

# **An Imagined Binary:**

## **The Exilic Body and the Host Nation in the Hollywood films of Peter Lorre, Béla Lugosi and Conrad Veidt, 1930-1956**

Submitted by **Gábor Gergely**, to the University of Exeter as a **thesis** for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in Film Studies, May, 2011.**

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

*Nagypapának / for Granddad*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates representations of exile in Hollywood cinema in the period between 1930 and 1956 through the films of Peter Lorre, Béla Lugosi and Conrad Veidt. It aims to dispel the remarkably durable assumption prevalent in critical approaches to Hollywood cinema that by virtue of its hegemonic, reactionary and exclusionary modes of representation, especially in what is considered its 'Golden Age,' otherness is excluded from, or only obliquely alluded to in Hollywood cinema. This thesis contends that Hollywood uses European émigré actors to speak of the experience of exile, exilic attempts at integration into the host nation, and the sometimes grand, often pitiful failures of these attempts.

Dictated largely by its contention that a consistent and fairly constant discourse surrounding exile can be apprehended in Hollywood cinema, this thesis focuses primarily on the film texts that form its corpus. The close reading of key texts is underpinned by a productive clash with existing critical writings on exile, shifting the focus back to the films, themselves, from analyses of the system, historical accounts of migration and exile, or critical evaluations of archival material and the impact of marketing and political strategy on production.

The thorough engagement with the films is further supported by an interdisciplinary critical framework. Theories of the nation and national cinema (Hayward, 2000), body theory (Butler, 1993), and critical works on identity, stereotyping and pathology (Gilman, 1985; 1991; 1995) are combined with critical accounts of immigration in the US (Behdad, 2005) and analyses of the significance and symbolism of blood in US concepts of nationhood (Chinn, 2000) to explore the complex system of representation that dictates the onscreen lives and deaths of exilic stars. Critical works on the language of death and bereavement (Seale, 1998; Hallam et al, 1999), the concept of the posthuman (Halberstam et al, 1995), Lefebvre's theory of space (1991) and Baudrillard's analysis of interior design are used to elaborate my argument further.