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'THE CURSE OF THE THING IS TECHNICOLOR BLOOD: WHY NEED VAMPIRES BE MESSIER FEEDERS THAN ANYONE ELSE?': THE BBFC AND HAMMER'S COLOUR FILMS, 1957–1962'

Paul Frith

Hammer Film Productions' move to colour in the 1950s has often been discussed in terms of their application of blood and gore becoming the primary concern for the British Board of Film Censors who sought to remove a number of shots deemed to be more objectionable when seen in colour rather than black-and-white. In order to circumvent these restrictions, it has been suggested that Hammer went against the BBFC's wishes by submitting work prints of their colour films in black-and-white in the hope that the examiner would be unable to detect the objectionable material. However, records from the period suggest that the BBFC were not entirely against this process, and that using black-and-white stock during post-production had more to do with cost-cutting than an attempt to out-do the censor. Primarily through an analysis of BBFC reports from this period, this article will therefore address the complexities surrounding the censorship of Hammer's early colour films, paying specific attention to what this practice of submitting black-and-white prints reveals about the decisions taken by the Board when viewing horror in both monochrome and colour.

Writing in his influential 1973 book *A Heritage of Horror*, David Pirie suggested that in order to circumvent the restriction of the British Board of Film Censors (Film Classification since 1984) Hammer Film Productions went against the censor's wishes in providing them with a black-and-white print of their colour film

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Dracula (1958) as a means of concealing vivid shots of blood and gore.¹ Pirie's view is primarily based on the response from the BBFC which criticised Hammer for not following standard procedures when it came to the classification process, with a warning not to let it happen again. Subsequent writing on Hammer's relationship with the BBFC have since favoured this notion that the studio were indeed working to manipulate the Board into allowing certain scenes to be passed which perhaps would not had they been seen in colour.² This approach to Hammer and the BBFC has marked their relationship as one based on restriction rather than negotiation which is also concurrent throughout writing on the BBFC more generally, choosing to emphasise prohibition and the excision of material deemed unsuitable for viewing audiences.³ As Annette Kuhn has highlighted, by focussing upon the 'act of prohibition, excision, or "cutting-out"', histories of film censorship often neglect the complex series of negotiations which take place between the filmmakers and the censors prior to classification; a give and take which, more often than not, results in a series of compromises on both sides.⁴

Through an analysis of BBFC records relating to Hammer films from this period, it becomes clear that the Board were in fact willing to accept the process of submitting black-and-white prints. Secretary of the BBFC Arthur Watkins addressed this in a memo to Hammer's Anthony Hinds, dated 6 February 1957, which states that 'When we view such versions we bear in mind the fact that the completed film is to be in colour and frequently ask for certain reels to be resubmitted when colour has been added.'⁵ During the editing stage, full colour reels of films were rarely seen by the Hammer production team themselves, as working with black-and-white prints until it was necessary to switch to colour simply made good economic sense.⁶ In fact, Hammer continued this process well into the 1960s with no further objection from the Board, making any suggestion that Hammer were attempting to subvert BBFC restrictions by using black-and-white prints a far more complex issue than it may at first seem.⁷

Primarily through an analysis of BBFC reports during the period 1957–1962, this article will therefore offer an alternative approach to the censorship of Hammer's colour productions, paying specific attention to what this practice of submitting black-and-white prints reveals about the decisions taken by the Board when viewing horror in both monochrome and colour. Far from being an attempt to avoid the wrath of the censor, the use of black-and-white in fact added to their concerns, with the BBFC often requesting cuts on the principle that what they had seen in black-and-white was likely to be more unsuitable when seen in colour, even before any colour images had been presented to the Board. The first part of this article will illustrate the primary concerns for the BBFC following this transition to colour in a period when the Board had little to no experience in the examination of this type of horror film. Made during their initial examination at the script stage for the black-and-white version of the film, their reports were primarily concerned with the application of horrific visual effects with sparse reference to any further potentially objectionable material. The impact of the BBFC's remarks are illustrated in the following section which highlights how a number of these decisions, indicating which shots were likely to be a cause for concern once seen in colour, would often be acceptable in the final version of the film with the

censor retracting earlier recommendations. Conversely, the BBFC would also take exception to individual shots they had previously approved, even championed, at earlier stages of the examination process, indicating that the addition of colour to certain scenes had in fact made them more objectionable. While the primary concern of blood and gore shown in full colour was quickly picked up by the examiners at the script stages, the BBFC took umbrage to a number of shots for which the switch to colour added to their concerns, irrespective of the inclusion of horrific special effects; no doubt as a result of the impact of Hammer's lavish production designs. What the transition to colour therefore reveals is far more complex than simply a case of attempted circumvention on the part of Hammer and prohibition by the censor, as has often been suggested. While this transitional period was clearly problematic for both parties during the classification process, the examination of BBFC correspondence for these early Hammer horror productions demonstrates an uncertainty on the part of the censor when it came to the impact of horror in monochrome or colour. The negotiations with Hammer are far more revelatory than has previously been considered in that they provide some insight into how horror in colour, and colour more generally, was perceived by the censors and how this differed from black-and-white. These early responses to the Hammer films, from reports compiled by a small number of examiners who heretofore had minimal experience of the application of colour to the horror genre, would help to determine what would be considered acceptable for audiences during this new era of chromatic horror.

Analysing British film censorship of early colour horror films

An industry-funded body, established in 1912, the BBFC was introduced to stave off the threat of state censorship and to protect the interests of the film industry itself.⁸ In order to ensure their films made it to the screen without being plagued by controversy and the unwanted costs incurred by making cuts, the Board provided filmmakers with guidelines designed to highlight potentially objectionable material. While not a requirement, the Board also requested to see scripts of planned films prior to shooting in order to offer advice on how to avoid censorship of the finished film, reducing the risk of any costly reshoots or cuts being made to the final product. This also afforded the BBFC the opportunity to circumvent any future repercussions from the local authorities whose criticisms of the Board's decisions often resulted in calls for government intervention. As the various local authorities retained the power to further censor, or to even ban, any film passed by the BBFC, the Board took every caution not to draw any unwanted attention in the press by approving a film which may come under scrutiny elsewhere in the country. Following the critical mauling and subsequent commercial failure of *Peeping Tom* (1960) for example, the BBFC found themselves taking a new approach to depictions of sex and violence in order to avoid any further criticism, with subsequent films submitted for approval facing harsher scrutiny as a result.⁹ The relationship between the BBFC and production companies, such as Hammer, was therefore one based on a series of negotiations which primarily focussed on

the stability of the industry and continuation of the Board as a body free from state intervention.

In order to re-examine the relationship between Hammer and the censors, this article will primarily focus upon correspondence between the two contained within examiner reports held by the BBFC for the period 1956–1962. The reason for this period is that it covers the years in which Hammer first started production on a series of horror films made in colour, with an output unrivalled in the United Kingdom until the appearance of Amicus in the mid-1960s. Furthermore, colour became a key selling point for horror during this period, with contemporary reviews for the Hammer films emphasising its contribution to the genre. The *Evening News* review of *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) stated that ‘it shows up human gore simply wonderfully’, while *Tribune* highlighted how ‘each clumsy stitch, each scar is exactly photographed in Eastman Colour.’¹⁰ The impact of Eastman Colour is also demonstrated by the *Daily Sketch*, stating that the ‘blood, grisliness and head-hacking packed into 82 minutes – all in glorious Eastman colour – makes Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* ... seem positively anaemic’, with similar sentiments coming from the *Sunday Express* who address the use of the colour red in the film which is ‘drenched over the screen in the shape of luscious blood dripping from severed hands, gouged-out eyes, decapitated heads. By comparison an abattoir is a rather friendly place.’¹¹ The impact of colour on the horror film, when compared to black-and-white, therefore meant that the British censors had to quickly adapt to this new wave of horror productions using colour in a manner largely unseen up to this point; principally, through the use of horrific visual effects previously only seen in monochrome.¹²

The reports from this period are indicative of wider concerns regarding the use of colour in British cinema following the introduction of the Eastmancolor process in the early-1950s which was quickly felt throughout the film industry, providing a more affordable and less restrictive colour process than that previously offered by Technicolor.¹³ Following the decline of the Technicolor three-strip process, Eastmancolor was therefore being employed by a number of production companies for whom colour had not previously been a viable option; either as a result of financial restriction or the relatively small number of cinematic genres for which the use of colour was deemed to be most effective.¹⁴ As Steve Neale has suggested, ‘Because colour was initially associated with fantasy and spectacle its use tended to be restricted to genres like the cartoon, the western, the costume romance and the musical rather than the war film, the documentary and the crime picture.’¹⁵ Up to this point the majority of films likely to contain the more explicit imagery warranting an ‘X’ certificate were filmed in black-and-white, with colour often reserved for more family-friendly fare. Now that colour was becoming increasingly more affordable, it would soon be exploited through a number of other generic styles not commonly associated with colour up until this point; after horror, the best example of this trend would be the series of nudist films shot in Eastmancolor in the late 1950s/early 1960s.

The BBFC reports suggest that the process of examining black-and-white prints for colour productions was not only commonplace, but something they were accustomed to. However, this is only suggestive due to the small number of

comparative case studies available for this period. Of the 194 colour films made in Britain during 1956–1962, the BBFC hold original examination records for only 23, each consisting of varying quantities of documentation corresponding to the various stages of the BBFC's involvement in a film's classification.¹⁶ Nine of the files from this period are for Hammer productions and contain the most detailed reports of the 23 still available at the BBFC. Two of the remaining fourteen files, for *Dr Blood's Coffin* (1961) and *World without Shame* (1962), confirm through BBFC correspondence that the process of submitting black-and-white prints was not unique to Hammer, nor that the Board had any objections providing that they may see certain reels in colour upon request. It is not my aim here to provide an analysis of all productions which employed the practice of providing a black-and-white print for a colour film: rather, to note that the small number of files available illustrate that this process was utilised elsewhere, and by other companies, without any objection by the BBFC. Given that, it appears likely that this was therefore common practice across a range of film companies and genres. I wish to use that supposition to move the discussion of Hammer and the censors away from one of prohibition and circumvention in order to focus upon how their relationship speaks more broadly to concerns surrounding the introduction of colour to the horror genre.

The Eastmancolor effect

First established in 1934, Hammer Film Productions found success during the 1940s, producing of a series of 'quota quickies' based on popular radio shows of the day.¹⁷ These cheaply made supporting features were designed to fill the void created by the 1927 Cinematograph Act which fought to protect the British film industry, stipulating that 25 per cent of features and 30 per cent of supporting films were required to be British productions. By 1950, Hammer had secured a distribution deal with American theatre owner Robert Lippert whose agreement with Twentieth Century Fox, to provide low-budget supporting features, meant that Hammer now had access to the important US market. This deal led Hammer to look elsewhere for inspiration, moving away from adaptations of British radio dramas for a more universal appeal. The majority of these productions were run of the mill crime thrillers, featuring once-popular American stars, designed to appease audiences on both sides of the Atlantic and to guarantee a US release. However, by the mid-1950s, Hammer were failing to compete with the changes taking place in Hollywood, falling box office receipts and the rise of television. As they had with the radio serials of the 1940s, Hammer looked to exploit the popularity of a recent BBC television series in an attempt to establish product differentiation from other low-budget productions of this period. The success of *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1955) set Hammer on a path leading to their rejuvenation of the horror genre in the United Kingdom through the application of colour to characters and themes derived from the Universal cycle of the 1930s. Their connections established in America also resulted in a series of lucrative distribution deals which made Hammer the dominant force in horror production by the end of the decade.

While *The Quatermass Xperiment* proved to be a success, the Grand Guignol style of horror they looked towards for their next venture had rarely been seen on British screens since the end of the Second World War when a series of black and white horror films, derived from the original Universal cycle, came to an end.¹⁸ As Hammer would have been well aware, the role of the BBFC in the early stages of preproduction was to make recommendations on how best to approach the material in order to avoid any costly editing or reshoots once filming was underway. Though the BBFC team had been accustomed to dealing with horror in the past, they now found themselves in a position wherein they would be required to make recommendations as to what may potentially be prohibitive in colour for a film genre that had previously been associated with black-and-white photography.

The first mention of Hammer's intention to move into production on a series of colour horror films came on 13 June 1956, when James Carreras submitted a treatment to the Board accompanied by a memo which indicated, 'We are re-making in colour, and with our tongue in both cheeks, "Frankenstein"'.¹⁹ The BBFC's primary concerns for this venture became apparent in their report on Hammer's script for the film which placed emphasis upon images of the 'rotting corpse', 'operation scenes', and 'the monster's face' particularly when seen 'streaming with blood'.²⁰ Similar issues are again raised in the report for Jimmy Sangster's subsequent draft screenplay, for which the Board cautioned Hammer on the inclusion of shots depicting 'the creature with a bloodstained bandage round its face'.²¹ In response to this, producer Anthony Hinds' reply stated that 'as I am setting out to make a 'blood chiller' I must incorporate a certain amount of visual horror as that is what the public will be paying to see.'²² In these early stages of negotiation, it already becomes apparent as to how the film would be judged following the addition of colour. For Hammer, the success of *The Curse of Frankenstein* lay in the horrific visual effects seen for the first time in colour and Hinds' pleas to the Board clearly play upon the BBFC's awareness of the plight of the industry.

In early-1957, Hammer presented the first edit of the film several reels at a time and in black-and-white, but had apparently neglected to remind the BBFC that the film would eventually be released in colour. In a memo, dated 6 February 1957, which reported on the screening of a further two reels of the film, Watkins wrote to Hinds:

Although reference was made as far back as the 13th June last, in a letter from Colonel Carreras, to the fact that the film would be in colour, no step was taken to remind us of this when a black and white print was submitted on 11th January, 1957. We are prepared to view intended colour films in a black and white version if we are approached and asked to do so. When we view such versions we bear in mind the fact that the completed film is to be in colour and frequently ask for certain reels to be resubmitted when colour has been added.²³

If Hammer had chosen to submit an early version of *The Curse of Frankenstein* in black-and-white in order to circumvent the restriction imposed by the censors, it was certainly not a fool-proof method as the BBFC still had the right to demand reels of the film in colour for which they foresaw the potential to be more

objectionable than in monochrome. As Watkins' report also suggests, this process left Hammer in a position which made it possible for the BBFC to request cuts to scenes they assumed would require them when printed later in colour. He adds:

There is one cut which I feel sure we shall have to ask you to make and you might as well do it now – and that is the shot in Reel 3 of *Frankenstein* wiping the blood off on his overall after severing the head. It is also the colour factor which has influenced our request, made above, for the shot of the head being dropped in the tank to be removed.²⁴

Following a subsequent viewing of further reels of the film in black-and-white, Watkins also indicated that the 'shot of the monster's face with a blood smear across one cheek when he is standing facing the maid' should be removed.²⁵ Hinds made no further objection to the removal of the 'visual horror' he had previously fought to retain as he later wrote to confirm that the film would be resubmitted in colour with the recommended cuts.²⁶

The case of *The Curse of Frankenstein* demonstrates both the BBFC's developed policy of examining black-and-white prints for colour productions, when requested to do so, and also their attempts to remove potentially objectionable material prior to viewing the final colour prints. The BBFC was therefore making requests to remove shots from the film based upon the likelihood that they would eventually become more unsuitable when seen in colour. While the confusion surrounding whether or not the film would eventually be seen in black-and-white or colour could be seen as an attempt by Hammer to mislead the BBFC, it certainly did them no favours as the scenes requested for removal were in fact left out of the final film.

Despite the concerns raised by the BBFC, were Hammer to capitalise on the success of *The Curse of Frankenstein*, more of the same would be required for their next horror production. Based on their experience with *Frankenstein*, Hammer's draft screenplay for *Dracula* spared no detail in the graphic descriptions as negotiations with the BBFC would inevitably save certain scenes at the sacrifice of those which were deemed to be far more objectionable. The BBFC offered Hammer a clear warning against what they found most prohibitive – as the report for the second draft screenplay, dated 14 October 1957, indicated:

It seems to me that there is nothing censorable in the story as a whole, but a good deal to complain of in details. The curse of the thing is technicolour blood: why need vampires be messier feeders than anyone else? Certainly strong cautions will be necessary on shots of blood. And of course, some of the stake-work is prohibitive.²⁷

In fact, any description of the appearance of blood was highlighted by the Board as being unsuitable for the screen, including mentions of 'Dracula's blood smeared face', 'a trickle of blood on a women's face and neck' and 'Mina on the bed covered in blood'. The author of the report was also quick to spot when Hammer had incorporated scenes which may have been included just to draw attention away from some of the milder moments. In reference to the scene within which a stake is driven through Lucy's heart the report states that, 'Lucy's eyes

“snap open” and she yells, screams, struggles and bleeds in most unseemly style – probably in order to make us think we are being let off lightly in other scenes and had better not object.²⁸ This quotation is particularly revealing as it demonstrates that the BBFC and Hammer entered the negotiation process aware of the fact that some give and take would be necessary from both parties. Having maintained a professional working relationship with Hammer for over two decades, and the industry as a whole since 1912, it is reasonable to suggest that the BBFC were accustomed to the methods employed by filmmakers to retain some of the potentially prohibitive elements of their film rather than sacrificing it all. As the report on *Dracula* suggests, Hammer knew that the BBFC were unlikely to refuse all prohibitive elements of the screenplay, with the inclusion of particularly graphic scenes offered as a sacrifice in order to allow the less-objectionable ones to be accepted. Once approved by the BBFC, Hammer were then able to defend these scenes after filming as they already had the blessing of the censor. Hammer and the BBFC knew how to play the game and both were well aware of the potential consequences further down the line if poor decisions were to be made in either direction; Hammer needed the shocking visuals but also knew how cautious the BBFC were when it came to subject matter of this type.

The BBFC’s report for the second draft screenplay of *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958) wasted no time in pointing out that ‘This will no doubt be a colour film, so a caution, here and elsewhere, on shots of blood’.²⁹ Additional warnings, following viewing a black-and-white print, were directed towards ‘Shots involving blood ... Reel 4. Various isolated parts of the human body ... Reel 5. Shot of brain going into jar ... Reel 11. Frankenstein’s face after he has been beaten up.’³⁰ Again, these recommendations were suggested to Hammer prior to viewing a colour version of the film with the proviso that ‘When the film is viewed in colour the following, in particular, may not be acceptable’. Similar concerns appeared in the Reader’s Report for *The Man Who Could Cheat Death* (1959) in reference to scenes of the ‘hideously scarred’ Margo and the gland which Dr. Georges Bonnet removes from his victims in order to preserve his own life:

If the “inter-parathyroid gland” really looks like a “pickled walnut” it should be all right, even if – as it appears – the film is to be shot in colour. Care should be taken with shots of bits and pieces of people in glass jars; a good many people are squeamish about such things.³¹

While the Board were able to issue a definite warning at the script stage regarding the scarred face regardless of whether or not the film were to be shot in colour (‘We have always taken a strong line about nastily scarred faces and would have to do so again’) the response to the ‘pickled walnut’ is somewhat ambiguous given that, in the same sentence, the BBFC were also warning of the inclusion of various other dissected body parts shown in colour.³² Indeed, upon viewing the black-and-white print, the BBFC responded to its inclusion by stating that ‘We think that the gland will look all right ... but we must reserve final judgement until we see it in colour.’³³

As a result of the controversy surrounding the UK release of *Peeping Tom* in April 1960, the BBFC would have no choice but to take a firmer stance on these potentially gruesome scenes, with Hammer's *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961) being the first of their films to face the Board within this new climate.³⁴ In his memo of 22 August 1960, Trevelyan again singles out multiple instances of violence and gore requiring revisions prior to filming, including:

the shot of the metal sconce being plunged deep into the Marque's back, with fresh blood welling from the wound, especially if the film is in colour ... close-up of the lamb's torn throat ... trails of blood. We do not want a great deal of blood in this film.³⁵

The common objections to using colour in scenes depicting the more explicit moments of violence were highlighted with somewhat greater emphasis by the BBFC, to which Hammer responded by assuring that future productions of this sort were to be removed from their schedule.³⁶ Following minor revisions to the script, which were criticised by Trevelyan for not getting 'to the root of the problem', the BBFC made a series of recommendations after viewing the black-and-white print which were characteristically opposed by Hammer.³⁷ This included an attempt by Anthony Hinds' to draw comparisons between the death of the Marques and that of Marion Crane in *Psycho* (1960).³⁸ This comparison to Hitchcock's film may have seemed just to Hinds but his approach fails to take into account that, when seen as a whole, *The Curse of the Werewolf* (1961) contains many more scenes of violence when compared to *Psycho* and it would be the BBFC's duty to reduce the overuse of violence and gore whenever possible. Furthermore, the BBFC were no doubt bearing in mind that the scene would eventually be seen in colour and therefore inevitably prove to be far more objectionable once the Marques death incorporated the blood-red make-up effects.

The examiner reports for the Hammer films above all demonstrate a primary concern during the script stages for the application of colour to scenes containing graphic shots of blood and gore; something which the censors knew had to be dealt with even before a colour print had been seen. What is also particularly revealing here is that, from *The Revenge of Frankenstein* onwards, it was often left to the script examiner to raise the issue of whether the film is to be shot in colour or black-and-white. While it may have been safe for the BBFC to assume that Hammer were unlikely to return to monochrome given their success with *The Curse of Frankenstein*, the examiner's uncertainty here suggests that Hammer were not forthcoming when it came to providing the BBFC with their decision during the script stage. As Hammer were known to use these examination stages as an opportunity to negotiate on some of the more explicit scenes, it would follow that their noncommittal on the colour decision represents another means of drawing the BBFC into further negotiation at a later stage over shots they had previously approved. While these script reports demonstrate the BBFC's primary concerns for the use of colour, and how Hammer made attempts to negotiate with the censors on these issues, it is also important to consider the subsequent stages of examination which revealed to the BBFC the impact of colour beyond mere blood and gore.

More objectionable in colour or monochrome?

As I have already shown, the BBFC made a series of recommendations to Hammer during the script stages requesting the removal or reduction of scenes judged to be potentially more prohibitive when later printed in colour. This process left Hammer in a position within which the Board was able to request the removal of scenes from their as-yet-unfinished films without fully comprehending their impact on the final print. Similar difficulties followed when Hammer submitted early versions of their films for examination in black-and-white, leaving the BBFC to make further recommendations before seeing anything in full colour. As with the speculative recommendations made at the script stage, these requests were potentially unnecessary given that the BBFC had not yet seen these shots in colour, and would not do so unless they felt it vital to their final decision. Although the examiner had the right to demand to see certain shots in colour before this final verdict could be reached, such requests were typically made when the black-and-white print revealed something which would clearly be objectionable in colour; as before, this was principally concerned with horrific visual effects. However, the impact of the addition of colour was not always tied to horrific special effects, as a number of exceptions taken to the colour version were directed towards the overall impact of the *mise-en-scène*. In some instances, the BBFC actually approved of the switch to colour, suggesting that certain scenes became *less objectionable* than they had previously been in monochrome, raising further issues surrounding the complex nature of the censor's approach to colour when looking beyond gruesome special effects. An additional issue arises when we consider that the BBFC also made recommendations *in favour* of the use of colour, resulting in further complications for Hammer and the Board during the final stages of examination. This is perfectly illustrated in the BBFC's script report for the final death sequence in *Dracula*, described by the examiner as 'imaginative horror stuff and acceptable. (This would be much better as a black and white film, with colour only used for shock effect in a few sequences like this one.)'.³⁹ When it eventually came to viewing the black-and-white print of the film, 'with six scenes missing', Anthony Hinds responded to confirm all of the Board's subsequent recommendations had been met, including 'shots of disintegration ... trimmed to the minimum.'⁴⁰ The scene which the BBFC deemed to be worthy of filming in colour during examination of the script had now come under fire even before a colour version had been shown. Following a screening of the complete film for President Sidney Harris and new Secretary John Nicholls, a further warning was issued to Hammer regarding the disintegration scenes.⁴¹ James Carreras argued back that 'those who go to see horror films expect something out of the ordinary, although quite often the horror mis-fires and they laugh at it.'⁴² Carreras' attempt to play down the effects of horrific moments on the audience had little impact on the Board as the subsequent response to their first look at a colour version of the film insisted that 'little if any ... disintegrating can be permitted' with shots of the disintegrating being eventually ruled out entirely.⁴³

In a memo dated 3 April 1958 (several weeks after the previous report was submitted), further cuts were recommended by the examiner, removing close-ups of the disintegrating hand but also allowing shots of the face if reduced to one

brief flash.⁴⁴ Hinds had clearly pushed the BBFC as far as they were willing to go on the film, but that did not prevent him from making further comments on their use of colour in order to detract from its overall impact:

At our meeting some weeks ago you warned me that certain shots accepted in black and white, might have to be deleted when printed in colour. As a result of this meeting I made certain alterations in the picture and then had it scored, dubbed and the matrices made from the Technicolor print. I note now that the board objects to the shot of Dracula's face approaching Mina in reel 8 but I cannot see how his face looks more censorable in colour than it did in black and white. He is wearing no special make-up, there is no blood on his face, he is not wearing contact lenses – in fact, the rather pink look makes him look, if anything, a little prettier than he did before! ... I appreciate the shot of the disintegrated hand looks different in colour from the way it did in black and white but in my opinion it does not look worse but, if anything, less effective as the poor colouring exposes the trick much more than before ... I know you warned me this might happen but I was so sure that you would agree with me that the shot looks far less effective in colour than in black and white that I took a chance.⁴⁵

The details of the meeting Hinds refers to are not recorded in the BBFC files although what is clear is that he called the Board's bluff by going ahead and striking the Technicolor matrices prior to seeking final approval.⁴⁶ In going through the final stages of the post-production process before a certificate had been secured, Hinds would be taking a costly gamble if it is to be believed that this was an attempt to retain some of the more explicit elements of the disintegration sequence.

Furthermore, his humorous attempts to underplay the sexually charged scene in which Dracula approaches Mina in her bedroom represent further attempts to draw the Board's attention away from a scene for which colour increases the overall impact. The BBFC may have been willing to accept depictions of sex or violence but objected outright to any combination of the two in the same scene. While Dracula's attack is ultimately indicated through a scream played over a shot of an owl, the impending threat is made apparent throughout the scene in his approach up the stairs and into Mina's bedroom. This is accompanied by the longing look on Mina's face as Dracula takes her in his grasp upon the bed which is made much more evocative in colour through the addition of Mina's deep-red lipstick and an increased sense of her state of undress when flesh tones are held in contrast to her plain white night-dress. This scene did eventually make it to the final cut of the film although the objections raised by the BBFC following the review of the colour print demonstrates how the overall impact could not be judged on the use of horrific make-up effects alone. In this instance, Mina's sexuality and the threat of Dracula brought sex and violence together through an increased emphasis upon the former following the introduction of colour. Hinds' pleas to the BBFC were further rewarded when the Board ultimately accepted the final version of the death scene following the removal of one of the shots of the disintegrating face.⁴⁷ The scenes depicting Dracula's attack on Mina and the final

death sequence demonstrate the difficulties faced by the BBFC in making recommendations prior to viewing the final colour print, either at the script stages or during examination of black-and-white prints, as the addition of colour caused concern beyond the mere addition of 'Technicolor blood'. For both scenes, the creative use of colour in set design, costume and special effects presented an added dimension to the depiction of sexuality and violence in the horror film which had been easier to manage in monochrome.

While these negotiation stages worked in Hammer's favour in certain instances, it is also important to stress that the BBFC quickly became accustomed to the fact that shots which were seen to offer nothing objectionable during the early stages of examination may indeed cause problems later once seen in colour; particularly following the difficulties surrounding the aforementioned bedroom sequence in *Dracula*. This is apparent in the BBFC's report following the examination of the black-and-white print of *The Man Who Could Cheat Death*:

The murder by Bonnet of the clerk in the park was almost invisible. From what we could see it appeared to be all right, but presumably there will be clear definition on the colour print. We must therefore have a slight reservation about this scene until we can see it in colour.⁴⁸

Although the colour version of the film reveals that the lack of definition is clearly a creative decision made to emphasise the low visibility in the foggy night-time setting, utilised in order to hide the identity of the killer, the fact that the BBFC made this request is important to consider for two reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates that the BBFC took the opportunity to request shots in colour whenever they felt in necessary to do so, even when the scene was no more objectionable in colour than in black-and-white. As a result of this, it also shows how the BBFC were not able to make a fair assessment of these prints which would hold up when the time came to print in colour. While submitting black-and-white prints has often been read as an attempt to circumvent the restrictions of the censor, it clearly had the potential to produce the opposite effect as the BBFC considered excisions which would later prove to be unnecessary. Not only were Hammer having to regularly make colour prints at the request of the censors, they also had to contend with the fact that their films were already being lined up for cuts which may have not been required.

This issue is also raised after viewing a colour version of *The Curse of the Werewolf*, as Trevelyan wrote to Hinds 'while the colour greatly improved the picture, it does in certain scenes add to our censorship problems.'⁴⁹ The issue of viewing black-and-white prints was evident once again, particularly during shots of the werewolf covered in blood and the scene in which the jailer's daughter is raped by the beggar:

We cannot accept any shots of the beggar, alive or dead, or any shots of her lying after the rape in a corner with lacerations on her face and chest. (Incidentally, these lacerations were not visible in the black and white version).⁵⁰

Conversely, the exception taken to the church scenes, in which thunder strikes and water boils within the font as Leon (the infant werewolf) is baptised, was reversed as the Board deemed it to be 'less offensive in colour than it was in black and white.'⁵¹ The practice of viewing black-and-white prints at the request of the

producers was evidently a fallible one as the process called into question the very nature of the censorship of colour films. While the BBFC may have been accepting of the fact that they were often asked to view black-and-white prints at the editing stage, the case of *The Curse of the Werewolf* demonstrates how this process led to a number of questionable decisions which ultimately had the potential to impact on the final release print of the film. As the BBFC reports for Hammer films of this period indicate, viewing a colour print often led to further exceptions taken to scenes depicting the more overt imagery. In the example of the baptism sequence, however, the impact of the monochrome print had the opposite, and potentially more harmful, effect of the BBFC requesting cuts that were unnecessary in the colour print. This also raises questions as to the impact of monochrome over colour in scenes such as the baptism sequence which is principally focussed upon atmosphere created through set and lighting design over performances or objectionable make-up effects. While the introduction of colour to the horror genre led to further restriction in some areas, the BBFC were also aware that the same was true of monochrome, thus making the notion that the addition of colour merely served to add to the concerns of the censor a far more complicated issue.

Conclusion

Though Hammer may have occasionally avoided cuts to their colour productions as a result of submitting black-and-white prints to the BBFC for examination, the fact remains that the process also gave the Board the opportunity to recommend costly re-edits or cuts to scenes which were not necessarily worthy of excisions. Had Hammer been submitting black-and-white prints of their films in order to maintain as much of the violence and gore as possible, it would be expected that this was to ensure that audience expectations of the 'X' certificate were being met in providing the shocking colour imagery centrally promoted as the key reason to see the film. However, this comes in to question at the turn of the decade when they started production on a series of successful 'U' and 'A' certificated colour films which maintained some of the violence and action of the earlier 'X' films.⁵² Even during the examination process for *The Mummy* (1959), for which Hammer had also submitted a print in black and white, Michael and James Carreras welcomed the idea that the film was initially being considered for the lesser 'A' certificate.⁵³ Although the film did eventually receive the 'X' once a colour version of the film had been submitted, the fact that Hammer were working towards securing the 'A' classification counters the argument that submitting a print in black-and-white was a method employed to circumvent the censor's restrictions. As illustrated in the success of swashbuckler *The Pirates of Blood River* (1962), the decision to shift their attention away from all-out horror, thus welcoming a much younger audience with the 'U' and 'A' classifications, was an important one considering the difficulties Hammer were facing at the turn of the decade. This included the poor performance of horror subjects *The Two Faces of Dr Jekyll* (1960) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1962) and also the extra caution taken by the BBFC following the backlash the Board faced following the release of *Peeping Tom*. Considering the climate in which it was submitted to the Board, Hammer were more than willing to sacrifice multiple graphic scenes as detailed in

the script for *The Phantom of the Opera* in order to open their film up to a wider audience offered through the 'A' classification.

This article has demonstrated that the BBFC's response to the Hammer films raises far more complex issues related to their approach to colour and black-and-white imagery and how, in particular instances, one may prove to be more objectionable over the other. The period in which film production was slowly shifting from black-and-white to colour was one of uncertainty for the BBFC as they found themselves in a position wherein they were now required to pass judgement upon what became more objectionable when seen in either monochrome or colour. While shots of blood and gore would always present a problem for the BBFC, a variety of visual techniques and designs applied to the colour horror film proved to be unfamiliar territory for the Board, with the examples provided here demonstrating the difficulties they faced throughout all stages of the examination process. The Hammer films, therefore, provided the BBFC with a testing ground through which they were able to reflect upon some of the key issues arising from the shift to colour. Similarly, following the rise in production of a series of nudist films shot in colour during this period, the BBFC were having to quickly adapt to other issues which presented themselves as a result of the move away from black-and-white, with the particularly troublesome problem of sex and nudity on the screen being one which would dominate the British cinema of the 1960s.

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Notes

1. David Pirie, *A New Heritage of Horror* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2008), 39–42.
2. For a more recent example see: Steve Chibnall, 'From *The Snake Pit* to *The Garden of Eden*: A Time of Temptation for the Board', in *Behind the Scenes at the BBFC: Film Classification from the Silver Screen to the Digital Age*, ed. Edward

- Lamberti (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 48. There are also numerous fan publications which have discussed the relationship between the BBFC and Hammer at great length, including: *The Dark Side*; *Halls of Horror*; *House of Hammer*; *The House that Hammer Built*; *Little Shoppe of Horrors*.
3. See: Neville March Hunnings, *Film Censors and the Law* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967); James C. Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema: British Film Censorship 1913–1972* (London: Routledge, 1974) and *The British Board of Censors: Film Censorship in Britain 1896–1950* (London: Croom Helm, 1985); Nicholas Pronay, 'The First Reality: Film Censorship in Liberal England', in *Feature Films as History* ed. K. R. M. Short (London: Croom Helm, 1981); Jeffrey Richards, 'British Film Censorship', in *The British Cinema Book: Second Edition* ed. Robert Murphy (London: BFI, 2001); Tom Dewe Mathews, *Censored – What They Didn't Allow You to See and Why: The Story of Film Censorship in Britain* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994).
 4. Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality: 1909–1925* (London: Routledge, 1988), 2–3.
 5. British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), *The Curse of Frankenstein* File, Watkins to Hinds, February 6, 1957.
 6. Interviews with film editors for Hammer Chris Barnes, Alfred Cox, Bill Lenny and Michael Reed discussing the use of black-and-white prints during production can be found in *The House that Hammer Built* 2, no. 4, (August 1999): 186–236.
 7. BBFC, *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* File, John Trevelyan to James Carreras, 1 April 1969. The file for this film mentions viewing a black-and-white print.
 8. For a complete history of the operations of the BBFC, see: Lamberti, *Behind the Scenes at the BBFC*.
 9. A full description on the *Peeping Tom* case can be found in: Anthony Aldgate, *Censorship and the Permissive Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 53–8.
 10. Richard Raine, *Evening News*, May 2, 1957 and Anon, *Tribune*, May 10, 1957.
 11. Harold Conway, *Daily Sketch*, May 3, 1957 and Milton Shulman, *Sunday Express*, May 5, 1957.
 12. 'As far as Hammer horror was concerned ... probably its major generic transgression had little to do with its controversial representation of sexuality or violence but was simply the fact that it was in colour while the majority of earlier horrors had been in black and white.' Peter Hutchings, *Terence Fisher* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 19.
 13. For further reading on the Eastmancolor and Technicolor processes, see: James L. Limbacher, *Four Aspects of the Film* (New York: Brussel and Brussel, 1968); Steve Neale, *Cinema Technology: Image, Sound, Colour* (London: Macmillan, 1985); Steve Neale, 'Technicolor', in *Color: The Film Reader*, ed. Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (New York: Routledge, 2006), 13–23; Sarah Street, *Colour Films in Britain: The Negotiation of Innovation 1900–55* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Heather Heckman 'We've Got Bigger Problems: Preservation during Eastman Color's Innovation and Early Diffusion', *The Moving Image* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2015); James Layton and David Pierce, *The Dawn of Technicolor, 1915–1935* (New York: George Eastman House, 2015).

14. Although the three-strip camera process was phased out in the mid-1950s, three-strip printing using separation matrices was still available until the mid-1970s. Although all Hammer films were shot using Eastman colour negative, from *Dracula* onwards the vast majority were printed in the UK using the Technicolor process.
15. Neale, *Cinema Technology*, 145.
16. For example, the file for *Sapphire* (1959) consists mainly of correspondence from the Royal Borough of Kensington concerning the impact on race relations in the area, while nudist film *My Bare Lady* (1962) merely contains the original certificate approving the film's classification.
17. For further reading on the history of Hammer, see: Howard Maxford, *Hammer House of Horror: Behind the Screams* (London: Batsford, 1996); Marcus Hearne and Alan Barnes, *The Hammer Story: The Authorised History of Hammer Films* (London: Titan, 2007); Denis Meikle, *A History of Horrors: The Rise and Fall of the House of Hammer* (Kent: Scarecrow Press, 2009).
18. While these Universal productions (represented by the 'H' certificate introduced in 1932) were met with varying degrees of success over the next 15 years, an untroubled nationwide release in the UK was not always guaranteed as local authorities often used their right to overrule decision made at the BBFC by making further cuts to films or even banning them outright.
19. BBFC, *The Curse of Frankenstein* File, James Carreras to Arthur Watkins, June 13, 1956.
20. BBFC, *The Curse of Frankenstein* File, BBFC to James Carreras, June 22, 1956.
21. BBFC, *The Curse of Frankenstein* File, Audrey Field to Anthony Hinds, October 19, 1956.
22. BBFC, *The Curse of Frankenstein* File, Hinds to Arthur Watkins, October 24, 1956.
23. BBFC, *The Curse of Frankenstein* File, Watkins to Hinds, February 6, 1957.
24. BBFC, *The Curse of Frankenstein* File, Watkins to Hinds, February 6, 1957.
25. BBFC, *The Curse of Frankenstein* File, Watkins to Hinds, February 11, 1957.
26. BBFC, *The Curse of Frankenstein* File, Hinds to Watkins, February 14, 1957. No further correspondence between Hammer and the censors regarding *The Curse of Frankenstein* exist within the archives of the BBFC suggesting that Hinds adhered to Watkins' requests before the film was granted an 'X' certificate, April 8, 1957.
27. BBFC, *Dracula* File, Second Draft Screenplay Reader's Report, October 14, 1957.
28. BBFC, *Dracula* File, Second Draft Screenplay Reader's Report, October 14, 1957.
29. BBFC, *The Revenge of Frankenstein* File, Second Draft Screenplay Reader's Report, November 25, 1957.
30. BBFC, *The Revenge of Frankenstein* File, John Trevelyan to Anthony Hinds, March 13, 1958.
31. BBFC, *The Man Who Could Cheat Death* File, John Trevelyan to Michael Carreras, November 3, 1958.
32. BBFC, *The Man Who Could Cheat Death* File, John Trevelyan to Michael Carreras, November 3, 1958.

33. BBFC, *The Man Who Could Cheat Death* File, John Trevelyan to Michael Carreras, February 19, 1959.
34. The second in a series of Anglo-Amalgamated productions dubbed the Sadian Trilogy which also included *Horrors of the Black Museum* (1959) and *Circus of Horrors* (1960).
35. BBFC, *The Curse of the Werewolf* File, John Trevelyan to Anthony Hinds, August 22, 1960.
36. BBFC, *The Curse of the Werewolf* File, James Carreras to John Trevelyan, August 22, 1960.
37. BBFC, *The Curse of the Werewolf* File, John Trevelyan to Pamela Anderson, August 30, 1960.
38. BBFC, *The Curse of the Werewolf* File, Anthony Hinds to John Trevelyan, November 28, 1960.
39. BBFC, *Dracula* File, Second Draft Screenplay Reader's Report, October 14, 1957.
40. BBFC, *Dracula* File, Examiner's Report, February 5 and 11, 1958.
41. BBFC, *Dracula* File, John Nicholls to James Carreras, February 13, 1958.
42. BBFC, *Dracula* File, James Carreras to Nicholls, February 14, 1958.
43. BBFC, *Dracula* File, Examiner's Report, February 14, 1958.
44. BBFC, *Dracula* File, Nicholls to Hinds, April 3, 1958.
45. BBFC, *Dracula* File, Hinds to Nicholls, April 8, 1958.
46. This process was particularly crucial to Hammer's efforts to maintain a strict budget given that their films were printed in the UK using the Technicolor imbibition process, involving the more expensive method of creating three separation matrices from the Eastman colour negative, from which prints could then be made. Once these matrices were created, it would have made life very difficult for Hammer had the BBFC requested any further cuts to the film as these separations had to be printed with a high level of accuracy in order to avoid the colours moving out of register; cutting the final matrices was not an option and to print them again unthinkable.
47. BBFC, *Dracula* File, Nicholls to Hinds, April 15, 1958. The film was certified 'X' on April 25, 1958.
48. BBFC, *The Man Who Could Cheat Death* File, John Trevelyan to Michael Carreras, February 19, 1959.
49. BBFC, *The Curse of the Werewolf* File, John Trevelyan to Anthony Hinds, February 2, 1961.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. The *Kine Weekly* review, 10 May 1962, of the 'U' certified *The Pirates of Blood River* (which appeared alongside *Dr No* and *The Guns of the Navarone* in the top 10 box-office hits of 1962) pointed towards the 'spectacular fights' and 'action galore' as key selling points while 'the blood flows freely against exotic backgrounds' which is 'vividly presented on the Hammerscope and Technicolor screen'. The *Kine Weekly* review of *The Sword of Sherwood Forest*, November 24, 1960, highlights the 'hearty action' which 'pits virtue against violence'. Denis Meikle has also described *Visa to Canton* (1960) as 'a second stab at historical

horror in the style of *The Stranglers of Bombay* but with the added benefit of colour' (Meikle, *A History of Horrors*, 103).

53. BBFC, *The Mummy* File, Michael Carreras to John Trevelyan, May 15, 1959.

Notes on contributor

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