

Sexsationalist Feminism in *The Devil's Carnival Project* (2012, 2015)

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Genres are mobile formations whose parameters are constantly reshaped and updated, which means that establishing a coherent history of the musical genre requires a rethinking of what the musical is, has been, and how it works in its myriad subsets. One such subset is the gothic musical, which focuses on the exploration of monstrosity, excess, decadence, entrapment, and depravity. The intersections between film, musicals, and “dark” styles or genres, such as noir and Gothic, although not new (Conrich 2006; Laderman 2010; Biesen 2014; Petermann 2015; Stokes 2016) remain widely under-theorized. With its risqué musical numbers often shot in low-key lighting, the gothic musical is, by definition, a marginal product that caters mostly to a marginal audience. The soundtrack usually mixes an operatic tone with glam rock and a punk or industrial edge and each song features incisive, witty lyrics that expose the ills and vices of society.

Darren Lynn Bousman, who is known for directing the first three sequels of the slash horror franchise *Saw* (2003–17), collaborated with writer-actor-composer Terrance Zdunich on three musicals: *Repo! The Genetic Opera* (2008), *The Devil's Carnival* (2012), and *Alleluia! The Devil's Carnival* (2015). Following in the footsteps of Jim Sharman's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), the most obvious referent for their musical ventures, these films revolve around death, transgression, revenge, and the injustices to which certain individuals, particularly women, are subjected in contemporary societies. Their in-your-face, self-reflexive approach to taboo content and tongue-in-cheek satire appeal to a niche subcultural audience that has granted a cult status to these productions. Despite amassing a devoted following, the films have nonetheless been ignored by critics and scholars.

In this chapter, I will focus on *The Devil's Carnival* and will refer to the project's second film, *Alleluia!*, when pertinent. The project constitutes a particularly interesting case study for the way it adheres to set rules and conventions of the Gothic and the musical, while giving them a luscious apocalyptic and intergeneric twist. It innovates, for instance, in its choice of location.

Unlike most European, Bollywood, and Hollywood film musicals, which take place in real (mappable) locations, *The Devil's Carnival*, save for just over a minute and a half in the first installment, is set exclusively in Hell and Heaven. It also melds a series of generic categories—musicals, horror, Gothic, and fantasy—which have traditionally occupied the lower ranks of genre hierarchy. Fred Botting observes that when “generic monsters combine, their coupling delivers monstrosities of hitherto unprecedented dimensions” (2008: 21). Botting’s graphic statement aptly describes the hybrid monstrosity that is *The Devil's Carnival*, which Bousman describes as “a mish-mash of insanity. Part musical, part horror film, part undefinable . . . a carnival in every sense of the word” (Cruz 2012). Analyzing such genre-bending and self-parodic works can help re/discover a marginal (and marginalized) history of film musicals.

My investigation is informed by Marie-Luise Kohlke’s notion of “sexsation,” which she uses to describe the excessive eroticism of neo-Victorian gothic fiction (2008a, b). The moniker, I argue, is equally relevant to examine gothic film. Barbara Creed’s definition of the “monstrous-feminine” ([1993] 2007), which extends Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection to the horror film, is also central to my analysis. In particular, Creed’s understanding of female monsters not as passive victims, but as boundary-crossing, active characters that contest and confront the prevalence of the male gaze ([1993] 2007: 7) can be productively employed to study the gothic musical and reassess the film musical’s typical representation of the female body as “lacking and passive, put on exhibition and looked at” (Cohan [2000] 2002: 62). My aim here is twofold. On the one hand, I will examine how the project problematizes representations of femininity through a focus on suffering and sexsation; on the other, I will analyze how it uses narrative, characterization, and mise-en-scène to forge a singular self-conscious reflection on the musical form and the film industry—all to the strains of a jazzy, cabaret, and punk-rock soundtrack.

The Aestheticization of Suffering

Initially envisioned as a TV series to serve as counterprogramming to Fox’s hit-show *Glee* (2009–2015) (Childers 2015), *The Devil's Carnival* and *Alleluia!* are bizarre musicals set primarily in Hell and Heaven respectively. The first film focuses on three characters—John, Ms. Merrywood, and Tamara—who die and wake up in Hell, a chief locus of gothic horrors here materialized as a lively carnival. Each doomed soul earns their one-way ticket to the

netherworld for a different reason: John, a grieving father, slits his wrists after losing his son; Ms. Merrywood steals some jewelry and is killed in her trailer during a shootout with the police; and Tamara, a young woman in an abusive relationship, is shot dead in her car when trying to drive away from her angry boyfriend.

The Devil's Carnival has *Aesop's Fables* at its core, with the main characters each representing a fable and a sin.¹ John's sin is grief, Ms. Merrywood's is greed, and Tamara's is gullibility. Even though Ms. Merrywood's greed figures as the only "true" sin (John's suicide is not considered so), this broader and highly contentious interpretation of what is sinful does not compromise the film's premise, to the extent that *Aesop's Fables* are invested in teaching a moral lesson by warning us about the dangers of engaging in potentially harmful behavior, such as grieving too intensely or being too trusting. As adapted by Zdunich, they succeed as cautionary tales, with the unusual definition of sin hinting from the start at an authoritarian power that, apparently rather arbitrarily, decides who should be sent to Heaven or Hell.

Throughout the film, Lucifer (played by Zdunich) and selected carnies tell the stories of John, Tamara, and Ms. Merrywood through songs based on three fables, respectively "Grief and His Due," "The Scorpion and The Frog," and "The Dog and Its Reflection." The film's musical structure is reminiscent of cabaret theater, punctuated with short stories and bawdy songs that encourage audience participation. There is one integrated song focusing on each newcomer and one summarizing their sealed fates. Zdunich and co-composer Saar Hendelman's score combines circus, punk rock, ballad, dark cabaret, and Dust Bowl folk influences (Anderson 2015), which lend the film's soundtrack a distinctively postmodern feel.

In the carnival, there are arcade games, a circus tent, and fairground attractions run and frequented by various freaks and misfits. The carnival's populace of dead bodies, "basic forms of pollution [and] waste" that represent "the utmost in abjection," illustrates Creed's theory that horror films stage a confrontation with the abject—a body with fluid borders that is easily infected by the other and—literally, in this film—by death (Creed [1993] 2007: 9–10; Kristeva [1980] 1982: 4). Painted Doll, played by Victorian industrial artist Emilie Autumn, is a case in point. Publicized as "the belle of Lucifer's ball" ("*Devil's Carnival*" 2012), this antiheroine resists classification. She has pasty white skin and her countenance is disfigured by a series of scar-like cracks that run down one side of her face, giving her the appearance of a broken porcelain doll. In *Alleluia!* we learn that Painted Doll, formerly known as June, was violently

cast out of Heaven. Her transgressions included dating God's right hand (The Agent), encouraging the "abnormal sexual desire" (Creed [1993] 2007: 11) of her lesbian friend Cora (there is a queer subtext to their relationship), and breaking into the Forbidden Books section of Heaven's library. She is depicted as a modern iteration of Eve, whose thirst for knowledge results in eternal damnation. Prelapsarian June inhabited the margins and the angels shunned her as utterly abject. Her face from then on bears the physical marks of her disobedience, collapsing the borders between beauty and disfigurement. "The wound," Creed explains, "is a sign of abjection in that it violates the skin which forms a border between the inside and outside of the body" ([1993] 2007: 82). Her adopted name, "Painted Doll," also signals abjection and operates on three interrelated narrative and cultural levels: "doll" is a patriarchal and derogatory term employed to refer to women (The Agent addresses June as "dollface"); the common usage of "doll" in this sense implies the convergence of subject and object, generating uncanniness; finally, the adjective "painted" may be read as relating to makeup, to the act of women "dolling up." Painted Doll attracts and repulses, her scarred-yet-sensual face and scantily clad body disclosing a troubled relationship to notions of (s)exploitation, abjection, and empowerment that at once reject and condone conventional ideals of femininity. As Creed argues, "woman is not, by her very nature, an abject being"; it is the dominant patriarchal ideology that constructs her as such ([1993] 2007: 83). June is thus constructed as abject when Heaven's patriarchal society reveals itself fundamentally intolerant toward queer identities and independent women who fight for knowledge and self-expression.

Alongside debauchery and abjection, Lucifer's carnival promotes comradeship and equality. Yet, the community is changing and the neighborly rapport between the carnies no longer precludes localized outbreaks of violence. The space of the underworld, in fact, becomes structured so as to tempt its newest residents to fall, once again, prey to their earthly sins. The closely knit hellish community will not accept any of the neophytes as part of the team without them first proving their worth—and so puts them to the test. If they are tricked into replaying the actions that led to their untimely deaths, the carnival folk intervene and violently show the newcomers how to behave properly. Unsurprisingly, John, Tamara, and Ms. Merrywood soon repeat their sins and suffer the dire consequences. John is tricked into believing his dead son is lost somewhere in the carnival and is cruelly taunted by a series of demons who refuse to tell him his whereabouts, leading him once more to succumb to grief. Naive Tamara, who wakes

up in the carnival wearing a child-like satin sailor dress stressing her ingenuity, is seduced by The Scorpion, a vain scoundrel, who ends up killing her on his knife-throwing wheel. Luring her to her death with dulcet tones and the complimentary words of the song “Trust Me,” The Scorpion straps credulous Tamara to the wheel while assuring her she can trust him because she is his “darling dear” and he is “so sincere” that “there’s no need to tear.” Once the fatal knife pierces Tamara’s heart, Painted Doll recounts her tribulations through song (“Prick! Goes the Scorpion’s Tale”) while showing off her inanimate body to the audience. Scornfully, Painted Doll incites the carnies to “drink to true love.” Delighted, they yell and applaud. The song, based on Aesop’s “The Scorpion and The Frog,” offers a biting commentary on gullibility and warns that some people cannot refrain from hurting others even when it means self-destruction. As for Ms. Merrywood, she wakes up in Hell lying next to heaps of jewels and trinkets, which she promptly steals, disregarding the note next to them that reads: “Take only what you need.” She then embarks on a mock contest to win a large diamond, which causes her to lose most of her clothes and leaves her stripped down to magenta satin gloves and lacy black and cream-colored knickers. To atone for her greed, she is publicly scourged while Hobo Clown solemnly sings “A Penny for a Tale,” a grim ballad about a narcissistic puppy whose greed leads to its untimely demise. The participatory dimension of the song (whenever the word “doggy” is mentioned, the audience woofs along three times) emphasizes the vileness of shared sensationalism toward bodily harm.

As they wander around the carnival, the two women become flagrant targets of gratuitous, male-inflicted pain. In effect, although all three characters are subjected to violence, John’s torture is mostly psychological, whereas the violence that befalls Tamara and Ms. Merrywood is primarily physical. Tamara suffers a “voyeuristic re-victimisation” (Kohlke 2012: 222) that is effected in a twofold manner. She experiences a double death (in Earth and in Hell) at the hands of two evil men and is doubly punished in the carnival: she is the only character who “dies” in Hell and vanishes from the narrative. It is telling of the film’s marginal status that the only carny whose femininity is conventionally coded disappears—there is no room for strict gender categorizations or naive girls among Hell’s denizens.

By depriving Tamara of all rights, including her right to an afterlife, Bousman opens the film up to criticism, with some viewers accusing the director of replicating what Kohlke terms “insidious patterns of victimization” (2012: 221) and fomenting discriminatory attitudes

through the deployment of a victim-blaming narrative. While on the surface this interpretation may seem justified, Tamara's story begs closer inspection. Examining the film through *Aesop's Fables*, that is, reading each character's story and fate as a cautionary tale, Tamara's second death and subsequent disappearance serve as a warning: her gullibility leads her to make the same fatal mistakes over and over again. In other words, she is doomed to repeat her so-called "sin" *ad eternum*. More than blindly trusting toxic men, her transgression therefore appears to be not learning from her mistakes, as Bousman explained (2015). Punishing the victim may be understood, in the context of the project, as a drastic measure to ensure audience engagement with timely issues in the post-millennium. As noted, this strategy is highly controversial and dangerous, in that it may be read as bolstering a normative, misogynistic, and regressive ideology. However morally and ethically reprehensible, it nevertheless succeeded in getting the audience to talk about the recurring and generalized condoning of female-oriented violence in the media and in everyday life (Hall 2015; Syn-Cypher 2016).

Carnival activities such as public flogging stress the pain/pleasure dynamic that underscores the film and highlights the endurance of patriarchal rituals of domination and submission by constructing erotic moments of punishment that fetishize the female body. The sexualized showcase of Ms. Merrywood's forced striptease and subsequent thrashing celebrate libidinous fantasies through the deployment of gendered violence, nakedness, and the trope of the subjugated, victimized woman. The emphasis here is on what Kohlke has termed "sexsation" or "erotic excess" (2008a: 54). She remarks that female and marginal bodies are often sexsationalized, that is, "transfigured into fetishized erotic spectacles" (2008a: 68). Much like the "'gratuitous' spectacle" of the showgirl's body in a backstage musical (Rubin 1993: 2) or the odd bodies monetized in Victorian freak shows, the deviant female body is constructed as spectacle, "coded for strong visual and erotic impact" (Mulvey 1975: 11). Torture, moreover, is "an objectification, an acting out"—"a demonstration and magnification of the felt experience of pain," which converts "the vision of suffering into the wholly illusory, but . . . wholly convincing spectacle of power" (Scarry 1985: 27). The carnies' sadistic rejoicing in Ms. Merrywood's suffering and her seeming indulgence in masochism (despite the fact that there are no obvious signs of consent) appear to legitimate patriarchal eroticism, for "the prone and naked female body [is] helplessly available to the manipulations of male desire" (Kohlke 2008b: 4). The use of BDSM imagery—from whips to leather accoutrements, knives, and

straps—and the spotlight on Tamara and Ms. Merrywood’s bodies afford a very tactile dimension of spectacle to the scenes. Unlike the type of spectacle normally offered in musicals, where it is the untainted singing and dancing body that captures the audience’s gaze, here the body—the female body, specifically—although still the center of attention, is restrained, its movements minimal or involuntary.

Spectacle therefore arises from a different form of sexualized aesthetics: one that feeds off abjection and limits the body’s freedom of movement. However, while forcefully constraining female agency facilitates the audience’s voyeuristic participation in illicit pleasure, it also confronts the viewers with their immoral condoning of sensationalized torture against women, “society’s internally colonized subjects or subalterns” (Kohlke 2012: 222).

The number “Kiss the Girls” further exposes the connections between sexualization, objectification, abjection, and dollhood. While roaming the carnival, John catches a glimpse of what he believes to be his son and rushes into the Big Top. As the camera quickly zooms in on his disconcerted face, he looks around and calls out for his son. A point-of-view shot reveals a deserted tent but, as the camera follows him, we notice a carny damsel in the center of the ring, quiet as a mime, still as a mannequin. She has the disturbing appearance of a life-like rag doll. John circles around her, the camera moving with him. He gets closer and, just as he touches the woman’s hair, she suddenly moves and speak-sings teasingly: “Missed me, missed me?” Immediately, the remaining Woe-Maidens, a group of carny women in smudged makeup and torn fishnet stockings, join the party, followed by the Hellharmonic, which marches in through the curtains of the ring doors. Singing at John while physically assaulting him, these “active monsters,” to use Creed’s expression ([1993] 2007: 153, 7), challenge patriarchal views that women are essentially victims. Female dominance reigns over the sequence and John falls to his feet halfway through, unable to fight off his assailants. In a way, this moment replays the earlier BDSM visual aesthetic and fetishistic gaze of Ms. Merrywood’s and Tamara’s torture scenes but reverses the gender dynamics. Now, it is the male character who becomes subservient to Hell’s dominatrixes. Their belligerence, marred beauty, torn clothes, and controlling behavior, along with the lyrics (repeatedly telling John he “has to” kiss the girls), deliberately defy straightforward objectification and thwart the male gaze. These women destabilize normative assumptions about the “proper feminine” (Pykett 1992: 12) and reclaim their identity as independent agents through monstrosity and dollhood.

Abjection and victimization draw unjustly mistreated souls together, forming a tight bond between them. The sexual abuse of Tamara and Ms. Merrywood acts as a call to arms that is not wholly concretized until the final number of the second film, in which Painted Doll rallies the female carnies and starts taking down the patriarchy, one despicable male after another, beginning with her former lover, The Agent. Sent on a godly mission to the carnival, The Agent is forcibly treated to a cabaret-style song-and-dance performance, “Hoof and Lap,” whereby Painted Doll becomes an almighty, all-destructive figure, representative of Creed’s “femme castratrice”—an avenging female castrator who “arouses a fear of castration and death while simultaneously playing on a masochistic desire for death, pleasure and oblivion” ([1993] 2007: 130). The lyrics tell of “fillies” who want to give a “pious dog” “a round of hell.” This abject performance is topped off with The Agent’s forced ingestion of some sort of poison before the euphoric exhilaration of the damned. In this way, the grotesque body (the human form made abject) is politicized and the seductive hero-villain is doomed to endure the shame and harassment to which he had subjected his lover. In Hell, victimhood is exorcized and empowerment settles in its place.

The pervasive—if twisted—sisterhood and solidarity underpinning Lucifer’s profligate community becomes more significant when compared to God’s glamorous Heaven, whose rules are far more rigid and brutal than Hell’s. To be sure, in Satan’s funhouse, everyone must abide by a set of 666 rules that detail how the miscreants must behave. No one, not even Lucifer or his second-in-command, Ticket-Keeper, is above carnival law.

Heaven, in turn, is presented in *Alleluia! The Devil’s Carnival* as a lavish Hollywood film studio—HPI (Heavenly Productions, Incorporated)—where the angels are organized according to a strict, seven-category caste-like system, mirroring the seven pairs of “clean animals” and “birds of the Heavens” that boarded Noah’s ark (Gen. 7:2-3). In this repressive panopticon, which has its own police and media outlets, each caste is inscribed on a fascist-like armband that God’s minions are forced to wear. Physiognomic perfection is controlled by a tyrant God, studio Head of HPI, who treats human beings as his personal playthings. This troubling representation of God as maliciously wicked reflects the reality of studio moguls, who puppeteered their starlets and disposed of them when they failed to meet box-office targets or, like Bousman’s God, when they no longer fit their ideal of canonical beauty (Wayne 2002; Fleming 2005; Malone 2015). There are no internal mechanisms in place to ensure that those at

the top will be held accountable for any wrongdoing. They can—and do—get away with anything. Bousman and Zdunich are therefore not only playing with generic tropes and articulating sociopolitical preoccupations about gender discrimination, bigotry, and religion; they are also taking a clear stance in regard to the studio system and the minute control ruthless studio executives exerted over every aspect of the lives of their starlets, treating them like nothing more than corporate assets. The fact that the soundtrack for scenes set in Heaven was inspired by 1930s–1940s show tunes seems to attest to a deliberate attempt at allegorizing the callousness of the Hollywood studio system.

With HPI standing for the studio system, Hell, by correlation, can be read as representing the musical (and the artists) at the margins. In effect, in making Heaven a more intolerant and unethical place than Hell, which accepts those that Heaven rejects as flawed and disgusting, Bousman and Zdunich seem to narrativize an idea of the marginal musical and its place in the film industry. When compared to HPI, Hell represents unbridled freedom and opportunity: the carnivalesque Hell, or the marginal musical, is not constrained by normative discourses or a commercial rationale and is therefore freer to experiment with form and tropes. On another level, this satiric and self-reflexive representation also comments on the creative team's own experiences with the Hollywood film industry: the studios repeatedly refused to distribute their musicals, which led them to self-release the films by investing in what would prove to be a series of successful road tours across North America.²

The adjacent underworlds, as we have seen, converge in their resort to violence—but there is hope for Hell. Tellingly, as the carnies sneer and flog Ms. Merrywood, the camera cuts away from the action three times to frame Ticket-Keeper who, dismayed at the abuse being committed, shakes his head and looks away. He does not intervene, but takes the matter to Lucifer, who confesses he is aware of how nebulous the distinction between his honest demonic hamlet and God's corrupt society has become. Hell's unwitting corruption thus reminds us of how easy it is to fall into patterns of abuse and discrimination. The surge in senseless aggression among peers and Lucifer's belief that Hell is fast becoming exceedingly violent and therefore too similar to Heaven serves as the trigger for an otherworldly battle, leading Lucifer and his children to plot Heaven's downfall. The economy of the grotesque which subtends life in the carnival should not involve the celebration and enforcement of torture—that is Heaven's signature *modus operandi*. At the end of *The Devil's Carnival*, Ticket-Keeper gathers Lucifer's

mischievous flock and announces they are “putting Heaven out of business.”

Bousman and Zdunich had initially planned a third installment, but the endeavor has since been indefinitely postponed. This attests to the creative team’s struggles to self-release their musicals and finance the long road tours. Given that most of *Alleluia!* is a flashback focused on June/Painted Doll (the remainder of the film revolves around Hell’s plan of attack and Heaven’s failure to keep up), there is no final showdown between the afterworlds. The fact that we do not know who would win the unholy war in the denouement means that the unfinished franchise is ambiguous in terms of the extent to which the marginal triumphs over dominant power structures. Borrowing Kohlke’s words, the films “eschew the restorative justice of the Radcliffean happy ending” (2012: 223) and offer a conflicted, but potentially productive, discourse for social criticism and political engagement.

Conclusion

The Devil’s Carnival films combine the colorful world of Hollywood musicals with a maniacal dystopian world of gothic excess. In privileging the comically perverse over the politically correct when dealing with specific sets of binary oppositions (feminism-patriarchy, conventionality-subversion, and sexualization-empowerment), this modern retelling of *Aesop’s Fables* pushes ethical boundaries. Beyond the arresting visuals, the tantalizing demons, and all of the delightfully distasteful sacrilege, we uncover a scathing sociopolitical critique that works on two different levels. The project’s subtext, I suggest, narrativizes the struggles of the marginal musical, represented by Lucifer’s Hell, by denouncing the excessive power of Hollywood executives in the studio era and today. In addition, the narrative provocatively exposes modern societies in their contempt for and willingness to harm and dispose of certain groups because of gender, sexuality, or physical appearance. Overall, the storylines of the two installments alternate between a hellish Heaven and a heavenly Hell to criticize institutional privilege, oppression, and the patriarchal subservience still demanded of women in contemporary societies.

Hell’s women combine the playful anachronism of the old-time carnival universe with a modern, rebellious, and bellicose attitude; they are tenacious, malevolent, and just as prone to violence and cruelty as men. Bousman and Zdunich scrutinize and deconstruct the clichéd image of traditional femininity and represent women carnies as strong individuals whose driving force

stems from grotesqueness and an unwavering refusal to conform to the status quo. Admittedly, representing empowerment through sexsation is problematic and adds “further tension to the problem of femininity as an excessively visible and materially-animated spectacle,” to borrow the words of Julie Park (2003: 53). *The Devil’s Carnival*, after all, literally presents the female body as a circus attraction and capitalizes on its power to draw the voyeuristic gaze. Nevertheless, perhaps in an effort to ward off fetishization, there is a blatant scarcity of close-ups in the film, so that women are not readily or stereotypically displayed for the male spectator’s scopophilia as a series of disembodied parts (Mulvey 1975: 14). There are no Berkeleysque musical moments in either film that halt narrative linearity in order to “feminize spectacle for a masculine viewer” (Cohan 2002: 87).

Focusing on bodies outside stereotyped notions of feminine beauty and sexuality helps devise a new model for thinking the structures of looking in the film musical, enabling female bodies to produce meaning outside hetero/normative male spectatorship. The abjection of the female carnes de-idealizes them as objects exhibited for male consumption and is in line with New Woman fiction and the empowered gothic heroines of the post-*Buffy* era.³ Hell’s women—the women at the margins—reclaim ownership over their own bodies. They are not frightened by mysterious or murderous husbands, evil doctors, or conspicuous ghosts; they have witnessed and experienced first-hand the injustices and restrictions placed on women in a world of male privilege and so plot to end an entire patriarchal society, represented by Heaven.

The Devil’s Carnival project renegotiates the primacy of the male gaze and proposes an emancipatory agenda that relies on abjection and the aestheticization of female pain as a paradoxical way of denouncing the banalization of gendered violence and the ubiquitous sexsationalism of female bodies in our cultural milieu. Above all, this is a story about the marginalized and the power within the margins. It tells us that abjection can be empowering and that otherness should be valued, nurtured, and praised. Moreover, it tells us that those who discriminate and abuse will eventually face their day of reckoning.

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30. *The Devil's Carnival* (2012), [Film] Dir. Darren Lynn Bousman, USA: The Orchard.
31. *Glee* (2009–2015), [TV program] Twentieth Century Fox.
32. *Repo! The Genetic Opera* (2008), [Film] Dir. Darren Lynn Bousman, USA: Lionsgate.
33. *Riverdale* (2017–), [TV program] The CW.

34. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), [Film] Dir. Jim Sharman, UK/USA: Twentieth Century Fox.

35. *Saw* (2003–2017), [Film] Dir. various, USA: Lionsgate.

¹ *Aesop's Fables* is a collection of tales attributed to Greek storyteller Aesop (sixth century BCE), many of which portray animals with human-like qualities to comment on the human condition.

² The team relied on digital platforms to divulge the films, offered live performances before each show, held contests and Q&As, and produced exclusive online content for the fans.

³ Examples of damaged yet empowered goth/ic heroines include characters as diverse as Lisbeth Salander, from Stieg Larrson's *Millennium* series (2005-2007), and the female protagonists of The CW's *Riverdale* (2017–).