



Eyes Without a Face (1960) 8/21/20 Show Notes

- ❖ We watched the [Criterion Collection release of *Eyes Without a Face* \(1960\)](#) for this week's episode. Wonderful release, as expected.
 - [“Eyes Without a Face: The Unreal Reality” by David Kalat](#) --- Here's the booklet essay for the Criterion Collection release.
- ❖ [Franju by Raymond Durnat](#) --- Wonderful book and one of the most significant, and perhaps earliest, studies of Georges Franju written in English. Durnat's a wonderful critic, and it's unfortunate this book remains OOP. We recommend this book and any others in this Movie Paperbacks series, edited by Ian Cameron, all of which seem to be OOP.
- ❖ [Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-garde by Joan Hawkins](#) --- An essential book for anyone with an academic interest in horror films and the way audiences consume them. Hawkins bridges the gap between art-house and exploitation cinema, exploring the connection between high and low culture. She devotes an entire chapter to *Eyes Without a Face* (1960). Highly recommended.
 - “Dr. Génessier's painstaking removal of female skin is reminiscent of the horror stories about lampshades made from the bodies of concentration camp victims... The doctor is obsessed with ‘ordre’ [order], and the factorylike precision of his movements both inside and outside his surgery (what *Variety* termed his ‘stilted acting’) are reminiscent of Erich von Stroheim's Germanic figure expression in Renoir's *La grande illusion* (1937). Furthermore, the doctor himself had an oddly Germanic look...Dr. Génessier may be ‘a normal man who does extraordinary things,’ as Tohill and Tombs assert (23), but he is normal in the way that Hannah Arendt asserted Eichmann was normal. His monstrously rational and chillingly inhumane code of ethics makes him a prime example of what Arendt has called ‘the banality of evil’” (69)
 - Hawkins makes reference to two sources here: *Immoral Tales: European Sex and Horror 1956-1984* (Cathal Tohill & Pete Tombs) and *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Hannah Arendt)
 - “If the film seems to reference German atrocities (the death camps), it also alludes to French collaboration and French anti-Semitism. Dr. Génessier mutilates women in order to restore to his daughter her true face, ‘ton vrai visage,’ he tells Christiane. But ‘vrai visage’ is the term that French Nazi sympathizers used during the war to describe French racial and national purity. ‘...[We fight the Jew in order to restore to France her true face] read a 1941 sign at the...(Institute for the Study of Jewish Questions). And the question here, as in occupied France, is precisely how many people must be removed, how many people must be tortured and killed, to ‘restore’ a true French face – a ‘vrai visage’ that is always, it seems, constructed from the skin of the Other” (70)

- “Even the disfigurement of women in this film has an eerie post-war French resonance...In postwar France, as well, bad memories of the war and patriarchal guilt were initially exercised by (temporarily) destroying the looks of women. While only the most egregious male collaborators and only some of the merchants who did extensive business with the Germans were tried for their crimes, women who had consorted with *Les Boches* – either for sentimental or commercial reasons – were publicly humiliated and had their heads shaved. In a sense, French guilt over all French collaboration was initially mapped onto women’s bodies, and it was women who bore the brunt of the punishment for most of the quotidian traffic in German commerce (prostitutes were punished for doing business with the Germans; bakers and butchers generally were not). In that sense, shaved postwar French women stood in for *all* French collaborators, and their temporary disfigurement served to cover over or mask some of the wider crimes and guilt of the patriarchal homeland” (71)
- ❖ *Georges Franju by Kate Ince* --- A much-needed addition to scholarship on Georges Franju, this book offers a great critical introduction to Franju’s career, as both a documentary filmmaker and European genre auteur. This is perhaps the best entry point into an examination of Franju’s films.
 - “All these comments identify a characteristic oscillation in Franju’s films between realism and its others, an instability that explains why spectators’ and critics’ responses to Franju’s films so often refer to their quality of anxiety...They present a recognizable world, but in a manner – or with a ‘regard’ – that perturbs our sense of the real, pulling it in unfamiliar directions. Despite often presenting himself as a realist, Franju’s own views on representing ‘reality’ were very much in tune with the impression his films made – that poetry (with the terms ‘poetry’, ‘non-realism’ and ‘surrealism’ being interchangeable in this instance) is amid or part of the real” (117-18)
 - “It is important to note that although Christiane brings about and may be said to be responsible for her father’s death, she is not the agent of his destruction or of the termination of his unethical surgical procedures: this is effected by his animal ‘slaves’ in their revolution against Genessier’s tyranny. Christiane’s act can be read in similarly political terms: it is too late for humanity to be restored to her in the shape of a viewable face (Genessier’s transplant surgery has failed), but not too late to arrest the repeated violence being done to other young women abducted to her father’s villa, in the appalling traffic in human faces set up by his illicit operations. Christiane acts for other women, not just for herself” (140)
 - Ince here footnotes an essay “Anxiety, ethics and horror: George Franju’s *Les Yeux sans visage*” by Elizabeth Cowie from the journal *Kinoeye*. It seems like a good essay for anyone interested in other feminist perspectives on the film’s ending.
- ❖ *Masks in Horror Cinema: Eyes Without Faces by Alexandra Heller-Nicholas* --- A brand new book (at time of recording), we haven’t even had an opportunity to read it but we’re recommending it anyway. Alexandra Heller-Nicholas’ other work is quite intriguing and

well-written, and this book will undoubtedly meet the same standard; we'll likely feature it in a discussion on the show at some point.

- ❖ [“Les Yeux sans visage” by Catherine Wheatley from *Senses of Cinema*](#) --- Here's a wonderful brief review of the movie from *Senses of Cinema*. It doubles as a shortcut catalogue of substantial academic writing about the film.
- ❖ [“Terrible Buildings: The World of Georges Franju” by Robin Wood from *Film Comment*](#) --- This article was written for a special documentary-centric issue of *Film Comment* in 1973, obviously including Franju for his *Court-métrage* filmmaking, but that doesn't prevent Wood from extending his insights to Franju's feature films. Wood examines the relationship between Franju's methods of staging and his use of “terrible buildings” as representative of social institutions. Great article!
- ❖ [“Let's Stop Calling Movies Feminist” by Anna Biller](#) --- Here's Anna Biller's oft-referenced blog post examining the shortcomings in our film culture's attitude toward feminist cinema. We'd recommend this blog post (and the rest of Anna Biller's blog) to all listeners, but it seems particularly helpful when questioning *Eyes Without a Face*'s conception of women and their place in the world. Whether or not *Eyes Without a Face* truly matches a criteria for being considered feminist appears to be an ongoing critical debate, but regardless of the other arguments being made, this article deserves to be a part of that conversation.
- ❖ [“Episode 278: Eyes Without a Face \(1960\)” from *The Projection Booth Podcast*](#) --- PBP recorded an episode on *Eyes Without a Face* and it's as informative as you'd expect. This episode features noted horror scholars Maitland McDonagh and Alexandra West, as well as an interview with Kate Ince.