



# House of Psychotic Women: An Autobiographical Topography of Female Neurosis in Horror and Exploitation Films

By Kier-La Janisse

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## **House of Psychotic Women: An Autobiographical Topography of Female Neurosis in Horror and Exploitation Films** By Kier-La Janisse

House of Psychotic Women is an autobiographical exploration of female neurosis in horror and exploitation films.

Cinema is full of neurotic personalities, but few things are more transfixing than a woman losing her mind onscreen. Horror as a genre provides the most welcoming platform for these histrionics: crippling paranoia, desperate loneliness, masochistic death-wishes, dangerous obsessiveness, apocalyptic hysteria. Unlike her male counterpart - 'the eccentric' - the female neurotic lives a shamed existence, making these films those rare places where her destructive emotions get to play.

Named after the U.S.-retitling of Carlos Aured's *The Blue Eyes of the Broken Doll*, House of Psychotic Women is an examination of these characters through a daringly personal autobiographical lens. Anecdotes and memories interweave with film history, criticism, trivia and confrontational imagery to create a reflective personal history and an examination of female madness, both onscreen and off.

This sharply-designed book with a 32-page full-colour section is packed with rare stills, posters, pressbooks and artwork that combine with family photos and artifacts to form a titillating sensory overload, with a filmography that traverses the acclaimed and the obscure in equal measure.

\* comprehensive appendix

\* 1000 rare photos, many in color



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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"God, this woman can write, with a voice and intellect that's so new. This is the truth in the most deadly unique way I've ever read." -- Ralph Bakshi, director *Fritz the Cat*, *Heavy Traffic*, *The Lords of the Rings*, etc.

#### About the Author

Kier-La Janisse co-founded the Blue Sunshine Psychotronic Film Centre & The Miskatonic Institute of Horror Studies in Montreal, where she edits the online magazine *Spectacular Optical*. She programmed for the Alamo Drafthouse in Austin Texas, founded the CineMuerte Horror Film Fest and the Big Smash! Music-on-Film Fest, and was the subject of the documentary *Celluloid Horror*. She writes for *Filmmaker*, *Rue Morgue* & *Fangoria*, contributed to *The Scarecrow Movie Guide* and *Destroy All Movies!! The Complete Guide to Punk on Film*, and authored *A Violent Professional*, published by FAB Press in 2007.

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It all started with *Possession*. Zulawski's film, formally speaking, is perfection - its deep blue hues, its labyrinthine locations, the hypnotic cinematography of Bruno Nuytten. But that's not what drew me to return to it again and again. There was something terrible in that film, a desperation I recognized in myself, in my inability to communicate effectively, and the frustration that would lead to despair, anger and hysteria.

My relationship with this film caused me to look at what kinds of warnings - or in some cases reinforcements - I was getting out of other films in which disturbed or neurotic women figured greatly. Over the past ten years I started keeping a log of these films, accompanied by rambling, incoherent notes and occasionally wet pages. I have drawers full of these scribblings; they're spilling out of manila envelopes in my closet, and they're all pieces of a puzzle that I have to figure out how to put together. But my starting point was a question, and that question presented itself easily: I wanted to know why I was crazy - and what happens when you feed crazy with more crazy.

As with most female horror fans, people love to ask me what it is I get out of horror. I give them the stock answers: catharsis, empowerment, escapism and so on. Less easy to explain is the fact that I gravitate toward films that devastate and unravel me completely - a good horror film will more often make me cry than make me shudder. I remember someone describing their first time seeing Paulus Manker's *The Moor's Head* as so devastating they had to lie on the sidewalk when they exited the theatre. Now, that's what I look for in a film.

Cinema is full of neurotic personalities, but I decided to focus on women because this is what I know. And again, I decided to focus on horror and exploitation films because this is what I know. Everything in my early existence - the Creature Feature double bills of old Hammer and AIP films, the Alice Cooper records and stage shows, *Scooby-Doo*, *The Devil and Daniel Mouse* and *The Hardy Boys Mysteries* - shaped me for this particular future. I was chauffeured into this dark terrain by my parents, but I stayed there because of something in myself. And that 'something' was decidedly female.

Unlike her comparatively-lauded male counterpart - 'the eccentric' - the female neurotic lives a shamed existence. But the shame itself is a trap - one that is fiercely protected by men and women alike.

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