

BOOK REVIEWS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TIM HETLAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

EDWARD O'HARE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KEVIN CORSTORPHINE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JOHN EXSHAW

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

EDWARD O'HARE