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Dark Shadows: Monster Culture on Daytime Television

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The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

Biographical Note

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Dark Shadows: Monster Culture on Daytime Television

Abstract: The soap opera Dark Shadows (ABC, 1966–71) gradually took on elements from horror movies, including an immensely popular vampire character. This article examines how the mixing of genre elements took place and how it changed the show's audience and messaging.

Dark Shadows was an innovative soap opera that ran on ABC from 1966 to 1971, attracting an enduring cult audience and spawning persistent syndication, feature films, spin-off novels and comic books, a television revival, and a wide range of merchandise. In an era when soap operas were defined by domestic melodrama rooted in realism, *Dark Shadows* used genre to reach a wider audience, bringing in teens and children to a format previously conceived as targeted to housewives by adding horror film tropes to a soap opera structure. As genre positioning changed the audience, genre and audience complicated the narrative assumptions of gender dynamics and social values.

From 1964 to 1966, the broadcast time of daytime serials increased from about 200 to 400 hours, with a corresponding increase in the hours spent by viewers on these programs. The bulk of that audience was adult women; as of October, 1970, 71% of day time serial viewers were adult women (Katzman, 201 – 204). Surveying the content, Katzman observes that “The excitement, or entertainment value, in the soap opera world is provided by a number of basic problems... not too far removed from the type of event that might happen next door” (212).

Producer Dan Curtis, allegedly inspired by a dream, pitched a gothic television series to ABC, eventually agreeing to make it a soap opera. Gothic romance, a genre originally defined by 18th-19th century literature, had the kind of cultural prestige that could draw a wide audience; but the gothic genre also had a recent revival in popular novels marketed to women. It was a reasonable fit for daytime programming. The network, in third place behind CBS and NBC, was open to fanciful programming; having already launched *The Addams Family* (1964-66) and *Bewitched* (1964-72), it would also soon air *Batman* (1966-68). Writer Art Wallace developed a series bible and storyline from Curtis's vision, drawing heavily upon his own teleplay aired as an episode of *Goodyear Playhouse* (NBC, 1951-57) in 1957. While the series would have nine writers (eight men and one woman) and nine directors in addition to Curtis (with Lela Swift directing 580 of the 1,225 episodes), Curtis is generally acknowledged as the *auteur* of the series, taking an active hand throughout the production (Scott & Pierson 102; Thompson 9-10). In years to come, Curtis would establish a reputation as a dependable producer and director, most significantly in the horror genre, frequently giving women strong roles and drawing a wide audience.

The show was scheduled at 4:00, between *The Nurses* (1965-67), a medical soap opera, and *Where the Action Is* (1965-67), a musical variety show for teens. By the end of the series, those adjacent programs had been replaced by *General Hospital* (1963-present) and *The Dating Game* (1965–73). *Dark Shadows* replaced *Never Too Young* (1965-66), the first soap opera geared towards a teen audience (Terrace, 276). It ran opposite the soap *The Edge of Night* (1956-84) on CBS, and the game show *You Don't Say!* (1963-69) on NBC. From the beginning, it existed in contested territory, the point when the

homemaker's isolation gave way to kids returning from school; when the show caught on with younger viewers, running home from school to catch it would become a defining anecdote.

But the early *Dark Shadows* was primarily a soap targeted at women. The heroine was Victoria "Vicki" Winters, a young governess raised as an orphan, in search of her own past as she comes to Collinwood, home of the wealthy Collins family. Other storylines concerned the handsome businessman Burke Devlin with a mysterious grudge against the decadent Roger Collins, Roger's disturbed young son David (Victoria's charge), and the efforts of the reclusive matriarch Elizabeth Collins Stoddard, sister to Roger, to maintain family dignity and their fishing business despite her own dark secret. Aside from some literary pretenses – Victoria's story has some resemblance to *Jane Eyre* and gothic literature in general, while Burke Devlin is shown reading *The Count of Monte Cristo* which is echoed in his own storyline as a wrongfully accused man seeking vengeance – the concerns of the early show resemble those of other soap operas.

Tania Modleski observes a reflection of women's work in the flow of daytime television, emphasizing connection to others. Action is less important than reaction; the melodramatic events of most soap operas – murders, kidnappings, amnesia, etc. – are primarily "occasions for characters to get together and have prolonged, involved, intensely emotional discussions with each other" (68). Soap opera characters spend a lot of time figuring out what others are thinking and feeling; constant camera close ups encourage audiences to do the same. The plodding, repetitive nature of these discussions suits the schedule of viewers frequently caught up in household chores and family responsibilities; soap opera creators assumed the average viewer would only see a daytime series twice a week (Benshoff 42). Both the shows and the commercials which accompany soaps (even giving the genre its name) emphasize the detection of personal needs (Modleski 69-71). At the outset, *Dark Shadows* participates wholly in this form. Victoria long ponders but never resolves the mystery of her parentage. Burke's motivations and intentions unfold over 201 episodes, complicated by romantic dalliances with both Victoria and Elizabeth's daughter Carolyn Stoddard, questions of David's paternity, and the complex character of Roger Collins's wife Laura. A silver filigree pen which Burke gives to Carolyn becomes entwined in a murder mystery – a plot thread that, notoriously among fans, takes thirty-three episodes of heated arguments, speculation, and frenzied searching of rooms to resolve.

The intertwining of family personal drama with the family fishing business is likewise typical of soap opera. Charlotte Brunsdon observes that the genre "*colonizes* the public masculine sphere, representing it from the point of view of the personal" (78). Burke Devlin's revenge scheme against Roger involves competition with the Collinsport fishery. Bill Malloy, the manager of the Collins fishing fleet and cannery, is the murder victim who inspires the long search for the filigree pen. Rogers' irresponsibility and Elizabeth's competence are demonstrated repeatedly with the family business. Carolyn's romance with fisherman Joe Haskell is complicated by his determination to succeed on his own. The show's gothic Collinwood sets – showcased not only in the drama but also during the closing credits of each episode - serve a similar function; Dennis Porter observes that the "milieux of soap opera are constituted almost entirely of interiors. It is the serious TV drama of domestic or domesticated spaces" (92). The early episodes of *Dark Shadows* fit Porter's view of soap opera as legitimizing a preoccupation with solely private lives, contributing to the domestication of the American woman (96).

However, *Dark Shadows* already differed from the other soap operas on the air. Its gothic setting gave the show a timeless feel, the atmosphere of a novel from a past century; other soap operas suggested a

mundane realism, and particularly in the mid-1960s sought relevance to the current social climate by presenting sensitive issues (Rosen, Levine 107). Ohrbach's, the department store that provided the fashions for *Dark Shadows*, gave a contemporary look to the clothing of the younger characters, but that contemporaneity went no deeper. In 1962, writer Agnes Nixon prevailed over network resistance to present a story on *The Guiding Light* (1952-2009) about cervical cancer, educating viewers about pap smears and opening the door for other controversial topics such as the Vietnam War, race relations, abortion, narcotics, and student unrest. While *Dark Shadows* spoke to a female audience on sensitive topics such as the gaslighting Jason McGuire and his sexually violent companion Willie Loomis, these issues had no particular tie to the present moment. Carolyn longs for a hip contemporary life, but that longing is stifled by her stolid family and home, making her a more perennial figure of frustrated youth. Most of the action is set in the aging Collinwood mansion; the Maine fishing town Collinsport seems only slightly less archaic. Even The Blue Whale, the town pub, suggests little of the mid-1960s. Porter observes that "soap opera is unique to the extent that it is the only genre in any medium whose duration year after year is coextensive with that of the calendar year. Soap opera has its own rhythms, it's weddings, births and even deaths as well as its Labor Days, Thanksgivings, Christmases, and New Year celebrations" (88-9). *Dark Shadows* presents no holidays and no natural births. Most weddings during the show are either off-screen, cancelled, or disrupted (Scott & Pierson, 250-52). When time setting becomes relevant as the series progresses, it has no connection to the viewers' calendar.

The early episodes of *Dark Shadows* are gothic romance, not gothic horror. Ghosts are discussed even in the first episode, but as metaphor or atmosphere, not plot. In her study of gothic television, Helen Wheatley contrasts television adaptations of gothic novels, targeted primarily at a female viewership, with film adaptations of those stories. Wheatley centers her discussion on 1979 and 1997 adaptations of *Rebecca*, but *Dark Shadows*, largely structured on adaptations of gothic novels (including *Rebecca*), fits Wheatley's observations well: "By bringing the narrative of domestic fear and paranoia back into the home from the late 1940s onwards, the closeness between the threatened heroine and the viewer of the text is reestablished or intensified on television, as a domestic medium" (94). Wheatley further observes that "Contrary to the representation of idyllic homes, the central homes in the female Gothic narrative visually represent a keen sense of domestic anxiety" (104). While soap operas in general might be viewed as helping homemaker viewers cope with the challenges of domestic life, *Dark Shadows* was focused from the beginning on the fears accompanying that existence. In episode 5, painter Sam Evans encounters Victoria gazing over the seaside cliff on Widows' Hill and shares the story of Josette:

Sam: "This is where she stood. Josette Collins. Brought here from France as the bride of the man who built that house. He built it for her. He gave it to her. But he couldn't give her peace."

Vicki: "What happened?"

Sam: "The townspeople hated her because she was a stranger. Her husband's family hated her because she was different. Even the house hated her, so she would cry herself to sleep night after night. And then one day... this is where she stood. And that... that's where she jumped.

Vicki: "How horrible!"

Sam: "A house of tears. Some quiet night if you listen, listen real carefully, you can hear her crying her heart out with loneliness."

Vicki: "But I – What I mean is, that's impossible."

Sam: "You've heard her."

Vicki: "No, no, of course not. There's no such thing as ghosts."

Sam: (chuckles) "Yes there are. Both living and dead."

Vicki: "I don't believe in them."

Sam: "Well they exist all right. What do you say about Mrs. Stoddard? Why, she hasn't been out of that house in 18 years. Is she any more than a ghost? Oh, they exist all right, as she does."

They cry out, as she does. They walk those halls, and haunt it, as she does."

This backstory is drawn straight from Art Wallace's bible for the series (4-5). It would become a foundational myth, repeatedly revised to fit the changing needs of the melodrama. At this point, the story reflects Elizabeth's sad existence and begins an ominous portent that Victoria, too, might be doomed to end her life on Widows' Hill. Elizabeth's plight is eventually revealed as a self-exile because she was tricked into believing she'd murdered her reprobate husband; Vicki's doom seems tied to her mysterious past and her fraught, indissoluble ties to the Collins family, reminiscent of Josette's. But the eeriness of Josette's tale is countered by both skepticism and hope. The supernatural is more a threat than an established reality. This fits with Fred Botting's description of the American Gothic:

Though the grand gloom of European Gothic was inappropriate, the commonplace of American culture was full of little mysteries and guilty secrets from communal and family pasts... The negotiation with fictions of the past, as both a perpetuation and disavowal of superstitious fears and habits, attempts to banish certain shadows haunting the American daylight and discovers new dark shapes.

(75)

These domestic concerns coincide neatly with those of soap opera, but the gothic framing allows literary pretenses – albeit a literary genre never far from popular appeal – that could hold the interest of Dan Curtis, and provided a framework potentially open to a wider audience.

Curtis had motivation to widen that audience. In July, 1966, the show had a Nielson rating of 4.3 and a 17.8% share of homes that were watching television during its time slot (Scott & Pierson 104). The numbers stayed low, putting the show in danger of cancellation, prompting Dan Curtis to take some risks. Reportedly, his daughters suggested he make the show scarier (Thompson 82). Curtis added increasingly overt supernatural elements to the show, until in episode 70, we see (unobserved by other characters) the ghost of Josette emerge from her portrait hanging in the Old House. In episode 85, the ghost of Bill Malloy appears to Vicki, adding a new twist to the mystery of his murder; he and Josette begin appearing frequently, though not so regularly as to lose the thrill of each apparition. In episode 123, Roger's estranged wife Laura appears, the first central character overtly rooted in the supernatural. With the Burke Devlin rivalry played out, she becomes the show's primary antagonist. Laura is a Phoenix – a being reborn every 100 years, who has supernatural powers involving fire. Harry Benshoff observes that "Most of the stylistic and narrative elements that would 'click' when Barnabas Collins was added to the milieu a few months later were either in place or developed during this story arc" (16). Laura had supernatural powers, posed a threat to the family, necessitated repeated trips to the graveyard, drew in

a psychic investigator, and was opposed by Josette's ghost. The initial Phoenix storyline was concluded in episode 191 (though later revisited) because the actress who played Laura, was pregnant – a fitting moment for a significant change in the show and its audience.

The vampire Barnabas Collins was introduced, after some foreshadowing, in episode 211 on April 18, 1967. Barnabas was originally intended for a finite thirteen-week story arc, a villain to be killed off after a few weeks of menace and murder. Jonathan Frid's performance as Barnabas added remorse and reluctance to his monstrous evil, which the writers were quick to support. A ratings spike and enthusiastic fan letters soon led to Barnabas – with an on-and-off cure to his vampirism – becoming a permanent addition to the cast, and soon he was the central character of the show. Ratings skyrocketed. In June 1967, a few months after Barnabas's introduction, ratings had risen to 5.0 with a 19.6 share; a year later, they were at 7.5 and a 28.8 share, with over 16 million weekly viewers (Scott & Pierson 104). The formerly failing soap opera became a phenomenon.

As Barnabas became the center of *Dark Shadows*, the characters realigned around him. Willie Loomis is the first to encounter the vampire when he accidentally frees him from a Collins family mausoleum in a hunt for jewels; Barnabas subjugates Willie, transforming the potential rapist into a sympathetically pitiable henchman. Barnabas insinuates his way into the modern Collins family as an "English cousin"; though hungering for blood, he also genuinely cares about the well-being of his family. Barnabas sparks romantically -- and predatively -- with both Vicki and Maggie Evans, both tied to Josette, who we now learn was in a romantic triangle with Barnabas, an unwilling bride to an older Jeremiah, and leapt from Widows' Hill pursued by her lover. After Barnabas abducts Maggie, she ends up in a sanitarium, treated by psychologist Julia Hoffman. Julia discovers the secret of Barnabas's vampirism, and in the course of her efforts to cure, defeat, or exploit him, she falls in unrequited love with him, becoming his most faithful ally.

Barnabas changed the dynamics of the show, but he enhanced, not diminished, its appeal as soap opera. His archaic formality, his hopeless longing for Josette, his tragic affliction, and his overt fascination with the women who became objects of his attention gave him sex appeal. Blogger Patrick McCray remarks, "If Barnabas were any more antithetical to the Schlitz-swilling husbands of 1967 middle America, he'd be a woman. And in his own way, he comes awfully close" (40). McCray insists that while Barnabas's kidnapping and brainwashing (he gradually convinces Maggie that she *is* in fact Josette) are abhorrent and cruel, "There's no rape" (41). The sympathetic presentation of a murderous, violative vampire might seem a problematic defense of toxic masculinity, but it demonstrably appealed to a female audience. Giving Willie a less antagonistic role required a more dramatic transformation: demasculinization through supernatural domination, physical beatings, and forced labor at repellant tasks. Barnabas kills the gaslighting Jason McGuire. The demon lover is more powerful and more appealing than the realistically toxic men. While rape would be troublingly forgivable in soap operas for years to come, *Dark Shadows*' supernatural framing of sexual aggression addressed fears and culpability while moving threats farther into fantasy. In episode 178, Barnabas half asserts, half pleads to Julia, "If I can love and not destroy, surely forgiveness can be found." This forlorn hope defines the character throughout the series.

While *Dark Shadows* remained unmistakably a soap opera, it was taking on conventions and tropes of the horror genre. Relationships, domestic fears, and contemplation of thoughts and feelings remained important to the show, but were making room for concrete supernatural threats; gothic romance

blurred easily into gothic horror. This was not as off-putting for daytime viewers as it might have seemed. Women had produced and consumed horror at least as early as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (Ritsma 48). Barbara Creed argues the importance and pervasiveness of the "monstrous-feminine" in film and culture; she notes a central theme in gothic horror films in which the heroine is haunted by the memory of another woman, a symbolic mother, just as Vicki is haunted by the ghost of Josette (54). Frid (a then-closeted gay man) was surprised to find himself a sex object, but Barnabas was also a point of identification for female viewers. Unable to live as a normal man and capable of generating his own "offspring", the vampire had much in common with his female audience. In her essay on the female look in horror film, Linda Williams asserts "the monster's power is one of sexual difference from the normal male. In that difference he is remarkably like the woman in the eyes of the traumatized male: a biological freak with impossible and threatening appetites that suggest a frightening potency precisely where the normal male would perceive a lack.... The strange sympathy and affinity that often develops between the monster and the girl may thus be less an expression of sexual desire... and more a flash of sympathetic identification" (22-3). With this identification and this mixing of genre conventions, Barnabas supplanted Vicki as central character of the series. The mystery of her parentage is forgotten, never to be resolved. Vicki's storylines begin to revolve around Barnabas, while Barnabas gets more screen time and greater involvement in most of the storylines of the show. Until episode 275, the show had always opened with a voice-over beginning 'My name is Victoria Winters...'; in episode 275, that voice-over is provided by Nancy Barrett, not speaking identifiably as Carolyn, leading to rotating roles as narrator by most of the cast. Alexandra Moltke left the show due to pregnancy in episode 627 on November, 1968; Victoria would be briefly recast twice, then written out abruptly in episode 665. Williams notes that "A key moment in many horror films occurs when the monster displaces the woman as site of the spectacle" (24). This restructuring of a series (rather than a film) around a popular character might not precisely represent the Freudian moment of horror Williams posits as a monster symbolizes a male child's first encounter with the 'mutilated' body of his mother, but it aligns with the mixing of genre conventions as *Dark Shadows* becomes a horror soap opera.

In examining *Dark Shadows* with regard to genre, it is crucial to acknowledge Jason Mittell's influential assertion that television genre is not inherent to the form and context of a text, but rather shaped by cultural circumstances, industrial motivations, and audience practices (*Genre and Television* 6-7). This approach explains *Dark Shadows'* strategic blending of horror elements into a story positioned primarily as soap opera; Mittell observes that "The mixing of genres is a cultural process enacted by industry personnel, often in response to viewing practices" ("A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory" 7). While Mittell prioritizes conception of genre as a category of text over than seeing it simply as a component of text (*Genre and Television* 7), the narrative, characters, pacing, visuals, and moral framing of the show were all substantially altered by deliberate shifts in generic conventions. This negotiation of genre, a ploy to improve ratings, altered narrative and theme as it altered the audience.

Dark Shadows had started as a soap opera with some appeal for younger women: a fan writes, "Most soap operas didn't focus on women who had just turned eighteen" (Oswald 47). But with the introduction of a vampire protagonist, followed by a nonstop supernatural succession of witches, werewolves, curses, more vampires, and other supernatural horrors, new viewers included more than just teen girls. Clark, Gresch, and Robin report that children wrote to tell their problems to "Uncle Barnabas" who struggled with "being bad" and would thus understand their conflicts. Similarly, they note, "teenagers identified with Barnabas' loneliness and isolation. His desire to fit in was forever

blocked, much like the adolescent audience *Dark Shadows* was drawing.” (124) Benshoff found that many fans, “while growing up... felt like outsiders and that *Dark Shadows* afforded them a place of comfort and/or a fantasy of power” (“Resurrection of the Vampire” 247). Benshoff’s interviews confirmed a strong presence of gay and lesbian viewers as well, drawn for much the same reasons (though perhaps also finding particular appeal in the campiness of the show.) Conspicuously absent from the original audience were adult working men, seldom home at 4:00 pm. Some boys would remain fans of the show into adulthood, but in the original airing, *Dark Shadows* spoke primarily to those excluded or not yet included by the patriarchal order.

The children and teens of the late 1960s had been primed for horror content by the trend referred to as Monster Culture. Supernatural monster movies had been popular in the 1930s and forties, but had given way to thrillers with science fiction overtones in the fifties. Parents, religious authorities, and politicians of the period saw supernatural horror as a threat to their children, suppressing it through such institutions as the 1954 Comics Code Authority. Monsters returned to film screens in 1957. *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* was successful with teens. Hammer Films released *Curse of Frankenstein*, then *Horror of Dracula* the following year, and a long series of films as Hammer acquired Universal’s copyrights. Monsters found an even wider audience on television in 1957. Screen Gems, the television subsidiary of Columbia Pictures, released “Shock!”, a package of 52 horror films and other thrillers, including Universal’s *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, and *The Wolf Man*. Highly successful on local television stations needing content, this package was followed by an additional collection the next year. Thus began a wave of entertainment and merchandise popular with children and teens. Horror movie show hosts became celebrities, novelty records like “Monster Mash” became hits, and toys and models abounded. *The Addams Family* (ABC, 1964-66) and *The Munsters* (CBS, 1964-66) debuted almost simultaneously. Genre film magazines became influential for fans and advocated for wider acceptance; a 1965 issue of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* featured the essay “Monsters Are Good for my Children – Yours Too!!!”, credited to “modern mother” Terri Pinckard (without mention of her own published science fiction), arguing that fictional monsters teach children to deal with fear better than the real-world horrors they will inevitably encounter. Henry Jenkins notes how the parents of boys, especially mothers, “acted to accommodate – and in many cases, facilitate – our fascination with monsters” (96). In the space of a few years, monsters had become viewed as healthy childhood entertainment endorsed by moms. *Dark Shadows* was a manifestation of that endorsement, a monster show that mothers and children could enjoy together.

Dark Shadows was still not primarily a horror series. Rick Worland notes the difficulty in applying Robin Woods’s definition of horror to the series, specifically the monster as a disruption to normalcy, asking where and when did normalcy ever abide? (171). *Dark Shadows* continued to follow the usual patterns of soap operas: narrative based in long, repetitive conversations, heavy use of close-ups, focus on an extended family, personal relationships, emotional and moral conflicts, settings in domestic interiors with only occasional excursions into new locations, and so on. Sponsors for the show continued to advertise household cleaners and kitchen goods, targeting housewives, which would factor into the eventual cancellation of the show (Benshoff 10-11, McBride). Perhaps if the series had been owned by the advertisers, as most soap operas of the time were, it would never have sought to bring in younger viewers. *House of Dark Shadows* and *Night of Dark Shadows*, the theatrical films released in 1970 and 1971, contrast significantly with the TV series, retelling stories of the Collins family with the suspense, fatalities, and gore expected in horror movies (particularly resembling a Hammer production) and

drawing a more typical audience for that genre. The resolution of the first movie is conventional for the genre; the monster, Barnabas, is destroyed, preserving the heterosexual couple through man's heroic action (Worland 179).

The grafting of horror film elements onto the soap opera structure of the TV series pushed it beyond the confines of both genres as they stood in the sixties. The TV show drew less from current Hammer films than from the Universal monster films of the thirties and forties. *Dark Shadows* replicated not just vampires, werewolves, and other obvious Universal monsters, but also the timeless feel of the movies' ambiguous settings. It was often difficult to pin down the setting of a Universal film; contemporary elements mixed with the trappings of past centuries. Even before the advent of the monsters, Collinwood felt removed from 1960s America. Then a séance sent Vicki back to 1795 for a sequence of episodes detailing Barnabas's origin as a vampire cursed by his spurned witch lover Angelique, the first of many time travel storylines which eventually branched into alternate timelines as well. The sets were fundamentally unchanged, give or take a telephone or electric light. Collinwood was always recognizable, and always a world removed from the mundane world the viewers lived in. In these past eras, the Collinwood residents were played by the same cast as in the present day, sometimes echoing their primary characters and sometimes contrasting with them. This repertory approach, too, resembled the Universal films, as a fairly stable group of actors (Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff, Lon Chaney Jr., etc.) returned for movie after movie but frequently switched between roles; Frankenstein's monster was played by four different actors from 1931 to 1948, frequently alongside another actor who had played the monster. Moreover, the characters themselves are more types than individuals; the poster for *The House of Frankenstein* (1944) promoted the return of "the Hunchback", invoking perhaps the Notre Dame bell ringer, or Frankenstein's assistant, or the broken-necked Ygor, but as an individual he was a new character. In both *Dark Shadows* and the Universal films, the established personas of the performers and the types of character they played became part of the genre appeal of the series.

Dark Shadows differed significantly from the Universal films, however, in adherence to serial structure. The Universal monster movies make no apparent effort to set up any sequels, however inevitable the continuation of the franchise was. The monsters are killed off at the end of each movie, only to be abruptly resurrected in the next sequel. There's some nod to continuity between movies - past events are referenced, and the monsters to be revived are generally found in the place where they last died - but never any evidence of a plan. The horror genre demanded that the monster be destroyed and normalcy restored at the end of each film. The soap opera base of *Dark Shadows* demanded a narrative that never ended, where any character could survive even when dramatic focus shifted to new situations.

Barnabas's popularity with viewers made his originally planned story arc as a murderous threat to the family untenable. Frid's performance suggested sympathetic complexity, but the perpetuation of that character in a soap opera format demanded that complexity be extended in plot and dialogue. To be sure, Barnabas was not the first sympathetic monster in popular culture. The monster in *Frankenstein* (1931) was a misunderstood misfit, King Kong (1933) died tragically when abducted from his home, and the villainess of *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) showed a reluctance to follow her vampiric urges. Dracula himself expressed torment in the 1931 movie: "To die, to be really dead, that must be glorious!". But Barnabas was the most sympathetic monster yet, shifting from villain to protagonist. When the "Leviathans" story arc (1969-70) attempted to return Barnabas to villainy, fan complaints led the writers to shift him abruptly back to a heroic role. The final episode of the series in April, 1971 offered a

surprising amount of closure for a soap opera, especially since the story of the last four months had taken place in “1841 parallel time”, involving characters of an alternate world where Barnabas and Josette had lived long enough to marry, with no literal connection to the main narrative of the series. Frid plays Bramwell Collins, the son of this timeline’s Barnabas and Josette, who has a happy romantic ending with the character played by Lara Parker, who had portrayed Angelique; this was a thematic resolution of the conflict which had driven much of the show’s storylines, but it was a departure from the horror formula as well.

Barnabas’s potential redemption was a template for similar redemptions throughout the series. Willie changed from would-be rapist to loyal servant. Julia Hoffman went from ruthless mad psychologist to unrequited lover and faithful ally of Barnabas. Quentin Collins was the most overt echo of Barnabas, developing from a malicious ghost in a *Turn of the Screw* pastiche into a charming rogue, a werewolf, an immortal, and a hero/ teen heartthrob who rivaled Barnabas. Among the monsters of *Dark Shadows*, Laura Collins/ the Phoenix stands out as irredeemable. It is possible to read misogyny or a defense of toxic masculinity into this; Julia’s and Angelique’s redemptions could be taken as mere tangents to Barnabas’s. Cheap forgiveness of men would be an ongoing problem in soap opera, most memorably when *General Hospital*’s rapist Luke and his victim Laura became lovers in a hugely popular storyline starting in 1978. But forgiveness does not seem cheap in *Dark Shadows*; redemption from monstrosity requires long suffering – often centuries of it. Nor are the offenses of men glossed over. A recurring implication of the series is that women and children should be believed. Roger and Elizabeth, always mindful of the family reputation, seek to deny or conceal the supernatural afflictions of the Collins heritage, but the audience’s sympathies are evoked more for those who witness the monsters – most frequently young David and Carolyn. In episode 344, David insists that he has played with a ghost girl (Barnabas’s sister) to his cousin, who listens where the rest of the family has dismissed him:

David: “Sarah’s real. I mean she’s a real ghost.”

Carolyn: “You want to know something David?”

David: “Yes.”

Carolyn: “I do believe you. “

By combining the standard soap opera element, the effort to understand others’ feelings and needs, with the horror convention that monsters are real, *Dark Shadows* acknowledges validity in the perspectives of both the victims and their antagonists that soaps and horror movies might otherwise neglect. This is recognized, but not simply accepted, as part of the human condition. When Julia, hopelessly smitten, listens sympathetically to the tale of Barnabas’s fateful romance with Josette, she comments, ““To love without destroying is not a particularly prominent human trait. Perhaps you’re more human now than you realize” (ep. 348).

Dark Shadows is a reconciliation of genre and gender dynamics. It is comparable in some ways to *Star Trek* (CBS, 1966-69); where Dan Curtis widened his audience by reaching beyond soap opera to bring in children and teens instead of just women, Gene Roddenberry added personal warmth and human struggles inspired by the western *Wagon Train* (NBC 1957-62, ABC 1962-65) to his science fiction adventure, drawing an enduring female audience to what had been perceived as a male genre. Though left unsaid at the time, this blending also allowed the show to appeal to viewers outside the accepted gender binary of the time. Benshoff notes the homoeroticism of the Barnabas/ Willie relationship, the “fag hag” devotion of Julia, and the many gay fans of the show (*Dark Shadows* 49, 111, 32-6).

In a period when popular culture was becoming the battleground of a culture war, where soap operas were referencing social issues and horror films were presenting more explicit sex and violence, *Dark Shadows*, with the manners of a 19th century novel and the thrills of a 1940s monster movie, might have seemed dully conventional. But it was that focus on convention – the mixing and recontextualizing of long-established tropes – that offered something new for the established daytime audience and brought in a new audience as well. As Jonathan Frid commented in a 1970 *Newsweek* interview: "Youngsters today are looking for a new morality... and so is Barnabas. He goes around telling people to be good, then suddenly sets out and bites somebody's neck. He hates what he is and he's in terrible agony. Just like the kids today, he's confused — lost, screwed up, and searching for something."

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