





A man in a green plaid suit and a woman with a back injury. The man is looking down at the woman's back, which has several deep, bloody wounds. The woman is wearing a white lace-trimmed dress. The background is a simple room with a white door and a wooden cabinet.

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CAST

Anthony Perkins Dr. Jekyll / Mr. Hyde

Glynis Barber Elisabeth Jekyll

Sarah Maur-Thorp Susannah

David Lodge Underwood

Ben Cole Johnny

Newcomen Ray Jewers

Jill Melford Flora

Lisa Davis Maria

Noel Coleman Egglestone

Briony McRoberts Ann Underwood

Harry Landis Coroner

Basil Hoskins Mr. Bottingham

CREW

Directed by **Gérard Kikoïne**

Written by **J.P. Félix & Ron Raley**

Produced by **Edward Simons & Harry Alan Towers**

Edited by **Malcolm Cooke**

Cinematography **Tony Spratling, BSC**

Music by **Frédéric Talgorn**



JACK'S BACK: EDGE OF SANITY'S RETURN OF THE REPRESSED

by Jon Towlson

By 1989 the horror genre was going through one of its periodic lulls. This tends to happen when international censorship strikes at horror's excesses. We might first evidence such a hiatus in the 1930s with the tightening up of the Hollywood Production Code, which effectively removed "gruesomeness" from the screen; simultaneously, the introduction of the "H" certificate in Great Britain in 1936 helped to take horror films off studio rosters for three years until *Son of Frankenstein* (1939) restarted production of (admittedly tamer) horror pictures. Something similar (if less drastic) happened in the 1970s after the financial successes of independently produced flicks like *The Last House on the Left* (1972) and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). These renegade movies undermined the Motion Picture Association rating system, putting pressure on the MPAA to make changes, pressure which the censorship body resisted for a number of years but which eventually resulted in the replacement of the X-rating with the NC-17. In the meantime, the MPAA's Classification and Rating Administration (CARA) slapped a number of horror films with X certificates as a way to discourage the genre, and brethren at the (then-titled) British Board of Film Censorship got handy with the scissors on a number of titles like *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) (while denying certificates to others). The aim was simple – to dissuade small independent

distributors from taking a punt on problematic horror pictures that might cause controversy and create competition with Hollywood studio product.

However, the mid-1980s saw the worst threat to the genre's financial viability with the introduction of the Video Recordings Act (1984). Draconian censorship of the genre in the UK, prompted by the media's attack on so-called "video nasties" (and mirrored by continuing antagonism by the MPAA) cut off its markets domestically and abroad; and even European horror production by the likes of Dario Argento and Lucio Fulci was affected by the tightening of international censorship in the 1980s and the 1990s following the scandal. The intention was nothing less than to bury the genre.

Given this context – the stifling of horror by the mainstream establishment – can it be any coincidence that the key works of this period – movies like *Hellraiser* (1987) and *Santa Sangre* (1989) – have at their hearts an inexorable return of the repressed? As Freud tells us, that which is repudiated, demonized, denied, and potentially annihilated – as horror was in the 1980s – inevitably seeks a monstrous return. Gérard Kikoïne's 1989 cult curio *Edge of Sanity* fits squarely into this canon of 1980s horror movies that seem to be fascinated by a symbolic return of the repressed. Indeed, in terms of its immediate subject matter and its production context, it is a particularly striking example of a horror film that centers on repressed energy and its explosive reappearance in monstrous form. The mere existence of these films, at a time when attempts were being made to stamp out the genre, speaks to the protean nature of horror: you just can't keep the genre down. Throughout cinema history, it always keeps coming back.

The genre itself, then, is an example of that which society represses or makes "other," returning in the form of the monster. Horror movies serve that function. They are essential Freudian projections of antisocial sentiment siphoned off as harmless entertainment but nevertheless problematic to bourgeois sensibility.

Horror movies by their very nature are themselves the return of that which polite society represses or oppresses. However, some horror films, such as *Edge of Sanity*, make repression and the process of monstrous return the actual focus of their story. *Edge of Sanity* uses as its basis perhaps the most canonical literary source of all in terms of the nature of repression – Robert Louis Stevenson’s 1886 novella *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Stevenson was prompted to write the novella as an inquiry into the dualistic nature of man – his propensity for both good and evil. The numerous stage and screen adaptations of the story have tended to foreground the theme of Victorian repression, drawing from the historical setting and the supposed hypocrisies of the Victorian age. In order to be “good,” Jekyll must banish his sexual impulses to his unconscious, where they take the shape of the degenerate Edward Hyde. In the same way, society in the 1980s banished horror movies to the collective unconscious where they ultimately festered until making a return the following decade in the more acceptable form of the libidinous psychological thriller (*Silence of the Lambs*, 1991).

In *Edge of Sanity*, Henry Jekyll represses his sadomasochistic desires fostered in him by childhood experience. Like many sexual psychopaths of 1980s horror (*Maniac* [1980], *Nightmares in a Damaged Brain* [1981]) his psychosis is activated by memories of the primal scene. The young Henry witnesses a man and woman having sex in a hayloft. The woman first titillates him and then taunts him as he watches from a trapdoor above. Henry makes his presence known when he accidentally tumbles into the hayloft only to be humiliated by the man who pulls down Henry’s pajama bottoms and slaps his bare arse. The woman takes obvious pleasure at Henry’s humiliation, and thus womankind thereafter becomes for Henry the object of his equal lust and disgust, sublimated into Hyde’s murderous desire.

In this, *Edge of Sanity* draws on a myriad of adaptations of Stevenson’s novella, but the most obvious point of comparison arguably remains Rouben Mamoulian’s 1931 classic, itself a “return of the repressed” masterwork. As critic Tom Milne has

commented, "The first thing that strikes one about Mamoulian's *Jekyll and Hyde* is its unequivocal sexual basis." Indeed, Mamoulian turned Stevenson's classic into a story of the "struggle between Victorian sexual repression and sexual expression." The original impulse of Jekyll is a noble one. He starts out by rightly rebelling against the narrow conventions of the Victorian period and especially against sexual repression. Jekyll's idea is that, if he can somehow separate the animalistic from this nature, he will become all one – totally spiritual and good. However, his Mr. Hyde is corrupted by human weakness and his human brain, which on one hand aspires to purity and on the other wallows in depravity. As the film goes on he begins to refine his unorthodox pleasures – cruelty, sadism, and murder. Gradually Hyde changes from an innocent animal into a vicious human monster, a monster that is part of us but which we usually keep under control.

Screen adaptations have provided Hyde with a focus for his enmity, usually in the form of a prostitute with whom both Jekyll and Hyde become fixated. The character of Ivy (played in the 1931 film by Miriam Hopkins), a dance hall prostitute who becomes the focus of Hyde's sadistic attentions, did not, in fact, feature in Stevenson's story, but originated in Paramount's 1920 version, appropriated from Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and remained a staple of *Jekyll and Hyde* adaptations ever since. The Ivy character brings a certain thematic symmetry to the story in terms of Victorian morality: Jekyll is engaged to the virtuous Muriel, but harbors desire for Ivy, a woman of ill-repute; Hyde embodies the eruption of this repressed sexual desire in degenerate, sadistic form. Likewise, in *Edge of Sanity*, Henry abandons his wife Elizabeth (Glynis Barber) in favor of a series of Whitechapel prostitutes who resemble the woman who scarred his childhood and who, in his adult life, returns to him in a recurring dream.

Edge of Sanity touches base with a number of later *Jekyll and Hyde* adaptations that provide variations on a theme. Perhaps the most unusual of these remains Hammer's *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (1971) in which the titular doctor is transformed

into a sensual woman who enjoys a spot of murder, an intriguing comment on the oedipal trajectory that prefigures *Edge of Sanity*. Another is Walerian Borowczyk's *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Lady Osbourne* (*Docteur Jekyll et les femmes*, 1981), which shares *Edge of Sanity*'s overt condemnation of Victorian morality. Like Borowczyk, Gérard Kikoïne's background in the erotic film industry presupposes an opposition to censorship and the kind of prudery that was taking over in the early 1980s with the rise of neo-liberalism in the West. *Edge of Sanity*, like Borowczyk's version of the Stevenson novella, might be seen as an allegory about the increasingly repressive climate in which European filmmakers working in pornography found themselves by the early 1980s. Finally, *Edge of Sanity* shares a particularly intriguing conflation of mythology with the Hammer movie: both incorporate elements of the Jack the Ripper case into the Stevenson story; point of fact being that *Edge of Sanity*'s Mr. Hyde is named not Edward but Jack.

Of course, Jack the Ripper is our culture's original serial killer, the basis of which so many cinematic sociopaths have been formulated. A major coup for Kikoïne was managing to secure Anthony Perkins for the role of Henry Jekyll/Jack Hyde – a classic horror conjunction of Ripper/Jekyll and Hyde/Perkins' oedipal conflation. In *Psycho* (1960), Norman Bates personified the ultimate return of the repressed monster – the ultimate human monster à la Jack the Ripper. By 1989, Perkins was enjoying a comeback of sorts, reprising his signature role in Richard Franklin's belated sequel *Psycho II* (1983), playing a psychotic amyl-sniffing sex pest priest in Ken Russell's *Crimes of Passion* (1984), and appearing in the little-seen 1988 slasher *Destroyer*. A further foray as Norman Bates in *Psycho III* (1986) (which he also directed) seemed to cement Perkins' image as the public's favorite psycho of the 1980s, an indication perhaps of the cultural repression of that decade. There is no getting away from this in *Edge of Sanity*. Perkins' sexual psychopath screen persona suffuses the film and even the ad line on the poster alludes to it, claiming "Anthony Perkins hasn't been himself lately..."

The poster image shows the two faces of Perkins in the film, his Dr. Jekyll persona and his hideous Jack Hyde visage. The latter – with his pallid face, red-rimmed eyes, and lank black hair – resembles none other than Conrad Veidt's Cesare, the somnambulistic murderer of Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, 1920). This visual association underlines how *Edge of Sanity* takes as its subject the horror genre itself and how it has been repressed. From its opening shot, *Edge of Sanity* exhibits as a film at least partly in the *Caligari*-style. Its highly exaggerated lighting design, its myriad canted and Dutch tilted camera angles, its emphasis on Expressionism as a projection of subjectivity, and fractured mental state remind us of the origins of horror cinema. It is rare for a film to hark back to the very beginnings of genre in such a marked way. One thinks of Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) and E. Elias Merhige's *Shadow of the Vampire* (2000). Praise should be given here to *Edge of Sanity*'s cinematographer, Tony Spratling B.S.C. Spratling and Kikoïne in fact give *Edge of Sanity* two contrasting visual styles. In the scenes depicting Henry's "good" persona as the Victorian doctor, the cinematography follows realism. Many of the exteriors were shot on location in London. In the scenes featuring Hyde, (interiors filmed in a studio in Hungary) the visual design becomes highly stylized. It is as though the opium dens, brothels, and gin palaces that Hyde frequents during his nightly jaunts threaten to burst through the sunny façade of mews houses at any moment. It is a strikingly executed visual expression of the theme of the return of the repressed, made all the more so by the anachronistic touches which mark the film. *Edge of Sanity* may be about repressive Victorian morality but it perfectly reflects the time in which it was made. With its hyper-saturated color palette, and its takes on drugs, gender, and sexual decadence, *Edge of Sanity* is very much of a late 1980s vibe.

Jon Towlson is a film critic and the author of Dawn of the Dead (Devil's Advocates) (2022), Global Horror Cinema Today: 28 Representative Films from 17 Countries (2021), and Subversive Horror Cinema: Countercultural Messages of Films from Frankenstein to the Present (2014).



ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Edge of Sanity is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with stereo audio.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 4K, then graded and restored in 2K at R3Store Studios, London. The original stereo mix was remastered by MGM.

All materials for this restoration were made available by MGM and Deluxe.

Restoration supervised by James White and James Pearcey, Arrow Films

R3Store Studios: Dan Crussell, Jo Griffin, Nathan Leaman-Hill, Rich Watson

MGM: Scott Grossman

Deluxe UK: Kat Barnby

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Jasper Sharp**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
Technical Assistant **James Pearcey**
Disc Production Manager **Sigrid Larsen**
QC **Aidan Doyle and Alan Simmons**
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **Engine House Media Services**
Artist **Graham Humphreys**
Design **Scott Saslow**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Sarah Appleton, Eugenio Ercolani, David Flint,
Sean Hogan, Laurent Ohmansiek, Daniel Perée, Clare Smith,
Stephen Thrower, Jon Towlson



FCD2290 / AV460

EDWARD SIMONS PRESENTS AN ALLIED VISION PRODUCTION "EDGE OF SANITY" ANTHONY PERKINS AS DR. JEKYLL & MR. HYDE
WITH GLYNIS BARBER SARAH MAUR-THORP DAVID LODGE DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY TONY SPATLING BSC MUSIC BY FREDERIC TALGORN
EDITED BY MALCOLM COOKE SCREENPLAY BY J.P. FELIX AND RON RALEY ASSOCIATE PRODUCER JAMES SWANN EXECUTIVE PRODUCER PETER A. MCRAE
PRODUCED BY EDWARD SIMONS HARRY ALAN TOWERS DIRECTED BY GÉRARD KIKOÏNE

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