Actor Frank Langella denounces “cancel culture” in response to firing from Netflix’s *Fall of the House of Usher*

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Veteran Hollywood and stage actor Frank Langella responded to allegations of “sexual harassment” in a scathing letter published last week in *Deadline*, the entertainment industry publication. The veteran performer was fired in early April from the set of Netflix’s miniseries *The Fall of the House of Usher*, based on the famed Edgar Allan Poe short story (published in 1839) and directed by Mike Flanagan.

Langella’s letter, which has received widespread attention, denounces the identity politics-fueled “cancel culture” that cost him his job. It also exposes the anti-democratic, stifling conditions that have been produced by the #MeToo frenzy pursued over the last several years in the press and political establishment.

According to the 84-year old Langella, who was playing the lead role of Roderick Usher in the series, the allegations of “unacceptable behavior” stemmed from the filming of a love scene on March 25. “I was performing a love scene with the actress playing my young wife. Both of us were fully clothed. I was sitting on a couch, she was standing in front of me,” he explains.

Langella continues: “The director called ‘cut.’ ‘He touched my leg,’ said the actress. ‘That was not in the blocking.’ She then turned and walked off the set, followed by the director and the intimacy coordinator. I attempted to follow but was asked to ‘give her some space.’”

This set into motion an “investigation,” the absurd and overbearing character of which could be mistaken for a parody if its implications were not so ominous.

Langella explains: “Approximately one week later, Human Resources asked to speak to me by phone. ‘Before the love scene began on March 25,’ said the questioner, ‘our intimacy coordinator suggested where you both should put your hands. It has been brought to our attention that you said, ‘This is absurd!’”

To his credit, Langella denounced this inquisition, saying: “Yes,” I said, “I did. And I still think so.”

“It was a love scene on camera,” he says. “Legislating the placement of hands, to my mind, is ludicrous. It undermines instinct and spontaneity,” he explains. Langella was asked not to contact the actress involved or the “intimacy coordinator,” due to fear of “retaliation.”

Langella states that the sum total of complaints against him amount to claims that: 1. “He told an off-color joke.” 2. “Sometimes he called me ‘baby’ or ‘honey.’” 3. “He’d give me a hug or touch my shoulder.” Serious infractions, all.

The veteran, award-winning actor was fired shortly afterward. “I was not given a hearing with Netflix. My request to meet one-on-one with the actress was denied. The directors and the producer stopped answering my emails and phone calls. Within 30 minutes of my firing, a letter went out to cast and crew and a full press release was sent immediately,” he writes.

In a telling aside, Langella recalls that he had been warned by his producer that he couldn’t “joke” or “compliment” or “touch. It’s a new order.” Advice from Langella’s managers and lawyers suggested he not “play the victim.” “Don’t sue. They’ll dig into your past.” “Sign the NDA [non-disclosure agreement], take the money and run.” “Do the talk shows, show contrition, feign humility. Say you’ve learned a lot.” In other words, Langella adds, “Apologize. Apologize. Apologize.”

In the fevered atmosphere stoked by the #MeToo

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frenzy, allegations become "fact." No sooner did Langella's firing occur than his name was being dragged through the mud. The actor notes that the first news report about his firing, which appeared on online tabloid *TMZ*, asserted he had "been fired by Netflix for fondling a young actress between takes and she stormed off the set."

"That is demonstrably false. That is a total lie," he protests. He had been accused of nothing more than touching a young actress on the leg, a gesture generally associated with intimacy and affection, in a *love* scene.

The *TMZ* article was later revised, but the damage was done. Now, Langella, a veteran of Hollywood and stage, faces "an unanticipated sense of grave danger" to his career and livelihood.

Langella writes that the impact to him has been "incalculable. I lost a thrilling part, the chance at future earnings and perhaps face a stretch of unemployment. Netflix terminated me after three months of work with only three weeks left to shoot, and I have as yet to be fully remunerated for my services. Most importantly, my reputation has been tarnished."

He concludes by declaring: "These indignities are, to my mind, the real definition of unacceptable behavior. Cancel culture is the antithesis of democracy. It inhibits conversation and debate. It limits our ability to listen, mediate, and exchange opposing views. Most tragically, it annihilates moral judgment."

In the recent period, a series of allegations against various figures has become a staple of the media and entertainment world.

Langella's removal preceded by only a few days the announcement that Bill Murray, the acclaimed comedian and film actor from *Groundhog Day*, *Ghostbusters* and other well-known films, had been accused of "inappropriate behavior" on the set of his new film *Being Mortal*. The film's production has been paused.

In an interview last week with *CNBC*, Murray explained that the allegations stemmed from "a difference of opinion with a woman I'm working with." The performer said that he "did something I thought was funny, and it wasn't taken that way."

Last week, spokespeople for 20th Television, a subsidiary of Disney Television Studios, announced that Fred Savage had been removed from his position as executive producer of the remake of the popular 1980s-early 90s show *The Wonder Years*. Savage, who starred in the original, had been accused of "verbal outbursts and inappropriate behavior," *Deadline* comments.

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