

Abstract:

“Seriality-Killers: Rebooting Film as TV Series, and Vice-Versa, in *Dark Shadows* (2012), *Bates Motel* (2013-) and *Damien* (2016-)”

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Norman Bates, Damien Thorn and Barnabas Collins—three iconic killers born out of popular works of literature, cinema, and television of the 1960s and 1970s—are alive and well and wreaking havoc in recent film and television reboots, though, given the number of earlier attempts at remakes, sequels and prequels each source work has undergone, the “seriality” and substantial baggage carried over from previous plotlines has to somehow be dealt with. What is more, each of these recent works represents in some way either a cross-over from a television series to film (in the case of *Dark Shadows*) or from a what is essentially a film series to a television series (in the case of *Damien* and *Bates Motel*).

The most notorious of the three in terms of heritage, recognition and seriality is of course that behind *Bates Motel* (A&E, 2013-present), which has to deal not only with Hitchcock’s landmark film *Psycho* (1960), and with the film’s three film sequels in the 1980s and 1990s—not to mention Gus Van Sant’s frame-by-frame remake in 1998—but also with the series of three novels written by Robert Bloch in 1959, 1982 and 1990, which provided a parallel and unrelated story-line to that provided in the film series. How does the new television reboot, which bills itself seemingly paradoxically as both a prequel and an updating, incorporate that ‘serial’ heritage, if at all? Nearly as well-known, in the U.S. at least, is the film series *The Omen*, which was not adapted from a novel, but which was such a popular film in 1976 that it sparked three film sequels in 1978, 1981 and 1991, and which has also been revived this year on A&E through the series *Damien*. Set in the present-day and billed as a direct sequel to the 1976 film, how does the new series deal with the seriality already established in the film series? Finally, working in the opposite direction, we have Dan Curtis’s cult ‘gothic soap opera’ of the 1960s, *Dark Shadows* (ABC, 1966-71) that was made into a 2012 film by Tim Burton. How was the seriality and myriad story-lines of the whopping 1,225 episodes of the series condensed to fit film format and to speak to both new audiences and die-hard fans—and in terms of seriality, did the previous attempts at film adaptations of the 1970s and at a series reboot in 1991 have any influence on the new story-line?

This paper will thus look at the reworking of such long-established and transmedia seriality in these three recent ‘reboots’—one of which is billed as a prequel, one as a sequel, and one as a ‘condensed’ remake. How do those works crossing over from film to television differ from those moving in the other direction? How do the works play with well-established timelines—often going backwards and forwards at the same time, or experimenting with converging, diverging or parallel timelines? How much freedom is there to change the pedigree of such iconic cultural characters as Norman Bates, Damien Thorne and Barnabas Collins? Can a totally different (psycho-)path be taken, or must one adhere to some degree to the established story-line? Though the paper will focus quite heavily on what Constantine Verevis has called the “textual category” of remakes (here, the reworking of the genre and story-line), it will also necessarily touch on the “critical category” as well, as all three cases deal with reception as well, given that the iconic characters and plot-lines have become part of (or have long haunted) our collective consciousness.

Bio:

Dennis Tredy is an associate professor of American Literature at the *Université de Paris III – Sorbonne Nouvelle*. He is co-founder of the ESJS (*European Society of Jamesian Studies*) and has published two recent volumes on Henry James: *Henry James and the Poetics of Duplicity* (2013)

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