"THAT BLOOD IS REAL BECAUSE I JUST CAN'T FAKE IT": CONCEPTUALIZING, CONTEXTUALIZING, MARKETING, AND DELIVERING GORE IN HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS'S BLOOD FEAST

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ABSTRACT

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In 1963 exploitation filmmaker Herschell Gordon Lewis released *Blood Feast*, a movie that showcases violence. Widely regarded as the progenitor of the gore genre and as the film that opened the door to depictions of graphic violence in American cinema, *Blood Feast* occupies interesting positions in the history of American genres and the American film industry. This project endeavors to explore and elaborate on these generic, historical, and industrial positions. To do so, it first clarifies the generic terms “exploitation” and “gore” through an examination of the literature produced on the two terms. It then provides a historical overview of the changes in the filmic marketplace during the 1950s and 60s that enabled the profitable production, distribution, and exhibition of the first gore film. The advertising materials used to promote the film are also analyzed in order to provide insights into the ways that *Blood Feast* and its graphically violent content were sold to the public. Finally, *Blood Feast* is examined on a textual level via an approach grounded in formal film analysis that discusses the use of color and performance in the film. Ultimately, the common thread that emerges from these analyses is one of the importance of differentiation to *Blood Feast* on both a textual and extra-textual level. Lewis’s effective efforts at differentiation ultimately were a major factor in both *Blood Feast’s* immediate financial success and its enduring cultural legacy.
For Oma.
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INTRODUCTION

“His films are impossible to defend; thus, he automatically becomes one of the all-time great directors in film history” –John Waters

On May 5, 1964, *Variety* ran a short review of a low budget film that had been playing in neighborhood theaters and drive-ins around the country for just under a year. “Totally inept horror shocker” decried the review’s headline. The text of the article was even more unkind, declaring the outing “[i]ncredibly crude and unprofessional from start to finish” and “an insult even to the most puerile and salacious of audiences.” The motion picture in question, Herschell Gordon Lewis’s *Blood Feast* (1963), supposedly “insulted” its audience through its abysmal acting, low production values, and poor technical quality. Yet, despite *Variety*’s protestations, Lewis’s film became a significant box office success and an enduring cult classic whose cultural legacy is still evident nearly fifty years later. The film undoubtedly owes much of its accomplishment to the intense degree of graphic violence it features; indeed, this depiction of violence was so intense and, for the time, unique that *Blood Feast* is widely regarded as ushering in a new genre: the gore or splatter movie.

That the film pioneered a genre that emphasizes excessive violence, especially against women, marks *Blood Feast* as an interesting topic for analysis. Surprisingly, however, the film and its director have drawn little critical attention from the Academy. Only a handful of works deal directly with Lewis, *Blood Feast*, or one of his other gore films. Jonathan Crane, for instance, provides a rambling discussion of the impact the debut of gore has on the horror genre while also contending that “*Blood Feast* fixes the border beyond which daring film interpretation can pass” (156). Mikita Brottman performs a psychoanalytical evaluation of *Blood Feast* in the only scholarly analysis of the film on a textual level published to date. Anthony Szczesiul’s essay “Re-mapping Southern Hospitality: Discourse, Ethics, Politics” discusses *Blood Feast*’s follow
up *Two Thousand Maniacs!* (1964)—a tale about a southern town full of murderous ghosts who were slaughtered by the Union army during The Civil War—contending that it “suggests [the discourse of southern hospitality] merely masks a legacy of thus-far unresolved regional conflicts and resentments” (127). Finally, Gary D. Rhodes writes of the “non-Hollywood spatio-temporal zone in Herschell Gordon Lewis’s *Wizard of Gore* [1972]” (6).

Lewis and *Blood Feast* are mentioned in passing in a handful of other academic works on horror or the exploitation film. Eric Schaefer, in his book “*Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959,” mentions Lewis briefly as the progenitor of “a new class of exploitation films” (289). Lewis also warrants a similarly limited mention in Kevin Heffernan’s *Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold: Horror Films and the American Movie Business, 1953-1968* (218), and David J. Skal’s *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* (312). Randall Clark’s *At a Theater or Drive-in Near You: The History, Culture, and Politics of the American Exploitation Film* mentions Lewis only in its literature review and in a filmography at the end of the book.

What none of these works fully emphasizes, apart from a short statement about Lewis and his film as originators of the gore genre and excessive cinematic violence, is the historical, industrial, and generic position of *Blood Feast*. To address this gap, this thesis sets out to accomplish two primary tasks. The first is to clarify how Lewis and *Blood Feast* figure into the history of American film genres and the American film industry. The second is to analyze Lewis’s work as an exploitation filmmaker who operated in the exploitation movie market of the 1960s and 70s which enjoyed a reduction in Hollywood’s control of the industry.²

Given these goals, chapter one attempts to first clarify the generic terms exploitation and gore, thus establishing working conceptualizations for the two that can be applied throughout the
rest of the thesis. In its examination of genre, the chapter employs Andrew Tudor’s concept that “[g]enre is what we collectively believe it to be” (7) by referring to a consensus among scholars, critics, and fans to determine generic boundaries. Beginning with an analysis of exploitation, it arrives at the conclusion that rather than a set of filmic qualities or a style of filmmaking, the term exploitation refers to a discourse designed to maintain difference between groups of films. Turning next to gore, the chapter identifies Lewis’s gore films as the progenitors of the gore genre based on a consensus among the literature produced on them. It then outlines the qualities identified in the discourses on gore that are most prominent. Finally, the chapter also examines oft-repeated claims that gore is “separate from its cinematic progenitor, the horror film” (Stine 56). To do so, it surveys the literature produced on the horror film to ascertain that whereas discourses on gore almost exclusively favor the genre’s excessive carnage, the literature on horror identifies multiple elements in addition to violence.

With working conceptualizations for exploitation and gore determined, the second chapter provides a historical overview of the changes in the filmic marketplace that enabled the profitable production, distribution, and exhibition of the first gore film. To fully elaborate the profundity of these changes, it is necessary for the chapter to also examine the larger Hollywood industry as it developed alongside the exploitation trade of which Lewis was a part. Also of interest to this chapter’s efforts at framing a historical window for gore are the various legal decisions handed down by the Supreme Court and their impact on the shifting strictures of censorship in the United States. With all of these elements outlined, the chapter contends that the combination of a temporary reduction in Hollywood’s domination of cinematic market share, a significant relaxation of censorship, the emergence of a new moviegoing demographic, and a
growing need for product differentiation enabled and encouraged Lewis’s production of *Blood Feast* and the development of the gore genre.

Chapter three engages in an analysis of *Blood Feast*’s marketing. Utilizing the film’s print and radio advertisements and its trailer as primary historical documents, the chapter explores the ways that *Blood Feast* and its graphically violent content were sold to the public. An additional brief overview of the traditions of exploitation advertising helps to demonstrate that Lewis and producer David F. Friedman relied on conventional techniques of exploitation marketing while also devising new schemes to promote their product and differentiate it from its competitors.

Finally, chapter four delves into *Blood Feast* on a textual level via an approach grounded in formal film analysis, albeit of a somewhat unusual stripe. Instead of opting to focus primarily on the traditionally evaluated formal elements of film like editing, lighting, and sound, this chapter instead examines the deployment of color and performance in the film. The chapter maintains that the saturated color and presentational performance styles in *Blood Feast* inevitably call attention to themselves. By doing so, they signal the rejection of maintaining a mimetic illusion in favor of establishing an overall feel of unreality for the film. In addition, the chapter argues that color in the film is crafted to powerfully accent the visual characteristics of the gore displayed onscreen. Ultimately, these strategies, which dispel realism and visually highlight gore through warm, saturated color, serve to further differentiate *Blood Feast* from mainstream films like *Psycho* (1960).

While Lewis and *Blood Feast* are the focus of these four chapters, a reader familiar with the subject might object to the relative absence of Friedman from the thesis. However, while Friedman, as Lewis’s partner and producer, was an important figure in the production of *Blood
Feast, the idea to exploit gore as the focus for a film nevertheless belongs to Lewis (Friedman 328). Between the two, moreover, Lewis was the filmmaker and ultimately enjoyed creative control over the production; thus, the performances and usage of color in Blood Feast were done under his direction. When their partnership ended after the production of their third gore film, 1965’s Color Me Blood Red, Lewis continued to make gore films, producing another four in the seven years he was still active as a filmmaker while Friedman never again visited the subject. This is not to say that Friedman is entirely excluded from this thesis; on the contrary, he is mentioned where applicable. Chapter three, for instance, credits both him and Lewis with the devising of their promotional schemes.

The decision to employ relevant anecdotes provided by Lewis and Friedman may also provoke some objections, particularly given Roland Barthes arguments against factoring details pertaining to the author into an interpretation of a text. While Barthes’s arguments are not universally accepted—Clara Claiborne Park, for example, argues that Barthes’s assertions stem from French cultural practices regarding language and authors that are not present in Anglophone cultures and are thus unnecessary in English-speaking traditions of literary criticism (319-324)—for the purposes of this project, they are effectively inapplicable. This thesis does not take the stance that Lewis is an author whose authoritarian control over language, message, and meaning should be resisted, but rather that he is a businessman who devises, develops, and disseminates a product into a competitive marketplace. Indeed, the larger film industry in the United States is very much a marketplace where business decisions often trump artistic concerns. To lose sight of the businessperson, especially given the dominance that Hollywood has and does exercise over the industry, when considering films as commodities is to commit a very significant error. Such an approach does not, however, excuse taking Lewis and Friedman at face
value. Instead, their anecdotes are approached with “the same wary sifting and comparing of
detail that is habitual in interpreting other forms of [historical] evidence” (Wexler 167).

Finally, this thesis is intended to clarify the generic, historical, and industrial position of
Lewis and Blood Feast. The material discussed in the project would benefit greatly from analysis
through a variety of methodologies including feminist and postcolonial approaches. Each of
these approaches to Lewis and Blood Feast warrants their own project, however, and therefore
are not applied in this thesis. Nonetheless, an additional purpose of the project is to call attention
to these opportunities for future research.

Taken together, these four chapters outline Blood Feast’s generic and industrial contexts
and detail how the film was crafted and marketed to stand out from its competition in
exploitation and mainstream media. Indeed, the common thread that emerges from the thesis as a
whole is one of the importance of differentiation to both Blood Feast and the larger exploitation
industry. Lewis’s effective efforts at differentiation ultimately were a major factor, undoubtedly
more so than its production quality, in both Blood Feast’s immediate financial success and its
enduring cultural legacy.
CHAPTER I: “THE MATTER OF SPLATTER”
CONCEPTUALIZING EXPLOITATION AND GORE

“I’ve often referred to Blood Feast as a Walt Whitman poem. It’s no good, but it was the first of its type.” –Herschell Gordon Lewis³

Contained within the pages of any piece of literature about Herschell Gordon Lewis or gore and splatter films one will almost undoubtedly find some reference to Lewis’s inauguration of the “gore film” with the release of 1963’s Blood Feast. John McCarty, for instance, hails Lewis “as the man who brought the splatter movie into full being. He literally was the first” (Splatter Movies 46). Xavier Mendik calls him “[t]he original pioneer of the American gore film” (188). Mike Quarles contends that “Blood Feast…was the first of its genre” (29). But what is a gore film? Is it the same thing as a splatter film? Is it its own genre or is it enclosed within the confines of another genre like horror? This chapter seeks to answer these questions in an effort to outline what is meant by the term gore film, thus clarifying subsequent chapters’ use of the term. Furthermore, because Lewis is widely regarded in conjunction with the exploitation field, it is also prudent for this chapter to delineate the term exploitation film.

Before moving on to examining these terms, however, it is necessary to first elucidate this chapter’s employment of genre, itself a difficult and elusive concept. In his essay “Genre,” Andrew Tudor identifies two primary deployments of the term. Using the western as an example, Tudor argues that the first usage “involves the idea that if a film is a western it somehow draws on a tradition—in particular, on a set of conventions….But other usages, such as ‘horror’ films might also mean films displaying certain themes, actions, and so on, or, just as often, films that have in common the intention to horrify. Instead of defining the genre by attributes, it is defined by intentions” (4). Nevertheless, Tudor writes that these two approaches both provide their own dilemmas. A focus on a genre’s intent, for instance, “suffers from the notorious difficulties of
isolating intentions” (Tudor 4). An approach that examines a genre’s conventions also poses its own difficulties. As Tudor notes:

To take a genre such as a western, analyze it, and list its principal characteristics is to beg the question that we must first isolate the body of films that are westerns. But they can only be discovered from the films themselves after they have been isolated on the basis of the “principal characteristics,” which can only be discovered from the films themselves after they have been isolated. That is, we are caught in a circle that first requires that the films be isolated, for which purposes a criterion is necessary, but the criterion is, in turn, meant to emerge from the empirically established common characteristics of the film. (5)

To avoid this circular logic, Tudor explains, one can instead “lean on a common cultural consensus as to what constitutes a [genre] and then go on to analyze it in detail” (5). This approach is effective, he argues, because “[g]enre notions…are not critics’ classifications made for special purposes; they are sets of cultural conventions. Genre is what we collectively believe it to be” (7). The chapter employs this conception of genre by scrutinizing the literature produced on gore and exploitation to identify a consensus of conventions for analysis. In addition to providing an identifiable starting point for evaluating characteristics of genre, this approach also provides insight into which qualities of gore and exploitation are most noticed and most written about and thus arguably are most prominent.4 In other words, one can recognize the key features of a genre by identifying which features are most commonly discussed in discourses about that genre, especially if genre is being treated as a set of cultural conventions.

Utilizing this approach with exploitation by surveying the scholarly, critical, and popular literature produced on it, one can identify four primary features that are commonly asserted as inherent qualities of exploitation cinema.5 To begin with, some sort of salacious, sensational, or
“forbidden”—drug use, miscegenation, abortion, etc.—material (Schaefer 5) is regularly identified as exploitation’s preferred subject matter. In addition, exploitation films are produced and distributed “by independent filmmakers…and reflect no studio control” (Clark 4). “[A] very low budget” (Maltby 169) is also recurrently asserted as essential to the exploitation designation. Finally, a strong emphasis is placed on exploitation’s extreme marketing and advertising tactics, particularly those which played up the salacious content of the films, as being essential to “the success of this type of film” (Tzioumakis 140). Indeed, the term exploitation itself refers to “the process of advertising and publicity that accompanied a movie’s theatrical release” (Doherty 2).

Leaning on this definition of exploitation is, however, an incredibly problematic position. Salacious or forbidden content, for instance, is not the exclusive domain of exploitation. Hollywood regularly featured films with the same sensational themes exploitation films endeavored to employ. *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (a 1933 release from Columbia) dealt with miscegenation. Otto Preminger’s *The Man with the Golden Arm* (a 1955 United Artists release) exploited drug use as its topic. It was really only during the reign of the Production Code Authority (PCA) from 1934 to the early 1950s that Hollywood was severely limited in terms of the content that could be deployed. Not only was this time period less than two decades, a small slice of Hollywood’s ninety year history, the code was also constantly and consistently challenged throughout its duration.

Not all exploitation films were produced or distributed independently of the major studios, either. Many of the teen exploitation films of the 1950s were either produced or distributed by one of the majors, including *Riot in Juvenile Prison* (1959, distributed by United Artists), *The Restless Years* (1958, produced and distributed by Universal), and *Teenage Rebel* (1956, produced and distributed by Twentieth Century Fox). Moreover, Sam Katzman,
considered the progenitor of the rock ‘n’ roll exploitation picture (Doherty 57) and regarded by David Friedman as “the absolute master of exploitation” (qtd. in McCarty 60, Sleaze), was nonetheless a “Hollywood minimogul” employed by Columbia (Doherty 55). Given these examples, it is impossible to say that all exploitation films were produced or distributed “with no studio control.”

A low budget and cheap production values are almost assuredly the most readily apparent and persistent qualities linking films designated as exploitation. Again, however, this quality is far from unique to exploitation movies. Cheaply made films are a hallmark of the film industry, particularly during the Great Depression when exhibitors sought inexpensive films, called B movies, to fill the bottom half of double bill screenings. An entire industry, also independent from the majors, formed to supply B films to exhibitors, the cheapness of their product garnering the companies that took part the title “Poverty Row” (Tzioumakis 64). That a different category of films, one considered distinct from exploitation (Schaefer 2), is also known for its lack of budget and production values significantly troubles the notion that cheapness is an exclusive attribute of the exploitation film.

Excessive and salacious advertising campaigns, exploitation’s titular trait, are also not a distinctive element of exploitation. While chapter 3 will fully elucidate Hollywood’s utilization of licentious and sensational marketing strategies, one example of a print advertisement does bear mention to make clear the lack of distinction that can arise between the advertising materials employed by Hollywood and those of the exploiteers. The poster depicts a woman in a sheer dress, breasts clearly visible, posed invitingly while an Asian man seemingly leers at her over his shoulder. A tagline at the top proclaims “They found a love they dared not touch!” While this poster would easily belong in any exploiteer’s marketing campaign it is, in actuality,
an advertisement for Columbia’s *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*, a film directed by Hollywood stalwart Frank Capra (See figure 1.1 in Appendix 2).

While none of these qualities are individually unique to exploitation, one could still argue that their combination is what defines an exploitation film. This approach has its difficulties as well. As has already been noted, a large section of films designated as exploitation have been produced, distributed, or both, by one the major studios. With this being the case, it is impossible to require all exploitation films to meet all four criteria. Requiring a combination of some but not all of the four elements is equally troublesome. A brief examination of a film like *White Zombie* aptly demonstrates the problems with this approach.

Filmed in 1932 on a mere budget of $62,500 (Russell 21), *White Zombie* has many of the hallmarks of an exploitation film. Its themes of voodoo and zombies set against a mysterious Haitian landscape fit the style of exploitation that Eric Schaefer calls “exotic films” that “dealt with people and behaviors that can best be described as those outside the experience of the white, middle-class mainstream of the United States” (254). Not intended to round out the bottom of a double bill, *White Zombie* enjoyed a vigorous and sensational exploitation campaign that included “a parade of zombies” (Russell 25) and a salacious tagline declaring “WITH THESE ZOMBIE EYES he rendered her powerless. WITH THIS ZOMBIE GRIP he made her perform his every desire!” The only one of the four requirements that the film does not meet is an independent status; it was produced independently but distributed by United Artists. Yet, despite meeting three of the four criteria, *White Zombie* is not regarded as an exploitation film. The literature produced on exploitation neglects to mention the film—Eric Schaefer even excludes it from his list of exploitation films produced between 1919 and 1959 (346-386)—and literature that deals with *White Zombie* generally refers to its position as the first zombie film. Therefore,
if *White Zombie* is not considered an exploitation film even though it fits three of the four criteria, simply meeting some combination of these qualifications cannot be deemed an indicator of exploitation.

Attempts to define exploitation are also further confounded by the incredible fluidity of the term. The B films of Poverty Row, for example, are only really differentiated from their contemporary exploitation films by way of their position at the bottom of a double bill. As Randall Clark writes in *At a Theater or Drive-In Near You: The History, Culture, and Politics of the American Exploitation Film*, “[t]he two types of films have much in common….The crucial difference between the two is that ‘B’ movies were intended to be the second in a double feature, while exploitation films were designed to be lead features” (31). In addition, Schaefer identifies a list of eighteen films that he contends were not originally exploitation films but later “were given exploitation or adults-only release,” including films originally produced or distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Paramount, and United Artists (387). Kevin Heffernan describes a similar practice in the 1950s and 60s where foreign films with salacious or sensational content would be simultaneously marketed as both artistic and exploitation product to different audiences (114). 1968’s *Spirits of the Dead*, a French film originally titled *Histoires extraordinaires* that featured three individual shorts based on Edgar Allan Poe stories that were directed by Federico Fellini, Louis Malle, and Roger Vadim, was given just such a release by notorious exploitation production company American International Pictures (AIP). To promote their film AIP produced a poster that prominently featured a scantily clad woman and proclaimed the film “EDGAR ALLAN POE’S ULTIMATE ORGY” (See figure 1.2 in Appendix 2).

What these examples demonstrate is that, far from having a codified set of characteristics one can point to as a clear definition, exploitation is a designation that can be applied to almost
any film, be it a cheaply made B film or a European art movie. So, if exploitation cannot be identified by a common set of qualities, how can it be conceptualized? To answer this question, it is important to stop thinking of exploitation as a type of film or a mode of filmmaking and to instead conceive of it as a discourse, as a way of speaking about and positioning a film. In his brilliant book *American Independent Cinema: An Introduction*, Yannis Tzioumakis provides a similar means for considering independent filmmaking that sheds light on this alternative method of viewing exploitation. After troubling the accepted definitions of independent cinema (1-10), Tzioumakis contends that the field is “a discourse that expands and contracts when socially authorized institutions (filmmakers, industry practitioners, trade publications, academics, film critics, and so on) contribute towards its definition at different periods in the history of American cinema” (11). Moreover, Tzioumakis continues, “[b]y creating objects of knowledge such as American independent cinema (and mainstream cinema for that matter), various institutional forces such as academia, the trade press, filmmakers and industry practitioners highlight specific practices and procedures associated with filmmaking upon which individual definitions are founded” (11). This conceptualization of independent cinema is an apt way of viewing exploitation; a term that was first established as a type of film in trade discourse (Doherty 6) and has since been defined and redefined by filmmakers (Lewis qtd. in McCarty, *Sleaze* 38 and Friedman qtd. in McCarty, *Sleaze* 58), academics, 9 fans, 10 and the trades (Doherty 6-7). In other words, like Tzioumakis’s notion of independent cinema, exploitation as a type of film is defined less by inherent qualities in specific movies and more by the different ways it is spoken and written about.

These ways of speaking and writing about exploitation serve a variety of functions. As Tzioumakis writes in reference to independent cinema:
As discourses are produced and legitimated by socially authorized groups, it is obvious that there are parties who stand to gain through their association with American independent cinema (and through the exclusion of other parties or groups). Not surprisingly, numerous sub-groups within the above institutions have appropriated the term independent in order to achieve particular objectives as well as define the field. (12)

The discourses informing and shaping exploitation provide similar benefits for the individuals and institutions that participate in them. Filmmakers, for example, often use their position to define exploitation in ways that are advantageous to an agenda they are trying to promote. David Friedman regularly emphasizes the salaciousness of exploitation, constantly referring to its “bad taste” (qtd. in Schaefer 3), which in turn further reinforces his self-created image as one of the “princes of picture-show prurience” (Friedman 336). Most importantly, however, the discourse of exploitation serves as a means for marking difference. For those filmmakers whose products were somehow at a disadvantage—be it from low budgets, cheap production values, limited distribution, lack of stars, or any of a myriad of other reasons—exploitation’s discourse offered a means of setting their films apart via salaciousness and sensationalism from the bigger-budgeted, better-distributed, star-studded movies of what is generally referred to as the mainstream industry in an effort to increase interest among potential moviegoers. On the other hand, the discourses of exploitation, particularly during the studio era, “allowed the mainstream industry to differentiate its movies from those of the renegade expoloteers” (Schaefer 154). Thus, to label a film exploitation is to separate it from a more “reputable” body of films regarded as mainstream by positioning it as different, generally in terms of its content, quality, and placement in the industry, regardless of whether these elements actually set it apart from other types of films.
Surveying the literature regarding the gore film proves to be a simpler process than doing the same with exploitation; gore film refers to a much smaller, more homogenous, and more historically concise group of movies. Before beginning this analysis though, it would be prudent to first clarify the term “splatter movie,” a designation which is often deployed alongside or in reference to gore films. Reviewing the literature on the subject reveals that the two terms are used interchangeably. John McCarty, in *Splatter Movies: Breaking the Last Taboo of the Screen*, contends that calling a splatter film “a ‘gore movie’…amounts to the same thing” (48). Scott Aaron Stine’s *The Gorehound's Guide to Splatter Films of the 1960s and 1970s* suggests in its title that gore and splatter are compatible terms, a practice that is supported by his interchangeable use of gore and splatter throughout the book. Lewis himself does offer a dissenting opinion:

Blood doesn’t make a gore film. That may be where the term “splatter movie” comes from, but it’s a corruption. Gore won’t splatter because gore is viscera; gore is messy. People can replace blood with a transfusion. They cannot replace their intestines, their heart, their liver, their lungs….even if a person has seen a so-called ‘splatter-film’ that doesn’t mean they’ve seen a *gore* film. (qtd. in Palmer 65)

Lewis’s assertion, however, seems to be the result of a savvy businessman still endeavoring to differentiate his product from his competitors. Therefore this thesis takes the stance that the two terms are interchangeable but opts to primarily employ “gore” to refer to the genre both because gore is Lewis’s preferred term—which, given that he is the subject of inquiry here, seems appropriate—and because gore carries with it a kind of brutal specificity that splatter lacks.

Yet establishing that gore and splatter refer to the same thing does not clarify what exactly a gore film is. To accomplish this task, it is important to again turn to scholarly, critical,
and fan discourses. As has been noted, the discourse unquestionably regards Lewis’s gore films as the first. So pronounced is his association with the genre, in fact, that the seven films identified as his gore oeuvre—Blood Feast, Two Thousand Maniacs! (1964), Color Me Blood Red (1965), A Taste of Blood (1967), The Gruesome Twosome (1967), The Wizard of Gore (1970), and The Gore Gore Girls (1972)—are remembered and celebrated well above the other thirty films he had a hand in producing.\(^1\) As Quarles writes on the prolific tendency to acknowledge Lewis’s gore output over his other works, “for a man so identified with bloody excess, it’s a surprise to find that more of his films either contained no gore or didn’t use gore as their selling point” (29).

The “bloody excess” of gore films like Lewis’s emerges in the literature as the most commonly noted characteristic of the genre. Oftentimes, the focus on gore and violence occludes or subordinates other filmic concerns like acting, plot, and cinematography. As Stine notes, gore films are “[t]hose films produced since 1963 that focus on blood-drenched special effects, often at the expense of minor technicalities like, well, everything else” (2). McCarty concurs, writing that “[i]n splatter movies, mutilation is indeed the message—many times the only one” (Splatter Movies 1). More specific about what is being overlooked or subordinated, Jonathan Crane contends that “plot functions solely as a makeshift contraption that allows the film to lurch forward from one violent set piece to another” (160). Moreover, he argues, “it is also the case that any and all aesthetic concerns common to almost all other realms of film productions are unnecessary expenditures of effort and attention that stand in the way of getting to the good stuff” (160).\(^2\) Even writings on the initial theatrical runs of Lewis’s gore films note the prominence of their gore. Variety’s original review of Blood Feast describes its plot as simply “concerned with a ubiquitous madman’s gory campaign to restore life to an Egyptian love
goddess, evidently by synthesizing the organs and entrails of his many young female victims” (5/5/1964). Writing about his first experience with Lewis and the gore genre, camp filmmaker John Waters recalls, “I discovered his monstrous trilogy, Blood Feast, Two Thousand Maniacs, and Color Me Blood Red at my local drive-in, and when I saw teen-age couples hopping from their cars to vomit, I knew I had found a director after my own heart” (202).

In addition to an emphasis on copious gobs of gristle and guts, the literature produced on gore also constantly references a tendency towards absurdity and humor. In reference to Lewis’s gore films, McCarty notes that “[he] imbues his films with an offbeat sense of the absurd. It’s as if, knowing that his work is schlock, he calls deliberate attention to the fact, serving up dialogue that is intentionally ridiculous and situations that are so excessive in their bloodthirstiness that they too seem ridiculous” (52). Discussing Stuart Gordon’s Re-Animator (1985), Mike Bracken, of Epinions.com, suggests that it “might be the perfect gore flick—it’s got a ton of grue and a truckload full of wild black humor” (“Pass Me the Barf Bag”). That there is an emphasis on humor and absurdity in the literature suggests that gore is not generally regarded as a genre that is meant to deal seriously with its subject matter.

Along with humor, gore films are also commonly connected to the horror genre. McCarty, for example, calls “[s]platter movies…offsshoots of the horror film” (Splatter Movies 1). Stine notes in his definition of gore films that they “also fall into the broader categories of the horror film and, specifically, the slasher film” (2). Also connects slashers and gore, arguing that “the story of Fuad Ramses and his Blood Feast stands as the ur-text for a long tradition of slasher and stalker films” (85), a sentiment echoed by Carol Clover who uses “slasher” and “splatter” interchangeably (21). Yet, if gore is somehow connected to horror, the presence in the literature of terms like “offsheat” and statements calling “gore films a legitimate genre separate from its
cinematic progenitor, the horror film” (Stine 57) suggest that, while linked in some ways, gore and horror are distinct in others.

Discourses concerning horror help to highlight these differences. Surveying the literature produced on horror films, one will note that violence is only one aspect of the genre that is discussed, if it is even mentioned at all. Stephen Prince writes that horror “explore[s]… fundamental questions about the nature of human existence, questions that, in some profound ways, go beyond culture and society as these are organized in any given period or form” (Prince 2). Others frequently comment upon the horror genre’s employment of monsters. Robin Wood’s chapter “The American Nightmare: Horror in the 1970s” in Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan, for instance, argues that “basic formula for the horror film” requires “normality [to be] threatened by the monster” (78). Noël Carroll, in The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart, also emphasizes the monster, contending that monsters are integral to the elicitation of the specific emotions he attributes to horror (182). Even the common partitioning of the horror film into subgenres is generally done along the lines of the type of monster featured in individual entries: vampire films, slasher films, zombie films, and so on.

What these discourses demonstrate is that violence is only one aspect of the themes, components, and goals identified with horror. Gore films, on the other hand, are identified first and foremost with their depictions of graphic violence. Two “Top 10” lists produced by Bracken, one for gore and one for horror, help to further underscore this distinction. Justifying the films that made his top ten list for horror, Bracken remarks that he “simply sat down, thought about the gazillion genre films I’ve seen over the years, and choose [sic] the ones that scared me, disturbed me, or simply grossed me out” (“Rating the Genre”). Presumably, Bracken would be “grossed out” by the gore in a horror film, but it is important to note that being grossed out is listed third
after being “scared” and “disturbed.” For his top ten list of gore films, however, Bracken’s “criteria behind the selections is [sic] simple—the film had to gross me out to make the list. If it made me stop eating, then it definitely made the list” (“Pass Me the Barf Bag”). Even the way Bracken discusses the films on each list differs notably. His list for horror films regularly praises the quality of the filmic elements of its entries, acclaiming Dario Argento’s “stylistic flourishes” in *Tenebre* (1982) and Jack Nicholson’s “outstanding performance” in *The Shining* (1980) (“Rating the Genre”). His entries in the gore list, in contrast, focus exclusively on the films’ gory sequences—something generally unmentioned in the horror list. His review of Lamberto Bava’s *Demons* states that (1985), “[t]hese demons are mean—poking out eyeballs, ripping out throats, tearing off limbs, etc. There’s lots of puss and vomit here too, which makes *Demons* a great ‘covers all the bases’ gore flick as well” (“Pass Me the Barf Bag”). Interestingly, Ruggero Deodato’s *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) appears on both of Bracken’s lists, yet the two evaluations differ in keeping with the genre they are listed under. On the horror list the review briefly mentions that “[t]he gore is intense,” before noting *Cannibal Holocaust*’s “driving theme…an exploration of who the real monsters are—us [white westerners] or them [cannibal tribespeople]?” (Rating the Genre). The review for the gore list neglects to concern itself with “driving themes,” instead elaborating on the film’s gory violence: “The cannibals chow down on the documentarians—but not before raping the female and tenderizing everyone with some huge mallets. Also, keep an eye open for the native woman impaled on a pole—with said pole running through her vagina and out her mouth…. For added grossness, a real turtle was killed on camera (and later eaten by the crew)” (Pass Me the Barf Bag). Such a lengthy description aptly indicates the emphasis placed on scenes of violence in discourses about the gore genre and, ultimately, underscores the differences in discourses on gore and horror.
Nevertheless, that Bracken includes the same films on both his top ten horror and gore lists also demonstrates the fluid nature of the two terms. *Cannibal Holocaust* is not unique in its position as both horror and gore film in the two genre’s discourses. Other films, like George A. Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*, are also included in both categories. Robin Wood writes extensively about *Dawn* as a horror film, ranking it “among the most powerful, fascinating, and complex of modern horror films” (114). Echoing Wood, much has been written about *Dawn* and its use of social satire and commentary. Discussing *Dawn* as a gore movie, however, Stine briefly acknowledges the film’s social commentary before dismissing it in favor of gore. As he writes, “Romero not only offers subtle sociopolitical subtexts within the context of the film, but confronts the viewer with the myths of consumerism. But don’t worry about grabbing a bottle of Tylenol before settling in to watch *Dawn*; the viewer never has to wait long before someone is eviscerated” (86). Chas Balun’s *The Gore Score*, a guide to “Ultraviolent Horror in the 80’s,” further elaborates this tendency to give primacy to a horror film’s violence. Balun’s book divides its evaluation of each film into two categories. The first, a “customary one to four star…rating system” to be used “in assessing the relative merits of each film” is clearly subordinated by the titular “Gore Score,” a zero-to-ten rating that “deals with nothing but the *quantity* of blood, brains, guts and assorted precious bodily fluids, spilled during the course of the film” (bolding original) (Balun 6). Balun further elucidates the primacy of The Gore Score to his book by closing his introduction with an assertion that “this dual rating will provide more ‘essential’ information for both the serious student of contemporary horror as well as the totally undiscriminating, bloodthirsty, sociopathic gorehound. I know which drawer I fall into. That’s why I thought the splatter rating was of such fundamental importance” (6). While Balun is most likely being flippant about his disdain for the finer points of horror films, his assertion
demonstrates that, rather than isolating a set of unique qualities, labeling a movie as gore identifies its violence as its primary element.

Given these conceptions of gore and exploitation, both genres emerge as a way of privileging specific elements in certain films rather than distinct categories with inherent qualities. Designating *Blood Feast* as an exploitation film, therefore, suggests that differentiation is integral to the film’s success. To call it a gore film highlights the importance of graphic violence to its cultural reception—particularly to its white male audience. To label *Blood Feast* as both a gore and an exploitation film indicates that its scenes of carnage are critical in distinguishing the film from its competition in exploitation and the mainstream.
CHAPTER II: SETTING THE TABLE FOR A BLOOD FEAST: FRAMING THE HISTORICAL MOMENT OF THE GORE FILM

“A new day is dawning Mr. Lewis. People can make up their own minds about what they want to see on a movie screen.” –David F. Friedman regarding the lack of censorship faced by Living Venus, circa 1960

In the early 1960s Herschell Gordon Lewis sat down with David F. Friedman to find a topic that would set their next film apart from the mass of exploitation films being produced at the time. After discussing a number of possibilities, the two settled on a “stark, single word—Gore” (Lewis qtd. in Krogh IX). Such an anecdote may seem a fairly inauspicious origin for the debut of graphic, visceral violence on the silver screen, yet it belies a complex confluence of events that enabled the first gore film to not only be produced, but distributed and exhibited profitably. A decade earlier, or later, and such a decision may not have been possible or even necessary. This chapter will trace the historical events that provided a window for gore films to be produced, distributed, and exhibited by recounting relevant details pertaining to changes in industry practice and censorship. Given the complex and shifting nature of film censorship and the practices and policies of the film industry in the United States, it is essential to begin decades before Lewis’s entry into filmmaking in order to accurately and effectively elucidate the importance of these alterations. Finally, on account of Lewis’s designation as an exploiteer, it is important to trace the history of exploitation as it developed alongside the mainstream so as to fully articulate his position in the film industry.

As chapter one noted, the term exploitation, when applied to a category of films, refers more to a discourse, a way of speaking about films, than it does to a specific set of filmic practices or qualities. Exploitation, moreover, is a historically fluid designation and thus it is helpful to sketch a history of the term before continuing the larger history the chapter is concerned with. Thomas Doherty notes that exploitation as a concept for a category of film first
entered industry discourse in 1946 with “no negative connotations but [rather] was used simply to refer to a timely picture with a clear promotional tie-in” (6). The films this discourse referred to were “mostly mainstream, major studio products such as RKO’s Back to Bataan (1945),” a World War II combat film, “which was ‘released almost simultaneously’ with the return of American forces to the Philippines” (Doherty 6). “[T]he bad reputation [exploitation] still retains” would not develop until a decade later when it came to refer to films that “favored the bizarre, the licentious, and the sensational” and tended to target “a teenage audience” (Doherty 6-7). By the 1960s, this discourse would expand to cover the soft core nudies and gore films being produced by Lewis and Friedman.

As the term exploitation began referring to the likes of Lewis and Friedman, it also came to be retroactively applied to a group of films and filmmakers who had operated during the heyday of the classical studio system in Hollywood. Eric Schaefer, in his study of the subject “Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!” A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959, applies the term “classical exploitation” to these films and their producers on account of their “parallel development with the classical Hollywood cinema” (4). This subsequent designation, moreover, is far from an arbitrary labeling; there is a sort of hereditary connection between this group of filmmakers and exploiteers like Friedman who worked alongside many classical exploiteers, including the notorious Kroger Babb, producer of the exploitation film Mom and Dad (1945). Indeed, Friedman’s autobiography A Youth in Babylon most likely contributed to this retroactive designation as Friedman constantly refers to these filmmakers as exploiteers in his book.¹⁵

These classical exploiteers and their products provide an excellent starting point for an overview of the history of exploitation filmmaking in the United States. Such a history, however, and indeed any history of filmmaking practice in the US cannot neglect the larger mainstream,
Hollywood film industry. With its near total domination of the filmic marketplace during the studio era and its even more complete dominance at the dawn of the twenty-first century, Hollywood has been and is in a position to influence, however minutely, even those filmmaking practices that are supposedly “independent” from it. Even Lewis, who operated at a complete remove from Hollywood, owes much of his success to Hollywood’s weakened control over the film industry during the height of his filmmaking career and the increased opportunity it afforded independents like him—a fact this chapter will elaborate on later. Therefore, it is imperative that this chapter also sketch the developments in the film industry that affected Hollywood, as their impact on the larger industry inevitably reverberated through to exploiteers like Lewis and Friedman.

The mainstream Hollywood industry began life as a “mature oligopoly” that developed in the 1920s (Tzioumakis 27). Consisting of eight companies, these studios “accounted for well over 80 percent of the movies exhibited across America” (Doherty 14). They were able to manage this dominance through vertically-integrated control of the market, meaning that they controlled a large portion of the production, distribution, and exhibition elements of the industry. Exhibition was particularly important to their industrial hegemony. While the studios operated only a fraction of the theaters across the country, “their possessions included 80 per cent of the first-run theatres and a large number of the best second-run ones,” which altogether accounted “for between 50 and 80 per cent of all box-office revenues generated in the US” (Tzioumakis 32). Theaters outside their control were subjected to restrictive trade practices like block booking that, as Yannis Tzioumakis notes, required them to purchase large numbers of low-quality films from the studios in order to obtain more high-value films, thus enabling the studios to distribute
as much of their product as possible while also limiting the amount of competitors’ films
exhibitors could book (26).

Despite their power, the studios nonetheless found themselves the target of external
censorship efforts on account of the perceived salaciousness of the movies and their “evil
effects” on “children” and “other easily influenced cohorts such as foreigners and the mentally
unstable” (Schaefer 138). The film industry had had to deal with censorship as early as 1907,
when “Chicago…establish[ed] America’s first ordinance empowering censors to regulate the
content of films” (Black 10). As more and more states and cities began passing censorship laws,
they found their efforts “empowered” (J. Lewis 90) by the Supreme Court’s decision in the
*Mutual Film Corp. v. Industrial Commission of Ohio* case of 1915. The decision “denied the
motion picture the constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and press” (Jowett 16) and
thus constitutionally justified film censorship. Furthermore, by lacking consistency in their
choices on what to censor, state and local censorship became a financial burden for the studios
“[s]ince the production of multiple versions and prints [of films to meet various boards’
standards] was costly and confusing” (J. Lewis 103).

With the threat of even more widespread censorship looming at the beginning of the
1920s, and the creation of a censorship apparatus in the valuable New York market in 1921, the
studios “joined forces in January 1922 to create a trade association, the Motion Picture Producers
and Distributors of America (MPPDA),” to combat the further spread of external censorship
(Black 31). Chosen to head the MPPDA, the now-notorious Will Hays proved a brilliant choice
as he curtailed censorship efforts by “promis[ing] responsible self-regulation” and ensured that
“[b]y 1925, thirty-five of the thirty-six states contemplating film censorship abandoned their
efforts” (J. Lewis 96). Yet, despite Hays’s success, the situation would once again flare up with
the introduction of sound. As Gregory D. Black notes in *Hollywood Censored*, the addition of “dialogue could and did challenge conventional norms,” leading to increased censorship efforts (34).

With the introduction of sound, and the offenses to moral standards it entailed, the Catholic Church began to take an interest in the content of movies. Catholics presented the MPPDA with an especially grave threat because of their sizeable concentration in the urban centers from which the studios drew more than half their income (J. Lewis 100). To appease the growing Catholic disdain, the studios agreed to subject production to a code drafted by a Catholic priest “that prohibited films from glorifying criminals, gangsters, adulterers, and prostitutes” while “bann[ing] nudity, excessive violence, white slavery, illegal drugs, miscegenation, lustful kissing, suggestive postures, and profanity from the screen” (Black 2). The studios’ adherence to the code, however, was marred by inefficient enforcement and outright defiance by producers, leading to a Catholic backlash. This backlash “launched a national crusade, the Legion of Decency, which signed millions of Catholic faithful to a pledge to boycott movies judged by Catholic officials to be immoral” (Black 149). To appease the Legion and its prodigious following, Hays and the MPPDA established the Production Code Authority (PCA), headed by the Catholic Joseph Breen, to monitor the studios’ observance of the code. To aid him in this task, Breen was given complete authority to prevent a film from being made if it violated the code’s strictures (Black 181-182).

The imposition of a stricter degree of self-censorship was, nevertheless, not an entirely negative development for the studios. As Kevin Heffernan points out, it enabled the studios to require producers independent of the studios to submit their films to the PCA for approval that would allow them to be “shown in the profitable houses controlled by the majors. This formed a
powerful barrier to producers or distributors who sought to differentiate their product through subject matter untouchable by the major studios” (4). In other words, it allowed the majors to vastly curtail the access to exhibition for groups of filmmakers like the classical exploiteers.

While the studios were grappling with censorship and developing into the oligopoly that would dominate the majority of the film industry, the nascent classical exploitation industry that Schaefer discusses began to take form. Springing from the progressive movement, the progenitors of exploitation were educational films like *Damaged Goods* (1914) that warned against the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases (Schaefer 17 and 23). Schaefer contends that, as the 1910s came to a close, a significant quantity of these films were distributed around the United States yet ran afoul of censor boards bolstered by the *Mutual* decision (Schaefer 25 and 29). Coinciding with the growth of the studio oligopoly, the venereal disease pictures’ struggle with censorship led to a fracture in the film industry, with “most producers [choosing] to toe the industry line by rejecting ‘salacious pictures’” while “[o]thers…pursued the profit potential in exploitation” (Schaefer 38). In the decades following this rift, the classical exploitation industry began to expand beyond venereal disease features and produce a greater variety of films. These included drug films like Dwain Esper’s *Marihuana* (1936), which decried the “evils” of the films titular drug, and “vice film[s],” which “encompassed ‘immoral’ activities such as adultery, gambling, and alcohol abuse, but usually took the form of a prostitution exposé” (Schaefer 254), including the likes of *Gambling with Souls* (1936), a sordid tale of young women forced into prostitution to pay off gambling debts.17

As the MPPDA and PCA came to prominence in the mainstream film industry, the schism between exploiteers and the studios developed into a contentious relationship. With a lower negative cost to recoup than higher-budgeted films, exploitation films did not need to rely
on the studios’ exhibition sites to make a profit and thus “remained outside the [PCA’s] sphere of influence” (Schaefer 136 and 161-162). This freedom allowed exploiteers to showcase content in their films that the studios were forbidden from employing. Yet, despite their freedom from the strictures of the PCA, the exploitation industry was nevertheless the target of state and local censors. Unlike the studios, however, the exploiteers were not as affected by the inconsistencies of state and local censor boards due to the smaller scope of their distribution (Schaefer 139-141). Even the Legion of Decency had trouble blunting the success of exploitation films. David Friedman, for instance, notes that exploiteer Kroger “Babb never knuckled down to the dictates of the [Legion]” (38). The relationship between exploitation and the mainstream would continue on in this manner until several changes in the late 1940s and 1950s—including a legal restructuring of the majors’ vertical monopoly, the emergence of television, changes in censorship, the availability of new technologies, declining profits, the emergence of a new audience demographic, and a decrease in films produced by the studios that greatly increased exhibitors’ demand for new product—dramatically altered the structure of the film industry as a whole. The reconfigurations that followed in the wake of these changes left Hollywood with a briefly weakened grip on the film industry that enabled the success Lewis and his gore films enjoyed.

The first and arguably most profound of these alterations was the Supreme court case United States vs. Paramount Pictures, Inc. (also termed the Paramount Decree). Ruling that the major studios had unfairly restricted trade, the Court forced the divestiture of their theater holdings while also forbidding the block booking practice (Tzioumakis 104). Already ailing from the loss of their exhibition sites, the majors were dealt a second significant blow whose repercussions reverberated throughout the film industry. As the postwar years faded into the
1950s, box office takes and theater attendance plummeted, threatening the future of the entire industry. As Tzioumakis notes regarding this box office slump, “after the end of the war, a large percentage of the audience had been deserting the major cities (and the large number of cinemas that were located in them) for the suburbs and started seeking ‘more sophisticated leisure activities’” (88). Alongside the migration of theatergoers from urban centers, the impact of the fast-growing television industry “forever ended the cultural hegemony of the movies” (Doherty 19) and further reduced revenues.

While movie profits sagged, the mainstream industry, now deprived of its lucrative block booking endeavor, concentrated on fewer, more expensive productions that could potentially garner a greater profit while cutting the expenses large quantities of cheaper films could impose (Heffernan 7). While the drop in low-budget pictures presented few problems for larger theaters, “small neighborhood theaters—‘nabes’ in trade jargon—” were adversely impacted by this reduction as they “drew from a limited audience” and thus depended on cheap films to fill their schedules (Doherty 25). Because of their lower overhead, independent producers and exploiteers were better situated to fill this gap, resulting in the development of “[a]n entire distribution network…to provide product” for nabes (Heffernan 92 and 119). For many struggling theaters, dealing with independents and exploiteers also proved more attractive than doing business with the majors. As Lewis himself comments on the situation:

How could I convince [theater owners] to set aside a week’s playing time for my picture? Well, I could give them better terms: a sliding scale from twenty-five to fifty percent, instead of demanding a ninety-ten split in my favor on the first couple weeks. So they figured to themselves, in their warped weasely little minds, “If I play this fellow’s films to a half-filled house, and I keep sixty percent of the gross, I am far better off than
playing to a filled house where I keep only ten percent of the gross.” So economics worked in favor of the low budget producer. (qtd. in Doherty 29)

This growing market for the fare produced by independents and exploiteers was paralleled by a significant change in audience composition. As a newly-conceived demographic category (Doherty 36), teenagers emerged as the dominant moviegoing group in the 1950s, providing “low-budget independent filmmaking [with] its salvation during [this] period of recession” (Tzioumakis 137). By the late 1950s, the teenage market had grown so large that one “survey concluded that the statistically ‘typical frequent movie-goer’ was ‘a teenager in high school’” (qtd. in Heffeman 67). Moreover, the teenage demographic’s favoring of the double bill (Doherty 91) helped to further the demand for cheap product to meet their needs.

Alongside the significant changes in industry practice and audience demographics, the strictures of censorship also underwent radical alterations in the 1950s and 1960s that greatly affected the permissible content of movies. One of the major impetuses for this change was the increasing competition presented by television. Doherty writes that “[t]here were two ways movies could outflank television: (1) do what television could not do in the way of spectacle (form) or (2) do what television could not do in the way of controversial images or narrative (content)” (20). While the changes in spectacle came in the form of new exhibition formats, like 3D and widescreen, and gimmicks, like those William Castle became famous for,18 content changes increasingly challenged the Production Code. In 1952 the United Artist film The Moon Is Blue, “a moderately risqué…farce,” became “a top twenty box office hit” despite being denied approval by the PCA (J. Lewis 105-107). With other films following The Moon Is Blue’s lead, the PCA and its code began to appear increasingly irrelevant. As a result, the code underwent repeated revisions in the 1950s until, by 1956, “the only two subjects remaining completely
forbidden were sexual perversions and venereal disease, with depiction of crimes still limited” (Draper 201).

At the same time internal censorship of the movies began to fade, a series of court decisions dealt severe blows to the external censorship apparatuses that had restricted the exhibition of controversial content around the United States. The first judicial challenge to external censorship came in the 1952 decision on Joseph Burstyn, Inc., v. Wilson, Commissioner of Education of New York, also called the Miracle case. Other decisions had tangentially contested the 1915 Mutual Decision, but the Miracle case explicitly “extended the protection of free speech under the First Amendment to movies” (Draper 187). While the decision did not explicitly ban state and local censorship efforts and even tacitly endorsed them (Draper 190), it nonetheless “rendered unconstitutional the very manner in which the local boards did their business” (J. Lewis 104). In the wake of Burstyn v. Wilson, mounting legal opposition to the authority of censorship apparatuses across the country would severely damage, and at times remove, state censor boards (J. Lewis 127 and 130).

A series of court cases in 1957 would also further weaken the already ailing position of external censorship in the United States. In Butler v. Michigan the Court determined that the old standard for judging obscenity—whether a work could “deprave or corrupt” any individual (Cockburn qtd. in J. Lewis 232)—went too far in “discriminat[ing] against adults” (Slade 209), thus removing the justification for censorship on the grounds that obscene works, movies included, might adversely affect children. The decision in Roth v. United States created a new test for obscenity that would prove much more difficult for censors to apply. As Joseph W. Slade notes, the Court ruled “that obscenity, being ‘utterly without redeeming social value,’ was not entitled to First Amendment protection;” however, “[b]y the same token, material with any such
value could not be obscene” (209). A third case in the New York State Court of Appeals, 
*Excelsior Picture Corp. v. Regents of the University of the State of New York*, would find that “nudity per se was not obscene” (J. Lewis 200).

While the Court’s decisions in the 1950s would make external censorship extremely difficult, two decisions in the 1960s would render censorship of the movies practically impossible. The decision in *Jacobellis v. Ohio* in 1964, which would have been handed down as *Blood Feast* was beginning to be widely distributed across the United States, ruled “that a work to be judged obscene must be shown to lack ‘redeeming social importance’ according to ‘national contemporary standards,’ not merely local ones” (Slade 213), thus situating censorial authority at the federal level where, as these decisions demonstrate, the courts were against imposing on the movies’ First Amendment rights. A second case, *Redrup v. New York* (1967), further complicated censors’ efforts by limiting “prosecut[ion to] the *distribution* of questionable works if (1) they were clearly aimed at children, (2) they were marketed so aggressively that unwilling audiences could not escape exposure, or (3) the distributor was clearly pandering” (Slade 215). As a result of these decisions, by 1968 “[t]he Court…had succeeded in rendering local censorship obsolete” (254).

With the decline of internal and external censorship, the entire film industry discovered a newfound freedom to produce increasingly risqué material. The traditional subject matter of classical exploitation, essentially everything the Production Code forbid, found its way into more and more major releases (Schaefer 327-328). In addition to the greater prevalence of salacious content in mainstream films, other factors drove classical exploitation fare into archaism. As Friedman recalls, “1960 is not a year I recall fondly. The sex-hygiene shows were waning…[i]f the drooling masses wanted to read about sex, they could buy *Playboy*” (252). While classical
exploitation withered, new exploiteers like Sam Katzman of Columbia and Samuel Z. Arkoff and James H. Nicholson of American International Pictures (AIP) emerged to tap into the burgeoning teenage market that most major studios were still ignoring (Doherty 50-51) by producing films that dealt with teen related subjects like rock ‘n’ roll and juvenile delinquency. Others, like Russ Meyer, capitalized on Court rulings like the Excelsior case by producing “frank and explicit films” packed with “onscreen nudity” (J. Lewis 201), a theme the majors were still generally restricted from exploiting. Shortly after the end of the classical exploitation era that Schaefer identifies as 1959, Herschell Gordon Lewis entered the exploitation market.

1960 proved to be an optimal year for Lewis to begin a career in exploitation. By the late 1950s, there were “over eight thousand theaters dependent [on the type of material Lewis would produce]” (Doherty 126). Moreover, the lucrative teenage demographic had grown “to 22.4 million in 1958; an increase to a formidable 30 million was projected by 1965” (Doherty 187). As Lewis notes, the market was so ripe for exploitation fare that “if I could put together a film that would run through a projector and had a quantity of dialogue and action in it, [there would be] no problem distributing it” (qtd. in McCarty 36). Essentially, so desperate were theaters for product that they were willing to reach out to anyone who could provide a supply to their demand.

While gaining distribution may have been effectively guaranteed by the state of the film industry in the 1960s, earning a profit was not as Lewis would learn with his first film, titled The Prime Time (1960). Targeting the teenage demographic by telling the story of a rebellious teenage girl who gets mixed up with a less-than-reputable police detective and a deranged beatnik, The Prime Time drew from popular teenpic subject matter like rock ‘n’ roll and juvenile delinquency yet nevertheless proved to be a box office dud. While the exact reason for this
failure is impossible to pinpoint Lewis suggests the problem with the film was its tameness and lack of “guts” (qtd. in Palmer 17). His second film, a fictional yarn about a scandalous magazine publisher loosely modeled on Hugh Hefner called *Living Venus*, attempted to correct this perceived mistake by “expos[ing] a lot more skin” (Friedman 252). Given the changes across the United States, this increase in salacious content met with very few censorship troubles. Friedman points out that by the time the film was ready for distribution most censorship boards were “falling by the wayside. The only ones still in business that affect[ed] sizable markets [were] Maryland’s and Chicago’s” (253). Even the once-mighty Legion of Decency, based in Lewis’s hometown of Chicago, had lost much of its influence (Friedman 253).

After *Living Venus*, Lewis and Friedman began making “nudies” in the vein of Russ Meyer’s *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959). While their nudies were ultimately profitable, Lewis soon began to tire of making them, noting wryly “there were only so many ways to show girls in a nature camp playing volleyball” (qtd. in McCarty 39). Furthermore, the profits on these films were in a slow decline. Determining they would need something to separate them from the plethora of nudity-oriented films being produced by other filmmakers like Meyer, Lewis convinced Friedman that it was necessary to find a new topic that would differentiate them from both their competition and the mainstream industry. As he relates, “[t]he independent low-budget production could get playing time only if it were one the major companies couldn’t or wouldn’t touch. Gore fit that narrow strait, so we settled on gore” (qtd. in McCarty 39). Such a comment demonstrates how small a field of topics they were left with given the ever-increasing freedom of the major studios to feature salacious material in their films.

With gore settled on as the subject of their next film, the two produced what would become the inaugural classic *Blood Feast* in 1963. Despite its graphic and repellent content, the
film comparatively escaped the ire of censors (Friedman 307). What trouble they did run into was minimal; Lewis recounts an instance where the Kansas censor board required him to excise the scene where Astrid Olsen has the tongue ripped from her mouth (qtd. in Palmer 59). Apparently the censors did not feel it necessary to cry over spilt brains during the beach scene, however, and the rest of the film, brain-scooping included, played in Kansas uncut. Despite this incident, the film otherwise ran into little trouble. Lewis’s decision to not feature nudity in *Blood Feast* to avoid antagonizing censors also helped to minimize problems (Lewis qtd. in Palmer 70). This caution proved ultimately unnecessary; the following year the *Jacobellis* decision would eviscerate state censorship, leaving Lewis free to mix nudity with viscera in his later gore films. Indeed, in the years following *Blood Feast*’s release, “censorship tended to diminish, based on gradual acceptance of these films as another avenue of exploitation” (Lewis).

Lewis was also able to capitalize on new developments in motion picture technology that greatly aided in the delivery of gore in *Blood Feast*. Prior to the 1950s, the process for producing color films had been controlled by a single company, Technicolor, whose “virtual monopoly over…color services for feature films” effectively limited the availability of color (Neale 17). Combined with “the high cost of color” (Neale 17), this lack of availability made the technology essentially unavailable to filmmakers outside the mainstream studios. The debut of a new, less complex, readily available, and cheaper alternative to Technicolor via Eastman Kodak’s Eastman Color process at the close of the 1940s significantly increased the access to color film for the entire film industry (Neale 19). This new Eastman Color process made possible the employment of color in *Blood Feast* which, as chapter four will demonstrate, was an essential component in the film’s depiction of its gore scenes.
With the benefits of a favorable market, a greatly relaxed atmosphere of censorship, and cheap and accessible color technology, Lewis operated in a nine-year window, from *Blood Feast*’s debut in 1963 to the release of *The Gore Gore Girls* in 1972, that enabled him to produce seven gore films and several other films that included scenes of gore. By 1968, however, events were beginning to conspire to close that window. That very year, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA and new name of the old MPPDA) introduced a new ratings system to replace the PCA and the code. Still in effect today, the rating system allowed—and allows—the studios “new freedom in representation of sex and violence” (Tzioumakis 198), by opting to give higher ratings like R and X (what is now NC-17) to more graphic films instead of explicitly forbidding them. This new freedom not only allowed studio films to feature a broader spectrum of content (qtd. in McCarty 58) but also provided the MPAA with an insidious means with which to regulate the theatrical exhibition of almost the entire industry. As John Lewis demonstrates, the MPAA was able to garner the backing of all but “15 percent of the nation’s theaters” in support of enforcing the ratings system (150). Moreover, the new X rating effectively excluded the majority of the valuable teenage audience while also hampering the promotion of a film because “many [newspapers] refused to carry advertisements for movies rated X” (J. Lewis 167).

In what was, and still is, arguably one of the most egregious breaches of free trade, the MPAA, under the ratings system, sat in judgment over all films submitted for ratings. It was, and is, able to determine whether a film would be saddled with an X rating while the “vague and variable nature of code designations enable [the ratings system] to be far more permissive in its ratings of studio films” than those that are independently produced (J. Lewis 172). As the ratings system itself notes, the failure to submit a film to the MPAA “will self-apply the X rating” (qtd. in J. Lewis 309).
Adding to the headaches of those burdened with an X rating, a series of court cases in the early and mid 1970s made the exhibition of X-rated films legally perilous for many exhibitors. With a newly conservative makeup, the Supreme Court in 1973 rendered a decision on the case *Miller v. California* that effectively overturned *Jacobellis* by returning censorial authority to the states and rejected the Roth test by “redefin[ing] the standard to read ‘whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value’” (Burger qtd. in Slade 217). Rendered along with *Miller* was *Paris Adult Theater v. Slaton* which overturned *Butler*, ruling “that adults-only admission policies at hard-core theaters were not enough to protect theater owners or managers from local prosecution” (J. Lewis 262). In the wake of these decisions, legal action at the state and local level began to target X-rated films with regularity (J. Lewis 273). However, when action was taken against an R-rated film and the case was brought before the Supreme Court in 1974’s *Jenkins v. Georgia*, the Court found unanimously in favor of the film. As a result, R-Rated prosecutions dwindled (J. Lewis 265), leaving the MPAA effectively in charge of what could and could not be legally screened.

In the aftermath of these decisions, Jon Lewis notes that “theater owners bore the brunt of local censorship at a cost of revenue, jail time for employees, and the constant anxiety and headache of dealing with informal, extralegal censorship activity” (273). By the mid-1970s, many of the nabes that had provided exhibition sites for exploiteers like Lewis began to go out of business (Heffernan 219). Facing a rapidly decreasing exhibition market, the reinvigoration of external censorship, and the MPAA’s subtle new method of restricting free trade, exploiteers were finding their practice increasingly insecure. As Tzioumakis asserts, “[o]nly the lifeline presented by the advent of video and cable towards the end of the 1970s saved them from extinction” (193).
For Lewis, these changes in the industry would not be felt until his last film, 1972’s *The Gore Gore Girls*. Saddled with his first X rating despite his protestations, Lewis felt that he was unfairly singled out by the MPAA because of his independent status (qtd. in Palmer 168). As the film was being distributed and exhibited, it repeatedly ran into censorship issues, finding itself the target of “more local editing…than had occurred before” (Palmer 169-170). Local censorship also affected the film’s ability to find exhibition, as “theater owners were afraid of the [film’s] go-go girl image” (qtd. in Palmer 171). Faced with increasingly harsh censorship, Lewis could not afford to tone down his product, however, on account of the mainstream industry’s increasing claim on graphic violence. By 1975, audiences did not need to attend a screening of *Blood Feast* to see a severed leg when they could see the same thing in the PG rated studio blockbuster *Jaws* (1975). It is during this time period that Lewis also left filmmaking in part, he contends, due to increased competition from higher-budgeted competitors (Lewis), a statement that films like *Jaws* bear out.

The industry shifts and legal changes of the 1970s effectively closed the door on the widespread theatrical exhibition of Lewis’s gore films and exploitation films in general. These films nevertheless did not cease to be produced, but rather by the 1980s “became gradually associated with the home video market” (Tzioumakis 206). For movies like *Pieces* (1983) and exploiteers like Ted V. Mikels, home video and DVD provided a new means of exhibition that has enabled the survival of gore and exploitation. The gore genre has also returned to theaters in the past decade with the emergence of the “Splat Pack,” a term used to refer to filmmakers like Eli Roth, director of the *Hostel* films (2005 and 2007), and Rob Zombie, director of *House of 1000 Corpses* (2003) and *The Devil’s Rejects* (2005). Even Lewis has returned to filmmaking in recent years to take advantage of the home DVD market, releasing *Blood Feast 2* in 2002 with
another film titled *The Uh-oh Show* slated for release in 2010. Driving much of this resurgence is the distribution and production company Lions Gate Films.\textsuperscript{21} That Lions Gate is independent from the larger, conglomerated studios suggests a connection between gore films, theatrical exhibition, and the independent marketplace. Ultimately, however, the impact of television on box office revenues alongside changes in obscenity law and censorship, studio control of the film industry, and audience demographics in the 1950s and 60s created a market for exploitation films where differentiation of product was paramount. Gore, that “stark, single word,” provided the perfect means for Lewis to distinguish his films from his competitors.
CHAPTER III: NOTHING SO APPALLING IN THE ANNALS OF ADVERTISING
EXPLOITATION ADVERTISING AND THE MARKETING OF BLOOD FEAST

“See the picture if you must; but remember, we warned you.” –Radio spot for Blood Feast

No strangers to hyperbole, Herschell Gordon Lewis and producer/partner David F. Friedman crafted a tagline to promote their gore film Blood Feast (1963) that proclaimed there was “NOTHING SO APPALLING IN THE ANNALS OF HORROR!” as their movie. Such a provocative statement was only one part of a vigorous advertising campaign that depended on salacious content and hyperbole across a variety of media to sell the film. More than just a sterling example of exploitation advertising, the Blood Feast campaign provides insights into the methods used to sell a new product, particularly one as seemingly “appalling” as gore. Through a detailed analysis of the advertising methods and materials—particularly print ads, trailer, and radio spot—used to sell the film and others like it, this chapter demonstrates the reliance on traditional methods of movie exploitation as well as innovative new techniques employed in the promotion of Blood Feast. In doing so, the chapter will also develop a conceptualization that outlines the importance of advertising to exploitation and, by extension, Lewis, Friedman, and their Blood Feast.

As the product of two consummate exploiteers, the campaign for Blood Feast drew on a long history of exploitation advertising, which itself derived from the carnival tradition of “Ballyhoo…a hyperbolic excess of words and images that sparked the imagination” (Schaefer 103). As Eric Schaefer contends, the promotional strategies of the early exploiteers sought to overcome their films’ “[lack of] conventional narratives, stars, or genres,” by employing “a marketing address that transposed to paper the key attributes of their films: spectacle in the form of education and titillation” (105). To do so, classical exploiteers utilized “six major themes…throughout exploitation advertising: (1) the aftereffects of heterosexual bonding [i.e.
pregnancy and venereal disease; (2) blatant sex and nudity; (3) the unusual, the aberrant, or forbidden; (4) timeliness or exposé; (5) veracity; and (6) pedagogical appeal” (Schaefer 105). A print ad for S. Roy Luby’s *Race Suicide* (1937) under the title *Vic­tims of Passion* demonstrates several of these themes. The advertisement’s text promises a timely exposé, declaring the film “A Vital Message….Frankly Exposed SPECIAL ABORTION RACKETS! Right from Today’s Headlines!” while additional copy proclaims its veracity, stating “A MOST SENSATIONAL STORY WITH A BACKGROUND DERIVED FROM GRIM REALITY!” Still photographs from the film placed on the ad depicting women in a variety of suggestive situations and sexual poses are bolstered by a tagline promising “A MILE-A-MINUTE ROMANCE….!” While these images promise blatant sex, they are also tempered by shots of women in the hospital being attended to by doctors and nurses after suffering the negative aftereffects of heterosexual bonding (See figure 3.1 in Appendix 2). Text on a poster for Kroger Babb’s *Mom and Dad* blends sex appeal with pedagogical appeal, stating “Now YOU Can SEE The Motion Picture That DARES EXPLAIN SEX As NEVER BEFORE SEEN and HEARD!” and promising “EVERYTHING SHOWN! EVERYTHING EXPLAINED!” (See figure 3.2 in Appendix 2). Unusual and aberrant sights are promised by a poster for George Terwilliger’s 1936 *Ouanga* (under the title *The Love Wanga*) whose tagline declares “STRANGE LOVES OF QUEER PEOPLE!” (See figure 3.3 in Appendix 2).

To accompany these salacious materials classical exploiteers like Kroger Babb devised carnival-like promotions to bolster their campaigns. To add weight to the pedagogical appeal and allay censorship of *Mom and Dad*, for instance, Babb invented “Elliot Forbes, the Eminent Hygiene Commentator,” to offer lectures on sex at every screening of the film; Forbes was, of course, played by a variety of different actors (Friedman 34). In another instance, Babb promoted
a theater he worked for by burying a man alive under the sidewalk in front of it and inviting audiences to come and view the daring internee through a tube maintained for feeding him over the course of his six-day internment (Friedman 26). During the Depression, Babb devised a scheme called “Grocery Night,” essentially a raffle where lucky moviegoers could win free groceries to further promote screenings (Friedman 28). 22

With the decline of classical exploitation at the end of the 1950s, new exploiteers like Lewis and Friedman continued to utilize many of these strategies. Changes in censorship practices obviated the need for pedagogical appeal in many of the exploitation films produced during this period (Clark 36). Nevertheless, the other five themes still figured prominently in exploitation advertisements as the analyses later in the chapter will demonstrate. In addition, exploiteers like Lewis and Friedman engaged in similar promotions to those of Babb to attract audiences to their films. The press book for The Prime Time (1960), for instance, suggested exhibitors stage a “Beard Contest” (Krogh 4) where contestants would presumably attempt to grow facial hair in an attempt to resemble the film’s villain, aptly named The Beard. For Blood Feast, “white barf bags” (Friedman claims “half a million”) with “You May Need This When You See BLOOD FEAST” written on them were distributed to moviegoers across the nation (Friedman 321).

The close of the classical exploitation period also brought a significant shift in the target audience for these advertisements. Classical exploitation films had mainly been aimed at the rural audiences of the small towns they primarily played in; however, with the rise of the teenage demographic in the 1950s, exploiteers shifted focus to take advantage of this new and lucrative market. AIP even went so far as to develop a formula, “described as “The Peter Pan Syndrome,”” that effectively demonstrates the very gender-specific component of the teenage
demographic targeted by exploiteers (Doherty 128). According to this formula, “a younger child
will watch anything an older child will watch… an older child will not watch anything a younger
child will watch…a girl will watch anything a boy will watch… a boy will not watch anything a
girl will watch; therefore…to catch your greatest audience, you zero in on the 19-year-old male”
(qtd. in Doherty 128). Furthermore, while the formula does not explicitly note a racial
component to its valued demographic, it is implied that this “19-year-old male” is undoubtedly a
white, suburban male as he would undoubtedly have the largest access to the disposable income
that made teenagers so prized.

It is important to note, however, that campaigns of this nature and the demographics they
sought are not necessarily unique to exploitation films. Indeed, even the term exploitation itself
is not unique to such films. As Thomas Doherty asserts, “[i]n early industry parlance,
‘exploitation’ meant only the process of advertising and publicity that accompanied a movie’s
theatrical release” (2). Exploitation in this sense, moreover, was not confined to the independent
filmmakers who would come to be identified as the earliest exploiteers; the mainstream film
industry also engaged in exploitation as “major studios maintained permanent full-scale
‘exploitation departments’” (Doherty 3). The “titillation” that Schaefer ascribes to the marketing
efforts of the exploitation film industry was also not a practice avoided by the majors. A poster
for Paramount’s White Woman (1933) depicts a woman reclining in a low-cut dress, cleavage
exposed, while three men ogle her (See figure 3.4 in Appendix 2). Columbia’s poster for The
Bitter Tea of General Yen (also 1933), as has already been noted, exploits the forbidden theme of
miscegenation in addition to its sexual content. While both of these posters promoted movies
during the early years of the Great Depression—a time when the majors “exploited sex and
innuendo on an unprecedented scale” (Nourmand and Marsh 26)—and the coming of the
Production Code Authority in 1934 would make the employment of salacious material incredibly difficult for the majors, their existence demonstrates the dependence of the entire film industry on titillating content for effective advertising.

Even with the hindrances of the PCA, licentious material still found its way into the marketing efforts of the mainstream. Howard Hughes’s 1943 film *The Outlaw* employed a poster featuring its star Jane Russell reclining invitingly in a state of near undress while copy above pronounces her “1943’s MOST EXCITING NEW SCREEN STAR” (See figure 3.5 in Appendix 2). Even though *The Outlaw* would run into trouble with Joe Breen and the PCA, forcing Hughes to release the film on his own (Nourmand and Marsh 33), it would be picked up in 1946 for distribution by United Artists, one of the major film companies. United Artists’ campaign for the film produced a poster only somewhat less racy than Hughes’s. In this updated version, Russell is sitting rather than reclining and her breasts and legs only slightly less exposed than in the original. “SENSATION TOO STARTLING TO DESCRIBE” declares this poster’s tagline (See figure 3.6 in Appendix 2).

While classical exploitation declined in the 1950s and studios like Columbia began moving into the realm of exploitation, the titillating content employed by the early exploiteers found its way into more and more advertising materials produced by the majors. The content of these films also demonstrates a targeting of the teenage demographic. A poster for Columbia’s *Teenage Crime Wave* (1955) proclaims the film’s timeliness in its tagline: “THE SHOCKING DRAMA OF TODAY’S TEENAGE TERROR!” (See figure 3.7 in Appendix 2). If a more discriminating audience required the presence of sexual appeal in the advertisement to pique their interest, *Teenage Crime Wave* does not disappoint; an image of two women wearing only slips interacting in a sexually suggestive manner—one is reclining, the other seemingly
preparing to straddle her—also graces the poster. United Artists’ 1959 Riot in Juvenile Prison takes sexual appeal even further in its print advertising. “THE EXPLOSIVE STORY OF A CO-ED PRISON! BOY AND GIRL INMATES TOGETHER UNDER ONE ROOF!!!” blares the poster’s copy while a licentious tagline declares “Their teen-age emotions were tender and ripe…SOMETHING HAD TO EXPLODE!” Accompanying the text is a prominent image of a leather jacket-clad “inmate” in the process of tearing off a young woman’s shirt. Further emphasizing the sexual nature of the image, the woman’s nipples are very clearly erect (See figure 3.8 in Appendix 2).

To accompany their advertising campaigns, the mainstream industry also engaged in promotional schemes in keeping with those devised by exploiteers like Babb, Lewis, and Friedman. The trade journal “Film Daily included an ‘Exploitation Digest’ in its yearbook that listed ‘a comprehensive summary of stunts for exploiting any type of picture’” (Doherty 4). One such stunt involved the release of “a number of trained green parrots…in selected newspaper offices to squawk [a] movie’s title;” while ambitious, the plan was ultimately fruitless as the film was released under a different name (Doherty 4). Promotional materials for Teenage Crime Wave advised theater managers to “display zip guns [an improvised projectile weapon favored by teenage gangs in the 1950s] in theater lobbies” (Doherty 111).

These similarities in marketing strategies—from titillating content in advertisements to grand, even absurd, promotional schemes—demonstrate that the carnival-like ballyhoo of exploitation is something that was (and is) utilized by the entire film industry. While not all mainstream films rely on titillation as a promotional method, the fact that many did calls into question the viewing of such advertising as a unique criterion for identifying exploitation films. Instead, what sets the two apart is exploitation’s reliance on differentiating itself through
advertising. While mainstream films enjoy larger, better organized distribution networks and big-budget production values as inherent draws, exploitation films require titillating advertising to stand out. It is this reliance that makes titillating advertising such an important component in the discourse of exploitation, regardless of whether or not other types of filmmaking employ it or not.

In this same spirit, exploitation advertising enabled market-savvy filmmakers like Lewis and Friedman to differentiate their films from their competitors in the booming independent marketplace of the 1960s and early 1970s. Especially interesting are their advertising choices for *Blood Feast* considering that the film and its content were essentially a new product. Turning first to the film’s print advertisements, a survey of these materials reveals a heavy emphasis on sexual content—undoubtedly aimed at the white, teenage male demographic—blended with horrific content in a varying degree of ratios. The primary poster for the *Blood Feast* campaign depicts a wild-haired madman menacing a young woman who is laid out on her back in front of him. While there is plenty of blood and gristle strewn about the scene, the ad still manages to present a fair degree of sexual content. The woman, for instance, is depicted in seminude fashion wearing only a revealing bra. Furthermore, the horrific content of the poster’s copy is tempered by the deployment of sexually suggestive language: “You’ll Recoil and Shudder as You Witness the Slaughter and Mutilation of Nubile Young Girls.” The poster also contains an image of Connie Mason alongside text informing the viewer that “YOU READ ABOUT HER IN PLAYBOY” (See figure 3.9 in Appendix 2). Given exploitation’s target demographic, the reference to *Playboy* not only offered extra sexual content, but also subtly promised teenage boys access to the magazine that they may have otherwise had a difficult time viewing.
Two other print advertisements for *Blood Feast* provide a much higher sexual content to horrific content ratio than the standard poster. The first depicts two seminude women who are both restrained, one sitting with her arms bound behind her back and the other standing with her hands chained together above her. One woman has a small trickle of blood running from the corner of her mouth but the two are otherwise unharmed. While two terrified looking women bound and restrained is certainly a horrific image, their state of undress suggests that their primary purpose is to function as titillating figures. The only other horrific imagery the ad offers is a lone skull tucked away in the corner. “You’ll Shudder and Recoil at the Bloody Mutilation and Defilement of His Nubile Young Girl Victims!” proclaims copy similar to that of the standard poster. The word “Defilement,” however, offers a lurid titillation as opposed to the horrific “Slaughter” of the original text (See figure 3.10 in Appendix 2). The second advertisement presents even less horrific content. It again features two seminude women yet here the more gruesome copy of the first ad, with its use of words like “Bloody Mutilation,” is replaced here with a different declaration: “While His Nubile Young Girl Victims Screamed Out Their Life Blood, He Prepared the Most Horrendous Of All Feasts.” “Slaughter” and “Mutilation” and have been replaced by simple “Life Blood” while the sexually suggestive phrase “Nubile Young Girl” is retained to bolster the sexual content of the advertisement. No other horrific imagery is present (See figure 3.11 in Appendix 2).

A fourth ad functioned as a substitute for the other three in areas where their sexual imagery might be found offensive (Palmer 64). The ad’s sole image is that of a small skull in an upper corner. The rest of the poster features text that reads:

> It started as a low—agonized gasp and built in force until it bounced off the walls in an ear-splitting crescendo. Then it was choked off in one shuddering sound. The smooth
gore-splattered body writhed in a straining, undulating dance forming a tableau of
madness incarnate. Now a chain rattled, rusty steel rasped on rusty steel. A nubile
woman’s voice pleaded. The plea was answered by ghastly, raucous laughter. The
mutilation began.

Even though the ad employs terms like “gore-splattered” and “mutilation,” the “smooth,”
“straining,” and “undulating” “body” of “a nubile young woman” provides plenty of blatant
sexuality (See figure 3.12 in Appendix 2). Presumably Lewis and Friedman hoped that passersby
that might be offended by the sexual imagery of the other ads would not stop to read the ad’s text
while their target demographic—the white, nineteen-year-old, suburban male—would be
attracted by the movies tagline placed at the top of the ad which promises them a movie more
“appalling” than any they have seen before. With their attention captured, the ad would then
further pique the teenage male demographic’s interest by promising sexual content in its text.
What is particularly interesting about this ad is its very singular nature; it seems to be unique
among the exploitation advertising of this time period and even among the advertisements of
Lewis’s and Friedman’s other movies. Given that Lewis and Friedman were concerned about the
potential censorship this new type of product might garner, this inventive strategy for print
advertising was most likely designed to allow them to play it safe in otherwise risky
communities in an effort to minimize, as much as possible, any kind of public outcry over their
film.

A similar endeavor is seen in the newspaper advertisements designed to promote the
film. No suggestion of nubile young girls or smooth, undulating bodies grace the text of these
ads. The copy instead asserts the horrors of Blood Feast with bold statements like “The
Goriest… Bloodiest Picture You Have Ever Seen!” and “So Bloody Gory The Newspapers Will
Not Run Scenes From This Picture!” The omission of sexual content from these newspaper advertisements when it is so prominent in the other print materials is not, however, an unusual occurrence. As Michael S. LaTour and Tony L. Henthorne note, “[a] magazine or newspaper’s entire readership is exposed to the sexually arousing stimuli [of an ad with sexual content] and many of these readers may formulate an attitude toward the ad…whether in the market for the product or not. Clearly, this ‘unanticipated’ audience views the rightness of a particular ad, which research has shown carries over to attitude toward the brand” (93). Thus presenting an advertisement featuring sexual content to the broad readership of a newspaper would unduly risk offending individuals that were not part of the film’s target audience, inviting potential censorship, particularly before the *Jacobellis v. Ohio* decision would be handed down in 1964.\(^{25}\)

Nevertheless, the presence of sexual content in advertising materials for exploitation films was not uncommon. Classical exploitation employed sexual content as one of its primary advertising strategies. Exploitation in the era of Lewis and Friedman was no different; sexual content provided a powerful lure to the white, teenage male to which these films were marketed. Of the seventy print advertisements presented in Alan Betrock’s *Cult Exploitation Movie Posters, 1940-73*, for instance, sixty-four contain some degree of sexual content. Furthermore, for self-proclaimed “princes of picture-show prurience” (Friedman 336), the utilization of sexual content was essentially second nature.

Even for a film like *Blood Feast*, sexual content was a commonly used method of selling similar product. Other gruesome, although notably less gory, films like Del Tenney’s 1963 shocker *Violent Midnight*, under the title *Psycho-Mania*, ran an ad that hardly demonstrated its horror bona fides. “[‘GIRL MAD’ KILLER STALKS THE CAMPUS! Which girl will be the next VICTIM?’] notes the tagline in the advertisement’s one attempt at outlining its horrific
content. An image of a man and woman in what can easily be viewed as the beginnings of a passionate embrace dominate the ad while a list of potential victims running along the side reads more like a catalogue of sexually appealing women: “THE WILD CO-ED…she’s mad over men!” “THE NICE GIRL…innocent to the ways of love!” and “THE MODEL—to her, posing is an exciting way of life!” Finally, an out-of-place illustration of a seminude woman reclining suggestively by the film’s title completes the poster’s message of sex over horror (See figure 3.13 in Appendix 2). Even films that would be inappropriate to advertise with sexual content did not resist incorporating it into their advertising materials. A poster for 1961’s After Mein Kampf, a Nazi atrocity pseudo-documentary, featured sexually suggestive language like “GIRLS USED FOR ‘SCIENTIFIC’ EXPERIMENTS WITH NEAR-DEAD PRISONERS OF WAR!” and “SEE…HITLER’S SADISTS LEAVE THEIR SHAMELESS MARK!” Such language is complimented by several images of seminude women scattered around the poster. These examples demonstrate an overall reliance on sexuality as a primary marketing strategy regardless of the content of the film (See figure 3.14 in Appendix 2).

While sexual content provides Lewis and Friedman with an effective method of advertising for Blood Feast, other choices indicate an effort to also greatly differentiate their product. The advertising for the film abounds with references to the unusual and the aberrant. Words like “weird” and “unspeakable,” alongside the aforementioned tagline “NOTHING SO APPALLING IN THE ANNALS OF HORROR!” appear across Blood Feast’s various print ads. In conjunction with the trailer’s declaration that Blood Feast is “truly one of the most unusual [pictures] ever filmed,” this language suggests an effort to highlight the aberrant and unusual nature of the film itself.
To bolster this assertion, Lewis and Friedman developed “An Admonition” regarding the content of the film that appeared in various forms throughout the advertising media used to promote *Blood Feast*. Its urgent and seemingly genuine tone is something that is unmatched in the vast number of advertising materials of this period. Appearing fairly uniformly throughout the film’s print advertising it reads: “If you are the parent or guardian of an impressionable adolescent DO NOT BRING HIM or PERMIT HIM TO SEE THIS MOTION PICTURE!”26 The “responsible,” text-only advertisement adds the line “This is no ‘Publicity Stunt’ warning” to the beginning of the admonition, a sentiment echoed in *Blood Feast*’s radio spot which informs listeners that “[a] nurse will be on duty during the showing of the picture…not as an advertising gimmick but because she may very well be needed.” The assurance that these precautions are not publicity stunts is most likely a subtle jab at Lewis and Friedman’s contemporaries like William Castle who would have fake nurses at screenings to “assist” patrons overcome by “terror.” Such a gibe is not only another demonstration of their advertising efforts to differentiate their film from those of their contemporaries but also shows an almost prescient awareness of the changes in obscenity policy that would lead to the *Redrup v. New York* case that the Supreme Court would decide on in 1967, which ruled in part that works could only be judged obscene if “they were marketed so aggressively that unwilling audiences could not escape exposure” (Slade 215).27 By issuing such stern warnings, Lewis and Friedman could market their works aggressively, but cloak those marketing efforts under the guise of a supposed warning to audiences about the content of their film. That strategy also recalls the “educational” marketing angle used to promote classical exploitation.
In addition to the print admonition and the efforts to distance *Blood Feast* from its contemporaries’ publicity stunt gimmicks, the radio spot and trailer also endeavored to warn audiences about the grisly nature of the film. As the radio spot cautions:

[L]et us warn you that no children will be admitted during the showing of blood feast. In fact, there will be a policeman on duty at the box office to make sure they do not enter the theater. And if you’re the least bit squeamish or have a heart condition, we strongly recommend you not attempt to see this picture. A nurse will be on duty during the showing of the picture, too, not as an advertising gimmick but because she may very well be needed. See the picture if you must; but remember, we warned you!

Mirroring the radio spot’s warning, the trailer features a spoken introduction by Bill Kerwin, the actor who plays Detective Thornton, which is “unusual” on its own. Speaking in a calm and sober manner, Kerwin warns the audience with essentially the same language used in the radio spot. The suggestion that there will be police present at screenings of the film provides the warning with an air of officiousness that helps to bolster the seemingly genuine claims of the admonition that the film is not only perilous not just for those with “heart conditions” but also for those that are “the least bit squeamish.” Far from scaring audiences away, however, these warnings provided a powerful lure for the film. As Lewis himself comments on the advertising decision, “[t]hat admonition was basic Psychology 101. People like to take a challenge….there’s nothing that provokes a response so much as a dare, so we dared them so see *Blood Feast*. And it worked” (qtd. in Palmer 63).

The repeated declarations in the radio spot and trailer that children would not be permitted to enter screenings of *Blood Feast* also served a beneficial advertising function. Schaefer writes that “[a]n adults-only label gave the appearance of responsibility to the
community” while “promising audiences sights not found in the average Hollywood film” (124). Therefore, by banning, or at least suggesting they would ban, children from showings of Blood Feast, Lewis and Friedman both increased their image of social responsibility while promising eager audiences salacious content, a move that once again shows an interesting foresight of the Redrup case’s assertion that for a work to be judged obscene it must be marketed to children. It is important to also note here that children did not comprise the lucrative teenage market. Indeed, as the admonition makes clear, male adolescents, as long as they are not “impressionable,” are more than welcome to view the film—impressionable ones are most likely even more welcome. Furthermore, given AIP’s assertion that younger children will watch what older children will watch, advertising Blood Feast as adult’s only would not alienate the teenage demographic; if anything, it would pique their curiosity further.

In addition to the admonitions and warnings contained in Blood Feast’s advertising materials, the structure of the trailer itself also served as a departure from contemporary advertising strategies. As has been mentioned, the spoken, on-camera introduction to the Blood Feast trailer is highly unusual for exploitation trailers, or any trailer for that matter. While this choice can be explained as the means for delivering the trailer’s form of the admonition, the ninety seconds that Kerwin warns the audience about are also highly unusual. What follows Kerwin’s introduction can essentially be called a one-and-a-half-minute-long catalogue of the film’s gore scenes. The voice-over narration that accompanies so many trailers for exploitation films like A Bucket of Blood (1959) Konga (1961), Carnival of Souls (1962), Bloody Pit of Horror (1965), and Bad Girls Go to Hell (1965) is completely missing. Alongside this odd absence, the trailer all but lacks the on-screen text J. Rocky Colavito notes is present in “trailers too numerous to list” (49). A small, fairly forgettable insert of the tagline sits briefly at the
bottom of the screen that, compared to the leaping text of the Konga trailer, appears rather impotent.

Also odd, the trailer features minimal sexual content. What little does make it into the trailer is almost entirely there by happenstance. The opening seconds of the trailer, for instance, show the infamous tongue scene. The audience is treated to a brief shot of a bra-clad Astrid Olson as red glop pours from her mouth. The camera cuts away in just over a single second, however, without fully lingering on the seminude actress. Later in the trailer, the potential to showcase prurient content is once again cut short as Sandra Sinclair, in a state of undress, prepares for her fateful bubble bath. The camera begins with a shot of her bare legs before traveling up to briefly reveal her underwear. Before the camera can reveal any more it bizarrely cuts to Sinclair relaxing in the bathtub for a few seconds before Fuad descends on her. The shot of Sinclair in the bathtub is indeed a titillating sight, but it boggles the mind as to why two “princes of picture-show prurience” would neglect to follow through with the shot before it.

Furthermore, Blood Feast contains other scenes of titillating content that are strangely absent from the trailer. Where is the extended scene of Connie Mason and companions frolicking gaily in a swimming pool? This scene was included in the film purely for prurient purposes, so why not showcase it in the trailer? And, for that matter, where is the mention of “Playboy’s Favorite Playmate” Connie Mason? She is not shown once in the trailer. These absences cannot be explained by sentiment oriented towards saving something for the movie. As Colavito notes, films like Blood Feast tended to reveal all the “‘gory’ details” in their trailers (50).

Fears of censorship also do not begin to justify this omission. While newspaper ads and even the radio spot run the risk of reaching a broad and unintended audience who may be offended by the ad’s content, a trailer plays in an enclosed movie theater to what would be the
film’s target audience. In addition, the blatant showcase of sexual content in the trailer for an exploitation film is as common as it is in print advertising. The trailer for *Bloody Pit of Horror* features numerous shots of scantily-clad women, including one shot of a man leering at two women undressing. Even a trailer for a movie with almost no sexual content like *Carnival of Souls* explicitly plays up sex in its trailer. A full twenty seconds of the trailer’s two minutes and ten seconds is dedicated to a single scene where the film’s protagonist bathes and then dresses as her neighbor watches her. As the scene unfolds, voice-over narration informs the audience that “there’s no privacy in her life; she’s ever watched, tormented. Either it’s her neighbor who desires of her physically, watching her with his leering eye, or it’s the evil eye of the man; the man who taunts her, the man who wants her.” While the trailer constructs this scene as a promise of more to come, it is essentially the entirety of the film’s sexual content. Thus, if even a film like *Carnival of Souls* plays up its prurience in its trailer, why does *Blood Feast* seem to avoid doing so?

In surveying the literature produced by and about Lewis and Friedman, there is little that explains this odd marketing choice. Randy Palmer, in his biography of Lewis’s filmmaking years *Herschell Gordon Lewis, Godfather of Gore*, notes that the *Blood Feast* trailer is “unusual” but neglects to offer an anecdote from Lewis as to why (62). Therefore, in lieu of other input, two suppositions can be posited that may shed light on the conundrum. The first suggests that perhaps Lewis and Friedman were conducting a sort of market research. The trailer for Lewis’s follow-up gore film *Two Thousand Maniacs!* is structure completely differently from that of *Blood Feast*. Its trailer features voice-over narration that does offers some degree of plot synopsis while Connie Mason is explicitly mentioned in the trailer as “Playboy’s Favorite Playmate.” Text, however, once again plays a minimal role as what little does appear is relegated
to being written on a blank red screen at the end of the trailer as opposed to being imposed over top of the trailers action. Lewis and Friedman’s third gore film, and their last production as a filmmaking team, *Color Me Blood Red* (1965) employs a trailer that once again utilizes voice-over narration. Sexual content of any kind, however, is jettisoned while a small on-screen text proclaims the film’s title as the narration speaks it aloud. Given the alternating choices for the various trailers, it could be imagined that Lewis and Friedman were experimenting with different ways to market gore. As a new product, the most effective methods for marketing it would hardly be set in stone. This possibility is further reinforced by the varying ratios of sexual to horrific content in the print advertising. Lewis and Friedman may have once again been endeavoring to gauge the effects of various marketing efforts by testing the effectiveness of blending sex with gore.

The second supposition, which is not mutually exclusive from the first, suggests that the various types of advertising media are intended to work in concert. An audience that would be viewing the trailer would assuredly also come into contact with some of the print materials for the film, most likely in the community around the theater or in the theater lobby itself. As these print ads almost universally featured sexual content, an audience viewing the trailer would know to expect sexual content in the film, an expectation that would be reinforced by the sexual content in the trailer regardless of how limited it is. The limitation of sexual content, moreover, allows more screen time for gore—an important concession in a trailer that already has a significant portion of its running time usurped by Kerwin’s admonition—while also emphasizing that *Blood Feast* is not just a vehicle for nudity but something truly unusual.

The advertising campaign for *Blood Feast* reveals the choices and efforts to differentiate product that go into an exploitation advertising campaign. As part of the larger tradition of
exploitation filmmaking, moreover, *Blood Feast* was very much defined by its advertising. With no pre-established system of national distribution or powerful box office lures like stars and big-budget production values, the film’s success was forced to rely on campaigning. In doing so, it became, like so many of its fellow exploitation films, considered a less reputable film than those of the mainstream. A lack of reputability, however, did not ultimately hurt the film as it rode its advertising campaign to both financial success and an enduring legacy in the annals of exploitation and cult cinema.
CHAPTER IV: “WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE UNUSUAL?”: BRILLIANT COLORS AND BAD PERFORMANCES IS BLOOD FEAST

“We coined the phrase ‘Blood color’ … and were determined to give the viewer an eyeful. I did and do regard dim coloring as cheating.”–Herschell Gordon Lewis

Echoing much of the discourse on Lewis’s inaugural gore film, Scott Aaron Stine begins his entry on Blood Feast (1963) in The Gorehound’s Guide to Splatter Films of the 1960s and 1970s by stating “This is it… the film that kick-started a trend and made gore films a legitimate genre separate from its cinematic progenitor, the horror film” (56). But are assertions like Stine’s and other fans’ and critics’ accurate; is Blood Feast, on a textual level, different from other entries in the horror genre? And, if so, how is it different? This chapter concerns itself with answering these questions through an examination of color and performance in Blood Feast, two elements of the film that distinguish it from contemporary films like Psycho (1960). By analyzing these qualities, it becomes apparent that Blood Feast is set apart from films like Psycho through a willful avoidance of realism.

Far from an arbitrary choice, the decision to focus on color and performance in Blood Feast arises from both elements being commonly commented upon in discussions of the film which, given the emphasis in this thesis on cultural consensus and the importance of commonly acknowledged attributes in interrogating genre, make them important avenues for analysis. Comparing Lewis’s gore entry to Psycho, moreover, is also not a specious decision. In addition to occupying historically contiguous moments, both films have been regarded as the originators of the slasher genre of horror. Carol J Clover, for instance, has noted “[t]he appointed ancestor of the slasher film is Hitchcock’s Psycho” (23). Paradoxically, however, Mikita Brottman contends that “the story of Fuad Ramses and his Blood Feast stands as the ur-text for a long tradition of slasher and stalker films” (85). That the two films are recognized as occupying a similar position
makes their differences all that more important, especially given that *Blood Feast* is credited with establishing another genre of film that is distinct from the slasher.

The key to these differences is both films’ efforts, or lack thereof, at realism. Directed by Hollywood stalwart Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho* follows in the traditional Hollywood mode of realism. It has a clear-cut, cause-and-effect narrative with little to no spectacle to detract from it. Even Norman Bates’s seemingly bizarre mental illness is neatly explained in simplified logic by the psychiatrist at the end of the film. *Blood Feast*, on the other hand, was never intended to approach anything close to a reasonable representation of reality. As Lewis has noted, “I wanted the audience to say ‘Of course this isn't real’ (qtd. in Bistoff). Far from a simple aesthetic decision, the lack of realism, Lewis explains, also functioned as a means for avoiding censorship: “I knew we would be getting ‘heat’ over the very nature of the film, and any recognition that this wasn’t reality would help” (Lewis). Furthermore, Lewis argues that studiously avoiding an air of realism in *Blood Feast* and his other gore features helps to differentiate them from “those ‘slasher’ films that pretend reality [and] become derivative” (Lewis). Lewis’s assertion that realistic slasher films become derivative is immaterial to this argument and most likely the product of a savvy exploiteer adept at setting his product apart from potential competition. What is important to note, however, is that he sees his films as distinct from them, an argument that this chapter will bear out.

Color, one of *Blood Feast*’s primary means of achieving an unrealistic tone, is also one of its most recognized and regularly commented on attributes. Xavier Mendik, for instance, mentions that “the colour coding of *Blood Feast*…seems somewhat exaggerated” (192). One of the most enduring tales of the film’s production, that of Lewis fashioning his own stage blood formula to achieve “the proper color” (Palmer 39), is retold consistently throughout the various
writings on Lewis,\textsuperscript{32} demonstrating a focus on color in the discourse on Lewis. Even the film’s marketing materials stress its use of color, proudly proclaiming that the film was shot in “BLOOD COLOR!” Lewis himself has remarked on the importance of color to the production of \textit{Blood Feast} as well, stating “I wanted saturation of colour, which meant that the blood could flow as red as blood could flow. The idea was that gouts of blood…are more effective if they are more colorful” (qtd. in Mendik 193). While \textit{Blood Feast} was Lewis’s most sophisticated deployment of color in his filmmaking career to that point, it was not his first innovative use of the technology. His \textit{Daughter of the Sun} (1962) featured its scenes of nudity in color while the black and white \textit{Scum of the Earth} (1963) used a single red frame to emphasize the violence in a scene where the film’s villain commits suicide.

As an important component of \textit{Blood Feast}, the film’s use of color deserves detailed analysis. To do so, it is first necessary to briefly detail some of the discussions regarding the use of color in film to further clarify how \textit{Blood Feast}’s use of color emphasizes its unrealistic nature. Trond Lundemo remarks that the period following the inception of film was marked by a debate over whether cinema is an art form or merely “an automatic, mechanical re-production of the world” (88-89). The introduction of color did little to clarify matters because it “entertains highly ambivalent relations to representation, as it clearly adds a new dimensions of likeness to the image, but one which is not always a mechanical result of what has been in front of the camera lens” (Lundemo 91). In other words, color can enhance cinema’s illusion of reality by recording the colors of the world or it can emphasize its crafted, artistic nature by distorting or embellishing those colors. Echoing this notion, Natalie M. Kalmus, a representative for Technicolor during the classical Hollywood era, argues that while “color…completed the process” of cinema’s movement “toward more complete realism,” its enhancement of the
mimetic illusion can be hampered by “[a] super-abundance of color [which] is unnatural (24-25). Yet despite Kalmus’s insistence on color’s realism—undoubtedly on behalf of her company’s interests—an “aesthetic association…between colour, fantasy, and spectacle” held sway “until the 1960s” when the emergence of color television saw “the overwhelming association of colour with fantasy and spectacle [begin] to be weakened” (Neale 15 and 22).

For Blood Feast, emerging in the time period when color film was becoming linked with realism, its “super-abundance” and “saturation” of color nevertheless denies the film a mimetic illusion by exaggerating and embellishing on the colors found in the natural world. This rejection of realism helped to further set the film apart from contemporaries like Psycho which were still being filmed in black and white.33 As Rudolph Arnheim suggests, “black and white film,” with its two-tone palette, is limited in its ability “to achieve extreme contrast” especially when compared to the variety of contrasts available to color film (54). Therefore, with its vivid color palettes, Blood Feast is able to make its shots of blood and gore stand out in starker contrast than a film like Psycho. Moreover, given Eric Rohmer’s observation that films where color dominates “haunt us not so much because of their overall climate as because of the power of certain details, of certain colored objects,” the vibrant reds of the gore in Blood Feast allow it to attain a powerful degree of thematic resonance that further demonstrates its departure from mimetic realism in favor of obvious craft.

An examination of individual gore scenes in the film highlights the ways in which Blood Feast’s gore contrasts with the rest of the mise-en-scène and thereby creates its intense thematic resonance. While scenes in the film such as the gratuitous swimming pool scene, the birthday party scene, and the scenes shot in Fuad’s sanctuary feature sets, props, and costumes, full of saturated color, the background colors in the mise-en-scène of many of the gore scenes is
conspicuously desaturated. The opening scene, for instance, is dominated by desaturated color. Whites and grays abound, while only a small, nearly out-of-frame vase of flowers and the dull blue-gray dress of the victim provide any color, the former only being briefly visible and the latter quickly discarded in favor of plain white undergarments. The brain-scooping on the beach scene also features desaturated colors, with low-key lighting illuminating only the beach-going couple and the brown sand they are lying on. Even the victim’s bright red and blue costume, the only saturated color in the early moments of the scene, is obscured during much of the time the gore is actually on screen. During the infamous tongue scene, vivid, saturated color is again all but absent. A blue blanket on the motel bed provides the only color in the scene and it too is concealed during much of the time the gore is on screen. Similarly, the minimally saturated color of the heart-removal scene is hidden from view when the gore makes its appearance; the Egyptian priest’s shiny gold-colored robe is not seen again after he plunges the knife into the sacrificial victim’s chest. Even the background, which was a dark blue-gray at the beginning of the scene, becomes almost black by the time the gore is in the frame. In sum, the lack of saturated color in these scenes makes the gore that much more pronounced when it does appear on screen.

The embellishment of the vivid reds of Blood Feast’s gore is accented by its conjunction with monochromatic backgrounds. During the gore scenes noted above, the gore is first seen foregrounded against the black and white of Fuad’s suit or the white outfit of the sacrificial victim and the black background of the scene. The profound effect such a juxtaposition of colored objects on black and white backgrounds has on the prominence of color in a shot is described by André Bazin in his essay on Henri-Georges Clouzot’s The Picasso Mystery (1956),
a documentary that features Picasso painting in color while the rest of the film is black and white. As Bazin writes:

Let’s suppose that Clouzot had shot the whole film in color. The painting would then exist plastically on the same plane of reality as the painter. The blue color on the canvas would be the same on screen as the blue of Picasso’s eyes; the red color on the same canvas would be identical to the red of Clouzot’s shirt. So, in order to make spectacularly visible the imaginary or aesthetic mode of existence of the colors on the canvas, in opposition to those of reality, the filmmaker would have to create coloring at a second remove. (61)

To achieve this effect, Bazin contends, Clouzot shot the entire film in black and white except for the painting which is done in color (61). The similar combination of colored objects, in this case gore, and a black and white background helps the gore to achieve this same effect of spectacular visibility.

The gore in Blood Feast is, in one scene, not foregrounded against black and white. In the final gore scene where the detectives stumble on the victim in the back of Fuad’s store, the gore is presented in the midst of several other bright, saturated colors. As the camera pans along the victim’s body, the red streaks of blood and assorted gristle staining her back share space in the shot with the bright blue of her tattered dress and the green of what can only be called a “gore salad.” Yet, despite sharing the frame with saturated cool colors, the warm reds of the gore are by far the most prominent colors in the shot. Taken together, however, the very conscious emphasis on saturated, warm colors throughout these gore scenes serves to demonstrate how Blood Feast amplifies the thematic resonance and spectacular visibility of its gore. The promotion of the film’s unrealistic nature via the prominence of saturated, almost unnatural
colors helps to highlight the crafted nature of the film and dispel any illusion at realistic representation.

The film’s often bizarre performances also convey its lack of realism. After gore, performance is perhaps the single most noted filmic element in Blood Feast, with every comment unfailingly disparaging the acting. “The acting is amateurish, top to bottom,” declares Variety’s original review of the film (5/5/64). John McCarty quips “[a]s for the quality of acting in Lewis’s films, well the less said about that the better” (Splatter Movies 52). Even Lewis and Friedman regularly disparage the quality of performance in their film. Discussing Mal Arnold’s portrayal of Fuad, Friedman recalls in his autobiography that “Mal played Fuad using the worst Bela Lugosi voice anyone ever heard. He was awful” (340). Lewis is even less kind: “If you take the gore out of Blood Feast all you have left is about 58 or 60 minutes of bad acting, and that’s no excuse for a picture” (qtd. in Palmer 59).

But what is it about the performances in Blood Feast that makes them so universally reviled? After all, the performances in Blood Feast were deliberately crafted. Mal Arnold, for instance, contends in an interview with Christopher Wayne Curry that he was given direction to intentionally craft a “stilted” performance (qtd. in 229). Lewis himself has confirmed Arnold’s claim, noting that “Fuad Ramses was an intentional caricature” (Lewis). So if the performances in the film functioned the way they were supposed to, why are they still regarded as “bad?” Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke shed some light on the matter in their book Reframing Screen Performance, observing that “[t]raditional ways of thinking about film and about acting have caused screen performances to be valued insofar as they appear truthful, sincere, and authentic” (18). These prized “naturalistic performances,” moreover, “prompt [audiences] to lose awareness of the actual performance elements and to focus instead on the
illusion those gestures and expressions establish”; essentially, “such performance elements are meant to disappear by calling attention neither to themselves nor to the skill of the actor” (Baron and Carnicke 181-182). These naturalistic performances are considered “representational styles,” in that they “offer the audience the illusion that they—or the cinematic apparatus that records the action—are invisible to the performers” (Maltby 381). Acting in a film like Blood Feast, however, has the opposite effect. As Baron and Carnicke note, “the physical details of a performance become more noticeable when they include strange, overt, or what [James] Naremore refers to as ostensive gestures and expressions” (182). The intentional failure to reproduce natural behavior designates Blood Feast’s acting as “presentational,” a type of performance which “exist[s] along a continuum” with “representational acting styles” (Baron 24). “Presentational styles” like Blood Feast’s “acknowledge the co-presence of performer and audience” (Maltby 381). Thus, performance in Blood Feast is considered bad acting because it fails, intentionally, at reproducing natural behavior, opting instead for a “bizarre” and “otherworldly” (Mendik 191) presentational performance that calls attention to itself and consequently diminishes the realism in the film in much the same way that the film’s excesses of saturated color distort its mimetic illusion.

Such performances also inevitably contrast Blood Feast with Psycho, whose representational performances are widely acclaimed. Anthony Perkins, Psycho’s star, has been praised as “remarkably effective” (Variety 6/22/60), while Janet Leigh, playing the role of Marion, was rewarded with a Best Supporting Actress Academy Award. An analysis of the performance choices in these two films serves to highlight the differences between presentational and representational acting, while also demonstrating further how Blood Feast rejects the realism Psycho endeavors to establish.
To conduct this analysis, it is useful to turn to Laban Movement Analysis as a means for describing the performance choices in both films. As Baron and Carnicke note:

[T]he Laban system provides a coherent set of terms for analyzing (1) the spatial aspects of the actors’ movements, (2) the temporal dimensions of their movements, (3) the weight or strength that infuses their movements, and (4) the contrast between the energy flow in [the actors’] portrayals. Laban terms help one pinpoint the direction and speed of their movements, as well as the degree of resistance and degree of control. Laban’s taxonomy prompts one to identify direct and flexible movements, sudden and sustained gestures, strong and light expressions, and bound versus free movements. (emphasis original, 192) (see chart 1 in Appendix 3)

The Laban system further develops its analysis of movement through “[s]pecific combinations of spatial, temporal, and weight qualities in the players’ movements,” called “efforts,” which “[designate] the inner impulse revealed by an expression, gesture, or movement” (Baron and Carnicke 198 and 199). These combinations produce “eight basic efforts”—called “pressing, thrusting, wringing, slashing, gliding, dabbing, floating, and flicking”—and twenty-four “variations” if an effort’s spatial, temporal, or weight quality is more prominent than the other two (Baron and Carnicke 199) (see chart 2 in Appendix 3).

Scrutinizing Mal Arnold’s portrayal of Fuad Ramses in Blood Feast through the lens of Laban Movement Analysis reveals a remarkably static range of performance choices throughout the film. Arnold’s selection of movements almost exclusively involve some combination of strong, direct, and sustained pressing movements even if such a performance would seem odd given the context of the scene. During the scene where Fuad is approached in his store by Mrs. Fremont (played by the much-maligned Lyn Bolton), for instance, the audience witnesses a
curious deployment of this performance choice. As Fremont enters the store, Bolton selects for her a light, direct, and sustained gait, what Laban terms a gliding motion, as she approaches the counter and engages Fuad. The relaxed and sustained lightness of her stride combined with the directness with which she approaches and addresses the Egyptian caterer suggests an air of privileged confidence reinforced by her attire that, while gaudy, also reflects her upper-class position. Fuad, however, responds by leaning towards her with a wide-eyed stare, which a quick cut to a close up allows the audience to study. This pressing motion, a balance of strong, direct, and sustained motion and expression, startles Fremont who takes a step back and immediately shifts her movements to a light, indirect, and strongly sudden, jerking set of motions that, along with the now halting timbre of her voice and the bound nature of her stance, demonstrate her discomfort at Fuad’s overpowering directness. Nevertheless, Fremont presses on, requesting “something unusual” for her daughter’s birthday party to which Fuad replies by leaning in closer and raising his voice to ask, “Have you ever had an Egyptian feast!” At this moment, the increased emphasis on the weight or strength dimension of his physical and vocal expression take on a crushing quality. The menacing nature of Arnold’s gestures and expression is accentuated by a sudden, sharp burst of organ music. However, in keeping with the film’s “unrealistic” presentational style, despite Fuad’s intimidation, Fremont excitedly requests the feast. As if this lapse in “realistic” dramatic logic were not enough, the upper-class matron is then hypnotized by Fuad and forced unnecessarily to once again acquiesce to the order. Following this interaction, Fuad inexplicably begins to avoid meeting Fremont’s gaze, turning his head away from her, while clasping and unclasping his hands. These light, indirect, and sudden, flicking motions seem to convey anxiousness. Fuad’s nervousness lasts only briefly, however, as Arnold quickly lapses back into his primary pressing and crushing gestures.
The gestures that Arnold uses to portray Fuad seem to make little sense in the context of this scene. Why would he try to startle and discomfort a potential customer? It could be argued that his actions suggest some sort of hostile motivation on account of Fremont’s privileged position of class and race, or perhaps Fuad is trying to exercise some form of patriarchal dominance over the confident woman. However, it would be more “realistic” for Fuad to not frighten his customers, and thus run a successful business and maintain a low profile as a murderer. Yet Arnold uses increasingly menacing movements when he suggests the Egyptian feast. If representational, narrative logic were integral to the film there would be no reason for Fuad to be menacing when he offers to provide a service that would interest a wealthy patron in search of something exotic. Similarly, there would be no reason for Arnold to convey the idea that Fuad was suddenly anxious after mystically compelling Fremont to order the feast. To understand the performance choices in the film, it is useful to recognize that they are designed not to draw audiences into the thoughts and feelings of complete, three-dimensional characters, but instead to (re)direct audience attention to the “surface” of the text, and in particular to the film’s virtuoso depiction of gore.

These peculiar performance choices continue throughout the film as Arnold continues to portray Fuad using almost exclusively strong, direct, and sustained gestures, regardless of whether or not they fit the context of a given scene. In the rare instances where he deviates from this pattern, as when he hypnotizes Mrs. Fremont, his motivations for doing so are often unclear and seem bizarrely and arbitrarily crafted without regard for the narrative. Only as Fuad endeavors to convince Mrs. Fremont’s daughter Suzette (Connie Mason) to recline on the countertop-cum-sacrificial altar do Arnold’s performance choices reasonably fit the narrative, as
his light and sudden but direct, dabbing gestures fit his attempts to relax Suzette and thus persuade her to trust him because he is a harmless “old man.”

While certainly strange, Arnold’s performance choices are far more than bad acting. They suggest a deliberate decision to construct Fuad Ramses as an overt exaggeration of a filmic villain in keeping with *Blood Feast’s* presentational styles of acting. In addition to calling attention to itself, a presentational performance can also be “used to present character types or social types” (Baron 19). In this case, the film panders to the exploitation audience’s expectations about villains, particularly that they are non-white, bizarre, and one-dimensionally evil. Arnold’s presentational performance of Fuad as a caricature of a villain is not the film’s only such performance. Bolton’s portrayal of Mrs. Fremont depicts her character as a victim incapable of resisting the villain’s dominating will. Scott Hall, who plays *Blood Feast’s* less-than-intrepid police captain Frank, functions as the film’s patriarchal voice of authority. Hall is constantly shouting his lines—which he also very conspicuously reads from his hand—regardless of whether he is outdoors directing his men during the analysis of a crime scene or indoors having a polite conversation. His excessively strident performance, in conjunction with Frank’s position as police captain, largely parodies “realistic” depictions of authority.

These unrealistic and presentational performances differentiate *Blood Feast* from a film like *Psycho* where the representational nature of the acting not only reinforces the film’s efforts at realism but is also “used to represent characters with ostensibly unique personality traits” (Baron 19). During the scene where Marion (Janet Leigh) first arrives at the motel and encounters Norman, Perkins selection of gestures predominately feature dabbing motions similar to, if not more expertly performed than, those Arnold selects to reassure Suzette. The combination of lightness and directness helps to cast Norman as a friendly and easy-going person.
while the suddenness of his movements imply a nervous anxiety around people that is supported by the relative isolation he lives in. This performance changes notably, however, after Marion overhears his mother berating him up at the house. When Norman returns with their dinner, Perkins amplifies the sudden quality of his previous gestures, performing shaking motions that highlight his embarrassment and agitation over being scolded by his mother. After Marion invites him into her room to eat, Perkins responds with the same anxious, increased suddenness but adds an indirectness to many of his gestures that transforms them from shaking into jerking movements. Norman’s increased discomfort in this scene, especially after being invited into Marion’s room, seems reasonable given that his mother has been upbraiding him for wanting to “[bring] strange young girls in for supper by candlelight…in the cheap erotic fashion of young men with cheap erotic minds.”

The ensuing dinner scene—which takes place in the safety of Norman’s office as opposed to the morally dangerous motel room—features several more remarkable and explicable changes in Perkins’s portrayal of Bates. As dinner progresses, Norman appears to relax as Perkins reduces the suddenness of his motions and begins to mix in movements directed at Marion, alternating between dabbing and flicking gestures. In conjunction with his rambling dialogue, Perkins gives off the impression that Norman is a lonely and socially awkward man who is easily unnerved but also starved for company. This demeanor, in turn, relaxes Marion, whose bound movements convey that she has been nervously on guard since stealing the money in the beginning of the film. Yet, despite this seemingly pleasant air, Norman’s behavior does not stay constant. When Marion suggests he put his mother “someplace,” a less-than-veiled insinuation he institutionalize her, Perkins shifts his gestures from dabbing and flicking to the strongly sustained and direct crushing effort Arnold crafted for Fuad’s suggestion of the
Egyptian feast. The threat these movements convey is further augmented by the harsh accenting of Perkins’s lines and the subtle and eerie string music that accompanies this change. Unlike Fuad’s menacing suggestion, this shift in behavior fits perfectly with Psycho’s narrative; Norman’s only “human” contact in his isolation is with his mother, who he remarks “is a boy’s best friend,” and the thought of sending her away is unbearable to him. Moreover, a viewer who has seen the movie before will recognize that Norman’s aggression is not only a sign of the violence he is capable of but also quite likely the mother part of his personality manifesting in a menacing manner in self-defense.

Perkins’s representational performance in Psycho reveals an integration of acting choices into the larger narrative; this approach to performance is entirely at odds with the gore aesthetic at the center of Blood Feast’s presentational style. Viewed in conjunction with Psycho’s black and white cinematography and Blood Feast’s foregrounding of highly saturated blood red gore, it becomes clear that Psycho endeavors to maintain an aura of realism while Blood Feast rejects such efforts in favor of establishing a spectacle well suited to the exploitation market.

Blood Feast’s unreality served two important functions. First, it enabled Lewis to reduce the risk of censorship, for it presented the film as something not to be taken seriously. Second, it allowed Lewis to differentiate his product from mainstream competitors like Psycho that were better equipped than Blood Feast in terms of budget, shooting schedule, acting and directing talent, and other production values to establish themselves as “realistic” representations of violence. This is not to say that Blood Feast is somehow a worse film than Psycho, but rather that the two films accomplish different goals; Psycho caters to an audience seeking a realistic horror on screen whereas Blood Feast aims to provide its young, white male audience with something movies like Psycho will not give them: gore and sexuality.
CONCLUSION

“A good closing statement would be that my entire career proves that Barnum was right.”—Herschell Gordon Lewis 35

In 2010, almost fifty years after Blood Feast premiered in Peoria, Illinois, the organizers of the Cinema Wasteland Movie and Memorabilia Expo allowed fans to vote for guests they would like to see attend the exposition’s tenth anniversary gathering that October. Receiving the highest number of votes was Herschell Gordon Lewis. That Lewis was the first selection for the majority of fans attending a convention dedicated to exploitation and trash films indicates the enduring cultural legacy of his work. This legacy undoubtedly owes much of its durability to Lewis’s efforts to differentiate Blood Feast and his other products from their competition. His attempts to create a unique product were necessitated by the movie marketplace in the 1960s and 70s. For exploitation filmmakers this marketplace was bolstered by the freedoms afforded by a reduction in the major studios’ control of the industry and a relaxation of censorship across the United States. However, to achieve a distinct position in the exploitation field, Lewis, alongside partner David Friedman, were required to create a promotional campaign that employed conventional exploitation methods along with inventive techniques like the admonition. Moreover, in terms of textual strategies, the filmmakers ensured that Blood Feast was differentiated by its use of saturated color and presentational acting styles which set it apart from mainstream competitors like Psycho. Ultimately, the textual and extra-textual exploitation strategies were so successful that they initiated a new genre that is perceived to depict scenes of carnage and violence against women above any other concern.

This new gore genre has secured for Lewis a legacy that can be seen in a number of places. Noted camp filmmaker John Waters, for instance, considers Lewis, along with Russ Meyer, one of “the two greatest masters in film history” (192). In addition, Waters writes, “I
even ripped him off by calling one of my films *Multiple Maniacs* in homage to *Two Thousand Maniacs*, and years later exhibitors playing *Pink Flamingos* copied his idea of giving ticket buyers vomit bags when they entered the theater” (202). An increased interest in his works is suggested by the release of remakes of Lewis gore films *2001 Maniacs* (2005) and *The Wizard of Gore* (2007). *2001 Maniacs* has even managed to garner a sequel due out in 2010.

In addition to film, Lewis and his *Blood Feast* have also left their mark on music. From a band called The Gore Gore Girls to the song “Blood Feast”—whose lyrics provided the title of this project—by renowned punk outfit The Misfits, nods to Lewis’s gore films abound throughout the music landscape. One of his most interesting legacies, however, concerns the band Impetigo whose landmark 1992 album *Horror of the Zombies* features a track titled “Wizard of Gore” which “is total homage to Herschell Gordon Lewis and his gore classic of the same name” (Stevo). Already heavily influential on a style of music called grindcore—a fast tempo blend of aggressive punk rock and heavy metal—Impetigo’s use of gory thematic content like Lewis’s *Wizard of Gore* also helped to spawn an offshoot called goregrind, identified primarily by its graphically violent lyrics and album artwork. Often recorded cheaply with minimal production values, goregrind is the aural equivalent to Lewis’s films.

Given this rather varied legacy, it is surprising to note that Lewis has garnered little scholarly attention. While he may not warrant as prominent a position in film history as Orson Welles or Jean-Luc Godard, Lewis deserves increased study. This thesis has primarily attempted to address this oversight through a study of *Blood Feast*’s political economy and a formal analysis of its textual and extra-textual elements; however, there is still a wealth of research that can be conducted on Lewis and the gore film in a variety of methodologies. A feminist analysis, for example, would bring interesting insights to the film’s depictions of graphic violence against
women and its teenage male audience’s interest in seeing such sights. Such an approach could also be used to interrogate the blending of sexual content and violence against women in the advertising materials used to promote *Blood Feast*, especially given that these advertising efforts proved so successful. A postcolonial methodology could explore the film’s treatment of Fuad’s race and Egyptian mythology, particularly in light of declining British and French dominance, and America’s increased presence, in the Middle East and North Africa during the 1950s and 60s. *Blood Feast*’s position in cult cinema raises questions about taste and the valorization of what is, ultimately, a cheap and poorly produced film. A psychoanalytic reading of the film could discuss both men’s and women’s desire to view the act of mutilation—primarily against women—on screen. An approach akin to Noël Carroll’s in *The Philosophy of Horror* or *Paradoxes of the Heart* could examine the potential emotions films like *Blood Feast* might evoke. Questions of race, class, and gender dealing with the film’s position in the political economy of the American movie market could also be addressed. Further analyses of Lewis’s other six gore films, or any of his other thirty-seven films for that matter, provide additional opportunities for research. Finally, the current moment also marks an interesting time to delve into scholarship on Lewis and gore films. Lewis’s return to filmmaking and the success of modern gore films like those of the Splat Pack suggest a resurgence in the production and popularity of gore films over the past decade. Research into the similarities of the movie market during *Blood Feast*’s moment and the contemporary era in terms of how they enable the production of gore films could produce notable insights.

In discussing his inaugural gore outing, Lewis “often says ‘*Blood Feast* is like a Walt Whitman poem. It’s no good but it’s the first of its kind, therefore it deserves recognition’” (qtd. in Faust). While this observation is undoubtedly the effort of a savvy businessman who is still
endeavoring to promote his product, there is a degree of significance to Lewis’s comment. *Blood Feast* is widely credited with establishing a new genre through its focus on graphic violence, particularly against women. Thus, given its position in the history of American film genres and the American film industry, in addition to the research opportunities noted above, *Blood Feast* and Lewis do deserve recognition, or at the very least increased scholarly study.
ENDNOTES


2 This work is intended to be a historical and critical analysis of Blood Feast and not a comprehensive biography on Lewis. Thus the biographical details throughout the thesis are kept to a minimum. For those interested in reading more about Lewis’s life and film career, I recommend Randy Palmer’s Herschell Gordon Lewis, Godfather of Gore: The Films and the second half of David Friedman’s autobiography A Youth in Babylon: Confessions of a Trash-Film King.

3 See Randy Palmer’s Herschell Gordon Lewis, Godfather of Gore p. 7.

4 Chapter 4 will utilize a similar approach when selecting which components of Blood Feast to analyze.

5 It is important to note here that exploitation is not a historically stable term. Conceptions of it have shifted over time; even its name has been retroactively applied to its earlier incarnation. Nonetheless, the four qualities provided here are consistent throughout the literature on exploitation, irrespective of time period. See chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of the history and shifting ideas of exploitation.

6 Chapter 2 details the history of this time period in greater detail.

7 So prolific were these objections, in fact, that the stress of dealing with them began to adversely impact the health of the notorious PCA chief Joseph Breen after only three years of heading up the office (Black 293).

8 For instance, see Jamie Russell’s Book of the Dead p. 20 and Peter Dendle’s The Zombie Movie Encyclopedia p. 190.


10 See Stephen Thrower’s Nightmare USA: The Untold Story of the Exploitation Independents.

11 See Appendix 1 for Lewis’s complete filmography.

12 It is interesting to note that while much is written about the genre’s violence, little is mentioned in the discourse about the genre’s tendency to portray this violence against women.

13 While gore films are regularly connected to the horror genre, one type of film they don’t seem to include is the mondo film, “those documentaries which employ a wide range of shock tactics,” and include “such unpleasantries as the Faces of Death series and its inbred kin” (Stine 2).

14 See A Youth in Babylon: Confessions of a Trash Film King P. 253.

15 In his book, Schaefer contends that what he refers to as classical exploitation is the “original meaning” of the term and that “this historically specific designation has been diluted over time” to “include movies engineered to appeal to kids tooting down to the drive-in with their newly acquired disposable income in hand” (3-4). Schaefer does not, however, provide an actual instance where these filmmakers and their products are referred to as exploitation films or filmmakers. Given Doherty’s assertion, and the specific Variety articles he cites to support his claim, his assertion that exploitation wasn’t coined as a negative term that referred to a specific group of films until the end of the classical exploitation period is much more plausible. John Lewis also implicitly supports Doherty’s contention, writing that “what we now call ‘exploitation films’ first reached theaters in the early 1920s” [emphasis mine] (198). This statement further suggests a retroactive application of the term to Schafer’s classical exploiters.

16 For more on independent filmmaking and its relationship with Hollywood, see Yannis Tzioumakis’s masterful study Independent Cinema: An Introduction.

17 For a complete look at the variety of films produced by the classical exploitation industry, see Schaefer’s “Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!”

18 Castle’s gimmicks included taking life insurance policies out on the audience in case they “died from fright” and fake skeletons springing from boxes to startle theatergoers.

19 Hannegan v. Esquire (Jowett 29) and the Paramount Decision (J. Lewis 102)

20 Such films include Rock Around the Clock (1956), a film that was little more than a vehicle for its popular title song, and Teenage Crime Wave (1955), which details a teenage couple’s felonious crime spree. For more on teen exploitation films see The I was a Teenage Juvenile Delinquent Rock ‘n’ Roll Horror Beach Party Movie Book: A Complete Guide to the Teen Exploitation Film, 1954-1969 by Alan Betrock and Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s by Thomas Doherty.

21 Lions Gate is responsible for the production and/or distribution of both Hostel films, Zombie’s House of 1000 Corpses and The Devil’s Rejects as well as numerous other films by members of the Splat Pack.
Babb’s scheme was similar to other promotions aimed at getting Depression era audiences into theaters like Dish Night, which offered a single piece of a set of china to women who attended specific screenings. For more on Dish Night see Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley’s essay “Dish Night at the Movies” in Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin’s anthology Looking Past the Screen: Case Studies in American Film History and Method.

For the newspaper advertisements, see the “Gallery of Exploitation Art” special feature on the Something Weird Video’s DVD of Blood Feast.

This is pure supposition on my part, but I find it interesting to note that the second part of the admonition that is capitalized reads “permit him to see this picture.” Perhaps this is a subtle and suggestive nudge on the part of Friedman and Lewis? Moreover, the repeated use of the word “him” further evidences the focus on male adolescents as the target for these films.

I am indebted to Mark Bernard of the American Culture Studies Program at Bowling Green State University whose input during a conversation about this troubling discrepancy led to this first supposition. Many thanks, my friend.

For the second supposition I am equally indebted to my thesis advisor, Dr. Maisha Wester of the American Culture Studies Program at Bowling Green State University, who illuminated this second possibility for me. Again, many thanks.

From a personal interview I conducted with Lewis.

All three filmic biographies on Lewis—Randy Palmer’s Herschell Gordon Lewis, Godfather of Gore, Daniel Krogh’s The Amazing Herschell Gordon Lewis and His World of Exploitation Films, and Christopher Wayne Curry’s A Taste of Blood—recount the stage blood anecdote alongside many other writings.

Many other horror and exploitation films of the early 1960s were also shot in black and white including Homicidal (1961), Violent Midnight (1963), The Haunting (1963), and The Horror of Party Beach (1964).

This conjunction of red, blue, and green also corresponds with the primary colors, the three colors the human eye is most sensitive to.

WORKS CITED


APPENDIX 1
A HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS FILMOGRAPHY

*The Prime Time*, 1960
*Living Venus*, 1961
*The Adventures of Lucky Pierre*, 1961
*Daughter of the Sun*, 1962
*Nature’s Playmates*, 1963
*Boin-n-g* (1963)
*Goldilocks and the Three Bares* (1963)
*Bell, Bare, and Beautiful* (1963)
*Scum of the Earth* (1963)
*Blood Feast* (1963)
*Two Thousand Maniacs!* (1964)
*Moonshine Mountain* (1964)
*Sin, Suffer and Repent* (1965)
*Monster a-Go Go* (1965)
*Color Me Blood Red* (1965)
*Jimmy, the Boy Wonder* (1966)
*A Taste of Blood* (1967)
*The Gruesome Twosome* (1967)
*Something Weird* (1967)
*The Girl, the Body, and the Pill* (1967)
*Blast-Off Girls* (1967)
*The Magic Land of Mother Goose* (1967)
*She-Devils on Wheels* (1968)
*The Alley Tramp* (1968)
*Suburban Roulette* (1968)
*Just for the Hell of It* (1968)
*How to Make a Doll* (1968)
*The Ecstasies of Women* (1969)
*Linda and Abilene* (1969)
*Miss Nymphet’s Zap-In* (1970)
*This Stuff’ll Kill Ya!* (1971)
*Black Love* (1971)
*Year of the Yahoo!* (1972)
*The Gore Gore Girls* (1972)
Figure 1.1
Figure 3.1
ONCE...IN A LIFETIME...Comes
A Presentation That TRULY
PULLS NO PUNCHES!

Now YOU Can SEE
The Motion Picture
That DARES
DISCUSS and
EXPLAIN SEX
As NEVER BEFORE
SEEN and HEARD!

THE ONE, THE ONLY, THE ORIGINAL...
"MOM AND DAD"
Truly The World's Most Amazing Attraction!

Extra IN PERSON
ELLiot FORBES
"THE SECRETS OF SENSIBLE SEX"

NO ONE UNDER HIGH SCHOOL AGE
Admitted Unless Accompanied By Parents!!

EVERYTHING SHOWN! EVERYTHING EXPLAINED!

Figure 3.2
Figure 3.3
Figure 3.4
Figure 3.5
Figure 3.7

OUT OF THE SIDEWALK JUNGLE...

THE SHOCKING DRAMA OF TODAY'S TEENAGE TERROR!

TEENAGE CRIME WAVE

COLUMBIA PICTURES PRESENTS

Starring TOMMY MOLLIE COOK-MCCART

Screen Play by HARRY ESSEX and RAY BUFFUM

Directed by FRED F. SEARS - A CLOVER PRODUCTION
Figure 3.8
Figure 3.9
Figure 3.10
Figure 3.11

While his nubile young girl victims screamed out their life blood, he prepared the most horrendous of all feasts.

Box Office Spectaculars, Inc.

Presents

An Admonition:
If you are the parent or the guardian of an impressionable adolescent—do not bring him or permit him to see this motion-picture.

More grisly than ever in blood color!

Introducing Connie Mason

Produced by David F. Friedman
Directed by Herschell G. Lewis
Figure 3.12

NOTHING SO APPALLING
IN THE ANNALS OF HORROR!

BLOOD FEAST

It started as a low-organized
ghastly built in force until
it bounced off the walls in
an ear-splitting crescendo.
Then it was choked off in
one shuddering sound.
The smooth gore-splattered
body writhed in a straining,
undulating dance.

BLOOD FEAST

forming a tableau of
madness incantate. Now
a chain rattled. rusty
steel rasped on rusty
steel. A nubile woman’s
voice pleaded. The plea
was answered by ghastly,
rancorous laughter.
The mutilation began.

Introducing
CONNIE MASON
YOU READ ABOUT
HER IN PLAYBOY

AN ADMONITION
This is no “Publicity-Stunt” warning.
If you are the parent or guardian of
an impressionable adolescent, DO
NOT BRING HIM or PERMIT HIM
TO SEE THIS MOTION PICTURE!

MORE GRISLY THAN EVER IN BLOOD COLOR
PRODUCED BY DAVID F. FRIEDMAN DIRECTED BY HERSCHELL G. LEWIS
RELEASED BY BOX OFFICE SPECTACULARS, INC.
Figure 3.13
Figure 3.14
APPENDIX 3
LABAN MOVEMENT ANALYSIS CHARTS

Spatial aspects
Place, direction, shape of movement
Direct versus flexible or indirect movement

Temporal aspects
Speed and rhythm of movement
Sudden versus sustained movement

Weight/strength
Degree of resistance to gravity
Strong versus light movement

Energy flow
Degree of control of movement
Bound versus free-flowing movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sustained</th>
<th>Sudden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strong</strong> and direct</td>
<td>Press (crush, cut, squeeze)</td>
<td>Thrust (shove, punch, poke)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strong</strong> and indirect</td>
<td>Wring (pull, pluck, stretch)</td>
<td>Slash (beat, throw, whip)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Light</strong> and direct</td>
<td>Glide (smooth, smear, smudge)</td>
<td>Dab (pat, tap, shake)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Light</strong> and indirect</td>
<td>Float (strew, stir, stroke)</td>
<td>Flick (flip, flap, jerk)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 1

Chart 2