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It's got to bleed!

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NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Translated by Patricia Bass.

Addendum (October 2008): Certain websites with the broadcasting rights for films and trailers have put their material online, allowing some of our cinematographic references to be seen. The choice remains limited, but this shows progress in the right direction. The *Criminocorpus* team will proceed, with the agreement of the authors, to add video citations in each case where that is possible.

“At Brighton I think it was that a Society was formed for the suppression of Virtue. That society was itself suppressed; but I am sorry to say that another exists in London, of a character still more atrocious. In tendency, it may be denominated a Society for the Encouragement of Murder; but, according to their own delicate euphemism, it is styled, the Society of Connoisseurs in Murder. They profess to be curious in homicide, amateurs and dilettanti in the various modes of carnage, and, in short, Murder-Fanciers. Every fresh atrocity of that class which the police annals of Europe bring up, they meet and criticize as they would a picture, statue, or other work of art.”
Thomas de Quincey, “On Murder Considered as
One of the Fine Arts”

First published in Blackwood's Magazine, February
1827

1 Things have changed since the 19th century when Thomas De Quincey denounced the description of horror by likening it to horror itself, and the texts that we publish here could hardly be considered a call for a Society for the suppression of virtue. But the authors of our texts could all belong, whatever their point of view, to this Society of Murder-Fanciers that De Quincy so relished denouncing.



- 2 Given the considerable breadth of possibilities that crime and criminals evoke in cinema (the subject of this third *Criminocorpus* dossier), there is no question of prioritizing a certain theme or approach. On this subject, it was possible to treat screen adaptations of important trials and crimes that shocked the public, to establish historical relationships and correlations between the criminality of one time period or one country and its current on-screen representation, or to concentrate on one or two films more in detail. Cinematographic representations of crime could interest any area of the human sciences (such as sociology, anthropology or psychology), but also film analysts and, of course, criminologists. From the beginning of cinema to the most recent releases, from statistical analysis to aesthetics, from the general to the particular, from one country to another, the variety of approaches and themes shows the potential of this subject.
- 3 Since its very beginnings, cinema has given special attention to crime and to criminals. Inspired by news items or by the criminological sciences (criminal anthropology, psychiatry, psychology, sociology, etc.), film directors produced their own representations of crime and criminals that affected public conceptions and maybe even criminals themselves (a possibility that has long been acknowledged). Addressing the detective novel of the late 19th century in its early years, cinema first focused on the investigative aspects of crime, before turning towards criminal psychology and the representation of crime itself in the 1930s, with gangster films. The *film noir* period, which began in the 1940s, accentuated this interest in the criminal, and often, as Thomas De Quincey noted, the films of this period addressed murder as a necessary stylistic aspect of their film genre.
- 4 Given the diversity of themes, establishing a rigid classification system was not a possibility for this dossier. We have therefore organized these articles somewhat artificially, separating the general themes from the more specific ones, before attempting, as much as possible, to organize them chronologically. The first three articles of the first part of this dossier address “faits divers” (news items), trials, and their portrayal in films – or their non-portrayal in the case of censorship. The second two articles provide us with a more general perspective: the first explores on-screen representations of medieval justice, and the second studies American gangster movies. The last three articles of this first section treat, respectively, the psychological immaturity of the criminal in a social context, homicidal madness as represented in a series of films (from silent to spoken), and the representation of “the victim” in French cinema.

- 5 The second part of this dossier consists of articles that focus more specifically on certain directors and films: Anthony Mann and the theme of counterfeiters, the stylistic approach of Orson Welles in one particular film, Alfred Hitchcock's murder scenes, the Italian-American criminals of Coppola and Scorsese, an analysis of insanity and murder in a Spanish film, a Gender Studies approach to an Almodovar film, and finally, a psychological and sociological analysis of a Guadeloupian film.
 - 6 We wish only that the reader take full advantage of this rich variety of texts, whether that be by reading these online articles as a complete and coherent book, or by choosing the themes and articles that interest him or her most.
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