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Dario Argento

The review of Dario Argento is based on two of his films; *Deep Red* also known as *Profondo Rosso*, and *Tenebre*. Both films are considered horror and thriller films. *Deep Red* features a musician, Marcus Daly (David Hemmings), who witnesses the murder of tenant in his building (the tenant happens to be psychic). Daly spends the movie trying to figure out who did it, and as the movie progresses, more and more characters are murdered. *Tenebre* features a similar story. In *Tenebre*, the main character is an author, Peter Neal (Anthony Franciosa). He has written a book called *Tenebre* and is on a book tour in Rome. While there, his life is threatened by a murderer who is using Neal’s book as a model. It would appear Neal is out to solve the murder, but with a plot twist, it turns out he had figured out who the murderer was, and become a murderer himself.

I think Argento is an auteur, an auteur being a complete filmmaker . Argento wrote and directed both films. This means he had complete control of the story as well as how the story was told. There are similarities in style between both films. Argento uses the same band, Goblin, to compose and perform the music. Observing the style of actors in both films shows Argento had a say in who would appear in his films. For example, the lead actors in both of his films were foreigners to Italy. Also, Argento’s girlfriend, Daria Nicolodi, appears in both films (Anne in *Tenebre* and Gianna Brezzi in *Deep Red*). For the most part, Argento had complete control of the editing as well. *Tenebre* suffered from being heavily edited for consumption in Britain and the United States. In Britain, the five seconds of “sexualized violence” was removed by the British Board of Film Classification . It also was listed with 38 other films in the list of “Video Nasties,” causing it to be banned for sale in the UK . It took two years for the film to even appear in the US and when it did, it was heavily edited and titled *Unsane* . It was ten minutes shorter, minus the violence and character setups, which left the film incomprehensible and open to bad reviews. *Deep Red* had twenty-two minutes of footage cut in the US version, and just 11 seconds for the UK version. *Tenebre* in particular featured gruesome violence and perverse sexual ideas. Europe is traditionally tolerant of sex, but not violence. The flip-side, the US traditionally accepts violence but with little tolerance for anything sexual. Argento does an excellent job, pushing both Europe and North America’s sensitive film watching buttons with *Tenebre*. *Deep Red* has the same underlying ideas as *Tenebre* but maybe not as pronounced. For example, *Deep Red* has sexual perversion when it was discovered Carlo (Gabriele Lavia) was having relations with another man. In *Tenebre*, it was more pronounced with it showing lesbian’s kissing and scenes with several topless women. *Deep Red* also had its fair share of gruesome violence. These features make up Argento’s signature style. To a director who is an auteur, “The subject is an essential aspect of style” . Argento writes and directs his films for greatest audience impact. For example, the inspirations for the murder scenes in Deep Red were from thinking what painful injuries the audience could relate to . There is a scene where a woman is killed by scalding water. In another scene, a man has his head bashed into office furniture before being killed by a knife. In the last scene, the murderer is killed by having her necklace caught and chokes and gets decapitated. Everyone likely knows what it feels like to be burned by hot water, bump or hit office furniture, or have an article of clothing or jewelry caught on something. Argento plays off of this pain in *Deep Red*. In *Tenebre*, Argento uses a combination of known fears. There are many scenes featuring fences that people are scaling over. A vicious dog chases a helpless woman. A signature of the murderer is to cut the power and phone lines (*Deep Red* predominantly featured the phone lines being cut), plays on the fear of being helpless and unable to call for help or be able to see the imminent danger.

Another feature of Argento’s films is the use of cinematography. In *Deep Red,* Argento uses odd angles, moving cameras, and different lighting techniques . It would seem he is defining his style with *Deep Red* while *Tenebre* is taking his existing style and pushing it further. In *Tenebre*, Argento purposely shots much of this film with bright or harsh lights. Argento states that this approach mimics what is seen in police shows on television and is a modern style of photography . Argento also uses advances in camera technology in *Tenebre* to perfect his shots. The example in *Tenebre* is the close up tracking shot of house, where the camera starts at one window and winds around the house to a window on the other side, setting up the scene where the two women are killed.

Overall, both *Deep Red* and *Tenebre* feature style similarities which make an Argento film an Argento film. Both films share plot ideas (a main character that is artistic in nature determined to discover the murder) and film genre. The music style is similar, helped by the fact the same band is composing and performing in both movies. The locations are similar, both films feature locations around Rome. The editing and camera points-of-view are similar as well. For some reason, I found *Tenebre* more enjoyable to watch. There were ideas in *Deep Red* which were perfected in *Tenebre*. For example, at the end in *Tenebre*, the detective bends down to inspect the murder scene and standing hidden right behind him is the murderer. In *Deep Red*, there is a scene inside a house, there is a scared woman moving towards the camera, and she is knocked to the ground and right behind her is the killer. This shot wasn’t as dramatic or cleanly done in *Deep Red*, but the idea appears to have carried over to *Tenebre*. Overall, I think both films strike a strong response, regardless if you liked or disliked the films.

# Bibliography

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