

"In Fear and Pain": Stardom and the Body in Two French Ghost Films

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Theories of Stardom, Identification and Horror

Stardom is often equated with fantasy; put at its simplest, stars "condense audience fantasies." (Crisp, 1993: 216) Stardom facilitates various forms of identification on the part of the movie-goer, including fantasies of being (like) a star. In *Star Gazing*, her study of how film fans relate to stardom, Jackie Stacey has observed that identification fantasies extend beyond the film-going experience to enter into everyday activities: hence they can be not just cinematic but "extra-cinematic." (Stacey, 1994: 171) In the relatively short history of star studies most emphasis has been usually placed on cinematic identification and particularly, via the psychoanalytical model of film spectatorship, on a pattern of identification which is at once idealising -- "stars become ideal selves for the audience" -- and sadistic: "The star is presented as an object for the spectator who views him or her voyeuristically." (McDonald, 1995: 87) Stars do not always, however, elicit sadistic pleasures -- they can also be the source of masochistic pleasures when the audience identifies with a star body in fear or pain. For if pain is precisely that experience which most separates individual human beings from each other -- "bringing about, even within a radius of several feet, this absolute split between one's sense of one's own reality and the reality of other persons" -- then cinema, and the identification processes it facilitates, offers a way of bridging the "absolute split" and allowing the experience to be, to some extent, shared (Scarry 1985: 4).

It is worth noting here that film spectators are not limited to identifying with actors or stars of the same gender. Hence, one may identify with the pain of the body gendered as other. Both masochistic and cross-gender identification have indeed been posited as essential to one genre in particular -- a genre that deals in fear and pain: the modern horror film. As redefined by Carol Clover in her seminal study *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, horror is predicated not on male sadistic voyeurism towards a female object, but rather on the pleasures of male masochistic identification with a "female victim-hero." (Clover, 1992: 7) Although Clover does not address the role of stars in horror, her work will be especially useful in guiding this account of the way that star bodies function in French horror. The focus for analysis will be two recent French ghost stories, contemporaneous with each other, both using the well known faces and bodies of popular star actresses: *Saint Ange* (2004) starring Virginie Ledoyen and *Histoire de Marie et Julien* (2003) starring Emmanuelle Béart. The aim will be to address the following questions: what happens when the fantasy genre explores fears about the (ordinary) body but uses the extraordinary bodies of stars to do so? How do the star images of Ledoyen and Béart imbricate with their performances in the two films? How have fans received the two films and reacted to the star bodies within them? It will be observed that one of the key distinctions between the two films lies in their reception, and in the presence of the star body as site of suffering and/or as object of desire, given the consequences that this has for identification processes.

Like stardom itself, fantasy genres such as horror tell us about the preoccupations of the society that generates them. James Donald calls horror "the insistent display of anxiety, violence and uncertainty in popular cultural forms," and "a history of popular fears." (Donald, 1989: 233, 235) In the ghost story (a sub-genre of horror also known as the occult film or possession film), these fears crystallise around the female body's experience of sex, pregnancy, and birth. With their fears and fantasies around sex and birth, with their haunted houses and haunted female bodies, the two films under discussion will explore just this subject. Both films employ female star bodies to body forth what is felt inside, since "If inner space is on the one hand a site of horror -- something to be exposed, denied, fixed, filled, colonized, detoxified -- it is also manifestly a site of curiosity and desire." (Clover, 1992: 109-110) *Saint Ange* and *Histoire de Marie et Julien* are, then, ghost stories which explore the interior space of the female body as a site of desire and fear, as we shall see below. Before engaging closely with these films, however, the centrality of the female body as a site of fantasy and horror needs elucidating further. Why in the horror genre is the female body in question?

With *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (translated as *Powers of Horror*), Julia Kristeva has provided perhaps the most influential theory on the relation between horror, the abject, and the female body. For Kristeva, as is well known, "followers of the abject are constantly seeking [...] the inside of the mother's body, desirable and terrifying, nourishing and deadly, fascinating and abject." (Kristeva, 1980: 66) [\[1\]](#) Less celebrated, perhaps, is Kristeva's assertion that the abject provides the "agonies and delights of masochism." (Kristeva 1980: 13) Following Kristeva's lead on the abject (but downplaying masochism), Barbara Creed has established the term *the monstrous-feminine*, writing that "it is the gestating, all-devouring womb of the archaic mother which generates the horror." (Creed, 1989: 80) Amy Ransom, in a further gloss on Kristeva, suggests that the literature of fantasy and horror expresses "the uncanny power, the ever-present threat of the resurgence of the feminine element repressed in patriarchal society." (Ransom, 1985: 8) For her part, Clover notes that the "metaphoric architecture" of the female body, "with its enterable but unseeable inner space, has for so long been a fixture in the production of the uncanny." (Clover, 1992: 18) But unlike Creed, Clover goes on to identify the centrality of the female body in horror cinema with the pleasures of masochism: "the first and central aim of horror cinema is to play to masochistic fears and desires in its audience -- fears and desires that are repeatedly figured as 'feminine.'" (Clover, 1992: 229) Her central thesis, predicated on the fact that horror audiences are predominantly male, is that "male viewers are quite prepared to identify not just with screen females, but with screen females in the horror-film world, screen females in fear and pain." (Clover 1992: 5) Rejecting the received wisdom on horror as masculine sadism, Clover proposes instead a reading of the genre as Freudian "feminine masochism" facilitated for its largely male audience by cross-gender identification with the "female victim-hero." This model, she argues, makes more sense of audience pleasures invested in the genre than accounts that stress castration anxiety, the incest taboo, and so on. It also avoids having to posit a tenuous identification between the presumed audience and the dysfunctional and opaque killers or sadists who populate the slasher movie in particular and who are, as she points out, ultimately defeated by the female protagonist or "Final Girl."

Stars in Horror

It has been argued that an actor's public persona or star image can be effectively obscured by appearance in a horror film: "people tend strangely not to know the actors and directors of horror films. The characters assume such gigantic proportions that [...] they subsume the

human agents." (Dadoun, 1989: 46) Certainly, one could say that the male roles within horror (Frankenstein's monster, Count Dracula, Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde) enjoy an iconicity which is greater than that of the actors, even stars, who have played them. This seems to be less applicable to women in horror, however. Possibly because the figure of the "female victim-hero" or "Final Girl," as Clover calls her, is much more recent -- dating from the rise of feminism in the mid 1970s --and perhaps more flexible, the role does not submerge or exhaust the image of actors during performance, even though they may become in part identified with such roles: Jamie Lee Curtis in *Halloween* (1978) and *Blue Steel* (1990), Sigourney Weaver in the *Alien* series (1979, 1986, 1992, 1997), Nicole Kidman in *The Others* (2001) and *Birth* (2004). If we look closer at female stars in the genre, however, we find a potential contradiction between stardom and horror. This is most evident in the case of the slasher sub-genre, but is characteristic of much horror in general, and derives from the genre's concern with youth. Horror takes as its recurrent theme the fears and anxieties generated by the youthful body -- its vulnerability, its changes during puberty, its adolescent sexuality. This is epitomised in one of the founding films of modern horror, *Carrie* (1976), where the social rites and rituals of growing into adulthood (dating, the high school prom) are matched by concerns with the adolescent female body (specifically, fears around menstruation and sex). Sissy Spacek's performance in the lead role, only a couple of years into her film career, was not undertaken as a star. The same is true of Jamie Lee Curtis in *Halloween*, and any number of lesser-known actresses in lesser-known movies. Horror is predominantly a teen genre, and usually calls upon teenage actors who have not achieved stardom, even if they do so subsequently, like Curtis or Spacek. By contrast, Nicole Kidman's presence in two recent ghost films sees a global star, in something like mid-career, functioning very successfully within the genre. Rather than playing the archetypal horror role of the vulnerable if resourceful teen hero, Kidman is cast in both films as a very capable adult and a mother: in *The Others* (a major influence on *Saint Ange*) she brings up two children in an apparently haunted house and in *Birth*, although childless, she stands as a surrogate mother for a ten-year-old boy who claims to be her dead husband. Because both of these films consider parent-child relationships, because Kidman's star image is not overly sexualised, and because in both cases it is belief -- the mind -- that is explored rather than the body, there is very little representation of the star body here.

Interestingly, this is not the case in the French ghost films under discussion, which feature established stars but which engage fully with the female body and its fluids, notably blood, thereby recalling the representation of the teenage body in most American horror. Virginie Ledoyen was in her mid twenties and already very well established as a star in France when shooting *Saint Ange*, while Emmanuelle Béart was an international star in her late thirties when filming *Histoire de Marie et Julien*. Similarly, other examples of established star actresses appearing in French fantasy / horror films have placed a great emphasis on the female body. In *Alice ou la dernière fugue* (1977), *Emmanuelle* star Sylvia Kristel found that on the other side of the looking-glass, her naked body was still on display, in this case to the male voyeurs in the house where Alice is trapped. As well as commenting ironically on Kristel's place within erotic cinema, the film also proposes "the general masochistic fantasy of passivity or imprisonment ('pleasure without responsibility')." (Clover, 1992: 223) The mysterious house both nourishes and imprisons Alice, until the final sequence where she leaves its maternal space to descend into the abyss. This descent into a subterranean space, a "horrific emptiness [...] full of fantasmic activity and meaning, a silence full of muffled echoes," is a staple of horror, and has been interpreted as "the blackness of extinction," and the "Terrible Place" from which the female hero must "deliver herself into the adult world." (Dadoun, 1989: 53; Creed, 1989: 81; Clover, 1992: 49) A more recent and gore-soaked

example of French horror is Claire Denis's *Trouble Every Day* (2001), in which Béatrice Dalle -- whose star image speaks of excess, desire, "scanDalle" (scandal) -- plays a cannibalistic sexual predator. Because Dalle is playing a form of monster here, we are closer to the pathologised "monstrous feminine" theorised by Creed than to the "female victim-hero" identified by Clover. But as these two examples demonstrate, the sexualised female star body star is very much at stake in French horror, whether the motivating fantasy is masochistic (*Alice*) or sadistic (*Trouble Every Day*).

In the case of both *Saint Ange* and *Histoire de Marie et Julien*, the female lead's public persona already involved a highly sexualised body image, which allowed for a seemingly natural "match" between the star as off-screen celebrity and the corporeality of their onscreen role. In other words, the star bodies of Ledoyen and Béart were at ease in the horror universe. The "match" between star and character can be expressed in particular by a common factor: maternity for Ledoyen/Anna, passion for Béart/Marie. In *Saint Ange*, Ledoyen plays Anna, a secretly-pregnant young woman employed to help look after an abandoned orphanage in the 1950s. Before the last children leave, one warns her of the presence of ghost children in the building. At first sceptical, Anna begins to open up to the idea as her own pregnancy progresses and as the ghosts make their presence felt. Finally, she makes a traumatic journey to the hidden basement under the showers, where she collapses and is delivered of her baby by the ghosts themselves. In an epilogue, we learn that Anna died in the shower block and that her baby is dead too: the journey underground thus stands as a metaphor for her own labour and death. Meanwhile, in *Histoire de Marie et Julien*, Béart plays Marie, a former lover of Julien (Jerzy Radziwilowicz) who returns to live with him after an absence of a year. Gradually it becomes apparent that, despite a passionate sex life, something is wrong: Marie has in fact returned from beyond the grave. Julien discovers that Marie hung herself in a room that she is now recreating in his own house. In desperation, he too attempts suicide in order to join her in the other realm. Marie prevents this and, in a miraculous ending, is permitted to become wholly human again (signalled by the capacity to bleed). The two films are ostensibly very different, of course: one is the first feature by a young director, the other probably one of the last works of a New Wave veteran. The films demonstrate very different relations to popular generic conventions regarding special effects, gore, editing and music. But they do share one key element of the popular: the spectacular use of the female star body in order to make visible the "invisible geography of pain." (Scarry 1985: 3) In both films, the star body is the place where pain becomes legible.

The Pregnant Body in *Saint Ange*

The young filmmaker Pascal Laugier -- like his mentor and producer Christophe Gans, director of *Le Pacte des loups* (*Brotherhood of the Wolf*, 2001), and more recently the Hollywood horror movie *Silent Hill* (2006) -- is faithful to the rules and traditions of horror. In *Saint Ange*, this is apparent from the presence of the following generic elements: isolated female protagonist (Anna); gore (the graphic sewing-up of Anna's leg wound, the blood in the birth sequence); atmospheric music and lighting; sudden shock effects via soundtrack and fast editing (Anna's nightmare); digital special effects (the ghost children). The setting, moreover, is a decrepit and all but empty orphanage, a variant on the house or castle which, from *Dracula* to *Psycho* to *Alice*, stands as the archetypal site of horror, described by Roger Dadoun as "a series of enclosures ever more rigorous, confining and distressing." (Dadoun, 1989: 52) Here, the house can be read as a metaphor for Anna's pregnant body (there is something inside it which cannot be seen) and the film dramatises the changes in her body and how this makes her feel, as the child grows inside her.

We never learn who the father of Anna's child is -- only that she has been beaten and abused in her previous employment. This leaves open the fear, shared by Anna and the spectator perhaps, that the child may be demonic. In a naturalistic rather than supernatural reading, fear is associated with the shame and secrecy of the young unmarried mother. Anna's anxiety and fear concerning the child she carries are then projected onto the ghost children she sees or imagines she does -- in a maternal variant on the theme of sexual fantasy projected as terror from Jack Clayton's classic ghost film *The Innocents* (1961). In *Saint Ange*, the presence of ghosts (first evoked with the phrase "the scary children") is initially located in the shower room, specifically in the plumbing, a uterine metaphor for the presence of a "scary child" within the maternal body. Moreover, according to the traditions of the occult, the portal to the supernatural -- or the site of hesitation between a naturalistic and supernatural reading of possession -- is almost always a woman. Buildings too tend to be haunted, possessed, or entered via a portal, "an unprotected opening on the under side," which chimes with their metaphoric relation to the female body, a relation that is made apparent throughout *Saint Ange*, whose key setting is the shower room and the shaft which links it to the subterranean secret under the building (Clover, 1992: 77).

Anna begins the film determined to control her body: her work outfit -- apron and scarf -- obscures her figure and holds back her hair. The control evoked here is only a glimpse of the central work that Anna submits her body to: the concealment of her pregnant stomach by means of a heavy, tightly-wound bandage under her clothes. During the course of the narrative, however, she will lose control of her body: at first troubled by a nightmare, then a nosebleed and a collapse, she will end up revealing her pregnancy to the other two women in the building, until finally, dishevelled and shattered, she gives birth and dies. After her initial collapse, Anna first lashes out wildly, her body out of control, before allowing the cook to sew up the wound in her leg, which was sustained when she fell. The close-up on the wound in this scene introduces an element of gore into the film (albeit very minor) and also figures the disavowal of her own sexuality that Anna could be said to fantasise at this moment -- wishing she never had been (never could be) made pregnant. No longer under restraint or buttoned up, Anna's body is in this sequence and increasingly from this point on throughout the film, subject to pain and fear, expressed as panting, trembling, sweating and bleeding. As Clover asserts, it is by such means that "occult films do their best to make the female body 'speak' its experience." (Clover, 1992: 109)

The "opening up" that Clover identifies as the key trope of the possession film is dramatised through Anna's experience in *Saint Ange*. The first stages are the revelation of her secret pregnancy and the wounding (opening) of her body in the scene just discussed, but they are paralleled by her mental opening up to the possibility that the ghost children are not mad imaginings but are actually to be found somewhere in, or beneath, the orphanage. The climactic sequence of the film shows Anna, having smashed the mirror in the shower room and crawled through this *vagina dentata*, descending in a tomb-like lift into the abyss under the school to seek out the children -- an action which combines a descent into death with a metaphorical birthing sequence in which Anna is shaken, exhausted and pushed to her physical limits by the process of labour. As in the ending of *Alice* (which also features a smashed mirror as a *vagina dentata*), the descent into darkness can be read as death because it is followed by an image of the dead protagonist. In *Saint Ange*, however, the trauma of the descent is separated from the image of the corpse by a second, explicit, birthing sequence which also enacts a shift from the code of horror to that of science fiction. Thus in a pristine but sinister laboratory under the school, she actually gives birth, aided by the ghost children. By opening up her mind to the fact (or fantasy) of their existence, Anna secures their aid in

opening up her own body and delivering her child, the original source of her anxieties and fears. The final twist, however, reveals that she and her baby died during the process: they have joined the realm of the ghosts.

Sex and Suffering in *Histoire de Marie et Julien*

Rivette's *Histoire de Marie et Julien* is also a possession film, but centred less on pregnancy than on the sexual act and on the forming of the straight romantic couple. The narrative focus is shared between the two eponymous leads rather than concentrated in the figure of the "female victim-hero" as in *Saint Ange*. Hence in this case the identification strategies for the audience include the possibility of identifying with the male protagonist who in turn desires the female lead /star. This alternative is not open in *Saint Ange* (where there are basically no male characters) nor in the modern paradigm of the slasher movie set out by Clover, where the Final Girl dispenses very rapidly with both potential male rescuers and masculine-coded, dysfunctional monsters. This difference may therefore be considered a product of Rivette's ambiguity towards the horror genre. For although *Histoire de Marie et Julien* is a ghost story, there is little use of the more spectacular codes of popular fantasy cinema -- no music, no shock sound effects, no special effects, no gore. Instead, Rivette makes references to fantasy literature (especially Edgar Allan Poe, whose raven is transmuted into a cat called "Nevermore") and to classical cinema (Dreyer, Cocteau) as well as to his own films (*La Belle Noiseuse* and others). The distinction between *Saint Ange* and *Histoire de Marie et Julien* can also be figured as a displacement upwards, a gesture which runs throughout Rivette's film. Although set in a rambling old house, the film enacts an ascent from the "low" or popular fantasy of *Saint Ange*. This is apparent in terms of the body: there is a clear shift from the lower body to the voice (Marie speaking as if possessed) and the upper body (her bleeding wrist); in terms of pain (the physical pain of the body displaced upwards to metaphysical pain in the angst of the *revenant*); in terms of character and setting (from the lower class cleaner Anna in *Saint Ange* to the middle class crafts of publishing and clock repair) and in terms of space: the film situates the morbid chamber not in the crypt or abyss under the house (contrast *Alice*, *Saint Ange* and numerous vampire narratives) but at the very top of the house (the suicide room recreated by Marie in the attic). But despite this displacement upwards, and the privileging of the male character's point of view in several key sequences -- including the opening scene and the discovery of Marie's death chamber -- there remains the spectacular presence of the female star body in desire, anguish and fear. Indeed, if the possession film, as Clover suggests, "opens up" both men and women to the feminine-coded powers of the supernatural, the demonic and the emotional, then it is Béart as Marie who represents that process in the film. It is via Marie as a vector of desire, of anguish and of emotional expression that Julien awakens to new possibilities. In interview, Béart has declared that she felt Marie was more alive than Julien, and in the final scene Julien literally wakes up to the existence of Marie.

Nineteenth-century fantastic literature in France provides Rivette with the paradigm of "a female spectre who returns to haunt the hero." (Ransom, 1985: 32) Marie is a case in point, an undead suicide who has returned to the world of the living and to Julien, a face from her past. While he remains ignorant of her status, she alternates between commitment and flight, passion and absence, while a recurrent nightmare urges her to re-enact her suicide. While Marie is therefore in a sense fantasy made flesh for Julien, her own situation is presented as a living nightmare. The key to that nightmare is the repetition compulsion Matt Hills sees as essential to horror. In general characterised by "repetitions of violence, suffering and catastrophe [...]" the genre frequently depicts characters repeating actions in such a way as to

(arguably) become uncanny -- often being diegetically rather than metaphorically possessed by daemonic forces." (Hills, 2005: 64) Driven by the "daemonic forces" that govern her existence in limbo, Marie recreates in minute detail, at the top of Julien's house, the attic room where she hung herself. This is the site of the uncanny in *Histoire de Marie et Julien*, the equivalent of the underground abyss in *Alice* or *Saint Ange*. When the original suicide room is discovered and the meaning of Marie's home decorating made clear, the effect is chilling: we have seen this place before. In Freudian terms, this sense of confronting a place we recognise is itself enough to summon up the image of the maternal body, now rendered *unheimlich*. Julien, like the spectator, confronts the nightmare of repetition where Marie is trapped, repeatedly trying to kill herself and to escape.

Marie's struggle within that nightmare is also a struggle to speak of her anguish, caught between life and death. Unable to tell Julien who she really is, she attempts to fix their existence as a couple through the introduction of narrative elements into the sex that holds their relationship together. There are five sex scenes, three of which are mediated by the voices of the couple, narrated as it were. In the third, Marie asks Julien "Tell me about the forest." The story that follows, shared between them, is a mixture of fairytale and horror, at the end of which the screen fades to black. If this narrative seems to present horror as a combination of male sadism and female masochism, the fourth sex scene ("le combat") pits the two protagonists against each other in a kind of mutual sadism which conjures up images of the devouring archaic mother, as when Marie tells Julien "I eat you until I'm sick," or when her sex is compared to wet soil. Despite the violence of the words in these sequences, there is all the same a displacement upwards and away from the body: firstly, in terms of the camera which, although these are nude sex scenes, concentrates mainly on the upper bodies and the faces of the two actors, and secondly in terms of the horror itself which is spoken of rather than being shown. This is a key factor in Rivette's modification of the horror genre. Just as "la forêt" (the wood) and "le combat" are evoked verbally but not actually shown, so too the abyss -- an actual site/sight in the climactic scenes from *Saint Ange* and *Alice*, is here reduced to a figure of speech, as when Marie tells Julien "There's a gulf [une abîme] between us." What remains of the horror body in *Histoire de Marie et Julien* is centred principally on the voice, as the sex scenes have indicated. The possession film, as Clover tells us, concentrates on the female body "speaking" its feelings: "Through moaning, vomiting, fevers, hypnotic revelations, swearing, swaggering, swelling, and the sudden appearance of rashes, bruises and scars [...] the woman is made to bring forth her occulted self." (Clover, 1992: 109-110) This recalls the scars on Anna's back in *Saint Ange*, but in *Histoire de Marie et Julien* Marie's secret (that she is in fact dead) is not inscribed on her body so much as expressed through the voice, both in her rather cryptic statements ("I'm cut in two") and in the chilling outburst when, preparing her own suicide chamber, she climbs up a step ladder, looks towards the ceiling and begins to speak in an unidentified language, the language of the other side, of possession.

Hélène Cixous has said of Freud's notion of the uncanny, "What is intolerable is that the Ghost erases the limit which exists between two states, neither alive nor dead [...]. There is no *reversal* from one term to the other. Hence, the horror: you could be dead while living." (Cixous, cited in Donald, 1989: 239) This is the nature of Marie's existence, her possession by death, and it is what the miracle at the end of the film overcomes. The ending is magical because Marie ceases to be a fantasy sex object (a living dead girl) and becomes a living subject. The transformation is achieved through the body, and specifically by means of bleeding. It therefore reminds us strongly of the ending of *Saint Ange*, where Anna bleeds in labour, although there the crossing over is from life to death, and to the world of the ghost

children. Blood is evoked in the narrative of "la forêt" (where Marie declares "my feet are bleeding"), but it is absent from Marie's body since she is undead. Marie is shown cutting herself by accident, but she does not bleed. In the final scene of the film, however, her suffering achieves a kind of triumphal bodily expression, first in the form of tears and then, miraculously, when the tears fall on her scar, in the form of blood. By comparison with *Saint Ange* and with the preoccupations of the possession film in general, we can read the blood that flows from Marie's wound as not just her life blood, symbol of a return to life, but also as menstrual blood displaced upwards, symbol of a return to womanhood. This reading may be aided by Marie's appearance in the latter sequences of the film: dressed in grey, looking tired and wan, she personifies ageing as well as angst. Therefore, the return of blood to the female body that can no longer bleed works very effectively as a fantasy of the overturn of the menopause. [2] In both films, then, blood is a symbol of birth: Anna's labour, Marie's rebirth. The ending of *Histoire de Marie et Julien*, moreover, reworks the opening of *Carrie* by locating bleeding in the desiring adult body rather than the anxious pubescent body: where for Carrie the discovery of blood provokes terror, it is a source of joy for Marie. As we shall see, Béart's star image is key to this distinction. Whether welcomed or feared, it is through the body that the pain and pleasure of the horror genre is expressed and the "invisible geography" of pain visualised. When the body belongs to a star, however, it already has certain associations and meanings from outside the particular film text or performance -- associations which we will now explore in the cases of Ledoyen and Béart.

Star Bodies: Virginie Ledoyen

Saint Ange and *Histoire de Marie et Julien* both employ the presence of a sometimes naked female star as the primary vehicle for fears and fantasies about the body. This can be construed as a cynical exercise designed to attract voyeuristic viewers (see, for example, Vincent, 2004). But the star body on display also functions as a medium for the masochistic pleasures sought by horror and fantasy audiences. The star images of both Ledoyen and Béart bring to the screen associations which resonate within the diegetic worlds of the ghost stories where they appear, and which have consequences for the way that spectators may or may not identify with the characters they play.

The face has tended to be the conventional index of film stardom (see Morin, 1970: 120). *Cahiers du cinéma* described Ledoyen's early film career as the story of a "radiant" face and saw her role in the musical *Jeanne et le garçon formidable* (1998) as a watershed, revealing her body to the camera as well (Joyard, 1998: 11). Although Ledoyen's face is the focus for many of her star photos (covers of magazines, L'Oréal advertisements and so on), so too is her body, notably in spreads for men's magazines in the UK but also for French publications including *Elle* and *Studio*. But Ledoyen identifies herself as a mother, and has been featured as such in the popular French press (see, for example, Pancol, 2003). (Her daughter was aged eighteen months or so during the filming of *Saint Ange*.) A match may therefore be produced in the informed spectator's mind between the off-screen and on-screen images of the star. Incidentally, two of Ledoyen's most well-known performances before *Saint Ange* saw her play young women who were secretly pregnant -- in *La Cérémonie* (1995) and *8 Femmes* (2002). Since those earlier performances, however, the actual fact of Ledoyen's own motherhood -- reported in the press and celebrated by herself -- combined with the 1950s setting of *Saint Ange* to suggest expectations of motherhood as unproblematic, positive, ideal.

Now, it is precisely the work of the horror genre to excavate such assumptions and to literalise the fears and desires they tend to repress. To this end, *Saint Ange* hints at

motherhood as an ideal before evacuating this possibility on the way to its bloody and ghostly conclusion. The Catholic iconography in the orphanage, as well as the choral soundtrack, creates something of an idealised atmosphere around motherhood, sanctity, and children. But the strongest hint at idealised maternity may well be the casting of Ledoyen herself, as suggested above. This is reinforced by the lighting for several shots of the star's face, most notably a radiant facial close up of Anna asleep some time after we have learnt that she is pregnant. Any sense of serenity is soon replaced by anxiety, however, as Anna uncovers her bare stomach which seems to be moving and causing her distress. The reassuring connotations of the star -- her celebrated face and her happy motherhood -- are countered by the terrors and fantasies that her character suffers and that originate (located there visually by the camera movement) in the pregnant body. A similar contrast is evoked in the striking image of Ledoyen from the end of the film, after Anna has died giving birth to a dead child. Anna stands surrounded by ghost children and cradling her own baby. Mother and child are both alive, it first seems, and naked, bathed in sunlight in an idealised pose. It is only at closer view that the scars on Anna's skin become apparent and that her eyes are shown to be vacant and dead. This final scene is symptomatic of the film's treatment of motherhood throughout: what seemed idyllic proves to be the source of horror.

The theme of maternity and Ledoyen's performance in expressing the fears associated with an unwanted pregnancy was welcomed by those fans of the film defending it against a critical pounding on websites. [3] Some even thought that Ledoyen was actually five or six months pregnant during filming (see Nielsen, 2004). The star in fact wore a prosthetic pregnancy for the shoot and spoke of the hard bodily work and physical discomfort this entailed: "we shot scenes in stifling heat, with my hair sticking to me, false blood on my face, and the latex stomach melting." (Cheze, 2004: 71) Although unnoticed by some spectators, who made the "match" between actor and character so precise as to suggest that they shared the same pregnancy, such star labour is a significant factor in the construction of any star performance, and while not always associated with Ledoyen, is more established in the star image of Emmanuelle Béart, certainly since it informed her first film role for Rivette, as *La Belle Noiseuse* (1991).

Star Bodies: Emmanuelle Béart

In *La Belle Noiseuse*, Béart's star body is very much on display -- she is naked on screen for several long sequences, as the muse for Michel Piccoli's painter -- but it is a body that is gradually dismembered, pulled apart by the labour involved. The painter tells Marianne (Béart) that he wants "no more breasts, no more stomach, no more thighs, no more arse!" The result is a performance in which the body is contorted, dislocated, pushed and pulled into painful poses and eventually dispersed across the various paintings that fill the studio. Béart's performance in *Histoire de Marie et Julien* is a kind of counterweight: it puts the star body back together as a living, bleeding thing. The body is the guarantor of human identity, and it is through bodily fluids (sex, tears, and most importantly, blood) that Marie comes to life again. She cheats the rules of limbo by loving Julien corporeally (her tears at being invisible to him create her new life-blood at the end of the film). In a moment which revises *La Belle Noiseuse* and also recalls the famous cataloguing of Brigitte Bardot's star body in *Le Mépris* (1963), Julien tells Marie "I love your neck, your arms, your shoulders, your mouth, your stomach, your eyes -- I love everything."

Like Bardot before her, Béart has a thoroughly sexualised star image. Both on and off screen she seems to incarnate and to generate desire. Such desire, however, can facilitate her

consumption as a sex object, especially by male spectators, and -- combined with a narrative structure that places her in a straight romantic couple -- it may prevent male viewers of *Histoire de Marie et Julien* from identifying with her as they might with Ledoyen in *Saint Ange*, following Clover's model of the Final Girl. Béart's star image was the cause for something like hysteria in the press and among her fans when, with the shooting of *Histoire de Marie et Julien* completed, she appeared naked on the cover of *Elle* in May 2003. The magazine sold out within days, with the photos provoking many commentaries on Béart's star body, favourably compared to younger and thinner models (see Mallaval, 2003). Unlike Bardot's performance in *Le Mépris*, however, Béart's in *Histoire de Marie et Julien* is not ironically or self-consciously addressed to voyeuristic spectators. There remains a strong sexual element to the narrative, including Rivette's first ever sex scenes, one of which was in fact staged by Béart. Her eroticised star image is crucial in what is, for Rivette, a very rare representation of sexual desire. But Marie is not just an eroticised body -- she is also a fighter in a cause. This combative element is both a reminder of one of the characteristics of the Final Girl of modern horror, and also a key component in Béart's public persona.

Béart declared in the aftermath of the *Elle* affair that many of her actions had shocked people, including her political protests during the *sans-papiers* affair of 1997 (Servat, 2003: 54). In the film, Marie returns from her own suicide "fighting," and has to struggle against the laws of her existence as a *revenant* (undead), as well as to make Julien understand who and what she is, and to prevent him from forgetting her (see Chakali, 2003). The match here between actor and character is clear, since Béart is, in the words of *Libération*, a "war-like Madonna." (Le Vaillant, 1996: 44) This combative persona became most evident during her active engagement in the *sans-papiers* protests (in defence of immigrants without the necessary papers), a political action that apparently cost her the Dior modelling contract. But the sense of a more personal struggle and a confrontation with death adds a further element of intimacy and intensity to the match between Béart and Marie, as well as linking her to the archetype of the Final Girl. Interviewed for the DVD release of the film, Béart equated herself with Marie precisely because of the character's desire to both live and die. This can be read as a possible allusion to her own experience immediately after filming ended: on 15 May 2003 Béart arrived at Nice airport for the opening of the Cannes festival only to learn that her partner, film producer Vincent Meyer, had been found dead in their Paris apartment. The star herself seems then to have made a retrospective identification with Marie by the time of the film's release (which, unlike the actual shoot, post-dated Meyer's death). Béart thus brings a strongly sexualised physical presence to the film, but she also brings less corporeal connotations of angst, loss, and a struggle to cling on to life in the face of despair. One might therefore call her a mature and sexualised variant on the female victim-hero, but one whose fans tend to situate her as an object of desire (hence of voyeuristic pleasures) more than as a site of suffering (hence of masochistic pleasures).

Spectators and Fans

Horror is strongly associated with bodily sensation on the part of the spectator, as in Linda Williams' taxonomy of "body genres" where horror -- along with melodrama and porn -- calls forth a physical reaction from the viewer (Williams, 1991: 3-6). The screams generated by horror may have their equivalent in the shivers or chills that can be provoked by fantasy films. This bodily reaction may be linked to the modality issue at the heart of the fantastic: can we trust what we see? Are the events shown natural or supernatural? In my own experience, *Histoire de Marie et Julien* was a literal chiller in the sense that while watching it for the first time I felt chills on four separate occasions. But because the film is positioned as

auteurist rather than popular, bodily reactions are not part of critical reactions to it. In both press and online, the head governs the body in reactions to Rivette. Viewers of *Saint Ange*, however, operating within the popular discourse of horror fandom on the web, frequently mention the bodily experience provoked by watching the film: "shivers will run down your spine;" "I felt a certain stress watching *Saint Ange* [...] and this feeling was pleasurable because it's quite rare;" "one of the last images literally paralysed me!;" "You feel in your flesh what happens to the little boy and it hurts!" [4] Consistent with Clover's theory of horror spectatorship, these reactions tend to stress masochistic pleasures, speaking of pleasurable stress and bodily pain.

Such examples of horror fandom, according to Matt Hills, define themselves against an established Other: "Discourses of aestheticization and authentication [...] allow fans to pleurably imagine and demarcate the boundaries of horror fan culture." (Hills, 2005: 73) On French web sites such as www.ecranlarge.com and www.cinehorreur.com, this means defining oneself against the classical values of French cinema and the tradition of social realism incarnated by stars such as Jean Gabin. Fantasy filmmakers are celebrated as mavericks and outsiders, with Christophe Gans especially revered as "A kind of French messiah." (BaNDiNi, 2004) Stars such as Deneuve and Bardot, associated by horror fans with mainstream cinema, are dismissed as "zombies," but perhaps because no single French star has become synonymous with horror, or indeed because, despite claiming to despise auteurism, many horror fans still use that discourse, directors rather than actors are championed. Although Ledoyen's performance is mentioned, usually positively, in fan reactions to *Saint Ange*, this is not a dominant theme. In fact, her co-stars Katriana McColl and Lou Doillon draw just as much comment. Particularly on the genre-specific site www.cinehorreur.com, it is not the actors' performances but Laugier's competence as a director that is most frequently debated. This has included dismissals of his technical ability and of the film's hackneyed special effects, and a celebration of "better" films within the horror genre. We might read such reactions as disavowals of the masochistic pleasures to be found in identification with Anna, the suffering female lead. As Hills comments, male horror fans often use "generic knowledge [...] to reduce the possibility of an affective/fearful response." (Hills, 2005: 81) The reiteration of the masculine discourse of connoisseurship and technical expertise may then disguise masochistic investment in the female star body.

The celebrity of the star body (its circulation outside the film text in the popular press and media, for example), while generating the cinematic and extra-cinematic identification that Stacey observes, may also direct such identification in the direction of voyeurism rather than masochism. This seems to be a dominant trend in the reception of Béart. Masochistic pleasures are apparent neither in the critical reception of *Histoire de Marie et Julien* (which mobilises a determinedly auteurist discourse, albeit one which may be based on the type of disavowal Hills mentions above) nor in the popular reaction to her star body manifest on fan websites. Such sites and chat rooms focus not on her performance in Rivette's film but on her off-screen appearances, most notably the infamous *Elle* cover shot. [5] Béart, it seems, functions as a voyeuristic fantasy for many of her fans. Therefore, despite the similarities between the two ghost films in question, the reception of the star bodies in *Saint Ange* and *Histoire de Marie et Julien* is clearly contrasting. Facilitated by a less rigid adherence to horror conventions, the sexual objectification so prevalent within readings of her star image, and the positing of a male viewpoint in the narrative of the film, Béart as Marie is, despite her bodily suffering, much less open to masochistic identification than Ledoyen as Anna in *Saint Ange*. The latter performance is situated within a male-free environment in which fears and fantasies about the pregnant body are played out freely, much more in line with what Clover

has observed in slasher and possession films. Anna/Ledoyen was subsequently consumed by both male and female fans as fitting closely within their generic expectations, and in several cases as embodying the "pleasurable stress" that is the prime attraction of horror. Thus while both female leads embody the "repetitions of violence, suffering and catastrophe" that Hills speaks of as being fundamental to horror, it is in the final analysis *Saint Ange* that plays most successfully upon the horror audience's willingness to identify with the female star body in fear and pain.

Notes

[1] My translation. All translations from the French in this article are my own.

[2] My thanks to Alison Smith for suggesting this reading.

[3] See for instance comments posted by Anonymous and Tartouillette on www.cinema/krinien.com during July 2004 [Accessed 2 September 2005]

[4] Stéphane Erbist, Saint Ange, and various, L'Avis des internautes, at www.cinehorreur.com/critique-617-saint-ange.html [Accessed 15 November 2005]

[5] See for instance a seven-page thread on this topic at www.0plus0.com [Accessed 30 November 2005]

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