

# Miskatonic Institute: "BLACK SABBATH"

Written by Kier-La Janisse

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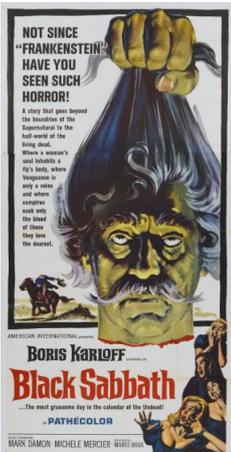
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It's hard to believe the first semester of Miskatonic is already over and the holidays are upon us! Donato Totaro from *Offscreen* magazine just wrapped his Mario Bava course, which focused on the Gothic elements of the director's work, discussing his predilection for mannequins, the uncanny, op-art and elaborate setpieces—as well as demonstrating the historical interplay between Federico Fellini and Bava—and placing them in the context of Italy's "Terza Visione" cinema. Miskatonic student Ariel Esteban Cayer took on the task of reviewing Bava's BLACK SABBATH, and we've posted it below for your enjoyment.

And just remember: If you see Santa Claus, you better run...you better run...*for your life!!!*

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BLACK SABBATH

Mario Bava, Italy, 1963

By Ariel Esteban Cayer

Composed of three short films, Mario Bava's 1963 BLACK SABBATH is required viewing for

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anyone looking to explore the director's body of work. Freely inspired from stories by Chekhov, Tolstoy, and Maupassant, the film was made as a response to Roger Corman's immensely successful Poe adaptations and features a taste of almost every genre Bava would become known for. In that respect, it is the perfect introduction to his work, as every story showcases the mood, atmosphere and uncanny quality we have come to love in Bava's films. Because of their literary roots, the three stories are very classical and conventional in form, but whether that's your thing or not, one thing is certain: the formula is infallible and BLACK SABBATH, which stars Boris Karloff as narrator and actor in the second tale, is guaranteed to give you a good time.

Following a very entertaining intro by Karloff himself, "The Telephone" begins as a conventional *giallo* but quickly reveals its layers, most of which were lost in the American recut of the film. While predictable, it is a brilliant example of what can be done with a single room and gorgeous actress (ANGÉLIQUE's Michèle Mercier). Preceding WHEN A STRANGER CALLS, BLACK CHRISTMAS and the SCREAM opener, Bava makes great use of the titular device as the viewer finds himself uneasy every time it rings. Thankfully, the short doesn't stray, and it very effectively grabs your attention and goes straight to the point. The segment manages to build (sexual) tension throughout, thanks to Bava's masterful cinematography and Mercier's presence, and serves as a very good opener to the subsequent terrors of this anthology film.

Interestingly enough, the stories revolve around the idea that the horrific hails from the deeper feeling of love or desire, which makes them altogether more relatable and chilling. After all, is there a more loving creature than a vampire, especially when he's in your own family? This preoccupation is at the center of "The Wurdalak," which offers a radical change in setting. Classic vampire lore, the segment features a bone-chilling performance by Karloff and some of Bava's greatest filmmaking, notably through his now-iconic use of color. Extremely powerful both in mood and tone, the story, despite its familiar synopsis, strikes with strong imagery and ambition that immediately brings to mind the better Hammer films.

In the last and equally stunning short film "A Drop of Water," Bava goes all-out with the lighting and technique to offer us what is arguably the most effective segment of the bunch. In this amazing psychological thriller, Bava blurs the line between the natural and the supernatural and ends his anthology with a bang. With its surrealistic use of color and creepy atmosphere, "A Drop of Water" is a mesmerizing short film, very important in the understanding of Italian horror as it puts films such as SUSPIRIA and INFERNO very much in context.

A consistent crescendo, BLACK SABBATH is an extremely effective and entertaining example of anthology horror done absolutely right. Stuck in a rigid mold, the film might seem outdated to

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younger viewers accustomed to the gory and violent, or viewers looking for an interesting change in gender dynamics or horror-film formula. That aside, Bava's essential anthology is an extremely well-done film that definitely warrants a viewing if only for its great coda, which reminds us that these stories are indeed constructs designed to entertain. A great "party" film, it features a wide range of genres that will most likely thrill fans looking for variety and a more restrained and classical approach to horror filmmaking. More than anything, it should not go overlooked, despite the abundance that swamps the horror genre.

{comments on}