood’s castle.

Alan is dropped off outside the gates of the castle, with Blackwood saying that they will return at dawn. Alan makes his way through the castle’s graveyard to a stable, where he finds a discarded shawl. Alan enters the castle and in his exploration, he happens upon a large portrait of one of the castle’s previous inhabitants, Julia (Margarete Robsahm), which begins to shimmer. In his periphery he sees and hears dancing, but when he investigates another room, he finds it empty save for a piano.

As Alan sits at the piano, he is introduced to Elisabeth (Barbara Steele), the sister of Lord Blackwood. She explains that her brother sends someone to her once a year to keep her company, providing legitimacy to the fantastic stories about the castle. Alan is immediately smitten by her beauty and both become enamored of each other. While Elisabeth escorts Alan to his bedroom, she explains that Julia, the woman in the painting, is not her relative while Alan gives her shawl back. In the bedroom, the two get acquainted before being interrupted by Julia. Julia admonishes Elisabeth, who becomes embarrassed and takes her leave. Julia follows her and proclaims that even with Alan’s help, Elizabeth will not escape – she is trapped in the castle.

Alan and Elisabeth soon meet again, profess their love and have a romantic rendezvous, while Julia eavesdrops outside their door. In their post-coital position, Alan states he is unable to hear Elisabeth's heart, to which she replies that she is not alive. Before Alan can react, an assailant bursts into the room, stabs Elisabeth and flees. Alan gives chase and shoots the assailant with his pistol, who vanishes into thin air. He returns to his room but notices that Elisabeth has also vanished.

Alan proceeds to call out for Elisabeth throughout the castle when he is approached by Dr. Carmus who explains to Alan the strange nature of the castle and its inhabitants: the dead will reappear to relive the last few moments before they died. Dr. Carmus leads Alan to various recreations in the castle. The first is an elegant ball, where the assailant from earlier approaches Elisabeth and demands that she leaves her husband and resume their relationship. He forces himself upon her in the stables. Afterwards, while Elisabeth is making love to her husband, her secret lover shows up and kills her husband, who in turn is killed by Julia. Julia forces herself onto Elisabeth and exerts her dominance over her. Elisabeth responds by stabbing her with a knife. Alan then witnesses Dr. Carmus' murder at the hands of Elisabeth's now undead lover followed by a final scene of a newly married couple that are also dispatched by the same lover.

All the murdered apparitions appear before Alan, and proclaim that they need his blood to continue their existence - another night of life a year later. Aided by Elisabeth, Alan flees from the castle. He attempts to bring her with him outside the castle, despite her protests that she cannot exist outside its confines. She falls to the ground and disappears, saying goodbye. Alan makes haste to the gate of the castle, but while stopping for a respite, it closes and impales him. The next morning Poe and Blackwood arrive. Seeing Alan dead, Blackwood takes Alan's wallet and pockets the monies for the

wager. Poe expresses his interest at writing a story about Alan's adventure while a disembodied voice of Elisabeth expresses her gratitude that Alan stayed with her, to which his ghostly voice replies in affirmation.

Italian Sexual Cinema Before 1960

During the 1950s, there were two major factors that allowed *Castle of Blood* to come about: the economic boon of Italian cinema plus the dominance of the Christian Democratic Party and the Catholic Church. Both factors are important and unique in their own right and need clarification in order to describe the filmic landscape of the early 1960s and before.

In *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present*, Peter Bondanella labels the decade spanning 1958 to 1968 as the golden age of Italian cinema.⁶⁸ Bondanella attributes this era's formation from the decline in the quantity of American films being distributed in Italy since the war, allowing for domestic Italian productions to overtake American films in their local market.⁶⁹ The rise of high art directors during this period, such as Fellini and Antonioni, allowed Italians to have an international presence. In spite of this, it was not these types of prestigious filmmakers that drove the success of Italian cinema during this period. In *Beyond Terror: The Films of Lucio Fulci*, Stephen Thrower posits that it was the genre and mainstream films with their established home market audience that provided the financial backbone to finance the higher art productions of the likes of Fellini or Visconti and others of their ilk.⁷⁰ Mikel Koven emphasizes the importance of Thrower's point by stating that "the only way an intellectual and critically acclaimed film culture can exist, particularly without the complex studio-like systems as in Hollywood, is through an exploitation and populist cinema."⁷¹

⁶⁸ Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 143

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 143

⁷⁰ Stephen Thrower, *Beyond Terror: The Films of Lucio Fulci* (Guildford: Fab Press, 2002), 42

⁷¹ Mikel Koven, *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film* (Lanham, Scarecrow Press, 2006), 12

While Thrower suggests that the proliferation of the popular cinema allows financiers to have the funds to gamble on the international directors,⁷² his claim needs to be expanded to also include popular, genre, and vernacular cinema as well. If there ever was an opportunity for cinema to try to test the waters with new concepts that may be too risqué, controversial, or taboo, it was in this realm of vernacular filmmaking. This was because the monetary stakes due to budget were not as high as the films of the international directors. It is perhaps in this arena where the filmmakers have the freedom to experiment with controversial topics while still operating within the budgetary confines, as well as exploring what the home market audience is interested in. Films such as *Castle of Blood* could freely explore controversial subjects, in this case the subject of sexuality and lesbianism, at a fraction of the cost. It is with this hegemony in mind that genre films proliferated, contributing to the monetary success of the Italian film machine during this period, while challenging what was acceptable to be shown on screen.

Experimenting in the genre realm of filmmaking provided another benefit for films like *Castle of Blood* allowed them to remain somewhat under the radar of the second dominant factor of Italian cinema, that of the religious hegemony of the Christian Democrats and the church.

In 1948 the Christian Democrats won the country's general elections with 48.5% of the votes,⁷³ ushering in thirty three years of political dominance that would end in 1981 with the election of Giovanni Spadolini, who was not a member of the Christian Democrats.⁷⁴ The political left became marginalized as right-wing elements were incorporated into the party. With regards to Italian cinema, the Christian Democrats and the church had political, economical, and social influence on the industry

⁷² Stephen Thrower, *Beyond Terror: The Films of Lucio Fulci* (Guildford: Fab Press, 2002), 42

⁷³ Carlo Celli and Marga Cottino-Jones, *A New Guide to Italian Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 53.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

in both the international art cinema as well as the vernacular cinema. This was accomplished by having screenplays, budgets, technical specifications, and crew personnel submitted to the Sezione Autonoma Cinema of the *Banca Nazionale de Lvaroro*, a state apparatus, who would disperse funds and loans for productions.⁷⁵ Another example of Christian Democratic influence can be illustrated with their attitudes towards the much lauded neorealism genre of films that emerged from the post-war landscape. These films were denounced by the Catholic Church who thought them to be a poor depiction of Italy.⁷⁶ Instead the church wanted producers to embrace a Hollywood style of production.⁷⁷ Marcia Landy states that “though still critical of certain areas (e.g., divorce, treatments of sexuality), there was no doubt that many Catholic authorities preferred the entertainment values and cosmopolitanism of Hollywood.”⁷⁸

It is this statement that needs emphasis because the church had a large influence on how sexuality was depicted in Italian films. Danny Shipka states in his book *Perverse Titillation: The Exploitation Cinema of Italy, Spain and France 1960-1980* that “it was difficult for filmmakers to explore controversial themes in religion because the church has a long history of being archaic and traditional in its thinking.”⁷⁹ The official stance of the church and the Christian Democrats was understandably conservative. Italian sexploitation filmmaker Tinto Brass reflects that the “official attitude towards sex was not so accepting.”⁸⁰ Censorship was evident, and in *Immoral Tales: Sex and Horror Cinema in Europe 1956-1984* authors Tohill and Tombs illustrate the environment by stating that:

The Constitution of 1947 has enshrined in law the free expression and diffusion of ideas

⁷⁵ Mary P. Wood, *Italian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 13.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁷ Marcia Landy, *Italian Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁷⁹ Danny Shipka, *Perverse Titillation: The Exploitation Cinema of Italy, Spain and France 1960-1980* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), 141.

⁸⁰ Dian Hansen, *The Big Butt Book* (Koln: Taschen, 2010), 292.

– which, by extension, included films. However, this did not guarantee a freedom from prosecution under the articles of the Penal Code, which forbade the distribution of obscene material. Magistrates had the right to seize individual films, either on their own initiative or following a complaint from an individual citizen.⁸¹

Filmmakers sought covert ways to circumvent the policies and expectations of the Christian Democrats in their films. This resulted in various creative solutions by both the prestigious international films and the vernacular film circles when depicting sexuality and sexual topics while staying under the political/religious radar.

In the higher-class cinema, a phenomenon known as the *maggiorata fisica* came into fruition. *Maggiorata fisica*, which means buxom beauty, was verbiage given to a particular look of Italian actress that became popular in the 1950s. Often culled from Italian beauty pageants, these women were physically imposing with their large breasts and striking beauty. Aside from their imposing attributes, these women's attitudes were equally domineering. The proto *maggiorata fisica* was Silvana Morgan from the neorealist film, *Bitter Rice* (1949), with her iconic image of standing knee deep in a rice field wearing stockings and a tight shirt that showcased her breasts. The *maggiorata fisica* did not gain momentum until the next decade when such famous actress such as Sophia Loren, Gina Lollobrigida, and Silvana Pampanini began to appear in critically acclaimed movies. Authors Carlo Celli and Marga Cottino-Jones hypothesize that in the “1950s and 1960s the emphasis on physically imposing actresses such as Loren or Lollobrigida was a response to the audience's interest in viewing sexuality on the screen and consequentially also had a large social and economic context.”⁸² In this context, moviegoers were titillated with the well endowed beautiful women on the screen while at the same time, within the

⁸¹ Cathal Tohill and Pete Tombs, *Immoral Tales: Sex and Horror Cinema in Europe 1956-1984* (London: Titan Books, 1995), 33.

⁸² Carlo Celli and Marga Cottino-Jones, *A New Guide to Italian Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 81.

same movies, enjoying state sanctioned fare from the melodramas and pink neorealism films.

The subaltern and genre filmmakers embraced another style of filmmaking that not only supplied the sex but the exploitative violence as well. One well known example is the development of the peplum *filone* in the 1950s. As mentioned in the introduction, the *peplums*, also known as sword and sandal movies, were a genre distinct to Italy that became popular after the release of *Hercules* in 1958 starring body builder Steve Reeves. According to Peter Bondanella, “more than 170 films, approximately 10% of Italian film production between 1957 and 1964, belong to this genre.”⁸³ This made the peplum quite profitable for the Italian film industry while satisfying the church’s stipulations.

The peplum storylines were heavily drawn from antiquity. Bible stories, folklore, Greek and Roman mythos, and other historic topics became the backdrop to stories involving Hercules, Italian folk hero Maciste, Samson, and Ursus. With these pseudo-historic settings, filmmakers satisfied audience demand for violence in their films by showing gladiatorial combat, strong man and Olympic-like contests, large scale battles, and wanton sword play and fisticuffs. Sexuality was depicted in other fashions. Belly dancers wearing veils and translucent garbs while suggestively dancing became the proxy for eroticism. Women became vamps and seducers, applying sensual charm not just on the protagonist of the films, but on the audience members as well. The men were not the only ones being treated with visions of beautiful women as women audience members could admire the visage of masculine men. The heroes of the peplums were played by body builders, such as Steve Reeves and Allen Steele, whose hyper masculine bodies were definitely counterparts to the *maggiorata fisica* women.

⁸³ Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 159.

The peplum became a successful genre that not only catered to the audience's request for sex and violence, but was also sanctioned by the Christian Democrats who saw the historic films as nationalistic, portraying Italy in a positive light while at the same time (seemingly) reaffirming religious values to the masses. The Biblical backdrops in essence became a subterfuge to exhibit sex and violence. Mary Wood points out that "ironically, the censorship efforts of the Catholic Church had as one effect the development of *filone* where sexual adventures, sadism, violence and the erotic might be safely depicted in narratives of the evil and perversions of ancient empires."⁸⁴ Judging from the aforementioned figures of 10% of movies during this period being peplums, it can be inferred the ruse worked masterfully.

Italian Sexual Cinema in the Later 1960s and Afterward

Fast forward to the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s and the depiction of sexual elements in Italian cinema has changed drastically. Worldwide societal changes eventually chipped away at Christian Democratic hegemony, and with the loosening of values came waves of films desiring to showcase content previously thought of as forbidden. Pornography, erotic films, and especially erotic comedies became both profitable and successful, hence a second distinct era of Italian sexual movies. Peter Bondanella downplays the role of sexy movies in his book *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present*, but does make the concession that "their popularity attests to profound changes in the Italian sexual customs that often find more compelling artistic expression in the film comedy."⁸⁵

In 1974, the French movie *Emmanuelle* was released to great success, both commercially and critically.

⁸⁴ Mary P. Wood, *Italian Cinema* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 70.

⁸⁵ Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 160.

The movie ushered in a new wave of erotic films that gained mainstream attention, not just in France but abroad as well. In true Italian derivative fashion, carbon copies emerged. The most famous example was *Black Emanuelle* in 1975 (the single “m” is an attempt to skirt copyright of the French versions⁸⁶), starring Laura Gemser. *Black Emanuelle* was quite popular, and much like its French counterpart, spawned numerous sequels. Although the first *Black Emanuelle* was directed by Bitto Albertini, the majority of the sequels were done by Italian exploitation director Joe D’Amato with such entries as *Emanuelle in Bangkok* (1976), *Emanuelle in America* (1977), *Emanuelle Around the World* (1977), *Emanuelle and the Last Cannibals* (1977), and *Emanuelle and the White Slave Trade* (1978). It should be noted that just by glancing at the titles, these films not only incorporated elements from the French original, but also exploited other genres that were gaining popularity at the same time as well. *Emanuelle and the Last Cannibals* is an obvious attempt to capitalize on the success of the cannibal *filone* movies that were being made popular by the likes of Ruggero Deodato and Umberto Lenzi. *Emanuelle and the White Slave Trade* was in response to the many women-in-prison films being made not only in the States but in Italy and Spain as well. Joe D’Amato would go on to find success in the 1980s when he shifted his focus from merely exploitation and sexploitation films to outright pornography.

Years earlier, director Tinto Brass started to gain momentum with his specific brand of posterior-emphasizing erotic works. His film *Salon Kitty* (1976) helped usher in the Italian Nazisploitation *filone*⁸⁷ and gathered the attention of Penthouse founder Bob Guccione who hired Brass to direct the infamous *Caligula* (1979) starring Malcom McDowell and Helen Mirren and written by Gore Vidal. Brass has stated that these movies were intended as political allegory and his true move to making

⁸⁶ Jim Harper, *Italian Horror* (Baltimore: Luminary Press, 2005), 223.

⁸⁷ Stephen Thrower, *Beyond Terror: The Films of Lucio Fulci* (Guildford: Fab Press, 2002), 108

erotic films and subsequent success occurred with *The Key*⁸⁸ (1983), where he focuses his efforts on fetishizing women and their buttocks. His career would continue with more releases in a similar vein with *Miranda* (1985), *Paprika* (1991), *All Ladies Do It* (1992), and *Monamour* (2005). His success continues to this day.

While the proliferation of the *Black Emanuelle* and Tinto Brass films are fine examples of the acceptance of erotic films in Italy, a far more important example would be the emergence of the Italian sex comedies. The Italian sex comedies emerged from the most popular of all genres in Italy, *commedia all'italiana*,⁸⁹ which means Italian comedy. The *commedia all'italiana* became an important breeding ground of many actors, such as Vittorio Gassman, made famous by *Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958), Alberto Sordi, famous from *The Great War* (1959), and even international stars such as Marcello Mastroianni from *Divorce Italian Style* (1961). Comedies like *Divorce Italian Style* are important because they provide examples of films subverting the established hegemony of the Christian Democratic government and their values. In *Divorce Italian Style*, Mastroianni is married to a smothering wife but falls in love with his cousin. Since divorce is illegal in Italy, he concocts a scheme to cause his wife to fall in love with another man, allowing him to kill her to keep his honor. The film was extremely successful and won an Academy Award for best writing.

The Italian comedians would soon scour every facet of Italian culture for elements to parody and from this would emerge the Italian sex comedies.⁹⁰ The Italian sex comedies became noteworthy for their plots revolving around adulterous couples, cross dressing, voyeurism, and secret romantic rendezvous. The genre provided the launching grounds of many sex symbol actresses, such as Edwige Fenech and Barbara Bouchet. In the book, *Italian Sexy Comedy*, the authors posit that these movies were born from

⁸⁸ Dian Hansen, *The Big Butt Book* (Köln: Taschen, 2010), 293.

⁸⁹ Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 144.

⁹⁰ Livio Raffio and Max Serio, *Italian Sexy Comedy*, trans. Pat Scalabrino (Milano: Mediane, 2007), xii.

the Italian horror films where there was already a “subtle erotic hue.”⁹¹ This is a critical statement as this is the catalyst for the rest of this thesis. As the next sections will demonstrate, there was a transition from the aforementioned periods of filmic sexuality, and *Castle of Blood* is the most important movie that was at the forefront of this period. Margheriti’s *Castle of Blood* was able to push the envelope from the conservative style of sexuality to the sexuality exhibited during the era of Italian sex comedies.

***Castle of Blood* – Transition of Italian Sexual Cinematics**

The statement from *Italian Sexy Comedy* becomes quite important because it postulates that the Italian horror movies of the earlier 1960s provided the launching pad of Italian sex comedies and by extension, future Italian erotic films as well. The authors do not mention any specific titles to back this claim up and refer to the genre as a whole, but the claim bears investigating with regards to *Castle of Blood* being at the forefront of Italian horror in challenging the censored cinematic landscape.

First, there is the issue of nudity. There is the iconic scene during the last ghostly re-enactment where the newlywed bride disrobes and her bare chest is fully exposed. This topless nudity lingers onscreen for a few seconds, much longer than just a fleeting glimpse. Her translucent hoop slip undergarment also leaves nothing to the imagination as to what sort of figure she conceals underneath. *Castle of Blood* was not the first Italian horror movie to show nudity as that honor belongs Renato Polselli’s *L’amante del Vampiro* (1960). Louis Paul notes in *Italian Horror Film Directors* that it is an “important footnote in the history of Italian horror for being among the first films to blatantly mix sex and horror”⁹² and that it features “effective above-the-waist nudity.”⁹³ It is important to note that since this movie was in the early 1960s, nudity of this caliber in films was still quite taboo and therefore seldom

⁹¹ Ibid., xi.

⁹² Louis Paul, *Italian Horror Film Directors* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2005), 14.

⁹³ Ibid., 15.

depicted. *Castle of Blood* may not have been the first Italian horror movie with female nudity, but the presence of nudity is one facet that challenges cinematic conventions.

The scene in question that catapults *Castle of Blood* above its siblings in Italian Gothic horror is the lesbian scene between Julia and Elisabeth. The scene, abridged in the plot synopsis, occurs when Julia accosts Elisabeth, proclaiming her dominance over Elisabeth. The encounter implies that Julia and Elisabeth have been sexually intimate before with the verbiage “I don’t want you anymore,” but Elisabeth has since moved on. The scene is shot in extreme close up: Julia kisses Elisabeth but her hands disappear on- and off-screen, suggesting Julia is groping of various private areas of Elisabeth when Julia is not fondling her face. Similarly, after Elisabeth stabs Julia and pushes her body away, her hand falls from Elisabeth’s breast. Though the action contains no nudity, and is quite tame by today’s standards, for its time the scene was quite controversial.

In *The History of Italian Cinema*, Gian Piero Brunetta claims that the lesbian scenes in *Castle of Blood* are the first ever in the history of Italian cinema.⁹⁴ The statement is seconded by Antonio Bruschini in *Bizarre Sinema! Horror all’italiana* who states that “the film includes one of the first explicit lesbian intercourses in the cinema, between Margaret Robsham and a sensuous Barbara Steele as her unwilling victim.”⁹⁵ Margheriti supports this proposition when he quips in an interview that “*Castle of Blood* was quite a scandal when it opened here in Rome because of the lesbian love scene.”⁹⁶

The statement of Margheriti being the pioneer in showcasing lesbian content in Italian cinema is true but needs more reinforcement to support the claim that both Brunetta and Bruschini fail to offer. The race to be the first movie to depict such actions is actually in contest with Mario Bava’s *Black Sabbath*,

⁹⁴ Gian Piero Brunetta, *The History of Italian Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton, 2009), 201.

⁹⁵ Antonio Bruschini, *Bizarre Sinema! Horror all’italiana* (Italy: Glittering Images, 1996), 78.

⁹⁶ Blumenstock, Peter. “Margheriti: The Wild, Wild Interview!” *Video Watchdog*, May/June 1995, 47.

specifically the anthology movie's first story *The Telephone*. In *The Telephone*, the main female protagonist, Rosy, has had a lesbian encounter with another woman in the story, Mary. Mary, who still harbors feelings for Rosy, uses threatening phone calls to scare Rosy into allowing Mary back into her life, and perhaps into her bed. Confusion occurs at first glance just by comparing the release dates of both *Castle of Blood* and *Black Sabbath*. *Black Sabbath* is stated with a release year of 1963 in its credits, while *Castle of Blood* is stated with 1964. But in *Italian Horror Films of the 1960s*, Lawrence McCallum explains that *Castle of Blood* was shot in 1962 but not released for general audiences until two years later,⁹⁷ which would explain the 1964 release date. In *Mario Bava: All the Colors of the Dark*, Tim Lucas notes that the filming dates for *Black Sabbath* were in February and March of 1963.⁹⁸ Going by production year, then the claim would be true that Margheriti filmed such controversial material before his colleague did. Technicalities aside, the biggest different between the two films is that the lesbian connection in *Black Sabbath* is inferred and open to subjectivity while in *Castle of Blood* the lesbian relationship is both visually and audibly showcased on the screen. Shipka highlights the importance of these specific scenes by stating that they “show how the traditional Gothic motif was looking up to the exploitation factor in order to secure an audience and how more displays of sexuality, especially involving pretty women, would be necessary to keep the ever-changing international audience interested.”⁹⁹

While the lesbian scene and overt nudity elevate *Castle of Blood's* cinematic importance during this transitional period, there remain a few other facets of the film that bear mentioning with regards to challenging sexuality in Italian cinema. In his essay “Art House or House of Exorcism?: The Changing Distribution and Reception Contexts of Mario Bava's *Lisa and the Devil*” Kevin Heffernan suggests

⁹⁷ Lawrence McCallum, *Italian Horror Films of the 1960s: A Critical Catalog of 62 Chillers* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1998), 55.

⁹⁸ Tim Lucas, *Mario Bava: All the Colors of the Dark* (Cincinnati: Video Watchdog, 2007), 482.

⁹⁹ Danny Shipka, *Perverse Titillation: The Exploitation Cinema of Italy, Spain and France 1960-1980* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), 42.

that the rampant sexual deviance in *Castle of Blood* doesn't just stop with lesbianism, but also include rape, adultery, and necrophilia, specifically with the romantic encounter between Alan and Elisabeth.¹⁰⁰ The necrophilia angle - the relationship between Alan who is alive and Elisabeth who is dead - is quite shocking even in contemporary cinema. It becomes difficult or risky to show, with films either taking the gory horror route as in the German film *Nekromantik* (1987), or a more subtle and perhaps sympathetic route such as the Canadian film *Kissed* (1996). Regardless of how it is depicted, concepts that overtly or covertly deal with necrophilia have yet to be normalized in present day cinema, so *Castle of Blood* was quite *avant garde* to even ponder such material forty years ago. The rape angle is also difficult to behold on the screen. From exploitation fare such as *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978) to art house mainstream movies such as France's *Irreversible* (2002), the subject is risky, squeamish, and always controversial. Though the lesbian scene in *Castle of Blood* does "go all the way," the rape implications add an extra controversial taboo to the film.

Much like the *peplums*, *Castle of Blood* exists due to using loopholes in what can be depicted or not in Italian films. While the *peplums* protect themselves with Biblical stories and settings, *Castle of Blood* protects itself in that at the end, the characters are still subjected to and punished by the morals and values set forth by the Christian Democrats. Alan, shown gambling and having sexual relations outside of wedlock with Elisabeth, does die in the end. Elisabeth is shown having an affair with another man while married, and she of course dies (again?) at the end. Both can be seen to be punished in the Christian eye for their debauchery. However, their deaths mean the audience's delight. Christian audience members have their moral obligations confirmed, while lower and working class *terza visione* audience members get the sex, death, and gore that entertains them. Shipka sums up this situation in regards to the Gothic films as a whole:

¹⁰⁰ Kevin Heffernan, "Art House or House of Exorcism?: The Changing Distribution and Reception Contexts of Mario Bava's *Lisa and the Devil*," in *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics*, ed. Jeffrey Sconce (Durham, NC: Duke university Press, 2007), 149-150.

Though the subject matters were decidedly adult, the execution was still steeped in traditional, Hollywood/religious/government code. This meant that while the subject matter of these films often dealt with modern issues such as sexual longing, unhealthy family relationships, and violent death, they were still rooted in suppression. Though some brief glimpses of nudity and overt violence were beginning to creep in, early Gothic audience members had to decipher these perversions themselves.¹⁰¹

In the case of *Castle of Blood*, there is much more on the screen than just nudity and violence, but a cavalcade of other taboo subjects as well. This brazenness doesn't require the audience to decipher the cues at all, but the trade off to allow the subject matter to be depicted is that the characters are held accountable for their actions. It is with this interesting configuration that *Castle of Blood* is able to subvert established cinematic restrictions under the political hegemony, ushering in challenging, risqué, and new sexual concepts to Italian cinema canon, to influence the erotic movies that follow, and to bridge the gap between two distinct periods of Italian sexual cinematic depiction.

¹⁰¹ Danny Shipka, *Perverse Titillation: The Exploitation Cinema of Italy, Spain and France 1960-1980* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), 39.

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis is to attempt to begin the dialog about Italian vernacular filmmaker Antonio Margheriti in an effort to recast him as a director worthy of academic consideration. To accomplish this feat, this thesis focuses on one movie in his filmography, *Castle of Blood*, with the idea that if the importance of this movie could be demonstrated, it would be a first step redefining Margheriti as an important director.

Along the way in this thesis, many important elements came together. The idea of a vernacular film director came to being as an alternative to *auteur* theory when describing Margheriti, an approach not typically utilized when analyzing a director. From this approach it was argued that Margheriti was not an *auteur* director, but he was occasionally able to make movies that pushed the envelope or to delve into topics that his mainstream *auteur* counterparts elected not to. This thesis also explored the complex world of the Italian genre film, with its history dating back to the 1950s, its various cycles of genres, from peplums to *giallos*, its importance on influencing the filmmaking world of the international directors, and the way Margheriti contributed to its rich tapestry. Finally it was discussed how *Castle of Blood* was important in regards to Italian film, specifically in how it led the charge in the way sexuality was depicted between two eras: the era exemplified by the *maggiorata fisica* during the 1950s to the era shaped by the Italian sex comedies beginning in the late 1960s. *Castle of Blood* challenged many conventions when it was released, showcasing nudity and lesbian intercourse, all the while under the influence of an industry moderated by the Christian Democrats. The ability of Margheriti to conjure such a film during those conservative times is the perfect example of his ability to explore new ideas, or even challenge established tropes, and this is what makes him a historically significant director.

There is still much more that needs to be fleshed out in regards to Margheriti, his films and his influence. This thesis' foundational work is the best stepping stone to tackle other facets of Margheriti. For example, his Vietnam film, *The Last Hunter* (1980) is derivative of both *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* (1979). At first glance, *The Last Hunter* could be dismissed as a simple knock off and nothing more. However, utilizing the framework of vernacular cinema, *The Last Hunter* can be analyzed as an Italian take on Americans during that conflict: from the black propaganda of a radio operator recalling sentiments of both Hanoi Hannah and Jane Fonda, to the demoralized and ineffectual American troops. The negative portrayal of troops in the film by non-American filmmaker is rife with political commentary. This thesis can also be a stepping stone for analysis of Margheriti's film *Ark of the Sun God* (1983). A film that looks to be merely a knock off of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Ark of the Sun God* challenges the baroque ideas of a hero by having the main protagonist already in a relationship as the movie starts rather than finding a female companion as the movie progresses. The film also portrays Arab and Middle Eastern villains in a more lighthearted manner, rather than the malicious, terrorist stereotypes seen in such blockbuster movies from *The Delta Force* (1986) to *True Lies* (1994). Finally, the work laid out in this thesis may be applied to other Italian vernacular filmmakers as well, from Bruno Mattei to Umberto Lenzi. While Margheriti may have single handedly created the sci-fi genre in Italy, Umberto Lenzi became the most prolific *poliziotteschi* [crime-action films, much like *Dirty Harry* (1971)] director, yet his contributions remain unacknowledged. An approach like the one this thesis took in regards to Margheriti could be applied to Lenzi and other Italian vernacular filmmakers as well. There is much work to be done and one hopes that this thesis is the first step of many.

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