Making Mischief

Steve Chibnall

The Cult Films of Pete Walker
MANY YOUNG GIRLS HAVE ENTERED THESE GATES ...NONE HAVE YET COME OUT!

The story of a strange hobby and its victims, whose only crime was to be young and beautiful!

A Peter Walker Production

HOUSE OF WHIPCORD
MAKING MISCHIEF

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for my father (1913-1997)
Long ago, when I was young, idealistic and didn’t know any better than to be so presumptuous, I worked as a film critic for the magazine, Films and Filming. So, incidentally, did David McGillivray, which was how we first met; little knowing at the time that we would both end up writing screenplays for Pete Walker.

I mention this brief period in my life only because the experience of being a critic taught me there are three ways of viewing a film: as a film-maker analysing a fellow film-maker’s craft, as a paying member of the public seeking escapist entertainment, and as an academic enthusiast seeking to find the artist’s inner monsters in the Loch Ness of Art.

And the reason I gave up reviewing films was because I realised the critic attempts to be all three of the above, simultaneously, and as a result, fails at being any one of them successfully.

This is one of the reasons why a masterpiece such as Psycho was critically condemned when it first came out and why, for years, the huge and popular exploitation market was never given any kind of serious attention and its film makers almost totally ignored by critics and those who write about Cinema.

As far as the critical faculty was concerned, there were really only two areas of filmmaking to be accorded serious discussion: the Art film - which, at that time, usually meant it was non-English speaking, and consequently refused exhibition by almost every cinema in the country - and films which were given the label Mainstream, which meant they were Hollywood made or, if British, came from one of the two major studios of that period; Rank or A.I.P. (later to be E.M.I.) And everyone else making films could go f***k themselves!

The end result was intrinsically, a two-tier system of film reportage: those films accorded the Art and Mainstream labels got serious media coverage and appraisal; the rest didn’t - despite popularity with the public - and we’re talking about everything from the “Carry On” films to Hammer, and the films of Roger Corman, John Waters and Dario Argento, etc.

Sub-culture in the Arts is nothing new. It is, however, only in recent years that a growing awareness of its impact on Film has precipitated it into the critical arena, which has resulted in the “good house-keeping seal of approval” being handed out to film-makers whose work, barely two decades ago, had either been dismissed out of hand as cheap exploitation or condemned for lack of originality, skill, style or taste.

Having now been approved, labels, namely: genre and cult have been handed out to accord these films, and their film-makers, respectability.

Which brings me to Pete Walker, this book and to that realisation which made me give up being a film critic and view films as they are, rather than as I believe they should be.

First: as a fellow film-maker viewing his work, I can confirm that he is a bona fide skilled craftsman. In fact, when I was writing for Pete, the terms by which he and I communicated were almost entirely in terms of craft, i.e. how we would structure a sequence to achieve maximum effect for an audience, shot by shot, rather than its intellectual significance. Second: paying members of the audience obviously got their money’s worth otherwise Pete would never have been able to raise money for further movies and his career would have ended pretty abruptly. Thirdly: he’s been around long enough and done enough and had his work survive long enough to show he has a continuing audience.
over generations. This now means, as far as those who write about us, the film-makers are concerned, that he finally qualifies as a *cult* film-maker.

And about time too.

Though it is not the reason why I was, genuinely, so pleased to be asked to write this foreword, because as far as I am concerned, Pete Walker has always been a film-maker whose work deserves to be taken as seriously as that of Eisenstein or Ed Wood; simply because they, as all who make films, are film-makers.

I am not suggesting, for a moment that *Frightmare* is equal as a work to, say, *Citizen Kane* but then, neither is Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture* equal to, say, Beethoven’s *Grosse Fugue*. But, each in its own right has its place and its right to be viewed for what it sets out to be. Everything else is pretentious. And that is something which can never be levelled at Pete Walker’s work.

Before I go any further, I would like to make one thing clear: I have no reason to flatter Pete or suck up to him. I’m one of the few people. I’m sure, who’ve woken him up at four in the morning, drunk out of my skull, struggling with some problem over a script I was writing for him and - God-bless-him - I’m sure he listened to me politely - or then again, maybe he didn’t because I was too drunk to remember. But I do know he’d still take me out to lunch the following day in a little restaurant in the Kings Road just round the corner from his flat and never mention it. Actually, he did, once - now I come to think of it - but I’m sure I ignored him and carried on, regardless. It’s one of the few indulgences allowed if you’re a writer - to wallow in the path set before you by the Brendan Behan’s and Scott Fitzgerald’s - well, in fact, any writer *per se*.

So, now that Pete Walker has officially been recognised as an artist, here are a few personal recollections for posterity: he always had very beautiful girl friends, he had a plane he flew for a while, he was always well dressed and very polite and bore the demeanour of a gentleman, he loved films, had the correct balance of ego and insecurity about his work, and was - and this is truly the highest commendation one can give to someone in the business - he was a pro. He was also great fun to work with, easy - at least as far as I was concerned - to communicate with, and... I’m sorry, for all our sakes, that he’s no longer making movies.

But I am glad, for the sake of true perspective as opposed to snob perspective that the films of Pete Walker are, finally, being accorded the place they have deserved for so long in the annals of academia and therefore, I hope, their rightful placement in the history of Cinema.

So, having now made that point, I shall cease to write any more words and thereby allow you to read this book, which is what really matters.

*Michael Armstrong*

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Michael Armstrong wrote the screenplay for Pete Walker’s last film, *House of the Long Shadows* (1983) as well as scripts for a number of Walker projects which never made it to the screen, including *A Star is Dead*, which was to have featured The Sex Pistols. As a young director he made *The Haunted House of Horror* (1969) and the notorious *Mark of the Devil* (1970). In 1974 he wrote and starred in *Eskimo Nell*, often regarded as the wittiest British sex comedy. His other screenplays include *The Sex Thief* (1973), *The Black Panther* (1977) and *Adventures of a Private Eye* (1978).
'Central to the effect and fascination of horror films is their fulfilment of our nightmare wish to smash the norms that oppress us and which our moral conditioning teaches us to revere.'

'I deliberately rub people up the wrong way. I want them to come into the cinema and be shocked.'
- Peter Walker, The Sun, 24 April 1975

Movie Maverick

Peter Walker has not been celebrated as one of the 'National Heroes' of British cinema. He does not rate a mention in his namesake, Alexander Walker's, survey of British film-making of the 1970s and early 1980s (Walker 1985), yet he produced and directed a dozen movies of great distinctiveness in the period. He was the most remarkable of a small group of independent makers of commercial pictures who flourished briefly during the final days of 'Hollywood England' and its collapsing studio system (Walker 1974).

As American finance pulled out of British productions in the early 1970s a space was left for opportunist entrepreneurs like Pete Walker to create a short-lived, but surprisingly
vibrant, Poverty Row film culture. Much of this new ‘permissive’ cinema cashed in on the sexual, moral and political upheavals of the sixties, and Walker was no exception. His titles alone are notorious for the way in which they invite salacious and sadistic interest - *School for Sex, Man of Violence, The Flesh and Blood Show, House of Whipcord, Frightmare*. They are, most definitely, sensationalist, but, unlike the products of many of his competitors, Walker’s films generally possess a depth and a freshness of vision which mark them out as more than pot-boilers. Even without these qualities, the films would demand our attention as fascinating commentaries on their times and effective counterpoints to some of the cultural and political trends of the 1960s and 1970s.

Walker’s cinema grows unquestionably from the gathering climate of permissiveness and the increasing commercialisation of sexual display during the sixties. He cut his director’s teeth on 8mm glamour shorts for private screenings at the time of the Profumo affair and the birth of the sexual revolution. His first 35mm feature, *I Like Birds* (1967) capitalised on the powerful allure of the fashionable ‘dolly birds’ of ‘swinging London’, and for the next six years his films documented the transformation of sexual morality and attitudes towards the body among Britain’s youth. At first, in the established tradition of Soho sleaziness, he presented youthful permissiveness as a spectacle for a predominantly older male audience, the notorious dirty raincoat trade; but by 1970 he was looking to reflect the libertarian practices of the young in movies made specifically for them. His films of the early 1970s contain a growing sense of cultural crisis and disunity and dramatise the moral backlash evidenced in the return of a Conservative government and the evangelical puritanism of The Nation-wide Festival of Light. They obsessively refer to the threat posed to new permissive lifestyles by a vindictive and morally bankrupt older order and its repressive institutions, but they are far from being political tracts advocating free love and the counterculture. Instead, Walker almost gleefully depicts his times as an age of moral dissolution in which hypocrisy is challenged by a hedonism which is only slightly less ethically repellent.

In his apparent pessimism about the human condition, Walker might be compared to the ill-fated young director of *The Sorcerers* (1967) and *Witchfinder General* (1968), Michael Reeves (Pirie 1973, pp. 145-155) Neither film-maker seems to hold out much hope for the resilience of goodness and freedom in the face of powerful forces of violence and corruption which emanate from the past and pervade the present. Walker’s pessimism, however, lacks Reeves’ sense of despair and is both more cynical and more good-humoured.

As part of the fresh wave of film-makers swept in on a tide of permissiveness at the close of the sixties, Walker inevitably explored the depiction of violence as well as sex, testing the limits of frankness in both. He quickly developed a pattern of alternating humorous sex dramas with violent thrillers, following up his hit adult comedy, *School For Sex* (1969), with an explicit gangland story called *Man of Violence* (1970), which exploited public interest in the activities of the Kray brothers and foreshadowed higher budget treatments of the criminal sub-culture such as *Get Carter* (1971) and *Villain* (1971). But it is for the series of gory films he made in the mid 1970s that Walker is best known. Located historically between the stylish but convention-governed Italian *gialli* and the American stalk-and-slash teenpics, these pictures conform broadly to William Schoell’s definition of the ‘psycho-shocker’:

‘They are films about madmen - or women - on the loose, stabbing and hacking at allegedly innocent victims. In these films the depiction of death is as important as the plot and the characters, if not more so. People are elaborately killed under bizarre circumstances, and the film-makers often spend more time planning out the death scenes than any other.’ - Schoell, 1988, pp. 1-2
Although callous and spectacular killings became a trademark of his films, Walker remained uneasy about the commercial imperatives that promoted their use, and the direction of the ‘splatter’ trend which he helped to set in motion. As he confessed in an American interview in 1983:

‘I started to perpetrate those kinds of brutal killings in my films starting around 1970, and now everyone else is doing it. And I don’t think they’re doing it terribly well ... they go to such an extreme now. Just killing off characters for the sake of killing. That’s not my aim.’ - Fangoria 27, 1983

This was not just a retrospective pang of conscience but the sign of a longstanding ambivalence towards the prevailing attitudes and tastes of his times, evident, too, in his curious relationship with the censor. It is hard to make sense of his expressed views on censorship without inferring an element of hypocrisy. He claims to have ‘stretched censorship to its limits’, but always to have been ‘on the side of good taste’ (Starburst 57, 1983). What he, perhaps, means by ‘good taste’ is that, although his films have displayed both sex and violence they have tended to keep them separate. They are not, in this sense, ‘sadistic’. It was this tendency towards sadism and the celebration of violence as pleasurable sensation that he deplored in his contemporaries:

‘I’m in favour of censorship providing it’s fair .. I’m against films like The Music Lovers and The Devils. I think they’re sick, sadistic, nasty films and I think they do a lot of harm to the business ... If we’re going to get A Clockwork Orange and The Devils then I think we need tighter censorship because I think they are corrupting. I think there’s a lack of responsibility in people who make that sort of film.’ - Films and Filming, Dec.1974

Although Walker was prepared to exploit violence as a box office attraction, unlike many Italian, American and even some British directors, he stopped short of its aesthetisation. For him, violence remains the antithesis of sex or the consequence of repression rather than its companion. Violence also remains largely associated with the stultifying older order rather than the liberated world of youth. In depicting the new youthful order, Walker draws on notions of classlessness which are inspired by sixties ‘affluence’ but really anticipate the eighties and nineties. The highs and lows of the class system are associated with the old and seen as relics of an age of injustice which refuses to accept that its day has passed. Walker’s version of social realism is a far cry from the back-street, kitchen-sink dramas of Britain’s sixties new wave (Murphy 1992). His young people no longer inhabit Northern industrial towns, they no longer live in the parental home or worry about sex or seek out abortionists. Instead they are quietly aspirational, located somewhere in the London suburbs doing professional or creative work and busy holding dinner parties. Class is a ‘hang up’ which the young do not need, and much of Walker’s cinema simply avoids the issue, just as it ignores the politics of race. It is gender and generation which make Walker’s films tick. Racism and industrial unrest may have been prominent features of the seventies scene but they were just not box office.
Walker was in the business of making genre pictures, but this did not prevent his films from being authored works. Most are clearly identifiable by their style and preoccupation’s which are very different from those of other British auteurs like the more flamboyant Ken Russell, the more romantic David Lean, or the more lyrical Michael Powell. None of Walker’s films has the visual grace or poetry associated with these directors, and it is perhaps unfair to make a comparison because they were working with budgets many times higher than Walker’s. He probably made all sixteen of his films for less than the cost of one David Lean epic; but there is no price tag on ideas, desire or nerve, and Pete Walker’s movies have these in abundance. We should be circumspect, however, about thinking of Walker as an artist, because he thought of his films primarily as business ventures designed to make a profit rather than as acts of self-expression. He placed them in the same category as Hammer’s output or the Carry On series, classing them as ‘entertainment films’ rather than ‘art’ (which he associated with David Lean) or ‘experimentation’ (e.g. Ken Loach) (Cinema X, vol.5, no.1, 1972). His aim, he once remarked, was ‘to be an exploitation film-maker and make commercial films’. He took entertainment seriously and this, he recognised, would probably mean that he would never be a ‘serious’ film-maker. ‘I don’t stand any chance of being a John Schlesinger because I’ve been doing what I am doing for too long’, he said, acknowledging the limitations of both genre pictures and critical attention. (Cinema TV Today, 12.7.75)
Although it would be a mistake to sanctify Walker’s films with the label of ‘art’, they can still tell us much about the possibilities of exploitation pictures as serious and intelligent film making. Crucially, Walker resisted the temptation to settle for established genre formulae. He knew that what audiences wanted was not formulae but the chance to experience certain pleasurable emotional states, particularly those occasioned by sexual arousal, humour, fear, shock and suspense. The manipulation of these feelings is the essence of the showman’s craft, but what Walker appears to have appreciated, additionally, is that the stimulation of the emotions does not preclude the engagement of the intellect. As a consequence, his mature movies are among the most intellectually sophisticated of all exploitation films. That most contemporary reviewers failed to notice this was largely a function of their own professional myopia. They saw in his films what they expected to see in cheap genre films - in other words, very little - and they saw the weaknesses before they ever got round to appreciating the strengths. They took the films to be tacky and tawdry because they assumed that Walker was incapable of producing, or his audience of appreciating, anything else. It did not help that Walker worked in the most critically despised of genres, sex and horror. As he said in 1983 after the completion of his last film to date,

‘Critics write for their readers little realising that most audiences love horror films, whether on the level of high camp or just as a frightening release. As the critics see more of my films and as I meet them at press shows, I think they appreciate more what I am trying to achieve.’ - *Starburst* 57, 1983

One of the most revealing elements of this statement is the implication that films can be given a structure that allows audiences to enjoy them on different levels. The notions of different levels and alternative sources of pleasure for the viewer seem to have become organising principles in Walker’s film-making, although ones which he or his writers rarely publicly articulated. They had no desire to undermine the populist appeal of the films or open themselves to charges of pretentiousness by claiming depth, cleverness or sophistication. David McGillivray, the writer of Walker’s most challenging movies, still artlessly maintains that the films he wrote should simply be taken at their face value and that there is no more to them than some mischievous sensationalism, effective direction and a few in-jokes. He emphasises the spirit of cynicism in which they were conceived and tends to caricature ‘Mr. Walker’ as a catchpenny showman, contemptuous of his customer. In truth though, McGillivray admits that in salvaging the unpromising ideas and ludicrous plots he was given he had one eye on the critical responses of his former colleagues at the high-brow *Monthly Film Bulletin* (*MFB*). He also concedes that ‘Mr. Walker’ is a ‘film buff’ who was not just obsessed with the noir melodramas of the forties but was a frequent visitor to art house movies at London’s National Film Theatre (NFT). McGillivray may delight in presenting his younger self as a wide-eyed star-struck film fan with ‘no education’ and his employer as a Svengali in a Rolls Royce Corniche, but both men were actually quite capable of intellectual engagement with film and aspired to more than the making of a quick buck (McGillivray 1993). In 1972, when Walker was still known primarily as a maker of ‘skin-flicks’, *Cinema X*, the magazine of Britain’s new permissive cinema, asked him about his film-going habits. He replied:

‘I don’t go and see other sex pictures because I don’t really like them... You tend to be influenced by other people and finish up making copies. Far better then to go and see a Buñuel picture and anything you learn there, fit into your own market.’ - *Cinema X*, vol.5, no.1, 1972

Like that self-styled Svengali, Malcolm McLaren, manager of The Sex Pistols, Walker knew not only that there was ‘cash in chaos’, but that art could be turned into commerce without losing its essential potency.
His role model in the skilful blending of art and populism into a cinema of entertainment was Alfred Hitchcock, a consummate showman who managed to win popular approval without losing too much critical respect. *Psycho* (1960) must be the key reference point in Walker's cinema, and its combination of black humour and nerve-shredding suspense became his Holy Grail. As his career progressed, and he grew in confidence as a film-maker, he became increasingly fascinated by the techniques of inducing and managing tension in the audience in what he dubbed his 'terror pictures'. Turning away from sexploitation as the trend towards explicitness gathered pace in the mid 1970s, because he 'never thought people
wanted to see sweaty bodies grovelling in beds’ (Cinema TV Today 12.7.75), he saw the opportunity to trade in the territory of the ailing Hammer Studios:

‘Really what I’m trying to do is out-Hitchcock Hitchcock by putting a few more harder-hitting ingredients into a picture that is rather vintage Hitchcock ... with movies you have to give the public something they don’t get on TV. If somebody is going to be brutally murdered I think they want to see them brutally murdered ... There is a niche for a British terror film-maker. I don’t think anyone else is actually specialising in them. It seems to be my forte. I enjoy doing it and it is commercial if you do it properly and effectively.’ - Film Review, Apr. 1976

It is revealing to compare Walker’s concept of ‘terror’ with Hammer’s idea of ‘horror’ because it differs in some important respects from the Gothic orthodoxy favoured by Hammer’s leading director Terence Fisher (Pirie 1973, pp.50-67; Ringel 1975).

1. Whereas Hammer locate their morality plays in a mythic (usually nineteenth century) past, Walker’s shockers are determinedly contemporary in their settings. This means that, for the modern viewer, they travel less well and their impact is lessened by anachronistic design elements, but for 1970s audiences they packed a heavier punch of immediacy than Hammer’s costume epics. This immediacy helped to give Walker’s films their primarily subjective appeal. Terror is what we feel when we ourselves are in danger, whereas horror is an emotion we might experience at the plight of others. Horror is terror-by-proxy. The Hitchcockian school of film-making tries to induce terror among spectators by using sound, editing and cinematography to produce an illusion of participation in the action on screen. With Hammer, the period settings, the costumes and the sober and objective style of filming that Terence Fisher developed all have the effect of distancing the viewer from the action. Hammer’s classical style creates interested voyeurs, but Walker strives for a greater sense of involvement and more opportunities for audience members to identify with the protagonists. When he said his films were ‘more identifiable’ he was following the lead of another of his directorial mentors, Jacques Tourneur, who once remarked:

‘If you’re going to have horror, the audience must be able to identify with the characters in order to be frightened. Now you can identify with an average guy like me, but how can we identify with a Lower Slobovian or a fellow with a big cape? You laugh at that.’ -Cinefantastique, vol. 2, no.4, 1973

Walker tries to create an illusion of naturalness within the fantastic, of real people in unreal situations (Film Review, Apr. 1976), in a way which parallels Steven Spielberg’s more spectacularly successful efforts in Jaws (1975), E.T. (1982) and Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977), and which owes a debt to George Romero’s Night of the Living Dead (1968).

2. Walker offers very different objects of identification from those suggested by the classical tradition of Hammer. In Fisher’s conventionally bourgeois mythology we are asked to empathise with his demure and naive beauties and to put our trust in a wise and heroic father figure (often Peter Cushing) with a belief in a judicious combination of Christian faith and scientific rationality. (Hutchings 1993: Pirie 1973, 1977). In Walker’s disturbing tales, this reassuring world is turned upside down. His female protagonists are anything but virginal and his father figures are not to be trusted. He offers, in anticipation of Punk, ‘no more heroes anymore’. His scientists (usually psychiatrists) wind up dead, and his Christians are quite likely to be their killers. His male protagonists are generally ineffectual and possess no more special qualities than the average viewer. Unlike Fisher’s, Walker’s world may be free of supernatural threat, but it is a world without reassurance.
3. Fisher and Walker are at odds again in their attitudes towards physicality and sexual morality. For Fisher the body is a site of danger, subject to libidinous desires which open the soul to evil. Desire must not be over-indulged, but kept in check by abstinence and self-control until it can find safe and legitimate outlets. While Fisher’s villains are rampantly sexual, and corrupt others by the exercise of that sexuality, his patriarchal heroes remain celibate as part of their defence against the power of evil. His rigid puritanism could not withstand the onslaught of sixties sexual libertarianism (if it feels good, do it) anymore than his strict dualistic vision of good and evil could cope with the moral relativism of the Aquarian age’s exhortations to ‘do your own thing’ and ‘choose your own gods’. Hammer tried vainly to adjust with its explorations of lesbian vampirism, Victorian hypocrisy and sexual ambiguity, and with attempts at self-parody and modernisation in the early seventies, but it was Walker’s brand of wryly-humorous and sex-positive nihilism that really filled the vacuum left by the collapse of Terence Fisher’s universe.

In Walker’s films, danger lies not in the free expression of sexual desire, but in its repression; and Fisher’s most cherished institutions, the family, the church, the medical profession, the legal system and the hierarchical ordering of society, became agents of that repression and the generators of violence. This makes these films ‘progressive’ in Robin Wood’s terms (Wood 1979), in spite of their director’s self-proclaimed reactionary disposition. Looking back at his ‘terror pictures’ Walker used a phrase borrowed from a political movement to which he never belonged, the revolutionary Left. The films included, he said, ‘institutional violence’. In other words, the violent threat in his movies is not from some external and supernatural force of evil, but instead, results from the way in which social life is organised and regulated. Those most susceptible to malevolent and violent impulses are not the young but their fathers and mothers, who have had more time to be corrupted by a misguided and repressive system:

‘I like the idea of taking people who are in a position of authority and showing that they have either murderous or peculiar quirks about them. Older people always seem to carry more authority. The idea of the young psychopathic killer is an area that I haven’t really worked in. I think it’s much more upsetting to have old, more mature killers.’ - Fangoria 27, 1983

The notion that a film-maker would want to leave his audience upset would have been quite unpalatable to the more upright and didactic Terence Fisher. But where Fisher offered moral lessons, Walker left unease, disquiet and a sardonic commentary on the legacy of corruption that continues to recommend him to cynical audiences today.

4. While Hammer’s horrors are firmly situated within the tradition of English Gothic drama, Walker’s terrors are revisionist in their meanings and representations. His films draw heavily on Gothic elements and the sense of menace, isolation and despair which they are so effective in producing, but inflect and reconstitute them in imaginative and contemporary ways. The dark and brooding atmospheres of films like The Flesh and Blood Show (1972), House of Whipcord (1974) and Frightmare (1974) are pure Gothic, as are the ways in which they employ cruel and violent spectacles to horrify their audiences. Terence Fisher uses similar devices in his more romantic melodramas for Hammer, but Walker’s pieces are more clearly influenced by French Grand Guignol in both their explicitness and their undertones of conscious theatricality.

Walker’s use of the Gothic tradition’s ‘persecuted woman’ is particularly evident in House of Whipcord and House of Mortal Sin (1975), (although his tragic heroines are significantly less passive than most of their literary and cinematic antecedents), but the way he presents his ‘fatal woman’ differs strikingly from Terence Fisher’s treatment. Fisher’s
femme fatales are eroticised women who corrupt through their sexuality in the same way that film noir’s ‘spider woman’ operates. In contrast, Walker’s dangerous dames, in line with his views on the healthiness of sexual desire, are more likely to be de-eroticised crones. They relate to an even older literary source, the folk tale, with its witches, bad mothers and evil queens. Similarly, his villains derive their destructive power not from their sexual seductiveness and alluring cruelty, like Dracula, but from their repressed desires and their social positions of trust and respect. In Walker’s modern Gothic they are privileged professional men who replace the decadent aristocrats of the classical tradition.

This contemporizing of the traditional is again evident in the way in which the key setting of Gothic drama and its most potent signifier, the castle, is re-configured more modestly as ‘the house’. Its central place in Walker’s cinema is confirmed by its presence in the titles of three of his terror pictures, and its prominence in different institutional guises (School, Theatre, Prison) throughout his cinema. He did not quite follow the lead, supplied by Roger Corman’s Fall of the House of Usher (1960) in making the house the ‘monster’ in his horror tales, but he certainly represented it as a passive complement to the active villain. In classical Gothic literature, the villain ‘is born as an adjunct to the castle and his nature is dictated by its origin’ (Varma 1964). In much the same way, Walker’s ageing antagonists are creatures of a building with a malevolent aura, the ‘Terrible House’, which Robin Wood suggests signifies ‘the dead weight of the past crushing the life of the younger generation, the future ...’ (Wood 1979). All his houses are sites of authority. They are either parental homes or associated with superannuated power, and the stability of their bricks and mortar stands in stark contrast to the unstable personalities who inhabit them. As symbols they represent a continuity with the past, existing now as they did then. They are the repositories of memory and the conduits through which malign atavistic influences flow, just as they are in classical Gothic stories which are permeated by ideas of fate and destiny. In Walker’s films this concern with the mechanisms of fate is all that remains of the Gothic tradition’s fascination with the supernatural. The rest has been lost to the same cynical rationalism which made the romantic hero obsolete in his cinema.
**Mischievous Movies**

Terence Fisher once stated that 'the best horror films are adult fairy tales, no more and no less' (Pirie 1973). As a teller of fairy tales Walker was a more honest narrator than any Hammer was able to supply. Rather than concealing the exploitative elements of his films or justifying their prurient appeal as a necessary part of moral instruction, he was frank about their importance to audiences. He saw his potential audience as the 40% of cinema-goers that he estimated were receptive to exploitation films and he was happy to admit that they paid their money for thrills rather than frills. 'I don’t want people coming out of the cinema saying “What a lovely well-made picture”’, he once told *Film Illustrated* (Mar. 1976), ‘the truth is that people don’t go to see lovely, well-made pictures’. This should be taken as a flamboyant assertion of the importance of an entertaining narrative rather than as a lack of concern for the craft of film-making, as he confirmed in another interview:

‘I don’t have unlimited funds for my films but I’ve always strived for a certain standard. There are always compromises, of course, but the skill, if I have any skills at all, is not to let them show.’ - Starburst 57, 1983

But although Walker was emphatic that popular cinema should be judged according to its entertainment value, what gives his terror films their astringency is the outrageousness and transgression of their ideas. Psychopathic priests, home-counties cannibals and sadistic moral re-armers are not the usual stuff of British cinema and, a few years earlier, they might not have made it past a censor who was still cautious about direct attacks on established authority (Robertson 1989, Phelps 1975, Trevelyan 1973). Walker’s cinema uses these oxymoronic characters not simply to shock and to challenge the trite and insipid sentimentality which blighted so much of British film-making, but also to comment on its times and to encourage thought. His films invited contemporary audiences and critics to question both their own security and their unexamined assumptions about the moral universe which they inhabited:

‘I wanted to make contemporary terror pictures that had some kind of statement to make. Now that sounds like I’m being very pretentious. When I say “statement” I really mean a film with a little more mischief about it.’ - Walker interviewed in Fangoria 27, 1983

A macabre and disturbing sense of ‘mischief’ is exactly what most of his mature films have. Rather than the good-natured puckishness or sprightly eccentricity of English comedy drama, the acerbic imaginations of Walker and his screenwriters offer a darkly humorous affront to a complacent national cinema and the drawing room sensibilities of its stuffier critics - a homage to Michael Powell rather than to Dílys.

There is a view that the distinctiveness and distinction of Walker’s cinema can be attributed largely to the quality of his scriptwriters, an idea that has been given some credence by David McGillivray’s (1994) assertion that his scripts were followed ‘to the letter, even down to camera angles’ and Walker’s own confession to ‘limited directorial ability’ (Starburst 57, 1983). Michael Armstrong, who scripted Walker’s last picture and worked with him on other projects which remained unfilmed, suggests that he was more interested in the craft of film making and the visualisation of scenes than in the ideas and themes contained in the screenplay.

‘Pete was very interested in the methods, systems and techniques of frightening people - more interested in the craft than the theme of it. It’s usually the critics who come up with all the themes for filmmakers ... when he and I talked it was never thematic at all, it was just craft, how would a scene work visually, what would work best to keep the audience in a state of suspense. With my own stuff it would be written, we would look at it
Shocks To The System

and we'd discuss just the visualisation of it. Overall there was little alteration really, he would just mainly edit where there was an excess of dialogue or just to cut down a scene, and even then a lot of that would be done in the cutting room. We never spoke in a deeply esoteric way. I mean, House of the Long Shadows, the themes and ideas were never discussed with Pete. All that philosophical rant, all the ideas that float around, that's purely from me.'

It is entirely right that Armstrong should take the full credit for what is a witty and imaginative screenplay, but it is also significant that many of its preoccupations and rhetorical devices were already familiar elements in Walker's cinema. Much of this can be accounted for in terms of the conventional demands and themes of genre film-making, as Armstrong points out: 'If I had been scripting for Hitchcock it would have been like scripting for Pete because they had the same type of interests.' But, although Walker's preoccupations may be rooted in the Gothic psycho-thriller and the Hitchcockian suspense drama, they are not confined to any genre or writer. They are distinctive enough for
Armstrong to recognise a script as being ‘very Pete’. The influence that he exerted over the thematics of a screenplay was principally at the stage of concept development. More often than not, Walker would lay foundations for an elaborate house of games which his writer would then construct. Each house is different but they share a common subterranean structure. Walker’s results were rarely achieved by direct instruction but more usually through mediated suggestion. He would show old films to his scriptwriters. These films would suggest themes, ideas and moods which might be selected and elaborated while remaining only semi-acknowledged by writer and director. Memories of past cinema are the bricks and mortar of Walker’s constructions. Armstrong and Walker shared so much common experience of cinema going and so many similar responses that the one knew intuitively when a script would suit the other. With McGillivray, on the other hand, Walker was obliged to stamp his authority on the proceedings at the script development stage, browbeating and cajoling until the narrative had been set off in an acceptable direction.

When it came to directing on set, Walker’s style was one of quiet authority but minimal intervention. McGillivray recalls that Walker ‘rarely told his actors anything apart from where to move’, but he is the first to recognise that this unobtrusive direction was wonderfully effective:

‘No matter who wrote the script, his films are instantly recognisable from the first scene. His way with suburban menace is uniquely his own. He was, in fact, a model director, slick and efficient and exerting a subtle influence to get what he wanted.’ - McGillivray 1994

Of course, what he achieved was inevitably constrained by the resources available. Perfection is never attainable on a budget that is so low you could not limbo under it, but Walker could make £60,000 look ten times as much on screen. Somehow he persuaded a wealth of talented writers, actors and technicians to work for wages that would have insulted
a Fleet Street print worker, and by fulfilling the roles of producer and director himself he further reduced expenditure. His exclusive dedication to location filming meant there were no expensive studio fees to be paid and a production designer could be dispensed with. The costs of costume hire and design were largely saved by giving his dramas a contemporary setting and avoiding exotic locales. Further economies were effected by the efficient organisation of shooting schedules. Speedy camera set-ups were ensured by close adherence to the shooting script and a regular team of technicians who were familiar with one another’s working practices. Alternative takes were kept to a minimum by employing actors experienced in stage and film craft. Walker tried to keep his shooting ratio below 5:1, supervising the editing process and priding himself on his ability to visualise the edited product as he filmed. ‘I shoot so tightly’ he explained, ‘that there is only one way the editor can cut my films, the way I shot them.’ (Adult Cinema, no.1, 1974).

It would be foolish to pretend that Walker’s films would not have benefited from a more generous budget, but not only do they disguise their financial limitations remarkably well, they also derive extra grittiness and immediacy from their Poverty Row origins. Their producer was painfully aware that it would be useless to apologise to his audience for his film’s low production values, declaring that ‘nobody will judge a film by how much it costs or how long it took to make’, but only by ‘how successfully [it] entertains you.’ (Film Illustrated, Mar.1976). Most of his early films fell well short of his own demanding targets. ‘I haven’t liked anything I’ve made. I mean that sincerely. I wince at everything’, he rather disarmingly told David McGillivray in 1971 (Films and Filming, Dec. 1974); but there were enough successes in later years for McGillivray to describe him as ‘Britain’s greatest exploitation movie director’ long after their association had ended somewhat acrimoniously (McGillivray 1994).

A Pete Walker film was usually entertainment with an edge, an intoxicating concoction of sardonic playfulness and outrageous sedition, liberally laced with enough sex or violence to maintain the disreputable status crucial to its commercial viability. If the nation’s moral guardians failed to recognise it as a palpable threat to respectability they could always be prompted by the film-makers themselves. Some light has been shed on exploitation cinema’s black propaganda machine by David McGillivray (1989):

‘I was dragooned into a team of people whose job was to get as much free publicity for a film as possible. The premiere for House of Whipcord, for instance, whose main selling point was flagellation, was followed up by a letter to the Daily Mail which made particular reference to “the sadistic pictures of a naked woman lying on a bed with her back covered in whiplashes”. Of course the name of the cinema was included. An even better ruse, however, was to get a leading moralist to lodge a personal complaint because this would sometimes entail banner headlines and editorial comment - enough to make any publicist weep for joy.’

The Nation-wide Festival of Light was a particular target for McGillivray’s team of mischievous agitators: ‘We would telephone them in rotation till we ran out of character voices’. This bizarre practice perfectly encapsulates the symbiotic relationship between exploitation films and moral reformers, partners in a mutually beneficial cycle of provocation and protest. As McGillivray tells it, there is an endearing innocence to this game of shock-and-gasp played out in the unselfconscious days before punk and post-modernity. It would be easy to agree with his ingenuous assertion that the type of films he made with Pete Walker were “a harmless outlet for over-grown schoolboys who were really doing little more than trying to see how much they could get away with before they were sent to bed” (McGillivray 1989). But, although there was fun to be had in their making and evident humour in their screenplays, Walker’s finest films remain a disturbing experience.
They possess, in Tim Rayner’s phrase, a ‘bizarre integrity’ (Cinema Rising, Aug. 1972) which finds a common ground for commercialism and subversion - populism with bite, sedition with a smile.

Peter Walker, then, is a significant figure in post-war British film-making, not only as a rare independent auteur in a studio-dominated production system, but also because his cinema shuns cultural orthodoxies and offers a mordant glimpse into a dark underworld of madness, obsession, and vindictive violence. The collapse of the studio system in the sixties and seventies threw up a number of individuals prepared to take the responsibility for the financing and filming of their own commercial projects. Most of these, like Harrison Marks, Stanley Long and Donovan Winter, remained locked in the sex film cupboard. One or two, like Norman J. Warren, consistently produced entertaining and idiosyncratic films with a characteristic directorial style but without any consistent thematic unity. But, probably, only the Canadian-born Lindsay Shonteff rivalled Walker as an independent film-maker working in Britain in a variety of genres but maintaining a distinctive unity of style and theme (Bryce 1994). Shonteff, however, could never quite match the intensity of Walker’s vision or the quality of the screen writing which he was able to commission. Ultimately it is these key factors which enabled Walker to employ the styles and techniques of low-budget exploitation cinema but to stretch its possibilities for transgression further, perhaps, than any other British productions since Peeping Tom (1960).

Villainous Verdict

When Pete Walker suddenly retired from film-making in 1983, just when it looked as if he might escape from Poverty Row, he had displayed enough talent and innovation to make his disappearance a genuine loss to British film production. Unfortunately, few critics would have agreed at the time, even though four of his ‘terror’ films had once received the accolade of an all-night showing at the National Film Theatre (April, 1977). The critical establishment could never really overcome their reservations about cheap exploitation films, and the kind that Walker made were not only in dubious taste, but suspect in their morality and their sexual politics. His concerns and motivations placed him outside the great tradition of British cinema. He was not interested in exploring the English character or in social documentation, nor in flag-waving or adapting the classics. His films had rarely dealt overtly with class and community, or the heroic spirit and the virtue of sacrifice. He had shunned historical whimsy, gentle comedy and cozy gentility, but not in the interests of political correctness or socialist agit-prop. He could not even be accommodated as an eccentric artist or visionary like Ken Russell or Michael Powell. His films were too prosaic, too grounded in mundane social reality, to be considered flights of the imagination. No, Pete Walker just didn’t have the credentials for admission into the pantheon of British film-makers. The cinema establishment barely noticed, let alone mourned his disappearance. He had been, in his screenwriter Murray Smith’s words ‘the uninvited guest at the feast of film-making’, the nouveaux riche playboy with a taste for the tasteless.

That Walker’s work has been ignored by British cinema’s old-school-tie brigade is not unexpected, but his most shameful treatment has come from critics apparently sympathetic to the intentions of the horror film. What retrospective enthusiasm they have shown for British horror has been for the costumed Gothic of Hammer studios and the staid dignity of Terence Fisher, rather than for Walker’s more contemporary brand of cleavers and cleavages. There are no monsters, vampires, werewolves, witches or Egyptian mummies in his movies, and only one features Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing. This means that his
films cannot be given the epithet classic horror and must be relegated to the subterranean world of the shocker, with all its connotations of catchpenny commercialism and debasing violence.

A few writers on horror cinema have referred to Walker’s films, but their assessments are never very positive. Robert Murphy quickly dismisses *House of Whipcord* as ‘bleak’, ‘grotty’ and lacking the generic innovation found in contemporary American horror films (Murphy 1992, p. 194). Kim Newman similarly describes Walker’s movies as ‘grim, gritty, and grotty’, managing to be ‘highly derivative and distinctively the work of their director at the same time.’ He calls one film ‘a nasty and depressing little movie’ and another ‘an incredible piece of tat’, but acknowledges that Walker ‘has a knack of getting non-stereotypical performances from his young ladies and old hams’. His overall judgement, however, is that Walker ‘has yet to make an entirely satisfactory film’ (Newman 1988, p.21). The American writer, Gene Wright, dubs Walker ‘Britain’s leading “gore-ophile”’. His films are ‘technically more polished and several levels above the usual low-budget products of his American colleagues’, but dramatically they are ‘no more substantial, even with the presence of a few reputable actors and a union cameraman.’ (Wright 1987, p.243). But it is Hammer fan, Alan Frank, who has been Walker’s sternest critic, describing his films as ‘trashy’, ‘silly and tawdry’, ‘unpleasant’, ‘voyeuristic’ and ‘puerile exploitation’ which combine ‘the nadir of bad taste with the bare minimum of expertise.’ His characters are dismissed as ‘ill-conceived’ and ‘clichéd’, and Frank’s judgement on *House of Whipcord* is that it represents ‘British exploitation cinema at its lowest common denominator’. (Frank 1981, pp.154, 160, 172). His extreme distaste is indicative of the bile Walker’s shockers arouse in those who prefer their horror more wholesome.

Peter Walker’s gruesome little offerings have been overlooked in the rush to re-evaluate films like *Witchfinder General* and *The Wicker Man* (1973) and effectively frozen out of critical study, but there are promising signs of a thaw. John McCarty, exploitation cinema’s most prolific commentator and one of Walker’s earliest champions (McCarty 1984, pp.125-6), groups Walker’s films with the controversial and fashionable Italian gialli, ‘whodunits mixed with lots of style and graphic gore’ (McCarty 1993, p.188) and praises the performances of his actors. Andy Boot’s history of the British horror film is the first to assign Walker a significant place in the development of the genre. Boot is not afraid to compare Walker’s *Die Screaming Marianne* to Edgar Ulmer’s *noir* classic *Detour* (1945), and to describe *House of Whipcord* as a ‘masterpiece’ (Boot 1996, p.217); he relishes Walker’s ability to combine self-parody and black comedy with ‘grotty suburban Gothic’ to chilling effect.

Recently the thaw has at last reached academic criticism with Leon Hunt’s persuasive defence of *Frightmare* and insistence that the time for a reconsideration of Walker’s work has arrived. (Hunt 1996). One can only regret that it has taken so long to realise the significance of a movie-maker who has shunned filmic and political orthodoxies, trashed regimes of taste and revelled in iconoclasm, and yet has still managed to sell his product profitably to home and overseas markets in a period of decline for British Cinema.
In January 1997, having read a draft of this book, Peter Walker agreed to a substantial interview about his films. Although he has very occasionally talked about his work at movie festivals, this was effectively the first time he had spoken extensively about his career since leaving film-making in 1983 to develop his interests in property dealing and, lately, in cinema exhibition.

He modestly expressed his surprise that anyone should be interested in ‘these old potboilers’ and doubted that they had ‘any significance or value today’, but as we talked it became clear that he had emotional as well as financial investment in many of his films. Some, particularly his early works, were a genuine source of embarrassment, but others displayed the ‘talent’ of his scriptwriters and technicians, were ‘ahead of their time’ and had ‘messages’ wrapped up in generic conventions. Interpreting some of his statements can be difficult as he is frequently trying to provoke a reaction, just as he did with his movies. This was a marked tendency early in our conversation, but as rapport grew, so did the qualification of absolutes and the ambivalence of attitude.

After five hours of taped conversation, I was left with the impression of a man whose life has been largely dedicated to the craft of showmanship, with only a cynical regard for his audiences. It is the creation of spectacle that he loves, the putting on a show, first as a performer, then as a technician, then as a director and producer and finally as the proprietor of a chain of cinemas. Peter Walker is the complete carnival man because he is also a tough and shrewd business operator, who is adept at the deal. The emotional privations of his childhood have given him elements of cynicism, detachment, distrust and pessimism which may sometimes shade into anger, misanthropy and a resentment of power. His is a Hobbesian vision of power. In his cosmology, evil is a dominant force in a corrupt, unforgiving and inhospitable world. Strength is a virtue which women have in abundance but which men must achieve by individual endeavour and the development of resilience. It will not be supplied by therapy, religion or mutual societies. Right and truth are to be discovered in individual consciences rather than the teachings of ideologues, and this belief expresses itself in a perverse but engaging rejection of orthodoxies. If there is a dominant message in his films it may be ‘Be on your guard because the world is a predatory place and there are people in it who mean to do you harm’. This is certainly the message of a Jeremiah, but Peter Walker’s saving graces are a modesty and a roguish humour which temper the maliciousness of his satire.

Extracts from the interview form the rest of this chapter and are included in all the subsequent sections of this book.
On Exploitation Cinema and his influences

Peter Walker (P.W): The whole meaning of exploitation was purely to appeal to a market at a certain time. I mean, it’s what I did in the past for a living, but when you look at the films you cringe because, although they appealed at the time, it’s hard now to realise that young people had such a curiosity and lack of knowledge about sex ... I see myself as a showman. I don’t see myself as anything else. What really happened is that there was just a dearth of British producers at the time. When the Americans left town there was just a vacuum and a window of opportunity that people like myself and Stanley Long stepped into and managed to get wide releases. It was a period of decline and I said at the time I saw it going the same way as the Music Hall. I remember the decline of variety theatres where virtually every town had a variety theatre and within two years they were gone. And one saw cinemas going that way. I mean video started in the early eighties and you thought there was never any recovery and it was almost the same because at the end of the variety theatres there were all the girlie shows, and what we were putting on were all these little sex films. It was exactly the same pattern, déjá vu.

Steve Chibnall (S.C): Besides Hitchcock, were there other directors you admired?

P.W: A lot of directors I admired - Jacques Tourneur and a lot of film noir people.

S.C: What about more contemporary directors? There are similarities between your films and those of Michael Reeves, for example. Reeves’ films are very pessimistic and there’s a degree of pessimism in yours.

P.W: Sure, sure. No. He only did two films and, can I be honest about this, I’ve never seen either of them. I’ve never seen Witchfinder General and I’ve never seen The Sorcerers. So,
no, Michael Reeves can’t have been an influence. Modern directors? No, not really, just a few of your continental directors.

S.C: Buñuel?

P.W: Oh yes, and a few others for the technical expertise and the construction. You see I’m not a great film freak in the up-market, wine drinking Hampstead intellectual kind of way. I’m very much commercial, you know.

S.C: Did you see any of the Italian gialli - Mario Bava, Dario Argento?

P.W: Yes, but not any influence, not really. I didn’t go hot foot to see them. I’ve never consciously been influenced by other directors. You fight against that because you feel then that you are copying. The whole idea of copying, of plagiarism, I find completely wrong.

S.C: What about Michael Powell and Peeping Tom?

P.W: No, never seen Peeping Tom. I’ve seen clips of it.

On Politics

S.C: The politics of your films are very interesting. One of the things that interests viewers now is that they are quite politically incorrect.

P.W: Well, they might be politically incorrect, but I’m a politically incorrect person. I’m a conservative, and if that’s wrong I should be burnt at the stake or whatever. But, you know, I believe in common sense, and political correctness would certainly be a theme of a film if I were making films today. I would be instilling that into a genre picture, because, although I used to dismiss it all by saying, “Oh, I’m a showman, I just used to do things for money” - it’s quite true, that’s what I did for a living and I have no regrets - one did always try to get a message into them, if only, as you quite rightly say, to make mischief.

S.C: Is that a fair title for the book?

P.W: I think that’s exactly what I did. I wouldn’t have admitted it at the time, but I think that’s exactly what I did. I mean when I gave a brief to a writer I would get hot under the collar about things. For example, when we made Frightmare I got hot under the collar about people just being released from jail, released from institutions when two weeks later they were slitting somebody else’s throat, you know, raping some other little girl. However it used to get bastardised on the way. It would be instilled into the plot in one way or another wrapped up in a conventional horror story. But there was always that message, and I was always condemned for it.

S.C: The legal system comes in for a lot of stick in your films.

P.W: It does indeed. Judges are hypocritical.

S.C: You present it as really corrupt.
P.W: Well they are corrupt. It’s not just.

S.C: Which is surprising from someone who describes himself as a conservative.

P.W: That’s right. It doesn’t mean to say that because you’re conservative you’ve got to condone all that is bad. That’s a left wing view of it. I’m on the side of right and fair play, level playing fields, cricket and all that.

S.C: A meritocracy?

P.W: Yeah, absolutely. I’m not in favour of privilege, but I’m very much against feckless behaviour by the working classes.

S.C: So your political views are not particularly doctrinaire, they’re individualist rather than party.

P.W: I’m not a political animal. I don’t know who I shall vote for this time, probably for the anti-Europe party ... There’s right and wrong and, you know, I’m on the side of right, but right isn’t what parties or judges or the church or Mary Whitehouse or whatever claim.

S.C: Or psychiatrists?

P.W: Well, absolutely. That’s another subject that could be given the Walker sword, isn’t it? Counselling, that’s another pet aversion. I mean, there are so many things I’d love to have a go at now.

S.C: You’ve obviously got respect for those people who have the courage of their convictions and stick to them.

P.W: Well yes, but I mean it becomes increasingly hard to do that. It becomes increasingly hard to be the stiff-upper-lip Englishman who believes in fair play because that’s seen as weakness in today’s society, isn’t it?

S.C: What about class?

P.W: I’ve no thing about class at all.

S.C: I pick up some things about class in your films. You’re coming through a tradition of British film making which was all about class in the sixties. A lot of British films are about the class system.

P.W: Oh yes, certainly, If (1968) and so on. No, I certainly don’t recognise that at all and it’s quite right that I don’t, because I came from that kind of class background which is a theatrical background, you know, show business parents who consider themselves to be classless, don’t they?

S.C: Your young people tend to be classless, but your older villains are often upper-class, establishment figures.
P.W.: Oh yes, Knights of the theatre, judges, doctors, psychiatrists, priests.

S.C.: So there is a sort of implied criticism there?

P.W.: Yeah, well, it’s not so much a class system. You see I think that people engineer their lives. I mean, why do people become priests? Why do they become schoolteachers? Because they want to hang around kids. Now sometimes women will say, “Well, I just love children” and I accept that, and their motivations are absolutely right, but sometimes, you know, men want to be with children ... Why do they become judges? They become judges because they want to sentence people. They are power freaks and that’s why they do it. And they need to be exposed.

S.C.: So it’s not that power corrupts. It’s that corrupt people try to find their way to power.

P.W.: Exactly, exactly.

On Gender Issues

S.C.: Women are often the central characters in your films ...

P.W.: And they’re the strongest. The leading men are all wimps, and that’s the way it is. We were always ahead of the times really, because they were all new men long before anybody talked about new men, all those leading men with very few exceptions. And then you get these weirdo’s who are invariably bi-sexual.
Peter Walker talks about film-making

S.C: Some of the attitudes of film noir towards women re-appear in your films, but the femme fatale becomes an older woman.

P.W: That’s right.

S.C: And the film noir protagonist, who is usually male in the 1940s, is turned into a female.

P.W: Absolutely. Oh yes, one is always very influenced by that because that is my period and those are the films that I love.

S.C: Your work has the same fatalism as a lot of film noir.

P.W: That’s something I’m not conscious of. I’m a realist, you see, I don’t like that feeling of fate. The old defeating the young, evil defeating good, the dominance of women, all those I am conscious of.

S.C: Is it a critique of the dominance of women? Are you saying that women are too dominant?

P.W: No, no it isn’t a critique. What one is actually saying is that it’s rather like feminism, really, it isn’t necessary. Women have always been dominant but, you know, they are trying to do it on male terms, and really it’s wrong. They did it far better when they were dominating from their own strength. I mean, I’m not saying anything that hasn’t been said a hundred times in articles in the Daily Mail twice a week. No it’s not a critique at all, but people just don’t recognise it ... women are underestimated, you know.

On Sex and Censorship

S.C: You never wanted to direct sex films. You were glad to put them behind you?

P.W: Very much so, yes. I hated them. I’m all in favour of sex and I was always fascinated by the curiosity that those kinds of films aroused, but you could never do it successfully. I never actually saw a sex film that was titillating. The most titillating films were invariably non-sex films. I mean, there were always scenes in a thriller, at the most odd times. Generally, anything that’s attempting to be sexy, isn’t. It’s all about subtlety.

S.C: What about censorship?

P.W: I believed in censorship, but not for the reasons, necessarily, that I gave. I always said that censorship was the exploitation film maker’s best friend, simply because, if you let everything rip, you’d got no sensational angle. You have to retain that curiosity and interest. But I believed in censorship for the reasons that Mary Whitehouse believes in it. I mean I do really believe that the reason we have a lot of violence is contributed to by violent films, violent television - violent television particularly. Film is a little more controlled, isn’t it? You’ve got to be over eighteen to see Bruce Willis sticking a knife in somebody.
S.C: How did you feel you were treated by the censors - John Trevelyan and Stephen Murphy? You got a good response to House of Whipcord from Stephen Murphy.

P.W: Oh yes, he saw it for what it was and looked at it more as a serious film. But it was in the early days of his reign and he didn’t quite understand exploitation films; whereas Trevelyan, he was actually a bit of a waste of time... I don’t think he believed in anything except himself. I didn’t have a very high opinion of him. I just don’t think he did the job properly. I mean, I got away with things with him, so I’ve got no axe to grind. It isn’t like me complaining about the referee... he liked that position of power. He loved to say, ‘Oh, I called Alfred Hitchcock in this morning and I said, “Hitch, I’m not allowing you to have this and I’m not allowing you this”’. And you used to think, ‘Oh come on, it’s jerk off time’. How dare he get somebody like Alfred Hitchcock into his office and say, ‘I don’t like that, I want it cut’.

S.C: Did you make the cuts that the censor asked for?

P.W: Generally speaking, the procedure with censorship that I found the best way of doing it (and Stanley Long used to do the same) was that you would show Trevelyan your fine cut or even a rough dub - and he would unofficially say, ‘No, look, we’re not going to allow that, you’ve got to cut a bit of that.’ Okay, you would trim it, perhaps not as drastically as he said, and then you would officially submit to the British Board of Film Censors. Trevelyan would then say, ‘Oh, you’ve made those cuts. I’ve looked at it. It’s alright now.’ It was an informal process first, he’d seen it with you privately. If it had been an official submission, then you would have had to make those cuts. On one of the films I remember I had about three screenings with Trevelyan. In fact we didn’t make the cuts, the distributors did it. So you never made cuts in the negative. You cut the prints.

S.C: I’ve heard that maybe, despite what the BBFC said, a lot of films went out uncut.

P.W: No, I don’t think that’s true.

S.C: The system was very lax and nobody bothered to check.

P.W: Well, that may well be. I remember, for example, with House of Whipcord originally we were going to go out with thirty prints. It was very successful, Rank gave us a big deal on it, and it went to one hundred and fifty prints. Now I know that the prints prepared for the original release were duly cut, but I don’t know if the extra prints that were quickly rushed out were cut.

S.C: I don’t suppose anybody is going to go and check.

P.W: No, they are not going to do that. That’s probably quite right. And, you know, all those cuts in those films were only token cuts, they were silly cuts. It’s like when the girl was being flogged, ‘Cut one of the lashes’. Why?

S.C: It’s about excess isn’t it?

P.W: Is that what it’s about? I don’t know, you tell me.

S.C: It’s bad taste if it’s excessive.
On Script writing

P.W: All my films are one man bands. I'm producing, directing, paying all the cheques, that's why I always like to get my scripts sorted. My thing with McGillivray was always we'd work on a story then I would feed him five pages of storyline cut into scenes. He would write the dialogue, send them back to me. I would edit, cut and put them into a shooting script. That was the way I always worked with McGillivray. But they had to be as I was going to shoot them by the time I had finished them and printed them, I couldn't have time to go into 'Oh, well I don't think we'll do that, we'll do something else' because, you know, you are working to a tight schedule, so it had to jump off the page. Don't get me wrong about my relationship with McGillivray. You know, everybody says there was a great antagonism between the two of us but I don't know how that came about. It came about really on Schizo when we were struggling to get an idea. But there was really no antagonism apart from that ... But he looked to me to provide him with the story. The construction particularly, and the characters. He would then take those characters and write them, and he did that very well.

S.C: I think he's coming from a different political position from you. I mean he's very much anti-censorship now.

P.W: Well he always has been. No, I liked David and I think he's very talented, but I could never befriend him. I could never socialise with him. Whereas with Michael Armstrong, Michael's very showbizy and I know where that comes from and I respect it and I enjoy it, and I think it's what it's all about - particularly as he's most talented, a very talented guy,
Michael ... when he gets going he thinks faster than I do and, my God, I can come up with some ideas - I can’t write dialogue, but I can certainly come up with some exploitable ideas. But Michael is a different kettle of fish to David. I worked much harder on David’s scripts than I did certainly with anything that Michael or Murray Smith did. With Michael you would just talk ideas and you’d have lunch and talk a few more ideas, and then go away and he would bring back something and you’d look at it and say, ‘Hey, that’s not bad. I’ll cut that scene out of it. That doesn’t quite wash. Michael, can you re-write that?’, and you would make suggestions and it would come back and it would be right.

S.C: Talking to your writers, the impression they give me is that you were interested in the techniques of film making - how to do a successful suspense scene, that sort of thing - and the ideas, the themes, came largely from them. Is that fair?

P.W: Of course, a writer will always say that my success is his success. No, I would say that certainly with Michael Armstrong that would be very fair comment. With Murray, much the same. Murray constructed a script and you would discuss extensively the storyline and exactly where it was going and what it was doing. Murray would be more inclined to not quite understand what I wanted. Murray would be harder work. With David they were totally joint efforts because I did the story and construction and he wrote the dialogue. There were meetings three times a week, and long meetings. I would be explaining the plot and the story and the way it would go.

S.C: It was you that wanted the downbeat endings?

P.W: Oh yeah. All the actual plots and storylines on the McGillivray scripts were worked out that way ... What David had with House of Whipcord was twenty-two pages of actual script and sixty pages of the storyline broken down. I mean, it was virtually ready to do. But the others were created from scratch - he was there at the start of it.
From Brighton Boy To Glamour Girls

’It’s a boy, Mrs Walker, it’s a boy’
- Pete Townshend, Tommy, 1968

’What would you do, chums?’
- Syd Walker’s catch phrase.

Primal Events

It may be a truism that to understand a film-maker as an auteur one must know about his early life, but in the case of Peter Walker, some knowledge of his biography is key to interpreting his work. He was born in January 1939, the son of the rotund and genial music hall star, Syd Walker, a regular with ‘big-hearted’ Arthur Askey on the popular Band Waggon radio show. His mother was Aymer Jesse, a showgirl and Syd’s mistress. Walker’s childhood in Brighton was scarred by insecurity, as he recalls:

’I was the illegitimate son of a comedian and a chorus girl. The thing about having theatrical people as your parents is that they are quite often self-centred people. My mother was very difficult, but she didn’t intend to be that way. Like a lot of comics, my father was
a bit of a womaniser and my mother was terrified that he was going to go off, because his track record was going off with different women, as comics still do in this day and age. So everything was geared really to maintaining the relationship between my father and her - they were never married, he was married already - and so we children were kind of neglected. We were appendages, really. I'm probably being very uncharitable saying this, but both my sister and I felt that we were conceived purely as insurance to keep him. We never had a home life, fostered out most of the time.'

The uncertainties of Walker’s childhood were deepened by the trauma of war and eventually thrown into crisis by the death of his father in 1945.

‘When our father died all his money went to his wife. All our mother was left with was a few pounds, a flat in Brighton and an old car. There was no social security so we were put into an orphanage and my mother went off to resume her stage career and, as far as we were both concerned and as far as the orphanage was concerned, we were orphans. It took some time, I suppose, but eventually they found out that we actually had a mother and they got hold of her and said “Come and take your children away. This is an orphanage”. In the meantime she had met and married a very much older man who had told her that he was very wealthy but was, in fact, penniless.’

Looking back, Walker now believes that there is little else his mother could have done, but her temporary withdrawal left him with a sense of difference. The problems of Walkers early life were compounded by his experience of Catholic boarding schools:

‘At the time, it seemed that the priests were all perverts. Most of them seemed to have their hands down little boys’ trousers. I was a lapsed Catholic from the time I left Catholic school. I think I was sensible enough to say, “Who needs this crap?”’

Twenty years later, he would choose the walk-on part of a priest in Cool it Carol and then begin to exorcise the demons of his schooldays in House of Mortal Sin, a bitter critique of the priesthood.

Perhaps the loneliness that Pete Walker experienced as a child is suggested by his fascination with the RKO ‘weepy’, The Enchanted Cottage (1945), the story of a love affair between a blind orphan and a scarred fighter pilot. The film invests a seaside cottage with powers of emotional transformation. The cottage stands as a haven of love and security in a world of war. Walker always wanted to re-make the film but could never convince others that it would be viable in the less sentimental 1970s.

**Stage and Screen**

The great compensation of Peter Walker’s childhood was cinema. He often saw four or five films a week and by the age of ten he had a cherished 9.5 mm projector which allowed him to see old films as many times as he liked (Verschooten 1984). Films were a real passion, as he told Mike Munn:

‘As a kid I remember going into the old type of super cinemas and just soaking up the atmosphere. I just wanted to spend my time in a cinema analysing films.’- Film Review, Apr. 1976

After leaving school, however, he first tried to follow in his father’s footsteps by building a career as a young stand-up comic in London’s declining music halls and burgeoning striptease reviews:

‘One of my jobs was working for Michael Klinger as a comic in a strip club, The Gargoyle Club. I mean, that was just an interesting experience, seeing the sort of people who came into this club for twelve hours a day. I would stand at the back and I would meet
everybody there and they were all high fliers, fabulously wealthy businessmen obsessed with watching sixteen year old girls take their clothes off, and spending hours doing it.'

This experience led to Walker's involvement in a short film directed by Roger Proudlock, *Soho Striptease* (1960), featuring Klinger's performers, and introducing the entrepreneur to the possibilities of film production. Without *Soho Striptease* Klinger might not have produced *Repulsion* (1965) or *Get Carter* (1971). A fascination with strip clubs would become a feature of Walker's early films, but by the late 1950s he was weary of trying to extract laughs from patrons who were there for serious voyeurism, and turned to repertory acting and to work in Brighton Film Studios (as a technician and assistant director producing quota quickies and TV ads) as well as a succession of short term jobs including dealing in 16mm projectors. 'I used to hustle about, a general spiv really', he told David McGillivray (*Films and Filming*, Dec. 1974). An increasing number of film acting opportunities were, however, coming his way, including the role of a casino cashier in Lance Comfort's *The Breaking Point* (1960), and a small role in Otto Preminger's *Exodus* (1960).

Preminger and the actor Sal Mineo, whom Walker had also met while filming *Exodus* in Israel, supplied him with useful contacts in America and, at the start of the new decade, he decided to try his luck in Hollywood as an actor/technician. Although he managed to secure some television roles, perhaps the most important aspect of Walker's eighteen months in the States was his exposure to the wave of short 'nudie cutie' films that became a feature of American exploitation cinema after the success of Russ Meyer's *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959). By the time he returned to England towards the end of 1961, Walker had tried directing and knew that he wanted to make films rather than act in them.

**Film Strips and Strip Films**

Back in Blighty, Walker set up his own production and distribution company, Heritage Films, financed by working as a gag writer and acting in films like Michael Winner's *Out of the Shadow* (1962) and *Behave Yourself* (1962). Heritage quickly established itself as a major competitor to George Harrison Marks, the glamour photographer (and music hall comic) who had begun producing three-minute 'girlie' films on 8mm for home projection in 1958. Walker could shoot a striptease short in half an hour and the demand for his product proved near insatiable. He issued one hundred a year and had made nearly four hundred by the time he sold the business. His entry into the home projection market was immaculately timed. 8mm movies became a craze in the early sixties in a similar way to video in the eighties. As foreign holidays became affordable to the middle classes, they bought home movie cameras to record them and projectors to exhibit the films to the family. The projectors, however, were also used for more secretive screenings of the type of striptease short produced by Walker and Harrison Marks. Heritage Films serviced both segments of the expanding home leisure market, offering abridged Hollywood features, like *Casablanca* (1942) and *The Outlaw* (1943), and cartoons and comedy shorts, as well as more 'adult' material.

In 1963, Walker's business was given a further boost by the titillating revelations of the Profumo affair. The amatory activities of 'good time girls' Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice Davies fuelled millions of male fantasies of uninhibited womanhood and sent frustrated students of the female form scurrying for copies of 8mm Heritage reels like Dawn Grayson in *Little Miss Muff-it* (30 shillings for 50 feet). Somehow, though, Walker missed out on the true motherload, as he recalls:

'Mandy (Rice Davies) was going to do a glamour movie for me. I offered her £3,000
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"Jayne Mansfield" approx. 100 ft.

above and opposite: Pete Walker began his career in films by directing and distributing 8mm glamour shorts
which was a lot of money in 1964. It would have taken a fortune on 8mm. I don’t know why I didn’t do it really. I mean, she was willing to do it.’

But, with or without Mandy, Peter Walker was swept up in the euphoria of ‘swinging’ London and its new liberal lifestyles. He was in the glamour business at a time when pornography was almost fashionable, money was easy to come by, and the capital’s club land was a Mecca for the young glitterati:

‘I was at that right age, when I was a young man on the King’s Road after Harold Wilson had been elected and said, ‘Right, let’s take the brakes off the economy and have a piss-up’. I was part of it. We all knew each other in those days - Terry Donovan, David Bailey, The Beatles. I knew the owners of clubs like The Scotch of St James, The Valbonne, The Ad Lib and LeKilt in Greek Street and that’s where I used to go. Clubs in those days you used to be able to talk in. There were restaurants and all that sort of stuff, and you only got decent people there. Now all these kind of places are open to anyone. In those days only the “elite” were allowed in.’

Walker certainly indulged in the glamorous life and promoted the new cultural liberalism, but not without a certain distaste for their empty hedonism and moral laxity. He insists that he did not find the swinging London lifestyle particularly satisfying, and there is a distinctly cynical tone in the London sequences of The Big Switch, the film he made at the end of 1967. The same cynicism was evident in his attitude to his ‘girlie’ films and their audience:

‘I was aware that what I was doing, although it was legal, marginally legal, at the time, was not really what I believed in. Anything happened on 8mm in those days. You could put anything out - blank film was saleable, almost.’

He once told McGillivray that he had never wanted to be Harrison Marks (Films and Filming, Dec. 1974), but he found himself fascinated by the obsession with sex in the sixties and could not resist the opportunity to exploit it financially. His ambivalence towards his profession is plain to see in the repeated satires on the sex industry in his early films.

By the mid 1960s, Walker’s frustrations as a filmmaker were beginning to show in the growing complexity of his glamour shoots. Although they could not match the kitsch of Harrison Mark’s costumed epics, many exhibited a taste for location work which would become a feature of Walker’s cinema. Donna Marlow in Super 8, for instance, runs thirteen minutes and takes its blonde-haired star out of the studio and down to the seashore by means of over twenty separate camera set-ups and nearly fifty edits. A move to 35mm was the logical next step and it was taken with both feet when Walker sold his home movie distribution business to concentrate on production.
producer: Pete Walker  
screenplay: Pete Walker  
director of photography: 
Gerry Lewis 
editor: Peter Austen Hunt  
music: Harry South

© 1967 Pete Walker Film Productions Ltd.  
production company: Border Film Productions

cast: David Keman (*Freddie Horne*), Andrea Allen (*Rosalie*), Derek Aylward (*Miles Fanthorpe*), Tom Gill (*Father*), Neville Whiting (*Claude*), Mai Bacon (*Mother*), Glyn Worsnip (*Rudolph*), Joan Ingram (*Esther*), John Cazabon (*Lamphrey Gussett*), Apple Brook (*Receptionist*), Gladys Dawson (*Mrs. Whitely*), Monika Dietrich (*Janet*), Britt Hampshire, Jill Field (*Gunella*), Monica Hahn, Donna Reading, Valerie Stanton, Jackie Poole, Christine Pryor, Carmen Dene, Susie Wood, Cindy Neal, Terri Martine, Sonia Elliot, Jo Wade, April Dawson

Released: 1967 (Cert A)  
Distribution: Border  
Running Time: 43 mins. (3,870 ft.)  
Eastman Colour  
US Title: FOR MEN ONLY (58 mins. 49 secs.)  
also aka: *Hot Girls For Men Only*  
Video Release in UK: None

**Synopsis**

Freddie Horne’s job with a women’s fashion magazine is causing problems with his fiancee, Rosalie. Her father arranges an interview for Freddie with Humphrey Gussett of The Puritan Magazine Group. He is sent to East Grinstead to meet the head of the Group, Miles Fanthorpe, whose speech to the local Women’s Institute suggests that he is committed to the cause of moral re-armament. However, when Freddie arrives at Fanthorpe’s house he finds it populated by a collection of scantily-clad young women and a camp photographer. Fanthorpe’s apparent Puritanism is only a front to conceal his activities as publisher of a sex magazine. Freddie’s enjoyment of the facilities of the household is interrupted by the embarrassing arrival of Rosalie and a number of local dignitaries, and an absurd car chase ensues. Rosalie and Freddie’s problems are eventually solved when he finds a job on a bodybuilding magazine for men.
I LIKE BIRDS

'Girls, as every man knows, are very beautiful, even the ugly ones. They are pretty, somewhat witty, often willing, lovely to look at, delightful to chase and heaven to catch. They sometimes pay for themselves. They have exciting ankles, round, silky knees, dim clouds of clean hair, lips, fingers, toes and hips. And, as most men know, there are almost twice as many breasts as there are girls.'
- Desmond Skirrow and Sue Puddefoot, 'Where the Girls Are', Town, July 1962

'Never before in history has the single girl enjoyed the complete freedom she has today. Everybody is fascinated by her. She's a tourist attraction, the glittering adornment of a more permissive society.'

Walker's first excursion onto the big screen was a modest little B movie made with an initial investment of less than £7,000, written in a weekend and running under one hour. I Like Birds was conceived more as a comedy than a sex film and was granted an innocuous A certificate by the censor. As Walker commented:

'There were lots of girls in it in bikinis. There was not much nudity, three or four minutes of it.' - Adult Cinema, no.1, 1970

The denizens of Wardour Street mostly judged it too explicit for general release but 'not sexy enough for the skin-houses' (Cinema X, vol. 5, no.1, 1972). Their assessments were confounded by the usually strait-laced Rank Cinema circuit which, remarkably, deemed it suitable to support Hayley Mills' Pretty Polly. And so, in November 1967, it became the first British 'girlie' film to enjoy general release.
The film was quickly screened for an American distributor who expressed an interest but felt it was too short for the US market. Walker’s response was to insert a 17 minute subplot into the film. The new footage for US audiences was also released as a black and white 8mm film in the Heritage series, entitled The Round Up. It seems to have been shot in different locations from the original film and its content is about as tacky as a recent coat of paint. Paul Marks, the American distributor, was delighted with the new scenes of stripping and bondage and retitled the movie For Men Only (aka Hot Girls - For Men Only). Walker was able to pocket a handsome profit on a total expenditure of around £25,000. The trade press received the British version of I Like Birds with the benign condescension they reserved for the quota quickie:

‘Contrived situation comedy serving as an excuse to show as many bosoms, buttocks and navels as possible. Grand for pin-up fanciers.’ - The Daily Cinema, 27.10.67.

‘This is a quite artless confection and is little more than an excuse to photograph girls in various stages of undress in picturesque surroundings ... A rather amateurish effort both in conception and execution.’ - Kinematograph Weekly, 4.11.67.

The film-maker was a little more satisfied with his first feature. ‘It wasn’t a bad little comedy’ Walker commented, ‘technically it was a first class picture’ (Adult Cinema No.1).

It is hard now to appreciate the technical excellence of I Like Birds from the grainy pirated video of its ‘hot’ American version. The colour, generously complimented by Kine Weekly on the film’s release, has sadly faded, the print is scratched, and the original editing must be reconstructed by the removal of inserts shot with different film stock. Certainly there is little to suggest a promising career in film-making in the static and largely unimaginative use of the camera and the stereotypical performances which Walker coaxes from his actors. To be fair, leading man David Kernan and ex-soap star Derek Aylward are at least adequate in their roles but neither can do much to breathe vitality into the film’s tired farce format. Neither actor is a comedian. The most likeable ‘bird’ is the inexperienced Andrea Allen, later to play the lead in Joseph (José) Larraz’s British giallo Scream... and Die (1973). The supporting characters are a procession of clichés - intellectually-challenged dolly birds in baby doll nighties, portly matrons with fur stoles and lap dogs, a Gothic puritan called ‘Gussett’ and a camp photographer played by a fresh-faced Glyn Worsnip.

The script features much getting in and out of cars. Walker displays the sleek body work of his automobiles with almost the same enthusiasm he has for the bouncy body work of the actresses who cavort in the grounds of Sir Aubrey Walker’s country house (the film-maker’s first self reference). These outdoor scenes are inspired by the great tradition of naturist cinema, except that bikinis remain on. In fact the original film has all the naive prurience of the typical British sex comedy, but the US inserts are decidedly sleazy, suggesting that abduction of naked women in order to force them to pose for a rival skin mag is little more than a form of unfair competition. Overall, the sexual politics of the film are those of the seaside postcard and the ‘Carry On’ film. Wives and fiancées are selfish and controlling, marriage imprisons the libido, and young women (‘birds’) are giggling playthings who exist solely for male pleasure - depressingly sexist by today’s standards but par for the course in 1967. There are, though, interesting differences between I Like Birds and the ‘Carry On’ tradition. Walker’s film dispenses with the domesticity and institutional settings of the Carry On’s, substituting the swinging locales and fashionable ambience of the London ‘scene’. The picture opens with models parading on a catwalk and quickly moves to a classic London disco (The Scotch of St James) where blokes in sharp suits, Bri-Nylon shirts and Michael Caine specs shake and shimmy with blondes in flamenco pants and frilly blouses. This is the hipster world of Blow Up (1966), Mary Quant and the new ‘classless’ glamour professions. Walker’s protagonist, Freddie Horne, is a feature writer for
a fashion magazine, an occupation much more in keeping with the sophisticated characters of Hollywood comedies than the down-market British 'Carry On's, and much of his satirical humour is directed at the po-faced respectability of the bourgeoisie. Freddie’s well-heeled fiancée wants to direct him away from the frivolous and seductive world of fashion so that he can ‘start thinking about the real things in life like a home and children, fishing and hunting’. Freddie prefers permissive pursuits, and Walker evidently approves of his hedonism and the ‘progressive’ ideas he contrasts with the chauvinistic conservatisms of the Church, the gentry and the Women’s Institute.

I Like Birds is a piece of post-Profumo permissive film making which attacks the moral hypocrisy of establishment figures and associates it with particular forms of nationalism, class consciousness and religious orthodoxy. In the character of Miles Fanthorpe, the head of The Puritan Magazine Group but also a successful pornographer, Walker introduces the theme of public-virtue-concealing-private-vice which he was to develop more effectively in later films. Fanthorpe’s address to The Women’s Institute could have come just as easily from House of Whipcord’s Mrs. Wakeham or Judge Bailey:

‘Nothing makes my blood boil more than to read in our national dailies flagrant evidence of a sharp decline in moral attitudes - the divorce rate rising, obscene fashions, the mini skirt, abuse of the Queen’s uniform and venereal disease... And with the advent of socialism in this country has come a working class attitude towards employers, indeed towards manners... I have endeavoured to drive home the true values of clean living in keeping with our great country.’

Fanthorpe’s homilies on moral rectitude and family values conceal a home life in which a harem of scantily-clad nymphets is a permanent feature - a domestic arrangement which the film happily endorses.
I Like Birds undoubtedly encourages the seraglio fantasies of its male viewers, but Walker here was already looking beyond the raincoat trade of his Heritage girlie loops towards a broader youth audience. The inserts may have been for the men in macs but the rest of the film had an eye on the cats in the Carnaby clobber.

PETER WALKER comments:

'I used Derek Aylward to start with because I thought he was Tony Britton! I got a mental blank. When I realised, I called his agent but by that time it was too late. But Derek was fine for those kinds of things because he was bland and inoffensive with the girls. It was essential then if you were trying to get films past John Trevelyan that you didn't have someone that Trevelyan would recognise as a lechy sort. It had to have a wholesomeness about it and Derek was very wholesome, as indeed was David Kernan. David Kernan was quite well known at that time because he was a regular in That Was The Week That Was (a satirical TV show), he was the glamour boy on it. He had turned down the part in my film because the money was so poor, but I bumped into him on the King’s Road, bought him lunch, and he promised to do the role.

The swimming pool in I Like Birds was built in a studio. We actually did shoot in a studio occasionally.'
producer: Pete Walker
screenplay: Pete Walker
production manager /
assistant director:
John Regan
director of photography:
Richard Scott
editor: Nehama Milner
supervising editor:
Peter Austen-Hunt
music: Harry South
sound recordist:
Peter O’Connor
narrator: Patrick Allen

© 1968 Pete Walker Film
Productions Ltd.

cast: Sebastian Breaks
(John Carter), Virginia
Wetherell (Karen), Erika
Raffael (Samantha), Jack
Allen (Hornsby-Smith),
Derek Aylward (Carl
Mendez), Douglas Black-
well (Bruno), Julie Shaw
(Cathy), Jane Howard
(Jane), Roy Stone (Al),
Nicholas Hawtrey (Gerry),
Brian Weske (Mike), Gillie
Grant (Sally), Derek Martin (1st Heavy), Steve Emerson (2nd Heavy), Desmond Cullum-Jones (Police Inspector), Tracey Yorke (1st Stripper), Lena Ellis (2nd Stripper)

Released: 1968 (Cert X)
Distribution: Miracle
Running Time: 68 mins. (6,130 ft.) (After 13 mins of cuts by BBFC)
Eastman Colour
US Title: THE BIG SWITCH (81 mins?)
Video Release in UK: as Strip Poker Home Video Suppliers (75 mins) VHS/B/V2000 not
available (n/a)
as The Big Switch Worldwide Entertainment Corporation (63 mins) VHS/B n/a
Synopsis

London playboy John Carter meets Samantha in a disco and goes to her apartment. While he is out buying cigarettes, she is apparently murdered by a prowler. He returns to find her naked body on the floor and inadvertently handles the murder weapon. Fearing involvement he leaves without calling the police. The following day he is suddenly sacked from his job and returns home to find three men and a woman holding a strip poker party. The men claim that he owes a gambling debt and beat him up. Carter is then contacted by club owner Carl Mendez who uses the Samantha murder to blackmail him into going to Brighton with a woman called Karen. On arriving at Mendez’s apartment in Brighton the couple are stripped and photographed. By seducing Cathy, one of Mendez’s girls, Carter discovers that he and Karen are to be killed and that their identities are to be assumed by a gang boss and his wife who are flying into the country. Mendez arrives with Samantha (who had faked her death) and Carter’s ex-boss who is the mastermind behind the scheme. Taken to an airport, Carter escapes with Karen and Cathy. They are pursued to Brighton’s West Pier where Cathy is killed and the others fight a gun battle on the ghost train. Mendez is wounded and the police arrive and arrest his gang.

STRIP POKER

‘I have never been to a party in Brighton with gangsters - still less clergymen.’ - Lord Boothby quoted in The Sunday Times Magazine, 27.12.64

‘This, as you may or may not know, is London - headquarters of devaluation, socialism and the permissive society.’

- Strip Poker, screenplay Peter Walker
Having proved that he could successfully make and market a feature film, Peter Walker was straight back on location. This time he wanted a product which would be immediately saleable to the lucrative American market, and for inspiration he turned to the style of film making which had impressed him so much in his youth - the film noir crime thriller. His choice for adaptation was John Farrow’s His Kind of Woman (1951), which had teamed moody Robert Mitchum with Howard Hughes’ favourite bra-filler, Jane Russell, as well as the incomparable Vincent Price who, thirty years later, would star in Walker’s last film. Recycling successful plot structures was a standard practice of American exploitation cinema and the new treatment was cobbled together in a matter of hours, shifting the Mexican resort of the original to Walker’s home town, Brighton. The new title was The Big Switch, reminiscent of another of Mitchum’s Mexican movies, The Big Steal (1949). This proved perfectly acceptable for its American release but insufficiently spicy for its British distributors, Miracle Films, who chose to emphasise the picture’s titillating potential by calling it Strip Poker (after a scene in the film).

The British print, awarded an X Certificate by the BBFC ran 68 minutes but Stateside audiences saw a more explicit version running an additional thirteen minutes. Location shooting in London and Brighton was completed in a week with the Mitchum and Russell roles going to Sebastian Breaks and Virginia Wetherell. Louella Parsons had described Mitchum and Russell as ‘the hottest combination that ever hit the screen’, but no one could quite muster this level of enthusiasm for the rather less charismatic Breaks and Wetherell. Marjorie Bilbow (The Daily Cinema, 30.8.68) praised Virginia Wetherell’s performance as ‘effective’, but David Austen was nearer the mark when he described the acting in the film as ‘stiff’ (Films and Filming, Dec. 1968). In his efforts to affect a ‘cool’ persona, Breaks exhibits the emotional range of an iguana, stoically accepting everything from a beating up to the loss of his job with hardly a flicker of concern. Wetherell’s role, like the other actresses’, is so essentially decorative that she is hardly given the opportunity to act expressively, while Derek Aylward’s performance as the shady Carl Mendez suggests a gangster educated at Eton.

The Big Switch is a film low on enthusiasm, with cast and director going through the motions of film making with one eye on the diminutive budget and the other on the clock. Although marketed as a skin flick, most critics were clear that the film was really what would now be termed an erotic thriller - a rare bird in the ornithology of British cinema, unless one counts the James Bond sagas. Unfortunately, The Big Switch is about as erotic and thrilling as a woolly cardigan and much less competently constructed. It begins promisingly enough with a travelogue of sleazy Soho with world-weary narration and jazz score, and moves effectively to Zu Zu’s Discotheque, all op-art minis and feather boas. After fifteen minutes, however, things are already on the slide, and it is not difficult to agree with John Carter, the film’s protagonist, when he mutters, ‘This I can do without’. Like Miles Fanthorpe, Carter is a fantasy extension of Peter Walker. He works in one of London’s glamour professions (advertising), which involves him in photo shoots with nude models, and he is described by the film’s sardonic narrator as ‘a misfit’ who ‘reached his prime in the days of rock and roll’ and is ‘now nearing the ripe old age of thirty’. He is a smooth man about-town, ‘kind of old for Carnaby Street’ and ‘not quite hard-up enough’ for the sort of cabaret club where London’s wide boys fleece the middle-aged. He drives around the West End in a red sports car, seduces women effortlessly, and specialises in terse one-liners. This may sound an attractive piece of characterisation, but any potential is dissipated by leaden direction, unimaginative camerawork and slovenly plotting. The dialogue is burdened with cliched argot like ‘the heat’s on’ and ‘one of your stupid birds blew the gaff’ and only once achieves the sort of unintentional campness which might have made the whole sorry thing a more satisfying cinema experience:
Sebastian Breaks as Carter with Virginia Wetherell (above) and Erika Raffael (below)
'Crazy acid heads. Some can take the stuff, they can’t. They used to have nightly trips. Now it seems permanent.'

Marjorie Bilbow was impressed with the realism of the film’s Soho club sequences, and the references to London’s gangland are certainly timely in the wake of the Richardson ‘torture’ trial and the imminent arrest of the Kray brothers, but *The Big Switch* paints a disappointingly anaemic picture of the criminal underworld. Faced with a gaggle of gangsters displaying all the collective menace of a Teddy bears’ convention, the viewer can never really worry about Carter’s ability to defeat their plot. The climactic chase sequence on Brighton’s snowbound West Pier is reduced to a formality. As our hero and his woman-in-danger (Virginia Wetherell) are hunted from amusement arcade to ghost train, detrimental comparisons to *Brighton Rock* (1947), *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948) and Hitchcock’s *Strangers on a Train* (1951) become painfully obvious. Most of the time, Walker seems to be satisfied with the first take, even when one of the gangsters slips over in the snow as he fires his revolver. When the excitement can be endured no longer, the mobsters surrender meekly to the police and Carter and Karen go off to the cop shop for a cup of tea.

*The Big Switch* is really cinema as clip joint, a cynical exercise in parting punters from their pennies. As such, it is a nice ironic touch that, for his acting cameo, Walker chooses to play a disgruntled Northerner who has been taken for a sucker at Carl Mendez’s dodgy night club.
PETER WALKER comments:

'The Big Switch was a picture that was knocked out in seven days, shot in seven days, and it doesn't stand up. I mean, I wrote the script myself in twenty-four hours. The idea really was to get as many colourful locations as possible and make it look expensive when it was really made for hundreds. I mean, the camera looks as if it's cemented into the ground. The Big Switch is really one to dismiss. I made a lot of money changing the title. It sold all over the place but it's very, very sixties - not sixties Georgy Girl, this was sixties naff.

We actually shot two versions. A benign version for Britain and another for the American and overseas markets. There was a lot of excessive nudity in that and a lot of excessive violence as well. Gratuitous scenes done for the American market. I know there was one scene where they torture the leading man by stubbing cigarette butts out on him. Then there was a topless girl as well - you know, it was all sleazy, violent, sexy unnecessary scenes. Things were opening up overseas, but at the time we were making it, the only place you could sell nudity and violence was America. All the rest of the world was still very Catholic.'
School For Sex

producer: Pete Walker
associate producer: Norman Lambert
production manager: John Regan
screenplay: Pete Walker
director of photography: Reg Phillips
editor: John Black
supervising editor/music editor: Matt McCarthy
music: Harry South
sound recordist: Bill Howell

cast: Derek Aylward (Giles Wingate), Rose Alba (Duchess of Burwash), Bob Andrews (Sgt. Braithwaite), Vic Wise (Horace Clapp), Hugh Latimer (Berridge), Nosher Powell (Hector), Amber Dean Smith (Beth Villiers), Françoise Pascal (Sally Reagan), Cathy Howard (Sue Randall), Sylvia Barlow (Judy Arkwright), Sandra Gleeson (Jenny), Maria Frost (Polly), Cindy Neal (Marianne), Gilly Grant (Striptease Artist), Jackie Berdet (Ingeborg), Nicole Austin (Tania), Nicole Yerna, Patsy Morrell, Samantha Bond, Dunja Maloon, Christine Jensen, Edgar K. Bruce (Fred), Simon Cain, Robert Dorning (Official), Julie May (Ethel), Alec Bregonzi (Harry), Wilfred Babbage (The Judge), Dennis Castle (Colonel Roberts), Deborah Ward

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Released: 1969 (Cert X)
Distribution: Miracle
Running Time: 80 mins. (7,200 ft.)
Eastman Colour
US Title: SCHOOL FOR SEX
Video Release in UK:
Home Video Suppliers (77 mins.) VHS/B/
V2000 n/a; Jezebel (77 mins.) VHS

Synopsis

Giles Wingate is convicted of embezzlement but gets away with a suspended sentence by offering persuasive mitigating circumstances to the court - a succession of gold-digging wives. With his experience of the techniques employed by his wives, Wingate decides to convert his country house into a school for training young women in the arts of fleecing rich men. He recruits a punch drunk boxer and a dipsomaniac duchess as his staff and persuades a corrupt probation officer to supply the first batch of students. The girls prove to be willing and able pupils and quickly find well-heeled husbands on graduation. News of Wingate's successful finishing school soon spreads and he is inundated with applicants. However, his activities come to the attention of local anti vice campaigners headed by the Squire, Colonel Roberts. Wingate again finds himself in court but this time the judge is less sympathetic. He jails Giles and takes over his business.
SCHOOL FOR SEX

‘I have tried to show that contemporary society is a repressive society in all its aspects, that even the comfort, the prosperity, the alleged political and moral freedom are utilised for oppressive ends.’ - Herbert Marcuse, Penthouse, vol.4, no.3, 1969.

‘From my point of view, that’s the best thing about comedy, it enables you to get stuff past the censors that would otherwise be banned in a flash. That way, my films play in legit movie houses, not in cellars and abandoned warehouses or whatever. And, incidentally, I’m making a bomb in the States as well.’
- Pete Walker, in the same issue of Penthouse.

Summer 1968: Revolution on the streets of Paris and Chicago, hippie happenings in Hyde Park, a time for every independent film maker to display his radicalism. Walker’s response to the Summer of Revolution was to make a movie about an academy for training young women to fleece rich men. One might regard this as a practical exercise in the redistribution of wealth from rich to poor and old to young, but, as it turned out, the most spectacular redistribution was into the coffers of Peter Walker and those distributors and exhibitors who handled School for Sex. The film was one of Walker’s most financially successful. ‘We sold it in every country in the world with the exception of Spain’ was its maker’s boast (Films and Filming, Dec. 1974). Certainly, the sale to the USA alone, for $25,000, recouped a large proportion of its cost, but the distributors made the deal of a lifetime. The film is said to have run for two years in New York and grossed around $1.5 million. In fact, there is a small reminder of its success every time Gordon Parks’ milestone movie Shaft (1971) is shown. As the titles come on screen and Richard Roundtree as the hip detective dude strides proudly down 42nd Street, he passes the Rialto cinema advertising the ‘First New York Show, School for Sex’.
In common with many British exploitation films of the period, certain scenes in School For Sex were shot in two versions; a 'soft' version for the home market (above), and a more risqué version intended for export (below).
At a time when long-haired politicos were preaching the freedom of sexual relations, Walker was capitalising on their commodification. There is precious little free love in School for Sex - love is something a man must pay through the nose for. Wives are out for all they can get, knowing that the way to relieve a man of his fortune is first to relieve him of his pants. Walker was making a School for Scandal for the permissive age but it is revealing that he should have resurrected the figure of the gold-digger, the urban guerrilla of the sex war, just when proto-feminist hippie chicks were trying to bury her. Walker, like most of the pre-war generation was still coming to terms with the notion that sexual pleasure might not be merely for men, and that women’s desire might not be satisfied by the gift of a fur coat. All its acres of exposed female flesh cannot conceal the fact that, rather than a progressive contribution to the sexual revolution, School for Sex is a patriarchal revenge fantasy. Taken to the cleaners by a succession of unscrupulous wives the film’s protagonist, Giles Wingate, gets his own back (emotionally and financially) by becoming a pimp - a pimp in a mortar-board and gown, perhaps, but a pimp nonetheless. By installing himself as headmaster in an academy for girls on-the-make our hero can become a playboy in a manor house, a Hefner of the harem, just like Miles Fanthorpe in I Like Birds. It is hardly surprising, then, that Miles and Giles are played by the same actor, the suave Derek Aylward, appearing in his third Walker film. In his detachment from lechery and attachment to its pecuniary possibilities, Aylward’s Wingate perfectly represents his director. At one point, Walker’s script places him in a strip club where he announces:

‘One thing I’ve learnt about my fellow men is that the shrewdest, toughest, hardest businessmen in the world have got one great weakness, one Achilles heel, one chink in their armour, and that is crumpet, sex.’

His words are underlined by the way in which Walker cuts from the stripper as she wriggles out of her underwear to shots of slavering bespectacled punters. Finally, the camera pans across the row of macs on laps, a shot which earned the disapproval of the censor - not
least, perhaps, because one of the lascivious crowd is a dead ringer for John Trevelyan, the BBFC's secretary. The scene offers a sardonic commentary on the absurdity of the spectacle and holds up a mirror to the film's voyeuristic audience. Walker is playing a knowing game with the peeping Tom, Dick and Harrys waiting for the exposure of forbidden flesh. 'I like voyeurism', he remarked later, 'I think that's what they go to see (sic)'. With School for Sex he makes it clear to his audience that he knows he is there to tease them with nudity revealed and withheld; the comedy is little more than a legitimising gloss. The 'put on' begins with the film's title, chosen to hook the older male audience:

'That was a great title. It had all sorts of connotations: blue knickers, fourteen year-old girls. I mean you could just see them reaching for their raincoats.' - Walker in Films & Filming, Dec. 1974

The Jezebel video release plays along by depicting a nymphet in school uniform on its sleeve, but the irony is that there is not a gym slip or schoolgirl in the movie. Although Walker delivers one of the most sexually explicit films of its time, he leaves a yawning gap between audience hopes (rather than expectations) and their realisation on British screens. Rather than lessons in juvenile seduction we are given, in the words of its creator, 'an innocent romp. Carry on Nudie'. School for Sex shamelessly plunders the cliched situations and stereotypical characters of smutty British film comedies and theatrical farces: the bobby on his bike, Mr. Clap in his bowler hat, the boneheaded prize fighter, the aged retainer, the tipsy duchess and the straight-laced neighbour, are all familiar from countless music hall sketches, seaside postcards and Carry On films. Sometimes the references are explicit: the scandalous private school staffed
School For Sex

by plausible reprobates echoes St Trinians, while the scenes of physical jerks in the outdoors immediately recall Barbara Windsor popping her bra in Carry On Camping (1968). This willingness to construct the film out of well-used pieces of other narratives only emphasises the satire implicit in School for Sex. It may not work as comedy but it is very effective pastiche, especially in the sequence in which Wingate is seduced by the star of the glamour film he screens in his living room. His home projector shows us a self-referential parody of one of Walker’s own 8mm girlie melodramas, with the director himself playing a would-be rapist who is eventually throttled by the starlet’s protector (played by Walker’s production manager). Of course, this is by no means the only example of self-satire. Giles Wingate, the film’s protagonist, may not be a portrait of its creator but he is closely associated with Walker. Not only is he a rich bachelor who profits from the commercialisation of women’s sex appeal, he also drives the director’s Aston Martin and lives in his Surrey mansion.

Thematically, School for Sex reprises I Like Birds, combining a blatant display of flesh with some fashionable jibes at the privileges and hypocrisy of establishment figures. Again, a respectable front conceals a disreputable racket. There is an implied criticism of the moneyed class, exemplified by the deferential police sergeant’s admission that ‘I always feel they’re above the law, them sort of people’. There is also a readiness to present the legal system as cynical and corrupt, a recurrent trend in Walker’s cinema. Judges and barristers happily give Giles Wingate a suspended sentence for embezzlement, supply girls on probation for his sex academy and finally steal his business. This criticism of crooks in chambers, however, is largely obscured by the parade of ‘brazen fortune-seeking wenches’ which supplies the film’s raison d’être. ‘Parade’ is perhaps an inappropriate word as these nudes are hardly more animated than their notorious sisters at the Windmill Theatre. From the statuesque Amber Dean Smith to the lissom Françoise Pascal, they have been chosen with a glamour connoisseur’s eye, but much of the time they do little more than pose decoratively in tableaux of undress. It is clear from Cathy Howard’s performance alone, that acting
prowess has not been the premier criterion of selection, as the script is honest enough to recognise when Giles Wingate declares, ‘Now that we have got the introductions over, I think it would be a good idea if you disrobed straight away’. The clothes come off to that cheesy type of cheery MOR music which served in the sixties as an all-purpose soundtrack for everything from tandoori ads to tedious travelogues. Stripping was more complete in the alternative scenes shot for overseas markets and enough to cause problems to British film processing labs. The difference can be judged by comparing the Jezebel video with the photographic spread in Penthouse (vol.4, no.3). Interviewed by Penthouse’s Roger Finborough, Walker explained how his typically-British approach differed from American sexploitation:

‘The American Nudie makers have got it all wrong with their hard-sex, almost pornographic approach ... My films are something that women can watch and - assuming they’re reasonably uninhibited and liberal-minded - they won’t be offended. Mixing comedy and nudity is, frankly, far more titillating to the average person than straight sex. The hard stuff tends to embarrass people, thereby inhibiting their enjoyment. But if the laughs are there, people relax.’

Unfortunately, School for Sex cannot match the Carry On series for laughs. It lacks both the quality comic performances and Talbot Rothwell’s ribald scripts. It remains firmly within the Harrison Marks school of film making, its humour weaker than its nudity. Walker, himself, was under no illusions that he had made Citizen Kane:

‘I remember sitting in the viewing theatre looking at the first print, thinking, “Christ, it’s a dog - dreadful” ... You and I say that it’s not a good film but I am reasonably intelligent and realise that 95 percent of the world’s population have Coronation Street mentalities. It was low brow and very simple, the gags were corny but people don’t notice. They don’t notice that girls don’t deliver their lines properly ... I don’t think it worries these funny people in Wigan and Scunthorpe.’ - Films & Filming, Dec. 1974

This statement almost too perfectly encapsulates the exploitation film-maker’s motivation and stance. It implicitly regards picture production as a trade rather than an artistic process and patronizingly dismisses the audience as dim, dull and other. It is the classic attitude of the fairground showman or Soho pornographer, the peddler of peepshows; but the very excessiveness of its home counties contempt for the North and its justification of mediocrity betrays Walker’s frustrated creativity. School for Sex was never likely to win critical plaudits for its director. Apart from the obligatory trade reviews it remained beneath the threshold of critical attention. Today’s Cinema (30.5.69) acknowledged its exploitation potential and praised the contribution of its reliable character actors in keeping a leaden script afloat. Kinematograph Weekly (31.5.69) condemned its ‘lame plot interpreted by inefficient players’, rather unfairly singling out Rose Alba’s ‘quite pathetic’ characterisation of the tipsy duchess hired to tutor the gold-diggers. Not surprisingly, the Monthly Film Bulletin (Aug. 1969) was little short of contemptuous, dismissing Walker’s ‘latest piece of titillatory entertainment’ as ‘nonsensical’ and ‘humourless’ with ‘wooden acting and rough sound recording’.
The paying public were considerably less critical. The film opened with *I, a Virgin* at the Cinephone in Oxford Street, London in February 1969. In March it was transferred to the Jacey Tatler where it played with *Swedish Heaven and Hell*, breaking box office records and ensuring Walker the finances for future film-making.

*School for Sex* was the last time Walker would play safe. He now understood his markets and was quickly learning his craft. He was evolving a strategy of alternating sex comedies for a reliable but specialised male market, with risqué thrillers aimed at a more youthful audience. Twice he had returned to his roots and produced comedies that were more memorable for their girls than their gags. Now it was time to develop the themes he had introduced in *The Big Switch*, but with a little more edge.
PETER WALKER comments:

'There's not a lot to be said for School for Sex except that it actually touched the right button at the right time and that's what it was intended to do. It's the first really to hit it on the nose. Although there was this curiosity of young people about sex, it was really to cater for the strip club audience. It was to cater for the sex cinemas which were doing terribly well at that time. But it also got an ABC release. I remember going to the ABC in Kingston, this 3,000 seater theatre and saying to the manager, 'there doesn't seem to be many in'. He said, 'many in?' This is the biggest crowd we've had for seven months or something'. Crazy. It was a different market then. They went on the title. The film actually recouped its production cost in six weeks at one London theatre (with the help of the Eady money which was high at the time). It went on to run for seven months at the Jacey Tatler and transferred to the Jacey Piccadilly where it stayed for another four months.

There was a lot of interest in people like myself who were photographing glamorous girls without clothes on, and I suppose in making School for Sex I was working in an area where I felt knowledgeable and confident, particularly as I was not a writer and I was writing the script. But I did not identify Giles as myself.'
Poster for the film's phenomenally successful American theatrical release

SCHOOL for SEX

THEY WENT TO SCHOOL TO LEARN ABOUT LOVE...
THE EASY WAY!

FEATURING THE FOLLOWING MISS UNIVERSE WINNERS: MISS ENGLAND,
MISS CANADA, MISS NORWAY, MISS HOLLAND, MISS BELGIUM—

Poster for the film's phenomenally successful American theatrical release
Man Of Violence

producer: Pete Walker
screenplay: Brian Comport & Pete Walker
director of photography: Norman Langley
camera operator: Peter Sinclair
supervising editor: Peter Austen-Hunt
production manager: Doreen Merriman
music: Cyril Omadel; sound recordist: Peter O'Connor

cast: Michael Latmier (Moon), Luan Peters (Angel), Derek Aylward (Nixon), Maurice Kaufmann (Charles Grayson), Derek Francis (Sam Bryant), Kenneth Hendel (Hunt), George Belbin (Burgess), Sidney Conabere (Alec Powell), Erika Raffael (Goose), Virginia Wetherell (Gale), John Keston (Girling), Jessica Spencer (Joyce), Mark Allington (Chicken), Sheila Babbage (Caroline), Patrick Jordan (Captain), Steve Emerson (Steve), Peter Thornton (Mike), Michael Balfour (Cafe Owner), Andreas Melanorinos (Pergolesi Mentobar), John Lawrence, Stephen Zamit, The Wishful Thinking

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Released: 1970 (Cert X)
Distribution: Miracle
Running Time: 107 mins.; Eastman Colour
US Title: MAN OF VIOLENCE aka THE SEX RACKETEERS
Video Release in UK: as Moon, Home Video Suppliers (97 mins. 39 secs.) VHS/B n/a; as Man of Violence, Worldwide Entertainment Corporation (97 mins. 39 secs.) B/VHS n/a May also have been released by Krypton Video
Synopsis

When rumours that £30 million of gold bullion have been stolen from Mentobar, a Middle Eastern state in the throws of revolt begin to circulate in the London underworld, Moon, an unprincipled loan operator, is hired separately by two rivals for the gold: Sam Bryant, a property tycoon, and Charles Grayson, a protection racketeer. Moon initially believes he is engaged in industrial espionage, but, through his association with Angel Weston (an ex-girlfriend of Grayson) he learns of the gold and decides to go after it himself. Grayson and Bryant both send henchmen to deal with Moon and Angel. Moon is beaten up and Angel is captured and tortured before they both set out for North Africa in pursuit of the gold. They are trailed by the mysterious Burgess, who eventually tells Angel that he works for Special Branch and blackmails her into helping him. In Mentobar, Moon is ambushed and forced to shoot his way out. Learning that Bryant is importing the gold into England, Moon and Angel fly back. Leaving Angel at Gatwick airport, Moon heads for Bryant’s Southampton warehouse where he finds Burgess (accompanied by Angel), Grayson and two gunmen. Burgess turns out to be another crook and the real special agent is Bryant’s right hand man, the unscrupulous Nixon. Bryant walks out a free man but Nixon tricks Grayson into shooting Moon, arrests him for murder and then has Angel charged with complicity.

MAN OF VIOLENCE

‘A lot of people, over the years, have asked me what motivated Ron and me, what drove us on. Well, a lot of it was that we loved to fight, not necessarily to hurt other blokes, but just to fight. Even in later years, when money and power became our motivation, it was still a good scrap that we enjoyed most.’

- Reg Kray, in Reg and Ron Kray (with Fred Dineage), Our Story, Pan, 1987, pp. 3-4
As the men in macs flocked to see *School for Sex* in the summer of 1969, Walker began work on his most ambitious project of the sixties. *Moon* (the working title of the film) was to be an 'exploitation type picture aimed specifically at the 16-35 age group' (press book), with a generous running time of more than one and three-quarter hours and a wide screen format. The aim was to combine the illusion of high production values with the reliable elements of exploitation film making. As the press book put it:

'Within the fast moving and unusual story line are guaranteed ingredients for the film's success, explicit violence and liberal sex interest both in good taste, coupled with strong identifiable characters and sophisticated and glamorous scenic backgrounds.'
Moon was another homage to the post-war American thriller with a Bogart-style anti-hero and a Chandleresque plot that made The Big Sleep's narrative complexities look straightforward by comparison. Brian Comport helped Walker to script the movie and the part of the eponymous hero was originally intended for the director's friend, Sal Mineo. In the end, he chose to stay in the States to direct a stage play, and the part went to Michael Latimer, an experienced West End and television actor. Latimer had recently starred in Hammer's prehistoric epic Slave Girls (aka Prehistoric Women, 1968), one of the unsung classics of camp cinema. He was paired with the diminutive but delectable, Luan Peters, an actress/singer fresh from Paul Raymond's stage success, Pyjama Tops. Greyson, the sadistic protection racketeer was played by Honor Blackman's husband, Maurice Kaufman, a well known TV face. And, of course, there was a part for the omnipresent Derek Aylward as the appropriately-named Nixon, an amoral double-dealing government agent. Continuity with The Big Switch was also maintained by casting its star, Virginia Wetherell as a lesbian gun moll with a penchant for skinny sweaters, floral hipsters and S & M. Opening at the Jacey, Leicester Square, in June 1970, the film's title was changed by its distributors, Miracle, to Man of Violence - probably to cash in on the recent notoriety of the Krays and certainly to play up its exploitation potential. The censor obligingly gave it an X certificate and the critics gave it the bird:

'Abysmal espionage melodrama, spiced with sex episodes and outbursts of violence, with an overly intricate plot which is, perhaps fortunately, impossible to follow. The general level of acting matches the inanity of the script.' - Monthly Film Bulletin, July 1970
'An incomprehensible story jazzed up with sadism, perversion, nudity and a pretentiously down-beat ending... more laughable than erotic.' - *Today's Cinema*, 19.6.70

'There isn’t one performance that rates even grudging praise and the entire venture must go down as an unfortunate mishap.' - *Variety*, 17.6.70

The newspaper press was no kinder:

'A load of old junk... The untidy screenplay seems to have been battered out with a sledgehammer, and violence and sleazy scenes are dragged in remorselessly. The direction and acting are too bad to be true.' - *Daily Mirror*, 9.6.70

'All sorts of sex, most sorts of violence but no sort of style.' - *The Guardian*, 15.6.70

'Cheap and nasty... brutal and tawdry sensationalism... a new low in cinema standards.' - *Morning Star*, 13.6.70

The reviews left in tatters any ambitions Walker may have had to join Britain’s exclusive club of legitimate film directors. At the time, the critical savaging must have lacerated his ego, but a few years later, he could look back on the project with slightly bemused resignation:

'It was a Bogart-style spoof and nearly there. It could have been a good picture... a glossy Hollywood thriller [with] the necessary ingredients: Luan Peters with her 42 inch bust and a bit of blood.'

He recognised the problem as a lack of budget to match his ambition but still maintained that 'there was a lot of production value for a four week picture'. (*Films & Filming*, Dec. 1974)
He had a point. The mauling dished out by the critical establishment was a cruel and unnecessary punishment for *Man of Violence*. Walker later confessed that he never felt at home with the gangster genre, and the film has some serious shortcomings in its acting, *mise-en-scène* and narrative structure but it is more than the derivative formula-produced trash it was condemned as. What probably really stuck in the critics' craw was the amorality of the whole proceedings. Moon is not Chandler’s untarnished knight, he is as mean as his streets. Angel Weston (Luan Peters) describes him ironically as ‘my bloody knight in armour’ and he describes himself as ‘an ambitious crook’. In the hands of Michael Caine, the unprincipled, bigoted and bi-sexual Moon might have made a memorable tainted hero, but Caine was out of Walker’s league and it would take the wealth of EMI to ‘get’ his Carter. Moon’s eclipse and Angel’s arrest in the (far-from-pretentious) downbeat finale pull the rug on the audience’s identification with the characters in what was to become the director’s trademark. Nixon, the government agent, is represented as no less deceitful, vindictive and ruthless than the criminals with whom he deals.

*Man of Violence* strives to be the type of slick and cynical thriller which has become so fashionable recently, but, twenty-five years ago, few appreciated its homage to the *noir* thriller and the nihilism of American pulp fiction. No one bothered to pick up on its knowing references to Bogart films because the films were not chic, just dated. After all, these were the days when post-modern quotation was still plagiarism and subtleties like having Moon drive down Luna Street were out of place in a cheap genre piece. The film had to contend with a critical orthodoxy which was dismissive of genre and valorised British social realism and European art cinema in equal measure. Viewed today, its occasional touches of sardonic humour (such as Moon wiping the ice pick with which he has just killed the heavy on Angel’s knickers) at least partially compensate for the film’s lack of pace, endless exposition and redundant telephone calls. We can applaud its mockery of genre conventions, such as a hero self-consciously dressed in white, and knowing dialogue like: ‘Really, Nixon, faceless tycoons, tawdry protection rackets, dirty little wallets - you ought to meet Dean Martin’s script writers’.

Walker was still acquiring the skill of telling a story in pictures rather than words but the cinematography of Norman Langley and Peter Sinclair in this film was a marked step forward. So too was Cyril Ornadel’s driving score, the first of a number of effective pieces of theme music for Walker’s films. The deficiencies of the budget are obvious in the way the Scotch of St James’s is re-dressed as three different locations, but *Man of Violence* shows Walker to be a thoughtful and capable creator of a believable and claustrophobic urban *mise-en-scène*. His depiction of the criminal locale as both seedy and exotic owes much to *film noir* but it is hardly derivative of other British crime movies. It should be remembered that this film pre-dates the release of the three major British gangster pictures of 1971, *Performance*, *Villain* and *Get Carter*. Its violence is as nasty as theirs and its negativity seems to provide inspiration for Lindsay Shonteff’s ultra-bleak *The Fast Kill* (1972). It is a pity, then, that when Walker unveiled his homage to *The Big Sleep*, the snores were quite so audible.
Man of Violence

A trail of blood in the search for gold
PETER WALKER comments:

'There was a lot of interest in crime. The Krays were very showbiz oriented and they were a hot thing at the time and there was a lot of interest in sort of glamorised gangsters. It was based on a hot issue really. The idea was to extremize that Bogart character, to make him a rather sixties character or, more than that, an eighties character really. He was in the David Bowie area because there was this bi-sexual thing about him which at the time was not very common. A lot of attitudes in my films were ahead of their time, and I have to say that in my own defence. And there was a rejection of that. Unfortunately the film doesn’t make it because it’s a bad script. I mean, I’m not a writer.

'When I had just finished Man of Violence I bumped into Michael Klinger on Wardour Street, and he said “Hello, son, they tell me you’ve made a gangster picture”. I said “Funnily enough, Mike, I’m just going to see the first print of it”. He said “Do you mind if I have a look at it, son?” So he sits down and watches the whole picture and about two thirds of the way through he turns to me and he says, “This is a load of old crap, son”. So I said “Well, yes, Michael”. “But it’s good value for money”, he said. “I’m going to make a gangster film, but it’s going to cost a lot more than this and it’s going to be better”. He then asked me for a copy of The Big Switch which was made a couple of years earlier and, of course, the leading man in that is called Carter, which is the name of Michael Caine’s character in the film he went on to make, Get Carter. Many years later, he was talking one evening to a mutual friend, producer’s representative David Goldstein on the telephone from his Hollywood home. “D’ you still see young Pete Walker?” he said. “We get together for lunch now and again”, said David. “Well tell him from me”, chuckled Michael, “he was always a far better comic than he was a film director”. Michael died that night.'
producer: Pete Walker
screenplay: Murray Smith
director of photography: Peter Jessop
production manager: Doreen Merriman
music: Cyril Omadel
editor: Tristam Cones
assistant editor: Glenn Hyde
assistant director: Ferdinand Fairfax
sound recordist: Peter O'Connor
make-up: Trevor Crole-Rees

cast: Robin Askwith (Joe Sickles), Janet Lynn (Carol Thatcher), Jess Conrad (Jonathan), Derek Aylward (Tommy Sanders), Kenneth Hendel, Stephen Bradley, Harry Baird (Benny Gray), Peter Elliott (Philip Stanton), Claire Gordon, Richard Aylen, Sydney Conabere, Alec Bregonzi, Douglas Ridley, John Dawson, Pearl Hackney (Mother), Martin Wyldeck (Father), Michael Daly, Walter Sparrow, Kevin Brennan, David Mayberry, Myrtle Moss, Stubby Kaye (Rod Strangeways), Peter Murray (himself), Eric Barker (Signalman), Christopher Sandford (David Thing)

© None
production company: Pete Walker Film Productions, Ltd.

Released: 1970 (Cert X)
Distribution: Miracle
Running Time: 101 mins. (9,090 ft.)
Eastman Colour
US Title: THE DIRTIEST GIRL I EVER MET
Video Release in UK: Intervision/CBS (96 mins. 52 secs.) VHS/B n/a
Krypton/Xtacy VHS/B n/a
Prime Releasing (96 mins. 52 secs.) VHS n/a
Jezebel (96 mins. 52 secs.) VHS
aka: Oh, Carol!

Synopsis

Bored by the dullness of their jobs in a butchers and a garage in Shropshire, Joe Sickles and Carol Thatcher agree to go to London to seek fame and fortune. After having sex on the train, they arrive in the capital and are thrilled and amazed by its energy and glamour. In Chelsea they meet Jonathan and Terry who take them to a gambling club where Joe loses his money and Carol accepts Jonathan’s sexual advances. With Joe unable to find employment, Carol agrees to ease their financial problems by working as a prostitute. The couple spend the proceeds at the Valbonne night club where they meet Philip Stanton, an agent who persuades them to perform in a blue movie. Money worries are soon a thing of
the past as Carol quickly develops a double career as a celebrated photographic model and a high class call girl whose clients include Sheikhs and cabinet ministers. To celebrate her ‘success’, Carol and her manager, Joe, hold a lavish party in their luxury penthouse, but as they pick their way through the debris of the party in the cold light of dawn, they realise that they have had enough of this life. Without any regrets they leave their penthouse and return to Shropshire to resume their old jobs.

**COOL IT CAROL**

‘Then there was like a sea of dirty smelly old men, trying to get at your Humble Narrator, with their feeble rookers and horny old claws. It was old age having a go at youth.’
- *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), Screenplay by Stanley Kubrick

They showed *Cool It Carol* in the States as *The Dirtiest Girl I Ever Met*, and I saw a full page ad for it in Variety and I said to my wife, ‘Shit, what writer could ever put his name to a title like that?’ She looked at me and said ‘Well, it was you actually’. I didn’t realise. I didn’t know they had called it that.
- Murray Smith, Screenwriter of *Cool It Carol*


The idea for Walker’s fifth film in three years came from an aspiring young writer named Murray Smith (now a prolific author for television) who had met the director while
having a drink in a Wardour Street pub. Smith showed Walker a short treatment based on a court case reported in *The News of The World*, and he immediately recognised its potential:

‘Two kids from the country had come up to London, become involved in prostitution and vice and made it quite big. She’d got herself an agent, she was earning twelve guineas an hour modelling - not quite to the extent that we glamorised it in *Carol* - but they’d made it good in the space of about four or five weeks just by doing anything, completely innocently. Of course, the reason it had reached *The News of The World* is that when they had returned to the village, instead of going their separate ways with a wistful wave as they did in my film, the girl had told a few of her old friends what they’d done in London, the boy had been arrested for living off her immoral earnings and given a two year Borstal sentence. It was a terrible travesty of justice. So Murray and I both agreed to change the end.’ - Walker in *Films and Filming*, Dec. 1974)
From the outset, then, Walker’s theme was the ‘naturalness’ of youthful sexuality and the perverse role played by the law in its suppression:

‘I didn’t make it to have a message but, for God’s sake, if there was a message there and any innocent 16-year old girl did take it seriously it was: “If you do go to town and you do become promiscuous you can always go back and pretend it never happened.”’ - Films and Filming, Dec. 1974

In Walker’s philosophy, morality is a matter for the individual rather than the law. It must be able to respond to changing cultural circumstances, free from the prejudice and
dogma of the past. Murray Smith harboured few illusions about the project. He saw it as an unmissable opportunity for a screen credit to kick start a career which he hoped would move in a more serious direction. He thought the idea for the film would be ‘smutty enough’ to interest Walker and rejected the real outcome of the news story because, ‘I thought that if I was going to justify doing an exploitation movie, at least I should give it a happy ending.’ But he shared Walker’s attitude to the message of the film, describing it as ‘very healing’ for people of his generation.

The budding scriptwriter was taken for a drive in Peter Walker’s Aston Martin and told that his producer could not afford more than £500 for the screenplay. It was an offer Smith was not in a position to refuse and really not bad remuneration for the week’s work which he recalls it took to produce the script.

The roles of the teenage adventurers were played by Janet Lynn and Robin Askwith. Twenty-one year old Lynn, an actress and cabaret dancer, was a product of stage school with a number of TV and radio credits. She had even cut a record with ‘swinging’ Norman Vaughn, but it was her role in Sidney Hayers’ thriller, Assault that brought her to Walker’s attention and he pulled out all the publicity stops to promote her. He probably realised that exploitation often works most effectively when its devotees are given a single object of desire to focus on, and that an erotic story with a woman as the principal protagonist might draw in the female audience which could move the film out of the sex cinemas and into the mainstream. Later films of the seventies were to develop the same tactic - Emily (1976), Bilitis (1978), and, most successfully of all, the Emmanuelle series (1974-9).

Cool it Carol (the film’s title when it opened at The Windmill cinema) is now remembered as featuring an early performance from Robin Askwith, the chirpy young actor whose thrusting buttocks became an icon of British vulgar comedy in the 1970s, but, although Askwith was given first billing, it was Janet Lynn’s image which was essential in the selling of the film. One publicity photo showed a naked Lynn straddling a chair in the classic Christine Keeler pose while the heavily ballyhooed press launch featured the film’s star topless in a shower, the key image of the movie’s publicity and an echo of Hitchcock’s more famous showering Janet. Walker told Cinema X (vol.3, no.6):

‘Janet is perfect for Carol ... [she] has the right kind, the less obvious kind, of sex appeal that is in today. She brings out the paternal instinct in men.’

The suggestion of incestuous desire gives an extra dimension to the question her father asks Carol in the film’s most memorable line: ‘Is your maidenhead intact?’
Janet Lynn, for all the attempts to build her notoriety, was not as glamorous as many of Walker’s previous leading ladies. Quietly spoken and reserved in spite of her willingness to appear nude, she had the charm of a girl-next-door. Cinema X said she was ‘far too nice for ... a skin-flick’. In fact Susan George (with whom Lynn shared an agent) had been the first choice for the part but probably balked at the frequency with which she would have to shed her clothes. Her replacement approached the part with some trepidation:

‘Peter was very good actually. He did try to put all the nice parts first - very little nudity at the beginning and so on. Obviously I had a few trembles inside. Unless I retained the character of Carol in my mind, I couldn’t have done it. It was Carol stripping, making love everywhere, not me. I’m not that sort of person at all.’ - Cinema X (vol.3, no.6)

In the end, her assessment was positive, ‘on the whole it turned out better than I thought’, but she expected the critics to be ‘rough’ on the film. She was right. Michael Walsh in the Daily Express (17.11.70) called it ‘a sordid little tale’ - others were not so kind. ‘A thoroughly nasty bit of pornography - liable (if not calculated) to corrupt’, was the judgement of the Evening News (19.11.70), echoed by the Daily Mirror’s Dick Richards who condemned it as ‘a depressingly sleazy film which is as near pornography as makes no odds’ (19.11.70). ‘What’s a nice girl like Janet Lynn doing in a nasty film like Cool it Carol?’ asked the Daily Mail (20.11.70), but the most withering approbation was heaped on the film by the Sunday Times’ Dily Powell who called it ‘a patch of untreated effluent’ (22.11.70). Few reviewers from the popular papers bothered to comment on the technical qualities of the film, what incensed them was the morality of its narrative. That there should be no wages for a whole hour and a half of sinning was more than they could stomach. To imply that promiscuity, pimping, prostitution and pornographic performance might leave no scars was to offer an invitation to wickedness to the young. This was permissiveness beyond the pale, not because of what it showed but because of what it meant.

While less abusive, the trade press could not see Carol as anything more than a sordid
Cool It Carol

piece of sexploitation, suitable only for sleazy flea-pits. Walker's response to this latest dose of critical vitriol was interesting:

'It pleased me, in a way, that they took it so seriously. They didn't say, you know, another load of badly-made rubbish with a certain amount of body exposure, end of story. They thought enough of it to tear it down for its moral content.' - Films and Filming, Dec. 1974

What is interesting is not the fact that he was pleased with the condemnation of his film as pornographic (every exploitation film-maker knows that notoriety is likely to boost business), but the reason for his pleasure, and the insights that it provides into his motivation. Walker was not in this simply for the money. He wanted his films to be confrontational. He wanted critics to be obliged to address his work. Beneath the rhetoric of rampant commercialism he had something to say. Cool it Carol, he insisted, was a 'moral film' with a 'decent script'. It was moral in the sense of the honesty of its intent and the reality of its characters:

'It is a serious film, a serious sex film, and they [the BBFC] say it is a voyeur's film. That's wrong. My film is made with ... integrity' - Adult Cinema, No.1, 1970

Walker's indignant defence of his product was not empty posturing, but the only critics to realise this were a small band of reviewers at the Monthly Film Bulletin. In what turned out to be one of the most fruitful reviews the MFB ever published, Paul Joannides praised Cool it Carol's 'rather attractive underlying attitudes' which he took to be 'quintessentially English, unconcerned and pragmatic'. He acknowledged the 'distancing irony' which Walker brought to the sex scenes and, although he felt the film could not stand up to close critical scrutiny, it was 'beguilingly good-humoured' with some fine 'throwaway laconic dialogue'. (MFB, Jan. 1971). Joannides' mildly favourable review might have passed without consequence if it had not aroused the curiosity of one of his colleagues, David McGillivray, an aspiring young screenwriter who would become an important element in Walker's cinema. Having seen the director's earlier output, McGillivray was sceptical, but found to his astonishment that Carol was 'head and shoulders above any other exploitation film at that time' (Fantasynopsis, No.4, 1991). He has since pronounced it 'probably the best British sex film ever made'. (The Dark Side, No.7, 1991)
It is unlikely that Britain’s ‘Iron Lady’ ever lowered her vision far enough to take in Miracle Films’ little movie, but if she had she might have been disturbed that the heroine of this seedy saga (unintentionally) bore the same name as her daughter. Walker’s Carol Thatcher was the progeny of an undertaker which some might regard as prophetic. Robin Askwith’s Joe Sickles also profits from the dead - he is a butcher’s boy. Both exhibit a casual matter-of-factness to behaviour and circumstances which would shock those who had led a more emotionally sheltered life. Perhaps it is their daily familiarity with death that gives them their insulating coat of pragmatism. Walker’s film begins with the same imagery of meat being chopped that recurs in Donovan Winter’s Come Back Peter (1969) made at about the same time. Both have butchers’ boys as their protagonists and both seem to suggest that flesh is only flesh, the spirit and the imagination reside elsewhere. Carol and Joe’s imaginations are already on the train to London. When their bodies join them in the capital they become the archetypal naïve provincials, mistaking Marble Arch for Piccadilly and marvelling at the number of ‘wogs’.

Joe’s pose of relaxed sophistication is constantly undermined by his lack of cultural and financial capital and his problems with ‘performing’ in London are symbolised by the onset of sexual impotence. Even in the apparent youthful, meritocratic utopia of ‘swinging London’, the forces that confront him are still those of class and generation. Floral neck scarves may be de rigeur but he still needs the right school tie. As the indignities pile up, he has to suffer Carol’s seduction by Jess Conrad’s decadent Sloane ranger. Conrad, in tight britches and ruffled shirt looks like a left-over from The Hell Fire Club and his natural habitat is club land, a nocturnal netherworld where the old come to prey on the young. Jess Conrad had played a similar character (a pop singer and robber) in Rag Doll (1961), a film that bears more than a passing resemblance to Cool it Carol. Lance Comfort’s B movie also tells the story of a teenager named Carol who quits her menial job in the provinces and heads for the bright lights of London and a relationship with a boy called Joe.

Murray Smith’s script for Carol moves from light comedy to something much darker, exhibiting a ‘bitter-sweet counterpoint’ which would become a feature of his writing. Joe and Carol’s artless innocence is stripped away as easily as Carol’s Biba maxi-dress. Flesh is the only card that’s left to play and Carol turns her trick with stoical indifference: ‘It’s only a fuck. I can’t believe people pay good money for it.’ But even her resilience is stretched in the harrowing scene in which she accommodates five clients in quick succession, only for Joe to blow half her earnings on a bottle of champagne. The sequence in which Joe waits with the punters outside the bedroom where Carol is making ends meet is one of Walker’s most accomplished. We cannot help but squirm in our seats as Joe’s unease and the degradation of pimping is communicated to us. Peter Jessop’s frank cinematography drains the scene of any sexual glamour as the camera dwells on an electric kettle and the sly, oily face of the more experienced procurer (played convincingly by one of Walker’s regular character actors, Kenneth Hendel).
Icons of British sexploitation cinema:
Robin Askwith's buttocks (in and out of his Y fronts) in the film's most self-referential scene.
The film’s real tour de force is the sequence in which the cash-strapped couple perform in a blue movie. As Carol and Joe self-consciously copulate for the camera, Walker has the courage to critique his own profession of sexploitation, with rather more bite than he had shown in *School for Sex*. On the porn film set it is debauched old men who call the shots. The corrupt roué who produces the stag reels, the sweating cameraman who directs them and the bowler-hatted voyeur who watches the action are all part of a generation that
makes sex sordid; the generation that links carnality to sin and exploits the flesh of the young. Walker takes the edge off the scene with comic excess, but it remains disturbing, providing compelling evidence of a shift in the director’s conception of permissiveness to embrace a less commodified notion of sexuality.

At this point, the film might easily have taken the conventional and approved route of showing the sorry couple’s terminal descent into the depths of degradation. Creditably, it heads off in the opposite direction as Carol discovers that her body is her fortune and uses it dispassionately as the means to a glamorous life-style which she ultimately decides is perfectly viable but not quite what she wants. In an extraordinary and perhaps sentimental ending, she and Joe return to their former lives in Shropshire but, crucially, without regret or remorse, and apparently unscathed by their experiences.

Cool it Carol is a parable of the resilient spirit and, in its rejection of orthodox morality, remains one of Walker’s most dissident films. Nowhere else does he make better use of real locations to give authenticity to his narrative. These included the studio of Mayfair magazine cameraman, Philip Stearns, who took publicity stills of the production. It almost goes without saying that stalwart Derek Aylward played the Mayfair photographer in the movie. The film has its rough edges and imperfections but is always engaging, with crisp dialogue and sure pacing. Walker, himself, retained an affection for his creation, commenting in 1974:

‘If I had to sit through any of my films, I’d sit through Carol because it wasn’t quite as naïve as the others.’ - Films and Filming, Dec. 1974

More naïve, perhaps, was the deal he made with AIP, Carol’s American distributors, which admittedly recouped half his production costs, but on a film which reportedly grossed $2 million.
PUBLIC NOTICE

CONDITIONS OF ADMISSION

DIRTIEST GIRL I EVER MET will be permitted to be shown complete and without cuts. But due to the true but censorable nature of the actual happenings in this story, as well as the age of the girl and the fame of the people involved, United Producers has agreed to the following conditions.

1. Admission will be denied to anyone under the age of 18, even if accompanied by a parent or guardian.
2. Fictitious names will be substituted for all actual names.
3. This notice will be displayed prominently in full view of prospective patrons at the site of the theatre playing the film.
4. Patrons will be advised of the shocking nature of the film and will be asked to guide themselves accordingly.

United Producers presents

DIRTIEST GIRL I EVER MET

Robin Askwith • Janet Lynn • Jess Conrad • Produced and Directed by Pete Walker • In Eastman Color

“What writer could ever put his name to a title like that?”: Cool It Carol’s American campaign poster
'I’ve got an affection for *Cool it Carol* because it was a fun film to do. My first assistant on that has actually just directed *True Blue* - Ferdy Fairfax. I think it worked. Murray did a terrific script on it. I thought it was very right for the time. It was a massive hit in America for American International Pictures. What I should have done at the time was go over and cash in on it because there were a lot of good vibes about it over there as well. If I was making it again now I would tighten it up a bit. It’s a bit loose. A lot of my films were too loose.

Your appraisal of the film’s message is totally correct. It was really saying, “Don’t take any notice about it. Don’t have your character blackened. Just go away and start again and come out of it unscathed”. And that needed to be said at that time because it came hard on the back of Christine Keeler, who I knew, and Mandy. They were both branded for life.'
**Die Screaming, Marianne**

producer: Pete Walker  
production manager: Doreen Merriman  
screenplay: Murray Smith  
director of photography: Norman Langley  
camera operator: Tony Mander  
editor: Tristam Cones  
assistant director: Brian Lawrence  
music: Cyril Ornadel  
song ‘Marianne’ by Hal Shaper & Cyril Ornadel; sung by Kathe Green  
location manager: Norman Lambert  
dubbing mixer: Tony Anscombe  
dialogue editor: Matt McCarthy  
sound recordist: Peter O’Connor  

cast: Susan George (Marianne), Barry Evans (Eli Frame), Christopher Sandford (Sebastian), Judy Huxtable (Hildegarde), Leo Genn (The Judge), Kenneth Hendel (Rodriguez), Paul Stassino (Portuguese Police Sergeant), Alan Curtis (Disco Manager), Anthony Sharp (Registrar), Martin Wyldeck (1st policeman), John Laurimore (2nd policeman)  

© 1970 Pete Walker Film Productions Ltd.  

Released: 1971 (Cert X)  
Running Time: 104 mins. (9,323 ft.)  
Eastman Colour  
US Title: DIE, BEAUTIFUL MARIANNE  
Video Release in UK: Home Video Suppliers VHS/B n/a  
Derann Film Services (97 mins. 21 secs.) VHS/B n/a  

**Synopsis**

Dancer Marianne MacDonald is the daughter of a corrupt judge who is trying to get his hands on money and incriminating documents which Marianne’s mother secreted in a Swiss bank before dying in suspicious circumstances. Only Marianne knows the number of the account. Escaping from her father and her amoral half-sister, Hildegarde, Marianne is taken to London by Sebastian Smith. She agrees to marry him but sabotages the ceremony by writing the name of the best man, Eli Frome, on the wedding certificate. Marianne moves in with Eli and her father pays Sebastian to have him killed and return Marianne to his villa in Portugal. Eli survives the attempt on his life and Marianne goes on the run but Sebastian eventually persuades them both to visit The Judge in Portugal. Eli is lured away to his death while Hildegarde and Sebastian imprison Marianne in a boiling sauna in an attempt to extract the account number. Attempting to rescue his daughter, The Judge is killed in a car crash.
Marianne escapes from the sauna but is tricked into going to a nearby ruined convent where she is again trapped by Sebastian and Hildegarde. In the ensuing struggle, Sebastian falls to his death and Marianne manages to flee to the local police. As Marianne learns of Eli's murder, Hildegarde is strangled by Rodriguez, The Judge's bodyguard, who can no longer tolerate her psychopathic nature. Rodriguez is arrested and Marianne is left alone in the villa.
DIE SCREAMING, MARIANNE

'The law is the true embodiment of everything that's excellent. It has no kind of fault or flaw, and I, my Lords, embody the law.'
- W. S. Gilbert

Film six from Peter Walker was another thriller. This time homage was given to the great noir romance, Gilda (1946). Die Screaming, Marianne was to take the erotic charge and hard-bitten cynicism of Charles Vidor's movie and graft them onto the pace and aesthetics of a Hitchcock suspense thriller. Like Man of Violence this film would suggest high production values with extensive location filming abroad, in this case a (tax-deductible) villa in Portugal purchased for the production.

When Norman Langley's cameras began to roll the omens looked good. Susan George, just developing as a hot property for her agent, had this time been secured to star as the eponymous heroine, and Barry Evans, who was such a hit in Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush (1968), was to be her co-star. Also in the cast was fifties heart-throb, Leo Genn, a respectable 'A' film actor in prestigious productions such as The Wooden Horse (1950) and Cleopatra (1963). Retained from the cast of Cool it Carol were Kenneth Hendel, making his third appearance for Walker, and pop singer Chris Sandford. Replacing Virginia Wetherell was Judy Huxtable, one of The Touchables (1968) and already versed in playing bored, spoilt and petulant rich kids. As Hildegarde, the wicked half-sister, she added a dash of psychotic misanthropy to the formula. Among the minor castings was one of particular interest. The part of the registrar was played by the future star of Walker's House of Mortal Sin, Anthony Sharp.
Die Screaming, Marianne was a troubled production with friction between Peter Walker, Susan George and other members of the cast from an early stage. On July 11th 1970, the Daily Express reported that the film had been 'scrapped' and that Walker had returned to England after 'paying off' the cast. Murray Smith suggests that the problems were as much financial as interpersonal but Walker insists that suspending the production for a weekend was a purely disciplinary measure designed to impress upon the cast the seriousness of the problems they were causing. Somehow, the picture was completed and premiered the following summer, heading a double bill with Dracula versus Frankenstein. ‘The Ultimate in Suspense’, declared the posters and, as the titles unrolled, audiences must have thought they were in for something special - it is one of the most arresting title sequences in the history of British film. Spotlit against a glowing red background the lissom Susan George gyrates in black bikini and shimmering chain jewellery as Cyril Ornadel’s pounding theme music keeps the pulse racing. George’s dancing is quintessential go-go while Ornadel’s music is sheer excitement. Ann Margret and John Barry could have done no better, even with the help of Saul Bass. It is a sublime moment. What follows is almost bound to be an anti-climax. Walker copes well enough for the first three-quarters of an hour, keeping things tight and inventive. He is helped by an innovative screenplay from Murray Smith who spices his dialogue with a piquant mixture of sardonic humour and oxymoronic touches, as in Marianne’s post-coital conversation with Eli Frome (Barry Evans):

Marianne: My father was a judge.
Eli: I should have worn my black cap.

There is a wonderfully bizarre wedding in which Marianne gets hitched to the best man, and an effective scene between the sinister ‘Judge’ and his daughter, Hildegarde, which smoulders with incestuous longing. Leo Genn, with devilishly bushy eyebrows, and Judy Huxtable generate a steamy atmosphere of malevolent sexuality as they play out a perverted courtship ritual in a household devoid of moral restraint. ‘Sweetness and love are our weapons’, he breathes as the duality of their relationship is effectively emphasised by showing them reflected in a double mirror. If Walker was striving for the sort of atmosphere of lust and greed spiked with jealousy and malice that made The Servant (1963) so memorable, he got pretty close. Dialogue like the Judge telling his daughter ‘I ought to spank you - only you’d like it’ has just enough irony to save it from melodrama. There is,
too, an entertaining Hitchcockian sequence in which Eli Frome gradually realises that the two men he took to be policemen really mean to do him harm. All this is in the first half of a film which starts to lose pace and panache in its middle section. The narrative begins to meander, the screenplay becomes increasingly impoverished and the threads of the plot start to unravel. Sloppy editing allows tension to dissipate and the director seems to lose confidence. Walker had, in fact, lost his confidence in the film at a very early stage, when he realised that his principal casting lacked an essential chemistry:

‘I intended a very stylish Gilda thing and, let’s face it, Susan George and Barry Evans were not Rita Hayworth and Glenn Ford ... I wanted flamboyance instead of mumbling in their soup.’ - *Cinema X*, vol.5, no.1, 1972

It is quickly apparent that boyish Barry Evans is miscast as Eli, the cool saxophonist, but most of Walker’s ire was reserved for Ms. George:

‘I mistakenly thought she would be a great, stylish masturbation fantasy for the spotty-faced youth. For me anyway, I don’t think she’s that good.’ - *Cinema X*, vol.5, no.1, 1972

Susan George might not have been Rita Hayworth but she turned in what was, at least, a capable performance as the free-spirited dancer, Marianne ‘Hips’ McDonald, the girl who ‘made a living out of being watched’. What probably angered her director was that there was not enough of Marianne on show. Unlike Janet Lynn, who could be persuaded to ditch her bra even at a press launch, Susan was firmly wedded to her undies. When the script called for nudity she infuriated Walker by calling for a body stocking. Perhaps Walker had George in mind when he warned of actresses who could hold a director to ransom once filming had begun and no replacement was possible:

‘They’ve got you by the short and curls. Once you’ve got ten slates of film of them, you’ve got them for the duration. So you’ve got to assess your people. And be honest with them - one of my few good points. “You realise you have to do exactly as I say. All the gear off when I ask for it and no aggravation.”’ - *Cinema X*, vol.5, no.1, 1972
Murray Smith is in no doubt that Walker’s error was to ‘take on Susan George and some very good name actors who weren’t going to make it sleazy’. According to Smith, Walker had misread ‘how far they would go’. Walker’s own comment on the film’s lack of box office success amounted to much the same judgement:

‘The mistake I made was that of being too glossy, too respectable.’ - *Film Illustrated*, Mar. 1976

As usual, the critics were in no mood to give *Marianne* a clean bill of health and wave it on its way. They would have been happy enough to see it die screaming as they plunged in the knife:

‘Computerised muckraking, over-acted with a forgivable lack of conviction by a cast who should be nameless. A mishmash of disjointed incidents related only by their sex and violence ... only the most easily satisfied of sensation seekers can be expected to enjoy it.’ - *Today’s Cinema*, 13.8.71

‘Fails to horrify or thrill thanks chiefly to an incoherent script and sloppy direction which misses every opportunity to introduce tension.’ - James D. White, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Nov. 1971

This time, poor reviews were supported by poor box office returns. The film had evidently failed to deliver the goods to Walker’s regular audience and was unable to convince a new generation of ‘spotty-faced youths’ and older cinephiles. As an exposition of the emerging themes in Walker’s cinema, however, it is a significant movie. Marianne is a free spirit who is trying to escape from the stifling control of her father, a venal debarred judge. He and Marianne’s half-sister, who has inherited the unscrupulous methods of her father, use all their wealth, power and deceitfulness to ensure the return of the prodigal daughter and extract the secret she carries with her. As a plot for a thriller it stretches credulity, but as an allegory of the rebellion of a faction of youth culture against a corrupt and malevolent order and as a critique of the family and patriarchal domination it works pretty well. Marianne is an extension of Carol, the epitome of permissive youth, footloose and happily promiscuous with the most casual of attitudes towards marriage. She gives freely while her father has been on the take for years, but she cannot herself be truly free until she returns to confront her past. ‘The times they are a-changing, Judgey-Fudgey’ says the dapper Chris Sandford at one point and it is in the open wound between the present and the past that the action of this film, and so many of Walker’s scenes, take place.
PETER WALKER comments:

‘Die Screaming, Marianne was not the film I wanted to make at all. Within the first week of shooting it became painfully apparent to me that I was not going to get what I wanted to get. What I intended to try and make was a very ballsy, sexy Gilda kind of thing, but 1960s Gilda not 1946 Gilda; and it wasn’t just a question of will she or won’t she do the nude scenes, it was a whole style of performance. I picked up the wrong people. I should have had Ian McShane instead of Barry Evans, or Patrick Mower even, God help us. McShane would have cost me too much money, that’s why I didn’t have McShane. If I’d used perhaps somebody else instead of Susan George. Susan had a new boyfriend who was hanging around the set. She had her twenty-first birthday on the film. She was the sexiest little thing around. She was the look of that period, she had that vulnerable little pout, she had that whole thing about her, and it had been exploited. She had just done Twinky. She had done All Neat in Black Stockings, but she was trying to fight against it at twenty-one years of age. She wanted to be something else. She wanted to be what Jane Fonda was at that time, she didn’t want to be Susan George. She wasn’t old enough to say “Hey, this is what I am, I’ve got to go for it” like Sharon Stone does. She was working against it. Against that, bring in young people - Christopher Sandford I knew well, I’d used him before, and Barry Evans who was very unsure of his own sexuality - and they wound each other up. I was having trouble getting them on the set. I was having trouble directing them, you know, just getting them to move from there to there. You’re driving home at night and you are thinking, “Well, I don’t know how I’m going to handle this. I don’t know what I’m going to do about it”. And it was getting worse and worse as the days went on.

What I thought was, ‘I’m not going to get what I want. I’m going to end up with one hundred minutes of footage you can see and hear but it’s not going to be the kind of picture I want. It’s not going to be any good to anybody. I’ll have to muddle through and do what I can. By the time we got to Portugal - and we were supposed to go to Spain as well and shoot some scenes there - I was tearing pages out of the script and making do and mending and patching while I was shooting. In fact I cut the budget short on it by literally tearing pages out of the script. I mean I had actually raised the money. I’d got a new bank and I’d done a deal to
make three films, so it wasn’t a question of running out of finance. It was a campaign of non-co-operation which was quite sort of unforgivable. What actually happened is that I engineered a situation where on Friday night, I supposedly abandoned the picture. I flew back to London, called the Press so that on Saturday we would (and we did) have the front pages of the tabloids. And I knew that if I flew Susan George and Christopher Sandford back too they wouldn’t have a chance to reply. But we were back shooting again on Monday but with a very contrite and red-eyed Susan George. So it was something I engineered which I had to do to get some form of discipline into the picture.

‘I didn’t speak to Susan for years afterwards but I have to give credit where it’s due. I was with Ian McShane and some friends at a club in Berkeley Square and Susan was there with a whole bunch of people and she came over to me and said, “I’ve got an apology to make to this man. I haven’t spoken to him for four years. I behaved appALLingly many years ago”. She said this in front of everybody and I thought that it was very big of her. She is actually a very nice girl, but from my point of view on that picture I have never really forgiven her because it was never the film I wanted to make. School for Sex is at least what it was intended to be, but Die Screaming, Marianne bore no resemblance to my concept or Murray’s original screenplay. Yes, Murray’s lines were spoken and I threw it all together, but it was an absolute nightmare. I can’t remember too much about it. It’s something I’ve blotted from my mind, that particular film. It’s a pity because there was an opportunity there to make a good thriller.’
Four Dimensions Of Greta

producer: Pete Walker
associate producer: Ray Selfe
production manager: Christian Fenton
screenplay: Murray Smith
director of photography: Peter Jessop
editor: Matt McCarthy
music: Harry South; song 'Greta' sung by Huckleberry Flynn
assistant directors: Brian Lawrence, Robert Fennell
sound recordist: Peter O'Connor
sound re-recordist: Tony Anscombe

cast: Tristan Rogers (Hans Weimar), Karen Boyes (Sue), Alan Curtis (Roberts), Robin Askwith (Roger), Leena Skoog (Greta), Kenneth Hendel (Percy), John Clive (Phil the Greek), Nick Zaran (Johnny Maltese), Martin Wyldeck (Schikler), Godfrey Kenton (Gruber), Pearl Hackney (Frau Gruber), Elizabeth Bradley (Frau Schikler), Erika Raffael (Karen), Felicity Devonshire (Serena), Jane Cardew (Kirsten), Carole Allen (Mrs. Marks), Bill Maynard (Big Danny), Marion Grimaldi (American Woman), Steve Emerson (Villain), Mynah Bird (Cyn), Ralph Ball (Fred Sharprock), Derek Keller (Footballer), Ivor Salter (Hotel Porter), Richard O'Brian (Degenerate), Tom Mennard (Manchester Businessman), Max Mason (policeman), Mike Stevens (policeman), Les Clark (police sergeant), Steve Patterson (hippie), Mike Brittain (hippie), Fred Hugh, Eddie Connor, Sonny Farrer, Jack Rowlands, Ivor Owen, Billy McNicholl, Ramon St. Clair, Charles Ady-Gray (Audience at Strip Club), Peter Walker (Waiter)

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Released: 1972 (Cert X)
Distribution: Hemdale
Running Time: 89 mins.
(7,997 ft.)
Eastman Colour
US Title: THREE DIMENSIONS OF GRETA
Video Release in UK:
Derann Film Services (85 mins. 6 secs.) VHS/B. n/a
(FDV307 was issued with 3D glasses but soon withdrawn after complaints about the quality of the 3D effects.)
Synopsis

Hans Weimar, a Berlin journalist flies to London to investigate the disappearance of Greta, a beautiful German woman who has been working in England as an au pair. Hans questions a number of Greta’s friends including two ‘groupies’, Cyn, a Soho stripper and Roger, a professional footballer. In 3D flashbacks they all paint a rather different picture of the missing Greta. It becomes clear that she has fallen under the influence of East End gangster, Carl Roberts, who is responsible for the beating up of Roger and seems to be linked to Greta’s disappearance. Hans’ girlfriend Sue is sent to investigate Roberts but is raped by both the gangster and his henchmen. She is then taken to a boat on the Thames where she finds that Greta is also being held because she knows too much about Roberts’ activities. Hans and Roger trail Sue to the boat and after a fight with the gangsters, manage to free the women. Greta and Hans fly back to Germany.

FOUR DIMENSIONS OF GRETA

‘I told them that I wasn’t going to deliberately throw things out, just for the effect of doing it. Things that came out had to be motivated by the story.
- Jack Arnold on his use of 3-D in It Came From Outer Space (1953)

Father (indicating the new au pair): Why did you choose a German one?
Mother: I told you, the French ones were all used up.
- Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush (1968). Screenplay by Hunter Davies.
Exploitation film-makers are showmen at heart and there is nothing a showman likes better than a gimmick to pull in the crowds. The promise of a new type of visual experience was a common promotional ploy of fifties American cinema - ‘Hypnovision’, ‘Emergo’, ‘Cinerama’ and, most famously, ‘3-D’.

The cinema’s experiment with stereoscopic imagery in the early fifties had been motivated by the spread of television and the desperate desire to make the box in the corner look even smaller than it was. Within a couple of years the flirtation with ‘depthies’ had been abandoned in favour of Cinemascope, a format which did not have the reputation for causing headaches which 3-D had acquired. But in 1969 ‘Stereovision’ had been revived by Louis K. Star and (the wonderfully named) Alf Silliman as an extension of the ‘girlie’ film. Their movie, *The Stewardesses*, cleaned up in the US, taking $26 million for an outlay of $100,000 (Hayes, 1989). The commercial possibilities were not lost on Peter Walker who began investigating the technology required. He discovered that virtually the only British film-maker to have worked with 3-D was Raymond Spottiswoode, who had made a series of shorts for screening at the Festival of Britain in 1951. Remarkably, Spottiswoode’s original camera was tracked down and restored to working order (at the cost of more than £1,000). Walker was all set to make Britain’s first 3-D feature film, and now required a subject which would exploit the full range of the stereoscopic technology. He came up with the idea of a film about an *au pair*, a staple of the British male’s erotic fantasies and he asked scriptwriter Murray Smith to develop it into a screenplay which would incorporate 3-D effects. Smith resisted pressure from his wife to devote himself to ‘proper’ work and accepted the commission. The result was *Four Dimensions of Greta*, one of the great sensations of home-grown sexploitation.
Leena Skoog displays her dimensions in one of the film's 3-D flashback sequences.
Walker needed assets he could project into the third dimension and he found them with, Leena Skoog, a Swedish singer and model. Ms. Skoog had recently arrived in London after four years’ experience of acting on television in Scandinavia. She had already tested for Hammer when, in the Spring of 1971, she featured on the cover of Mayfair magazine, photographed by Philip O. Stearns, the stills cameraman from Cool it Carol. ‘I’m here until I break into films’, she told the magazine, ‘I want to be an actress, not just a small time one, but a really big movie star. That’s my purpose in life.’ (Mayfair, vol.6, no. 1, 1971). Not only did Walker make her big, he gave her dimensions she never dreamed of.

Alongside Leena’s ‘finely moulded 39-inch breasts’ (Mayfair) were perky Robin Askwith as a randy footballer with the table manners of a caveman, and Tristan Rogers (later a star of the American soap, General Hospital) as Walker’s typically-bland leading man. If they had been Terence Stamp and David Hemmings it would not have made a great deal of difference because all eyes were on the magnificently endowed Ms. Skoog and her supporting cast of three-dimensional glamour girls. David McGillivray called their shameless frolics ‘the most frenzied display of mass nudity and sexual gymnastics yet seen on British screens’ (Films and Filming, Dec. 1974). Greta is certainly a film in which special effects steal the limelight from the acting and the script, which is probably just as well as neither was particularly distinguished. Walker was perfectly aware that he had not coaxed vintage performances from his thespians, as he commented:
‘You really can’t make silk purses out of sows’ ears. And unfortunately, if you have an inexperienced leading player... they drag the performance of everyone else down.’

Not that he was really criticising Leena and the other naked nymphs who he rather ungraciously admitted were wanted ‘for their pubes and very little else’. (*Films and Filming*, Dec. 1974).

Hollywood publicity had launched its first 3-D feature, *Bwana Devil* (1952) with the slogan ‘a lion in your lap’. *Greta* followed suit with ‘a girl in your lap’ but if audiences were expecting super-real Technicolor holograms of Leena and her lovelies to be projected into their arms, they would have been sadly disappointed. The twenty minutes of stereo imagery which had added six or seven thousand pounds to the film’s budget were in a partially mis-matching duo-tone - hardly voyeur friendly. Walker and his crew had struggled with the unfamiliar technology. ‘Floundering in the dark’ was the way he put it, and, if the experience of watching it on video is anything to go by, the audience must have been floundering in the dark too. Each viewer would have experienced the 3-D effect differently as the antique anaglyph process interacts with the eyes in individual ways. But, in spite of the imperfections, the director was pleased with his brave innovation: ‘Because it was the first British 3-D film one felt very proud, the Abel Gance of the seventies.’ (*Films and Filming*, Dec. 1974)

Those readers of the new ‘soar away’ *Sun* newspaper who had seen Leena Skoog on page three couldn’t resist the enticement of seeing her in another dimension and flocked to the film. *Greta* smashed box office records when it opened at the Classic, Piccadilly in May 1972, taking more than £5,500 in its first week, playing to ‘virtual capacity’ houses. Fourteen weeks later it was still running and had grossed almost £40,000. A delighted Brian Sammes of Hemdale, the film’s distributors, enthused that ‘major bookers are keen to get it everywhere’ (*Cinema TV Today*, 3.6.72). It went into profit in the home market alone and gained mainstream distribution in the USA with a few judicious cuts to secure an ‘R’ rating. Walker must also have been proud that it premiered in the same week as *Frenzy*, the latest blockbuster from his idol, Alfred Hitchcock.

Needless to say, critics were harder to impress than the paying public, although even *Films and Filming*’s Alex Stuart grudgingly admitted that he could ‘watch Leena Skoog in two or three dimensions for some time’ (Sept. 1972). Most concurred with Nigel Andrews’ assessment of *Greta* as ‘tepid and tedious sexploitation’ (*MFB*, July 1972); with the exception, that is, of Tim Rayner of the bright young cinéaste magazine *Cinema Rising*. Rayner joined the small band of maverick film fans who began to champion Walker as a fascinating new outré talent. His appeal lay in his capacity for self-parody and ironic use of popular aesthetics.
‘The fascination of the film is that its makers, while pandering to the dismal tastes of its projected market, seem able to rise above the minimal requirements of that market and provide a product that has more flair and initiative than most of the more expensive commercial films around the circuit at the moment.’ - Cinema Rising, 3, 1972

Walker was beginning to acquire a cult appeal for a jaded critical fringe who appreciated his ‘freshness of approach’ and ‘sense of fun and irreverence’.

It was that sense of fun and irony that lifted Greta out of the rut of sex films. Among the bouncing go-go boobs, the Afghan coats and the white thigh boots there are witty conceits and surprising characterisations like the droll minders and the black stripper with a PhD.

From the moment ‘Captain Walker’ welcomes his passengers aboard the BEA flight to London it is clear that this is a comedy drama which will not take itself too seriously, and, if the visual humour usually works better than the somewhat laboured repartee, that is appropriate enough in a film which foregrounds voyeurism, making us acutely aware of the process of seeing. The 3-D scenes have much of the camp excessiveness associated with Antony Balch (Horror Hospital, 1973). Sex-mad hippies hurtle down banisters towards us in those ubiquitous floral hipsters and a punch-ball is propelled alarmingly out of the screen. Everything is thrust or thrown at the camera, from bras and briefs to bananas and broken bottles. It’s almost enough to distract the viewer from the voluptuous Leena and her erotic escapades (one of which demonstrates that she can do almost as much with a cherry stalk as Sherilyn Fenn). She and Robin Askwith tumble out of their tank tops in a wild parody of the gastronomic seduction in Tom Jones (1963) as the footballing Askwith eulogizes, ‘making love to her was like setting a long ball down the centre with only the goalkeeper to beat, and then slotting it home with the crowd going wild’.
It is not only in the 3-D sequences that Walker reminds his audience that they are watching a particular kind of film. He again offers them parodic images of themselves as patrons of a sleazy Soho strip club, while one of his characters remarks, 'This is just like a very cheap British sex movie'. At one point Smith even mischievously punctures his director's pretensions to be anything more than an exploitation film-maker: at the end of a virtuoso sequence of 'arty' montage and lyrical dissolves in which Walker plays a cameo role as a supercilious waiter at an exclusive restaurant, he receives a custard pie squarely in the face. It is a private joke since few picturegoers would have recognised, or even been able to name, the film's director, but it is a prime example of Walker's acceptance of the tongue-in-cheek approach which his scriptwriters loved. The sequence demonstrates his ability to take a joke, to be the 'trooper' his music hall training had prepared him to be. It also
Four Dimensions of Greta demonstrates his growing confidence in his own abilities as a film-maker, balancing virtuosity with the desire not to ‘appear to be too pompous’. In the early seventies, the high level of self-referentiality evidenced in this scene was associated with art cinema rather than cheap sexploitation. Nor would we have expected the presence of interesting sub-textual themes in hurried and ‘thoughtless’ catchpenny flicks, but they are present again in Murray Smith’s screenplay, buried and awaiting discovery by textual archaeologists. ‘One day’, Smith remarked to a friend at the time, ‘somebody’s going to do a PhD on these movies and discover all those things that I put into them for fun’.

Greta, like Marianne, is another free-spirited young woman seeking independence from a powerful patriarch by fleeing to London, permissiveness central. Again, she is ‘lost’ as far as the older generation is concerned and pursued by a younger man on their behalf. This was a narrative structure which was becoming almost as familiar as the disco with the tartan decor which is back as a location in Greta, and here the narrative supports a modest investigation of perceptual distortion which complements the film’s visual illusions. There are three dimensions to the visual representation of Greta but four perceptions (dimensions) of her character. Using 3-D to represent a sense of the past, Walker shows how memory and perception combine to produce divergent accounts of the same person. The sub-textual concern with reality and perception would reappear in his next film.

**PETER WALKER comments:**

‘Leena Skoog was one of those Scandinavian hustlers, but what a body, what a body. Ideal for 3-D. You see in 35mm, in a properly graded print, shown in a theatre, that 3-D actually worked very well. It didn’t work on video, that’s why it had to be withdrawn. But everybody said it wouldn’t work. You have to have exactly the right grading of green and red, which we did on all the prints we supervised and it did work terribly well. And do you know who played one of the hippies who chased Leena around in one of the 3-D sequences? Richard O’Brien of The Rocky Horror Show.

The whole thing was intended to be tongue-in-cheek, although Murray didn’t necessarily script it that way. I think I bastardised a lot of Murray’s script, actually, because I think that was really a chore for Murray. I mean, he just literally churned out a script and I don’t think...
I was terribly happy with it and I did a lot of re-writing myself because I just felt he’d been a bit slapdash about it. A lot of the jokes weren’t in the script. They were put in on the floor. The line about it being ‘a cheap British sex movie’ wasn’t in the script. That was me just telling Tristan Rogers, “you come in and she’s sitting on the bed”, and he said, “do I say anything?”, and I said “yeah, just say this is just like a cheap British sex movie”! The custard pie wasn’t even in the script. We just put that in to get laughs. It was just an idea to make the crew laugh, really.

The German scenes were just an idea to get some foreign locations in. I was always trying to make the films look very expensive and the way to do that was to put a foreign location in or a country house or whatever, anything to make the picture look sumptuous. So a quick flight to Germany to do one and a half days filming.'
producer: Pete Walker
screenplay: Alfred Shaughnessy
director of photography: Peter Jessop
music: Cyril Ornadel
production manager: Robert Fennell
assistant directors: Brian Lawrence, Paul Fell
editor: Ron Pope
make-up: Bill Lodge

cast: Ray Brooks (Mike), Jenny Hanley (Julia), Luan Peters (Carol), Robin Askwith (Simon), Candace Glendenning (Sarah), Tristan Rogers (Tony), Judy Matheson (Jane), David Howey (John), Elizabeth Bradley (Mrs Saunders), Penny Meredith (Angela), Raymond Young (Inspector Walsh), Alan Curtis (Jack Phipps/Iago), Jane Cardew (Lady Pamela Gates/Desdemona), Stuart Bevan (Harry Mulligan/Cassio), Kent Baker (Mortuary Attendant), Rodney Diak (Warner), Sally Lahee (Iris Vokins), Carol Allexn (Librarian), Brian Tully (Willesden), Tom Mennard (Fred/S.D. Keeper), Michael Knowles (Inspector Curran), John Yule (Gerry), Jess Conrad (Young Actor), Patrick Barr (Major Bell/Sir Arnold Gates/Othello), [uncredited] Pete Walker (Ludovico), Raymond George (Stephen Brant), L.W. Clarke (constable)

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Released: 1972 (Cert X)
Distribution: Tigon
Running Time: 96 mins.
US Title: THE FLESH AND BLOOD SHOW
Video Release in UK: Videomedia (Vampix) (91 mins. 38 secs.) VHS/B n/a;
Satanica (91 mins. 38 secs.) VHS

Synopsis

A group of young actors are engaged by a mysterious agent to produce a musical review. They assemble for rehearsals in a derelict theatre at the end of a pier. Jane, Carol, Tony, Simon, Angela and the director Mike arrive first and decide to save money by sleeping in the theatre. During the night Angela disappears and Mike sees what he believes is her headless corpse, but when the police investigate, it turns out to be a wax figure. The cast is joined by Sarah and Julia, a successful film actress. Carol is attacked by a tramp with a knife and then John, notorious for his practical jokes, goes missing. The rest of the cast decide to
stay at a local guest house where they again encounter the kindly Major Bell, a retired army officer who has already shown an interest in their production. They discover that the theatre has been closed since one terrible night during the war when, after a performance of Othello, distinguished actor Sir Arnold Gates, his wife Lady Pamela and a young actor, Harry Mulligan, disappeared.

Rehearsals continue, but soon Carol and John are found dead and finally the naked corpse of Sarah is revealed when a spotlight is turned on. At this point Major Bell, speaking in Shakespearean style and condemning the morals of the acting profession, reveals himself to be Sir Arnold Gates. In a 3D flashback sequence to the wartime production of Othello we see the jealous Sir Arnold discover his wife’s adultery, imprison her with her lover in a room below the theatre, and stage his disappearance. The witness to the crime, Gates’ young daughter, turns out to be Julia who, it is revealed, has helped protect her father by murdering Carol.
THE FLESH AND BLOOD SHOW

‘Beware of jealousy, it is the green-eyed monster’
- Othello by William Shakespeare

‘I wanted to be something better than I was, an actor, a real actor. I had to teach myself to talk, do you know it?, to move and think. I had to tear myself apart and put myself together again and again, and the left over pieces are all scattered somewhere between here and a thousand one night stands.’
- A Double Life (1947) screenplay by Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin

‘After you’ve been rehearsing for a bit you start to think of the character you’re playing as yourself,’
- Double Dare (1976) screenplay by Dennis Potter

Let’s make no bones about it, The Flesh and Blood Show deserves cult status. Made before Walker’s more celebrated trilogy of ‘terror’ films of the mid-seventies, it has been largely dismissed as a rather slow and predictable whodunit with too much gratuitous flesh and too little gratuitous blood. It is too Agatha Christie for horror aficionados and too sensational for mystery fans. This is a pity, as its screenplay is one of the most complex and interesting of any produced for a Walker movie. As a thriller, it may be seriously flawed, but as a text it is rich with latent meanings and allusions which, as a humble exploitation flick, it hardly has a right to flaunt. Like the theatre in which it is set, there are a lot of strange things going on beneath the surface.

The film went into production early in 1972 in Cromer on the Norfolk coast and in Brighton, the director’s home territory. Filming in a seaside resort out of season has always been advantageous in terms of costs and the availability of accommodation and locations, and the principal locations here were Brighton’s West Pier and the theatre at the end of the Palace Pier. This alone places The Flesh and Blood Show in a substantial tradition of British cinema which has set its action on Brighton Pier, from Brighton Rock (1947) and Oh! What a Lovely War (1969) to Mona Lisa (1986) and Dirty Weekend (1994), not forgetting Walker’s own The Big Switch.

The cast combined a number of familiar faces including Tristan Rogers, Robin Askwith and Jane Cardew from the previous film, Luan Peters from Man of Violence (making a welcome return after some vampire work for Hammer), Jess Conrad from Cool it Carol and Patrick Barr from Die Screaming Marianne. Making their debut appearances for Walker in the ensemble cast were another Hammer heroine, Jenny Hanley, sultry presenter of TV’s children’s programme Magpie, the radiant Candace Glendenning (who would later star in Norman Warren’s Satan’s Slave (1976)) and Ray Brooks, a school friend of Walker, who was making something of a cinematic comeback after celebrated roles in The Knack (1965) and TV’s Cathy Come Home (1966).

The script came from Alfred Shaughnessy, from whom Walker had already commissioned an unfilmed screenplay of the classic adventure, The Black Arrow. Shaughnessy, best known for his work on television’s Upstairs, Downstairs, was already an experienced scriptwriter and director with a background that challenges our easy assumptions about exploitation film writers. His stepfather had been equerry to Edward VIII and George VI, and Alfred had been educated at Eton and Sandhurst. Bizarrely, Britain’s maestro of the skin flick found himself employing a man who had socialised with the Queen of England. He was also the man who had directed Britain’s first rock-and-roll/skiffle picture, Six-Five Special...
Fifteen years before, he had directed and largely scripted Cat Girl (1957), a Lewtonesque exploration of double identity, jealousy and repressed passions which David Pirie (1973) would shortly single out as a landmark in the development of British Gothic horror. This would come as a surprise to Shaughnessy who saw the film (complete with alternative 'continental' scenes) as an enjoyable exercise in exploitation of which he had 'no very high opinion' (Shaughnessy 1978, p.127). He has a higher regard for his last project as writer/director, The Impersonator (1961), a film which would also resonate in his work for Walker. The Impersonator is the story of a jovial pantomime dame (John Salew) who is also a psychopathic killer. One of the film's key locations, a decaying theatre, as well as its central theme of the actor who conceals his murderous past, would be used again in The Flesh and Blood Show. Shaughnessy's most recent excursion into the macabre had been the scripting of Hammer's Crescendo (1970), another dark tale of duplicity and madness. Walker commented:

'Freddy's a past master of doing Hitchcock-type scripts, very good at coming up with constructional, creepy things - everything slotted in perfectly'. - *Cinema X*, vol.5, no.1, 1972

Certainly, Shaughnessy's thematic obsessions meshed perfectly with Walker's own, and in The Flesh and Blood Show these obsessions are fuelled by the memory of past cinema. The film was 'directly inspired' by Agatha Christie's celebrated whodunit, Ten Little Niggers, first filmed by Twentieth Century Fox in 1945 as And Then There Were None (Verschooten 1979). Walker's film is a similar tale of serial murder in an isolated setting. A disparate collection of young actors is brought together by an unseen producer to rehearse an entertainment called 'The Flesh and Blood Show'. They assemble in an old theatre at the end of a pier and we see them picked off by a mysterious assassin who turns out to be a distinguished actor long thought to be dead. The plot and location also echo The Brighton Strangler (1945), the story of a stage actor who sustains an injury in an air raid and, adopting the persona of the murderer he is playing, terrorises the seaside town. Another antecedent is Men Are Not Gods (1936) a British picture in which an actor playing Othello tries to murder his wife, just like The Flesh and Blood Show's killer; but the most obvious reference is to George Cukor's Oscar-winning A Double Life (1947) in which Ronald Coleman stars as a stage actor who again falls prey to the same murderous obsessions as Shakespeare's Moor. Walker's film reuses this premise and juxtaposes classical theatre and popular film culture in a similar way.

To suggest, however, that Walker and Shaughnessy merely assembled The Flesh and Blood Show from the remains of older movies is unfair. First, they shift their story into a different genre category by overlaying it with Grand Guignol touches and giallo elements;
then they underpin it with a complex web of subtext, and finally they sensationalise it by adding a largely gratuitous 3-D finale. The result is a surface which displays all the hallmarks of an exploitation film - creepy suspense, gruesome deaths and titillating flashes of nudity from the attractive female cast - but, below, is a fascinating discourse on acting as a metaphor for both illusion and promiscuity, which deconstructs stage performance in much the same way that Powell’s celebrated *Peeping Tom* deconstructed the voyeurism of cinema. Powell’s film used exploitation as a flag of convenience to launch a piratical attack on his profession. Shaughnessy and Walker might not be quite such daring sea dogs but *The Flesh and Blood Show* suggests that they can certainly wield a cutlass when opportunity permits.

The film first lays bare the mechanics of exploitation presentation. The title itself draws attention to its theatricality and the audience’s desire for visceral sensation, or, as the publicity put it, ‘carnage and carnality’. But, whereas *Peeping Tom* emphasises the role of the viewer in the exploitation spectacle (the looking), *The Flesh and Blood Show* concentrates on the contribution of the actor (the showing). To make a display of oneself in an exploitation epic like this one, it suggests, is to prostitute one’s art, and to invite the righteous wrath of the great knights of the stage like the film’s avenging assassin, Sir Arnold Gates. Sir Arnold castigates the youth of his profession:

‘They’re all the same, young actors - filthy and degenerate lechers - all of them. And the females, flaunting their bodies, offering their thighs and their breasts. Scum! Excrement!’
In both Sir Arnold’s imagination and the film’s scenarios, acting and promiscuity are closely connected. Actors are necessarily faithless and their commitment is provisional and short lived. They briefly align themselves with the author whose lines they speak and the company of which they are temporarily and arbitrarily a part. These brief assemblies of footloose young people are a breeding ground for sexual promiscuity, the condition which Sir Arnold deplores as ‘the filth and degradation of our profession, the temptations of the flesh which we are all exposed to’. More fundamentally, the personal integrity of actors is constantly undermined by a professional life which invades the self, creating a duality at its core. This is the ‘Double Life’ described in George Cukor’s classic treatment of the theme. Actors are both themselves and the parts they play - ego and alter-ego fused in the moment of performance. This is demonstrably the case in the respected traditional theatre which Sir Arnold represents. The process is appropriately dramatised when the distinction between the cuckolded Sir Arnold and the jealous Othello disappears with lethal results. But the fusion of character and actor is even more explicit in exploitation performance when the script calls for a character to appear naked. In these circumstances it can only be the actor’s flesh which is exposed. However hard the actor might strive to create illusion, the flesh is real.

For a cheaply-made mass-entertainment film to be this self-reflexive is unusual, to say the least, but The Flesh and Blood Show explores the relationship between real life and theatrical performance with all the insight and some of the erudition of a Dennis Potter play. Potter’s own key exploration of the theme, Double Dare (1976) was still four years in the future, but it would display remarkable affinities to Shaughnessy’s screenplay, exhibiting a similar interest in the déjá vu phenomenon and constantly probing the relationship between the actor and the character portrayed. Potter’s play examines a writer’s fantasies about an actress who is being cast as a prostitute. While she thinks of acting as ‘the opposite of being yourself’, he struggles to disassociate ‘private acts and emotions’ from ‘public performance’ because the same body experiences, or is responsible, for both. Prostitutes become actresses when they simulate emotion, but do actresses become prostitutes when they engage in sexual acts as part of a role?

Actress: ‘The ‘I’ that is me and the ‘I’ that is the character - whore/actress they get mixed up. One being me, and the other being a whore which is also me - which, let’s face it, is still the way, the secret, half-hidden, sneaky way that writers, directors and even audiences want to think about actresses like me.’ - Double Dare

Like Double Dare, The Flesh and Blood Show is interested in the limits of performance and the consequences of the trend towards increasing verisimilitude in the theatrical display and use of the body. Where does ‘faking it’ end and ‘living it’ begin?

Throughout The Flesh and Blood Show, there is constant reference to the ambiguous relationship between the real and the illusionary, between life and its imitation. Dummies are substituted for people; a man who seems to be dead is only sleeping; a woman who seems to be alive is ‘really’ dead, and so on. Not unusual pieces of trickery for a horror film, but uncommon in these quantities. The central motif which expresses this illusion of the fake-as the-authentic is the macabre practical joke. As
Mike/Ray Brooks complains at one point: ‘Somebody’s having us on and I don’t like it’. In the opening scene, two actresses (playing actresses) are disturbed in the middle of the night by an actor (playing an actor) who convinces them that he has been stabbed before revealing that it was ‘really’ just an act. He tells them that he has just finished acting in a horror film, although he is, of course, still acting in this horror film. He is ‘having us on’ in more ways than one. The theme is continued in the numerous plays within the play that are a feature of the script; in cinematographer Peter Jessop’s use of mirror images, and in a narrative structure which sets up fake killers (suspects) before revealing that the ‘real’ killer is a fake (i.e. he is not who he pretends to be).

The real and the fake begin to function like the two images in the film’s 3-D sequence. At first they seem distinct but the longer the eyes gaze at them the more they fuse together until the one is indistinguishable from the other and the illusion is complete. At least, it would be complete if we were not also made acutely aware that the whole thing is a theatrical performance by the self-consciously highlighted clichés and conventions of the whodunit and Simon/Robin Askwith’s final declaration that ‘if it wasn’t so tragic and horrible it would almost make a movie script’. Ultimately, of course, the ‘somebody’ who is ‘having us on’ the real practical joker, is the film-maker. He not only cons his audiences into thinking that what they see is real but, in this instance, he enjoys a kind of revenge on the acting profession of which he was once an undistinguished member. Not content with having his players denigrated as ‘sex-crazed, evil and obscene young jackanapes’, Walker obliged them to suffer the privations of the flesh, scantily attired in a freezing location (Cinema Rising, May 1972) or, as Sir Arnold puts it, ‘lashed naked to each other in a dark
place where the sea doth rage below’. Sir Arnold’s jaundiced views on actors may well reflect some of Walker’s own attitudes. His contempt for actors has been noted by his regular script writers, one of whom has reported Walker’s complaint that ‘all actors are egotistical poofs and all actresses are pompous prostitutes’ (McGillivray 1993). Actors may be the butt of The Flesh and Blood Show’s jokes, but Walker at least has the balls to share in some of the humiliation, briefly stepping over the footlights to play an actor taking the part of Ludovico in a war-time production of Othello. He poses ironically as part of the great tradition of British stage drama.

The convolutions of its sub-text would, alone, be enough to redeem this rather slow and murky thriller, but there is much more here for the student of Walker’s cinema. First, this initial venture into the realm of horror marks an important new direction for Walker, but only in terms of genre. The essential themes of his cinema - permissiveness and generation, the prison of the past and the degeneracy of the establishment - are still very much in evidence. A permissive company of young actors naively assemble in one of those old dark places of English heritage, a decaying theatre, for a producer they know nothing about. They nickname this relic of another age ‘The Morgue’. One character says it smells like an old museum, and beneath its stage are the rotting remains of its violent history, the illusionary violence of Grand Guignol production and the real violence of a war-time jealousy. As the story develops, the violence and vindictiveness of the past return to prey on the ingenuous representatives of an artful profession. The executioner is a crazed patriarchal figure with a knighthood that signifies the approval of an aged establishment. Interestingly, the one character who can control these atavistic emanations is the company’s director (Ray Brooks) because only he understands the relationship between the past and the present. He can even offer an explanation of déjà vu, the phenomenon the past relived:
‘We just jump for a split second into a subconscious where there is no time. It’s an illusion of repetition. We see the past, present and future all at once because our four dimensional view of it doesn’t fix it in time.’

Brooks, as the director of the fictitious Flesh and Blood Show seems to speak for Walker, the director of the ‘real’ Flesh and Blood Show. In explaining the fascination of another character with macabre jokes he inadvertently reveals a possible psychology of the horror film-maker:

‘His morbid obsession with gruesome practical jokes is just a sub-conscious cloak to hide a dangerous obsession with violence. It’s an outlet.’ Not only does The Flesh and Blood Show re-examine its director’s favourite themes, but it also exhibits those autobiographical features which often characterise film auteurship. Peter Walker’s childhood in Brighton was blighted by the death of his father, a successful comedian, and his desertion by his mother. Walker sets his action at the time of his father’s death in what was probably a key site of his childhood. His father, like Sir Arnold Gates, probably trod the boards of that same theatre at the end of the pier. In the celluloid fantasy, the lost father returns to join the child he abandoned 25 years before, and it is the faithless mother who remains dead. These parallels with personal biography add a surprising pathos to an apparently cynical exploitation venture.

Walker has never drawn attention to his film’s autobiographical references, but he has said that it is a picture ‘I like very much’ in spite of its ‘weaknesses’ and ‘missed opportunities’. He had been attracted by ‘the idea of an absolutely closed-off place as a point of departure’, but feels that the film’s erotic scenes were inappropriate to the horror genre and caused the film to ‘lose something of its intensity’. Placing the picture’s only 3-D sequence towards the end of the film had also proved a mistake:
The Flesh and Blood Show may be a slow-paced murder mystery, but its sub-textual world is rich and rewarding. It offers commentary on the director’s emotional life, discourse on the nature of performance and, ultimately, an attack on the privileged status of theatre in relation to cinema. Soon after the release of Walker's film, George Perry wrote that 'within the British cultural establishment, the theatre is still regarded as superior to the film'. (Perry 1975, p.11). The Flesh and Blood Show challenges the pre-eminence of theatre. It does this explicitly in the way it represents the theatre as a decaying institution, poisoned by jealousy and presided over by a shameful cast of decadent actor-knights. But it also offers an implicit challenge in its deployment of special effects and stereoscopic imagery which seem to argue that, if acting is illusion, then film is supreme in its ability to enhance that illusion.

Critics and, no doubt, audiences, took The Flesh and Blood Show at its face value, another dumb bit of sensationalism from a film-maker with a long track record in this kind of hokum. Marjorie Bilbow, for example, patronizingly dismissed it as suitable for 'uncritical younger audiences' (Cinema TV Today 4.1.72). The paying public were curious, but did not flock to the film in the numbers that had given such a record-breaking run to its predecessor, Four Dimensions of Greta, the film it replaced at The Classic, Piccadilly in September 1972. It took only half as much as Greta in its first week, but did enough steady business to occupy the Classic's screen for two months or more. Better still, it was picked up for United States distribution by veteran showman, David Friedman, who gave it the full exploitation treatment: 'Pulse Throbbing! Blood Chilling! Half Clad Girls! All Mad Ghouls! ... Gruesomely stained in colour' shouted his publicity. Walker was probably amused. He
may even have used the words of Sir Arnold Gates to recall the way in which the suffering of his actors had given life to his commercially successful film:

'For have I not with the flesh and blood of these other evil and obscene young jackanapes extracted the price of freedom for the whore ...'

PETER WALKER comments:

'I have a soft spot for The Flesh and Blood Show. There were obligatory sexual things which at the time were probably necessary but these days they aren't, so that really has dated it. I would rather have got on with the plot and tightening it up. It loosened the tension by having sex content in it, and that bothered me.

The whole idea was really Ten Little Niggers and Ten Little Indians, which I always loved, and I played it myself in repertory. The idea of an unknown person gathering all these people together is a very good concept for a thriller. There was also George Zukor’s The Most Dangerous Game. There was a bit of the Ronald Coleman picture, A Double Life. You just stole a little idea from that because the actor had to be living this fantasy of neither one or the other. So we were incorporating all these ingredients into it. There was a definite bit of Double Life in it, although subconscious. But I love the theme that Freddy Shaughnessy liked and had in his films of the past coming back to haunt you. I like the concept of that. Here again I would have done it better if only I’d had more time and more money and all those things; but that’s what I liked about The Flesh and Blood Show - dark secrets, people disappearing and coming back incognito, bodies buried under the stage that have been there thirty years - all that kind of stuff I find absolutely fascinating. Freddy liked this business, too, of people in make-up. I mean, women dressed as men are quite frightening. Men dressed as women are frightening, hence The Impersonator. It’s bizarre. It’s off-beat. All these people who do this sort of thing, these transvestites, it’s mentally unhealthy, these strange desires that nobody can explain. I like everything to be explained. They can’t control themselves. I’m a very controlled person, actually, and I find it hard to understand people who aren’t controlled.'
The end of the show for Sarah (Candace Glendenning)
It wouldn’t be fair to say that I am not fond of actors. I mean they are a bloody nuisance, they really are. Good actors I like, but unfortunately I’ve worked with too many bad actors. I’ve had to doctor their performances and, invariably, those bad actors are the ones that give you the trouble. The good actors are the people that just get up and do it and sometimes if you try to meddle with their performance you spoil it. It’s a time honoured thing that actors will always say that directors are frustrated actors. No, I don’t think that would be very fair to say that totally, but there again, I wouldn’t argue with your comments. There’s that Hitchcock thing where he said that actors should be puppets, you know, and if I could make films without actors I would rather do it. But Jenny Hanley was great. Jenny was a real, real nice girl and she was not a bad little actress. A proper little lady. This film is Ray Brooks’ favourite of the ones he did with me.

If you would have asked me and said, “What are your motivations in putting things into the film?”, I wouldn’t have been able to come up with the same things that you have done as an observer. But I’ve looked at them and said, “Well, actually he’s probably right”. I think all those are valid comments, everything you said, although I wouldn’t have been conscious of it at the time, but then very few people do do things consciously. There are a lot of other comments you’ve made about my motivation for doing things that are not things I actually thought about but, having read them, having been faced with them like you might be by a psychiatrist, you would say, “Well, I don’t know, maybe that’s why I did put that in. Maybe that’s something I did have to get out”. I don’t know. As I say, I don’t like this area. I’m very much a realist. I’m a very down to earth person.’
Tiffany Jones

producer: Pete Walker
production manager: Robert Fennell
screenplay: Alfred Shaughnessy
(based on the comic-strip by Pat Tourret & Jenny Butterworth)
director of photography: Peter Jessop
editor: Alan Brett
music: Cyril Ornadel;
title song: Cyril Ornadel, Norman Newell
assistant directors: Brian Lawrence, Brian Bilgorri
sound recordist: Peter O’Connor
sound re-recordist: Tony Anscombe

cast: Anouska Hempel (Tiffany Jones), Ray Brooks (Guy), Susan Sheers (Jo), Eric Pohlmann (President Jabal), Martin Benson (Petcek), Damien Thomas (Salvador), Alan Curtis (Marocek), Bill Kerr (Morton), Richard Marner (Vorjak), John Clive (Stefan), Geoffrey Hughes (George), Ivor Salter (Karatik), Lynda Baron (Anna Karekin), Nick Zaran (Avtun), Martin Wyldeck (Brodsky), Pearl Hackney (Demonstrating Woman), Tom Mennard (Board of Trade Man), Derek Royle (Foreign Office Man), Sam Kelly (Film Director), Tony Simpson (Man in Gullivers), Walter Randall (Jan), Rose Hill (Woman in Gullivers), Kim Alexander (Harry Wheeler), Maggie Walker (Rita Wells), David Hamilton (Himself)

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Released: 1973 (Cert X)
Distribution: Hemdale
Running Time: 90 mins. (8,114 ft.)
Eastman Colour
US Title: TIFFANY JONES
Video Release in UK: Intervision VHS/B n/a
Ambassador Video (Rank) (86 mins. 35 secs.) VHS/B n/a
Video Masterpiece (86 mins. 35 secs.) VHS/B n/a

Synopsis

President Jabal, the ruthless dictator of Zirdana is infatuated with the model Tiffany Jones. In London for an arms deal, Jabal tricks Tiffany into meeting him by an offer of work. She also meets Salvador, the son of Zirdana’s murdered king, and agrees to help him overthrow the new regime. After a night at the opera with Jabal, Tiffany is kidnapped by members of Zirdana’s Marxist resistance movement who comically attempt to ‘torture’ her in the kitchens of a London restaurant. Escaping, she sets out to sabotage Jabal’s arms deal by persuading her modelling friends to distract him by stripping at a garden party. In the
meantime members of the Resistance attempt to secure the arms for themselves by impersonating Jabal and his foreign secretary at a meeting with the dealers. Everyone is finally brought together at a disused airfield and in the ensuing confusion Salvador flies home to stage a coup d’état and Tiffany is reunited with her long-suffering boyfriend, Guy.

TIFFANY JONES

It is depressing to report that the director and screen writer who created The Flesh and Blood Show were also responsible for Tiffany Jones. Although he was keen to make another suspense film, Walker was persuaded by his distributor, Hemdale, to produce a sex comedy which they hoped would reproduce the box office bonanza of Four Dimensions of Greta. Hemdale favoured a comic strip adaptation like Barbarella (1968) and Modesty Blaise (1966) and Walker suggested the Daily Mail’s dizzy ‘dolly bird’, Tiffany Jones. Tiffany was the creation of Jenny Butterworth and Pat Tourret and aimed predominantly at a female reader. ‘Tiffany is a wonderful character for a light-hearted adventure’, Walker told Shaun Usher of the Daily Mail, ‘and the cinema is overdue for the return of a real heroine who can get into and out of scrapes’ (27.10.72). Really he was valiantly covering a distinct lack of enthusiasm and affinity for the project (Verschooten 1979). It was a feeling shared by Cinema X who thought scatty model Tiffany was a dismal choice, declaring the character ‘a bit of a Girls’ Own Magazine hero’ and a rather sad leftover from the swinging London scene:
‘A long-haired, small-minded dolly London fashion girl bird. The last of a dying breed. The dollies are long gone from the scene ... But head-in-the clouds Tiffany still dollies ever onward ... she’s such a sexless drag.’ - Cinema X, vol.5, no.8, 1973

Walker claimed to be attracted by the Britishness of the character. It is strange, then, that he should have cast the New Zealander, Anouska Hempel, a model-turned-actress, in the role. Ray Brooks returned to play Tiffany’s photographer friend, but the rest of the cast had none of the usual Walker’s-own-repertory-company look about it. Instead, it conformed to the standard British sex comedy formula of a supporting cast of reliable character actors and comedians and a set decorated with stripping extras.

The film opened in the Spring of 1973 to disappointingly modest audiences deterred by poor notices. The box office receipts at the large Rialto cinema averaged less than £70 per screening in its first three weeks. For once, most of the reviewers got it right.

‘Minimal plot values, juvenile comedy dialogue and acting on the level of substandard television situation comedy.’ - David Robinson, The Times, 13.4.73

‘A comedy thriller so deadly that I’ll let the director off lightly by not naming him. It reminds me of those old naturist frolics filled to the brim with bosoms and bums that have nothing to do but wobble.’ - Derek Malcolm, The Guardian, 12.4.73

‘This is quite one of the most inept, witless, joyless, unerotic movies I’ve ever seen.’ - Philip French, New Statesman, 20.4.73

‘A fairy tale mess that ... would make a political satirist weep and a comic strip fanatic turn to Shakespeare.’ - Alexander Stuart, Films and Filming, Aug. 1973

‘The plot is a shambles, the comic business awful, and most of the “seductive” girls
who strip would be advised to cover up, poor dears. The film deserves one loud critical raspberry. Dreadfully unfunny.' - Arthur Thirkell, Daily Mirror, 13.4.73

These were harsh judgements certainly, but more on beam than the aberrant assessment of Cinema TV Today (28.4.73):

'A good script and some nicely timed comic performances lift this film out of the turgid skin flick class... cheerfully nonsensical.'

It was a stroke of luck for Walker that the trade press responded so favourably to his adult panto, at last appreciating his ironic style, but only when it was so liberally applied that it lost all subtlety. Satirising material which does not take itself too seriously in the first place is a difficult task even for the finest comic imaginations. In less distinguished hands the result is inevitably embarrassing. The Monty Python team would probably have turned Tiffany Jones into a classic, but Walker had already had it made painfully clear that he did not quite have his father's comic gifts and Shaughnessy was too serious a screen writer for this fluff. Michael Armstrong, the versatile writer to whom Walker was later to turn, might just have pulled this project out of the fire, but as it was, it got thoroughly roasted. As Gareth Jones remarked at the time:

'In place of humour, the production has recourse to some of the more lethal devices of British farce - funny foreigners and inflated third-form puns.' - MFB, May 1973

The inescapable impression left by the film is that it displays more tit than wit. Its attempts at campness and to send up the espionage thriller in the way that Horror Hospital sent up the gore movie, always lack the conviction and sheer zaniness of Antony Balch. There is a bizarre scene, surprisingly passed by the BBFC for video, where a topless Tiffany is comically tortured by some Marxist cooks and threatened with hot soup and a whipping with spaghetti. The intention is Pythonesque but the result trades uneasily on the very pleasures it satirises. Lindsay Shonteff's contemporary 'Zapper' films (Big Zapper 1973, The Swordsman aka Zapper's Blade of Vengeance, 1974) achieve the kind of tongue-in-cheek parody that Tiffany Jones merely attempts by using sudden flourishes of comic book excess to surprise and delight the audience. There are few surprises in Tiffany Jones and only the occasional memorable moment, the best example being when one of the red cooks utters the immortal assertion, 'Karl Marx never liked transvestites'. For the rest of the time, the gags flag and the tired script resorts to xenophobic patriotism and a succession of devices to reveal Anouska Hempel's charms. In fact, her charms and bubbly performance were the film's only redeeming feature for most commentators. The script gives Ray Brooks little to work with, most of the comedy performances are unconvincing and even Cyril Ornadel produced a trite and saccharine title song. Only ace lighting cameraman, Peter Jessop, comes out of this sorry romp with much credit, reserving some of his most spectacular cinematography for the gratuitous mass strip at the garden party hosted by the 'South London Branch of the Model Girl's Union'. Rarely in the annals of sexploitation have the technique of deep focus and the female pudendum combined to such extraordinary effect. This sort of glamour photography gives a whole new meaning to the phrase 'bit part actress' and one of the actresses showing her bits in the part of a model girl in the scene was about to be propelled into a starring role in Walker's next picture. Her name is Penny Irving and the film, House of Whipcord, was to set new standards for the low budget thriller.
PETER WALKER comments:

’Tiffany Jones I had quite a good deal on. Hemdale picked up on delivery in the UK and one or two other rights for virtually the cost of the negative, and then we split fifty-fifty on the rest of the world. Actually, the American deal was quite good. But it was one of those films that was asked for. Whenever I’ve done that it hasn’t worked properly. I mean it wasn’t a very good thing to start with anyway, but it just was an idea that I could sell. So it was prostitution really. It wasn’t a film that I wanted to make really but I was going to stand by the camera and shout “Action!”.
Anouska Hempel was a nice enough lady but she was difficult to work with. She wasn't troublesome but she moaned a lot and it was hard work getting the picture done. In the end, although you might just say, "Oh, let's just go out and make that film", a professionalism comes out in you, and when you get on the floor you've got to try and get the best you can from what you've got. It was difficult. You're quite right, it wasn't a good Freddy script. I had an overall idea of where it should go but, I don't know, it just didn't work. I had good enough people in it, you know. There were some good performances. I was going to use Olivia Newton John, and that was before it all happened for her. She'd been in a rock group called Toomorrow (sic). I was talking a deal with her manager who was an Australian guy, and then I heard her talking and she had this terrible Australian accent and I thought, "that's not really Tiffany Jones"; but she had the look."
**House Of Whipcord**

producer: Pete Walker  
screenplay: David McGillivray  
original story: Peter Walker  
director of photography: Peter Jessop  
editor: John Black  
music: Stanley Myers  
production manager: Edward Dorian  
assistant directors: Brian Lawrence, James Hamilton  
editor: John Black  
supervising editor: Matt McCarthy  
art director: Mike Pickwoad  
make-up: George Partleton  


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Released: 1974 (Cert X)  
Distribution: Miracle  
Running Time: 102 mins.  
US Title: HOUSE OF WHIPCORD  
Video Release in UK: Home Video Suppliers (83 mins?) VHS/B n/a; Derann Film Services (97 mins. 56 secs.) VHS/B/V2000 n/a; Redemption (97 mins. 56 secs.) VHS

**Synopsis**

Ann-Marie De Vernay, a French model working in London, has been fined for posing in the nude in public as part of a publicity stunt. She is consoled by a mysterious stranger, Mark Dessart, who invites her to his parents' home in the country. Upon arrival, Dessart disappears and Ann-Marie is inducted into what she soon learns is a prison by two uniformed women, Bates and the sadistic Walker. Forced to strip, shower and wear a hessian tunic, Ann-Marie is dragged before the prison's unbalanced governor, Mrs. Wakehurst, and her blind and feeble partner, Justice Bailey, and informed that she is being punished for her permissive behaviour. Her cellmate, Claire, explains that the penalties for infringement of the stringent rules are solitary confinement, flogging and, for a third offence, death by hanging. Hearing that another inmate is to be hanged, Ann-Marie and Claire stage an unsuccessful rescue attempt resulting only in solitary confinement and whipping.
Refusing to accept her fate, Ann-Marie manages to escape and is given a lift by a lorry driver, Mr. Kind, who only succeeds in returning her to the prison in the mistaken belief that it is a hospital. He does, however, notify her flatmate Julia, who goes to visit Ann-Marie in the 'private clinic' and discovers that she has been hung for attempting to escape. Julia is now herself in the clutches of Mrs. Wakehurst but is trailed by her boyfriend, Tony, who alerts the police. Wakehurst accidentally kills her son, Mark Dessart, and then commits suicide. Julia is rescued and Bates and Walker are arrested.

**HOUSE OF WHIPCORD**

‘When lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.’ - James 1, 15

‘Once we have recognised this quality of English sadism or, more precisely, Selwynism ... we are in a far better position to consider later manifestations of the Gothic strain in English culture ... Selwynism can be utilised to create a highly effective and perfectly legitimate work of art, just as much as it can deteriorate into sensationalism. But what is vitally important is that the critic has some awareness of these components of Gothic literature, rather than simply throwing up his hands in horror at what he imagines is some new and particularly degenerate form of morbidity.

- David Pirie, *A Heritage of Horror*, Gordon Fraser, 1973 p.18
In an austere and echoing refectory a young woman’s back is bared for punishment. She stands as if crucified, with arms spread wide waiting for the whip to fall. Above her a banner reads ‘THE WORLD FOR CHRIST’. We are watching an emblematic moment from Walker’s tenth film, *House of Whipcord*. Nothing in the previous nine has prepared us for this, and yet there is a grim familiarity about the proceedings. Scenes like this recur in English films like guilty thoughts in a troubled conscience. Press-ganged sailors are flayed with cat-'o-nine-tails, accused witches are thrashed into confessions, stern Victorian prostitutes chastise their clients, emaciated prisoners of war are beaten by Nipponese guards and stoical public schoolboys thank their prefects for the caning they have just endured. *La vice Anglaise*, *sado-masochism*, these are paradoxically foreign expressions for the secret rites at the heart of British imperialism. We are fascinated by the ritualistic giving and receiving of pain. As spectacle, it appeals to our most primitive repressed sexual drives, and political instincts - the twin thrills of power and submission fixed in the iconic image of the ritual flogging. Walker was fully aware of its power to excite:

When we sat down to do *House of Whipcord* we said, “What turns them on? Sadism and flagellation” - *Films and Filming*, March 1976

*Sado-masochistic sexuality is the ace card of the exploitation film-maker, a winning combination of sex and violence that can only be trumped by the censor. The safest way to play the S-M card is in the context of a socially-redeeming critique of brutality and repressive ideology. Walker played it to perfection but in taking the trick he created a piece of cinema with a profundity he never really anticipated. Although its inspiration was the exploitation of a prurient interest in discipline, ‘there came out of it a much better film than a fladge fantasy’* (*Films and Filming*, March 1976). It was a film with all the austerity of the three-day week that prefigured its release; a film with the same stench of moral decay as the public life of the time.

When exploitation film-makers claim redeeming social value for their product it is usually a sign of bogus posturing, a self-interested ploy to escape the censor’s knife. Only a few of these films actively seek to change the conditions from which they profit, but almost all represent, in some way, the world in which they were made. Only the rarest of them capture an essence of their age with the allegorical precision of *House of Whipcord*.

Although *Whipcord*’s makers deny its significance in motivating the movie, it is instructive to look at the film’s contemporary context. *Whipcord* was written in the early months of 1973, a period of considerable challenge to social consensus in Britain. Gas and hospital workers were flexing their industrial muscles, IRA car bombs were exploding in the heart of London, ‘mugging’ had become a cause for concern and the newspapers were full of stories about the involvement of Lord Lambton in a ‘top people’s vice ring’. Pressure from ‘below’ was met with only moral laxity and corruption from above as the unruly classes ran riot in a way dramatised by the recent cinematic *bête noir*, *A Clockwork Orange*.
(1971). There were, however, clear signs of rearmament among both official and self-appointed guardians of moral propriety. In 1971, the Nation-wide Festival of Light brought together a number of organisations with parliamentary links campaigning for a reassertion of Christian values. One of its most prominent celebrants, Lord Longford, quickly published a widely-publicised report on pornography, while permissiveness in the cinema was attacked in the ultimately unsuccessful Cinematograph and Indecent Displays Bill (1973). In Soho, the cosy and corrupt relationship between porn barons and the Obscene Publications Squad was being rapidly dismantled by the new Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Robert Mark, with a consequent wave of raids and seizures. In Parliament, the House was about to debate the restoration of hanging. Placed in such a morally volatile context, it is hard not to think of Walker’s tale of the punishment of the permissive as an allegory of the times.
If Walker and his distributors had realised the potential of marketing the film as an attack on reactionary repressions, rather than as a simple ‘flagge fantasy’, they might have discovered a whole new audience of radical students and intellectuals. As it was, they targeted the market they knew, and audiences arrived in raincoats rather than combat jackets. But at least pressure from the film’s distributors (Miracle) to change the title to ‘Whiplash Girls’ was resisted.

In the time-honoured exploitation tradition, Walker conceived *House of Whipcord* first as a poster, ‘a girl’s face screaming through a noose’ and then built his concept around that image. He developed a story outline with Alfred Shaughnessy who wrote twenty pages of screenplay before he had to abandon the project, probably because of more lucrative television commitments. Walker, however, was in no mood to quit, having been ‘definitely convinced’ by *The Flesh and Blood Show* that he was capable of making a horror film (Verschooten 1979). He needed a writer, fast, and consulted with his friend Ray Selfe, a director, exhibitor and all-round cinephile. Selfe recommended a young cinema journalist who had just tried his hand at screen writing with Selfe’s own *White Cargo* (1973). David McGillivray was already known to Walker as the first journalist to interview him and a visitor to the filming of *The Flesh and Blood Show*, and was immediately enthused by the idea of working on what he saw as a serious thriller. The screenplay was turned out in two weeks for the bargain price of £200. Walker was delighted, making only minor adjustments, simplifying the climax and adding a few extra scenes, but he had insisted all along that his writer stick faithfully to the plot outline he had been given. McGillivray, however, did persuade his director to tone down the film a little, reducing the amount of whipping in a key scene - an influence he now regrets asserting:

‘I made him take the sex out of the film. I can’t believe what I did ... I thought there was too much whipping in it.’ - McGillivray, 1995

To McGillivray’s amazement, Walker filmed his screenplay ‘virtually word for word as I typed it’. McGillivray had written a part for himself so he could attend the location filming, and was fascinated by Walker’s technique:

‘I loved the speed at which he worked ... I was very impressed. He knew what he was doing and, although he followed the script to the letter ... something he was doing worked. He was able to exert a subtle influence. I don’t know what it was because I couldn’t see, but something he did worked.’ - McGillivray, 1995

*Whipcord* is the story of a private prison whose aged governors have wanton young women abducted for cruel and merciless chastisement. The interiors were filmed in a disused asylum in Clapham, south London, but many of the exterior locations were shot in the Forest of Dean. This was unremarkable enough at the time but now gives the film a
chilling new resonance. It was, after all, at the edge of the Forest of Dean in Gloucester that serial killers Fred and Rose West were operating their own private house of torture throughout the 1970s; not ironically, in the cause of moral rearmament but in celebration of their own warped take on sexual liberation through S&M. Filming was completed in just four weeks in the summer of 1973 with a cast that again included Ray Brooks as the male lead and The Flesh and Blood Show’s villain, Patrick Barr, as blind Justice Bailey, another of Walker’s twisted judges. It is women, however, who are at the centre of most of Walker’s films and Whipcord for the first time gave prominent parts to older actresses - Barbara Markham as the sadistic prison governor, Dorothy Gordon as Bates, the faithful wardress, and, most significantly, Sheila Keith as the authoritarian prison ‘screw’, self-mockingly named Walker. This was the first of five memorable collaborations between Walker and Keith, a veteran Scottish actress previously known for her minor contributions to television sit-coms. ‘I’d never done anything like this in my life before, playing this frightening prison wardress creature. [But] I said I’d have a crack at it’, was how she recalled her approach to the part (World of Horror 9, 1975), and her performance won nothing but plaudits from her director. He later described her to Alan Jones as ‘an actress who never needs direction’ (Starburst 57, 1983). The leading roles for younger women went to the tried-and-tested Ann Michelle, sister of TV comedy ‘Allo ‘Allo’s Vickie and star of Virgin Witch (1970), Psychomania (1971) and Mistress Pamela (1972), and more controversially, to a diminutive glamour model, Penny Irving. The vivacious Penny had a small role in Tiffany Jones and was also cast as a gangster’s girl in Lindsay Shonteff’s remarkable Big Zapper, but this was a much more demanding part requiring a convincing French accent and an emotional range which would have taxed an experienced thespian. Her casting was risky, as McGillivray acknowledged: ‘We were all doubtful about whether she could pull it off and all I can say is that she was better than I expected’ (The Dark Side, Apr. 1991). Ms Irving went on to pursue a career in television - as a regular cast member of the sit-com Are You Being Served? and as a hostess for the Mr and Mrs game show.

After three months of post-production House of Whipcord was ready for the censor’s stern appraisal in March 1974. Between its inception and its completion England had been blitzed by IRA bombs, John Poulson had been convicted of corrupting local government officials, millions of homes had been repeatedly blacked out by power cuts and millions of workers had been put onto a three-day week. Half of the strip clubs in Soho had closed down, some of the most powerful vice barons had been arrested, and the Conservative party had voted for the restoration of the death penalty and had finally lost its majority. Its leadership was about to be passed to ‘The Iron Lady’, champion of moral rearmament and a terrifying echo of another Margaret - House of Whipcord’s grim-faced governor.
At the BBFC, Stephen Murphy’s response to the film must have surprised and delighted its makers. Rather than a simple flagellation fantasy, Murphy saw it as ‘a very fine film and a very timely one’ (McGillivray 1995). He detected a hard-edged social allegory attacking the Nation-wide Festival of Light, with senile Judge Bailey representing Lord Longford and scheming governor, Margaret Wakehurst standing for moral entrepreneur, Mary Whitehouse. The film was passed with one tiny sound cut (an extra whip crack and scream). Its allegorical significance came as a revelation to its writer. As McGillivray put it, ‘this was news to me’ (The Dark Side, Apr.1991). Walker, however, was cock-a-hoop, and immediately added a prologue to the film as a ‘come-on’ to audiences looking for political significance and as further provocation to moral rearmers:

‘This film is dedicated to those who are disturbed by today’s lax moral codes and who eagerly await the return of corporal and capital punishment.’

One must assume that the dedication was meant ironically but Welch Everson argues in Cult Horror Movies (1993) that the film’s message is sufficiently ambiguous to leave this open to doubt. The film’s trailer lends little support to this theory. Its copy roundly condemns the House of Whipcord’s custodians as ‘warped tyrants’ and ‘depraved women’ who turn ‘young girls into fear-crazed animals’. Interestingly, the opening scene of the script, in which Whipcord’s liberal credentials are established, is absent from the film. In the missing scene a BBC journalist interviews the governess of Coswell Grange open prison, the institution which Mrs. Wakehurst had run during the 1940s as if it was ‘Newgate’. The new award-winning governor stresses the importance to rehabilitation of treating a prisoner ‘like a human being instead of an incurable criminal’. There is nothing more demoralising, she insists ‘than wearing some dreadful smock day in day out’ and ‘they’re not here to be demoralised’.

Whipcord opened at the 1,000 seat London Pavilion and grossed more than £13,500 in three weeks, an encouraging return on a £60,000 investment. Critical reception was kinder than it had ever been before. Felix Barker in the Evening News (28.3.74) was prepared to qualify his dismissal of the picture as ‘pretty sick stuff by accepting that it did show a ‘vestige of validity’. Nigel Andrews in the high-brow Financial Times was more impressed, describing the film’s concept as one of ‘quite inspired nastiness’ and complimenting its ‘strong performances’ and ‘deft screenplay and direction’:

‘Pete Walker’s direction never sacrifices realism of setting and character to the Gothic excess of the plot ... All in all, it’s a surprisingly superior addition to one of the cinema’s more disreputable genres.’ (19.4.74)

In Films and Filming (May, 1974), Derek Elley also praised the performances of Barbara Markham and Sheila Keith and described Walker’s direction as a ‘revelation’ for a film-maker who ‘has been notable to date only for the worthlessness of his product.’ The tireless Marjorie Bilbow also gave the film qualified approval in Cinema TV Today, but the most enthusiastic response again came from the Monthly Film Bulletin where Tony Rayns was impressed by Whipcord’s portrait of certain types of Englishness and an emotional depth which was ‘extraordinary’ to find in ‘an essentially commercial exploitation movie’ (MFB May 1974).

House of Whipcord is certainly Walker’s most effective evocation of mood. Stanley Myers’ Gothic score and Peter Jessop’s noir photography are skilfully blended with the starkest of production design to create an atmosphere of brooding malevolence. Whereas most women in-prison films concentrate on the relationships between inmates, Whipcord emphasises isolation and fear. The minimalism necessitated by low-budget set-dressing is turned to advantage - uncovered light bulbs, bare walls, carpetless floors and rude benches perfectly complement an aural environment of jangling keys, echoing corridors, quiet
...and no one escaped...

HOUSE of WHIPCORD

Barbara MARKHAM
Patrick BARR
Ray BROOKS
Ann MICHELLE
and introducing
Penny IRVING

MAKING MISCHIEF
sobbing and the rhythmic creak of the gallows. You can almost smell the aroma of sweat and carbolic. Sheila Keith, clad in simple blue serge shift and leather belt exudes an air of icy malice. Few other actors can match the menace she generates with a narrowing of the eyes or the bogus charm she manufactures with a forced smile. As head wardress, she elevates sadistic puritanism to a vocation and shame and guilt to a state of grace. ‘I’m going to make you ashamed of your body’, she assures Penny Irving’s character, ‘I’m going to see to that personally’. And later she makes clear that her ultimate interest is the total humiliation and destruction of the self: ‘First we will kill your vanity, and then the rest follows of its own accord’.

There is nothing particularly novel in Walker’s characterisation of his namesake as a subaltern bully in uniform. She is a staple of the prison movie. So, too, is the psychopathic governor, melodramatically interpreted here by Barbara Markham in a wardrobe of clothes eerily reminiscent of Whitehouse and Thatcher. The tailored woollen suit, the cameo brooch and the sensible brogues present the stable bourgeois matron, the facade which conceals the unstable and vindictive dominatrix within. The sombre restraint expressed in the prison costumes contrasts dramatically with the flamboyant fashionableness of the feckless young. The stripping away of this decadent finery is a crucial rite of passage at the House of Whipcord, an essential prelude to the tightening of loose libidos. Walker once confided to McGillivray that, as a man on the edge of middle age, he was worried about his ability to communicate to a young audience, but here he perfectly articulates the nightmare of a generation still freeing itself from a prison of moral judgements. He gives the film, in its iconography and structure, the character of a waking dream. Its mise-en-scène is both bizarre and ‘other’, a frightening and claustrophobic place from which one flees only to be returned. The film uses the same dream narrative of compulsive struggle to escape followed by inevitable confinement which was so effectively invoked by Patrick McGoohan’s The Prisoner on television, but is much darker and more harrowing in tone. Whereas in McGoohan’s series we share his prisoner’s dream and wake at the end of an hour when the cell door bangs shut again, in Walker’s existentialist nightmare the protagonist fails to make it to the hour of waking and we are offered only the satisfactions of retribution rather than reassurance. In constructing his narrative, of course, Walker owed a considerable debt to Psycho, a debt subtly acknowledged by naming one of the wardresses ‘Bates’ and making his own Hitchcockian cameo appearance as a passing cyclist. Not content, however, with Psycho’s linear narrative, he reordered it using the flashback technique so popular in his favourite film noirs. The flashback sequence had been an integral part of his 3-D movies but in Whipcord it is used to re-configure the film, amplify its claustrophobic quality and supply a false sense of security to the viewer.
If Whipcord is, structurally, Walker's most accomplished film, thematically it contains most of his keynote obsessions. Most obviously it dramatises the conflicts between generational moralities and between libidinous London and the puritanical provinces. In the perception of the blind and senile Judge Bailey, London has ceased to be a spiritual centre for the disintegrating British Empire and State. Its decadence is confirmed by the leniency of its 'corrupt and permissive' courts which pass 'effete and misguided judgements'. As a consequence, spiritual and penal authority have been usurped by the displaced survivors of the old order in their rural retreat. It is their self-appointed responsibility to maintain the old values of penitence and deference, to anticipate Thatcherism by privatising those functions which the state can no longer fulfil:

'We do not countenance, here, reformers, prison welfare visitors or chaplains. We do not provide comfortable rooms with chintz curtains, television. This, young woman, is a real prison, a proper house of correction.'

Crucially, however, old Bailey's rhetoric is undercut by the massive hypocrisy which Walker always associates with his generation and class. His claims to offer Christian correction are negated by his vilification of prison chaplains (see above) and the confiscation of an inmate's gold crucifix; and his assumptions of moral superiority are undermined by a personal history of adultery, unmarried co-habitation and the fathering of a child out of wedlock. His lover, Mrs. Wakehurst, compounds their 'sinfulness' with incestuous cravings for their 'illegitimate' son to whom McGillivray mischievously gives the alias, Mark E. Dessart (DeSade). Wakehurst is driven neither by moral zeal nor religious evangelism, but by sadism and resentment. Her malicious cruelty is thrown into sharper relief by the good Samaritan lorry driver, Mr. Kind, who tries to rescue one of her victims, but his artless artisan good will is no match for her bourgeois cunning.
HOUSE OF WHIPCORD
COLOUR

BARBARA MARKHAM
PATRICK BARR  RAY BROOKS
and introducing PENNY IRVING

PRODUCED and DIRECTED by PETER WALKER

MIRACLE FILMS present

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MAKING MISCHIEF
Wakehurst (her name combines the prisons of Wakefield and Parkhurst) is not simply the representative of a decaying power elite, she is also a corrupt matriarch and wicked mother. McGillivray’s script plays with oedipal signs and Shakespearean allusions to establish her as a deranged Lady Macbeth, steeped in blood and crazed by power. She uses and manipulates Judge Bailey at will, tricking him into signing execution warrants and giving him lines to speak. The old Judge no longer has control of the game he set in motion. He sits at his chessboard, fondling the pieces, trying to distinguish the more powerful Queen from the beleaguered King. ‘I find it very difficult to tell the King from the Queen, they feel exactly alike’, he complains ‘I dare say one is taller than the other.’ It is Margaret Wakehurst who is now the tyrannical ruler of the House of Whipcord. Hers, like Thatcher’s, is a ruthless, primitive and xenophobic new conservatism with little but contempt for the old paternalism that the Judge stands for. Not only is she a figure associated with the past who is trying to stifle the vitality of the present, she in turn, is also relentlessly goaded by the demons of her own past. Wakehurst is bitter about the mistakes that led to her dismissal from the prison service twenty-five years before, and in the figure of Anne-Marie she sees the ghost of the French woman whose brutal treatment caused her jailer’s downfall. Like Sir Arnold Gates in The Flesh and Blood Show she has lost the ability to separate the past from the present. She, too, is living twenty-five years ago.

Unlike the earlier thriller, there is a distinctly misogynistic flavour to much of this, which might have been expected to cause disquiet in the BBFC when the video was submitted by the Redemption company in 1995. It is, after all, women who are punished for their ‘immorality’ and female tyrants who whip, starve and hang them. Moreover, there are moments in McGillivray’s script which sardonically extend the metaphor of the jail and sadistic treatment to the institution of marriage and the perceived emotional cruelty of Tony’s (Ray Brook’s) mistress. But the BBFC’s examiners were prepared to pass the video uncut, perhaps recognising the qualities and importance of the picture, just as their predecessors had. Their decision must have surprised Redemption as much as the earlier response had amazed Walker and McGillivray. Together they had set out to make a sensational thriller, but almost by accident they finished up with one of the most socially significant films of the 1970s. Looking back at their achievement two years later, Walker was modest in his assessment:

I don’t like any of the films I have made, but I thought that that worked on its level.’ - Film Illustrated, Mar. 1976

By 1983 he was more positive:

‘I have good ideas for the concept of films and Whipcord was my best.’ - Starburst 57, 1983

He denies that there are political messages in the film beyond the condemnation of fanaticism and its association with mental collapse, but this has not stopped viewers from
finding significance in its highly schematic narrative. Gilbert Verschooten recalls that when *Whipcord* was screened at the 1975 Sitges Festival it was strongly applauded by a Spanish audience who saw in Judge Bailey a caricature of General Franco and read the film as an allegory of the political situation in their own country.

McGillivray, like Walker, while doubting the validity of the political readings of the film, still regards it as his finest achievement:

'It's the only one of my films I can bear to watch today.' - *Fantasynopsis* 4, 1991

**PETER WALKER comments:**

'Everyone else reads these things as though I was saying, "This is the way it should be". Not at all. *Whipcord* particularly was sort of tongue-in-cheek really. I mean, I was sort of on the side of Mrs. Wakehurst and Justice Bailey. You had to be really careful, you see. I mean, every week *The Avengers* made films like that. They were all about people from The Monday Club who mete out their own justice to people. That's what Steed and whoever it was investigated every week. So you had to be very careful not to get into that area. In fact, this was something that older statesman Freddy Shaughnessy always used to lecture me on. "Be very careful about that otherwise, if you've got to do it, you've got to do it so they don't know which side you're on". I thought Mary Whitehouse had got a point. I just thought she did not sell it very well. I still think she's OK. It's just that she was ridiculed, and set herself up to be ridiculed.
MANY YOUNG GIRLS HAVE ENTERED . . .
NONE HAVE YET COME OUT!

HOUSE OF
WHIPCORD

A PETE WALKER PRODUCTION starring
BARBARA MARKHAM  PATRICK BARR
RAY BROOKS  ANN MICHELLE
Screenplay by DAVID MCGILLIURAY
Of course Margaret Wakehurst was not intended to be Margaret Thatcher. She was a nobody when that film was made. She was Education Secretary and quite glamorous and feminine, and it was only after getting the leadership that she began to toughen herself up. No, that’s purely coincidence, but a nice thought. The idea in creating these characters is that they are quintessential people. Mrs. Wakehurst, I wanted her to be feminine. I remember Barbara Markham saying to me, “Now, do you want me to play this like a tough lesbian?”. And I said, “No, no, no she’s feminine”, and there’s something more sinister about that than putting it on the nose like Sheila Keith, you know, greasing her hair back. You do meet people like that [Mrs. Wakehurst] all the time. Esher ladies are like that - cold calculating they are, you know, quite ruthless.

Barbara Markham was actually one of the country’s leading dialogue coaches. She had worked with all the major stars, you know, Brando, everyone. She’d had a whole history of theatre and television and stuff, but nothing major. She looked just right. She was a terribly feminine woman. She had this kind of attractive/ugly face. She had men running after her like you couldn’t believe, handsome young men falling at her feet. Extraordinary. Actually, when she was working on the picture I thought she wasn’t doing it for me. I felt, ‘I’m not getting really what I want here”. But, when the picture was all together, it suddenly all worked with her. She was right and I was wrong. Not that I argued with her, I didn’t. That was a very happy picture. It was a doddle to direct really. Actually, Mrs. Wakehurst was out of a book. Freddy [Shaughnessy] had an old book on prisons, published at the turn of the century, and there was this ferocious-looking woman who ran a prison and her name was Mrs. Wakehurst.

In calling the Sheila Keith character ‘Walker’ I was just going with Freddy Shaughnessy actually. When we were doing the story I said “Well, she’s the real evil one, this wardress, lesbian, no redeeming features, what shall we call her?” And Freddy said ‘How about calling her Walker?” I said OK. And Bates, as you quite rightly picked up, was just a throwback to Psycho. My brief to Dorothy Gordon was, “Recreate the part you played in Women of Twilight with Freda Jackson”. I said “It’s that woman grown up - a bit dopey, does what she’s told, doesn’t know what’s happening”. Little Penny [Irving] was very good too. She was a real gem. Casting her in a lead role was a risk but, here again, it was who would do it: “Well, dear, we’re going to take your clothes off and we’re going to whip you”. You don’t quite put it that way, but they read the script and they say, “Hey!”, you know.

House of Whipcord was a very good idea but I didn’t like the film. If I’d made it again I would have made it three times better. For one thing, it would have been shorter. It was padded and there were expositions that I would have done differently now; but then that’s just the way that movies have moved on, you know, there isn’t so much dialogue now, you don’t have to explain the way you used to. The scene when poor old Jack Kind takes her back to prison I didn’t shoot terribly well. It should have been a real gasp, “Oh no!” but I didn’t get the right angles, I didn’t construct the scene properly. I mean the message got over but I could have made much more of it. There’s so much more I could have made of that film but, you know, all these things you’re up against. It’s always the producer in you that has to win over the director. You have to look not at the best way of shooting a scene but the quickest and most efficient way. But I enjoyed that film. It was a good film. It was fun.”
producer: Pete Walker
executive producer: Tony Tenser
screenplay: David McGillivray
director of photography: Peter Jessop
music: Stanley Myers
production manager: Robert Fennell
assistant directors: Brian Lawrence, James Hamilton
editor: Robert Dearberg
art director: Chris Burke
sound recordist: Peter O’Connor
sound re-recordist: Tony Anscombe

cast: Rupert Davies (Edmund Yates), Sheila Keith (Dorothy Yates), Deborah Fairfax (Jackie), Paul Greenwood (Graham), Kim Butcher (Debbie), Fiona Curzon (Merle), Jon Yule (Robin), Tricia Mortimer (Lillian), Pamela Fairbrother (Delia), Edward Kalinski (Alec), Victor Winding (Detective Inspector), Anthony Hennessey (Detective Sergeant), Noel Johnson (Judge), Michael Sharvell-Martin (Barman), Tommy Wright (Nightclub Manager), Andrew Sachs (Barry Nichols), Sue Shander (Female Guest), Nicholas John (Pete), Leo Genn (Dr. Lytell), Gerald Flood (Matthew Laurence), Jack Dagmar (Old Man), Martin Taylor (Male Guest), Bill Barnsley & L.W. Clarke (patrolmen), Donald Stratford (Actor), Beryl Nesbitt (Actress), Jim Bowdell (Bike Youth), Veronica Griffiths (1st Bike Girl), Deena Martyn (2nd Bike Girl), David McGillivray (Young Doctor), Pete Walker (voice of Mr. Brunskill)

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Released: 1974 (Cert X)
Distribution: Miracle
Running Time: 86 mins. (7,753 ft.)
Eastman Colour
Shooting Title: NIGHTMARE FARM
US Title: FRIGHTMARE (video title: FRIGHTMARE II)
Video Release in UK: Home Video Suppliers VHS/B n/a Derann Film Services (82 mins. 46 secs.) VHS/B n/a Redemption (86 mins. Due to NTSC transfer)
aka: Once Upon A Frightmare; Schizophrenic Murderer; Terror Sin Habla
Synopsis

In 1957 a husband and wife are committed to a mental institution for 'sickening' murders. Fifteen years later, their daughter Jackie and her delinquent half-sister Debbie are living together and constantly quarrelling. At a dinner party, Jackie confesses her worries about her younger sister to Graham, a psychiatrist, but she does not tell him that she is secretly delivering gruesome parcels to her stepmother Dorothy at an isolated farmhouse where she has been living with her husband, Edmund, since their release from the asylum.

Neither Jackie nor Edmund realise that Dorothy has been advertising her services as a fortune teller in order to lure new victims to the farmhouse.

Graham visits Debbie hoping to discover the cause of her rebellious behaviour and Jackie is furious when she finds out he has been interfering. However, we soon learn that Debbie has been following her mother's footsteps when she shows her boyfriend Alec the mutilated body of a barman his gang had recently beaten up. As the police begin to investigate Debbie, Graham begins to investigate her parents, discovering that their crimes had involved cannibalism and that they have now been released. He confronts Jackie with his findings and she admits that she has been trying to satisfy her stepmother's craving for eating brains by delivering parcels of animal brains. Graham decides to visit Dorothy (under the pretext of having his tarot cards read) to determine her state of mind. He does not realise that Debbie is already at the farmhouse, having delivered her boyfriend to be murdered by Dorothy. Jackie is called to the farm to find Debbie and Dorothy mutilating Graham's corpse with a power drill. She is to be their next victim. Edmund looks on impotently.
Frightmare

“All murders are family murders”
- David Cooper, The Death of The Family, Penguin 1971

‘Brown paper packages tied up with strings, these are a few of my favourite things’
- Rodgers and Hammerstein, The Sound of Music, 1965

Whipcord had established a distinctive direction for Walker and McGillivray. Convinced that the march of permissiveness was rapidly making sex films passé, Walker decided to abandon his practice of alternating thrillers and skin flicks and pursue the new path of ‘terror’ pictures. With Hammer studios in terminal decline and desperately searching for some way to modernise their tired Gothic product, the time seemed ideal for a fresh look at the horror genre. Hammer had already explored the psychological thriller in a series of black and white low-budgeters including Taste of Fear (1962), Maniac (1963), Nightmare (1964), Hysteria (1964), The Nanny (1965); and more recently with colour chillers like Crescendo (1970), Straight On Till Morning (1971) and Fear in the Night (1971). The financial success of these films rarely matched that of the studio’s period horrors. Their problems were probably both narrative and aesthetic. While their publicity followed the prime directive of the exploitation movie - first attract the 19 year-old male - their narratives frequently failed to offer him appropriate opportunities for identification and involvement. The protagonists of these features were usually female, leaving the key category of picturegoers of the sixties and seventies with an identification problem. If the protagonist also failed to function as an object of lustful desire because of the casting or aesthetic treatment of the production, the
film inevitably suffered damaging ‘word-of-mouth’ among the most pro-active members of its potential audience. When these basic rules of commercial film making are broken in, say, a picture like *Carrie* (1976), identification and sexual desire must be compensated by other exploitation elements, usually graphic violence and displays of blood. Walker understood this perfectly, but Hammer were handicapped by an innate respectability which they struggled to overcome. Nudity and bloodletting were still constrained by notions of good taste which quickly became antithetical to the successful exploitation film of the 1970s. While the extent of Hammer’s ambition was to ‘chill’ or mildly disgust their audiences, Walker wanted to scare them rigid and ‘gross them out’ in the way that *Psycho* had done and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) was doing when he was making his ‘terror’ films.

Even while he was still shooting *Whipcord*, Walker was looking for something which would breach the taste barrier still more comprehensively. He put McGillivray on the case and was rewarded with a ‘phone call from the writer which simply said, ‘cannibalism’. This might seem an almost conventional starting idea for a horror film to a video age, but in 1973 Italian flesh eating epics were still in the future. The idea, however, was not totally out of the blue. It was inspired by a plane crash in the Andes in 1972 after which some passengers had survived by eating the bodies of others, an event which was to produce two more films, *Survive!* (1976) and *Alive* (1993). Cannibalism driven by necessity was shocking enough, but pathological cannibalism, as suggested by McGillivray, would certainly breach the taste barrier cinematically and gastronomically! But it was still not without precedent in British cinema. Although Walker denies any direct influence, McGillivray had seen the previous year’s *Death Line* (US title *Raw Meat*), Gary Sherman’s grisly subterranean X-file about the weird wild man of the London Underground who lived on human flesh.
Walker was instantly enthused by McGillivray's idea and set to work on a poster design for a film with the working title, 'Covered in Blood'. 'The main object' McGillivray recalls 'was to be nastier than House of Whipcord' (McGillivray 1994), to invent sequences which would cause feelings of nausea in the viewer, without totally alienating the censor:

'It (the film) was designed to make people feel ill ... Pete Walker and I sat in his London office thinking up gory murders and when we thought of something that we found utterly reprehensible I would go away and write it down.' - Fantasynopsis 4, 1991

The aim was clearly to 'gross out' the audience but Walker’s vision of the film embraced more than gore. At an early stage of concept-development he arranged a screening of one of his favourite film noirs, Out of the Past (UK title: Build My Gallows High 1947), Jacques Tourneur’s fatalistic masterpiece scripted by Daniel Mainwaring and photographed by Nicholas Musuraca. His interest in Out of the Past may have been revived by Tom Flinn’s article in a contemporary issue of the influential cineaste magazine, The Velvet Light Trap, but the film was already a seminal influence in Walker’s cinema. It may be purely coincidental that both Out of the Past and Cool it Carol begin and end at a petrol station but there is no mistaking the presence of its central theme, the inescapable legacy of the past and the inevitability of fate, in a number of Walker’s films. House of Whipcord certainly owes a debt to the style of Tourneur’s dark drama in its use of high-key and low-key lighting. More directly, Whipcord echoes structural elements of Out of the Past in the way it uses the flashback. Both films insert lengthy flashback sections into a doomed night-time journey which returns the protagonist into a situation from which there is no escape. Interestingly, Tourneur’s protagonist adopts the name Bailey, the name of Whipcord’s blind judge. There is little to connect the two characters except, perhaps, that they are both ultimately
controlled by powerful and ruthless women. The demented villainess would return in Walker’s next film, but not as the *femme fatale* of the *noir* thriller but as a mad matriarch. It is in the characteristic twist he gives to female transgression that Walker simultaneously bends the conventions of *noir* cinema and represents the changed anxieties of his era. Crucially, these centre not on assertive female sexuality but rather on female power and control. It seems that Walker’s principal purpose in showing *Out of the Past* to his scriptwriter was to highlight a particular aspect of the *femme fatale* played by Jane Greer. He was fascinated by her duality, the way her sweet and plausible exterior conceals an inner self of murderous unscrupulousness. This duality would be more fully explored in McGillivray’s final collaboration with Walker, *Schizo* (1976), but here it provided an initial impetus in the development of a story idea. According to the scriptwriter’s diary, the initial concept was of ‘an apparently innocent and charming girl who is in fact killing men for her mad cannibal mother to eat.’ (McGillivray 1994). Vestiges of this idea would remain in the final script of *Frightmare*, but by then mum was quite capable of killing her own prey.

McGillivray wrestled with the plot throughout the autumn of 1973. ‘The story was so ridiculous that it took a very long time to instil it with any credibility’, remembers McGillivray (McGillivray 1994), and by December Walker was anxious to see a completed script. Some perfunctory research on the psycho pathology of cannibalism revealed that it is neither a psychotic symptom nor a hereditary condition but McGillivray was undeterred, coining the term ‘caribanthropy’ - a condition unknown to medical science. Launching into the final script he still did not know how the narrative would end. In spring 1974 his hasty and largely unrevised script went into production under the title ‘Nightmare Farm’ with a tight twenty five day shooting schedule (less than half the time it took Tourneur to film *Out of the Past*). There was never any doubt that Sheila Keith would play the mad mother. It was

Death by pitchfork. Mrs Yates claims another victim.
“HORRENDOUS CHILLER” Evening News
“FRIGHTENINGLY WELL MADE” Daily Telegraph
“BLOODTHIRSTY CREEPIE” Daily Mail

Starring:
SHEILA KEITH   RUPERT DAVIES
DEBORAH FAIRFAX   PAUL GREENWOOD
KIM BUTCHER
with guest star LEO GENN

FRIGHTMARE
A PETE WALKER PRODUCTION

FAR BEYOND A NIGHTMARE
a perfect piece of casting which she was happy to accept. Playing her husband was Rupert Davies, television’s Maigret and the sort of ‘name’ actor that Walker was keen to attract. Davies was best known for his long television career but he was no stranger to horror films, having already appeared in *The Bride of Fu Manchu* (1966), *Witchfinder General* (1968), *The Curse of the Crimson Altar* (1968), *Dracula Has Risen From The Grave* (1968), and *The Oblong Box* (1970). Leo Genn, the judge from *Die Screaming Marianne*, this time played a psychiatrist, but the rest of the cast were largely new to Walker’s films and unfamiliar to the public. Perhaps the best known face at the time was that of the beautiful Fiona Curzon who had just played a supporting role to bubbly popster Lulu in *The Cherry Picker* (1974), a truly dreadful comedy drama. The actor who would become the most famous face in the film played a character butchered within the first few minutes. He was *Fawlty Towers*’ Manuel, Andrew Sachs.

The result of all their labours premièred at the giant London Pavilion in time for Christmas 1974. The timing was not ideal. The weeks before Christmas are generally quiet for cinema box offices and that December London was in the grip of a ferocious IRA bombing campaign with explosions at post offices and large department stores. Cinemagoers frequented Piccadilly at their peril. Even so, *Frightmare* (as the film was renamed) netted £4,500 in its first two weeks and did better business than any of the other five British exploitation films showing in the West End. *Whipcord*, however, had done more than twice as well in its opening run. Those patrons whom the IRA could not deter, the critics did their best to discourage. *Frightmare* was swamped by a tidal wave of critical vitriol from the press.

‘If you like this, have your brain examined.’ - Ian Christie, *Daily Express*, 6.12.74

‘We can all, I think, manage without Pete Walker’s *Frightmare.*’ - Eric Shorter, *Daily Telegraph*, 6.12.74

‘both ridiculous and nasty’ - Hugh Herbert, *The Guardian*, 5.12.74

‘nasty, foolish and morally repellent’ - Philip French, *The Times*, 6.12.74

‘a moral obscenity’ - Margaret Hinxman, *Daily Mail*, 7.12.74

‘a peculiarly repellent little shocker’ - Derek Prouse, *Sunday Times*, 8.12.74

There was a recognition from some reviewers that the film was, at least, effectively made. Tom Hutchinson in *The Sunday Telegraph* likened it to ‘a well-crafted gibbet’ (8.12.74), while Margaret Hinxman acknowledged that it was ‘frighteningly well made by Pete Walker’ with ‘unnerving performances, especially from Rupert Davies and Sheila Keith.’ (Daily Mail 7.12.74). But these grudging words of praise were eclipsed by Fergus Cashin’s hysterical feature article in *The Sun*. Headed ‘What are stars like these doing in trash like this?’, it questioned the wisdom of Rupert Davies and Leo Genn in appearing in ‘the disgusting, repulsive, nauseating rubbish that is *Frightmare.*’ Walker, he recommended, should have his camera confiscated for life because ‘everything he has made is diabolical.’ In high dudgeon, he had phoned the director to express his indignation, telling him that a fellow journalist had been driven out of the screening by nausea. Walker told Cashin that he was delighted with his film but that:

‘I think it is a sickening movie and I’m not surprised a colleague of yours walked out. My lighting cameraman’s pregnant wife was actually sick. No, it is certainly not the kind of thing I like. I would prefer to make sentimental love stories. But I used my own money and have to give the public what it wants.’ - *The Sun*, 7.12.74

Walker’s statement had more than a hint of tongue-in-cheek, but probably he was upset by the ferocity of the press reviews and was yet to read the more favourable comments of the cineastes at *Films and Filming* and the *MFB*. ‘I don’t deserve this treatment’ he complained to McGillivray who managed to convince him that all the critical bile could be
turned to some advantage by using the most sensational phrases in the film’s advertising (McGillivray 1994). The strategy was courageous but largely unsuccessful. Not even the prospect of a ‘nasty’, ‘repellent’, ‘gruesome’ ‘moral obscenity’ could persuade the capital’s gorehounds to brave IRA bomb blast and critical bombast and enter the London Pavilion in the cold days of advent. They missed the film which Walker considered his most horrific and which his trailer promoted with the wonderfully droll copy line ‘an everyday story of country folk’. There is nothing everyday or ordinary about Frightmare, the story of a suburban psychopath who is irresponsibly released by liberal psychiatrists to drill and eat the brains of fresh victims. Over the last two decades its impact has been reduced by the rivers of blood and offal that have flowed in the film studios of Hollywood and Italy, but in the mid 1970s this was strong meat for British sensibilities. Again, it owes a considerable debt to Psycho in its atmosphere, execution and camp morticians’ humour, but it goes beyond Hitchcock in the depth of its scepticism towards psychiatry, and the irredeemable pessimism of its vision. It exudes precisely the mood Paul Schrader attributed to classic film noir, a sense of ‘all-enveloping hopelessness’ (Schrader, 1972). Its themes are violence, insanity, fate and the matriarchal family and it pursues them like Leatherface with a chainsaw.

Frightmare’s prologue takes us to a deserted funfair where the action was to have been set before a farmhouse in Haslemere offered a cheaper option. Stripped of its noise and flashing lights it presents the grey corpse of commercial pleasure like an out-of-season holiday camp, another location that was originally considered for the film. Andrew Sachs enters a fortune teller’s caravan and learns his destiny in a way he had never expected. Peter Jessop’s roving camera maintains a detached objectivity taking in images of domestic neglect and exotic fatalism until it comes to rest on Sach’s ripped-open head. Domesticity, destiny and death are on the agenda even before the tarot card iconography of the title sequence. The film’s opening scenes contrast the imagery of an aged establishment with pleasure-seeking youths who are denied participation in the adult world, as one by one the familiar Walker themes are introduced. The malign legacy of the past is represented by Sheila Keith’s Dorothy Yates, the mother from hell who has passed her pathological genes to her teenage daughter, Debbie. Sheila Keith gives McGillivray’s most inspired creation a terrifying life with a performance of demonic intensity. Dorothy is all the things a mother should not be - controlling, self obsessed and, ultimately, psychopathic - yet she gives the appearance of kindly beneficence which begins to undermine our faith in the beatification of motherhood and the essential goodness of family life. Frightmare offered a renewed assault on moral rearmament by implying that its core values might not necessarily be enshrined in its key institution of social stability.
In the Christian view of society the family is one of the vital parts of the structure... There must, at the centre of society, be a social unit where everyone can feel safe. Men and women are not given the emotional strength to live without the security which comes from love and trust.' - Sir Frederick Catherwood in Pornography: The Longford Report, 1970, p.140

But what price love and trust if your mother is a cannibal? Frightmare's politics of the family are similar to Psycho's, but its dynamics and psychology are rather different. Both films present a portrait of domineering mothers but, whereas in Psycho she is a triumph of taxidermy, in Frightmare she is loose with a Black and Decker. Her activities play just as entertainingly with Freudian theory as do those of Norman Bates. Norman may have realised his oedipal fantasies by stuffing his mother, but Dorothy expresses her own fantasies of matriarchal power by appropriating a frightening range of phallic weaponry - a power drill, a chopper, and a red-hot poker. It is this sort of camp excess which gives Walker's film its parodic edge and opens it up to metaphorical as well as literal readings. It delights in ironic references and the mischievous provocation of moral reformers. In the sequence where Graham, the psychologist, courts one of the daughters of the Yates family by taking her to the cinema, the film turns out to be La Grande Bouffe (Blow Out), Marco Ferreri's decadent tale of four men who eat themselves to death. This not only playfully alludes to Dorothy Yates own deadly appetites but also to The Nationwide Festival of Light whose members had been vociferous in their condemnation of La Grande Bouffe's gross offensiveness. Frightmare takes this offensiveness a step further by satirising the family relationships which were so sanctified by supporters of The Festival of Light: Yes, it agrees, the good mother should pass on her skills to her attentive daughter - but trepanning techniques? Yes, the dutiful daughter should bring a gift for her mother when she visits her - but a brown paper parcel stuffed with brains? Sure, a caring husband is protective of his wife - but even when she is butchering visitors? The Yates family (the name contains an anagram of 'eats') are an obscene travesty of familial fidelity and the values of hearth and home. Walker shows us all the comforting features of the peaceful home - pleasant rustic surroundings, a warming fire, a solid mantelpiece, a concerned father and a silver-haired mother, but they fail spectacularly to add up to security. This is not 'a social unit where everyone can feel safe.' Its signs no longer signify the conventional meaning. This is 25 Cromwell Street in rural Surrey, a domicile of perversity. It is a place to which offspring return with trepidation and as such it acknowledges the dark side of the family, the side of violence and abuse, the side that 'does people's heads in.'

In so far as Frightmare identifies the family as an incubator of trauma and psychosis it not only links with other horror films of the period but also appears to side with the radical psychological theories of R. D. Laing and David Cooper whose work was particularly influential in the early 1970s. Cooper (1971) attacked the nuclear family as the enemy of liberation and self-knowledge, the antithesis of the therapeutic communities advocated by his brand of anti-psychiatry. Laing and Cooper's ideas chimed with the children of the 'generation gap', many of whom experienced problems of varying degrees with parental attempts to control their life style and reorientate their values. There must have been plenty of members of Walker's audience for whom a trip home was an ordeal not too far short of Frightmare proportions. Walker and McGillivray were never committed Laingians, but they did share their sceptical anti-psychiatry stance.
Frightmare can be seen as a ferocious satire on the pretensions and failings of the psychiatric profession. On release, the film was heavily criticised for its reactionary depiction of mental illness and its scare mongering assault on mental health policy.

'The real obscenity of this seedy movie is the message that the mentally sick breed insane children, and should be locked up for life if found guilty of a criminal act.' - Fergus Cashin, The Sun, 7.12.74

'The message seems to be that the mentally ill should be locked up forever, and the implicit attitude towards insanity is thoroughly unpleasant.' - David Pirie, MFB, Jan. 1975

There is some justification for these criticisms in McGillivray's flippant attitude towards the mentally ill and Walker's conservative views on their incarceration. Unlike Laing and Cooper who looked forward to the wholesale closure of the asylums, Walker emphasised the need to protect the public from potential dangers:

'I won't talk a load of humbug, but I really did believe that people were being let out of jails and mental asylums before they were properly cured. The week before the film went to the censor, a man was released from Broadmoor by a lot of well-meaning psychiatrists who said he was ready to take his place in society again. A week later he killed two more children ... I was just saying we should be more careful.' - Films Illustrated, Mar. 1976

This stress on the need for caution is not surprising from a man who is constantly warning us that the past can never be forgotten because it continually revisits the present. In selecting a maternal figure as the representative of a misanthropic past, Frightmare effectively universalises that past and personalises its terrors. Dorothy Yates, the epitome of the castrating matriarch, certainly recalls the wicked crones of folk tales like Hansel and Gretel (Hunt 1996), and may be representative of Walker's troubled relationship with his own mother, but the universal truth for the audience is that we all have a mother and her influence is inescapable. In making Dorothy a monster of a mum, the film engagingly parodies psychiatric theories of family pathology. In a wonderfully camp moment it is revealed that Dorothy's condition is the result of her parents' decision to eat her pet rabbit during the hungry 1930s -
Frightmare, a (bob) tale of childhood trauma which actually duplicates the real-life experience of the lion-loving Joy Adamson. *Frightmare*, however, does not stop at the lampooning of psychoanalytic theory, it goes right for the jugular of the psychiatric profession itself. Not content with naming the senior psychiatrist ‘Dr Lytell’ (think about it!), it features as its leading man, Graham, is a well-meaning but entirely ineffectual shrink, complete with heavy-framed spectacles. For Graham, psychoanalysis seems to be a substitute for seduction. Alone with Jackie, the object of his desire, he plies her with theory rather than strong liquor and forces her to listen to his analysis of her sister Debbie’s problems:

**Graham:** Look, Jackie, Merle says you like to pretend that nothing’s the matter; but something is the matter and Debbie can be helped.

**Jackie** (rather disparagingly): By you?

**Graham** (earnestly): Yes, I’d like to try. (Puts on glasses). Look, it’s too early to draw any conclusions, I’d have to spend much more time with her, but it’s pretty obvious that she’s suffering from some kind of identity problem.

**Jackie:** I can’t stand that jargon.

**Graham** (annoyed): Yes well, it’s very simple if you’d just listen.

Jackie may be sceptical of the psychiatric profession but it is ultimately her stepmother Dorothy who enjoys the hyperbolic revenge of the lobotomised as she drills into Graham’s skull. In a neat piece of role reversal, the patient messes with the head of the psychiatrist. Before that, Graham visits her for a bizarre consultation. With the aid of the tarot cards she tells him things about himself which he would rather keep hidden. As a consultant analyst she is the more effective of the two, or at least, she achieves the more spectacular results. Her ‘magic’ is contrasted with his ‘science’ but it is the magical that appears to have the greater predictive powers. The film seems to pose the uneasy question: ‘Is belief in the inevitability of fate revealed in the turn-over of cards any more fantastical than the idea that pathological cannibalism can be cured by psychoanalysis and a bit of care in the community?’ *Frightmare* tells us that psychiatrists are as deluded as their patients. After all, ‘they said she was well’. Like Hitchcock, Walker and McGillivray believe that there are depths of perversity in the human mind which are beyond the reach of medical science. Theirs is an altogether darker vision of ‘night people’ like Dorothy who defy any explanation and manifest a power of evil. Appearances deceive, people are not what they seem, the safest-looking places can be the most dangerous, things do not work out OK in the end. In fact it is the end of *Frightmare* which is its most chilling moment. A spiral staircase, the scream of the drill, predator and prey, a family that consumes its members - Walker shuns the reassuring closure of the Hollywood ending and refuses to offer his audience faith in the power of redemption or care. Rejecting the liberal ideology of *Whipcord*, *Frightmare* seems to suggest that solutions may only be found in stricter penal and psychiatric regimes which recognise the inevitability of evil. As Walker commented:

‘Evil triumphing over good is my comment on life today. People do get away with murder. In some ways I pioneered the downbeat ending trend. I wanted audiences to leave the theatre thinking, yet feeling frustrated.’ - Starburst 57, 1983
Helped, once more, by Stanley Myers’ mournful score and Peter Jessop’s shadow play imagery, *Frightmare* succeeds beautifully in this melancholy aim. Its plot may have nearly as many holes as the skulls of Dorothy’s victims and its style may take hyperbole to the edge of black comedy, but it punctures pretensions and pursues its targets with all the power and accuracy of Mrs. Yates’ Black and Decker.
Those who dismiss Walker and McGillivray’s morbid little fairy tale as being ridiculously far fetched and totally unbelievable, might be interested in the case of Jason Mitchell. Described by a consultant psychiatrist as ‘a pleasant young man with no real malice’, Mitchell was released from a secure mental hospital early in 1995. Within weeks of being moved to a Felixstowe hostel he had strangled two pensioners before killing and dismembering his own father. He told police that he had planned to eat his victims but decided their flesh was too old. (Daily Mail, 8.7.95.)

PETER WALKER comments:

‘Frightmare is the only film that I would look back on and say “Well, that’s the one”. If somebody said, “Oh, you used to be a film director once, show us one of your films”, that’s the one I would show. Yes, it’s a violent film but it did actually have the moral tale that I wanted it to have, and it told it in no uncertain terms. I believed at the end that I had made the point.

I do think that psychiatry, like counselling and all this, is a lot of rubbish. It’s an over-rated profession and that’s my feeling on it. You also suggest Frightmare is a very jaundiced view of family life. Well, I’ve never had a family life so family life is another taboo, isn’t it? There’s a lot of hypocrisy really. Everybody I know that has grown-up children has trouble with them. There is always dislike and ostracising in families and problems, you know. There are very few “happy families”'.
House Of Mortal Sin

producer: Pete Walker
screenplay: David McGillivray (original story by Pete Walker)
director of photography: Peter Jessop
production manager: Robert Fennell
production secretary: Leigh Taylor
assistant directors: Brian Lawrence, James Hamilton, James Beasley
camera operators: Peter Sinclair, John Metcalfe
music: Stanley Myers
editor: Matt McCarthy
assistant editor: John Black
art director: Chris Burke
make-up: George Partleton, Pearl Rashbass
sound recordist: Peter O'Connor

© 1975 Peter Walker (Heritage) Ltd.

cast: Anthony Sharp (Father Xavier Meldrum), Susan Penhaligon (Jenny Welch), Stephanie Beacham (Vanessa Welch), Norman Eshley (Father Bernard Cutler), Sheila Keith (Miss Brabazon), Hilda Barry (Mrs. Meldrum), Stewart Bevan (Terry), Julia McCarthy (Mrs. Davey), John Yule (Robert), Victor Winding (Dr. Gaudio), Kim Butcher (Valerie), Andrew Sachs (Young Man), Bill Kerr (Mr. Davey), Jack Allen (G.P. Doctor), Ivor Salter (Gravedigger), Jane Hayward (Nurse), Mervyn Johns (Father Duggan), Austin King (Schoolboy), Melinda Clancy (Schoolgirl)

Released: 1975 (Cert X)
Running Time: 104 mins. (9,389 ft.)
Technicolor
US Title: THE CONFESSIONAL
Video Release in UK: as The Confessional Murders RCA Video (100 min. 3 sec.) VHS n/a
aka: The Confessional; Confessions At Death's Door; Death's Door

Synopsis

Jenny Welch lives above a craft shop with her wayward boyfriend Terry and visits the local Catholic church to see the curate Bernard Cutler, an old friend, but instead her confession is heard by the sinister Father Meldrum who seems perversely interested in her sex life. Dashing out of the church she drops her keys, which Meldrum later uses to get into her apartment where he assaults her ex-boyfriend, Robert, with boiling water. Returning to the presbytery he shares with his aged mother and his housekeeper Miss Brabazon, Meldrum invites Jenny to collect her keys. He plays her a tape recording of her confession and indicates that he intends to blackmail her.
Terry confronts Meldrum in his church but is attacked with an incense-burner and buried alive in the churchyard. Visiting Robert in hospital, Jenny discovers that Meldrum is the hospital chaplain but she is unable to stop the priest murdering Robert, or to convince anyone of his guilt. Bernard and Jenny’s friend Vanessa are advised that Jenny is suffering from delusions, and the only other person who knows the truth, the mother of another of Meldrum’s blackmail victims, is murdered by the priest with a poisoned communion wafer. Vanessa eventually intercepts a phone call from Meldrum and goes to the presbytery to find Jenny’s confession tape. Meldrum’s mother warns Vanessa that her son is mad but cannot save her when he bursts in and strangles Vanessa with rosary beads. Miss Brabazon then convinces Meldrum that, as a witness to the crime, his mother must also die. When Bernard arrives at the presbytery he discovers that Miss Brabazon has also joined the body count. Meldrum blames everything on his dead housekeeper and wins Bernard’s complicity in covering up the crimes for the good of the Church. The ruthless priest now sets off to eliminate Jenny, the last remaining witness to his villainy.

**HOUSE OF MORTAL SIN**

**Insp. LaRue:** Murphy, I want you to check every rectory in town and find out which priests were out last night.

**Murphy:** Yes, sir.

**Mr. Robertson:** Of course it’s absurd that a priest would be involved. You don’t think it could be a priest do you?

_I Confess_ (1953) scr. George Tabori and William Archibald. d. Alfred Hitchcock

‘A Catholic is more capable of evil than anyone. I think perhaps - because we believe in Him - we are much more in touch with the devil than other people’

-Catholic priest in Graham Greene’s _Brighton Rock_ (1938)
By the time that *Frightmare* went into post production in the summer of 1974, Walker was committed to his new direction as a ‘terror’ film-maker. He was itching to make another and approached McGillivray with his own idea for a sensational tale about a killer vicar. His writer suggested that this sounded rather too much like an Ealing comedy, enabling Walker to explore the more menacing concept of a murderous and licentious priest. He had learnt the lessons of *The Devils* (1971) and *The Exorcist* (1973) that the best way to stir up controversy in the permissive 1970s was with a generous helping of blasphemy. McGillivray recalls his director’s enthusiasm for the project:

‘Walker was as gleeful as he always was in the early stages of a project’s development, but especially so on this occasion because he thought he’d found a theme so controversial that it would top the skull-drilling cannibalism of *Frightmare.*’ - McGillivray 1994

A rough synopsis was completed in a little over a week early in June and presented to the director who wanted it immediately developed as a screenplay. McGillivray departed to improve his meagre knowledge of Catholicism by visiting his local church where he was also ‘hoping to get ideas for killing people.’ (McGillivray 1995). The initial draft was the product of researches fraught with shame and embarrassment and left Walker unconvinced. He felt they read like a ‘*Play For Today* with murders’. (McGillivray 1994). His reaction

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*I remember as a schoolboy at a Catholic school in the 1930s being made to feel intensely ashamed of my sexual urges by the local priest whose idea of sexual love was both degrading and disgusting. For him it was unquestionably a dirty subject.*

was indicative of his desire to avoid the respectability he saw as commercial suicide, and to develop his growing reputation as a controversialist. As he told Photoplay (Aug. 1975):

‘My movies deliberately deal with distasteful subjects. They are out to shock people... Being sensational, I think that’s my forte.’

McGillivray’s screenplay, under the working title ‘Mass Murder’, was short on sensationalism and Walker decided to work on it himself. Two months later, neither his own efforts nor a substantial rewrite by McGillivray had produced a satisfactory script and another writer who could cure the screenplay of its wordiness and shortage of action was sought - but without success. At the end of September, Walker, armed with one minor new idea, looked once again to McGillivray to realise the potential of the killer-priest scenario. A heated discussion ensued as the two collaborators worried over the narrative’s contrived nature and lack of action and began to bicker about responsibility for its improvement.

‘Finally, he started getting dramatic and said he hadn’t got the time to think up ideas, that was the scriptwriter’s job. Hadn’t he sparked anything off? I said no. So he sat down on his sofa and looked dejected and said he didn’t know what to do.’ - McGillivray 1994

In an atmosphere of some animosity, McGillivray produced a complete rewrite of the script, incorporating some additional Walker ideas and trimming the screenplay of extraneous elements. His revision was ready before the premiere of Frightmare in December and, although the director still had reservations, he was mightily relieved. The writer was left feeling that he might be better off with a less demanding client, especially in view of Walker’s parsimonious rates of pay. Less than one per cent of House of Mortal Sin’s £60,000 budget went to remunerate its writer.

When filming began in the Spring of 1975, Walker had assembled one of his most distinguished casts. He had wanted Peter Cushing for the part of Father Meldrum but Cushing’s agent had been less than enthusiastic about his client appearing in one of Walker’s exploitation flicks. Harry Andrews and Lee J. Cobb were also considered before Anthony Sharp became the last minute choice to play the murderous cleric. Sharp already had some experience of playing a powerful, manipulative man, having portrayed the Machiavellian Home Secretary in A Clockwork Orange (1971). This was hardly a qualification for the part as Walker loathed Kubrick’s film which he thought was made with ‘a lack of responsibility’ and was ultimately ‘corrupting’, (Films and Filming, Dec. 1974), but he recognised Sharp’s ability to combine respectability with menace. In casting the leading female roles, Walker finally abandoned the practice of looking for glamour girls who could also speak lines and recruited two promising young actresses, Susan Penhaligon and Stephanie Beacham. As Penhaligon had risen through rep and TV drama to screen parts in Under Milk Wood (1972) and No Sex Please - We’re British (1973) she had been compared to another Susan - Susan George, star of Die Screaming, Marianne. Walker dubbed her ‘Susan George with depth’ and, in his film, she demonstrated more of the acting ability and less of the pouting sexuality which were to make her so successful in the television adaptation of Andrea Newman’s
Bouquet of Barbed Wire (1976). Stephanie Beacham's was already a familiar screen face with appearances in TV series like UFO and Jason King and film roles in The Nightcomers (1971), opposite Marlon Brando, And Now The Screaming Starts (1973) and Hammer's Dracula AD 1972 (1972). She would go on to achieve international recognition as a star of glossy American soaps. There were small parts for Andrew Sachs and Kim Butcher from Frightmare, and another sinister role for Sheila Keith as Meldrum's housekeeper, Miss Brabazon. The regular creative team of Peter Jessop (photography) and Stanley Myers (music) were on hand to work their atmospheric spells on mood and ambience.

Location filming took place in a de-consecrated church in Berkshire and Walker's growing reputation as a deviant film-maker even persuaded The Sun to send journalist Chris Kenworthy to look over the production. On the day his report appeared (24.4.75) Walker's
career was also featured in a BBC2 documentary, *X-ploitation* made by James Kenelm Clarke, who presumably learnt enough to begin directing a series of films starring Britain’s premier sex symbol, Fiona Richmond.

*House of Mortal Sin* is another exposé of the abuse of power by a generation who no longer deserve to hold it. The film displays the same anti-Catholicism as Luis Buñuel, one of the directors Walker recognised as an influence on his cinema, and makes the same connections between religious fanaticism and perverted sexuality as Jesus Franco in *The Sadist of Notre Dame* (1974) and its various re-workings. Father Meldrum, his name evocative of malignant misanthropy, is a priest whose vocation has been warped and tainted by maternal control and sexual denial. Instead of praying for his parishioners, he preys on them, convincing himself that he is doing God’s work. ‘I was put on this earth to combat
The Church comes between two sisters: Jenny (Susan Penhaligon), Father Bernard (Norman Eshtey) and Vanessa (Stephanie Beecham)

sin', he declares, 'and I shall use every available means to do so'. The means he uses are profoundly blasphemous, turning the religious paraphernalia and sacraments of his profession into murderous tools to protect his own threatened position. Meldrum's acts are monstrous but as an individual he is largely absolved of guilt for his lethal machinations. He is the product of the perversion of natural and legitimate desires by repressive institutions. His threat, the film seems to argue, will endure as long as 'mothers' and 'fathers' are allowed to exert an institutional control over the minds and bodies of their children.

Although it is bizarrely decorated with gratuitously-offensive and sacrilegious Guignol, obscured by sensation-seeking and softened by camp, this is Walker's most overt attempt to promote a message in his films. As a deserted child and lapsed Catholic, this attack on family and church, the institutions he had lost, is both personal and passionate:

'I'm not going to moralise. I'm in the business of making commercial films. But that said I am a lapsed Catholic myself, I was brought up in Catholic schools, so I know what I'm talking about in House of Mortal Sin. I have a very strong feeling about celibacy in the church. I know about the frustrations, what they turn priests into, the monsters they become in the hot months of summer. OK, it is distasteful to have the priest murder his mother, especially with the Body of Christ... But it's a man-made religion. I'm not sticking two fingers up at God, not personally. Just at the religion.' - Film Illustrated, March 1976

Walker's denouncement of the priesthood links his film decisively to the experiences of his childhood and illustrates the way in which commercialism so often overlays personal statement in his cinema, just as his deliberately cultivated persona as a hard-bitten businessman conceals the traces of his private life. In the statement above he confines his criticisms to the celibacy of the priesthood with no mention of the maternal monstrousness that was so apparent in Frightmare, but McGillivray's script for House of Mortal Sin certainly implicates Meldrum's mother (Hilda Barry) in the creation of the monster he has
THE Omen. The Exorcist. The Confessional. The unholy trinity is now complete.

One day a monstrous evil was unleashed from the most sacred place on earth...

MAURICE SMITH presents a PETER WALKER Production

Starring ANTHONY SHARP • SUSAN PENHALIGON • STEPHANIE BLEACHAM • NORMAN ESILLY and SHERA KILTH
Special guest appearance of MERVYN JOHN as Father Duggan
Produced and Directed by PETER WALKER

The film's American poster
become. She has passed the guilt, denial and received religion of her own generation to her son and intervened in his pursuit of pleasure and happiness with disastrous but predictable results. ‘Mother said no. Mother knows best’. His lover, Miss Brabazon, has been left with the corpse of their relationship, cohabitation without erotic fulfilment, and a bitter resentment towards the mother whose possessiveness and dogma have robbed them of happiness by forcing her son into the priesthood. Mother and church are equivalent signs of repression and failure, linked by the saccharine sounds of Mrs. Meldrum’s favourite religious 78 rpm record. The sounds and their method of transmission are as archaic as the institution they represent and both mother and church suffer from a degenerative condition which leaves them senile and out of touch. Neither can control the black avenging angel they have created.

McGillivray provides the melodrama with an engagingly ironic tone, giving Meldrum and his liberal colleague the Christian names Xavier (pronounced Saviour) and Bernard (burn hard?) respectively; and dropping subtle cinematic references into the screenplay, like the red-hooded figure on a church pew (Don’t Look Now, 1972) and the attack with scalding coffee (The Big Heat, 1953). There is also evident irony in the reversals of conventional expectations. Instead of burying the dead, Meldrum is a priest who, literally, buries the living (the victim of his attack with a ceremonial censer). Rather than a place of absolution, the confessional becomes a fearful site of anxiety and corruption. The communion wafer is turned from a symbolic way of enhancing life to an active agent in its destruction. This disruption of the taken-for-granted was now a trademark of Walker productions and here it is played to excess and coupled with an emotional intensity which is reinforced by continual close-ups and a Myers score which makes liberal use of bells and choirs. Sheila Keith’s presence again contributes hugely to the overall effect. She prowls the presbytery with all the brooding malice of Mrs. Danvers at Mandalay, her black costume in stark contrast to the (rather overlit) white walls of her home. A fine touch of bizarreness is given by the black patch over one lens of her spectacles, recalling Bette Davis’ eye patch in The Anniversary (1968).

Susan Penhaligon’s Jenny Welch is a classic film noir protagonist in most respects apart from her sex. Threatened and desperate, she can persuade no one to believe her story as her life becomes a waking nightmare. Chief among the culprits is Walker’s favourite whipping boy, psychiatry. The diffusion of half-baked psychiatric theories among the medical profession causes Jenny’s reality to be dismissed as delusion while the hospital pager calls in vain for a ‘Dr. Walker’, the consultant we need to straighten out this mess.
Jenny is confronted by an array of professionals - doctors, priests, policemen - who instead of having her welfare at heart operate together against the interests of ordinary people. All offer patronising advice but are prevented by their own dogma, vested interests or world views from seeing the real manifestation of evil. As in previous films, Walker and McGillivray convey a strong impression of a closed system from which there is no way out. For the protagonist there is an inevitable fate which is sealed by the complacency and hypocrisy within the system. In a conversation about the problem of celibacy, a progressive priest remarks 'I've never been able to understand why the Catholic church looks on itself as a kind of prison with those in its service doing life sentences', but the metaphor of imprisonment in *House of Mortal Sin* extends well beyond the priesthood. No one here escapes from their life sentences. In the end most are snuffed out like the candles in Meldrum's church.

Not every element in the film works smoothly towards its overall effectiveness. For all its daring and its stylistic triumphs - and the ingenious closure of its plot - McGillivray's screenplay still suffers from some of the structural problems diagnosed at an early stage of its development. The dialogue devotes rather too much time to exposition, while the action is further slowed by lengthy discussions of priestly celibacy when pictures might have conveyed the ideas with more immediacy. The production's Italianate style, sensational use of Catholic iconography and melodramatic flourishes like Meldrum's desire to wash away his guilt in 'the cleansing rain', all open it up to camp appropriation and reduce its impact as 'serious drama'. Walker was certainly not satisfied with the result, as he told Alan Jones:

'I don’t think *House of Mortal Sin* achieved what I wanted it to. Somewhere there is a very serious film to be made about the subject.' - *Starburst* 57, 1983

McGillivray was equally unsatisfied by his work. 'It was too far-fetched to work' was his judgement (*Fantasynopsis* 4, 1991). Most critics agreed with him when the film opened at the prestigious Warner West End in February 1976, the first of Walker's films to be distributed by one of the major players, Columbia. Nigel Andrews, who had been impressed by *House of Whipcord*, could not tolerate *House of Mortal Sin*’s ‘disintegrating plausibility’ and felt obliged to dismiss the film as ‘a load of old rubbish’ (*Financial Times*, 13.2.76). Russell Davies acknowledged its claims to significance and the quality of some of its acting but still dismissed the picture as 'paltry horrorama' and 'cranky suburban Guignol' (*The Observer*, 15.2.76). 'A mocker piece of Gothic I’ve seldom seen' opined *The Guardian*’s Derek Malcolm (5.2.76), while Felix Barker in the *Evening News* (15.2.76) found the film both 'nasty' and 'banal'. No one would have expected praise from Dilys Powell and her judgement ran true to form - 'squalid horror' (*The Sunday Times*, 8.2.76). Even that centre...
of Walker fandom the Monthly Film Bulletin failed to be impressed by his latest offering, blaming its 'limp acting', 'sluggish direction', 'comic-strip horrors' and 'script's contrivances' (March 1976). It was left to Jenny Craven at Films and Filming to mount a guarded defense, regretting the film's plot deficiencies but praising its acting and suspenseful direction:

'Always such films demand a suspension of belief and credibility. House of Mortal Sin demands more than most. In return it offers some scary moments, a number of amusing ones and an enjoyable, if not enlivening, 104 minutes. Time passes speedily. All of which, in comparison with many a more-lavishly made effort of this kind, is saying a great deal.' - April 1976

The remarkable thing is that a film designed to be controversial aroused so little public protest. Walker deliberately set himself up 'to have bricks thrown' in the belief that, 'the more the controversy, the more the condemnation, the better the film will do' (Film Illustrated, March 1976); but even the planting of a front page story in the Sunday People, disclosing that real human blood had been used for the film's special effects, could not move the populace to moral indignation. As McGillivray put it, 'we hoped it was going to cause another scandal; ... but it came and went without anybody batting an eyelid' (McGillivray 1995). This is extraordinary when one considers that it was a film that was able to disturb its own actors. As a Catholic, Anthony Sharp found his role very distasteful and McGillivray recalls that Hilda Barry was so distressed by the sacrilegious nature of the murders that 'when she asks for forgiveness, those were real tears she shed. She was mortified by the premise'
A victim of religious frenzy (Stewart Bevan)

(The Dark Side, May 1991). The Catholic church, however, seems to have adopted the policy of ignoring the blasphemy rather than provide the film with the oxygen of publicity.

Twenty years on, House of Mortal Sin still packs a punch and impresses with its style, in spite of its quaint period fashions. Historically, it stands as a challenge to a tradition of film-making which has celebrated the heroic struggles of priests to overcome their own doubts and crises of faith to fight the powers of evil on behalf of the community. In particular, it is a response to The Exorcist, a film which situates the priesthood as a sole line of defence against rampant malevolence. House of Mortal Sin relocates that malignancy in the church itself, deliberately undermining any easy reassurance.

Other British directors had condemned the Catholic church for crimes against humanity and collusion with the evil it professed to exorcise. Michael Armstrong’s Mark of the Devil (1970) and Ken Russell’s The Devils (1971) are obvious examples, but both set their critiques in another historical time, relying on allegorical association to suggest their relevance to the present. Walker is the first British director to mount an attack on the contemporary church and to do so in such uncompromising terms.

House of Mortal Sin is memorable for its brash courage, its macabre touches and breathtakingly bad taste, and for its continuity of theme with Walker’s other ‘terror’ films. Notably, it explores another facet of justice and punishment. Die Screaming, Marianne is dominated by corrupt justice, while The Flesh and Blood Show features extra-judicial, personal justice or revenge. House of Whipcord examines privatised justice, and Frightmare traces the consequences of misguided justice. House of Mortal Sin presents the delusion of divine justice as a cover for erotic obsession and stifled desire.
**PETER WALKER comments:**

'The Confessional was influenced by my own Catholic school upbringing more than anything else. I mean, these priests eyeing up women, mentally undressing the sisters of any of the boys that came along. It's such an uncivilised way of life, the priesthood. All that hypocrisy if they couldn't get hold of little girls, they got hold of little boys.

I was responsible for the plot but I worked with McGillivray on the script. We used to laugh. The whole thing was a joke as we constructed those horrific murders. We would treat it very flippantly and very lightly and I suppose a lot of that came over; but, having said that, we were very aware that if you had played those things without any humour they wouldn't have been acceptable because the plots were so improbable. So the humour was definitely intended, hence the black patch on Miss Brabazon. If you were playing it straight, you wouldn't have given her those quirky things. You wouldn't have had her appearing on the stairs in a Bette Davis pose. There was always this very Gothic thing about it. You couldn't naturalise it. But my brief to the actors was to play it absolutely straight and David had injected any laugh lines or touches of humour that were there into the script and, on that basis, I think it worked.

I remember Barry Norman specifically did like *The Confessional*. Maybe he had a Catholic upbringing as well. He was quite fascinated by it when he actually saw it, but he had to damn it with faint praise when he did it on his television show. He just said, "Well it's pernicious and this and this and this - of course, it's very well made and very well acted, but it's still pernicious. Whereas now he would take a different attitude, he would go for it, he would say, "Well, I like the picture".'
producer: Pete Walker
screenplay: David McGillivray
production manager: Edward Dorian
production supervisor: Clifford Parkes
production secretary: Ginger Corbett
assistant to producer: James Kelly
director of photography: Peter Jessop
camera operator: Peter Sinclair
editor: Alan Brett
music: Stanley Myers
assistant directors:
Brian Lawrence, Glynn Purcell, Iain Cassie
make-up: George Partleton
sound recordist: Peter O'Connor
post production supervisor: Matt McCarthy

cast: Lynne Frederick (Samantha), John Leyton (Alan Falconer), Stephanie Beacham (Beth), John Fraser (Leonard Hawthorne), Jack Watson (Haskin), Queenie Watts (Mrs. Wallace), Trisha Mortimer (Joy), John McEnery (Stephens), Victoria Allum (Samantha (as a child)), Paul Alexander (Peter McAllister), Colin Jeavons (Commissionaire), Raymond Bowers (Factory Manager), Terry Duggan (Picture Editor), Robert Mill (Maitre d'Hotel), Diana King (Mrs. Falconer), Lindsay Campbell (Mr. Falconer), Victor Winding (Police Sergeant), Pearl Hackney (Woman at Seance), Primi Townsend (Alan's Secretary), Wendy Gilmore (Samantha's Mother), David McGillivray (Man at Seance)

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Released: 1976 (Cert X)
Distribution: Columbia-Warner Distributors Ltd.
Running Time: 109 mins. (9,808 ft.)
US Title: SCHIZO
Video Release in UK: Warner Home Video (103 mins. After 70 seconds of cuts) VHS/B n/a
aka: Amok; Blood Of The Undead; Blade Of The Ripper

Synopsis

After reading in a newspaper that ice-skating star Samantha Gray is to marry wealthy manufacturer Alan Falconer, night shift worker William Haskin leaves north-east England for London, with a carving knife in his bag. He disrupts Samantha and Alan's wedding reception and then begins to stalk Samantha, making sinister phone calls and sneaking into her house while she is showering. On a visit to the supermarket, Samantha is panicked when she hears threatening voices and looks for reassurance to her psychiatrist friend Leonard Hawthorne (also the lover of her best friend Beth). She tells Leonard that, when she was a
child she witnessed Haskin stab her mother during a lover’s quarrel. He has served his sentence for the crime and apparently now wants to kill Samantha. However, it is Leonard who is found with his throat cut, possibly by Haskins, by one of his psychotic patients or by Samantha’s jealous husband.

Persuaded to attend a seance by her cleaning woman, Mrs. Wallace, and still stalked by Haskins, Samantha sees Mrs. Wallace’s daughter Joy go into a trance and declare in Leonard’s voice that his killer is present. Joy is hammered to death on her way home and her mother is murdered with a knitting needle in Samantha’s house. Beth tries to help by trailing Haskins to his lodgings where she discovers a cupboard full of knives. Finally, Samantha comes face to face with Haskins in her husband’s deserted factory. It is revealed that it was she who killed her mother and that Haskins has only been trying to shock her into an admission, but Haskins fall to his death and Samantha’s secret is safe. Samantha gets ready for her postponed honeymoon and, believing that Beth and Alan are having an affair, packs a knife.

**SCHIZO**

‘It seems to me that paranoia in our age, in the first world at least, is a necessary tentative to freedom and wholeness.’

‘The schizoid patient experiences himself as an object of the attention of someone else because he cannot experience himself ... People who find their way to “perform” in front of cameras, in “sex” films, and those who film them, are therefore almost certainly driven by some kind of schizoid impulse.’
- David Holbrook in *Pornography: The Longford Report*, Coronet, 1972
By the end of 1975, Peter Walker’s prospects looked unusually good. He had achieved a modicum of critical recognition in highbrow circles while maintaining his appeal to the ‘ordinary punters’, and his distribution deal with Columbia seemed to offer both prestige and a measure of financial security. Things, however, were not as rosy as they seemed, his usually assured business strategy had already begun to let him down. He began to imagine that he could court the youth audience by combining the horror genre with a rock music film. He had already been approached by pop specialists GTO Films (Never Too Young to Rock, 1975, Side by Side 1976), to make a production deal for non-musical films, but it was the huge success of two rock films in 1975 that probably led him to persuade Columbia to back a rock opera. Ken Russell’s film of Pete Townshend’s Tommy showed that some key themes of Walker’s own cinema could be handled in a musical form, notably the unscrupulous manipulation of the young by more powerful adults. (It is also interesting to realise that Tommy’s surname is Walker). However, it was his old bit player, Richard O’Brien’s The Rocky Horror Picture Show that provided the major inspiration for Peter Walker’s abortive experiment with pop pictures.

Remembering John Barrymore’s bravura performance in the 1931 production of Svengali, Walker conceived the idea of taking George du Maurier’s tale of a sinister hypnotist who determines the career of a young protégé, and giving it the Rocky Horror treatment. His choice for a rock Svengali was Alvin Stardust, the ageing black-gloved balladeer of glam. The faithful David McGillivray was commissioned to write a screenplay which would up-date the Victorian melodrama and relocate its operatic setting to the pop scene of the 1970s much as Brian De Palma had done in Phantom of the Paradise (1974). Although he was not looking for a Gothic ‘terror’ movie, Walker was still keen that the production should involve ‘certain amounts of cellars and sleaze’ (The Dark Side, May 1991). His screenwriter dutifully bashed out a script without ever being fully convinced by the venture. Next, Walker needed some songs and it was then, in the autumn and winter of 1975, that the project began to founder. He quickly discovered that Tin Pan Alley no longer offered the cheap and cheerful commercial service that it had provided to music hall. As he told Film Illustrated (March 1976):

‘It was to have been my next picture but we needed some music written. Here you leave the area of sane film people and meet the megalomaniacs of the music business. You’d think you could just commission a couple of writers to compose some songs, but no - there are all manner of deals and ego trips.’

Walker remained outwardly confident that the project would still see completion in 1976, but McGillivray’s pessimism was to prove justified:

‘I was convinced it was a no-hoper and, because it was deemed too expensive to produce, I was proved right.’ - The Dark Side, May 1991

With Svengali becoming an expensive white elephant, attention was switched to Schizo, a story idea about another deranged killer from Murray Smith, the writer of Carol and Greta. Smith had offered a draft script with an implausible O. Henry ending that Walker believed could be made to work. He began to engage a succession of script consultants and rewrite men, including Francis Megahy and Bernie Cooper, but started and finished with the trusty McGillivray who was obliged to toil over a concept and narrative which were not of his own choosing. As draft followed draft, McGillivray got no closer to solving the problem of concealing the killer’s identity: “People will know who did it instantly”, I kept screaming at Walker, but to no avail” he recalls (The Dark Side, May 1991). His director, who was rarely one to overestimate his audience, had greater confidence in the power of his story’s twist-in-the-tail. He proudly announced his latest ‘nasty murder thriller’ to David Castell of Film Illustrated (March 1976):
(above): The murder of Samantha's mother was substantially cut in the UK video release
(below): Jack Watson as Haskin
'It started out with a terrific twist ending, the first time it has ever been used, and the story spread out from that like a stain. Obviously I put on my nasty black producer's hat and stirred in the exploitation ingredients.'

With his premiere project on the back burner, Walker desperately needed to push forward with *Schizo* and see the film in production by summer 1976, one of the hottest in Britain's history. With a budget of £80,000, *Schizo* was slightly more expensive than Walker's previous films. Its cast featured Lynn Frederick (Samantha), the young actress who would later marry Peter Sellers before meeting an untimely death in her thirties. Although only 22 when she made *Schizo*, she already had seven years experience of film and television work, including a part in Hammer's *Vampire Circus* (1971). The role of Samantha's stalker, William Haskin, went to the craggy-featured Jack Watson, veteran of numerous action and horror features including *Tobruk* (1966), *The Strange Affair* (1967), *Tower of Evil* (1971) and *From Beyond the Grave* (1974). Stephanie Beacham was retained from *House of Mortal Sin*, apparently suffering no ill effects from her strangulation with rosary beads, while another faded pop personality, John Leyton, was given the opportunity to carve out an acting career in the role of Samantha's husband. The part of Samantha's cleaning woman, which seemed tailor-made for Sheila Keith, went to blues singer and character actress, Queenie Watts, a familiar face on television. Myers and Jessop were once again entrusted with the vital tasks of supplying quality sounds and images. No production or costume designer is credited, which might explain why *Schizo*'s outfits and interiors are so memorably awful even by the standards of an age when people took in their stride patchwork wallpaper and floral shirts with floppy collars.

The plot of *Schizo* is not quite as transparent as McGillivray feared but the title gives us a conclusive clue to the killer's identity and the film must then work desperately to convince us that Jack Watson's sinister loner is the danger man. But the more it tries to convince us of his guilt the greater becomes our scepticism. The film's twist ending acts as confirmation rather than revelation and this severely reduces the picture's overall impact. What we are left with is some very contrived storytelling, a series of shocking set-pieces, some lively directorial flourishes and a collection of visual quotations from Walker's earlier work and the films of his guru, Alfred Hitchcock. *Schizo* exhibits more Hitchcockian references than even the average Brian De Palma film. The title and logo clearly recall *Psycho* and the menacing of Lynne Frederick in the shower by a mysterious knifeman is an unmistakable echo of the Bates Motel (not to mention a very similar scene in the previous year's blaxploiter, *Friday Foster* (1975)). Thematically, however, Walker's film has more in common with Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964) with its disturbed heroine and childhood flashbacks. All three films graphically depict the pathological effects on a child's personality development of exposure to adult sexuality.
As a homage to Hitchcock, *Schizo* succeeds best in its handling of suspense. Walker shows here that he is becoming increasingly accomplished in this department, stretching the tension and jolting the viewer with an intensity largely missing in *The Flesh and Blood Show* and more muted in *Frightmare* and *House of Mortal Sin*. He is helped by convincing performances from Stephanie Beacham, Jack Watson and Lynne Frederick and by some sharp editing and gory special effects (the latter significantly trimmed by censorship - see below). None of this is particularly original and some of it suffers from a clichéd and over-stated approach - why use one knife when you could have a whole cupboard full - but it works efficiently enough in causing its viewers to catch their breath. At the very least, Walker demonstrates that his technique for generating tension and a sense of menace with a moving camera and judicious close-ups is considerably in advance of the static theatrics of more celebrated British thriller directors such as Terence Fisher. Walker may lack Fisher’s sense of Gothic lyricism but he more accurately understands the horror film’s visceral connection to its audience.

As usual, McGillivray’s and Walker’s tongues are never far from their cheeks. There are knowing references to the macabre practical jokes of *The Flesh and Blood Show* and the meat chopping opening of *Cool it Carol*, and a bizarre meeting of the ‘Psychic Brotherhood’ which is a gleeful pastiche of the spiritualist gatherings in films like Joseph Losey’s *Secret Ceremony* (1968) and Bryan Forbes’ *Seance on a Wet Afternoon* (1964). McGillivray appears as one of the Brotherhood. Less palatable is the film’s exploitative attitude to mental illness which is no more progressive than *Frightmare’s*. *Schizo’s* poster campaign defined schizophrenia as ‘when the left hand does not know who the right hand is killing’ (modified in Britain to ‘what the right hand is doing’) and incurred complaints from MIND and the National Schizophrenia Fellowship. The film hinges on what is now called Multiple Personality Disorder, but its grasp of psychology is pretty tenuous. Its faith in the efficacy of psychiatric practice is summed up by the corpse of a psychiatrist, victim of a patient he has failed to successfully diagnose.

*Schizo* again demonstrates the profound pessimism of Walker’s terror films. Faith in redemption and cure is mocked by the forces unleashed by cruel fate and a vengeful past. When the past returns, as it does with the release from prison of William Haskin (Jack Watson), there is no escape. A chain of events set in motion years before will be brought to its inevitable conclusion. ‘Time for the reckoning, Jean’, Watson announces to a fearful Lynn Frederick, ‘You remember what happened fifteen years ago, don’t you?’. But the
When the left hand doesn't know who the right hand is killing, you're dealing with a...

SCHIZO

From Warner Bros., A Warner Communications Company

RESTRICTED TO ADULTS 18 YEARS AND OVER

The uncut Australian video release complete with the film's original tag-line
trauma of her past is locked away from her consciousness and Haskin, the lonely stalker, represents the shadowy presence of that unpalatable memory. Stalking and slashing become a metaphor of the persistence of memory and the violence of revelation, but the essence of Schizo is to challenge our easy assumptions about the familiar scenario of the menacing madman and of the old preying on the young. The revelation of the story is meant to be revisionist of both the horror genre and Walker's own cinema but its impact is blunted by its predictability.

Schizo's screenplay may not be as sharp as the spikes in its climactic impalement scene but the film still leaves the viewer with a sense of disquiet. The co-ordinates of good and evil, innocence and guilt, security and threat, have once again been scrambled and another murderer is free to go on killing. Unusually in Walker's criminology, however, it is not the young who have been victimised but the poor. Walker generally offers us a vision of British culture in which class differences are not a prominent feature. In a world of retired judges, psychiatrists, priests, actors, publishers and property speculators, solidly working-class characters are few. There are gangsters' heavies, the footballer in Greta and the lorry driver in Whipcord, but Walker mostly contrasts the staid milieux of his aged but affluent killers with the bright lights and glossy habitats of a classless culture of youth or with the blandness of suburbia. Schizo, on the other hand, shows the victimisation of Walker's 'common working man', the person he once called 'the salt of the earth' (Cinema X, vol.4, no. 1). Samantha's rise to bourgeois comfort and respectability, it transpires, has been at Haskin’s expense, and eventually it demands his martyrdom. Walker effectively contrasts
Two scenes of violence which were trimmed by the British censor
The knives are out:
(above) Beth battles Haskin
(below) A Front of House still that does its best to give the game away,
although the patch-work wallpaper may provide just enough distraction

WILLIAM J NAGY & MAURICE SMITH PRESENT

SCHIZO

STARRING
LYNNE FREDERICK • JOHN LEYTON • STEPHANIE BEACHAM

DIRECTED BY PETE WALKER

A PETE WALKER PRODUCTION

COLOR ENTECICOLOR

© 1972 MILICENT INTERNATIONAL
the worlds in which Haskin and Samantha move. Samantha has deserted her roots among
the steam whistles, donkey jackets and heavy machinery of the industrial north for the
affluence and gentility of the home counties. Haskin has been made rootless, driven to an
existence of lonely obsession in flophouses and bed-sits by injustice and deceit. He haunts
the upwardly-mobile Samantha like a spectre of class betrayal. They are two characters
emblematic of twentieth century winners and losers - the career woman and the proletarian
man. While his ambitions are terminally spiked hers soar skyward like the aeroplane she
boards in the last scene of the film.

To what extent Schizo’s submerged politics are the conscious invention of its makers
or merely the reflection of its times is hard to say, but Walker’s intention was certainly to
move his cinema in a more realist direction:

‘I wanted less incident and outrage. Schizo was an attempt to level off the Gothique
and make things a little more threatening than over-the-top. It was purposely underwritten,
and I see it as an improvement in an area I wanted to move into.’ - Starburst 57, 1983

This trend towards understatement was given an uninvited boost by the BBFC which
called for more than 70 seconds of cuts from Schizo’s goriest murder scenes. Forty-five
seconds were removed from the flashbacks to the killing of Samantha’s mother. The
offending material included not only knife slashes to the victim’s naked torso and blood
splattering to her face, but also brief shots of sexual grappling and soundtrack references to
Sam’s mother as a ‘lovely whore’ and ‘tight butt bitch’. The murder of the medium at the
bus stop lost a series of bloody and sickening hammer blows to the face, and viewers were
also spared a lingering shot of a knitting needle jutting from the eye socket of Samantha’s
cleaning woman. This censored footage, missing from Warner’s British video, can be
viewed in the Australian video release.

Sanitised by the censor, Schizo opened at Warner’s Leicester Square flagship cinema
in November 1976. Arriving in the same week as Death Weekend and The Texas Chainsaw
Massacre, Walker’s blood bath seemed like a quick shower. Tobe Hooper’s celluloid
nightmare together with Argento’s shocker, Suspiria (1976) moved the goal posts of the
horror game. Shocking the hard-bitten horror audience had not been easy in the years after
Psycho but now film-makers like Walker would have to attend to new aesthetic standards
and lowered barriers of taste. Jack Watson in his red bobble hat would no longer cut the
mustard. Already, critics began to detect an element of nostalgia in Schizo. Nigel Andrews
(Financial Times, 19.11.76) remarked on some of its hackneyed suspense devices and its ‘air
of faded trendiness that suggests the makers lost their hearts ten years ago in swinging
London’. For Alan Brien of The Sunday Times the film’s gore was ‘stereotyped’ (21.11.76),
while Tom Milne in the Monthly Film Bulletin was irritated by the way ‘each cliche’ was
‘heralded by a triumphant tremolo or bass boom from the score’ (Dec. 1976).

Most critics, however, viewed Schizo in the context of the week’s other shockers as a
sad sign of the level of violence that had become acceptable in cinema entertainment, or as
Felix Barker put it in the Evening News (18.11.76), ‘an ever increasing downhill slide into
sensationalism’. Ian Christie in the Daily Express (19.11.96) advised his readers to ‘stay
away’ from all of the previous week’s three horror films which, he suggested, were
‘inexcusable’ because they ‘simply invite you to gloat over bloodshed and viciousness’. For
the Sunday Telegraph’s Tom Hutchinson, Schizo was ‘very entertaining ... if you like street
accidents’ (21.11.76), while Margaret Hinxman in the Daily Mail (20.11.76) described the
film as ‘polished, pernicious cods wallop’ with a level of violence that ‘blunts the finer
emotions and sensitivity of audiences’. Few approved of Schizo’s gruesome killings and
most were unconvinced by its plotting but there was some grudging praise for the standard
of acting and for Walker’s direction. The most positive assessment came from Films and
Filming’s Julian Fox (Jan. 1977) whose incredulity at the narrative was tempered by his admiration for ‘the sheer expertise of the telling’. For Fox, Schizo was ‘a film that is really about the nature of panic, that awful feeling of isolation which comes when one’s susceptibilities to fright are allied to the disbelief and lack of sympathy of others’. He was convinced that not even ‘the most superior student of film could unblushingly declare that Walker has not evolved a style where shaking on the edge of one’s seat is virtually a last step towards burrowing under it’. Much of the credit for this, Fox suggested, should be shared by the talented creative team the director had assembled around him.

At the box office, Schizo did steady business but failed to match the performance of its rival American films. Death Weekend and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre had record opening weeks at their West End cinemas and after four weeks Tobe Hooper’s film had taken nearly twice as much as Walker’s (almost £28,000 to Schizo’s £14,668).

PETER WALKER comments:

“We started with my idea of making a picture where the heroine is in fact the murderess. That’s the start, that’s the hanger on which we put our coats. What then happened was it was very hard to construct a story. When we did get some semblance of a story I gave it to David [McGillivray] and he came back with a forty-two page script. I said, “But, David, this will run thirty-five minutes. It’s a short!”’. “Well that’s all the story you gave me”. And I said, “Well you’re supposed to put sub-plots in and create characters, that’s what writers do!” and he said “Well, you know I don’t write stories. I only write dialogue”. My feeling was that David didn’t contribute when I think he could have done, and I think he was losing interest in making this kind of film. But I’m very loath to apportion blame on it. The picture didn’t work. Somehow I think it could have been done, but I struggled for ideas on it.

I didn’t think the part of the housekeeper was good enough for Sheila Keith - she’s so terrific, such a lovely woman and such fun. I thought, “I won’t offer Sheila this” - of course she would have done it - but, apart from that, I thought she might be an unnecessary red herring.”
The Comeback

producer: Pete Walker
screenplay: Murray Smith (based on story by Michael Sloan)
additional script material: Michael Sloan
director of photography: Peter Jessop
camera operator: Peter Sinclair
music: Stanley Myers; song ‘Traces of a Long Forgotten Tune’ by Jamie Anderson
production manager: Denis Johnson jnr.
assistant directors: Brian Lawrence, Glynn Purcell
director: Alan Brett
assistant editor: Chris Rodmell
art director: Mike Pickwoad
make-up: George Partleton
sound recordist: Peter O’Connor

cast: Jack Jones (Nick Cooper), Pamela Stephenson (Linda Everett), David Doyle (Webster Jones), Bill Owen (Mr. B), Sheila Keith (Mrs. B), Holly Palance (Gail Cooper), Peter Turner (Harry), Richard Johnson (Macauley), Patrick Brock (Dr. Paulsen), June Chadwick (Nurse), Penny Irving (Girl Singer), Jeff Silk (Police Officer)

© 1977 Peter Walker (Heritage) Ltd.

Released: 1978 (Cert X)
Running Time: 100 mins. (9,023 ft.)
US Title: THE COMEBACK
Video Release in UK: Derann Film Services (95 mins. 56 secs.) VHS/B n/a;
Derann Film Services (95 mins. 56 secs.) VHS/B re-issue, n/a;
Satanica (95 mins. 56 secs.) VHS
aka: The Day The Screaming Stopped; I Wake Up Screaming; The Sixth Gate Of Hell; Hallucinations (France)

Synopsis

Faded singer Nick Cooper returns to England from America to make a comeback album with cynical recording manager Webster Jones. Unknown to Nick, his ex-wife Gail has been gruesomely murdered in their penthouse in docklands by a grotesque figure in a dress. Her body remains undiscovered because Nick is staying in a country mansion maintained by middle-aged housekeepers Mr. and Mrs. B. His rest, however, is disturbed by nocturnal noises.

After a difficult recording session, Nick is befriended by Webster’s secretary Linda and they are joined at dinner by Nick’s roadie, Harry. Linda goes to the penthouse with Harry to pick up some of Nick’s belongings but they are unable to get in and Linda is scared by the atmosphere of the place. Harry tries again the next day and, after discovering Gail’s decomposing body, is murdered in the lift by her killer. Suspicion is cast on Webster when
he is revealed as a transvestite. Nick’s nights are still disturbed by the sound of sobbing and, on investigation, he finds first a rotting corpse in a wheelchair and then a head in a hatbox. Driven to a breakdown by his discoveries, Nick is hospitalised and put under the care of psychiatrist Dr. Macauley. Discharged, Nick returns to the mansion and learns that his lover Linda has disappeared. He visits the penthouse, but the body has been removed and the apartment cleaned. Returning to the mansion to meet Webster he is attacked by the transvestite killer who turns out to be Mr. B. He and his wife have been exacting revenge for the suicide of their daughter, an obsessive fan of Nick’s who could not accept his marriage to Gail. Mr. B. accidentally kills his wife with an axe and the police are called, while Nick searches the house for Linda and eventually discovers her alive after being entombed with the dead daughter. As Linda is driven away in an ambulance, Nick looks up at a window and sees Gail.

THE COMEBACK

‘I’d like to make another movie. Remember, I always wanted to be an actor.’
- Jack Jones, Souvenir Concert Programme, Chrysalis 1973

1977: bunting in the streets for the Queen’s jubilee, a celebration of past glories for a society increasingly looking back rather than forward; and, in bitter counterpoint to the waving Union Jacks and the rhetoric of patriotism, the suppressed sound of The Sex Pistols singing ‘no future’. They might have been crooning an elegy to a British film industry crippled by lack of investment and a shrinking distributive infrastructure. As the 1970s moved relentlessly towards their final winter of discontent, more and more of the independent local cinemas, the natural exhibition sites for the low-budget British feature, closed their doors to
(above): Jack Jones and Pamela Stephenson
(below): Mr and Mrs B: Bill Owen and Sheila Keith
The film's American theatrical release poster
Homage to Psycho - a murderous transvestite on the stair

all but the Bingo-mad. For the few independent film-makers still trying to operate in the contracting British market this meant targeting their products more squarely at American audiences. This imperative is clearly evident in Pete Walker’s fourteenth film, The Comeback.

Most obviously, the need to internationalise his cinema is evidenced in the introduction of popular music as a prominent element in the film’s narrative. Just as in the ill-fated Svengali, the main character is a pop singer, a part for which Ringo Starr and Cat Stevens were initially considered but which eventually was offered to Jack Jones, another of the singers-turned actors favoured in Walker’s casting policies (John Leyton, Chris Sandford, Jess Conrad, Queenie Watts etc.). Ironically, Jones had been the lover of Walker’s least favourite leading lady, Susan George, but the couple were estranged by the time the director saw Jones in an episode of TV’s Macmillan and Wife. ‘I thought he was terrific’ recalled Walker, ‘I also needed a name Americans would know, and as soon as he read the script he became very keen to do it.’ (Starburst 57, 1983). The script was by Murray Smith, who accepted the job partly out of friendship but only on payment of ‘proper’ money (£7,000). A variety of working titles were used - ‘I Wake Up Screaming’, ‘The Sixth Gate of Hell’, ‘The Day the Screaming Stopped’ - and rejected by Walker as ‘too downmarket and catchpenny’ before finally settling for the ‘classier’ The Comeback (Starburst 57, 1983). The desire for something classier was not just a function of Walker’s drive towards mainstream cinema status but also an acknowledgement of the demands of the American market. The Comeback’s mise-en-scene reflects this in its use of locations. Gone are the nondescript suburban settings and low-key locales of Walker’s earlier terror movies, and in
their place are airports, Thames-side penthouses and a grand country house - fit locations for the lifestyles of the rich and famous. American sensibilities were further reassured by the inclusion in the cast of *Charlie's Angels'* mentor, David Doyle, as Jones' manager, a suspicious character with a taste for transvestism. But at least the need to appeal to a transatlantic audience did not prevent the return of Sheila Keith to Walker's repertory company. Keith brought her own inimitable brand of camped-up histrionics to another role as a housekeeping harridan. Throughout the film, she never misses an opportunity to squeeze every ounce of sardonic potential from Murray Smith's script. Memorably, when Jack Jones collapses from a bout of wild hallucinations and screaming nightmares, she offers cold comfort with the unctuous explanation: 'too much coffee'. 'I thought she was going a bit over the top', remarked her director. 'but she was injecting a certain amount of humour that
actually made the part work better' (Starburst 57, 1983). Keith’s performance was complemented by the experienced playing of her screen husband, Bill Owen, a veteran who could trace his career back to The Way to the Stars (1946) but who remains best known for his long-running role in BBC’s Last of the Summer Wine (began 1974). Youth was represented by the fledgling Pamela Stephenson, like Anouska Hempel, a talented and beautiful New Zealander. She had made her debut opposite Walker regular, Robin Askwith in Stand Up Virgin Soldiers (1977), and would quickly emerge as a national celebrity via television’s Not the Nine O’Clock News (1979-82). In addition to the presence of Sheila Keith, continuity with previous Walker films was provided by a brief appearance of Whipcord’s Penny Irving, who was also beginning to establish herself as a familiar face on TV.

The Comeback is a psychological thriller which punctures its own pretensions with sly touches of macabre humour. There is a certain tension between a script which Smith conceived as a pastiche of the psycho-chillers which Jimmy Sangster wrote for Hammer (Taste of Fear, Hysteria etc.), and Walker’s realisation which emphasises the elements of terror. A protagonist beset by weird and apparently supernatural events designed to drive him into insanity is a standard Sangster trope, but here it is grafted uneasily onto a gore-hound-pleasing slasher scenario. The result is an uneven and unconvincing narrative full of contrived motivations and unexplained occurrences. The reasons why these sorts of plot weaknesses are forgivable in most of Walker’s films are again evident here in the use of humour and the handling of the horror. The humour is used sparingly to create an occasional self-parodic feel similar to Antony Balch’s Horror Hospital. When, for example Nick (Jack Jones) comes round in hospital after his nervous collapse he sees a nurse who consults her clipboard and tells him ‘it says here, if you should wake while I’m on duty I should tell you tactfully what happened’. ‘What happened?’, asks the groggy Nick. ‘You went nuts!’ comes the sharp reply. Moments like this gently mock the absurdity of the proceedings without undermining the genuinely frightening passages in the film. It is not really surprising that Walker believed this to be his most technically accomplished work because the violent and macabre set-pieces are handled with more assurance than any of his earlier efforts. These scenes may not bear favourable comparison with Argento’s lurid poetry of terror or compete with the visceral simulacra of modern special-effects mayhem, but they are still definitely not for the squeamish. In style and substance they refer back to Psycho and forward to De Palma’s Dressed to Kill (1980). There is a knife-wielding killer in drag, a bloody murder in a lift and a decomposing corpse in a wheelchair, all milked for maximum shock and suspense with the help of Peter Jessop’s accomplished photography and Alan Brett’s sharp editing. Unusually, though, their thunder is almost stolen by the sound recording of Peter O’Connor and Tony Anscombe, who augment the score with a wonderful array of sound effects - nocturnal sobbing, dripping water, ticking clocks, buzzing flies and a whistling killer.
The usual Walker conceits and preoccupation’s are present, as one might expect. References to classic Hollywood and British cinema abound, from the references to ‘Rosebud’ (Citizen Kane, 1941) to a head in a hatbox (Night Must Fall, 1965). Psychoanalysis, a favourite whipping boy for both Murray Smith and David McGillivray, takes its accustomed punishment:

**Linda (Pamela Stephenson):** A corpse in a wheelchair. What could that be symbolic of?  
**Nick (Jack Jones):** Never mind symbolic, sunshine, it was fucking there!

The apparent place of safety, this time the country retreat, turns out to be a haunt of fear; but it is the central theme that marks *The Comeback* most indelibly as a Walker film. The title, alone, suggests a problematic relationship between the past and the present, and it is Nick’s ambivalent feelings towards his own biography that power the narrative. His intention is to revive a career which represents both professional success and personal failure (in the form of the break-up of his marriage). It is as if his past contains a combustible mixture of creative and destructive forces. Without access to the creative elements there can be no comeback, but his attempt to recover them is fraught with danger. His past is clearly symbolised by the abandoned penthouse (in reality Walker’s own office) he used to share with his wife but which now contains only her festering corpse. ‘I don’t want to go back there’, he confides, hoping that he can recover his creative powers without unlocking the door to the apartment. His manager believes that he can make a fresh start, breaking the continuity of his biography, ‘You want to look ahead’ he advises Nick, ‘clear out the past like it never happened’; but Nick can neither forget nor avoid the back draft from the opened door. Once revived, the past is an uncontrollable force, just as it was in *The Flesh and Blood Show, Frightmare* and *Schizo*. In the recording studio Nick cuts a track about childhood memories, singing about ‘traces of a long-forgotten tune’ and trying to comprehend the forces that have been unleashed; but outside the studio unknown and unanticipated consequences of his past are already at work, shaping his future. His housekeepers are the bereaved parents of one of Nick’s obsessional fans. Years before, distraught because of his marriage, she had committed suicide and now her parents are plotting their own ‘comeback’ on the man they think of as ‘scum’. As a plot device it may be far-fetched but as exposition of Walker’s most obsessional concerns it is ideal and leads to one of the definitive moments in the director’s canon when Sheila Keith confronts a bemused and terrified Jack Jones. Its camp excessiveness echoes Sir Arnold’s ‘sex-crazed jackanapes’ speech in *The Flesh and Blood Show*:

> 'We had a daughter once. A lovely girl. Just starting university, she was, studying sociology. Mr. B and I adored her. She adored us. We called her Rosebud. She was a pop music fan like many young people. You were her idol. You with your foul contortions and lewd, suggestive songs; with your music that drives innocent children to behave like beasts in the farmyard. Disgusting!`

Played to the hilt by Sheila Keith with all the venomous contempt she can muster, the speech plays back a set of social and sexual attitudes which are as gloriously out-of-time as the manor house in which they are expressed. That they are sentiments more attuned to 1957 than 1977 contributes to the film’s mounting air of absurdity but it is the person to whom they are directed that gives them a bizarrely ironic edge. Mick Jagger, Jim Morrison or Elvis Presley, perhaps, but to imagine Jack Jones in the throws of lewd contortions singing suggestive songs requires a hilarious leap of the imagination.

The incongruous presence of Jones playing a singing sex bomb in a gruesome gore opera did not pass unnoticed by some contemporary critics - Scott Meek in the *MFB* (Aug.
(above): Death in the lift.
(below): Mrs B accuses Nick of "foul contortions and lewd, suggestive songs".
1978) described him as ‘ludicrously miscast’ - but others were quite impressed by his first cinematic ‘comeback’ since his debut in Jukebox Rhythm (1958). ‘He plays the beleaguered singer with a delightful throw-away humour when occasion allows, but otherwise with a direct sincerity that engages our sympathy and affection’, was Eric Braun’s assessment in Film and Filming (Aug. 1978). Murray Smith certainly thinks that the casting of Jack Jones enhanced the camp and satirical style of his script - ‘so awful he was wonderful’ was his comment - but he gives a competent enough performance as a typically-bland Walker leading man. Walker’s male protagonists are usually sensitive rather than macho and, in The Comeback, Jones is given a role which genre conventions would generally suggest to be female - the vulnerable and emotionally disturbed individual fearfully exploring the Old Dark House and mildly eroticised by the camera’s gaze. His casting guaranteed the film more extensive press reviews than most low-budget features, but may have been a significant hindrance to The Comeback’s commercial success, particularly in Britain. Walker fully understood that the nature of the casting in exploitation cinema sent messages to its potential audience, and Jones was never likely to appeal to the young male cinemagoers who were the key demographic for sensationalist cinema. Offered the prospect of Jack Jones and Pamela Stephenson - with her kit firmly on - they stayed away in droves. Walker had never been comfortable or confident with a youth audience, and The Comeback finally showed his estrangement from it. This may have been the result of accident or misjudgement, but it is more likely to have been a deliberate part of his strategy to gain mainstream acceptance. The growing competition in the blood and guts market may also have been a factor in the search for audiences who were easier to shock than the young enthusiasts for Italian gialli and Hollywood chainsaw atrocities. Commercially, this was a sadly misguided strategy. For
films of a modest budget, financial success lay not in appealing to a broad public but in carefully targeting product at the cinema's most regular attendees. Hollywood had already recognised this and was ready with a stream of teen pics and 'brat pack' acne operas. The horror market wanted Freddy and Jason, not Sheila Keith and Jack Jones.

On the whole, mainstream critics were nonplussed by The Comeback, confused by its combination of gratuitous nastiness and a tendency towards black comedy which many mistakenly assumed was unintentional. For most, Sheila Keith was the film's saving grace:

'Without Miss Keith's presence The Comeback would have been a violent, gory, predictable shocker. She sees that it raises more laughs than goose pimples - Arthur Thirkell, Daily Mirror, 16.6.78

For the New Statesman's John Coleman, Keith's performance reduced 'Judith Anderson's celebrated housekeeper
in *Rebecca* to the geniality of a geisha girl* (16.6.78), while for Ian Christie of the *Daily Express* she was ‘pure joy’ (17.6.78). The response of *The Sunday Times’* Alan Brien was representative of most when he described *The Comeback* as ‘terrible, and yet, I must confess, terribly enjoyable’ (18.6.78), and Keith’s performance as one of ‘genuinely astonishing deep-frozen malice, each potentially lethal syllable sticking to the heart like a stab by a daggered icicle’. ‘There may be audiences who will shiver with dread and hide their heads’, he suggested, ‘but I suspect the more general reaction will be wild, grateful hilarity, especially when the chatelaine of the haunted mansion is chopped in half by a misplaced axe stroke - an event which brought down the roof at the Press Show’. The roof of the ABC, Shaftsbury Avenue, however, was never seriously threatened by the meagre numbers of paying customers who turned up in the Summer of 1978 to view Walker’s latest shockerama.

Murray Smith now regards *The Comeback* as his most successful collaboration with Peter Walker:

‘I was killing myself doing it. I don’t know what my secretary thought because I would explode with laughter, because in those days I used to work in longhand and she would type it ... it was quite frightening in the end, quite good fun, really. I must say I watched it recently with two or three friends and they were rolling about saying “this is quite good for you!”’

 Appropriately enough, *The Comeback* looked both forward and backward - forward in its grisly set-piece murders to films like *Halloween* (1979), and the sad procession of eighties stalk and slash schlock cinema; but backward in its reworking of Hammer psychodramas and Old Dark House Gothics. On the face of it, the film extends Walker’s cinema of terror in a perfectly logical direction towards higher production values and greater international recognition. *The Comeback* has all the cine-literacy of earlier films in his terror
cycle but, with the departure of McGillivray as scriptwriter, something has changed. The key to the impact of the earlier films, it now becomes clear, was not so much their use of violence and gore as the transgressiveness of their ideas and themes. *The Comeback* is awash with blood, but its morality has become as conventionalised as its protagonists. In spite of some desperate gestures towards deviant cross-dressing, its characters behave in the ways broadly expected of their class, gender and age, leaving the narrative bereft of breached taboos beyond the sight of rotting corpses and amputated body parts. Even the resolution of the plot conforms to established Hollywood conventions of narrative closure with only the vestige of unease as Nick sees his dead wife waving from a window. The rampaging killer of the previous three films had been finally incarcerated and, with his/her removal, the beast that Walker's transgressive texts were becoming was partially domesticated.

**PETER WALKER comments:**

'Pamela Stephenson was very much a last choice, I mean she wasn’t Pamela Stephenson of *Not the Nine O’Clock News* then, she was just a struggling Luan Peters lookalike. I was going to make *The Comeback* in America initially, I thought about it. One of my best pals is an American agent and we were talking about who was going to play the girl and I met Kim Basinger who was unknown at that time. So if I’d made it there I probably could have used Kim Basinger. She’d been around and done some good work but she hadn’t achieved star status at the time. The boy who played the weird hanger-on, the roadie, was Peter Taylor. He wrote *Movie Stars Don’t Die in Liverpool*, the book about Gloria Graham. Jack Jones and I were great friends and we had a very similar childhood background. In fact people used to see us together and always think we were brothers.'
While Walker was making his accommodations to blandness and banality, another independent British film-maker, Derek Jarman, was exploring the possibilities of anarchy on celluloid with his punk shocker, *Jubilee* (1978). Jarman’s film has little of Walker’s polish or professional panache, but it effectively plays back the anti-social sensibilities of an ascendant youth culture and it is steeped in the degraded aesthetics of the punk movement. Here was a golden opportunity for a mischievous film-maker like Walker to generate controversy by exploiting a musical and expressive idiom which really did seem, in Mrs B’s words, to ‘drive innocent children to behave like beasts in the farmyard’. He almost had his chance in December 1977, soon after filming *The Comeback* when Malcolm McLaren invited him to salvage the wreck of The Sex Pistols movie. The project had been scuttled by the Fox corporation when it lost faith in the handling of the project by McLaren’s chosen team of Russ Meyer and Roger Ebert, and finally sunk when McLaren failed to refloat the project with Jonathan Kaplan and Danny Opatoshu (Bromberg 1991). Walker turned immediately to Michael Armstrong to collaborate on a treatment. Besides directing the controversial *Mark of the Devil* (1969), Armstrong had written the marvellously satirical *Eskimo Nell* (1975) and the zaniest of Stanley Long’s ‘Adventures’ series, *Adventures of a Private Eye* (1977). He had just completed the screenplay for the dour true-crime drama, *The Black Panther* (1978). Britain’s fringe cinema in the 1970s was a small and incestuous world and both Walker and Armstrong had made cameo appearances in Stanley Long’s *Adventures of a Taxi Driver* (1976). As Armstrong recalls:

‘Pete was in the film because I cast all those things and I was involved with Stanley’s company throughout that period and Pete was always popping in and out. Pete had sort of wanted to work with me but had been reticent because of the relationship I had with Stanley... It was only when I left Stanley that Pete leaped in. But we had talked quite a bit about doing films together and it seemed a very logical area really for the two of us to get together.’

The new collaborators were driven to a Sex Pistols gig in a gymnasium in the middle of a muddy field. Hundreds of ‘screaming punks’ were besieging the building and Armstrong and Walker (incongruous in his smart business suit) had to be smuggled in. Once inside, the crush was so great that they feared for their lives:

‘When the Sex Pistols came on all hell broke loose, all the barriers are flying in the air and the cans - oh terrible! We didn’t stay too long. Pete watched about ten minutes and said “I think I’ve seen enough, why don’t we go and have a nice quiet dinner?” We fled the place.’

Irreverent and seditious film-makers they might be, but Armstrong and Walker were temperamentally unsuited to punk. Nevertheless, a screenplay called *A Star is Dead* was quickly produced and pre-production preparations begun as the Pistols left for their American tour:

‘Pete didn’t really know what punk was, I don’t think anybody knew to be honest. We knew what it was supposed to be. The script was difficult for me as a writer because, on the one hand I was trying to write something terribly straightforward for Pete, and yet

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**A Star Is Dead**

*(unfilmed)*

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something which would satisfy Malcolm McLaren which was supposed to be nihilistic and anarchic and God knows what else. We ended up with some sort of compromise, a kind of half and half thing. The first draft was much wilder and then it got tempered down into something which was almost like “the Rank Organisation makes respectable punk”. We were throwing story ideas around together and curling up with laughter most of the time. It was the absurdity of the whole thing we had fun with. What would have happened on set I don’t know. I just said to Pete. “Look, just go on and whatever they do just film it”. But it would have been a respectable Pete Walker film rather than something which was truly anarchic and wild. You almost needed a Godard or Dick Lester on it. Quite what the thing would have ended up like if he’d directed it, I’ve no idea’.

We will never know because The Sex Pistols split up during their American tour in January 1978 and McLaren finally decided to work with Julien Temple on The Great Rock’n Roll Swindle (1980). Fortunately, the script for A Star is Dead has survived and, in reading it, the tensions between the old school of knock-about farce and the punk attitude of surly insubordination are clearly evident. Like Armstrong’s Eskimo Nell the script is a self-reflexive satire on exploitation film-making, full of consciously over-drawn characters in absurd situations. The world it constructs is one which is steadily running down into decay and disintegration. Everyday life is constantly disrupted by strikes, power cuts and bomb alerts, the media is out to manipulate its audiences and no-one is immune from the lure of easy money.

A celebrated left-wing playwright of the sixties, Howard Ritchie, (his socialist credentials belied by his name), is hired by film producer Jim Orton and record company executive, Laurie Harm, to write a ‘nihilistic’ movie featuring The Sex Pistols. Ritchie sees it as ‘a hard-hitting document portraying Capitalist exploiters of the downtrodden working classes as they really are: Fascist pigs!’ At the same time he makes contact with the film director Tony Richardson who is at the time directing the film adaptation of the play Caligula. And as if to prove how appropriate and timely a piece of work the script is, Orton discovers that potential distributors of the film will not handle it while the anarchic reputation of The Sex Pistols is being promoted. Orton instantly changes tack and decides to make ‘a musical version of The Three Musketeers instead. Johnny Rotten is to play D’Artagnan, a notion that is no less absurd than the kung fu nuns in the musical of Eskimo Nell. Screenwriter Ritchie turns out to be as financially motivated as any commercial hack and agrees to pen the new ‘prestige picture’ for an increased fee to be deposited in his Swiss bank account. The Pistols’ long-suffering and permanently-stoned (fictional) manager, Norman Salvin, agrees to the ‘sell out’ in the interests of business, but is understandably reluctant to break the news to his volatile clients.

The Sex Pistols, themselves, are portrayed not as affluent pop stars but as penniless proles slumming it in squats and council blocks, although a sub-plot has Steve Jones moonlighting as the respectable suitor of a merchant banker’s daughter (to the consternation of his squat mate Paul Cook). Sid Vicious’ home life makes the Bacon family from Viz Comic look well adjusted. He lives in a ‘cliché of a slum’ with his mother and her relentlessly violent lover. Sid consoles his battered mum with incestuous embraces. They kiss ‘like Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman in Indiscreet’ before he screws her on the settee in front of a visiting journalist. Johnny Rotten’s ma, a part earmarked for Diana Dors, is a junkie who runs a bondage and domination business from her council flat while his sister spends most of her time eating baked beans and breaking wind. Rotten’s role is as the political conscience of the band. He puts the brakes on the backsliding of Jones and manager Norman and articulates the existentialist philosophy of punk: ‘You’ll end up like all the other goldfish’, he warns Norman, ‘swimming round and round worrying about whether
someone's going to sprinkle a bit of fish food on top of the water so's you can stay alive to keep swimming round and round till you die'. Armstrong's script reproduces John Lydon's (Rotten's) speech patterns quite effectively and allows the character space to convey ideas, but the other band members are given few opportunities to express themselves beyond the expected fusillades of abusive language. Even these, though, have an authenticity of response which is denied to the media professionals in the script. Journalists, photographers, film and music executives are interested only in the creation of false images. In their world the real has been replaced by the rhetorical. The reporter, Margaret Hixon, wants to write a piece on Sid Vicious as 'yet another sweet ordinary working-class [kid] who's made good - rather like Cliff Richard'; while Alex, the photographer from Vogue, has spent so long watching models pose that he can no longer recognise natural behaviour.

Walter Hurst, 'academy award-winning director of The Maltese Duck', and the man assigned to helm The Three Musketeers, is another media phoney whose practice is to 'throw the script away on the first day'. Resplendent in beads, floral shirt, skin-tight leather trousers, cowboy boots and fur coat, he is described as 'like Ken Russell and Mike Winner rolled into a paunchy Mike Sarne', and announces that he wants to make a film that is 'romantic, delicate, like a flower - but with guts!'. The Pistols' co-stars are Sally, a 'sweet little girl from a Mormon family', who made her name playing Anne of Green Gables, and (in a clear nod to The Flesh and Blood Show) the puritanical actor-knight Sir Arthur Gates, who plays Cardinal Richelieu. Rotten rewrites his scenes with Sir Arthur, providing one of the script's most bizarre comedic moments as the camera cuts between the knight and the punk each independently rehearsing their dialogue:

Sir Arthur: So, noble D'Artagnan, we meet at last!

Johnny: Oh, piss off, you boring old fart!

Sir Arthur: No, my fine young upstart, your fine words and fancy phrases do not work on me. I know why you are here. To see the Lady Constance.

Johnny: Yeah, I want to fuck her.

Sir Arthur: I have her safety under lock and key and none - not even you, D'Artagnan - shall rescue her! Never let it be said a mere Musketeer got the better of Cardinal Richelieu!

Johnny: All right ..Richloo - fuck off, you cunt, or I'll shove my sword up your arse.

Sir Arthur: Mercy! Mercy! No more! I can't take any more!

Much of the humour and dramatic tension of A Star is Dead lies in anticipating the calamity and embarrassment that will ensue when respectability meets punk insensitivity. What will happen when The Pistols meet the virginal Sally? (Rotten throws up over her and Vicious attempts to rape her). What mayhem will result when the band play to a mixed audience of punks and sisters of mercy ('bottles, chairs, and nuns' fly everywhere); or even when Cook, Vicious and Rotten lock three old ladies in the lavatory and take their place as the trio of chamber musicians at the merchant banker's swanky party? (Steve Jones abandons matrimony in favour of cacophony). Not surprisingly, the key moments of A Star is Dead are The Sex Pistols' live performances. There are four scheduled - at the Slagheap Club, at a Catholic Church Hall, at a society party and, finally, on their own television special. The first
two result in near riots in which the audience of punks become a wild and uncontrollably violent force just as Armstrong had experienced on his only visit to a Pistols gig. The other performances enlist our support for the band’s invasion of bourgeois spaces. During their live TV appearance they reject the more wholesome image planned by their record company and win back the allegiance of their manager with a gesture of defiance reminiscent of Jimi Hendrix on *The Lulu Show* (BBC 1968). ‘Right. That’s enough of that shit’, snarls Rotten, abandoning the ‘restrained’ style that has been imposed upon the band for their glitzy television special before bursting into ‘a wild and extremely abusive number with all the vehemence they can muster’.

Should it be a matter of regret that *A Star is Dead* was never filmed? Certainly, it would not only have been Peter Walker’s most famous film, but it would also have been as culturally significant as *A Hard Day’s Night* (1964). Michael Armstrong’s script is witty, irreverent and daring in its use of language (particularly the ‘C’ word), but there is little evidence of innovation. It takes few risks with the tried and tested format of comedy with music that had been the standard way of exploiting the box office potential of British pop acts since *Expresso Bongo* (1959). Admittedly, *A Star is Dead* does not try to rehabilitate the bad boys of punk or to sanitise their sound, but the script does reduce the impact of their rage, turning revolt into laughter.

**PETER WALKER comments:**

‘Michael Armstrong’s script for the Sex Pistols’ film was hilarious. It’s just terrible that we never had a chance to make it; but the deal was all set up and that would have been an interesting picture’.
Home Before Midnight

producer: Pete Walker
screenplay: Murray Smith
(from a story by Pete Walker)
production manager:
Matthew Robinson
production assistant: Ginger Corbett
director of photography: Peter Jessop
camera operator: Peter Sinclair
director: Alan Brett
music: Jigsaw & Ray Russell
art director: Mike Pickwoad
assistant directors: Brian Lawrence, Terry Madden, Marcia Gay
post-production supervisor: Matt McCarthy
make-up: George Partleton
sound recordist: Peter O'Connor
sound re-recordist: Tony Anscombe

cast: James Aubrey (Mike Beresford), Alison Elliot (Ginny Wilshire), Mark Burns (Harry Wilshire), Juliet Harmer (Susan Wilshire), Debbie Linden (Carol), Andy Forray (Vince Owen), Chris Jagger (Nick), Sharon Mughan (Helen Owen), Ivor Roberts (Inspector Gray), Antonia Pemberton (WPC Wilding), Faith Kent (Miss Heatherton), John Hewer (Donnelly), Patrick Barr (Judge), Charles Collingwood (Burlingham), Jeff Rawle (Johnnie McGee), Edward De Souza (Archer), Emma Jacobs (Lindy), Edward Kalinski (Danny), Nicholas Young (Ray), Nigel Rathbone (Andrew Lomax), Leonard Kavanagh (Mr. Beresford), Joan Pendleton (Mrs. Beresford), Ian Sharrock (Malcolm), Anne Nightingale (herself), Clive Scott, Des Dyer, Jigsaw (Bad Accident), Bobby Bernard (Publisher), Clare McClellan (Tracey Wilshire), David Hamilton (himself), Richard Todd (Geoffrey Steele)

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Released: 1979 (Cert X)
Distribution: Columbia-EMI-Warner
Running Time: 111 mins. (9,965 ft.)
US Title: HOME BEFORE MIDNIGHT
Video Release in UK: Home Video Marketing (106 mins. 23 secs.) VHS/B n/a

Synopsis

Mike Beresford, songwriter for the rock band Bad Accident, picks up hitch-hiker Ginny Wilshire and takes her to dinner and introduces her to showbiz friends. The couple quickly become lovers, but when, on a Thames boat cruise, Mike discovers that Ginny is only fourteen years old, he tries to end the affair. Ginny, however, persuades him to continue their
relationship and they visit his parents in the North, Ginny telling her parents that she is staying in Wales with a school friend. She is found out when a TV interview with Bad Accident arouses her parents' suspicions. After a family argument, the police are called in and Ginny accepts their assumption that she was seduced and assaulted by Mike. He is charged with rape and the publicity leads to him being dropped by his band. Ginny wants to tell the truth but is dissuaded by her head teacher. Mike gets into further trouble when an attempt to talk to Ginny, who has now transferred her affections to a fellow pupil, ends in her blouse being torn. At the trial, Mike is acquitted of rape but is sentenced to two years imprisonment for unlawful intercourse.
HOME BEFORE MIDNIGHT

'We argue that the law is out of touch with current behaviour because it does not consider consenting sexual relationships among the young ... The practice of many professionals - judges, general practitioners, police and social workers - reflects the view that the law is inappropriate in today's sexual climate.' - Pregnant at School. A report by the National Council for One-Parent Families and the Community Development Trust, Sept. 1979.

'It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.'  
- St Luke 17, 2

With the opportunity to explore punk aesthetics passed, Peter Walker decided to revisit more familiar territory - the bumpy terrain of the sex drama. He conceived a tale, like Cool it Carol, 'ripped from today's headlines' and timed perfectly to coincide with a controversial Government-sponsored report recommending the abolition of the age of consent. Murray Smith was given the job of scripting Walker's story of a personable and sensitive songwriter who falls for the deceptions of a 14 year-old temptress. Additional material was supplied by Walker's new collaborator, Michael Armstrong. As an exploitation concept, Home Before Midnight was not quite as cheesy as the American Jail Bait Babysitter or John Lindsay's taboo tales of hockey sticks and gymslips but it was not exactly odour-free.

Like Gerry O'Hara's The Brute (1977), Walker's new project rescued the tradition of the British social problem film from the naked cynicism of Derek Ford and Stanley Long. Films like The Wife Swappers (1969), Suburban Wives (1971) and On The Game (1973) had foregrounded titillation and humour at the expense of verisimilitude. Surprisingly, Donovan Winter's Escort Girls (1974) had begun a minor trend back towards naturalism, seen most
clearly in Armstrong’s script for The Black Panther. Home Before Midnight would be more theatrical than The Black Panther, but it would have an air of realism and responsibility sufficient to counter charges of paedophilic exploitation. As Walker told Murray Smith when he gave him the brief ‘the only way we’ll get away with it is if we make it socially responsible’.

The film’s closest antecedents are the youth problem films of ten years earlier - Baby Love (1969), Groupie Girl (1970) and Permissive (1970) - and exposé dramas such as Too Young to Love (1959), That Kind of Girl (1963) and The Yellow Teddybears (1963). Walker was also extending a renewed interest in precocious sexuality occasioned by the pubescent heroines of Martin Scorsese’s Taxi Driver (1976) and Louis Malle’s Pretty Baby (1978). In keeping with Walker’s trend towards more wholesome exploitation, however, their jail bait prostitutes played by Jodie Foster and Brooke Shields were replaced in Home Before Midnight by the much older Alison Elliot as Ginny, a pleasant, middle-class schoolgirl from Wimbledon. Her lover, Mike, was played by James Aubrey, an actor already associated in the audience’s minds with the consequences of inter-generational desire. Aubrey had played the husband of House of Mortal Sin’s Susan Penhaligon in the steamy Bouquet of Barbed Wire TV series. His portrait of a violent philanderer whose sexual taste encompassed his mother-in-law was so convincing that the actor was attacked by an irate guardsman in Sloane Square (Photoplay, May 1977). Ginny’s protective father was played by Mark Burns, a seasoned campaigner whose credits included Times of Glory (1960), The Charge of the Light Brigade (1968), The Virgin and the Gypsy (1970) and Death in Venice (1971). The part of his understanding wife went to Juliet Harmer, a well-known face in TV adventure series since her debut as Adam Adamant’s side-kick in 1966. Among the supporting players was the tragic young model and television actress Debbie Linden, whose career was to be destroyed by the drugs that would eventually cause her death in 1997. Walker’s faith in the commercial appeal of MOR pop had clearly not been shaken by the response to The Comeback because he retains the music business setting and entrusts the score to Jigsaw, one
of the most forgettable easy listening rock bands of the 1970s. Cursed with musical misjudgement of this magnitude it was always going to require more than the casting of Radio One jockette Anne Nightingale and Mick Jagger’s brother Chris to convince a hip youth audience of the film’s merits.

What emerges in Home Before Midnight is largely an outsider’s view of the rock business and a liberal attitude towards under-age sex. The screenplay replays the permissive themes of Smith and Walker’s first collaboration, Cool it Carol - immorality and illegality are not synonymous, teenage sexuality is natural and should be allowed to find its own expression, and institutional power corrupts and distorts human relationships.

Typically, these references back to the earlier film are knowingly signalled in the name of Ginny’s hitch-hiking friend (Carol) and in lines like ‘I thought we’d travel up river through Maidenhead’ (Cool it Carol’s most famous line being, ‘Is your maidenhead still intact?’). The film’s jaundiced view of the legal system is related back to House of Whipcord by similar devices - the obliging lorry driver at the start of the film and the appearance of Patrick Barr as the judge at the end. Diligent students of British exploitation film could probably spot references to other movies in Ginny’s gratuitous shower scene or in the naming of Mike’s rock band ‘Bad Accident’, perhaps an echo of the fatal collision in Derek Ford’s Groupie Girl.

James Aubrey’s Mike is cast in a similar, although slightly more youthful, mould to Jack Jones’ Nick (The Comeback) and confirms Walker’s shift towards more prominent male leads. He is portrayed as a sympathetic character, wrongly accused and persecuted by a system which refuses to accept the reality of youthful sexuality and operates according to stereotypical conceptions of the innocent child and the predatory male. Ginny is rewarded for remaining passive and childlike and allowing her father and his generation to avoid confronting their ambivalent feelings towards her burgeoning nubility. Her apparently liberal father is transformed by the recognition of his daughter’s sexual receptiveness and his own repressed jealousy into a stern Victorian patriarch. Her school’s primary concern is with its own reputation and the police’s purpose is to enforce a strict model of guilt, coercion and exploitation onto a relationship which is experienced as free and mutual. Only her mother is prepared to acknowledge Ginny’s active sexuality and approach the situation with empathy and understanding.
(above): The fourteen-year-old Ginny
(below): Mike contemplates the collapse of his career
Directorially, Walker steers a difficult course between the sensitive handling of the emotional complexities of the film’s central relationship and the occasional exploitation of the sexual frisson associated with Lolita figures. It is unfair to suggest, as one reviewer did, that his direction puts his film ‘firmly on the side of the dirty mackintosh brigade’ (*Films Illustrated*, Oct. 1979), but in graphically depicting Ginny’s enthusiastic desire and evident sexual competence he inevitably fuels fantasies centred on pubescent girls.

A possibly misleading impression of adolescent sophistication is also given by the casting of Alison Elliot. She tackles her demanding role with skill and confidence, but her appearance makes it easy to accept that her character is well above the age of consent. As *Films Illustrated* put it, ‘if Ms. Elliot didn’t blow the candles out on her twenty-first birthday cake long ago, then there’s hope for us all’ (Oct. 1979). Generally, though, Walker achieves a sense of realism which, although never gritty, usually has a semblance of truthfulness. He is helped, as always, by Jessop’s cinematography which is equally comfortable in the day-glo, ketchup and formica *mise-en-scène* of The Happy Eater café or the more lyrical situations of courtship and its consummation. The script, a prizewinner at the Grenoble Film Festival, is more uneven, sporting some unconvincing dialogue in scenes featuring the rock musicians (‘You were humping a minor, and that’s death to a band like Bad Attitude’), as well as some disarmingly candid exchanges between the lovers (‘you’re even hornier since you found out I’m only fourteen’). It does its best, however, to point out the difference between sexual fantasy and real relationships, particularly effectively in the scene where Mike receives an obscene phone call from a paedophile.

As the story moves slowly (much too slowly for most critics) towards its close we are given the accustomed Walker ‘take’ on the professional classes. Ginny’s headmistress is unscrupulous and self-serving, while Mike’s barrister (the venerable Richard Todd) is cynical about the prospects of justice in a legal system which is as arbitrary as it is outmoded. ‘Innocence or guilt is purely academic in a court of law until there’s a verdict’ he tells a disoriented client who is learning just how ‘distorted’ things become when the law is invoked.
Truth becomes even less recognisable when it is subjected to the generational prejudice of judicial rhetoric: 'Decent people as a whole are sick and tired of hearing and reading of the amoral exploits of the young' Judge Patrick Barr announces in a speech which he might have given in any of his previous appearances in Walker's films. 'You were in the position, and the profession, whereby you wielded considerable influence over adolescent young persons. You chose to abuse that privilege'. Mike is given two years in jail, while we listen to Jigsaw singing 'World kick me when I'm down'. Who gets the lighter sentence is a moot point.

Home Before Midnight opened quietly in October 1979 at the Classic Victoria and the ABC Edgware Road before going on general release as the main feature of a double bill with both Donovan Winter's Give Us Tomorrow (1979) and the re-released Sweeney! (1976). Reviewers were suspicious of its maker's sexploitation CV and unconvinced by its best-case scenario of desire across the generational divide. They questioned the authenticity of its courtroom scenes and complained about their difficulty in believing Alison Elliot to be fourteen. Some were sympathetic to the film's attempt to treat, as Felix Barker put it, 'a highly charged subject with discretion' (Evening News, 20.9.79), but others found it 'crude' or 'grubby'. The suggestion that a girl's accusations of rape against an older man might be motivated by self-interest and should therefore be treated with caution was unlikely to please feminist critics.

Like House of Mortal Sin, Home Before Midnight is an 'issue picture' and, this time, the issue rather than the sensational elements is clearly foregrounded. It is probably Walker's most successful attempt to reach a female audience and, certainly, the woman for whom I screened a copy of the video had no trouble in engaging with the characters and becoming involved in their story. Her comment, 'it wasn't as tacky as I thought it was going to be', is indicative of Walker's move towards the mainstream entertainment picture. Home Before Midnight appears to acknowledge the growing importance to film of the television market, and today it might well be formatted as a two-part TV drama aimed primarily at women viewers.
The film marked the end of the Walker-Smith collaboration, with Murray Smith departing, during filming, to Canada and Alaska to write the final script for *Bear Island* (1980). "That was really the cusp of my work with Peter," he recalls 'because, as I had been hoping, things took off'.

**PETER WALKER comments:**

'What on earth made me think *Home Before Midnight* was the film we should be making? I don’t quite know why I did it. It was 1978 and, by that time, people were clued up on their sex, but it was a bitter-sweet thing. But it didn’t work commercially. I mean, it didn’t cost much to make, so it didn’t lose any money, but it certainly didn’t work commercially. Although, actually it did alright in this country. It was the last of the Eady Levy films really. Even in 1979 *Home Before Midnight* was attacked for being very sexist, which actually was its intention. I mean, there was this poor guy and everyone took the side of the girl. The intention was for the audience to be sympathetic to James Aubrey when everyone else wasn’t. Alison Elliott was about eighteen. She was not a bad kid at all. She was a good little actress. She was very hot on television immediately after that for a year or two, and then she disappeared. Maybe she got married as some of them do, you know; they just get married.'
House Of The Long Shadows

producers: Menahem Golan & Yoram Globus
associate producer: Jenny Craven
screenplay: Michael Armstrong (suggested by the novel Seven Keys to Baldpate by Earl Derr Biggers and the dramatisation by George M. Cohan)
director of photography: Norman Langley
camera operator: John Simmonds
music: Richard Harvey
production manager: Jeanne Ferber
editor: Richard Dearberg
assistant editors: Sarah Vickers, Brian Trenerry
assistant directors: Brian Lawrence, Glynn Purcell, Paul Carnie, Nick Godden
art director: Mike Pickwood
make-up: George Partleton
sound recordist: Peter O'Connor
sound re-recordist: Richard King

cast: Vincent Price (Lionel Grisbane/Geoffrey), Christopher Lee (Corrigan/Roderick Grisbane/Bernard), Peter Cushing (Sebastian Rand/Sebastian Grisbane/Humphrey), Desi Arnaz Jnr (Kenneth Magee), John Carradine (Lord Grisbane/Elijah Quimby), Sheila Keith (Victoria Quimby/Victoria Grisbane), Julie Peasgood (Mary Norton/Mary Jameson), Richard Todd (Sam Allyson), Louise English (Diana Caulder), Richard Hunter (Andrew Caulder/Phil), Norman Rossington (Station Master)

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Released: 1983 (Cert 15)
Distribution: Cannon
Running Time: 101 mins. (9,132 ft.)
US Title: THE HOUSE OF THE LONG SHADOWS
Video Release in UK: Guild Home Video (97 mins. 24 secs.) VHS/B/V2000 n/a
Guild Video Collection (97 mins. 24 secs.) VHS n/a

Synopsis

Cynical young American novelist Kenneth Magee accepts a bet from his English publisher Sam Allyson that he cannot write a classic Gothic novel in twenty-four hours. Allyson arranges for Magee to work at Blyydpactwr Manor, a dilapidated old mansion in Wales. Undeterred by grim warnings from the stationmaster, Kenneth arrives at the manor and soon encounters the building's sinister 'caretakers', Elijah and Victoria Quimby, and Allyson's secretary, Mary Norton, who tries to distract him from his work. More suspicious characters soon arrive including Sebastian Rand, a stranded motorist; Andrew and Diana Caulder, two
holidaymakers sheltering from the storm; Corrigan, a property developer; and Lionel Grisbane, who has returned to visit his family’s ancestral home. From the family portraits, Kenneth and Mary realise that Elijah is really Lord Grisbane and that Lionel, Sebastian and Victoria are his children.

The Grisbanes reveal that they have returned to release Roderick, the black sheep of the family, who they imprisoned in an attic room forty years earlier, believing him responsible for the death of a local girl. But Roderick has already escaped and appears to be intent on wiping out the inhabitants of the Manor. Elijah dies from a stroke. Victoria is strangled. Diana is burnt by acid. Andrew is poisoned, and Sebastian is hanged. Corrigan, it turns out, is Roderick. He charges Lionel with the murder of the local girl and attacks him with an axe. He then goes after Kenneth, who manages to overcome him after a desperate struggle. At this point, however, it is revealed that none of the deaths was real. It has all been a charade staged by Allyson to scare and distract his author, but Kenneth wins his bet by finishing his book on time. The whole film has actually been a dramatisation of that book.

**HOUSE OF THE LONG SHADOWS**

Kenneth Magee:
‘It’s crazy. I mean, it’s just some stupid story about a publisher who makes a bet with a writer... even with the twist at the end which exposes the whole thing as a joke... but I like it, Sam. Maybe it is the characters - Hell! I enjoyed doing it.’


Laura Pennington:
‘Houses are like living things, alive with all the thoughts and memories of the people who lived in them, and those thoughts and memories go on living as long as the house stands.’

- *The Enchanted Cottage*, screenplay by De Witt Bodeen and Herman J. Mankiewiez.

The early eighties were difficult years for British cinema and they were fallow years for Pete Walker. His brand of intelligent low-budget entertainment was no longer viable in a marketplace transformed by new economic and political conditions. Although the international success of *Chariots of Fire* (1981) apparently gave substance to Colin Welland’s assertion that ‘the British are coming’, the truth was that the condition of British film culture had never been more feeble. Cinema admissions dropped below 100 million for the first time in 1980 and reached a nadir of 64 million in 1982 as home video began offering a more comfortable alternative to an evening in an increasingly dilapidated picture house. As ticket prices were increased to accommodate the trend towards expensive blockbuster movies, the low-budget independent film no longer seemed to offer value for money. Low-budget commercial film-making was being squeezed from all directions. Fewer ticket sales meant less cash in the Eady fund, a vital government subsidy for many producers, including Pete Walker. At the same time the independent (particularly suburban) cinemas which were essential to the distribution of Britain’s Poverty Row productions were closing at an alarming rate, unable to cope with escalating overheads and an audience taste for blockbusters. The last incentives both the remaining independent exhibitors and the major cinema chains had for screening modest British product disappeared in 1982 with the collapse of the quota system for indigenous films (Auty and Roddick 1985). The squeeze on exhibition meant that British producers were obliged to address international markets and sources of finance more exclusively than ever.
Pete Walker’s project for the new decade was a script by Michael Armstrong, titled *Deliver Us from Evil*. Although the script had been written some time before the two bête noirs of British exploitation cinema began their collaboration, Armstrong recognised that his ‘supernatural psycho-thriller’ was an ideal Walker vehicle, ‘very Pete’. The protagonist of *Deliver Us from Evil* is an heiress with a traumatic past, involving maternal madness and adoption, which has similarities with Walker’s own. As a small girl she had discovered the body of her young brother, murdered by their mentally ill mother. Following her mother’s commitment to hospital she was adopted by a wealthy couple who had died in an air crash and left her their fortune. As in *Schizo*, she is about to marry the man she loves (a politician) when her past returns to haunt her in the shape of her ‘dead’ brother, a young man offering others a plausible explanation about how he survived his mother’s attack but telling his sister that he is an avenging ghost. In Armstrong’s words this is ‘a nightmare situation of a person knowing something when nobody else around you believes you’. It has obvious parallels with *House of Mortal Sin* except that here the audience is not certain if our heiress is being set up by a confidence trickster (shades of Jimmy Sangster’s *Paranoiac*) or if she is really lapsing into psychosis like her mother. The resolution would have been a new departure for Walker as the narrative takes the supernatural option and confirms that the brother is indeed an apparition.

No longer able to finance his own projects, Walker took *Deliver Us from Evil* to Hollywood where he had established a base and become friendly with Desi Arnaz Jnr. American screenwriters worked on Armstrong’s script, changing elements and re-locating its action from the South of France to Mexico where filming would have been considerably cheaper. Initial interest by a major Hollywood studio eventually evaporated and Walker turned to Cannon Films. Menahem Golan showed an interest, but suggested that the time might be right for a Gothic revival film which would unite the genre’s leading actors. *Deliver Us from Evil* was not the ideal vehicle and enthused by the idea of ‘a nostalgia piece’, Walker and Armstrong began to look for an old story which would enable significant roles to be
given to five great horror stars - Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, Vincent Price, John Carradine and Elsa Lanchester. *The Old Dark House* was the obvious choice, but that had already been revived by Hammer less than twenty years before and, in any case, there were problems over the rights. Instead, Walker returned, as usual, to the movies of his youth and a lumbering old property of 1947 based on Earl Derr Biggers’ *Seven Keys to Baldpate*. The story dated from 1913 and had already been used for five films. ‘All we really used of the original was the beginning and the end’, explained Armstrong. ‘We took the premise to make a picture that is a pastiche of all the ’30s and ’40s fear films - very stylish, Gothic and creepy - but fun’ (*Prevue*, July 1983). He polished off a twenty page treatment which Walker took to Hollywood to show Cushing, Price and Carradine, all of whom agreed to join the project, subject to seeing the finished script. Christopher Lee, too, agreed to join in the reunion. This was a considerable achievement for Walker, given his reputation for making the kind of films which both Cushing and Lee had publicly criticised. Peter Cushing, after all, had turned down *House of Mortal Sin* and was still declaring his distaste for graphic violence in press interviews:

‘I can’t stand blood, gore or so-called splatter effects just for the sake of shock. That’s why our films feature more fantasy than horror. I feel horror refers to war, terrorism and the dreadful things going on in the world today. Our films are make-believe, with events that can’t happen except in our pictures. People enjoy them because they provide relief from the strain of everyday living.’ - *Prevue*, July 1983

Perhaps he had forgotten his role in *Corruption* (1968), Robert Hartford Davis’ blood feast. Christopher Lee was also relieved that Michael Armstrong’s treatment suggested that *Long Shadows* would not be the type of film which had ‘an axe sticking out of someone’s face every ten minutes’. He told *Cinefantastique* (Sept. 1982):
'It is not, in any sense, a horror film, and I have told the producers I am not interested in doing a horror film. There is some violence ... but there's no graphic mutilation or any of that nonsense. And there is a lot of comedy - not slapstick, but natural humour.' Having secured provisional agreements from his main men, Walker telephoned Armstrong to say he needed a script a.s.a.p. 'He'd told them it was almost finished', Armstrong recalls, 'but I hadn't even started it. So I wrote the script in two weeks, with the last batch of pages being delivered to Pete about two hours before his flight to L.A. was due' (The Dark Side, July 1993). With the script approved, Walker quickly assembled his distinguished cast for a five week shooting schedule, beginning August 1982. Elsa Lanchester was too ill to make the trip to England and her replacement by the indomitable Sheila Keith ensured a continuity with Walker's cinematic past. Further continuity was supplied by the presence of Richard Todd (Home Before Midnight's barrister). The 'juvenile leads' to play against this formidable assembly of acting experience were Walker's friend and Lucy's son Desi Arnaz Jnr, and a vivacious English actress from The Royal Shakespeare Company, Julie Peasgood. Arnaz, youthful looking but with ten years screen acting experience behind him, strengthened the film's appeal to American audiences and was everything we had come to expect from one of Walker's male protagonists - pleasant, but absent when the charisma was being handed out. Ms. Peasgood, now well known on British daytime television and in commercials for (good) peas, was the film's attempt to discover 'this year's blonde, 1983'. Perhaps Pamela Stephenson had become too expensive. In supporting roles were Richard Hunter, whose credits included David Lynch's The Elephant Man (1980), veteran character actor Norman Rossington, and Louise English, once a dancer with Pan's People and more recently a regular on TV's The Benny Hill Show.
For this project, his first to be produced by someone else, Walker had to manage without the considerable talents of Peter Jessop as director of photography. This at least gave him the opportunity to renew his partnership with Norman Langley, the lighting cameraman he had last worked with on *Die Screaming Marianne*. The bulk of filming was done in a stately home in Hampshire.

Like *The Flesh and Blood Show*, *House of the Long Shadows* is a film whose simple and familiar surfaces conceal a deeper structure of meaning. Like the earlier film, it is an apparently ‘obvious’ piece of genre cinema which quietly mocks its own conventions and continually refers to itself. Its address to its audience is a knowing one. It expects its audience to be Gothic literate and to probe beneath the surface to the sub-textual life of the movie.

Armstrong’s script unashamedly bristles with clichés. ‘We began by sitting down and drawing up a list of every single cliché we could think of’, he recalls and they are faithfully reproduced in Walker’s shadowy mise-en-scène. The eerie ancestral home is everything we have come to expect from dozens of previous productions. The echoing entrance hall with its heavy doors and broad oak staircase is fully-furnished with dusty tapestries, stuffed trophies, family portraits and sinister suits of armour. The whole house is cobwebbed and strange with its sepulchral passageways, its black cat and its obligatory locked room with oversize iron key. It is a classic setting for Gothic melodrama which instantly, and inescapably, references a whole theatrical tradition. ‘It’s a cursed place’, says one character. ‘Yes I saw the movie’, replies another. As his reply suggests, *Long Shadows* is not about the re-creation of life as it is lived, but the reproduction of fiction. The film’s narrative is apparently merely the vehicle for the real business of cinephilia, as Walker confirmed:

‘It’s the complete film buff’s movie. When I ran the old 1930 version of the movie, and then I ran the 1935 version and then the 1947 version, I noticed there was the same shot - I won’t tell you which one - in each film. So I duplicated that shot for this version. The film is full of in-jokes like that.’ - *Fangoria*, 27, 1983
Some of those in-jokes, characteristically, are about the director’s own Gothic films. The house’s dustsheet-covered statuary and creepy caretakers clearly recall The Comeback, the private court sitting in judgement and illegally incarcerating returns us to House of Whipcord, while Sheila Keith’s histrionic declaration of lost love echoes, not only Gone With the Wind (1939), but her own role in House of Mortal Sin: ‘He loved me. He did love me. I was beautiful then and he was so handsome. We were to be married, Ashley!’ In-jokes like these are part of the way in which Walker and Armstrong use the screenplay for some wry self mockery.

The film’s protagonist Ken Magee (Desi Amaz) is a speed-writer of commercial fiction who accepts the challenge of writing a Gothic novel in 24 hours, only a slight exaggeration of Armstrong’s two-week script. Like Walker, he believes that contemporary audiences need more than the outmoded and over-stylised melodramatics of Gothic narrative. As he tells his publisher, Sam (Richard Todd):

Ken: People have different behaviour patterns now. They just don’t go around acting like they’re out of Wuthering Heights.
Sam: Are you trying to tell me that Wuthering Heights, with all its brooding intensity, isn’t as involving and real as a contemporary novel?
Ken: It’s over the top. I mean, anyone can write one of those things. It’s just a question of letting your imagination go bananas.

Ken is a cynical producer of pulp fiction, but the experience of working in one of literature’s richest genres leads him to question his easy assumptions about art and commerce. Perhaps there is more to writing than financial gain and perhaps the popular need not be superficial. ‘It’s kind of weird, but somehow, writing it, I really cared about the characters’, he confides to his publisher at the end of his ordeal. ‘I can’t wait to read it, dear boy’ he replies, ‘I’m sure it will make just as much money as everything else you’ve ever written’. But Ken is reappraising his values. ‘Great, but is that what’s really important?’ he muses. As the creator of Midnight Manor, the central story which House of the Long Shadows frames, Ken represents Walker and Armstrong’s own aspirations for the craft of popular storytelling as well as their ambivalence towards its commercial reduction. Both men are capable of Ken’s cynicism towards the audience and neither would classify their creations with the pretentious label of ‘art’, but both believe in the potential of ‘pulp’ to transcend its intellectual boundaries and supply an entertainment which is stimulating and intelligent.

An understanding of the way in which the writer and director are implicated in their own creation is not essential to the appreciation of Long Shadows, but it adds to the film’s fascination and brings another layer to its strata of meanings. It is not simply a film written
in the Gothic style which features some well-known genre actors. Its screenplay fuses narrative with ironic commentary so that it becomes a film about not only the Gothic genre but also about popular writing, and also about the nature of screen acting and stardom. The raison d’être of the picture, after all, is to assemble together the four greatest living stars of the horror film. Their roles were not cast in the conventional way but written specifically to suit the four’s screen personae. The script emphasises their status as acting heavyweights, giving them grand entrances. ‘I have returned’ intones Vincent Price as he steps through the portals of Blydyfwr Manor. Walker has each player pause for effect and audience recognition as he makes his entrance. Theatricality is further emphasised in both the dialogue and acting style. ‘Please don’t interrupt me when I’m soliloquising’ admonishes Price at one point, while Peter Cushing affects a very obvious speech impediment which shows off his accomplished technique. Gestures are exaggerated in a conscious display of melodramatic style. Vincent Price, in particular had become so adept at camp self-parody in his Dr Phibes and Theatre of Blood roles in the 1970’s that neither he nor his audience expected ‘straight’ acting. Instead, he relishes his touches of black humour such as the discovery of the murdered body of a sister who had rather fancied herself a songstress. ‘Piano wire!’ he declares, ‘he must have heard her singing’.

Desi Arnaz and Julie Peasgood as Ken and Mary are asked to employ a more naturalistic acting style, but even they are given lines which draw attention to their roles and the artificiality of genre conventions. At one point Ken is followed by Mary who tells him ‘I’m coming with you’. ‘The classic heroine line’, remarks Ken, sardonically. Michael Armstrong had envisaged Ken and Mary being played in a rather more camp style, recalling the quickfire wisecracking of Fay Wray and Dick Powell. He was disappointed with the slow pacing of their scenes: ‘Julie and Desi didn’t really gel and the scenes between them are just sort of leaden whereas they should be really sparkling and bright and very quippy’. He recognised, however, that his director took campness as far as he was able given the casting and his own feel for the material. What Walker does do most successfully is to toy with our ideas about performance and theatricality, encouraging first disbelief, then its suspension, then its return. His manipulation of a sceptical audience is paralleled in the changing responses of Ken to the weird happenings which he encounters. Ken’s incredulity is overcome only to find that he was right to be sceptical all along when the actors turn out to be just that. In the final scenes we see the famous thespians acting at being actors, not themselves, but stereotypical “luvvies” which purport to be their real selves.
Armstrong’s ending, which has frequently been condemned as contrived and insulting to the audience, is in fact one of the picture’s greatest pleasures. In the realisation that we have been lied to as an audience we experience frustration and annoyance but also the thrill of sudden mental dislocation. We are obliged to re-run the narrative and refocus on its events. Nothing, it transpires, is as it appears to be; and if we extend this line of thought a little further, we realise not only that what we accepted as truth was really a fiction, but that we had known this all along. It is a universal truth of cinema that screen ‘reality’ is merely a performance by actors. The skill of House of the Long Shadows is continually to remind us of this and still persuade us to forget it. In the end we are left disorientated: the character we took to be the film’s protagonist and then to be the audience for its play-within-a-play, turns out to be its ‘author’. It is the sort of effect that Agatha Christie achieved in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd but here the effect is enhanced by the multiple personae of the film’s actors which deny us any stable point of reference - all the actors play more than one part.

Although structurally more complex, House of the Long Shadows shares many of the themes of The Flesh and Blood Show. The two writers, Armstrong and Shaughnessy, both play with ideas about acting, performance and dramatic truth but whereas Shaughnessy emphasises the thinness of the membrane that separates the performance from the real, Armstrong’s screenplay tells us unequivocally that we cannot trust performance to reveal the truth. ‘Hasn’t there been enough lying and deceit within these walls?’ asks Peter Cushing’s character at one point, while another remarks ‘It’s human nature to tell lies - makes life and relationships more intriguing’. Certainly, the final twists and tricks make this screenplay more intriguing, but it should not be forgotten that this is a Walker film and his own concerns are clearly marked within it.

Long Shadows is Walker’s most explicit meditation on the malign legacy of the past, the central obsession he shares with the Gothic tradition. The lachrymose song which Sheila Keith sings in the film is from Verdi’s The Force of Destiny and the idea of a future controlled by the sins of the past is the overplayed leitmotif of the whole movie. The family Grisbane reassembles at a time set forty years before to discuss the implications of their own secret and shameful history. ‘Death is our only true destiny’, declares Lord Grisbane (John Carradine). ‘Our heritage died long ago. Died in shame, Sir, unspeakable shame’, he adds, gloomily. The shame relates to Roderick, the skeleton in the family cupboard, the wayward son whom the family condemned to imprisonment as scapegoat for a crime he did not commit. They believe him to be still locked in an attic room with only a maggot-filled doll and other rotting memories of childhood for company. ‘Like all of us, locked in the past
forever', bewails Lionel Grisbane (Vincent Price), 'the doomed family to whom destiny has denied a future'. Roderick has bequeathed them 'a private and terrible grief', but it is grief of their own making, the consequence of Walker's favourite targets, sexual repression and social hypocrisy. This time, the hypocritical justice he attacks is a family justice more concerned with the honour of the household than with innocence and guilt. Like the film itself, the past embraces lies, and those lies are visually represented by the house, the house of the long shadows. 'House' and 'Heritage' are Walker's signature words - the first used in the titles of three of his key films, and the second the name of his production company. Vincent Price shows how they are inevitably linked to identity when he announces, 'This is my ancestral home, my heritage; what I am lies within these walls'. Cinema and performance are Walker's ancestral home, his father's profession and his chosen career, but House of the Long Shadows was to be his last film (unless he stages his own comeback). In spite of all his efforts, he remained trapped in his own cinematic past of low-budget exploitation film, unable to move to the house of mainstream cinema, while economic forces beyond his control caused his home to fall as dramatically as The House of Usher. Armstrong's script, in lampooning Gothic melodrama, supplies an unconscious and overblown elegy to Walker's career as a film-maker. 'The old order is gone forever and now we too much crumble into dust' says Vincent Price, the voice of pessimism and despair. But there is another, more upbeat voice, that of Christopher Lee. 'History holds no sway with the present', he tells the gloomy Vincent Price, 'particularly industrial development'. It is an astonishingly prophetic statement because, within a few years, Walker was riding the eighties boom, devoting himself to buying and selling property, the business he had once said he would be in if he was 'only interested in making money'.

Reviews of House of the Long Shadows were mixed. Surprisingly the film was appreciated in some pretty conservative areas of the press as an obituary of the Gothic horror film. Patrick Gibbs in the Daily Telegraph (17.6.83) praised its 'combination of absurdity with artistry' and David Hughes in the Sunday Times (19.6.83) enjoyed 'the jokes that flow like blood'. Other critics, while being mildly amused by what Arthur Thirkell called its 'hammy horror' (Daily Mirror, 17.6.83), were infuriated with its plot twists. Derek Malcolm, The Guardian's cineaste, and Kim Newman, one of new-wave horror's principal advocates, were the film's most unsympathetic detractors. Malcolm condemned its 'total lack of ambition', calling it 'a horror flick which basks in the Hammer tradition without understanding it' (Guardian, 16.6.83), while Newman questioned its retrogressive
posturing, loose plotting and its 'preposterous twist ending' which displays 'an appalling contempt for the audience' and 'turns a disappointing project into an infuriating one' (MFB, April 1983; see also his review for City Limits, 17.6.83). Critical response in Europe was rather more enthusiastic. Armstrong was awarded the prize for best screenplay at the Sitges Festival while Vincent Price and Peter Cushing took the acting awards. In Paris the film's popular success was evidenced in the award of the audience prize for best film.

Michael Armstrong has suggested that both he and Pete Walker have 'mixed feelings' about the result of their labours. The enthusiasm which Walker had brought to the filming of Long Shadows was steadily sapped in the weeks of post-production as associate producer, Jenny Craven, began to exert a more controlling influence. The film was trimmed of some of its comedic elements in the editing process so that Cannon could sell it more easily as a horror film. Armstrong remembers that Walker’s original cut of the music scene was far superior to the final edit:

'It was very funny, absolutely delightful and when I finally saw the finished edit ... I wondered where it had gone. Great chunks had been cut out or fiddled around with.'

The marketing of the film as horror certainly dismayed Armstrong:

'It was silly because it killed off the people who wanted to go and have a good laugh and it disappointed the people who had gone along to be frightened.'

To prove his point, Armstrong persuaded Cannon to let him control the publicity when the film opened in East Anglia:

'What I did was to sell it totally as a comedy right from the word go so they knew it was a spoof. And it was amazing. The second the thing started, they were laughing and they loved it, applauding, cheering, roaring with laughter.'
House of the Long Shadows largely succeeds in its mission to amuse, and it is an undoubted treat for fans of its four immortal horror stars, but for most devotees of Pete Walker’s cinema it remains something of a disappointment. This is not because of its direction (which is compromised but competent) or its writing (which, given the speed at which Armstrong had to work, is astonishingly accomplished), but because it has lost the edge of bitterness and nastiness which makes Walker’s best films so challenging. In finally establishing his credentials as a capable director of entertainment films, Pete Walker had sacrificed his unique place in seventies British cinema as a popular auteur of the transgressive. But perhaps that was a place where he never really wanted to situate his house of creative talents. As he told an American interviewer when Long Shadows was released:

“All I know is, I didn’t want to get into the trap of trying to outdo the trends that modern horror has taken. I started to perpetrate those kinds of brutal killings in my films starting around 1970, and now everyone is doing it. And I don’t think they’re doing it terribly well. Sometimes I see very effective scenes, but I certainly didn’t want to try and outdo the present-day movies. My point of view was to go back.” - Fangoria 27, 1983.

PETER WALKER comments:

‘House of the Long Shadows was exactly the sort of film we intended to make, that we had to make. Menahem and Yoram (Golan and Globus) ordered a horror film with all the old horror stars and I thought that with those horror stars you couldn’t deliver a horror film that would be a horror film because times have gone on and they belong to an era twenty years past. So we had to create a project to satisfy Menahem and Yoram initially and then we had to say, “Well, we can’t go and make a Gothic film that’s going to be taken seriously, so what we’ll do is a little self-satire”. And that’s exactly what we did. Because it wasn’t my money we thought, “We’ll make the best film we can - they had no money, Menahem and Yoram, so we were still limited by budget - but it would have been stupid if in 1983 we had made a film that Hammer was making in 1967. So we just had to do a nostalgia piece and say, “We’re doing it for the film buffs”.

Menahem never came on the set. Neither of them ever read the script. Under the terms of the contract Menahem had final cut approval. He’d never seen any rushes and I remember it was pulling teeth to get him to see the final cut, my cut. We got him out of The Inn on the Park at 9.00 am on a Sunday morning to run it with the editor. He sat there for two hours watching everything and he made five suggestions. Three of them were bloody good suggestions, things that somebody looking freshly would see, and we acted on them and the picture was done. There was that one scene that Michael mentioned [the piano scene]. He was right about that. There was a cut there which for some reason I did against my better judgement. I thought, “Well, I won’t argue that because he’s conceded everything else”.

John Carradine
Epilogue:

Ever The Exhibitionist

Peter Walker has not made a movie since 1983. Instead he has invested in property. In the 1990s he has brought his interests together by building up a chain of cinemas which he rescues from dereliction or bingo and restores as working picture houses. Although the recession in the movie business in the 1980s made the financing and production of projects difficult, it was as much the restrictions they placed on the creative side of film-making that influenced his decision to lay down his camera.

After House of the Long Shadows, Walker had the option of developing a script which Michael Armstrong had written for him entitled Falconfell. The story was a variation on the Rebecca theme with a marriage between a young woman and an historical novelist which is blighted by the malign influence of Falconfell Hall, a cursed house with a history of murder and injustice. From Armstrong’s description, it is clear that most of Walker’s thematic elements had been incorporated into the treatment:

‘What’s happened is like a time warp has occurred in Falconfell Hall and it keeps repeating the same scenario, it’s just that the thing is played out by a different generation of actors or people ... it’s very Pete’.

Walker, however, seems not to have wanted to be trapped in his own time warp by making another film about sinister houses and the struggle to escape a heritage of evil. He chose to explore new ideas of his own, as he explains in this final extract from our interview:

S.C: Did you expect House of the Long Shadows to be your last film?

P.W: No, I didn’t expect it to be my last film. In fact, it wasn’t going to be my last film. I set up a film after that. I found a young writer called Merlin Ward and he was rather like a David McGillivray. He was a guy who had been an actor and he was starting out and didn’t know how to write a film script and I did a thing with him about that. He was a bloody talented guy actually - writing dialogue, constructing characters and scenes, much the same as David McGillivray. We wrote a picture called Blind Shot based on a story that I had fed him in much the same way as I’d worked with David. And I set that picture up. I had a deal with Lorimar for the Western Hemisphere and I had a deal with Guild here for the UK rights and Scandinavia. I budgeted it in 1984 at 1.5 million dollars. I was getting a pick-up deal from Lorimar of 1.2 million dollars and from Guild I was getting £300,000 advance for the UK and Scandinavia. So that gave us 1.7 million dollars to make a film costing 1.5 and I’d got the rest of the world free. Lorimar just had the approval of the two stars. Lorimar had set up a feature film department and the two guys who were running it, one had known me from Columbia (who had distributed House of Mortal Sin and The Comeback) and the other one had been with AIP so they both knew me. I set the whole thing up and I worked quite hard on it and I fixed the two stars - it would be churlish of me to say who they were, they were creaky old Hollywood stars that had been popular 20 to 25 years before but were now over the hill - and I remember I was in my hotel room, having set the whole thing up and gone over and cast it and got Lorimar’s approval to the cast and I just looked at the project
and I thought “Do I really want to make this? Do I really want to make a picture with tired old actors in it that’s really going to go no place, and I’m going to face six months of hard work still doing a picture on a reasonably low budget?” And I left a copy of the script, the contract, all the approvals and everything under the Gideon’s Bible neatly in the hotel room and I came home. So I thought some would-be film producer is going to go into that hotel in Los Angeles and say “Hey, there’s a ready-made deal here!” But I really did think, “This is not what I want to do”. It was quite a good script, but a conventional thriller with a couple of old creaky Hollywood stars in it and I felt I just don’t want to do that.

S.C: So what did you do instead?

P.W: I just came back and did my wheeling and dealing in property.

S.C: That was property market boom time.

P.W: Oh yes, it was and I just had a good time. I was quite cash rich at the time. Everybody said to me, particularly Stan Long, “Don’t you miss the business, aren’t you frustrated?” But I’m not frustrated because I gave up the business. It didn’t give me up. And that, psychologically, was good for me - the fact that I rejected the deal. I’d set the thing up. I could have been out and shooting a picture but I didn’t, I rejected it.

S.C: Was it that you just didn’t want to do that film or that you no longer wanted to be a director?

P.W: No. I’m a realist, and I looked at it and I thought “What are my alternatives, if I don’t direct pictures?” Michael Sloane had said “Come out to Hollywood and direct episodic television”. He was making The Equalizer and all those kind of series. But I’d been around
Hollywood studios and I’d seen what you do when you’re an episodic television director and it’s not for me. I mean I’ve always had that freedom and it’s not for me. I’d probably have been quite good at it with my experience of doing things quickly. I’d probably have been the quintessential Hollywood episodic director. So what was my alternative? Nobody was going to offer me a picture of high artistic merit and I certainly wasn’t going to produce those with my own money. I certainly wasn’t going to produce pictures that were a great risk. There was no longer a safe area with Eady having been dismantled. There was no longer a safe area of British films for the entrepreneurial producer/director like myself. I couldn’t suddenly go into quality pictures because I was too well known for having done too much trash. So there was no place for me to go really.

S.C: Do you have any regrets?

P.W: No, I haven’t got any regrets on anything I’ve done in life, touch wood. I don’t have any regrets. It was a conscious thing when I said I was going to be a film director, I thought “Well I don’t care what I direct as long as I’m standing behind a camera saying ‘Action’”. I mean there were too many guys wandering around with scripts under their arm for four, five or six years and they never got ’em made. That wasn’t for me. If I was going to direct, I was going to direct anything.

S.C: I think there are a lot of fans of genre cinema who regret your departure as a talent lost.

P.W: Well, it’s very nice of them to say that, but unfortunately that genre doesn’t exist - if it still existed I’d still be making those things.

S.C: You could still make horror films

P.W: I don’t think you could. I don’t think there’s a market now. There’s a straight-to-video market but I wouldn’t want to do that. My love was the cinema. It was darkened auditoriums and shadows on a screen and shared experiences. I don’t want to make films for people with six packs.

S.C: Has the romance of the cinema vanished?
Epilogue: Ever the Exhibitionist

P.W: I'm reliving the romance of the cinema now. I'm in the cinema business now. I've got eight at the moment including the only original cinema on the Isle of Wight and it's really our flagship. It's a very successful cinema. I added screens to it and I did it all up. I do that all the time. I've just bought one at Bognor which I'm doing up. All my cinemas are wonderfully restored traditional cinemas. Two of my cinemas are the oldest cinemas in the country - Bognor and Cannock. Cannock is a 1914 cinema and I've restored it and it's beautiful, not as beautiful as Bognor Picturedrome. Bognor is fabulous, one of the nicest cinemas in the country.

S.C: Are they all called 'Picturedrome'?

P.W: All bar two or three of them. We've just reverted to the old name unless they are old Odeon's or ABCs when we can't use the name. There's a problem with the multiplexes but I compete with the multiplex in Bristol and I compete very successfully. At the Orpheus at Bristol we are still doing as much or more business as we did before the multiplex opened.

Peter Walker may no longer make movies, but he has not lost that love for the cinema which was nurtured in the dream palaces of Brighton. Once one of the wide boys of British filmmaking, he now cuts a more heroic figure as he stands Canute-like before the tide of multiplexes. Old dark houses are still a preoccupation, but now he rehabilitates the past by refurbishing the decrepit picture houses which might once have provided settings for his grizzly spectacles.

The time for re-evaluating Walker's contribution to the genre of the horror film and to British cinema in the 1970s is long overdue. He can no longer be dismissed simply because he worked in the most critically despised genre during the dog days of the 70s. As I hope this book has demonstrated, Walker's 'pot-boilers' have the coherence of auteurist cinema and the power to unsettle audiences. When given serious analysis the films emerge as more than shockers with fashionable kitsch 70s styling. They exhibit all the political transgression, taste attrition and roguish humour which make exploitation cinema a vital force in film-making. Peter Walker spent fifteen years making mischief on the margins of British cinema, with considerable success, at a time of financial constriction and cultural transformation. If we wish to understand how tastes and sensibilities were shaped by that period of social and economic change, we should think seriously about moving Walker's films closer to the centre of critical attention.
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“I deliberately rub people up the wrong way”, Pete Walker once remarked, “I want them to come into the cinema and be shocked.” And shock them he did. No other British film-maker achieved the level of transgression that Walker regularly delivered to cinema-goers in the 1970s.

Beginning his career by making ‘skinflicks’, Walker went on to direct a trio of bona fide horror film classics. HOUSE OF WHIPCORD, FRIGHTMARE and HOUSE OF MORTAL SIN probe beneath the glossy surface of the permissive society to expose a malevolent underworld of madness, obsession and vindictive violence.

Pete Walker is British cinema’s closest equivalent to Russ Meyer; a low-budget auteur with the talent to make mainstream movies but the desire to remain independent and offer mordant commentaries from the sidelines. Between 1967 and 1983 he directed sixteen films. All but one were self-financed, and all made a profit. They are time capsules of an age which is enjoying a new vogue, and feature famous faces like Susan George, Stephanie Beacham, Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee and Vincent Price, as well as a host of glamorous starlets well known to Hammer horror fans.

Making Mischief is the first major critical study of the controversial director, and it has received the full cooperation of Pete Walker and his screenwriters. Extracts from a five hour interview with Walker appear throughout the book which also contains a wealth of previously unpublished photographs and, for the first time, reveals details of the Sex Pistols’ movie A STAR IS DEAD, which Walker was about to direct when the Pistols split.

The author: Steve Chibnall teaches Film and Cultural Studies and co-ordinates the British Cinema and Television Research Group at De Montfort University, Leicester