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Jack the Ripper's Bodies–without–Organs:
Affect and Psychogeography under the scalpel in *From Hell*

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The victims of Victorian serial killer Jack the Ripper were shockingly literal bodies without organs.(1) From the first shot, the film *From Hell* (the Hughes Brothers 2001) also turns bodies inside out by cinematic means.(2) Many sequences are insistently wet or damp, via tactile close-ups of juicy fruit, dripping rain and clinging mud. The Whitechapel sky is drenched with the blood of murdered women. Shades of red consistently saturate the mise-en-scène of this infernal vision of London, turning the city's labyrinths, their denizens and objects into bleeding wounds and eviscerated organs.

For Deleuze and Guattari, though, a body-without-organs (BWO) is never used in its literal meaning of an eviscerated corpse. They clearly state that their own term focuses not on 'organs without bodies, or the fragmented body,' but intends a figurative body, which may or may not be of flesh, 'animated by various intensive movements' in process of becoming.(3) *From Hell* thus gives us a conundrum to launch this re–mapping of Gothic film theory. Despite the apparent contradictions encountered along the route, I want to argue that the film's bodies, both living and dead mobilise a powerful series of intensive affects via extreme cinematic sensation.

My exploration in this article is twofold and interstitial. Linking, but distinguishing literal and figural bodies, it moves across distinct but intersecting planes: place and time, history and philosophy, fact and fantasy. I write at the junction of Deleuzian affect and the psychogeography that overtly shapes the plot and locale of *From Hell*, a film ostensibly based on popular crime culture and historical events in the slums of late Victorian London. Linking philosophical theories of duration and the virtual with the work of psychogeographic writers on recognisable historical events and actual locales, I set out to explore the affective geographies of Gothic horror film.

So how might the concept of affect be defined in general usage? To affect as a verb is to 'lay hold of, impress, or act upon (in mind or feelings) or to 'influence, move, touch'.(4) Affection as noun is 'a mental state brought about by any influence; an emotion or feeling'.(5) Although retaining shades of these broader meanings, Deleuze and Guattari use affect in a special sense that mixes body and mind via the 'logic of sensation'.(6) For Guattari, the aesthetic event of a potent art work is viral in its action upon us, being known 'not through representation, but through *affective* contamination'.(7)

Affect permeates Deleuze's solo authored cinema books as well as the joint work with Guattari and both the movement–image and the time–image are distinct but congruent explorations of it. Via this work, studies of the horror film experience can extend beyond psychoanalytically inflected approaches, most notably those shaped by Laura Mulvey and Julia Kristeva.(8) As I argue elsewhere, moving images on screen hook into us to literally 'get under our skin' to make a mental encounter through the viscera.(9) On–screen images are, in one sense, non–material simulacra, yet the viewer encounters them both corporeally and conceptually at the same time. Stimulating neuronal networks, they produce biologically quantifiable events on our internal and surface organs. Filmmakers maximise the palette of sensation, using sight and sound along with the simulation of other senses to produce affective thoughts and ideas.

By watching characters touch on–screen objects or by the use of close-ups with a tactile of quality such as images of blood we also 'touch' and respond to them haptically. We extend our medium-specific cinematic sensorium virtually to include a 'sense' of physically absent sensations.

But cinematic affect does more than replicate sensory response in the corresponding organ, whether it is directly appealed to (a movie sequence can cause goose bumps of terror or genital sensations of erotic arousal) or in the more covert operations of haptics, which evokes touch through vision, sound and synaesthesia, the mingling of the senses. It moves beyond the organic body to stimulate the embodied mind on many levels, as, slumped in our cinema seat, or in front of the domestic screen, our customary body maps can become BWOs. Affect is produced by the formal grammar of film as it works through the medium of images moving in time. Impacting affectively on senses and brain, the virtual cinematic event reverberates intensively as thought and memory.(10)

From a Deleuzian perspective, and contentiously for some kinds of Film Studies such as socio-cultural approaches, much of the impact of images does not entirely depend on their overt representational content, despite their narrative meanings and socio-historical signification. What Deleuze calls affection–images express 'the event in its eternal aspect' by foregrounding affects over representational content as 'pure singular qualities or potentialities-as it were, pure "possibles"'.(11) Emotions like terror and optical sensations like brightness, he argues, manifest 'power-qualities', which are virtual possibilities waiting to be actualised in particular conditions. Of course, the viewer's affective encounter with such images is inevitably shaped by plot mechanics and characterisation, which themselves build up the affective landscape of the film's narrative context. What Deleuze is suggesting is that we open ourselves up to the film's potential to stimulate thought beyond what the images show in terms of their obvious content or what the film is 'about' in common-sense terms.

Deleuze himself uses the example of Jack the Ripper's knife, or rather, of its gleam intensified by close–up and ambient darkness, to exemplify the limits of cinematic representation. Such affective qualities; brightness, terror and compassion in the case of his own citation from *Pandora's Box* (Georg Wilhelm Pabst, 1929); are 'pure singular qualities or potentialities-as it were, pure "possibles"' that constitute eternal aspect of the event.(12) In a comparable shot from *From Hell*, too, the murderous glint of a knife as it stabs downwards is envisioned by Detective Fred Abberline (Johnny Depp). Surrounded by darkness, the gleaming blade becomes an autonomous tool acting without visible agent to emphasise the depersonalised violence of the stabbing. This does not replace, but is supplementary to, our horror at the narrated act of murder. It is an event of light, colour and sound moving in the special sense of time opened up the cinematic encounter.

Affect in Time

Henri Bergson is the direct philosophical precursor of Deleuze's temporally based thinking on cinematic affect. Though Bergson accused early cinema of representing temporal flux as a series of static 'snapshots' strung together by mechanical movement,(13) Deleuze nevertheless identifies a fundamentally 'cinematic' philosophy in Bergson's implication of 'the universe as cinema in itself, a metacinema'.(14) Like Deleuze himself, Bergson regarded the world as 'flowing-matter', a material flux of images, with the human perceiver as a 'centre of indetermination' both within it and able to reflect on its intensive affect in duration.(15)

For Bergson, perception is extensive and actual, a response triggered by external stimuli and producing external action, but affection, unextended and virtual, occurs in the temporal gap between stimulus and response. Unlike perception, which seeks to identify and quantify external stimuli, affection is qualitative, the intensive vibration of a 'motor tendency on a sensible nerve'(16) Rather than being 'geographically' located, he argues, affect surges in the centre of indetermination. Its pre–subjective processes engage a kind of auto–contemplation that participates in the wider flux of forces, and moves in duration.

Deleuze, like Bergson, locates affection in the evolution from external action to internal contemplation. Whilst 'delegating our activity to organs of reaction that we have consequently liberated' he writes, we have also 'specialised' specific facets as 'receptive organs at the price of condemning them to immobility'.(17) These immobile facets refract and absorb images, reflecting on them rather than reflecting them back. Deleuze offers a Bergsonian definition of the affective process as a 'motor effort on an immobilised receptive plate'.(18) Deleuze's approach to the cinematic image presents affect not as a failure of the perception-action system, but as its third element, 'absolutely necessary' to produce new thought.(19)

Affects occupy, without filling, the interval between stimulus and response. Internal and self-reflexive in nature, affect operates by 'a co-incidence of subject and object, or the way in which the subject perceives itself, or rather experiences itself or feels itself "from the inside".(20) A cinematic image's affect on the viewer's awareness occurs in this potent interval. For Claire Colebrook, commenting on Deleuze, cinematic affect 'short–circuits' our perceptual habit of selecting images that interest us only for potential action.(21) She asserts that the power of affect is 'crucial to such violent forcing of thought out of accustomed patterns by shifting them from spatial extension to intensive temporality.(22)

Cinematic affect mobilises gaps and fissures in the image content itself (such as the out–of–frame) and breaks in linearity (such as non-continuity editing). I use the terms affect and affection, then, to suggest a self–reflexive pause, a temporal hiatus catalytic for potential change. DeleuzeGuattarian affect is pivotal to my wider project to explore the forms of Gothic film sensation as they impact on the BWO to undermine spatial conventions of linear time and sensory–motor movements linked by action. So how is this kind of affect exemplified further in the film of *From Hell*?

Affect and Delirium

From the outset, soft-focus close-ups key in the temporal fluidity of affect and express Detective Fred Abberline (Johnny Depp)'s role as a visionary rather than an action-hero. The visual images (what Deleuze calls opsigns) and sound track elements (sonsigns) of the title sequence engage sensation. This affects us via the sharp striking of a match and the camera's languid pan from the detective's clenched lips along his long stemmed ivory opium pipe to its bowl. The pulsing soundtrack slows the normal paced heartbeat as the effects of opium stretch out linear time. (23) Immersed in pure affect, the images of Abberline's face slowly melt by fades that work to keep the plot suspended and will undermine our conventional confidence in the detective's official police persona.

The film's lurid images and exaggerated sound are intensified by the drugs that fuel Abberline's journeys across space and time. Surrealist writer Antonin Artaud, who crucially influenced Deleuze and Guattari's

thinking, conceived the BWO during a peyote hallucination. In an attempt to break his own addiction to heroin, he partook of the peyote ritual of the Tarahumara tribe in 1936 in New Mexico. His account of this experience describes a schizoid process of 'internal separation and distribution'.(24) as 'organs break away and burst' in a euphoric atmosphere of liminality which 'wavers between gas and water'.(25) Freed from his hierarchical body–map, he tells us, he is able to embrace the 'limitless'.(26)

For Deleuze and Guattari, hallucinogens are actually powerful but dangerous agents of affect, but virtually, we can use them without bodily harm though their artistic expression. In fictionalised accounts of narcosis such as those of Carlos Castaneda (27), ingestion appears to offer an autopoetic tool which, Deleuze and Guattari argue, may help to 'combat the mechanisms of interpretation' and instil in users 'a presignifying semiotic, or even an asignifying diagram'.(28) According to such user accounts, subjective consciousness melts into 'flows of intensity, their fluids, their fibres, their continuums and conjunctions of affects'.(29) Drugs appear to have 'changed the perceptive coordinates of space–time and introduced us to a universe of microperceptions'.(30) As the interface of actual and virtual blur, the delirious subject experiences becoming a BWO.

For Deleuze and Guattari, though, delirium should not be used for the purposes of pleasure, escape or imploded self-cultivation by using art as a 'safe' kind of drug, but rather to mobilise the most life–affirming action. Delirium can be creatively diverted into aesthetic expression and political praxis.(31) A more productive response carefully prevents the kind of actualisation which 'characterises the victim or the true patient' by engineering its creative diversion though art.(32) Deleuze argues that the aesthetics of affect thus offers us 'the chance to go further than we could have believed possible'.(33) If the pure event is 'imprisoned forever in its actualisation', art 'liberates it, always for other times'.(34) He expresses hope that the fictional 'revelations' offered by drugs and alcohol might be encountered at the surface, independently of the use of those substances, provided that the techniques of social alienation which determine this use are reversed into revolutionary means of exploration.(*35*) The potency of intoxication can thus be actualised productively without courting self–destruction.
In literature and film, many works present drug and alcohol as initially glamorous but eventually causing the degeneration of body and mind.(36) A parallel to this in the Gothic mode is the thematic figuration of vampirism as addiction. Examples of this are seen in Abel Ferrara's *The Addiction* (1995) or the 'cold turkey' of Sarah, the fledgling vampire in Tony Scott's *The Hunger* (1983). Like drugs, much fictional vampirism leads to escalation, dependency and severe punishment. To apply Deleuze's terms, its apparent 'deterritorializations remain relative, compensated for by the most abject reterritorializations'(37) ending in the user's death by overdose as in Abberline's own case in *From Hell*.(38)

Bodies without Organs and Time

Abberline's opium ingestion aids the processes of detection by shifting the everyday perceptual co–ordinates of space and time. Infinitely extending the moment, the detective is able to cross geographical space mentally to locate events and predict the future. His visions undermine the linearity of clock–time and conventional narrative as he short–circuits temporal layers to locate images of the event. He does not, however, always hit the memory he seeks and inadvertently jumps into the wrong layer of the past, the painful memory of his dead wife. Eventually, though, he encounters the death of Polly (one of the film's street-walker 'unfortunates'), by short–circuiting time and space. This occurs both on screen and in the viewer's own mental images moving in time.

Deleuze and Guattari note that the temporal distortions induced by drugs stimulate acute awareness of 'speeds and slownesses'.(39) The film's stylistic skewing of time has a preference for two techniques: jagged jump cuts (as when Abberline envisions the murders) and molecular graininess (as seen in the opium den scene above). Abberline's subjective sense of clock and calendar time is anomalous in its distortions and slippages. When 'rescued' by Sergeant Godley (Robbie Coltrane) after four hours spent in the opium den according to the clock, he assumes he has 'lost' a whole day there. The stretching out of time is further heard in action when he tells Mary Kelly (Heather Graham) another 'unfortunate' and his doomed love–interest, that his wife and baby died 'a year ago, no two years, no, more than two years'. Smoking opium and drinking absinthe laced with laudanum to forget the pain of personal memory and to assist detection, instead he accesses place memory and common memory.

One useful Deleuzian concept with which to think the affective quality of certain on-screen images is molecularity. Re–deploying the concepts of molecular biology to film-philosophy, Deleuze suggests that as 'thought is molecular', so 'molecular speeds make up the slow beings that we are'.(40) Abberline enhances his extra-sensory perception by occasional bouts of absinthe drinking. In a grainy close-up of his glass, the bubbles rise and burst in the green mixture as the alcohol slowly melts the sugar. The bubbling of fluids such as this and, later, both water and blood express Abberline's own molecular condition. Intriguingly, too, this magnification of melting sugar recalls Bergson's image of time stretching and melting in duration like sugar in water.(41) While the purely spectacular image demands our attention on screen, the unfolding of the plot is held in suspense.

Classic narrative film seeks to collapse temporality into the flattened plane of standardised on–screen time, with deviations clearly marked in the narrative by flash-backs and dream sequences. Yet this attempt inevitably undermines itself because the medium of film is itself made up of virtual, hence durational, images that cannot enter the normal clock-time of actualisation. As well as the molecular quality of grainy close-ups, time's moving map and the mental jumps we make across it are expressed by special effects. In *From Hell*, very brief intercuts of images with a manic, irritant quality are used to express the death of Annie Chapman, seen by Abberline spontaneously on a rare occasion in which he does not use narcotic assistance. In these images, garish strobes and rapid flicker stab into our visual faculties as affective components of light.

Such effects, which overlay and freeze 'present' time by flash-frames so brief as to be almost imperceptible, induce what Deleuze calls the 'emancipation of time, which ensures the rule of impossible continuity and aberrant movement'.(42) Such affective techniques complicate the validity of the on–screen temporal schema, itself made up of visionary experiences recalled by virtual images that undermine actuality. In *From Hell*, particular devices deliberately seek to complicate standardised movie time. One example occurs when Abberline actually discovers the corpse of another street walker, Martha Tabram rather than that of the woman whose murder he has just witnessed in his precognitive vision.

A further example occurs at the end of the film as Abberline overdoses on opium. At this point, he envisions a happy ending for Mary Kelly, in which she has eluded Jack's knife by escaping to the west coast of Ireland with the money the detective gave her. In a soft-focus sequence, we see into the future with him. Mary has set up a pretty home in a cottage by the sea with Alice (the daughter of her friend Ann immured in an asylum when her secret marriage to the prince of Wales is uncovered by Queen Victoria's

agents) and looks out to sea as she waits for Abberline to join them. Abberline's idyllic vision could be intended as a compensatory fantasy projection, the wish-fulfilment of possibilities frustrated in reality.

This happy ending is only one aspect of the film singled out for attack from a psychogeographical perspective. If Mary's escape were intended as a plausible event, then it would, of course, refute her actual death in both history and Moore's fiction. As Ian Sinclair's review of the film suggests, however, the opening sequence might feasibly the first in a series of Abberline's opium dreams that enfold the other actions we witness later. If this were the case, then all events as presented in the film could well be read as Abberline's extended posthumous reverie.(43) It is to the more spatial psychogeographical possibilities opened up by the film's 'unreal geography' and the light these shed on the Gothic mode that I now want to turn, using explicit content and context to illumine and supplement the implicit intent of its affective style.(44)

'All there in the breath of the stones': Psychogeography in From Hell

Psychogeography sketches an occult landscape of atmospheres, histories, actions and characters impacting on actual environments, and has much insight to offer on the role of locale in Gothic studies. It developed from the same historical nexus as Deleuze and Guattari's work and shares some earlier antecedents in avant–garde aesthetics. In France, psychogeography originates both in the Baudelairian figure of the *flaneur*, the perambulant urban dandy, and Walter Benjamin's walks around the Paris streets of the 1920s. Emerging from Situationism it combines Marxism and the visionary techniques of Surrealism. In their own ways both psychogeography and Deleuzeguattarian concepts manifest the same cultural currents which developed from post–war Paris into the events of May 1968 and their theoretical aftermath.

Psychogeography is the hidden landscape of atmospheres, histories, actions and characters impacting on environments. After the *Internationale Situationiste* gathering in 1957, the term is used by Guy Debord to indicate the experiential study 'of specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals'.(45) and like the Surrealists before him, he provocatively recruits Jack the Ripper to his pantheon as 'psychogeographical in love'.(46)

On one level, Psychogeography moves extensively in specific places and historical events, whilst Deleuzian affect, as we have seen, moves intensively on the abstract, mental plane of duration. Yet, on another level, their dynamics are congruent. Whilst undertaking physical walks in the city, the Situationists sought out 'zones of distinct psychic atmospheres'.(47) As well as actual walks, mental journeys such those of the Surrealists are also incorporated in the psychogeographic paradigm, though they usually involves the mental projection of actual sites.(48) As well as 'authentic' locales and physical walks, early Gothic mental travellers such as Thomas De Quincey have psychogeographical currency as 'founding fathers'.(49)

Abberline has considerable psychogeographical credence, particularly as characterised in Moore's comic version. His opium addiction, detailed above, certainly qualifies him as a mental traveller across time and space. In Abberline's actual, physical perambulations of the Whitechapel locale, too, he experiences the psychogeographical imprint of the murders on the very stones of streets and buildings.

The movie adaptation of *From Hell* evolved from Sinclair's novel *White Chapell Scarlet Tracings* (1988) as already adapted by Moore's comic series.(50) Given Sinclair's long-term engagement with psychographical issues via his fiction and independent film and video making, it is hardly surprising that he would take issue with this lush multi-million dollar Hollywood version of the story.(51) Sinclair's own form of psychogeography meshes psychic states with layers of history in a specific geographical locale which exacerbate, or even cause, them. His schizophrenic character James Hinton sounds remarkably Deleuzian in his embrace of subjective dissolution, duration and becoming. Hinton seeks to be 'disencumbered, no longer prey to the physical laws of the universe and the grinding tyranny of time […] In erasing myself, I should truly become'.(52)

Deleuze and Guattari's schizoid BWO is likewise an 'affective aggregate to dissolve subjective identity'.(53) They deploy maps and terrains not to encompass spatial geography but to figure the intensive motion of the abstract 'plane of immanence' with its own metaphysical geography of 'poles, zones, thresholds and gradients'.(54) This concept repudiates transcendence as 'other' to immanence. The plane of immanence flattens all binary divisions such as body and mind, spirit and matter in the shifting forces of 'a powerful, nonorganic vitality'.(55)

Both theoretical perspectives we are considering foreground time and memory, to gain insight from past experiences, mobilising vital forces in the optimum direction for future change though with a very different emphasis. Sinclair asserts that 'unless we can remake the past, go into it, change what is now […] we are prisoners, giving birth to our old faults, carrying our naked grandfathers in our arms'.(56) The role of history in Deleuze and Guattari's work reflects on history though the prism of philosophy via theories of time and evolution via historical thinkers such as David Hume and Friedrich Nietzsche.(57)

Sinclair's objections to the Hughes' brothers' film diverge sharply from a Deleuzian perspective on cinema. He attacks the film on two counts–lack of historical authenticity and stylistic overload. The directors' stated attempt at a 'ghetto story' (58) enrages Sinclair, who asserts that this 'industrial product treats the past as the final colony in the American world empire'.(59) It 'robs' the climactic slaughter of Kelly in Miller' s Court, of its 'place in time' and the sentimental happy ending trashes history.(60) Moore's self–reflexive and structurally complex comics are, on the other hand, lauded as admirable with its strong sense of Victorian London locales and its 'darkly realist; fiercely drawn, crosshatched' graphic style. (61) Sinclair complains that the Hughes' cinematic excess swallows the 'bleak nightscape' of Moore's vision and floods it with garish Technicolor.(62)

Ironically, the filmmakers had sought to lend authenticity to their 'ghetto story' by shooting in Prague, where a Victorian Gothic facsimile of Whitechapel was lovingly assembled (63) Old cobblestones 'borrowed' from Polish breweries and civic institutions dressed the set. In Sinclair's uncompromising view, this 'industrial product' that 'treats the past as the final colony in the American world empire' has maligned, not reanimated, history. (64)

From a psychogeographical point of view, though, a virtual past is feasible only if it retains material determinants as traces of physical contact with the past. Alan Moore asserts that the past is ultimately unknowable and inevitably generates imaginative fictions, yet the Whitechapel locales and the murders, whether perpetrated by the single figure of Jack the Ripper or not, were, of course, actual. Sinclair regrets the film's entirely virtual and evanescent nature.(65) He writes that 'Colours bleed. The visceral impact of

the Hughes' grand guignol, with its Steadicam swoops and dynamically articulated tracking shots, loosens its grip. Memory won't hold us in this other place, however cunningly the never-was is resurrected'.(66)

At the other pole on this count, the virtual rather than the actual plane is crucial to the mental operations of Deleuzian cinematic affect. In order for Abberline's BWO to shift its spatial co–ordinates, the actual and the virtual, space and time, must interface. Though both actual and virtual poles are mobilised by the film as experience, the cinematic trajectory travels chiefly on the virtual plane of affect. From Sinclair's geographically and historically –based psychogeography, then, the film has little to recommend it. Yet, rather than abandoning the two perspectives because of their irreconcilable divergence, I would, instead, like to continue my exploration of the congruence.

Psychogeography accesses cultural memory of events and places to glean present insight, often of a politically radical and anti-Capitalist nature. Like the affective intensity of Abberline, this process demands psychic receptivity. Sinclair recommends the technique of what he calls 'saturation' with a 'solution of the past, involuntary, unwilled, until the place where you are has become another place; and then you can live it, and then it is.'(67) He describes an intense visionary encounter with the past experienced by his novel's unnamed psychogeographical narrator as he walks around the East London area of Brick Lane. He is pulled into the presubjective past in which older landscapes on the site are 'superimposed' along the present line of Brick Lane as the 'force of the river' pulls him 'beyond the human heats, running out of time into the previous, ahead; nerved to a candle–flame consciousness'.(68)

Here, Sinclair's psychogeographical process parallels Bergson's description of the circuits of personal memory, which Deleuze makes pre-subjective in his own interpretation in the cinema books. In these, the 'past in general', which forms images of an 'unstable set of floating memories', that move at 'dizzying speed, as if time were achieving a profound freedom' has a similar function to communal events and place memory in psychogeography.(69) Bergson's concept of duration links the past, present and future in a seamless continuum, artificially divided by turning time into space. He argues that by stepping outside everyday modes of thought, the 'deeper' self can intuit fluid and multiple states of consciousness that move in the flow of duration. He claims that the insights of 'immediate intuition' can show us 'motion within duration, and duration outside space'.(70) By intensive focus on these states, the perceiver will, in Bergson's lyrical simile, see them 'melt into one another like the crystals of a snowflake when touched for some time with the finger'.(71) Durational continuity thus underlies the apparent distinction of clock-time.

For Bergson, aesthetic absorption has a special power to trigger the intensive affective vibrations of duration in our consciousness. Like music, duration is 'an indivisible multiplicity changing qualitatively in an ongoing movement'.(72) It unites past and present into an ever-flowing organic stream, as 'when we recall the notes of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another'.(73) Affect is imbricated in the processes of memory via which we recover the enduring past. In order to endure, consciousness is not entirely absorbed in the passing moment. Time passes, but time continues.

Memory enables the consciousness to experience its 'full, living, potential' as it opens itself up to duration via a state of awareness not limited by everyday egoic constraints.(74) Bergson states that pure duration is 'the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states'.(75) Memory returns the past to

the present of consciousness, as we experience 'full, living, potential' in its quality of 'pure heterogeneity'.(76)

With this insight to guide us, he argues in *Time and Free Will*, we are better equipped to make existential choices.(77) We do not use the re–animated past as an escape route from present demands, but, rather, it enables us to become fully alive to time's richness and complexity. Aware of becoming, we participate in its affirmative force. By reanimating the past, we do not use it as an escape route from present demands, but, rather, we become fully alive to time's richness and complexity. Thus, we gain awareness of the nature of becoming and our own participation in its affirmative potential.

Crucially to Deleuze's thinking, Bergson points out that memory, like the flux of matter and our own perception, is image-dependent. All experiences are shot through with memory, but for him outstanding memories emanate light, as 'shining points round which the others form a vague nebulosity'.(78) In *From Hell* a place as well as a person can generate the act of remembering. As a receptive psychogeographer, Abberline catalyses this by mental contact as 'shining points' are reversed by the Gothic mode into horror by the atrocities he dredges up.

Psychogeography seeks links to cultural memory and times past in order to gain present insight by learning from events in particular places. Like the affective intensities of Abberline, these special insights are accessed in altered states of consciousness. Sinclair suggests that historically charged places like Southwark, the City and Whitechapel 'hold' time. Here, we may 'walk back into the previous, as an event, still true to this moment. The past is a fiction which absorbs us. It needs no passport: turn the corner and it is with you. The things they do there are natural. You do those things.'(79) In such locales, times past become present experience for the psychogeographer. For both Sinclair's psychogeography and the Bergsonian Deleuze, time is a plurality where if we 'give ourselves up, let go' then the 'dead moment only exists as we live it now'.(80)

Whist retaining their singularities, all bodies are interconnected at an atomic level in the BWO's field of force. Again, the psychogeographical perspective expressed by Sinclair in his Ripper novel remarkably recalls Bergson's durational model of memory in positing time as a co–existing, and enduring whole with accessible memory traces.(81) In the novel, Sinclair affirms in a rhapsodic passage, the past is

'all there in the breath of the stones. There is a geology of time! We can take the bricks into our hands: as we grasp them, we enter it. The dead moment only exists as we live it now. No shadows across the landscape of the past–we have the past–we have what is coming; we arrive at what was, and we make it now'.(82)

Again, like Bergson and Deleuze, he posits time as a presubjective, collective multiplicity, '*wherein all that has ever come into being or will come co–exists*, which, passing slowly on, leaves in this flickering consciousness of ours […] a tumultuous record of changes and vicissitudes'.(83)

Despite the obviously divergent routes of affect and psychogeography, I have suggested that their paths cross in recent Gothic horror film. Although memory 'imitates' perception as it returns from duration, elements of 'original virtuality' will always prevent complete actualisation.(84) Shot through with

fantasy, history can never be totally grasped. Yet, like the former sense impression manifested in the 'coloured and living image' of memory, cinema's virtual images touch sensational actuality, as Abberline touches the stones.(85) As well as having distinct particularities, all bodies are interconnected with each other at an atomic level within a larger field of force. Aesthetic delirium feels the enduring past and accesses a terrain for new forms of thought.(86) However virtual and in some ways corrupted the film's diegesis may be, *From Hell*'s dead bodies still generate a living map of affect.

1. At least five street walkers were murdered and sexually mutilated in a 'serial' manner in the Whitechapel area in 1888. I am using Jack the Ripper here as the name popular crime culture and 'Ripperology' gives to the perpetrator of these murders, though the women may not have been killed by a sole person.
2. The Hughes brothers' film is an adaptation of Alan Moore's ten-volume serial comic *From Hell*, Kitchen Sink Press, 1991-1996.
3. Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone, 1988), hereafter referred to as *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 171.
4. *The Oxford English Dictionary* Vol 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 211.
5. Ibid, p. 213.
6. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2003).
7. Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. P. Bains and J. Pefanis (Sidney: Power Publications, 1995), p. 92.
8. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Vol. 6. No. 6, 1975; Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Women in the Horror Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
9. Anna Powell, *Deleuze and Horror Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).
10. Julian Hanich, *The Paradox of Fear* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010, forthcoming). Hanich presents a phenomenological study of audience response to horror and thriller films.
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"You guys and your cute little categories": *Torchwood*, The Space-Time Rift and Cardiff's Postmodern, Postcolonial and (avowedly) Pansexual Gothic

Linnie Blake

This article is about Russell T. Davies's decidedly grown-up *Dr Who* spin off *Torchwood* and Cardiff, the city in which it's set: specifically the ways in which two seasons of inveterately Welsh misadventures in science fiction depict Cardiff as a pansexually and a decidedly postcolonial gothic location; a site at which historically embedded discourses of identity politics (specifically those to do with sexuality and nationhood) are purposefully deconstructed - with often hilarious, or wildly erotic, or erotically wild and hilarious consequences.

The Cardiff-based Torchwood Institute was founded by Queen Victoria to defend Britain from the highly gothic invasion of supernatural forces she witnessed in the Scottish highlands in the *Doctor Who* episode "Tooth and Claw." As the voice over that accompanies the rain-slicked, leather clad, labyrinthine and partly subterranean credit sequence indicates, moreover, Torchwood exists "outside the government, beyond the police, tracking down alien life on earth." But noticeably, even in the credit sequence, the Imperial Gothic's fear of invasion, its fear of being contaminated or over-run by the alien other is tempered by a decidedly post colonial sense of overwhelming possibility. For, as we learn, "the twenty first century is when everything changes" and it is the job of the Torchwood team to facilitate that change – as humanity moves beyond its materially earth-bound and conceptually binaristic models of historically circumscribed and rationally underpinned human identity. It is, then, unsurprising that *Torchwood*'s Cardiff should be haunted by the gothic spectres that, for Ken Gelder, haunt the structural logic of postcolonial studies – a city totally saturated with ghosts of the returning repressed, monstrous hybrids, uncanny misrecognitions, possessions and dispossessions. For the entire *Torchwood* project, it seems to me, is an attempt (by Russell T. Davies, its creator, Chris Chibnall, its main writer, and their team) to pick away at the models of individual, gendered and racial identity that postcolonial studies takes as its subject and, through an insistent queering of those models, to break down what Captain Jack Harkness terms, their 'cute little categories' into their ideologically expedient components. What emerges from all of this, moreover, is decidedly postcolonial and insistently pansexual gothic celebration of all possible possibilities.

Torchwood's Cardiff is, of course, a highly gothic location – an interstitial border crossing resting on a rift in both time (that allows two way traffic between our past and our future) and space (which results in all manner of aliens being washed up on the streets of the city and all manner of city dwellers being hurled into the furthest reaches of the cosmos). And as we discover as the series progresses, both sides of the rift are horrific to those catapulted into them. The good people of Cardiff, for example, are not above tunnelling with chainsaws into a giant aquatic alien life-form washed up by the rift, carving out slabs of its still living flesh over a period of weeks and selling it on as cheap meat. They are happy to place bets on fights to the death between men and aliens. And in both their past and their present, they are equally happy to fight and kill and rape each other on a seemingly daily basis.

This is not a straightforwardly Imperial Gothic paradigm in other words – whereby a sense of a strong and integrated national identity is counterpoised to the horrific excesses of an alien other. And the reason for

that, as the series' repeated reference to location underscores, is that this series is set not in London but in Cardiff – the capital of a nation itself colonised by the English since the twelfth century, a nation repeatedly vilified by its colonial masters who throughout the generations would teach their children that:

Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief,
Taffy came to my house and stole a leg of beef.
I went to Taffy's house, Taffy was in bed,
So I picked up the piss-pot and smashed it on his

So, whilst in *Torchwood*'s sister programme *Dr Who* we see hostile aliens such as the appropriately named Sykorax invade the capital, knocking a symbolic chunk out of Big Ben's phallic primacy in the process, things are rather different on the other side of the Severn estuary. For Cardiff is itself a hybrid entity, born of the colonial past and the postcolonial present and generically characterised in this series by an intriguing admixture of gothic preoccupations and *mise-en-scene* and science fiction characters and narrative devices. And so, the first series alone takes in ghosts, demons and monsters, murderous fairies, cannibals, cyborgs, aliens and those who have simply fallen through time – a plague victim, a Roman soldier, the passengers of a 1950s light aircraft. The second series moves on to the existential agonies not only of the key characters but of *both* alien 'sleepers' living quietly in Cardiff until they erupt into alterity and slaughter everything they've ever cared about *and* those locals who have returned so hopelessly damaged from their experiences on the other side of the rift that they are unable to rejoin the human race. Most poignant of all is the plight of the shellshocked World War One soldier who must return to 1917 to be shot for cowardice despite saving the world in our present. I'll return to all of this later.

Clearly, then, this is a far darker creation than *Dr Who* – the chiaroscuro lighting, the subterranean or urban-labyrinthine *mise-en-scene* and its monochromatic colour palate evoking a decidedly postmodern sense of a destabilised urban space, where locations slide into each other, repudiating fixity and militating against a concrete sense of locale. Accordingly, the series' narratives, its camerawork and its editorial logic is seen to slide, with often vertiginous speed, between the shiny new buildings of the Altoluzzo development to the urban deprivation of Butetown, from the city's bars, clubs and restaurants to the suburban respectability of Pentyrch's manicured lawns, from Barry Docks to the Brecon Beacons to the picturesque shopping opportunities of the nineteenth century Castle Arcade. All are recognisable locations (and for those who do not actually recognise them a community of fans maintain a website to assist the uninitiated).(1) But the topology of *Torchwood* (most specifically its edits) ensures that they also exist in a constant state of spatial and temporal slippage that repudiates any commonly accepted sense of logic, cohesion or normality.

Clearly, there's something queer going on in Cardiff. For high atop the Altoluzzo bulding stands Captain Jack, a fifty first century alien assigned to watch over the city and its environs, a space where suburban woodland is infested with malevolent spirits that steal away little girls to dance with them forever; where the countryside is home to murderous cannibals (who can not even blame their actions on alien intervention, murdering and eating strangers being something of a tradition in these parts) and where, beneath the city, the demon Abbadon waits, until that nice old queen from the clock shop in the Castle Arcade opens the rift and lets him out. And this is just Series One! *Torchwood*'s Cardiff, it seems, is nothing less than a grotesque urban body repeatedly penetrated by the fantastic spectres of other times and places. Its topology bulges and leaks, it bleeds into its own past and future, it oozes sexuality and dark

desire. And in so doing, of course, it displays a pronounced concern with questions of identity – individual, gendered, sexual, national ... human.

But if all this sounds rather Emo, then I should stress that one of the key delights of the series is the way it tempers its more pressing existential concerns with decidedly celebratory deployment of self-reflexive parody and archly camp pastiche. In *Torchwood*, in other words, we have a text that is characterised by a variety of queer representational and critical practice that undertakes a radical deconstruction of the ideologies of identity that have historically underpinned mass cultural formulations of both Welsh and British selfhood.

The universe of sexual possibility pointed to by *Torchwood* is nothing if not rococo. The central character Captain Jack Harkness – an indestructible Captain Scarlet figure, played by out gay actor John Barrowman, is (as I have said) of alien origin, hailing from the 51st century. As far back as the *Dr Who* episode "The Empty Child", though, he has been seen to rejoice in humanity's forthcoming sexual exploration (in distinction to militaristic colonisation) of the universe. Throughout both series, moreover, Captain Jack is seen to engage in a panoply of erotically charged relationships with men and women, humans and aliens, relationships that fly in the face of all heteronormative prescriptions.

Handsome, macho, authoritative and supremely rational (but with a naughty twinkle in the eye and charmingly boyish forelock), Captain Jack may appear to be the reasoning subject of Descartes' *cogito* on whose intellectual enquiries into the nature of being, post-enlightenment subjectivity rests. But he also contains within himself, those aspects of consciousness putatively antithetical to such a rationalist project – being possessed of an entirely rapacious and ostensibly indiscriminate libido and unable, however many times you shoot him in the head, to remain dead for long. Unable to sleep and prone to depression, he haunts the Hub's underground chambers, remembering the male (and occasionally female) lovers who have pre-deceased him, intermittently engaging in some very hot sex, but yet very much alone. In ways, one could argue, Captain Jack contains within himself that "wildly dichotomous play around solipsism and intersubjectivity" that for Eve Sedgewick characterised the "paranoid male plot" (2) of the Age of Frankenstein in which both the gothic and Foucault's homosexual (as identifiable subject) came into being. And so he chases himself down the corridors of memory, through the liminal spaces of the city, alone, even as his co-workers pursue their own pansexual adventures – and, in so doing, affirms his unknowable, noumenal, highly corporeal, yet decidedly spectral, self.

Captain Jack's pansexual prerogative is echoed, in other words, in those of his colleagues. Toshiko Sato is a gauche and geeky computer genius (complete with glasses and pre-pubescent demeanour). The voice of logical calculation, Toshiko spends much of both seasons in unrequited love with whiney misogynist medic Owen Harper, in the episode "Greeks Bearing Gifts", Toshiko nonetheless partakes in an erotico-philosophical project very similar to that of Captain Jack. Here Tosh indulges enthusiastically, if rather remorsefully, in a passionate affair with a woman called Mary, who is in fact an alien serial killer living inside the appropriated body of a C19 Cardiff prostitute. Wearing the alien's pendant, Tosh, in classic female gothic mode, is granted the ability to feel the feelings and think the thoughts of others; her own sense of self melding with the thoughts and desires, fears and dreams of the city, as indeed it does later in her affair with a cryogenically suspended time travelling infantryman from World War One.

But not only does this underscore Tosh's aloneness, it further differentiates the human-seeming Captain Jack from the humanity he protects, reading his mind being compared to reading that of a corpse. Clearly,

the sexual fetishisation of the abject-pansexual-dead is an essential part Torchwood's pansexually gothic project – being further explored in the second series when Owen too becomes the living dead.

So, for all Captain Jack is perhaps not quite as hot as he believes himself to be, dead or not he remains a pretty attractive proposition – his glorious affirmation of all possible sexual permutations and hence modes of being spilling over the boundaries of the heterosexist world. Gwen Cooper, for example, the newest member of the team and the series' Welsh Everywoman, is ostensibly straight - not a term, of course, that sits at all at ease with this series. She is engaged to bovine boyfriend Rhys, who does a nifty line in housewifely role reversal, and she later marries him. But she is nonetheless wildly attracted to Captain Jack – even whilst indulging in extra-curricular sexual shenanigans with the considerably more dangerous Owen Harper. What is more, Gwen also partakes enthusiastically in a passionate same-sex encounter in the episode "Day One" – in this case with a serial killing alien who feeds off orgasmic energy. Nothing is as clear cut or as straightforward as it initially seemed. Gwen, like us, has had her eyes opened to a world of possibilities that lie well beyond our everyday imaginings of the world. What is more, the tall hyper-Welsh cutie that is Ianto Jones, devastated by the death of his half-human, half-cyborg girlfriend whom, in a manner that can only be described as parodic of every crazed scientist picture the viewer has ever seen, he has kept in the Torchwood cellar for some time, eventually finds abject consolation in a rumbustuous affair with his tender, paternalistic (and still dead) boss, Captain Jack.

Around the characters a world of erotic possibility holds out its hot flushed hand. Sex with aliens, sex with machines, sexualised murder and murderous sexuality are all paraded before us – in a highly humorous, highly self-referential fashion. Even the body, the topos of sexuality itself, is repeatedly invaded – Gwen being physically impregnated by a shape shifting alien called a Nostrovite in the episode "Something Borrowed" and alien parasites called Mayflies curing experimental subjects of terminal illnesses by 'resetting' their body mechanisms to 'well' in "Reset". These are only two examples of many. Identity, it seems, is a far more fluid entity than one has been conditioned to think.

What *Torchwood* seems to be affirming here is a decidedly Foucauldian sense that the heterosexist patriarchy that lies beyond the hub (on the streets of Cardiff, in its nightclubs and workplaces, cafes and bars) rests on a series of illusory binarisms (self and other, male and female, straight and gay, natural and unnatural, human and inhuman, Welsh and not-Welsh). And this comprehensively fails, of course, to acknowledge the fact that most people participate in a range of identities and sexual desires that fall well outside such neat binaristic logic. For if the rococo sexual practices of *Torchwood* show nothing, they show that there is no such thing as a 'natural' state or an essential orientation. "You guys and your cute little categories" remarks Captain Jack, in the awareness that whilst medical, psychiatric, political, legal or historical discourse may name, categorise or taxonomise people as straight, gay, human, alien or indeed Welsh, it does not change the nature of things in and of themselves. For "Captain Jack Harkness" is itself a pseudonym ... our hero having long ago appropriated the identity of a dead World War Two fighter pilot – a man he meets, and is strongly attracted to, in the episode that bears their name. It's a delightfully erotic, playful and arch moment of doubling that again calls into question both identities and identity politics in a highly gothic way.

For *Torchwood* is nothing if not arch. It delights in the artful stylisation of its sets and settings – that in all its slick constructedness draw attention not only to the shiny newness of modern Cardiff, but to the over determined symbolic machinery of the gothic itself. Characters, accordingly, are frequently androgynous - kitted out (by Bafta Cymru winner Ray Holman) in exceedingly fetishistic costumes that are themselves a

pastiche of styles from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And time travellers, of course, arrive in the exceedingly fetishised outfits of their respective eras – centurions, civil war soldiers, 1950s family men. All meticulously, pitch perfectly, realised.

Torchwood's performance style, in contrast, is pretty theatrical, characters often being 'blocked' into improbable lines and clusters more suited to the stage than the screen. Delivery veers between genres, from the contemporary histrionics of soap opera to the monochromatic repressiveness of 1940s British melodrama (all clipped delivery and thwarted passion) with a little of the technicolour queerness of American melodrama of the 1950s (all Rock Hudson in a workshirt) on the side. In either case, it's a pretty overdetermined, pretty pastichy bricolage. And so, in a fashion that's recognisably camp (camp being, as Jonathan Dollimore has termed 'the pervert's revenge on authenticity')(3) *Torchwood* delights in an aesthetic valorisation of form over content. For however many loose ends of character, plot and indeed probability there are, it usually looks pretty damned sexy - being ironic, extravagant, slick and decidedly outrageous. For unlike much contemporary television that rejoices in such camp practices yet erases their historically queer referent (I'm thinking of television like *Sex and the City* here) *Torchwood* never loses sight of its subject – the queer in all its abject, alien, grotesque, fantastical manifestations; the queer in all of us.

It's at this point though that I should probably make mention of *Torchwood: Children of Earth* – the miniseries that ran on the BBC between 6 and 10 July 2009. Revolving around the evil plans of a three headed alien species named the 456 to remove ten percent of the earth's children for use as a form of drug (because, as the alien says, "they feel good") the narrative sees Captain Jack not only insistently heterosexualised by the death of his male lover Ianto but deified with the appearance of not only an adult daughter but a grandson whom (as Nobodaddy in a Greatcoat) he must sacrifice to save the eponymous children of earth.

Having lit the fansites ablaze with equal measures of praise and condemnation, *Children of Earth* can be seen as a kind of anti-*Torchwood* that deploys earlier characters and character relationships in the telling of its tale but is considerably more SF than gothic and considerably less queer than it ought to be. Set mostly in London's corridors of power (repeated use of bird's eye view shots of Whitehall replacing those of Cardiff that characterised series one and two), *Children of Earth* highlights the morally bankrupt nature of government, the militaristic underpinnings of everyday life and the invidious nature of the British class system - bourgeois English children, for example, remaining safe by virtue of their private schools' excellent league table results while children from working class communities, such as Cardiff's council estates, are herded off in busses to their doom. A conceptually binaristic piece, *Children of Earth* thus pits good guys against bad guys, humans against aliens, Americans against Brits and the English against us all in an entirely un-*Torchwood* way. It is shot and edited in a straightforward TV Realist style (lacking the funky edits and incongruous tonal juxtapositions of earlier series). It lacks the decidedly queer love action between men, women, aliens and cyborgs that has characterised earlier series and is almost entirely po-faced in its approach to the subject matter. It is, I would argue, an anti-gothic *Torchwood* for a mainstream BBC1 audience – which may explain the fact that some 5.8 million viewers (a staggering 26.7% of the available viewing public) watched the final episode. And as such, it is far removed from the first two series.

Self-consciously concerned with questions of regional, national and individual identity (as gendered subject, as human being, as alien) these series participated joyously in queer theory's critique of all

essentialist identity discourses as they sets out to deconstruct the hetero/homo binarism and the power/knowledge regime that underpins it and consequently shapes the ordering of desire, behaviour, social institutions and social relations in the world. In so doing, of course, the first two series set out to explore exactly what it is to be enculturated (as British and as Welsh) to call oneself a man or woman, straight or gay; whether, of course, one is 'essentially' anything at all or whether, as Judith Butler has argued at length, one's identity is itself is nothing more than a melange of both disavowals and identifications, wherein parodic representations of what it is to be a British or Welsh person encourages consideration of the ideological underpinnings of these effectively contingent though historically situated categories.(4) So, for all the first two series of *Torchwood* were insistently set in Cardiff, for all they signified a sense of 'Welshness' that entails the idea of community, a sense of linguistic homogeneity and geographical contiguity, a system of economic exchange and, putatively a common culture underpinned by a shared psychological make-up,(5) these series were very keen to explore precisely what all of this adds up to.

All three series of *Torchwood*, in other words, are as hip to the dangers of nationalism as Homi Bhabha who has warned of the ways in which nationalist discourse offers an ideologically expedient "continuous narrative of national progress" that reflects both "the narcissism of self-generation" and troublingly "the primeval present of the *Volk*"(6) – with often cataclysmic consequences. In their depiction of what Benedict Anderson would term the "imagined community"(7) of Cardiff, it is then notable that the distinctive cultural forms and practices of the nation that have been historically manifested in icons, ceremonies and symbols of Welshness, are noticeably absent. There are no miners here, no rugby players, no male voice choirs and no eisteddfods, for *Torchwood* is keen to explore the ways in which such symbolic signifiers of nationhood effectively mediate our experience of the real and, in so doing, offer only illusory resolution of the conflicts of interests groups and contradictions of identity that in actuality beset the nation state, its varied cultural products and the histories of both.(8)

If, as we've seen, the transparently 'normal' spatial relations of the city are challenged by a forceful interjection of the 'abnormal' into the 'real' world – an interjection which prompts a reconsideration of what it is we consider by 'reality' in the first place – then the same can be said of time. *Torchwood* insistently undermines the rationality of linear time by collapsing all time periods - repeatedly bringing the past into the present, the present into the past and the future into all. Alien technology brings back the dead and interjects the living into past time, the rift plucks unsuspecting individuals from the past and lands them, understandably stressed (though occasionally delighted), into our present, whilst the eponymous "Adam", a particularly inventive alien, feeds off the psychic energy of others, altering their memories of the past and in turn the ways they perceive themselves and each other in the present. And at every turn, these logic defying events provide opportunity for the team to indulge in further erotic adventures.

In a piece entitled "Gothic Sexualities,"(9) Steven Bruhm pointed to the ways in which sexuality, filtered through Freudian, post-Freudian and queer thought, is itself "nothing short of gothic in its ability to rupture, fragment and destroy both the coherence of the individual subject and the culture in which that subject appears."(10) For like the queer episteme, he argues, "the Gothic disrespects the borderlines of the appropriate, the healthy or the politically desirable. It resists the authority of the traditional or received and insists with more or less gleeful energy, on making visible the violence underpinning the sexual norms that our culture ... holds most sacred."(11) In the postcolonial context of contemporary Wales, such observations, I would hazard, are doubly relevant. Itself an interstertial entity that has worked

tirelessly to affirm its linguistic, cultural and historical alterity in the face of four hundred and fifty years of "union" with England, Wales may now enjoy limited autonomy in terms of the economy, environment, health, social services, education and culture.

What *Torchwood* would seem to suggest is that full autonomy lies not in identity discourse (such as nationalism) or even in the kind of 'paranoid reading' of the world practiced, as Eve Sedgwick has argued, by much queer theory (including her own). For *Torchwood*, if nothing else, can be seen to offer a far more reparative exploration of subjectivity and desire than most popular culture – underscoring possibility, pleasure, understanding, belonging and healing. And I'd hazard that's precisely what the pansexual postmodern postcolonial gothic is all about.

1. www.torchwoodlocations.com
2. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), p. 163.
3. Jonathan Dollimore, "Post/Modern: On the Gay Sensibility, or the Pervert's Revenge on Authenticity" in Fabio Cleto (ed), *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 2002), pp. 221-236.
4. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
5. Stalin, Joseph, 'The Nation,' in Bruce Franklin (ed), *The Essential Stalin: Major Theoretical Writings 1905-1952* (London: Croom Helm, 1973), pp. 57-61.
6. Homi K Bhabha, 'Narrating the Nation,' in Homi K Bhabha (ed), *The Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 1.
7. Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (London: Verso, 1983).
8. As Althusser would put it: 'In ideology men […] express not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but the way they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence; this presupposes both a real relation and an 'imaginary,' 'lived' relation. Ideology […] is the expression of the relation between men and their 'world,' that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence.' Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), p. 233-4.
9. Stephen Bruhm, "Gothic Sexualities," in (eds), Andrew Smith and Anna Powell, *Teaching the Gothic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 93-106.
10. Bruhm, p. 93
11. Bruhm, p. 94

Psychoanalysis of a Sequel: The Disinterment of *Pet Sematary Two*

Douglas Keesey

In *The Language of Cinema*, Kevin Jackson defines a *sequel* as 'a film which picks up characters, stories or gimmickry that have already proved a success at the box-office and re-packages them in more or less derivative ways', and he adds that it is 'often said that sequels are always and inevitably inferior to their originals'.(1) Built into most people's very definition of the word *sequel* is the automatic assumption that it will be deficient in relation to its predecessor. Where the original was artistic, the sequel is held to be a strictly commercial venture. An original creation becomes a mass-produced copy, its strength diluted through an extenuation of material stretched too thin. A famous director, writer and stars are replaced by journeymen, hacks and a no-name cast, perpetrating an unauthorized or even plagiarized fraud on the original's true genius. Abjectly belated in relation to its real source, the sequel is often self-conscious about its own inferiority, a discomfort manifested in awestruck or joking allusions to its parent-text. These irreverent citations – this 'nostalgic repetition and compulsive winking'(2) – only serve to give the sequel an even worse reputation, for parody is often seen as the death of a genre. So pervasive is this scorn for the sequel that I could only find the contrary view – 'the sequel and its intellectual cousins the prequel, the spin-off, the tie-in, the themed attraction, and the licensed product are not, as has been alleged, mere "cultural stepchildren", but legitimate art forms in their own right, each as deserving of critical respect as any of the more traditional accepted modes of creative expression' – as a position stated facetiously in a spoof called *The Book of Sequels: The Greatest Stories Ever Retold!* (3)

Consider the reception of *Pet Sematary Two* (1992) as evidence of this widespread bias against sequels. The original *Pet Sematary* (1989) was authorized by Stephen King in more ways than one: not only did he pen the novel on which the film was based, he also 'wrote the script and he made the deal that saw it was done right. In addition to agreeing to shoot the production in Maine, producer Laurel Entertainment agreed to film King's script as written'.(4) It's no wonder that one admiring reviewer called *Pet Sematary* 'the most faithful film adaptation of a Stephen King novel yet'.(5) But *Pet Sematary Tw*o was filmed in Georgia; none of the original cast or characters appears in the sequel; and, most damaging of all, Stephen King had nothing to do with it. Given its commission of all these sins *typical of a sequel*, *Pet Sematary Two* was practically destined to meet with adverse critical comment. When it was reviewed at all (that is, when it was not considered beneath contempt), Pet Sematary Two was derided as derivative and inauthentically horrific: 'Lacking the morbid tone of the original, [director Mary] Lambert's sequel is unnecessarily repetitive'.(6) Predictably, the film's lack of originality is traced to the absence of its prime mover: 'Unfortunately, [the studio] left out the most important ingredient in the original's formula: [Stephen] King'.(7) The negative feedback on this film – some of it quite vitriolic – can be tellingly traced to the movie's (lack of) status as a sequel: '"Pet Sematary" was a work of art by the master, Stephen King. "Pet Sematary II" was a work of trash by some wannabe'; 'If they knew they were going to make a sequel they could have used some of the original characters'; 'Sequels keep ruining the horror-genre and this is also one of the worst movies ever made'; 'This is over 90 minutes of my life gone forever. I'll never get those minutes back again, and I could have used them for something of purpose. For instance, to petition against unnecessary sequels. ...like this one'; 'I really liked the first [*Pet Sematary*], but if there's ever another sequel and it's as bad as this, so help me god, I will kill myself'.(8)

Within a context so hostile to sequels, it becomes nearly impossible to view *Pet Sematary Two* as anything other than a mere shadow of the original, an unwelcome revenant. Even the advertising for the film is subject to this 'ghost of the original' effect: 'Remember the tagline for the original ("Sometimes dead is better")? That should have [gone] for "II", too. Not as a tagline but as a production note'.(9) Given this attitude toward shady sequels, how can the tagline for *Pet Sematary Two* – 'Sometimes you should just let dead dogs lie' – invite anything but derision? But what if we were to read this tagline for what it actually says, and to view *Pet Sematary Two* on its own terms, not as a mere ghost of its predecessor? Preposterous as it may seem, I propose to put the cart before the horse, to read a sequel *not* as a sequel, but as an original work in its own right, to approach *Pet Sematary Two* as worthy of in-depth analysis all by itself, without relation to its Ur-text.

Certainly, an interesting study of this sequel *qua* sequel could be done, for the film makes numerous and complex references to its predecessor and to other films in the horror genre. In the discussion that follows, I note some of these references, but I do not intend to pursue them.(10) Instead, I cite these allusions as cobwebs to clear away, as the trappings of a 'sequel' which must be removed if we are ever to see the work itself, the artefact buried under layer after filmy layer of predecessors and of prejudice against sequels. It is only when *Pet Sematary Two* is dug out from under its filmic overlay, disinterred from its graveyard as a 'sequel', that it can be approached as a 'legitimate art form' in its own right, 'as deserving of critical respect as any of the more traditional accepted modes of creative expression'(11) – to take *The Book of Sequels*' joke seriously, at least once, for the sake of experiment. Thus the discussion that follows – yes, for a movie called *Pet Sematary Two* – and is as lengthy and detailed as one you might expect for *Touch of Evil* or *North by Northwest*, and the critical approach taken – psychoanalytic – is as serious as those applied by Stephen Heath and Raymond Bellour in their profoundly respectful studies of these now-classic films. Whether this experiment of approaching a sequel as a serious work of art is successful can only be decided on the basis of the particular insights revealed from doing so. After reading this analysis of *Pet Sematary Two*, you be the judge.

Pet Sematary Two begins like an old-fashioned Gothic horror film with a beautiful blonde carrying a lantern down the winding staircase of a castle. As she leans down near an iron gate, skeletal hands reach up from underground to grab her. The hands' fumbling and the blonde's feeble screams provoke a director's cry of 'Cut!' and we realize that we have in fact been watching a movie (cf. the real/reel confusion and the need for a better scream in De Palma's *Blow Out*). The blonde, actress Renee Hallow (Darlanne Fluegel), confronts her director Frank – 'You get off on seeing me suffer, don't you?' – in a feminist moment which reminds us that the director of the film we are watching is female.(12) During the retake, Renee screams for real when she is electrocuted as the result of an accident with the film equipment, while inept Frank, and Renee's young teenage age son, Jeff (Edward Furlong), look on helplessly.

After Renee's funeral, Jeff and his father, Chase Matthews (Anthony Edwards), move from Los Angeles to the town where the Creeds once lived. At the animal hospital where Chase works as a vet, Jeff adopts a kitten, Tiger, which he must protect first from Zowie, a dog, then from Clyde Parker (Jared Rushton), a school bully. Jeff resents the fact that his housekeeper, Marjorie Hargrove, seems to be trying to take the place of his dead mother.

Similarly, Jeff's friend, Drew (Jason McGuire), dislikes his stepfather, Gus Gilbert (Clancy Brown), for having taken his mother, Amanda (Lisa Waltz), away from his father. When Gus shoots Zowie in order to

keep the dog away from Gus's rabbits, Drew buries Zowie in the Micmac burial ground beyond the pet sematary.(13) Later, Jeff (wearing a hockey mask like Jason in *Friday the 13th*) and Drew go to the pet sematary on Halloween night where they sit around a fire and listen to ghost stories told by Clyde. (This is where viewers learn what 'happened' to Ellie after *Pet Sematary* ends. For the record: she hacked up her grandparents with an axe, licking the brains off the blade. She was then committed to a psycho ward but, as in numerous teen-slasher-film campfire stories, she has just escaped and. . . .).(14) Drew's stepfather Gus breaks up the Halloween story and is about to strike Drew with a pet-sematary cross as punishment for disobedience (Drew had been grounded that night) when the resurrected Zowie jumps Gus and tears out his throat. Jeff and Drew inspect the dead body (shades of *Stand by Me*) and then, feeling guilty, they bury Gus in the Micmac ground. Gus returns from the dead, smiling more than he ever did when alive, but also hanging up skinned and gutted rabbit carcasses (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*), gulping and dribbling his meals as if human food were alien to him (*Invaders from Mars*) and killing Clyde by forcing his head between the spikes of a motorbike. Finally, Gus uses a hammer to break through a door to get to Drew (as Gus sticks his head through the boards, he looks like Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*), forces Amanda and Drew into a head-on collision with a truck, and attacks Jeff's father Chase with a power drill (*Body Double*). Chase survives only by shooting the zombie-like Gus through the head (*Night of the Living Dead*).

Neither Chase nor Jeff has been able to get over Renee's death. Both become obsessive watchers of a video in which the character played by Renee is shot. (This movie is actually *Once Upon a Time in America*, which features a scene with Darlanne Fluegel, the actress who appears as Renee in *Pet Sematary Two*). Jeff dreams of his mother alive again and seated in her favourite rocking chair, but as she turns toward him he sees that she has a ferocious dog's head; he wakes to find the demonic Zowie actually sitting in his mother's chair. Chase dreams of making love to Renee, but above the breasts he is fondling is the head of a wolf-dog which attacks him; waking, Chase finds the resurrected Zowie biting him and then fleeing by jumping out a window (*The Company of Wolves*). After receiving a disturbing report on the composition of Zowie's blood (the dog is dead!), Chase visits the town's former doctor, Yolander (Jim Peck), who had once found the same thing when he tested the blood of Church, the cat from the first *Pet Sematary*. Like *Psycho*'s Norman Bates, Yolander has been driven mad by this blurring of the line between life and death; his latest obsession: taxidermy. Back home, Jeff awaits the return of his mother Renee, whom he has buried in the Micmac ground. While Jeff sits smiling in his mother's chair, Renee arrives to kill the 'usurper', housekeeper Marjorie (Sarah Trigger), who has had the effrontery to put on Renee's dress. Then, following a battle to the death between Jeff and the resurrected school bully, Clyde (Jeff electrocutes him), Chase is able to convince Jeff that the revenant Renee's true goal is not to get the family back together, but to kill them both. Renee stands atop a bed while watching the destruction caused by a fire she has set (*Carrie*) and, as the wounds in her face re-open, she remarks on the fact that she is melting (like the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*). Chase and Jeff leave as the house, with Renee in it, burns ('Dead is better!' she screams, in a grimly humorous echo of the original film). Then, while Chase and Jeff drive away, the camera helicopter-pans and zooms over the woods to the pet sematary and the Micmac burial ground beyond, zeroing in on the grave site but cutting to black before we can see who or what (sequel) will be the next to arise from the dead.

In the first *Pet Sematary*, those buried are all loved ones (Timmy Baterman, Spot, Church, Gage, Rachel) from whom the living have been unable to part. The dead returning from the grave are initially the wish-fulfilment fantasies of grieving families who want their loved ones back. But the revenants represent the fears as well as the hopes of these families: the scalpel-wielding Gage is Doc Creed's guilt

over his inability to save his son from dying, and Gage attacks Rachel in the form of Zelda, the sister for whose death she felt responsible. The protagonists of the first *Pet Sematary* must learn that 'sometimes dead is better', as the ad for the movie put it; they must forego hope of seeing their loved ones again in this life, and they must overcome irrational feelings of guilt for their deaths.

Pet Sematary Two continues the original's idea of the living dead as the projection of hope and fear, of wish-fulfilment fantasy turned nightmare, but complicates the premise, for this time it is not only loved ones who are buried (Zowie, Renee) but also hated enemies (Gus, Clyde). Zowie returns as a result of Drew's wish to have his beloved dog back and to have a defence against his abusive stepfather Gus (Gus beat Drew and shot Zowie; the resurrected Zowie kills Gus). Feeling guilty over Gus's death (since Zowie enacted Drew's wish-fulfilment fantasy), Drew buries his stepfather, hoping that he will come alive again and (secretly) hoping that he will return as a better father. Both wishes come true – for a while. Soon, however, Gus's smiling is revealed to be a cover for even worse evil than he committed when first 'alive', and Drew's beloved dog Zowie turns out to be in cahoots with the murderous Gus against Drew. 'Raise some hell', the tagline for the sequel, is thus accurate in both senses: first the revenant Zowie helps Drew defy his sadistic stepfather (helps him rebel or 'raise some hell'), but then the living dead Zowie and Gus turn against Drew (who has unwittingly brought damnation upon himself, '*raised* some *hell*'). Similarly, Jeff rebels by summoning his mother Renee to kill the housekeeper Marjorie who threatens to take his mother's place at his father's side, only to find Renee's hellish power turned against himself and his father. Unlike Drew, however, Jeff realizes the terrible consequences of hell-raising in time to save his family.

Drew's stepfather, Gus, is the kind of insecure authority figure whose sadism is designed to provoke violence in others so that Gus can prove his manhood by taking them on. (At one point in the film, Gus asks the rebellious Drew a question more appropriate to his own provocative behaviour: 'What are you trying to prove?') Gus, a sheriff, calls attention to the law as a way of daring others to break it, and the law includes such minor rules as not watching TV during dinner. 'You're breaking the law', Gus warns Drew, ordering him to 'shut [the TV] off'; Drew, of course, aims the remote control at his stepfather and tries to shut *him* off. Gus's orders are deliberately hard to follow, ensuring the disobedience that will bring down the wrath he associates with virility. After telling Drew to 'show [his mother] some appreciation' by eating the meal she has cooked, Gus takes some of the food off Drew's plate, saying 'Not that much appreciation' and calling the boy fat. Gus *wants* Drew's dog Zowie to attack the rabbits so that the electrified cage he has set up will be given a chance to prove itself. In fact, Gus seizes the opportunity to shoot the dog himself, his rifle becoming – like the keys, hammer and power drill he holds later – an extension of his manhood. When Drew lies about who shot Zowie in order to protect his stepfather ('Some psycho got trigger-happy'), the lie reveals a truth: sheriff Gus is a psycho; his authoritarian laws are the danger from which society needs protection.

Drew may dream of an ideal father (at first seemingly embodied in the resurrected Gus: 'He even kind of smiles, like he forgot he hates me. He serves me an extra helping of pancakes. It's like we're family, a real family'), but soon Drew's fantasy of a benign paternal authority figure (Gus does save Jeff from the bully Clyde) turns into a nightmare – a revenant Gus even more insecurely sadistic than his stepfather used to be: 'Drew, buddy, you have the right to remain silent – I'm gonna bash your head in! You have the right to an attorney, but you won't need one because you'll be dead!' Drew and Amanda are pursued by Gus in his sheriff's car, wearing his sheriff's hat and giving them a friendly patrolman's wave before

forcing them to drive head-on into an oncoming truck: Gus is a vision of the dark side of patriarchal authority which incites and exacerbates the violence from which it claims to be protecting us.(15)

Prominent on the soundtrack just as Gus causes the deaths of Drew and Amanda are the rock lyrics: 'I wanna die just like JFK; / I wanna die in the USA.' Earlier in the film, a strict schoolteacher orders Drew, Jeff and the other kids to sit down, and she would most certainly confiscate the kitten (Tiger, the mother-substitute)(16) that Jeff has smuggled in under his jacket were she to discover it; behind this teacher is a large poster of George Bush Senior. There isn't much political allegory in *Pet Sematary Two*, but what there is suggests that, just as wicked stepfather Gus has displaced Drew's real father, so Bush, Reagan, and other dangerously authoritarian presidents have displaced John F. Kennedy, America's true father. (Drew is like Clinton, whose father died before he was born and who suffered under an abusive stepfather.)(17)

At one point in the film, Gus insists on making sexual advances to Amanda right in front of Drew, a form of bragging that Gus (not Drew's father or Drew) has possession of the wife/mother. For Gus, sex is male pursuit and conquest of the female; as he admits in the scene where the dog Zowie chases the kitten Tiger, 'When I was young I thought cats were the girls and dogs were the boys.' Gus's sexual aggression is given full rein when he returns from the grave to rape Amanda. (Alternatively, we might read all these scenes with Gus as a projection of Drew's Oedipus complex – perhaps it is the son who desires his mother and so perceives Gus as a rival – and of Drew's reaction to the primal scene – perhaps it is Drew who confuses sex with aggression, fearing that Gus is hurting his mother.) The sexually voracious Gus (he taunts Chase by claiming that he 'had Renee first'; he rapes Amanda; he says that Zowie must have 'thought [the kitten] was lunch') would seem to have a lot in common with Zowie, but this fact of course actually makes the man and the dog rivals in Gus's mind: Gus wants all the rabbits for himself to 'eat'. Zowie's attack on the rabbit cage not only threatens Gus's food supply, it also interrupts the sex he was having with Amanda. Earlier, Gus had watched approvingly while the rabbits themselves had sex.

From Drew's perspective, Zowie is a kind of father-substitute (18), befriending the boy, preventing the wicked stepfather from having sex with his mother, and finally saving Drew by killing his stepfather just as Gus is about to strike Drew with a pet-sematary cross. Zowie enacts Drew's fantasy of defence, of revenge and – at least for a short time – of the return of his real father in the resurrected body of a reformed Gus. Drew tells Jeff, 'sometimes I wish Gus would die', and, dressed up as Dracula for Halloween, Drew threatens to 'drink his [stepfather's] blood'. We should not be surprised, then, that Zowie (Drew's familiar) kills Gus by biting him in the neck, or that Drew later hastily covers up the neck wound as if he himself were responsible for it. Like many children, Drew may have internalized the guilt that properly belongs to the abusive adult, feeling that he himself provoked Gus's attack. (This is what Gus tries to get him to believe.) Drew's ill will toward Gus is a *defensive* hate, but it may still have led Drew to consider himself a kind of vampire who deserves to be punished by the cross-wielding Gus. Drew's sense of guilt is revealed in his punning explanation to his mother of what he and Jeff did to his stepfather: 'we just ditched Gus' means to her that they outran him, to Drew that they killed and buried him, and to us that Drew feels both triumphantly alive and morbidly guilty about the act.(19) The lyrics 'I wanna die, I wanna die' are heard over and over again just as Drew and his mother are forced by Gus into a fatal collision. Is Gus the tragic enactment of Drew's death wish, the suicidal longing that comes from unresolved guilt? (Alternatively, the lyrics 'I wanna die just like Jesus Christ' suggest that Drew, like the movie's other insecure males, may be tempted by the thought of the immortal power to come from death and resurrection – a power that turns out to be both dehumanizing and defeatable.)(20)

One difference between Drew's and Jeff's families that may explain why the latter has a happier ending is that, unlike Drew's insecure and sadistic stepfather Gus, Jeff's father, Chase, is strong and loving. Though initially it seems as if Chase will make the opposite mistake from Gus, allowing his love for Jeff to turn him into a weakly permissive father, Chase eventually shows he has the strength to curb his son's harmful fantasies – and his own. Both Gus and Chase disbelieve their boys' stories about burial and resurrection ('You think a lie like that's never going to catch up to you?'; 'Don't you lie to me!'), but Gus succumbs to Drew's fantasy of life everlasting, whereas Chase resists his son's desire as unhealthy ('I've been letting you get away with a lot these past few weeks, but I will not stand for crap like this!'). Chase realizes that he and his son have given themselves over to a morbid longing for Renee's return, a desire that can only lead to further death.

Chase's wish-fulfilment dream of making love to a beautifully revenant Renee is interrupted by his intuition that she is a she-wolf biting his groin – that his inability to part from her is leading him to a longing for suicide. (Perhaps this is also what Drew half-realizes when his fantasy of the good father returning to his mother becomes a reality-principle nightmare of her being raped by a corpse ['You're cold as ice! Oh, you smell bad! Let go of me, Gus!']). Dead, Renee can be only a castrating succubus – that is, giving way to his desire for her can only disable Chase as husband and father. When Gus disinters Renee (prior to her reburial and resurrection) in order to 'fuck her', he is enacting Chase's own deepest desire, and when Chase fights to keep Gus from drilling a hole in his head ('No brain, no pain – think about it'), he is struggling against his own longing for death as an end to the pain of mourning and as a necrophiliac reunion with his wife. 'Remember, Chase, I had Renee first', Gus insists; the resurrected Gus is death, who has become Chase's rival for Renee, but Chase must fight death, not to get Renee back, but in order to let her go – it is his *sense of rivalry with death* that he must overcome. Gus is a living (dead) example of the monster Chase would become if he gave way to his desire to possess everything – even life beyond the grave.(21) In killing Gus, the embodiment of his own possessive desire for the dead Renee, Chase frees himself to become a good father to Jeff, warning the boy that the resurrected Renee is 'not your mom' and convincing him to leave her – the figure of Jeff's own possessiveness and death wish – behind.

We can approach an understanding of Jeff's fears and desires by way of his encounters with Clyde. After being protected from Clyde's torment by Chase's arrival ('saved by the bell'), Jeff eventually finds himself alone with the bully ('I guess your dad's not here to save you now, is he?'), who threatens to send Jeff to where he can 'join [his] mom' – a deadly reunion that is both dream and nightmare for Jeff. 'You're gonna die', the revenant Clyde promises Jeff in the climactic battle at the end, but Jeff rejects this return of his repressed desire by electrocuting Clyde. Recall that Jeff had earlier watched helplessly while his mother Renee was accidentally electrocuted. Her death by electrocution becomes the barrier separating Jeff from repossession of his mother, much as the electrified cage keeps Zowie from the rabbits. If Jeff had given way to his desire to join his mother in death, he would have electrocuted himself; instead, he kills that desire – that voracious hunger for *all* life – by destroying Clyde ('Eat this, asshole!').

Consider, too, Jeff's relation to Marjorie, the housekeeper. Unlike Gus, who really seems to be an evil stepfather, Marjorie is appealing, helpful to Chase and concerned about Jeff – a potentially loving stepmother. Her only 'crime' is that she wants to fill Renee's shoes as wife and mother, and Jeff's inability to accept the fact of his mother's death – a refusal embodied in the revenant Renee – leads to the

death of the innocent Marjorie.(22) It is Jeff who preserves Renee's clothes for her return, Jeff who actually buries his mother in the Micmac ground ('You bury your own'), and Jeff whom Marjorie 'mistakes' for Renee when the born-again Renee attacks her. As Renee breaks the mirror with its reflection of Marjorie dressed in Renee's gown and stabs Marjorie in the cheek with a mirror shard ('Did you really think you could be like me?'), we wonder if it isn't Jeff whose fantasy of Marjorie as his new mother is shattered by a fear that this would mean disloyalty to Renee.(23) Curiously, although Drew felt suicidally guilty about his self-defensive killing of Gus via Zowie, Jeff does not seem as conscience-stricken about his Renee-engineered murder of Marjorie. Perhaps this is a sign that the movie has not quite moved beyond Jeff's initial childish perception of Marjorie as the wicked stepmother usurping his mother's place, or maybe Jeff's successful distancing of himself from 'Renee' also helps him feel less responsible for 'her' evil deeds.

Renee is a Hollywood movie star, made up as the image of men's desire and victim of their possessiveness. Everyone wants Renee dead or alive: the skeletal hands that reach for the buxom blonde Renee in the horror movie-within-a-movie; Frank the director who 'get[s] off on seeing' the star he cannot control 'suffer'; Gus who claims to have 'had' her before she became a star and who digs her up to 'fuck' her again; the man in the Renee movie which Chase and Jeff watch obsessively who shoots her for having slept with another man. Hollywood constructs Renee as the object of male desire and institutes a jealous rivalry among men for her possession. Chase makes the right move when he decides to 'get my son Jeff out of L.A.', but he must then rid the boy's mind of Hollywood's idealization of Renee and its incitement of possessive desire for her. The school Jeff attends erects a shrine in her honour ('We Remember Renee Hallow') as one might for a sex symbol like Jean Harlow or Marilyn Monroe; male schoolmates ask Jeff, 'Hey, what's Hollywood like?' and enviously call him 'celebrity boy'; reporters crash the funeral to get photos of the grieving Jeff at his mother's graveside, and the sheriff who stops them, Gus, turns out to be even more competitively intrusive: 'Hey, Jeff, you know your mother and I used to be sweethearts…prom, homecoming, the whole nine yards.' Jeff watches Renee act in a movie at the beginning of the film; he watches her over and over again on video after her death; he prepares her movie star's dress for when she will return from the grave to play her part again. Jeff may resent Hollywood for taking his mother away from him and his father (Renee the movie star is divorced from the veterinarian Chase), but Jeff's image of her and his possessive desire for her are structured by Hollywood. As the facial scar that Renee received during the movie-set electrocution re-opens at the end of the film to reveal her disfigurement, Jeff is forced to recognize the real woman behind the idealized image, the reality of imperfection, ageing and death that no movie make-up can disguise.

While serving as a specific critique of media images of women, *Pet Sematary Two* also provides more general instruction in the realities of divorce and death. In fact, divorce can be experienced by children as the accidental death of a parent: a forced and irrevocable parting without rhyme or reason. The resurrected Renee is Jeff's childish fantasy of absolute control: his mother will never grow old or die and therefore neither will he; his real mother will remain as beautiful as her Hollywood image – those cheeks will never be scarred(24); time will be slowed to the point of stopping so that the ideal can be realized, as if life were a video that you could slo-mo or freeze-frame.(25) Also, of course, the return of Renee means no divorce: before her death (the death of Jeff's hopes), his mother had indicated that she was willing to consider a reconciliation with his father, and now the (wish-fulfilment fantasy of a) reborn Renee pleads, 'We can try again, Chase. We can make it work this time.'(26) In order to face the fact of his mother's death (the irrevocability of divorce), Jeff must conquer several fears: that divorce means his mother doesn't love him anymore; that he is responsible for his parents' divorce due to his lack of faith in their

relationship; that in choosing life with his father he is abandoning her: 'You're not going to leave me, Jeff', says the revenant Renee, 'your father and I are trying to work things out. Jeff, I don't want to be alone. Jeff, come back. Jeff, I love you.' And, regarding Renee's death, Jeff must overcome his desire to join his mother in the grave rather than go on living without her: 'Stay with me!' Renee pleads, 'Dead is better! Dead is better! Stay with me!'

The kitten which Jeff saves from the fire destroying (his childish hopes of saving) Renee is perhaps a sign that Jeff has preserved the only part of his mother that he could: the maternal instinct that lives on in him. He has saved his feeling self, rather than succumbing to the 'no brain, no pain' death that his real mother would never have wished for him. However, the brief shots of Renee, Gus, Marjorie, Clyde, Amanda and Drew which we now see, and the conversation between Jeff and Drew which we hear repeated from earlier in the movie, would indicate Jeff's – and our? – continuing inability to accept death;

[Drew:] I've never had anyone die before. But I guess you get over it, eventually.

[Jeff:] No, you never get over it.

The unstoppable urge to have our loved ones back motivates the camera's final pan and zoom back to the pet sematary and the Micmac burial ground. Someone who knows better will nevertheless bury one of their own there sometime soon – and suffer the consequences of a dream come horribly true.(27)

1. Kevin Jackson, *The Language of Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1998), 227.
2. Mark Crispin Miller, 'Advertising: End of Story', in *Seeing through Movies*, ed. Mark Crispin Miller (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 228.
3. Henry Beard et al., *The Book of Sequels: The Greatest Stories Ever Retold!* (New York: Random House, 1990), 5.
4. Gary Wood, 'Stephen King & Hollywood', *Cinefantastique*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1991), 51.
5. Mick Martin and Marsha Porter, *Video Movie Guide 1997* (New York: Ballantine, 1996), 824.
6. Mark Kermode, 'Pet Sematary Two', *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 3, No. 10 (1993), 60.
7. John Hartl, '"Pet Sematary" Sequel Is a Corpse', *Seattle Times*, http://community.seattletimes.nwsource.com/archive/?date=19920828&slug=1509720, accessed 5 October 2009.
8. 'IMDb User Comments for *Pet Sematary II*', Internet Movie Database, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0105128/usercomments, accessed 19 October 2009.
9. Ibid.
10. Even judged by the standards of other postmodern horror films of the 1980s and '90s, *Pet Sematary Two* has an extremely high degree of intertextuality. Although we cannot know for sure how many of these numerous references to other films were consciously intended, the fact that Mary Lambert was directing a sequel to the original *Pet Sematary* movie, which she had also directed, probably made her hyper-aware of her film's relation to other films as well.
11. Beard, 5.
12. Prior to *Pet Sematary* and *Pet Sematary Two*, Mary Lambert was best known for having directed Madonna's controversial music video 'Like a Prayer' and the female-centred film noir *Siesta* (1987).
13. Although the sequel maintains the distinction introduced in the original film and book between the pet sematary and the Micmac burial ground, these two are often conflated in the popular mind, as evidenced by the Ramones' song to the closing credits of *Pet Sematary*: 'I don't wanna be buried in a pet sematary; / I don't want to live my life again.' Perhaps the confusion owes something to the fact that the idea of the pet sematary has gripped the public imagination (a childish misspelling for a common childhood wish to commemorate a pet – in the hope that there will be some kind of afterlife for it – as for the adults we bury), whereas the concept of the Micmac burial ground doesn't seem as haunting – or as fully developed.
14. Elsewhere in the film, Dr. Yolander tells Chase that Rachel was 'killed for the second time' – presumably after she killed Louis with a knife at the end of the first *Pet Sematary*.
15. Sheriff Gus and school bully Clyde would seem to be opposites: law and outlaw. As Drew watches the resurrected Gus save Jeff from Clyde's potentially murderous bullying, it would seem that Drew's fantasy of an ideal father has come true. However, Gus does not chasten Clyde in a loving way as would befit a benign patriarch; instead, Gus forces Clyde's head between the spokes of a motorbike – a form of poetic justice (Clyde had threatened to do the same to Jeff), but an act more vicious than any Clyde himself had actually committed and a punishment worse than the crime. Thus the overly zealous lawman is an outlaw. Gus goes in deadly pursuit of Drew in order to stop the boy from revealing the sheriff's crime (Gus's murder of Clyde), and Gus and the revenant Clyde become evil co-conspirators – doubles, not opposites. Gus (who calls Drew 'buddy') and Clyde (who calls Drew 'junior') are older than Drew and Jeff; they are the wicked stepfather and rivalrous older brother of childhood nightmare. (Note that Clyde threatens Jeff early in the film by claiming that the kitten Tiger – Jeff's mother-substitute – died from getting its head caught between the spokes, and note that Jeff's mother Renee dies with her head against the rails of an iron gate. The 'bad father' 'responsible' for Renee's death is Frank the film director – and, Jeff may fear, himself.)

16. Adopted by Jeff after his mother's death, the kitten Tiger may be considered a mother-substitute or, more accurately, a child-figure allowing Jeff to play mother, to bring his mother back by enacting her role. The kitten's name, Tiger, suggests a fiercely protective mother, but its tininess implies vulnerability. As further evidence of this kitten's double meaning, note the curious fact that the bully Clyde considers Tiger 'a pussy name'.
17. Like Bush's family, Gus's has a dog, whereas Jeff and Chase, like Clinton, have a cat.
18. Thus, we have symmetry between the film's families: kitten Tiger is a mother-substitute for Jeff, while dog Zowie is a father-substitute for Drew. Director Mary Lambert often emphasizes the family parallel through cross-cutting. For example, right after Marjorie says something maternal to Jeff who nevertheless insists that she is not his mother (in his eyes she is the 'wicked stepmother'), there is a cut to Gus (the wicked stepfather) ordering Drew to put Zowie (the father-surrogate) outside.
19. 'You are grounded!' Gus had earlier told Drew, 'that's the new law, buddy'. Drew disobeys, literally *grounding* his stepfather.
20. The deaths of Drew and Amanda may be seen as the inevitable result of Gus's voracious appetite. Earlier he had stuffed Amanda's mashed potatoes in his mouth, and at the end he causes her and her son to be crushed on impact with a potato truck. As he leaves, Gus smashes one of the potatoes that have spilled out of the overturned truck. Gus has broken the law he swore to uphold (the sheriff's and the father's job is to protect and serve), and he is about to learn the truth of the moral adage he hypocritically uses to admonish his son: 'Life is full of lessons, buddy. No one's above 'em. Not you, not me.'
21. The film's feminist message equates male possessiveness with death. Skeletal hands reach up to grab Renee's breasts in the film-within-a-film at the movie's beginning, and Renee accuses the male director of 'get[ting] off on seeing [her] suffer'. Gus fondles Amanda's breasts when she is in the kitchen, asserting his possession of her in front of Drew; later, Gus rapes Amanda. Chase fondles Renee's breasts in his dream of making love to her: he must come to realize that this male possessiveness is deadly – for the women who suffer it, and for the men themselves who become voracious monsters (their humanity dies).
22. The only sign that Marjorie might make a bad mother is that she falls asleep when she is supposed to be preventing Jeff from leaving the house; he sneaks out and buries Renee, who returns to kill Marjorie – for her failure as a mother-substitute?
23. Interestingly, Marjorie's cheek scar echoes Renee's earlier in the film. Does the vengeful Renee destroy Marjorie's beauty out of envy, or is reality beginning to interrupt Jeff's fantasy as it will when Renee's facial scar spontaneously re-opens later in the film? The fire Renee sets and that threatens to destroy everyone might be seen as the extension of Renee's disfigurement, the crack in the world engulfing all.
24. Compare Dr. Yolander's fantasy of taxidermy as control: 'You would be so much more interesting with blue eyes', he tells a dead, stuffed animal, sticking his hand through its hollow body as if it were a puppet and popping out and replacing the creature's eyes.
25. We note again that Jeff watches his mother over and over again on video. Furthermore, director Mary Lambert sometimes shoots the resurrected Zowie and Renee in slow motion: as the living dead, they occupy a time outside of time; such zombie motion is also chillingly unlifelike.
26. 'Renee' is (ironically) reborn, returned from the dead; as a revenant, Renee 'Hallow' is unhallowed, not sanctified. 'Chase' chases after Renee in his imagination until he realizes that her deadness endangers his life (that his longing for her is suicidal). 'Zowie' is an exclamation expressing excitement, usually positive, but not in the case of this formerly-friendly-but-now-vicious dog from the dead.
27. The terrible fact that life in this world entails the death of those we love may account for the almost suicidally world-weary tone of the Ramones' song played to the end credits of the first *Pet Sematary*: 'I don't want to be buried in a pet sematary; / *I don't want to live my life again*' (emphasis added).

Additionally, the pain of divorce and of an abusive stepfather may contribute to the sourness of *Pet Sematary Two*'s closing tune, also by the Ramones: 'I just wanna walk right out of this world / 'Cause everybody has a poison heart.' Stephen King quotes the Ramones' '*Hey-ho, let's go*' as a weary, deadly siren song in his novel, *Pet Sematary* (New York: New American Library, 1984), 227.

Keeping a Distance: The Joy of Haunted Attractions

Madelon Hoedt

"It's hard to tell the difference, sometimes, between fear and excitement."
Richard Laymon, *After Midnight*

Frayed white letters appear against a blood-soaked background, accompanied by images of shambling figures and the sound of a chainsaw, a slow pulse and maniacal laughter: "This fall, you will be tested, mentally, physically, until your blood is shed. Are you ready?" The trailer of the Terror Test venue in Mississippi gives visitors a clear idea of what they are in for.(1) Similarly, in 2008, the New York City-based Nightmare Haunted House made the following promise to its visitors: "With more special effects, more elaborate sets, and more evil baddies waiting to get you then [sic] ever before, NIGHTMARE: BAD DREAMS COME TRUE will bring your worst night terrors to screaming life."(2) If we look at the facts listed on the website of the Haunted House Association, we can see that there are over 3,000 haunted attractions in the United States, which together generate revenue of around 300 million dollars in ticket sales each year.(3) Haunted attractions are big business, it seems, drawing in millions of visitors each Halloween who willingly pay to be scared out of their wits. Yet what is the attraction of these venues? Why would anyone respond to these grisly invitations?

The question of the attraction of horror has been addressed by scholars in the past. Most of these theories, however, are linked to the more obvious forms of horror culture, most often extending no further than novels and movies. Yet it seems safe to assume that there is a huge difference between the relative safety of a horror book or film and the in-your-face frights of a scare attraction, where visitors are transformed into the protagonists of their own horror narrative. Andrew Tudor has noted these differences between horror forms in his article 'Why horror? The peculiar pleasures of a popular genre': "They [the scholars] ask, in effect, what is it that people-in-general like about horror-in-general" (4), further stating that "…the question should not be 'why horror?' at all. It should be, rather, why do *these* people like this horror in *this* place at *this* particular time?" (5) I agree with Tudor: 'horror', especially in its more extreme forms, cannot be seen as one big entity, but instead should be divided into its different manifestations. In this article, then, I will focus on haunted attractions and the issues that play a part in the explanation for their enjoyment.

Scholarly scares: concepts and theory

What exactly is a haunted attraction (or scare attraction)? The definition used in this article is as follows: a haunted attraction is a venue, designed to frighten its audience. The term does not apply to sites that claim to be haunted by actual ghosts. Instead, the venues have a basis in fiction or 'horrible history'. Haunted attractions are site-specific (though the contents are not always directly related to the actual location of the venue) and contain a number of performance elements. Effects used can include live actors, animatronics, theatrical sets and sound- and light effects. The themes of haunted attractions are intended to be frightening in nature, revolving around serial killers, mysterious murders, mad scientists and their creations. Most haunted attractions are staged during or around the month of October and

operate in correlation with the Halloween holiday season. Some venues, such as the Dungeons franchise and the London Bridge Experience, are open all year.(6)

The following discussion will only concern itself with haunted attractions and not with fairground ghost rides. The problem with this form is the complex nature of the form: actors can be used, or rides can merely contain animatronics. In addition, there is an issue as to whether visitors placed in carts or able to move around on their own (differences which each present specific challenges). For this reason, it would appear that a separate exploration of ghost rides has more merit. Hell Houses, venues run church communities will not be discussed here, either. Although the means for scaring the audience are similar, a Hell House focuses on showing its audience the horrors of sin and the aim of these venues is fundamentally different to that of a haunted attraction: a haunted attraction is meant for fun, firstly, with education being a possible second focus.(7) In contrast, Hell House concentrates on instilling actual fear in its visitors, warning them about the fate that might be awaiting them in the afterlife. The absence of the "entertainment for fun" element places the concept of hell houses outside the scope of this research. However, further exploration of this phenomenon is not without interest for any future work. (8)

In many ways, a haunted attraction is similar to other forms of horror. The goal to entertain through fear is present in any. So, what makes haunted attractions exceptional and merits a separate theory for their enjoyment?

Two concepts are of interest here, control and distance, which have been put forward by John Morreall in his article 'Enjoying negative emotions in fictions'. Control is understood as the power an audience can exert over the material; the means by which they can directly influence or manipulate the material presented. Often you hear people telling of how they closed their eyes during a particularly gory part of a movie, or how they had to stop reading a book because it was simply "too scary". This is what is meant by control here: the option to manipulate the material in such a way that the horrific experience ceases immediately. Such an 'emergency exit' is an option in the case of both novels and films: by closing the book, or closing one's eyes, the horror is immediately shut out. To use Morreall's own words: "When we have this ability to start, stop, and direct the experience, we can enjoy a wide range of experiences, even "unpleasant" ones." (9) His argument is based on this notion that, as long as we are in control, negative, and (for the sake of this argument) scary emotions can be enjoyed. As stated by Morreall: "Intense fear – terror – is not enjoyable because in such a state we lose control over our attention, our bodies, and our total situation." (10) A similar idea can be found in the text by Daniel Shaw: "If one were really in danger, one would not feel the terror as pleasurable."(11)

Next to the sense of control, Morreall adds a second concept, distance, stating that: "Control is usually easiest to maintain when we are merely attending to something which has no practical consequences for us, as when we watch from a distance some event unrelated to us." (12) Distance implies the position of the audience in respect to the material. For instance, in the case of a film, the viewer takes a third person view and is watching the actions of others without actively taking part. Although identification of the audience with the characters is possible and even necessary to fully enjoy the material, it can still be noted that there is a difference between the audience and the actual story. They can identify, but are not actively involved: the protagonists are chased by a maniacal killer, and not the cinema-goer. Yet this is exactly what happens when visiting a haunted attraction. To use the example of the London Tombs, visitors can expect to be chased by the creatures living inside the crypts. Similarly, there is no way in which one is able to simply 'switch off' the action in a haunted venue, as is possible when watching a movie. These

issues clearly pinpoint the differences between haunted venues to other forms of horror, most notably novels and movies. It can be said that the enjoyment of a horror book or film is an experience that is relatively safe, where the worst than can happen is sustaining a paper cut or a sleepless night. A haunted attraction, however, uses the idea of 'fear for fun' for a terrifying, in-your-face experience.

However, similarities do exist between scare attractions and other forms of horror, in particular with theatre and videogames. Despite the fact that the element of control is present in the case of horror videogames (play can be ended by the click of a mouse), the distance between the player and the material is much smaller than in the case of a movie or novel. When playing, the player's 'avatar' acts as the protagonist and the player is thus much more involved in the action. Any scares in the game are aimed directly at the player, similar to the way in which the scares in a haunted attraction are aimed directly at its visitors. The correlation between the two is voiced in a paper by Bernard Perron: "...horror videogames are nothing else than Haunted Houses, playgrounds where we come to play at frightening ourselves."(13) Although the player is able to control both the game (by ending a playing session) and his actions (by controlling the avatar), there is still an element of the action being outside of the player's hands, adding to the experience. This aspect has been described by Tanya Krzywinska, who has discussed the difference in responses to movies and videogames:

The element of pre-determination, which lies outside the player's sphere of agency, is therefore linked to the metaphysical dimension in which manicheanism operates. The concept of the moral occult plays a central role in my argument that horror-based videogames are strongly dependent on their capacity to allow players to experience a dynamic between states of being *in control* and *out of control*.(14)

According to Krzywinska, the presence of a force that lies outside of the player's control adds to the horror experienced by the player. This idea coincides with the control theory of Morreall: the parts of the game experience which cannot be controlled by the player, which put the player in a situation where he is *out of control*, are perceived as frightening. This distinction in experience and control between a movie and a videogame, which I described earlier, is expressed by Krzywinska, as well: "...films are less able than games to build into their deep structure a concrete experience of being in control and out of control of on-screen events."(15)

However, the element of distance is still present: players are physically removed from the virtual horrors on the screen and therefore unable to fully participate in the way in which the audience of a haunted attraction is exposed to the scares. Secondly, although there is the tension between being in and out of control, essentially, the player remains in control of the game (literally holding the controller) and is thus able to direct the action, something which is impossible in the case of a haunted attraction. Although books and movies can ultimately be described as 'safe', allowing a reader or cinema-goer to manipulate the material, this process is lessened in the case of videogames, yet these still retain elements of control and distance, more so than scare attractions do. Seemingly unparalleled, a haunted attraction merges the idea of 'fear for fun' into one terrifying, in-your-face experience.

Seeing that most existing horror theory has been written with novels and movies in mind, it would appear that haunted attractions require a slightly different approach. In the next few paragraphs three of the main theories on the enjoyment of horror and their position in relation to scare attractions will be discussed.

The first theories that will be addressed are the cognitive theory, with Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror* as its main work, and 'fantastic' theory of Tzvetan Todorov. (16) A decision has been made to discuss these two theories together, as they pose similar problems for the current argument. Firstly, both theories contain the idea of fascination and curiosity, where it is assumed that the monstrous beings of horror, human or inhuman, fascinate us. This feeling can be seen as a sense of morbid curiosity, where something is so ugly, so revolting, that one cannot look away. Although this is true for both movies and novels, which usually contain a moment where the monster is revealed to the audience in all its revolting glory, this idea is more problematic in the case of haunted attractions: the lack of light and other obstructions make a similar observation and subsequent appreciation of the creatures in the venue nearly impossible.

Secondly, there is the notion of a progressive narrative and disclosure plots. This view relates to the idea that, in order to witness the ending of a story, one is inclined to ignore the scary or gory aspects of the narrative or at least tolerate them for the sake of the plot. It should be noted that such a narrative is almost completely absent from scare attractions. The Dungeons franchise uses displays based on legends and history, such as Sweeney Todd and Jack the Ripper. Nightmare Haunted House has used nightmares, paranormal experiences and the most common phobias for the various instalments of this attraction. For 2009, Terror Test will use the theme of infection, creating a background story of a deadly virus being released into the general public. In all of these, the themes function merely as a backdrop for the sets and scares. When walking through a haunted attraction, we are treated to scenes, not a full narrative with beginning, middle, end and plot. Therefore, the theory that the horror is ignored in order to find out what happened cannot be applied to these venues.

The last problem with the cognitive and 'fantastic' theory is the reliance on aesthetic distance and a rational approach. Both views assume that an audience will take a step back in order to appreciate the narrative, the monster and its power, in short, to appreciate the aesthetics of horror. However, when inside a scare attractions and being chased by the creatures inside, it is simply impossible to sit back and take a good, long look. Often, groups of visitors are literally chased through the venue with performers urging them to run from room to room and are thus kept from expressing any form of appreciation. A second possibility is the simple fact that a visitor might not want to stay and examine the displays, as they are frightened and want to 'get out'. To quote Carroll: "One supposes that fascination would be too great a luxury to endure, if one, against all odds, were to encounter a horrific monster in "real life"." (17) Although haunted attractions are a game of make-believe, the monsters you encounter inside are as close to real life as it gets. Both the cognitive and fantastic theory requires a specific, rational mindset from the audience, which is hardly feasible in a discussion of scare attractions.

What remains is to look at psychoanalysis, at Freud and his ideas of the uncanny; the alien and the familiar becoming alien, both of them frightening. When these fears are repressed, according to Freud, they lead to a contamination of the unconscious. By allowing a 'return of the repressed', a controlled experience of the repressed emotions (and possible unconscious, unwanted desires), a feeling of catharsis can occur. Thus cleansed from any unnatural emotions or urges, a person can once again return to the existing order. (18) Objections have been raised as to whether this theory is valid when discussing books and movies. As stated by Berys Gaut: "...These films not infrequently leave (and are designed to leave) a lingering sense of fearfulness in their audience [...] This is precisely the opposite effect one would expect if one's fear had been lightened." (19) Yet this idea of catharsis seems very plausible in a discussion of

haunted attractions. A visitor enters the venue, is scared out of their wits, and then emerges back into the sunlight and the real world: order is once again established.

Enter at your own risk: case studies

Returning to London Bridge Underground Station after a visit to the London Dungeons and the London Tombs; eyes stinging and throat parched from the darkness inside, the strobe-lights and the artificial fog; tired, the beginnings of a headache poking at the back of the eyes. All this and more: a strange combination of discomforts with a strong sense of elation and sheer pleasure, the sense of a day well-spent. This section contains a number of case studies, which will be linked to the concepts of control and distance, outlined above, as well as additional observations. Where possible, the information was gathered first-hand by visiting the attractions and contacting the staff of the venues to obtain additional insights.(20) In the case of the two venues discussed that are located in the United States, the author was forced to rely solely on the correspondence with the owners. Inevitably, my personal experiences will at times resound in the following discussion. These occurrences will be marked as such and should not be considered as conclusive evidence. As mentioned above, a number of venues were studied for the case studies presented here. This selection was based on location (whether or not it would be feasible to visit them) and on the nature of the venue. Here, each of them will be briefly introduced.

- Dungeons franchise:

Currently, there are five Dungeons in five European cities (three in the United Kingdom, one in Germany and one in the Netherlands). The Dungeons focus on 'horrible history' and each instalment features displays which are typical for that city (using Jack the Ripper in London, for instance, and Rembrandt in Amsterdam), yet the effects and scenes used are largely similar. This case study will deal with the London, Amsterdam and Edinburgh Dungeons, specifically, as these have been visited by the author.

- London Bridge Experience/London Tombs:

Open since 2008, the London Bridge Experience is located directly underneath the actual London Bridge. The venue contains two segments: the first, the London Bridge Experience, is an actor-driven attraction which relates the history of London Bridge from Roman times up to the present day. The second part is a visit to the London Tombs, where the frights begin: dressed in hardhats and high-visibility vests, groups are led into the crypts of London Bridge and confronted by the various creatures that inhabit them. Since its opening in 2008, the London Tombs have already been awarded the title "UK's best scare attraction" in the same year.

- Fright Club:

Located on the South Bank in London, Fright Club is a lesser known attraction. It is a relatively short, but quite intense, venue, its theme rooted in the well-known 'mad scientist' stories. The venue is designed by the same production team that was responsible for the London Bridge Experience and London Tombs and several similarities can be detected.

- Nightmare Haunted House:

Nightmare Haunted House, based in New York City, has been around since 2003. Approaching a haunted attraction as a theatrical event, its aim to frighten its audience, Nightmare employs a form of hyperrealism and provides an experience that is mainly actor-driven. In the words of director Timothy Haskell: "Real things are more scary than the fantastical."(21) The theme of the venue changes yearly and has included Nightmare: Face Your Fear (staging the thirteen most common phobias), Nightmare: Ghost Stories (portraying people's personal experiences with the paranormal) and Nightmare: Bad Dreams Come True (displaying twenty different recurring nightmares). All information for these instalments was gathered by

asking the audience of Nightmare about their own experiences, thus making for a very personal event for its audiences.

- Terror Test:

Wanting to bring the technology of a professional haunted house to a state which (at that point) had none, the Terror Test venue was opened in Mississippi. Through use of movie-quality scenes and ultra-realism, a professional cast and scripted scenes, Terror Test tries not only to shock, but to tap into the more primal fears. Like Nightmare (and most other US-based scare attractions), the theme of Terror Test is changed yearly. Last year, the venue consisted of three separate attractions: Legion, Switchblade Circus and the aptly named Slaughterhouse. The theme for the 2009 instalment is 'Infection', where a research lab accidentally releases a virus into the general public.

Although all venues also have older or younger visitors, the age groups that make up the typical audience for these attractions are teenagers and people in their twenties. Secondly, when staff of the different venues is asked about the reasons for audiences to visit their attractions, the main incentive is said to be: the adrenaline rush. Other motivations listed were: visiting a scare attraction is the best way to fully enjoy Halloween season (in the case of the US attractions, which operate during the end of October); enjoyment of the high detail of sets and theme; unusual date; and (interesting for our current discussion) 'pathos through a good scream'.(22) However, the main incentive listed here points directly at Aristotle's ideas on catharsis. The relation of scare attractions to the horror genre in general is an ambivalent one. When discussing the 'edutainment' scares of the Dungeons and the London Tombs, it can be said that the themes addressed inside the venues position them outside of the genre as a whole: although the horror element is key, it is unlikely that the contents of any of the locations respond to larger trends within the horror genre. Other venues, such as Terror Test, state that they mix 'current trends' with their own unique style, (23) whereas Timothy Haskell of Nightmare has said that he follows his own views and does not 'comport to the trends of the horror genre.'(24)

So far, the concepts of control and distance are assumed to play a huge part in whether or not something will induce fear. To once again quote Morreall: "Control is usually easiest to maintain when we are merely attending to something which has no practical consequences for us, as when we watch from a distance some event unrelated to us." (25)Yet, what features are presented in the venues that influence control and distance and how are these experienced by the audience?

Obviously, visitors are unable to physically influence the action once they enter the attraction and to start and stop the experience at will. However, most venues have some kind of 'emergency exit' available, where some displays can be skipped (as is true in the Dungeons in the case of the rides and sections that use strobe lighting) or where the scares can be avoided altogether (one can go and enjoy the London Bridge Experience without having to venture into the Tombs). In the case of Nightmare, the actors are trained to spot the difference between "let me out, seriously I want to get out" and "let me out, this is so much fun". Where needed, visitors can be escorted out of the venue.(26) It should, however, be noted that these exits are not easily visible, as this would break the illusion when inside the venue (and damage the feeling of not being in control).

Another way to break the feeling of control is to use elements of the unexpected. We cannot control what we do not know will happen. The most basic examples of this are simple shock effects, with actors or animatronics suddenly jumping out at you. A more intricate way to deal with this is presented in the case of the London Tombs and Fright Club. The actors in these venues are very active and the props and sets

are designed in a way that makes it possible for the actors to really 'work the crowd'. By ducking through trapdoors or moving through the scene, the performers can deliver fright after fright, something which causes visitors to feel a heightened sense of fear, as they never know where the next scare might be coming from. These 'surprises' can take two forms: during my visit to the London Tombs I witnessed one of the actors running around and climbing onto parts of the set, clawing at the tour group through a fence in an attempt to 'get us'. In other cases, actors simply followed the group, keeping level with us without actually doing anything. This created a strong sense of unfulfilled anticipation. A similar effect was reached when encountering an actor who was lying on the floor and slowly crawling forward, seemingly without noticing the group (yet, as a visitor and being aware of the kind of venue we were in, a number of people in our group were waiting for them to lash out and grab us any moment).

This expected grabbing of ankles brings us to the next issue: that of touching. Although many venues have clear rules on this issue, stating that visitors are not allowed to touch the actors, and vice versa, I found that I felt somewhat unsure about this once inside, as in the example of the crawling performer (which is, of course, the desired effect). In the podcast "How the hell you scare people?", featuring Timothy Haskell and Richard Jordan, the issue of touching is briefly discussed.(27) One of the main types of fear, described by Haskell, is to make the audience feel as though they are actually in danger. Richard Jordan relates how this feeling can be achieved: "Whatever you can do to invade their personal space without actually touching them." (28) Exploring these boundaries of distance obviously makes for a more intense experience. However, this rule is not used everywhere. For some time, Fright Club employed a tactic where visitors would be made aware of the possibility of being touched, but once inside this did not happen (again, unfulfilled anticipation), or the touch would be very light, a mere brush with props such as feather dusters. This decision was made to bring an extra dimension to the otherwise somewhat limited attraction (the space is quite small, compared to some of the other venues).(29) However, when the ownership of Fright Club changed hands, changes were made. These days, the venue employs a more active touching policy. There are several accounts from visits to Fright Club where the visitors were subjected to intentional, intense contact: a visitor related an experience where one of the actors approached them, put their hands on their head and ruffled their hair.(30) Another story even mentions a visitor getting head-butted.(31) Obviously, this account is an example of taking a lack of distance to the extreme and is not always appreciated by the visitors.(32) However, it can be noted that stories like these (whether or not they are true) give a venue a certain notoriety and could add to the feelings of anticipation and fear for future visitors that are familiar with these comments.

Yet apart from these 'physical' examples, it seems that there exists a second form of control and distance. The previous discussion defines control and distance primarily as physical properties. However, when looking into the practice of haunted attractions, it is also possible to identify a form of mental control and distance, rooted in the idea of anticipation of fear. As Morreall points out, it is easiest to maintain control when there is a distance between an audience member and the event or performer. Although the physical events in a scare attraction do have direct consequences for the audience (actors jumping out at you, etc.), it is still a game of make-believe. If, somehow, a visitor can convince themselves that the events portrayed are unrelated to them, they might be frightened, but this fear can be expected to be less intense than in the case of someone who does not distance themselves. Returning to the Haunternet podcast, anticipation of fear is another type of fright that is defined by Haskell. In relation to this, Richard Jordan states that "you want to get them [the audience] scared before they even get inside." However, it is possible for people to resist this anticipation of fear ("They'll be shutting themselves off."), which makes it all the more difficult to get under someone's skin and truly frighten them.(33) By taking the show 'outside' and adding scary

elements before visitors enter the attraction itself, their sense of control and distance are already diminished.

At this point, it is interesting to turn to the ideas of Richard Schechner. In his book *Performance Theory*, he describes the idea of a 'pre-show': "Too little study has been made of how people – both spectators and performers – approach and leave performances. How do specific audiences get to, and into, the performance space; how do they go from that space?"(34) As can be understood from the words of Timothy Haskell and Richard Jordan, this process is very important when visiting a scare attraction. The experience does not begin when entering the venue; it starts long before. It can be argued that the location of the venue itself plays a part in this. The London Tombs are situated in the spaces below London Bridge and requires the visitors to don a hardhat and a high-visibility vest. Although these are not necessary safety precautions, this process has been installed to involve the audience and add to the anticipation of the actual visit.(35) In other cases, information of the venue location is not used. The Amsterdam Dungeons are located in a deconsecrated church, where the relic of the Miracle of Amsterdam was held.(36) Features of this church are still visible in the venue itself, such as the vaulted ceilings and the organ. However, visitors are not made aware of this in any way (yet one might wonder what the response would be if they were informed).

Some form of 'preshow', as described by Haskell and Jordan, is a more obvious example of the process of preparation. Upon arriving to the venue, visitors are treated to suggestive music, dimmed lights and a designed environment, causing them to brace themselves for the scares that are yet to come. More importantly, the 'pre-show' can be used for a blurring between the imagined horrors and the real world, almost forcing the audience to believe that what they will be subjected to is 'the real thing'. Carroll describes the 'willing suspension of disbelief' that is necessary to be affected by horror novels or movies. In order to be frightened, one has to believe that the events and monsters depicted in writing or on screen are (at least for a short period of time) real. Essentially this is only a game of make-believe: "… if one really believed that the theater were beset by lethal shape changers, demons, intergalactic cannibals, or toxic zombies, one would hardly sit by for long. One would probably attempt to flee, to hide, to protect oneself, or to contact the proper authorities […]." (37) For this discussion, the use of the term 'willing' is particularly interesting. When travelling to a haunted attraction, a visitor could mentally prepare themselves for the experience to come, where, for the duration of the tour, they will believe that zombies exist. However, once inside, it is difficult to hold on to that idea. None of the visitors will call the police after visiting the London Tombs, nor make an attempt to alert any other authorities. Yet, whilst inside the venue, an attempt (or at the very least, an urge) to flee cannot be denied. Despite of the fact that every visitor knows that zombies do not exist, very few will stand around to put this knowledge to the test when a number of creatures are shambling in their direction. This response corresponds with another observation of Freud: "Nowadays we no longer believe in them ["secret injurious powers and the return of the dead"], we have *surmounted*these modes of thought; but we do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation." (38) Although modern society no longer believes in evil spirits or monsters, we are not yet fully convinced of these beliefs. The emotional response visitors have to the 'creatures' they encounter inside scare attractions seems to support this notion of a clash between what we know to be real and what might exist, thus making the experience all the more frightening.

It appears that this form of 'blurring' between actual and imagined horrors is readily exploited by the venues on a number of levels. One of the most notable attempts of connecting reality with fiction in this

way is the article that was published in various newspapers in November 2007, when the first tickets for the London Bridge Experience and the London Tombs went on sale. According to the coverage, a large number of skeletons were found in a sealed vault by the contractors working on the construction of the venue, which resulted in a series of spooky events (missing tools, defective light bulbs and even disappearances), resulting in the crew becoming too scared to keep working at the site. Although this was proven to be nothing more than a publicity stunt, connected to Halloween and ticket sales, the article was readily copied by a large number of media, including the BBC.(39) Another example is Nightmare Haunted House, where 'linescarers' are employed to prepare its audience. However, to quote Timothy Haskell: "We stage happenings where a weirdo is bothering patrons and making them feel uncomfortable and then we have a security guard throw them out like they actually weren't part of the event."(40) Again, the illusion of scares is made very real. It can even be argued that the actors standing outside London Bridge Underground station with flyers to lure visitors to the nearby London Dungeons and Tombs are another exponent of this. Instead of encountering these 'ghouls' within the defined space of a scare attraction, one finds them in the middle of a busy London street, another case of 'creature meets reality' and of the remaining 'doubts', as described by Freud.

In addition to the issues with control and distance, there was another point of interest that came to light during the case studies: the workings within the tour groups. When being guided through a venue in a small group (usually ten to twelve people), it is not uncommon that some form of 'community spirit' emerges. Connections between visitors are made on a number of levels, most notably that of mutual enjoyment. During my visit to the Edinburgh Dungeons, when the group consisted largely of visiting families, I even found myself looking out for the children in the group and trying to reassure them where needed. The selection of a leader in the London Bridge Experience is another example: during my visit, the young man who was selected as group leader at the beginning of the tour remained the leader throughout and was eventually teased by the group into entering the Tombs first. In the words of Tash Banks, this selection of a leader "gives visitors a false sense of security and identifies them as a group". This idea of "you're a group travelling through time together, and this is your leader X" makes it easier to draw the audience into the story.(41)

Opposed to this, a feature which is employed in both the London and Amsterdam Dungeons is to (briefly) separate members of the audience from the tour group. When considered in correlation with the bonding described above and the idea of 'safety in numbers', it is easy to see how this separation would cause a very immediate sense of nervousness. Although one is aware that the venue is supposed to be 'safe', it is difficult to firmly retain this idea when one person from your group, who could easily be one of the friends you are visiting with, is selected to be tortured or die a gruesome death. Some examples: in the new Surgery segment in the London Dungeons (installed in 2009), a member of the group is selected to enter the surgical theatre before the others. When the group is allowed to enter, they find the person strapped to a chair. An audio segment follows, explaining about medieval methods of anatomy and operations, which ends with an account of beheading. At this point, all the lights go out. A scream is heard and the audience is covered with a light spray of water. When the lights are once again switched on, the curtains around the 'volunteer' are closed and the group is ushered out, forced to leave them behind. The concept of separation is explored even further in the Amsterdam Dungeons: at several points in the show, visitors are singled out and asked to enter a room before the rest of the group. In addition, visitors are separated as soon as they enter the Amsterdam Dungeons. A large part of the venue is situated underground and the groups are transported there using two elevators. Upon entering the venue, visitors are asked to divide themselves between these, into a male and a female group, leaving them feeling

unsure as to whether they will be reunited when reaching their destinations. When taking into account that a lot of couples visit the Dungeons, the sense of dread is even more immediate.

It can be anticipated that there are other processes at play within a group, apart from the 'bonding'. In the fourth chapter of *The Pleasures of Horror*, Matt Hills notes that the horror fandom is one that consists largely of connoisseurs who take pride in the fact that they are no longer scared by horrific images but are, instead, able to see the genre for its aesthetic merit. Although the aesthetic merit of haunted attractions is marginal, as we have already seen, the notion of 'not being scared' might play a big role. The groups in the attractions are assembled randomly, resulting in an arrangement where visitors are taking the tour together with a number of strangers, as well as friends or family. A feeling of peer pressure might become of importance, related directly to Hills' statements about the connoisseurship of most horror fans, where a visitor might be labelled as 'weak' when they display any signs of being frightened. Although no definite assumptions can be made regarding this matter at this point in time, it would appear that further exploration of these ideas is feasible.(42)

Apart from the psychological aspects, neurological research might also provide interesting insights, most notably theories in the area of sensation seeking. The definition coined by Marvin Zuckerman, in his book *Sensation seeking: beyond the optimal level of arousal*, is as follows: "Sensation seeking is a trait defined by the need for varied, novel, and complex sensations and experiences and the willingness to take physical and social risks for the sake of such experience." (43) These ideas do not seem to hold up in the case of novels and movies: as has been noted by various scholars, horror narratives are quite conservative (at least on the surface) and often explore very similar themes, thus eliminating the "varied and novel sensations" mentioned by Zuckerman. Similarly, the physical risks are virtually absent: as mentioned before, it is difficult to sustain more damage than a paper cut from reading a horror novel. The social risks, understood by Zuckerman in terms of 'shame and embarrassment' (44) are still a possibility as the genre is not held in high esteem by many people. All in all, it is very difficult to apply the theory of thrill-seeking to horror novels and movies. This is different in relation to haunted attraction: the audio-visual stimuli provide the aforementioned "varied, novel and complex sensations", whereas the more immediate danger where there is none (only in extreme cases can a visitor be harmed by either the actors or the installations of the venue) hold up the theory of physical risk. The apparent lack of acceptance of the genre could, once again, account for the social risk involved. Also, we have seen that the main reason people to visit scare attractions would appear to be because of the adrenaline rush it may provide, which appears to point directly to the theory of sensation seeking and the need for thrills, providing us with even more reasons to take a closer look at the ideas put forward by Zuckerman.

Conclusions

On a purely theoretical level, it is easy to acknowledge the lack of narrative, control and distance in scare attractions, which seems to rule out explanations located in the cognitive or fantastic theories of, most notably, Carroll and Todorov. The adrenaline rush has been listed as the main reason for people to visit haunted attractions and it can be established that this, then, is also the main reason for their enjoyment of these venues. This seems to point us to the ideas of catharsis and the return of the repressed, to the theories of Freud and Aristotle. By being able to experience intense emotions in a (relatively) safe environment, one can be scared without any lasting consequences, as opposed to the lingering dread that can be the result of novels and movies (as noted by Gaut).

Scare attractions are a form of release, a way in which to experience scares in a closed environment, more direct, more primal than any horror movie could ever be.

However, when we want to find a more complete explanation for this enjoyment, we need to consider other factors, as well, which have been largely ignored in existing works of horror theory. Both group psychology and sensation seeking are concepts that have not yet been considered. However, as I have shown, these concepts hold an important place in the discussion of the horror-seeking audience of scare attractions. It would therefore be beneficial to explore these processes further.

Finally, I have attempted to show that the treatment of the theory on the enjoyment of haunted attractions is quite different from other theories coined to explain the attraction of horror. Returning to the ideas of Tudor, which I quoted at the beginning of this paper: 'horror' is a sum of its parts and not a one big entity. In order to answer the question 'why horror?', we should not explore the genre as a whole, but its different forms. To use the invitation, extended by Terror Test to its visitors: "Are you ready?"

Acknowledgements

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1. Source: http://terrortest.com/. Text is taken from the 2008 trailer, available on the website (July 20th, 2009)
2. Source: http://hauntedhousenyc.com/newyork/about-2/ (July 20th, 2009)
3. Source: http://www.hauntedhouseassociation.org/haunted_attraction_information.htm (July 15th, 2009)
4. Tudor, Andrew; "Why horror? The peculiar pleasures of a popular genre"; in: *Cultural Studies*, 11(3) 1997; pp. 443-463; citation taken from p. 445
5. Ibid., p. 461
6. For additional information on these venues, see: http://thedungeons.com and http://www.thelondonbridgeexperience.com/ (October 20th, 2009)
7. The Dungeons franchise (http://thedungeons.com) focuses on a form of scary edutainment. The venues are situated in various cities and depict the more grisly aspects of the town's history. An example is the use of Jack the Ripper and the Great Fire in the London venue.
8. The documentary *Hell House* (2001) by director George Ratliff depicts the efforts of the members of the Trinity Church community from Cedar Hill, Texas, in setting up their hell house and is a valuable source of information regarding this phenomenon. For more information, see: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0301235/ (November 15th, 2009)
9. Morreall, John; "Enjoying negative emotions in fictions"; in: *Philosophy and literature*, 9:1 (1985: Apr.), pp. 95-103; citation taken from p. 97
10. Ibid., p. 97
11. Shaw, Daniel, "Power, horror and ambivalence"; in: Shaw, Daniel (ed.); *Film and Philsophy: Horror Special Edition*; 2001. http://www.lhup.edu/dshaw/pohor.html (July 20th, 2009)
12. Morreall, p. 97.
13. Perron, Bernard; "Coming to play at frightening yourself: Welcome to the world of horror video games"; http://www.aestheticsofplay.org/papers/perron2.htm (December 5th, 2009)
14. Krzywinska, Tanya; "Hands-On Horror", in: King, Geoff, Krzywinska, Tanya (ed.); *Screenplay*; London: Wallflower Press, 2002, p. 206-224. Citation taken from p. 208
15. Ibid., p. 216
16. Carroll, Noël; *The Philosophy of Horror; or: Paradox of the Heart*; New York: Routledge, 1990. Todorov, Tzvetan; *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975
17. Carroll, p. 189.
18. The concept of catharsis finds its origins with Aristotle, who defined catharsis as 'purging of the spirit of morbid and base ideas or emotions by witnessing the playing out of such emotions or ideas on stage' (Powell). Freud's 'cathartic treatment' incorporates some of these ideas: in the case of the return of the repressed, the patient would be forced to relive the repressed fears and experiences. The cathartic experience described here, in relation to scare attractions, is closer to the ideas of Aristotle and focuses on the notion of being scared in a (relatively) safe environment. See also: Powell, Esta; 'Catharsis in Psychology and Beyond: A Historic Overview'; http://primal-page.com/cathar.htm (December 11th, 2009)
19. Gaut, Berys; "The paradox of horror"; in: *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 33:4 (1993: Oct.); pp. 333-345. Citation taken from p. 336.
20. The following visits were made to: the Amsterdam Dungeons (May 22nd, 2009); the London Dungeons (June 16th, 2009); the London Bridge Experience/London Tombs (June 16th, 2009); Fright Club (June 17th, 2009) and the Edinburgh Dungeons (July 26th, 2009). The discussion is based on the scare attractions as they were at that point in time.
21. Correspondence with Timothy Haskell.

22. Ibid.
23. Correspondence with Rick Carballo.
24. Correspondence with Timothy Haskell.
25. Morreall, p. 97.
26. Correspondence with Timothy Haskell.
27. The "How the hell do you do that?" series were made for the Haunternet site (link) and deals with all the aspects of running a haunted attraction. Episode 9, which is cited here, discusses the ways in which people can be scared (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVUkt_HkDGs; originally posted: April 10, 2009) (December 11th, 2009)
28. Citation taken from podcast.29. Correspondence with Tash Banks.
30. Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wGct0VwsL8; second comment by user 'obelysk08'. (July 5th, 2009)
31. Correspondence with Tash Banks.
32. Source: http://hauntedattractions.co.uk/index.php?option=com_fireboard&Itemid=147&func=view&catid=5&id=&id=187&catid=5 (July 5th, 2009)
33. Citations taken from podcast.
34. Schechner, Richard; Performance Studies; London: Routledge, second ed., 2003. Citation taken from p. 190.
35. Correspondence with Tash Banks.
36. See also: http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/mir/holland.html (July 10th, 2009)
37. Carroll, p. 63.
38. Freud, Sigmund; "The Uncanny"; 1919. Taken from: http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~amtower/uncanny.html (December 11th, 2009)
39. Coverage by the BBC: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/7072188.stm and the Daily Mail: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-491080/Builders-spooked-skeleton-discovery-tourist-attractions-sealed-vault.html. Others had their doubts about the story, as can be seen in this article from the Londonist: http://londonist.com/2007/11/spook_central_b.php (July 5th, 2009)
40. Correspondence with Timothy Haskell.
41. Correspondence with Tash Banks.
42. Hills, Matt; The Pleasures of Horror; London: Continuum, 2005. Chapter 4 of the book focuses on the horror fandom.
43. Zuckerman, Marvin; *Sensation seeking: beyond the optimal level of arousal*; Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1979. Citation taken from p. 10.
44. Ibid., p. 11.

BOOK REVIEWS

Bernard Perron, ed., *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play*
(Jefferson: McFarland & Companys, Inc, 2009)

In Clive Barker's forward to Bernard Perron's edited collection *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play*, the novelist ambitiously proclaims that in the present moment, video games are largely ignored by academic enquiry (1). Though Barker is trying to set the stage, so to speak, for the collection of essays that follows his forward, he is, as people who study video games will know, fortunately wrong. However, though video games in general have gained significant academic interest since 2000, Barker would be right to assume that horror video games have been somewhat left out in the dark. As Perron says in his introduction, though the horror genre in its literary and cinematic forms has attracted strong intellectual interest, no book dedicated to horror video games has yet been published in English (3). *Horror Video Games: Essay on the Fusion of Fear and Play* attempts to fill that void.

The collection is divided into two parts: "Approaching the Genre" and "Encountering the Games." The first section takes a more theoretical approach and broadly looks at the horror genre in video games, while the second section is dedicated to examining specific games through various methodological approaches. In both sections there is a real sense of interdisciplinary research, with the contributors looking at the horror genre and horror video games through various manifestations of film, horror, cultural, and video game theory. However, the various approaches do not send the collection into an aimless and non-cohesive downward spiral. Instead, the different approaches, and the collection in general, are held together by a central theoretical position: that the horror video game intends to elicit a specific mimicked bodily reaction of horror from the player.

That theory is most explicitly expressed in Bernard Perron's own piece, in which he nicely involves horror video games in discussions of cinematic horror theory put forth by Linda Williams. In Williams' piece "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess," she argues that pornography, the horror film and the melodramatic film are "body genres," or film genres devoted to making viewing bodies experience the same thing that the film bodies experience. Through an engaging discussion of the bodies involved in survival horror video games, namely the body of the monster, the body of the player-character and the body of the gamer, Perron works to show that survival horror video games act in very similar ways to horror films: they draw out bodily responses from the player through the actions of the bodies in the game. Though Perron's article comes at the end of the "Approaching the Genre" section, it constructs the theoretical foundation upon which most of the other articles build their interdisciplinary arguments.

Though, as an edited collection, *Horror Video Games: Essay on the Fusion of Fear and Play* does not have an intended overall argument, the contributors in both sections of the book, working from Perron's theoretical groundwork, do discuss and explore how player horror is a product of ludic construction as well as of game narratives. For example, in Daniel Pinchbeck's piece, he argues that "horror can be understood as a gameplay device" (80). Pinchbeck points out that in first-person horror video games like *Left 4 Dead*, as compared to third-person horror video games like the *Silent Hill* games, the player loses a certain amount of movement control. Consequently, when the player loses control, the game gains it. That

relinquishing of control in first-person games, Pinchbeck asserts, can lead, through the kind of movement that is allowed in the game, to a player's experience of horror (80). In another example, where Pinchbeck views horror as being manifested in the player through the ludic interface, Inger Ekman and Petri Lankoski more specifically see player horror as derived from game sound and ludological goals in *Silent Hill 2* and *Fatal Frame* (197). The authors argue that, as players of horror games, "we fear for the character, because we empathize with the character, but also because we need to keep the character in good health in order to pursue game goals" (197).

Finally, in Laurie N. Taylor's and Simon Niedenthal's pieces, they individually look at how different traditions of the literary gothic are used by horror games to similar effect: Taylor agues that player horror comes from the usage of gothic structural traditions in horror video games, while Niedenthal examines how gothic atmospheres create horror in *Resident Evil 4* and *Silent Hill 2*. Though most of the articles do tend to examine the ludological relationship between game and horror, Ewan Kirkland, while acknowledging the ludological and narratological debate over video games, suggests that because the narrative structure of survival horror video games often controls what the payer is allowed to do and where the player is allowed to go, player horror ultimately comes from an understanding that "we are not masters of our own fate" (77) Kirkland's point is a valid and useful one. It not only contextualises horror video games in the continuing and pertinent debates of video game studies, but it nicely counters the work of others in the collection who attribute player horror to game construction and not narrative structure. Though player horror is ultimately probably a product of both narrative and ludologcial aspects, Kirkland's piece is nonetheless insightful and important to the collection's balance.

In other articles from the "Encountering the Games" section, Matthew Weise explores Ian Bogost's notion of "procedural translation," arguing that horror games constantly borrow from their cinematic cousins. Michael Nistche looks at player horror through the *Fatal Frame* franchise as a result of the franchise's use of the photographic image; Christian McCrea interestingly applies Derrida's idea of "hauntology" to *Dead Rising*, *Siren*, and *Michigan: Report from Hell*; and, through a formalist approach, Guillaume Roux-Girard shows how the seminal *Alone in the Dark* franchise has continually evolved to deepen the gamer's emotional horror in each new manifestation of the game.While the collection largely addresses how horror is related to the player, it also does a good job of interrogating why the horror genre has been successful in video games (Richard Rouse III), of providing an historical account of the horror video game (Carl Therrien), and of looking at the issues of transnationality in horror video games (Martin Picard). The collection ends with Tanya Krzywinska's exploration of how H.P. Lovecraft's fiction has been translated into *Call of Cthulhu: Corners of the Earth*. Krzywinska's piece is an appropriate ending to the collection as it additionally asks a number of important questions about the horror genre in general, the video game industry, game design, and ludic and participatory-driven player experiences in horror video games.

Ultimately, though some readers may desire a more explicit discussion of how horror video games complicate the narratological and ludological debate in video game studies, as well as a more overt definitional and critical consideration of player agency and perspective, the collection is a solid introduction to the topic. *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play* more than adequately gives readers who might be interested in video games, horror studies or cultural studies a number of critical, engaging and theoretically involved articles to think about, draw from and ultimately, evolve and further complicate.

TIM HETLAND

The Curse of the Yogi's Tomb: Cheiro, *A Study in Destiny*
(University of Tampa Press, 2006)

When the author of the story you are about to read sounds like one of the more fantastical minor characters in a particularly outlandish Victorian adventure story, prepare yourself for something special. William John Warner – also known as Count Louis Hamon, known also as Cheiro – was one of those individuals you can scarcely believe ever lived beyond the pages of a novel. Although forgotten today, he was an astrologer who enjoyed a spectacular period of international fame from the 1890s to the 1920s.

Born either in Dublin city or Bray in 1866, Warner had, unsurprisingly, no legitimate claim to an aristocratic title. In fact, he may have originally been a Romany or gypsy. Leaving Ireland behind at a young age he claimed to have travelled to India, where he learnt ways of the mystics. When he returned he had a new identity, Cheiro, a name derived from the Greek for hand. In an age when the public fascination with the occult meant that there was a good living to be made as a spiritualist or fortune-teller, Cheiro rose above the scores of mediums, numerologists, Rosicrucians, magicians and Theosophists who crowded the drawing-rooms of the great houses of late-Victorian Europe. Within a few years he had become the celebrity seer of choice, and told the futures of a distinguished assortment of personages, from Sarah Bernhardt to Mata Hari, Thomas Edison to Lord Carnarvon and Oscar Wilde to the Prince of Wales. Such was his popularity, that Cheiro's *Language of the Hand*, the astrology manual he authored in 1895, went through twenty-five editions and was still in print some twenty years after his death in 1936.

Cheiro's association with these society movers and shakers led him to become a sensation and his prophecies, including predictions that Edward VIII would abdicate and that the opening of Tutankhamun's tomb would unleash a curse, were world-wide news. Unfortunately for Cheiro, like many charlatans he became intoxicated by his image as an all-powerful oracle, and found it difficult to resist the more sordid opportunities that life presented. In Paris in the late 1880s, he became wealthy enough to acquire a splendid house, a racing stable, a private carriage and a team of liveried servants; but in 1910 he was arrested on charges of fraud and sent to jail for a year. Unperturbed, he relocated to California where he soon acquired an even greater following. One need only look at the expression of supreme self-confidence on Cheiro's handsomely roguish and unmistakably Irish face in the *carte de visite* reproduced in this book to know that he was not a man given to self-doubt.

Whatever Cheiro's occult skills may have been, he certainly had an excellent capacity for cashing in on developing cultural trends. This was certainly the case when he came to write his first and only novel, *A Study of Destiny*. Originally published in 1898, the book is an archetypal product of those years when the public fascination with all things to do with Ancient Egypt was at its height. It is a work saturated with moonlit deserts, mysterious and therefore evil foreigners, torch-lit passageways, tombs piled high with riches and the mummies of ancient royalty, confounding riddles, black magic and unimaginable terrors.

The unnamed narrator recounts an expedition he made to Egypt with one Professor Von Heller, an attaché to "the Mummy Departments of great Museums," a man who knows "every stone in the Great Pyramids," who is "personally acquainted with every mummy ever embalmed from the days of Cheops down to our present era of cremation" and who is also famous for being "quite mad." Having met the professor in a London café when he was casually told that the ring on his finger "dated back to the Sassasian period of

Persia" (3), he joins Von Heller on his treasure hunt. In the Valley of the Kings they set about looking for the tomb of El Karnak, the last great prize to elude all archaeologists.

Within a few pages we are treated to all the clichés sacred to this kind of novel. The explorers hear strange noises in the dark; they are attacked by bats; they have to restore their superstitious servants to their senses with some good stirring rational words; they see men doing unspeakable things with snakes and find that they are being watched by a silent onlooker who seems possessed by some fearful and all-consuming melancholy. When they fail to find the hidden tomb, the heroes nearly give up. Suddenly the silent figure appears and reveals that he alone knows the whereabouts of the tomb; and, being a sporting Englishman, he is happy to reveal it.

The morose stranger, whose name is Chanley, guides the two protagonists through the maze of subterranean passages (which, for some inexplicable reason, are alive with naked Arab men) to the heart of the secret structure, the lost tomb of El Karnak. No sooner have our heroes set eyes on the treasure within than the door is sealed shut by its shadowy guardians and the trio find themselves facing the unpleasant fact that they have been buried alive. But for Chanley misery is nothing new. As the thousand year-old dust settles and the light from their lanterns fades, he sets about telling our heroes about the chain of terrible misfortunes which has led to him prowl around the Valley of the Kings in the dead of night.

It transpires that Chanley is a child of Empire and was raised in India. His fate was decided even before his birth when his mother decided to show off her power over the natives by banishing all the mystics and fakirs of the nearby town. She then entered into a vendetta against a much-feared and somewhat peeved Yogi who she convinced her husband, a British general, to have executed for his disrespect. This foolish move set in motion a chain of disaster which has followed Chanley all his years and claimed the lives of anyone he has come into close contact with. Now, following his premature burial beneath the dunes, he believes the curse will finally die with him. Can the archaeologists escape their fate or will the other horrifying and deadly secret that Chanley has kept hidden kill them even before their air runs out?

A Study in Destiny is a truly rum tale. What amazes more than anything is that even though Warner's novel was quickly thrashed out to capitalise on his name, he was actually not a bad writer at all. He handles the plot and characterisation deftly and the likeably sardonic voice of his narrator grounds the peculiar narrative in some kind of reality. And there are other gems. Cheiro's descriptions are marvellously melodramatic and in the range of his gaze everything assumes a dementedly odd aspect. Take the following description of a sunrise: "It was scarcely dawn. There was only a long, luminous streak faraway in the Eastern horizon sending out wide-spreading shafts of light like arrows to pierce the heart of departing night, driven hence like some fugitive before the fierce harbingers of the King of Day" (25). As this passage suggests, this is the kind of novel that H. Rider. Haggard would have written if he had leaned too heavily on the laudanum.

Better still are Cheiro's hilarious and incomprehensible digressions about the vicissitudes of existence. What are we to make of the following?

> What vanity for mortals to strive to cope with and thwart the inevitable – the law of Destiny – … Nations rise and fall, and so do men, but they reckon not what they sow in seed-time, or reap "what they have not sowed." The inscrutable law of Destiny is above all, around all, and in all, is all. It encompasses the beginning and the end – it is Truth and Falsehood – the good and the evil

> and the consequences that follow. It is God the Infinite, man the finite – and love and good are the mysteries that conceal the purpose. (52)

In many ways, this is really just gibberish, but the important thing is that it sounds awesome.

A Study in Destiny is second in the Insistent Visions series of neglected work of supernatural fiction to be reprinted, along with notes and a new introduction, by the University of Tampa Press. It's a good choice, as *A Study in Destiny* deserves a place alongside Haggard's works, Guy Boothby's *Pharos the Egyptian*, Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* and Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of the Seven Stars* on the shelf reserved for all those books that came about as a result of the Egyptomania craze. Perhaps the law of Destiny has worked in Cheiro's favour one last time.

EDWARD O'HARE

John Ajvide Lindqvist, *Handling the Undead*, trans. Ebba Segerberg
(London: Quercus, 2009)

Zombies. Their popularity has never been greater, yet the possible philosophical quandaries raised by the notion of a re-animated corpse tend to be limited to the debate as to whether they should run or shuffle about in the traditional manner. To clear things up for those who care about such matters, the zombies here are most definitely shufflers. Let's move on. In many ways the point is irrelevant here, as Lindqvist's novel, though not completely gore-free, avoids the torn limbs and exploding heads of current zombie-based cultural productions in favour of a more subtle and nuanced approach. In the same way that his 2004 (English 2007) novel *Let the Right One In* cast a sympathetic eye on the vampire, *Handling the Undead* (first published in Sweden in 2005) attempts to do the same thing with the zombie. A trickier task perhaps; although vampires have been culturally rehabilitated (see the baseball-playing, art-appreciating 'vegetarians' of the *Twilight* series), zombies remain somewhat less attractive, suitable only for containment and elimination.

This is of course, not the first sympathetic look at the zombie. Several have cropped up in films including Carrefour in *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943), Bub in *Day of the Dead* (1985) and of course Ed in *Shaun of the Dead* (2004). This year sees the release of a 'no budget' horror film called Colin, which is entirely based around the perspective of a zombie. *Handling the Undead*, however, does not attempt to show the point of view of a zombie (can we coin the phrase P.O.Z.?) but focuses on the social and personal repercussions of a mass resurrection of the flesh. Readers of *Let the Right One In* will be familiar with Lindqvist's unhurried pacing (with another fine translation here from Ebba Segerberg), which effectively builds a sense of foreboding throughout. As with his earlier novel, this switches between the perspectives of several groups of characters. Here, all of the protagonists are forced to deal with the fact that their recently deceased loved ones have come back to some kind of life. The nature of this existence is unclear, and we quickly come to realise that this apparent miracle is a mixed blessing at best.

The main device of the novel is unashamedly supernatural. An electrical storm seems to be building in Stockholm, giving everyone appalling headaches, while (unseen by most of the population) small white caterpillar-like creatures enter into the recently dead and restore a sense of vitality. These re-animated corpses don't speak (apart from one notable exception), but show some basic urges. These do not include the movie zombie's traditional urge to consume human flesh, nor anything resembling the higher functions, but some have a homing instinct and return to their families, while others show some basic curiosity towards mechanical devices. A sense of confusion and anxiety permeates the narrative, exemplified by the debates that take place as to whether the phenomenon is proof of the existence of the soul, or is due to some other factor such as a meteorite from Mars. This second explanation, surely a reference to the Venus probe in Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), exemplifies the postmodern nature of this tale, where characters attempt to make sense of their circumstances through existing narratives, whether religious, historical, or from popular culture. One of the protagonists, Elvy, drifts off to sleep with her thoughts about recent events confused in 'an unruly mishmash of images' (165). This inability to relate directly to what is happening is integral to the novel's central theme; that the dead have no real meaning in themselves, but are conduits of the hopes and fears of the living, something that will have tragic consequences when the narrative finally builds to a climax.

Lindqvist wears his pop-cultural references on his sleeve: at one point Elvy actually catches her ten-year-old brother watching *Day of the Dead*. Indeed, he seems to be following in the tradition of Romero's *Dead* movies with the inclusion of some sharp social satire. This certainly occurs when government officials, unsure of how to refer to the walking dead, settle on the politically correct sounding 'reliving'. In another section, a group of young men head out to kill some reliving for fun in a way that Elvy sees as a kind of live-action version of the zombie videogame *Resident Evil* (326). The pervading sense, though, is that of the personal. A grieving husband is unable to explain to his young son what has happened to his mother and so awkwardly buys him a rabbit in an attempt to pacify him before a doomed visit to her waking corpse. A desperate grandfather, trying to bring his daughter back from the depths of depression, digs up his thoroughly rotted grandson and attempts to nurse the withered creature back to health. The whole novel aches with a sense of futile longing, a sense of irrational desire winning out over the cold reason that would argue that despite this freak occurrence of nature, the dead are indeed dead. In terms of mood, it evokes W.W. Jacobs's 'The Monkey's Paw' (1902), except that here the couple would open the door to their hideously mutilated son and let him in. Indeed, there is a sense here of yearning for an underlying reality in the face of a bleak nihilism. David, the grieving widower, embraces the possibilities of this new world where the dead can come back to life:

> He smiled at the comforting thought. The continued normality of society – picnics in the park and automated phone systems – was a mockery, and its collapse into the supernatural would be a relief. The attempts of scientists to understand the phenomenon from a biological perspective had nothing to do with him. Come angels, come fairies, it is starting to get cold. (207)

As this passage might suggest, the novel will be too elegiac, too restrained, for some craving a zombie fix. For others, the lack of narrative resolution will frustrate (Lindqvist has written a short sequel which remains as yet untranslated). *Handling the Undead*, though, excels in its blend of hard-edged cynicism and fairy-tale charm. It somehow manages to convey a sense of hope amidst extreme bleakness, and even fits in some extremely dark humour. Most remarkable of all, though, is that here is a zombie novel with the power to be genuinely moving. This is surely a more interesting development than whether or not they can run.

KEVIN CORSTORPHINE

Dacre Stoker & Ian Holt, *Dracula the Un-Dead* (or "An arse! An arse! My kingdom for an arse!")
(Harper, 2009)

According to its publishers, *Dracula the Un-Dead* is nothing less momentous and earth-shattering than 'the official sequel' to Bram Stoker's immortal novel of 1897. This implausible claim, risible and impertinent though it may be, rests on the participation of a certain Mr. Dacre Stoker in the creation of said literary sensation. Mr. Stoker, a great-grandnephew of the afore-mentioned Bram, was, it would appear, inveigled into co-writing this mess of a book by one Ian Holt, a screenwriter of little discernable achievement who seems to have persuaded his putative colleague that it would be a jolly good wheeze to 'reestablish [*sic*] creative control over Bram's novel and characters by writing a sequel that bore the Stoker name' (401).

While one can readily see why Mr. Holt might find it advantageous to attach a real live scion of the Stoker tribe to his project, it is considerably less clear how writing a bad book (or even a good one) would help re-establish 'creative control' over a character no longer in copyright. As the co-authors are presumably aware, any 'control' will extend no further than their own work, from which one may deduce that what Mr. Stoker actually hopes for is to re-assert some form of moral control over the fate of Count Dracula, Van Helsing, et al. Or, to put it another way, if anyone should be allowed to write a rotten sequel to *Dracula*, it may as well be a genuine bona-fide member of the Stoker bloodline.

It transpires (as we are informed in the lengthy and tedious justification which comprises the Authors' Note) that the Stoker clan – or at least the North American branch of it – is not at all happy with the treatment meted out to Bram's creation by the barbarians of Beverly Hills and Bray, though it may be observed that their collective displeasure would seem, from Mr. Stoker's account, to stem more from financial, as opposed to aesthetic, concerns. Indeed, the fact that Bram Stoker failed to register *Dracula* for copyright in the U.S. prior to its publication there in 1899 appears to have caused an ongoing and deep-seated resentment on the part of his American descendants, a resentment which, like the Count's revenge, looks set to be 'spread over centuries,' while at the same time leading to the unworthy, though perhaps well-founded, suspicion that if Hollywood or Hammer had decided to cast Mickey Rooney as Dracula opposite Van Johnson's Van Helsing, that would have been just dandy with the Stokers – as long as they were cut in for a piece of the action.

In any event, as Mr. Stoker recounts, it came as a nasty surprise to Florence Stoker, Bram's widow, to discover, following Tod Browning's version of *Dracula* in 1931 (adapted, it will be recalled, from Hamilton Deane's stage play rather than Stoker's book), that Universal Studios could, in fact, do whatever they damn well liked with her husband's creation without paying her the proverbial red cent, never mind allowing her any 'input or approval of any of the hundreds of incarnations of *Dracula* over the next century' (400).

It is, of course, not easy to decide if this was a good or a bad thing. Had Mrs. Stoker retained control, we might have been spared the sight of the Count being reduced to a comic opera bogeyman in Universal's larky and generally lamentable monster-compendium movies of the 1940s. That noted, however, it is nigh on impossible to sympathise with Mrs. Stoker's distress on learning that, despite her best efforts, at least one print of F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* had escaped the incinerator following her successful case against the German production company responsible for his unauthorised adaptation of 1922. The question of

duration of copyright is a similarly tricky issue for those not directly involved. On the one hand, it is difficult to disagree with the strongly expressed view of Leslie Charteris, creator of *The Saint*, that literary copyright should last indefinitely, with the author's heirs and descendants being free to benefit in precisely the same way as those of an inventor or manufacturer of any other popular product. On the other hand, however, there is something decidedly disagreeable about the often inflexible and humourless corporate control exercised by authors' estates for the benefit of heirs who themselves, one suspects, are incapable of writing anything more creative than a line of lavatory-wall graffiti.

This, of course, is all by-the-by, and as one can only ride for so long around the grim task of delivering some semi-coherent account of the preposterous nonsense that is the plot of *Dracula the Un-Dead*, we had better knuckle down to it. In 1912, Quincey Harker, son of Jonathan and Mina, is reluctantly studying law at the Sorbonne. Quincey would rather be an actor than a solicitor but his parents have vetoed this, partly to protect him from some unspecified 'evil' that may or may not be hovering in the background. In Paris, Quincey witnesses the arrival of Basarab, a mysterious Romanian actor of great power, whom he contrives to meet after being bowled over by the latter's majestic rendition of *Richard III*. In the meantime, Dr. John Seward, now a drooling morphine addict, travels to Marseilles on the track of Countess Elizabeth Bathory, whom he believes to be Jack the Ripper. Failing to kill the Countess, Seward cadges a flight back to Paris, arriving just in time to thwart an attempt on Basarab's life by Bathory's un-dead companions (referred to as 'the Women in White,' ho, ho). He is then run over by a black, driverless carriage before expiring on the street, muttering the name of Lucy Westenra.

Back in Blighty, an Inspector Cotford, learning of Seward's demise, visits the doctor's digs in Whitechapel. Cotford, haunted by his and Scotland Yard's failure to apprehend the Ripper in 1888, finds a clue which leads him back to the original case file and towards one suspect in particular, a Dutch professor named Van Helsing.

Quincey returns to London, announces to Mina that he is chucking his studies, and applies for an apprenticeship at the Lyceum Theatre, where owner and manager Bram Stoker is attempting to rescue his fortunes with a production of *Dracula*, starring the celebrated American thespian, John Barrymore. However, following a fistfight with the actor playing Van Helsing, Barrymore loudly announces his departure, leaving Quincey to propose Basarab as his replacement, a suggestion dismissed by Stoker but which appeals to the play's producer, Hamilton Deane. Meanwhile, in Amsterdam, an ailing Professor Van Helsing reads of Seward's death by driverless carriage, and concludes that none other than Count Dracula must be involved ...

Back in London, Jonathan Harker ponders the failure of his marriage to Mina, who has remained mysteriously youthful – and sexually insatiable – since drinking the Count's blood. Jonathan suspects, rightly as it happens, that blood was not the only bodily fluid exchanged between the pair, and his consequent jealousy has led him to become a pitiful drunk. Resolving to mend his ways, as well as his marriage, Harker sets off for home, only to be accosted by one of the Women in White, from whom he is saved only by the timely intervention of a mysterious shadow. No sooner does he imagine he is safely out of the woods, however, than he finds himself being chased by an equally mysterious red mist. The next morning, he is found impaled on a forty-foot stake in the middle of Piccadilly Circus ...

And so it goes, on and on and on, one improbability piled on top of another, until the reader starts to wish that someone wielding a mallet and a nice, sharp stake would put an end to the eternal, hellish torment of

it all. Not only have the authors made no attempt to replicate anything of Stoker's original prose style (which at least is something to be thankful for), they have also rendered his characters virtually unrecognisable to anyone even vaguely familiar with them. This is a book written for the sort of people who enjoy modern horror films – in which crude shock tactics invariably trump any obligation to logic, in which characters who have seemingly been definitively dispatched spring back to life two minutes later, and in which no explanation of even the most improbable event is ever deemed necessary (needless to say, the reader is not told how, even allowing for supernatural agency, Harker's eventual demise was effected without anybody noticing). The blame for this must presumably lie with Mr. Holt and his overactive, if under-developed, screenwriter's imagination; one can readily imagine him scribbling "CGI needed here" in the margin of the page in which Countess Bathory, in the guise of a dragon, chases Mina and Basarab through the London Underground system, and it comes as no surprise to learn that we are already being threatened with a film version of *Dracula the Un-Dead.*

But the essential stupidity of this misbegotten enterprise is not confined to mere absurdity of plot or distortion of character – there is also the authors' combined tin ear for the English language as spoken by people who speak English (Mr. Stoker, incidentally, is a Canadian, resident in the U.S., while Mr. Holt, one gathers, is an American). Here, for instance, is Arthur Holmwood, Lord Godalming, giving Inspector Cotford and Sergeant Lee (named in honour of Sir Guess-who) a piece of his mind – '"I've heard quite enough. I am an English lord and you have no grounds for keeping me here. Harass me again, and I'll have both your badges."' Why on earth would a peer of the realm feel it necessary to stress his nationality to a pair of flatfoots from Scotland Yard? Why should he mention 'badges,' when British policemen carry warrant cards? Why, indeed?

The authors also display an hilarious fixation with the word 'arse,' nowhere more inappropriately or ridiculously employed than in the following musings ascribed to Mina as she contemplates her husband's sudden demise – 'Sadly, there was also little point to a funeral service. No one would be there. Quincey was missing, Jack was dead, Arthur was an arse, and Jonathan no longer had any clients who had respects to pay.' Absolutely priceless, and about as likely as Elizabeth Bennett saying, 'Well, up yours, Mr. Darcy!' But then, as Basil Fawlty once remarked to his American guests, 'Everything's bottoms with you people, isn't it?'

And the howlers just keep coming. Why, one might well wonder, would Jonathan send Quincey to study law in France, which employs the Napoleonic legal code, when he wishes his son to inherit his practise in England? Are French ticket inspectors really endowed with Gestapo-like powers of interrogation? Might not the sight of Seward and the Women in White brandishing swords in the middle of Paris have aroused the curiosity of *les gendarmes*? Is it at all likely that the Anglo-Irish Stoker would be given, in moments of stress, to cursing in Gaelic? Was 'Kristan' a name in popular usage in Edwardian England? Why are those responsible for killing Dracula in Stoker's original novel so ready to believe, without any evidence, that the Count is still alive? Could Mina really have wandered into her local bookshop in Exeter and found it well-stocked with useful information on Countess Bathory? Why is Quincey under the impression that Arthur Holmwood may have had some ulterior motive in adopting his title – or 'moniker,' as it is ineptly termed – when in fact, unless he was some sort of proto-Tony Benn aristocratic radical, it would never have occurred to him *not* to do so? And is it even remotely likely that Arthur would have killed three men in duels in the period elapsed since the events of the original novel – that is, between 1893 and 1912?

This last point leads to rather more serious concerns regarding the authors' mishandling of their material – for in order to accommodate their ill-advised inclusion of Jack the Ripper, Mr. Stoker and Mr. Holt have shifted the events of Stoker's novel from 1893 to 1888, thereby also allowing them to present Quincey as a young adult in 1912. Although they wish this to be viewed as no more than artistic license, most admirers of Stoker's novel are likely to regard it in the same way that Leslie Charteris would have done – as blatant cheating. And this, remember, from a member of a family which claims to take exception to other people's misuse of their forebear's creations! But even this bare-faced effrontery is eclipsed by the authors' unflattering and distorted portrait of Stoker himself. As his biographers all concur, Bram Stoker was loyal, hard-working, brave, and of a generally genial disposition, yet the present authors, in addition to exploiting and traducing his characters in their remarkably stupid and tasteless enterprise, have opted to portray him as a bitter, twisted and avaricious old failure. This is not only an act of staggering hypocrisy and cynicism, it is an act of betrayal – the roots of which may presumably be found in the bitter, twisted and avaricious attitude of his descendants alluded to previously.

There are many more things wrong with this wretched book, but enough is enough. Suffice it to say it makes one glad Bram Stoker neglected to register *Dracula* for copyright in the United States. In the unlikely event that one is a member of the Un-Dead, with all eternity at one's disposal, one might conceivably find this moronic exercise in unintentional hilarity and bad taste mildly diverting. If however, one is a mere mortal of normal lifespan, it would be better – much better – to leave *Dracula the Un-Dead* as *Dracula the Un-Read*.

JOHN EXSHAW

The Man who Never Smiled - Peter Ackroyd, *Poe: A Life Cut Short*
(Chatto and Windus, 2008)

When an author's life and work have been scrutinised for over a century and a half, it's fair to assume that there can't be much left to say about them. Since his death in 1849 at least a dozen full-length biographies have been written of the high-priest of horror, Edgar Allan Poe. His individual tales of mystery and imagination have been ceaselessly discussed since their publication and have been subjected to Freudian analysis, deconstruction and just about every kind of literary and cultural analysis in creation. Surely then, the days of major discoveries in the realm of Poe are nevermore? Peter Ackroyd doesn't believe so and if this brief life proves anything it's that earlier writers on Poe have only touched upon his true greatness.

Ackroyd's previous efforts at biography have produced varied results. *Blake* (1995) and *Shakespeare* (2006) were models of precision, elegance and economy, but his *Dickens* (1991) was an odyssey of excess. With *Poe* Ackroyd has got the formula right again, but a mystery remains: it only runs to 160 pages. What is the reason for this? Was a much longer biography originally intended? Did Ackroyd find his interest dwindling? Or is it that Poe's shadowy personality proved too elusive even for his prolific pen?

The answer is that Ackroyd wishes to present Poe's life as "a series of mistakes and setbacks, of disappointed hopes and thwarted ambitions" (2). His is one of those horrendous lives that, awful though it is to admit, makes for consistently fascinating reading. Poe's plight began before he was even born. His parents, travelling players, lived in obscene poverty and his mother may have contracted tuberculosis while she was pregnant with him. Edgar was born, a malnourished little wretch, in Boston on the 19th of January 1809. In the spring of 1911 his father disappeared. That October his mother retreated to her bed and died the following month.

Poe was put up for adoption and taken into the household of John Allan, a rich Scottish merchant, and his wife Frances. The Allans moved to England three years later and Poe was enrolled in a London boarding school, where his exceptional intellectual gifts were instantly recognised. When the family returned to America in June 1820 and settled in Richmond, Virginia, Poe was already beginning to write verse and had decided to become a poet.

Although John Allan was neither a stern nor an unloving man, Poe began to resent his dependence upon him. Ackroyd notes how even the earliest descriptions of Poe mention that he was "self-willed, capricious, inclined to be imperious, and though of generous impulses, not steadily kind, or even amiable." His awareness of his humble origins bred in him a ferocious ambition and high self-esteem that remained his defining characteristics. When he turned sixteen he entered the University of Charlottesville and, though he excelled in his studies, his wayward streak became increasingly obvious.

He started drinking heavily and gambled large sums he did not have. By the end of 1826 he had achieved the dubious distinction of being $2000 in debt. Incensed at this recklessness, John Allan refused to pay for his second year at university. Poe then joined the United States Army before deciding to enter the West Point military academy. If Allan thought that the discipline of West Point would redeem Poe, he was badly mistaken.

Within months Poe's old habits were back with a vengeance. The harsh routine allowed him no time for his creative work; he retaliated by neglecting his duties and was dishonourably discharged. When Allan learned of this, he told Poe that his obligations to him were over. With only his literary talents to save him from starvation, Poe therefore began the long and harrowing journey in search of work that made up the second half of his life. But he was not entirely alone. Poe was joined by his aunt, Maria Clemm and her tiny daughter Virginia. In the years that followed, old Mrs. Clemm was the unfailing protector of her "dear Eddy" and Virginia became his wife.

Poe had published two small collections of poetry by this time and, though verse would always be his true calling, he began other work to bring in money. In January 1832 his first fiction was published in Philadelphia. The following autumn *The Baltimore Saturday Visiter* announced that "MS Found in a Bottle" had won its short-story competition. Poe must have thought that his star was ascending but this was still a long way off. Slowly, painfully slowly, he ingratiated himself into the nascent American literary community. Even when those he met could not help him, they were left deeply impressed by his writing. And there was something in his appearance – perhaps the gigantic forehead, the lop-sided face or the huge, bright piercing eyes – which they never forgot.

In time his contacts found him jobs filling the pages of newspapers and magazines. It was in these publications that the supernatural tales that would make Poe's name began to appear, including "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Masque of the Read Death," "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat." Poe was later given a salary of $800 a year and his long-nurtured idea about starting a publication of his own was suddenly no longer an idle fantasy. Then, just when his fortunes were beginning to improve, tragedy struck. Virginia collapsed with the first symptoms of consumption.

Ackroyd's account of the dreadful years of Virginia's illness, with Poe hovering over her sickbed like an enormous human raven, is almost unbearably sad and intense. And yet Poe continued to write, and this period saw him produce some of his greatest work. The family relocated to New York, where Poe joined the staff of *The Broadway Journal*, eventually becoming editor. Then there came the publication of his immortal poem "The Raven," which won him a belated national celebrity. But even this could not distract him from Virginia's condition and when she died, his life too was ended.

Thrown into a maelstrom of grief, Poe found himself encircled by all the mental demons he had so valiantly fought all his life. He dashed from one city to another looking for a woman, any woman, who would love and take care of him, but each relationship was doomed. There was Fanny Osgood, a wealthy literary patron whom Poe courted even though she was married. Even worse was his infatuation with Helen Whitman, a table-rapper and ether-addict, who was just as unstable as he. At this time Poe was working on his magnum opus *Eureka*, a prose poem which he believed contained the secret of the universe and which would not be understood for another 2000 years. Almost no copies sold and the only audience Poe found for his theory were the patrons of taverns.

As a portrait, *Poe: A Life Cut Short* is like one of those spontaneous little pencil sketches that seems far more alive than the stilted oil painting it gives rise to. Ackroyd has done an excellent job of stripping Poe's life of all the myths and lurid speculation that have attached to it over the past 150 years and gives us a vivid and unforgettable image of the man. As well as the morbid poet and storyteller, he introduces us to a pantheon of lesser known Poes: the sportsman, the hoaxer, the Southern Gentleman, the

cryptographer and lover of codes and ciphers, the shrewd businessman and the brilliant judge of developing literary tastes and fashions. He has admirably little time for the many conspiracy theories about Poe's death, and believes that his disappearance and last illness were the consequence of him finally losing his life-long battle with drink.

As for Poe's legacy, Ackroyd believes that his reputation as the father of science fiction and the detective story is well-deserved, but that his most momentous achievement was the way he challenged the conservative literary society of nineteenth-century America and opened it up to new ideas and voices. He pitted himself against a world of egotistical hacks, snobbish hostesses of literary salons and vainglorious and well-connected poetasters; and lost his life but won in posterity a fame and an inviolable reputation the likes of which most contemporary writers can only dream about. His last words were "Lord Help My Poor Soul." Let us hope his prayer was answered.

EDWARD O'HARE

FILM REVIEWS

Thirst

(Dir. Park Chan-wook) Korea, 2009
CJ Entertainment, Korea with Focus Features, USA

From the chillingly beautiful Swedish vampire child of *Let the Right One In* (Dir. Tomas Alfredson, 2008) to the all-American undead of Catherine Hardwicke's *Twilight* franchise, vampires are clearly in vogue once again. Yet what director can cook up anything genuinely new with this weary stake-and-crypts cliché in a post-Dracula, post-Buffy universe? South Korean director Chan-wook Park (previously best known for his critically acclaimed 'Vengeance' trilogy) has pulled it off with *Thirst* (2009), the beautifully filmed tale of a Korean Catholic priest enduring the physical and ethical turmoil of vampirism. I can hardly put it better than did one fan on *Thirst*'s Facebook page: 'A Korean vampire movie…how cool is that!'

Of course, Park's connection between the Catholic ceremony of communion and the vampire's blood-garnered immortality is not original: Alan Ryan's 1982 short story *Following the Way*, to give just one example, implies that all Jesuits are immortal vampires ('"This is the cup of My blood… Take and drink of it"'). What is truly original is Park's use of a background not only of modern Asian evangelical Christianity but also of contemporary urban Korea. Significantly, there is no native Korean variant of the vampire legend. Park delights in revitalising Western tropes within a radically alien context (a previous film, *Oldboy* (2003), reframed the Oedipus legend in modern Seoul); and the greater part of *Thirst* is a darkly humorous Korean pastiche of Émile Zola's 1867 novel, the Gothic *Thérèse Raquin* (think adultery, murder, drowned bodies and a gooseberry-playing ghost).

Thirst's hero, a deeply spiritual Korean priest, Sang-hyun (Song Kang-ho), volunteers for medical martyrdom as a test subject for an antidote to a deadly African virus, which kills by causing multiple haemorrhages. Sang-hyun duly succumbs to the disease's symptoms, including disfiguring blisters, and passes away on the operating table during a blood transfusion. Moments later, inexplicably, he comes back to life, apparently cured. He returns to his parish in Seoul as "the bandaged priest" with a reputation for achieving miraculous cures. But Sang-hyun realizes that the transfused blood which saved his life has also infected him with vampirism; he gains supernatural strength, but craves human blood and scorches in sunlight. The virus, lurking in his bloodstream, returns unless he replenishes his vampire strength by drinking blood. Meanwhile, Madame Ra (Kim Hae-sook), the mother of Sang-hyun's childhood friend Kang-woo (Shin Ha-kyun), implores him to cure her son's cancer. When Kang-woo recovers, Sang-hyun becomes a regular visitor at Madame Ra's weekly mah-jong soirées (domino evenings in Zola's original). Here he meets and falls in love with Tae-ju (Kim Ok-vin), Kang-woo's fey, dissatisfied wife. From this point, the events of *Thirst* parallel Zola's Gothic narrative with fiendish accuracy, only occasionally distorted by the film's vampire sub-plot. Sang-hyun and Tae-ju make secret, passionate love in the Catholic hospital and in the recesses of Madame Ra's claustrophobic apartment. "It's not a sin for me, I'm not a Catholic", Tae-ju reassures her clerical lover. She is first disgusted, then enthralled by his vampirism; later, she tricks Sang-hyun into killing her husband by implying that the marks of self-harm on her body are wounds inflicted by the benignly imbecilic Kang-woo. As in *Thérèse Raquin*, the husband dies in a boating accident, the mother-in-law becomes a paralysed invalid, and the lovers move in to look after her and maintain her tradition of weekly at-homes. But Kang-woo's ghost spoils their idyll

by literally coming between them at every moment, even the most intimate. Sang-hyun and Tae-ju grow to hate each other. He kills her, but instantly repents and forces his own blood down the corpse's throat (all witnessed by the paralysed Madame Ra). Tae-ju is reborn as an inexorably vital undead. She despises Sang-hyun's practice of stealing donor blood (like Louis in Anne Rice's 1976 *Interview with the Vampire*, Angel in the television series of the same name, or the Cullen family in *Twilight*, Sang-hyun is the vampire equivalent of a vegetarian) and insists on killing fresh human prey. This predilection bodes ill for the mah-jong guests when Madame Ra attempts, more successfully than her French counterpart Madame Raquin, to expose the lovers' guilt. From this point the film's ending is inevitable (foreshadowed by Zola), but also internally meaningful and poignant.

Thirst is stitched up the middle like an autopsy subject: the documentary tone of the first part, with its emphasis on Christian passion and medical horror, jars with the tragicomic narrative of the Zola-dominated second half. But to dwell on the artificiality of this join would be to overlook Park's subtle homage to Zola's naturalism. The original *Thérèse Raquin* was intended by Zola to demonstrate the inevitability of human actions under certain predetermined conditions (boredom, sexual frustration, temptation), or, as he puts it in his Preface to the novel, to apply to 'living bodies the analytical method that surgeons apply to corpses'. Park's film is an equally naturalistic study of human responses to slightly more unnatural conditions (as before, plus vampirism): what is a vampire if not a corpse, after all? Meanwhile, almost in passing, Park undermines a few minor presuppositions, like the sanctity of the clergy. In an interview, Park admitted that he visualized *Thirst* as the story of a 'moral downfall' rather than a vampire flick: thus he deliberately picked a protagonist 'at the apex of human holiness or earnestness' in order to study his moral degeneration (see http://www.filminfocus.com/video/the_moral_vampire). Yet, as Sang-hyun develops from a holy ingénue into a multiple murderer, he never loses his original faith or the audience's sympathy. He accepts vampirism as an organic compulsion, stronger than God, but not stronger than his innate sense of humanity and justice. Although he loves Tae-ju, he admits that the impulse to compromise his vows by seducing her originates with his vampire side rather than plain old human lust. Even the prospect of vampirism corrupts: Sang-hyun's confessor, a saintly, blind old priest (In-hwan Park), begs vainly to be infected with vampire blood in order to see again. The film frequently borders on the distasteful or grotesque (for example, in the scene in which Song-hyun sucks blood from an unconscious patient's drip), but this is inevitable in the genre of Gothic naturalism. One of the most comically repulsive scenes (Madame Ra diagnosing her adored son's tummy trouble by sniffing his fart) is all too human.

While critics are keen to namecheck the influence of *Thérèse Raquin* on *Thirst*, they ignore the film's potential debt to a slightly later Zola novel, *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* (1875). Here, Zola's hero, the youthful, worshipful Abbé Mouret – who, like Sang-hyun, is obsessed with mortifying the flesh for spiritual profit – convalesces from a life-threatening illness under the care of a naïve, free-spirited local girl, Albine. Together, they discover the edenic virtues of carnality. Like the lyrical rooftop courtship of Sang-hyun and Tae-ju, Albine and Mouret celebrate first love. But, as in *Thirst*, their idyll cannot survive beyond the boundaries of a very circumscribed Eden. The banal misogyny of Mouret's confessor, an elderly priest, echoes the venial preoccupations of Madame Ra and her circle of friends. Mouret's eventual retreat into the sanctity of the Church is bought at the cost of Albine's life. *Thirst* similarly re-evaluates the importance of conventional ethics, and the price paid by individuals to sustain others' illusions.

The acting throughout *Thirst* is exceptional: Kim Ok-vin, in her first film role, evolves convincingly from apathetic domestic helot to sociopathic seductress, while Song Kang-ho, having tangled with a man-eating mutant carp in another South Korean blockbuster, *The Host* (Dir. Bong Joon-hu, 2006), is no stranger to supernatural scenarios. *The Host* was the only South Korean film ever to be praised by the North Korean authorities, apparently because it blamed the American military for everything. Park's *Thirst* projects a more subtle warning against all external influence, from transfused blood to the Catholic faith. Yet *Thirst* itself transfuses much-needed new blood into the anaemic genre of the vampire movie.

Muireann Maguire

Colin
(Dir. Marc Price) UK 2008
Kaleidoscope (2009)

Much of the pre-publicity for this new British zombie film places great emphasis on the budget: forty-five pounds Sterling. As the director, Marc Price, has commented, this small amount was a lot more than he anticipated spending, hoping to make the film for very little, if not for free. This over-expenditure went on purchasing tea and biscuits for the zombie extras, a pack of mini-DV tapes, a crow-bar and jars of golden syrup and red food colouring to make fake blood. While these facts regarding the production provide a unique, ready-made hook upon which to sell the film, it also, more covertly, celebrates the achievement of *Colin* and, by doing so, brings the possibilities of low-budget filmmaking to the fore. The availability of reasonably priced quality digital video cameras and the inclusion of video editing software with both Window and Macintosh computers now potentially provides us all with the opportunity to make a film. As Price has proved with *Colin*, all that is required are imagination, creativity, and reasonable writing skills in order to use this technology to make a film of some standing. For his part, Price initially shot *Colin* on a five-year-old Panasonic mini-DV but this broke during the eighteen month shoot. The camera was replaced by a ten-year-old mini-DV and the subsequent footage edited on an old PC with out-of-date software. To compound all of this, Price wrote and edited the film while working the night-shift for a courier company.

Working with low-budgets often forces filmmakers to rule out certain genres and narratives and instead forces them to work with a limited cast, a limited crew and equally limited locations and effects. While these parameters may seem restrictive, they can often work to the benefit of the film itself, making the writer and director focus their narrative and work creatively with what is available in order to achieve a film of quality. With this in mind, choosing to make a zombie film – a genre which is heavy on zombie extras, requiring varied locations which should, preferably, be empty of people, and a whole host of realistic and gory effects – initially seems an ill-fated endeavour. Yet Price's debut film takes the genre and gives it new life by positioning the film from the titular zombie's perspective. The premise is this: for an unspecified reason, the undead are returning to life and consuming the flesh of the living. Zombies roam the streets as survivors either barricade themselves within their homes or form large groups to hunt down and slaughter the undead hordes. While fighting a zombie in his home, Colin (Alastair Kirton) is bitten and soon dies. Returning from the dead, he joins the undead masses and stumbles along the streets looking for flesh, encountering other zombies, violent survivors and, eventually, his sister (Daisy Aitkens). As Colin's undead life unfolds, fragments of his human life are revealed alongside the barbaric acts of the survivors, culminating in a film that subtly meditates on the emotional impact of death and subsequent mourning.

When I interviewed Price about the film on 10th September 2009, we discussed this sombre quality, with Price commenting that the way in which both he and the actors approached the film was to consider the zombies not as the traditional lumbering, flesh-eating monsters of popular cinema but more as if these were people with a terminal disease, one that has shut them off from their world in terms of memory and emotion. As a result of this, the scenes between Colin and his sister play out as a dialogue of dementia as one struggles to recognise the other in this new mental condition. Such a quality is amplified by the manner in which Colin is both presented and acted: from the first moments of his undead life the camera follows him through the streets, tracking his movements and recording the events and people he

encounters with a measured distance. His encounters with other zombies, survivors and the many lonely images of him staggering down empty streets, present Colin as a sympathetic creature, one far removed from the countless flesh-thirsty undead of George A. Romero's cinema and its countless imitators. And, while an obvious reference for a sympathetic zombie would be Bub from George A. Romero's *Day of the Dead* (1985), Price cited *King Kong* (1933) as a more direct influence:

"What I really liked about *King Kong* was the connection between Kong and the audience is only said between Kong and the audience… I thought that would be the way to go so the idea with *Colin* was to find ways to put on the audience the awareness of any danger that Colin would be in that the character wouldn't be aware of because of the of cognitive thought."

As the film draws towards its seemingly predictable end, this emotive quality comes blatantly to the fore: * * * * SPOILER BEGINS * * * * having stumbled from one increasingly dangerous incident to another (being attacked by two muggers who attempt to steal his trainers; a group of masked men who capture him at his sister's request, her sister's ruthless boyfriend), Colin staggers into a street and joins a shambling mass of the undead. As they all lurch mindlessly forward, a group of heavily armed survivors emerges and begins a lethal assault on the undead. As this 'battle' draws to its end, a makeshift bomb explodes, tearing half of Colin's face off. Left for dead, Colin lies in the gutter. The camera drifts way from him, seemingly implying he is, finally, dead yet his body stirs and he drags himself to his feet once more and stumbles off towards the film's melancholy end: stumbling into a house, Colin steadily begins to recognise details of his surroundings, eventually clawing his way upstairs to find a corpse. He sits down, his back to the body, looking out of the window as, in what may be a memory or merely a flashback for the audiences benefit, the body is revealed to be his girlfriend, a girl he had to kill for she too had become a zombie. With this end, the film makes clear Price's intentions:

"…[*Colin* is] about what it means to be human through the eyes of something that isn't human and that idea of Colin 'knowing' or just having a vague shadow of a memory of this connection with this girl at the end but not knowing what it is. It was really important when we got that shot of him kneeling next to the body that he not look at it. I remember saying to Alistair everything I want to do is have him look at it, pawing at it and not understanding but clearly trying to and that would be great but it's wrong because he wouldn't be able to. It's important that he doesn't do that because that makes everything so much more tragic."

* * * * SPOILER ENDS * * * *

Such a critique of the film implies that *Colin* is devoid of the prerequisite content of zombie cinema yet, in its own way and with its incredibly small budget, the film manages to include these defining moments: there are (seemingly) masses of zombies, grotesque scenes of flesh eating, survivors defending themselves either on the desolate streets with any available weaponry or within barricaded houses. People are pulled out through windows and eaten, a man simpering in the corner is attacked and eaten, a woman falls into a mass of zombies and is devoured, each deathly moment unfolding almost real-time as rotting hands claw at clothing and flesh to tear away warm and bloody chunks. Yet for all the gory spectacle, this content does not detract from the narrative's emotional core and, instead, competently grafts it on without detracting from these emotional resonances. This is perhaps because the deaths that are witnessed by both camera and audience are of those they have no knowledge of. They are simply anonymous citizens yet * * * * SPOILER BEGINS * * * * the deaths of the central characters – namely Colin, his sister and what can

be assumed to be Colin's girlfriend – * * * * SPOILER ENDS * * * * all take place off screen. Their deaths are private, quiet and unseen. There is no spectacle or celebration in these moments. Instead there is only loss and consequential mourning. Such is the effect of *Colin* that the film has the potential to mark the arrival of a new genre talent, with the film's narrative, images and subtext raising the question of what could Price do with a bigger budget.

Additional Information

Colin went on general release on 23rd October 2009 and was released on 26th October on DVD.

James Rose

Jennifer's Body
(Dir. Karyn Kusama) USA, 2009
20th Century Fox / Dune Entertainment

Despite its horror inflection, the second film written by Diablo Cody, is actually not much of a departure from her Oscar-winning *Juno* (2007), with a similar focus on high-school life and the female body. *Jennifer's Body* is told in flashback from a mental hospital to which Needy (Amanda Seyfried), a young woman with seriously violent tendencies, is confined. We learn that she was once the mousy best friend of the glamorous Jennifer (Megan Fox), the most popular girl in school (though she does seem only to hang around with Needy). We begin when Jennifer drags her friend to a concert by indie band Low Shoulder, who are performing in a bar on the outskirts of their small town. To the chagrin of her friend, Jennifer is fixated on hooking up with the band's lead singer (*The O.C.*'s Adam Brody) and, after the bar burns to the ground, abandons Needy and drives away in a van with the band. Later that night, in a scene with a wonderfully suspenseful build-up, a bloodied Jennifer arrives at Needy's house, eats some of her Mom's chicken and vomits torrents of black goo. Next day at school, she is seemingly her brassy self again. And then she starts seducing, killing and eating her male classmates. It is later revealed that Low Shoulder performed a satanic rite in a bid for fame and success which involved sacrificing Jennifer to the Devil. Since the ritual required a virgin, and the victim is played by Megan Fox, Jennifer was not killed but became a sort of demon who must eat people in order to stay vibrant.

Visually, the film's unyielding focus is Jennifer's body, while thematically it charts Needy's complicated, dependant relationship with her friend, and the tension that develops as the bodies mount. There is a solid emotional core to the friendship which is charmingly established by flashbacks to their childhood. The extent of their unequal dynamic is nicely suggested by a psychic connection Needy has with Jennifer (at certain points, Needy can "sense" what Jennifer is up to and where she is) but which does not appear to be reciprocal. At one point, Needy is distracted during lovemaking with her boyfriend Chip (Johnny Simmons), psychically sensing that Jennifer is killing another boy, a far more suggestive scene than one in which Jennifer and Needy kiss. The film flaunts a self-conscious knowingness about the voyeuristic nature of horror movies. In one sequence, a freshly sated Jennifer swims languidly the full length of a lake towards the camera and emerges like an amphibious predator from the water, fully naked. If, as has been pointed out by some theorists, voyeurism in its strict definition is disabled by such awareness, scopophilia certainly isn't – this scene and the film's other meta-cinematic strategies hardly disturb or interrogate with any conviction those impulses that lie at the heart of cinema, horror films and female representation. In fact, in many ways, *Jennifer's Body* is paradigmatic of that apathetic, ideologically passive/complicit brand of postmodern fiction.

Pop culture references (of which the title, taken from a song by Hole, is a slightly more obscure example) rigorously enforce a facetious tone throughout. One of the few genuinely distressing moments, in which a bound and gagged Jennifer whimpers as the band of Satanists advance on her, is rendered toothless by a reference to the American rock band Maroon 5. Not that relentless referencing isn't an accurate reflection of how people behave these days (I'm wearing my Iron Maiden T-shirt as I write this). But it's the uncomfortably Tarantino-esque nature of this tonal venting that gets to me. At least the audience is spared from watching Jennifer being raped, though in a more general way Cody's girls do seem to be informed by Tarantino's own weird fixation on dubiously empowered women. Nevertheless, *Jennifer's Body* handles the Tarantino influence quite well overall, and manages to contribute quite a bit of its own

aesthetic, which can't be said for the innumerable dreadful films that try their hand at mixing humour and violence; nor does *Jennifer's Body* display the sense of moral depravity that so often accompanies the mix. Also, the depiction of Low Shoulder's greed and popularity suggests that Cody is sensitive to cultural vacuity, or some of its manifestations.

Pop culture references are also put to thematic use, quite cleverly. The last sequence of the film, in which an empowered Needy seeks out the rock band that facilitated her friend's outrages, plays to a cover of Blondie's "In the Flesh". As well as playing on the various connotations of the word flesh, the song is covered by a male vocalist, which complicates the gender dynamics. Considering the film's unremittingly scopophilic agenda, the lyrics resonate perfectly: "Darling, I can't wait to see you. Your picture ain't enough; I can't wait to touch you in the flesh". The subject matter of indie bands ties in nicely here; a male dominated musical and cinematic terrain is subverted efficiently and satisfyingly.

I don't mean to invest this particular song too heavily with meaning, to the neglect of diegetic elements of *Jennifer's Body*. It's a risk Cody courts in a film this intertextual, with a setting as iconographically replete as the American high school. The film is wonderfully shot throughout; in one scene the camera is poised above a shadowy street, offering an extensive view of a young man tentatively searching for Jennifer – the sequence is tense, amusing and aesthetically pleasing all at once. Also, Megan Fox is excellent as Jennifer – perfectly coy, brash and flippant. A number of motifs are entertainingly developed; true to teenage life (and life in general), there are times when Jennifer and other characters look far less glamorous than usual. This is usually attributed to the long time Jennifer has spent between eating boys, yet this can also be easily incorporated into the film's metaphorical framework. There are echoes throughout of plot elements from various earlier high school fictions, most clearly*Heathers* (Dir. Michael Lehmann, 1989) and *Freaks and Geeks* (1999-2000). Indeed, murder and cannibalism aside, the film is another rehearsal of the story of erstwhile best friends Lindsay and Millie from *Freaks and Geeks*, told from Millie's perspective (albeit with a little less warmth and less acute characterisation than that found in the underappreciated *Freaks and Geeks*). And of course, the high school setting also resonates with Cody's earlier *Juno*, which garnered far more positive responses than *Jennifer's Body* has received so far. Her latest film's gaudy and confrontational aesthetic, as well as the weighty implications of its subject matter and technique, explains why it has been less well received than *Juno*. To my mind, in terms of humour and characterisation, it's no better or worse.

Eoin Rafferty

Highlights from Horrorthon, October 2009

Grace
(Dir. Paul Solet) USA/Canada 2009
ArieScope Pictures

If there is a central conflict in Paul Solet's feature film debut *Grace* it is between instinct and intellectualism. Both essential parts of the human condition, the primordial needs of love, food and protection often exist in stark contrast to the lofty ideal that people can moralise their way out of any unpalatable desire. Here this tension is played out when Madeline, a fragile academic, struggles to cope with her duties as a new mother to an infant whose very existence defies logic, and has needs far beyond her ability to deal with.

Grace begins with a soft focus love scene that goes from romantic to antiseptic as the camera slides along with curve of intertwined bodies. The vacant, indifferent expression on Madeline's face (played to the edge of reason by *Cabin Fever*'s Jordan Ladd) as husband Michael (a chastened Steven Mark) withdraws tells us all we need to know about their relationship in thirty seconds. With a practiced motion she lies back, hugging her knees close to her chest to promote the flow of semen to her uterus. This lack of interest in her other half, and Selot's attention to detailing female biology, nicely foreshadows the coming 80 minutes of 'gyno-centric' horror, and is one of the many potshots directed at his male characters.

It's not just Madeline and Michael's sex life that reeks of Dettol, however. Outside the bedroom their dynamic comes across as a goal-oriented contract good for one trip around the baptismal font. From the too-clean house to their white/beige/grey wardrobe, everything speaks of an existence bereft of passion. Even their diet has been reduced to a tasteless vegan mulch, quaffed down with a large glass of soy milk. It's a horrific arrangement quickly seized upon by Michael's mother Vivian (a matronly Gabrielle Rose), a judge with more than a few words of choice old-school advice in the meat and two veg tradition. A conservative authoritarian, Vivian's overt distaste for her son's supine lifestyle is offset only by Madeline's ethereally passive aggression. Laced with razorwire, their polite dinner table banter renders Michael and his father unable to do anything but stare into their plates with all the enthusiasm of smacked toddlers. The mood is further darkened when Madeline reveals she has opted to forego the traditional route of having a obstetrician attend the birth in favour of employing flaky academic midwife Patricia Lang, a feminist with a yen for soft lighting, cultural studies and vegan cookies. The decision seems justified when Vivian's scalpel-happy specialist of choice (Malcolm Stewart) almost conducts an unnecessary Caesarean section when a case of cramping is misdiagnosed as pre-eclampsia. All seems well until the trip home when a freak car accident kills Michael and leaves Madeline with what appear to be serious internal injuries. Despite being told the foetus no longer has a heartbeat Madeline refuses to accept defeat and carries the child to term. In a truly gut wrenching scene she gives birth to a stillborn child that, when pressed against her mother's breast, takes in a gulp of air and breathes. After quickly naming the infant Grace, Madeline shuts off contact with her critics to care for the child on her own, a task she seems singularly ill-equipped to do. Mired in post-natal depression, Madeline struggles to care for newborn until a feeding accident uncovers its true appetite: a taste for human blood. Running in tandem with Madeline's journey, Vivian rediscovers her own maternal longings in scenes as uncomfortable as any stalk and slash sequence. At the same time there are hints the relationship between Madeline and Patricia is much more complex than a simple patient/quack dynamic.

Something of a slow burner, Solet's picture uses crisp, almost TV movie-style lighting to set up a world of comforts tinged with grisly violence. Constant references to the Animal Channel, with its intermingling of pieces on animal experimentation and reproduction, underline the point that savagery is a shared part of the human and animal conditions. Solet also balances out the gender bashing by casting an eye over the pseudo-gestalt therapies of birthing pools, scented candles and the virtual denial of masculinity. Mischievous surely, but nothing is played for laughs. The characters are cold, humourless creations; the script never deviating from a tone of quiet desperation and barely-in-place facades. This approach cuts both ways. On one level viewers will be surprised at a film that plays more on a mother's reaction to her creation as the creation itself. Grace, the child, is not an insatiable creature howling at the moon but an infant too low maintenance for its own good. With the reveal on the halfway point one fears more for what Madeline will do to maintain her veneer of competence and 'right-on' liberal values.

It sounds great on paper but for a film with so much to talk about it's interminably slow. Expanded from a six-minute short, Solet makes the most of his premise, but at 85 minutes it feels like a much longer film. There are also a few Screenwriting 101 narrative tricks in there (I won't spoil them) that tidy things up a little too neatly but are hardly cardinal errors. If only it provided as many plot points as ethical quandaries.

If you like your viscera accompanied by social comment and polite conversation then this could well be your very own little bundle of joy.

Niall Kitson

Tony
(Dir. Gerard Johnson) UK 2009
Abbott Vision

Gerard Johnson doesn't do sensationalism. Having already established a penchant for 1980s-style social realism with his portrait of a petty criminal in the short film *Mug*, Johnson moves on to far darker territory with his first feature, *Tony*. Understated from the first minute, we follow our eponymous protagonist through the streets of a decaying, morally bankrupt London. Using a series of tracking shots direct from the Alan Clarke playbook (or Gus Van Sant depending on when you grew up), we see the city through the eyes of a welfare sponger unable to deal with even the bare basics of urban living. A pair of plastic shopping bags never far from his reach, Tony is just another face in the crowd. Did I mention yet that he's also a serial killer?

The build-up to the film's core revelation is a series of random encounters, beginning with Tony (Peter Ferdinando) trying to engage a disinterested DVD street vendor in conversation to no effect. Thankfully he fares much better after offering to play host to a pair of junkies in a 'drugs are on me' exercise in goodwill. After an awkward meeting with a kingpin, Tony brings his confidantes home for skag and an afternoon of action movies on VHS. When his guests reveal themselves to be less than reputable characters things, take a turn for the worse and Tony lets rip with a heretofore unhinted-at brutality.

The rest of the film is constructed around a series of vignettes loosely tied together by the disappearance of a local boy, an event that throws Tony's reclusive lifestyle into sharp relief. When not under scrutiny by concerned neighbours and chavs with anger-management issues, Tony looks to the gay scene for solace but learns that, while he may find it easier to relate to men, the kind of relations they want back isn't something he's capable of dealing with.

Tony's paucity of life skills is best illustrated in his encounters outside the relative safety of his drab, smelly flat (the only attempt to mask the odour of death being a rotting bunch of bananas in the front room), where what little self-confidence he has is ripped away. In danger of having his social welfare cut off he gets a job in a tanning salon only to blow off his first day of work. Instead he tries to pass time in a brothel only to get kicked out and branded a pervert when he finds out hugs and chats are not on the menu.

Ferdinando commands his role brilliantly, teasing out Tony's life of the mundane and the macabre with something approaching humanity. Far from being a quintessential man in a long coat, Ferdinando's bowl chop haircut and heavy glasses make him look almost too ordinary, too familiar. It's easy to imagine Ferdinando cutting up bodies, pausing only to sip from a mug of cold tea with a Jean-Claude Van Damme movie supplying the background noise. Indeed the biggest laugh (and there are a few to be had) comes courtesy of some pillow talk with an uncomplaining, decomposing partner. Close your eyes and the 'dialogue' could be from *Terry and June*.

Final note must go to the haunting score from The The. A repeated piano refrain serves the tone of the film well, without lapsing into drone or becoming distracting.

It would be easy to argue that Gerard Johnson has produced a monster but that would be to miss the point. Tony is a failed human, more Roy Cropper than Henry Lee Lucas, a collection of ticks and quirks, incapable of self-analysis or maintaining a relationship. He murders out of a desire to push beyond his passivity, to take a dominant role in his relationships. It's a sympathy card Johnson plays remarkably well. Again, following in the tradition of psychopath movies there is usually a historical model for the protagonist (Ed Gein in *Psycho* for example). One wonders how large a shadow Brian Masters' seminal *Killing for Company*, an account of English serial killer Dennis Nilsen, cast on the script, such is the fine balance between subtlety and menace.

Would Alan Clarke approve? The audience I saw it with certainly did – maybe that's a more relevant barometer.

Niall Kitson

The Horseman
(Dir. Steven Kastrissios) Australia 2008

Revenge dramas have an all-too-familiar trajectory: some unforgivable sin is committed (usually rape or murder); a lone hero, fuelled by righteous anger and/or a sense of familial duty, takes up arms; through a series of coolly planned set pieces vengeance is exacted; and, if done correctly, said hero is removed from society through death or imprisonment, closing the circle of violence that stirred them to action. From *Elektra* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* to *Deliverance* and *Dead Man's Shoes* the formula has been refined to such a point that one wonders if there is anything, or anywhere, new to explore in it. The evolution of the concept of family and the dangers of contemporary society, however, still manage to throw up a few new nightmares, no better exemplified than in Steven Kastrissios' uncompromising debut, *The Horseman*.

The film begins with an all-too-regular scene. A teenaged girl stumbles her way around what appears to be an industrial estate by a motorway at night. Obviously tired and drunk she clutches at her mobile phone. Suddenly the action moves to a small house in the Australian Outback. A handyman calls in to check on a bug infestation, only to use his tools on the man of the house in a manner certainly not specified in their respective manuals. Our handyman, Christian (Peter Marshall), is interested in two things: a selection of videotapes and the whereabouts of a man named Derek.

Through a series of intercut scenes, we learn what ties these two incongruous incidents together. The young girl was Chris' daughter, who after a night of alcohol, hard drugs and sex, collapsed and choked to death on her own vomit. Some time later the grieving single parent receives a video in the post from an anonymous source showing his daughter's ignominious last hours as a stoned porn actress getting gang banged by the clientele of a local gym.

Stirred to action by paternal rage, Chris begins a one-man crusade to honour his child's memory. First he attempts to buy up every copy of the video ever produced, a straightforward transaction of some 300 units sullied only when enquiries as to its origin reveal a clue to another person involved in the production before coming to a brutal conclusion. It's a pattern that permeates the film, as the protagonist begins each interaction with a workmanlike efficiency before moving to a grisly toolbox interrogation that leads to the reveal of a new piece of information and a final decision on the battered victim's life. In turn a distributor, producer, editor and a series of cast members get the same treatment before he finally reaches the director/instigator, the aforementioned Derek (Brad McMurray), deep in the Outback, surrounded by a pack of 'actors'.

That's all well and good but if that were it, the film would make for relatively straightforward, if extreme, viewing. A welcome complication arrives in the shape of Alice (Caroline Marohasy), a pregnant runaway looking to connect with the father of her baby. Hardly a choir girl herself, Alice and Chris develop an awkward bond, each filling the other's need for the kind of unconditional love felt only between parent and child. It's only as this relationship cements itself on the backroads that Chris must face a decision between abandoning his self-destructive crusade for his dead daughter and moving forward with a living girl clearly in need of help. Only then does he find that the decision has been taken out of his hands.

It's fair to say *The Horseman* is nothing if not a determined piece of work. Each scene feels truncated to the point of claustrophobia, the camera so often in the actors' faces to feel like the audience itself is gearing up for a fight. No line is dwelt on; there is no time for humour or remorse; and every character seems in danger of falling apart at the seams once Chris gets loose on them. No detail is shirked but Kastrissios is smart enough to balance the visceral interrogation scenes while still serving the plot. The final scenes are a particularly hard-to-stomach sequence of torture and sexual violence made all the more unnerving by their lack of *Hostel*-style self-awareness. Marshall's performance manages to carry every scene through his unpredictable cocktail of rage, tenderness and anguish – any or all of which can manifest themselves within a heartbeat. McMurray, when we meet him, is a formidable opponent, a 'roided up predator with a heaving physical presence that underlines his capacity for hatred and his willingness to debase his 'actresses'. Anyone interested in analysing performances of pure evil in contemporary cinema should take note.

Harsh, abrasive and not afraid to make hard choices, *The Horseman* is an endurance test, but a satisfying one nonetheless. Looks like the revenge drama will be with us for some time yet.

Niall Kitson

MULTI-MEDIA REVIEWS

Cursed Mountain
Developer: Sproing Interactive, Publisher: Deep Silver
Platform: Nintendo Wii

Cursed Mountain opens as the gamer's onscreen avatar is climbing a mountain in a blizzard. It's slow, torturous and at times you wonder if you're going to make it. You're vision is obscured by snow and another climber shouts encouragement. And then you get attacked by the evil ghost of a Buddhist monk. Which is surprising, as you don't normally think Buddhists of any sort as being evil, but what are you going to do? The opening is an excellent, atmospheric beginning to what is still one of the few horror games available on the Wii console.

For a long time the Wii has had the charge laid against it that is purely for the casual gamer. Games like *Rabbids Go Home* (which is enormous fun), *Mario Kart* and the innumerable kids games haven't helped endear the console to hardcore gamers or horror enthusiasts. *Cursed Mountain*, however, may be a sign of things to come.

The story proper begins with Eric Simmons searching for his brother Frank (who you controlled on his journey up the mountain) who has become lost somewhere on the Holy Mountain of Chomolonzo in Tibet, Eric arrives in a deserted mountain town, seeking out the man who financed the expedition. This is basically an introduction to the control and combat system, with the gamer slowly exploring the town streets and buildings.

All too soon you face your first ghost, a shadow that appears in front of you leading you on through the town until it suddenly attacks. Wielding an ice axe equipped with a handy mystical amulet you're able to defend yourself, banishing the spirit from the real world. Soon after you learn mystical prayers that can be used to banish the ghosts without resorting to hacking at them with an axe. These prayers, which I'll discuss later, are simple (sort of) gestures made using the remote and the nunchuck.

Graphically, *Cursed Mountain* is a good advance on similar Wii games such as *Overlord* and *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Empire*. The backdrops are well designed, with few, if any, glitches. Character models move naturally, responding quickly to commands and it is a good sign for the future of the console that relatively realistic graphics can be used on the Wii. Whilst not exactly Playstation 3 level, they're functional and work well. The in game sound is also quite good, with the scream of a ghost attack echoing not just from the television but from the small built in speaker in the remote.

Unfortunately, there are several problems with *Cursed Mountain*. The story is developed by cut scenes which take place both within levels and in bridging the transition to the next stage. However, rather than use CGI, cursed mountain instead uses still images, drawing the attention of the gamer away from the action. This creates a significant barrier in keeping the gamer's attention. The breaks slow down and almost stop the action and this is further exacerbated by the dry storytelling. To be honest I had no real interest in rescuing Eric's brother and after reading several of his diary entries scattered throughout the

game I found myself feeling rather glad that he was still lost up on the mountain and not on ground level annoying me.

In terms of the control system, Sproing Interactive does everything it can to avoid utilising the traditional gamepad controller. Movement is controlled with the nunchuck and targeting via the remote. Unfortunately it tries to do too much, especially when you are under attack from multiple ghosts. The combination of axe and prayer attacks soon becomes awkward, with any attempt at a coherent strategy lost in mad flailing around. The camera doesn't help either, occasionally getting stuck in walls or focusing on the back of Eric's head when it would be better served fixing on the ghost currently trying to rip your face off. This results in unnecessary damage being taken as a ghost you either forgot about or hadn't seen lays into you from behind.

The prayers used to banish ghosts, whilst a good idea, is an attempt to make further use of the motion controls unique to the Wii. However, these prayers become more and more complicated as you gain more of them and whilst onscreen instructions are a constant source of help, you will still find yourself gesturing madly in the air and just hoping for the best.

Adding this to the previous camera problems and you'll soon find yourself becoming frustrated with the game.

Later in the game you begin to face boss battles and these are surprisingly difficult, especially after the relatively easy time you have getting to these sections. You'll find yourself trying to solve puzzles whilst fighting giant bat winged demons at the same time as trying to avoid the spirits of dead monks. Suffice to say you will die, and often.

As I played the game, I found myself reminded of games developed in the eighties and nineties for the Sega and Nintendo Consoles, where the difficulty level was excessively high in order to make the game last longer. Puzzles appear that serve no real purpose other than to extend the gameplay, end of level bosses are inordinately difficult to beat and it is filled with diary entries, mountain climb logs and ancient scrolls to keep you occupied.

Cursed Mountain is a good attempt at a horror game for the Wii, using the motion controls relatively effectively. The graphics throughout are of good quality for a console like the Wii, and although not of the same quality as a Playstation 3, it shows what can be done with the Wii in the hands of a skilled developer. If only some more time had been spend on refining the combat system, and developing an engaging plot this could have been the first truly excellent horror game on the console.

This is a game to try, but not to buy.

Eoin Murphy
Cursed Mountain
Graphics: 7
Sound: 7
Gameplay: 6
Replay Value: 3
Overall Score: 6

Batman: Arkham Asylum
Developer: Rocksteady Studios, Publisher: Eidos Interactive
Platform: Xbox 360

The Dark Knight has returned, and finally to a game worthy of his name. Batman has been linked to a number of sub-par videogames in the past, many of them rushed through development to coincide with the release of the films. However, *Batman: Arkham Asylum* truly feels like an independent story, a compliment rather than a mere accompaniment to the lore laid down by the graphic novels and movies.

The premise of the game is simple, but effective. The Joker has broken loose from his imprisonment in Arkham Asylum, releasing a rogues' gallery of Batman's previous super-villain foes, who must all in turn be confronted and defeated before the Clown Prince of Crime turns the prison island into his very own funfair kingdom. While it might seem little more than a convenient excuse for a fan-pleasing who's who, each villain leaves their mark upon the storytelling and gameplay: Batman's encounters with Bane and Killer Croc lead to straightforward combat, whereas the taunts and teases of the Joker or the Riddler are more puzzle-based affairs. Combat is smooth and the auto-targeting system ensures you always hit the intended thug amongst the crowd.

Batman's attacks, mapped to three separate buttons on the controller, are categorised as three main types: offensive, counter and stun. These can be used to stylistically deflect enemy attacks or disarm them of dangerous weapons such as knives or stun rods. Also, Batman can, in a suitably bat-like fashion, tackle enemies in a variety of stealthy ways. Whether it's descending from the roof using the grapnel gun, throwing batarangs round corners or sneaking up behind enemies and disabling them in a single takedown, as the player you really feel compelled to explore and utilize the dark surroundings of Arkham Asylum to your advantage. These extra combat options really bring the environment to life, making it seem like a believable prison island that reacts intelligently to how you play, rather than simply forcing you down a linear path from point A to B. With hidden collectibles scattered throughout the asylum, including interview tapes, some of which are genuinely disturbing to listen to, trophies and biographies which reveal the finer details of The Dark Knight's most infamous adversaries, the compulsion to explore every nook and cranny is given weight and reward.

Some of the game play sections are particularly effective in evoking the gothic origins of the Batman character. Batman's movements are particularly esoteric. In one particularly memorable sequence, Batman suffers the fear-effects of Scarecrow's mind-altering drug, where the game's environment is warped to reflect the pitfalls of the Caped Crusader's subconscious. Although this eventually leads to some fairly rudimentary *Prince of Persia* style platform-hopping, other ways in which this interiority of mind is rendered, such as leaving the prison's morgue by the door only to find yourself back inside it, or revisiting the alley scene where Batman's parents were killed (with the costumed Batman suddenly appearing as a young Bruce Wayne), are subtly unsettling. As is the case in all mediums through which the Gothic is manifested, interior anxiety is rendered through surface appearance, a series of returns and re-visitations; in this case through the spectacle of fear in sight and sound. Indeed, *Batman: Arkham Asylum* plays on the relationship between Batman and his surroundings. Just as the asylum displays his sense of duty, acting as post-modern museum, stage and re-staging site for his own vigilante justice, so to does it manifest his own doubts about his separation from those he put behind bars. Developing the themes of the graphic novels, *Batman: Arkham Asylum* explores the ever-shortening gap of difference in

the modern Gothic between crusader and criminal, justice and injustice, Jekyll and Hyde. Much like in the graphic novel *The Dark Knight Returns*, the Joker emphasises the similarities between Batman and himself; how, much like Jekyll and Hyde, one requires the other for existence, and one feeds off the other. In *Returns*, the Joker remains in a coma until Batman comes out of retirement, inactive and unneeded without an opposite. In *Arkham Asylum*, the division between the two, between chaos and order, good and evil, becomes blurred through the power of the penal and psychiatric institution: psychology and technology. This theme of the game is based partly on the graphic novel *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth*, where the actions of the institution's directors become themselves criminal, provoked by trauma and made possible by technology. For example, the Asylum's founder, Amadeus Arkham, purposefully kills by electric chair the serial killer, "Mad Dog" Hawkins, as an act of revenge for murdering and raping his wife and daughter. Other doctors working in the asylum, including Harleen Quinzel and Jonathan Crane are eventually admitted as patients.

In the game, after the Joker takes over the asylum, he uses its surveillance system to observe and analyse Batman's movements. Appearing intermittently on the television screens dotted throughout, he taunts Batman and takes the position of authority as the psychologist, subverting the culturally high value placed in its usefulness to heal the fractured patient subject. While this replacement shows the total interchangability between interrogator and interrogated, it further demonstrates that the panoptical power of the prison lies not in stable morality, but merely in the shifting use and abuse of its technology. His words through the speakers are well chosen: "Why, it's all the same, isn't it, Bats? You and I, this and that? You're just as mad as the rest of us! Why don't you let me take a look inside YOUR mind?" Here, the Joker perfectly encapsulates the Modern Gothic concerns of the world that surrounds the madman or serial killer: where the now-complete breakdown of the social class system, its dependence upon new media to classify the criminal, and the universality of technical expertise and education afford an escapee like the Joker more power than would be possible in any other era. As in Alan Moore's graphic novel, *The Killing Joke*, the Joker is able to manipulate our trust in new media and its network of meanings which construct society's relationship with the criminal. In *The Killing Joke*, the Joker attempts to convince the police that he is sane, tortured by Batman's own convictions to the contrary, a product of the Caped Crusader's own mad belief. In *Arkham Asylum*, the Joker subverts the techniques of psychology to prove how hollow they are, highlighting the middle class anxiety that therapy doesn't work. "What do you see?" a psychotherapist asks Joker when showing him a Rorschach card. "A dead elephant," he replies, sarcastically.

Architecturally, the environment of *Batman: Arkham Asylum* adds to the cerebral elements of the game considerably. The Asylum itself is a mixture of Victorian Gothic and twentieth century Eastern European Expressionism. The latter emphasises the psychological history of Freud and Jung, and the artistic acceptance by America of the films of Fritz Lang, Robert Wiene and F.W Murnau. The game's twisted camera angles and long, stark shadows are reminiscent of this movement that forms a major part of the origins of Modern Gothic, and the game recreates them lovingly in order to reflect Batman's own dubious morality and sanity throughout the story.

Rendered in Epic's latest Unreal 3 Engine, *Arkham Asylum* is beautiful, atmospheric and always smooth to the eye, even when the action gets busy as Batman fights up to ten henchmen simultaneously. It's a coherent island that, even once the main story has been completed, remains open to exploration. With the game's extra challenges, unlockable trophies, biographies and back stories to draw you in and seek out, this is a game that ensures you won't be escaping from the asylum any time soon.

Stuart Lindsay

Batman: Arkham Asylum
Graphics: 8
Sound: 8
Gameplay: 8
Replay Value: 8
Average: 8

Blood and Water
(DC Comics Vertigo)
Writer: Judd Winick, Artist: Tomm Coker

It seems everywhere you turn these days the average horror fan is assaulted by the monstrosity that is paranormal romance. You can't walk into a bookshop without seeing it with its own dedicated section, edging out traditional horror and replacing blood sucking monsters with sexy and misunderstood immortal teens.

Unfortunately, all hope is lost for those of us who prefer our undead to be soaked in the blood of the sexy and misunderstood teens. *Blood and Water* is the latest piece of writing to revel in the trials and tribulations of young vampiric love, albeit with a slightly gorier approach, in what is a collected reprint of Judd Winick's 2008/09 Vertigo comic series.

The story follows Adam Heller, once the former cool kid of his high school who, despite having Hepatitis B, was guaranteed to be a bright young star. Now, at the age of 23 Adam is dying, having contracted Hepatitis A from a bad burger. He is retaining water in his torso, spends an hour of every morning vomiting and has just gotten word he has a tumor on his liver and won't survive the year.

All in all, it's been a bad couple of years.

In steps Adam's best friend Joshua and Nicole, who explain to him that they are vampires and that they would like to turn him into one in order to save his life.

Now, when I first picked up this book, I thought it could be an interesting read, having at its core a terrible dilemma, in which a young man facing an early, painful death is given the chance to embrace an eternity of killing others so that he can survive. It's a moral and ethical conundrum which forces the reader to consider whether they themselves would kill in order to survive. Adam is initially disbelieving, confused and tempted by the offer, debating with himself and his vampiric friends about whether or not it is right to do this. That is, of course, until his vampire friends explain that they don't need to eat humans, indeed, they can survive quite well on the blood of animals.

Reading between the lines, it seems likely that Winick introduces this spin on the vampire tale in order to do away with the inevitable plot strands linked to all the angst that comes with being a vampire (amply covered in Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* Series). Winick's vampires drink animal blood, go out in the daylight (wearing suntan lotion of course) and get to have all the fun of undeath without having to worry about hurting any humans.

Of course, if they want to drink human blood they can. But it comes with terrible side effects - Human blood is massively addictive to vampires, and whilst it gives them enhanced strength (even for a vampire) it eventually leads to insanity and being hunted down and killed by other nosfreatu for giving the cuddly vampires a bad name.

Winick's take on the vampire mythos ultimately therefore takes a meandering path down the road of damnation to paranormal romance. By taking away the need for human blood from his characters Winick has removed a plot point that has been the bane of all vampires since long before Buffy took her first steps, the angst ridden moment when they try to resist the red thirst until a final bloody baptism. Then some more angst about having eaten your girlfriend/best friend/math teacher/high school bully.

Yes, this theme has been done to (un)death, especially when written in the clichéd manner that infects most, if not all paranormal romance. However, by removing it Winick has also lost something that could have made *Blood and Water* stand out amongst other similar pieces of writing as the crux of this collection is around the effect the change has on Adam's life. Adding a bit of bloodletting amongst the hedonism could have added a darker edge to the story and made it a more captivating read.

Rather than have to choose between his or someone else's life, the protagonist of *Blood and Water* discovers that becoming a vampire means being one of beautiful people, enjoying hedonistic nights, and no one had to get hurt in the process. This lack of payback for being undead is in truth rather annoying, making the story a pretty superficial read.

Later in the narrative, presumably to add a bit of tension and conflict to the plot (please note this is where the spoilers kick in) Winick has added an ancient tribe of vampires that not only fed on humans but also on other vampires. These creatures bred with humans (in between eating them apparently) with their children only turning vampiric once they drink blood. The Tribe, as it was known, was hunted to extinction by the other vampires who didn't want their kind to eat humans (kind of like a vampiric RSPCA) although rumour persists that some went into hiding.

It, of course, turns out that Adam is, by a remarkable coincidence, a descendent of these evil vampires and now they've returned in order to get him to reawaken the rest of their race. So begins a vampire versus Super vampire battle. Fair, enough you think, this should liven the story up a bit. It doesn't and seems far too much like the end of *Blade* and several episodes of *Buffy*.

The sheer number of coincidences attached to this story soon becomes too much to sustain in such a short collection. For example: boy gets hepatitis, eats a bad burger, gets worse hepatitis, gets turned into a pointy toothed member of the cast of *90210*, fancies his dead vampire friend's girlfriend, turns out to the last descendent of an ancient evil clan of cannibalistic vampires, defeats supervamps, discovers dead friends girlfriend fancies him back...

6 issues. Too many coincidences.

The artwork within the comic series is good, with the story easy to follow and suffering from none of the confusion that the more stylistic *30 Days of Night* endured. Like the writing, it serves its purpose in delivering the story but adds nothing new or different to the vampire mythos. Of note are the covers of each issue which have been included in the collection. Drawn by the legendary Brian Bolland (*2000AD*, *Superman*, etc), they are the one thing about this series that stands out.

Blood and Water tries, desperately, to create a group dynamic similar to that which was used in Grant Morrison's classic *Preacher* series. Unfortunately it fails miserably, lacking the believable friendship and

witty dialogue that existed between Jessie and his friends. The story is further hampered by awkward dialogue that creates an immediate barrier between the reader and the characters.

Having read the comic book you'll find yourself dismissing it as nothing more than another superficial vampire story that adds little to the genre. It has no atmosphere attached to it and when it's revealed that Adam lied about how he contracted Hepatitis, and actually got it from shooting up Heroin with dirty needles, you'll find yourself wishing you had some yourself in order to liven up this drab piece of writing.

Blood and Water leans far more heavily towards Paranormal Romance than towards horror. This needn't necessarily have been a bad thing if the writer had tried something new with an increasingly oversaturated genre (as Charlaine Harris did with the *Sookie Stackhouse* series) Unfortunately with such poor writing and plotting, vampires that aren't really vampires (even the ones in the *Twilight* series eat the occasional human…) and uninteresting stories, *Blood and Water* was one comic series I just couldn't get my teeth into.*

*The Journal Editors would like to take this opportunity to apologise for the bad pun with which this review concluded.

Eoin Murphy

TELEVISION REVIEWS

The Imp of the Ad-verse
The rise of the slimy little monster in advertising

Considerable quantities of ink are currently being spilled in academic circles over what, exactly, constitutes or defines the post(-)modern Gothic, and where, if anywhere, to locate the boundaries that demarcate it from other genres, particularly those of fantasy and mainstream culture. While fiction, film, photography and full-length television programmes continue to struggle with and perpetuate the blurring and reconfiguration of these boundaries, the world of advertising seems to have hit upon a rather more successful means of giving shape to the fears and anxieties that can turn our everyday experiences into nightmarish situations.

For several decades now (the 1950s spring most readily to mind), the advertising industry has committed itself to presenting us with images with transform the commonplace and the quotidian into the supernatural. Products come to life and cavort across our television screens; metaphors take on an apparently concrete reality; streets and buildings tremble and take on fantastical forms as multimedia devices are turned on, chocolate bars are consumed or cans of alcohol are opened; and decidedly unremarkable individuals suddenly become improbably attractive to attractive members of the opposite sex. Even if these condensed narratives do no directly represent the fulfilment of our desires (why on earth anybody would want man-hole covers to explode colourfully behind them while eating confectionary is beyond me), they body forth a more complex desire for change and defamiliarisation, for a world in which everything is at once simpler and more exciting, safer but also thrillingly alien.

This is by no means that case, however, with the gradual invasion of our television screens by tiny, slimy, havoc-causing yet weirdly cute monsters which seems to have occurred over the past few years. This, I hasten to add, is not in reference to that brief slew of films from the 1980s, including *Gremlins* (1984) and *Critters* (1986), which centred around such creatures. Nonetheless, these films *did* appear at that time (when in America as much as in Ireland and Britain, sudden prosperity and financial crisis danced merrily around one another to the confusion and consternation of all). Indeed, the term "gremlins" was coined by fighter pilots (and exploited by Roald Dahl in a 1943 novel of the same name) in World War II who couldn't understand why their equipment repeatedly failed for no apparent reason. This, arguably, should render it unsurprising that these minute yet highly dangerous imps should once again be popping out of the woodwork all around us. This time, though, the phenomenon has eschewed the grand narratives of the big screen in favour of the rapid flickering of small-screen advertising.

Of course, diminutive demon-like things have graced our ad breaks for several years now. The internet is almost literally howling with bloggers and message-board posters shuddering electronically at the memory of Digger, the toenail demon from a 2003 advert for Lamisil, an anti-fungal treatment. Lifting up and crawling in under the big toenail of his unsuspecting host, Digger cheerfully informs us of how much he enjoys inhabiting and infecting what quickly becomes a vast, discoloured landscape of flesh, literally hopping with equally gleeful clones of our personal guide to this underworld of germs. Somewhat similarly, two years later, the Domestos people gave us their noir-ish "millions of germs will die" series of ads, featuring monstrous CGI representations of Salmonella, *E.Coli* and so on, who rasped mournfully at the camera about how difficult life had become since the advent of a new toilet cleaner. These were

monsters in the sense that Frankenstein's creation is – articulate, tortured and lonely. Arguably, this characterisation, along with the tag-line, encourages us, rather uncomfortably, simultaneously to empathise with these doomed grotesqueries. Nevertheless, this cannot be disentangled from the pleasure and relief generated by our foreknowledge of their certain and unpleasant demise beneath a pyroclastic flow of pungent bleach.

Increasingly, however, these microscopic demons have ceased to speak directly to a fictional camera – and hence to the audience – and have become instead closer to the gremlins and critters of twenty years ago. The Sunsilk "wash out your hair demons" campaign from 2006 features a range of scaly little imps doing unspeakable things to the follicles of harassed-looking young ladies. A personal favourite – and the one that has generated the greatest amount of online comment – simply shows one of these Gollem-like terrors licking a girl's hair in a particularly repulsive manner as she squirms in her cinema seat, evidently aware that her greasy locks are more than evident, but that the demon responsible for it is invisible to everyone but her. And it is here that the particular brand of paranoia and isolation that characterises these ads comes into play. An invisible enemy that we cannot help but be convinced exist but that no-one else can see is perhaps the most pernicious of all, and it is here that it becomes clear that such advertisements have entered the realm of the Gothic – one already familiar from such offerings as James Fitz O'Brien's "What Was It?", Ambrose Bierce's "The Damned Thing" and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*.

Many earlier ads featuring demonic or supernatural entities of one kind or another, especially those for various forms of bathroom cleaner, display a markedly more triumphalist attitude that aligns them with the school of sword-and-sorcery quest fantasy rather than with the more insidious fears of horror. There was, for example, the long-running Domestos advertisement series, dominated by the "Big Bad Dom" theme tune, in which the bottle of bleach was itself the hero of the brief narrative, strutting around the bathroom and battling germs merely by asserting its manly presence. This, along with a 1990 ad in which a bottle of Listerine boxes against a shadowy opponent (representing gingivitis in a manner that is decidedly not abject or yucky), conflates product and user in a manner which implies power, control and easily identifiable enemies. This is suggested even more explicitly in the genre of advertisement which takes its inspiration from *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *300*, such as the current Rennie Dual Action commercial, and those from a few years ago for Aptamil baby formula, Danone Actimel, Gaviscon and Guinness. In these ads, once again, a simple us-against-them scenario bolsters the ego of the viewer or user, by constructing a universe where things are frightening and dangerous, but can nonetheless be managed in a straightforward yet heroic manner.

Quite the opposite is true of the other strand of demon-related advertising, where the enemies are considerably smaller and yet somehow more frightening, and which seems to have gained ground over the huge flaming monster kind mentioned above. Continuing the trend established by the Sunsilk series, an Irish Specsavers advert features a hairy little critter that that little boy protagonist identifies to his disbelieving mother as one of "the Specklies" – elusive but persistent creatures determined to destroy perfectly good pairs of glasses, bending them out of shape and snapping their arms. This image of inexplicable persecution moves out of the realm of childhood and into the adult world with a controversial British Telecom advert from 2008 starring Peter Jones, a former *Dragon's Den* contestant and some very expensive and faithfully recreated Gremlins (yes, with a capital "G" – these seem to have been lifted almost directly from Joe Dante's film), which many viewers saw as too frightening to be shown on television. Creeping into the reality-TV star's office, the scaly little divils have a rare ol' time chewing, overturning and smashing up just about everything they can find whenever Jones isn't looking, and hiding when he is, leaving him utterly confused as to why his computer has just eaten all his work and the printer

is being uncooperative. Much the same thing is going on in an Eircom ad in which a woman's little boy is transformed into a gremlin-like creature, hell bent on pulling out all of the wires behind her computer.

With these lavish, special-effects driven productions, the sense of powerlessness and incomprehension inspired by "the Specklies," along with the feeling that no sane person would believe that this could happen so quickly without anyone else being in the office, comes to invade, not merely the world of childhood terrors, but of the ordinary office worker and housewife. We do not need overactive imaginations to feel like this, we are being told – all of us do, and something like this will happen to all of us at some point or another, no matter what our age. Indeed, they imply that we are in fact correct when we feel that tiny things in the world are out to get us, and that, as individuals, there is little or nothing that we can do to prevent or remedy it. Somewhat more optimistic are the various toilet-cleaner adverts – in particular the newest Domestos series in which entire, carefully realised and highly detailed "germ armies" living in limescale and classrooms full of infant germs are destroyed in one fell swoop. Nonetheless, we are left in no doubt that all of this is occurring in the realm of our bathrooms rather than some imagined space beyond time – indeed, the Toilet Duck "Freshdisks" advert pictures tiny germ-demons emerging from a loo-block immediately inside an otherwise normal toilet.

What is particularly interesting about all of these adverts is the way in which they differ from those in which the product itself is an animated figure. In particular, the Lemsip ad series in which the packets grow limbs in order to help out those in need of soothing relief and the Gaviscon and Actimel ads with their tiny mobilised men fighting off germs and heartburn, suggest, not a supernatural universe in which commodities are disturbingly alive, but rather one in which those commodities themselves are active on our behalf, not merely inert objects waiting to be put to use by us, but already acting for us independent of any effort we might put into it.

It would be tempting to suggest that there have been more ads of this kind since the advent of the economic crisis, and it would be equally tempting to dismiss this thesis on the grounds that such ads, particular in those promoting Domestos, have been around for many years. At the same time, it is the emphasis on the viewers' vulnerability that does appear to be new – and, potentially, as much a symptom of our post-9/11 world as it is of the economic crisis. Even the Lemsip ad images a young man so much in need of paracetamol that he happily yields himself up to the ministrations of a tiny animated cardboard box. Unlike Listerine's boxing bottle or the people in the Orbit Complete commercials who mime fighting plaque, the man in the Lemsip ad does not so much struggle against his problems as rely on an external agency to solve them for him. Moreover, the protagonist for a recent Benilyn Mucus Relief ad is actively attacked by his problems, in a manner that explicitly echoes nineteenth-century ideas about incubi and succubi. Prone in his bed, a stocky imp, charmingly representing the mucus that, at this time of year, we all a little too familiar with, pounces upon his chest and refuses to be thrown off, no matter how vigorously the hero fights back. Nicely side-stepping the traditional connotations of illicit sexual pleasure that tend to be attached to such preternatural encounters, this focuses merely on how monstrous and unnatural the situation is.

This, like the Eircom ad, is to a certain extent a heroic battle, in which the man struggles around his bedroom to rid himself of the indomitable demon. In both cases, nevertheless, the reassurance function of both adverts comes in the form of outside help – help that is very much needed and without which the demons would inevitably win. While we are initially presented with a situation in which the individual seems to be all alone in the world, with nothing to allow him or her to fight off the threat, succour

speedily arrives in the shape of the product or service – the call-centre worker and the medicine respectively – who succeeds in banishing the threat. Once again, however, there is no sense of conflation between user and product – instead, the product acts as a *deus ex machina*, swooping in as the only way that this problem can be resolved. So, we are first and foremost presented with a world in which personal, very real and yet somehow mildly unbelievable threats isolate the individual in a world of danger, chaos and violence. Rapidly, however, this is replaced by the restoration of order, effected entirely by the commodity in question. Salvation is possible, they seem to imply, but only through consumption – the very thing that, in the financially troubled universe that they depict, is most difficult and elusive.

Unlike the heroic, demon-fighting adverts, those I have been discussing infest the everyday world with monsters, those we can barely see but whose insistent, unnerving presence is undeniably felt. Where the animated *E.Coli* monster from the 2005 Domestos ad both engaged our empathy and distanced himself from us with the Depression-era poverty and criminality he so evidently embodies, now, in a time of global recession and anxiety about the future, neither of these subject positions is either desirable or even possible for audiences. We can no longer feel that there is an unbridgeable gap between us and those who are literally in the gutter, but neither do we want entirely to admit it or simply capitulate whatever power the previous years of giddy spending have accorded us. The tiny imps and demons of current adverts therefore serve the dual purpose of graphically imaging our sense of being victimised by a world we cannot control, while implying that continuing to act as consumers, even in these less than affluent times, can help us to re-establish that control quickly and easily. All-pervasive as our problems may appear, such commercials suggest that they are nonetheless tiny, beneath us, and simply waiting for us to eliminate them – providing we have purchased the correct tool for doing so.

In this way, I would argue, the lingering sense that these adverts convey that these demons will always be with us, that life will constitute a series of endless, only semi-satisfactory skirmishes, at once successfully captures the spirit of these troubled times, but also tries to make us buy our way through them. Living as we now do in a world where governments make decisions that profoundly affect our everyday lives, and yet which, to them, and perhaps even to others, appear to be nothing more than minute alterations in percentages and tax brackets, the imp is the perfect image for the current economic climate. We cannot march onto on to a flaming battlefield and challenge them to mortal combat – the clear-cut rules and morally unequivocal nature of such encounters have been denied to us. Indeed, rather like the original Gremlins and the CGI *E.Coli* demon from the Domestos commercial, it is far from evident if these forces which seek to undermine our hitherto comfortable existence are in fact our enemies, or if we ought to treat them with understanding, even empathy. Our demons will always be with us, we are being told – indeed, are now inextricably bound up with who we are. There is, therefore, little for us to do but to eat, clean and be miserable.

DARA DOWNEY

Wuthering Heights
(ITV, August 2009)

For a novel that has spawned numerous adaptations – cinematic, televisual and musical – *Wuthering Heights* has proven "stubbornly unadaptable" over the years, as Peter Bowker notes in his screenwriter's note on the webpage for ITV's recent reinterpretation of Emily Brontë's text.* The novel's sprawling time frame takes in not only the doomed love of Heathcliff and Cathy but also the exploits of the generation that follows them, making it particularly difficult to condense for the big screen. Moreover, it is a twice-told tale, narrated by Nelly Dean but relayed to the reader by the hapless Mr Lockwood, a device that previous adaptations have often struggled to negotiate. Peter Kosminsky's 1992 adaptation starring Ralph Fiennes as Heathcliff and Juliette Binoche as a rather Gallic Cathy, for example, opted for the clunky introduction of the character of Brontë herself (played by Sinead O'Connor) as the author of the tale; while William Wyler's 1939 version with Laurence Olivier and Merle Oberon omitted the whole story of the second generation of Lintons, Heathcliffs and Earnshaws entirely. Wyler's classic still remains the best version of *Wuthering Heights* (apart, maybe, from Kate Bush's) and is a fine film in its own right, but it is still not quite what Brontë wrote, and there has to date never been a screen adaptation that has adequately captured the novel in its entirety. For some time now, it has been subject to anodyne adaptation in musicals by Cliff Richard and appropriation by the *Twilight* brigade as 'Bella and Edward's favourite book' (as the cover of a hastily rebranded recent new edition puts it).

With the *Twilight* tie-in, *Wuthering Heights* is in vogue once more, with yet another cinematic adaptation – with Ed Westwick and Gemma Arterton –scheduled for release next year, and most recently ITV's adaptation, boasting a script by the in-demand Peter Bowker (who also gave us Pre-Raphaelite romp *Desperate Romantics* this year) and starring the acclaimed and up-and-coming Tom Hardy (who's just won a British Independent Film Award for his turn in Nicolas Winding Refn's *Bronson*). Here was a *Wuthering Heights* that set out to capture more of the spirit of Brontë's text than has been managed in previous adaptations, by eliminating the role of Lockwood but maintaining the complex chronology that ranges back and forth over the course of thirty years or so. The first episode opens in the Yorkshire moors, as a camera speedily tracks along a wild and desolate landscape, before lifting its gaze once it arrives at its destination – Wuthering Heights – and continuing on its track into the house and up some stairs, finally coming to a halt in a room in which Heathcliff (Hardy) lies on a bed being tortured by the memory and ghost of Cathy (Charlotte Riley). By the time her decomposing hand has smashed its way through a window, it's become apparent that Bowker and director Coky Giedroyc are determined to emphasise the darker aspects of the fabled romance of Brontë's original, and make this even more apparent a few minutes later when Heathcliff pays a visit to Cathy's grave, exhuming what he still sees as her pristine corpse (but which the viewer sees is actually a skeleton) to share one more embrace eighteen years after her death. Quite grisly stuff for a Sunday night on ITV, really, and in between these obsessive and maniacal acts, Heathcliff is in full-on scheming misanthrope mode, taunting his sickly son Linton (Tom Payne), imprisoning young Catherine Linton (Rebecca Night) and Nelly Dean (Sarah Lancashire), and forcing the former to marry his son so as to disinherit the lot of them and complete some carefully laid plans of vengeance.

The reasons why he seeks vengeance are then played out in flashback over the course of two extended episodes (amounting to a little under three hours of television). We witness Heathcliff's childhood as the adopted son of the Earnshaw family; his mistreatment at the hands of true son and heir to the Heights,

Hindley (Burn Gorman); his burgeoning and increasingly passionate relationship with Cathy; her apparent betrayal of him by marrying the more genteel Edgar Linton (Andrew Lincoln); and his subsequent disappearance and return as a man of wealth intent on destroying the lives of all around him, which he spends most of the rest of the running time trying to do. Yet in the end, although most of his old enemies are gone, the growing affection between young Catherine and Hareton Earnshaw (Andrew Hawley) makes it apparent to Heathcliff that his scheming may have been in vain, and he puts an end to it by shooting himself so he and Cathy can apparently live out the afterlife together. In fact, the final shot shows the other inhabitants packing up and leaving the Heights for friendlier climes while the ghosts of both Heathcliff and Cathy look on. This ending indicates that the show hasn't entirely made up its mind just what to do with its supernatural trappings, though. Up to this point, Cathy's ghostly presence had only been registered through Heathcliff's eyes (in particular, he seems to see her face looking back at him whenever he pauses and sees anybody looking out a window), and had seemed to function as a manifestation of his increasingly unstable mental state. In the final scene, though, the audience sees these ghostly figures for themselves without Heathcliff as a filtering presence, in an apparent vindication and reassertion of this supernatural realm.

ITV's *Wuthering Heights* promised a lot, with Bowker's professed ambition to get back to the heart of Brontë's original, and certainly it makes a decent stab at bringing to the fore neglected elements of the story and trying to make Heathcliff less the romantic figure he's often presumed to be and a more complicated, conniving and conflicted character all round. Yet in the end it falls short. Hardy should have made for a great Heathcliff – he certainly has the pedigree and the acting chops – but his Heathcliff sounds distractingly like Steve Coogan's "Paul Calf" character throughout, which takes away from the severity of his persona as tortured lover/scheming miserabilist, while Charlotte Riley seems hindered with a slightly underwritten Cathy who lacks the complexity of Heathcliff. And for all the attention to the second generation of Heathcliffs, Lintons and Earnshaws, a running time of under three hours on the small screen just can't do justice to the intricacies of Brontë's novel. In the end, then, this will have to take its place in an ever-expanding list of disappointing interpretations of *Wuthering Heights*, and Bowker's description of the novel as "stubbornly unadaptable" seems an unfortunate self-fulfilling prophecy.

* available at http://www.itv.com/drama/perioddrama/wutheringheights/abouttheshow/default.html

JENNY McDONNELL

Psychoville
(BBC Two, June/July 2009)

The poison pen letter as a dramatic device has a long and illustrious genre history. From Henry George Cluzot's classic 1943 film *Le Corbeau* (*The Raven*) in which the inhabitants of a small French town are sent letters accusing them of wrongdoing, to Shirley Jackson's story "The Possibility of Evil" (in which a self righteous and seemingly respectable spinster torments her neighbours with nasty missives) via the likes of *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, the notion that the postman may unexpectedly deliver something even more unpleasant than last month's credit card bill is one that has frequently been exploited by authors and filmmakers eager to explore the unpredictable repercussions of the anonymous, spite-filled epistle. Like a hand grenade tossed in to a sedate drawing room, the poison pen letter suddenly and violently tears conventional mores and responses asunder. We all have something to hide, after all (some rather more than others, of course) and the notion that somebody, somewhere, knows that which is most secret (and most damaging) to us is enough to make even the most sedate personality lose its equilibrium. And when the individual being targeted is fairly unstable to begin with, well, trouble is all but assured.

That's certainly true of the protagonists of Reece Shearsmith's and Steve Pemberton's new comedy thriller *Psychoville*, each of whom, during the first episode, receives a note with consists of a single devastating sentence: "I know what you did". As one half of the critically acclaimed quartet of writers and performers known as *The League of Gentlemen*, best known for the morbidly witty and at times, genuinely grotesque television series of the same name (which was as indebted to *The Wicker Man* as it was to *Monty Python*), any collaboration between the duo was bound to have a considerable weight of expectation attached to it. This is all the more true given that the big screen version of their most famous project failed to recreate the genuinely disturbing and yet simultaneously hilarious impact of the television series. Royston Vasey was a place in which cannibalistic butchers, mysterious nosebleed epidemics, curiously insular shopkeepers not averse to sacrificing the odd policeman ("We'll have no trouble here! This is a local shop, for local people!") and terrifying circus performers existed alongside human grotesques of a more mundane, but no less humorous variety, such as lascivious landlords, ill-advisedly monikered children's theatre troupes ("Legz Akimbo") and civil servants who have grown a little too attached to their pens. Though saturated with sly and not so sly references and allusions to (particularly the British) horror tradition, *The League of Gentlemen* was a truly original and creative addition to the genre in it's own right, the laughter it inspired almost always tinged with disquiet. It was grotesque in the truest sense of the world, depicting as it did a place in which the boundaries between humour and horror, right and wrong, and the humdrum and the bizarre were not so much trampled over as erased all together.

However, whereas *The League of Gentlemen* was set in a specific, albeit fictional geographical location *Psychoville*, ultimately, is more about a certain state of mind. One of the joys of *League* was the narrative arc which permeated each of the three seasons: there was always the sense that the writers knew exactly where everything was going, which gave proceedings a momentum and an impact that would have otherwise been lacking. The conventions of the poison pen narrative are even more straightforward, leaving the audience (and the protagonists) with two pressing questions: who has been writing these letters, and why? These questions propel *Psychoville*'s seven episodes, for the series is essentially an Agatha Christie style mystery spiced up with *Giallo*-style murders carried out by a black gloved

perpetrator (and even concludes as all of the seemingly disconnected characters gather together on the same room to try and figure out who their tormenter is). What the strong overall narrative thrust does is provide a framework for Shearsmith and Pemberton to do what they do best: create a gallery of deeply disturbed characters, wind them up, and let them go.

So it is then, that *Pyschoville*'s protagonists constitute a striking assemblage of misfits and eccentrics whose psychological hang-ups and idiosyncrasies run the gamut from "somewhat odd" to "extremely dangerous". There's embittered children's entertainer Mr Jelly (Shearsmith, once more donning Papa Lazarou-style clown make-up), whose ability to make balloon animals has been severely undermined by the fact that one of his hands has been replaced by a hook. Oscar Lomax (Pemberton) is a miserly millionaire who literally gave up his eyes so that he could add to his beanie babies collection, the completion of which gives his strand of the story a kind of *Citizen Kane* "rosebud" style resonance. Joy Aston (played with evident relish by Dawn French) is a deeply disturbed midwife convinced that the demonstration doll used to teach new mother's how to bathe their newborns is her child: as a result, the increasingly uncanny antics of little "Freddy" supply many of the series most unnerving moments (and Joy's behaviour, ultimately as poignant as it is disturbing, can't help but bring to mind that of the heroine of the horror film *Grace*, reviewed in our current film section). Panto dwarf Robert is madly in love with the vacuous, self-absorbed actress who plays Snow White: what's more, the fact that he (apparently) has telekinetic abilities means that the bullying he received from his fellow cast members soon results on *Carrie*-style outbursts of psychic rage. The final member of the quintet is socially retarded, skin-shedding serial killer David Sowerbutts (Pemberton again), whose relationship with his doting mother Maureen (Shearsmith) makes them the most unnerving mother-son duo since Norman and Mrs Bates.

As the series progresses, the connections between this seemingly disparate collection of individuals slowly becomes apparent. This means however that the first couple of episodes, whilst at times very funny indeed, do have a rather disconnected, sprawling feel, close to that of a sketch show, as the story skips from one comedy grotesque to another. But by episode three, in which we discover that all of the characters have spent time in the same asylum, and the notes begin to become more revealing ("You Killed Her"), the central mystery begins to take on a power of its own, and the seemingly disconnected escapades of the central characters gradually converge.

It must be said that there are some immensely effective moments here. Joy's relationship with little Freddy (which is observed all the while by her seemingly loving and long suffering husband George), initially played for laughs, becomes increasingly disquieting as the series progresses, and the doll takes on a life of his own. Mr Jelly, the burnt out, resentful clown whose life has been ruined by his amputation and by the fact that the surgeon responsible for the medical mishap has now adopted the persona of "Mr Jolly" and stolen all of his business provides some of the most humorous interludes, many of which feature him traumatising small children who find his repertoire of prosthetics alarming rather than entertaining.

It is courtesy of this character that one of the funniest scenes in the entire series arises. On the run for murder, and having *39 Steps*-style become handcuffed to an old lady who has just fallen into a diabetic coma, the embattled clown (still in full makeup) ends up hiding in a public toilet. When a little boy comes in to use the facilities, he offers the child money to go and buy some chocolate for his prostrate companion, but, having a hook on one hand and an unconscious pensioner handcuffed to the other, cannot reach the his pocket. Cue the entrance of a toilet attendant who walks in as the clown loudly exhorts the

child to put his hand down his trousers and reach the coins inside, all whilst still cuffed to the old woman. Seldom has the phrase "This isn't what it looks like…" been used so effectively.

Somewhat less successful are those story strands involving Robert the Psychic dwarf (although the bitchiness of his panto colleagues does supply some good one liners, and the payoff to his story is ultimately quite surprising) and Lomax's quest to find his final beanie baby, which evolves into a battle of wits between himself, his new helper "Tea Leaf", and the crone-like, eye-patch wearing Crabtree twins, who spend their lives accumulating tat on e-bay. This strand does however have a surprisingly poignant (and ironic) conclusion.

The best episode of the entire series is the fantastic two-hander between David and Maureen Sowerbutts, shot all in one take (and one set) in a deliciously inventive homage to Hitchcock's *Rope*. Superb even on a technical level (as it needed to be), the episode also works very well on a narrative plane, revealing as it does something very important indeed about the death of David's father (which he thinks of as his first murder), and the motivations of his increasingly ruthless mother. Amidst the slapstick scenes in which mother and son try to prevent the body of their newest victim from being discovered by the police detective (fellow *League of Gentleman* star Mark Gattis) who has called in for a chat, there is, unexpectedly, a very funny dance routine to the tune of Black Lace's "Superman". Later in the series, David's hapless attempts to hand himself in to the police result in another gem of a scene. Despite announcing that he has "done five murders", David is told by the bureaucrat at the front desk that because one of his crimes falls outside of the local catchment area, he'll have to go see the Citizen's Advice Bureau instead. As he leaves, David is further fobbed off with a Crime Stoppers leaflet ("Although it might be too late for that" as the man at the front desk notes).

Given the plot stands which begin to merge in the final episode, one comes to it expecting something very special indeed, but in fact it is here that the series really lets itself down. *** Spoiler begins*** The motivations of the blackmailer/author turn out to the stuff of many a Slasher film, albeit with a strong hint of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* thrown in for good measure when it transpires that the protagonists all suffered under the regime of a Nurse Ratched-style chief matron during their time in the asylum. But while there is some satisfaction in seeing the central mystery resolved (to a point), the final ten minutes of the series are a real disappointment, ending as they do with the trite *deus-ex-machina* of a massive explosion which seems to have killed off most of the main characters. *** Spoiler ends*** One gets the sense that the series was originally meant to end entirely at the end of this episode, but that having suddenly been granted a second season, Shearsmith and Pemberton found themselves having to drag the plot out beyond its original parameters. If this is indeed the case, it shows. Nevertheless, like its illustrious predecessor, *Psychoville* fuses horror and comedy in a manner that has seldom been bettered on the small screen, even if it has yet to realise its full potential. If you didn't catch the series during the summer, I strongly recommend purchasing the DVD. But do yourself a favour, and leave e-bay to the one-eyed crazies.

BERNICE M. MURPHY

Dexter
Season 4
(Showtime, 2009)

In what can only be described as a compelling television show which combines black humour and vigilante anti-heroism, *Dexter*, now concluding its fourth season in the US, has become the most highly rated original television show for its US cable broadcaster Showtime. Anti-hero Dexter Morgan (Michael C. Hall) projects the image of a happy, cheerful blood spatter analyst for the Miami Police Department, but has secret penchant for carrying out murders of his own, a predilection now significantly complicated by the fact that he has seemingly subscribed to the American dream of suburbia with his unsuspecting wife Rita (Julie Benz) and their three children. Since its first season in 2006, reviewed in our third issue, *Dexter* has taken a further significant departure from Jeff Lindsay's source novels, largely by teasing out the complexities of Dexter's personal life and relationships and the ways in which they collide with the murderous activities of his blood thirsty alter ego (which he fondly names his 'dark passenger').

By the conclusion of its fourth season, the overall style and plotting of the show bears much in common to the first season's plotting, dealing as it does with themes of familial doom, violence and personal tragedy. The fourth season in particular is structured as a returning rondo, where, like the Ice Truck Killer arc of the first season, Dexter once again falls under a temporary sway of admiration for a new serial killer, in this instance the so-called Trinity killer (portrayed by John Lithgow in a fantastic return to onscreen villainy). The interplay between Trinity and Dexter makes for compulsive viewing, and largely compensates for the temporary digressions of season two and, in particular, season three. With a fifth season contractually confirmed (according to Showtime), it seems that Dexter Morgan will continue to attract people as damaged as himself; be it as love interests, new best friends, rivals and "worthy" victims.

Seasons two and three of the series largely dealt with the trauma Dexter has experienced as a result of having to murder his long-lost brother Brian (the Ice Truck Killer), and of steadily losing faith in his adoptive father, Harry Morgan (James Remar), whose unorthodox moral code has concealed Dexter's murderous tendencies from detection. However, in Season 2 Dexter's increasingly fragile mental state causes his mask of normality to temporarily slip, with both the introduction of Lila Tournay (Jaime Murray) who insists on uncovering Dexter's true self, and under the continued pressure exerted by the obsessive Miami PD Sergeant Doakes (Erik King) who believes Dexter is a killer, further complicating his life. Much like the focus of season one, in which the Ice Truck Killer murders terrify Miami, Season Two reflects this focus back onto Dexter himself. His nautical dumping ground for dismembered body parts is found, culminating in the involvement of the FBI, led by serial killer expert Special Agent Frank Lundy (the excellent Keith Carradine) who is determined to catch the "Bay Harbour Butcher". While season two is largely focused on Dexter's increasingly compromised ability to remain undetected, the introduction of flaky (indeed, ultimately psychotic) new love interest Lila ultimately detracts from the show's focus, an indulgence that is thankfully rectified by the season's conclusion.

Season three begins with the announcement that Dexter will become a father, adding an interesting twist to proceedings as he wonders whether his own murderous tendencies may be inherited by his son Harrison (the name is of course a homage to that of Dexter's adoptive father Harry) and introducing, as antagonist, the suave but dangerous District Attorney, Miguel Prado (a sorely miscast Jimmy Smits),

whose interest in Dexter culminates in the awakening of Prado's own murderous impulses. Divergences aside, both seasons two and three add considerable impact to the overall development of Dexter as a painfully conflicted character, a trend that is fully realised in the fourth season.

This return to first season form is evident even in early episodes of the fourth season. Dexter, now a married father barely coping with living the suburban dream, becomes embroiled in the Trinity killer case – a case which he soon comes to believe will teach him how to maintain the balance between suburban existence, family life, and the needs of his bloodthirsty 'dark passenger'. Much credit is due to the menacing performance by Lithgow in sustaining the tension onscreen – while we only become fragmentally aware of his motivations, what becomes chillingly apparent is the perceived normalcy of his external life – something which reminds us that Dexter's own facade of normality is equally illusory. The sharp editing and inter-splicing of narratives keeps the momentum of this season razor sharp, even as it careens towards its devastating conclusion.

Much like the conclusion of the first season, the final three episodes vividly return to the core theme of family, raising the troubling question of what we actually know about its' members and dark secrets. Debra Morgan (Dexter's foul-mouthed yet lovable sister, played by Jennifer Carpenter) uncovers the extra-marital affairs of her once-idolised father Harry, and discovers the devastating connection between Dexter and the Ice Truck Killer (who was also her Fiancé). While Carpenter's role is fleshed out somewhat in season three, her increasing onscreen maturation furthers the emotional arc of the fourth season in particular, and provides Carpenter with ample opportunity to illustrate her capabilities as an actress.

Overall, this season marks a superb return to form for *Dexter* after a temporary lull in terms of genuinely challenging nemeses for our superficially charming anti-hero. Whereas foes from previous seasons genuinely lacked menace, Lithgow's return as a truly terrifying suburbanite with deeply disturbing family issues revives the thrilling and grisly origins of Dexter's own past, and raises questions about the future of his own family. The genuinely shocking conclusion is both a brave and unexpected twist, not only creating in the viewer a ferocious appetite for the next season, but also ensuring that series will continue to thrive. Gore-laden, twisted, and immensely entertaining, *Dexter* is compulsive viewing for an age still fascinated by serial killers.

SORCHA Ní FHLAINN

Between the Dust and the Devil
An Interview with Richard Stanley

James Rose

Cult filmmaker Richard Stanley's acclaimed sci-fi horror debut Hardware (1990) *has recently been released as a special edition DVD by Optimum Home Entertainment: set in a post apocalyptic future, a nomadic Zone Tripper (Carl McCoy) finds the remains of a cyborg. Selling it for scrap, it comes into the hands of Mo Baxter (Dylan McDermott) who purchases it as a gift for his sculptress girlfriend, Jill (Stacey Travis). Unbeknown to them is that the cyborg – a prototype named Mark 13 – is a combat droid that is capable of reconstructing itself through the appropriation of any metal object and has one sole purpose, to kill. Inadvertently activating the cyborg, Mark 13 rebuilds itself and begins its violent assault upon Mo and Jill.*

Prior to this cinematic debut, Stanley had directed a number of music videos for Fields of the Nephilim, a band fronted by McCoy that emerged with a strong following in the mid Eighties trend of Goth music. In these short 'films' Stanley's preoccupations with the image of The Man with No Name, strong women and weak men, myths, magic and rituals as well as the symbolic potential of barren, seemingly post-nuclear landscapes began to manifest themselves. These traits would find their place in Hardware and, in more explicit terms, in his second feature Dust Devil (1990). *James Rose talks to Richard Stanley about these recurrent elements, exploring his early works alongside his two feature films and his more recent forays into documentary filmmaking.*

Rose: How did the production of *Hardware* come about?

Stanley: Like most things in life it came about more or less accidentally. I'd been rattling about the lower depths of the biz for a couple of years and womped up the first *Hardware* draft in a fit of frustration after getting one thank you but no thank you letter too many. The script came together inside of a week during which time I remember playing Iron Maiden's *Flash of the Blade* so many times and at such heroic volume my then girlfriend upped and walked on me. I gave a copy of the draft to my friend, the late Barney Jeffrey (son of Peter Jeffrey who played Inspector Trout in *The Abominable Dr. Phibes*) who passed it on to his aspiring producer buddy Paul Trijbits who in turn handed it [to] his mate Trix (Trix Worrell the principal writer on the hit TV sitcom *Desmonds*) who apparently read part of it out loud in a nightclub to young Palace Films impresario Steve Woolley who happened to be on the lookout for low budget product akin to Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* the film that had launched Palace's video arm back in the mid-eighties. Steve asked to see a copy and a few days later approached Paul Trijbits to try and option the material. This presented the young producer with certain problems. In order to sell the underlying rights he had to own them first which meant finding me. By now over a year had elapsed since penning the initial draft and despairing of making a go of being a writer director hyphenate I had not only given up on the film industry but western civilization in toto, dropping out to join a fundamentalist Afghan guerilla party under General Younis Khalis and throwing in my lot with the people of Kafiristan in their struggle against the Russians. Trix eventually managed to track me down to a Saudi Arabian Red Crescent hospital in Frontier Province then filling up with survivors from the siege of Jallalabad. At first I flatly didn't believe him and treated his claims with derision but after a few twists and turns relating to the fact that I had lost my passport and accordingly my identity during the most recent battle I came round to

his point of view, allowing myself to be repatriated to Britain where I picked up the reigns and went straight into preproduction.

Rose: Prior to making *Hardware* you worked with Fields of the Nephilim on their promotional videos. Was this a valuable experience in terms of developing your filmmaking practice?

Stanley: The Nephilim promos certainly helped me make the transition to the professional arena and crystallized what was to become the 'look' of the film. Running into Carl McCoy and his gang at that stage in our mutual careers was one of those 'meeting of minds' things that almost never happens in so-called 'real' life. We were too young to realize how fortuitous it was at the time. We assumed everyone was just as obsessed as we were with Italian horror movies, 'spaghetti' westerns, radiation poisoning, shamanism and other esoterica and got on with it.

Rose: Is there a connection between the Preacher Man character personified by Carl McCoy in the Nephilim promos and the Zone Tripper character, also played by McCoy, who first obtains Mark 13's skull in *Hardware*?

Stanley: They're both the same guy. No question. The archetypal Man with No Name reconfigured as false prophet or prairie AntiChrist, the devil in Durango originals, an avatar of Nyarlathotep the Crawling Chaos in Cuban heels. He's probably related to the Biblical Asmodeus, the daemonic teacher of all occult knowledge who was cast out into the wasteland by King Solomon or some such. A traveling man. One who moves. We certainly didn't invent him. We simply tried to redefine him. You can find traces of the dude in Charles Laughton's *Night of the Hunter,* Stephen King's *The Stand* and Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked this Way Comes* and songs from *Riders on the Storm* through Bob Dylan's *Man in the Long Black Coat* and Nick Cave's *Red Right Hand* which itself seems to have been at least partly inspired by *Dust Devil*. I used to dream of him often back then, always with a storm following not far behind, nor was I the only one to have those sort of dreams but at the very least I think you can safely say we did our bit to help introduce long black coats to the nascent Goth scene.

Rose: Your films and documentaries tend to feature strong women – Jill in *Hardware*, Wendy in *Dust Devil*, Edelle in *The White Darkness*. There is also the female cowboy who reveals herself near the close of *The Preacher Man* promo. Why is this character prevalent in your work?

Stanley: My parents separated when I was four years old and I was raised by my mother and two older sisters. Accordingly women tend to dominate my life and work whereas guys tend to come off as schmucks and ne'er do wells. On a wider level you could say its representative of my undying faith in the restorative power of the Goddess over patriarchal order and the sort of repressive dogma espoused by the Holy Roman Church and the other monotheisms. The Goddess rules.

Rose: Can you tell us a little about your intentions for Jill's role in *Hardware*.

Stanley: Jill descends from a long line of embattled heroines, a combination of the 'last girl' of the slasher era and the lead character from a Super 8 movie I started shooting when I was fifteen. I saw her as a sort of 'everywoman' - hence her name which is drawn from *Jill's America* – the main theme on Morricone's *Once Upon A Time In The West* album – outsider artist, lover, big sister, 21st century cyber warrior and

post technological cave girl all rolled into one. She was initially intended not only as the heroine of *Hardware* but as a continuing character in her own right.

Rose: Is there a specific reason why Jill is isolated in her room? She has seemingly barricaded herself inside her apartment with her only contact with the outside world through the television set and high-level security equipment.

Stanley: Considering the state of the world in *Hardwar*e it's hardly surprising Jill's turned into a bit of a techno hermit. The fact that she is more or less permanently stoned is another sign of her disengagement from society. None of the characters in *Hardware* ever question the status quo or seek to rebel against their circumstances, preferring to hide behind their sunglasses or spend most of their time off-world like Jill's neighbour Shades. In expressing her anxieties through her art Jill has customized her apartment to the point that it has actually become more nightmarish than the outside world. She's so unplugged that she initially mistakes the Mark 13 drone soldier for a TV show and reaches for her remote control to try and change channels when it attacks her. The events that follow provide the necessary catharsis that enables her to break out of her cocoon and take control of her destiny. This is signposted in the scene where the blazing 'droid plunges through her picture window, leaving a gaping hole in the wall and Jill is struck not by the violence of the act but by the beauty of the skyline revealed beyond. I hope to be able to return to her story some day but in the meantime if you want to know what happened next the unproduced sequel screenplay is available for free download from the unofficial fan site *Between Death and the Devil*.(1)

Rose: In respect of the above questions, the men in your films are often positioned as strong but ultimately unable to save the women from the narrative's threat – Mo is unable to save Jill, so she has to be resourceful and overcome Mark 13 by herself. Is there any particular reason for this?

Stanley: With all due respect to Jill and Mo the narrative threat in *Hardware* – the aforementioned Mark 13 cyborg – is defeated accidentally. Jill simply grabs hold of the shower faucet to try and get back on her feet. She has no idea what will happen next. This reflects not so much on gender politics as on my view that most things in life tend to happen by accident rather than design. On a symbolic level you might say the technological golem is laid low by wood and water, by the chaotic forces of good ol' Mother Nature.

Rose: Mark 13 is an interesting creation. Was it intended to be read in religious terms? I am referring here to its name as a biblical reference and its ability to resurrect itself. These qualities are potentially compounded in the robot's pentagram circuitry and its BAAL code.

Stanley: Absolutely. The parallel between Mark 13's serial number and the relevant Biblical chapter and verse was more or less a happy 'coincidence' at the time but the apocalyptic analogies run deep. Bear in mind that the film is not only set on Christmas Eve but that Mo and Jill just happen to be a childless couple with procreation issues – a subtext given greater emphasis in the deleted scenes included on the current DVD release. Other sequences draw parallels with the Tibetan Destroyer God and the multi-armed Goddess Kali of Hindu mythology, another avatar of Chaos – an idea we tossed around earlier.

Rose: Why was it decided to paint Mark 13's skull with a Stars and Stripes?

Stanley: Again this came about more or less by accident. In the script Jill painted night on one side of its face and day on the other. When it came to doing the final paintjob on the 'droid itself the stylized rays of

the sun met the night sky to become the stars and bars. The crescent moon on the one side and the rising sun on the other recall militant Islam and Imperial Japan. I guess it's subconsciously getting at the same thing as the killer cowboy in *Dust Devil* – that the United States of America is probably going to end up killing us all. Not only that but they're gonna con us into not only going along with it but actively enjoying the experience. The development of drone soldiers was, I suppose, always inevitable and with the Pentagon's Joint Robotics Masterplan currently intending to replace up to a quarter of America's ground forces with fully 'battlefield responsive' war 'droids by 2020 the issue remains as much of a clear and present danger as it did in the early nineties. It would seem to me that the day of the 'droid is at hand and believe me, I ain't smilin' about it!

Rose: Am I right in saying that the documentary *Voice of the Moon* was made between *Hardware* and *Dust Devil*? How did this opportunity come about?

Stanley: Actually the footage was shot before *Hardware* but I didn't have the time or money to post produce *Voice of the Moon* until the feature was done and dusted. As ever the circumstances of its shooting came about by chance. Few people are aware of the fact that Islam only arrived in the Hindu Kush in 1910 when the indigenous pagan 'kafirs' were either converted by Abdur Rahman or put to the sword. Accordingly I was very interested in the mountainous heartland of Kafiristan where without written language or electrification news travels slowly and the myths, codes and customs of the past still prevail. I thought I might be happy in a world like that and being a keen reader of Robert E. Howard and suchlike wanted to try it on for myself. The chance came at the end of a particularly thankless music video shoot. I have a 'first on and last off' policy as director and accordingly stayed to help pack up the vans. One of the drivers was bitching about the gears on the truck being as stiff as the shift on a BTR 60 which I knew to be a lightweight aluminum troop transporter deployed in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. I enquired as to how my companion came to have driven one and swiftly learned he was a former jihadi, washed up in London and trying to work his way back to the war where he felt he belonged. I offered to pony up for his ticket, provided he took me along for the ride.

Rose: What were your experiences during the making of *Moon*?

Stanley: We crossed into Afghanistan with a UN flour convoy and having ingratiated ourselves to a branch of Hezbi Islami under the command of General Younis 'Redbeard' Khalis returned with his guerillas on a second tour during which time I succeeded in penetrating some of those blank spots on the map that had first caught my eye back in London. Little white spaces accessible only by horse or donkey that were simply labeled 'relief data incomplete'. What I saw and experienced there can't be readily reduced to words or ably encapsulated within the scope of this interview. It was a world at once pre-technological and post-apocalyptic, a medieval feudal society where magic was commonplace and you could still buy boiled sweets, hashish, tracer rounds, chick peas, gasoline and plastic explosives under one roof at your local store. The outside world, the so-called 'real' world, exists only in stubborn shades of grey but at that altitude the colours really do seem brighter and the sunlight, unfiltered by the haze of smog that permeates the west, falls more sharply on the ochre walls and Saracen towers. The tastes, the grapes cooled in snowmelt, the green tea flavoured with cardamoms, seem more vivid even at a distance, the odours more pungent but at the end of the day how can I ever really tell you about the grumble and thunder of tanks, the contrail of a rocket or the smell of women ? It's twenty years later and I'm still trying to figure out how it felt to turn and see the provincial capital burning behind me or the light going out of a man's eyes as I rummaged about in his guts trying to hold him together. Experiences like that are so

stupidly far off the scale it's like undergoing some sort of hysterical pregnancy. Your soul gets stretched so far out of shape that when the rest of the world shrinks back to normal you find you're left with the psychic equivalent of stretch marks. 'Survivor guilt'. 'Post-traumatic stress disorder'. Call it what you may. I know I was happy back then. What else can I say? That my heart and soul belong in the dark ages? I got more involved than I had initially intended and saw action in Kuz Kunar and later during the onset of the civil war that would eventually bring the Taliban to power but at least we helped defeat the Russians – which seemed like a big deal at the time, what with all that fuss and bother about the Cold War. When the Berlin Wall came down a few months later it felt good to know we had somehow been a part of it. One of my compadres from the siege of Jallalabad, Abu Zarqawi who later became the self-proclaimed 'head of al Qaida' in Iraq once told a journalist that he often wished he could have died in that battle because his soul would have "made it to heaven faster". The funny thing is I think I know what he means.

Rose: Do you consider your documentaries and genre films to be separate or both as part of a unified whole?

Stanley: Trying to separate fact from fiction is like trying to separate dream from reality or light from shadow. It simply can't be done. The one is the flip side of the other, the shadow side. All three documentaries (*Voice of the Moon*, *The White Darkness* and *The Secret Glory*) incorporate mythological and folkloric material as well as the occasional outright lie whereas both dramatic features contain grains of truth. I took care to include images of real death in both *Hardware* and *Dust Devil* as a deliberate counterpoint to the 'splatstick' gore effects which tend to be played for laughs. On the whole the documentaries you could say, the three principal documentaries serve as rough sketches for epic feature films that could never be made, at least never sanely commissioned or distributed.

Rose: In relation to the above question, I am suggesting this because you have said in interview that there is no Good and Evil only Spirit and Matter. Is this a critical standpoint that informs all of your genre and documentary work? I am thinking here, in particular, of *Dust Devil* and *The White Darkness*, and I am curious to know if this opposition is evident in *Hardware*.

Stanley: Like I said, I've always been a medievalist at heart. It's no secret that I feel considerable empathy for the 'Cathars' – the so-called 'heretics' who were largely exterminated by [the] Roman Church in the 13th century. Life back then was pretty nasty, brutish and short so it figures that folk needed to find some way of explaining it to themselves. Infinite goodness is incapable of creating evil hence as there is evil in the world it follows that this world cannot be the creation of some all wise all loving Christian God, at least not as he, she or it intended it. The creator of this paradigm either doesn't exist or is insane and does not necessarily love us nor mean the best for us. Although this force apparently has the power to torture our physical bodies, kill us or burn us to ashes, it has no power over our immortal souls, which according [to] the 'Cathars' were created by the true, good God and are eternal. Described in these terms life can be seen as a constant friction between our spiritual needs and the base, animal desires of the bodies we inhabit. As the man so succinctly puts it in *Dust Devil* - "there is no good or evil, only spirit and matter, only movement towards the light or away from it".

The Mark 13 cyborg in *Hardware* is in fact on a very weird spiritual journey all of its own. Being a 'borg' to begin with it follows that its wetware (living, artificially cultured brain tissue) imbues it with something perilously close to a soul, a tiny splinter of fallen light that blindly seeks redemption, imprisoned, as it is in its steel carapace, in the dense vibration of heavy metal. Fulfilling its primary function gives the drone

soldier a primitive sense of fulfillment, a li'l endorphin rush deep within its biomechanical matrix but like a child or a clinical psychopath it has no conception of conventional morality. It simply follows its programming which compels it to hunt down and exterminate as many human-shaped heat blips as it can. Nonetheless, in its murderous way our cyber-pilgrim constantly seeks the light and hence it too can be redeemed. As Goethe puts it: "He who strives constantly upwards – him can we save!" In the end the drone finds inadvertent deliverance when it fatally mistakes the shower head for God – a seemingly infinite source of radiant energy – the nebulous image that tops and tails the film.

Rose: The desert, as a mythic and arcane space, features heavily in your work – why is this?

Stanley: It would seem what magic remains in our world tends to linger in those places where humans fear to tread, spaces that exist outside of our definition of 'consensus' reality. On the one hand the open desert provides a convenient metaphor for the inner moral and spiritual wasteland my characters tend to find themselves adrift in while at the same time it offers an ideal empty stage, a blank canvas that demands action or completion of a sort. On a practical level wastelands are a helluva lot cheaper and easier to work with than trying to pony up for a soundstage at Pinewood or work around the traffic in central London. I prefer to stay at as great a distance from the backers, agents and accompanying industry politics as humanly possible. I've never been particularly wild about human beings and, as Lawrence of Arabia puts it, the desert's 'clean'.

Rose: There also seems to be a great interest in cultural myths and magic in your work?

Stanley: That comes, no doubt, from being born and raised in Mother Africa. My own mother, Penny Miller, was an artist, an anthropologist and something of a proto-feminist although I was too young to recognize a political dimension to her work at the time. Her magnum opus was a colossal tome entitled *Myths and Legends of Southern Africa* which, though long since out of print is still recognized as something of a classic in its field. Accordingly I did most of my growing up surrounded by storytellers, traditional healers and sangomas – what western folk refer to as 'witch doctors'. As a child it never occurred to me that there was any other way of explaining the world and as a young adult it came as something of a shock to realize how little currency magic and mythology had for my peers. Accordingly I found myself drawn towards the genre from an early age and the sort of faerytale imagery and frozen archetypes all too readily dismissed as 'cliches' by the wider critical community. If there's one theme I return to again and again it's the notion that mythology remains an active process in our present rather than being safely confined to the distant, immutable past. The myths of the future are being forged today, as we speak, and like it or not, we are all a part of that process.

Rose: Westerns clearly have a big influence on you. What do you take from them as a filmmaker?

Stanley: Westerns are amongst the most purely mythic of genres with their seemingly schematic plotlines serving as an active interrogation of exactly the sort of 'frozen archetypes' we discussed earlier. Besides they're good fun to watch – at least they used to be. A lot comes down, of course, to the sort of material I was exposed to as a child. Television didn't exist on the sub-continent in those days so my initial exposure to the medium came in the form of double bills at the Drive In or Saturday matinees at the local fleapit where 'spaghettis' were standard fare. They not only gave me a handle on the language of cinema and a way of dealing with the rugged, essentially inhuman landscapes that surrounded me but went a long way towards helping me form a nascent sense of ethics. I certainly didn't grow up according to the moral code

handed down to me from my teachers or the corrupt apartheid era government but tried instead to live up to the example set by characters like Cheyenne in *Once Upon a Time in the West* or Mr. Judd in Sam Peckinpah's masterpiece *Ride the High Country* which remains one of my favourite films of all time. Most of my classmates matured into staid right wingers but Westerns, 70's horror comics and a penchant for smoking dope in the stalls made me into a long-haired, camera-toting liberal. In short they made me into what I am today...

Rose: Am I right in saying that *Dust Devil* started as a student film? How, if at all, did this screenplay/film differ from the released version?

Stanley: *Dust Devil* was conceived as the simplest story I could possibly put together under the circumstances, revolving around a man, a woman and a Volkswagen astray amidst the overwhelming vastness of the African landscape which of course came free of charge to us locals – sort of the equivalent of shooting a film in your own backyard. The first draft was vaguely inspired by a string of unexplained murders that were ongoing at the time and drew heavily on the sort of Western iconography I mentioned earlier. It was initially intended as a low budget feature and my cohorts and I succeeded in committing a good 45 minutes or so to Super 16mm before shooting broke down due to lack of funds and myself and the cameraman's forced conscription into the South African Defense Force and the then current Angolan Bush War. The saga of Wendy and the Walking Dude remained much the same, albeit somewhat streamlined by the modest budget – boy meets girl, boy kills girl and relates the whole story in flashback to an old man he meets between trains on a deserted railway siding – essentially the first take on Zake Mokae's Ben Mukurob character – conceived initially as an ageing linesman rather than the more conventional world-weary cop that he became in subsequent drafts. Ben hears the dude out before killing him with a fire axe, revealing himself in the process to be just as murderous as his unwitting prey. To some extent it’s a stronger story than the one that eventually made it to the screen, albeit not a particularly 'commercial' one.

Rose: Your commentary on the Subversive Cinema DVD release of *Dust Devil* suggests a number of biographical elements in your films – are there any instances of this in *Hardware*?

Stanley: The first draft was penned in a squat in South London and reflects the kind of late eighties, post-punk industrial culture I was imbued in at the time. [The character of] Shades is an amalgam of myself and one of my friends, Anton Beebe (grandson of *Flash Gordon* director Ford Beebe) who first essayed the role on Super 8. Of course the fact that my first girlfriend was a scrap metal sculptress who had a penchant for setting her own work on fire might have had something to do with it and having a couple of wars under my belt by then didn't exactly hurt. Good for the work, they say. More than anything else Hardware relates to our fears of the future and a world we were terrified we'd end up living in unless folk got off their asses and did something about it. Sadly the future seems just as dark now as it did then, only more so! Some things never really seem to change...

Rose: Your experiences on *The Island of Doctor Moreau* are well-documented. What was your intention and vision for this film as it seems that this may well be one of the lost great films of the genre.

Stanley: You could say that the good doctor is one of the great, lost heroes of the genre, a seminal figure on a par with Dr. Frankenstein and the grand-daddy of every mad scientist working alone on an isolated tropical island from Boris and Bela to *Jurassic Park* and beyond but sadly, like Dr. Fu Manchu or Dr.

Mabuse, Moreau's controversial and ground-breaking work has been allowed to slide into relative obscurity in recent years, largely as a result of the novel's failure to make an effective transition to the screen. The AIP version with Michael York and Burt Lancaster was one of the first flicks I can recall that made me so angry even as a child that I wanted my money back and probably planted the seed in my mind that I could make a better fist of it than Don fuckin' Taylor. Sadly events were to prove me wrong and the final cut turned in by New Line proved to be even more of a travesty than what had gone before, a total waste of time, talent and opportunity. Although my name is prominently flagged on the opening credits not one line or beat of my original screenplay survives to inform the miasma that follows. That initial, discarded shooting script has been widely posted over the internet in samizdat form, allowing the casual reader to appraise the damage for themselves.(2)

The screenplay was co-authored with Michael Herr (*Apocalypse Now* and *Full Metal Jacket*) and Walon Green (*The Wild Bunch*) and was one of the finest pieces of material to have ever passed through my hands. Given the chance I'd frankly still like to take a shot at it, although replacing Mr. Brando and Nelson de la Rosa, who are sadly no longer with us, wouldn't exactly be a pushover. Needless to say my initial conception hewed closely to the Wells' original, updating the events to the near future and the aftermath of a limited nuclear exchange while retaining the novel's dramatic structure and more importantly remaining faithful to its overall tone and subtext. The principal difference between men and animals boils down to digits, opposable thumbs and in the case of the major primates – the simple matter of a larynx – a trifling difference when it comes to the miracles of biomechanics and the infinite plasticity of the living form. One of the cardinal errors in all three previous adaptations was to portray Moreau's 'beast folk' as lumbering monsters rather than humanized animals imbued with all the conflicting emotions, humour and pathos that implies. I mean imagine what would happen if your dog or your cat could not only address you in Queen's English but hold its own in conversation? It would open up a Pandora's box of possibilities. Now take on board the fact that given the current state of genetic engineering, such wonders and horrors are only a few years away. Already we have Day-Glo cats and mice and dogs cloned back from the grave. Moreau's island and all the challenges it presents to our cosy definition of 'humanity' is not so far away as we might wish to think.

Rose: You recently co-wrote *The Abandoned* with Nacho Cerdà and Karim Hussain. This is a high quality piece of writing and filmmaking – how did this project come about?

Stanley: *Los Abandonados* started life as an original screenplay by Karim entitled 'The Bleeding Compass'. I like to think I might have been a vague influence on its inception having turned Karim on to the work of Andrei Tarkovsky to begin with but I guess that's another story. The first draft was set in French Quebec but when Nacho picked up the project he decided to move the action to Russia. He produced a second Spanish language draft entitled 'Blood Line' which was set up to shoot in Bulgaria starring a Czech leading man, Karel Rodin, and a British actress, Anastasia Hille, playing the ostensible American lead. Then it began to rain, the bridge washed away making it impossible to film the ending as written and budgetary and scheduling issues lead to a slew of other scenes going astray. So they dialed me in. I flew into Sophia approximately three weeks into production with a brief to try and make sense of what they had and essentially reshape the beast as we went along. It was grueling work including over a month of ADR back in Barcelona but from what you say the mission seems to have been a qualified success. My most effective contribution probably concerns the character of the off-screen daughter and the framing device that along with the new title effectively *gives* the whole film a new reason d'etre. My favourite memory was helping to train up those razorback hogs to attack human beings. The hogs were

kept in a barn out in the woods and had been starved for a while to make 'em mean. We used to drive up there in the late afternoon in a convoy of four-wheeled-drive jeeps and feed 'em dummies stuffed with meat. All those burly east block crew guys standing about in their mirror shades made me feel like I'd strayed into an out-take from *Hannibal*. Funnily enough Nacho just called this afternoon. Apparently he's got another film on the go. Something to do with Nazis versus vampires. He asked if I felt like helping out and being a happy go lucky sort of guy I said I might. It wasn't so bad that I wouldn't go through it all again just for the hell of it.

Rose: Speaking of Nazis, how is *The Secret Glory* coming along?

Stanley: It's still coming, I'm afraid. It's been a journey to Hell and beyond with seemingly no end in sight, encapsulating some of the strangest events of my life. In point of fact much of what I have seen and experienced these last few years has been so fundamentally far-fetched that I've been forced to go to great lengths in amassing the necessary hard evidence to prove, to myself as much as to anyone else, that any of it actually happened. The initial feature-length documentary charting the life and work of the German Jewish Grail historian Otto Rahn and his Faustian pact with the SS mushroomed along the way into a broader examination of the so-called European esoteric tradition, the Fourth Reich, the EU and the revival of the 'Cathar' faith. The existing cut is still very much a 'work in progress' with the feature length version included on Subversive Cinema's *Dust Devil* boxkit suffering from patchy audio that at times wanders wildly out of synch as a result of a rinkydink PAL/NTSC transfer. I have plans to make an updated cut available over the net, either by mail order or direct download, within the next month or two via a new site devoted to the ongoing enigma and its unsettling implications for the broader public. Just getting the basic information out there should turn a few heads and shake things up a little. *Terra Umbra – Empire of Shadows* will be on-line by Hallow'een so keep your eyes wide open and remember you heard about it here first! I wish I could tell you more right now but, as the man says: "To know is to die..."

Rose: Finally, do you have any feature projects in development?

Stanley: As a matter of fact I'm up to my eyeballs, burnin' the midnight oil on a li'l sci-fi action eco-thriller named *Vacation*. The plot concerns an average American couple, a former exotic dancer turned failing singer-songwriter and her East Coast stockbroker boyfriend, who are on [a] cut rate package holiday in north Africa catching a li'l late season sun when an unexpected solar cataclysm annihilates Western Europe and the United States. Cut off from their credit cards and any hope of returning home Carly and Bryce are forced to redefine their relationship in order to survive in a radical, post-technological Muslim culture that holds them responsible, wrongly or otherwise, for the world's pain. I like to think of it as a very black xenophobic comedy about sun, surf, casual sex and the reckless abuse of alcohol and automatic firearms, a lively, fun-filled romantic holocaust for two set against the wider backdrop of the downfall of the west and the incipient extinction of the human species. The project looks set to go before the cameras this autumn on a series of typically inhospitable locations in southern Morocco so keep your fingers and toes crossed. With luck and the grace of God, inshallah, it should be playing your local multiplex next summer, presuming you still have a local multiplex by then and there are still enough folk left alive to watch the damn thing. Considering the current state of the world I'm lucky to be working let alone to have my work in distribution but then chaos has always been kind to me.

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1. http://www.everythingisundercontrol.org/nagtloper/write/hw2script.php
2. http://www.everythingisundercontrol.org/nagtloper/write/moreauscript.php