'Suzy, we always knew you: The Timeless Terror of Witches in Old and New *Suspiria*'

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ABSTRACT: *Suspiria* (Argento 1977) is a Gothic fairy tale. The innocent ballet student, Suzy Bannion, defeats the evil ancient witch-host, Helena Markos in Germany's Black Forest. Controversially reimagined, *Suspiria* (Guadignino 2018) finds Susie in Berlin of the Baader Meinhoft era, where she overthrows Markos to reveal herself as the queen witch. A concoction of feminism, terrorism, and occultism, new *Suspiria* postures about German history, yet, like the old one, peddles the timeless fear of witches.

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Historically, as Barbara Creed argues, witches inspired both "awe" and "dread" (74). She cites various historians who have suggested how this possibly stems from the early role of women as healers and mothers, and the magical properties often attributed to pregnancy, menarche and menstruation in early societies (Creed 74). Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject provides a hypothesis for the source of this fear of maternity and how the mother-child relation is fundamentally abject in so many cultural and religious traditions. "Although the subject must exclude the abject, it must, nevertheless, be tolerated, for that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define life" (Creed 69). It is this abject relation that was demonized in the medieval literature of witch persecution, like the 15th century witch-hunting manual *Malleus Malificarum* in which the witch was associated with the suckling of familiars or Satan himself, with whom she was assumed to fornicate. This infamous book "is permeated by an extreme hatred of women and fear of their imaginary powers of castration" (Creed 75).

Its account of witchcraft is now seen to owe much to regional German folklore (Hillard 2014), which speaks to the ambiguous depiction of witches in history and folklore. The monstrosity of the witch is such that the pervasive myths of witches make it impossible to distinguish the historical realities (Doty and Ingham 9). Even the Satanic affiliation was a

contrivance that derived from the rise of the Roman church and its demonization of witchcraft as heresy in the 14th century (Creed 74). From this time, the "depictions of witchcraft" shifted "from the toxic to the explicitly satanic" (Walter cited in Walton 2018). The satanic witch is "able to fly or to levitate, to concoct poisons, control the weather, command or possess animals … and to harness the extreme 'forces of nature such as tempests, hurricanes and storms' for her own purposes" (Walton 2018).

Writing in the early 1990s, Creed argued that the close alignment between 'mothers' and 'witches' was widely propagated in popular culture, and one of her defining films was *Suspiria* (1977). Directed by Dario Argento and co-written by Argento and Daria Nicolodi, it was the first of Argento's trilogy of 'Mother films': *Suspiria* (1977), *Inferno* (1980) and *The Mother of Tears* (2007) which features a triumvirate of ancient witches: Mater Tenebrarum, Mater Supiriorum and Mater Lacrimarum, or the Mothers of Darkness, Sighs and Tears. These witches are derived from the Latinate occult essay, *Suspiria de Profundis* by Thomas da Quincey in 1845 (McDonagh 2010). Creed argues *Suspiria* presents "the stereotypical image of the witch as a malevolent, destructive, monstrous figure whose constant aim is destruction of the symbolic order" (Creed 77). She is "an abject figure who dwells with abject things" (77).

Suspiria (1977) remains one of the classic cult horror films of the 1970s. It tells of the ballet student from New York, Susie Bannion, who goes to the provincial Freiburg dance academy near the Black Forest in Germany unaware that it harbours the ancient witch-host of Mother Suspiriorum, Helena Markos. If the "ultimate abjection is the corpse" (Creed 70), Markos is the quintessential corpse-like undead horror crone whose presence is menace incarnate. Suzy, played by Jessica Harper with charm and savvy, overthrows Markos and the coven at the school, escaping with a giggle and a knowing smile like some occult-fielding 'final girl'. With its strange concoction of black mass and allusions to Walt Disney's *Snow White*, *Suspiria* is a Gothic horror fairy tale that is celebrated for its evocation of the abject witch through psychedelic mise-en-scene, schlock violence and lurid musical score (performed by the Italian avante garde group, Goblin).

The remake in 2018 by the Italian filmmaker and Argento devotee, Luca Guadagnino is a deliberately counter-psychedelic reimagining with a grim social realist aesthetic set in Berlin

divided by the Cold War in 1977 – the year of the original film - and beset by the "German Autumn" of the Baader Meinhoft gang (aka the Red Army Faction, or RAF). The former Freiburg dance school is reimagined as the "Markos Tanz Gruppe", an all-female performing dance troupe run by the coven. As its newest recruit, Susie (Dakota Johnson) has escaped to the Berliner world of dance art from a fundamentalist Mennonite upbringing in Ohio and via a sojourn at the Martha Graham Dance Company in New York where she has become a disciple of the Gruppe's lead choreographer, the ambiguous Madam Blanc (Tilda Swinton). Susie still overthrows Markos but is revealed as the queen witch herself, Mother Suspiriorum, while Markos is exposed as the "false Mother".

Some critics have responded positively to the remake as an empowered view of witches. Angela Watercutter (2018) says that whereas "Witch" is synonymous with "woman who has too much power", "in Guadagnino's world they are feared *and* revered" and "show femininity as a force". This aligns with comments by the screenwriter, David Kajganich in explaining his revision of the final-girl figure of Suzy in the old film: "'the fear of witches really was a fear of female empowerment … those two things … the feminist movement and this fear of the occult had points where they crossed paths … [I was] just trying to figure out as practically as possible what a real coven in Berlin in 1977 might look like'" (qtd in Righetti 2018). How the "fear and reverence" differs from the "awe and dread" that Creed says witches have always inspired is questionable. Kajganich's allusion to feminism also seems ill-fated in alluding to contemporary women given the separatist and underground activities of the coven.

In effect, the events of the film, and Susie's ambiguous power, fundamentally reinforce the same ancient patriarchal fear of the malevolence of witches so viscerally palpitated in Argento's classic film. *Suspiria* (2018) does little more than strip away the Gothic Satanism of Argento's witches (they are explicitly 'de-Satanised', to coin a term, and described as "pre-God" and "pre-Devil"). They practice a secular cult of magic that is shadowed by the ambiguous power of mothers. The haunting theme song, "Suspirium" (by Thom Yorke) captures its foil: "Mother wants us beside her…Is the darkness ours to take?" Among the range of transgressions that Guadagnino's witches represent is what Doty and Ingham (2014) term the "uncanny temporality" of witches (10). If the figure of the witch "regularly crosses boundaries" of physical, psychical or political order, the most persistent transgression, they

argue, is temporal. The witch "confuses repeatedly, at diverse historical moments, although in strangely familiar ways" (Doty and Ingham 11). It is this confounding temporality that emerges in both old and new *Suspiria* and occupies this chapter.

I look first at old *Suspiria,* its fairy-tale allusions and Satanic witches. Then I turn to the remake and the transformed role of Susie (Suzy in 1977), and the integral role of dance in the (supposedly) modernized plot of witchcraft. Amid the breadcrumb trail of intertexts between the two films is the blue iris, a motif of the old film that enables Susie's liberation from the academy and the witches. In the remake, it becomes the name of the rehearsal studio that is a sinister theatre of exploitation of dancers and the power struggle between Blanc and Markos for leadership of the coven: the 'Blue Iris Studio'. Finally, I discuss the psychoanalyst Dr Jozef Klemperer who is adapted from the brief scenes of Suzy's interview with Professor Millius in the original film, with questionable allegorical effect. Klemperer's efforts to locate a missing dancer, Patricia Hingle, becomes implicated in the ritual of Suzie's ascendance as Mother Suspiriorum, an aspect that has attracted significant criticism for his identity as a Holocaust survivor and the strangely multiple casting of Swinton as Blanc, Klemperer (cross-dressed) and Markos. Through the parallel narratives of Klemperer and Susie, in spite of the period detail of 1977, new *Suspiria* still purveys the timeless fear of the malevolence of witches.

Old *Suspiria*: Susie and the Snoring Mother of Sighs

In her book on Argento's *Suspiria,* Alexandra Heller-Nicholas (2015) places it among other European films about witchcraft. But the reputation of *Suspiria* most arises from its vivid aesthetics and its allusions to schlock and arthouse horror cinema (see Conterio 2019), including Argento's own films. The ghoulish murders and ghosts owe much to Mario Bava's horror cinema (McDonagh 22), and its colour palette to Walt Disney's *Snow White* (1937). The plot is derived from *gialli,* an Italian genre of novels "centred around novelty murders, twisted sexual pathology and ridiculously contrived psychological explanations" (Schieb 2017). *Gialli* (singular *giallo* meaning "yellow") refers to the yellow covers of the books and also to the film genre. Argento's career began with a series of such "mannerist thrillers" (Hoberman 2009), notably *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970), which is among the references in *Suspiria*.

Its storyline has been a source of persistent criticism (see Hoberman 2009; McDonagh 2010), but it does make sense if you watch and listen closely. In advocating for the sensory power of *Suspiria*, Heller-Nicholas suggests that its de-emphasis on story "invites us to surrender to the illogical, to be seduced by spectacle". Without disagreeing at all with this view, its simple story line also speaks to the fairy-tale-like quality that imbues the mystique of its witchcraft. Maitland McDonagh traces Vladimir Propp's functions of a folktale (134-135), suggesting its strong links to folk and fairy tale. The innocence of Suzy's encounter with the fiendish witches is reminiscent of Snow White and the wicked step-mother in Disney's animated film.

The film follows Susie from her from arrival at the airport, its exit conspicuously plastered with a poster for the "Black Forest". Her taxi ride to the academy passes through the forest in which weird voices utter "witches". As she arrives, a young woman is speaking to someone at the door of the academy before running away into the storm. Suzy bangs repeatedly on the door and is told to "go away". Later, she learns that Patricia was the runner and Sara was the voice warding her off, both of who are gruesomely murdered. Susie takes up clues bequeathed to her by these girls to discover their fates, puzzling out the words of Patricia in the raging storm: "secret"; "blue" and "iris". By turning the blue iris, one of three irises painted on a false wall in Madam Blanc's parlour, Suzy stumbles into the lair of the coven.

Passing through secret passageways, she comes upon the living corpse of Sara, and overhears the Madam Blanc speaking of herself in declaiming that the "American girl" must "vanish" sand "die". As Blanc issues this edict, she ingests bread and wine handed to her by the zombie-like servants, simulating and subverting the Catholic tradition of Mass into an infernal counter-ritual. But Susie eludes them when she knocks over a crystal peacock and uses a shard of its plumage to strike the apparition of the corpse-ghost of Helena Markos. As all hell breaks loose, Susie escapes, tripping through the burning and collapsing debris of the academy and exiting, smiling, to safety. A simple tale in essence, the horrors of the Freiburg Academy do not consume Suzy Bannion.

The Disney influence is noted in the colour palette. The "scarlet reds, velvet blues and iridescent greens" are "so thick they seem to ooze right off the screen" (Schieb 2017). The effects were created through play with technicolour in post-production using "'three base colours: red, green and blue and then superimposing them'" to "'reproduce the colour of Walt

Disney's *Snow White*'" (Argento qtd in McDonagh 138; 140). The colours form a code: red bathes the haunted corridors and spaces of the coven; tragic Sarah is lit green before her death; faithful Suzy and her room are bathed in blue. Fittingly, the blue iris leads to the haunted basement – a red one might have been fatal for Suzy! The code is reinforced through the musical score with its pounding drums and tingling xylophone which Argento used to create an "infernal" atmosphere.

The Bava-esque horror of Marcos herself is sparingly seen. Her delegates, the camp Miss Tanner and Madam Blanc speak mysteriously of the absent 'directress'. Their monstrous cluster of servants and accomplices includes Dr Verdegast who drugs Suzy on the pretext of "building up" her strength with red wine after she collapses mysteriously at her first class. Soon after, the abject academy rains with maggots from the ceiling. Suzy combs the swirling hatchlings from her hair before the deluge descends throughout the building and is traced by Tanner to rotting food in the attic. The real source is revealed when the rooms are evacuated and a makeshift dormitory is created with white sheets that turn red after lights out. A mysterious figure stirs behind the drapes who emits a gravelly mucous-laden snore that Sara recognizes as 'the directress'. This snoring apparition is Marcos-Mother Suspiriorum – the Mother of Sighs. Her snores later alert Suzy to her presence during the climactic foray into the basement.

Before this, Susie is alerted to the threat of witchcraft by her meeting with Patricia's psychiatrist in her effort to locate Patricia. The psychiatrist informs Suzie that the academy was founded by the witch Helena Markos, prompting Suzy to ask what it means to be a witch. He replies that it is mental illness, not luck or magic. "Broken mirrors, broken minds", he says and introduces her to Professor Millius, the author of a book on witchcraft and mental illness. Susie asks Millius if he "believes" in witches and he says that knowledge of witches is an "important appendage to modern psychiatry". He is unequivocal that witches are "negative and destructive" and accumulate wealth by doing harm to others. Helena Markos, he says, was a "black queen" and "famous" for doing "evil", and the strength of a coven is its queen; without her the coven is like a "headless cobra". Millius advises Suzy not to be too skeptical. Galvanised, Suzy seizes her investigative resolve to locate the blue iris and venture into the underworld of the academy.

Creed observes that there is "no explanation given for the presence of the witches at the school; they simply exist and their sole purpose appears to be to wreak havoc and destruction" and "from the basement" Markos has "contaminated the whole city" (77). The scene of the psychiatrists' convention offers another perspective that apprehends and objectifies the threat of witchcraft. It is one of only three scenes away from the academy or its pink façade. (The others are the lederhosen beer house that precedes the demise of Daniel the blind rehearsal pianist in a deserted square buzzed by witches where his throat is ripped out by his bewitched eye dog). These male dominated spaces form a contrast to the hysterical world of the school that raise a question about a template of sexual difference and the relationship of *Suspiria* to feminism, given its production at the height of the women's movement in the 1970s.

Heller-Nicholas (see her Chapter Three on "Reception and Legacy") gives an interesting account of the gender politics of old *Suspiria,* through her discussion of Argento's influences on feminist filmmakers, and comments by its star, Jessica Harper. Commentary on *Suspiria* has not been noticeably occupied with connections between feminists and the evil coven at the Freiburg Academy, beyond discussion of witchcraft such as Creed's. In terms of narrative allegory, Susie's destruction of the coven held no obvious or explicit connotation of feminism, unless it is interpreted as modern young woman dispatching an old reactionary order of maternal power. Nor was allegory obviously a premise of the tale as this would undermine those visceral sensory qualities that Heller-Nicholas describes as the mesmeric power of the film.

In Guadignino's remake of *Suspiria*, however, the power of Markos is expanded beyond a city across time and nations, and the marginal sub-plot of the psychiatrist is reinvented as a frame narrative. The screenwriter's comments cited earlier, this suggests that gender and feminism are in play in the remake. Most in question is the allegorical effect of the psychiatrist, Klemperer, who is confronted with his skepticism about witchcraft in a way that disturbingly transforms the visceral fairy tale of old *Suspiria*.

"Mother wants us beside her": Witches and the wicked spirit of the dance in new *Suspiria*

A 'remake' of a well-known film is uncanny at any time, especially a celebrated horror film. Con Verevis (2006) warns that film remakes are wrongly understood as a one way movement from "authenticity to imitation" but engage in "wider and more open-ended intertextuality" (58-59). Anyone looking for a revived carnival of Argento's baroque psychedelia would be disappointed by the grim, rationalised plot of *Suspiria* (2018) and its muted aesthetic which is "closer to Fassbinder than Argento" (Rooney 2018). Guadagnino says he sought to make a film about a "precise time period" when Berlin was a city "divided" ("The Making of Suspiria"). He speaks of doing something "stern" and in a "completely different direction" to Argento's film ("The Making of *Suspiria*"). The period aesthetic is pronounced in some aspects: the reconstruction of the violent activities of the Baader Meinhoft Gang, the image of the Berlin Wall, and the modernist dance art of the troupe. But the witches are as dangerously powerful and their magic as calculating as the most misogynist folklore.

If their dance style is modernist, dance sits easily with medieval witch lore, and their experimental magic culminates in a ceremony that strongly resembles the medieval myth of the witches' Sabbath. It gives a timeless aura to their craft, while their modernity is more suggested through the political architecture of the coven. The veneer of democracy shapes the voting that conducts the wretched power struggle between Markos and Blanc, and the coven is feminist in its conception as an all-female "collective". Susie is offered a free room in "support" of women's "economic autonomy". But their feminism becomes castrating and trivial in the torture of the police officer who investigates the disappearance of Patricia. The lesbian currents are also contradictory: the warming passion between Susie and Madam Blanc is shadowed by the coven's lewd exploitation of the dancers. These witches retain a residue of Disney-like parody with their tendency to shrieking and cackling laughter, and their menacing threat towards young women.

In a nod to the first film, *Suspiria* (2018) begins with a young woman banging on a door. But it is Patricia not Susie, and she hammers at the door of Klemperer's rooms. Ostensibly seeking escape from the violent protests on the street, as she plies Klemperer with her terrified fears of the coven it is clear she is afraid of something far worse. Klemperer takes notes as Patricia rambles in English and German, while the camera pans books on Jungian psychology. The scene then switches to rural farmlands in America and the bedroom of a dying woman tended by her family, with a lingering image of a wall-hanging praising the

love of mothers. The connection to Susie is not yet apparent, and the woman's death is clearly imminent. Her rattling gasps form a slow, staggering rhythm that bridges into the next scene in Berlin in which Susie Bannion makes her entrance, arriving at a metro station named 'Suspiria'. In a cute allusion to *gialli,* Susie consults a yellow booklet that is a traveler's map of Berlin before she threads her way along the Berlin Wall to the Markos Tanz Theatre. This sober assortment of landscapes – the rural farmlands of Ohio and the brutalist concrete environs of Cold War Berlin – lend a chilling surround to the grotesque dance-art and violence of the coven.

The witches use the bodies and energies of young women for their experimental magic to host the soul of Markos as Mother Suspiriorum. Their regime of magic becomes truly menacing through the sadistic machinations of the coven and their systematic exploitation of the dancers, methodically sampling their hair and urine for their magic. Laced into their macabre control is a spirit of love. Sarah informs Susie that Madame Blanc is "love", and praises her for maintaining the dance company through the war. The witches believe Sara "feels loved" by them. Sara herself at first rejects Klemperer's warnings about the coven because the theatre, she says, is a "family" of "love". Klemperer replies that "love" and "manipulation" often "share houses".

The dubiousness of the love is most apparent from Blanc, an imposing but ambiguous figure. Styled a la Pina Bausch with monastic gowns and cigarettes, she is modelled on a number of women choreographers, notably Mary Wigman, an influential figure in modern dance in Europe ("The Secret Language of Dance"). Adored by the dancers and open in her affection towards them, she is a powerful witch who infiltrates minds through dreams. She blatantly lies about the fate of Patricia, speculating that she has run away to the RAF and should be free to make this choice. In the politics of the coven, Blanc is a progressive who prefers not to use the title "Mother" and she is frustrated by Markos's continued dominance and senses something amiss with it. Her rehearsals in the Blue Iris studio are hives of action in her struggle with Markos.

Whereas the ballet classes were a minor part of Argento's *Suspiria*, Guadagnino's choreographer, Damien Jalet, speaks of the objective to integrate the dance as an arcane language of the coven ("The Secret Language of Dance"). The dance becomes the key

channel of their magic as they communicate and struggle with each other through the bodies and movements of the dancers. This proceeds through rehearsals for the performance of the company's signature ballet, *Volk*, which is Blanc's creation - supposedly conceived in 1948. No hint is given of the source of the ballet, except the title which is German for "people", and Simon Abrams (2018) alludes to its ominous associations in Nazi Germany. *Volk* is rehearsed in the Blue Iris Studio and Susie dances the lead role. It is the basis of her growing power and her relationship with Blanc. It is also the source of some play with medieval and modern ideas of witches' magic.

Susie takes to the lead role with consummate skill but struggles to master the high jumps. "We need to get you in the air," says Blanc, and takes her for private tuition. It is a fleeting allusion to the medieval myth of witches' flight, and later, in a dream, Susie levitates up a doorway. These allusions seem teasing towards any suggestion that these witches are medieval stereotypes. Their scientific magic, their psychic communication, and their "democratic" system of leadership models witchcraft as a kind of modern political technology. But their dance magic is deep evil. Markos invisibly "feels" Susie as she dances, and when Olga accuses the leaders as "witches" they trap and hideously torture her through a magical co-dance dictated – unknowingly - by Susie's moves. Still alive in the twisted wreck of her body, the witches skewer Olga with hooks to extract her to their basement. Markos' presence, like the torture of Olga and later Sara is invisible to the other dancers. This modern politics of witchcraft is manipulative, exploitative and highly abusive.

Susie's performance of *Volk* forms a prelude to the climactic ritual of the witches' sabbath where she is destined to host the soul of Markos who is present for the first time, naked, leering and gross. The dancers – all naked – perform a frenzied ritual of dance and prostration. Sara is ritually disemboweled and her entrails are consumed by the gathering. Blanc expresses misgivings but she is struck down by Markos who advances on Susie demanding that no biological mother lives and that there be no "false mothers" before her. A flash to Mennonite Ohio reveals Susie's departing mother who earlier has rejected the last rites, pronouncing, in her only speech, that her last daughter is her "smear" on the world. It seems that Susie is at Markos's mercy. But she sighs into authority pronouncing Markos the false "Mother Suspiorium" and declaring: "I am she." Opening her chest, she summons Death - played by the same actor as Susie's mother (Malgorzata Bela) - who dispatches

Markos and all her followers. Youthful Susie assumes the mantle of Mother Suspiriorum, not a host but the living embodiment.

"Mother wants us beside her… Is the darkness ours to take?"; Yorke's haunting song captures the ambiguity of the mothers who appear in traditional and occult form in *Suspiria.* The doubled casting of Susie's mother and Death resonates beyond the film with the ambiguity of the abject as "that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define life" (Creed 69). It is traced aurally in a rhythmic sound motif that links the snoring Mother of Sighs in Argento's *Suspiria* to the web of witches and mothers in Berlin and Ohio in a persistent motif of breathing, wheezing, gasping, panting, grunting, rasping and, most authoritatively, sighing. It commences in the dying rasps of Susie's Mennonite mother in the opening scenes and bridges Susie's arrival in Berlin and her deep breathing to calm her audition nerves. It persists in the grunting of the dancers in *Volk,* and the panting of Klemperer in his quest to find Patricia, and finally in Susie's sighs as Mother Suspiriorum. But the story comes to rest on Klemperer, as I explain in the next section, and how his skepticism about witches is refuted by witnessing Susie as Mater Suspiriorum.

"Is the darkness ours to take?": The plight of a rational man

Klemperer's skepticism about witchcraft comes out in his efforts to find his missing patient, Patricia. Klemperer does not believe in witches and regards it as the equivalent of fascist ideology. But from Patricia's diaries, he knows that a power struggle is taking place in the coven between Markos and Blanc, and he is aware of the ancient lore of the Mothers Tenebrarum, Suspiriorum and Lachrymosum. He makes contact with Sara who at first is unwilling to listen but then goes to him with one of the witches' large silver hooks that she has taken from the basement. Klemperer compares it with the "insignia" and "esoteric rituals" of "the Reich". But Klemperer becomes vulnerable to the witches through his own secrets.

He is seen passing through border control to visit a house in East Germany where he honours a love-heart on the wall of the house. It is a mystery for much of the film as to what memory it holds until he goes to the police about Patricia. Faced with their disinterest he declares that he does not believe in witches but that people can organize for crime "and call it magic". On the way out, he confides in Agent Glockner that he remembers him gratefully from the war,

implicitly alluding to his survival of the Holocaust, and how Glockner assisted in Klemperer's failed attempts to trace his lost wife, Anke. The spectre of the Holocaust in one sense deepens the poignancy of Klemperer's cynicism about the coven and the connotations of their practices. But Klemperer's perspective on witchcraft is revealed as futile because the cinema audience is privy to the magic of the coven through the dance action.

Eventually, he too is admitted to this reality when he is lured by the witches to their sabbath as a "witness". They trap him by conjuring a reunion with Anke (a cameo by Jessica Harper) in which it is revealed that their identities were given up to the SS during the war. In this dream reunion, they reminisce about what transpired until Klemperer finds himself alone and seized by the screeching witches. They abuse him for disbelieving his wife's concerns about the risks of not escaping Berlin during the war. Klemperer, the only man present at the ritual (actually Swinton wearing a prosthetic penis) is stripped naked, abused and forced to watch the grisly spectacle of Suzy's instalment as Mother Suspiriorum.

In an "epilogue" he is visited the next day by Susie, apologizing for what her "daughters" did to him. She finds him perusing Anke's false "Aryan" passport and discloses to him the true fate of his wife as having perished at an historical death camp. It seems both a strangely benevolent and suspicious gesture given that the old man sought to expose the coven, and the barbarity of the ritual in which Susie's power is conferred. In fact, it is the cruelest of twists because Klemperer's convictions about the falsehood of witchcraft are discredited by Susie's magical power. In a disturbing conclusion to this visitation, she wipes his memories of his wife and the witches, declaring that: "We need guilt. And shame. But not yours."

These events pertaining to Klemperer have attracted both puzzlement and condemnation. Anthony Lane (2018) notes that his name "recalls Victor Klemperer, the Jewish scholar whose diaries … record … daily existence under the Third Reich", although there is no evidence that the character is based on the historical Klemperer. Sympathetic critics like Watercutter overlook the historical detail to perceive broad "allegories … about life in a Germany still dealing with the fallout of World War II and … denazification" and of how the "past haunts everyone more than any vision or incantation". But fiercer opinions place more stake on the historical references. Richard Brody (2018), in particular, takes extreme exception to the naming of Theresienstadt as the place of Anke's death, vilifying this detail as

grossly unacceptable in a film of this kind. Indeed, this infamous place is noted not only for its hideous record of murder but as a "unique" Nazi "tool of deception" for the propaganda generated about it (Holocaust Encylopaedia n.d.). Brody is scathing of the film overall, terming it "political frivolity" and "lazy filmmaking". He says it "has nothing to say about women's history, feminist politics, civil violence, the Holocaust, the Cold War, or German culture."

In harmony with this view, Simon Abrams (2018) sarcastically laments every possible angle on the allegory that might be interpreted. If it concerns revenge by women like Markos's group towards "men like Klemperer" who "dismissed them" as "delusional" then it is without a sense of what they were "delusional about" - whether "[s]omething about the Nazis…or reproductive rights". And "who exactly does Blanc's 'Volk' dance … condemn?" and who is the "real villain", he asks. He speculates it could be Klemperer, an "emasculated sort of patriarchal figure", or "Markos and Blanc's followers, since they were … blindly worshipping a false goddess". Yet Abrams misses the obvious: that the delusion concerns the reality of witches. Klemperer's skepticism about witchcraft is disproven by the events of the film. If there is any analogue with his attitude towards "the Reich", then an even more troubling implication is that this, too, is dissolved. In spite of the claims about the "precise" setting, no German historian or Holocaust consultant appears in the film's credits, nor, indeed, any consultant on the history of witchcraft in Germany or elsewhere.

The ambiguities of Klemperer exceed the film through the double-casting of Swinton as Blanc and Klemperer. One actor thus doubles as both a lead witch and their main antagonist. The casting was disguised in the film credits, a ruse maintained in publicity by Swinton and Guadagnino until well after the film's release. This was in spite of published rumours that the credited 'Ludst Ebersdorf" was fictional (Lane 2018; and see Shanley 2018). It resonates with Brody's barb about political frivolity and as Swinton also plays Markos, this deepens the ambiguity of Klemperer. Guadagnino has commented that the movie is "very connected to psychoanalysis, and I like to think that only Tilda could play ego, super-ego, and id"' (qtd in Robinson). Yet – aside from the question of which of these characters represents each part of the Freudian psyche - this would seem to overlook the film's plot twist that Susie is actually Mother Suspiriorum (or that Klemperer is a Jungian psychotherapist). One thing is certain: Klemperer is deeply tied to the image and myth of witches in Guadagnino's *Suspiria.*

Conclusion: Lazy witchcraft and the lost innocence of the Blue Iris

The setting of *Suspiria* in historical Berlin transforms the fairy-tale premise of the old film and launches it into some warp of the myth of the witch. *Suspiria* (2018) proceeds from an idea – a problematic one - of witches as authentic figures of female power, and this is emblematic in Susie's emergence as Mother Suspiriorum. It is in keeping with a contemporary feminist trend to reclaim and venerate misogynist stereotypes. Susie's visitation to Klemperer after her instalment presents the witch queen as an omnipotent power who wholly disproves Klemperer's disbelief in the existence of witches. In this sense, it is a response to the old *Suspiria* that keeps alive the myth of the witch, and by sweeping aside the heroism of Suzy against the evil represented by the witches. As the revised witches remain essentially steeped in medieval myth, the elevation of Susie as the queen of them does not overcome the misogyny of the myth, or the web of false mothers and false love that resonates throughout the film. It makes Suzy, if anything, a complicit figure.

Of the various critics who observe the deficiencies of new *Suspiria*, Emily Yoshida (2018) laments only that it was not made by a woman, referring to several other potent films, putatively pro-feminist, made by men. She sees value in the portrait of the "violence" of being a woman and proclaims the power of its images. But this overlooks that the reveal of Susie as Mother Suspiriorum is sidelined by the frame narrative concerning Klemperer, especially as the final shot of the film returns to Klemperer and Anke and the etched love-heart that he honours on his first visit to their house. What it symbolizes is a question mark. It could be the lasting insignia of true love, or a monument to a mis-placed faith that evil in its truest form does not exist. Like the riddle of Klemperer himself, it is deeply ambiguous.

Overlooking the rhetoric of empowerment, the alignment of witchcraft with feminism propagates a longstanding and egregious myth of both practices as dangerous and predatory. While I share Yoshida's view that new *Suspiria* contains powerful images, these images are only of that phantom abject timeless thing, the myth of the witch, which emerges from the gaping threads of history, folklore and misogyny. The troubled reception of the remake is salutary that, at the very least, trying to historicize a tale based on occult fictions is a design flaw. A consensus of a number of critics is that the deficiencies of the remake reinforces the merit of Argento's *Suspiria*. While 'innocence' might be a strange word to use for a horror

film, it is afforded a kind of innocence in retrospect and comparison with the remake as a simpler tale more vividly told. Ironically, it preserves a simpler misogyny towards witches whose true history is obscured by the timeless myth. The figure of the blue iris that Suzy follows with canniness, courage and commitment to her friends in the old film cannot finally unlock those persecuted secrets any more than its studio namesake in the remake can reconcile the summoning of forces of evil with justice for witches.

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