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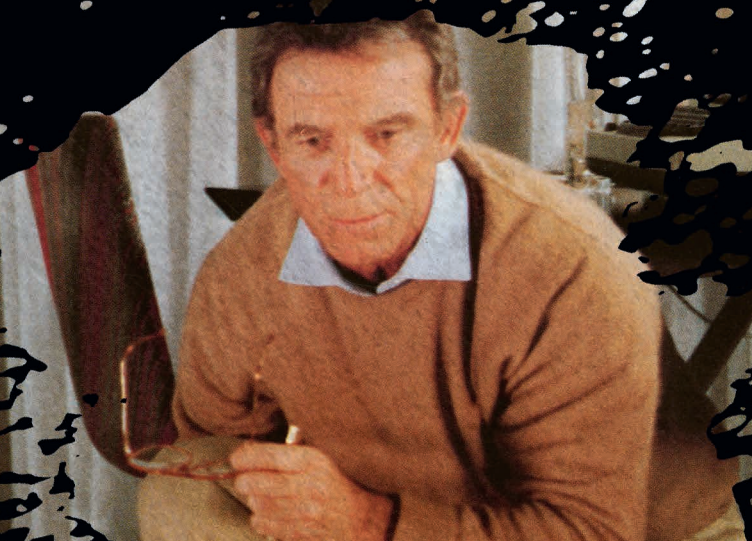

CREW

Written and Directed by **Dario Argento**
Produced by **Claudio Argento**
Director of Photography **Luciano Tovoli**
Production Designer **Giuseppe Bassan**
Film Editor **Franco Fraticelli**
Music by **Simonetti - Pignatelli - Morante**
Costume Designer **Pierangelo Cicoletti**

AN APPRECIATION OF *TENEBRAE*

by Peter Strickland

Tenebrae marks Dario Argento's return to the giallo staple after some supernatural distractions with *Suspiria* and *Inferno*. From the diabolically heightened bombast of those two excursions, *Tenebrae* initially feels a little deflated in comparison. Even compared to Argento's seventies giallo classics, such as *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, *Tenebrae* has lost all the genre's chiaroscuro, ushering in a new, supposedly brighter decade. Yet the impact of the blood is only more shocking against white. Though both the production design and music have donned a hitherto unseen slickness, the brutality remains inimitably baroque.

Suspiria is still the benchmark Argento for me, but within the sheen of *Tenebrae*, there remains enough excess and innovation to warrant repeated viewings. The film was one of the first instances in which I noticed the subversion of non-diegetic music and it's something I recently realized I must have subconsciously copied in my own work. The whole

sequence in which Goblin's mutant electronics augment the altitude of an extended crane shot is one of the highlights of the film, both for its delirious bravado and for the realization that we're not hearing a soundtrack, but someone playing Goblin on the turntable on the top floor. And as for Goblin, in the film's credits, the music is simply credited to former members Claudio Simonetti, Fabio Pignatelli and Massimo Morante. The music itself is a radical departure from the prog-Goth excess they were known for. Being a colossal fan of both *Suspiria* and Goblin's soundtrack to the film, I have to confess to feeling a little disorientated when Messrs. Simonetti, Pignatelli and Morante were let loose on *Tenebrae*. However, one quickly embraces the new direction the music took and it perfectly enhances the world Argento created here. If anything, the *Tenebrae* soundtrack is among the most chilling music I've ever heard. Its cold and harsh tonality perfectly matches the angular architecture and white surfaces of the film. For anyone familiar with Simonetti's disco side-projects during the seventies, the *Tenebrae* soundtrack is in hindsight a fairly natural progression.

I love the way *Tenebrae* ends so abruptly on the final scream, which bleeds into the score. The complete disregard for a little tidying up or resolution is fantastic. The presence of John Saxon is also a coup. I'm also intrigued by the fact that a scene featuring Silvio Berlusconi's former wife, Veronica Lario (who played the bitter ex-wife of the film's anti-hero), was allegedly posthumously censored.

The dubbing (both in English and Italian) is something that I learnt to embrace. The artifice of it all used to bewilder me, but it's something I've grown accustomed to after many years and now I see it as integral to how many films from this genre cast their spell. Stephen Thrower's book on Lucio Fulci eloquently trashes the oft-used argument that dubbed dialogue is artificial. Mr. Thrower states that many viewers don't consider the use of sound in the majority of films they watch artificial and that they would balk at authentically recorded sound, as used in many Cassavetes films or Paul Morrissey's brilliant *Flesh-Trash-Heat* trilogy. My guess is that Nick Alexander was behind the English dub for *Tenebrae*, having been the English sound man that horror and giallo directors in Rome would call upon. A whole section is dedicated to the great man in the Alan Jones book, *Profondo Argento*.

Along with Mario Bava, my favorite giallo films are by Argento. An obvious choice, but obvious because of the visionary set-pieces and the way in which he can shroud his worlds in such a unique, creepy atmosphere.

Peter Strickland is the acclaimed director of Berberian Sound Studio, The Duke of Burgundy *and* In Fabric.

GIALLO PERFECTION

by Alan Jones

"Terror Beyond Belief" was promised on the UK poster for *Tenebrae*. And the "Italian Hitchcock", Dario Argento, reached a pinnacle of giallo perfection with this ultra-modernistic bloodbath examining the horrors of random violence. Crime novelist Peter Neal (Anthony Franciosa) goes on a Roman book publicity tour and crosses the path of a deranged killer inflamed by his latest spine-chilling bestseller *Tenebrae* in Argento's deceptively traditional mystery, cruelly and sexually subverted into a skin-crawling symphony of fear. It's a synthesis of Argento's most popular motifs – black-gloved assassins, a writer impotently trapped in Rome, perverse chromosomal make-up, the something-not-quite-right flashback – combined with his flair for outrageous set pieces and jaw-dropping gore. This disturbing mindbender found the director back on familiar ground making another defining mark with the precision of a deftly wielded scalpel. Light and dark, sanity and insanity, fact and fiction, real and unreal, guilt and innocence, life and death – these are the many contradictions explored by Argento's ingenious and labyrinthine shocker.

Tenebrae was something of a surprise move on Argento's part in 1982. After his terror tour-de-force *Suspiria* had made him a horror superstar, Argento quickly followed it with the sequel *Inferno* using the same inspiration, Thomas De Quincey's 1821 fable of the Three Mothers from his book *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Many were expecting Argento to complete his supernatural witch trilogy. But *Inferno* had been a chore to make for the director. He got very ill while writing and shooting it and hated dealing with the Hollywood politics involved working with co-producers 20th Century Fox. Worse, after all the problems getting it on screen, *Inferno* wasn't well received upon completion either. So plans for finishing the trilogy were put on hold (the eventual *Mother of Tears* capper got delayed a further 27 years) and Argento returned to the genre he knew inside out. "The motivating force behind *Tenebrae* was to put on film a gory roller-coaster ride packed with fast and furious murders," Argento told me when I first met him in 1983. "I came to the conclusion that I shouldn't resist what my hardcore audience wanted.

"Every now and again I get tired of the giallo and want to see where else I can take my anarchic ideas. Then, suitably refreshed, I always come back to it fired by a new enthusiasm. That's what happened on *Tenebrae*. I was at my lowest ebb on *Inferno* but my second soul took over and gave me the inspiration for what my fans think is one of the most impressive achievements of my career."

Argento based *Tenebrae* (literally meaning 'Darkness' or 'Shadow' – the latter became the title in Japan) on two frightening incidents that happened to him while on holiday in America. "I was in Los Angeles and a more than keen fan had gotten hold of my telephone number and started making progressively more alarming threats on my life. It seemed symptomatic of that city of broken dreams, what with celebrity stalkers and it being the home of senseless crime. Then while I was staying at the Hilton Hotel, three men entered the lobby and shot dead a Japanese tourist. Just like that, for no reason. I also heard about a drive-by shooting outside a cinema with again no motive. To kill for nothing, that is the true horror of today. If you are killing for money or to achieve a goal, OK, I can understand it even if I obviously can't condone it. But when that gesture has no meaning whatsoever it's completely repugnant and that's the sort of atmosphere I wanted to put across in *Tenebrae*."

Within *Tenebrae*'s opening seconds Argento places the spectator deep in the warped mind of the assassin as a faceless narrator intones a passage from Peter Neal's novel:

> The impulse had become irresistible. There was only one answer to the fury that tortured him. And so he committed his first act of murder. He had broken the most deep-rooted taboo and found not guilt, not anxiety or fear, but freedom. Every humiliation which stood in his way could be swept aside by this simple act of annihilation: Murder.

As Argento's camera tracks across the lines of the page, the perspective is broken as the book is engulfed in flames. Serving notice that further disorientation is ahead within each subsequent murder distorting time, space and perspective, the audience is firmly kept on the edge of their seats when Neal's fictional homicides become the blueprint for sadistic slaughter.

Shot in ten weeks from May 3, 1982, almost entirely in Rome, Argento's complex and contemporary nightmare reunited the director with Luciano Tovoli, his cinematographer from *Suspiria*. "I honestly never thought I'd work with Dario again because we had made such a masterpiece with *Suspiria*," remarked Tovoli after I had tracked him down in Italy for the TV documentary *Dario Argento: An Eye for Horror*. "The first conversations we had made me realize he needed a totally different look to this neo-giallo than the primary three-color vibrancy of *Suspiria*. Dario wanted to film modern Rome, not the museum city the tourists love, in a crystalline, clinically aesthetic, almost futuristic brightness. He wanted ordinary events scrutinized with the closest of attention, the smallest and most trivial of objects exalted in an obsessive manner, and every scene of shocking violence bathed in sharp white lights so there could be no escape for the victim. Much of the tension in *Tenebrae* comes from there just being no place to hide."

This innovative element of fear as an intensely dazzling spectacle is on thrilling view in *Tenebrae*'s most stunning sequence. To convey the menacing no escape presence of the

unseen assassin Argento's camera scales the walls of a house where a lesbian couple are unaware they are the killer's next prey. Then it slides over the rooftop, down the other side, flies through a window and rests on the maniac breaking in. "It's a bravura showstopper for sure," remarked Tovoli. "I worked with Michelangelo Antonioni on *The Passenger* and Dario was completely in love with its final shot – a long pan culminating in the camera entering through a window. We had to import the Louma crane necessary from Paris at great cost to achieve that fluid one-take but the fact people are still talking about the nearly three-minute sequence means it was worth every penny." Accompanied to nerve-wracking music by Claudio Simonetti, Fabio Pignatelli and Massimo Morante, who as part of the rock band Goblin had scored *Deep Red* and *Suspiria*, the overall vertigo effect is made doubly electric as their pulverizing soundtrack highlights every sinister, demented and exciting movement.

One of the lesbian couple (slashed to ribbons while changing her T-shirt in one of Argento's most outré deaths) is journalist Tilde (Mirella D'Angelo). And it's she who does something quite unusual for a horror thriller in this pre-*Scream* era. At one of Peter Neal's press conferences Tilde goes for the jugular by loudly claiming, "*Tenebrae* is a sexist novel... Women as victims, ciphers, the male heroes with their hairy macho bullshit." It's a line of questioning that has dogged Argento ever since the controversial knife rape sequence in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and within *Tenebrae* he gives voice to his opinion on the constant feminist attacks on his work. It's easy to spot

Argento's personal vitriol coming through his dialogue when Neal says, "If someone is killed with a Smith & Wesson revolver, do you go and interview the president of Smith & Wesson?"

One of the most widely reprinted quotes Argento ever gave me was directly linked to his supposed misogyny. I can still remember his anger when I posed the question about it. "I like women, especially beautiful ones," he literally snarled at me. "If they have a good face and figure, I would much prefer to watch them being murdered than an ugly girl or man. Women in peril were a mainstay of literature long before the cinema got a hold of this easy way of provoking a protective reaction. I certainly don't have to justify myself to anyone about this and I don't care what anyone thinks or reads into it."

Anthony Franciosa deserves a special mention for his performance as the inscrutable mystery writer Peter Neal. Argento had offered the role to Christopher Walken (*The Deer Hunter*) but settled for Franciosa, the star of *Death Wish II*, instead. True to the Hollywood gossip that preceded him, Franciosa had fiery disputes with Argento and often skulked in his dressing room. However, with his credible anchoring of the twisting plot, Franciosa gives one of the best male turns in an Argento picture. Making Neal believable, sympathetic and funny (his startled reaction when his traumatized assistant runs a red light without even noticing succinctly sums up the Rome traffic experience), he makes the final solution both startling and moving. The moment Neal is revealed to be behind detective Germani (spaghetti western legend Guiliano

Gemma) when he bends down to pick up a piece of evidence is one of Argento's most renowned visual flourishes that has been copied countless times.

Although she had exited the production of *Suspiria* in a rage over her nonexistent story credit, Argento's disillusioned lover Daria Nicolodi had reluctantly returned to the fold in *Inferno*. The critically acclaimed stage actress, and mother of his now famous daughter Asia, had only wanted to play a cameo role in *Tenebrae*. But in a set of circumstances that would mirror exactly what happened in *Opera* in 1987, Nicolodi found herself tackling the much more substantial part of Anne, Neal's Roman secretary. "I agreed to play the part of the Girl on the Beach in the fetish red stiletto shoes who humiliates the murderer as a youth in the important flashback sequences," she explained. "At the last moment the actress Dario had originally cast to play Anne dropped out and he begged me to step into the role." (The Girl on the Beach was recast with transsexual Eva Robins.) Everything was fine to begin with, but when Anthony Franciosa and I started bonding over our conversations about playwright Tennessee Williams and his ex-wife Shelly Winters, Dario got furious and made our scenes together an ordeal to endure. I would often finish the days in tears. The ending where I scream and scream and continue screaming over the credits? That was my cathartic release from the whole nightmare that *Tenebrae* turned out to be for me. I was astonished when Asia told me it was this scene that had made her want to become an actress because its realism affected her so much. If only she knew!"

Even so, Nicolodi liked *Tenebrae* a great deal when she saw the final cut – the reason she accompanied Argento across Europe to promote it. She told me during that tour she thought it was one of Argento's finest giallo movies, "Especially the open air death scene with John Saxon (playing Neal's agent, Bullmer). I found that a clever homage to Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*." Bullmer sits on a bench in a public square, waiting to meet Peter's wife Jane, watching couples fight in the street, in this galvanizing, tension-raising moment proving Argento's overriding ideology once again that violence is all around us. One of the more excessive deaths belongs to Jane, whose severed arm sprays a vibrant slash of red against the white wall of her kitchen. Deliberately evoking the work of painter Jackson Pollock (whose 'Jack the Dripper' nickname Argento loved) and his own self-reflexive comment on 'Violence as Art', this bloody sequence was one of Argento's most censored scenes at the time of first release. In Italy, this set piece got cut even further in 1990s prints for the simple reason that actress Veronica Lario had gone on to far bigger things than mere cinema. She had become Silvio Berlusconi's wife, and the Italian Prime Minister did not want the public seeing her so explicitly murdered, even if it was in a film by his country's premier horror expert.

Alan Jones is the bestselling author of Dario Argento: The Man, The Myth & The Magic *and* The Rough Guide to Horror Movies, *a film critic for* Radio Times *and co-curator of FrightFest, the UK's top horror fantasy event.*

LIGHTS! CAMERA! HUMAN PERVERSION!

by Ashley Lane

Gialli – flashy but empty. Frequently misogynist. Perhaps, visually, they have their moments with some striking camerawork or cinematography, but basically they are only a celebration of the grim violence committed by the black-gloved killers they feature. The filmmakers can't even be bothered to lay out an actual mystery for the audience. Instead, it's just one murder after another, with some sex thrown in, and then in the last few minutes the killer is revealed. Gialli may be a fun watch, but they are problematic and ultimately disposable.

At least, that's what the criticism is. The truth is that, like any genre of film, there are good gialli and bad gialli. Dario Argento himself was responsible for probably the most famous of the 'good' gialli, *Deep Red* (*Profondo Rosso*, 1975). But once 1982 arrived, the glory days of the gialli were long gone. Argento hadn't made another giallo since *Deep Red*, and that film was even considered by some to be the final word on gialli. After *Deep Red*, was there anything new left for a giallo to do?

So a giallo made in 1982 was surprising, not least because Argento had reinvented himself somewhat as a horror film

director. After *Deep Red*, he made the explicitly supernatural *Suspiria* (1977) and *Inferno* (1980), with *Suspiria* becoming his most famous film. Yet after those two films, Argento went back to the apparently dead giallo genre with *Tenebrae*. *Tenebrae* features little character development, bad dubbing, a character who shows her nipples even when dressed, and lots and lots of blood, usually with sliced-up women. It has so many murders in it that it was banned as a "video nasty" in Britain during the 1980s. *Tenebrae* had to wait until the early 2000s for an uncut UK re-release. Even its name seems a bit misleading, as someone who had watched *Suspiria* and *Inferno* could reasonably believe it was the conclusion to the horror story started with those two films.

Watched without attention, *Tenebrae* looks visually interesting, but is ultimately violent and empty. This, though, does it a huge disservice. The style is more than simply a striking way to portray the film's scenes. The violence is essential for the issues that *Tenebrae* raises. It's not simply chance that its main character, Peter Neal (Anthony Franciosa), is a thriller writer, or that he is accused of sexism in his work. There's a reason why *Tenebrae* has one of the highest body counts among Argento's films, as well as why – unusually for a giallo – *Tenebrae* plays out as a true murder-mystery, giving the audience clues to work out whodunnit before the reveal.

Tenebrae is a deeply personal work for Argento. Its main character, like Argento, creates stories of violence. Like Argento, he is accused of sexism, and critics such as Cristiano

Berti (John Steiner) – who actually enjoys Peter's work – give his work readings that he explicitly disagrees with. Berti, the first of the film's two killers, reads Peter's latest novel – also called *Tenebrae* – so badly that he uses it as justification for his own sadistic murder spree. Whilst *Tenebrae* seems on the surface to confirm everything Argento's critics accuse him of, the film is actually a response to their attacks. It is also, in its plotting, proof that Argento can successfully develop a real murder-mystery, rather than just being a stylist who doesn't care about anything but his murder set-pieces.

Tenebrae is a defense against Argento's critics, and an exploration of a creator's relationship with his audience. We can see three main themes: violence specifically as it relates to misogyny, violence more generally, and how *Tenebrae*'s plot fits into the thriller genre.

"Why do you despise women so much?"

We can start with the misogyny accusation against Argento. Horror films (I include supernatural stories and thrillers here) are traditionally seen as scandalously transgressive, and something at best tolerated by good society. The idea behind the video nasties list in the first place was that the public had to be protected against the corrupting influence of sexually explicit or graphically violent films. Even today, horror films may be decried as pandering to the worst in human nature, and even blamed for creating real-life murderers. However, horror films can be as conservative and reactionary as any Mary Whitehouse figure. Think of, for example, the Catholic

Church's active contribution to the filming of *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973).

This means that horror films can be curiously inconsistent. Absolutely no pretense is made in *Friday the 13th: A New Beginning* (Danny Steinmann, 1985) when a girl reveals her breasts with a cry of "It's showtime!" – the audience wants its kicks, and if they want MPA-friendly titillation, who are the filmmakers to deny them? But that girl ends up dying. They usually do in horror films. "Have sex and die" is one of the most well-known tropes in horror. Whilst a film may use it innocently, seeing it as an easy way to give the audience sex and horror at the same time, there's always a danger that the audience will think the dead girls are being punished specifically because of their sexuality. A facetious critic might suggest that the grandest such use of the trope is in the Bible with the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, in which case horror films are as conservative as their attackers want them to be. Keep pure like the Final Girl, lest God strike you down with Jason Voorhees as his instrument.

Argento has been accused of sexism at various times because many of his victims are women, and have been from the start. His first film, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (*L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, 1970), features a killer who specifically targets women, and one of the most harrowing scenes in that film is when Suzy Kendall's character is trapped in her apartment with the murderer trying to get in. The revelation of the killer's identity and their motive muddies the waters even

further. What's more, the entire giallo genre has been seen as sexist, given films such as *The Case of the Bloody Iris* (*Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer?*, Giuliano Carnimeo, 1972) or *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* (*Lo strano vizio della signora Wardh*, Sergio Martino, 1971). In *Mrs. Wardh*, the female protagonist has to be saved by men from the fatal consequences of her involvement with BDSM activities. Meanwhile, her friend, who cheerfully describes herself as "a bit of a whore", dies horribly at the hands of a killer.

Tenebrae goes down a different route. Though it features women being killed brutally, especially sexually active women at the beginning of the film, its attitude towards the deaths is different. It's worthwhile at this point dividing the murders into two types: Cristiano Berti's murders and Peter Neal's murders. We'll look at Berti's murders first.

Berti has given himself the task of ridding Rome of corruption and "human perversion". Two victims are queer, a third is a shoplifter who escapes arrest by selling herself to a store detective, and Berti has to abandon a plan to kill a prostitute. He's insane, but so are many killers in gialli. In *The Case of the Bloody Iris*, the murderer kills 'loose' women because he believes that they corrupted his daughter, but even with this explanation it doesn't seem that the filmmakers become any more sympathetic towards his victims. So we can't use Berti's madness alone to absolve Argento from the charge of sexism.

Faced with this, Argento hits on a neat solution. He puts himself into the film.

When Peter gives his first interview to journalists, one of them, Tilde (Mirella D'Angelo), accuses him of sexism. Interestingly, it's never made clear whether she actually believes this herself or is merely being confrontational for the sake of a good story. Peter points out that he's publicly stood up for equal rights, and outside the interview Peter and Tilde are good friends. Elsewhere, the literary critic Berti cannot deny that the gay character in the novel *Tenebrae* is portrayed as "perfectly happy", which indicates that Peter has a liberal view of homosexuality even though the character dies. The implication here is that Argento himself is disagreeing with Berti, which is important for Berti's murder of Tilde and her girlfriend. They die because Berti thinks they should be punished, not because Argento thinks they should be. Berti is clearly following the novel *Tenebrae* in his campaign against human perversion, but Peter is adamant that he's misinterpreted it. Notably, after their discussion, Berti's next anonymous message to Peter openly threatens him, accusing him personally of perversion.

Through Peter Neal, Argento creates a distance between killer and filmmaker. This distance doesn't exist so much in a lot of other gialli. In *The Case of the Bloody Iris*, the fun-loving victim is thoughtless, the group sex enthusiast is a rapist, and the lesbian vamps on anyone who passes by. This isn't to say that the filmmakers are consciously being sexist or punishing their characters. The implications may be there simply because nobody thought about it. Nevertheless, they are there, and a film is meant to speak for itself without a dissertation on what the filmmakers actually intended. In *Tenebrae*, though, Argento

cleverly bypasses this problem. Peter Neal is thrown into the works, saying 'Hang on. You haven't really got the point, have you?' And the critics, along with Berti, haven't. Consider the relationship between Marc (David Hemmings) and Gianna (Daria Nicolodi) in *Deep Red*. Marc gets childishly petulant when he loses a battle-of-the-sexes arm-wrestling match, has a sexist streak that we are clearly not meant to like, and has to be saved from a burning building by Gianna. Elsewhere, if you scratch the surface of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, or *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (*4 mosche di velluto grigio*, 1971), you'll discover that Argento is not a woman-hater. He is much more sympathetic towards women, and crucially much more scathing towards men, than his critics realize. Marc in *Deep Red*, Sam (Tony Musante) in *Bird*, Roberto (Michael Brandon) in *Four Flies*: all of them subscribe to some form of damaging masculinity, and they suffer for it.

Argento goes further than putting such a blatant (and at the same time, such a natural) spokesperson into the film. He hires a transgender woman, Eva Robins, as the initial victim, the woman on the beach who is stabbed by the young Peter Neal. Does this mean anything? It's not completely unprecedented in Argento's films. In *Deep Red*, he cast a woman in a man's role, that of Carlo (Gabriele Lavia)'s boyfriend, and it's so successful that many viewers don't notice the gender switch. Despite Carlo's complicity in that film's murders, his relationship is still shown sympathetically for the time period. Over the last few years, we've come a long way with representations of LGBTQ+ characters in films (even if not far enough), but Argento was doing better than most in the 1970s.

The casting of Robins as a murder victim is not simply a case of a director getting his kicks from killing another woman, or another 'degenerate'. A woman forces a young Peter Neal to confront his inner darkness, but Peter himself is responsible for what happens next. He can't let it go, and it costs him and everyone around him dearly. Making women – or gay people, or transgender people, or whoever – the victims in a murder mystery is not necessarily a sign that the story creator hates them. Automatically assuming otherwise is a neat and simple position to take, but also wrong.

The woman on the beach wasn't killed by Berti, though. She was killed by Peter, Argento's spokesperson, and she is far from his only victim. Some reviewers see Peter as secretly misogynist, which leads to two questions. The first is whether he really is. The second is that, if he's supposed to be Argento's mouthpiece, what are we to make of the fact that he's an insane killer?

Most of Peter's murders seem to have little to do with sexism. Bullmer (John Saxon) and Jane (Veronica Lario) are having an affair, and the fact that Peter kills both of them looks less misogynist than if he had only killed Jane. Had he done that, it would suggest that he sees Bullmer as less deserving of punishment, but they get the same verdict: death. He kills Berti because Peter sees him as a threat and a convenient scapegoat for his subsequent murders. His other victims are killed because they are getting too close to the truth. The motives here are specific, as opposed to the general crimes that Berti commits. Berti could have killed any lesbian or

shoplifter in Rome, but only one person was having an affair with Jane. Peter kills people that have or could personally harm him, while Berti is trying to kill off an entire type, as he confesses in his anonymous letters. And if you want a score count, consider that Berti only kills women. Peter kills three women and four men.

If sexism is a factor in any of Peter's murders, it has to be with his first murder of the woman on the beach. Argento is on shakier ground here, since the motive is clearly one of sexual revenge. But is Peter presented as justified? We don't exactly know his relationship with the woman, but the first sign of violence comes from him, not her, when he hits her hard enough to draw blood. Afterwards, he's assailed with agonizing flashbacks and has to take medication to deal with the psychological fallout. As I pointed out above with Marc, Sam and Roberto, the story's male protagonist is presented as the problem as far as masculinity and relationships with women are concerned. It's just that, in *Tenebrae*, Peter goes far further than the other three ever do.

It might look like special pleading to point out here that Peter Neal is not Dario Argento, despite being his spokesperson to some extent. But if we remember this, the second question becomes easier to answer. The fact that Peter is not Argento allows Argento to make him a killer and the film's ultimate villain. Argento uses Peter to play with the audience. It's a somewhat contemptuous response to the facile argument that exposing people to violent films will make them violent. If that's true,

then how depraved must the filmmakers be? Argento must be a slavering maniac! By making Peter the second killer, Argento is poking fun at critics who think that he must be a rather horrible person for making the films that he does.

Argento has already been poking fun with Cristiano Berti. Berti is explicitly targeting "human perverts", giving the film the superficial appearance of agreeing with him. So if *Tenebrae* – both the film and the novel – is sexist, why not go further and make the Argento-substitute the killer? In effect we have two Peter Neals fulfilling separate functions. One Peter Neal is Argento's genuine and serious reaction towards critics who accuse him of sexism. The other Peter Neal, who goes about killing everyone around him, is the joke that comes when the accusations aren't worthy of a serious response.

The apparent sexism in *Tenebrae* thus isn't what it seems to be. It's summed up by the relationship between Captain Germani (Giuliano Gemma) and Detective Altieri (Carola Stagnaro). Altieri usually stands in the background, and Germani seems rather dismissive of her, but there are several hints that this is a game they play. When he complains that "I should have a tough male assistant who runs fast!", she responds, without resentment, "You'd hate it. You'd have nothing to bitch about." When he confronts Peter, knowing that he's the killer, he seems more upset about Altieri's death than anything else. *Tenebrae*'s attitude deserves a closer look than some critics are prepared to give.

"I will eliminate those who disgust me, the human perverts"

Tenebrae is the perfect name for the film, for several reasons. Most obviously, it's connected with the title of Peter's novel, but it is also the name of a film filled with light. Large parts of horror films and thrillers take place in the dead of night, with everything shrouded in shadow. Watch enough of them, and you will be begging the filmmakers to at least turn the lights on occasionally. The Latin word '*tenebrae*', and its Italian equivalent '*tenebre*', can be translated as 'darkness' – yet the first thing that strikes you when watching *Tenebrae* is just how bright everything is. The days are sunny, the nights are lit up by garden lamps and room lights, the characters all wear pale clothes, and the walls are painted white. Until they're painted red; the reason why everything is so bright is that this is Argento's most violent film. I don't mean that it's his most explicit, as films such as *Sleepless* (*Nonhosonno*, 2001) and *Opera* (1987) are arguably more so. *Tenebrae* has less gore, but it is absolutely saturated with the idea of violence. It has one of the largest body counts of any Argento film, and it doesn't end there.

The first three acts of violence shown in the film are not committed by either of the two killers. Jane shreds the contents of Peter's bag, Elsa Manni (Ania Pieroni) struggles with the store detective, and then she is attacked by another man, a tramp. Other scenes include a fight breaking out in a police station, a couple arguing vehemently in public and a struggle in a restaurant (the latter two are witnessed by Bullmer just before his death). These are background incidents, suggesting that

violence is endemic to the entire society. Even the dogs give into the urge to attack and maim. The 'darkness of the mind' that Argento wants to allude to applies not only to the killers, but to practically everyone. One could argue that Argento wants to make a point about society in real life here. No matter how brightly lit the environment is, no matter what we do to make everything clean and light, we're always going to face violence in real life, committed by ourselves or others. It doesn't matter how many streetlamps the the local authority installs, or, more to the point, how many horror films the government bans. Blaming films and books is not the answer because the violence and potential for malice is there with or without Peter Neal's books. Berti would have been insane even if he had never read the novel *Tenebrae*. To blame his murders on the contents of a fictional story is completely unrealistic.

This reading of the film is wider than the reading of the film I've pursued above concerning sexism. The author of the fiction does not have to agree with their characters. The reader of the fiction does not agree with the characters simply because they're in the fiction. Authors and readers can usually tell the difference between fiction and reality, and if the readers can't, like Berti, that's not the author's fault. *Tenebrae* makes this argument not just about sexism, but about violence itself. By losing his ability to distinguish reality from fiction, Berti becomes not just misogynist but homicidally misogynist. He keeps reading into Peter's novel what Peter insists isn't there and he takes it as real. Berti clearly has far bigger psychological problems than just the novels he reads.

Argento isn't content to let the film's themes remain only in the script. He uses *Tenebrae* as a brilliantly successful experiment in style. Film audiences have been conditioned for years by most thrillers to expect darkly lit scenes, so much so that it feels almost confusing in *Tenebrae* when the first victim's throat is slashed in broad daylight. In fact, there's hardly a darkly lit scene in the entire film. Even though *Tenebrae*'s climax takes place on the traditional 'dark and stormy night', it might as well take place in the middle of the day. It's almost surreal, with each act of brightly lit violence adding to the viewer's impression that this is wrong, this is bizarre, this should not be happening. But why shouldn't it? There's no reason why murder can't be committed during the day, especially in the aggressive society that the film portrays. Mere lighting isn't going to help you. The juxtaposition of such violence with visual brightness is startling not only because it tells us that there is no safety in the light, but because so few other films tell us that.

The lighting also makes the film look sterile, as if you could almost perform medical operations on the street. But it's a very unhealthy sterility, which is summed up by the shot of Berti running a bloody razor blade under a tap. Clean and bright though it looks, the style just highlights how sick its killers are. It's emphasized by *Tenebrae*'s greatest set-piece, the 'Louma crane' shot. We first see Tilde through a window on the ground floor of her house. The camera slowly rises to the top of the house, across the rood and down the other side to show the killer breaking in, all in a single shot. It was a great accomplishment for a film made in 1982. Whilst this moment

isn't violent, it's undeniably sleazy because of the voyeurism. The camera is pressed up so close to the house, actually entering a room through a window at one point, that it's difficult to make out the house's shape. And why does the camera go through that window? Because a woman is there dressed in nothing but a towel.

Tenebrae's extraordinary style is not there just for style's sake. If it had been, it would still have made the film memorable, but it becomes all the more striking for its connection with the film's focus on society's perversities.

"I guessed who the killer was on page thirty. Page thirty! Never happened before!"

Not many gialli reflect on their use of violence or how they use their female characters. Neither are they generally interested in actually setting up a mystery for its protagonists or the audience to solve. Even in Argento's later giallo *Opera*, we are given no real clues as to who the killer is until the revelation during the opera performance. *Tenebrae* is different, because this time the audience is given enough clues to work out what's happening before Captain Germani explicitly tells us after Peter Neal's faked suicide.

Tenebrae is filled with references to the thriller genre. Peter Neal is himself a thriller writer. The opening shot of the film shows the killer reading the novel *Tenebrae*. Germani tells Peter that usually he can't work out who the killer is in murder-mysteries, despite being a detective. Authors such as Agatha

Christie and Arthur Conan Doyle are mentioned, and this isn't by chance. One of the great joys of their work is trying to work out whodunnit before the story's climax, and this is exactly what Peter does. Whilst the clues he finds aren't conclusive, it's reasonable for him to suspect Berti as the killer. In fact, he successfully solves the case long before anyone else. Well, of course he would. He's a thriller writer trying to solve a murder plotted by Dario Argento, a thriller screenwriter. Peter knows how murder-mysteries work.

And Argento plays fair with the audience. He gives us enough information to work out who committed the murders, even though, like any good author, he tries to trick us enough so that we don't manage it. The clues include:

1. Cristiano Berti's house. One victim stumbles into it and finds the killer's darkroom in it. This is a blatant statement that Berti is the killer, but Argento then deliberately confuses the issue by having Berti killed there by Peter, the second killer. When Gianni (Christian Borromeo) sees the murder, he hears the words "I killed them all". He assumes, like the audience, that they were uttered by Berti's killer, and not Berti himself.

   But if Berti was not the speaker, then the darkroom in his basement makes no sense. When the police search the crime scene, they note that Berti was very interested in Peter – just like the killer. Yet the audience usually doesn't get it.

Stylistically, Argento also throws the audience off the track with Peter's flashbacks to his murder of the woman on the beach. The first flashback occurs after Peter is told about Elsa Manni's murder, with the implication that the killer is having the flashback. The second flashback occurs immediately after Berti's murder. This creates the impression that there must be one killer, the person having the flashbacks, and so Berti can't be the killer. Argento manages to deceive the audience without lying to them, simply with where he places each flashback.

2. The anonymous letters. Peter never gets one after Berti's death.

3. As noted above, Berti was killing a type of person: prostitutes, shoplifters, lesbians. After his death, the murders are of specific people, like Bullmer. The killer's tactics have changed.

4. The red shoes worn by the woman on the beach. They are given anonymously to Jane, whom we know is having an affair with Bullmer. The first victim was someone who hurt and humiliated her killer, so the poisonous gift of the shoes seems ritualistic. The killer is comparing Jane to the first victim. So who is Jane hurting? It could only be either Bullmer or Peter, and since Bullmer dies shortly afterwards, that only leaves Peter.

5. Gianni's death. It's highly unlikely that the killer just happened to be wandering around when Gianni went back to Berti's house for the last time. But he had told two people that he was doing so: Anne (Daria Nicolodi) and Peter.

6. Peter was at the house when Berti was murdered. He got hit on the head, creating the impression that he was attacked, but any Agatha Christie fan will tell you that that means nothing.

Argento is remarkably even-handed with his audience. Some critics have claimed that he breaks the rules of detective fiction by having two killers, but Christie, who wrote a novel in which everyone was the killer, would surely have approved.

Conclusion

'Flashy but empty'; not in this case. You can almost see Argento daring his detractors with *Tenebrae*, and if they didn't get it – much like the British censors didn't get it – too bad for them. It landed on the video nasties list when it was making an argument against the very idea of a video nasties list. It pointed out that it is foolish to assume that a writer must share the opinions of their most homicidal characters, or that the victims are always being 'punished' by their creator. A psychotic, bigoted killer misreads the novel *Tenebrae* just as Argento's critics misread *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. Playing games with *Tenebrae*'s author protagonist, Argento

also shows that he can create a murder mystery plot just as well as Peter Neal can.

Tenebrae dares the audience to take it at face value, as just a collection of stylish but bloody murder set-pieces. Some will take the bait, failing to recognize what's lurking underneath the surface. *Tenebrae* is a great thriller, and deserves its place as a superior giallo.

Ashley Lane is a film critic for The Geek Show (www.thegeekshow.co.uk).

LUCIANO TOVOLI INTERVIEWED

by Daniel Bird

Typical of any vintage Dario Argento film, *Tenebrae* is a visual knock-out. Argento's early films were notably for their bold compositions and virtuoso camera moves. With *Suspiria*, Argento broke new ground with an expressionist, almost psychedelic approach to color. Anyone familiar with Mario Bava's gothic extravaganzas of the 1960s will know that such a non-realistic approach to color was nothing new in Italian genre cinema. However, it was not just the colors that made *Suspiria* dazzling, but also the lighting. Cinematographer Luciano Tovoli played a central role in transforming Argento's vision into an on-screen reality. Five years after *Suspiria*, Argento was reunited with Tovoli on what would be the second of their three collaborations (the third being Argento's 2012 recounting of *Dracula*). In many ways, the cinematography for *Tenebrae* is the complete opposite to that of *Suspiria*: whereas *Suspiria* is awash with color, *Tenebrae* is virtually monochrome except for subtle, almost pastel hues. Whereas the compositions of *Suspiria* are often marked by stark, dense shadows, those in *Tenebrae* are notable for the almost complete absence of color. If the visual reference for *Suspiria* was Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), then

Argento cited Andrzej Zulawski's *Possession* (1981) as a key influence on *Tenebrae* in terms of the almost hyper-realist approach to lighting. Argento has spoken of his admiration for the Belgian surrealist painter Paul Delvaux (1897–1994), and his paintings of trains at night evoke the ethereal quality of one of the many stand out scenes in *Tenebrae*, featuring a nighttime chase through a park... In this interview, conducted in Rome in 2009, Tovoli recalls collaborating with Argento on both *Suspiria* and *Tenebrae*, as well as the audacious climactic shot of Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975) and his encounter with the Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky.

How did Argento explain to you what he wanted for *Suspiria*?

[Dario and I] didn't talk about any specific movies or paintings at all. Dario, I remember, had a very clear idea about what he wanted, but I presented him with experiments. I showed him a test using Technicolor, which was well timed and perfected. I remember him standing up, going up to the screen and touching it, saying "This! I want this for my film!"

***Suspiria* has a very opaque, almost flat look, like a cartoon. How did you achieve this?**

I didn't use gels, but tissue and velour instead. So, it was a completely different experience for me. A revolution. So I created this approach all by myself, specifically for the film. It was a moment for Dario to change his style a little bit too. All of his other movies were very successful. Nevertheless, they had

a different kind of look, something very realistic, which made them frightening. To be honest, I find *Suspiria* less frightening than his other films, perhaps because of the artificiality. The colors make you 'aware' of the image, almost to the point where it may even seem a little bit distracting.

Which is exactly the opposite of your cinematography for *Tenebrae*.

Yes. For that we decided to come up with an entirely different kind of look. No color at all. Usually, in horror, or the thriller, it is all about shadows. The murderer lurks in the shadows. Or, when the murderer comes after the victim, they can hide in the shadow. But if you get rid of every kind of shadow, and light everything... I am very proud of the sequence in the park at night in *Tenebrae*. It is totally lit so that you can see everything. It is totally frightening! I like this very much. It is, however, totally unrealistic. It is also totally realistic. We usually say that *Tenebrae* is more realistic than *Suspiria* because the color palette is more muted, but the scene in the park is a total abstraction.

How did the sequence involving the Louma crane come about?

When we made *Tenebrae*, I had just worked in France on a big film, *The Roaring Forties* (*Les quarantièmes rugissants*, 1982), a story about an English guy who did a round-the-world sailing race, but he didn't know anything about sailing. In fact, he stayed very close to Portugal. He was very good on radio. He

gave fake information. Then, when the race was nearly over, he committed suicide. It is based on a true story [*The Last Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst*, by Nicolas Tomalin]. In this story we used the Louma crane a lot. So I said to Dario, if there is to be a shot where the camera needs to go over a roof, from one side of a building to another, then this was the way to do it. He has always been very collaborative. If you get an idea, Dario gets very enthusiastic and the production follows, so... The producers were his father and his brother. So we hired the Louma crane and did the shot.

One of the most audacious shots in your filmography is the much discussed finale of Antonioni's *The Passenger* where it looks like the camera tracks through the bars of a hotel window before tracking perfectly steadily through before doubling back on itself to reveal the exterior of the hotel facade – in one shot. How did you do that?

It was very complicated. First of all, I didn't do any scouting for this movie. At the time I was working on a comedy, *Bread and Chocolate* (*Pane e cioccolata*, 1974). I came to Munich on a Saturday, we started on Monday with a crew that I didn't know, because my crew stayed on with my camera operator to finish the last week of *Bread and Chocolate*. Antonioni never, ever gave any explanation. I arrived on set, he didn't know what to do. In the morning you didn't know what was going to happen. You just had to wait. Then, the master would decide, on the spot, what he wanted. About halfway through the film, he started to talk to me about this final shot. He wanted it so

that the point of view of the camera, which had up until the end been closely identified to the 'subjective' point of view of the protagonist, would go outside of a room and look back, 'objectively', at what was happening, so that we see that the protagonist had died. How to do that? We started doing a long pan in a hotel in the desert, where we discovered the same guy who is dead is speaking with Jack Nicholson in the same shot. It was about breaking the notion of time. A way of mixing the past, the future and present. Mixing objectivity with subjectivity, that was Antonioni's theme. For me, the problem was how to help him. It was my duty to solve it. At that moment I was very famous throughout the world for commercials. I had just been in London to make one commercial. I discovered a new camera system, involving a camera mounted in a sphere. It was the first time a camera had been attached to a helicopter, with a monitor, so you could move the camera according to whatever direction you wanted. So, I said to Antonioni, 'maybe this is the system?' They [the camera mount people] came. They said no, because the 35mm camera was too heavy (they were using 16mm), and if they got rid of the sphere casing, the camera would go crazy, because you couldn't control the direction. I insisted, saying that it was what Antonioni wanted. It was a Mitchell camera, which is very heavy. So they changed all the gyroscopes and then they mounted the camera anyway. Then I mounted the track across the ceiling of the hotel room. We pushed the camera along, opened the bars in the window, zoomed, the camera went outside – we built a construction outside the window, and two grips attached the camera to a cable, and another guy pushed the camera to make 'the

tour' outside, meanwhile, the bars in the window were closed. It took one week to get right. It didn't work at first. As soon as it got outside all it took was a little breeze or one of the guys would push too hard in one direction and the gyroscopes would go and the camera would start spinning like crazy. After that, every time they need a camera to go through a wall they call me!

Shortly after *Tenebrae* you worked with another filmmaker who liked breaking notions of time: Andrei Tarkovsky. How did you get involved with the making of his television documentary, *Travelling in Time* (*Tempo di Viaggio*, 1983)?

My first meeting with Tarkovsky was extraordinary. It was one Sunday afternoon. I was at home, not knowing what to do. Suddenly, the intercom rang. I said, "Hello?" "Oh yes, Mr. Luciano Tovoli? I am Tarkovsky." I thought, "Tarkovsky? No, it can't be." So I said, "Sorry, who are you?" "I am Andrei Tarkovsky, Mr. Tovoli, can you open the door please?" So Tarkovsky, one of the greatest directors ever, came to me without saying anything in advance... I had never seen his picture before, and I imagined that he looked like a giant, always cold, with a beard, with pieces of ice hanging down. So he comes up, I open the door and I see this small guy (it was in summer), dressed in shorts, wearing a Hawaiian shirt! So that was how we met. We had a fantastic meeting. We saw each other almost every day, as he was then living in Rome. We developed the idea of making a movie, but first of all we had to do the scouting for locations. The great Italian poet and screenwriter,

Tonino Guerra, who I knew because he worked with Antonioni on a few films, was close to Tarkovsky at the time. So we went scouting for the movie, *Nostalgia*, but during the scouting we decided to make a movie about the scouting. A movie not just about scouting, but about art, literature, landscape... So these two people, Tarkovsky and Guerra, were always talking about art. I was there with a hand-held camera, shooting their conversations. So we made the movie for Italian television. It was shot on Super16 mm. It was very interesting because it was a kind of philosophical, aesthetic thinking about the arts. Then, I was forced, in a way, to refuse to do the cinematography for *Nostalgia*, because Antonioni asked me to do another movie at the same time. As Antonioni was the first, let's say, truly great filmmaker who asked me to make movies with him, I felt obliged to put him first. I explained to Tarkovsky why I couldn't do his movie. Antonioni, however, never actually made the movie. So I lost the chance to work with Tarkovsky. The only thing I regret about this experience was that once I was in Hollywood making a movie with Barbet Schroeder, I went into a bookshop, and saw a copy of Tarkovsky's diaries. I opened the book on a random page, and the first thing I read was, "then suddenly Luciano Tovoli abandoned me". This made me very unhappy, because it was not my intention. I didn't abandon him, I gave my reasons. It made me think about the egoism of artists. A great master like Antonioni forced me, purely out of jealousy, to leave Tarkovsky. That's how it happens.

ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Tenebrae is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with Italian and English mono sound.

The original 35mm camera negative elements were scanned and restored in 4K resolution at L'Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna. The film was conformed and graded in 4K HDR/Dolby Vision at Silver Salt Restoration, London.

The title sections for *Unsane* were scanned from a 35mm print in 4K resolution at AGFA and restored and graded in 4K HDR/Dolby Vision at Silver Salt Restoration.

The mono soundtracks for *Tenebrae* were remastered from the original sound negatives at L'Immagine Ritrovata with additional work by Michael Mackenzie and Matt Jarman/Bad Princess Productions. There are times in which audio synchronisation will appear slightly loose against the picture, due to the fact that the majority of dialogue in both languages were recorded in post-production.

All original materials for *Tenebrae* were supplied by Intramovies.

The *Unsane* print was supplied by AGFA. This cut of the film was conformed at Arrow Films by Michael Mackenzie from the new 4K restoration of the full-length version.

Restoration supervised by James White, Michael Mackenzie and James Pearcey, Arrow Films.

This project has been completed in cooperation with Synapse Films, Inc.

L'Immagine Ritrovata:
Gilles Barberis, Alessia Navantieri, Charlotte Oddo, Caterina Palpacelli, Davide Pozzi, Elena Tammaccaro

Silver Salt Restoration:
Anthony Badger, Steve Bearman, Mark Bonnici, Ray King

Bad Princess Productions:
Matt Jarman

Intramovies:
Paola Corvino, Paola Mantovani, Manuela Mazzone

AGFA/American Genre Film Archive:
Sebastian del Castillo, Ivan Peycheff

Synapse Films, Inc:
Don May, Jr., Jerry Chandler

PRODUCTION CREDITS

For Arrow Films
Discs and Booklet Produced by **Michael Mackenzie**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
Technical Assistant **James Pearcey**
QC **Aidan Doyle, Michael Mackenzie**
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**
Disc Mastering **Fidelity in Motion / David Mackenzie**
Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**
Design **Obviously Creative**

For Synapse Films, Inc.
Executive Producers **Don May, Jr., Jerry Chandler**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Dario Argento, Daniel Bird, Naomi Holwill, Peter Jilmstad, Alan Jones, Ashley Lane, Walter Martino, Paola Mantovani, Maitland McDonagh, Federica Mei, Massimo Morante, Kim Newman, Christian Ostermeier, Fabio Pignatelli, Daria Roberti, Thomas Rostock, Edwin Samuelson, Claudio Simonetti, John Steiner, Peter Strickland, Luciano Tovoli, Gianni Vittori, Calum Waddell, Jonathan Zaurin