

Episode 71: Joe Vallese — Editor of It Came from the Closet

Emily Einolander 00:21

Welcome to the Hybrid Pub Scout podcast with me, Emily Einolander.

Corinne Kalasky

And me, Corinne Kalasky.

Emily Einolander

We're mapping the frontier between traditional and indie publishing. And today's guest is Joe Vallese, editor of the new anthology from the Feminist Press, *It Came from the Closet*.

Corinne Kalasky 00:37

Through the lens of horror from *Halloween* to *Hereditary*, queer and trans writers consider the films that deepened, amplified and illuminated their own experiences. Horror movies hold a complicated space in the hearts of the queer community, historically misogynist and often homo and transphobic, the genre has also been inadvertently feminist and open to subversive readings. Common tropes, such as the circumspect and resilient final girl, body possession, costumed villains, secret identities and things that lurk in the closet, spark moments of eerie familiarity and effective connection. Still, viewers often remain tasked with reading themselves into beloved films, seeking out characters and set pieces that speak to your and parallel unique ways queerness encounters the world. *It Came from the Closet* features 25 essays by writers speaking to this relationship through connections both empowering and oppressive. From Carmen Maria Machado and *Jennifer's Body*, Jude Ellison S. Doyle on *In My Skin*, Addy Tsai on *Dead Ringers* and many more. These conversations convey the rich reciprocity between queerness and horror.

Emily Einolander 01:45

Joe Vallese is editor of the anthology *What's Your Exit: a Literary Detour through New Jersey*, his creative and pop culture writing appears in *Bomb*, *VICE*, *Backstage*, *PopMatters*, *Southeast Review*, *North American Review*, *Narrative Northeast*, *VIA: Voices in Italian-Americana*, among others. He has been a Pushcart Prize nominee, and a notable Best American Essays for his essay, *Blood Brothers*. He is currently clinical associate professor in the expository writing program at New York University, and previously served as site director and faculty for the Bard Prison initiative. Joe holds an MFA, New York University and MIT and BA degrees from Bard College. Welcome, Joe.

Corinne Kalasky 02:30

Welcome.

Joe Vallese 02:31

Hi, thanks for having me. So excited to talk to you.

Emily Einolander 02:34

We're excited to talk to you. And we're excited to talk about horror and queerness, two of my favorite things. So tell us a little bit about yourself and your writing and publishing career so far.

Joe Vallese 02:48

Yeah, well, um, you, thank you for reading that bio. Sums a lot of it up. But I mean, essentially, you know, I've been writing my entire life. I write both fiction and nonfiction. And I've started dabbling recently in screenwriting, which I'm really enjoying and feels like a very natural evolution for me, especially since I'm interested in writing horror screenplays, queer horror, in particular. And, yeah, I just, you know, something I've come to discover about myself. You know, we all I'll speak for myself, I think many of us have novels that are sitting in our desks or almost got published and you had an agent and, you know, didn't go anywhere, or almost sold and didn't sell. And I definitely have a bit of a laundry list of those experiences myself. But I feel like what I love about anthologies, and this is my second, the first one about New Jersey came out in 2010. So it's been a while, but they take so long to make. So actually, *It Came from the Closet* is about five years in the making. So yeah, it's been almost five years to the day when it comes out since I first thought of the idea to publication. And the experience of making the book is so much different than the experience of writing a book. And it's a lot more fun. And so when I, when I had the idea for this, I there was a part of me that initially thought that I might write a memoir about growing up queer and Catholic and Italian and then having heard as part of a or writing a series of essays. And I just kind of, I stopped myself and I said, Wait a second, I think this is something that needs a chorus and needs a lot of voices. It would be doing such a disservice to the concept if it was only about myself, and that would be so boring and I think and so that's when it sort of dawned on me that I wanted to create this book and I was looking for this book. And it was one of those things where I was like this must exist, there must be a book of personal essays, from queer writers writing about her, it must exist. And it just, it didn't. And then I got in that weird area where like, uhm, but if somebody's making right now, like, am I going to try to start and somebody else is already doing it. And you know, you get kind of paralyzed that that's going to happen. And then finally, you have to say, eff it, and you have to just go do it. And I said, Okay, I'm gonna be a good gay Virgo. And I'm gonna get started. And I'm gonna do it. And I did. And, you know, I started, you know, slowly accumulating work and putting out calls. And it's so difficult in those early days to try to figure out what the vibe and the tone of the book is, obviously, you want diversity of all kinds in the anthology, but there has to be this unspoken cohesion, there has to be this thing that feels like all the pieces belong in the same book. And I kept saying to myself, I want this to feel like a collective queer memoir, like all the voices are going to be different, the experiences are gonna be different, but I want it to feel like we're all kind of in something together. And it takes a little while and like a leap of faith to figure out how you're going to find that work. And you know, then there was enough work that I was able to pitch it and send the proposal a few places and Feminist Press was my my number one and wanted them to pick it up. And I never heard back from anybody, and then wonderful. And then a wonderful writer, friend of mine who has published two novels with a Feminist Press, Carlene Moore. She said, send it one more time just bother them again. I know we're not supposed to do that. You're not supposed to do that in publishing. Don't don't bother them again. But I did. And this time, there was a response in my editor, Nick Whitney, just quickly, quickly was like, okay, okay, don't, don't do anybody else. Let's have a meeting. And then we did and then very quickly, there was a contract, and there was a publisher, and then, you know, the

past two years have been just working on it to make it perfect. And so that's the journey of me, but also, more importantly, the journey of *It Came from the Closet*.

Emily Einolander 07:00

I love the framework of the chorus. It's very theatrical. It goes along with the idea of screenwriting and film. All that stuff. Yep. Oh, Corinne, I think you need to ask your question because it's very important to you.

Corinne Kalasky 07:15

It is. So Joe as a fellow horror lover, I would like to know, did you see the movie *Mother*? That came out a few years ago with Jennifer Lawrence?

Joe Vallese 07:26

Yeah, the Darren Aronofsky movie? Yes.

Corinne Kalasky 07:28

What did you think of it?

Joe Vallese 07:30

I love it. I think it's really good.

Corinne Kalasky 07:33

I love this because I feel like everybody hated it. I didn't, I didn't like it either. We went together. And we were both like this is bad.

Joe Vallese 07:44

I mean, the thing is, I understand why people don't like it. And if I'm being honest, and if I investigate it more closely, and I do that thing that maybe we're supposed to do, I don't know if we're supposed to think about real life context. I can be like, Oh, this is so gross and misogynist. And you know, like, I can do some of that, you know, but I kind of, I kind of liked that it was sort of this biblical retelling and sort of this mother nature, you know, like, you know, but I'm a lifelong Tori Amos fan. I love the idea of, you know, *Mother Nature*.

Corinne Kalasky 08:20

You mentioned that you're a Virgo. I'm a Virgo. And Tori is like my Northern Star truly. So

Joe Vallese 08:27

Wait, when's your birthday? September 5, September 21. So I'm closer to the to Libra.

Corinne Kalasky

So right but slightly different Virgos

Joe Vallese

But yeah, no, but Tori has been my number one since I was, I think 11. My sister was listening to Under the Pink and I walked past her room and I was like, What's this? What's this crazy song you have I think was The Waitress. And she was like, no, no, but listen to this next one. Then she played me Icicle and then it's weird like me. Me 11, my sister, 14, listening to Icicle like in the dark in the bedroom? And I'm like shaking with like, Oh my God. I don't know. Like this is yeah, but yeah, but that's why I think I like Mother. You know, like I'm so I'm so invested in that sort of mother nature as a character and you know, anything that sort of puts, I mean, I'm not a religious person, but anything that sort of fucks with them. And of course, anything that manipulates or retells something biblical and kind of turns out, you know, turns it on its head a bit. And you had that Michelle Pfeiffer performance is just talking about camp, man she just walks in and she so I think so maybe I want to revise and say I can see why people wouldn't like it if I thought about it more deeply. I've only seen it once, but I remember it, and if I thought about it more deeply, I would find things to dislike about it but I'm not sure that we call it a horror movie but but it's the Michelle Pfeiffer she comes in, like I love movies that have an almost extended cameo or like a great like actress comes in and just chews the shit out of everything and turns it upside down. And that movie has that it has you know that with Michelle Pfeiffer?

Emily Einolander 10:07

If okay, if it were based on that performance, then yes, I agree.

Joe Vallese 10:15

I stupidly was like, Oh, she's gonna get an Oscar nomination for this. Right, Michelle? That's what I was thinking. When I left the theater. Everybody's like, man, good question. Man. I hope they get questions that could another podcast as well.

Emily Einolander 10:33

I wanted to ask what your favorite scary movie is. If you have one or more than one, it's fine.

Joe Vallese 10:40

I mean, it's hard because I've got quite a few. I have the ones that are about nostalgia, and I have those that I sort of more intellectually, view as favorites. If I can just give you a few. I'll say that, you know, sort of the core of my being as a horror fan is A Nightmare on Elm Street. Freddy, you know, and that sort of original incarnation of Freddy. You know, the original is just such a creative, bizarre, like masterfully made film. Wes Craven is incredible. And the Scream franchise is probably my favorite contemporary, you know, franchise, because I think that despite movies sort of dipping in quality in some ways that you know, like, overall, it's just the strongest of all those slasher franchises. Every movie has something very, very worthwhile.

Emily Einolander 11:27

I chickened out asking you that question in the Ghostface voice. I was like, Nah, that's too cheesy. I can't do

Joe Vallese 11:35

Do you have like a Ghostface? Please do. Please do. Oh, you're just doing your own impression. I think the greatest slasher movie of all time, and I love that remakes keep failing is Black Christmas, I think is actually the best. Oh, god.

Emily Einolander 11:53

Yeah, we watch that together every year.

Joe Vallese 11:56

It is just so scary. It is so well written. It is so well acted. And it is what horror is there is subversive social commentary. It's not even when the latent subversive, it's there. She wants an abortion. It's right there in the movie. It is so feminist it is. So it's doing everything and and people, you know, there's always you know, there's just, I mean, you're gonna have to go into the obnoxious troll culture of, you know, Jordan Peele is racist because he doesn't want to make movies about white people. And, you know, like, you know, that terrible online, you know, troll nonsense that happens about any movie that's, you know, female led. It's like, hello, the final girl, every horror movie is like all the things that you love are, you know about strong women, sort of overcoming and outsmarting. And, and it's just so, so separate of that, you want to hear that I roll my eyes? Because I'm like, like, look at Black Christmas. Like, it's right there. What are you talking about? It's right. Like, this is what horror has always done. And that's part of the reason why I really wanted to conceive of this book, from the queer perspective, because so much harder is coded in queerness. And, you know, you have to pluck it out. And I'm certain that so many of its creators are queer. And we know, some of them, but we don't know that Pete You know, like, you know, I couldn't tell you like, the people who worked on movies in the 60s and 70s. And, you know, I don't know what was going on in their bedrooms or their lives interiorly and like, I'm sure there are because creativity, you know, there's so much queerness and creativity in general. Right. So it's like, this idea that it's not there. It's just so you know, so misguided, so limited. So, yeah, Black Christmas, because it does all those things that I'm referring to, and does them so masterfully. And you know, it's incredible. And then, you know, for contemporary, like, or more recent films. I just think Hereditary is like, tops. I mean, I know a lot of people don't like our Ari Aster and I, again, I'm very empathetic. I'm like, Yeah, I guess I can see why you don't like that. Like, I'm always like, thinking about why but I just think it is such a tight, beautifully crafted, like, expert film that is inspired by so many things that I love, but also is so much its own thing. And you know, I don't love midsummer as much, Midsommar, maybe you say but I still enjoy it. But I think Hereditary is like really it. I could watch that once a month and still find something to really be knocked out by.

Emily Einolander 14:27

Yeah, we saw that together. It was it was an amazing experience. The thing is, we tried to watch it again with our friend to show them how great it was. And it was in their house during the day and they didn't have good curtains on the windows and they didn't have the screen calibrated Correct. Yeah. So you know the part, you couldn't see it. It was terrible.

Joe Vallese 14:48

Yeah, always. I always wondered if he needed to go back and lighten that just a little bit to make sure because there are people who missed it in my theater. They just didn't see it. Like, I know that. Because

they didn't scream. They didn't comment. They didn't gasp, they just missed it. Because if you look down at your popcorn for a second you miss it, you know, it's fast.

Emily Einolander 15:09

I mean, they gave, what, it was probably like 10 seconds though, like, that's a lot though.

Joe Vallese 15:14

But it makes you wonder how people or or some people just don't get. Or some people get scared in the same way, you know, and they don't, they don't see it. And then of course, not long after there's that terrifying sound, you know that before the finale. And that's pretty I mean, it's just it just works on so many levels, the visual, the sound, the acting, the I mean, I mean, it'll go on forever about the fact that her performances don't get honored. For Oscars and critics, Critics Awards and things like that. But I mean, if they were Toni Collette would have just been walking home with gold after gold, right. Like, just what a remarkable performance.

Emily Einolander 15:57

Yeah, I think it's people are afraid to admit that they're fallible and can be scared of things.

Joe Vallese 16:02

But yes, or it's a lesser genre, the craft is not the same. It's like, oh, you can make a horror movie on, you know, 2 million bucks. And it's, you know, whatever. But it's like, no, but that's what's so good about it, you know?

Corinne Kalasky

Exactly. Yeah.

Emily Einolander 16:15

Oh, thinking about chewing up scenery and Black Christmas, Margot Kidder like, oh.

Corinne Kalasky 16:21

You would not believe how disappointed people are when you bring that movie over to their house on Christmas. Because I did that before. Like, my friends. Were just like, let's come over here watch Christmas movies. I've got a perfect Christmas movie. And like they were all so like, What the fuck is this? And I was like, this is the best Christmas movie ever. What do you mean, what? Any love you so fair, we love you so much. But fair warning. It's not for everybody. I guess so.

Joe Vallese 16:48

And the, the wonderful, I don't know if we call it an irony, but you know, just back that the director also did A Christmas Story, right? So we did like two, seven seminal Christmas films, that are, I mean, A Christmas Story is kind of a horror movie itself. I was pretty terrified that I'm like, I'm gonna not be able to not stick my tongue on an icy pole from this guy. You know, I'm like, I know. I'm gonna do it. Even though I shouldn't miss. Like, that's a Freudian thing, right? Dr. Yes. You're not afraid of heights. You're afraid of throwing yourself off a high building? Right? Like the fact that you could. So yeah, no. Yeah, he's those are two amazing movies for him to have directed. I love this. This is fun.

Emily Einolander 17:34

Do you have your own movie analysis that you wrote yourself in this?

Joe Vallese 17:41

Yes, I do. I wrote. My piece is called Imprint, and it, the movie that it connects with is a little seen, or maybe you've seen it I don't know, a little seen horror movie called Grace. And it came out in 2010. I want to say it's about a pregnant woman who gets into a car accident with her husband, the husband dies, and the baby dies in her womb, and she carries the baby to term, births it and kind of wills it back to life by breastfeeding it. And then it turns out little Grace needs blood, not milk. And I just, the movie stuck with me. I mean, you know, like it's a ridiculous film. But it is engrossing. And it is there is a queer relationship in the film. And there's just a lot of interesting stuff going on in it. But, you know, my, my husband and I are dads to a two year old son Elio. But the journey to him was really difficult. We did it through surrogacy. And we had multiple losses, including a late term loss. And, and just I mean, so many things go through your head when you have a traumatic experience. And I remembered that birthing scene from Grace coming into my mind. You know, one of many things that came into my mind during that period. And I didn't think that I, I tried to write about it, and it was all very, like, you know, like a very like, depressing poem, and then the very sad essay, and then I was like, I'm not going to do this. And then I decided, I'm actually going to write a horror screenplay. So I started writing and finish a screenplay that was closely based on our experience until it wasn't so it was very much based in the reality of surrogacy a gay couple Losing a baby, late term, and then it sort of winds its way into like Rosemary's Baby Omen kind of territory. And yeah, and it was so fun to do and very cathartic. And after I did that, I found myself able to write the essay about that in the book. I know what I was going to write, I was doing all this work to gather and edit and I was coming down to the wire and sort of had like two months to get my own work in and I you know, So I need to, I can't just write the introduction because it's somehow felt like, if I didn't participate in the book fully, then it would somehow be a betrayal to the whole idea. And the whole mission, the whole project, so and then it just sort of wrote itself and Grace became the film. That sort of anchored the experience. And there were some interesting parallels to it. And but yeah, I really wanted to write about queer fatherhood and the journey to it, and I, you know, write in it that it's not the exact quote, but I say that nothing reminds you have the limitations of what queer bodies can do together than trying to start a family. And it really, that really was just banging behind my eyes the whole time. And so I wrote my essay. So it's, it's a bit of a heavy one. Most of the essays in the book are, somebody said to me, Oh, the cover is so campy but the essays are so serious. And I said, yeah, yeah, that's right. Like, that's that it's queerness. Right? It is. It is. It's campy, and it's, and it's dead serious. And it's, you know, fabulous and artistic. And, you know, it's emotional. And so it was hard. And so, if you're looking for a collection of like, funny as essays about queerness, and horror, you're not going to quite find them, though. There are moments of humor and in many of the essays, but this is like serious memoir. That is all in the language of horror movie. Yeah. And I'm very proud of it. Yeah. So that's my case.

Emily Einolander 21:33

Grace is a, that's an intense film. I was not expecting you to say that.

Joe Vallese 21:39

Yeah, I didn't think I was gonna write about it. But it's the only thing that made sense. When I decided that this is the way I was going to contribute.

Emily Einolander 21:49

Yeah. So can you tell me more about what you were looking for during submissions? I know that you put together a proposal and sent it to the Feminist Press, but like, what did you have as part of your proposal that you had already collected? And then how did you receive submissions after that?

Joe Vallese 22:07

Yeah, so a great thing that happened, a colleague of mine at NYU, he's an administrator at NYU, published a piece in Electric Literature that I believe was titled at the time, What Halloween Taught Me about Queerness. And he was sort of making this argument of Michael Myers, and the beginning of Halloween being a coming out story. And he was linking it to his own discovery of his homosexuality throughout his youth, and it was such an amazing essay, and I was like this, this is the exact type of thing I want to read a book of. So I sort of said, you know, hey, I don't know if it's gonna happen. But can I, you know, reprint this down the road, if I, you know, get somebody to publish this anthology I'm thinking about, and he was like, Yeah, that sounds awesome. So I had his piece and then I, and there are only, maybe I think four previously published, the rest are all brand new essays. So 25 essays, and I think four were previously published and or slightly, slightly altered, but that was one of them. And then I put out just like a call on Twitter, a call on some forums, I used my NYU creative writing program listserv to say, Hey, can you spread this far and wide, and it was very slow going, but a few months later, and a few more pieces. So I think, in the end, before the proposal went out, I had maybe seven, seven essays. So the proposal had like seven finished essays. All of the essays made it into the book, and I was very serious about that. I said, I'm not going to use someone's work just to get me my contract for the anthology and say, sorry, it doesn't fit anymore. So those seven pieces helped to sort of structure, what the vibe of the book would be. And I, you know, wrote sort of my main theory of the case about why we needed this, and, and it really rested on the fact that it didn't exist. And ever like, this just doesn't exist. There are other anthologies, or other queer anthologies are there. You know, there's camp anthologies, and there's a lot of academic writing on queerness and horror, but there is not personal essay, there's no collection of personal essay. So it was very clear, I want it like very accessible film criticism and analysis, but it really at its root is creative nonfiction, and memoir and personal loss. So I had that in there. And then when Feminist Press was interested, Nick, my editor there worked with me to say okay, but now before we can, you know, present it to the board because everybody has to decide that they want to take on this book. If Feminist Press is a wonderful, you know, Legendary press, but they are an independent press and they, you know, take on a few titles a season, and they put everything they have into those titles, which is exactly what I wanted. I wanted, you know, somebody could really focus on the book and not say, Oh, it didn't really sell on the first week, I guess we're gonna just let it you know, go to the discount bin. And then, you know, he said, we now have to envision what the rest of this anthology looks like, how many pieces? And who do we want, right? Are there people that we will go after to try to solicit and get a piece from them? Is there more previously published work that you want to include? What are we thinking about in terms of diversity and demographic? And how do we, you know, how do we honor the spectrum in every way, with the knowledge that we can't hit every button and you know, and get every type of writer in this book, we come pretty close. I'm really proud of it. But obviously, no anthology can do that. And there are going to

be some blind spots. And I'm very aware of those and you know, but we did our best to sort of, you know, kind of imagine, who do we want even if the person is not a nameable figure, who are we looking for? And what kind of stories are we looking for? And I was very, you know, I got some wonderful writing from, you know, I think I got 240 submissions total, I think. And a lot of them were just beautiful essays that were coming out stories that linked to essays, sorry, linked to horror films. But I couldn't risk the redundancy, like this had to every essay had to be different in some way, every essay to be complementary in its way, and every essay had to be somebody's favorite. So I had to think about it in those terms. And it had to cover the queer experience the queer and trans experience in a number of ways and, you know, just life experience in terms of, you know, just every sort of imaginable facet of that. So, we worked on that together. We worked on soliciting writers, we made a list of a list of hypothetical writers that we might get work from, and then revised, you know, in length and the, the proposal some other pieces had come in during that time, too. So it was actually very, very lucky some really wonderful the last essay in this book, notes on sleepaway camp, which via din writes sort of a numbered list in the vein of Susan Sontag's notes on camp, but he does it with sleepaway camp and being being an effeminate, Asian gay youth at camp in the 70s. And just as this beautiful, his is actually quite funny, quite darkly funny. And if the last essay in the book, and it came in, right, as I was resubmitting, I was like, Ah, yes, what a gift. This is so amazing. And I was able to include that like an expanded version of the proposal. And you know, within a few days, Feminist Press unanimously agreed that they wanted it and it was just a wonderful thing. And shortly after that, we got a commitment from Carmen Machado, to write an original piece on Jennifer's Body, and she said she'd been, she'd been waiting for years for somebody to ask her to write about Jennifer's Body for some publication. It's so good. No, it's so it's really good. Hers is quite funny as well, actually. So we may take that back. Maybe there is more humor than I'm letting on. But

Emily Einolander 28:30

It's all wrapped up together in horror.

Joe Vallese 28:33

Yeah, totally. And it's such a cool piece, and it's a totally original piece. And it's it's sort of debating bisexuality as queerbaiting in Jennifer's Body, right? It's, it's just, it's really smart and sharp. And, and I was so like, I just breathed the sigh of relief when she said she would write something because I was like, I don't know that I can legitimately put out this book without Carmen in it like, like, right like that. Like, if you think of a writer who sort of mainstream fiction and nonfiction, but is very much one, you know, more than a foot like most of her body in the queer and the horror spaces. And if she's not in there, it would have felt so incomplete and not have the time. And so it was just a wonderful gift. She wrote that essay, and it's great. I think you'll love it.

Emily Einolander 29:29

That's fantastic. I'm so excited to read that and that's a great movie for her to write about. I almost feel like choosing the person who gets to write about Sleepaway Camp, though, must have been like casting the Sugar Plum Fairy for this for this anthology is like, oh, everyone's gonna want to hear about this. Or at least that's what I would think

Joe Vallese 29:51

Yeah, and I didn't assign films, like they just had to submit it. So I had multiple essays about the same films, and I just let them come in. And I didn't ask. I mean, you know, some writers, I have solicited them. You know, Carmen said, I'm gonna write about Jennifer's Body. That's mine. So anybody else who came in is like, I can't. All right. I can't take this. There were a few about Seepaway Camp. There were a few about Nightmare And I was free part two, which, of course, is the queerest of queer. But there is an essay about and illustrating here that is just remarkable. And I wanted to favor like, a, a new approach to writing about Freddy Krueger, versus another piece of writing about Elm Street two, which has a documentary on its own, you know, *Scream Queen*, which is a lot of fun, and has been written about so much. And I just thought I don't, you know, if the right pieces had shown up, I would have Yes, I would have said yes to it. But instead, we have this amazing piece called the Trail of His Flames by Tucker Lieberman, a trans writer who—do you know him?

Emily Einolander 31:01

We just followed each other. Yeah.

Joe Vallese 31:03

And, and it is, basically he says, I had this traumatic experience with a friend, it happened while I was transitioning, it was super traumatic, I don't have permission to really tell you what happened, sort of instead, let me tell you about how I was on a ton of medication when I was young, and thought I was Nancy from her Nightmare on Elm Street and imagined myself on fire. And it's just a crazy Journal of like, day one, as Nancy day two as Nancy and sort of retelling the story of a Nightmare on Elm Street through this like hybrid of real experience and real trauma mixed in with the the actual narrative of the movie, and sort of like these twists on dialogue from the film and things that happen in the movie, but told through this, like, it's not a fictional perspective, because it's real for Tucker, but it's fictional to the film and everyone on the street, I can't even describe it. It's so hard. But when I read it, I was like, oh, make like this is gonna allow people, it's so strange and so beautiful and so painstaking. And you're gonna love that piece. So I said, you know, so instead of a Nightmare on Elm Street to piece, and I want this piece and want this, you know, and there was even some Feminist Press was super supportive, and I was allowed to choose everything that went in. But I remember there being a little bit of like, Ha, this is a really long, kind of strange piece. We don't know if it goes against the Fair Use Act, because it talks about the movie so much like, you know, and it didn't it didn't we were able to rein it in, in some ways. And you know, we edited it down. It's really cool. I can't help but it's it's a, it's a risky piece. And I'm really happy that it's there. Yeah.

Corinne Kalasky 32:52

What was the sort of the most popular movie across all the submissions? Was there one that was sort of like people wanted to write about more than any other?

Joe Vallese 33:02

That's a good question. I. That's a really good question. So there were a few Elm Street 2 pieces that came in, I got a couple of Hellraiser pieces. Yeah. But none made it in. They weren't right. They weren't right. They weren't, they weren't. There was also a thing where, you know, I say this with, you know, generosity of spirit. I think that many people don't quite understand the craft of an essay. So I wasn't

always getting essay submissions, I was getting like reviews, or, like, kind of general reflections on the experience of watching the movie, but not doing much else with it. So that's why a lot of pieces sort of came in that way. There were a few Pet Sematary pieces. And there is a Pet Sematary piece in here, Zefyr Lisowski, The Girl, The Well, The Ring, which is both Pet Sematary and The Ring. So there were a few of those. And I think there was there were a few, there were a few Jennifer's Body pieces. There were a few Scream pieces that unfortunately, just weren't right and didn't quite make it in. Didn't make it in that quiet. They actually didn't. And they just didn't fit the vibe. But I would say generally speaking, there wasn't like one film that just had like a pile. There was, you know, there was really and there also some writers who just also didn't quite understand the concept and they were right about a lot of movies at once. Oh, and I definitely got several Exorcist essays. And that was actually quite hard to choose. I mean, once S. Trimble, they go by T. T's essay came in, it was like, Oh, this is the one if it just you know, and that's the fun thing about this too. Sometimes you get a piece and you're like, this is perfect. This is exactly what I want. But there a few Exorcist pieces. And some of them, many of them were really good. And I almost toyed with the idea of like, can we have like a section that's like multiple exercises, essays and Feminist Press was like No, no, no, it's one essay. One essay per essay. I mean, one film per essay. But, yes, maybe the exorcist as well, I got a good. Maybe four of those maybe.

Corinne Kalasky 35:22

Oh, wow. Okay. Yeah,

Emily Einolander 35:24

That sounds about right.

Corinne Kalasky 35:29

I imagine there will be some nuance to your answer. But would you say that there's a lot of apologia in this collection for the more transphobic and homophobic entries in the horror canon?

Joe Vallese 35:41

Interesting. Will you repeat the second part of the questions? I want to make sure that I'm answering it correctly. Yeah.

Corinne Kalasky 35:51

Would you say that there's a lot of apologia in this collection for the more transphobic and homophobic entries in the horror canon.

Joe Vallese 36:01

I think many stuck on the word apologia were you.

Emily Einolander 36:03

Like? I pronounced that like apology? Oh, I'm sorry.

Joe Vallese 36:08

No, no, no, no, I think I think we're both right. But in my head, I was like, What am I what word? Am I missing here?

Emily Einolander 36:18

No, I was definitely saying that. I'm like, Oh, is that how you pronounce it? I just mean, like, there's a lot of people who are like, you absolutely should not watch this movie. Because it's transphobic. Right. Right. Right. A lot of horror fans are like, Yeah, but it means something to me.

Joe Vallese 36:35

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I think that I think there's a little bit in there. I mean, so the thing is, and the thing that's so wonderful about the book, is that for the most part, the trans and non binary writers did not like choose movies that dealt with the didn't really didn't really confront transphobia. They sort of were like, well, I am a trans writer, but I don't need to write about, you know, territory, and it's stupid ending or, you know, like, we didn't have a, you know, there's not a trans writer writing about Sleepaway Camp. You know, so, I would say that, you know, there was, I don't know how conscious that choice was, but I think, you know, there was a freedom that those writers understood they had, they didn't feel like they were forced to sort of do that work. I think that the whole book sort of has this nuance of, we know that we're kind of done dirty by these movies. And that's okay, like we are reclaiming these films, and we find our place in them. And we're going to sort of overtake them and not sort of, nobody imposes. Nobody imposes, like, unfair readings on the film's. Nobody does anything that you'd be like, hey, like, I don't see that. What are you talking about? That's not in the movie, like, there's really not like a heavy, you know, like, super scholarly critical thing happening, where it's like, you're sort of, because that can be the criticism of academic writing sometimes, right? Like, you're really just reading into this way too much. And this doesn't exist in the movie. And, you know, nobody intended to do that. So there's not like a ton of that it's actually quite, it's actually mainly about sort of the emotional and experiential connection between the writer in the film, but I would say that for the most part of the trans, a number of trans or non binary writers don't. They don't. They didn't choose those movies as a means of like, either apologizing for them, or making excuses for them, or attacking them and saying that, you know, this is done. This has done some harm to me. I think there's a place for that. And there's, there's always a valid space and time for it. But the the writers didn't choose to do that. So I don't think quite answers the question. But, you know, yeah,

Emily Einolander 39:15

What I'm getting from this is, that might be more the place for like a theoretical academic piece, if someone were to do that, but this is just about people. I would almost venture to say, expressing joy, and their connection with something that they like, so there's no need for it.

Joe Vallese 39:32

Yeah, but also saying like, just because just because I'm a trans, trans or non binary writer, doesn't mean that I have to choose one of those movies, right? Like, like, I don't, I don't respond to it. Yeah, exactly. I don't see my experience as being sort of like so for example, there's a there's a fantastic piece called called indescribable by Carrow Narby, a trans writer who got violently ill at the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic. Although every month feels like the beginning of it, and they talk about being hospitalized. And because there was not, they didn't have the ability to sort of groom and take care of themselves the way they would when presenting to the world because they're stuck in a hospital bed. And they don't have control over body hair and how it's growing. And just this feeling of being like an IT

or a thing. And how disturbing that was and how traumatizing it was to be in that place. And they connect it to the 1988 remake of *The Blob*, and the film *Society* and talk about sort of this like, the self as in other the self as a blob, the self as a mass, like a mass of flesh, you know, becoming sort of monstrous. And so that does some of that work that I think we're we're referring to, but there is not any sort of specific transness or transphobia. About the blob, right? *The Blob*, is this right? Like a more or less like, yeah, yeah, exactly. And they make a funny joke about the sort of the hot pink blob in the remake, right, being sort of queer in its way and the way it It eats and wipes out like a yapping child and how that's a fun attack on heteronormativity. But, yeah, so so so it's there, but it's not there in the selection of the film. So if that makes sense. No, that totally makes sense. Yeah. And it could have been, I would have been, you know, thrilled if the right essay was doing that. And I think the girl did well, on the rainbow is effortless. ASCII does some of that. And there is some direct mingling with Samar from the ring and also Zelda from *Pet Sematary*, and the fact that Zelda was played by this man. And so there's sort of this, you know, confusing visual that you get, like, Zelda is sick. But in her sickness, she loses any femininity, and she's now masculine and terrifying. And, you know, so there is some of that, but yeah, but I think overall, you know, if a writer had chosen to do that, right on, but they, for the most part, didn't, they went another route.

Corinne Kalasky 42:27

Alright, so congrats on that extremely successful Kickstarter, by the way, over \$10,000 higher than the \$6,666 goal.

Joe Vallese 42:38

I was pretty shocked.

Corinne Kalasky 42:39

Who was the one who chose that goal, by the way, that particular number,

Joe Vallese 42:42

Oh, Feminist Press. They're a cool group of people. And they had this idea for the Kickstarter. And I was confused, because I didn't know that Kickstarter Reads was a thing. I didn't know that there was like a use for it beyond like, hey, pitching this money. So I can make this thing as opposed to, we've made this thing. Now we want to celebrate it and spread the word about it. And you know, so it became sort of a hybrid fundraiser, but it's also, you know, our launch party is connected to it, and exclusive merchandise. And yeah, it was that 6666 amount. And then I think at the end, it was over 18,000. So it was pretty, pretty rad. I was very surprised by it. But I thought that was fun, you know, you become kind of addicted to looking and see how many backers we have now, how many books are being sold here as opposed to, you know, through other means, which I can't tabulate. But yeah, I think it was, I don't know if it was Margo, that the executive director or the publicity team, but it was a good way to start. Definitely. Fun, traditionally. Hard trophy numbers. For all the goals. Yeah.

Emily Einolander 44:04

And so how are they going to? The money's used for the party and publicity?

Joe Vallese 44:08

Mostly? Yeah, well, so the packages were bundles of books, Feminist Press books. copies of It Came from the Closet, either print or ebook. And then our amazing the artist who did the amazing cover design Braulio Amado, designed a tote bag for Feminist Press, and you can only exclusively get it through the Kickstarter. I mean, maybe it'll be made available later. I don't want to say for sure that no one can get their hands on it again. But it was sort of Yeah. So it's both fundraising for the press. And also, um, yeah, fundraising and Feminist Press, but also means to throw a big celebratory party. And yeah, I mean, I don't, I don't think it'll be. I don't think there'll be they'll squander it, I think but cuz it was

Emily Einolander 45:03

We're deeply upset, we can't go to this party.

Joe Vallese 45:06

I think it's gonna be a lot of fun, I think, I think it was just a good reminder to say hey, like, you know, the press is putting its faith and its resources behind a book they're really, really proud of and believe in. And so if folks can believe in the press back and help us both celebrate it, and also give them, you know, boost, because you know, the things that are happening right now with the the monopolies of publishing houses, is really kind of terrifying and awful. And so anything that can be done to sort of make sure that you get the book either from an indie bookseller or directly Feminist Press, and then also, you know, make a contribution. So they can continue to do their work because they do amazing work with a pretty small group of people. And you know, the book, I'm not sure if you all have copies yet, but when you get it, I mean, it's just, it's so gorgeous.

Emily Einolander

I preordered it.

Joe Vallese

So yeah, it's just I mean, they, they've just done like everything. I mean, it's, it's really a, it's an A plus job all around, I'm very, very pleased and proud that they've done such a good work with it. So I think it'll really be sent off into the world with, you know, with my very first variable tweet ever, from the came from the closet Twitter account, was literally just a picture of my copy of the book that I just got. And I think we're at like, I think I'm at like 11,000 to 11,000 Likes and 1000 retweets, and I was like, this is, this is a mistake, like, because it's an algorithm mistake. It's literally just the picture of my book. It's like I've tweeted here 1000s of times over the past five years, and suddenly something clicked and people Yeah, no, it's it's I mean, it's remarkable. He did such a great job. And inside, there are these illustrations by be shocked, some who's also a writer, Feminist Press, who publishes the Feminist Press, and does these incredible graphic novels. And there are these collages. For every section, there are five sections to the book. And we spoke in the summer last summer. And we had this idea of sort of like old school movie posters, I'll show you I mean, nobody can see it over this. But oh,

Emily Einolander 47:23

It's black and white kind of hand drawn exactly different scenes from the exercise that we're looking at.

Joe Vallese 47:30

So key scenes from the different essays or every essay is represented in an image somewhere in the book. So be shocked, sort of decided what spoke to them and made these just gorgeous collage prints. So it's really like, you know, you want to buy a hard copy of this because it's kind of a piece of art, the cover inside. And of course, the writing inside. So a friend of mine said, Man, you guys are really forcing people to buy hard media, like you have to, you gotta hold this one in your hands. And you have to, you know, flip through it and, of course, want to buy an ebook. Thank you. Go ahead. There's also going to be an audio book, which is actually really exciting. Oh, yeah, it's gonna be a multi narrator, audio book. And all of the voice actors are part of the queer community. So it's a completely Yeah, queer read slash acted, multi Narrator book, and I had no idea that was gonna happen and happening kind of late in the day. It's gonna come out on the same time as the book in October. They're sort of going into production fast. They're doing it ASAP.

Emily Einolander 48:44

Oh, that doesn't happen all the time. That's really exciting.

Joe Vallese 48:47

No, yeah. Yeah, Blackstone media. And they're, they're, they're doing it real fast. So we're gonna have all these different mediums for the book to be out around the same time, which is awesome.

Emily Einolander 49:01

So are you gonna wear a costume to the party?

Joe Vallese 49:04

I don't know if it'll be a costume, but it will definitely, I've been thinking, it'll definitely have some queer horror iconography. Either inspired by or on, I don't know yet. Well find. If if I get told that people are going to be like, it suddenly morphs into a costume party. That's different than I'll do my you know, I'll be probably a good soldier and I'll put on I'll find something. But I'll definitely, definitely will be a spirited, spirited attire. Yeah, for sure.

Emily Einolander 49:42

But you have a lot to celebrate.

Joe Vallese 49:45

Yeah, yeah. And we have yeah, there's a lot going on in those early weeks and we'll be at AW up in the spring with a great panel as well. So the celebrating and discussions of the book are going to extend for quite a while, which is really what I wanted, I didn't want something that just came out. And then that was the end, I wanted something that really sparked a conversation and joined an existing dialogue that I argue has been happening with the queer community in horror for a long time. And if this helps to center it, and even just in the five years, that from conceiving of this book to it being released, the whether it's podcasts or social media, Instagram, queerness and horror are really like, they're at the hip together right now. They're really, it's kind of the time. So it's coming out at the right time, because I feel like everywhere I turn that sort of validation of, of her as queer is kind of everywhere. And yeah, it's the right moment.

Emily Einolander 50:53

We go to, like, every six weeks we go, there's like a queer horror night at one of the independent theaters. And there's like a drag show and a horror movie. Yeah, I don't know. I feel like people would buy your book there.

Corinne Kalasky 51:04

Oh, my God. Yeah, absolutely.

Joe Vallese 51:07

Well, the party is, yeah, well, yeah, we should talk about getting some copies to them. That was, that'd be pretty rad. Yeah. And the party is going to have a drag component and a performance. And, you know, all that stuff is. And the next night, Carmen Maria Machado, and Sarah Fonseca, who has a great essay in here will be in discussion at the Brooklyn Museum. And Miss Malleus. A pretty great local drag queen is going to be moderating and doing a performance. So drag culture is certainly, you know, very, very tightly bound to his or her. So yeah, there's a lot to celebrate. There's a lot of good stuff going on. I'm excited.

Emily Einolander 51:51

Great. So where can people find you online?

Joe Vallese 51:55

Yeah, so you can find me on Twitter at homohorror. That was years ago, like our working title, I guess, for the anthology, and it's pretty catchy. So you'll find me at Homer horror, I'm also you can find me at Joe Vallese on Twitter as well, but don't really post very much there. So it's really the Homer horror account where you can find me and you also find the joevallese.net. But that website is deeply under construction. I promise it will look more. By the time this comes out. Maybe it'll it'll look a little more professional. But yeah, but yeah, definitely, definitely on Twitter. That's that's the spot right now.

Emily Einolander 52:38

Excellent. You can find us on Twitter at hybrid pubs scout on Instagram at hybrid pubs Scout pod, and then online hybrid cub scout.com. Thank you for joining us today.

Joe Vallese 52:51

Thank you so much for having me.