Program note for retrospective on **George A. Romero**
January 11-26, 2003

BRUISER

2000, 99 mins. 35mm print source: George A. Romero. Courtesy Lions Gate Films. Written and directed by George A. Romero. Produced by Ben Barenholtz and Peter Grunwald. Executive Produced by Allen M. Shore. Original music by Donald Rubinstein. Photographed by Adam Swica. Edited by Miume Jan Eramo. Production design by Sandra Kybartas. Art direction by Mario Mercuri. Set decoration by Enrico Campana. Principal cast: Jason Flemyng (as Henry Creedlow), Peter Stormare (Milo Styles), Leslie Hope (Rosemary Newley), Nina Garbiras (Janice Creedlow), Andrew Tarbet (James Larson), Tom Atkins (Detective McCleary), Jonathan Higgins (Rakowski), Jeff Monahan (Tom Burtram), Marie Cruz (Number 9), Beatriz Pizano (Katie Saldano), Tamsin Kelsey (Mariah Breed), and Kelly King (Gloria Kite).

From the article *Face To No Face* by Michael Rowe, *Fangoria*, April, 2001:

From one of an endless number of nondescript warehouses in an industrial district near Toronto's lakeshore, a cluster of location vans and trailers materializes out of the dirty downtown rain. It's the last day of shooting on George A. Romero's new thriller *Bruiser*, and the fickle weather has tossed the crew a bone in the form of a few hours of sunlight. Not that it matters to anyone—the location is deep inside the warehouse's airless recesses. The air inside is so thick and dark that it's a small mercy to surface into the fresher air outside. In a film that embraces metaphor, the secrecy and intensity surrounding the story being shot inside couldn't have a better frame than today's location.

"It's a very American film," producer Peter Grunwald says, "in the sense that there's a tradition in American moviemaking of outsiders, of people who've tried to conform but just can't quite make it click, people on the outside who are struggling to make their way. The theme is fighting authority, a quintessentially American notion."

The film's line between metaphor and reality blurs and becomes indistinct, even to its creator, who ultimately leaves the truth up to the audience. The question of whether or not Henry has truly woken up faceless is an elusive dance led by Romero, with the viewer as his partner. "I suppose that aspect is a little surreal," Romero

says. “Maybe it occurred. Did it happen, or didn't it? That's another thread that runs through this film. Is it real?”

And neither is it the first such dance. “This is one of the debates that I've had about my film *Martin*,” the director adds, invoking his cult vampire film. “Was the kid a vampire? By definition he is. He does drink blood. But...?”

Grunwald and Romero are more than friends—they're business partners in a production company. “When we met,” Grunwald explains, “I was working on *Monkey Shines*. I just thought he was the greatest thing since sliced bread. I'd known his work forever, and had always loved it, been scared by it and marveled at its humor and intelligence. I worked for the company that bought *Monkey Shines*, and when we were talking about who would adapt it and direct it, we went after George. We worked pretty closely on that movie and had a great time. Later, I asked George if he wanted to start a business, and he did.”

Romero has remarked that *Bruiser*'s close-knit production and crew have brought him nostalgically back to his early days filming in Pittsburgh, where everyone pitched in, and that this shoot has a certain homey feel to it. “I love when he says that,” notes Grunwald proudly, “because I took that as my job. After all the years of hearing about the familial atmosphere of making the old movies in the 'Burg, I knew he wanted to see if we could pull it off one more time. And we got extremely lucky with the people we were able to hire in Toronto.

There's a phenomenal commitment here to the process and fun of making movies. We have great people, and all of them are really intelligent. You can walk across the set and hear two guys who have nothing to do with the script arguing if the character would sit in a certain type of chair. There isn't anyone here who hasn't read the script, doesn't know the film, doesn't have a theory on what it's about and how it should look.”

Bruiser also welcomes 1980s horror icon Tom Atkins back to the screen, in the kind of hard-boiled macho role he played so well in *The Fog*, *Halloween III* and *Night of the Creeps*. “We met on *Creepshow*,” recalls the gravel-voiced actor, who plays the cop who pursues the murderous Henry. “I was living in LA at the time, and I went in

to meet him and Christine, his wife, who was acting as his producer. Since *Creepshow*, we did *Two Evil Eyes*, and we've been friends ever since. We get together at Christmas, and a few times during the year for dinner or drinks, or just to shoot the breeze."

One thing that everyone involved seems to agree on is that *Bruiser* is a departure for Romero. The man who brought us such pop-culture staples as zombies and EC-like characters who come murderously to life here presents an enigma: a story that is part existential horror, part comedy, part art film, part satire on corporate greed at the turn of the new century and, perhaps most of all, a portrait of the vulnerability of the average man in the face of monstrous social and emotional abuse by people he trusts. "When I read the script," Atkins says, "I thought, 'Wow, this is different from George's other films. It's a wonderful departure."

"The thing that people sometimes forget about George is that he's a sensational writer in any genre, and he's a terrific director in any genre," adds Grunwald. "All of his films have been thoughtful and well-executed and well-written, and in any terms of the production, it has always been a question of how much money he has, and how much support he's had. But the films have all been intelligent, and that's his place. He stands out as being not only an innovator in the genre, but also an unusually smart director for the genre. The problem," he adds thoughtfully, "is that he's an unusually intelligent writer and director, to say nothing about the genre. And this picture should show that he's capable of doing things other than what people have come to expect."

THE CRAZIES
1973, 103 mins. 35mm print source: Films Around the World.
Written, directed, and edited by George A. Romero. Produced by A.C. Croft. Original music by Bruce Roberts. Photographed by William Hinzman. Principal cast: Lane Carroll (as Judy), Will MacMillan (David), Harold Wayne Jones (Clank), Lloyd Hollar (Colonel Peckem), Lynn Lowry (Kathy), Richard Liberty (Artie), Richard France (Dr. Walls), Harry Spillman (Major Ryder), Will Disney (Dr. Brookmyre), and Edith Bell (Laboratory Technician)

From a review by Vincent Canby, *The New York Times*, March 24, 1973:

The citizens of Evans City are in fix, but they don't know it. The Army plane that recently crashed nearby was carrying some deadly bacteria that have poisoned the water supply. The symptoms of the illness: uncontrollable giggles followed by madness and probably death.

Like Night of the Living Dead, *The Crazies* was shot near Pittsburgh with a bunch of actors who perform with the kind of hysterical enthusiasm I haven't seen in 30 years, not since viewing a grade-school production of "Six Who Pass While the Lentils Boil," in which one young actor fell off the stage into the orchestra pit.

The film's real subject is not bacteriological weaponry, or the idiocies of the military, but the collapse of a community presented as a spectacle, prompted when the Army moves to quarantine Evans City without explaining what's wrong.

The soldiers, who wear gas masks all the time (though the poison is in the water supply), shoot the citizens in sight. The citizens begin shooting soldiers on sight. Here and there, people go mad. A priest immolates himself, and the Army commander shouts: "You must get the president on the phone! We've got to get a nuclear weapon over that town!" The scientist who developed the bacteria despairs: "Jesus Christ! This is so random!" Toward the end, his beautiful lab assistant quietly asks: "Just how would you rate our chances, doctor?"

From an interview with George A. Romero, *CineFile*, 1978:

In The Crazies*, we witness the rape of a girl by her own father. Was that for shock value only or is there something behind it?*

I've always used the disintegration of the family in my films. I try to attack the family unit, organized religion, and if possible, the military in some way.

You don't support the family unit?

I try to attack it for what it is defined as, in terms of an organized definition of it. I think we should be able to make decisions about what we want to do, instead of being told that this is the way to behave. I think maybe that is really what my films

are about.

Is this the result of your own family experiences to any extent?

Yes, in somewhat. I was raised in a Catholic family in which on the surface everything was very structured and very nice. But underneath it all nothing was happening, "we were already invaded by the body snatchers." I went away to school at Carnegie Mellon and it was a major break for me. I called up my family one day and said, "I'm not coming back."

CREEPSHOW
1982, 120 mins. 35mm print source: Warner Bros. Classics.
Directed by George A. Romero. Written by Stephen King. Produced by Richard P. Rubinstein. Original music by Michelle Dibucci and John Harrison. Photographed by Michael Gornick. Editing by Romero ("Tide" segment), Pasquale Buba, Paul Hirsch, and Michael Spolan. Production design by Cletus Anderson. Art direction by Larry Fulton. Costume design by Barbara Anderson. Special effects makeup by Tom Savini. Principal cast: Hal Holbrook (as Henry Northrup), Adrienne Barbeau (Wilma Northrup), Fritz Weaver (Dexter Stanley), Leslie Nielsen (Richard Vickers), Carrie Nye (Sylvia Grantham), E.G. Marshall (Upson Pratt), Viveca Lindfors (Aunt Bedelia), Ed Harris (Hank Blaine), Ted Danson (Harry Wentworth), Stephen King (Jordy Verrill), Warner Shook (Richard Grantham), John Amplas (Nathan's Corpse), Christine Forrest (Tabitha Raymond), and Tom Savini (Garbage Man).

From a review by Vincent Canby, *The New York Times*, November 10, 1982:

Creepshow, which opens today at the Rivoli and other theaters, is a collaboration between George A. Romero, the Eisenstein of Pittsburgh who directed *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead*, and Stephen King, the novelist (*The Shining*, among others), who wrote the screenplays for this five-part films and acts—outrageously—as the star of one.

Creepshow takes its format as well as its title from a horror comic book, a prop that has a significant role in the film's prologue and epilogue. In between are five stories that have nothing in common except that Mr. King wrote them in what appears to have been a hurry.

The best of the lot is a virtually one-character piece in which E.G. Marshall has a ball, playing a nasty business tycoon who has a phobia about dirt, germs and bugs, especially cockroaches. It's a most enjoyable study in acute distress as the fellow's white-on-white, air-sealed apartment is invaded by more cockroaches than one could shake a stick at.

A segment titled "The Crate" also has its moments, being a sort of comic-book version of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Hal Holbrook and Adrienne Barbeau play the battling university couple, Fritz Weaver is their best friend, and the demon, which in Edward Albee's play is only an emotion, is played by someone in an ape suit.

In "Something to Tide You Over," Leslie Nielsen is seen as a husband who, impatient with his wife's infidelity, buries her and her lover up to their necks on the beach, just below the high-water mark.

Mr. King, made up to look like a yokel in a high-school play about Dogpatch, plays the title role in "The Lonesome Death of Jordy Verrill." This one is about a hillbilly who finds a meteorite carrying a dread disease that looks like fast-growing Spanish moss. The performance owes a lot to the set decorator.

The best things about *Creepshow* are its carefully simulated comic-book tackiness and the gusto with which some actors assume silly positions. Horror film purists may object to the levity.

THE DARK HALF

1993, 122 mins. 35mm print source: MGM/UA.
Written, executive produced, and directed by George A. Romero, from the novel by Stephen King. Produced by Declan Baldwin. Associate producer, Christine Forrest. Original music by Christopher Young. Photographed by Tony Pierce-Roberts. Edited by Pasquale Buba. Production design by Cletus Anderson. Art direction by James C. Feng. Costume design by Barbara Anderson. Principal cast: Timothy Hutton (as Thad Beaumont), Amy Madigan (Liz Beaumont), Michael Rooker (Sheriff Alan Pangborn), Julie Harris (Reggie DeLesseps), Robert Joy (Fred Clawson), Kent Broadhurst (Mike Donaldson), and Beth Grant (Shayla Beaumont).

Review by Todd McCarthy, *Variety*, April 21, 1993:

The writer's desk intriguingly becomes a gladiatorial arena for warring manifestations of the same personality in *The Dark Half*, George A. Romero's fine adaptation of Stephen King's 1989 best-seller. One of Orion's numerous long-on-the-shelf items during its bankruptcy hiatus, this one should actually generate some welcome coin for the beleaguered distrib.

A classic Jekyll and Hyde story played out in recognizably King-like terms, pic features enough gruesome killings and special effects to satisfy hardcore horror fans, but also has sufficient narrative and thematic substance to keep more mainstream viewers interested. It certainly ranks as one of the top King screen adaptations.

After a 1968-set prologue establishes Thad Beaumont as a precocious kid writer and depicts a gross operation in which physical evidence of a twin is discovered in Thad's brain, story proper picks up in the current day, with Thad trying to turn out a great book.

Married to the solid, resourceful Liz (Amy Madigan) and the father of —natch—twins, Thad has previously penned two failed "art" novels. But under the pseudonym of George Stark, Thad has authored four disreputable best-sellers, books that pay the bills but would do nothing for his standing at his Maine university.

When a grungy student turns up proof of his double life and demands money to keep silent, Thad takes matters into his own hands by going public about his dual career and, in the presence of a People magazine photographer, literally burying "George Stark" under a tombstone bearing the epitaph, "Not A Very Nice Guy" (author King himself wrote five novels under the name Richard Bachman between 1977 and 1984 before publicly knocking off his double).

But Stark doesn't take too kindly to his premature death, and begins manifesting his existence in places other than the best-seller list. The People lenser is the first to go, and the finger of blame points squarely at Thad since his fingerprints are all over the murder scene. Then the student who exposed Thad is found brutally slaughtered, and who else had a motive?

As the killings mount up, it's not hard for either Thad or the audience to figure out what's going on, that the author's evil alter ego has somehow sprung to life and is, in a sense, holding his “brother” hostage until he agrees to revive him by writing again in the Starkian vein. That Thad is able to elude arrest throughout the carnage is one of the less convincing aspects of the tale, but he must remain free in order to enact the epic confrontation with his doppelganger.

Playing Thad/Stark represents a juicy challenge for an actor, and Timothy Hutton makes the most of it in his most impressive screen work in quite some time. Unlike most thesps, Hutton is plausible portraying a writer, and manages to give Thad solid human dimensions beyond the earnestness and distress that are the surface keynotes of the role.

His George Stark is a terrific contrast, a cowboy greaser in black who's all razor edges, cigarettes and booze. Hutton's never attempted a part like this before, and he makes the guy quite scary, a genuine threat to any and all who come under his amoral gaze.

None of the other characters has much depth, but all performers register favorably, including Madigan as Thad's steadfast wife, Michael Rooker as the cop reluctantly on the writer's case, and Julie Harris as an eccentric academic colleague.

Aside from the assorted killings and opening-scene surgery, the major special effects effort has gone into the sporadic massing of thousands of birds. Winged ones are dragged in by way of an ancient Greek myth, in which sparrows were the conductors of human souls from one world to another. What their presence actually does is provide Romero with an opportunity for some climactic ornithological gore way beyond anything Alfred Hitchcock attempted 30 years ago.

Director's customary Pittsburgh-area locations double adequately for King's small-town New England, and tech contributions are all solid without being ostentatious.

DAWN OF THE DEAD

Laurel, 1978, 126 mins. New 35mm print source: New Amsterdam Entertainment. Written, directed, and edited by George A. Romero. Produced by Richard P.

Rubinstein and Dario Argento. Photographed by Michael Gornick. Makeup art and cosmetic special effects by Tom Savini. Costume design by Josie Caruso. Principal cast: David Emge (as Stephen Andrews), Ken Foree (Peter Washington), Scott H. Reiniger (Roger DeMarco), Gaylen Ross (Francine Parker), David Crawford (Dr. Foster), David Early (Mr. Berman), Richard France (Dr. Millard Rausch), Howard Smith (TV Commentator), Daniel Dietrich (Givens), Fred Baker (Police Commander), James A. Baffico (Wooley), Tom Savini (Motorcycle Ryder), John Amplas (Rooftop Bandit), Christine Forrest (TV Producer), and George A. Romero (TV Director).

From an interview with Dan Yakir, *Film Comment*, Vol. 15 No. 3, 1979:

How did the concept of the "Living Dead" first strike you? And how did it develop into Dawn of the Dead*?*

I read a book called *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson and got very much into the socio-political through-line that's present in it, although it doesn't really follow through. Inspired by it, I wrote a short story which dealt with a revolutionary society coming into being in the form of a zombie society—people coming back to life as soon as they die—and it was a trilogy right from the jump. In Part I, they appear, but operative society seems to be staying on top of it, even though there's a lot of chaos and people don't know how to handle it. In Part II, there's an equal balance, with the outcome undecided. In the Third Part, it's the zombies who are operative. I have this vision of a layered society where the humans are little dictators, down in bomb shelters, and they fight their wars using zombies as soldiers. The operative humans have to be out feeding the zombies, controlling them and keeping law and order. In that layer of society we'll ultimately get our hope; those are the characters we'll be able to care about. It's a return to what the zombie was in the beginning: Lugosi always lived in a castle while the zombies went out to pick sugar cane.

It's Part I that we turned into *Night of the Living Dead*: the new society appears and attacks every aspect of our society and all the mores down to religion and concepts about death. People don't really know how to deal with it other than just defend themselves. The scientific community has absolutely no answers. The radiation scenario that people feel is an explanation in *Night of the Living Dead* was actually one out of three that were advanced in the original cut of the film, but the other ones got cut out and people have adopted that radiation thing as the reason why the dead

are coming back. I really didn't mean that to be.

So in *Dawn of the Dead* I was careful to avoid any explanation of the phenomenon.

After making *Night of the Living Dead*, I went through a paranoid phase of not wanting to be a horror moviemaker, which is why my next two films were not horror films: *There's Always Vanilla* and *Jack's Wife*. I resisted even developing a second part into a sequel. Then, gradually, as I became comfortable with what *Night of the Living Dead* was and with what my reputation was, I finally got the idea for it. It was four years ago. I saw Monroeville Mall, with its Civil Defense area up above. And Mark Mason, one of the owners, told me he had always had this fantasy about some hermit living up there, who could have anything he wanted. That gave me the idea that it was the perfect setting for the equal-balance part of the trilogy.

So I wrote a treatment and it was very heavy, ponderous, possessing roughly the same attitude as *Night of the Living Dead*. But then I realized that the place itself, the mall, was too funny to serve for a nightmare experience. *Dawn of the Dead* is a nightmare, but it's more a pop fantasy than a brooding nightmare—which *Night*, with all its funny scenes, was.

You can't use the word "camp" anymore, but that's what we were doing then and still doing. We're just calling it something else, I guess. Camp has come to mean something disrespectful, but I wasn't trying to be disrespectful of the genre. I was just trying to indicate some of the things that were going on within it.

Dawn of the Dead is very much upfront; *Night* is more insidious. Now we can laugh at it, but when the film first came out, most of Middle America was scared watching it. In *Night*, I was going for a real, traditional horror-movie scare, rather than an intellectual fear. *Dawn of the Dead* has some startles, but if you come out of it afraid, it's purely on an intellectual plane. It's not really frightening. I meant it to be kind of exuberant. And the battle that develops over Revlon and Charmain and whatever treasures they believe they've found takes the trappings from the traditional genre and puts it in high adventure—a mixture of weird pop with the fantastic.

What's the difference between fantasy violence and real violence?

The fantasy violence in *Dawn of the Dead* is just a texture. You come to accept it like the violence in *San Antonio* with Errol Flynn, where the gun battles go on for thirty minutes. It doesn't have the effect of the violence in say, *Taxi Driver*, where we're watching a real person getting his hands on a gun and we go through the whole range of emotions of what it means to have that power and think about killing someone. That's where I draw the difference. I object more to the blood and violence in something like *Every Which Way But Loose*, in which Clint Eastwood travels across the country beating up on people. Quantifiably there's less blood than in *Dawn of the Dead*, but it's this kind of cavalier violence that has an effect on the street.

DAY OF THE DEAD

Laurel, 1985, 102 mins. 35mm print source: North Carolina School of the Arts. Written and directed by George A. Romero. Produced by Richard P. Rubinstein. Original music by John Harrison. Photographed by Michael Gornick. Edited by Pasquale Buba. Casting by Christine Forrest and Gaylen Ross. Production design by Cletus Anderson. Art direction by Bruce Allen Miller. Principal cast: Lori Cardille (as Sarah), Terry Alexander (John), Joseph Pilato (Captain Rhodes), Jarlath Conroy (William McDermott), Anthony Dileo Jr. (Pvt. Miguel Salazar), Richard Liberty (Dr. Logan), Sherman Howard (Bud the Zombie), Gary Howard Klar (Pvt. Steel), Ralph Marrero (Pvt. Rickles), and John Amplas (Dr. Ted Fisher).

From the article "The Woman's Nightmare: Masculinity in *Day of the Dead*" by Robin Wood, *CineAction!*, Summer/Fall 1986:

It is perhaps the lingering intellectual distrust of the horror genre that has prevented George Romero's "Living Dead" trilogy from receiving recognition for what it undoubtedly is: one of the most remarkable and audacious achievements of modern American cinema. Now that it has been completed by *Day of the Dead* one can see it clearly for what it always promised to be: the most uncompromising radical critique of contemporary American that is possible within the terms and conditions of a popular "entertainment" cinema.

One particularly unfortunate and misleading critical strategy has been to collapse the three films into each other as if they were not distinguished by crucial differences. For a start, there is the very marked difference of tone, established most obviously

by broad differences of format: grainy black-and-white for *Night of the Living Dead*, bright lighting, garish colors, lavish decor for *Dawn of the Dead*, subdued lighting, drab colors, a totally depleted decor for *Day of the Dead*. Corresponding to this is the presence or absence of humor: *Night* has a kind of brutal, sardonic humor mainly directed at the posse of zombie-destroyers and the figures of authority (including the father-of-the-family); *Dawn* has a pervasive satirical humor directed at consumer-capitalism. Unless I have missed it (as the film is banned in Ontario one cannot have the experience of seeing it with a large audience), humor, like bright colors, has been eliminated from *Day* altogether (though its military figures are certainly grotesque one never finds them funny). More important—and again the differences correspond—one must see the films historically, in terms of Romero's changing responses to changes in American society and ideology: *Day* relates as significantly to Reaganite America (and to the cinema it has typically produced) as *Night* did to America of the Vietnam period.

In fact, although certain motifs recur and are developed through the three films (most obviously, the presence of a black as the most intelligent and aware of the male characters), Romero never repeats himself. If the films constitute an assault on the structures and assumptions of patriarchal capitalism, the specific target is different in each, and once that target has been hit the attack is not repeated. Thus *Night* deals centrally with the nuclear family, its inner tensions, its oppressiveness, the resentments and frustrations it tries to conceal or repress (relating the film to the general movement of the genre since *Psycho*); after that, the family is dropped entirely as a concern of the films. *Dawn* is centered on consumerism, the obsession with status and possessions, and on our culture's (and it's cinema's) dominant couple-relationships: heterosexual marriage and the "male buddy" syndrome. Romero ends *Dawn* by permitting the escape (provisional, because there may be nowhere left to escape to) of the two people (male and female, but not romantically involved) who have learnt to extricate themselves from the dominant patterns, the ideological norms; the woman is pregnant. In writing on the film I commented that Romero appeared to have set himself a formidable challenge for the sequel, the challenge to define what new, non-oppressive human relations might be. Perhaps he never saw it in those terms: all three films avoid the conventional "happy ending" (construction of the heterosexual couple) by finally avoiding the issue of sexuality altogether. *Day* sidesteps the hypothetical challenge in favor of a new assault on

patriarchy from another direction: *Dawn*'s subordinate concern with structures of masculinity (in its treatment of the "buddy" relationship and its parodic extension to the motorcycle gang) becomes the central concern of *Day*.

Central to the trilogy's progress is the development throughout the three films of the leading female characters. Barbara in *Night* becomes virtually catatonic near the beginning and remains so throughout most of the action, a parody of female passivity and helplessness; Fran in *Dawn* is at first thoroughly complicit in the established structures of heterosexuality then learns gradually to assert herself and extricated herself from them (her rejection of marriage is crucial to this development). In *Day* the woman has become, quite ambiguously, the positive center around whom the entire film is structured. Strikingly androgynous in character, she combines without strain the best of those qualities our culture has traditionally separated as "masculine" and "feminine": strong, decisive and resourceful, she is also tender and caring, and she shows no desire to dominate. As a scientist, she wants to understand what has produced zombies so that the process might be reversed; Logan wants to control the zombies, turning them into his slaves. Initially antagonistic, she progressively associates herself with the two men who have opted out of the military vs. scientist conflict; she effectively learns, in fact, to abandon any attempt to save American civilization, which the film characterizes as a waste of time. Her lover, Miguel, is the least masculine of the soldiers, tormented indeed (partly under the goads of the other men) by the failure of his masculinity, and provoking disasters by his attempts to reassert it.

The film begins and ends with Sarah awakening from a nightmare of being assaulted by the zombies: the overtones of rape link the zombies to the military, who repeatedly threaten her with just that. This formal device produces complicated narrative ambiguities. We are given no sense of where the final nightmare (the zombies are inside the helicopter, and attack Sarah as she climbs in) begins: it is possible to read the entire film as the woman's nightmare, with the exception of the brief coda where Sarah wakes up on the beach of a tropical island, the two men fishing nearby (though, paradoxically, that ending validates the nightmare's "reality"). However, the abruptness and implausibility of this "happy ending" (a striking instance of what Sirk called the "emergency exit") encourages an opposite reading: the body of the film is the reality, the epilogue a wish-fulfillment fantasy

(perhaps Sarah's fantasy as she dies, perhaps simply the filmmaker's ironic comment): the island image forms part of the decor of John's room in the underground shelter. Romero allows one to read the film optimistically if one wishes: the final image relates back to John's solution, that they fly away to an island and have babies who will be reared without ever having to know that the whole legacy of American culture existed. ('Teach them never to come here and dig these records out'—the records of "...the top five hundred companies, the defense department budget, the negatives of all your favorite movies...'—effectively, the records of the economic base and the ideological superstructure of American capitalism: 'This is a great big fourteen-mile tombstone with an epitaph on it that nobody's going to bother to read.') Obviously, the optimism is heavily qualified: the zombies have taken over the entire world and, while they can't reproduce, they appear not to die unless deliberately slaughtered; and the notion of flying away to an island is established, near the beginning of the film, as a form of hedonistic escapism. The ambiguity renders even this limited hope for any human future tentative and uncertain, and we are permitted no hope whatever for American (Western, maculinist) civilization. It is an extraordinary film to come upon in the midst of the *Rockys*, *the Rambos*, the *Back to the Futures*, that dominate our present era: scarcely surprising that a film that goes so strongly against the current of its age has not been a commercial success.

JACK'S WIFE (a.k.a. HUNGRY WIVES)

1973, 130 mins. Written, directed, photographed, and edited by George A. Romero. Produced by Nancy M. Romero. Original music by Steve Gorn. Makeup art by Bonnie Priore. Principal cast: Jan White (as Joan Mitchell), Raymond Laine (Gregg Williamson), Ann Muffly (Shirley Randolph), Joedda McClain (Nikki Mitchell), Neil Fisher (Dr. Miller), Esther Lapidus (Sylvia), Dan Mallinger (Sergeant Frazer), Daryl Montgomery (Larry), Ken Peters (John Fuller), Shirlee Strasser (Grace), Robert Trow (Detective Mills), and Jean Wechsler (Gloria).

From a review in *Variety*, April 18, 1973:

Hungry Wives is a witchcraft yarn, but you'd never know it from the title and ad campaign slapped on the Jack H. Harris acquisition. Trio of sexy dames who get "caviar in the kitchen" but "nothing in the bedroom" are graphic focus for pic's marketing approach, but the heroine "with an appetite for diversion" is actually a 39-

year-old housewife who takes up the occult as a hopeful cure for boredom and frustration.

It's not too difficult to understand why distrib Harris has distorted the film's "values" in his campaign, however. Director-writer George A. Romero, who turned out the highly successful *Night of the Living Dead* five years ago, here does an about-face on that earlier gore-gushing shocker and totally neglects the horrific requirements of the genre. Except for a few bits of fantasized assault and rape, little transpires in Nancy M. Romero production to satisfy patrons of such fare.

Insecure and edgy as she approaches the dreaded 40-year mark, upper-middle-class house-frau Jan White is sufficiently entranced by neighborhood witch Virginia Greenwald to try the hobby herself. No sooner has she learned a few incantations than she "seduces" her daughter's willing boyfriend and killers her husband under the misapprehension that he is a prowler.

Miss White is fine in the central role, and Ann Muffly has several standout sequences as a despair-ridden friend. Ray Laine (previously seen in Romero's *There's Always Vanilla*) is okay as the housewife's eventual trysting partner, but he is at least 20 years too old for the part of a free-loving hipster. Secondary performances further testify to director Romero's improved skill in handling actors since guiding the *Night of the Living Dead* players.

KNIGHTRIDERS

1981, 145 mins. 35mm print courtesy New Amsterdam Entertainment.
Written and directed by George A. Romero. Produced by Richard P. Rubinstein. Original music by Donald Rubinstein. Photographed by Michael Gornick. Edited by Pasquale Buba and Romero. Principal cast: Ed Harris (as Billy), Gary Lahti (Alan), Tom Savini (Morgan), Amy Ingersoll (Linet), Patricia Tallman (Julie), Christine Forrest (Angie), Warner Shook (Pippin), Brother Blue (Merlin), Cynthia Adler (Rocky), John Amplas (Whiteface), Don Berry (Bagman), Amanda Davies (Sheila), Martin Ferrero (Bontempi), Ken Foree (Little John), Ken Hixon (Steve), John Hostetter (Tuck), and Harold Wayne Jones (Bors).

Review by Jack Kroll, Newsweek, April 13, 1981:

Romero's *Knightriders* is a kind of casual epic, with a cast of little-known but

appealing actors who seem not to be strenuously playing their characters but to be those characters. Romero is the independent, Pittsburgh-based director whose horror movies *Night of the Living Dead*, *Martin*, and *Dawn of the Dead* have become classics of the genre. *Knightriders* is not a horror film; in Romero's screenplay, Billy Davis (Ed Harris) has formed a group of motorcycle riders into a community based on the Round Table, with Billy as the Arthur figure, King William, and the others as the knights, ladies and attendants. They barnstorm the country, putting on fairs and tournaments dressed in medieval costume, the knights wearing tin armor and jousting on their motorized steeds with weapons—swords, lances, maces, axes—that are not quite the real thing but close enough to make their battle-play a real test of courage and skill. Billy has created a crazy Camelot, a mini-utopia based on the Arthurian rules of order and hierarchy. Just as in Excalibur, there are rivalries, jealousies and betrayals that threaten the dissolution of the troupe, which also has to fight the viciousness of local Hell's Angels-type bikers, the inanity of spectators who think the tourneys are just like wrestling or roller derby, and the sudden threat of showbiz promoters who want to turn the group into a Las Vegas-style "act".

The situations and characters are beguiling parallels of the Arthur tale: there's Alan (Gary Lahti), a Lancelot figure who is a friend of Billy; Morgan (Tom Savini), Billy's rival who's torn between envious machismo and a real feeling for the Camelot spirit; Linet (Amy Ingersoll), Billy's queen who really loves Alan, and Rocky (Cynthia Adler), the girl "knight" who's as tough as any of the men. Romero's Merlin (played by a lean and stylish black actor called Brother Blue) is a dropout doctor who paints black butterflies on his face but whose real sorcery is the logic and common sense that cuts through Billy's obsessive pride in facing a world that doesn't understand what he's trying to do.

Despite pitfalls of bathos and silliness, *Knightriders* has a startling sweetness, warmth and humor. You get caught up in Billy's crusade for a value-oriented community; the movie has narrative drive and a skillful interweaving of the many characters into its own tapestry, less pretentious but funkier than *Excalibur*'s and in the end more serious as well. Instead of the heavy-breathing, blood-spurting violence of *Excalibur*, the motorcycle jousting of *Knightriders* has a hair-raising kineticism as the cycles clash in roaring skirmishes of careering machines and somersaulting riders.

Interestingly, Romero admits to the non-democratic vision of their films, but insist that the vision is not reactionary but transcendent. "I've sort of given up on democracy as a political concept. It has come down to an incredible bureaucratic mess. People have forgotten their own individual responsibility. True order grows from compromise of individual desires." Actually, such sentiments are at the root of the democratic ideal. The great Victorian William Morris combined a practical socialism with a love for the spirit of the King Arthur legends. What these films show is the paradox democracy has forgotten—that the dream of Camelot is the ultimate dream of freedom and order in a difficult but necessary balance.

MARTIN

1978, 95 mins. New 35mm print source: New Amsterdam Entertainment.
Written, directed, and edited by George A. Romero. Produced by Richard P. Rubinstein.
Original music by Donald Rubinstein. Photographed by Michael Gornick. Makeup art and special effects by Tom Savini. Principal cast: John Amplas (as Martin Madahas), Lincoln Maazel (Tada Cuda), Christine Forrest (Christina), Elyane Nadeau (Mrs. Santini), Tom Savini (Arthur), Sara Venable (Housewife Victim), Francine Middleton (Train Victim), Roger Caine (Lewis), George A. Romero (Father Howard), and James Roy (The Deacon).

From an interview with Dan Yakir, *Film Comment*, 1978:

In Martin*, how do you subvert the vampire genre and why?*

I don't think I'm trying to subvert it. Someone asked me, "are you exploding the genre or expanding it?" I don't mean to explode it. The thing that motivated me to do *Martin* was that there were certain points of logic that bothered me—not the least of them being if such a character, a vampire, existed from the beginning of time, he'd really have a tough time today because he'd have to get a new ID every twenty years or so. I mean, a vampire today would really have some sweats.

The vampire is a character that we created so that we can drive a stake through its heart, thereby cleanse our own souls. I took a character out of the traditional myth, a twenty-year-old character who believes he's a vampire since he drinks blood, but who may not be a supernatural character. I don't believe he's eighty-four years old. I

think those are things that have been drummed into him from infancy from people like his grandfather Cuba. So, he's a victim and when he tries to explain his problem, the people around him don't listen or take him seriously. His neighbor, Mrs. Santini, just wants to get laid, so she uses Martin. Martin is very honest and open about his problem when he calls the radio talk-show, but the talk-show host just says, "Great! Keep Calling!"

The setting to me signifies that, for a traditional vampire, the old days are gone: the industrial pride is gone, the jobs are gone, the church is collapsing. Everyone is just surviving. The disintegration is so evident around Pittsburgh. The little mill towns that used to be thriving, proud communities are gone with the wind. It made one of those towns, Braddock, the perfect setting for this kind of situation.

Let's talk about Martin's sexual repression and his disorientation when he finally has sex with a consenting woman.

Martin believes that he needs blood to survive. He doesn't relate it totally to a sexual act, but it's there and he prefers it that way. But when he finally gets into a relationship with Mrs. Santini, he becomes disorientated because he's got a person to relate to and it throws him off stride. He says that all he wants is "the sexy stuff" that real people have, which must be great—he has some misconceptions as to what that's about. That's what screws him up as a killer more than as a vampire. It threatens his behavior as a killer. He's no longer efficient.

Would you say that Martin *is a more personal film?*

Yes. To me, it's a much more human story, about one on one human relationships and I approached it with a different tone—more subtly and seriously.

I love *Martin*, because I enjoy working with small details. The attack in the house, when Martin discovers Sarah Venable with Al Levitsky—I love that. It all has to do with doorknobs, telephones, stairways...

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD
1968, 96 mins. 35mm print source: Roxie Releasing.
Directed, edited and photographed by George A. Romero. Written by Romero and

John A. Russo. Produced by Karl Hardman, Russell Streiner, and Karen L. Wolf. Makeup art by Karl Hardman. Principal cast: Duane Jones (as Ben), Judith O'Dea (Barbra), Russell Streiner (Johnny), Karl Hardman (Harry Cooper), Keith Wayne (Tom), Marilyn Eastman (Helen Cooper), Judith Ridley (Judy), Kyra Schon (Karen Cooper), Charles Craig (Journalist), S. William Hinzman (Cemetary Ghoul), George Kosana (Sheriff McClelland), and Frank Doak (Scientist).

Followed by a Pinewood Dialogue with George A. Romero, moderated by Giulia D'Agnolo Vallon, curator of the George Romero retrospective for the 19th Torino Film Festival

Review by Elliott Stein, *Sight & Sound*, Spring 1970:

New York has it underground cinema. Now a 'middle ground' cinema has emerged in Pittsburgh. Two years ago, the Latent Image Corp., offshoot of a Pennsylvania advertising agency, produced its first fiction feature. It cost 125,000 dollars, opened in New York in December 1968 and was dismissed in a few disgusted lines by critics who deigned to take note of its existence. *Variety*, outraged, opined: 'This film casts serious aspersions on the integrity of its makers, distributor, Walter Reade, the film industry as a whole and exhibits who book the pic, as well as raising doubts about the future of the regional cinema movement and the moral health of filmgoers who cheerfully opt for unrelieved sadism..... amateurism of the first order (sic).'

The Night of the Living Dead (Crispin) went generally unremarked in America until last October, when its distributor sent it out again as second feature with *Slaves*. Then word of its excellence began to spread. More than a year after its original release, it picked up favorable reviews in serious journals and appeared on several lists of ten best films of the year. Its director, co-scenarist, cinematographer and editor, George A. Romero, was invited by the Film Department of New York's Museum of Modern Art to present it at a Cineprobe (study session devoted to 'authors' of noteworthy first features). It has grossed a million dollars, causing Dame *Variety* to treat its makers with more respect these days—the paper recently devoted a detailed piece to Latent Image's second feature, now shooting.

The plot cannot possibly be managed in the space allotted here, so in a compact nutshell: it is roughly a baby *Grand Hotel* situation involving a group of people

barricaded in a Pennsylvania farmhouse, surrounded by radio-active ghouls (NASA has goofed its Venus space probe and large areas of the United States are tainted) who murder, mutilate and eat all the inhabitants except the leading man, Duane Jones, a black—he is shot down by the police, his 'saviors'.

How can such a tale be worthy of attention? We apply to comedies for chuckles; if you do like horror films, this may well be the most horrifying ever made; Romero was offered a budget for color; he preferred shooting in black and white; the result is a flat murky ambience which is perfect for the ramshackle American Gothic landscape where the events occur. He eschews comic relief, explanatory scientists, romance, distractions of any sort—all the conventional elements usually tacked on to horror films to relieve tensions and which usually merely dilute interest. Our computerized responses are splendidly jolted when the young lovers (we're sure they'll survive) are roasted and devoured with the film barely half over. The main character is black—but not only is the point not rubbed in—it’s not mentioned once. After a shock reel in the cemetery for openers, the arrival at the house is followed by a slowly paced sequence of petty haggling, while outside the world is coming to an end. This adagio is vital, buttressing ensuing paroxysms—this film is 96 minutes long and any cuts will impair its admirable architecture. It is symphony of psychotic hands—the house is surrounded by endless rows of ghastly grasping insatiable claws which poke through boarded windows and seize victims whose own hands are munched like hand-burghers. (Anyone who has ever lunched at an American drugstore will take these sequences in his stride.) The climax is a lively *morceau de bravoure*—an unpleasant WASP *paterfamilias* has discovered that his daughter has risen from the dead and is devouring her mother in the cellar. At that very moment, ghouls finally break through the front door and the ingénue is seized by her own brother, from whom she had been separated since the first reel. He is now a drooling ghoul. The American family is really in trouble. Perhaps the secret of our involvement in this grainy Grand Guignol is to be found in a recent interview with Romero. He states: "Most of the people were actually from the small town we shot in.... we had quite a bit of co-operation from people here in the city—the police and the city fathers...happy to have guns in their hands."

Who are these ghouls, who are these saviors, all of them so horrifying, so convincing, who mow down, defoliate and gobble up everything in their path? In the

film a local TV station sends out a warning message: 'The ghouls are ordinary people....but in a kind of trance' (Indeed, some of them are just little old ladies in tennis shoes and runny make-up.) Many of these ordinary people, in all the trance-like security of their 'silent majority' can be seen these days, afternoons at 2:30 and evenings at 8, clutching hard tickets and cramming their popcorn in front of a large Broadway screen where Fox's *Patton* is doing landoffice business.

SHORT WORKS
1962–1974, approximately 95 mins.
COMMERCIALS
***Natural Man Duke Beer**, 1 min.*
***Happy Birthday, Melvin Awrey Bakerie**s, 1 min.*
***Until You Taste It Iron City Beer**, 1 min.*
***Some Things Are Not For Sale Hartzell's Rose & Sons**, 1 min.*
***Natural Man II Duke Beer**, 1 min.*
***Portrait of a Doer: John Tabor Tabor for Mayor**, 5 mins.*
INDUSTRIAL
***Steel and the Single Girl United States Steel**, 23 mins.*
EXPERIMENTAL
***Time** 13 mins.*
DOCUMENTARY
***The Juice is Loose ABC**, 49 mins.*

All Beta SP tapes (except The Juice is Loose) are from George Eastman House. The Juice is Loose is courtesy New Amsterdam Entertainment.

From the article *Knight of the Living Dead* by Tom Allen, *The Village Voice*, April 23, 1979:

"We opened an office on the south side of Pittsburgh at $65 a month and we moved in with our Bolex and two baby spots from my uncle. We called it Latent Image. We had no income and started sleeping there. We did everything from communion photographs to whatever would make people walk in off the streets. Some weeks, we made more money on bets from a miniature hockey game in the window than from our work.

"Finally, we got a gig from the Buhl Planetarium for a television spot. They were

getting bids from New York at 40 Gs for this storyboard of a rocket landing on the moon. They had something like $800, and we said, shit, we'll do it. We made a little rocket and some fuel out of sugar and saltpeter melted down and made a moonscape. We shot the spot and everybody was blown away because it looked good. It was our first commercial thing with synchronous sound. It went on television, and it was the first professional film I ever made in terms of doing it properly. Still, to this day, the most expensive minute of film that I've ever shot was a commercial for Calgon. It came out to 90 grand. It was a spoof on *Fantastic Voyage* about a little submarine shrunk down and sent into a washing machine to observe the effects of Calgon on the threads."

Pittsburgh was virgin territory and the only competition was live beer commercials for baseball games. With the help of a loan from the Regional Development Corporation, Romero moved into his present offices and began establishing a reputation. "We got hot. We were winning all the regional awards. We were doing some network things, the local beer commercials, and worked for Alcoa and U.S. Steel. Then we got into political campaigns. We worked with the real political kingmakers, the guys who brought you Nixon '68. We did Lenore Romney for Michigan. We did Albert Brewer against Wallace in Alabama, the year he won and they recalled it and said, 'No you didn't win.' We all had to get haircuts; cracker-barrel stuff. To me it was service work. I still don't have compunctions about doing that. We were hired guns; it was either that or selling beer."

TWO EVIL EYES

1990, 121 mins. 35mm print source: North Carolina School of the Arts. Courtesy Taurus Entertainment.
Executive Produced by Claudio Argento and Dario Argento.
Original music by Pino Donaggio.

The Facts in the Case of Mr. Valdemar

Written and directed by George A. Romero, from the story by Edgar Allan Poe. Produced by Achille Manzotti. Photographed by Peter Reniers. Production design by Cletus Anderson. Costume design by Barbara Anderson. Special effects makeup supervision by Tom Savini. Principal cast: Adrienne Barbeau (as Jessica Valdemar), Ramy Zada (Dr. Robert Hoffman), Bingo O'Malley (Ernest Valdemar), Jeff Howell (Policeman), E.G. Marshall (Steven Pike), Chuck Aber (Mr. Pratt), Tom Atkins (Detective Grogan).

The Black Cat

Directed by Dario Argento. Written by Argento and Franco Ferrini, from the story by Edgar Allen Poe. Photographed by Giuseppe Maccari. Principal cast: Harvey Keitel (Roderick Usher), Madeline Potter (Annabel Usher), John Amos (The Black Cat), Sally Kirkland (Eleonora), Kim Hunter (Mrs. Pym), Holter Graham (Christian), Martin Balsam (Mr. Pym), Julie Benz (Betty), Barbara Bryne (Martha), and Lanene Charters (Bonnie).

From a review by Henry Sheehan, *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 28, 1991:

The talented horror veterans George Romero and Dario Argento each contribute an adaptation of an Edgar Alan Poe story to the feature-length *Two Evil Eyes*.

Romero has updated *The Curious Facts in the Case of Mr. Valdemar*, Poe's tale of a man who remains under hypnosis after he is dead. Valdemar (Bingo O'Malley) is a rich recluse whose estate is looted by his wife, Jessica (Adrienne Barbeau), as he lies on his deathbed.

Jessica and her lover, Dr. Robert Hoffman (Ramy Zada), have hypnotized the old man into signing away his millions. But after he dies and is stored away in a basement freezer, Valdemar begins moaning about beings on the other side who wish to use him to cross over.

Like his *Creepshow* screen anecdotes, Romero's 55-minute tale leans mightily on a twist ending, but the filmmaker also manages, in his portrayal of the hateful bickering between Jessica and the doctor, to interject his familiar musings on the relative merits of the living and the dead.

Poe's *The Black Cat* is about a man who walls up a hated feline with the remains of his murdered wife, but the subject seems to be insufficiently gory for Italian horror maestro Argento. He turns his protagonist, Rod Usher (Harvey Keitel), into a crime photographer specializing in gruesome killings. This permits him to begin his 65-minute sequence with a shot of the bisected corpse of a naked woman, thus keeping his bloodthirst in check for most of the action.

Argento marshals his usual collection of Steadicam and oddball point-of-view shots, so we get to view the action not just from a cat's perspective, but also from that of a corpse about to be plunged into a bath. The camera thus adorns the story of a man driven wild by a malevolent cat and the fearful fantasies it inspires about his violin-teaching, live-in girlfriend Annabelle (Madeleine Potter).

The latter provides the opportunity for the resourceful Argento to stage a dream sequence about a medieval auto-da-fe, and it is this sense of elegant excess that, as with any Argento exercise, gives the film its vitality.

Both features contain some character work from familiar names and faces, including E.G. Marshall and Tom Atkins in Romero's segment, and John Amos, Martin Balsam and Kim Hunter in Argento's.

The print screened at a local theater for purposes of this review was in bad enough shape to make a judgment on cinematography impossible, and the sound mix in general was a little ragged. However, this Pittsburgh-lensed production did not lack for atmospheric sets, and the makeup effects by Tom Savini Ltd., though closely rationed, were up to, if you'll pardon the expression, snuff.

The Pinewood Dialogues, an ongoing series of screenings and discussions with significant creative figures in film, television, and digital media, as supported with a generous grant from The Pinewood Foundation.

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