

The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies 9 (February 10, 2011)

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The Influence of H P Lovecraft on Occultism

K R Bolton

ABSTRACT

Lovecraft's horror stories have become not just a literary cult like many others, but a tangible cult of the occult. The Cthulhu Mythos of the Old Gods with Unspeakable names are evoked and worshipped, and respected practitioners of the esoteric use the symbolism and mythos as the basis of a magical system. This essay examines some of the individuals, orders and doctrines of the adherents of the Cthulhu Mythos.

RATIONALISING THE IRRATIONAL

The adoption and adaptation of a theme from Lovecraft's horror stories, that of the Cthulhu Mythos, is no less plausible than any other occult system or doctrine of magic. Magic is based on the irrational, on the intuitive, the unseen – literally that which is 'occult' or hidden, being summoned forth for individual or communal purposes by circumventing the causal relationships of the material universe.

Rituals, charms, spells, and incantations are used to produce the willed result, based around two principles, according to Frazer: 'first, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and second, that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed'. Frazer calls these principles, the 'Law of Similarity' and the 'Law of Contact or Contagion' respectively.(1)

Hence ritual magic is based on the 'Law of Similarity' and is generally a complex operation of aligning every word and element used in the ritual, using a system of correspondences,(2) which would in Western magic for example typically include the so-called 'Elemental Weapons', Wand, Cup, Dagger and Pentacle,(3) representing the elements of Fire, Water, Air, and Earth respectively; along with corresponding colours, incense, astrological times, etc. The creation of charms might use the 'Law of Contact'.

One of the primary ceremonial magicians of the 'magical revival' that started in 19th Century England was Aleister Crowley, whose doctrines and practises are now often synthesised with the Cthulhu Mythos.

However, while the practice of occultism might employ a complex formulae of ceremony, or simply comprise the use of hallucinogenics to achieve altered states of consciousness, in the words of Nevill Drury, Australian occult practitioner and author, 'I have found in my study of esoteric traditions that beneath the outer veneer of complexity – occult symbols, elusive meanings, passwords and "keys", and other protective devices – there is a comparatively simple core essence'.(4)

Another form of magic that has become widespread over the last few decades is 'Chaos Magick' which is also heavily influenced by British ceremonial magician Crowley, with an added primary influence being another English occultist of the same era, the artist Austin Osman Spare.(5) Spare disposed of the complex rituals and based his work on sigil(6) meditations. In occultism this is a method called 'path-working' by which the practitioner chooses a symbol and meditates upon it, often as the sign on a doorway that is entered. The result is supposed to be what could be described as image association. Analytical psychology has a similar technique called 'active imagination' whereby a dream image is

chosen for the purpose. Jung describing this method wrote, 'start with any image, for instance, just with that yellow mass in your dream. Contemplate it and carefully observe how the picture begins to unfold or to change. Don't try to make it into something, just do nothing but observe what its spontaneous changes are....'(7)

Both shaman and ceremonial occult practitioner, and one might add the LSD experimenters of the Leary generation, seek altered states of consciousness through acts of will. Additionally there is the interpretation of dreams which has a lineage far older than modern psychiatric analysis, the dream world being as important to the ancients as the waking world, just as it is recognised today by psychology. One might recall the particularly famous examples of dream interpretations or 'visions' by Daniel,(8) or that of John described in *The Revelation*, both examples being replete with esoteric symbolism.

The purpose of this brief diversion into basic occult theory is to explain that since any symbol could be used that has sufficient impact on the imagination, or the unconscious of the meditator it can be readily seen how the Cthulhu Mythos has sufficient influence upon the psyche to be of use as a complete occult system, despite its origins in 20th century short stories. The words, imagery and symbols portrayed by Lovecraft are sufficiently arcane to excite the imagination, no less than a medieval *grimoire*, or the Enochian 'Calls', alphabet and language devised by Dr John Dee, Queen Elizabeth I's Court scholar, around which has arisen a major occult school of Enochian magic since the occult revival of the late 19th Century.(9)

Against this fantastical background, we understand how occultists such as Frater Tenebrous, an adherent of the Cthulhu Mythos, explains that Lovecraft was, unwittingly, one of those fantasy writers who could convey genuine occult knowledge via dream.(10)

On that basis the Esoteric Order of Dagon, one of the primary organisations based on Cthulhu, has offered a particularly cogent explanation as to the legitimacy of Lovecraft's mythos and indeed of Lovecraft himself as a seer, despite his own repudiation of the metaphysical:

Lovecraft's fiction, first published in the American pulp magazines such as *Weird Tales*, presents an internally consistent cosmology, constructed through the literary realizations of the author's dreams and intuitive impulses. This cosmology came to be known as the 'Cthulhu Mythos', after its central deity. These stories and novels contain hidden meanings and magickal formulae unknown even to their creator.

Lovecraft suffered from an acute inferiority complex, which prevented him from personally crossing the Abyss in his lifetime. He remained a withdrawn and lonely writer who retained a rational, skeptical view of the universe, despite the glimpses of places and entities beyond the world of mundane reality, which his dream experiences allowed him. He never learned the true origin of the tremendous vistas of cosmic strangeness that haunted his dreams. He never realized that he was himself the High Priest 'Ech-Pi-El', the Prophet of the dawning Aeon of Cthulhu.(11)

Frater Tenebrous similarly explains the relevance of Lovecraft's stories for the serious occultist:

In the 1920's, an American magazine of fantasy and horror fiction called *Weird Tales* began to publish stories by a then unknown author named H. P. Lovecraft. As his contributions to the magazine grew more regular, the stories began to form an internally consistent and self-referential mythology, created from the literary realisation of the author's dreams and intuitive impulses. Although he outwardly espoused a wholly rational and sceptical view of the universe, his dream-world experiences allowed him glimpses of

places and entities beyond the world of mundane reality, and behind his stilted and often excessive prose there lies a vision and an understanding of occult forces which is directly relevant to the Magical Tradition.(12)

While the shaman and the occultist *will* their altered states of consciousness, Lovecraft, a rationalist and materialist, is considered by his occult followers as what we might term an ‘unwitting shaman,’ whose ability to channel the denizens of the astral or unconscious realms through dreams is as legitimate as a *willed* channelling by the occult practitioner.

As for Lovecraft’s own world-view, he eschewed anything of a mystical nature, and saw the universe as mechanistic. However, Lovecraft nonetheless had an interest not only in science but also in ancient history and mythology. Lovecraft scholar S T Joshi writes that Lovecraft, ‘...confessed, acutely, that his very love of the past fostered the principal strain in his aesthetic of the weird - the defeat or confounding of *time*’.(13)

His fantasy is therefore a synthesis of the arcane/ mythic and the cosmological: the description of creatures lurking beyond the physical universe, waiting for entry through the nightmares of mortals. Hence, the ‘Gods with Unspeakable Names’ are an odd mixture of devil and ‘extraterrestrial’. But unlike J R R Tolkien and C S Lewis who wrote their stories in the hope of prompting an interest in the mythic and the religious in the face secularism and materialism, Lovecraft as an atheist had no such desire to see a religious revival. In deprecating attempts to relate quantum theory, for example, to religious beliefs, Lovecraft stated:

...Although these new turns of science don't mean a thing in relation to the myth of cosmic consciousness and teleology, a new brood of despairing and horrified moderns is seizing on the doubt of all positive knowledge which they imply; and is deducing therefrom that, *since nothing is true*, therefore *anything can be true*.....whence one may invent or revive any sort of mythology that fancy or nostalgia or desperation may dictate, and defy anyone to prove that it isn't *emotionally* true-whatever that means...(14)

As a materialist with a mechanistic view of the universe Lovecraft regarded the supernatural as nonsense, but provided himself with sufficient, albeit scant, knowledge to enable him to include allusions to genuine esoteric figures and texts to provide his tales with arcane plausibility. According to Owen Davies, Lovecraft’s main source of occult information was the entry on ‘Magic’ in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.(15) For example when the *Necronomicon* was mentioned for a second time, on this occasion in ‘The Festival’, published in 1925 in *Weird Tales*, the theme of the story was inspired by Lovecraft’s having read Margaret Murray’s *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*.(16 & 17) which was itself an influential source for the rebirth of witchcraft or ‘wicca’ or at least the version synthesised into modern existence by Gerald B Gardner.(18) In ‘The Festival’, a descendant of New England witches finds three grimoires or occult texts, *Saducismus Triumphatus*.(19) *Daemonolatreia*.(20) and the *Necronomicon*, the first two being genuine grimoires.(21)

Several genuine characters of occult tradition are alluded to by Lovecraft in his stories, again giving them a tantalising hint of genuine esoteric tradition, including the Elizabethan scholar and inventor of the ‘Enochian language’ and method of scrying, Dr John Dee.(22) Hence, when Lovecraft mentions in ‘The Dunwich Horror’ that John Dee provided the only English translation of the *Necronomicon*, this is taken up as a subject for commentary by Robert Turner, in which he describes his discovery in the British Museum of a letter by an ‘unknown scholar (dated 1573)’ written to Dee, concerning the ‘Towne of donwiche’.(23)

While Lovecraft's knowledge of the arcane was limited, the vague hints in his tales are themselves the stuff of which esoteric lore and the occult Orders that form around it, are made. The allusions to Dee and grimoires, etc. provide those looking for a genuine occult tradition in Lovecraft's tales with grounds for contending that Lovecraft was a channel for the transmission of an occult tradition that is traced from Sumeria through to the Lovecraftian 'Mad Arab', to John Dee, Aleister Crowley, Kenneth Grant, *et al.*

Ironically, Lovecraft's occult interpreters are committed to precisely what their unwitting shaman found contemptible in his own day in those who "invent or revive any sort of mythology... and defy anyone to prove that it isn't *emotionally* true..." Nonetheless Lovecraft provided his stories with sufficient plausibility for seekers of arcane knowledge to enable them to weave a tapestry out of the threads he provided.

'THE CALL OF CTHULHU'

The Cthulhu Mythos manifested first with Lovecraft in his short story 'The Call of Cthulhu', published in 1928.(24) The 'heroes' of the story, at least to the followers of the cult, are the Great Old Ones whose earthly followers might evoke them from extraterrestrial dimensions when astral alignments are right. Their followers were, from Lovecraft's description, the most degraded dregs of the Earth:

They worshipped, so they said, the Great Old Ones who lived ages before there were any men, and who came to the young world out of the sky. Those Old Ones were gone now, inside the earth and under the sea; but their dead bodies had told their secrets in dreams to the first men, who formed a cult which had never died.(25)

Frater Tenebrous, rationalising the existence of the Great Old Ones as objective realities, explains:

These entities exist in another dimension, or on a different vibrational level, and can only enter this universe through specific 'window areas' or psychic gateways - a concept fundamental to many occult traditions. Cthulhu is the High Priest of the Old Ones, entombed in the sunken city of R'lyeh,(26) where he awaits the time of their return. He is described as a winged, tentacled anthropoid of immense size, formed from a semi-viscous substance which recombines after his apparent destruction at the conclusion of the tale.(27)

The Cthulhu Cult is given a certain objective legitimacy by supposedly having extant remnants since time immemorial, examples alluded to by Lovecraft including South Seas Islanders, Voodoo worshippers, and the *angakoks*(28) of Greenland.(29) Hence, the present day Western adepts, dedicated to a return of the Great Old Ones to Earth to assume their godly mantles, claim to be part of a living tradition that has long existed, the very phenomena Lovecraft deplored in his own time.(30)

While it is difficult to discern the doctrines of this cult from Lovecraft's stories, there is nonetheless sufficient indication to enable a weaving of a dogma that is clearly nihilistic or chaotic as is the nature of the Great Old Ones; the new earthly dispensation upon their return evoking a society that many people might consider to be a utopia of psychopathology. Hence Frater Tenebrous cites a passage from the seminal 'Call of Cthulhu':(31)

The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and

reveling in joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom.(32)

Frater Tenebrous attempts to bring this pathological, nihilistic outlook into accord with the doctrines of certain occult schools, including Templars, Assassins, Gnostics, and in particular the 'Law of Thelema' the new religion of Lovecraft's contemporary, Aleister Crowley.(33) This is a theme that is especially adopted by Kenneth Grant and those of similar outlook who synthesise Cthulhu with Thelema. While the Aeon of Horus as a martial age would be ushered in by conflict, to compare the vision of a Thelemic society that Crowley advocates with the a global atavistic bedlam under the regime of the Great Old Ones is to offer a superficial analysis at best, despite all these adepts of Cthulhu seeming to also be well versed in Thelema.

Aleister Crowley (1875- 1947) has had a seminal influence on the occult revival since the late 19th Century. His enduring legacy has been helped by the notoriety he sought as the self-described 'Great Beast 666', and the sensationalist headlines that appeared in the press in his time describing him as 'The King of Depravity' and the like. Crowley entered the crypto-Rosicrucian(34) society, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the basis of the occult revival in England, whose initiates included W B Yeats, in 1898.(35) As befits his temperament Crowley soon argued with the Golden Dawn, and in 1912 transferred his commitment to a so-called 'sex-magical order', *Ordo Templi Orientis*, at the invitation of its founder, journalist and German intelligence agent Theodor Reuss.(36) As one would expect from such an energetic personality Crowley became Outer Head of the Order, and used the Order as a vehicle for the propagation of his religion for the 'New Aeon', *Thelema*, a synthesis of mysticism and Nietzsche.

What Crowley advocated was a society that offered the individual the chance at discovering and fulfilling his 'True Will', or what might be broadly termed in a mundane sense self-actualisation. However the Thelemic society Crowley advocated was anything but anarchistic let alone nihilistic, being hierarchically structured, and reminiscent of the Medieval era but with Thelema replacing Christianity. Crowley wrote of his Thelemic state as conferring both rights and duties, each individual being, 'absolutely disciplined to serve his own, and the common purpose, without friction'.(37) The Thelemic social structure is based on the guild, which is also a feature of the organisational structure of Thelemic orders.(38) The premise of the Thelemic state Crowley described as being to, 'gather up all the threads of human passion and interest, and weave them into a harmonious tapestry...' reflecting the order of the cosmos.(39) This incorporation of all human passions and interests into a 'harmonious tapestry' seems remote from the raving, frenetic, murderous lunacy promised by the return of the Great Old Ones and looked upon with enthusiastic expectation by the Cthulhu cultists.

With this moral nihilism the cult of the Great Old Ones must be classified as part of the Left Hand Path, or the sinister tradition, the doctrine of Eastern origin that repudiates orthodox morality. The purest remnant is that of Left Hand Path *Tantra* as a heresy of Hinduism, where adherents in their rites partake of the substances prohibited by orthodox Hinduism, and include women in sexual rituals, regarded as a yogic interplay of the male and female cosmic principles represented by Shiva and Shakti. In India this is called *Vama Marg*, Sanskrit for 'left path', which according to Kenneth Grant, a Western initiate, who will be considered below, is 'so called because it involves the use of Woman and/or certain organic substances that are usually regarded with abhorrence'.(40) Hence the interest by overtly Satanic cults in the West.

CULTS OF CTHULHU

Kenneth Grant and the Typhonian Cultus

The individual most responsible for the development of Cthulhu as an occult system seems to be the British occultist Kenneth Grant, one of several claimants to Aleister Crowley's mantle on the latter's death in 1947.(41) Grant has the advantage of having met Crowley and having been in correspondence with him as one of his magical students. Grant is also a practitioner of the sigil magic of the aforementioned A O Spare; hence synthesising the two systems, while adding a third element, that of Cthulhu to form 'Typhonian Thelema'. Grant created the 'Typhonian' Ordo Templi Orientis in 1955,(42) as the heir to the occult organisation taken over by Crowley in 1922 from Reuss.(43) Grant's assumption to head what was his own version of the OTO with the designation 'Typhonian', named after the Egyptian dark god Set(44), emerged in the predictable midst of a conflict of succession following Crowley's death.

Grant has done much in an attempt to reconcile Lovecraft's nightmare fantasies with ancient mythic entities, the view of Grant and others being that Lovecraft's ancient (fictional) grimoire, *The Necronomicon*, is a legitimate esoteric text extant on the *akashic* or astral realm and accessed via dreaming. Grant writes of this: 'As I have shown... it is not unlikely that Blavatsky(45), Mathers(46), Crowley(47), Lovecraft and others are reading from an akashic grimoire...'(48)

Grant regards Lovecraft and Crowley as parts of the same mythic and occult system, Crowley's *Book of the Law* (also referred to as *Liber AL*) being 'interpreted as the Book of the Law of the Great Old Ones; it is the grimoire containing the keys to mans' intercourse with Them'.(49) Hence, Lovecraft's fiction is regarded as a legitimate part of occult tradition, and an important part for Grant and others; as dream interpretation has been a major aspect of occultic, shamanic, and religious experiences from antiquity to the present, in which we might include the prophetic dreams and visions that are a feature of the Old and New Testaments.(50) Lovecraft attained to visions as a frequent and unwilling part of his dream-world while occultists work hard and long to achieve the same results via complicated magical formulas.. Thus, Crowley's 'Awaiss(51) Current', Austin Spare's 'Zos Kia Cultus'(52), and Lovecraft's 'Cthulhu Cultus', 'are different manifestations of an identical formula – that of dream control'.(53) Grant specifically alludes to Lovecraft as a 'magician':

Each of these magicians lived their lives within the context of cosmic dream myths which, somehow, they relayed or transmitted to man from other dimensions. The formula of dream control is in a sense used by all creative artists, though few succeed in bringing human consciousness into such close proximity with other spheres.(54)

The difference is that Lovecraft was a rationalist of middle-class background, who found the imagery evil and horrendous. As Grant explains it, Lovecraft held back from 'Crossing the Abyss', which prevented him from seeing his dreams in magical context and from detaching himself from moral judgements on good and evil Grant writes of this:

The quality of evil with which Lovecraft invests the types of his Cthulhu Cult and other mythoses is the result of a distortion in the subjective lens of his own awareness, and I have shown elsewhere how these images emerge when not so deformed, approximating sometimes to the point of actual identity with Crowley's cult-types of Shaitan-Aiwass and The Book of the Law...(55)

Grant takes to task those Lovecraft fans who claim that their favourite author's stories are uniquely original, rather than manifesting a long occult tradition; and for Grant Lovecraft's status is thereby not diminished but enhanced, when he is recognised as a channel for cosmic forces of epochal or aeonic significance.(56)

Grant regards Lovecraft as having tapped through dreams, albeit in distorted manner, the same ‘Current’ as Crowley, of whom Lovecraft apparently had not heard, Grant providing a number of correspondences between the Cthulhu Mythos and that of Crowley:

Lovecraft: Al Azif The Book of the Arab; Crowley: Al vel Legis, The Book of the Law.

Lovecraft: The Great Old Ones; Crowley: The Great Ones of the Night Time.

Lovecraft: Yog-Sothoth; Crowley: Sut-Thoth, Sut-Typhon.

Lovecraft: Gnoph-Hek (The Hairy Thing); Crowley: Coph-Nia (a barbarous name in Liber vel Legis).

Lovecraft: The Cold Waste (Kadath); Crowley: The Wanderer of the Waste (Hadith).

Lovecraft: Nyarlathotep (a god accompanied by ‘idiot flute players’). Crowley: ‘Into my loneliness comes the sound of flutes’, Liber VII).

Lovecraft: The overpowering stench associated with Nyarlathotep; Crowley: ‘The perfume of Pan pervading’ (Liber VII).

Lovecraft: Great Cthulhu dead, but dreaming in R’lyeh. Crowley: The Primal Sleep, ‘In which the Great Ones of the Night time are immersed’.

Lovecraft: Azathoth (‘the blind and idiot chaos at the centre of infinity’). Crowley: Azoth, the alchemical solvent; ‘Thoth, Mercury: Chaos is Hadit at the centre of Infinity (Nuit)’.

Lovecraft: The Faceless One (The God Nyarlathotep); Crowley: The Headless One.

Lovecraft: The five pointed star carven of grey stone; Crowley: Nuit’s Star: the five pointed star with the circle in the middle. Grant explains: ‘Grey is the colour of Saturn, the Great Mother of which Nuit is a form’. (57)

Of these correspondences, however forced they appear to the non-adept, Grant states:

The table is interesting because it shows how similarly and yet how differently related were certain archetypal patterns characteristic of the New Aeon. But whereas to Crowley the motifs conveyed no moral message, to Lovecraft they were instinct with horror and evil.(58)

It could be contended that Grant places too much focus on Lovecraft’s failure to attain adeptship or occult understanding of what he was unconsciously channelling because of his alleged moral hang-ups; however, as quoted by Joshi, Lovecraft does not seem to have had any such moral prejudices, but rather like Nietzsche to have considered the universe to operate ‘beyond good and evil’.

Michael Bertiaux and the Lovecraftian Coven

Bertiaux is a Chicago-based practitioner of ‘Gnostic Voodoo’, synthesising Thelema and Lovecraft, who has received a lot of interest from Kenneth Grant. Bertiaux’s main vehicle for esoteric transmission is as Master of the Cult of La Couleuvre Noire, The Black Snake, and director of the Monastery of the Seven

Rays.(59) Grant writes of Bertiaux that he ‘claims to have established contact with the “Deep Ones”, the fearful hunters of Outer Spaces that Lovecraft has brought so close to earth in his terrifying fictions’.(60)

The Lovecraftian Coven is a branch of the Cult of La Couleuvre Noire, and is led by ‘a priestess of the Black Snake Cult’.(61) The basis of the practise is that of sexual magic, or what might be called a version of Left Hand Path *Tantra*, ‘structured on the basic law of sexual polarity’, with the female principle represented by the sea-goat which corresponds astrologically with Capricorn, a ‘sea-shakti’, mated with the male principle as the Goat, or ‘sea beast’, or in Lovecraft Shub-Niggurath, the Goat of a Thousand Young.(62)

Grant claims that according to August Derleth, who continued the literary tradition of Lovecraft, parts of Wisconsin (where Derleth establish his publishing house) ‘contain specific Cthulhu power zones’, the most potent being centred on a deserted lake. This area is frequented by Bertiaux and his followers where the ‘Deep Ones’ are evoked, whose point of entry to earth lies in the lake itself. The rites are performed when astrologically propitious and the ‘Deep Ones’ are said to ‘assume an almost tangible substance’. The performance is one of ceremonial magic and includes the use of paintings and statues of sea monsters, turtles, amphibia and batrachia, consecrated with the *kalas* (fluids) of the priestess. A special chant in Creole-French is particularly effectual. (63)

Church of Satan

Without getting too far off field with definitions, the reader might generally perceive by now that the Cthulhu Mythos comes closest to the Western or Judaeo-Christian conceptions of ‘Satanism’ and ‘evil’ in the normally accepted use of the word, although advanced esotericists such as Crowley and Grant would eschew the definition of ‘Satanism’ as too limited for their systems. Nonetheless, the Arabic word *Shaitan* does appear in the Thelemic cosmology and in particular in that of Grant.(64) Mankind throughout history and across ethnicities and cultures has had a conception of ‘good and evil’ as a necessity for living together in some type of workable accord. Taboos and commandments with divine sanction are devised to create *society per se*. Lovecraft saw his nightmares as representing figures as entirely negative or evil and life-negating in-so-far as he believed that ‘good and evil’ is defined as whatever serves the social fabric. Crowley, Grant, and Satanists advance the proposition that the cosmos is an interplay of polarities, the ‘evil’ or negation represented in Judaeo-Christianity as Satan, ‘the accuser and adversary’, which to such occultists is a necessary part of cosmology, otherwise stasis and eventual stagnation would ensue.(65) During the late 19th Century Satan even appeared to certain political rebels as the heroic, archetypal ‘rebel in the cosmos’.(66)

With the Cthulhu cultists it is difficult to see mere ‘rebellion’ or ‘heresy’ in a zealous commitment to supposedly ‘restore’ The Great Old Ones to sovereignty over the Earth. The only indication of what type of regime these Great Old Ones would impose is that of greater and more horrific ways of killing, and the imagery invoked is probably closer to the scenes from a blood-and-guts soaked Earth from the recent movie version of the ‘War of the Worlds’(67) where the outer ‘gods’ (?) proceed to feast upon humankind, than a 19th century romantic revolutionary image of a Miltonian Lucifer enthroned over a freed humanity, or the hierarchical and ordered society that Crowley himself proposed. Despite the attempts of occultists to put a positive and even liberating slant on the return of the Old Ones to reign over the Earth, Phil Hine has stated more realistically:

The Great Old Ones are served by various human, and non-human cults in wild and lonely places, from ‘degenerate’ swamp-dwellers to the innumerable ‘incestuous’ Whateley’s of the fictional region Dunwich.

These cults are continually preparing both to bring about the return of the Old Ones, and also to silence anyone who does stumble across the awful secret of the existence of the Old Ones.

The return of the Old Ones involves, as Wilbur Whateley puts it in 'The Dunwich Horror',⁽⁶⁸⁾ the 'clearing off' of the Earth. That is, the clearing off of humanity, apart from a few worshippers and slaves. This apocalyptic reference can be asserted as metaphorical, or as referring to an actual physical catastrophe - Nuclear holocaust perhaps? Perhaps Lovecraft wished to emphasise that the Great Old Ones would give no more thought to wiping out humanity than we might give to wiping up water on a table. Exactly why the Old Ones wish to return to Earth is never clear, but we might assume that for them, Earth is close to the bars and convenient for bus routes!

Lovecraft is careful to point out that most of the Old Ones are, in fact, mindless, or 'idiot gods'. Only those who are already insane or degenerate could worship them sincerely. Only Nyarlathotep, the Crawling Chaos, is given a human semblance of intelligence...⁽⁶⁹⁾

One would expect that given Phil Hine's description of the Great Old Ones as for the most part 'idiot gods' rather than teachers of man, whose servants are imbeciles, and whose only perceivable goal is to eliminate humanity, save for a few craven inbreeds, he would be a fervent rejectionist of the Cthulhu Cult among occultists, yet Hine is one of the principal members of the Esoteric Order of Dagon ⁽⁷⁰⁾, which will be described below.

It is therefore not surprising that self-described Satanists have a considerable interest in the Cthulhu Mythos. The most overt manifestation of present day Satanism is of the Church of Satan founded in San Francisco in 1966 by Anton LaVey.⁽⁷¹⁾ The principal exponent of the Cthulhu Mythos in the Church of Satan was Michael Aquino, who was a Magus IV^o in the Church, i.e. LaVey's deputy. LaVey's *Satanic Bible*⁽⁷²⁾ had become a best-seller, and LaVey compiled *The Satanic Rituals*⁽⁷³⁾ in 1972 with Aquino's assistance.

Aquino's Cthulhuan chapters in *The Satanic Rituals* comprise a chapter on Lovecraftian metaphysics, 'The Ceremony of the Nine Angles', and 'The Call of Cthulhu'. No other subject in *The Satanic Rituals* has as much dedicated to it as Cthulhu.

Aquino here regards Lovecraft as having penned 'the most convincing and thoroughly terrifying works of macabre fiction in modern times'.⁽⁷⁴⁾ Aquino aimed in the essay to consider Lovecraft as a philosopher despite noting the scorn with which Lovecraft regarded any such metaphysics. Aquino suggests a Faustian theme of man's drive for knowledge to the point of self-destruction and cataclysm represented by the Great Old Ones:

This theme of a constant interrelationship between the constructive and destructive facets of the human personality forms the keystone of the doctrines of Satanism, even as theism argues that the integrity of the individual can be increased by a rejection of the carnal and an obedience to morality.⁽⁷⁵⁾

Aquino attempts to present the Cthulhuan monstrosities as somewhat benevolent towards mankind, as teachers that do not require worshipping other than to be evoked by festivals. Aquino invites the reader to compare a Cthulhuan festival to the 'element of servility' in Christian and other religions. Here then is a revival of the 19th century romantic notion of the devil as the cosmic rebel and teacher of humanity. It is also suggestive of the divine beings, the 'Watchers', who became the 'Fallen Angels' after rebelling against Jehovah and under the leadership of Azazel (or Samyaza), descended to Earth to not only mate

with the daughters of man whom they lusted after, siring offspring of mighty renown,(76) but also teaching humanity all the arts of civilisation.

Aquino continues with this type of theme, stating that Lovecraft sought to portray the Great Old Ones as ‘never conclusive stereotypes of good or evil; they vacillate constantly between beneficence and cruelty’. Conversely, it might be recalled, Kenneth Grant, contends that Lovecraft did regard these nightmare creatures as wholly evil and destructive and completely alien to human consciousness. The protagonist of each story ‘abandons every prudent restraint’ on a Faustian quest for knowledge.

It was from this introductory essay that Aquino proceeded with two Cthulhuan rituals. ‘The Ceremony of the Nine Angles’(77) is to be performed in a ‘closed chamber with no curved surfaces’, and lighted by a single brazier or flame-pot, before an altar behind which there is the sign of a trapezoid. All celebrants are masked to distort their facial features. ‘Yugothic’ language was formulated by Aquino to enhance the evocative atmosphere of the rite by the main celebrant, to whom the participants respond in their mundane language. The beings evoked are Azathoth as ‘great center of the cosmos’; Yog-Sothoth, ‘master of dimensions’; Nyarlathotep, ‘black prince from the Barrier’; and Shub-Niggurath, ‘father of the World of Horrors’. After evoking Nine Angles, each representing a cosmic sphere presided over by an Old One, the celebrant intones that ‘the hounds are loosed upon the barrier, and we shall not pass; but the time shall come when the hounds will bow before us, and apes shall speak with the tongues of the hornless ones. The way is Yog-Sothoth, and the key is Nyarlathotep. Hail, Yog-Sothoth. Hail, Nyarlathotep’.(78)

In ‘The Call of Cthulhu’ the ritual is performed in a secluded area ‘near a major body of water’, preferably on an overcast night, when the water is tempestuous. The chief celebrant assumes the role of Cthulhu, while the participants encircle a large bonfire. Participants evoke sundry water deities indulging Kraken, Poseiden, Typhon, Dagon, Neptune, Leviathan, Midgard, and Cthulhu.(79)

Something of the positive aspect Aquino aims to suggest is alluded to when the participants chant in unison that Cthulhu crossed the Abyss to walk upon Earth, and ‘taught the apes [humanity] to laugh and to play, to slay and to scream’. This is suggestive of the mad utopia described by Frater Tenebrous in referring to ‘The Call of Cthulhu’ when the Old Ones will teach humanity new ways to slaughter each other; apparently an update of what was taught millennia ago.

The participants state in unison: ‘I danced and I killed, and I laughed with the apes, and in R’lyeh I died to sleep the dreams of the master of the planes and the angles’. The ritual ends with a repudiation of the Christian God, as the ‘god of death’ who will be overthrown upon the return of the Old Ones.

Aquino explained in an article for *Nyctalops Magazine*(80) that he constructed the ‘Yugothic’ language by the patterns suggested in Lovecraft’s incantation given in the ‘Call of Cthulhu’: ‘Ph’nglui mglw’nafh Cthulhu R’lyeh wgah’nagl fhtagn’.

There is nothing phoney about such an invention per se, within the context of the occult traditions. All such ‘magical languages’, other than those that are obscure or ancient languages used for a magical purpose, are contrivances, as are the magical alphabets. It is the very nature of their unfamiliarity that makes them evocative. On a more common level, Latin Mass might be particularly evocative to a non-Latin speaker. The most famous of the occult languages is Enochian, formulated by Elizabethan scholar Dr John Dee, around which an entire system of magic has been practised from the time it was revived by the Golden Dawn in England during the late 19th Century. Enochian is said to be the langue of the angels, and Dee claimed that he scried with the use of the Enochian language and sigils and received

communications from the Enochian denizens of other planes. Either one accepts that Enochian really is a supernatural language given to Dee, or that Dee made it up, but it has nonetheless remained a very evocative language.(81) A more familiar form of evocative language is the 'speaking in tongues' by some Pentecostal churchgoers. I heard this spoken several decades ago, much to my mirth at that time; however a Pentecostal friend of Indian descent recently offered a quite rational explanation as to its efficacy, stating that as a practitioner himself he finds it to be an efficacious means of altering one's consciousness, like the mantras used in meditation by Eastern religions.

Aquino explains also that the 'nine angles' are the five points of the pentagram and the 4-edge angles of the 'phi-trapezoid' or the pentagon within the pentagram.(82)

In 1972, the year *The Satanic Rituals* was published, Aquino wrote in the Church of Satan's newsletter the *Cloven Hoof* an article attempting to identify the location of R'lyeh.(83) Aquino identifies this as Nan-Madol, Ponape in Micronesia, Ponape being a destination for sea captain Ahab Marsh in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*.(84) The immense and still mysterious stone walls of Nan-Madol, considered by the islanders to be haunted, is a convincing location, given that it matched key features for R'lyeh given by Lovecraft as an island in the Pacific with mysterious megalithic structures. Aquino states that island tradition tells of the city having been created by a race of gods, the Anti-Aramach, 'who came down from the sky in great canoes', while the great stones of the city flew down from the sky.

Aquino, like Grant, has attempted to draw objective parallels with the imagery presented from Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos, although while Aquino does this as an intellectual exercise in itself, Grant places literal significance on the mythos as being an echo of actual ancient traditions, cults and myths, mainly deriving from the demonology of Egypt and Sumeria.

Esoteric Order of Dagon

The Esoteric Order of Dagon (EOD), named after the society in Lovecraft's *Shadow Over Innsmouth*.(85) was founded in 1981. Randolph Carter had assumed the shape of a 'thought form' existing in the word of dreams (or the astral realm) even during Lovecraft's lifetime, waiting for the right moment to manifest into a human consciousness. This occurred in the 1960s during the drug induced state of a young man, Steven Greenwood,(86) who assumed the name and character of Carter and issued *The Manifesto of the Aeon of Cthulhu*, which led to the formation of the Temple of Dagon, from which emerged the EOD. Greenwood (aka Randolph Carter) inaugurated his own Aeon, like Crowley with the Aeon of Horus, and Michael Aquino with the Aeon of Set; this having the numerological value as 'Current 23' equating with Chaos or Kaos and represented by the Great Old One named Azathoth.(87)

In 2007 Obed Marsh, representing the Supreme Council of the Temple of Dagon, went to England to meet Michael Staley of Grant's Typhonian Ordo Templi Orientis, and the EOD became an affiliate of the Typhonian OTO.(88)

The EOD explanation on the Lovecraft mysteries follows the line of other occultists, that Lovecraft's transmissions from the Great Old Ones are part of a genuine tradition, but Lovecraft himself was not capable of 'Crossing the Abyss'(89) and of becoming an adept.

The EOD embraces Thelema, Wicca, Tantra, and like Grant traces its tradition back to Sumeria and Egypt, and to stellar worship centred on Sirius, the Dog Star that Grant has identified with Set.(90)

The EOD is loosely based on self-initiation with three degrees, that of Neophyte, Initiate, and Adept.(91)

What is of particular significance about the EOD is that within this have coalesced the principal representatives of a number of primary magical systems and/or organisations including: Kenneth Grant, who is stated to have been an important influence on the formation of the EOD and has ‘graciously acknowledged his honorary membership’; Michael Staley, spokesman for Grant’s Typhonian OTO; Nicholaj de Mattos Frisvold of Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica(92); Phil Hine, previously mentioned, a philosopher of Chaos Magick; John Balance of the British industrial band Coil; Nema the formulator of Maat Magick;(93) Michael Aquino, previously mentioned author of the Lovecraftian elements within the Church of Satan, and founder of the Temple of Set,(94) along with authors, publishers, film-makers and artists.

From this it can be seen that the EOD includes representatives of Thelema, Chaos Magick, Industrial sub-culture, Maat Magick, and Setianism.

NECRONOMICON

There have been several attempts to present to the discerning occultist public, editions of the *Necronomicon*, the dreaded grimoire for summoning the Great Old Ones alluded to in Lovecraft’s stories. As one should expect, Kenneth Grant has attempted to argue for the existence of the *Necronomicon* on an objective basis, albeit as a book that exists on the astral plane which might be accessed by occult practices or via dreams, as Lovecraft did unwittingly.

The *Necronomicon* was first mentioned by Lovecraft in 1922 in a short story, ‘The Hound’, which was published in 1924. The protagonists are an unnamed hero and his now mangled, dead friend St John, who had both become so jaded in a Faustian quest for evil and decadence that they resorted to grave robbing, being collectors of diabolic antiquities:

Only the somber philosophy of the decadents could help us, and this we found potent only by increasing gradually the depth and diabolism of our penetrations. Baudelaire and Huysmans were soon exhausted of thrills, till finally there remained for us only the more direct stimuli of unnatural personal experiences and adventures. It was this frightful emotional need which led us eventually to that detestable course which even in my present fear I mention with shame and timidity - that hideous extremity of human outrage, the abhorred practice of grave-robbing.(95)

The corpse that was uncovered, that of a 500 year old satanic character, was adorned with an amulet bearing markings reminiscent of the symbols found in the *Necronomicon*, the book being introduced to Lovecraft’s reading public in a quite unassuming manner:

...Alien it indeed was to all art and literature which sane and balanced readers know, but we recognized it as the thing hinted of in the forbidden *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred; the ghastly soul-symbol of the corpse-eating cult of inaccessible Leng, in Central Asia. All too well did we trace the sinister lineaments described by the old Arab daemonologist; lineaments, he wrote, drawn from some obscure supernatural manifestation of the souls of those who vexed and gnawed at the dead.(96)

An account of the origins of the *Necronomicon* has been provided by Lovecraft, stating that the original title is, ‘Al Azif - azif being the word used by the Arabs to designate that nocturnal sound (made by insects) supposed to be the howling of daemons’.(97)

Composed by Abdul Alhazred, a mad poet of Sanaa', in Yemen, who is said to have flourished during the period of the Ommyade caliphs, circa 700 A.D. He visited the ruins of Babylon and the subterranean secrets of Memphis and spent ten years alone in the great southern desert of Arabia - the Roba El Khaliyeh or 'Empty Space' of the ancients - and 'Dahna' or 'Crimson' desert of the modern Arabs, which is held to be inhabited by protective evil spirits and monsters of death.(98)

Abdul Alhazred wrote *Al Azif* in Damascus and died or disappeared in 733AD, one account being that he was devoured by an invisible demon in broad daylight in front of a multitude of terrified witnesses, after having lived in madness for years, 'worshipping unknown entities whom he called Yog-Sothoth and Cthulhu'.

In 950 AD *Azif* was translated into Greek as *Necronomicon* by Theodorus Philetas of Constantinople, followed during the Medieval era by translations into Latin and Spanish.(99)

With a quite convincing historical chronology provide by Lovecraft, the *Necronomicon* became the subject of much speculation as to its actual existence.

Avon Books published this dread document, said to induce insanity by its mere possession let alone by practising its rites, in 1980, from a previous edition published in 1977 at the instigation of Herman Slater, proprietor of Magickal Childe bookstore, and himself a publisher under that imprint, in Manhattan. The edition was published thanks to a thought-form entering the consciousness of L K Barnes, publisher, which prompted him to enter Slater's bookshop, 'the crazed proprietor' waving the MS of *Azif* about. Fortunately, Barnes had long been looking for the genuine *Necronomicon*, which since childhood he had known existed. This MS had been produced by 'Simon' who had the necessary documentation to prove the authenticity of *Azif*.(100) This edition makes it plain that it is an aspect of Thelema, and the preface to the second edition ends with a reference to entering the 'New Age of the Crowned and Conquering Child, Horus, not in a slouch towards Bethlehem, but born within us at the moment we conquer the lurking fear within our own souls'.(101)

This version of *Azif* is rather interesting in that despite the situation of such a dread tome being published by Avon Books, a respectable amount of research has gone into tracing Mesopotamian and other parallels, reminiscent of the approach of Kenneth Grant:

It is of extreme importance to occult scholars that many of these deities had actual counterparts, at least in name, to deities of the Sumerian Tradition, the same Tradition that the Magus Aleister Crowley deemed it necessary to 'rediscover'.(102)

A 'Chart of Comparisons' links correspondences between names used by Lovecraft, Crowley and Sumer, as follows:

Cthulhu – The Great Beast CTHAH 666 – Ctha-lu; Azathoth – Aiwass – Azagthoth; Shub Niggurath – Pan – Shub Ishniggarab(?); Out of Space – The abyss – Absu; IA! – IO! IAO! – IA, EA; The Five Poutned grey Star carven – The Pentagonam – The Ar; Vermis Mysteriis – The Serpent – Erim.(103)

The Avon Books *Necronomicon* proceeds with several hundred pages of incantations, spells and sigils. What is of interest again however, is that the corpus of the book is mainly drawn from Babylonian mythology, and includes the names of deities such as Inanna, Ishtar, Enki, Marduk et al, these being identified with what in the Cthulhu Mythos are the Elder Gods who defeated the Great Old Ones; which

has its analogue in the Babylonian Creation Myth of the defeat of the dragon Tiamat by Marduk. It is not until one reaches the 'Urilia Text', or 'the Book of the Worm', that the diabolical adept gets to the Cthulhu conjurations, which provides 'the formulae by which the wreakers of havoc perform their Rites'. These are the conjurations of the 'hidden priests' of the creatures that were defeated by Marduk, and here the author identifies Tiamat, 'the Ancient Worm', with Kutulu, slain by Marduk, 'yet who lies not dead, but dreaming', which is the manner by which Cthulhu is described by Lovecraft.(104) The demons evoked are from the Sumero-Babylonian traditions; such as Humwawa,(105) Pazuzu,(106) and Lilit[h].(107)

Given that Tiamat is the dragon or great worm of the primal chaos and moreover of the sea in Mesopotamian legend, defeated by Marduk,(108) the analogies between these Mesopotamian myths and the Lovecraftian theme of the Great Old Ones defeated by the Elder Gods, seems sufficiently close to contrive a convincing and workable system of occult theory and practise. At any rate, it captured the imagination of a sufficient number of Cthulhuan aspirants to prompt the Church of Satan to set up a website to 'answer the large amount of e-mail the Church of Satan continually receives concerning this purported book, the *Necronomicon*, and its history and validity'.(109) The author of the Church's response, Peter Gilmore, who assumed the role of High Priest on LaVey's death, states that he had conversed with Herman Slater of Magical Child about the book, who told Gilmore that the number of requests about the existence of a *Necronomicon* clearly showed that there was a large market for such a volume:

The book thus fabricated by the mysterious Simon is an artful blend of pseudo-Sumerian and Goetic ritual, with names crafted to resemble those of Lovecraft's invented monster gods. More importantly for many would-be Black Magicians who bought copies, it had performable rites and plenty of arcane sigils. It was more than enough to sucker-in the gullible and it still sells well today.(110)

However, within the context of LaVeyan Satanism, this certainly does not mean that the Simon *Necronomicon* is without value. It could not consistently be stated otherwise, as LaVeyan ritual, including the Lovecraftian rites written by Aquino for LaVey's *Satanic Rituals* (also published by Avon Books) are also contrived with introductory histories for each no more nor less accurate than those of the Simon tome. The advice of Gilmore is simply that one should not be fooled into thinking that the rites are authentic and arcane, regardless of whatever practical use they might be in shifting one's consciousness. This accords with the nature of LaVeyan Satanism, as distinct from the schools of thought developed by Crowley, Grant, et al, that the entities being called upon are symbolic and without any objective existence on any plane. In that respect, LaVeyan Satanism is a form of 'atheism' with ritual trappings that are not claimed to be anything but 'psychodramas'.(111)

CONCLUSION

While Tolkien penned his Ring Trilogy as a Mythos for Britain that he hoped would prompt a rejection of materialism and industrialism, having a strong moral outlook in regard to waging a chivalric war against 'evil', inspired by the Heathen ethos of England and Northern Europe; Lovecraft was quite different. He was a rationalist, who eschewed any notion that his stories and the nightmares that inspired them had any cosmic or moral consequences. Nonetheless, Lovecraft's mythos has taken on a life of its own in precisely the same manner Lovecraft lamented the emergence of such crypto-religious and mythic revivals in his own time. Not surprisingly, the mythos has attracted the perverse fascination of occultists who are drawn to the 'dark' and 'chaotic' sides of life and the cosmos. There are moreover sufficient hints in the Lovecraft stories around which an entire occult system of theory and practise can be woven, especially when synthesised with other dark forms of occultism such as those of Crowley. Since the occult, and indeed in the wider context religion, has since times immemorial been based in no small measure upon

dreams, dream interpretations and visions, often wilfully invoked by the use of rituals or of drugs, it is entirely fitting that some occultists would conclude that Lovecraft was unwillingly tapping into the astral plane, or what Jung called the collective unconscious, where there exist many atavisms repressed into the subconscious since the dawn of humanity, awaiting conscious awakening. Whether one calls such archetypes gods and devils is a matter of semantics or moral relativity. The Lovecraft mythos is just as 'legitimate' – or otherwise – as any other form of occultism or mysticism, and if it has sufficient force to impact upon the psyche then it is at least as proficient as any other, whether old or new.

1. J G Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1987), 11.
2. See for example the 'Table of Correspondence' in: Aleister Crowley, *777 and other Qabalistic Writings* (Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1986), 2-38.
3. Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 67.
4. Nevill Drury, *Music for Inner Space: Techniques for Meditation and Visualisation* (Sydney: Prism Press, 1985), 'Foreword'.
5. Adrian Savage, *An Introduction to Chaos Magick* (New York: Magickal Childe, 1988).
6. Magical symbol.
7. Carl Jung writing to a patient. Gerhard Adler and Aniela Jaffe (eds.) *Selected Letters of C G Jung* (Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 459.
8. *Daniel*, Chapter 5.
9. Pat Zalewski, *Gold Dawn Enochian Magic* (Minnesota, Llewellyn Publications, 1990).
10. Fra. Tenebrous, *Cults of Cthulhu: H P Lovecraft and the Occult Tradition* (Daath Press, 1993), 9.
11. Esoteric Order of Dagon, <http://www.esotericorderofdagon.org/>
12. Fra. Tenebrous, *Cults of Cthulhu*, op.cit., p. 5.
13. J T Joshi, *Introduction to An Epicure in the Terrible: A Centennial Anthology of Essays in Honor of H. P. Lovecraft* (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991), II.
14. J T Joshi, *ibid.*, quoting Lovecraft.
15. Owen Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 266.
16. Owen Davies, *ibid.*, p. 265.
17. Margaret Murray, *The Witch-Cult of Western Europe*, 1921.
18. Margaret Murray wrote the 'Preface' to Gardner's seminal 1954 book *Witchcraft Today* (New York: Magickal Childe, 1982), pp. 15-16.
19. Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 1681.
20. Remigius, *Daemonolatreia*, 1595.
21. Owen Davies, op.cit., p. 265.
22. Owen Davies, *ibid.*, p. 266.
23. George Hay (ed.) *The Necronomicon: The Book of Dead Names* (London: Skoob Books, 1992), Robert Turner, 'The Necronomicon: A Commentary', p. 69.
24. H P Lovecraft, 'The Call of Cthulhu', *Weird Tales*, Vol. 11, No., 2, February 1928, Miskatonic University, <http://www.yankeeclassic.com/miskatonic/library/stacks/literature/lovecraft/stories/callcthu.htm> (accessed on September 29, 2010).
25. *Ibid.*
26. R'yleh, a city that first appears in Lovecraft's *Call of Cthulhu*, where Cthulhu lies buried, dreaming.
27. Fra Tenebrous, op.cit., p. 10.
28. High Priests of the Eskimo, suppressed by the Christian missionaries. Hinrich Rink, *Danish Greenland: Its People and its Products* (H S King, 1877; republished by General Books, 2009), p. 91.
29. Fra. Tenebrous, op.cit., p. 10.
30. J T Joshi, op.cit.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
32. H P Lovecraft, 'The Call of Cthulhu', op.cit.
33. Fra. Tenebrous, op.cit., p. 11.
34. Alex Owen, op.cit., p. xvii.
35. Colin Wilson, *Aleister Crowley: The Nature of The Beast* (Northamptonshire, The Aquarian Press, 1987), p. 45.
36. Colin Wilson, *ibid.*, p. 102.

37. Aleister Crowley, *The Law is for All* (Arizona: Falcon Press, 1985), p. 101.
38. Crowley, *Liber CXCV*, 'O.T.O. An Intimation with Reference to the Constitution of the Order', paragraph 21, *The Equinox*, Vol. III, No. 1, 1919.
39. Crowley, *Liber CXCV*, *ibid.*, 'concluding remarks'.
40. Kenneth Grant, *Outside the Circles of Time* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1980), p. 294.
41. Others who claimed to be heirs of Crowley and created their own OTOs or Lodges, included rocket scientist Jack Parsons, who died in a laboratory explosion in 1952; Karl Germer, a German refugee living in New York who inherited Crowley's papers and robes; and a Californian named Grady McMurtry who had received a Lodge charter from Crowley in 1946 and was appointed Crowley's 'Caliph' or spiritual representative. Francis King and Isabel Sutherland, *The Rebirth of Magic* (London: Corgi Books, 1982), pp. 182-184.
42. Michael Staley, 'Typhona Ordo Templi Orientis: A Brief History', 1986, <http://user.cyberlink.ch/~koenig/dplanet/staley/staley1.htm> (accessed on September 27, 2010).
43. Michael Staley, 'Typhonian Ordo Templi Orientis: The OTO after Crowley', <http://user.cyberlink.ch/~koenig/dplanet/staley/staley2.htm> (accessed on September 27, 2010).
44. Grant etymologically derives the name Typhon as the Greek form for the Egyptian name Ta-Urt, 'Mother of Set'. Kenneth Grant, *Outside the Circles of Time*, *op.cit.*, pp. 292-293.
45. Helena Blavatsky, founder of Theosophy, who claimed that a *Book of Dzyan* existed in an astral Tibetan realm, and formed the basis for her seminal *Secret Doctrine* (Madras, The Theosophical Publishing House, 1978); first published 1888. This set in motion a renewed tendency of occultists to claim revealed wisdom or a special mandate from 'Secret' or 'Hidden Chiefs', one of the more recent being the claim by Dr Michael Aquino, formerly of US Military Intelligence, to have received *The Book of Coming Forth by Night*, from the Egyptian deity Set, which mandated the forming of the Temple of Set. Arthur Lyons, *Satan Wants You: The Cult of Devil Worship in America* (New York: The Mysterious Press, 1988), pp. 126-127.
46. McGregor Mathers, a founder of the Order of the Golden Dawn, Ellic Howe, *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn: A Documentary History of a Magical Order 1887-1923* (Northamptonshire: The Aquarian Press, 1985).
47. Aleister Crowley claimed to be the prophet of a new aeon through the transmission of *The Book of the Law* by a messenger of the Gods, Aiwaz. Colin Wilson, *Aleister Crowley: The Nature of the Beast* (Northamptonshire: The Aquarian Press, 1987), pp. 71-72.
48. Kenneth Grant, *Outside the Circles of Time*, *op.cit.*, p. 167.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
50. *Genesis* 37:5-10 (Jacob's dreams), *Matt.* 1: 20-24 (Joseph's dream of Jesus' birth), *The Revelation* (John's visions), etc.
51. One of several spellings, as determined by numerological factors.
52. Kenneth Grant, *Images and Oracles of Austin Osman Spare* (n.d. or publication details). The once widely acclaimed artist Spare withdrew from society and existed in poverty to devote himself to the painting and writing of his hellish visions, and performing magic, the basis of which was 'dream control', masturbation, meditation upon sigils, and auto-suffocation via the so-called 'death posture'.
53. Kenneth Grant, *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1974), p. 94.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
55. Kenneth Grant, *Aleister Crowley and the Hidden God*, *op.cit.*, pp. 35-36.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
57. Kenneth Grant, *The Magical Revival* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1972), pp. 115-116.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

59. Kenneth Grant, *Cults of the Shadow* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1975), p. 165. Grant also states that the Monastery of the Seven Rays is the 'Outer Court of the Black Snake Cult', and is a 'cell of the OTOA, or Ordo Templi Orientis Antiqua', a Thelemic order. Grant, *ibid.*, p. 166.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 186-187.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
64. As a representative example see Grant, *Outside the Circles of Time*, *op.cit.*, p. 290, where Shaitan is identified as the Chaldean form of Set, worshipped by the Yezidis, with Crowley being, according to Grant, a reincarnation of the prophet Yezid who revived the Cult of Shaitan/Set. Shaitan is also identified with Aiwass (Aiwaz and variant spellings according to numerology), the extraterrestrial messenger of the Gods who supposedly dictated *Liber al vel Legis* to Crowley as the bible of the New Aeon.
65. For an historical survey on the concept of evil and its representation by demonic entities, see: Paul Carus, *The History of the Devil and the Idea of Evil – From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (Illinois: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1974).
66. The anarchist Mikhail Bakunin wrote for example: 'The Evil One is the satanic revolt against divine authority, revolt in which we see the fecund germ of all human emancipations, the revolution...' Mikhail Bakunin, *God & State* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), p. 112. Baudelaire: 'All-knowing lord of subterranean things/ Who remedy our human sufferings,/ Satan have pity on my long despair!...' Charles Baudelaire, Marthiel and Jackson Mathews (ed.) 'Litany to Satan', *Flowers of Evil* (New York: New Directions, 1962), p. 172.
67. 'War of the Worlds', 2005, director Steven Spielberg, starring Tom Cruise.
68. H P Lovecraft, 'The Dunwich Horror', *Weird Tales*, Vol. 13, no. 14, April 1929, pp. 481-508, Miskatonic University Press, <http://www.yankeeclassic.com/miskatonic/library/stacks/literature/lovecraft/novellas/dunwich.htm> (accessed September 29, 2010).
69. Phil Hine, 'H P Lovecraft: Visionary of the Void', <http://www.scribd.com/doc/3054993/Chaos-Magick-Using-The-Cthulhu-Mythos-by-Phil-Hine> (accessed on September 29, 2010).
70. The Esoteric Order of Dagon, <http://www.esotericorderofdagon.org/eod%20additional%20information.html> (accessed on September 29, 2010).
71. Arthur Lyons, *Satan Wants You : The Cult of Devil Worship in America* (New York; the Mysterious press, 1988), Chapter VIII, The Church of Satan, pp. 104-124.
72. Anton S LaVey, *The Satanic Bible* (New York: Avon Books, 1969).
73. Anton S LaVey, *The Satanic Rituals* (New York: Avon Books, 1972).
74. Michael A Aquino, 'The Metaphysics of Lovecraft', *The Satanic Rituals*, *op.cit.* My reference is: Michael A Aquino, *The Church of Satan* (Temple of Set, 1989), Appendix 69: 'The Metaphysics of Lovecraft'.
75. *Ibid.*
76. *Genesis* 6:4.
77. Michael A Aquino, *The Church of Satan*, *op.cit.*, 'Appendix 70: "The Ceremony of the Nine Angles"'.
78. All of the 'satanic rituals' end with a 'hail' to some demon, devil or deity, and with the 'sign of the horns'.
79. Michael A Aquino, *The Church of Satan*, *op.cit.*, 'Appendix 71: "The Call of Cthulhu"'.
80. Michael A Aquino, *Nyctalops Magazine*, No. 13, May 1977; reprinted in Aquino, *The Church of Satan*, *op.cit.* Appendix 72: 'Lovecraftian Ritual'.

81. Donald C Laycock, *The Complete Enochian Dictionary: A Dictionary of the Angelic Language as Revealed to Dr John Dee and Edward Kelley* (London: Askini Publishers, 1978). I have heard Enochian spoken fluently by the New Zealand occultist and author Pat Zalewski when he was working as a Tarot reader at a Wellington market, and can attest to its efficacy upon the ear.
82. Aquino, *The Church of Satan*, op.cit., Appendix 72.
83. Michal A Aquino, ibid., Appendix 55: 'Expedition to R'lyeh', reprinted from *The Cloven Hoof* #6, July-August, 1972.
84. H P Lovecraft, *Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1936)
<http://www.yankeeclassic.com/miskatonic/library/stacks/literature/lovecraft/novellas/shadowin4.htm>
 (accessed on September 29, 2010).
85. Obed Marsh, 'An Introduction to the Esoteric Order of Dagon' (Oregon: Yaddish Lodge, 2007), p. 3.
86. Esoteric Order of Dagon,
<http://www.esotericorderofdragon.org/eod%20additional%20information.html> (accessed September 29, 2010).
87. Crowley's Thelema (Will) Aeon is numerologically designated 'Current 93'.
88. Obed Marsh, 'An Introduction to the Esoteric Order of Dagon' (Oregon: Yaddish Lodge, 2007), p. 2.
89. Ibid., p. 3.
90. Kenneth Grant, *Outside the Circles of Time*, op.cit., p. 289.
91. Obed Marsh, op.cit., p. 7.
92. Brazilian author, psychotherapist and astrologer. Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica is the ecclesiastical branch of the OTO.
93. Nema, aka Andahadna, declared the Aeon of Maat in Ohio in 1976. Kenneth Grant, *Outside the Circles of Time*, op.cit., pp. 137-163.
94. Michael Aquino broke with LaVey's Church of Satan in 1975, and declared the Aeon of Set. Arthur Lyons, op.cit., pp. 126-127.
95. H P Lovecraft, 'The Hound', *Weird Tales*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 50-52, 78.
<http://www.yankeeclassic.com/miskatonic/library/stacks/literature/lovecraft/stories/hound.htm> (accessed on September 29, 2010).
96. Ibid.
97. H P Lovecraft, 'The History of The Necronomicon', Miskatonic University,
<http://www.yankeeclassic.com/miskatonic/library/stacks/literature/lovecraft/stories/hplnecro.htm>
 (accessed on September 29, 2010). The reader is referred to the large collection of archives at Miskatonic University, Department of Literature,
<http://www.yankeeclassic.com/miskatonic/dliterature/authors/lovecraft/hplmain1.htm#hplstories>
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid.
100. *Necronomicon* (New York: Avon Books, 1980), vii.
101. Ibid., x.
102. Ibid., xix.
103. Ibid., xxxix.
104. *Necronomicon*, op.cit., 'The Urilith Text', 183.
105. Brother of Pazuzu, with a beard of human entrails.
106. Demon of famine and locusts.
107. In the Talmudic tradition of Judaism Lilith is Adam's first wife. She is derived from a class of Sumerian demonesses, the lilitu.
108. George Smith (Tr.) *Chaldean Account of Genesis* (Minneapolis: Wizards Book Shelf, 1977), pp. 91-99.

109. Peter H Gilmore, 'Necronomicon: some Facts about a Fiction', Church of Satan, <http://www.churchofsatan.com/Pages/FAQnecronomicon.html> (accessed on September 29, 2010).

110. Ibid.

111. Anton S LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, op.cit., 'The Book of Belial', pp. 137-134.

**Providence and Intertextuality:
LeFanu, M. R. James, and Dorothy Sayers' *The Nine Tailors***

Helen Conrad-O'Briain

Sayers' interest in Sheridan LeFanu, Wilkie Collins, and, to a lesser extent, M. R. James is well known.(1) The gothic quality of her *The Nine Tailors* is often assumed if not clearly acknowledged.(2) Its relationship with works like *Wylder's Hand*, *The Moonstone* or M.R. James' 'ghost stories' should not, however, be construed as simply literary *homage*.(3) A careful reading of *The Nine Tailors* (1934), perhaps the best of her novels of detection, suggests Sayers purposefully deployed her mastery of their material to re-align the genre in which she worked to suit it to the 'old theme' of her sub-title, divine providence, resulting in the first of her confessional works. *The Nine Tailors* is not undifferentiated Gothic, it is ecclesiastical Gothic.

'Tolling bells, hidden manuscripts, [and] ancestral curses'(4)

There has always been a connection between the detection of crime and supernatural powers. Sayers made the connection herself in her introduction to the Gollancz collection *Great Short Stories, of Detection, Mystery and Horror*: Blood cries to heaven; unearthly powers awake. The restless dead will importune friend and stranger.(5) *The Nine Tailors*, albeit suggestive rather than lurid in its treatment, belongs to this tradition, but with an important difference. The detection is left to human agency; the crime, if it can be called such, is providential. *The Nine Tailors*, contains a substantial number of 'Gothic' commonplaces. It is a legitimate descendant of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), and even more so of Clara Reeves' naturalized and to some extent rationalized gothic tale, *The Old English Baron* (1778; first published anonymously as *The Champion of Virtue*, 1777), both of which are in essence murder mysteries.(6) All murder must border on the *outré*, but in *The Nine Tailors* Dorothy Sayers grafted the narrative of crime and detection back onto its Gothic roots. It begins with benighted travelers. It is set in an ancient church, overshadowed by the memory, if not the actual presence, of a long-dead abbot whose identification with his great bell is suggested as popular local belief.(7) There is theft of treasure, a wronged noble family, a dispossessed heiress, a mutilated body, a desecrated grave, a cipher, a noble and dis-interested hero, a deliciously evil villain (who is, in the best tradition, something of a lothario) killed by mysterious and providential means – and finally a cataclysm. However, because these *recherché* features have been integrated so thoroughly into Sayer's present-day tale (here at least Edmund Wilson had something of the right of it)(8) she must remind her reader of the horror tricked out in the commonplaces of the present, by reference to other horrors and to the Gothic narratives of her literary forbearers.(9) But if she is closer to Reeves in the transposition of the foreign to the local and the impossible to the plausible, *The Nine Tailors* nevertheless returns to Walpole's (and Reeve's) supernatural/providential punishment of the criminal.

Almost none of Sayers' novels are exclusively murder mysteries. She acknowledged this herself.(10) With the exception of *Five Red Herrings* (1931) the murder puzzle is not at the heart of her narratives. From her first novel, *Whose Body?*(1923), her stories most often accommodate a generic detective plot, but one directed by a particular ethical/social problem (in *The Nine Tailors*, a theological one), exemplified in the narrative and its characters. The murder is set in motion by this leading problem,

shared or exacerbated by society at large. This warping informs the larger social and circumstantial setting of sub-plots, clearly affecting characters' attitudes and actions.(11)

We should then accept Sayers' word that she attempted more than a detective story in *The Nine Tailors*. Whether we take her assertion she aimed at a 'comedy' of manners or 'poetic romance' literally is another matter.(12) The novel is not a comedy in the modern meaning although it is arguably a *commedia* in the medieval. It is, however, 'romantic' in the sense of participating in the characteristics and commonplaces of 'romantic' or Gothic narrative. In *The Nine Tailors* there are at least three strands:

1. The mystery of the murder itself – a cleverer puzzle than is often acknowledged, turning on the inability of nearly all involved (13) to rid themselves of presuppositions and assumptions.
2. A complex inter-textual conversation between two closely related categories of gothic fiction involving three of its most successful craftsmen –M. R. James, Wilkie Collins, and Sheridan Le Fanu, to whom she literally calls attention in Deacon's cipher. (14)
3. A consideration of divine providence ambiguously referenced during the narrative but given an orthodox presentation by Mr. Venables at its end in the manner of the moralizations of the *Gesta Romanorum* or the exempla of the medieval sermon tradition.(15)

It is always difficult to be certain if shared material, particularly when well digested in its adaptation, is mediated by the cumulative effect of many texts or reflects conscious recollection of a specific work. On balance, in *The Nine Tailors* the accumulation of such reminiscences or echoes, some minor embellishments, some part of the structure of the narrative, joined with her own critical writings, suggests the writer's larger purpose uses such inter-textuality to direct the reader's understanding of the narrative's purpose by reminding them of other cognate narratives. This recollection, leaving aside the flattering intellectual pleasure of recognition, enlarges the meaning of the present text, directs the reader's reaction to events, and prepares them to accept a particular reading at the dénouement. But Sayers relationship with these texts is complicated and, at times, almost ironic, she embraces the Gothic only to spurn it in the best reforming spirit as in Mrs. Ashton's narrative of the Thoday children's fright (16) or in the cautious agnosticism of Jack Godfrey. (17)

The sheer weight of the shared material and its transposition in Sayers is worth considering. I would not suggest the following lists are exhaustive:

Collins: *The Moonstone* (18)

Plot revolves around theft of cursed diamond
Theft committed unwittingly by 'hero'

Nine Tailors

Plot revolves around theft of emerald necklace spoken of as cursed (19)
'Murder' committed unwittingly by 'hero' and innocent associates

Le Fanu: *Wylder's Hand*

A major character (Mark Wylder) is assumed alive when actually dead.
The sighting of another man confuses the issue
The discovery of the body sets in motion the dénouement
A proposed marriage precipitates

Nine Tailors

A major character (Deacon) is assumed dead when actually alive.
The sighting of another man confuses the issue
The discovery of the body sets in motion the 'mystery plot'.
A marriage provides the cir-

the murder	circumstances of the first crime
Wylder's hand reveals him	Deacon's lack of hands conceals him

The shared motifs can be called commonplaces. There is narrative inversion: the assumption of Wylder's living is to *Wylder's Hand* what the assumption of Deacon's death is to *Nine Tailors*. The effect which the discovery of the bodies has on each narrative is also inverted. The identification of Wilder's body solves the mystery; the identity of Deacon's body is the mystery.(20) Arguably, only Sayers' interpolation of material from the novel would draw attention to any connection between the two:

Le Fanu: *The House by the Churchyard* *Nine Tailors*

The vicarage is a pivotal site	The vicarage is a pivotal site
The River Liffey plays an important role	The River Wale and the fen drains play a pivotal role
The discovery of a mutilated skull sets the narrative in motion	The discovery of a mutilated body sets the mystery in motion
A deathbed confession solves the murder	A sickbed confession solves the murder
A wronged 'noble' family	A wronged 'noble' family
Wronged family restored to position and prosperity in the next generation	Wronged family restored to position and prosperity in the next generation
A young family left fatherless	A young family left fatherless
A question of bigamy	A question of bigamy

At least three of M. R. James' stories are relevant to *The Nine Tailors*: 'An Episode of Cathedral History', 'The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral', and 'The Treasure of Abbot Thomas'. But if the reader approaches James' stories without the direction of his collection titles – beginning with *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* – s/he will find more murderers than ghosts. 'Martin's Close', 'The Ash-Tree', 'The Haunted Doll's House', 'A School Story', 'The Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance', 'Casting the Runes', 'Lost Hearts', 'Two Doctors' and 'The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral' are all in a sense murder mysteries with the inbuilt assumption that 'murder will out'. The antiquarianism of *Nine Tailors* owes more to James than to Le Fanu. In *The House by the Churchyard*, Le Fanu hovers between historical fiction and the gothic mystery, but does not use antiquarian pursuits to enter or propel the narrative. James' use of antiquarian conceits is essential, but fluid. His stories often rely on the past to set up present problems. Others stories are set entirely in the past except for a frame story that discovers the narrative by means of historical/antiquarian research. *The Nine Tailors* shares the typical Jamesian use of 'practical scholarship' to understand and solve present problems: the past must be known and understood to properly deal with the problems of the present. In Sayers' novel, Wimsey needs to understand the placement of the old galleries and the date of their removal just as much as the Chapter of Southminster, in James' 'An Episode of Cathedral History', needed to know (but did not) the history of their own cathedral's furnishings. Batty Thomas, both bell and abbot, are as important to Sayers' narrative as Canon de Mauléon and his scrapbook are to James'(21).

Sayers had made a decision not to frame her Wimsey stories – an option open to her if she had desired to follow Conan Doyle or James. That she did not suggests that the time lag exploited by both was counterproductive to her, far more socially involved, stories. Today's readers may revel as much in the

period atmosphere as in the plot or characters, but that period atmosphere was once up to the minute social realism, albeit with a often gently satiric colouring. Sayers judged her audience's tastes and her own message to require the immediate not the distanced:

<u>James: <i>Collected Stories</i></u>	<u><i>Nine Tailors</i></u>
narrative focused on church	narrative focused on church
object which should not be removed	object which should be removed is
Commanding presence in Church: Lady Sadlier	Commanding presence in Church: Abbot Thomas
power focused in church fittings	power focused in church fittings
Biblical cipher	Biblical cipher
Importance of well name Gaudy and history	Importance of well name Gaudy and history

While Sayers draws attention to Le Fanu's *Wylder's Hand*, and more generally to its author, through Deacon's cipher, she acknowledges her debt to James with more subtlety. Wimsey is introduced to the reader as a serious collector of incunabula as early as the opening pages of *Whose Body?*. It is perfectly reasonable, then, that the scholarly Venables will recognize him only in connection with his *Notes on the Collection of Incunabula* (12) and only later, in a moment of mild humour, as an infamous dilettante detective (91) and offer to show Wimsey his own books, particularly his own incunabula *Gospel of Nicodemus*. M. R. James' editions of the apocryphal gospels are still the scholarly standard. The *Gospel of Nicodemus* is of course particularly appropriate to *Nine Tailors*: its narrative heart is the harrowing of hell and the dead literally rising from their graves in an expansion of Acts 2.24 and Mathew 27:52. The Gaudy family tombs, 'They lived here up to Queen Elizabeth's time, but they've all died out now' (57), represent a pointed reference to James' Gawdys in 'The Mezzotint'.(22) Abbot Thomas himself may recall the German Abbot Thomas of 'The Treasure of Abbot Thomas', (23) although Sayers gives the concealment of treasure and the making of a cipher to another character. Sayers shares James' preoccupation with ecclesiastical restoration (24): 'The east window is Theodore's bête noire. That dreadful crude glass – about 1840, I think it is. Quite the worst period, Theodore says.'(43) In 'An Episode of Cathedral History' James wrote: 'It was in 1840 that the wave of Gothic revival smote the Cathedral of Southminster.'(25) This story by James contains, like *The Nine Tailors*, a lovingly described a nighttime visit to the church with remarks on the effect:

<u><i>Nine Tailors</i> James: 'An Episode of Cathedral History'</u>	
The tiny ray of the the lantern picked out here the poppy-head on a pew, here the angle of a stone pillar, here the gleam of of brass from a mural tablet. (28-9)	light wavering along the length of the church, and up the steps into the choir until it was intercepted by some screen or other furniture, which only allowed the reflection to be seen on the piers and the roof. (26)

James has nothing of the slightly comic interlude of the 'powerful ecclesiastical odour, compounded of ancient wood, varnish, dry rot, hassocks, hymn books, paraffin lamps, flowers and candles all gently baking in the warmth of slow-combustion stoves' (28). His humorous interlude in answer to Mr. Lake's

question ‘Did you ever find anybody here locked in by accident?’(27) has its own place and narrative relevance in a tale of what was let out by ill-judged deliberation. And while James’ description moves along the length of the church and upwards, Sayers line of sight is relatively restricted in height, reserving the magnificent cherubim and seraphim of Fen Church St. Paul for a set piece of their own.(28)

What is the point of this emulation, if not intellectual homage? Entering the orbit of these works hands Sayers a number of subtle but suggestive tools. She has crossed over into a genre that presupposes the supernatural, generally an a-confessional supernatural. The gothic quality of Collins and more particularly, Le Fanu, calls up, within and around a crime, a sense of foreboding, not merely of the inevitability of discovery and punishment, but the miasmatic weight of some cosmic order seeking to right itself. While this silent presence is not identified in these texts as the Christian God (quite the opposite in *The Moonstone*), it nevertheless places the actions of the characters within a larger setting, calling up, at the very least, the atavistic fear of ill fortune and at times an almost palpable nemesis. Even M.R. James, who is closest to Sayers in formal belief, always left some distance between vengeance and providence – as Sayers does until the final page of *The Nine Tailors*.

This intertextuality is not merely homage to these authors. Charles Williams’ reaction to the novel must have been what Sayers half hoped, half feared of her audience.(29) It almost subliminally directs the reader’s reaction to events and prepares them to accept Mr. Venables Christian reading of the dénouement:

‘There have always,’ he said, ‘been legends about Batty Thomas. She has slain two men in times past, and Hezekiah will tell you that the bells are said to be jealous in the presence of evil. Perhaps God speaks through those mouths of inarticulate metal. He is a righteous judge, strong and patient, and is provoked ever day.’ (350)

The pattern of reminiscences and borrowings in the context of her shifting or re-positioning of this murder mystery away from the intellectual puzzle and towards the novel of manners suggest that the ‘manners’ she wishes to dramatize are her countrymen’s complex relationship not merely with the established Church, or even Christianity, but ultimately with God. The novel is punctuated by biblical references and ethical/spiritual concerns occasioned not only by the setting, but also by the circumstances. Wimsey speaks more truly than he knows when he remarks to Mr. Venables early in the novel: ‘being in and about this church brings eternity too close.’ (32)

This positioning begins in an almost querulous register in the Forward:

From time to time complaints are made about the ringing of church bells. It seems strange that a generation which tolerates the uproar of the internal combustion engine and the wailing of the jazz band should be sensitive to the one loud noise that is made to the Glory of God.(4)(30)

The Nine Tailors is not the first of her mysteries to include extended references to Christianity, particularly Anglican Christianity. In *Unnatural Death* as well as *Strong Poison* we are treated to the spiritual delicacies of Miss Clemson, references in which gentle humor is restrained by respect. And in the former novel too, Sayers introduces a brief, but arresting commentary on Wimsey’s ethical and spiritual life, placed (unusually for her) in the interior voice from the vicar with whom Wimsey has discussed the morality of euthanasia.(31) In *The Nine Tailors*, however, religious scruples are not an interlude, mildly comic or otherwise. The setting and the intertwining of events with the high days of the Church year, from the ‘devil’s bargain’ (312) and Deacon’s death during the days of peace to the resurrection of his body in Eastertide to the apocalyptic flood on the feast of St. John (traditional author of

both the Gospel and the Book of Revelations), form an inescapable Christian setting and commentary on actions and motives.

The real thread of this crypto-spiritual tale, from Mr. Venables' 'Isn't it wonderful?' [...] 'Is it not really providential? That just at this moment we should be sent a guest who is actually a ringer and accustomed to ringing Kent Treble Bob?' (20) to its ending, with his *mistice* or *moralisatio* (32), is the working out and recognition of God's providence. Until the moment Wimsey is revealed as a ringer, the vocabulary of coincidence and happenstance has been 'fortunate, unfortunate, fortunately, unfortunately' (15, 16, 19, 20). After that, fortune recedes from Sayers' vocabulary. The providential arrival of another ringer signs Deacon's death warrant. There is in retrospect, a dark irony about Mr. Venables' insistence: 'I cannot get over the amazing coincidence of your arrival. It shows the wonderful way in which Heaven provides even for our pleasures, if they be innocent.' (21) Mr. Venables introduces Wimsey to the other ringers as 'providentially sent to us' (23), and to his congregation, adapting Milton's *Comus*, (33) as 'sent "by what men call chance"' (38). The ringing of the peal and, with it, Deacon's life are in the balance until Jack Godfrey, who 'no doubt [...] wants to get home to his supper' and '[...] has the key of the bell-chamber' (31)(34), rings Batty Thomas himself, making what can hardly be described as an informed decision to be 'unaccountably deaf' (32) which effectively signs Deacon's death warrant.

Sayers, in effect, has created an Augustinian if not Augustinian-inspired exemplum of providence working through free human wills:

Moreover, even if there is in God's mind a definite pattern of causation, it does not follow that nothing is left to the free choice of our will. For in fact, our wills also are included in the pattern of causation certainly known to God and embraced in his foreknowledge. For the wills of men are among the causes of the deeds of men, and so he who foresaw the causes of all things cannot have been ignorant of our wills among those causes, since he foresaw that these wills are the causes of our deeds. In his [God's] will lies the supreme power, that strengthens the good wills of created spirits, judges the evil wills, and subjects them all to his divine order. (*De civitate Dei* V. ix)(35)

The reader is reminded, at Deacon's graveside, 'God moves in mysterious ways' as Sayers leads her characters in conversation and thought around the hymn's title (115, 120). She even alludes to the complexities and confusions of the concept of providence with a touch light enough to put neither theologian nor atheist off their reading:

'We mustn't question the ways of Providence,' said the Rector.

'Providence?' said the old woman. 'Don't yew talk to me about Providence. I've had enough o' Providence. First he took my husband, and then he took my 'taters, but there's One above as'll teach him to mend his manners, if he don't look out.'

The Rector was too much distressed to challenge this remarkable piece of Theology.

'We can but trust in God, Mrs. Giddings,' he said, and pulled up the starting-handle with a jerk. (81-2)

It is within an Augustinian setting Mr. Venables will console and counsel Wimsey:

[...] it does not do for us to take too much thought for the morrow. It is better to follow the truth and leave the result in the hand of God. He can foresee where we cannot, because He knows all the facts. (271)

As the novel draws to a close through the final cataclysm of the flood which will both reveal the manner of Deacon's death and claim the tragic soul of Will Thoday, a character worthy of Hardy, Mr. Venables will speak in conformity to his principles and recall to the reader what is played out on the page:

We have taken our precautions. Two Sundays ago I warned the congregation what might happen [...] Yes, yes. The first thing to do is to ring the alarm. They know what that means, thank God! They learnt it during the War. I never thought I should thank God for the War, but He moves in a mysterious way. (334-5)

Within the changes of this world, as Hezekiah tells Wimsey, 'Yew ain't no call to be afeard o' the bells if so be as yew follows righteousness.' But the bells 'know well who's a-haulin' of 'un. Wunnerful understandin' they is. They can't abide a wicked man. They lays in wait to overthrow 'un.' (272). Within this theology and narrative men make their own fate, as providence slowly brings all things back into harmony. Deacon, a ringer, their servant, never ceases to think in terms of the Fen Church bells, and his choice of Fen Church St. Paul for the hiding place of his theft and shame places him in their power at his end:

He left Hezekiah and went into the church, stepping softly as though he feared to rouse up something from its sleep. Abbot Thomas was quiet in his tomb; the cherubims, open-eyed and open-mouthed, were absorbed in their everlasting contemplation; far over him he felt the patient watchfulness of the bells. (272-3)

Men and angels and all this great creation wait on the revelation of God's justice.

1. Dorothy L. Sayers, 'Introduction' in *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror* (Gollancz: London, 1928), repr. in *The Art of the Mystery Story*, ed. by Howard Haycraft (Carroll and Graf: New York, 1983), pp 71-109, at 86-92; see also 'There's a book of very gruesome grues in the library, called *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* by James – very nice and nasty.' Letter to her parents, January 26, 1913. In *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers 1899-1936: The Making of a Detective Novelist*, chosen and edited Barbara Reynolds pref. P. D. James (Stodder and Stoughton: London 1996), pp 70-1.
2. All references are to Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Nine Tailors: Changes Rung on an Old Theme in Two Sort Touches and Two Full Peals* (Gollancz London, 1934).
3. Sayers, besides a quotation from Edgar Allan Poe's 'Berenice' at the beginning of 'The Fifth Part: The Dodging' in *The Nine Tailors*, p.310, uses in it an extended reference (317-8) to Jean Sermetet, 'The Rosamonde', *The Strand Magazine*, vol 8 (1894), 450-4. *I would like to acknowledge the help of Ms. Jasmine Simone of the Dorothy L. Sayers' Society in locating the full reference for this work.
4. Linda Bayer-Berenbaum, *The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Gothic Literature and Art* (Toronto: Associated UP, 1982), p.21.
5. See R. C. Finucane, *Appearances of the Dead: A Cultural History of the Dead* (Junction Books: London, 1982)
6. Reeves writes in her introduction to *The Old English Baron* 'to unite the various merits and graces of the ancient Romance and modern Novel. To attain this end, there is required a sufficient degree of the marvelous, to excite the attention; enough of the manners of real life, to give an air of probability to the work; and enough of the pathetic, to engage the heart in its behalf.'; Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, Clara Reeves, *The Old English Baron* (Nonsuch Publishing: Stroud and Dublin, 2007), 115.
7. *The Nine Tailors*, p. 74: 'I'm not taking you up to Batty Thomas, Miss Hilary. She's an unlucky bell. What I mean, she's bell that has her fancies and I wouldn't like to risk it [...] she's queer-tempered. They do say that old Batty down below, what had her put up here, was a queer sort of man and his bell's took after him.'
8. '[O]ne of the dullest books I have ever encountered in any field': 'Who cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?', *The New Yorker*, January 20, 1945 repr. *The Art of the Mystery Story*, pp 390-7, at 392.
9. See Dorothy L. Sayers, 'Introduction' *The Omnibus of Crime* (Gollancz: London, 1928), repr. *The Art of the Mystery Story*, pp 71-109, at 72-6.
10. See Sayers' essay on her novel *Gaudy Night* in *Titles to Fame*, ed. Denys K. Roberts (Nelson: London, 1937), repr. *The Art of the Mystery Story*, pp208-221.
11. *Strong Poison* for example introduces an earlier 'shameless woman' in Cremona Garden whose fortune is the catalyst of the murder. *Whose Body?* chillingly twists together the vague, off-hand anti-Semeticism of her contemporary society with the arrogance of the scientific *übermensch*
12. 'Gaudy Night' in *Titles to Fame*, ed. Denys K. Roberts (T. Nelson and Sons: London, 1937), repr in *The Art of the Mystery Story*, pp 208-221 at 210. Her insistence, 'Peter [...] remained untouched by its spiritual conflicts', is only understandable if she equated 'touched' with *conversio*.
13. Mrs. Venables, the centre of practical wisdom in the narrative, correctly identifies the character of the dead man's wife from her handiwork after ironically insisting 'I'm afraid I'm not a Sherlock Holmes.' In doing so, she draws attention to the greater importance of the underclothes than the outer garments to his identity, and adds 'But you don't know he was the man you met. He may be somebody quite different.' *The Nine Tailors*, p. 167.
14. 'I should say that it was written by a person of no inconsiderable literary ability, who had studied the works of Sheridan Lefanu' [...] 'Lefanu, did you say? That's not a bad shot, Bunter. It reminds me a little of that amazing passage in *Wylde's Hand* about Uncle Lorne's dream.' *The Nine Tailors*, pp 212-3.
15. Willard Huntington Wright had described the *Gesta Romanorum* as 'long a mine of suggestions for the modern writer of crime-mystery fiction.' 'Introduction', *The Great Detective Stories* (Scribner's: New York, 1927) repr. *The Art of the Mystery Story*, pp 33-70, at 43.

16. Polly Ashton soothes the Thoday girls' fears with an argument based firmly on the reformers with a touch of the age of reason and an appeal to the children's own familiarity with Lady Thorpe: *Wylder's Hand*: 'Polly being a good girl, she tells 'em there's no call to be frightened, the dead being in the arms of our Saviour and not having the power to come out o' their graves nor to do no harm to nobody. [...] So Polly told Rosie it couldn't have been Lady Thorpe's spirit for that was at rest, and if it had been, Lady Thorpe wouldn't do harm to a living soul; and she said Rosie must a-seen Harry Gotobed's lantern.' *Nine Tailors*, p.162-3. On the reformed orthodoxy of Polly's approach see Peter Marshall, 'Transformations of the ghost story in post-Reformation England' in *The Ghost Story from the Middle ages to the Twentieth Century*, ed Helen Conrad O'Briain and Julie Anne Stevens (Four Courts: Dublin, 2010), pp16-33.

17. *The Nine Tailors*, pp 74-5.

18. Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, ed. Sandra Kemp (Penguin: London, 1998)

19. 'Beastly things,' said Hilary. 'They've killed grandfather, and practically killed Dad, and they've killed Deacon and they'll kill somebody else before long.' *The Nine Tailors*, p. 301.

20. It is worth Deacon's hands are cut off because a scar on one (let alone his fingerprints) would insure his identification. *The Nine Tailors*, p. 316, 318

21. 'Canon Alberic's Scapbook' in *Casting the Runes*, pp 1-13.

22. 'Well, this man that was left was what you find pretty often in that country – the last remains of a very old family. I believe they were lords of the manor at one time. [...] But this fellow could show a row of tombs in the church there that belonged to his ancestors [...] and this man Gawdy (that was the name, to be sure – Gawdy; I thought I should get it - Gawdy)', James, 'The Mezzotint', *Casting the Runes*, p. 25; Cox's note suggests the name was 'probably borrowed from a Norfolk family whose papers were the subject of a historical Manuscripts Commission Report in 1885 which MRJ would almost certainly have known.' *Casting the Runes*, p. 305

23. James, 'The Treasure of Abbot Thomas', *Casting the Runes*, pp 78-96. It might be worth mentioning that the decoration of the Abbot's tomb would be unusual for the period, 'Carved panels decorated the sides of the tomb, and showed various scenes in the life of the abbey; one of them depicted the casting of a bell ...' (*The Nine Tailors*, p. 59) might be compared to that on Count Magnus' tomb in James' 'Count Magnus': 'round the edge were several bands of similar ornament representing various scenes. One was a battle, with canon belching out smoke, and walled towns, and troops of pikemen.', 'Count Magnus', *Casting the Runes*, p.52.

24. On the theme of architectural restoration in James see H Conrad O'Briain, "'The gates of hell shall not prevail against it': Laudian Ecclesia and Victorian culture wars in the ghost stories of M. R. James' in *The Ghost Story*, ed Conrad O'Briain and Stevens, pp47-60.

25. James, 'An Episode of Cathedral History', *Casting the Runes*, pp. 210-27 at 213.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

27. *Ibid*

28. 'The wide nave and shadowy aisles, the lofty span of the chancel arch – crossed, though not obscured, by the delicate fan-tracery [...] Then his gaze, returning to the to the nave, followed the strong yet slender shafting that sprang fountain-like from floor to foliated column-head, spraying into the light, wide arches that carried the clerestory. And there mounting to the steep pitch of the roof, his eyes were held entranced with wonder and delight. Incredibly aloof, flinging back the light in a dusky shimmer of bright hair and gilded outspread wings, soared the ranked angels, cherubim and seraphim, choir over choir, from corbel and hammer-beam floating face to face uplifted. "My God!" muttered Wimsey, not without reverence.' The close reader may also note the reminiscence of Worby and Lake in Mr. Godfrey with his 'old fashioned lantern' leading the way to the church in *The Nine Tailors* (28). James, in his own touch of intertextuality has Lake remark, 'Anyone might think we were Jasper and Durdles over again, mightn't they?' said Lake as they crossed the close- for he had ascertained that the Verger had read *Edwin Drood*. ('An Episode of Cathedral History' in *Casting the Runes*, p.211)

29. 'The ending is stupendous.' *Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers* p. 340, note 1; see also op cit.pp. 400-1.
30. Suggestively, like any *good insular manuscript of the golden age of the English church the forward uses Diminuendo*.
31. Dorothy, L. Sayers, *Unnatural Death* (Ernest Benn Limited: London, 1927), p.227.
32. The terms come from the *Narrationes* of Odo de Cerinton and the *Gesta Romanorum*, respectively, and refer to the spiritual or ethical interpretations provided at the end of a fable or tale. For an easily accessible selection of texts see Charles H. Beeson, ed., *A Primer of Medieval Latin: an Anthology of Prose and Poetry* (Catholic University Press: Washington, ND), pp 42-5, 55-70.
33. Line 588 John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (PUBLISHER'S NAME New York, 1957), p.103.
34. The continuing reference to keys lost and found, used and not used in *The Nine Tailors* is worthy of a study in itself. The misplacement of the keys means not only Deacon dies, but that the body is not found on New Year's day see *The Nine Tailors*, pp 58-9.
35. St. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans* 7vols, with trans. by William M. Green (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1978) Vol. 2, pp 175, 177.

**‘The suffering black male body and the threatened white female body’: ambiguous bodies in
*Candyman***

Lucy Fife Donaldson

Race is not a subject often directly encountered in the horror film, despite the highly charged conflict of black and white constituting a central oppositionary structure in American culture and in its cinema. That this conflict is dramatised in specifically physical terms, as in the threat of miscegenation that permeates the dramatic chase scenes of D. W. Griffith’s films, resonates with the emphasis on the body’s importance for horror’s excesses, so that opposition of black and white bears a suggestive relationship to the poles of monster and victim.(1) Linda Williams, writing on race and melodrama, suggests that there are two key icons which articulate the moral dilemma of race for America: ‘the suffering black male body and the threatened white female body’. (2) Williams’ articulation of these embodiments as entwined, presents a correspondence between aspects of black and white experience (as well as between male and female) which destabilises the more common impulse to see race as opposed, polarised as the language around black and white suggests.

Candyman (Bernard Rose, 1992) marks the introduction of an African-American monster to the horror mainstream. As well as combining a threatening physical presence and gruesome method of attack, Candyman (Tony Todd) seemingly offers an embodiment of divided racial stereotypes based on fears of miscegenation through his attention to the film’s blonde heroine Helen (Virginia Madsen). Elspeth Kydd maintains that ‘*Candyman* takes the fear of miscegenation to an extended monstrous form when the black male body becomes the grotesque site for the eruption of these racial/sexual fears and the white woman’s body the site where these fears are played out’.(3) Although Kydd suggests that ambiguity is created in the film’s treatment of racial stereotyping, ‘the excess of these representations point to both the contradictions and the attractions that allow these stereotypes to perpetuate’, the general tenor of her argument is to see the film as perpetuating the usual oppositions of race and gender.(4) I would like to suggest that the apparent duality of gender, race and character types in the film are challenged by much more complex strategies of embodiment and representation. In particular, the film places emphasis on the connectedness of Candyman and Helen, of monster and victim, who are both ambiguously embodied, becoming more like doubles than clearly defined binary figures.(5) Exploring the roles of monster and victim as experienced through the body points to the way physicality is being used and presented, particularly through performance, to offer further layers of complexity that undermine straightforward binaries of black/white or male/female. From this basis, the article will consider how the relationship between violence and the body affects the presentation of horror’s central roles of victim and monster.

Prefacing his discussion of the embodiment of whiteness, Richard Dyer observes that ‘to represent people is to represent bodies’.(6) Through attention to the physical – the details of the body in movement and expression, as well as its placement within the visual style of the film - I intend to explore how the seemingly fixed roles of monster and victim are in fact more fluid than first apparent, and that these can co-exist in the same body. Candyman’s physicality and the way it is presented foregrounds the oscillations between violence and suffering, the relationship between the body and the violence inflicted on and by it, ambiguities which are also found in Helen’s development, thus enhancing the film’s striking preoccupation with the shifting parallels between monster and victim.

Candyman is centred on the investigations of two research students writing a joint thesis on urban legends: Helen, who is white, and Bernadette (Kasi Lemmons), who is a light skinned African-American or possibly of mixed race. Helen is introduced to the Candyman legend by a white middle-class undergraduate at the University of Chicago, who places him in a suburban setting killing white middle-class teenagers who invoke his presence in the mirror, and then by a couple of African-American cleaners at the university who claim he killed Ruthie-Jean, another African-American woman, in the projects. The tonal and generic contrasts between the stories, as well as the three told later in the film, are central to building ambiguity about the monster before we see him.(7) They also efficiently dramatise a divide between race and class that pervades the film, setting up a striking play of visibility/invisibility between white and black communities as well as increasing the sense of anxiety and intrusion when they cross. Making such a point, however does not deny that the film employs an oppositional structure and certain types within certain social contexts that go with it: smug white male academics; aggressive black males in gangs; there are no white inhabitants of Cabrini Green, just as there are no black inhabitants of Helen's condominium.

I have explicitly noted the racial backgrounds of the characters in order to start to foreground the fundamental difference in perspectives between the white world of middle-class academia, unconcerned with the everyday reality of its research subjects and the African-American underclass, inhabiting a violent and emphatically real ghetto. Significantly, the racial divisions which permeate the structure of the fictional world are entirely an invention of Bernard Rose's adaptation of Clive Barker's short story *The Forbidden*, on which the film is based. Rose brings race to the forefront by transposing the action from Liverpool to Chicago, a city which became an important urban settlement for African-Americans during the first half of the 20th Century, and brings with it a complex history of racial tension. This interest in racial dynamics is foregrounded by his use of real-life housing project, Cabrini Green, then an infamous Chicago landmark dominated by violence, drug gangs and terrible conditions. The choice of Cabrini Green as site of Ruthie Jean's death and therefore a key location in the film (some scenes were actually shot there) thus immediately situates the narrative in the context of racially polarised worlds – sheltered white middle-class academia set against the poverty and violence of the inner-city African-American experience – which is further dramatised by the (fictional) architectural doubling of Helen and Ruthie Jean's apartments.

By the time Helen and Bernadette reach Cabrini Green a great deal of tension has accumulated around the prospect of their intrusion into a community very different from the domestic and academic spaces so far occupied, and furthermore between their investigation and the realities of the environment they find themselves in. The importance of the social context in this respect is emphasised by John Gibbs who recognises that '[c]onsistent with this emphasis on the social reality of the projects, the film's shocks at this stage are organised around the dynamic created by a pair of middle-class women intruding into a community that is not their own'. (8) The most immediate threat is not from a supernatural source, but rather from neighbourhood gangs, who Helen already believes are using the Candyman myth to control the building. Thus, the way race and racial divides are represented by the film is specifically important to the construction of a monster who is afforded invisibility by the black community's fear of him and is then made visible again by the intrusion of a white woman.(9)

Andrew Tudor sees horror as based on a fundamentally oppositional framework:

[t]he structure of oppositions serves as a more precise formulation to the kinds of narrative space in which this order – disorder – order sequence is played out. Typically, a horror movie will exploit the tensions implicit in a particular contrast, confronting known with unknown.(10)

This could be a suggestive way to look at the genre, and one that keys into the oppositions – both visual and in our experience of each fictional world – drawn on by Candyman’s narrative and visual strategies. Nevertheless, it also establishes narrow confines, confirmed in Tudor’s proposal that there are just three types of horror narrative (knowledge, invasion, metamorphosis) and three types of characters (victims, monsters and experts). (11) He goes on to assert that, ‘[i]t is rare to find a horror movie that singles out individual protagonists for the kind of sustained characterising treatment routinely found in other more ‘serious’ forms’.(12) The opening of *Candyman*, in which Helen is introduced to the Candyman legend by an undergraduate she is interviewing for her research into urban legends, seems to suggest that it is explicitly involved in singling out an individual protagonist. The camera’s close relationship to Virginia Madsen secures her centrality in the stylistic strategies of the film, while attention to the details of her performance offers characterisation designed to involve the viewer, not only with the action but with what is going on around it.

Rather than upholding the separateness of horror characters as Tudor presents them, the rest of the film’s narrative merges the roles of expert and victim, as Helen’s investigations draws her into the dangerous spaces of Cabrini Green and she is attacked by gang members, and then placed into the positions of victim and perpetrator by Candyman himself. Indeed, engagement with Helen is much more complicated than as if she was a plain victim, or even a straightforward heroine. Her investigations encourage sympathy, anxiety and elements of critical distance. Although she central to the majority of scenes and thus to our experience of the film, and we might feel anxiety for her as she moves through the dangerous spaces of Cabrini Green, Helen’s behaviour also reveals arrogance and ambition. Gibbs proposes that Helen’s manner and ways of seeing are indicative of her academic department, learnt behaviour from those she wishes to supersede: her egotistical husband, Trevor (Xander Berkeley), who is conducting an affair with a student, and the patronising Professor Purcell (Michael Culkin), who smugly informs Helen and Bernadette of his expertise on “the hook man”.(13) Helen’s overconfident attitude is qualified, and perhaps tempered, by the degree of their condescension, and her status as postgraduate student, and therefore not yet a full-blown academic, is significant to this.

Central to the ambiguities in the construction of Helen’s character is the way the film makes us aware that her investigations focus on the housing projects solely as a source of data, rather than the realities of living in the space. During the trip to Cabrini Green Helen and Bernadette encounter a graffitied slogan ‘Sweets to the Sweet’ painted across the side of an apartment, a moment in which the placement of the camera and the editing – apart from the camera’s pan across the graffiti – places emphasis on Madsen and Lemmons looking rather than on the details of the space. Attention to Madsen’s performance further demonstrates that her response is distanced from the reality of the space. The potency of the graffiti as material for her research eclipses the inherent danger of their surroundings: Helen relaxes into her purpose as investigator, Madsen confidently positioning her body to take a photograph, the gesture assertively investigative. At this the film reminds us of the dangers of looking, or more precisely the dangers of looking with an exclusively investigative gaze. The shock of the door to the apartment opening affects both women physically, as previously controlled postures are disrupted and replaced with surprise and rapid movement. Through this scare – which shocks us in our complicity with their looking – they are, in effect, warned to remember their fearfulness. As Gibbs observes, Helen’s response to the graffitied slogan, as well as other details of expression and appearance (that she keeps her gloves on while introducing herself to Anne-Marie, an inhabitant of Cabrini Green), and the contrast of Bernadette’s more cautious approach, draw ‘attention to some of the limitations of Helen’s way of conducting herself’.(14)

The role of the female investigator in the horror film has been explored by several writers, including Linda Williams who picks up on investigation and its place in the relationship between victim and monster, arguing that an investigating gaze is punished explicitly through this connection: 'the woman's look of horror paralyzes her in such a way that distance is overcome; the monster or the freak's own spectacular appearance holds her originally active, curious look in a trance-like passivity that allows him to master her through *her* look'.(15) Rhona Berenstein similarly aligns the act of looking with persecution or victimisation, as she suggests that: 'the cropped image of a woman gazing at an unseen threat has the kind of cultural and marketing clout that streamlines analysis and affirms the simplicity of visual symbols'.(16) Mary Ann Doane insists that '[t]he woman's exercise of an investigating gaze can only be simultaneous with her own victimisation. The place of her specularisation is transformed into the locus of a process of seeing designed to unveil an aggression against itself'.(17) Through such approaches, investigating women are understood as victims, persecuted for demonstrating agency.

That the execution of investigation places the female body not as spectacle, but rather active presence, pursuing and progressing the narrative is frequently ignored, as is the engagement and attitude offered by the look. Charlene Bunnell argues that the journey (whether psychological, physical or both) is a stock gothic device for revealing themes and enhancing characterisation, thus underlining the mode's emphasis on affect and experience rather than action.(18) Indeed, investigation has a long history in the gothic narrative, typically being undertaken by female characters who must move through dangerous spaces in order to make discoveries, actively solving narrative mysteries in the process. Ellen Moer suggests that '[a]s early as the 1790s, Ann Radcliffe firmly set the Gothic in one of the ways it would go on ever after: a novel in which the central figure is a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine'.(19) Questions of agency and victimisation in relation to horror films are subject to debate by various writers, most prominently in Carol J. Clover's discussion of the 'Final Girl' figure of the slasher film, who she suggests achieves agency, but at the cost of her femininity, which connects her to the ambiguously gendered killer and thus also draws a connection between monster and victim. However, more problematically Clover suggests that her 'unfemininity is signalled clearly by her exercise of the "active investigating gaze"'.(20) Rather than limiting female investigators to either agency or victimisation, or viewing the latter as the inevitable result of the former, Moer's writing usefully embraces the possibility of a duality that more forcefully conjures the complexities of response to the execution of investigation. The roles of monster and victim as embodied by Candyman and Helen presents opportunity to understand a similar simultaneity between them, one that seeks to more fully evoke the experience of watching and allows for a complexity of response.

Although Candyman is glimpsed at the start of the film and his legend discussed by several different characters, the initial meeting between him and Helen is our first experience of his physical presence. Significantly, the scene occurs after Helen has identified the gang member who attacked her, claiming to be Candyman. At this point in the narrative, it seems that she has resolved the material reality of the legend, by revealing that the drug gangs have been playing on fear of Candyman to keep the community quiet. Shortly after, Bernadette gives Helen 35mm slides retrieved from the attack and informs her of a publisher's interest in their research. The sequence which follows dramatises Candyman's introduction to Helen as both conversational and disruptive, the materially divergent strategies around camera placement, editing and performance support and dissemble boundaries of race, class, gender and space that the film has been building up to prior to this point.(21)

As Madsen is making her way through the university car park, looking excitedly at the slides, the camera tracks beside her in a medium shot. This is then interrupted with a cut to a close-up of Tony Todd's feet, which begin to move towards the camera. The film returns to Madsen who puts away the slides, shaking

her head excitedly as though inwardly astonished and delighted at their existence, and reaches for her car keys, the camera panning right as she turns towards the trunk of her parked car. The film cuts back to Todd's feet, as he continues towards the camera. Cutting back to Madsen – now in a medium shot – a deep male voice intones “Helen” and she stops closing the trunk, her smile dropping slightly, and turns around, looking about the car park, then frowning a little and calling out “Yes?”. The voice calls her again, and as Madsen turns away the camera does so too, placing her on the right, with Todd, now still, in the far distance on the left hand side of the frame. Madsen calls out “Who is that?” and the film cuts to a long shot of Todd as he raises his head. The film returns to Madsen from the front as she strains to look off-screen, tilting her head and softly repeating the question. The film then cuts between Todd who repeats her name, and the previous shot of Madsen, who turns to the car as he continues “I came for you”. Here a shot of the graffitied head and mouth that Helen encountered beyond Ruthie Jean's apartment momentarily interrupts the cutting between Todd and Madsen. Madsen stumbles against the back of the car, facing away from the camera. Another quick flash of the graffitied portrait appears and Madsen leans on the car, fumbling with her sunglasses. The insert is repeated once more and Madsen drops her glasses and grasps at the car, turning round again to face Todd, her face exposed. The film cuts back to Todd, who has remained exactly as he was, before returning to a close-up of Madsen's face as she blinks and struggles to focus. A rapid cut-away, to the close-up of her face previously seen on her second visit to Cabrini Green as she was taking photos, interrupts this shot twice, and when the film returns to Madsen the second time her pupils are dilated and her gaze unfocused. The cut-away is repeated once more, and when the film returns to Helen in the car park she asks “Do I know you?”, her voice slow and without expression. At this point Todd starts moving towards the camera, the film setting up a series of reverse field cuts that contrast his determined movement towards her and Madsen's transfixed and unmoving expression.

Although Helen addresses Candyman boldly at first, Madsen holding herself assertively as she shouts across the car-park without removing her sunglasses, the stylistic strategies concerning Candyman's appearance are significantly disruptive: his presence interrupts Helen's progress back to her car, the tracking shot which follows her, the silence of the soundtrack and ultimately the narrative's trajectory. Candyman's manifestation at this stage intervenes in the process of rationalisation, allowing the supernatural, more fragmentary and perhaps less coherent narrative experience to take over. The disembodiment of his call adds to his supernatural quality as much as his otherworldly deep tone. That his appearance coincides with the moment when everything seems to be resolved, which moreover validates her blinkered arrogance, operates as a considerable caution to Helen's rationalised certainty and her ambitions.

Helen's fearless, even curious reaction informs our own, although the memory of the recent attack on her and her isolation in this moment certainly promotes anxiety on her behalf. The presentation of Todd actively asserts the materiality of Candyman's presence over Helen, the combination of body and voice rendering him more powerful. At this point in the sequence the entirety of his body is revealed alone in the frame, Todd's distance from the camera effectively obscuring the detail of his physicality or expression, keeping us and Helen separate from any insight into his reactions or other elements of his inner life. This withholding downplays his human qualities: his presence is emphatically unknown and unknowable as a result. His face remains in darkness so that the intentions behind his words are still manifested as ominous, maintaining the threatening nature of his progression. Without any detailed access, his body – through his almost militaristic posture with hands held behind his back, and emphasised by the line created by his coat – is singularly commanding and powerful: he doesn't need to come to her or demonstrate violence to achieve disruption.

Rather than attack Helen physically, Candyman interrupts her cognitive processes, as represented by the cuts to the graffitied mural of his face and then to her looking at it. Candyman's disruption is structured as part of Helen's visual experience, placed between shots of Madsen stumbling and blinking, which disables Helen's physical composure, thus signalling the authenticity of Candyman's identity, as well as his supernatural status. He radically alters her physicality in order to make her vulnerable: Madsen's body changes from confident and relaxed to panicked and frail as she stumbles and falls. Towards the end of the sequence, the close-ups of Madsen's face reveal that Helen is hypnotised by Candyman's presence. Her expression becomes passive and unfocused, accentuated by softened lighting which highlights her eyes, which become fixed in a trance-like stare.(22) The treatment of their interaction thus plays with a dislocation of mind and body, which is followed up by the blackouts she suffers in his presence and her apparent mental breakdown. The link here between looking and punishment would seem to directly support Linda Williams' argument that an investigating gaze is punished explicitly through the connection between the woman and the monster whose appearance 'holds her originally active, curious look in a trance-like passivity that allows him to master her through *her* look'.(23)

This isn't the only way to experience the moment, however. To articulate their exchange as punishment ignores the complexities of engagement built into the narrative, the combination of anxiety for Helen and critical distance from her places the moment much more ambiguously. Although the moving camera offers alignment with Helen's movement, her sunglasses, in particular, cut us off from the detail of her expression and thus the possibility of interiority, which places us at an emotional distance from her. The affect of Helen's transformation is complicated by her previous agency, which is still an important consideration even now, as she is specifically not just a helpless victim.

Moreover, Madsen does not simply portray Helen in the terms given to her by writers such as kydd who asserts that 'Helen's femininity is highlighted, as it also highlights her cultured, frail, "pure" whiteness'.(24) Rather, I would seek to emphasise that Madsen's performance of capability combines mind and body and is, although unequivocally that of a middle-class white woman, not particularly frail or feminised and is indicative of her specific cultural positioning. In the context of the film's depiction of an emphatic social and racial divide, Helen's whiteness links her to the academic world – represented as operating with a limited perspective, concerned with research and hierarchy, oblivious to experience of the everyday as anything other than as potential subject matter – and in doing so her own ambition and transgressive desires to outdo her (male) superiors as well as the limitations of her perspective, both in cultural and literal terms. As Richard Dyer emphasises in his writing on whiteness, black and white is not always organised down binary lines.(25)

In consideration of the potential for opposition contained within representations of race it is pertinent to attend to what is brought up in such a confrontation between white woman and black man, particularly in thinking through the connective implications of the editing decisions and the place of this within a horror narrative. Is this scene, and the film as a whole, merely trading on conservative notions of miscegenation, as some commentators have been quick to claim, or is there something else to be fleshed out? Laid out flatly, the contents of *Candyman*'s narrative suggest a certain amount of conservatism, perhaps placing schematic conflicts based on oppositions (racial/gendered/socio-economic) structured to articulate white fears and expressive of the fears of miscegenation that have informed American cinema since its depiction in D.W. Griffiths' *The Birth of a Nation* (and before).

The connection between white femininity and vulnerability is an enduring image in American culture. Richard Dyer's reflections on movie lighting, and more specifically the angelically glowing white woman and aspirational quality of whiteness, is most revealing in contextualising this tendency in American

history through its representation on film: '[t]he white woman as angel was...both the symbol of white virtuousness and the last word in the claim that what made whites special as a race was their non-physical, spiritual, indeed ethereal qualities'.(26) Fears about the excessive physicality of black men draw from deep-seated prejudices, which compliment this idealisation of white femininity: the iconography of what Donald Bogle terms 'the brutal black buck', a violent archetype that 'played on the myth of the Negro's high-powered sexuality, then articulated the great white fear that every black man longs for a white woman ... the ultimate in female desirability, herself a symbol of white pride, power, and beauty'.(27) The cultural power invested in material representations of white, and black, and evocative horror presumed at the meeting of Helen and Candyman can be forcefully indicated in the way Lillian Gish came to be the paradigmatic vulnerable white victim of D.W. Griffith's melodramas exactly because her fair skin and hair set her visually against the images of non-white men who threatened her innocence.(28) That *Candyman* is organised around such concerns is certainly a perspective held by Judith Halberstam, among others, who states that 'no amount of elaborate framing ... can prevent [the film] from confirming racist assumptions about black male aggression towards white female bodies. Monstrosity, in this tired narrative ... remains anchored by the weight of racist narratives'.(29) I would suggest that the way physicality is used and presented draws on contrasting archetypes that complicate this evocation, as with the combinations of heroine and victim embodied by Helen, thus revealing ways in which seemingly tired narrative structures can be developed. Halberstam's claim in particular doesn't account for the ways in which the film foregrounds the fundamental differences in perspectives between the white world of middle-class academia, as located in lecture theatres, condos and nice restaurants and the attitudes that go with these spaces, and the African-American underclass, which is tied explicitly to Cabrini Green.

After Candyman has transfixed Helen in the car park, a tear visibly rolling down her cheek, the film starts to reveal the detail of Candyman's embodiment through a series of shots that bring us closer to Todd, and Madsen as she is entranced. From here on Todd's face is visible, the lighting allowing us to see his face clearly for the first time. Still moving forwards, though now in a medium shot, Todd perceptibly breathes in and then out, the film then cutting to a close-up of his hooked hand, the camera moving with it as Todd lifts his arm in a flourish, inviting her to "Be my victim". The film cuts to a closer shot of Madsen, her mouth now slightly open, her hypnotised gaze held in the same way as before, the camera moving gently towards her. The film cuts to a close-up of Todd as he repeats "Be my victim", still moving forwards, the camera tracking backwards to maintain its framing of him. The film returns to a close-up of Madsen's eyes, which, as Todd continues his speech off-screen, roll upwards, her eyelids flickering as her head sways slightly.

There are ways in which this part of the scene, and the earlier elements previously discussed, seem to present Candyman within the terms of his monstrousness, his excessive physical presence emphasising the intimidating nature of his corporeality and supernatural qualities. Such characteristics are made prominent through the introduction of Todd's performance, his body uncertain and withheld from us at first, the relationship between camera and performer focusing on his supernatural qualities and then later his physical power. Having successfully hypnotised Helen, Candyman calmly breathes in and out deeply, the hint of a smile on Todd's face, before the close-up of his face gives way to a close-up of his hooked hand. The details of Todd's expression in this introduction give the impression that he is experiencing a certain amount of enjoyment in the embodiment of this monstrousness, as though savouring his return to flesh.(30) This is then compounded by the expressive gesture he makes with his arms, which retains the elegance of his body and operates as a rather theatrical invitation to her, as well as an expression of his purpose in brandishing the hook. There is no getting away from his frightening physicality; his right arm, with its still bleeding stump and large vicious hook, fills the frame, the camera following its movement closely so that we cannot escape from its terrible appearance and the implications it carries. In this

manner Candyman's body offers an insight into the violence he will inflict. The stories related about him during the film all dwell on the brutality of his monstrosity and the way his body is shown here foregrounds these concerns, showing the hooked hand in close-up, detached from the more appealing and less threatening aspects of his body.

Yet the different manifest elements of his character complicate our engagement with him. In this moment, and throughout the film, Candyman is revealed to be sophisticated as well as barbaric. The more human and cultured elements of his presence are shown most prominently through the combination of his movement and costuming. The lack of violence in his movement on this occasion, as well as the elegance of his body – elaborated by the flourish of his hook – counters the violent intensity of his determination. When he is finally placed in a close-up the handsomeness of Todd's features is immediately apparent: he doesn't look like a monster, his face unmarked and his expression intense. He appears dignified, his head held high and posture upright, his movements unhurried and purposeful. His voice, while still unnaturally deep, gradually softens and becomes seductive, his language refined. The details of his costume, which include a white cravat and fur-trimmed coat, accentuate the distinguished aura his quality of movement and physicality presents, making him appear more like a dandy than a monster. Derived from minstrel songs and sketches that sought to disparage the perceived pretensions of black northerners, the idea of the black dandy – a caricature satirising blacks attempting to live like whites – was, according to Robert C. Toll, founded in white anxiety over black class mobility.⁽³¹⁾ These concerns key directly into his narrative history, originally an artistic and educated son of a slave, the replacement of his paintbrush with a hook a poignant consideration. Through such details, which evoke his historical context, he offers a stark contrast to the African-American working-class as depicted in the film so far.

Attention to physicality demonstrates that the film is engaged in a complex and self-conscious relationship to representational stereotypes which evoke the concerns of race and class, resulting in a less transparent depiction of Candyman as man and monster. Candyman's frightening physicality – his right arm with its still bloody stump and large vicious hook – offers an insight into the violence he will inflict, promising brutality and making us frightened for Helen's own vulnerable body, evoking both sympathy and fear. However, it also bears the markings of violence done to him, the exploitation of his body drawn out further by a combination of disregard for, and anxiety of, his physical form by his attackers. The act of torture represents a castration in its historical context, which then instigates the taking of revenge and significantly is the sight of his monstrous embodiment, the source of our terror. His physicality and the way it is presented foregrounds violence and suffering, he is materially both monster *and* victim.

To take the discussion of race and gender further, the way in which Helen and Candyman's meeting is constructed, through their corporeal presence and our access to their bodies, is suggestive of a reciprocal relationship, one that has interconnections, rather than oppositions. From examining strategies around the introduction of Candyman in this moment, we can start to see the ways that his embodiment, which bears the markings of his torture, corresponds to the key icon of the suffering black male body. Moreover, the connectedness of Todd and Madsen's placement goes some way to offering an intimate connection with, or even doubling of the threatened white female. The bulk of his frame in combination with sophisticated attire, as well as Todd's rhetorical flourishes, connect him to the romantic gothic hero, as recognised by Brigid Cherry: '[h]e is the tall, dark, handsome foreigner of feminine horror, but here the mysterious European aristocrat of Dracula (and the Gothic in general) is transformed into the tragic figure of the oppressed African-American male'.⁽³²⁾ Helen's own oscillations between heroine, victim and later monster, equally confound the rigidity of the vulnerable white female. Blackness, like whiteness, is not presented simplistically: both are framed as slave and victim, both exploited by the capitalist structures of white patriarchy and involved in transgressing such boundaries. So, while there is an undeniable erotic

charge to their interaction, to characterise this as merely dramatising and perpetuating fears of miscegenation is to ignore the ways in which Candyman and Helen are visually, physically and ideologically linked, rather than opposed.⁽³³⁾ They are tied together further by the narrative, which establishes a historical connection between the characters; as the torture inflicted on Candyman was motivated by his relationship with an aristocratic white woman, and his pursuit of Helen becomes a kind of recreation and dissembling of the original act of transgression and oppression, which significantly doesn't end with the creation of a couple.

Helen's final appearance in the film more fully embraces the doubling motif as the sequence repeats the complexities bound up in Candyman's simultaneous embodiment of victim and monster, in the appearance and presentation of Madsen's body. Moreover, that it is Candyman's relationship with Helen which transforms her from capable and threatened investigator to victim and eventually monster: destabilising Helen's certitudes and narrative coherence, more fully embeds their connectedness. After her death in the bonfire which also kills Candyman, Helen materialises for her husband Trevor in the bathroom mirror, her head burnt, her skin extremely white, and dressed in her white burial outfit. Her altered, and apparently supernatural, presence is accompanied by a strobe light effect that sporadically lights up the dark bathroom. Madsen appears in a close-up, now in the same space as Xander Berkeley, the strobe making her skin even whiter, her burnt head clearly visible and her features dramatically pronounced by their contrast with her whitened skin. The film cuts to a close-up of her hand grasping a metal hook, before cutting again to a close up of Berkeley's face as he reacts to her hook being rammed into his body.⁽³⁴⁾

This final scene continues the depiction of Helen as determined and physically capable, full of life even in death, directly confounding the values Dyer articulates in his suggestion that 'whiteness qua whiteness ... is often revealed as emptiness, absence, denial or even a kind of death'.⁽³⁵⁾ Strikingly, the spatial presentation of Madsen's performance offers a certain amount of alignment with Helen, inviting an intricate engagement with her based on tensions between anxiety, sympathy and distance in death as in life. This appearance complicates the representation of her body, continuing her ambiguous construction much like Candyman himself: both monstrous and victimised, dead and alive, her body lifeless but active and capable. Indeed, that certain elements of the scene echo strategies of the stylistic assembly of Candyman – the view of Helen in the mirror alongside her victim, the close-up of her hand/hook, her expression of pleasure – marks the likeness as part of the way Madsen's performance is placed.

The doubling of Helen and Candyman further problematises fixed interpretations of racial relationships, as well as the narrative roles of victim and monster, presenting them as changing and multifaceted, even interchangeable. An important aspect of the effect of the ambiguities created between the apparent poles of monster and victim is this creation of a bond between them that comes to guide the course of the narrative. Moreover, because the relationship between Helen and Candyman is articulated through the material details of the performers' bodies and the ways in which they are staged for the camera, it allows their connectedness to inform our experience of the film beyond the narrative itself, thus becoming its central dynamic. The expression of gothic motifs through performance – the significance of the body in creating a doubling, and in its enactment of certain repetitive situations such as Helen's journeys into the derelict spaces of Cabrini Green – support the gothic mode as not involved in articulations of rigidity, but rather ambiguity. The blurring, or doubling, of victim and monster is a crucial part of dramatising this ambivalence, and one repeated in other visual strategies of the film's *mise-en-scène*, such as the identical layout of Ruthie-Jean and Helen's apartments, the repeated motifs of eyes, mirrors and death by fire.

In his account of *I Walked with a Zombie* (Jacques Tourneur, 1943) Robin Wood suggests that the superiority of the film is located in ‘the poetic resonances, the suggestive ambiguities and uncertainties’ rather than its narrative.⁽³⁶⁾ The structure of *Candyman* follows a similar emphasis on ambiguity and uncertainty. The two films, coming from very different eras in filmmaking, make for a suggestive comparison for precisely the reason that they appear to set out a range of structural oppositions – black/white, male/female, human/inhuman, life/death, reality/the supernatural – then proceed to destabilise the divisions between them.⁽³⁷⁾ The ambiguous embodiments of victim and monster in *Candyman*, its main characters at once capable and vulnerable, victimised and threatening, key directly into these oppositions.

Dana B. Polan suggests that such ambiguity is specific to the post-studio era horror film:

part of the significance of recent horror films lies in the way they reflect or problematise [the] simple moral binary opposition to suggest horror is not something from out there, something strange, marginal, ex-centric, the mark of a force from elsewhere, the in-human. With an unrelenting insistence, horror films now suggest that the horror is not merely among us, but rather part of us, *caused by us*. [my italics] (38)

While this is a revealing comment in relation to *Candyman*, its correspondence to *I Walked with a Zombie* (amongst others, for example *White Zombie* [Victor Heplerin, 1927]) suggest that there are many ways that this is not limited to recent horror. The connecting dynamic between threat (them) and threatened (us), can be seen across the history of horror supplying textual weight to Robin Wood’s thesis of horror’s articulation of the ‘return of the repressed’.⁽³⁹⁾ As he suggests, there is a clear relationship *between* the cause of the threat and its constitution, which permeates each film from its material details, such as the suggestive comparisons between bodies both threatening and threatened, and further to much wider cultural concerns of how each is positioned in relation to questions of colonialism. Through this latter context, the weight of ‘caused by us’ is highly significant to questions of white anxiety and monstrosity.

Investigating the embodiments of monster and victim offers an opportunity to engage with the representation of the body and the corporeality of performance, within a horror specific framework. Attention to engagement with them directs consideration of the body, and issues of race and gender; to be responsive to their material articulation, followed by cultural/ideological articulation (rather than the other way round). Detailed attention to embodiment thus underlines the hypothesis that oppositions are fleshed out and dramatised by bodies, appreciably shaping our experience of them beyond binaries of race and gender, and thus enriching understandings of genre. In addressing these dynamics in relation to *Candyman*, I aim to have demonstrated that commitment to a detailed approach offers an intricate and rewarding critical interaction, one that evokes the experience of watching and the complexity of our engagement with these figures that substantially blur the boundaries of monster and victim.

1. Such examples of Griffith's concern with the threat of miscegenation includes: *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Intolerance* (1916) and *Broken Blossoms* (1919).
2. Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2001), xiv.
3. Elspeth Kydd, 'Guess Who Else is Coming to Dinner: Racial/Sexual Hysteria in Candyman', *Cineaction*, 36 (1995), 63.
4. Ibid, 72.
5. The double (doppelganger, shadow figure, mirrored reflection) is a device 'which allow[s] a character to perceive more clearly and personally both worlds and both sides of his or her self'. Charlene Bunnell, 'The Gothic: A Literary Genre's Transition to Film' in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1984), 83.
6. Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 14.
7. The other people who recount the legend are: the white professor Purcell (Michael Cullin) who tells the history of Candyman over dinner; Anne-Marie (Vanessa Williams), a young African-American woman who lives in Cabrini Green and repeats the cleaners' version of events; and Jake (DeJuan Guy), an African-American boy who Helen meets on her second visit to Cabrini Green, and repeats a different but still supernatural story.
8. John Gibbs, 'What killed Ruthie Jean?: Architectural design in Candyman (1992)' in *Close-Up 01: Filmmakers' Choices/The Pop Song in Film/Reading Buffy*, eds John Gibbs and Douglas Pye (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 72.
9. Although the focus of my discussion is on Helen and Candyman, it is worth mentioning that Bernadette's place within the film's representation of race, as a middle class African-American woman, is also made ambiguous. While there are some aspects of Bernadette's behaviour that in combination with her race situate her as bound by racial divides (potentially troubling in this context is her deference to white academia, and desire to cause no trouble), it is significant that Lemmons' performance doesn't fit such a narrow conception of her character. Rather she foregrounds Bernadette's pragmatism, which corresponds to the way in which she moves more cautiously through both white and black environments – her ability to see and understand the implications of both sides – as the source of her unease.
10. Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987), 82.
11. Ibid, 81-130.
12. Ibid, 112.
13. Gibbs, 74.
14. Ibid, 73.
15. Linda Williams, 'When the Woman Looks' in *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, eds Mary Anne Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1984), 86.
16. Rhona Berenstein, *Attack of the Leading Ladies. Gender, Sexuality and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1.
17. Mary Anne Doane, 'The Woman's Film: Possession and Address' in *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, eds Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp & Linda Williams (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1984), 72.
18. Bunnell, 79-100.
19. Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (London: W. H. Allen, 1977), 91.
20. Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 48.
21. See Gibbs for a more extensive elaboration of the boundaries built into the stylistic strategies of the film. Gibbs, 69-82.

22. The appearance of her eyes echoes the moment when – having returned to Cabrini-Green alone – she took more photographs in the space behind Ruthie Jean’s apartment.
23. Williams (1984), 86.
24. kydd, 71.
25. Richard Dyer, ‘White’ in *Screen*, 29, 4 (1988), 45.
26. Dyer (1997), 127.
27. Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum, 1973, 2006), 14.
28. Lillian Gish’s performance, and the importance of her skin tone, in relation to Griffith’s films and the construction of the romantic relationship is discussed in more detail by Virginia Wright Wexman. An anecdote she quotes about Gish’s casting reveals the importance of this contrast of skin tone: ‘[Gish’s] major role in *Birth of a Nation* came about one day when she substituted for Blanche Sweet in a rehearsal of the scene in which Elsie Stoneman is accosted by a mulatto. “During the hysterical chase around the room, the hairpins flew out of my hair, which tumbled below my waist as Lynch held my fainting body in his arms,” Gish has recalled. “I was very blonde and fragile-looking. The contrast with the dark man evidently pleased Mr. Griffith, for he said in front of everyone, ‘Maybe she would be more effective than the more mature figure I had in mind’”. Virginia Wright Wexman, *Creating the Couple: Love Marriage, and Hollywood Performance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 48-49.
29. Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic, Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (London: Duke University Press, 1995), 5.
30. The choice of title for the sequel, *Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh* (Bill Condon, 1995), also places this issue of embodiment, and thus the tangibility of Candyman’s presence, as crucial to his representation.
31. Robert C. Toll, *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).
32. Brigid Cherry, ‘Imperfect Geometry: Identity and Culture in Clive Barker’s ‘The Forbidden’ and Bernard Rose’s Candyman’ in *Monstrous adaptations: Generic and thematic mutations in horror film*, eds Richard J. Hand and Jay McRoy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 59.
33. For further discussion of the eroticism of their relationship see Cherry, 48-63.
34. The hook is thrown into her grave by the little boy Jake.
35. Dyer (1988), 44.
36. Robin Wood, *Personal Views: Explorations in Film* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1976), 221.
37. A key aspect of a more general sense of ambiguity lies in the importance of varied perspectives, as discussed by J.P. Telotte, (‘Narration and Incarnation: I Walked with a Zombie’, *Film Criticism*, 6, 3 (1982), 18-31.) and by Aviva Briefel & Sianne Ngai (‘“How much did you pay for this place?” Fear, Entitlement, and Urban Space in Bernard Rose’s Candyman,’ in *Camera Obscura*, 37 (1996), 70-91.).
38. Dana B. Polan, ‘Eros and Syphilization: The Contemporary Horror Film’ in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1984), 202.
39. Robin Wood, ‘An Introduction to the American Horror Film’ in *American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film*, eds. Robin Wood & Richard Lippe (Toronto Film Festival, 1979), 7-28. The article was reprinted in his book *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan ... and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) as ‘The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s’ (63-84) and ‘Horror in the 80s’ (168-179).

**“A horror picture at this time is a very hazardous undertaking”:
Did British or American censorship end the 1930s horror cycle?**

Alex Naylor

Introduction

The massive success of Universal's *Dracula* (Universal, 1931, dir. Tod Browning) and *Frankenstein* (Universal, 1931, dir. James Whale) launched a fashion for horror films. Over the first half of the 1930s, instead of petering out like many one-year cycles, horror became an increasingly stable niche market. However, in the spring of 1936, there was an abrupt hiatus in the horror cycle when, despite a number of recent successful horror films, Universal took horror productions off its schedule, and other studios followed. In autumn 1938, a phenomenally popular theatrical reissue of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* as a double bill offered evidence of a continuing high public demand for horror. Universal almost immediately put another big budget *Frankenstein* sequel, *Son of Frankenstein*, on to its production schedule. This reawakened the interests of other studios in horror and horror-inflected films. Horror film production resumed, with greater quantities of films than ever before.

Modern scholarly accounts, such as those of Rhona Berenstein, David J. Skal and Edmund Bansak, tend to credit this abrupt break in an apparently profitable film cycle directly to an alleged 1935 ban on horror films in the United Kingdom. This explanation, although currently standard among horror scholars, is erroneous; based upon a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature and operations of 1930s British censorship: the British 'ban' on horror films never existed.

This article proposes that the most important factor in the film industry's two year abandonment of horror was active campaigning and dissuasion of studios from horror production, on the part of the Production Code Administration (PCA), run by the Motion Picture Producers' and Distributors' Association (MPPDA). The evidence leads us to a rather more complex picture of the PCA's regulation and censorship methods and their treatment of horror. It also provides us with an informative case study of the often complex power struggles and negotiations that went on 'behind the scenes' in 1930s film censorship.

Attention to British archival sources and to recent scholarly work on British film censorship thoroughly explodes the notion of any wholesale restriction of horror analogous to a ban. Although the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), like the PCA, considered horror films problematic and wished to discourage them, British censorship of horror films never constituted a general ban. American scholars have also greatly overstated the restriction of access to horror films in the UK over this period.

Available British and American archival material connected to horror censorship suggests that direct pressure on studios from the Production Code Administration played a much greater role in the hiatus in the horror film cycle than trouble and loss of profit from British censorship itself. The PCA, who interpreted the complex, decentralised and often confusing British censorship process for Hollywood studios, talked up and simplified British censorship organisations' dealings with horror films, to the point of suggesting to studios that the BBFC had instituted a 'ban' upon horror films. The PCA were at this time openly discouraging studios from making horror films as part of their attempt to guide studios towards 'inoffensive' types of filmmaking. They used this threatening picture of a British horror ban as a

key part of their argument. Several studios which attempted to put horror films onto their production schedules between 1936 and 1938 were dissuaded from doing so by harshly worded advice from the PCA.

Horror as product in 1935-36

Classical Hollywood film cycles were often brief trends lasting for one or two waves of production. Horror, however, appeared to shift towards a niche market. Both trade reviews and box office reports from 1935 and 1936 see the market for horror films as stable rather than declining – quite a contrast from their expectation in 1932-3 that the horror cycle was a brief fad. For instance, the *New York Times* review of *The Walking Dead* (Warner, 1936, dir. Michael Curtiz), in March 1936, remarked that “horror pictures are a staple commodity, and this one was taken from one of the better shelves.” In May 1936 *Hollywood Reporter* said of *Dracula’s Daughter* (Universal, 1936, dir. Lambert Hillyer): “With the stout box office of “Dracula”, “Frankenstein” and the other chillers on Universal’s list a matter of record, it is a safe bet that this latest one will make money.” *Variety* said of the same film: “Rates tops among recent horror pictures and, as such, figures to deliver nice grosses. [...] sufficiently shocking for the horror-pic fans.” Other typical comments were “should give the “horror” fans all they want” (*Motion Picture Herald* on *Mark of the Vampire*), “audiences liking horror should go for this” (*Motion Picture Daily* on *Mad Love*), and: “If your customers like horrors, they will find what they want here [...] Karloff and Bela Lugosi should mean much in bringing in your shocker fans” (*Film Daily* on *The Raven*).⁽¹⁾

The domestic performance of horror films released in 1935 and 1936 were correspondingly above average. *Bride of Frankenstein* (Universal, 1935, dir. James Whale), released May 1935, became one of the cycle’s greatest box office successes. In Los Angeles *Bride*’s opening week gave the Pantages Theatre “one of biggest weeks it has had in its career.” Around the country, the film did similarly magnificent business. On Broadway, it broke attendance records at the Roxy, “so far outdistancing everything else there is no comparison.”⁽²⁾ Whether because of or despite *Bride*’s performance, the glut of horror films which arrived, one after another, in the cinemas in the spring and summer of 1935 nearly all managed to do very good box office without overcrowding the market. *Mark of the Vampire* (MGM, 1934, dir. Tod Browning) did good, solid business around the country, running for two weeks on Broadway, in Minneapolis and in Los Angeles. It was enough of a success for MGM to give Tod Browning the director’s chair on the higher-budget *The Devil Doll* (MGM, 1936, dir. Tod Browning). *Werewolf of London* (Universal, 1935, dir. Stuart Walker), too, was “great with kids” in LA, running for two weeks, and also did consistently well around the country. *The Raven* (Universal, 1935, dir. Lew Landers) was held over in Minneapolis and did decent program business, while *The Black Room* (Columbia, 1934, dir. Roy William Neill) did above average business in Los Angeles and Minneapolis.⁽³⁾ Only *Mad Love* (MGM, 1935, dir. Karl Freund), released at the tail end of this string of horrors, made an overall loss.⁽⁴⁾ Another independent horror film, *Condemned to Live* (*Invincible*, 1935, dir. Frank R. Strayer), was released in October, and Republic’s *The Crime of Dr. Crespi* (John H. Auer, 1935, dir. John H. Auer) in January 1936. The latter did well on Broadway despite its low budget and some rather harsh reviews.⁽⁵⁾

While the horror films released in 1936 were, in the broad sweep, not as profitable, they still did decent business. Several lower budget films - *The Invisible Ray* (Universal, 1935, dir. Edmund Grainger), *The Walking Dead* and the independent Halperin brothers’ production *Revolt of the Zombies* (United Artists, 1936, dir. Victor Halperin) did business varying from excellent to struggling depending on the city. Meanwhile, the bigger-budget films *Dracula’s Daughter* and *The Devil Doll* enjoyed far better receipts. *Dracula’s Daughter* ran for two weeks on Broadway, making “a happy figure”, and enjoyed solid success, with particularly excellent business in Chicago, San Francisco, and Minneapolis.⁽⁶⁾ *The Devil Doll* was a

less notable success, but still ended up \$68,000 in profit, and was Tod Browning's most successful film for years.(7)

Box office reports from 1935-1936 quite frequently mention the reliable popularity of horror at particular theatres and in particular towns. For instance, *Werewolf of London* in Portland, in June 1935, was taken to be "getting a play on mystic horror angle which has ducat sales value in these parts." (8) *Variety*'s Chicago reporter similarly explained *The Invisible Ray*'s success at the State-Lake in July 1935 by saying that "Boris Karloff is always a magnet in this house," and commented of *The Raven*'s good business at the same house in April 1936, horror "is caviar for this audience." (9) Of *Dracula's Daughter*'s success in San Francisco in June 1936, the reporter commented that "films of the horror type always go well in Frisco", and similarly of a Cleveland theatre the same week, "this spot has regular clientele of thrill-seekers." (10) Interestingly, none of this available data on the box office performance of horror films in 1936 gives any hint of the upcoming cessation of horror production.

Tellingly, in 1935 and 1936, studios used opportunistic horror angles to market numerous films not primarily received as horror. In January 1935, *The Man Who Reclaimed His Head* (Universal, 1934, dir. Edward Ludwig), a drama about war profiteering, was marketed with a horror-angled campaign. For instance one poster evokes horror indirectly but thoroughly, being dominated by a giant skull, while in the background a man lit from below cowers in the grip of the hand of a shrivelled corpse. The tagline proclaims "Accused – of the world's most monstrous crime!" (11) *Variety* disputed the angle, however, opening its review by stating "This isn't a horror picture, as the title and memory of [Claude] Rains in other films might suggest." (12) In 1936, one poster for the medical drama *The Story of Louis Pasteur* (Warner, 1935, dir. William Dieterle) uses a similar indirect evocation of horror, selling the film as a *Jekyll and Hyde* story with two contrasting pictures of Paul Muni – one handsome and clean shaven, the other bearded, glowering and lit from below – and the tagline "Was he hero ... or monster?" (13) If studios used horror angles to widen the appeal of films not generally identified as horror, it suggests strongly that the trade still considered horror marketable.

The 1930s censorship struggle

During the first half of the 1930s, there was increasing tension between the concerns of censorship campaigners and the film industry's reliance on sensation, taboo and controversy as an effective way of marketing films and drawing box office in the hostile economic climate of the Depression. Controversy usually boosted the profitability of individual films, making them more likely to feed into a cycle – but that same controversy would provide the censorship lobby with "evidence of the industry's lack of social responsibility." (14) Richard Maltby argues that "the industry's predilection for the crude but reliable market mechanism of rushing imitations of profitable pictures into production, generating seasonal cycles" exacerbated this conflict. (15) Given the short-term promotional effects such controversy could have, the presence of a number of controversial cycles, such as the gangster cycle and 'kept woman' cycle, besides the horror cycle, is not surprising. Ruth Vasey states that "moral insecurity" caused by the Depression was responsible for much of the industry's public-relations crisis. (16) Indeed, the 1930s saw a rise in moral conservatism within American culture in general. (17) Conservative commentators frequently made permissiveness and moral decadence the scapegoats for the 1929 Wall Street Crash and the cultural and economic crisis of the Depression.

The Production Code of 1930 was the cornerstone of a broader strategic response by the Hollywood film industry to increasing controversy and censorship activism. Through it, the MPPDA aimed to encourage films and production trends which showed the industry in a good light, and to discourage the controversial

and sensational. Thus, it aimed to integrate censorship “within the larger institution of cinema production, distribution and exhibition” and thereby to permanently answer those pressure groups who called for federal censorship.(18) It took some years to integrate Code regulation fully into production, and for the first half of the 1930s, the censorship debate was defined by the struggle between different censorship organisations and pressure groups, and particularly between the industry’s internal Production Code censorship and independent and local groups.

This was also in part a struggle over broader issues of cultural power, concerning, in Maltby’s words, “who possessed the appropriate authority to police the ideological apparatus of representation.”(19) The rise in film censorship activism also coincided with a decline in the censorship of more established art forms such as the novel, the theatre and magazines, especially on the part of the Catholic Church, as Ruth Vasey has usefully charted.(20) This was an argument which frequently incorporated concerns regarding class and cultural power like those cited above, and specifically regarding the regulation of working class social behaviour through leisure. The Production Code, attempting to synthesise such concerns, argues that while most arts appeal only to the “mature”, and have “[their] grades for different classes”, cinema “at once reaches every class of society”.(21) Moreover, different cultural groups competing for wider social influence took an interest in the censorship campaign, as we see, for instance in the competition between the Catholic Legion of Decency and the Protestant Motion Picture Research Council over movie reform.(22)

Explaining the horror hiatus: existing scholarly accounts

Earlier accounts of horror cinema which do not emphasise film cycles, but treat horror cinema as having a continuous and largely linear history, have understandably therefore given less attention to the historical details of a censorship-led horror hiatus. For instance, Brunas *et al*’s *Universal Horrors* merely notes in one line that “an outright ban on horror movies imposed by the British Commonwealth” led to a hiatus.(23)

More recent accounts tend to give the hiatus rather more space and interest, since they devote more attention to censorship in general, have more access to archival material, and give a greater emphasis on film cycles as the means through which cinematic trends ebbed and flowed. Edmund Bansak’s account of the role of censorship in the horror cycle’s demise is fairly representative. He writes that:

Universal’s *The Raven* (1935) [...] signalled the sudden end to the horror craze. Because of its torture theme, which incited considerable outrage in England, *The Raven* initiated a virtual ban on all horror films shown in the British Isles. [...] The British market was vital to the Laemmles. The insistence of the British Board of Film Censors upon rating horror films with an “H” certificate was the kiss of death to Universal’s horror exports. The studio’s resulting losses could not have been much worse if horror films had been banned outright.(24)

This explanation attributes the two year hiatus in horror production, from 1936 to 1938, to several factors. Firstly, it mentions that a British “virtual ban” upon horror films, via the “H” certificate, severely reduced the British market and seriously impeded the cycle’s box office takings. Secondly, it states that this led to Universal’s collapse, with the implication that, given the fact that they were market leaders in horror production, an end to their production of horror would result in an end to the cycle more generally.

Other scholars tend to concur, including the writers of the two most currently standard historical accounts of 1930s horror cycle. David J. Skal attributes the hiatus straightforwardly to “overseas censorship

concerns”, and specifically to the 1935 British horror ban.(25) Skal does not deal in much detail with the hiatus in horror production from 1936 to 1938. However, he does report that a British ban on passing horror films was in operation from 1935, after the release of *The Raven*, and claims *Dracula's Daughter* was therefore aimed at the domestic market alone. In fact, *Dracula's Daughter* was passed in Britain with an ‘A’ certificate which meant that under-sixteens could only see it with a parent or guardian.(26) As Sarah J. Smith points out, the ‘A’ certificate was loosely enforced at best, and did little in practice to restrict children’s access to films. The BBFC may well have understood this: the following year, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Disney, 1937, dir. David Hand) was also given an ‘A’ certificate.(27)

Rhona Berenstein, taking the details of her historical account from Skal, cites “the increasing resistance of foreign censors to accepting horror films”:

Another factor contributing to the end of the horror cycle was. Britain, a popular market for Hollywood motion pictures, was a significant case. The British Board of Film Censors was approving fewer horror movies each year [...] 1934 domestic and foreign censorship boards ... were far more ruthless than their predecessors. Breen’s more enthusiastic enforcement of the industry’s Production Code [...] was combined with growing international disdain for horror [...] This trend was accompanied by an upsurge in domestic commitment to high-budget prestige pictures. The result was a decrease in horror’s popularity, particularly in terms of studio rosters for big-money productions.(28)

This account follows Skal’s, and like his and Bansak’s, is founded upon numerous factual errors. Berenstein suggests that the BBFC were banning an increasing number of horror films from exhibition over the period 1931-1936. In fact, *Freaks* (MGM, 1932, dir. Tod Browning) and *The Monster Walks* (Action, 1932, dir. Frank Strayer) were banned in 1932, *Island of Lost Souls* (Paramount, 1932, dir. Erle C. Kenton) in 1933, *Black Moon* (Columbia, 1934, dir. Roy William Neill) in 1934, and the independent *The Crime of Dr Crespi* in 1935. No horror films at all were banned in the UK from 1936 to 1942.(29)

There was no rise in the number of horror films refused a certificate, far fewer films were banned than Berenstein’s narrative implies, and all the banned films apart from *Island of Lost Souls* and *Freaks* were obscure low-budget films from small studios. None of Universal’s films – the lynchpin of the horror cycle – were banned. Berenstein may be referring to BBFC use of the ‘H’ label over the period 1933-1935: it was awarded to five films in 1933, another five in 1934, and six in 1935.(30) As I will discuss in greater detail below, although scholars commonly identify the ‘H’ label with a ban, in fact it was a purely advisory label which did *not* restrict children’s or adults’ access to horror films, either in theory or in practice.

The Sale of Universal and the Cessation of its Horror Production

Available information on the sale of Universal Studios in 1935 contradicts Edmund Bansak’s assertion that a 1935 British ban on horror films was primarily responsible for Universal’s collapse. While horror itself remained consistently profitable, Universal made an overall loss in the Depression years of 1932, 1933 and 1935. Important as horror was to Universal, the length of the period of financial difficulty suggests that other long-term factors were the cause. In fact, the aging Laemmle had been turning down offers to sell up since 1929, and rumours and reports about Universal’s sale regularly surfaced throughout the 1930s. Towards the end of 1935, a successful deal became public knowledge. J. Cheever Cowdin of Standard Capital, a New York-based syndicate who specialised in bailing out troubled companies, in

partnership with Charles R. Rogers, an associate producer at Paramount, finally bought 80% of Universal's stock on March 13, 1936. Rogers was now functionally the head of the studio.(31)

Horror had been a 1930s staple of Laemmle's Universal, but the new Universal management seemed far more receptive to the PCA's warnings concerning the censorship drawbacks of the cycle. On June 17 1936, Rogers announced in the *Los Angeles Daily News* that "Universal this year will go in for less tense drama and so-called 'horror' pictures, and make more pictures to amuse and enthuse audiences." (32) James Curtis, in his filmic biography *James Whale*, suggests that Rogers "took note of the increased hostility such product engendered abroad." (33)

However, the takeover of Universal, while perhaps an influencing factor in the end of the cycle, cannot alone fully account for its ending. While Universal produced far more horror films than any other single studio, throughout the cycle Paramount, Warner Bros. and MGM produced horror films. More than half of the cycle overall was the product of other studios, including several horror films released in 1936: *The Walking Dead* (Warner), *The Devil Doll* (MGM), *The Crime of Dr. Crespi* and *Revolt of the Zombies* (both independent).

In fact, examining the sale of Universal leads us to the question of why the new management chose to end one of its more profitable and well-known lines of product, and why the rest of the film industry might have followed this trend and taken horror films off their own production schedules. So an examination of Universal's sale returns us to the original question of whether censorship demands ended horror production, and if so, how this came about.

Historical evidence of a British 'ban' on horror

Those accounts of 1930s horror production which attribute its end to British censorship often cite reports within the Hollywood trade press at the time. David J. Skal bases his account of the British ban primarily on an Associated Press article of August 23rd, 1935, reprinted widely in the American local press. This article announced: "'Horror'" Films Taboo in Britain; 'The Raven' Last." J. Brooke Wilkinson, secretary of the British Board of Film Censors, is reported in the article as saying that the film would be the last horror film passed by the board. Wilkinson's warning followed a comment from Edward Short, President of the board, that such films were "unfortunate and undesirable". Wilkinson is reported as ascribing his own comments and Short's to the fact that they knew "that similar productions were being planned in Hollywood," and they felt need to give notice that future horrors would be judged "more strictly". Wilkinson added that "If this notice is disregarded, the producers must take the consequences." (34) The other accounts of the British ban I have mentioned appear to depend as much as Skal's own account as on this article. Rhona Berenstein takes her account from Skal, while the Edmund Bansak passage quoted earlier seems to suggest that like Skal, he draws his account from the same article. (35)

An article from *Variety* on May 6th, 1936, nearly a year later, appears to support the narrative of the Associated Press article. Here *Variety* reported the decision of Universal's new management to cease production of horror films, and cited British censor hostility:

Reason attributed by U. for abandonment of horror cycle is that European countries, especially England, are prejudiced against this type product. Despite heavy local consumption of its chillers, U. is taking heed to warning from abroad.

[...]

Studio's London rep has cautioned production exec to scrutinize carefully all so-called chiller productions, to avoid any possible conflict with British censorship.(36)

These reports claim in clear and definitive terms that the British Board of Film Classification intended to pass no more horror films in 1935, and that this in turn influenced Universal to abandon horror production. It is certainly the case, as Bansak claims, that the British market was an important one for the major studios, constituting, according to Ruth Vasey, more than 30% of its total foreign income.(37)

However, a comparison of the claims of the PCA and two brief newspaper articles about this 'ban', the three sources which underpin so many accounts of it, with actual available data on British censorship shows that they were both overplaying the severity of the situation and oversimplifying the complex and decentralised British censorship situation. In short, the British 'horror ban' never existed.

British horror censorship and the 'H' certificate

One major reason why so many historical accounts of the horror cycle rely on the PCA's explanation of the British 'ban' is practical. Skal and Berenstein are both US-based scholars and rely on American archival sources for accounts of the British censorship situation. Moreover the majority of the BBFC's own 1930s records are not extant, thanks to the bombing of their London offices during the Second World War. However, much information still exists, especially given that British censorship primarily took place at the local government level during the 1930s. James C. Robinson has done informative work with surviving records and sources in two books: *The British Board of Film Censors: Film Censorship in Britain, 1896-1950* (London: Croom Helm, 1985) and *Hidden Cinema: British film censorship in action 1913-75* (London: Routledge, 1993). More recently, Sarah J. Smith's 2005 *Children, Cinema and Censorship* has also made use of this archival material to provide a much fuller account of the 'H' certificate and British horror censorship in the 1930s than has previously been available. Smith's work in particular substantially modifies the more usual accounts of British horror censorship in the 1930s.

British film censorship of the 1930s, like American film censorship of the 1930s, was decentralised and complex, taking place in different forms across numerous sites: "within the BBFC, within the production companies themselves, at the local authorities, and from extra-parliamentary critics and would-be censorship reformers." (38) The BBFC granted certificates for exhibition, local authorities could additionally ban a film (although they rarely did so), and critics and campaigners created negative publicity for the film industry. The BBFC granted two kinds of certificate: A and U. While U films were supposed to be particularly suitable for children, those under fourteen could attend an A film in the company of an adult.(39) The BBFC, moreover, had no legal status: local authorities could and sometimes did choose to show a film to which the BBFC had refused a certificate.(40) The PCA therefore had a valuable interpretative function for Hollywood film studios, parsing and simplifying British censorship for them.

As I mentioned above, the 'H' certificate, as it was introduced in May 1933 – two years before *The Raven* – and moreover, as James C. Robertson and Sarah J. Smith explain in detail, was a purely advisory classification which allowed horror films to be passed with a warning, without further cutting or precautionary banning.(41) Smith argues that it is more accurate to refer to it as the "Horrific label", as it was not a certificate as such and "therefore did nothing to stop unaccompanied A film attendance by young people." She goes on to explain that the 'H' certificate was a compromise measure introduced after campaigning by the NSPCC, the Order of the Child and some other bodies which lobbied for children to

be banned from admission to horror films. Indeed, she suggests that on the contrary, the Horrific label may have actively enticed the custom of children to “the forbidden fruit of ‘unsuitable’ films”.(42)

The A certificate did not restrict attendance and profits in the quite the same way that might be true today of a 15 or 18 certificate in the UK, or an R or NC-17 in the USA. Smith documents the huge popularity of horror with children through extensive interviews with respondents who attended horror and other films in the 1930s. She notes the widespread practice of children getting strangers to ‘accompany’ them into horror and other A certificate films. She even notes that Scottish children’s matinees routinely showed both films with the Horrific label and other controversial A certificate films like *The Story of Temple Drake* (Paramount, 1933, dir. Stephen Roberts).(43)

British regional censorship of horror films was only sporadically stricter than this. More importantly, British local censorship of horror films was oriented almost entirely at preventing children from attending, rather than banning films altogether. Smith reports only two such bans: Birmingham and St. Helens banned children from attending *King Kong* in September 1933 and in December 1935, Middlesex, Surrey and Essex – three of the thirty-nine English counties – all instituted a more comprehensive prohibition against children attending any film that they themselves deemed horrific, regardless of BBFC classification.(44)

Moreover, while the BBFC may have claimed to be hostile to all horror films, a survey of their treatment of individual films shows that their treatment of horror films was variable and inconsistent, analogous to neither PCA nor studio marketing classifications of horror. It also shows no evidence of a shift around 1935 to a stricter policy, as announced by both the Associated Press article and the PCA themselves. Throughout the 1930s, the BBFC passed some horror films uncut but bearing a Horrific label, while others were passed with an unlabelled ‘A’ certificate but with cuts. Which of these policies was applied a film bears no immediately obvious relation to its content or to its marketing, and James C. Robertson has suggested that this inconsistent policy “[reflected] rather a mixture of confusion and possible fear of an adverse Film Censorship Consultative Committee reaction at the BBFC”.(45) *The Mummy* (Universal, 1932, dir. Karl Freund) was passed uncut with an ‘A’ certificate alone, while *The Vampire Bat* (Majestic, 1933, dir. Frank R. Strayer) was cut by 99 feet and still given a Horrific label. *Bride of Frankenstein*, *Mad Love*, *Mark of the Vampire*, and *Werewolf of London* all received the Horrific label.(46) Most importantly, the alleged stricter attitude following *The Raven* never really appeared: BBFC treatment of horror films after this date is merely consistent with their established policy. *The Walking Dead* was passed in April 1936 with an unlabelled ‘A’ certificate and a cut of 100 feet, while *The Devil Doll* received a Horrific label.(47) *Dracula’s Daughter* was passed uncut with an ‘A’ certificate.(48) The Horrific label was neither applied to all films marketed as horror nor applied only to horror films – and it did little to nothing to restrict the circulation of a film.

In July 1935 the London County Council proposed a nationwide ban to the Film Censorship Consultative Committee and the Home Office on children attending Horrific label films. However, no real changes were made at the national level until June 1937, after the cycle’s end, when the Horrific label was replaced with a formal H certificate, a third certificate in addition to A and U, which finally banned the attendance of children under sixteen.(49)

After 1935, the BBFC banned only two horror films outright, both 1942 Poverty Row films: *The Corpse Vanishes* (Monogram, 1942, dir. Wallace Fox) and *The Mad Monster* (PRC, 1942, dir. Sam Newfield). The 1937 ‘H’ certificate was used liberally in 1939, on eleven films, but thereafter on only two films

between 1940 and 1944, despite the many horror films produced and given UK releases over that period.(50)

The PCA and the British ‘ban’

As Richard Maltby argues, the PCA, in keeping with the broader aims of the Production Code, were interested in discouraging consistently problematic cycles and encouraging ‘good’ ones.(51) Studios, on the other hand, were interested in minimising local censorship while conserving as much box office potential as possible. Controversial cycles which remained profitable were still attractive to studios, particularly in the case of a cycle like horror where a moderate degree of controversy could even increase box office performance. Maltby comments that “when such cycles provoked controversy, the takings of individual movies were undoubtedly increased, but they provided the reform lobby with evidence of the industry’s lack of social responsibility.”(52) While the good health of the film industry was in the interest of both parties, the PCA were prepared to have individual films and cycles make a loss in order to preserve the film industry’s longer-term interests as conceived by the MPPDA and the Code.

I would argue that the PCA approached horror films in 1936 with a two-pronged attack. They simultaneously sternly warned producers that horror films *per se* were unworkably problematic, more trouble than they were worth, and ‘proved’ this by objecting to every element they felt might result in affective reactions of horror and miring films in long and troublesome negotiations. In this they were much helped by the notion of Great Britain’s supposed ban on horror films via the ‘H’ certificate. The PCA routinely alluded to this ‘ban’ as proof that horror films were bad news for the industry, despite being in direct communication with the British Board of Film Censors and therefore presumably having easy access to the real facts of the case.

In 1935 and 1936, the PCA issued increasingly harsh warnings to studios submitting horror scenarios, placing emphasis on the notion of this BBFC ‘ban’. The BBFC’s position was one of the PCA’s most important pieces of evidence that horror was such a “precarious undertaking”. By September 1935, the PCA were making their policy on horror clear from their first communications with producers. Writing to Warner in September 1935, after a discussion of a treatment of *The Walking Dead*, Breen appeared to be verging on attempts to completely dissuade the studio from making it:

Horror stories of all kinds are a precarious undertaking in these days, especially with respect to their likely reception at the hands of political censor boards. I think you know that the British Board in London has indicated a disposition not to approve out-and-out horror stories; and a number of boards in this country, and in Canada, have already demonstrated their dislike for this type of story by mutilating a number of “horror pictures” which have been released in recent months.(53)

The warning about the British censor board’s disposition was repeated again almost word for word in a December 1935 letter in response to a redrafted script of the film.(54) Likewise, Universal was repeatedly warned in correspondence over *Dracula’s Daughter* “that the making of a horror picture at this time is a very hazardous undertaking from the standpoint of political censorship generally.”(55)

Such warnings painted as bleak a picture as possible of local censorship prospects. The PCA, in correspondence dealing with the cycle’s final films, did their best to persuade producers and studios not to make more horror films, and to remove all horror content from films in development. Any element understood to cause a reaction of horror was to be excised, and the differences between acceptability under the Code and to “political censor boards” was no longer quibbled over, or even mentioned. In fact,

the plots of the final three films in the cycle, *The Walking Dead*, *The Devil Doll* and *Dracula's Daughter* were all substantially remodelled after the PCA made it clear that the original narrative was in itself unacceptable.

The script of *Dracula's Daughter* was rejected outright by the PCA in its initial form. A PCA memo notes that the original script contained “countless offensive stuff which makes the picture utterly impossible for approval under the Production Code”, and in particular “a very objectionable mixture of sex and horror”. After Carl Laemmle Jr. and Breen talked about it personally in conference, the former agreed to a complete rewrite.⁽⁵⁶⁾ However, when the rewritten script was submitted and another conference meeting held on 23rd October to discuss it, the PCA requested another complete revision of the script, still unhappy with the “combination of sex and horror”. The list of changes required to the rewritten script runs for six pages. By now it was mid-January, and Universal planned to start shooting on the 23rd. The makers of *Dracula's Daughter* had the daunting task of completely re-plotting and writing the film in line with censorship requirements just before the now delayed shoot. In fact, rewrites continued almost all through the production period, sent daily, page by page, to the PCA for approval. The new script, which, the PCA granted, seemed “to meet the basic requirement of the Code”⁽⁵⁷⁾, had an entirely new plot which contained no explicit gruesomeness at all. Still, the PCA cautioned Universal “with regard to the necessity for care in avoiding any unduly gruesome shots in your picture” – an intensification of their former policy.⁽⁵⁸⁾

The Walking Dead underwent similar, extensive rewriting at the behest of the PCA. After viewing a treatment and meeting with the producer, Breen warned Warner to “exercise the utmost care” in toning down those potentially horrific aspects of the film “which are likely to give serious offense.”⁽⁵⁹⁾ The removal of explicit detail from both the revival of the dead and the murders, which make up the bulk of the action, necessitated that the studio rewrite the story entirely. Over the course of several rewrites, the PCA repeatedly asked for the script to be further toned down, concentrating their attention on the revival of the dead, the murders, and the appearance of Karloff's character, which must not “overdo the gruesomeness.”⁽⁶⁰⁾

The Devil Doll, the last of the 1930s horror cycle, began its existence in the early months of 1935, as an adaptation of the 1934 novel *Burn Witch Burn* by A. Merritt, intended firmly as a horror film. However, after lengthy and convoluted negotiations with the PCA at every stage of its making, it was finally released as a film marginal to the cycle, with studio marketing advising strongly against its promotion as a horror film. The plot of *The Devil Doll*, like those of *The Walking Dead* and *Dracula's Daughter* before it, underwent substantial PCA-led changes, which continued into the production period, and even after shooting had ended.⁽⁶¹⁾

Unsurprisingly after such comprehensive alteration, all the final films of the cycle had relatively minor local censorship difficulties. *The Walking Dead* and *The Devil Doll* were approved uncut throughout the US. Quebec and Britain made some cuts to *The Walking Dead* but passed it, and both also passed *The Devil Doll* with minor cuts. *Dracula's Daughter* was approved in most states; Maryland, Ohio, and Ontario all cut a single, sexually suggestive line, and the latter also excised the Countess' “frightening” of Lili. It passed in Britain. ⁽⁶²⁾

The PCA's treatment of all three of these 1936 films follows the same pattern, suggesting a consistent policy on horror: the warning directing the studio not to make a horror film, followed by firm requests for a comprehensive remodelling of the film's plot and content. This policy militated against horror in several ways. The policy had an arguably deliberate filibustering effect, making production of a horror film

contingent on time-consuming and obstructive negotiations and renegotiations over every aspect of production, from script to make-up, It also resulted in final films that differed notably in content from the rest of the cycle.

All three films began as relatively typical horror cycle entries but changed almost beyond recognition between initial plot outline and finished film. There is some evidence that PCA negotiations over these films even attempted to achieve a shift in genre. Originally conceived as a horror film, *The Devil Doll* was eventually marketed as a fantasy and novelty film. The studio press manual advised exhibitors: "IT IS NOT A HORROR PICTURE ... in any sense of the word. It is a thriller, a melodrama, a punch, sock, dynamic story that is real entertainment ... but most of all it has novelty ..." (63)

The available evidence suggests that the PCA took advantage of the importance of the British market and the complexity and murkiness of its censorship situation, in order to use an alleged British 'ban' as leverage in their argument. The PCA's mediating correspondence with studios concerning the BBFC appears to have had an important interpretative function in explaining the more obscure and localised aspects of British censorship. Indeed, as Ruth Vasey has chronicled, part of the PCA's remit was to relay to studios difficulties with specific international markets. (64)

We should pay more scholarly attention to this hiatus period, particularly in light of the fact that the hiatus was not due to a complete studio abandonment of attempts at horror production. The hiatus dissolved when the autumn 1938 *Dracula/Frankenstein* double bill suggested to Universal that great profit could be had from a new *Frankenstein* sequel. The PCA's lively attempts to discourage them with tales of British opposition had little effect. The hiatus in production of new horror films continued only so long as the PCA could discourage studios' proposals for more horror films.

In April 1936, less than two weeks before the *Variety* report announcing the end of horror production, Universal sent the PCA the synopsis of a proposed horror film, *The Human Robot* - eventually filmed as *Man Made Monster* (Universal, 1941, dir. George Waggner) - and the PCA responded with a particularly strongly-worded warning. They stated, "[British] opposition to this kind of screen entertainment suggests that the making of a horror picture is a somewhat hazardous undertaking, from the standpoint of its general release." (65) Breen further suggested that Universal carefully consult their Foreign Department "before embarking on the actual production of this picture". (66) In the event, Universal shelved production of *The Human Robot*, and horror in general, less than weeks later.

In 1937, the PCA's archives appear to show no attempts by any studio to put a horror film into production. Columbia, in September 1938, also began developing a horror film, *The Man They Could Not Hang* (Columbia, 1939, dir. Nick Grinde). Columbia's treatment for *The Man They Could Not Hang* was met by the PCA with a firm line. The PCA informed the studio flatly that the story was "not acceptable under the provisions of the Production Code" because of "the excessive number of gruesome and brutal killings." They added their now customary statement that the "political censorship" difficulties of such a film could be gauged by the fact that British censors were likely to reject it "as falling into the horror category." After a conference, Columbia agreed to develop the film "as a murder mystery rather than a horror story," with gruesomeness minimised and killings left largely off-screen. (67)

In March 1938, Universal made enquiry informally to the PCA about the Code certificate prospects of a sequel to *The Invisible Man* (Universal, 1933, dir. James Whale). The studio received a carefully-worded warning in response, advising the studio to go ahead on the understanding "that it is your purpose not to make a, so-called, "horror picture", or to deal with subjects which are forbidden under the Code as

excessively brutal or gruesome [...] [but] to play the story for broad comedy and with trick photography.(68) The story was shelved for over a year, and a full treatment was not sent to the PCA until June 1939, six months after the release of *Son of Frankenstein*. By that point, perhaps emboldened or encouraged by *Son*'s profitability, *The Invisible Man Returns* (Universal, 1940, dir. Joe May) was more clearly a horror film once more, the elements of comedy were de-emphasised, and the treatment received numerous PCA cautions on gruesomeness, revenge, blood, and strangulation scenes.(69) They still warned Universal to bear in mind "the extremely critical attitude of the British Censor Board and their statement that they do not approve pictures falling in the "horrific" category for exhibition in England." They made a similar statement in another letter a week later.(70) The final film was passed by the BBFC without an H certificate.(71) As I mentioned earlier, these warnings about British censorship did not come to pass: between 1936 and 1950, the BBFC banned only two horror films, both in 1942.(72)

Unsurprisingly, in 1939, the PCA tried very hard to dissuade Universal from making a second *Frankenstein* sequel, *Son of Frankenstein* (Universal, 1939, dir. Rowland V. Lee), and to discourage the other studios which, sensing a trend, were also contemplating the production of horror films. Following their established practise, much of this pressure focused on the potential banning of the film in the United Kingdom. On receiving the initial script for *Son*, Breen telephoned and wrote to Universal warning them to contact the BBFC regarding the film's possible "H" classification. However, the PCA also got in touch with the BBFC independently. Breen cabled the British Board of Film Classification, asking them "WOULD YOU BE DISPOSED TO APPROVE HORRIFIC PICTURE LIKE FRANKENSTEIN."

The reply was resolutely negative, although of course it only stated the BBFC's broad disapproval, rather than any statement of intention to ban new horror films:

FILM CREATED CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC OUTCRY AND PARTLY INSTRUMENTAL IN BRINGING INTO EXISTENCE HORRIFIC CATEGORY STOP FILM WOULD TODAY UNQUESTIONABLY COME WITHIN THIS CATEGORY STOP WE USE EVERY ENDEAVOUR TO PREVENT SUCH PRODUCTIONS.(73)

The PCA forwarded this response to Universal, as well as to Columbia (who had earlier in the year considered *The Man They Could Not Hang*), dryly commenting to Universal that "the above may be of some importance and value to you in the consideration of your plans to produce a "horror" picture."(74) This time, however, the PCA's established strategy of non-specific warnings about British censorship policy did not work: *Son of Frankenstein* had already gone into production.(75)

By the late 1930s, Production Code censorship negotiation was fully integrated into Hollywood filmmaking. As the moral conservative campaign died down, the debate over cinema censorship moved on from the issue of federal censorship. The dominant issue in censorship had now become overtly political content, and particularly anti-Fascist material. Greater debates over cinema censorship were now largely concerned with the limits of the Production Code's power to forbid explicitly political argument in a film, rather than with the social effects of sex, violence and horror. Crucially, this meant that when horror production resumed in 1939, it did so in a changed censorship climate in which, whatever the Production Code's policy on the matter, horror was far less central to the current censorship debate in American (and British) culture.

I have aimed in this article to make a case for scholars of Hollywood censorship and genre to take into account the complexities of British censorship and media controversies, and their relationship to the

British market and cinema culture - rather than relying upon the MPPDA as sources for the activities of other censorship bodies.

We can learn other very useful things from the more complex picture we thus gain of the controversy over horror production. The disputes over 1930s horror are particularly informative about the PCA's level of activity and *modus operandi* as it attempted to actively influence film trends. They also suggest some of the limits of PCA influence when pitted against commercial cinema's ultimate and defining goal: profit.

1. Review of *The Walking Dead*, *New York Times*, March 2 1936; reviews of *Dracula's Daughter*, *Hollywood Reporter*, May 2 1936 and *Variety*, May 20 1936; review of *Mark of the Vampire*, *Motion Picture Herald*, April 6 1935; review of *Mad Love*, *Motion Picture Daily*, undated; *Film Daily* review of *The Raven*, April 4 1935.
2. Box office reports, *Variety*, April 24, 1935, p. 8; May 15 1935, p. 9.
3. Box office statistics from *Variety*, May 8 – August 28 1935.
4. Gregory William Mank, *Hollywood Cauldron: Thirteen Horror Films From the Genre's Golden Age* (London: McFarland, 1995), p. 123.
5. Box office statistics from *Variety*, January 15 1936.
6. Box office statistics from *Variety*, January 15 - August 26 1936.
7. Mank, *Hollywood Cauldron*, p.xviii.
8. Box office reports, *Variety*, June 26 1935, p. 10.
9. Box office reports, *Variety*, July 31 1935, p.9; April 8 1936, p. 9.
10. Box office reports, *Variety*, June 17 1936, p. 6, 8.
11. Poster for *The Man Who Reclaimed His Head*, reprinted in Michael Brunas, John Brunas and Tom Weaver, *Universal Horrors: the Studio's Classic Films, 1931-1946* (London: McFarland, 1990).
12. Review of *The Man Who Reclaimed His Head*, *Variety*, Jan 15, 1935.
13. Poster for *The Story of Louis Pasteur*, reprinted in Altman, *Film/Genre*, p. 57. Altman also points out the use of a horror angle in service of his point that classical Hollywood marketing often evoked multiple genre identities in a film's marketing to widen its appeal.
14. Richard Maltby, "'Baby Face'", p. 30.
15. Richard Maltby, "'Baby Face' or How Joe Breen Made Barbara Stanwyck Atone For Causing the Wall Street Crash" in *Screen*, vol. 27 No. 2, March - April 1986, p. 30.
16. Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1919-1939* (Exeter, University of Exeter, 1997) p. 101.
17. Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," p. 49.
18. Richard Maltby, "'Baby Face'", p. 22.
19. Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," p. 43.
20. Ruth Vasey, "An American Tragedy: A Comparison of Film and Literary Censorship", in *Quarterly Journal of Film and Video*, 1995, Vol. 15, no. 4, p. 87-98.
21. Doherty, *Pre-Code Hollywood*, p. 349.
22. Maltby, "The Production Code and the Hays Office," p. 54.
23. Michael Brunas, John Brunas and Tom Weaver, *Universal Horrors: the Studio's Classic Films, 1931-1946* (London: McFarland, 1990), p. 92.
24. Edmund G. Bansak, *Fearing the Dark: The Val Lewton Career* (London: McFarland, 1995), p. 112.
25. David J. Skal, *The Monster Show: a Cultural History of Horror* (London: Plexus, 1994), p. 195, 201.
26. Sarah J. Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship: From Dracula to the Dead End Kids* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), p.1.
27. Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, p.1.
28. Rhona Berenstein, *Attack of the Leading Ladies: Gender, Sexuality and Spectatorship in Classic Horror Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, c1996), p. 15.
29. James C. Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors: film censorship in Britain, 1896-1950* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p.187-188.
30. Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*, p. 183.
31. Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (London: Faber, 1998), p. 235; James Curtis, *James Whale: A New World of Gods and Monsters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 267-276.
32. *Los Angeles Daily News*, June 17, 1931.

33. Curtis, *James Whale*, p. 291.
34. Article from *Michigan City News*, August 23 1935, PCA case file for *The Raven*, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles.
35. Berenstein, *Attack of the Leading Ladies*, p. 15.
36. "Horror Films Taken Off U Sked", *Variety*, May 6, 1936.
37. Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1919-1939* (Exeter, University of Exeter, 1997), p. 99.
38. James C. Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema: British film censorship in action 1913-75* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 5.
39. Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, p.62.
40. Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, p.121.
41. Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*, p. 56.
42. Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, p.56, 70-71.
43. Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, "Chapter Five: Children as Censors," and particularly p. 110, 165.
44. Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, p. 71-72.
45. Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*, p. 59.
46. Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*, p. 59.
47. Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, p. 59, 183.
48. Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema*, p. 66.
49. Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship*, p. 72.
50. Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*, p. 183, 188.
51. Richard Maltby, "'Baby Face' or How Joe Breen Made Barbara Stanwyck Atone For Causing the Wall Street Crash" in *Screen*, vol. 27 No. 2, March - April 1986, p. 30-31.
52. Maltby, "Baby Face," p. 30.
53. Breen to Warner, September 26 1935, PCA case file for *The Walking Dead*.
54. Breen to Warner, December 2 1935, PCA case file for *The Walking Dead*.
55. Letter from Breen to Zehner, January 15 1936, PCA case file for *Dracula's Daughter*.
56. Internal memo dated 13 September 1935, PCA case file for *Dracula's Daughter*.
57. Letter from Breen to Zehner, January 24 1936, PCA case file for *Dracula's Daughter*.
58. Letter from Breen to Zehner, February 4 1936, PCA case file for *Dracula's Daughter*.
59. Letter from Breen to Warner, September 26 1935, PCA case file for *The Walking Dead*.
60. Correspondence between Breen and Warner, September 26 1935 to January 20 1936, PCA case file for *The Walking Dead*.
61. Correspondence between Breen and MGM, September 12 1935 to April 7 1936, PCA case file for *The Devil Doll*.
62. Regional censor reports for *The Walking Dead*, dated February 27 to May 21 1936; *Dracula's Daughter*, dated May 28 to June 25, 193; and *The Devil Doll*, dated June 26 to August 31, 1936, in from PCA case files for above films.
63. Studio press book for *The Devil Doll*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Production Material Collection, Margaret Herrick Library.
64. For a fuller account of the PCA's dealings with studios over international issues, see Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood*, p. 127-157.
65. Breen to Zehner, April 24, 1936, PCA case file for *Man-Made Monster*.
66. Breen to Zehner, April 24, 1936, PCA case file for *Man-Made Monster*.
67. Letters from Breen to Harry Cohn, September 30, October 5 and October 25 1938, PCA case file for *The Man They Could Not Hang*.
68. Letter from Breen to Zehner, March 22 1938, PCA case file for *The Invisible Man Returns*.

69. Letter from Breen to Pivar, June 3 1939, PCA case file for *The Invisible Man Returns*.
70. Letters from Breen to Pivar, September 26 1939 and October 6 1939, PCA case file for *The Invisible Man Returns*.
71. Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*, p. 183, 188.
72. Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*, p. 187.
73. Telegram from Breen to “Censofilm, London”, November 3 1938; telegram from Brooke Wilkinson to Breen, November 4 1938, in PCA case file for *Son of Frankenstein*.
74. Letter from Breen to Cliff Work, President of Universal, November 7 1938; letter from Breen to B. B. Kahane at Columbia, November 7 1938, PCA case file for *Son of Frankenstein*.
75. Letter from Work to Breen, Nov 12, 1938, PCA case file for *Son of Frankenstein*.

BOOK REVIEWS

“Tales from the Crypt”

Roger Luckhurst (ed.), *Late Victorian Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

The first thing that strikes the reader about this fantastic new anthology of Victorian gothic stories is the calibre of the authors it features. Seeing one famous name (Rudyard Kipling, Arthur Conan Doyle, Henry James, Oscar Wilde) following another serves as a reminder of what an astonishingly fertile period for Gothic writing the 1890s were. The variety of talent gathered here is also proof of how versatile a genre the Gothic tale had become by this time. In this collection, the hack writer of sensationalist shockers sits alongside the dedicated literary artiste, the recorder of colonial life, the subversive satirist and the experimentalist. All found in the Gothic tale a peculiarly flexible literary form which proved irresistible to their audience.

In his perceptive introduction, Roger Luckhurst relates how gothic literature has undergone continual transformation since its inception, but he believes that the genre has never spoken to or for the moment more powerfully than it did at the *fin de siècle*. He explains, for the benefit of the uninitiated, how rapid social and technological development, a growing taste for decadent aesthetics, the collapse of sexual and racial identity, the concept of degeneration and the possibility of the end of civilisation itself came to preoccupy the Victorian mind. All of this meant that a new kind of literature was necessary. Luckhurst argues that the Gothic genre was “perfect for this new literary environment” because it was an “intrinsically hybrid form” of fiction that had a spectacular capacity for mirroring the fears of the age.

Each of the twelve tales chosen for this anthology represents one or more of the archetypal Victorian Gothic themes and forms. We have straightforward ghost stories (Grant Allen’s “Pallinghurst Barrow,” Jean Lorrain’s “The Spectral Hand”); psychological studies in the supernatural (Henry James’ “Sir Edmund Orme” and Vernon Lee’s “Dionea”); tales of terror from the Empire (B.M. Croker’s “The Dak Bungalow at Dakor,” Kipling’s “The Mark of the Beast”); exercises in suspense and revenge (Wilde’s “Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime,” Conan Doyle’s “The Case of Lady Sannox”); a work of outright horror (Conan Doyle’s “Lot No. 249”); and two pieces of science fiction (M.P. Shiel’s “Vaila” and Arthur Machen’s “The Great God Pan”).

One way of assessing this anthology is to follow the Gothic themes, characters and motifs which appear over and over again, albeit in a variety of forms. The return of the past is given a startlingly different treatment in the hands of Conan Doyle, Croker and Allen. Whether ghosts are a creation of the mind is a question that receives contrasting answers from Henry James, Allen and Lorrain. The *femme fatale* is a source of comedy for Wilde, a deadly influence for Conan Doyle and a figure bound up with ancient deities according to Machen and Lee. Bodily transformation is a subject that receives full-blooded exploration in Kipling, Allen and Machen, whose works all feature characters who turn into animals, undergo reverse decomposition and mutate. Finally, the extent to which the reader is encouraged to respect the ancient beliefs of different cultures varies depending on whether you are reading Croker, Kipling or Conan Doyle.

However one approaches it, this anthology is ultimately about enjoying some of the great moments in Gothic literature, and there is a tale here to suit everyone. Some fall short of the mark: Croker’s “Bungalow at Dakor” is a flat affair; Conan Doyle’s “Lady Sannox” is predictable but still horrid; and Wilde’s “Lord Arthur Savile” unwisely veers towards farce. If anything, the rarities please more than the

offerings from the “big names” of the genre. “Pallingshurst Barrow” is a splendidly chilling bit of hokum about a horde of spectral cavemen, and the two tales by Lorrain are classy and ironic, while “Dionea” is memorable for its heady atmosphere and gradually escalating sense of terror.

The centrepieces of the collection are the tales by Machen and Shiel. Both “The Great God Pan” and “Vaila” are overpowering amalgamations of science, the arcane and the occult. In the intricacy of their storytelling and their complex merging of the different species of the Gothic, they far surpass everything else on offer. They are phantasmagorical, hallucinatory, full of shadowy presences and dreamlike visions. Whereas the objective of many of the other stories seems to be simply to frighten or entertain, these two works represent something different – an attempt to use the genre to push the very boundaries of fiction itself.

“The Great God Pan” is a disturbing medley of Gothic obsessions. It manages to encompass an experiment to unmask the true face of reality, an epidemic of suicides, the discovery of a hideous archaeological artefact, a nocturnal journey through London’s necropolis, a crazed artist, a shape-shifting villainess who can literally frighten people to death, and the return to this dimension of the Lord of Misrule himself! Somehow, despite the luridness of his concoction, there is a tenderness about Machen’s writing, a tangible wonder at nature and the mysteries of creation that remains in the mind when the tale’s more morbid aspects are forgotten.

Shiel’s “Vaila,” on the other hand, contains not a shred of subtlety. It begins stark raving mad and reaches fever pitch by the end. The plot involves the narrator’s journey to the home of an old fellow student named Harfager on one of the Shetland Islands. He discovers him living in a spherical brass house surrounded by a maelstrom of howling winds and raging waters. It transpires that Harfager, his sister and their servant are all afflicted with Oxyecoia, a peculiar condition that makes them acutely sensitive to noise. Harfager shows his friend around the house, which turns out to be a single vast mechanism, constructed for some obscure purpose. What follows is a surreal epic involving bizarre technology, esoteric messages, necrophilia, spring-loaded coffins, an infestation of rats, mass death and the *aurora borealis*. A stranger, more demented piece of fiction would be difficult to conceive.

A volume like this is always going to have its omissions (Bram Stoker is notable by his absence and surely one of H.G. Wells’s darker fantasies should have found its way in ...) but overall this is the best representation of the diversity of *fin de siècle* Gothic literature available today. Luckhurst’s notes, chronology and bibliography shall prove invaluable to those new to the subject. For the seasoned devotee of the ghoulish, the grotesque and the decadent, however, it will be a pleasure to have these rare pieces between two covers. This is a book that is certain to stay by the bedside of any true horror lover.

EDWARD O'HARE

**Marilyn Brock, (ed.) *From Wollstonecraft to Stoker:
Essays on Gothic and Victorian Sensation Fiction***
(Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2009)

The Gothic is a genre that has long been studied for the issues that it raises concerning identity. *From Wollstonecraft to Stoker: Essays on Gothic and Victorian Sensation Fiction* is a refreshing and valuable collection that explores this genre within the context of nineteenth-century identity conflicts. In her introduction to this anthology of essays, Marilyn Brock explains that “Gothic and sensation fiction have much in common as literary genres that represent experiences inexpressible in literary realism by providing access to a dark, unconscious mode of knowledge” (1). She notes that both the reader and subject of a Gothic work experience a temporary identity crisis that is at once enjoyable and frightening. This takes into consideration that “the subject can project unresolved drives onto the characters, villains or otherwise, which provides an outlet for cathartic release of the psychic energy caught up in repressing these drives,” permitting the reader of these genres to “find one’s self while purging the unwanted, the Other” (2). The self is therefore forced into questioning its own perceptions about itself. Explaining that “the Gothic demonstrates that cultural assumptions about identity, sexuality and the circulation of power require ongoing challenge and reformulation,” (13) Brock correctly notes the potency this genre holds in comprehending the complexities of a particular society. She thus establishes her collection as an enlightening piece of scholarship for the twenty-first-century critic interested in Gothic and sensational works of the nineteenth century.

The literary works discussed here are well-known to critics; *Jane Eyre*, *The Woman in White*, *Great Expectations*, *Carmilla*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and *Dracula* are among the more famous specimens examined in this collection. Lesser-known works, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s “Good Lady Ducayne” and Bram Stoker’s *Jewel of the Seven Stars*, are also treated here, receiving as much attention and consideration as their better-known brethren. Brock has divided the thirteen essays of this collection into three sections; the issues that mark these divisions are the instability of identity, the colonial context, and the reoccurring theme of fallen men/ women in Victorian fiction. This is extremely helpful to the reader as these divisions give a coherent and logical structure to this collection. Furthermore, all of the essays here brilliantly explore how Gothic and sensation-fiction writers utilise the iconic devices of these genres to illustrate some precise attitude and/ or mentality that characterised nineteenth-century Britain. The thorough analysis throughout this volume of the application of the Gothic to the conflicting issues of the self in nineteenth-century literature is the highlight of this work.

Scholars interested in this period, or the particular literary works examined, will find these essays convincing and helpful. In the first subdivision of this text, that which focuses on identity roles, such as gender, class, and character, Brock explores Mary Wollstonecraft’s unfinished *Maria*, specifically examining the feminist overtones that are intertwined with Gothic elements because, according to Brock, the “Gothic is an important genre for representing female experience” (17) and is thus used by Wollstonecraft to explore the repressed female voice. With similar considerations in mind, the nineteenth-century distinction between poet and “poetess” is considered by Richard Fantina in his essay that looks at the works of Letitia Elizabeth Landon. Fantina considers Gothic examples, such as “The Bridge of Lindorf” in comparison to the works of the major Romantic poets, resulting in the conclusion that Landon has more in common with the male poets of her time, such as Byron and Keats, than with female counterparts like Felicia Hemans. Writing on Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Laurence Talairach-Vielmas examines the feminine ideal, with the Gothic helping “to shape Brontë’s reflection on contemporary culture and aesthetics” (50). Judith Sanders and Elizabeth Anderman each provide essays

on Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*; Sanders looks to the narrative consciousness of this text and the anxieties that are brought on via heterosexuality and marriage, whereas Anderman focuses on the disintegration of the novel's narrative voice, resulting in what this essay terms "reader hysteria."

The second part of this collection, which concerns itself with colonialism, begins with a discussion by Julie M. Barst on the contradictory nature of Australia, in novels such as Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* and Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*. Barst skillfully argues that Australia is portrayed as a duality; it is a mysterious place of danger and cruelty, yet also functions as a land of opportunity and second chances. According to Barst, these literary representations of Australia allowed the Victorians to come to terms with the complexities of British imperialism. In the same section, Braddon's 'Good Lady Duayne' is examined by Saverio Tomaiuolo, who explores the economic parallels between bourgeois desires and vampirism. Feminine boundaries connected to racial differences, with an emphasis on motherhood, are analysed by Brock, who focuses on J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and Stoker's *Dracula*. Brock explains that "the female victims in both tales are characterised as potential good English mothers, which is the most critical component of the stabilized definition of the Victorian home" (120). In much the same vein, Kate Holterhoff looks to Stoker's obscure *Jewel of the Seven Stars*, addressing the connections between gender and liminality. There is great variety of subject between this grouping of essays but they are unified by a strong colonial context that is significant to the direction that Gothic fiction was taking during this point in time.

The remaining essays of this collection focus on the idea of the fallen man/ woman as he or she is depicted via the Gothic literary trappings of the nineteenth century. Maria Granic-White examines the artificially created social values of mid-century Victorian society in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*. Specially, Granic-White argues that Gaskell questions "the absolute nature of two groups of women – the pure and the fallen – that expose the complex problems of the Victorian society's dichotomous worldview, and dismantles them in order to reconstitute them" (148). This discussion is followed by Stephanie King's essay which concerns itself with fatherly violence in Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*. King emphasises the characterisation of the fallen man, which is defined as encompassing "characters who succumb to deviance and vice, thereby threatening their gentlemanly status" (164). She cleverly juxtaposes this concept with the well-known image of the fallen woman and notes that the status of Silas and Dudley, as fallen men, is in direct opposition to ideas of the idolised Victorian male. With a similar interest in male figures, Jennifer Beauvais discusses *fin-de-siècle* masculinity in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. She interprets Hyde as an unmarried figure who moves between public and private spheres, displaying a duality of masculine and feminine traits, and who is ultimately used to personify the popular, yet non-traditional, image of the *fin-de-siècle* bachelor, an image that serves to question the perceived goodness of late nineteenth-century masculinity. Patriarchal expectations in Henry James's 'Owen Wingrave' and 'The Jolly Corner' are taken into consideration by Nicholas Harris in the final essay of this collection. As with the previous two divisions of essays, while there is a wide breadth of literary works examined here, the overarching theme of fallen men/ women in nineteenth-century Gothic fiction is conveyed effectively, adding to the overall value of this collection.

From Wollstonecraft to Stoker is an excellent collection of essays that will certainly be useful to those interested in how nineteenth-century writers utilised Gothic conventions when addressing issues of class, gender, and imperialism in their works. All of the essays are well-argued and brilliantly expounded on by their authors. The subjects and themes that are covered here, made especially coherent due to the clear direction of its editor, results in an approachable and intelligent work that should certainly be read by any scholar of the nineteenth-century novel, especially those interested in the Gothic and sensation-fiction genres. **JOEL T. TERRANOVA**

**Kate Egan, *Trash or Treasure?:
Censorship and the Changing Meanings of the Video Nasties*
(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)**

In September of last year, *The Irish Times* carried a report headlined “Re-release of ‘I Spit on Your Grave’ banned by film body” – proving, among other things, that you can’t keep a good “video nasty” down. In its infinite wisdom, the Irish Film Classification Office, currently headed by acting director, Mr. Ger Connolly, decided to prohibit a “new version” of Meir Zarchi’s 1978 rape-revenge thriller on the grounds that it “depicts acts of gross violence and cruelty (including torture) towards Humans.” Not an uncut version, one notes, merely one containing “a substantial amount of extra footage”. Cynics, of course, might suggest that this Canute-like decision was nothing more than a publicity ploy designed to secure Mr. Connolly’s elevation from acting to full-time director of the IFCO by being seen to get tough with the sort of filth that could otherwise easily be bought (uncut) with a few clicks of a mouse and a functioning credit card. But as no one in their right mind could possibly want films depicting “gross violence and cruelty (including torture)” made available to the Irish viewing public, it should be clear that the correct response of all right-thinking citizens is to applaud Mr. Connolly and his minions for their brave stance, and look forward to their rigorously applying the same criteria whenever *The Passion of the Christ*, for example, is submitted for DVD re-release.

I Spit on Your Grave was, of course, one of the originally “video nasties” outlawed in Britain with the introduction of the Video Recordings Act (VRA) of 1984, and as such features in Kate Egan’s *Trash or treasure?: Censorship and the changing meanings of the video nasties* (that loathsome lower-case is how the title is given), a short but heavyweight examination of the phenomenon which aims to “chart and explore the cultural mediations and historical processes that have underpinned the video nasties genre and its changing uses and meanings, and through this, to contribute to an understanding of how genre users can affect the functions and meanings of a genre or cultural category through time, and in relation to specific contexts and circumstances.” So there we have it. Comprised of three main sections (“Producing the nasties,” “Cults, collectors and cultural memory,” “Re-releases and re-evaluations”), each subdivided to cover such topics as the legacy of British horror film reviewing, the marketing of the video nasties, the anti-nasty press campaign, specialist horror magazines, “masculine” identities and nasty websites, collecting nasties, the post-VRA remarketing of nasties, and their revival at film festivals and on television, *Trash or treasure?* proves to be both an exhaustive and exhausting analysis of a much-covered subject.

There is, no doubt, a fascinating book to be written on why Britain, as opposed to other Western democracies, has always regarded the moving image with a suspicion and fear bordering on the pathological, leading to a system of censorship still routinely described as more restrictive than that of any comparable state (and despite the recent and strenuously Blairite efforts of the British Board of Film Censors to rebrand itself as a cuddly “classification” service, solely devoted to, like, helping parents make the right decisions for their kids, yeah?) It’s not as if there have been historic outbreaks of savagery, nihilism and civil disobedience arising from exposure to the evils of motion pictures; even post-VRA links made between films such as *First Blood* and *Child’s Play 3* and certain celebrated crimes have been shown to be less convincing than a politician’s promise. Part of the reason, in Egan’s view, is the suspicion of popular culture – and American popular culture, in particular – harboured by film critics across the political spectrum, all of whom seem to imagine the film business should be governed by the same Reithian principles espoused by the BBC, viz., to educate, inform and entertain – and preferably in

that order. Horror films, in particular, have routinely been dismissed as either “slick” (if well-made and American), mindless (badly made and American) or implausible (formulaic and American), the latter a charge seldom made against “approved” directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, for whom plausibility was never a pressing concern.

In the section covering the marketing of the video nasties, Egan opens with a quote describing the early, unregulated years of home video as “A golden age ... [which] offered brief and unprecedented access to material which was almost legendary in its unavailability.” While that was undoubtedly the case, it should be remembered that the “golden age” was not the exclusive property of the gorehounds who have since appropriated it as their own: in those distant days one was as likely to find rare D.W. Griffith titles and previously unreleased Italian Westerns in one’s local video shop as *Prisoner of the Cannibal God* and its more notorious ilk such as *The Driller Killer* and *Zombie Flesh Eaters*. Later on, Egan makes the point that, while the subsequent campaign run by “a newly censorious right-wing British establishment” created and fuelled the nasties scare, the nasties themselves had been “created” by the outrageous (and frequently misleading) artwork and provocative sales tactics of the very distributors who would soon be having their collars felt by the Law. It is also useful to be reminded that the Thatcher government, with its emphasis on free-market entrepreneurship, initially had no interest in legislating against the “flickering filth” hysterically denounced by the *Daily Mail*, and was only reluctantly persuaded to introduce the VRA as a response to that organ’s on-going campaign of scaremongering, itself apparently instigated by some deranged Labour MP from Wales.

In considering the “second life” of (second-hand) video nasties, Egan provides a sustained and not-always flattering analysis of *The Dark Side* magazine and its role as a “gateway” for collectors and would-be collectors of “illicit” videos, while also subjecting the tactics employed by editor Allan Bryce, particularly in his letters page, to the sort of in-depth scrutiny that would, one imagines, leave that worthy gentleman feeling distinctly ill-at-ease, if not actually paranoid. Following on from this, Egan turns her attention to websites dedicated to video nasties, which she discovers to be mainly maintained by a coterie of mainly male obsessives obsessively dedicated to endless list-making, trivia and “facts” – to which one can only say, no shit? Rather bafflingly, however, Egan then takes issue with their appropriation of facts, asking “how can websites present these facts as their information and as part of their archive when such facts derive from official documents produced by governmental or state departments?” For an academic, whose own book is stuffed with endless “borrowed” quotes from other academics, to query the propriety of non-academics using official and presumably tax-payer-funded information to bolster whatever argument they want to make seems decidedly odd, to say nothing of rich.

At other points in the book, there are further examples of what might be termed a clash between the author’s ivory tower perspective and the real world. In the chapter on collecting video nasties, Egan paraphrases approvingly from a 2001 essay on the subject which states that “media industries and film distribution companies have sought to market contemporary collectibles, firstly, through the creation of discourses of scarcity or exclusivity (where videos or discs are marketed as limited collector’s editions, collector’s special editions or classic collectibles) and, secondly, through the inclusion on discs of an array of extras and other forms of background information on the production and post-production history of the film concerned.” While there is no doubt a certain amount of truth in this, as far as it goes, it tends to overlook the primary commercial reality which determined that DVD companies, in order to sell their new product, had to provide a reason for people to make the switch from VHS to DVD in the first place, and that providing extra goodies was the obvious way to do so.

In the section on remarketing the nasties in the post-VRA era, Egan draws attention to the fact that Anchor Bay UK chose to use the American packaging for its DVD release of *The Evil Dead* rather than the iconic imagery employed by Palace Pictures in Britain on its first release, making the assumption that this was done deliberately, to avoid courting further controversy (unlikely, given the fact that the film had then been passed uncut on DVD). A more probable explanation is that Anchor Bay UK were either unable to license the original artwork or were too idle or tight-fisted to do so, and simply issued the film, with national modifications, in the packaging provided by its American parent company. This is followed by a lengthy examination of the pre- and post-VRA incarnations of Vipco, the video distribution company which most assiduously trumpets and exploits its origin in the nasties era, that will leave most horror enthusiasts wondering why so much attention is being devoted to a company that, in the real world, is a byword for heavily-censored, poor-quality prints bought only by those who know no better (a reputation eventually, and amusingly, acknowledged by Egan through quotes from understandably aggrieved fans).

All in all, *Trash or treasure?* is an interesting and valuable work, though the necessity of hacking one's way through an often impenetrable jungle of academic jargon rather detracts from the overall effect, and there is a tendency, common to such works, to state the obvious as if it were revelation. On its own terms, however, it is well-written (though a Lecturer in Film and Television Studies at the University of Wales should know that cameras pan left-to-right or vice versa, and not "in and out") and cogently argued, but its future lies entirely within the walls of academe, not least due to its outrageous £50.00 retail price. It is also to be regretted that Manchester University Press baulked at the cost of colour plates, as the author makes a number of references to the colour schemes of the original nasties' screamingly unsubtle artwork. Given the high cost of the book, combined with the nation's parlous financial state, the current reviewer is considering donating his copy to the Irish Film Classification Office, where it may be read as an historical object lesson in the futility – and indeed, the immorality – of dictating to adults what they may or may not watch in the privacy of their own homes.

JOHN EXSHAW

**Patrick McAleer, *Inside the Dark Tower Series:
Art, Evil and Intertextuality in the Stephen King Novels***
(North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2009)

Patrick McAleer's *Inside the Dark Tower Series* (2009) traces the history of Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series from conception to completion. Beginning in 1970 and stretching up to 2004, the *Dark Tower* series has reached a significant readership and consumed a large portion of Stephen King's life. McAleer discusses the effect the series has had on King, his readers, and the academic world.

McAleer begins by analysing the various genres of the *Dark Tower* series, claiming that the series fits within the realm of science fiction. Despite McAleer's assertion that King is attempting to defy genre and ascend to the ranks of more serious writers, the series is limited by being classed as belonging to a popular genre. McAleer gives reasons as to why the series should be examined outside the realm of the popular, and concludes that the main character, Roland, with his quest for knowledge, can be deemed a science-fictional figure. If examined in this way, McAleer explains, the series' ending can be better understood; however, this leaves multiple questions unanswered as to the completion of the series, since the end of *The Dark Tower* takes the reader and Roland back to the beginning of *The Gunslinger* where he must continuously repeat his quest.

Nevertheless, assigning genre to the *Dark Tower* series is difficult, because King himself did not follow any strict pattern which might permit it to be labeled as belonging to a specific category. In the Afterword to the original *Gunslinger* (1978), discussing where the series will go, Stephen King says, "Somewhere inside I know all of those things, and there is no need of an argument, or a synopsis, or an outline (outlines are the last resource of bad fiction writers who wish to God they were writing masters' theses). When it's time, those things – and their relevance to the gunslinger's quest – will roll out as naturally as tears or laughter." At any rate, McAleer brings a new and interesting academic interpretation to King's series, something which had previously been lacking due as much to the sporadic publication of the individual books as to confusion concerning the purpose and direction of the series.

Following his analysis of genre, McAleer asserts that, with the exception of James Egan's *The Dark Tower: Stephen King's Gothic Western* (1987), the texts written to support and analyse the series only add to the content of the series rather than provide real academic analysis. Bev Vincent's *The Road to the Dark Tower* (2004), for example, serves as a summary, and Robin Furth's *A Concordance* (2003), which is an encyclopedia, only attempts to give the reader a more ordered understanding of the content of the series as opposed to the context. King himself tries to add to the context of the series with two comic books, *The Gunslinger Born* (2007) and *The Long Road Home* (2008), but McAleer believes that these prevent it from being taken as a body of serious literary work: the comics do not connect to the rest of the series, as they add new information that contradicts events in the novels. Therefore, they create confusion for a consistent reader and misconception for the new reader. The length of time King took to publish the series could have caused his lapses in information, or, as McAleer says, it could be attributed to King's determination to make up a story despite existing genre rules and conventions.

McAleer seeks to add clarity to the series and provide a more academic interpretation, primarily by emphasising Roland's propensity for evil. He writes, "Roland remains as an evil character, not necessarily because he often chooses what appears to be evil to the reader but because he knows he is damned and does nothing to atone for his actions" (122). McAleer analyses the series' other characters in the same light, discussing the various forms of evil and the absence of good in King's fictional world. He focuses on the characters whose main crimes stand in the path of Roland's pursuit of the Tower: Rhea,

Jonas, Mordred Deschain, John Farson, the Tick Tock Man, Blaine the Mono, Randall Flagg, and the Crimson King. McAleer concludes that it is Stephen King's universe that is perverse and, as a result, the characters are portrayed as being perverse. Ultimately, however, Roland remains the most ruthless character in the series, though his actions are justified as he treks toward the Tower to save all universes.

Nevertheless, McAleer questions the validity of both King and Roland's motivations. Despite the perverse nature of the universe, it is King's story, and he uses the characters for whatever purpose he chooses. His main reasoning for this is to maintain his fictional world so as to allow him to continue to write. What McAleer's reading fails to acknowledge here is the extent to which the Tower's existence maintains evil in the universe. As long as the Tower stands, King will have a story to tell and Roland will continue to exist. Evil will need to be written about by the author and gotten rid of by the character. King and Roland work together to maintain the Tower because both King and Roland thrive on the evil that exists in the world, which the Tower creates, immortalising their required symbiotic relationship and justifying their existence as writer and character. Anyone who threatens the existing perverseness of Roland or King's world therefore stands as a threat. The characters who question the nature of the universe are destroyed because they either attempt to bring down the Tower, such as the Crimson King, or they choose death, like Jonas, Mordred, the town of Tull, and the city of Lud. This is not the first time characters from a Stephen King novel have tried to destroy evil at its source, but it is the first time a character – the Crimson King – has found the origins of evil and tried to bring down the entire fabric of existence by destroying the Tower. Because all characters fail to do so, the origin and continuation of "King's Evil" in his other works can be understood.

The Dark Tower, which is the center for King's fictional universe, draws characters from some of Stephen King's other books, including Randall Flagg from *The Stand* (1978) and *Eyes of the Dragon* (1987), Father Callahan from *Salem's Lot* (1975), and the Crimson King from *Insomnia* (1994). McAleer suggests that these intertextual references are a gateway to all of King's other fiction. He then describes King's *oeuvre* as "the longest novel in history," tying all the other works within it to the *Dark Tower* series as one story. McAleer claims that "... in approaching Stephen King's fiction in its entirety, each tale unto itself is read in one of two ways: as an isolated, stand-alone story or as a connected piece to the *Dark Tower* series" (139). If the latter statement is true, this would certainly answer many questions as to why evil is portrayed as an explicit force in all of King's fictional writing, and why the majority end with explosions, the aim of which is to rid the world of evil. These conclusions, or lack thereof, are, in McAleer's reading, a result of Roland's continuous quest for the Tower. As long as Roland preserves the Tower, then evil will continue to exist in all of King's fictional worlds. And since it can only be undone in the world of the Dark Tower, characters such as John Coffey from *The Green Mile* (1996) do not live very long, or choose not to, because of their propensity to do good. The reasoning for the continuation of Roland's quest is, for King and Roland, therefore both personal and universal.

McAleer concludes his book by discussing whether or not the *Dark Tower* series will survive, ultimately depending on time to reveal the answer. He also discusses the harsh criticism King's writing has faced in the past from critics like Harold Bloom, and the resentment King feels for post-structuralism and Roland Barthes' notion of the "Death of the Author." King's solution to this is to write himself into the story and save the main character's life, thus very literally asserting the continuing importance of the author's presence in his work. McAleer claims that King uses metafiction and intertextuality to satirise Roland Barthes' essay, stating, "All in all, it is with this planned, complex and intricate network of fiction that King reminds readers that not even the death or removal of the author would allow for readers to take over their own readership of King's fiction because the pulls and designs of Stephen King as an author are ubiquitous and anything but negligible" (145). Ultimately, Roland's quest for the Tower doubles with

King's quest for immortality through writing which would imply that the series itself calls for the very thing that McAleer wants – further academic attention.

Whether or not the series will survive, McAleer's analysis of the series is an excellent step in that direction. McAleer calls for the recontextualisation of King's other works and their place within his fictional universe. If his "other" novels and short stories all have a place within the series, then King will have created the longest novel in history. Therefore, if one book is available for critical analysis, they all are. As McAleer puts it, "For the time being, the door to the Tower is open and readers are walking through it. King is certainly doing all he can to keep the path to the Dark Tower cleared for his readers, but even an author with such popularity and control over his creation cannot ensure that the *Dark Tower* will live on. Mayhap it will, mayhap it will not. Still, the tale of the gunslinger is being read, and that is certainly a promising start" (*Inside the Dark Tower Series*, 182). McAleer's book cannot decide the fate of *The Dark Tower* series, but it has certainly laid the foundations for further analysis of the series in its entirety. If nothing else, it serves as the first of hopefully many academic texts analysing a central work in the Stephen King canon.

DAN TOOLEY

“Into the Labyrinth”
Adam Foulds, *The Quickenings Maze*
 (Jonathan Cape, 2009)

Adam Foulds is one of Britain's most highly acclaimed young poets and it's therefore appropriate that *The Quickenings Maze*, his second novel, should feature fictionalised characterisations of two of the greatest British poets who ever lived – Alfred, Lord Tennyson and John Clare. The result is one of the finest works of Gothic fiction of the last twenty years and a stunning performance by a new master of the genre. Set in the Forest of Epping near London around 1840, *The Quickenings Maze* concerns the fortunes of Dr. Matthew Allen, chemist, phrenologist, naturalist, and the physician in charge of High Beach Asylum, a shelter for the insane which Allen runs along his own reformist precepts.

An autodidact with a vast, inquiring mind, Dr. Allen has become a wealthy and influential figure, but he wants more. No longer finding the plight of the insane sufficiently stimulating, Dr. Allen conceives a new business scheme which he is convinced will make him one of the richest men in the country. Risking everything, he sets about developing a machine to change the very face of the earth.

Among Allen's patients at High Beach is the so-called “Peasant Poet” John Clare, a great recorder of the vanishing English countryside. Once the toast of literary society, Clare's drinking and depression have led to his incarceration. Cut off from his wife and children and the natural kingdom that nourished his soul, he drifts ever deeper into a labyrinth of lunacy. Another poet soon appears in Epping – Alfred Tennyson, who has come ostensibly to entrust his melancholic brother into Allen's care. His real intentions, though, are to overcome the crippling grief caused by the death of his best friend Arthur Hallam and to rediscover his lost inspiration.

Gradually the lives of Foulds' characters begin to touch one another's. Dr. Allen seeks Tennyson's investment in his machine while Hannah, his lonely daughter, hopes to win the heart of the dashing if aloof poet. However, Allen also enlists the help of an engineer, Thomas Rawnsley, whose awkward but sincere love finds its object in Hannah. Together Allen and Rawnsley construct the machine, a mechanical device designed for automatically reproducing woodcarving, but their reckless dreams quickly lead to disaster. Meanwhile, Clare's roaming beyond the asylum to a gypsy encampment ends with him falling victim to Allen's sadistic assistants, who place the gentle, child-like poet in solitary confinement. Soon his only hope of salvation rests on returning home.

As the work of a 33 year-old writer, *The Quickenings Maze* is an colossal achievement, a work whose tender, delicate prose holds within it a galaxy of complex thought, powerful emotion and human truths. Foulds marvellously evokes the utter strangeness of an earlier age. He delights in the arcane details and bizarre trappings of a time when science and medicine were still not that far removed from metaphysics and alchemy, and when the goal of genius was to discover the Grand Agent, the animator of everything. As with all of the great Gothic writers, in Foulds' imagination, man is part of a single, unified reality in which human beings, trees, thought-waves, sunbeams and shadows are all equally alive. There are no beginnings or endings, births or deaths in this book, only metamorphoses.

Foulds' talent for characterisation is also extraordinary. His creations instantly emerge from the page as complete beings, each with a brain, heart and voice of their own. This allows Foulds to handle one of the classic Gothic themes – the shifting, unstable nature of identity – exquisitely. Those who live in his asylum, both sane and insane, are people who have lost or are in danger of losing themselves. Allen's

obsession with the great mysteries of the universe and his belief in progress lead him to overlook his human frailty, with catastrophic consequences. By contrast, Tennyson is a vacant creature, waiting to turn his own sadness into his life's work. In response to violence, Clare becomes other people (including Lord Byron, Shakespeare and a boxer named Jack Randall). Another inmate called Margaret has been transformed, as a result of her husband's savagery, into an avatar of religious martyrdom and prepares to absorb all the evils of the world. The scenes in which she experiences miraculous visions are Gothic writing of the highest order:

"And the wounds of the nails, driven into His poor, innocent body by the hammering of Sin. They held him up. He hung from them. This thought enlarged suddenly – they were how He hung in the world: it was his wounds, His pain, that connected Him to the world. She felt this in herself, that at her points of contact with the world she was in pain, that her soul was pinned to the wall of her flesh, suffering, suffocating for release. She knotted her fingers tightly together, swaying in the strength of this thought. She breathed hissing through her teeth, grateful for this illumination, and wanting more."

What gives *The Quickenning Maze* its exceptional power is Foulds' ability with language. His shimmering, evanescent writing dances to a unique and glorious melody and every sentence glitters with gemstones. The period dialogue, the undoing of many lesser historical novels, is vivid, lyrical and entirely convincing. Above all, his attunement to the natural world, his appreciation of the patterns and cycles of organic life unseen by most of us, makes *The Quickenning Maze* a humbling celebration of our planet. This is a novel about two great poets written by a novelist with poetic powers of perception equal to theirs in every way.

A brief, simple story in which the universal predicament of mankind can be glimpsed, *The Quickenning Maze* is a literary novel set apart by its capacity to be frequently and often unbearably moving. It is a book which reveals much about our primal relationship with the earth, the quiet disappointments and tragedies which ruin the lives of most people, the brutality and folly which can destroy us so quickly, the limitless scope of the imagination, the resilience of faith and the precariousness of our hold on reality. *The Quickenning Maze* confirms Adam Foulds as one of the most brilliant young authors to appear in recent times. A truly beautiful novel, it is a work of the highest distinction that will linger long in the memory and in the heart.

NORMAN OSBORN

Ludmilla Petrushevskaya, *There Once Lived a Woman Who Tried to Kill Her Neighbour's Baby*
(London: Penguin, 2010)

It would be fair to say that, until recently, Russian writer Ludmilla Petrushevskaya has been rather unknown in the West. A few of her novels and short stories have been translated over the years and the short animated film *Tale of Tales* (1979), which she helped to write, is a minor cult classic, but otherwise she remained hidden behind the Iron Curtain. Reading this new collection of tales, one wonders how she could have been overlooked for so long. As it turns out, for much of her career Petrushevskaya had trouble getting her work published in Russia. Her realist tales about the hardships suffered by ordinary people were classed as being too radical, dissident and, surprisingly, “too grim” (given the period she was living through this is about as considered a literary judgement as saying that there’s too much snow in Pushkin’s *The Blizzard*). In the introduction to this collection of short stories, Keith Gessen, who has translated with the help of Anna Summers, highlights just how difficult it was for her to be published: “[t]he same editor who first published Solzhenitsyn in the Soviet Union in *Novy Mir* in the early 1960s met with Petrushevskaya in 1968 to tell her that, in her case there was no hope.” Instead, she wrote largely for fringe theatre. But in the late 1980s, Petrushevskaya returned to prose and her reputation started to grow. The title page of this collection states that she has since been shortlisted for the Russian Booker Prize and has won The Triumph, Russia’s most prestigious award. Petrushevskaya is now commonly regarded as one of Russia’s leading contemporary writers, is studied in universities and her 70th birthday was even cause for national celebration.

The subtitle of this collection is, fittingly, *Scary Fairy Tales* and the stories are divided by Gessen and Summers into four sections, “Songs of the Eastern Slavs,” “Allegories,” “Requiems” and “Fairy Tales.” While these categories encompass a wide variety of styles, from magical realism to ghost stories and even science fiction, Petrushevskaya can skilfully make them all feel like age-old folk tales. Quite a few even begin with the classic invocation; “There once lived ...” In a recent introduction to a volume of Grimm’s Fairy Tales, A.S Byatt mentions how the Brothers retained “the peculiarly flat, unadorned nature” of fairy tales. This is a stylistic quality which Petrushevskaya also utilises, while her characters often function more as archetypes than as individuals, and remain unnamed or are simply referred to as Mothers, Wives, Husbands or Sons. Indeed, family is one of Petrushevskaya’s recurring preoccupations, along with its attendant obligations, sacrifices and betrayals. One of her most disturbing treatments of this topic and possibly the most powerful story in this collection is “Hygiene,” in which a deadly virus may or may not be spreading through a small community. With its queasy mix of tension and violence, it’s the sort of story one wishes David Cronenberg would adapt. From the first line, it grabs the reader and refuses to let go:

“One time the doorbell rang at the apartment of the R. Family, and the little girl ran to answer it. A young man stood before her. In the hallway light he appeared to be ill, with extremely delicate, pink, shiny skin. He said he’d come to warn the family of an immediate danger: There was an epidemic in the town, an illness that killed in three days. People turned red, they swelled up, and then, mostly, they died.”

What follows is a gut-wrenching account that unflinchingly charts the disintegration of a family as a result of misfortune, fear, greed and suspicion. The violent disintegration of the family unit is a common feature of fairy tales (just think of Hansel and Gretel) but here Petrushevskaya infuses it with elements of Gothic horror. There is even an explicit reference to that other famous tale of paranoia and murder – Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Black Cat.” With its brutal portrayal of a society where its inhabitants quickly

turn on each other, deserted by the government, willing to murder each other and even their young, it is a chilling thought that this story is listed under the section entitled “Allegories.” It would seem that a grim parable could be a more accurate method of depicting such material than any amount of state-sanctioned “Socialist Realist” tales.

As this brief synopsis indicates, Petrushevskaya’s real skill lies in the way in which the mundane, the horrific and the fantastical are always narrated in the same matter-of-fact style. For her, fantasy and reality appear to be of the same substance. A contemporary of Petrushevskaya, the fabulist author Andrei Sinyavsky, wrote in his essay “What is Socialist Realism?” that “I put my hope in a phantasmagoria art [...] an art in which the grotesque will replace realistic descriptions of ordinary life. Such an art would correspond best to the spirit of our time. May the fantastic imagery of Hoffman and Dostoevskii [...] teach us how to be truthful with the absurd and fantastic”, a sentiment Petrushevskaya would seem to share. Indeed, the stories wouldn’t work quite so well if Petrushevskaya wasn’t so good at capturing everyday life; the fact that she was initially known for writing gritty, realist stories comes as no surprise. The characters that populate her stories are drunks, failures, the grief-stricken, the meek and the unlucky. Some of the stories, such as “There’s Someone in the House” and “Revenge,” show a real flair for domestic Gothic and could rival the work of Shirley Jackson in their depictions of mental disintegration and hysteria. However, unlike her more straightforward works, these fairy tales manage to reveal obliquely what it was like to live under a Soviet regime. There is no unveiling of massacres or gulags; but the bleak, insistent reality of life in Russia is everywhere in these stories. For example, “The New Robinson Crusoes: A Chronicle of the End of the Twentieth Century” recounts a family’s hardscrabble existence, living a semi-itinerant lifestyle which means that they have to barter, cajole and work constantly to survive. Money appears to be useless and they don’t listen to the radio because it’s “full of lies and falsehoods.” What the family is running from is never fully revealed, but it is implied that it might be the government. This story could almost be a post-apocalyptic fable, except that one has the sense that Petrushevskaya’s portrait of a society in ruins wasn’t totally fictional or figurative. Corruption is endemic in these stories, the family unit is unstable and life is often disposable. Like many of her other tales, the unsettling atmosphere in this story is created by a low-level, underlying terror that is never resolved; the family is constantly under threat and any day could be their last.

Other stories in the *Fairy Tales* section of the book such as “Marilena’s Secret” (in which a pair of ballet-dancing twins are turned into a single overweight woman by a vengeful wizard) or “The Cabbage-Patch Mother” (narrating what happens when a woman comes across a tiny, teardrop-sized infant) incorporate more traditional fantasy elements and seem closer to the work of Angela Carter. There is a whimsy in these stories that’s skilfully tempered by dark humour and a deadpan treatment of surreal events. Petrushevskaya also has a great knack for a striking phrase. When the twins are transformed into an obese woman, she is described as having “a chest like a big pillow, a back like a blow-up mattress, and a stomach like a bag of potatoes.” Events unfold in a way that is difficult to predict, but it feels like there is a nightmare logic dictating the events in these stories, while the occasional flights of fancy act as a respite from some of the darker aspects of the collection.

If there is one drawback to this book, it is the occasional repetitiveness that mars many short-story collections. Given the scant characterisation and reoccurrence of similar scenarios, it is occasionally difficult to tell certain stories apart, but this is only a minor criticism. Overall, Petrushevskaya draws on the strengths of fairy tales, their capacity for magic and tragedy, their hard-nosed folk wisdom, and their ability to terrify and entertain. Writing about Andrei Sinyavsky, Geoffrey Hosking says that his “tales all invest mundane Soviet reality with elements of the grotesque partly as a technique of *ostranerie* ('making strange') to draw attention to specific aspects of that reality [...]. The atmosphere of authoritarianism,

mass deceit, mistrust and fear transposes readily into a nightmare world.” He may as well have been thinking about Petrushevskaya. These are unsentimental stories written by someone with a clear eye for the realities of life. There are few consolations but occasionally there is a happy ending; the child is saved or the dead lover comes back one last time. In their introduction, Gessen and Summers trace these tales to the ancient tradition of *nekyia* (though they may be confusing this with *katabasis*) which has literary origins in the *Odyssey* and runs right through to *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Turn of the Screw*, whereby characters travel “to the underworld and other parallel realities occur outside past, present, and future.” *Nekyia* results in a communion with the dead whereby they speak once more to the living. With these Gothic tales, Petrushevskaya performs her own sort of *nekyia*, giving voice to those who were silenced, disappeared and killed. Gessen and Summers have done a commendable job in doing much the same thing for Petrushevskaya’s literary voice. It is to be hoped that this collection is only the beginning and that in time we may finally have the full measure of this intriguing author.

BRIAN DAVEY

FILM REVIEWS

Black Swan

(Dir. Darren Aronofsky) USA 2010

20th Century Fox International

“Done to death, I know. But not like this.” When Vincent Cassel’s leery ballet school director, Thomas Leroy, introduces his cast to the new season’s programme featuring ‘Swan Lake’, he describes how he will reinvent the classic ballet by stripping it down and making it visceral. To do this, he needs a new lead dancer, a woman capable of embodying the characters of both the innocent white swan and the seductive black swan. Darren Aronofsky’s *Black Swan* takes us on a journey from rehearsal to the stage as a delicate young woman, Nina Sayers (Natalie Portman), prepares for the role and undergoes a tragic transformation. Aronofsky’s latest film doesn’t so much delve into the world of ballet as use it as a pretty setting for his psychological tale of artistic obsession. Nina’s life consists of dancing and not much else. She appears to have no interests outside ballet and lives at home with her mother (Barbara Hershey as a truly terrifying composite of stage mother and classic horror psycho mother), whose grip on her daughter is far tighter than Nina’s own grip on reality. Already unpopular with the other dancers, and with suspicion surrounding her sudden elevation to prima ballerina, the introduction of a new dancer to the company (Mila Kunis) quite literally throws Nina off balance and forces the viewer to reel with her for the rest of the film as she tries unsuccessfully to regain her footing. When Nina’s obsessive efforts to be perfect come into conflict with Thomas’s insistence that she needs to lose herself, her descent into madness accelerates.

The tortured artist is a common figure in popular culture, almost as common as the portrayal of female artistic creativity being the result of a sexual awakening, and *Black Swan* flogs this tired cliché with the best of them. Lily’s fluidity and ease of movement in her dancing is aligned with her promiscuity whereas Nina’s inability to seduce the audience is attributed to her perceived crippling frigidity, so instead of suggesting that Nina perhaps needs to get in touch with herself, Thomas instructs her to go home and “touch yourself”. Of course, if *Black Swan* is about one woman’s psychological breakdown, then the choice of ballet, where dancers are required to be beautiful and dainty on the surface while covering up all kinds of things that society might consider ugly, like deformed feet and eating disorders, is an appropriate one. Nina is a professional athlete with a finely tuned body who hasn’t paid attention to her mental health and the deterioration of her mind manifests itself in the slow and subtle destruction of her body. Director David Fincher has called *Black Swan* “a werewolf movie, with a woman” but so wildly varying between subtle and obvious are some of Nina’s bodily mutations that hers in an unconvincing metamorphosis. Perhaps the problem is that before its release, there was a perception that this was going to be a film about ballet. Many of the more gruesome, teeth-clenching moments actually depict average day-to-day realities experienced by ballet dancers, such as damaged toenails and bone-cracking muscle stretches. Some of the violence Nina inflicts on her mother, however, is refreshingly shocking in its simplicity, as are her skin problems, but the decision to amplify these symptoms into full-on CGI transformation is a major flaw with Aronofsky’s film: *Black Swan* doesn’t know if it wants to be a body horror film or a psychological thriller and it fails as both. Despite the behind-the-head vantage shots and the sense of disorientation we share with Nina, we are still never fully admitted to her mind. Outside Nina’s head, gaps and inconsistencies leave the viewer questioning the plot as the film hurtles from one incident to the next without any smooth development; *Black Swan* struggles to decide if it is depicting Nina’s breakdown from inside her head or from without. It’s all a bit *Mullholland Drive* but without Lynch’s sense of

wonder. Aurally, though, *Black Swan* astounds with Clint Mansell's reworking of Tchaikovsky's 'Swan Lake' score. Over this is the unusual inclusion of organic sounds from the dance; movie-makers tend to record over or edit out the live sounds of dancers breathing and of shoes hitting the floor. These combine with the post-production sounds of muscle and skin stretching, contracting, snapping, blistering and writhing to create a meaty soundscape that keeps the viewer on edge.

The heavy-handedness with which many aspects of the film are presented is quite disappointing from the director of *The Wrestler* and *Requiem for a Dream*. The use of mirrors in heightening the viewer's and Nina's sense of paranoia is effective but rather obvious, as are Nina's creepily out-of-tune Swan Lake ringtone and music box. Similarly, the contrasts between the sinister urban scenes, in the subway, and Nina's womblike bedroom, where it is never night or day (only pink), continue the clumsy visual dichotomies in this film, exemplified by the costumes of the main characters. One can imagine some slapping of palms on foreheads when it was decided that Nina should always wear pink and white and Lily should be dressed in black – just in case the viewer doesn't realise which one is the good girl and which one the bad girl, which the white swan and which the black swan, the mommy's girl and the party girl, the virgin and the whore etc.

Perhaps most of all what Aronofsky's movie suffers from is what Thomas says of Nina's dancing: it is overstudied with not enough feeling. The casual acceptance, without comment, of issues and themes in the world of ballet such as eating disorders leaves giant chunks of unexplored areas. Neither does *Black Swan* say anything new about age and beauty. In particular, the character of Beth, Nina's predecessor (the woefully underutilised Winona Ryder), represents a wasted opportunity, and the story of a dying swan may have made for a more interesting film. All in all, you can't help wishing that Aronofsky had spent just a little more time developing his other characters – poor Vincent Cassel is given some of the hammiest lines in a 'backstage' movie since Mickey Rooney. Having said that, there are very few demanding and screen-dominating roles for women of any age in Hollywood and to his credit, Aronofsky has created a complete and nuanced female character that is in almost every frame of the film. Natalie Portman's Nina is a very carefully crafted and precise performance that suggests months of dedicated practice, with Portman making up for her lack of skill in ballet shoes by portraying what is going on in Nina's head (her minute changes of facial expression, in particular, are quite amazing). Don't see *Black Swan* if you're expecting anything along the lines of *The Red Shoes*, though. Despite the obvious comparisons, Powell and Pressburger's 1948 movie about ballet and obsession is a far more restrained and sophisticated affair than the rather obvious melodrama of *Black Swan*. "Done to death, I know. But not like this." Unfortunately Darren, done better elsewhere.

Niamh Dowdall

Confessions
(Dir. Tetsuya Nakashima) Japan 2010
 Third Window Films Limited

This review contains extensive spoilers

John Aptly described on the poster as a “cross between *Grange Hill* and *Old Boy*”, *Confessions* is an energetic, compelling and often rather silly revenge flick in which a young school teacher is pushed too far and gets her own back by encouraging her former charges to do what they do best: inflict pain upon one another. It is also Japan’s official entry for the Best Foreign Film category at the 2011 Oscars, although it didn’t make the shortlist.

The film begins with an arresting 30-minute monologue which opens as the seemingly mild-mannered Miss Moriguchi (Takako Matsu) announces to her disinterested, milk-slurping students (all aged around 12 or 13) that this will be her last day as their teacher. Initially, they’re all too busy gossiping, flirting, text-messaging and bullying one another to take any notice of what she’s saying (and here, the sound design, which emphasises their ceaseless chatter, does almost too good a job of conveying their insolence: it’s like being in the classroom yourself). Nevertheless, Miss Moriguchi keeps talking, calmly, clearly and intensely, and as she does so, a deeply tragic story emerges. Having become pregnant four years previously during her relationship with a more senior colleague – a noted educationalist with a considerable cult following – she discovered that her fiancée had contracted the HIV virus. He refused to marry her or have anything to do with their child for the little girl’s own sake, so that she will not be subjected to the same kind of ignorant prejudice that the class display once their teacher mentions the disease. Nevertheless, Miss Moriguchi and her daughter have lived a happy, contented existence – at least until the day the child’s body was found floating in a swimming pool near the school.

Though the death was declared an accident, the teacher has, she announces, just realised that her daughter was murdered, and that two of her own students – who she dubs ‘Boy A’ and ‘Boy B’ – were in fact responsible. However, the Japanese penal code apparently means that minors convicted of even the most heinous of crimes receive very lenient punishment: even if she turns the murderers in, therefore, she knows that they will suffer very little. Hence the nasty little twist in Miss Moriguchi’s tale. She tells the class that she has deliberately contaminated the milk just consumed by the boys in question with HIV-infected blood from her late fiancée. Cue hysteria, and fade to black.

It’s a striking opening, to be sure, and one of the things that makes it so effective is that the teacher’s measured tone, composed demeanour and sober dress all seem so completely at odds with the horrific chain of events that she describes. For their part, although some of them are obviously disturbed by what she is telling them, Moriguchi’s students react to much of her account with derision or apparent indifference. Indeed, they must surely be one of the most unlikable group of youngsters assembled onscreen since *The Village of the Damned* (Dir, Wolf Rilla, 1960).

Where the film differs from many previous revenge thrillers is in its choice to follow, not the person seeking revenge, but rather the wrongdoers themselves; in fact, after her opening monologue, Miss Moriguchi is not onscreen again for another 45 minutes or so (although the ramifications of her actions obviously permeate all that follows.). The middle of the film alternates between the very different ways in which ‘Boy A’ (mother-fixated electronics whizz Shuya, played by Nishii Yukito) and ‘Boy B’ (class

swot and frequent punching bag Naoki, played by Fujiwara Karou) react to their punishment during the following term, when the students (who have maintained a strictly enforced conspiracy of silence among themselves about what had previously transpired) are assigned their new homeroom teacher, the goofily energetic 'Werther'. ("But that doesn't mean I'm going to kill myself!" he tells them during their first meeting, in one of the film's sillier jokes).

Shuya has returned to school but is now a despised outcast, relentlessly tormented by the others, who see themselves as meting out a much-deserved punishment. Their actions are orchestrated by the anonymous sender of text messages who encourages them to see their bullying as part of a real-life video game in which points are racked up for each act of humiliation or physical abuse they inflict upon their classmate. Even worse off is Naoki, who has become completely obsessed with notions of contamination and refuses to leave his bedroom, or to bathe, lest he accidentally infect his beloved but overbearing mother.

Indeed, the relationship between mothers and children lies at the very heart of the film. Miss Moriguchi, devastated by the death of her own child, fails to consider the consequences of her vengeful actions, while Naoki's mother is aware of what her child has done but is unwilling to admit the truth even to herself. As the film progresses, we realise that everything that Shuya does is a way of trying to attract the attention of his long-gone mother, an electrical engineer who abandoned him so that she could return to academia. Their fathers – like the father of Miss Moriguchi's child – are all but absent figures in their son's lives. We never see Naoki's, who appears to be working away from home for the entire film (despite the fact that his son is clearly in the midst of a colossal nervous breakdown), and Shuya's father, now remarried and with a new family, moves him into an old shack outside the main family home so that he can 'study in peace'. The film seems to imply that it is hardly surprising, then, that both boys are, in their own ways, disturbed young psychopaths to whom empathy is simply a meaningless word. Even more alarming is the suggestion that their classmates differ only in the scale of their cruelty, having thus far confined themselves to vicious bullying rather than progressing to outright murder.

The only character who seems to have any compassion at all left in her is Misuki (Hashimoto Ai) the bright and observant girl who grows to feel sorry for Shuya and eventually embarks upon a romantic relationship with him. It is entirely in keeping with the film's bleak worldview that her acts of kindness towards him should be rewarded with violence, and that she too should express the desire to harm others, although we are never quite sure if this is seriously meant or is mere emo-style posturing. Though initially, and understandably, we are on Miss Moriguchi's side (and, as previously noted, her students are such a relentlessly awful bunch that they appear to deserve everything that's coming to them), as the film progresses, and the extent of her distinctly Machiavellian plan becomes apparent, she becomes less sympathetic, so blinded by her lust for vengeance that she is entirely unwilling to take responsibility for her actions. Reformation, as she says herself in the film's final moments, is a lie: clearly, the sentiment applies as much to herself as to her former pupils. There are some undeniably unsettling moments here, particularly once we begin to realise the extent to which both Shuya and Naoki have become disengaged from conventional notions of right and wrong. At times, they're like nothing more than a pint-sized Leopold and Loeb. What's more, their terrifying detachment, self-absorption and willingness to harm others seems to have been nurtured by both their parents (alternatively suffocating and neglectful) and by society at large, which refuses to force such youngsters to take responsibility for their actions. There are also some scenes that showcase the rather camp exuberance often found in Asian genre films (as in the scene where the class are forced to perform an all-singing, all-dancing rendition of KC and the Sunshine Band's 'That's the Way I Like It' by the relentlessly upbeat pawn Werther).

The film is often shot in a very hyperkinetic, lively fashion, though this does mean that it does at times, particularly in the latter stages, it starts to seem a bit like a collection of music-video montages rather than

a coherent narrative, and there is one bombastically over-the-top sequence – involving Shuya’s dastardly plan for revenge, and accompanied by Radiohead’s “Last Flowers” – that comes across as especially ill-advised: it’s like watching a particularly pretentious late-90s Pop promo. Having said that, *Confessions* remains a thought-provoking, intensely watchable and relentlessly bleak depiction of a generation so alienated from all that is meaningful in the world that their only real enjoyment comes from inflicting pain on others. By the time the end credits roll, you’ll be wishing for an alternate opening in which most of these kids had been sent to the island from *Battle Royale* (Kinji Fukasaku, 2000) instead. Mind you, some of them would probably enjoy a fight to the death a little *too* much...

Bernice M. Murphy

The Ward
(Dir. John Carpenter) USA 2010
FilmNation Entertainment

When did it all start to go for horribly wrong for John Carpenter? Perhaps no other director best epitomizes the sad fate of so many of the most notable progenitors of the 1970s American horror film boom. After the terrifying intensity of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), Tobe Hooper managed one genuine commercial hit – *Poltergeist* (1982) and a string of uninspired and at times downright awful flops thereafter (anyone unlucky enough to have seen the train wreck that was his 2004 remake of *The Toolbox Murders* will know what I mean). George A. Romero, father of the modern boom in all things zombie produced a run of genuinely interesting, if underappreciated, films in the 70s and 80s – gems such as *Jack's Wife* (1972), *The Crazies* (1973), *Martin* (1977), *Creepshow* (1982), *Monkey Shines* (1988), and, of course, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and *Day of the Dead* (1985) – but now seems content to spend the rest of his career churning out increasingly less effective additions to his own canon (such as *Diary of the Dead* [2007] and *Survival of the Dead* [2009]). William Friedkin rapidly faded into irrelevance, although his 2006 effort *Bug* suggested that he may yet still have something to offer the genre; and although Wes Craven (certainly the most commercially successful of that generation) has managed to reinvent himself often enough to remain relevant, the news that he has once more returned to the over-mined *Scream* franchise provides an indication of the fact that he has long been a director more interested in fiscal rather than artistic considerations. Only maverick Canadian David Cronenberg, whose career has in recent years undergone a renaissance and showcased his still-lively intellectual curiosity, continues to make films that defy conventional categorization and further the themes that have been present in his oeuvre from the very beginning.

And then we have John Carpenter. Director of not one, but *three* of my favourite horror films of all time – *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976), *Halloween* (1978), and *The Thing* (1982). Acclaimed as an *auteur* by the French even before he was known to critics in the US. Capable, at his best, of conjuring up scenes saturated with atmosphere from the most hackneyed of plots – the masked killer, the group of reluctant allies under siege by some terrifying external force, the alien invasion narrative. There are moments in Carpenter's work that have a genuinely sinister dreaminess: the ice-cream van scene in *Assault on Precinct 13*; Michael Myers standing stock still in a sunny suburban garden towards the beginning of *Halloween*, his very presence an affront to the supposed security of the family-centered neighbourhood; or a drive along a country road at night that turns into the stuff of genuine nightmare (*In The Mouth of Madness*, 1994).

But even the most ardent Carpenter apologist would be hard pressed to find anything particularly admirable in most of his work since the infamously bad Chevy Chase vehicle *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* (1992). There has been an unnecessary sequel to what was already one of his more minor efforts (*Escape From LA*, 1996); a sorry remake of a classic 60s SF thriller (*Village of the Damned*, 1995); and, in *Vampires* (1998) and *Ghosts of Mars* (2001), two very silly action/horror films that only highlighted Carpenter's indebtedness to his own past successes. And now, we have *The Ward*, which, at first glance at least, seems as if it might be rather promising, returning as it does to one of Carpenter's most fruitful stock situations, that of the relationship between a small group of people trapped in a claustrophobic space, and threatened by a menacing other: here, a psychiatric ward for disturbed teenage girls which seems to be haunted by the vengeful ghost of Alice Hudson, a former patient.

Set in Oregon in 1966, *The Ward* opens well enough, as a clearly unhinged young woman, Kirsten (played by the unconvincing Amber Heard) burns down a house in the middle of nowhere and is taken into custody by the local police. She's involuntarily committed to the Northbend Psychiatric Hospital, and assigned to the care of Dr Stringer (Jared Harris, best known for his parts in the TV shows *Fringe* and *Mad Men*). From this promising opening, the film descends into a decidedly unsuccessful cross between two films directed by James Mangold, 1999's *Girl Interrupted* (also set in a psychiatric ward for teenage girls during the 1960s) and the genuinely ridiculous 2003 psycho-thriller *Identity*, which climaxed with a groan-inducing plot twist of such idiocy that it has since only been eclipsed by the climactic revelations of M. Night Shyamalan's monumental folly *The Village* (2004).

The first major problem here is that, although this is supposed to be a period film, it boasts one of the least convincing 1960s settings *ever*, perhaps constrained by a budget that just couldn't stretch beyond the leading lady's hair. There are a few stock concessions to the decade made in terms of clothing and furniture, but Heard, like her fellow actresses, simply never convinces as a genuine product of the 1960s and it doesn't help that she sports a particularly straggly set of Jordan-style hair extensions throughout the proceedings. Given that he is clearly so uninterested in the decade, and that the 60s setting is completely irrelevant to the story itself, one wonders why Carpenter didn't just set the film in the present day and save us all a lot of annoyance. Alongside 'Kirsten', there are four other young patients in the same ward (along with the doctor and a couple of nurses, they seem to be the only people in the entire hospital), all of whom, as in *Girl Interrupted*, serve more as stock character types than as actual characters (to be fair, this lack of characterisation may be at least partially explained by the concluding revelations – although this would be a generous interpretation). There's a childlike one, a slutty one, a self-harming one and a vaguely intellectual one, all of whom are terrified of their former ward-mate Hudson, who is said to have died in mysterious circumstances.

The scenes in which Hudson's ghost seems to attack various patients and staff members provide Carpenter with an excuse to turn the film into a tame rip-off of those (by now very familiar) Japanese horror films in which disgruntled female ghosts get their own back on the living in various unlikely ways. It's all so workmanlike, dull and unconvincing that the thankfully lean running time (88min) feels decidedly longer, and the climactic twist is by now so overused that it evoked groans of disdain rather than terror from this reviewer. It doesn't help either that *Shutter Island* (Dir. Martin Scorsese, 2010) – another hackneyed period film set in an insane asylum, albeit one made with considerably more atmosphere and a much larger budget – featured a very similar revelation in its final moments, nor that Darren Aronofsky's recent *Black Swan* (2010) does something along the same lines. In fact, can I propose banning this particular plot twist from all films made for the next twenty years? Then the makers of clichéd psycho thrillers would have to try and come up with some other convenient variation on the 'William Wilson'--style plot twist that was already old when Hitchcock used it in *Psycho* (1960).

But perhaps I'm being too harsh. Maybe we should be happy that a man as important to the development of the American horror movie as Carpenter can still find the backing to make a film at all. Unfortunately, though, *The Ward* would seem to provide further evidence that Carpenter's best days are behind him – it is a truly mediocre film made by a man of once considerable talent, and all the more disappointing for that.

Kelly Grant

Primal
(Dir. Josh Reed) Australia 2010
 IFC Midnight

It's difficult to resist a film which is marketed (in the literature for the 2010 Horrorthon at the Irish Film Institute in Dublin) as containing "the greatest killer-bunny scene since *Monty Python and the Knights of the Holy Grail*." Nor should anyone reading this attempt to do so, despite the fact that the Pythons manage to pull out a far scarier and more blood-soaked rabbit routine than the one which is, undoubtedly, a high point in Josh Reed's highly entertaining if admittedly slight Ozploitation flick *Primal*.

This, however, is by no means to suggest that *Primal* isn't gory or scary, or indeed funny – quite the opposite. And I'm sure that there are all manner of dull misogynistic puns to be made about bunnies and the blond, somewhat pneumatic young lady (charmingly over-acted by Krew Boylan) who rapidly eclipses the aforementioned homicidal lapine in terms of toothy ferocity and feral appetite. That, however, would be to do an injustice to the film's commitment to nodding but never giving in to the tendency of many horror films to focus on sex and female nudity at the expense of a serious consideration of what makes us afraid. In the case of *Primal*, what gives us the heebie-jeebies is fairly old hat – getting lost; enclosed spaces; arguing with friends and lovers; things that lurk in deep water and dark forests; incomprehensible religious practices; the failure of modern civilisation and all the paraphernalia upon which we've come to depend so heavily; and the sense that the past is a foreign country that nonetheless refuses to remain as far away from us as we might like. With horror, however, a lack of innovation or originality in terms of the sources of our fear is not always something to be lamented. It's sometimes more about playing with expectations and tinkering around with a familiar formula than it is about making us dread turning our bathroom taps, or teaching us to look warily at the patterns in our wallpaper (even if the genre has done both over the past hundred years or so). The right effect can only be achieved, after all, if a film, book or story taps into anxieties that perhaps we didn't know we had – or at least didn't want to remember that we had – until they're projected, ten feet tall and in living, bleeding colour, in front of our dilated pupils.

And bleed the characters in *Primal* most certainly do – copiously, and sometimes with an animalistic glee that might be hard to stomach if it weren't shot through with cheerful good humour. What also prevents this from becoming an exercise in gore-for-gore's sake is, perhaps surprisingly, a reasonably steady grasp of some of the more complex anthropological theories regarding the distinction between myth and ritual – in other words, between the often bizarre daily religious observances of frenzied believers and the behaviour of the deities or other supernatural entities that are the object and focus of that worship. Briefly, *Primal* revolves around a group of college students who head out into the Australian outback in search of cave paintings that have languished almost entirely unresearched for over a century – until now. Anja (Zoe Tuckwell-Smith), the quiet, thoughtful one, has come across references to the paintings in the journals of an intrepid great-uncle who seems to have warned of terrible evil lurking in them there woods, evil that he himself has tried and failed to fight. Dace (Wil Traval), the thoroughly unlikeable self-appointed leader of the group, who makes up in brawn what he clearly lacks in either brains or sensitivity, exploits both this and his faintly abusive flirtation with Anja for his own academic advancement, remaining bullishly determined to get the data he needs for a career-defining thesis, even when things start to go wrong and his friends start dying one by one.

Once this starts to happen, the fragile hierarchy and shaky romantic alliances that make up the group crumble with startling but not-unrealistic alacrity. The catalyst is a notably unerotic skinny-dipping scene

involving the aforementioned blonde, Mel, who winds up covered in leech-type creatures and soon begins shivering and writhing in the tent she shares with dutiful, two-dimensional boyfriend Chad (Lindsay Farris), her previous horniness transformed into a hideous parody, prompting Chad to run to Anja for help, establishing her even more firmly as prime final-girl material. What follows, including the killer-bunny scene, is a tense, often hilarious stand-off/chase sequence where Mel becomes a ravenous, horribly unpredictable predator, and the rest of the group her disorganised and poorly prepared prey. I won't give away who becomes infected next, though it does employ the typical horror-movie logic of karmic pay-offs for offensive behaviour.

Once this has been gotten out of the way, we are gradually permitted to learn more about what is causing this demonic, cannibalistic possession, leading inevitably back to the rock paintings and a nearby cave that causes Anja to faint in the opening minutes of the film, and to which she refuses to return, claustrophobia rooted in a past traumatic experience that, frustratingly, (or perhaps tantalisingly), is only briefly alluded to. But return she must, if she is to rescue the only surviving (and unpossessed) member of the group, the constitutionally terrified Kris (Rebekah Foorde), who has been dragged there by Mel and whose screams reverberate harrowingly through the threateningly lush forest. Though the final scenes of the film do not produce quite as coherent a *dénouement* as one might wish, it is here that we are given some hint as to why Mel and Dace, now copulating like (sorry) rabbits, appear to be terrified of the cave, despite being fairly formidable themselves, not to mention the fact that the two phenomena are quite clearly symbiotically connected. While shark-like teeth and an inhuman appetite for raw flesh might characterise those who, against their will, have been made the acolytes of whatever resides in the cave, they are but small fry compared to the thing itself. As usual in supernatural fare (*Jeepers Creepers II* (Dir. Victor Salva, 2003) being a prime example), female characters are far closer to the experience of the numinous than their block-headed male friends, and Mel in particular acknowledges the authority of the thing in the cave by depositing a sacrifice there in the shape of Kris. Nonetheless, she then beats a hasty retreat, terrified of the awesome power of the primeval divine in a way that, anthropology assures us, is typical of all religious behaviour. Anja, however, the very epitome of civilised self-restraint, forces herself, against her better instincts, to walk back into the tenebrous, unsightly vaginal cleft in the rock-face, and what she finds there is certainly a surprise, even for those schooled in the ways of the genre. Suffice it to say that the revelation of the monster is as disappointing as it always is, in a *Night of the Demon* kind of way, but what happens to Kris should satisfy all but the most jaded of *aficionados*, and the punch-line, while undeniably unbearably cheesy, elicited enough of a roar of laughter and approval from the audience to allow one to come away from the film feeling really rather well disposed towards it in general.

In many ways, *Primal* is exactly what a horror film should be, with most of the budget poured into make up and special effects rather than into big-name stars, mainstream directors, fancy sets or high-concept plot lines. While nowhere near as tightly conceived or neatly executed as *The Blair Witch Project* (Dir. Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999), nor as slick and flashy as *Jurassic Park* (Dir. Stephen Spielberg, 1993), it succeeds in borrowing some of the best elements of both – a hostile, inhuman environment, collapsing group dynamics, technology and the trappings of modernity turning against those who attempt to wield it in order to save themselves (I'm thinking in particular of a scene in a Jeep here). All in all, I would highly recommend *Primal*. Genre-defining cinema it might not be, but it stands up well as an effective little shocker that remains with the viewer as a fond memory of an enjoyable ninety minutes spent in a darkened room in a comfortably deforested Dublin.

Pat Wolfe

MULTI-MEDIA REVIEWS

Batman: Arkham Reborn

Writer: David Hine , Artist: Jeremy Haun
(Publisher: DC Comics, 2010)

Gotham City is a fitting home for its guardian – Batman lurks in the recesses of its distinctive architecture, camouflaging himself among the gargoyles and grotesques. Gotham’s cityscape is one of the most developed of all fictional locations: for the series *No Man’s Land* (1999) a detailed map of the city was produced, its rivers, bridges and streets named after DC Comics’ most beloved artists and writers. Undoubtedly, one of the most famous buildings in Gotham is Arkham Asylum – or, to give it its full name, ‘The Elizabeth Arkham Asylum for the Criminally Insane’ – a location introduced to the comics in 1974 to serve as a holding pen for Batman’s rogues gallery.

Arkham Reborn is the latest story arc to develop the asylum’s mythos. It begins with the director, Jeremiah Arkham, picking his way through the ruins of the asylum (which was destroyed by the crime lord Black Mask during the events of a previous storyline). Stopping before one particular cell, Jeremiah recalls its former occupant, Humphrey Dumpler (AKA ‘Humpty Dumpty’), a man compelled to take things apart and put them back together – inevitably with disastrous consequences. ‘Poor Humphry,’ he muses. ‘Obsessed, like me, with repairing what was broken.’

This beginning recalls both Dan Slott and Ryan Sook’s *Arkham Asylum: Living Hell* (2003), the work in which Humpty Dumpty was introduced, and the seminal Arkham text, Grant Morrison and Dave McKean’s *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (1989), wherein one doctor tells Batman: ‘sometimes you have to break down to rebuild, psychiatry’s like that’. *A Serious House* introduced the concept of Arkham and its inhabitants as a mirror of the protagonist’s psyche – here Jeremiah replaces Batman as the subject reflected, and the story follows his attempt to rebuild his own life and professional reputation along with the asylum, only for both projects to falter and fail.

Jeremiah Arkham (nephew of the asylum’s founder Amadeus Arkham, who built the facility in memory of his murdered wife and was eventually doomed to become a patient within it) is here fleshed out, having appeared in previous works only as a weak mollycoddler of patients, suffering from the delusion that his efforts can ‘cure’ violent sociopaths such as the Joker. Our perceptions of Jeremiah as foolish and ineffective will be proved false by the story’s shocking denouement, and even reflected back upon us: ‘foolish, gullible reader, I confess... I have lied to you.’

Other established characters given an outing include Victor Zsasz, the serial killer whose body is covered in tally-marks, one for each victim. Zsasz promises Jeremiah he is keeping ‘a special place’ for him, on the inside of his eyelid, ‘so every time I blink I’ll be reminded of what an irritating little man you were’. Another prominent villain to feature is Killer Croc, who is, well... a giant reptile with a taste for human flesh. Head of security Aaron Cash is missing an arm from one of Croc’s break-outs. They taunt each other through bullet-proof glass, Cash gleefully telling his ward that for thanksgiving dinner he ate crocodile: ‘it tasted like chicken with a hint of fish’.

New to *Arkham Reborn* are the characters Alys Sinner, and the trio Jeremiah refers to as ‘the Beauties’. Alys, who becomes Jeremiah’s second in command, is the only survivor of the ‘Lux Beata’ cult, of which her parents were the self-appointed prophets (but who did poison that Kool Aid?). The distinctive red

ribbons which twine around sections of her hair are revealed early on in the story to be printed with the names of the seven deadly sins – and each time she unravels one she acts accordingly. ‘The Beauties’ are three special patients who Jeremiah keeps sequestered. ‘No-Face’ is the victim of a horrifying childhood accident which left him with no discernible facial features – he can only show his emotions by painting them on. ‘Narcissus’ is a nameless enigma of a man obsessed with his own reflection. Like Narcissus’ pining lover Echo, he can only speak by faintly repeating what has just been said to him. Last is ‘the Hamburger Lady’, a woman whose appearance is so grotesque it is said that all who look upon her go mad.

Needless to say, the recurring motifs here are faces and masks. Masks (of both the literal and Freudian kinds) can be found everywhere in the story – Jeremiah’s rebuilt Arkham is a mix of gothic and classical architecture, and the new doorway is a huge yawning mask of Greek tragedy which seems to swallow up those who enter, signifying that the interior is a place in which all characters are transformed into their primal archetypes.

While *Arkham Reborn* is largely a mystery story, enriched with much psychoanalytic meditation, it does not stint on the horror content. Beneath the cleanliness and order of the rebuilt asylum lies a hidden second building – a nightmare landscape created to torture the wayward inmates. One such unfortunate is Benjamin Wiley, AKA ‘the Raggedy Man’, a child-killer who wears a cloak fashioned out of the blankets of his victims and decorated with their toys. Wiley finds himself in a recreated version of his own childhood basement prison, and the only escape is death – by means of seppuku administered with a can-opener. In many ways Hine is the ideal writer for an Arkham story: a previous major work was the black and white horror miniseries *Strange Embrace* (1993) which dealt with psychosexual trauma, body horror, madness, death, and congenital syphilis. Although his current work is a slim volume, it delivers value in terms of having an engaging and well-plotted storyline with a satisfying twist – and plenty of nasty little details.

DC’s recent output has suffered from spotty artwork, with titles often being shunted between artists of varying ability. *Arkham Reborn* benefits from being the product of a single, highly accomplished artist: Haun’s work is clean, consistent and modern without being too stylized, the panels both interesting to look at and clear to read. He shifts easily between distance views of multiple figures, action frames and detailed close-ups of faces. Particularly worthy of admiration is his depiction of female characters: Alys Sinner is not one of the pouting, improbably-chested, tiny-waisted *femmes* still ubiquitous in superhero comics. She has a slender, androgynous frame and a prominent nose – a quirky, individual kind of beauty.

Arkham Reborn is suitable for both avid readers of Batman comics and newcomers. Those familiar with the workings of continuity will know that it takes place during Bruce Wayne’s lost year, and the ‘Batman’ featured is actually his *protégé* Dick Grayson (the first Robin), but the story has been carefully constructed in such a way as to render this information unnecessary.

Kate Roddy

Dead Space: Extraction

Developer: Europcom Visceral Games, Publisher: Electronic Arts

Platform: Wii (reviewed on)

Space, as it has been pointed out on more than one occasion in various films, books and games, is a dangerous place. Nowhere, however is more dangerous than Aegis VII, the setting for the Wii prequel to 2008's hit horror game *Dead Space*.

Dead Space Extraction (DSE) takes place a few days before the events of *Dead Space*. You begin the game as Sam Caldwell, an Engineer working on the extraction (you see what they did there?) of the Marker, a mysterious alien device found on the surface of the planet (at some point a mysterious artefact won't turn out to be a harbinger of doom or the control device for the birth of a new solar system. It will be an alien portaloo.)

Following the open chapter, the player moves to another character perspective, that of Nathan McNeill, a Detective for the colony's police force. You then play as McNeill, as the colony slowly becomes over run with necromorphs, with only a rivet gun and your wits to protect you, as you team up with three other survivors and try to fight your way off the world and to the dubious safety of the Ishimura (the mining ship which was the location for the first game) above.

DSE carries on with the dismemberment fun that ran throughout the original game. The only way to stop the vile monsters that overrun the colony is shoot off their limbs using whatever weapons you can find, which usually amounts to various engineering tools. This adds a degree (although not massively) of strategy, with it being essential for the player to shoot off enemy limbs as shots to the body will be absorbed (they are dead after all...).

The Nintendo Wii has a number of on rail shooters ("on rails" games are played from a first person perspective, with the game dictating where the gamer goes, hence "on rails") from *House of the Dead* (meh) to *Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles* (good). However, none of them have quite the same level of interactivity that is available through *DSE*.

In most games of this type, the game is relatively static. The gamer is assaulted by a multitude of enemies, defeats them, then the camera shifts to a new location where they attacked all over again. *DSE* follows a similar methodology but where it is different is that it has puzzle solving, route selection and ongoing conversations between the gamer's character and the Non Playable Characters (NPCs). For example, following a burst of frenzied attacks from Necromorphs, the player is trapped in a network of tunnels beneath the colony. The three NPC characters and the player character begin to argue about which route to take with the decision finally left to the gamer.

Importantly, all the dialogue is well written and voice acted, and this level of storytelling adding to the game's appeal; turning it from something where you play maniacally for four hours and then never touch again into a compelling interactive narrative that draws you in and encourages you to genuinely care for the characters concerned. In terms of graphics *DSE* is excellent. It makes maximum use of the power available to the Wii and the character and enemy models; whilst not up to PS3 or XBOX 360 level, Wii still standouts as amongst the best on the console.

The game makes great use of the Wii control, so rather than the norm for this kind of game, which involves pointing the Wiimote at the screen and pulling the trigger, *DSE* uses the Nunchuck as well, which can be used during some sections of the game to turn the player's head, use different weapons and attack enemies with a melee weapon.

The sound and music for the game again is of high quality, with juddering creaks, screams and all manner of creepy music adding depth to the game. This is further helped by the small speakers built into the Wiimote, so during the moments when the player starts to descend into madness, voices can be heard whispering from the controller (at least I hope they're coming from the controller, otherwise I need to be kept away from the cutlery).

DSE is a perfect example of just what the Wii is capable of. A hardcore game, using excellent storytelling, pace, sound, music and graphics to create a great horror experience. Published in September 2009, the game, strangely, did not do brilliantly in sales, so for those of you have a Wii and have gotten tired of Mario and his mushroom antics, or for who Lego Harry Potter just isn't wizard, try *Dead Space Extraction* and let the dismemberment begin!

Eoin Murphy

Dead Space Extraction

Graphics: 9

Gameplay: 9

Sound: 9

Replay Value: 7

Overall Score: 8.5

The Strange Adventures of HP Lovecraft

Writer: Mac Carter

Pencils and Inks: Tony Salmons

Producer, Cover Art and Colours: Adam Byrne

Flats: Keaton Kohl

(Publisher: Image Comics, June 2010)

The HP Lovecraft: explorer of the unknown, writer of dark mysteries, and slightly mad racist. And now, apparently, the only thing that stands between humanity and the rise of evil ancient gods (even though they're not Gods, they're actually all-powerful alien entities, but you all knew that, didn't you?).

The Strange Adventures of HP Lovecraft (SAHL) tells the tale of a young HPL living in Providence, Rhode Island. He's a struggling writer, selling his weird tales to publishers (who, then, as now, prefer vampires to fish men), living with two elderly aunts and occasionally visiting his mother in the insane asylum. So, really, he's not that much different from the rest of us...

Coupled with the love of his life rejecting him for an aristocrat (and you would think that this fictionalised version of HPL's life was complicated enough for anyone), the chance sighting of a certain ancient book tucked away in a library exhibition (10 points if you can guess which book it is) awakens ancient intelligences that stare with malevolent avarice through the dimensional barriers that separate their realm from Earth.

And so begins the collapse of HPL's life. Rejected by his sweetheart, librarian Sylvia St. Claire and mugged by dock workers, HPL begins to dream horrible events only for them to begin to come true when HPL's muggers turn up eviscerated...

The inclusion of HPL's night terrors follows closely the man's real life; HP having suffered from nightmares for much of his life. Indeed, he used these terrifying dreams as source material for some of his work ("The Night Gaunts").

The mysterious murders are linked to him; and, with ancient evils, a jealous boyfriend, an overly helpful psychiatrist (aren't they all) and the police all after him, HPL must solve the mystery of the book and not only save his soul but the world itself.

When I first picked up this collected volume I was a little dubious. HPL as a lead character initially struck me as a bit odd, but the conceit is surprisingly well executed by Carter. HPL is a flawed but interesting character, with just enough back-story about his family life fed to the reader to increase interest and not come across as an info dump. The supporting characters, such as HPL's aunts and his sanatorium-based mother (who knows far more than she lets on, naturally), all help flesh out the story and add to character believability and motivations.

The story itself will be familiar to the more gothically-inclined reader, encapsulating as it does many of the classic elements of (unsurprisingly) Lovecraftian horror but at no point does this come across as stale or hackneyed. The artwork helps carry the story along, with Salmons and Byrne effectively conveying 1920s Rhode Island and its inhabitants, complementing the story rather than superseding it (think *30 Days of Night*). When the creatures that lurk beyond the dimensional gate make an appearance they are well

enough illustrated to almost repel the reader (just imagine far more mouths, eyes and limbs then are necessary and you're on the right path).

The Strange Adventures of HP Lovecraft draws inspiration from many of the true events of HPL's life. Prior to her death in 1921 his mother, Sarah Phillips Lovecraft was indeed committed to Butler Hospital (a psychiatric hospital to this day), the same sanatorium in which HPL's father died (as a result of syphilis induced insanity. Ah, for simpler times...).

The story does however gloss over the true nature of the trans-dimensional interlopers; with the squiggly-tentacled ones being discussed here as dark gods, rather than as aliens (which is, of course, their true nature). HPL himself was a renowned atheist, with his creations hiding behind the mantle of godhood to fool the simple masses of Earth. Whilst this is not explored in *SAHL*, it is an ongoing story, so this may be delved into in further issues, and, in truth, it is not overly important to the story anyway.

The story builds slowly, introducing HPL and the people and places that form his life, with the gradual build up highlighting the collapse of his safe existence into a series of desperate chases, tragic misunderstandings and teeth turning to maggots (one of the more unpleasant parts of the story...).

The Strange Adventures of HP Lovecraft is a fairly good, solid comic and whilst it won't have you huddled under the bed clothes as you read it, it is something I would recommend. This first volume helps establish the character of HPL (although without all the racism...) and finishes with the promise of further tentacled-horror to come. Oh, and by the way...Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn!

Eoin Murphy

Metro 2033

Developer: 4A Games, Publisher: THQ

Platform: XBOX 360 (reviewed on), PC

Moscow is not somewhere I would normally think of going on holiday. I can't quite explain why, other than that decades of Cold War propaganda must have warped my opinion of this great city. In the post apocalyptic world of *Metro 2033*, however, Moscow is definitely off the list. The city, and the rest of the world, has been devastated by nuclear war and the few survivors cling on to survival in the Moscow Metro system (with parts of the system reinforced during the Cold War to act as shelters in case of Nuclear War).

Set twenty years after the nuclear Armageddon, the various metro stations of the underground have formed their own little puddles of civilisation, alternating between vague democracies and neo-Nazi playgrounds.

Playing as Artyom, you have spent your entire life in the same metro station, raised by your uncle in the relative safety of Exhibition Station. With the arrival of a Ranger called Hunter, however, you discover that a new threat has emerged in the Underground, alongside the various bandits and mutants, which roam the tunnels. The Dark Ones are a new stage in evolution and have already wiped out other station communities. Tasked with travelling with Hunter to warn the Polis Station and its army of Rangers about this new threat, Artyom must travel through hostile tunnels and stations to save the only home he has ever known.

Metro 2033 is based on the novel of the same name by author Dmitry Glukhovsky and follows the original story closely. Glukhovsky's novel was well received both in Russia and in Europe (with 4A Games based in Ukraine) and much of it is conveyed in the game. The stations are hubs of life in the darkness of the tunnels and the various enemies in the game are no pushovers. Mutants of various shapes and sizes, from giant rat things to giant cat things, roam the tunnels and the surface and can be an absolute nightmare to bring down, making quick attacks and dashing away before you can react.

The game makes use of ammunition as currency and it is always in short supply. Throughout the game you're faced with hoarding good quality bullets to upgrade your weapons or giving into temptation and using it to clear a tunnel of mutant enemies quickly and efficiently.

The game has a number of standout dynamics. Unlike similar post apocalyptic games, *Metro 2033* goes all out for realism. As with most nuclear apocalypses, radiation is a major problem. However, in *Metro 2033* it has a major effect on gameplay, with one of the first items you acquire being a gas mask to help protect you from radiation. The masks need regular filter changes, with a small meter and some other visual cues to let you know when you need to change it (your breathing becomes laboured and vision greys out). Too much exposure and its game over.

There is also a good variety of weapons but it is with this that some of the niggles that often afflict this type of game become apparent. You can only carry three firearms at any one time, with one from each type of weapon. So you can carry a handgun, a larger gun such as a submachine gun, and your specialist weapon, such as a gas powered rifle or a multi-barrelled shotgun. This in itself is fine and is a mechanic that is used in a number of highly successful games. However, here it doesn't really make much difference. At one point I found myself dithering over which type of submachine gun to pick up. Both

looked about the same, had similar names and yet I had no way to tell which was better, which is a serious issue in a game where resource management is all important.

Graphically, *Metro 2033* is good. It's not *Halo* or *Enslaved* but it does the job to ensure you spend most of your playing time staring into the darkness and hoping nothing leaps out and tries to rip off your face. Character models are good and it aids the storytelling well, with in-game graphics used throughout.

It should be noted though that this is not an easy game. Unlike others in the genre that rely on slowly drawing you in, with easy enemies attacking you as it works up to the real nasty stuff (think *Resident Evil* moving from zombies to lickers and finally bringing you face to face with Nemesis), *Metro 2033* drops you right in it, with even human enemies needing multiple shots to bring them down. Mutants and tougher enemies soak up ammunition, making it a real problem when you want to upgrade weapons or ammunition and I found myself spending most of my time searching dark corners and wondering through stations scrabbling for ammo.

Whilst this adds to the realism of the world, it really breaks up the gameplay and leaves the player (certainly this one anyway) frustrated and irritable.

To sum up then, *Metro 2033* is (and I'm aware this is less than eloquent as a critical judgement, but it's accurate) ok. It's not the best game I've ever played, nor is it the worst and it does have a good sense of atmosphere throughout. However, the high difficulty level, tough resource management and sheer speed of enemies makes the game less accessible than other, similar shooters.

If you're after a post apocalyptic, scare-heavy and challenging shooter then *Metro 2033* may be the game for you, but if you prefer the likes of *Halo*, this station shouldn't be your final destination...

Eoin Murphy

Metro 2033

Graphics: 7

Gameplay: 7

Sound: 8

Replay Value: 6

Overall Score: 7

TELEVISION REVIEWS

The Walking Dead

(AMC, 2010, now showing on the FX channel in the UK & Ireland)

Given the sheer ubiquity of all things zombie related in popular media over the past decade or so, it was really only a matter of time before the undead shambled on to the small screen as well. If there's anything truly surprising about *The Walking Dead*, then, it's to do with the channel that it's appearing on: the small scale but prestigious cable channel AMC, until now best known for being the home of awards-magnet *Mad Men* (2007 –).

Perhaps the biggest drawback about what might be called the current “zombie renaissance” is the fact that so many of these narratives slavishly follow the template first established by George A. Romero. The ur-text for *The Walking Dead*, as for practically every other zombie story since 1968, is of course Romero's Living Dead series, and in particular, his second and third instalments, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and *Day of the Dead* (1985), both of which depict a squabbling group of survivors trying to make it in a post-apocalyptic world infested with flesh-eating living corpses. We may have had fast zombies, slow zombies, zombies that weren't really dead at all but just ‘infected’ (be it with a rage virus as in *28 Days Later* [2002] or psychosis-inducing nerve gas, as in *The Crazies* [1973; remake 2010]), and several different permutations in-between (as in 2007 Spanish flick [*Rec*]) but really, formula is the order of the day here, and Romero's template – predicated as it is upon the notion that no matter how bad the dead are, it's the people that who are *still alive* you should really be scared of – has by now been used so often that it has lost much of its initial impact. One notable exception to this is John Ajvide Lindqvist's genuinely original novel *Handling the Undead* (2005), which actually tries to do something new with the notion that the dead may someday refuse to stay buried, and does so in a disturbing yet deeply humane fashion.

Lack of originality is therefore the biggest problem that I have with this series. *The Walking Dead* features fairly effective actors (including Andrew Lincoln, previously best known as weedy wannabe writer Egg in mid-90s British drama *This Life*, and here sporting a generally convincing Southern accent), excellent special effects (save for a very poorly rendered explosion at the end of the sixth episode) and evocative direction and production design. It is obvious that a great deal of time and effort has gone into this production, and it is heartening to see an American TV channel spend so much money on a show that is so unashamedly horrific – not Sci-Fi horror (as in the currently excellent *Fringe*) or horror-comedy, as in *Supernatural*. LOTS of people die in this show, as one would expect, and there are more gunshots to the head in a single episode than in a whole season of *The Sopranos*. In addition, the scenes in which our protagonists are surrounded by hordes of zombies tend to be as disturbing and as well rendered as anything found in Zack Snyder's very effective 2004 *Dawn of the Dead* remake, to which this production is clearly much indebted (as in that film, the first truly horrific zombie encounter that we see is between our hero and an undead little blonde girl).

But it's all so familiar. Even someone only half-conversant with the tropes of the modern-Zombie move would know exactly what to expect here. Like the comic book series on which it is based, *The Walking Dead* is a deeply derivative, formulaic narrative that by the end of its first six instalments has done absolutely nothing new or surprising with its well-worn premise. It doesn't help that the first episode – in which Sheriff's deputy Rick Grimes (Lincoln) is shot in the line of duty and then wakes up in the hospital several days later to find that all hell has, quite literally, broken loose – replicates exactly the opening of

28 Days Later, which was itself cribbed from John Wyndham's similarly apocalyptic 1951 novel *Day of the Triffids*.

Grimes then spends much of the rest of the episode stumbling about in a hospital gown, gradually coming to terms with the fact that civilisation has collapsed since his shooting. He is unaware that his wife, Lori (Sarah Wayne Callies), and son, Carl (Chandler Grimes), have fled their hometown and joined a small encampment of survivors in the countryside, outside of Atlanta. He is similarly ignorant of the fact that his supposed best friend (and fellow cop), Shane (John Bernthal), has become just a bit too comfortable in the role of substitute husband and father, during his brief absence. This, combined with the fact that Shane told Lori that Rick was dead without checking to see whether this was the case or not, understandably makes for some awkward character dynamics when Rick finally catches up with his family.

It's all, as I've indicated, generally quite well done, but, nonetheless, the show proceeds with such plodding inevitability that one can only anticipate the various touchstone tropes of the modern zombie narrative with resignation rather than anticipation. The initial, terrifying realisation that, yes, the dead walk (filtered through the disorientated perceptions of our hero); contact with a rag tag bunch of survivors, some of whom turn out to be decidedly unpleasant (aka Merle, the handcuffed racist and the wife-beating scumbag, who joins their quarry encampment); movement out of the infested cities and into a temporary safe place which is soon overrun by zombies; scenes concerned the acquisition of guns (a major plot point in all American zombie films); the discovery that the entire world seems to have fallen to the undead; the dangerous journey into the unknown which will hopefully lead to sanctuary, and lots of scenes in which people cry because "it's all gone – all of it". We have, quite literally, seen this all before, many times, and as yet, the show's writers – all of whom were, perhaps for this very reason, sacked a few months ago – have not shown a willingness to deviate from the Romero template, perhaps because their source material is itself so sorely indebted to what has gone before.

It may be, however, that those not quite as familiar with the conventions of the post-1968 zombie narrative will find the show more engaging than I have done thus far, or that there will be many viewers for whom its familiarity is a recommendation. Certainly, *The Walking Dead's* derivative nature has not harmed ratings, and it finished its initial 6-week run in the US as the most watched show on basic cable. What's more, the show has the look and feel of a feature film, and serves as a showcase for action sequences and make-up effects as good as anything that can be seen on the big screen. And while it unashamedly apes all things Romero, there are some undeniably thrilling and disturbing sequences – such as the sight of a corpse missing its lower half slowly pulling its way across a neat suburban lawn, or of a woman sitting by the body of her beloved sister, waiting for the moment when she reanimates so that she can shoot her in the head. Or of Grimes, in full sheriff regalia, bag of guns across his back, entering the seemingly-deserted city of Atlanta on horseback, like something out of a particularly post-modern western. It's a heroic image soon punctured by the fact that, moments later, the horse has been devoured by zombies, whilst Grimes cowers in an abandoned US army tank. It is in sequences such as this that *The Walking Dead* is most effective, and most promising, but they are still not quite enough to stem the overwhelming feeling of over familiarity evoked by the show. I will certainly tune in for the next instalment, but I will also be hoping for the show's new creative team to breathe fresh life into a premise that, like many of the undead stars of the series, has become more than a little ripe.

BERNICE M. MURPHY

Being Human

BBC Three, 2009-2010 - Series 1 and 2 box set (2 Entertain Video, 2010)

Stop me if you've heard this one: a vampire, a werewolf and a ghost walk into a house in Bristol... The central conceit of *Being Human* does sound like the kind of joke that might elicit a few groans in the pub, but the show itself is not hackneyed or formulaic.

The series' three central characters are affectionately drawn and immediately likable. Irish actor Aidan Turner (heartthrob of *Desperate Romantics*) plays Mitchell, a vampire trying to put his days of carnage behind him, and to cajole Bristol's blood-sucker population into adopting his abstemious ways. Russell Tovey plays uptight, bespectacled werewolf George, who wants to find love and learn how to manage his 'time of the month'. Leonora Crichlow plays Annie, a ghost torn between passing on and sticking by her two best friends, who obsessively makes endless cups of tea because it makes her feel 'normal' (in series two she progresses to also crumbling biscuits into the mugs, rendering the final concoction an undrinkable sludge).

Being Human can be defined, most tellingly, by what it is *not* – that is to say, a slick, sexy US production like *True Blood*. Much of the viewer's pleasure comes from the kitchen sink touches: if you like the idea of a vampire and a werewolf throwing an emotional tantrum over the changed scheduling of *The Real Hustle*, then this is the show for you ('I saw a preview, they were going to do a con about cashpoints...' 'Really? I would have loved that. You bastards! Argh!').

This insular humour and absence of Hollywood glamour is oddly reassuring. Mitchell aside (whose brand of straggly-haired brooding probably appeals to certain teenage viewers), there is remarkably little eyecandy, and most of the nudity involves George waking up in freezing forests, post-transformation. The female characters *are* characters, not two-dimensional motivations for the male leads. George's sometime girlfriend, Nina (Sinead Keenan), is a senior nurse with an acerbic sense of humour (Nina and George on lycanthropy: 'They might have a cure.' 'For what?' 'Cystitis! What do you think?'), and by the end of series one, her story develops into one of real pathos. Nina and Annie's friendship also assures that the Bechdel Test is passed with flying colours.

As the title suggests, *Being Human* is about the characters' attempt to deny their supernatural natures and take up residence in the human world. George and Mitchell muddle along on the periphery of society, renting a house and holding down minimum wage, unskilled jobs as hospital porters. Annie struggles to make herself seen and heard, as her tangibility wavers with her confidence. Humanity is, by turns, something longed for, and something abhorred; something which seems within the characters' reach, or an unsustainable charade. Echoes of *Frankenstein* can be detected in the series' treatment of the false binaries of humanity and monstrosity, particularly in an early episode where Mitchell is wrongly labelled a pedophile and hounded by an angry collective of *Daily Mail* readers – a vampire with the mob at the gate, albeit for the wrong reasons (or, at least, for reasons which twenty-first century society finds more pressing than unholy enchantment and exsanguination).

Insofar as the three types of monster go, *Being Human* treads familiar ground with the legends of the vampire (insurmountable bloodlust, existential angst) and werewolf (painful transformation, feared loss of control). It is the ghost that is given the most creative treatment. Death is presented to Annie and other ghosts she encounters as a door – yet what lies behind it is sometimes portrayed as heavenly release,

sometimes as a tedious purgatorial bureaucracy, and – most unsettling of all – sometimes as a demented, luring funhouse, wherein ‘gatekeepers’ lie in wait with sticks and ropes. The motivations behind this varying portrayal of death, as well as Annie’s fluctuant corporeality, are only hinted at in the first two series, while the third series (currently showing on BBC Three) gives a fuller exploration of what really awaits beyond the threshold.

Being Human is a ‘dramedy’, a story having an equal balance of comic and serious elements. While the comedy rarely falters, the drama is perhaps less successful. In both series, much of the ‘serious’ material focuses on Mitchell’s difficulties in dealing with the vampire populace. These segments sometimes feel overwrought, and can drag – mainly because there are seen to be no easy answers, only the cyclical argument of ‘killing is bad; vampires want to kill’. A plot based upon an intractable problem is one which inevitably becomes static and unsatisfying.

Where *Being Human* is strongest is in its deliberate juxtaposition of the genres: the prosaic or comic elements are made to clash with moments of horror, and this can work powerfully. Herrick (Jason Watkins) from the first series is the Bristol coven’s sinister head vampire, whose position as police constable allows him to facilitate the disposal of victims’ bodies. Herrick is gleefully amoral and dangerously power hungry, yet all this comes in the form of a short, pudgy man with thinning sandy hair, and a smile that is chillingly affable – a fitting symbol of the banality of evil. The grand set piece of the second series is a train carriage which shows the aftermath of a vampire feeding frenzy – blood-spatter and prone bodies – yet there are neat comic counterpoints: commuters choked with their own copies of *Heat* magazine, a cheery engineer who says ‘who’s been playing silly buggers?’ before he turns on the lights for the final reveal. This being a BBC production, *Being Human* can even rope in real newsreaders and familiar daytime TV stars to ‘speak’ to a paranoid schizophrenic through his television set – check out the creepy cameo in episode 2 of the second series by none other than a twinkly-eyed Sir Terry Wogan.

Sharply written and well-crafted, *Being Human* stands up to repeated viewings – repeats may in fact be desired in light of the many questions that are raised by the second series finale, an ending which suggests a radical departure from previous plot arcs. The box set extras include a feature on werewolf animatronics, special effect make-up, and the 1960s set dressing of a flashback episode – all of which will particularly appeal to the technical geek viewer. Fans may also wish to preserve these original series to compare with the American remake currently showing on U.S. channel Syfy (where George, inexplicably, has been butched-up into a ‘Josh’), and which looks set to hit us in DVD format in the coming months.

KATE RODDY

“Welcome to the Recession”:

***Valemont*, Season 1**

(MTV, 2009)

Almost anyone working in television looking to make money without going to too much trouble or expense would have to be profoundly unobservant not to seize upon the current teen-vampire phenomenon as the solution. And really, who could blame them? For MTV, chief purveyor of high-concept reality TV like *Scream Queens* and low-budget melodrama and comedy like *The Hard Times of RJ Berger* to the under-sixteens, it must have seemed like a moral responsibility.

But they didn't stop there. In a move which blurs the lines between programming and advertising to an extent that even the infomercial never quite attains, the now anachronistically monikered Music Television Channel screened *Valemont*, its in-house take on the adolescent blood-sucker trend (in this case, exploiting the vampires-go-to-college end of the sub-sub-genre) as a series of 33 episodes, each lasting two and a half minutes, inserted into the commercial slot between the scripted “reality” shows *The Hills* and *The City*. Following this canny 2009 stunt (for it's difficult to see it in any other light), the channel re-released the programme, first as a half-hour special, and then in November 2009 as a one-hour “Extended Edition,” which brought viewers roughly as far as Episode 20, and directed them to MTV.com, where the remaining fifteen micro-episodes and extra footage could be watched online (though not, frustratingly, outside of the US – but more on this later). Simultaneously, it established the Valemont University website (<http://www.valemontu.com/>) a pretty and not-unrealistic but somewhat sparse page, marred by whole sections which require registration to view – something those of us in the UK and Ireland are unable to do as a result of geographical restrictions. Somewhat more interesting are the websites links to related Facebook and Twitter fan pages, as well as to Valemont Commons (<http://valemontcommons.com/>), a discussion forum and web noticeboard which, along with the social networking sites, speaks loudly of a reasonably active and loyal international fanbase, all eager for news of Season 2.

If one November 2009 post “From a Show Producer” is to be believed, the second season of *Valemont* may take the form of a more traditional television dedicated series instead of a mixture of short bursts of plot and streamed content. As should be clear from the date, however, and from the lack of any sign on the internet of these plans becoming concrete, MTV does not appear to be in any hurry to satisfy enthusiastic audience demands. Nor is this entirely surprising. With the release of the less-than-lavish DVD box set in November 2010, and a screening of *Valemont: The Movie* (the “Extended Edition,” which edits so much from the original as to be all but incomprehensible) on MTV UK over Christmas 2010, along with the extras available on MTV.com (which seem to be far better and more extensive than those on the DVD), MTV is evidently cashing in on fans' desire to get their hands on something that appears to be rare, even endangered. Programmes like Joss Whedon's *Firefly* and *Angel*, or Michele Fazekas and Tara Butters' *Reaper*, all of which were axed unceremoniously in the middle of involved plot lines, have similarly come into their own through DVD sales and fan sites, not to mention YouTube uploads and illegal streaming sites.

Taking cynical advantage of the ways in which young audiences in particular have begun to use multi-media platforms, MTV has established its own visible web presence related to the show, while working hard to crush any unofficial internet dissemination. It would be inaccurate to say that sites not run directly by MTV discussing *Valemont* don't exist, but it's certainly true that it is all but impossible to watch even the briefest clip or trailer in any forum other than those under the thumb of the Viacom-owned station. The ins and outs of intellectual property laws are by no means the focus of this review, and it is

certainly understandable that MTV should want to keep so tight a rein on its productions. Both Viacom and MTV itself have been engaged in lengthy court battles against Google, accusing them of copyright infringement via YouTube. Nonetheless, by refusing to post clips or episodes (remember, a *Valemont* episode is only 150 seconds long) on YouTube themselves, and by choosing instead to restrict access to a US-only site, MTV are sending out a clear and slightly peevisish message – they want us to watch their programming their way, or not at all. And while this might appear to miss out on a valuable opportunity to gain extra fans for *Valemont* and other shows via the multifarious paraphernalia of the worldwide web, it nevertheless succeeds in fuelling that atmosphere of rarity that leaves devotees clamouring for more.

So, it may be time to ask, what exactly is it that *Valemont* fans are so impatient to see more of? This, it must be admitted, is a very good question. On the one hand, it is little more than a sloppily edited, derivative, hammily acted, soulless exercise in tapping into a market left gagging for anything vaguely reminiscent of *Twilight* or, indeed, *Harry Potter*, to which I'll return in a moment. It would take little to categorise it, along with the rather similar *Satan's School for Girls*, also reviewed in this journal, as “horror lite”. On the other hand, much like the early seasons of Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (in which *Valemont* lead Eric Balfour appeared briefly before being summarily picked off by sartorially challenged fiends), it's a fairly well-informed, almost affectionate effort that, with some tweaking, might have potential. The fans certainly seem to think so, and it does feature a few genuinely jumpy moments, along with what seems to be a healthy mistrust of power and authority figures.

Briefly, the plot revolves around Sophie Gracen (Kristen Hager), real name Maggie, a self-styled tough girl and leather-clad orphan who steals and grumps her way through adolescence following a car crash which seems to have killed her parents and led to her estrangement from her only brother Eric (played by a really quite creepy Balfour). When Eric dies in mysterious and gruesome circumstances while attending the ultra-exclusive Valemont University, “Sophie” buys another girl's identity and enrolls in an effort to find out what may have happened to him (the fact that she doesn't seem especially fond of him is conveniently glossed over). Once there, she quickly learns about the four distinctly Rowling-esque “houses,” each of which is named in a vaguely Greek sort of way after a different predatory animal (Panthera, Serpentes, Crocidilia and Aotidae (the apes, in case that one was less than clear)) and the Desmodus house, named for the bat, which burnt down many moons before (cue portentous music). In a familiar development, Sophie (it's too confusing to call her Maggie) finds herself compulsively attracted to the darkly brooding Sebastian, despite being warned off him by her cheerful-if-clingy roommate Poppy (played at full tilt by an irrepressible Nikki Blonsky, who has one of the most impressive screams I've heard in a long time), while all the time trying to decipher the allusive and sometimes garbled video messages recorded by Eric on his mobile phone.

This nifty little piece of hardware, which many foretold would be the end of the horror genre, but which has been used to great effect in numerous films, from the later *Scream* films to the more recent *Buried*, acts as a framing device at the beginning of each episode, giving us access to Eric's degenerating mental state as he discovers, keeping pace with Sophie and the audience, that many of the students at Valemont are vampires. Indeed, it would seem that any of them could in fact themselves be latent fiends, but with their vampiric traits yet a secret, even to themselves. I won't go too much into the rather complex explanations that surround this, but suffice it to say that they include the appalling neologism “Haemogoblins”; the depiction of human blood to a drug, banned on campus, that is addictive to vampires and that ultimately kills them; the hereditary nature of vampirism, which links each vampire to one of the five animals after which the houses are named; and the possibility of “forcing the turn” by injecting oneself with garlic oil. This, it transpires, Eric had done prior to his disappearance (surprise surprise, he's not dead!), as does Sophie, by accident, which inevitably leads to the revelation of their shared

vampirification. Of course, it transpires that Sophie and Eric are of the elite Desmond clan, descended directly from the original vampire bat, and that their mother is still alive but (in what may be a nod to Mark Z. Danielewski's 2000 novel *House of Leaves* or possibly the American adaptation of *Ring 2* (Hideo Nakata, 2005)) utterly insane and confined to a mental institution.

There are, equally inevitably, some problems surrounding their paternity, which, I'm happy to say, remain unresolved by the end of the final episode, but which I'll leave to be discovered by those who are yet to watch *Valemont* – because I'm not above recommending it. If a very cheap, slightly disorganised and not entirely well-thought-out genre exercise that might turn into something more promising (should Season 2 go ahead) is what you're after, then *Valemont* is for you. Not least among its virtues is its refusal, as the fatherhood issue brings to the fore, to clear up uncertainty and ambiguity. This may not be especially new or radical, particular in horror, but here time gets skewed, information is withheld, falsified or lost, violent visions intrude upon normal life, “good” and “evil” characters become difficult to distinguish and death and pain are dealt out to central players. Even if all of this fails to leave the horror-hardened viewer feeling pleasantly confused, it's at least possible to imagine how it might affect a rather younger viewer only vaguely aware of genre conventions in this way.

While there isn't much gore, then, bad things do happen to (relatively) good people, and we do get one or two effective scares, along with a good few decomposing corpses flashed across the screen for longer than I'd dared to hope, while the scene with the mother in the mental facility, although clichéd, is well handled, particularly with the surprising introduction of a ginger cat into the proceedings. Though I find it difficult to warm to Tyler Hynes as Gabriel (Eric's best-friend-turned-co-vampire-hunter who clearly has a thing for Sophie, but, inevitably, may not be all he appears), as I've already indicated, Balfour and Blonsky give stonking performances as the slightly pervy vampire brother and the hysterical room-mate respectively. However, the conventions of the genre, and possibly the mis-casting of the sweetly pretty Hagar as Sophie/ Maggie, mean that our heroine's tough-girl act tends to crumble in the face of danger – or, more frequently, in the face of Sebastain's watered-down *True Blood*-inspired charms – leaving her little more than a typical blonde, whimpering, love-struck victim.

Matters improve considerably once she's vamped – there's a highly entertaining hazing scene where she finally gets the better of the snobby Serpentes girls - though it's here that it all begins to get a bit too *Buffy* for its own good. For much of the total running time of *Valemont*, it appeared that, despite its commitment to (mild) ambiguity, rather depressingly, the University itself might be set up within the narrative as the ultimate authority, all knowing and all powerful, and just waiting smugly for Sophie and Eric to work out the truth that it, as a body, already knew. What's more, it looks very much like Prof. Nicholas Blunt, nearly the only lecturer in the whole show, may turn out to be a Dumbledore (*Harry Potter*), or, preferably, a Rupert Giles (*Buffy*) type figure, wisely dispensing information to the newly initiated. It is to be hoped that, should a second season be in the offing, his position as mentor won't reduce the uncertainties about good and evil that the show promises to render central to its aesthetic. The difficulty is that, considering its status as a cynical money-making device for MTV, such narrative doubt might be seen as too risky by nervous, post-Credit Crunch executives. What suggests that it might manage to retain some of its less tiredly conventional aspects, or at least still have some (if you'll excuse the pun) bite is moments like the one when Gabriel brings Sophie vampire watching in an “abandoned high school” – acknowledging the programme's debt of *Buffy* once again – and remarks “Welcome to the Recession.” Whether that recession proves to necessitate play-it-safe tactics, to inspire a more innovative approach to a well-worn subject, or to put *Valemont* in the grave for good, remains to be seen.

DARA DOWNEY