The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies 12 (Summer 2013)

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Editorial note

We're pleased to announce the publication of the latest issue of *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* – the first issue since we took over the editorship from the journal's co-founders, Elizabeth McCarthy and Bernice M. Murphy. We'd like to thank them for the sterling work they did over the course of six years as editors of the *IJGHS*, and more particularly for the continued advice and support that they have provided during this transitional phase of the journal.

This new incarnation of the *IJGHS* has undergone a few changes, but we hope you'll find that its ethos remains very much the same. One key change that we've made is to the layout, as each issue will now be published in the form of a single, fully searchable PDF file – but rest assured that all previous issues will continue to be available in full in The Vault. We'd also like to announce that from now on, the journal will be published annually each summer – we continue to invite submissions (both articles and reviews) on an ongoing basis throughout the year, but please note the deadlines for Issue #13 are as follows: 1 March 2014 for articles and 16 May 2014 for reviews.

We've taken this decision to stagger our deadlines for article and review submissions in order to keep our review sections up-to-date, and also have plans to refine our review sections further in the coming months. We'll keep you updated about any developments via our Facebook and Twitter feeds, but in the meantime we'd like to stress that we are still interested in receiving reviews of events and multi-media/visual cultures, as well as books, films and television shows. Please don't hesitate to write to us with any enquiries about this, or any other aspect of the *IJGHS*: irishjournalgothichorror@gmail.com

We hope you enjoy reading Issue #12 – we hope it's a sequel that lives up to the promise of its original!

Dara Downey and Jenny McDonnell

A "Beastly, Blood-Sucking Woman": Invocations of a Gothic Monster in Dorothy L. Sayers' *Unnatural Death* (1927)

Katherine Bischoping and Riley Olstead

A Mystery of Four Sapphists

In 1927, Dorothy L. Sayers published her third mystery novel, *Unnatural Death*,[1] in an England reeling from the uncertainties and instabilities of a new modernity. A war of unprecedented brutality had demoralised Europe. In England, there had been six changes of Prime Minister within a decade, as well as an economic slump.[2] Definitions of femininity and of women's social roles were in flux. During World War I, women had gained jobs that had hitherto been held only by men; afterward, women's job options again narrowed. England's two million "surplus women" were newly identified as a social problem, suffragettes were demonstrating, Freud's works were in the bookshops, and hems were on the rise.

The New Woman was also on the rise, and Sayers' character, Mary Whittaker, appears to be a prototype. Possessing "handsome, strongly-marked features and [a] quiet air of authority", she "was of the type that 'does well' in City offices."[3] *Unnatural Death*'s plot centres on various detectives' efforts to establish that Mary had murdered her wealthy and ailing great-aunt Agatha Dawson – a crime that appeared to lack both means and motive. Agatha's demise was imminent and Mary appeared to be her lone relative and obvious heir. The detectives eventually establish that Mary had committed a murder that left no trace by injecting Agatha with a syringe full of air, stopping her heart. In so doing, Mary forestalled the possibility of being disinherited by an obscure amendment that was soon to be made to England's *Inheritance Act*. As she endeavours to cover her tracks, Mary attempts at least five further murders, with would-be victims that include Lord Peter Wimsey, the novel's lead detective; Miss Climpson, one of Wimsey's assistants; and Mr. Trigg, the lawyer whom Mary had consulted about the *Act*. Mary succeeds twice in her attempts, most cruelly in killing

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[1] Dorothy L. Sayers, *Unnatural Death* (1927; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003).
[2] Robert Kuhn McGregor and Ethan Lewis, *Conundrums for the Long Week-End* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2000).
[3] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.49.

Vera Findlater, the bobbed-haired contemporary who had loved her. Following her eventual arrest, Mary commits suicide.

Even though *Unnatural Death* never depicts women in erotic physical contact, Mary, the lovelorn Vera, Agatha Dawson, and a fourth character – Clara Whittaker, a long-deceased Victorian eccentric who had been Agatha's devoted life partner – have generally been read as lesbians.[4] Scholars have long wondered what to make of this, specifically, what attitude toward lesbianism Sayers intended to convey and what this attitude indicated about her own sexual identity. On one hand, *Unnatural Death* can be understood to follow trends in the literature contemporary with Sayers' career, which generally cast the lesbian as a morally disordered figure. One example is D.H. Lawrence's "The Fox", a 1923 novella in which a vulnerable woman is torn between her growing affection for a man and her existing domestic partnership with a cold and withholding woman.[5] Another example is Clemence Dane's 1917 *The Regiment of Women*, a boarding-school novel in which a new teacher and a fragile student are preyed upon by a lesbian teacher, who comes to a repentant end.[6] In a passage of *Unnatural Death*, it may well be *The Regiment of Women* that Miss Climpson references when she writes to Peter Wimsey, with frenetic emphases, that Vera's "pash" for Mary is "rather *unhealthy* – you may remember Miss Clemence Dane's *very clever book* on the subject?"[7] Some analysts of Sayers' work regard Miss Climpson's views as the most telling of any expressed in *Unnatural Death*. Brunsdale even identifies Miss Climpson's voice with that of Sayers, claiming that "[i]n many important respects such as her High Anglican persuasion, Miss Climpson was Dorothy as she might have been had Mac [Sayers' husband] not come along", particularly her faith that "it is more natural and proper for opposite sexes to attract and cleave to one another."[8]

However, despite Vera's piteous state and Mary's ruthlessness, *Unnatural Death*'s lesbians are not all sad or bad. Substantial passages of *Unnatural Death* show trustworthy

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[4] For example: H.E.D. "Review of *The Dawson Pedigree*", *New York Evening Post* (3 March 1928), p.13, cited in Ruth Tanis Youngberg, *Dorothy L. Sayers: A Reference Guide* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co, 1982), p.4; Dawson Gaillard, *Dorothy L. Sayers* (New York: Frederick L. Ungar 1981); Valerie Pitt, "Dorothy Sayers: The Predicaments of Women", *Literature and History* 14, no. 2 (1988), p.176; Kathleen Gregory Klein, "Dorothy Sayers", in E.F. Bargainnier (ed.), *10 Women of Mystery* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1981).

[5] D.H. Lawrence, *The Fox* (London: Martin Secker, 1923).

[6] Clemence Dane, *Regiment of Women* (London: Heinemann, 1917).

[7] Sayers, *Unnatural,* p.84.

[8] Mitzi Brunsdale, *Dorothy L. Sayers: Solving the Mystery of Wickedness* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1990), p.97. In a similar vein, Durkin agrees with Miss Climpson's view that Vera's love is idolatrous, but dismisses other characters' accounts of Agatha and Clara's harmonious relation as "uninteresting". (Mary Brian Durkin, *Dorothy L. Sayers* (Boston: Twayne, 1980), p.43.)

characters speaking warmly of Clara Whittaker ("'a woman of wonderful judgement'") and Agatha Dawson ("'a very kind, nice lady'"), and touchingly recalling how Agatha was "'that fond of Miss Whittaker and not wanting to let her out of her sight.'"[9] Some scholars have wondered whether Sayers herself might have been a lesbian. In an early biography entitled *Such a Strange Lady*, Janet Hitchman made this a focal question, prefacing her discussion of Sayers' adolescence with, "Many girls, normal girls not in the least inclined to lesbianism, go through a period of hating themselves for being women, and adopt boyish habits to gain attention."[10] Subsequent biographers have made much of even the least cue to Sayers' gendered self-presentation, such as her childhood preference for a dilapidated toy monkey rather than dolls.[11] Today, many of these discussions read as somewhat confused, in that they tend to conflate gender performance with sexual orientation. Still, the consensus has been that Sayers was heterosexual.[12]

We maintain that the strongest indicator of Sayers' beliefs about lesbianism is to be found in a largely overlooked letter that she wrote in late November 1928, in which she asks a medical colleague for advice about "inverts". Although one reviewer carped about Sayers' four Sapphist characters,[13] *Unnatural Death* had received largely positive reviews when it appeared. But in November 1928 came the obscenity trial of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*,[14] a novel with an unrepentant lesbian protagonist who relied on scientific analyses of inversion to account for her deviance.[15] Sayers wrote:

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[9] Sayers, *Unnatural*, pp.136-37.

[10] Janet Hitchman, *Such a Strange Lady: An Introduction to Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957)* (London: New English Library, 1975), p.34.

[11] James Brabazon, *Dorothy L. Sayers: A Biography* (New York: Scribners, 1981), p.45.

[12] Throughout her biography of Sayers, Reynolds offers by far the most expansive discussion of Sayers' gender self-presentation, sexuality, and relationships. (Barbara Reynolds, *Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).) Heilbrun's commentary on Brabazon's biography makes a point that can be generalised to many of the works on Sayers: that they excessively focus on the extent of her conformity to "the erotic plot – the script already written by men for women by which women wait for maturity, marriage, motherhood, and, above all, for the chance to find their place in the destiny of a man." (Carolyn Heilbrun, "Dorothy L. Sayers: Biography Between the Lines" in Alzina Stone Dale (ed.), *Dorothy L. Sayers: The Centenary Celebration* (London: Walker and Co., 1993), p.2.)

[13] H.E.D., p.13. Eight reviews of *Unnatural Death* were available to us.

[14] Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (Paris: Pegasus, 1928); for the trial judgment, see Sir Chartres Biron, "Judgment", in *Palatable Poison: Critical Perspectives on The Well of Loneliness*, Laura Doan and Jay Prosser (eds.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp.39-49.

[15] *The Well of Loneliness* contains an introduction by Havelock Ellis (see Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume II: Sexual Inversion*, 3rd ed., (1927), Project Gutenberg 2004, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13611/13611-h/13611-h.htm) and refers to the work of Krafft-Ebing (see Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886; Burbank: Bloat Books, 1999). Yiannitsaros indicates that Hall's literary work came under more scrutiny than had middlebrow works of the time. See Chris Yiannitsaros, "'I'm Scared to Death She'll Kill Me': *Devoted Ladies*, Feminine Monstrosity, and the (Lesbian) Gothic Romance", *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* 8 (June 2010),

> [O]ne is so often asked questions, and it is as well to be able to give a reasonable and scientific answer. People's minds get so confused on these subjects, and they *will* suppose that if one stands up for these unfortunate people, one is advocating all kinds of debauchery. As a matter of fact, inverts make me creep […] [T]he normal person often makes the invert creep; I had a friend who was rather that way […] but she won't see, speak, or write to me now I'm married, because marriage revolts her. So there you are.[16]

Although Sayers' references to "creep", "debauchery", and misfortune could hardly be called complimentary, she seems briskly even-handed in suggesting that the sensation of "creep" is experienced just as much by "inverts" as "the normal person". Her position here presages the liberal individualism that she would express in later essays.[17]

Female Sexuality and Social Crisis

Her decisiveness counters McGregor and Lewis' claim that "[t]here seems some ambivalence in Sayers's underlying message [in *Unnatural Death*], as if she cannot make up her own mind on the subject."[18] In our reading, the novel's ambivalence toward lesbianism arises, not because Sayers herself is undecided, but because she has chosen to offer a deliberately polyvocal text whose characters express an array of discourses available in her time.[19]

These discourses were largely negative, reflecting the aforementioned medical and popular literatures that cast the lesbian as, at best, a deviant, and, at worst, a sower of moral disorder. Even though *Unnatural Death* swims against the tide of opinion in depicting Agatha Dawson and Clara Whittaker as beloved and admired, it still depicts their rejection of male partners as a niggling problem, a deviation for which others in their circles offer accounts. For example, a retired stablehand who had worked for Clara mulls over his employer's disinterest in men, likening her to a "'terrier-bitch'" that would not mate with any dog, for "'The Lord makes a few of them that way to suit 'Is own purposes, I suppose. There ain't no

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http://irishgothichorrorjournal.homestead.com/DevotedLadies.html.

[16] Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Letters of Dorothy Sayers 1899-1936: The Making of a Detective Novelist*, Barbara Reynolds (ed.) (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), p.289.

[17] In "Are Women Human?", for example, Sayers presents a fundamentally liberal individualist position, with feminism as its corollary. She asserts that women seek "to be human individuals, however peculiar and unexpected. It is no good saying: 'You are a little girl and therefore you ought to like dolls'; if the answer is, 'But I don't,' there is no more to be said." See Dorothy L. Sayers, *Unpopular Opinions* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946), p.112.

[18] McGregor and Lewis, p.69.

[19] Unsurprisingly, later in life Sayers would become a playwright. See Crystal Downing, "Minding the Performance: Sayers's Literary Criticism" in Lawrence J. Trudeau (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning, 2010), pp.102-15.

arguing with females.'"[20] In sum, the lesbian was a conventional character who could be expected to embody various threats of deviance, disruption, and social upheaval, reflecting a more general use, both past and present, of women and female sexuality as surfaces onto which modern anxieties about social change are projected.

Pitt, Kenney, Morris, and McGregor and Lewis[21] have already taken up *Unnatural Death* as an examination of how a "shaky world"[22] was altering women's options and statuses. Our analysis has the opposite causal direction. We explore how *Unnatural Death* uses female sexuality to express social crisis, as well as its concomitant modes of truth and power. Our method is to examine Sayers' use of Gothic horror and Sensation-fiction devices from a perspective informed by Foucault's conception of the "abnormal individual", a monstrous figure who crops up "only when confusion comes up against, or overturns, or disturbs civil, canon, or religious law."[23]

We first establish that Sayers had an extensive knowledge of earlier genres on which she could draw to heighten readers' sense of relish and suspense. Second, we show how, in key chapters of *Unnatural Death*, Mary Whittaker masquerades in many guises as she attacks both law and "natural" notions of gender and sexuality, represented by the persons of Mr. Trigg and Peter Wimsey, respectively. In Foucault's terms, she thus monstrously commits "a double transgression, of law and nature."[24] Third, we consider how the Gothic foundering of Agatha Dawson's and Clara Whittaker's lineages, which had culminated in Mary, expresses anxieties surrounding cultural transmission, both in terms of the biological reproduction of society and of the normative passage of property through patriarchal lines, as mediated by inheritance law. Finally, we establish that the character of Mary is a palimpsest of J. Sheridan Le Fanu's 1872 vampire creation, Carmilla[25] – an imagining of legal and medical disorder that relies upon popular memory of the vampire's carnal monstrosity. Yet, we also show how the rendering of Mary parts ways with Gothic depictions, indicating that a new arrangement of knowledge has emerged in which the essence of the monster is no longer to be criminal as much as it is to be an irregular character who violates social norms.

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[20] Sayers, *Unnatural,* p.142.
[21] McGregor and Lewis; Pitt; Virginia B. Morris, "Arsenic and Blue Lace: Sayers' Criminal Women", *Modern Fiction Studies* 29, no. 3; Catherine Kenney, *The Remarkable Case of Dorothy L. Sayers* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1990).
[22] Kenney, p.129.
[23] Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France*, Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni (eds.) (New York: Picador, 1999), p.63.
[24] Andrew Sharpe, "Structured like a Monster: Understanding Human Difference through a Legal Category", *Law and Critique* 18, no. 2 (2007), p.7.
[25] Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *In a Glass Darkly* (1872; London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1897).

Dorothy L. Sayers as a Scholar of Horror and Sensation

The troubled Interwar period became known as a "Golden Age of Detective Fiction", for readers were escaping in droves into mysteries' increasingly complicated, emotionally detached puzzle plots.[26] When *Unnatural Death* was underway, Sayers described mystery writing as an "exercise of cunning craftsmanship […] rather like laying a mosaic."[27] But, Oxford-educated, she was beginning to aspire to legitimise the genre as more than simply "popular" and superficial. In 1930, she would found the Detection Club, alongside greats such as Agatha Christie and G.K. Chesterton, and would quickly become known as an analyst of the genre, one to be quoted in *The New York Times* and *The Saturday Review of Literature*.[28] In the introduction to her 1928 edited collection, *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*, Sayers maintained that readers' increasing demand for tightly plotted puzzles had been causing mystery authors to limit their emotional palettes and characterisations, for "[a] too violent emotion flung into the glittering mechanism of the detective-story jars the movement by disturbing the delicate balance."[29] She suggested that, as the mystery genre developed away from elaborate plotting, it might come to take up moral themes – a possibility that, by the 1930s, Sayers was beginning to implement in her own work.[30]

Sayers also lavished praise on the past century's horror fiction, in which "the reader's blood […] is curdled by some horrible and apparently inexplicable murder or portent."[31] Among the writers whom Sayers particularly lauded are the English Wilkie Collins (1824-1889), Sensation-fiction author of *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*,[32] and the Irish Gothic horror author J. Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873). These two subgenres created similar emotional and physical sensations in their readers through spine-tingling suspense and

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[26] See Gaillard, pp.5-10, for a further discussion of the Golden Age, as well as McGregor and Lewis, pp.2-6, on the strains of the Interwar period.

[27] Sayers, *Letters*, p.241.

[28] Katharine Fullerton Gerould, "Murder for Pastime", *The Saturday Review of Literature* (3 August 1935), pp.3-4; p.14; Herbert William Horwill, "News and Views of Literary London", *The New York Times* (17 July 1932), p.BR8; Herbert William Horwill, "News and Views of Literary London", *The New York Times* (25 February 1934), p.BR10.

[29] Dorothy L. Sayers, "Introduction", in Dorothy L. Sayers (ed.), *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror Part 1: Detection and Mystery* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1928), p.38.

[30] Ibid, p.44. Also see Durkin, who offers an extended exploration of how Sayers' detective fiction increasingly developed literary themes (Durkin) and Gaillard, whose work maps Sayers' progress toward unifying themes and plots (Gaillard).

[31] Sayers, "Introduction", p.10.

[32] Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (1860; London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1910); Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1868).

deliciously shocking revelations. They differed chiefly in that Gothic horror embraces settings of melancholy decay and may involve the supernatural, while Sensation fiction sets its lurid secrets – such as "bigamy, illegitimacy, drug abuse, murder, inheritance scandals, and adultery"[33] – squarely within middle-class or aristocratic domesticity.[34] Sayers had begun a biography of Collins in the same notebook as her early version of *Unnatural Death*[35] and particularly admired his plotting and characterisation.[36] However, it was Le Fanu whom she thought possessed "the gift of investing the most mechanical of plots with an atmosphere of almost unbearable horror",[37] and Le Fanu whom her mystery-novelist character, Harriet Vane, would later claim to study as a pretext for investigating a crisis in Oxford.[38] Harriet calls Le Fanu "the master of the uncanny whose mastery comes by nature."[39] Sayers herself was praised for creating a "grandly grewsome"[40] tale in *Unnatural Death*, with elements of horror on which many commentators have remarked,[41] and sensational use of imagery that is "bold, melodramatic, often indelicate."[42]

Mary Whittaker, a Masquerading Monster

Prime examples of how Sayers emulated these earlier genres in *Unnatural Death* are to be found in two of the chapters in which Mary Whittaker assumes different guises in pursuit of her ends. Mary does so with an uncanny deftness reminiscent of Le Fanu's vampire Carmilla, who not only deceives her victims by taking on the anagrammatic names Millarca and Mircalla, but also participates in a magnificent and fantastical masquerade ball.[43] As Conrad-O'Briain points out, Sayers did not use intertextuality arbitrarily or solely as homage.[44] The masquerade is a Gothic trope that suggests that, in carnivalesque spirit, the boundaries of the

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[33] Richard Fantina and Kimberly Harrison, "Introduction", in Kimberly Harrison and Richard Fantina (eds.), *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), p.ix.
[34] Tamara S. Wagner, "Sensationalizing Victorian Suburbia: Wilkie Collins's *Basil*" in Harrison and Fantina (eds.), *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre*, p.202.
[35] Kenney, p.135.
[36] Sayers, "Introduction", p.25.
[37] Sayers, "Introduction", p.22.
[38] Dorothy L. Sayers, *Gaudy Night* (1935; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003).
[39] Sayers, *Gaudy Night*, p.227.
[40] Will Cuppy, "Review of *The Dawson Pedigree*", *New York Herald Tribune Books* (5 January 1928), p.12, cited in Ruth Tanis Youngberg, *Dorothy L. Sayers: A Reference Guide* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co, 1982), p.4.
[41] For instance: Klein; Kenney; and Helen Conrad-O'Briain, "Providence and Intertextuality: LeFanu, M.R. James, and Dorothy Sayers' *The Nine Tailors*", *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* 9 (February 2011), http://irishgothichorrorjournal.homestead.com/HConrad-OBriain.html.
[42] Brabazon, p.128.
[43] Le Fanu, pp.437-42; p.403; p.444.
[44] Conrad-O'Briain, n.p.

self can blur, social norms can be transgressed, and ordinary reality itself can come to seem uncertain.[45]

The first of the chapters we examine recounts the experiences of Mr. Trigg, the London lawyer whom Mary consults.[46] His earliest encounter with Mary is in her guise as "Miss Grant", a young woman whose summery, embroidered dress sounds rather different from the "severe fineness of outline"[47] of the clothing that Mary wears in her home village. When he next sees Mary in a London restaurant, she feigns not to recognise him – in other words, donning a new mask that casts doubt on Mr. Trigg's definition of reality. Soon after, adopting a servant-like "'strong Cockney accent,'"[48] Mary telephones Mr. Trigg late at night and lures him to a house on Hampstead Heath, where he is to assist in making an emergency will. Mr. Trigg arrives to find the house dark and empty, but for Mary, unrecognisably wrapped in white bandages and going by the name of "Mrs. Mead". While gasping out a tale of abuse at the hands of her husband, she drugs Mr. Trigg, intent on murdering him (he narrowly escapes). This final encounter evokes the opening of Wilkie Collins' Sensation-fiction masterpiece, *The Woman in White*.[49] Its male protagonist walks near midnight between Hampstead and London, coming upon a forlorn, white-clad woman who turns out to have escaped from a lunatic asylum, having been wrongfully committed by her fiancé. Thus Mary adroitly deploys devices of both Gothic horror and Sensation fiction, in tandem with the stereotype of woman as helpless victim, in order to become author of her own fate.

In an even more remarkable chapter of her masquerade, Mary is planning to drug and then kill *Unnatural Death*'s principal detective, Peter Wimsey. At the chapter's outset, Wimsey had already met Mary in her guise of "Mrs. Forrest", a heavily powdered, perfumed, and painted Londoner whom he suspects to be connected to the case. Now, Mrs. Forrest has invited him to pay an unchaperoned evening call. He finds her dressed for seduction in "an exotic smoking-suit of embroidered tissue, like a young prince out of the Arabian Nights."[50] It is a development that is Sensation-fictional in its adulterous tone, as well as richly and decadently Gothic in its female character's appropriation of both masculine garb and

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[45] Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Gaillard, whose interpretation of *Unnatural Death* does not note its intertextual connection to "Carmilla", instead considers Mary Whittaker's and other characters' guises to convey the evils of the new urban artifice (see Gaillard, pp.33-41).
[46] Sayers, *Unnatural*, pp.205-17.
[47] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.49.
[48] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.209.
[49] Collins, *Woman*, pp.13-21.
[50] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.179.

masculine sexual aggression,[51] the latter amplified by its reliance on the Orientalist coding of an Arabian prince as a splendorous, sensual, sexually-untrammelled figure.[52] Then too, her choice of costume implies that Wimsey should be tantalised by transvestism, with its suggestion of homoeroticism.

For all that, Wimsey is depicted as observing that Mrs. Forrest's attempt conflicts with her demeanour, which he considers "spinsterish" and lacking in "It" – that is, sex appeal. Her actions seem to him to be carried out "clumsily, stupidly, as though in spite of herself."[53] Perplexed and curious, he ultimately kisses Mrs. Forrest, "with a practiced exaggeration of passion."[54] "He knew then", Sayers proceeds, "No one who has ever encountered it can ever again mistake that awful shrinking, that uncontrollable revulsion of the flesh against a caress that is nauseous."[55] The chapter therefore insinuates that Mrs. Forrest is a lesbian.[56] Further, in its climactic lines, Sayers has not simply used a sensational, visceral vocabulary that resonates with that of her letter about how "[t]he normal person often can make inverts creep."[57] She has also subtly shifted the chapter's narrative perspective from the "he" of Wimsey to that of "no one who has ever encountered it", intimating that readers themselves may have revolted others with their caresses.[58] It is arguably *Unnatural Death*'s most subversive passage.

In her attempted sexual manipulation of Peter Wimsey, Mary's masquerade undermines the epistemologies by which sexed and gendered nature had been understood, introducing disorganisation and uncertainty. In Foucauldian terms, it is Mary's joint transgression of law and nature – represented by the attacks on Mr. Trigg and Wimsey, respectively – that makes of her a monster. Prescott and Giorgio have uncovered how Bram Stoker's *Dracula*[59] narrates the politically charged climate of late-Victorian England and the social significance of its changing gender relations through the female characters. In their

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[51] For a related discussion, see William D. Brewer, "Transgendering in William Lewis's *The Monk*", *Gothic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2004).
[52] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), p.118.
[53] Sayers, *Unnatural*, pp.181-82.
[54] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.183.
[55] Ibid.
[56] To be sure, the passage allows for the possibility that it was Wimsey, rather than men in general, whom Mary found revolting. However, as Simonds tartly points out, Sayers had characterised Wimsey as so satisfactory a lover of women that she intended Mary's revulsion to be "clear evidence that she was no normal woman". See Katherine Simonds, "Bloodhound into Bridegroom", *Saturday Review of Literature* (3 September 1938), p.14.
[57] Sayers, *Letters*, p.289.
[58] Sayers' critical work demonstrates her interest in the nuances of narrative point of view. See Sayers, "Introduction", pp.34-37.
[59] Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897; Mineola: Dover Publications, 2000).

analysis, although Mina Harker ultimately upholds Victorian norms of femininity, she also importantly expresses attraction to the "shadowly and only dimly understood threat of lesbian desire"[60] that is represented by her friend (and possible alter ego), Lucy Westenra, who has newly become a vampire. Sayers likewise imports and translates the Gothic to produce a monster befitting the shifting gender relations and radical possibilities being raised by New Women, who were often stereotyped as lesbians.[61]

The Pedigree of a Monster

While the New Woman was associated with a variety of social ills, it was her apparent rejection of traditional motherhood that captured the attention of eugenicists at the time, many of whom argued that New Women threatened the well-being of the British Empire.[62] Without either deploring or celebrating these anxieties, Sayers picks up on them. She employs the foundering of a familial line, a device beloved of Gothic literature and Sensation fiction alike (including *The Castle of Otranto*, "The Fall of the House of Usher", and *Lady Audley's Secret*[63]) to augment the sense of impending doom.[64] By choosing this device, Sayers interestingly locates Mary's deviance and her transgression of the boundaries of law and nature not so much in New Womanhood, as in a pattern that has been forming for generations.

Unnatural Death depicts a once-numerous family so reduced in number by Gothic-style catastrophe that Mary Whittaker's first victim, Agatha Dawson, is the last who can legitimately lay claim to the Dawson name. Agatha's sister had married a James Whittaker, twin siblings had died in infancy, and a fourth sibling had committed murder-suicide upon hearing of his son's death in war. Dawsons of recent generations had a penchant for relationships both literally and figuratively outlandish. Agatha's father had married a

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[60] Charles Prescott and Grace Giorgio, "Vampiric Affinities: Mina Harker and the Paradox of Femininity in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*", *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33 (2005), p.506.

[61] See Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.124.

[62] Ledger, p.18.

[63] Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (London: Thomas Lowndes, 1764); Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1986); Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, Natalie M. Houston (ed.) (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003).

[64] Conrad-O'Briain similarly examines how Sayers drew on J. Sheridan Le Fanu and Montague Rhodes James in *The Nine Tailors* (Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Nine Tailors: Changes Rung on an Old Theme in Two Short Touches and Two Full Peals* (London: Gollancz, 1934)), to powerfully wed Christian beliefs in Divine Providence to the Gothic fascination with the supernatural. (Conrad-O'Briain, n.p.)

Frenchwoman and had been involved in "'wicked'" speculation,[65] while an uncle had fallen into unrequited love with one of the Frenchwoman's sisters, who was "'walled up alive in one of them dreadful Romish convents,'"[66] and had then himself ""'gone over" to the Scarlet Woman'"[67] by becoming a monk. Encoded in these choices are the Gothic notions of Catholicism as irrational and perverse, and of France as the enemy of the British Empire.[68] An even more transgressive choice was made by a ne'er-do-well great-uncle who had sailed for the West Indies where he was succeeded by an illegitimate grandson of mixed race.[69] Although Sayers criticised eugenics,[70] the Wimsey family history that she created in a playful correspondence, as well as the biography of Peter Wimsey that she appended to *Unnatural Death*, speak freely of "stock", "types" and "breeding out",[71] with temperament casually deemed an inheritable trait. Thus, by *Unnatural Death*'s logic, that Agatha is the last of the Dawson name is not happenstance, but indicative of the family's lack of temperamental fitness. In the United States, the novel was known as *The Dawson Pedigree* – a title that neatly sums up the centrality of this pedigree to the plot.

Like others in her family, Agatha takes an unconventional path. She forms a domestic partnership with James Whittaker's sister, Clara, described in Miss Climpson's excited correspondence with Peter Wimsey as a woman who "'[i]n her day was considered very "advanced" and *not quite nice* (!) because she refused several good *offers,* cut her hair SHORT (!!) and set up in business for herself as a HORSE-BREEDER!!!'"[72] Although the couple are devoted, that neither woman marries and bears a child lays ground for suspicion and dispute.

Notions of family pedigree, which imply that deviance and abnormality are genetically transmitted, have their counterpart in the legal problematic of how culture – and specifically property – is transmitted. As one of Sayers' chapter epigraphs puts it, "The power of perpetuating our property in our families is one of the most valuable and interesting

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[65] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.44.
[66] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.144.
[67] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.148.
[68] Darryl Jones, *Horror: A Thematic History in Fiction and Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
[69] Anita Raghunath, "Race", in William Hughes, David Punter, and Andrew Smith (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic* (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2013).
[70] Sayers, *Letters*, p.73.
[71] For example, Sayers' biography of Wimsey contains the sentence, "The only sensible thing Peter's father ever did was to ally his exhausted stock with the vigorous French-English strain of the Delagardies." (Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.300.) Scott-Giles quotes correspondence with Sayers in which she described two "Wimsey types", one of them physically strong, stolid, and literal-minded, and the other more fragile, brilliant, and imaginative; the term "breeding out" also appears. (Charles Wilfred Scott-Giles, *The Wimsey Family: A Fragmentary History Compiled from Correspondence with Dorothy L. Sayers* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1977), p.18; p.20.)
[72] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.85.

circumstances belonging to it."[73] Because the Whittakers disapprove of Clara's horse-breeding venture, an unsatisfactory replacement for human reproduction, Clara leaves her fortune to Agatha. Enmity ensues. According to Miss Climpson, Clara's brother has "'inherited the *bad, old-fashioned* idea that women *ought not* to be their own mistresses, or make money for themselves, or do what they like with their own!'"[74] Later, Agatha does not trouble to make a will, because she assumes that her proper heir is Mary, her great-niece. Then Agatha's lawyer visits her sickbed to point out that, should Agatha die intestate, the upcoming amendments to the *Inheritance Act* would mean that her estate might well be assigned to the Duchy of Lancaster. Although the lawyer beseeches her to make a will, she refuses, persistently asking, "'Why should the Duchy of Lancaster have any right to [my property]? […] I don't even know the Duke of Lancaster.'"[75]

In sum, tragic flaws within the Dawson and Whittaker families compound to set the stage for Mary Whittaker, grandniece of both Agatha and Clara via the marriage of their siblings, to forestall the prospect of being disinherited – that is, to kill Agatha off. Both Agatha and Clara have resisted patriarchal legal institutions and their norms: Agatha, by wilfully (if understandably) resisting the intrusion of her lawyer, and Clara, by her breach of patriarchal norms regarding women's roles and control of property. Both have also resisted "natural" notions of the function of women and the family: Agatha, through the Dawsons' temperamental proclivity for exoticised liaisons that fail to produce legitimate heirs, and Clara, through an adamant disinterest in men. Mary's murder of Agatha is the monstrous culmination of a pedigree characterised by transgressions of both law and nature.

From Vampire to Abnormal Human

Although Sayers enhances the sense of doom by giving Mary a Gothically troubled pedigree that spans five generations, it is in crafting Mary as a palimpsest of Le Fanu's vampire, Carmilla, that Sayers most effectively contributes to *Unnatural Death*'s horror. The parallels between the two characters are several. While Mary Whittaker causes the demise of the Dawson lineage, Carmilla attacks the last of her own noble line, the Karnsteins, whose remote château lies in ruins. While Mary is capable of a "vicious fury" likened to that of a "cornered cat",[76] Carmilla can alter her form to become a "sooty-black animal that resembled

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[73] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.140.
[74] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.86.
[75] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.196.
[76] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.77.

a monstrous cat."[77] Thus, both are monsters who transgress the boundaries of legal and natural life. Both are also murderers who can arouse an eroticised homosexuality in their victims. While Mary is censured as "'a beastly, blood-sucking woman'" for preying on and charming the naïve Vera Findlater, Carmilla is a vampire whose caresses can induce a "strange tumultuous excitement."[78] These similarities ground both characters in a structure of monstrosity in which sexual, gendered and moral categories are disrupted.

These points are reinforced when we consider how Carmilla and Mary violate law by bringing about "unnatural deaths". Mary injects her victims with a prosthetic – an air-filled syringe – after winning their trust by presenting herself in various idealised feminine guises. Meanwhile, Carmilla uses her own needle-like teeth: as one of her victims reports, "suddenly I felt a stinging pain as if two large needles darted, an inch or two apart, deep into my breast."[79] The materiality of Carmilla's body, and particularly of her erotic body, is central to the ways in which she attacks and kills. Her victim's account of an attack culminates in what sounds very like an orgasm:

> Sometimes there came a sensation as if a hand was drawn softly along my cheek and neck. Sometimes it was as if warm lips kissed me, and longer and longer and more lovingly as they reached my throat, but there the caress fixed itself. My heart beat faster, my breathing rose and fell rapidly and full drawn; a sobbing, that rose into a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a dreadful convulsion.[80]

Both monsters murder by displacing the patriarchy, in that penetration is occasioned via phallic objects wielded by women. Like vampires, women who encourage lesbian attraction infect and convert others to their perceived monstrosity, and, in so doing, transgressively usurp men and their penetrative capacities. They radically eliminate difference and reproduce their own kind.[81] From this perspective, Mary's real crime is to be a "'rapacious female'",[82] who displaces "normals",[83] the "normal" order of things, including the patriarchy – or, as

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[77] Le Fanu, p.411.
[78] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.270; Le Fanu, pp.390-91.
[79] Le Fanu, p.411.
[80] Le Fanu., pp.417-18.
[81] See Douglas W. Allen, *Sexuality in Victorian Fiction* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Nancy Welter, "Women Alone: Le Fanu's 'Carmilla' and Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'", in Harrison and Fantina (eds.), *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre*, pp.138-48.
[82] Sayers, *Unnatural,* p.160.
[83] Sayers, *Letters,* p.289.

Foucault would say, the juridical order, which is confounded and perplexed by disorders of nature.[84]

Yet, the differences between Mary Whittaker and Carmilla are also important to note, for each age recreates the monster to its own purposes.[85] Literary analyses have observed that Gothic monstrosity became progressively interiorised in the course of its twentieth-century iterations.[86] Foucauldian research has similarly observed the shift from "monstrosity written on the surface of irregular bodies" to "the abnormal individual's monstrosity [which] is of the invisible kind."[87] Foreshadowing both, Sayers herself had remarked that, "[i]n modern stories of the weird, we may trace the same themes [as the vampire and other supernatural figures], rationalised or semi-rationalised, to suit our altered conception of the relation between flesh and spirit."[88] Throughout Le Fanu's novella, Carmilla's monstrosity is literal, manifest and – despite the guises she assumes – discoverable through her material body. Sayers instead made Mary's abnormality metaphoric, calling into question the authenticity of a selfhood perpetually shrouded in artifice, performance, and masquerade. Mary is a decidedly modern monster, a Foucauldian "abnormal individual", whose deviance signals a cultural shift away from a concern with irregular bodies towards a problematisation of deviant identities.

This shift reflects changes in cultural economies of knowledge, particularly the ascent of scientific discourse, which had begun in the sixteenth century and which had been undermining, yet not entirely supplanting, the superstitions historically associated with the monster.[89] Alongside earlier ways of thinking ran new scientific taxonomies, such as those classifying sexual inverts, bisexuals, transvestites, lesbians who reluctantly adopted "womanliness as masquerade",[90] and other sexual metamorphotics.[91] These taxonomies sought to institutionalise, transform and naturalise the monster as the "abnormal human".[92] The concurrent discourses are manifest in Sayers' polyvocal handling of lesbianism, especially in the different ways in which her characters speak of the two lesbian relationships

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[84] Foucault, p.64.
[85] Dani Cavallaro, *The Gothic Vision: Three Centuries of Horror, Terror and Fear* (London: Continuum, 2002), p.179.
[86] For examples, see: Jones; Valérie de Courville-Nicol, *Le soupçon gothique* (Laval: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2004).
[87] Sharpe, p.388.
[88] Sayers, "Introduction", p.45.
[89] Sharpe, p.395.
[90] Joan Rivière, "Womanliness as Masquerade", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929).
[91] Ellis; Krafft-Ebing; Magnus Hirschfeld, "Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress" in *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexological Science,* Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (eds.) (1910; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.104.
[92] Foucault, p.133.

in their midst. Medical terms are never used to discuss Clara Whittaker and Agatha Dawson's bond, which would have been formed in an era when women's intimacy did not attract psychiatric scrutiny and classification[93] and when women's sexual desire went unrecognised.[94] However, the detectives of *Unnatural Death* diagnose the young Vera's affections for Mary Whittaker as a lingering immaturity, marked by the persistence of a phase of schoolgirlish *Schwärmerei*,[95] an excessive and not entirely wholesome sentimentality. Like the vulnerable women in Lawrence's "The Fox" and Dane's *The Regiment of Women*, Vera is positioned as a character who could be cured by marriage to a man.

Significantly, even those lesbians depicted in a more negative manner in Sayers' work are not Gothic monsters, whose fanged, grotesque, or eerie bodies and vicious actions decisively indicate their deviance. Instead, the modern monstrousness that Sayers attributes to the lesbian is more accurately a metaphoric expression of her abnormality, marginality, and ambiguity in relation to the emerging discourses of law and medicine. It is the social effect of these characters' reproductive *inaction* that speaks to their monstrousness. Thus, in contrast to one of Clara Whittaker's contemporaries, who proudly reports having had five children, and seventeen grandchildren and great-grandchildren,[96] Clara herself was voluntarily childless. Her involvement in the feminine pursuit of "breeding" consisted of orchestrating the breeding of horses. Vera Findlater appears made for motherhood, as she is first depicted at a sewing party where her hands are "filled with baby-linen."[97] Yet, in a plan similar to that of the women in D.H. Lawrence's "The Fox", Vera aspires to take up chicken farming with Mary Whittaker. She rejects suggestions about "fruitful affection" with "the right man" as old-fashioned talk that "makes one feel dreadful – like a prize cow."[98] In other words, while both Clara and Vera are proximate to normative expectations of women to reproduce, they displace those expectations onto horses and chickens.

Conclusion

We have demonstrated that Sayers invokes the Gothic – and, to a certain extent, Sensation fiction – in *Unnatural Death,* giving her novel touches of delicious horror, suspense, and shock that elevate it beyond the ordinary puzzle-plot mystery of her day. But Sayers achieves

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[93] Smith-Rosenberg, pp.58-76.
[94] Prescott and Giorgio, pp.492-98.
[95] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.185.
[96] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.147.
[97] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.50.
[98] Sayers, *Unnatural*, p.191.

more than this. In Mary Whittaker she creates a monster whose systematic transgressions of law and nature come with a five-generation pedigree and hearken even further back to the transgressions of Le Fanu's Carmilla. As revenants, vampires are powerful symbols of the impossibility of closure. Even after Carmilla has been staked, with her head struck off, her corpse burned, and her ashes consigned to a river, she continues to haunt her victim, who fancies that she can yet hear Carmilla's light footsteps at her door.[99] Similarly, even after Mary Whittaker has committed suicide in jail and had her strangled body inspected by the detectives, her uncanny influence lingers: Peter Wimsey, emerging from the jail, is ready to mistake an eclipse for the end of the world.[100]

As shown, Mary's monstrosity differs from that of Carmilla in key ways. The shift in the monster's position reflects what Cavallaro terms "pure culture": an expression of what is culturally significant, meaningful, and feared at any given time and place.[101] As "pure culture", the figure of the monster crystallises, and thus makes more visible, the weighty social and political concerns of the period. Alongside Gothic elements, Sayers takes into account significant social anxieties about the changing roles of women in modern life and their implications for the patriarchy. She also incorporates the modern medical discourses that interiorise monstrosity, reshaping it into the deviant identity of Foucault's abnormal individual. Sayers' effect here is to compound the lack of closure already associated with the vampire by delineating a character-type who is unknowable, shifting, ever masquerading, and persistently destabilising. That modern monstrosity cannot readily "be detected" suggests that other categories of knowledge could also become uncertain and contingent, and that an end to the world as knowable is nigh.

[99] Le Fanu, p.471.
[100] Sayers, *Unnatural,* p.299.
[101] Cavallaro; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1996); see also Edward Ingebretsen, *At Stake: Monsters and the Rhetoric of Fear in Public Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

Bluebeard's Wives: Horror, Quality and the Gothic (or Paranoid) Woman's Film in the 1940s

Mark Jancovich

Although a body of work now exists on the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film of the 1940s,[1] most of this work ignores or explicitly denies any association between these films and the horror film more generally. As a result, the following essay presents a study of the critical reception of these films during the period that demonstrates that at the time of their initial release these films were clearly understood as women's horror films. It starts out from a survey of the academic debates over these films and their relationship to horror before moving on to explore the strategies through which these films were generically understood and critically evaluated on their release in the United States. In the process, it argues that many key examples of the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film were championed as the epitome of cinematic quality films, rather than being denigrated as low-brow entertainment. At the same time, other films were condemned as pretentious exercises that sought to disguise lowbrow materials as quality productions, or as quality productions that lacked visceral thrills and failed to deliver as horror films.

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[1] I use the term "Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film" as a composite given that there are so many overlapping terms used to describe these films; the Gothic film, the Gothic woman's film, the paranoid woman's film, the female Gothic, and so forth. Furthermore, while different generic terms are rarely synonymous with one another, these terms operate as a rare case where critics do seem to be using different terms to refer to the same films, and seem to be directly engaging with one another's work. The use of this composite term is therefore to try to capture the key features to which a variety of critics are referring in the debates about these films. See, for example, Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Lucy Fischer, "Two-Faced Women: The 'Double' in Woman's Melodrama of the 1940s", *Cinema Journal* 23, no. 1 (Fall 1983), pp.24-43; Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (1974; London: New English Library, 1975); Karen Hollinger, "The Female Oedipal Drama of *Rebecca* from Novel to Film", *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 14, no. 4 (August 1993), pp.17-30; Tania Modleski, *Loving With A Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (1982; London: Routledge, 1992); Tania Modleski, *The Woman Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988); Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* (1973; London: Peter Owen, 1975); Diane Waldman, "'At Last I Can Tell It to Someone!': Female Point of View and Subjectivity in the Gothic Romance Film of the 1940s", *Cinema Journal* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1984), pp.29-40; Andrew Walsh, "Films of Suspicion and Distrust: Undercurrents of Female Consciousness in the 1940s", *Film and History* 8, no. 1 (Feb 1978), pp.1-8; and Andrew Walsh, *Women's Film and Female Experience, 1940-1950* (New York: Praeger, 1984).

The Gothic (or Paranoid) Woman's Film: Critical Debates

Although it is a common claim that the 1940s was a "period of comparative infertility" in the history of the horror film,[2] critics at the time saw the first half of the decade as one that was witnessing a boom in horror production. Furthermore, they claimed that many examples of this boom were "dressed in full Class 'A' paraphernalia" and addressed a prominently female audience.[3] Many key examples of this trend have come to be known as the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film; and although these films are quite diverse, most involve a woman who feels threatened or tortured by a seemingly sadistic male authority figure, who is usually her husband, a feature that prompted many critics at the time to identify them explicitly as retellings of the fairy tale of Bluebeard and his wives. In other words, these films often feature deranged villains who inflict psychological violence on their female victims. As Siegfried Kracauer put it at the time, many key psychological horror films of the period featured "the theme of psychological destruction" in which their villains "no longer shoot, strangle or poison the females that they want to do away with, but systematically try to drive them insane."[4] In Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941), the heroine is under no threat and her fears stem from simple misunderstandings, but this is a highly unusual case and most heroines are in genuine danger.

In other words, examples of the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film were usually explicitly identified as horror films within the period, although accounts of the horror film since the 1960s have tended to privilege alternative traditions of horror, so that these films are generally excluded from most histories of the genre's development.[5] If this exclusion is often based on a tendency to privilege "masculine" traditions of horror over "feminine" traditions, a similar set of oppositions can also be identified in feminist criticism. Not only do many feminist critiques of horror, such as Clover, Creed and Williams, clearly present the horror spectator as essentially

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[2] David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (London: Longman, 1980), p.24.
[3] Fred Stanley, "Hollywood Shivers", *The New York Times* (28 May 1944), p.X3.
[4] Siegfried Kracauer, "Hollywood's Terror Films: Do They Reflect an American State of Mind?", originally published in *Commentary 2* (1946), pp.132-36; and republished in *New German Critique*, 89 (2003), p.107.
[5] Mark Jancovich, "Pale Shadows: Narrative Hierarchies in the Historiography of 1940s Horror", in Lincoln Geraghty and Mark Jancovich (eds.), *The Shifting Definitions of Genre* (Jefferson: Mcfarland, 2008).

masculine in character,[6] but feminist work on the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film has found it difficult to address (or even acknowledge) its relationship to horror.

For example, the work of Joanna Russ has been highly influential on later writing on the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film, despite Russ' focus on a form of popular women's literature that began in the 1950s, and which she refers to as the "Modern Gothic", rather than on the 1940s woman's film. Nonetheless, in her condemnation of the "Modern Gothic", Russ distinguishes it from both the Gothic novel of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and its supposed successor, the horror genre:

> the stories bear no resemblance to the literary definition of "Gothic." They are not related to the works of Monk Lewis or Mrs. Radcliffe, whose real descendants are known today as Horror Stories.[7]

Ironically, while Russ associated the "Gothic" literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century with horror, and distinguished these two forms from the "Modern Gothic", many of the film critics who later drew on her work would associate the "Gothic" literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film, and distinguished these two forms from the horror genre.

For example, Diane Waldman clearly identifies horror as a masculine genre, and therefore sees it as being distinct from the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film:

> The central feature of the Gothic is ambiguity, the hesitation between two possible interpretations of events by the protagonist and often, in these filmic presentations, by the spectator as well. This it shares with other filmic and literary genres, for example, the horror film and the fantastic. Yet in the Gothic, this hesitation is experienced by a character (and presumably a spectator) who is female.[8]

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[6] Carole J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: BFI, 1982); Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993); and Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks", in Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams (eds.), *Re-vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism* (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1984), pp.83-99.
[7] Joanna Russ, "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: The Modern Gothic", *Journal of Popular Culture* 6, no 4, (Spring 1973), p.666.
[8] Waldman, "'At Last I Can Tell It to Someone!'", p.31.

Although she acknowledges that horror and the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film "share" certain features, she sees them as necessarily different genres and it is the gender of their protagonists and spectators that is used to establish and define their difference from one another.

Mary Ann Doane also presents the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film and horror as separate genres, although she does not present them as diametrically opposed to one another but as distinct traditions that may at times intersect: "The woman's film is frequently combined with other genres – film noir and the gothic or horror film, even the musical."[9] Nonetheless, she still suggests that the woman's film and the horror film exist as separate genres with different pre-occupations; and she even claims that these pre-occupations are normally foreign to one another. As she puts it, in the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film, "Horror, which should by rights be external to domesticity, infiltrates the home."[10] She even repeats Linda Williams' claim that horror is masculine, and that the woman's film is traditionally associated with romance rather than horror: the "marginality" of the woman's film "is associated with its status as a feminine discourse – the 'love story' purportedly 'speaks to' the female spectator. While the horror film, as Linda Williams points out, prompts the little girl (or grown woman) to cover her eyes, the sign of masculinity in the little boy, when confronted by the 'love story,' is the fact that he looks away."[11]

Nor are these generic distinctions absent from more recent writing in the area. In her book on these films, Helen Hanson clearly distinguishes between "two genres, *film noir* and the female gothic film",[12] even though she also seeks to identify some points of contact between them. Hanson's study is certainly fascinating, particularly due to her analysis of the ways in which, "within both *film noir* and the female gothic film, female characters are frequently placed in narrative positions that challenge assumptions of gendered agency".[13] In other words, she acknowledges that many women in these films, like the final girl of the slasher film,[14] are not simply positioned as victims but often possess an investigating gaze, a possession for which they are not

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[9] Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, p.4.

[10] Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, p.136.

[11] Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, p.96. See also Williams, "When the Woman Looks".

[12] Helen Hanson, *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), p.xiii.

[13] Hanson, *Hollywood Heroines*, p.xviii.

[14] Clover, *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*.

punished but rather proves essential to their survival. Nonetheless, despite these strengths, Hanson's work still presents "*film noir* and the female gothic film" as clearly distinct genres, even if historical conditions meant that they shared some overlapping features.

Moreover, while she acknowledges that "the female gothic cycle is located" within a "wider trend in popularity for gothic and horror fictions" within the 1940s,[15] she only locates this cycle in relation to the literary versions of this "wider trend" and studiously avoids any discussion of the cinematic boom in horror that so impressed commentators at the time, even when she states that the female gothic "has been defined with a variety of generic terms":

> In the industry and the trade press the films are frequently described as "suspenseful drama", "murder thriller", "heavy drama with femme appeal", "melodrama" and "cinematic psycho-thriller".[16]

The problem here is not only that these comments imply that commentators at the time clearly recognised these films as a distinct genre, although they may have given it different names, but also that, as will become clear, the absence of the term "horror" from this list is quite extraordinary.

Part of the reason for this omission may be that, like other critics, Hanson presents the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film as being organised for the female spectator, while she assumes that horror is organised for the male spectator. Nonetheless, as we have seen, she departs from conventional accounts of the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film in one important sense. Most accounts of these films regard the female protagonists of these films as little more than victims. For example, in her classic study of women in film, Marjorie Rosen declared that this was "a genre whose success absolutely depends on female weakness, mental and physical".[17] These claims are also given a psychoanalytic inflection in Doane's account, where they are linked to issues of knowledge, psychology and vision. As Doane claims, these films often revolve around a problem of seeing and work to both frustrate and punish the heroine for her investigating gaze: "The violence associated with the attribution of a desire to see to the woman reaches its culmination in the gothic paranoid films, where

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[15] Hanson, *Hollywood Heroines*, p.39.
[16] Hanson, *Hollywood Heroines*, p.40.
[17] Rosen, *Popcorn Venus*, p.224.

the cinematic apparatus itself seems to be mobilized against the female spectator, disabling her gaze."[18]

If many of these narratives involve women who find themselves unable to trust their perceptions of the world around them, and particularly their relationship to men, it is also claimed that these films present the pursuit of knowledge as inappropriate for these women. Women are not only presented as failing to understand the world but of being *incapable* of understanding it. For Doane, even if she is "endowed with the necessary curiosity and desire to know", the films present the female protagonist "as impotent in terms of the actual ability to uncover the secret or attain the knowledge that she desires."[19] Similarly, Waldman argues that "the unusual emphasis on the point of view of the heroine has been put to the service of the invalidation of female perception and interpretation, equating female subjectivity with some kind of false consciousness, as the male character 'corrects' the heroine's impressions."[20] In other words, Waldman claims that in most of these films, women are simply wrong in their perceptions and, even when they are not wrong, they can only be saved when a male character "corroborates the heroine's experience."[21]

The following article will therefore examine the critical reception of these films and the ways in which they were generically identified within the period. The point here is not to prove that the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film is "really" horror, but rather the article concurs both with those who reject a sense of genres as distinct bodies of films that are each defined by, and distinguished from, one another on the basis of specific generic preoccupations;[22] and with those that argue that one cannot simply deduce the reception of texts from an analysis of their formal features.[23] As a result, the article explores how individual films and broader generic categories were defined within the specific historical context of the 1940s and, during this period, this horror cycle was supposedly distinguished by films that had moved

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[18] Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, p.35.
[19] Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, p.135.
[20] Waldman, "'At Last I Can Tell It to Someone!'", p.33.
[21] Ibid.
[22] See, for example, Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999); James Naremore, *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000).
[23] See, for example, Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Routledge, 1979); Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); David Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992); and Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

away from the fantastic monsters associated with Universal Studios and were described as "fresh psychological efforts".[24] In other words, they not only tended to feature disturbed villains who perpetuated mental torture on their victims but these films were also supposed to unsettle their viewers psychologically through their use of suggestion (rather than explicit visualisation), a technique that made their worlds uncertain and mysterious. Furthermore, the mentally tortured victims of the 1940s horror films were not exclusively female. On the contrary, this impression is only due to the later separation of the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film from other 1940s horror films; and Kracauer's description of the "terror films" of the 1940s also included a range of male-centred films that would usually be described as *film noir* today and he claimed that these psychological films were not preoccupied with female weakness but quite the reverse: "many a current melodrama suggests that normal and abnormal states of mind merge into each other imperceptibly and are hard to keep separate."[25] One of Kracauer's main complaints about these films was therefore that he saw them as presenting psychological disturbance as being profoundly "normal".

As a result, few reviews at the time considered the mental distress experienced by many women in the 1940s horror film as a sign of their psychological inadequacy or as requiring male intervention. On the contrary, in the case of *Suspicion*, one of the rare examples where the heroine's perceptions are in fact invalidated, even Waldman is forced to acknowledge that the ending "was mentioned by *every* contemporary reviewer" [Waldman's italics],[26] and that they complained that it was at odds with the film more generally. Far from being an inevitable, or even a common feature of this type of film, *Suspicion*'s invalidation of its heroine's terror was seen as being both illogical and an insult to its audiences. As John Fletcher has pointed out, the heroine of the Gothic (or paranoid) woman film was usually, like Paula in *Gaslight* (1944), not the victim of psychological inadequacy but rather of an "internalized prohibition against recognising what she knows", a prohibition that she must overcome if she is to save herself.[27] Like the heroine of the Gothic novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, these women can only defend their virtue by renouncing the

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[24] Stanley, "Hollywood Shivers", p.X3.
[25] Kracauer, "Hollywood's Terror Films", p.107.
[26] Waldman, "'At Last I Can Tell It to Someone!'", p.33.
[27] John Fletcher, "Primal Scenes and the Female Gothic: *Rebecca* and *Gaslight*", *Screen* 36, no. 4, (Winter 1995), p.364.

ignorance of the world that is the basis of feminine innocence, and they can only protect the domestic by rejecting the separation of spheres that keeps her ignorant of the world of men. As Ellis puts it, these novels allowed "the heroine to purge the infected home and to establish a new one, by having her re-enact the disobedience of Eve and bring out of that a new Eden 'far happier'".[28]

Nor were the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's films critically disparaged as a group, as Waldman and Doane suggest, no matter how much its reputation may have been reconstructed in retrospect; and the following article examines the ways in which many of the films that are associated with this term were seen at the time as aspiring to the status of quality products. Indeed, as Lee Grieveson and others have demonstrated, the film industry's efforts to "make cinema respectable" was not only achieved through the generation of "quality" productions but also through "a conscious effort to attract middle-class women".[29] To put it another way, definitions of quality were associated with feminine tastes and feminine tastes were associated with quality. He therefore uses Mary Ryan's work on the formation of the middle classes in the United States, where she demonstrates that the very identity and authority of the middle classes was "predicated on notions of domesticity and gentility which were closely aligned with idealized notions of femininity as moral guardianship."[30] Consequently, an appeal to women was simultaneously an aspiration towards respectability and quality; and to the cultivation of a middle-class audience more generally, and an audience of middle-class families more particularly.

However, if examples of the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film, such as *Rebecca* (1940), were seen as representing the epitome of cinematic "quality", there were also examples that were ridiculed and condemned. The first section of this essay therefore examines the values through which these distinctions were made, values that did not simply privilege "highbrow" quality but also celebrated "lowbrow" vitality over what was seen as ponderous pretension. To put it another way, films were rarely attacked for being little more than "lowbrow" shockers, but rather films were usually

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[28] Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), p.xii.
[29] Lee Grieveson, "A Kind of Recreative School for the Whole Family: Making Cinema Respectable, 1907-1909", *Screen* 42, no.1 (Spring 2001), p.65. See also Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
[30] Grieveson, "A Kind of Recreative School for the Whole Family", p.65.

condemned on the grounds that they did not "know their place" and used the signifiers of quality to blur the line between popular and legitimate taste.[31]

These themes are then expanded in more detail in the next section, which focuses on the gaslight melodramas,[32] where the period details had a profoundly ambiguous meaning. On the one hand, these details could provide a suggestion of quality but, on the other, they could also be seen as a mere affection and even as encouraging an association with the supposedly lowbrow and outmoded sensationalism of nineteenth-century popular entertainment. Finally, the third section concentrates on the notion of cultural boundaries, and examines the ways in which films were judged according to a notion of "purity". While some films were criticised on the grounds that they were supposed to have violated the distinctions between different cultural materials, other films were praised for their "purity", which was associated with both a clear central purpose and a respect for the distinction between different cultural materials. The films that were celebrated were therefore not only presumed to "know their place", but were also seen as accepting rather than disturbing existing cultural categories.

"Haunting, Suspenseful, Handsome": Horror, Quality and the Gothic (or Paranoid) Woman's Film

Without doubt, the most influential quality horror film of the period was *Rebecca*, which was produced by the key producer of quality women's pictures in the period, David O. Selznick, and was directed by Alfred Hitchcock. The film went on to become a major hit and the cycle of quality women's horror films was, in part, initiated by its success.[33] However, while the reviews made a lot of Hitchcock's presence as a director, they did not see the film as being out of character when placed alongside his earlier films, and many made particular reference to his previous film, *Jamaica Inn* (1939), which was also based on a Daphne du Maurier novel and also featured many elements of the Gothic. Indeed, Selznick clearly saw *Rebecca* as a horror project and regarded Hitchcock as vital to these horrific elements. For

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[31] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984).
[32] Guy Barefoot, *Gaslight Melodrama: From Victorian London to 1940s Hollywood* (London: Continuum, 2001).
[33] Although the peak years of production followed the success of *Cat People* (1942), *Rebecca* remained the prototype that many of these productions sought to imitate or reference.

example, during the script writing process, there were tensions between the director and the producer, and Selznick explicitly stated that he wanted to steer the film away from the light, "frisky tone" that inflected some of Hitchcock's British films and for Hitchcock to "look after [the] horrific atmosphere".[34] Furthermore, when considering writers for the project, Selznick had been interested in John Balderston, who had done "an excellent job for me on *The Prisoner of Zenda*". But Selznick did not push for Balderston simply because he had a good working relationship with the writer: his main justification was due to Balderston's background in "horror pictures, all of the best of which – including *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* – he wrote."[35]

Consequently, reviewers were hardly surprised by the film's horrific materials, and clearly saw them as well-established conventions within women's fiction. This is hardly surprising given that *Rebecca* was, in part, marketed as a quality production through its generic associations with literary classics of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Frank Nugent, in *The New York Times,* referred to it as "an altogether brilliant film, haunting, suspenseful, handsome and handsomely played."[36] In doing so, he balanced two key features of the film. On the one hand, the terms "haunting" and "suspenseful" made claims about the likely emotional impact of the film while also associating it with the ghost story in particular and the horror genre more generally. On the other hand, any anxieties about the film's generic identity were offset through two key markers of quality: the reference to the film as being "handsome" worked to praise its production values, while the reference to it as "handsomely played" praised the performances of its actors.[37]

Nugent implies not only that the horrific elements were fully expected but also that the material "demanded a film treatment evocative of a menacing mood",[38] and described the film as one that abounds in familiar Gothic conventions. The house is haunted by "Rebecca's ghost" and even contains a "bluebeard room".[39] However, despite the highly conventional features of this "macabre tale", both the "Gothic

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[34] Selznick quoted in Leonard Leff, *Hitchcock and Selznick: The Rich and Strange Collaboration of Alfred Hitchcock and David O. Selznick in Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.43.
[35] Selznick quoted in Rudy Behlmer (ed.), *Memo from David O. Selznick* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), p.281.
[36] Frank S. Nugent, "The Screen: Splendid Film of du Maurier's 'Rebecca' Is Shown at the Music Hall", *The New York Times* (29 March 1940), p.25.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.

manor" of Manderlay, and the "demon-ridden countryside" within which it is located, were claimed to contain "real horrors".[40]

In addition to extravagant praise for Joan Fontaine, on which the film's interpretation of the novel "stands or falls", reviewers also made reference to Olivier's performance and its similarity to his appearance the previous year as Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* (1939), another "study in dark melancholy".[41] If the association with horror was clearly implied in the reviews of *Rebecca*, the reviews of *Wuthering Heights* were more overt. The film was referred to as a "horror-shadowed narrative" that is distinguished by its "strong sombre tone", and by the way in which it "explores [the] shadows of the original novel".[42] Not only was Heathcliff claimed to be "demon-possessed", "a demon, a ghoul, Afreet",[43] but Emily Brontë was even compared to Mary Shelley. Just as Mary Shelley "only dimly sensed the potent force that she was wielding" with her creation, Frankenstein's monster, so Emily Brontë was claimed to have never fully understood the power of her own creation, Heathcliff, at whom her sister had "recoiled in holy horror".[44]

If *Wuthering Heights* was claimed to be a strong adaptation that went "straight to the heart of the book [and] explores its shadows", the 1943 adaptation of *Jane Eyre* was seen quite differently:

> No depths of consuming passion are plumbed very diligently in this film. No haunting pathos pervades it. The producers had little time for that. With Orson Welles playing Rochester, the anguished hero of the book, they mainly gave way to the aspects of morbid horror to be revealed.[45]

Rather than a literary adaptation, *Jane Eyre* was seen as a straightforward horror film. It might been "grimly fascinating" but was also accused of concentrating on the "dark, malignant side of Charlotte Bronte [sic]" and on those aspects of the novel that are "conducive to shivers down the spine": "the secret horror locked away at

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Frank S. Nugent, "The Screen: Goldwyn Presents Film of 'Wuthering Heights' at Rivoli", *The New York Times* (14 April 1939), p.28.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Bosley Crowther, "'Jane Eyre,' a Sombre Version of the Bronte Novel with Joan Fontaine and Orson Welles, Opens at the Music Hall", *The New York Times* (4 February 1944), p.12.

Thornfield Hall, the screams in the night" and the "mysterious moods of Rochester".[46] In other words, while reviewers clearly saw *Jane Eyre* as a film that aspired to cultural prestige through its association with Brontë's literary classic, *The New York Times* was unconvinced; and the film only escaped accusation of pretentiousness due to its "continuous vitality as a romantic horror tale".[47] In this way, the film was praised for succeeding as a horror film, even if it failed as a literary adaptation.

Alternatively, while *Jane Eyre* was supposed to have failed in terms of quality but to have been saved by its generic vitality, *Dragonwyck* (1946) was condemned for its pretensions and was dismissed as "grandiose and obvious".[48] While the presence of familiar Gothic conventions presented no problem in the case of *Rebecca*, *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, their use in *Dragonwyck* was seen as tired and dull, and the film makers were said to "have done the whole thing so ponderously that they have drained it of electric essence and even the element of surprise."[49] The film was not simply conventional but a "*repetition* of the Bluebeard story" [my emphasis] that followed the patterns too dutifully: it had all "the elemental features of the familiar old tale [...] including a tower-room which the wife is forbidden to enter. The arrogant husband is a killer, the little lady is a much-deluded child and the whole atmosphere of palace terror is dutifully embraced."[50] Moreover, it was added that, "Phantoms of immaterial aspect also lurk in the vaulted rooms, and the ghost of a murdered great-grandmother sometimes plays the harpsichord."[51] As the reviewer's tone makes clear, *Dragonwyck* might have had all the familiar Gothic elements but it lacked "the taut excitement inherent in the tale", and "for all these conventional horror elements there is so much talk in the script and so little motion in the action that the tale rather tediously unfolds."[52]

However, if the thrills were supposed to be missing from *Dragonwyck*, reviews claimed to find them in abundance in *The Spiral Staircase* (1946), which was praised as a thoroughly unpretentious film that, despite its polished production, was

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Nugent, "The Screen: Goldwyn Presents Film of 'Wuthering Heights' at Rivoli", p.28.
[48] Bosley Crowther, "'Dragonwyck,' Which Opens at the Roxy Theatre, Seen as One More Repetition of the Famous Old Story of Bluebeard", *The New York Times* (15 April 1946), p.35.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

"a shocker plain and simple".[53] Even its "pretensions […] to psychological drama" were seen "as merely a concession to a currently popular fancy", pretentions that never got in the way of its clearly defined and primary purpose, that of terrifying its audience. Robert Siodmak, the film's director, was claimed to have a "feeling for terror",[54] and to have made it clear from "the technique" that he "has employed to develop and sustain suspense – brooding photography and ominously suggestive settings – that he is at no time striving for narrative subtlety."[55] While this comment might sound like a criticism, such is not the implication here. On the contrary, the film was praised for its purity of purpose, in which "narrative subtlety" was irrelevant and the use of familiar Gothic conventions did not distract from what was seen as its key asset: its honest and straightforward dedication to its central purpose. The film was therefore praised as "an obvious though suspenseful murder thriller"[56] that operated on "the time-tested theory that moviegoers are seldom more satisfied than when a film causes them to experience cold-chills";[57] and while it "has drawn on practically every established device known to produce goose pimples", critics claimed that the "only thing that matters" about the film is that those devices are used "to startling advantage".[58] In this way, the film was celebrated precisely for its visceral thrills, which are claimed to make any intellectual concerns irrelevant: "even though you are conscious that the tension is being built by obvious trickery, the effect is nonetheless telling."[59] The film makers were therefore said to have put "an early-morning house under their spell", an enchantment that "was evident by the frequent spasms of nervous giggling and audible, breathless sighs."[60] Nor was this response perceived as exceptional, and indeed one reviewer predicted that "the film is likely to scare the living daylights out of most of its audiences."[61]

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[53] T.M.P., "At the Palace", *The New York Times* (7 February 1946), p.35.
[54] Herb., "Film Review", *Variety* (Wednesday, 9 January 1946), p.79.
[55] T.M.P., "At the Palace", *The New York Times* (7 February 1946), p.35.
[56] Herb., "Film Review", p.79.
[57] T.M.P., "At the Palace", *The New York Times* (7 February 1946), p.35.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.

"Victorian Villainy": The Conflicting Meanings of the Gothic Past in the Gaslight Melodramas

As we have seen, the horrors of these films were usually associated with the dark and disturbed personalities of their characters, particularly their intimidating male leads, so that one of the distinguishing features of the 1940s quality horror films was that they were seen as "fresh psychological efforts".[62] For example, while *Dragonwyck* was described as "a psychological yarn",[63] *The Spiral Staircase* featured a "fiend" who murders his victims "on the warped premise that the world has no room for the imperfect".[64] This feature can also be seen in *The New York Times*' assessment of *Experiment Perilous* (1944), which it described as being "one of the better psychological melodramas that has come this way since Hollywood began dabbling in the macabre some months back."[65] The story concerns an "unfathomable" and "cunningly insane monster", played by Paul Lukacs, whose wife finds herself threatened by the strange goings-on in his "mysterious household". However, while the film is "one of the better psychological efforts",[66] the psychological concerns were criticised for slowing down an otherwise gripping horror story. As a result, *The New York Times* did not necessarily see psychology themes as positive, but was often highly critical of psychological films, at least until 1945.[67] In the early 1940s, it did not associate psychology with the realistic depiction of character but, on the contrary, with horror and fantasy and with what it saw as often preposterous explanations for implausible behaviour. As a result, despite its supposed virtues, *Experiment Perilous* was criticised for the way in which the psychological explanations slowed down the action so that "words speak louder than action" and "the microphone proves to be more important than the camera."[68] However, the film was praised for its good performances, particularly from Lukacs, and most other elements of the film were

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[62] Stanley, "Hollywood Shivers", p.X3.

[63] Kahn., "Film Review", *Variety* (Wednesday, 20 February 1946), p.8.

[64] Herb., "Film Review", p.79.

[65] T.M.P., "At the Palace", *The New York Times* (30 December 1944), p.15.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Mark Jancovich, "The Crack-Up: Psychological Realism, Generic Transformation and the Demise of the Paranoid Woman's Film", *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, Issue 3 (November 2007), http://irishgothichorrorjournalhttp://irishgothichorrorjournal.homestead.com/Crack-upJancovich.html.

[68] T.M.P., "At the Palace", *The New York Times* (30 December 1944), p.15.

said to be "well calculated to hold your attention, despite its excessive talkativeness."[69]

The historical setting was also seen as a significant feature of the film. While the novel on which it was based was set in contemporary America, *The New York Times* noted that the film was set in 1903. Like a series of other films, then, it did not signify quality through its association with classic literature but through its setting within a vaguely imagined world of "Victorian villainy",[70] a feature that it shared with one of the most distinguished of examples of the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film, *Gaslight*, for which its star, Ingrid Bergman, won an Academy Award. The script was also partly written by John Balderston, who, as we have seen, had previously adapted two other successful stage plays into the two classic horror hits of 1931, *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. Furthermore, like *Experiment Perilous* and many other Gothic horror films of the period, the film featured a "homicidal husband"[71] who is trying to "drive his wife slowly mad […] in his best dead-pan hypnotic style",[72] a role that had been played on Broadway by Vincent Price, the star of *Dragonwyck*, and was played in the film by Charles Boyer.

The New York Times described *Gaslight* as a "dark shivery study" whose "audience was giggling with anxiety at a performance yesterday."[73] *Time* also saw the film as "a fierce, hair-raising, handsome piece of psychological horror",[74] while *Variety* saw the film as "an exciting screen treatment"[75] that avoided the "corny theatrics" that were supposed to be a prominent feature of the type of nineteenth-century melodrama on which it was based. Consequently, it claimed that the use of period features "only serves to hypo the film's dramatic suspense", while "lacking the ten-twent-thirt element that was a factor in the stage play",[76] the reference to the "ten-twent-thirt element" being an explicit reference to the world of nineteenth century melodrama.

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Bosley Crowther, "'Gaslight,' Adapted from Play 'Angel Street,' at Capitol", *The New York Times* (5 May 1944), p.17.

[71] Kahn., "Film Review", *Variety* (Wednesday, 10 May 1944), p.10.

[72] Crowther, "'Gaslight,' Adapted from Play 'Angel Street,' at Capitol", p.17.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Anon, "The New Pictures", *Time* (22 May 1944), www.time.com.

[75] Kahn., "Film Review", *Variety* (Wednesday, 10 May 1944), p.10.

[76] Ibid.

Most reviews also praised Bergman, who is due "a lot of the credit" for the "unusual degree of emotional subtlety" with which the film handles its central relationship.[77] However, not everyone agreed with *Variety* and many saw the film as old-fashioned, so that its period features came to signify an association with outdated forms of lowbrow melodrama rather than genuine quality. Manny Farber, for example, had no particular objection to the "creepy plot" and, although he found Boyer "unconvincingly insane", his most fundamental objection was to the inclusion of "a stock detective mystery involving stereotyped mystery problems", problems that were so "stereotyped" that he warned readers that they "will remind you of the kind of mystery stories Earl Derr Biggers use to write."[78] He also complained that this detective plot distracted from the intensity of the central struggle between husband and wife, an intensity that was also undermined by a series of "devices that are supposed to be hair-raising but are only reminders of what may have scared you in your childhood."[79]

The New York Times made a series of similar points and, while the film was generally praised for its "ticklish assortment of melodramatic camera tricks", and for the performance of its stars, who "play their roles to the hilt", it was also claimed that "the film doesn't match the play".[80] While *Variety* saw the play as being similar to the nineteenth century theatrical melodrama, and praised the film for avoiding "corny theatrics",[81] *The New York Times* took a different line. It argued that, although the film might prove frightening to audiences, it had lost the power of the play, which, "by its rigid confinement within the limitations of one room, pervades the spectator with the horror and frustration of its claustrophobic mood", while the film opens out the action so that "the fearful immediacy of the play is sadly lost".[82]

However, despite this quibble, *Gaslight* was generally well regarded, particularly when compared to films such as *Hangover Square* (1945), which was seen by *The New York Times* as a far more risible exercise, in which its period details were dismissed as mere window dressing that sought to disguise its lowbrow features

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[77] Ibid.
[78] Manny Farber, "Creep House", *The Nation* (22 May 1944), p.711. Earl Derr Biggers was the author of the Charlie Chan stories.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Crowther, "'Gaslight,' Adapted from Play 'Angel Street,' at Capitol", p.17.
[81] Kahn., "Film Review", *Variety* (Wednesday, 10 May 1944), p.10.
[82] Crowther, "'Gaslight,' Adapted from Play 'Angel Street,' at Capitol", p.17.

and pass it off as a work of quality instead. *Variety* praised the film, which it described as an "eerie melodrama of the London gaslight era" that told the story of "a distinguished young composer-pianist with a Jekyll-Hyde personality", whose "ghastly end is not for sensitive audiences."[83] It also claimed that the production "is grade A, and so is the direction by John Brahm, with particular bows to the musical score by Bernard Hermann and the sharp editing."[84] In contrast, *The New York Times* observed that this "period horror piece" featured a "plushy replica of a rich, turn of the century English home",[85] a description that focused on the lavishness of the production values but also suggested that they were merely tackily extravagant rather than being representative of real quality. Similarly, the film's horror elements were dismissed with the claim that "there is not a first-class shiver in the whole picture";[86] and the only real interest was said to be the presence of Laird Cregar, *Hangover Square* being the last film that the actor had made before his death. Nonetheless, Cregar was not seen as having much to work with in the film: he "plays a schizophrenic genius who gets a warning pain in the neck whenever he is about to go into one of those blank, murderous spells which take him away from his piano and out into the murky night in search of victims."[87] In other words, this description strongly conveys the critic's weariness at the supposed predictability of the film, and their sense of its status as little more than lowbrow horror entertainment, a sense that is made even more explicit by the claim that his "transformation from man to beast is accompanied with wild grimaces, the whole while he crutches his neck in a manner reminiscent of Frankenstein's monster. It is all apparently supposed to send chills coursing up and down your spine, but the chances are you'll find the whole business inexplicably tedious, if not actually ludicrous."[88]

In much the same way, *Variety* praised the earlier collaboration between Cregar and Brahm, a remake of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Lodger* (1927). For *Variety*, the film was "a super chiller-diller" that offers "a psychological study" of Jack the Ripper and operates as "a deftly paced horrific who-dun-it".[89] It also paid attention to

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[83] Kahn., "Film Review", *Variety* (Wednesday, 17 January 1945), p.14.
[84] Ibid.
[85] T.M.P., "At the Roxy", *The New York Times* (9 February 1945), p.15.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Wear., "Film Review", *Variety* (Wednesday, 5 January 1944), p.16.

the film's high production values and the "impressive performance" by Laird Cregar as Jack the Ripper:

> Robert Bassler has provided plenty of production values in carrying out with authenticity the London of the gaslight era. Lucien Ballard has turned in a superb job of photography, his use of light and shade being fine throughout. John Brahm's direction, making a maximum reliance on suspense, is possibly the strongest feature of the picture. Barry Lyndon's scripting from the novel is standout.[90]

In much the same way, *Motion Picture Herald* claimed that the film was produced "on a lavish scale with excellent atmosphere and fine cast and should strike frequent terror in the hearts of horror fans."[91]

But again *The New York Times* begged to differ. Although it acknowledged that the film was "handsomely produced" and "designed to chill the spine",[92] it also claimed that the film ends up looking like "a sly travesty on the melodramatic technique of ponderously piling suspicion upon suspicion (and wrapping the whole in a cloak of brooding photographic effects)".[93] In other words, it suggested that the film, for all its surface gloss, was a fundamentally crude affair that lacked proper restraint and forced its central character "continually [to] go around trying to scare the living daylights out of everyone."[94] As a result, just as we saw in relation to *Hangover Square*, the psychotic killer was associated with the "lowbrow" horror monsters when it was claimed that the film's hero finally "pours more bullets into the murderer than even Frankenstein's monster was ever asked to absorb."[95]

"Murder Mulligan": Purity, Contamination and the Problem of Category Violation

As we have seen, then, respected newspapers such as *The New York Times* were not critical of "lowbrow" horror during the 1940s, and often celebrated its value as entertainment. But they objected when they believed that films were passing off lowbrow materials as highbrow products or when aspirations to quality drained a film

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[90] Ibid.
[91] E.A. Cunningham, "The Case of Jack the Ripper", *Motion Picture Herald* (8 January 1944), p.1705.
[92] T.M.P., "At the Roxy", *The New York Times* (20 January, 1944), p.15.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.

of its entertainment value. In other words, when films were condemned, they were claimed to lack clarity of purpose. Films such as *The Spiral Staircase* might have a handsome finish but they were praised for never trying to be anything more than "a shocker plain and simple",[96] while films such as *Dragonwyck* were derided for being neither one thing nor the other, an unhappy hybrid of different elements that had no clear sense of its position or purpose. If *The Spiral Staircase* was "plain and simple", *Dragonwyck* was an impure object, a confused mess of different elements.

Similarly, while it was claimed that the makers of *Dark Waters* (1944) had "produced the whole show for strictly A-picture tone, even though the content is really more consistent with low-budget fare",[97] the film was ultimately praised as a "horror film" that is "neatly produced and directed – and well played by an excellent cast."[98] Again the film concerns a young lady who "thinks she's going crazy",[99] when she goes to stay with weird relatives in Louisiana, relatives who are trying to destroy her psychologically. Rather than being described as "inexplicably tedious, if not actually ludicrous",[100] like *Hangover Square*, the film was referred to as a "killer-diller of a thriller".[101] Certainly, it was stressed that the film "is nothing sensational in the soul-exploration line", but it was also professed that the film didn't make any claims to being anything more than an entertainment and ultimately "what it comes down to" is that the film provides an effective "tingling diversion for the latter part of an hour and a half."[102]

In contrast, *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* (1947) was described as a "murder mulligan, which […] is as wretched a stew of picture-making as has been dished up in many a moon", and the fault was precisely the mismatch between its pretentions to quality and its "crude and mechanical melodramatics".[103] Indeed, the review noted that the film had been withheld by Warners "for almost two years after it was made" and it suggested that the studio had needed this time before it could "work up their

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[96] T.M.P., "At the Palace", *The New York Times* (7 February 1946), p.35.
[97] Bosley Crowther, "'Dark Waters,' a Horror Film that is Diverting, with Merle Oberon and Thomas Mitchell, Makes an Appearance at Globe", *The New York Times* (22 November 1944), p.25.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] T.M.P., "At the Roxy", *The New York Times* (9 February 1945), p.15.
[101] Crowther, "'Dark Waters,' a Horror Film that is Diverting, with Merle Oberon and Thomas Mitchell, Makes an Appearance at Globe", p.25.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Bosley Crowther, "'The Two Mrs. Carrolls,' With Humphrey Bogart, Barbara Stanwyck and Alexis Smith, Arrives at the Hollywood", *The New York Times* (7 April 1947), p.20.

nerve to risk this incredible monstrosity upon even the most tolerant movie fans".[104] The most "conspicuous embarrassment" in the film, however, was seen as being "the performance which Humphrey Bogart gives as a homicidal artist with particular designs on his wives".[105] The problem with this performance was precisely the ways in which it was associated with the lowbrow so that Bogart was claimed to go "through the whole repertory of a low-budget bogey-man" and play his character in a way that reminded one of "a dead-panned American thug whose mother was horribly frightened by a robot built by Dr. Frankenstein."[106] If *Dark Waters* was claimed to have raised the value of its low-budget content through its "A-picture tone", *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* was claimed to have degraded its stars and its material so that "Whatever 'The Two Mrs. Carrolls' had upon the stage, it has lost in an artless rewriting by Thomas Job and the mugging of all concerned."[107] Once again, however, it was not the association with the "lowbrow" that was the problem, but the film's refusal to know its place. Scorn was therefore poured on its psychological pretensions, in which Bogart plays "a psychopathic dauber who paints his successive fraus as the 'Angel of Death' and then slips them poison when he feels their inspiration has run dry."[108] In this way, the film's psychological themes were condemned as pretentious: the psychological themes were largely dismissed as providing unconvincing motivations for implausible action.

The reviewer for *Time* was slightly more sympathetic, and claimed that at some points, particularly "when the second Mrs. Carroll begins to suspect what she is up against, audience spines register an authentic chill."[109] But even here Bogart's performance was seen as unconvincing and, although "violence and murder are old stuff to him", the actor "appears uncomfortable" in his role.[110] If the explanation given was that "madness and paintbrushes are not quite in his line",[111] Bogart had long been associated with psychological disturbance, at least since his breakthrough

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[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Anon, "The New Pictures", *Time* (12 May, 1947), www.time.com.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.

role in *The Petrified Forest* (1936),[112] and it was therefore the association between madness and art which seemed uncomfortable, rather than madness and murder alone.

In contrast, *Suspicion* was praised for its purity, as a film with a clear and logical focus in which Hitchcock "constructs his attack around a straight psychological progression".[113] In other words, while the psychology of *The Two Mrs. Carrolls* is a pretentious excuse for implausible action, Hitchcock's film is presented as one that is tightly constructed around a clear psychological logic. The film is "not Mr. Hitchcock at his best" but "Mr Hitchcock is probably the most artful sophist working for films – and anyone who doesn't think so should see 'Suspicion' at the Music Hall."[114] Again the film concerns a young bride who begins to suspect that her husband may be a dangerous killer who plans to murder her, and it therefore operates as "a psychological thriller" in which Hitchcock's skill is demonstrated through his ability "to build, out of slight suggestions and vague, uncertain thoughts, a mounting tower of suspicion which looms forbiddingly."[115] It was also claimed that Fontaine "deserves unstinted praise" and "has unquestionably become one of the finest actresses on the screen" whose performance as the "fear-tortured character is fluid and compelling all the way."[116] The film was therefore seen as one of genuine quality, in which the psychological themes are subtle, plausible and integral to the story, even though the ending was "not up to Mr. Hitchcock's usual style."[117] Furthermore, the film was praised for the ways in which its production values enhanced, rather than distracted from, its value as an entertainment, so that it "is packed with lively suspense and [...] entertains you from beginning to – well, almost the end."[118]

If *Suspicion* has "a straight psychological progression",[119] *Secret Beyond the Door* (1947) was seen as "psycho-nonsense", in which its heroine should "know at the start that the gentleman played by Michael Redgrave is a bad one to wed",[120] and

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[112] Mark Jancovich, "'The Murderer's Mind': Edward G. Robinson, Humphrey Bogart and the 1940s Horror Film" in Kristopher Woofter, Charlie EllBé and Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare (eds.), *Fragments of the Monster: Recovering Forties Horror* (forthcoming).
[113] Bosley Crowther, "'Suspicion,' a Hitchcock Thriller at Music Hall", *The New York Times* (21 November 1941), p.23.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Bosley Crowther, "On the Screen: 'Secret Beyond the Door,' With Joan Bennett and Michael Redgrave, Has Premiere", *The New York Times* (16 January 1948), p.25.

in which everyone's behaviour is seen as unconvincing. The heroine's new husband walks "out on her right in the middle of their honeymoon just because she, for coy reasons, momentarily locks her bedroom door", and when she follows him to his "musty old manse", she finds that it is "inhabited by several odd characters" and that "he has a morbid fixation upon death, a collection of rooms where murders took place and an untagged death-room reserved for – guess who!"[121] Furthermore, if the husband's psychological problems are supposed to make little sense – "the lady discovers […] that her husband just doesn't like dames, mainly because his mother didn't come upstairs and read to him one night when he was 10 years old"[122] – the finale is seen as even more unlikely. The heroine not only decides "to help her old man", despite being threatened with "death and numbed by terror", but "be dogged if her amateur psycho-therapy doesn't do the job."[123]

Nonetheless, the central complaint was not simply that the film is silly but that it is once again a pretentious mixing of elements. As a result, *Variety* observed that the film "is arty, with almost surrealistic treatment in camera angles, story-telling mood and suspense",[124] while *The New York Times* scoffed at the preposterous dialogue: "There's something in your face that I saw once – in South Dakota. Wheat country. Cyclone weather, it was."[125] The film was therefore dismissed by *The New York Times* as a "pretty silly yarn", in which the only saving grace is the skill with which its director is able to create terror in his audience: "Mr. Lang is still a director who knows how to turn the obvious, such as locked doors and silent chambers and roving spotlights, into strangely tingling stuff."[126] If the film had some "mildly creepy spots", and even manages to conjure up "some occasional faint resemblance to 'Rebecca,' which it obviously aimed to imitate",[127] it still fell short of the earlier film by a considerable margin, and its positive features were all associated with lowbrow entertainment: "Pure ten, twent', thirt".[128]

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[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Anon, "Film Reviews", *Variety* (31 December 1947), p.10.
[125] Crowther, "On the Screen: 'Secret Beyond the Door,' With Joan Bennett and Michael Redgrave, Has Premiere'"", p.25.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Bosley Crowther, "A Matter of Style – Now You See It and Now You Don't", *The New York Times* (18 January 1948), p.X1.

However, despite these complaints, *Secret Beyond the Door* still came off rather better than *Undercurrent* (1946), in which another young wife (Katherine Hepburn) finds herself menaced by her disturbed husband (Robert Taylor). The film was claimed to feature "one of those silly climaxes such as you'd hardly expect to see on [sic] a film starring Katherine Hepburn and Robert Taylor",[129] the implication being that there was a mismatch between the quality of the material and the stars involved. Indeed, the film was supposed to be so preposterous that the critic for *The New York Times* refused to reveal the ending, not because the studio "has beseeched us to keep the secret of this 'amazing ending' to ourself [sic]" but rather because "we suspect you'd never believe us if we told you – and if you did, you'd only laugh".[130] Manny Farber also found the "terror-ridden ending" somewhat laughable, although for him the moment "which tends to alleviate the horror somewhat" is one in which "Katherine Hepburn, so ravaged by fear, opens her mouth but remains speechless. This you may want to see."[131] In other words, despite the antipathy that some critics clearly felt for Hepburn, the material was seen as beneath the dignity of its stars, and the film was described as an "emotionally presumptuous story" in which "a fine young lady […] finds herself married to a brute – a discovery which she makes in painful stages while unconsciously falling in love with her husband's mysterious brother whom she has never seen".[132] What is more, her love for the husband's brother was seen as poorly motivated and develops as "she learns her brother-in-law likes music, dogs and books."[133]

Consequently, it was claimed that the film was "a trifle senseless" and that, although Hepburn "gives a crisp and taut performance" and Robert Taylor plays the psychologically disturbed husband with "a brooding meanness", the film was ultimately lacking in horror thrills.[134] Vincente Minnelli, who directs the film, "has used atmosphere to build up some rather fateful moments in which you wait for the unknown to occur", and certain cinemagoers may find "certain passages engrossing in

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[129] Bosley Crowther, "'Undercurrent,' Metro Drama in which Katherine Hepburn and Robert Taylor are Teamed, Moves into Capitol", *The New York Times* (29 November 1946), p.36.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Manny Farber, "Movies", *The Nation* (23 December, 1946), p.879.
[132] Crowther, "'Undercurrent,' Metro Drama in which Katherine Hepburn and Robert Taylor are Teamed, Moves into Capitol", p.36.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.

a strictly melodramatic way",[135] but such comments were very guarded praise, even when compared to *Secret Beyond the Door*, and gave little suggestion of any real emotional impact, even as a lowbrow entertainment. As a result, the film was condemned as a quality production that failed to provide either the logic of convincing psychological motivation or the thrill of horrific entertainment.

Conclusion

Nonetheless, there was a clear expectation that *Undercurrent should* provide horrific entertainment and that those films that critics would later identify as the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film were understood as horror films during the 1940s, when they were not even seen as a distinct group but as part of a much larger cycle of horror production. Nor were these films disparaged through their association with femininity but rather their femininity was often seen as a sign of quality. For example, *Rebecca* was not only seen as the prototype for many of these films, but also as the epitome of cinematic quality. If certain examples of the Gothic (or paranoid) woman's film were condemned, it was not due to their association with female audiences, but rather due to their "impurity". The examples that 1940s critics condemned were usually vilified as pretentious, in a manner that repeats familiar anxieties about the blurring of distinctions between class-based taste formations.[136]

Furthermore, while many of these films were referred to as "psychological efforts", there is a strong sense that these references usually refer to the psychological motivations of the male threat, and the specific nature of their violence, rather than to any psychological inadequacy on the part of the female protagonists. If these women were mentally disturbed, and found it difficult to distinguish fantasy from reality during much of the narrative, their mental instability was usually seen as perfectly understandable given the terrifying situations in which they find themselves. In other words, these films were rarely seen as requiring female passivity but rather as a condemnation of the repression of knowledge, much like their novelistic predecessors in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

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[135] Ibid.
[136] Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

"Nightmare Horrors and Perils of the Night": Zombies and Modern Science

Kristine Larsen

> *Science (so noble in origin and original purpose) has produced in alliance with sin nightmare horrors and perils of the night before which giants and demons grow pale.*[1] – J.R.R. Tolkien

In the second half of the twentieth century, the zombie has increasingly become the poster child for the collection of cinematic monsters that have captivated the imaginations of film directors and their audiences. From multiple encyclopaedic compendia and myriad graduate student theses to articles in *The Economist*, *Popular Mechanics*, and *Newsweek*, popular culture pundits and academics from across the disciplines are pondering the increasing popularity of these unlikely cinematic darlings. Zombies are devoid of social skills, aesthetic properties, and basic hygiene. They lack the eroticism of the vampire, and never ask their victims if they want to be "turned". Rather, they are usually portrayed as part of a mindless, marauding hoard driven by the single-minded primeval urge to feed on human flesh. But this has not always been the cinematic vision of the undead. In the first few decades of the zombie's film history, it was still recognizable as human, a silent, lumbering slave who often menaced rather than killed, and would never think (if they thought at all) of eating their victims. These early cinematic zombies were created using some semblance of traditional Haitian rituals, and even if their creator was a scientist, science had very little to do with it.

Then the world changed. On 16 July 1945, American scientists tested the first nuclear bomb, and less than a month later used this terrifying weapon on Japanese civilians in order to end World War II. At that first test in Alamogordo, New Mexico, lead physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer recalled a quotation from the Hindu scripture,

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[1] Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson, *Tolkien on Fairy-stories* (London: Harper Collins, 2008), p.269.

The Bhagavad Gita: "Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds."[2] While Oppenheimer later admitted that he was "a little scared of what I had made",[3] and tried (in vain) along with many of his Manhattan Project colleagues to prevent the development of the even more destructive hydrogen "super" bomb, he hid behind the party line of scientists in claiming that he (and they) could not be held accountable for the misuse of their discoveries. "If you are a scientist," he argued, "you believe that it is good to find out how the world works; that it is good to find out what the realities are; that it is good to turn over to mankind at large the greatest possible power to control the world…."[4] Some scientists may earnestly believe that the situation is so clearly black and white, but as the arts have shown us, the world is filled with fascinating shades of grey. Science does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it is the vocation of *scientists*, who, as humans, are certainly not infallible. While, as Tolkien noted, the goal of science may be noble in principle, scientists as individuals cannot be expected to be any nobler than the general public, especially when their funding is provided by large military complexes or global corporations (whose motivations are certainly considered less than noble in the eyes of the general public).

Enter the stereotype of the mad scientist, overstepping the bounds of what is "natural" and falling into the trap of "playing God". Since the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in 1818, some in the general public have looked at the scientific establishment with suspicious eyes. Modern marvels such as genetic engineering, nuclear energy, and nanotechnology only further their mistrust of science, as they see the modern equivalent of a genie released from its bottle with little thought as to the possible outcomes. A significant percentage of the general public worries, based on what surveys demonstrate is an incomplete understanding of the basic science,[5] if the Large Hadron Collider will create a black hole that could destroy the earth. They question why the U.S. military stockpiles smallpox and anthrax in high security laboratories, and question the wisdom of changing the genetic structure of bacteria, crops, and livestock. It appears that with each scientific advance

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[2] "J. Robert Oppenheimer Interview", *A.J. Software and Multimedia*, http://www.atomicarchive.com/Movies/Movie8.shtml, accessed 3 January 2011.
[3] Gerard J. De Groot, *The Bomb* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p.112.
[4] Ibid.
[5] The National Science Board has been tracking the public's attitudes towards and knowledge of science for several decades. *Science and Engineering Indicators: 2010* can be found at http://www.nsf.gov.statistics/seind10.

there seems to be yet another theoretical opportunity for the world to destroy itself, whether through nuclear holocaust, pandemic, or deadly material returned to our planet through some space mission. The modern zombie can therefore be thought of as the bastard child of science, a metaphor for the horrors – both real and perceived – that may unintentionally befall humanity as a result of cutting-edge scientific research. The methods of zombification portrayed in films in recent decades reflect the general public's fears about what many believe modern science has (or has the potential to) become, especially in partnerships with military and corporate institutions – the so-called "military industrial complex". This essay will explore examples of some of the most widely-used "scientific" causes of zombification, and illustrate how these films reflect real-world concerns of science and ethics.

The number of zombie films which feature archetypal mad scientists is legion. Two representative examples separated by six decades are *The Walking Dead* (1936) and *House of the Dead* (2003). In the former, Boris Karloff stars as an executed prisoner who is resurrected by an unscrupulous scientist obsessed with the secrets of life and death. The more recent film centres on college students who attend an ill-fated rave on a mysterious island and become the prisoners of an evil scientist who has developed an immortality serum which he has not only used on himself, but also has used to create zombies. Some works openly embrace the Frankenstein comparison, as in the case of George A. Romero's *Day of the Dead* (1985), where the mentally unbalanced scientist Dr. Logan is openly referred to as "Frankenstein" by both his fellow scientists and the military personnel sharing their bunker. In Robin Becker's 2010 novel *Brains: a Zombie Memoir*, the scientist who develops the zombie-creating biochemical agent is named Dr. Howard Stein. Former English professor-turned-zombie Dr. Jack Barnes refers to Stein as "my creator. Our father, Mad Scientist Extraordinaire. God in the Garden of Evil."[6] Like Shelley's protagonist, Howard Stein spurns his creation, explaining to Jack that he and the other still-cognisant zombies are "a mistake. Something out of *Frankenstein*."[7]

Perhaps the most (in)famous mad scientist of zombie films is Herbert West of the *Re-animator* series. Loosely based on a short story by H.P. Lovecraft, the original film introduced audiences to the megalomaniac young scientist West and his glow-in-

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[6] Robin Becker, *Brains: A Zombie Memoir* (New York: Eos, 2010), p.4.
[7] Becker, *Brains*, p.178.

the-dark green reanimating reagent. With a complete disregard for both the ethical mores of the medical establishment and the Miskatonic Medical School student handbook, West conducts his reanimation experiments on both animals and humans – seen by him as simply objects on which to test his serum – without seeming concern for either the wishes of those experimented on or the unpredictable and unstable results of these experiments. "I've conquered brain death," he boasts to roommate and fellow medical student Dan Cain. "We can defeat death. We can even achieve every doctor's dream and live lifetimes."[8] While it can be debated whether or not West was right about physicians' aspirations, the viewer can certainly interpret the film as a cautionary tale against unrestricted, profit-driven medical research, especially such experiments in which the unwilling participants have not given their informed expressed consent.

In *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic*, Linda Bradley sees *Re-animator* and similar works from the 1980s as reflecting not only on the objectification but the intentional commoditisation of the human body, both as a whole and as a semblance of pieces. For example, in *Re-animator* West injects the head and decapitated corpse of rival scientist Hill, noting with enthusiasm "Yes, parts. I've never done whole parts."[9] In *The Return of the Living Dead* (1985) the reanimating gas causes individual body parts and dogs sliced in half for medical school demonstrations to move on their own. In Bradley's words, "the horror and the real monster had become the body itself."[10] The zombie horrifies us not only because it wants to eat our flesh, but because it violates the presumed sanctity of the body, and robs us of the promise of a peace after death – so much for "rest in peace". In the early scenes of *Dawn of the Dead*, corpses are not objectified, but initially humanised, given last rites and covered in shrouds before being locked into a low-income housing unit's basement storage cage, despite the fact that the next-of-kin know what their family members will become. "Why do these people keep them here?" Roger asks. Fellow SWAT team member Peter explains, "because they still believe there's respect in death."[11] As

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[8] Dennis Paoli, William J. Norris, and Stuart Gordon, *Re-animator*, directed by Stuart Gordon (1985; Troy, MI: Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2007), DVD.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Linda Bradley, *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp.73-74.
[11] George A. Romero, *Dawn of the Dead*, directed by George A. Romero (1978; Troy, MI: Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2004), DVD.

long as one considers zombies as human, there is an emotional attachment, and disposing of the bodies in a violent and callous way (beheading or burning) becomes difficult. However, as the epidemic spreads and the main characters (the two SWAT team members and two television journalists) barricade themselves in a shopping mall, the zombies are increasingly seen as (and treated like) objects, an admittedly dangerous form of trash that must be unceremoniously disposed of. The zombies – useless commodities – stand in stark opposition to the riches of the mall's stores and restaurants which sustain the characters over several months.

Similar to *Dawn of the Dead*'s mall dwellers, cinematic scientists have no compunctions about dispatching zombies, often after having conducted vivisection or other experiments upon them. These scientists are portrayed as logical, detached, and mechanical. Just as they can inflict pain on a lab rat in the name of science, or disembowel a cadaver with clinical precision, scientists in zombie movies are above thinking of zombies as human. Similarly, a soldier thinks of the zombie as the enemy, a target to be eliminated. But in many zombie films, some characters openly consider whether or not zombies actually retain some of their humanity, and therefore are still deserving of basic human rights. This way of thinking puts these characters in direct opposition to the military and scientific perspectives depicted in the films. For example, in the 2006 Canadian dark comedy *Fido*, Jon Bottoms, a nefarious former Zombie Wars hero and ZomCon head of security, visits a school classroom. Young Timmy Robinson asks if zombies are dead or alive. Bottoms warns Timmy and the other children that although "to some people zombies might seem human," they are in fact "creatures [with] only one goal, and that is to eat your flesh."[12] In *Night of the Living Dead*, Dr. Grimes dispassionately describes an experiment in which a cadaver whose four limbs had been amputated came back to life. He calmly instructs people to dispose immediately of all corpses through burning, and that "the bereaved will have to forgo the dubious comfort that a funeral service will give. They're just dead flesh, and dangerous."[13] While corpses are only seen as dangerous in works of art such as film and literature, corpses themselves are sometimes seen by some *as* works of art, or more basely as cash-generating commodities to be bought and displayed, for

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[12] Robert Chomiak, Andrew Currie, and Dennis Heaton, *Fido*, directed by Andrew Currie (2006; Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate, 2007), DVD.

[13] George A. Romero and John A. Russo, *Night of the Living Dead,* directed by George A. Romero (1968; New York: The Weinstein Company, 2008), DVD.

example in exhibits of plastinated corpses and body parts such as *Bodies Revealed* and *Human Body Worlds*. In the case of at least one such exhibit, *Bodies: the Exhibition*, there have been allegations that the bodies were those of Chinese prisoners procured from the black market.[14]

Not only are entire bodies procured without the consent of the deceased or their kin (as was done in past centuries in the case of grave robbers supplying cadavers to medical schools), but individual body parts can likewise be illegally obtained. The infamous "Travellers Beware" viral email from 1997 purported to tell the true story of business travellers waking up in a bathtub of ice and missing a kidney. This urban legend is possibly based on a 1989 news story out of London about a Turkish citizen who claimed he was lured to London under false pretence and had a kidney stolen. However, it turned out that he had in fact advertised his kidney for sale in a Turkish newspaper.[15] There have been a number of large-scale black market organ rings broken up across the world in the past few decades, in which profit-driven doctors prey on poor, uneducated people as the unwilling (or at least uninformed) donors, and rich and desperate Westerners as the recipients of the ill-gotten organs. For example, the World Health Organization estimates than a fifth of the 70,000 transplanted kidneys each year are illegally procured.[16] But shadowy black markets are not the sole illegal source of human body parts and tissues. In 1997 it was disclosed that the Los Angeles County Coroner's Office was harvesting corneas from corpses and selling them to tissue banks without the next-of-kin's consent.[17] Unscrupulous funeral home and crematorium directors, as well as employees at one noted medical school, have succumbed to the high prices which pharmaceutical companies, surgical instrument companies, and tissue banks are willing to pay for human tissues and body parts.[18]

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[14] Brian Ross, Rhonda Schwartz, and Anna Schecter, "N.Y., China Investigating Black Market in Bodies", *ABC News* (15 February 2008), http://abcnews.go.com/id=4296982, accessed 3 January 2011.
[15] Barbara Mikkelson and David P. Mikkelson, "You've Got To Be Kidneying", (12 March 2008), http://www.snopes.com/horrors/robbery/kidney.asp, accessed 3 January 2011.
[16] Janeen Interlandi, "Not Just an Urban Legend", *Newsweek* (10 January 2009), http://www.newsweek.com/2009/0109/not-just-urban-legend.html, accessed 3 January 2011.
[17] Karen Brandon, "Mortician Accused of Selling Body Parts", *Chicago Tribune* (25 February 2002), http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2002-02-25/news/0202250134_1_michael-francis-brown-corneas-body-parts, accessed 3 January 2011.
[18] Alan Zarembo and Jessica Garrison, "Profit Drives Illegal Trade in Body Parts", *LA Times* (7 March 2004), http://articles.latimes.com/2004/mar/07/local/me-parts7, accessed 3 January 3, 2011.

Zombie films have long capitalised on the public's fears about illegal organ harvesting. For example, in *The Mad Ghoul* (1943), mad scientist Dr. Morris uses fresh human hearts (and an ancient Egyptian poison) to reanimate corpses, while in *Doctor Blood's Coffin* (1960) the eponymous medical student transplants hearts cut from the chests of still-living donors into dead bodies in order to reanimate them. The zombie film *Monstrosity* (1963) tells the story of a mad scientist who aids an elderly woman in her plot to transplant her brain into a more youthful body. New York police follow a trail of missing body parts and mutilated corpses to a zombie-creating mad scientist in *Dr. Butcher, M.D.* (1980), while in *The Chilling* (1989) the president of a cryogenics laboratory sells the organs of those he is supposed to be protecting in cold storage, until a freak storm turns the frozen patients into zombies. In the misuse of human tissues and organs, profit is the underlying motivation. There is money to be made, and there are those in the medical community who ignore both morality and legality in order to profit from such activities.

While capitalism is generally favoured over other economic systems by most Americans, the general public is all-too-aware of the inherent dangers of large corporations insinuating themselves into our lives (at the cost of all other competition). For example, there are those who refuse to shop at Walmart and refer to Microsoft as the "Evil Empire", choosing to use other computer products whenever possible just on principle. In several recent zombie films, the intersection of science and profit plays a central role, in the guise of unethical super-corporations whose activities either create the zombies, or use the zombies as an excuse to control society as a whole. The first film in the *Resident Evil* series (2002) begins with a confidential file on the Umbrella Corporation, outlining the scope of its influence. It is described as a ubiquitous commercial enterprise that is funded by the military and specialises in genetic experimentation and viral technology.[19]

As Alice, the heroine of the series, slowly regains her memory throughout the film, the viewer learns that she had planned to steal the Umbrella Corporation's bio-engineered T-virus from the subterranean Hive laboratory in order to bring down the all-powerful unethical corporation (whose trademark can be found on everything from bullets to wedding rings in the film). Spence (like Alice, a security officer who was

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[19] Paul W.S. Anderson, *Resident Evil*, directed by Paul W.S. Anderson (2002; Culver City, CA: Sony Home Entertainment, 2008), DVD.

supposed to be guarding the mansion entrance to the Hive) actually steals the virus and antivirus for monetary gain. Despite the damage the T-virus does to the planet once it escapes from the Hive, the Umbrella Corporation continues to experiment with its deadly product in the remaining films in the series. Their goal is not to cure what remains of humanity, but instead to control both the zombies and the human survivors, and therefore rule the world. In *Resident Evil: Afterlife* (2010), Umbrella Corporation chief Albert Wesker injects Alice with a serum which neutralises the T-virus, thus deactivating the telekinetic and extrasensory powers, superhuman strength, extreme agility, and seemingly limitless healing ability the virus had granted her. "Umbrella Corporation is taking back its property", he sneers. "You didn't work out, so you're being recalled."[20] Although Alice is clearly being referred to as a product, a thing, she actually thanks Wesker for returning her humanity to her. In the eyes of the corporation, their exclusive virus (with which they had intentionally infected her) had turned her into a commodity; hence she is often referred to as "Project Alice" by Umbrella scientists and executives throughout the series. Alice recognises that she has been dehumanised by this process, by the experiments that were done upon her without her knowledge or consent, and therefore welcomes the chance to be cured of what she considers to be a disease.

A less overtly evil (but equally manipulative) science-based corporation is *Fido*'s ZomCon. The film opens with a black and white newsreel extolling the virtues of ZomCon and its role in winning the Zombie Wars, as well as its centrality in securing the safety of the suburban way of life. ZomCon controls not only the zombies, but every aspect of society, from burials to school curricula, and the ZomCon logo appears on items from cars to caskets. The society of *Fido* is reminiscent of George Orwell's *1984* and similar dystopias in the way that information is controlled and spun for public consumption. In one of the more disturbing references in the film, Ray and Stan, the school bullies, are uniformed "ZomCon Cadets", an organisation which appears to owe more to the Hitler Youth than the Boy Scouts (including violence against those who do not follow the ZomCon party line).

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[20] Paul W.S. Anderson, *Resident Evil: Afterlife*, directed by Paul W.S. Anderson (2010; Culver City, CA: Sony Home Entertainment, 2010), DVD.

One cannot raise the spectre of the Nazi Party without considering the horrors they propagated on humanity. One class of atrocities in particular was done with the help of science, namely human experimentation. Although a complete examination of the barbaric experiments perpetrated on concentration camp victims is certainly beyond the scope of this work[21] (as is a detailed exploration of a subgenre of zombie films that feature Nazis), it should be noted that they included (but were not limited to) the intentional infliction of gangrene and mustard gas wounds; infecting victims with malaria and typhus; simulations of high altitude (low oxygen) conditions; freezing experiments; forcing victims to drink sea water; and Josef Mengele's infamous experiments on twins. However, despite the fact that the Nazi experiments are perhaps the most well-known (thanks in part to the Nuremberg Trials), they are by no means isolated cases in the twentieth century. For example, during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and World War II, Japan's Unit 731 did their own experiments on the effects of freezing conditions on the human body (using Chinese prisoners of war) and studied the effects of plague and other diseases on the human body through the vivisection of both living and dead Chinese victims (some of the former without the benefit of anaesthesia).[22]

Nor was the United States above conducting secret (and not-so-secret) human experiments without the informed consent of the participants. Between 1950 and 1975 the U.S. Army conducted experiments on nearly 7000 human subjects which studied the effects of nerve gas, psychotropic chemicals, and pain killers as incapacitating agents for use in warfare.[23] But by far the most infamous example of American human experimentation is the "Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male," a forty-year study conducted by scientists associated with the U.S. Public Health Service of the effects of syphilis on over 400 African-American men in Alabama who were not even told that they had the disease. What is perhaps most alarming about this event is that it was not concealed, but in fact was openly discussed in medical journals and conferences. It was not until the media caught wind

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[21] A more detailed study of Nazi human experiments can be found in Vivien Spitz, *Doctors from Hell: the Horrific Account of Nazi Experiments on Humans* (Boulder, CO: Sentient Publications, 2005) and Lucette Matalon Lagnado and Sheila Cohn Dekel, *Children of the Flames: Dr. Josef Mengele and the Untold Story of the Twins of Auschwitz* (New York: Morrow, 1991).

[22] Gerhard Baader Susan E. Lederer, Morris Low, Florian Schmaltz, and Alexander v. Schwerin, "Pathways to Human Experimentation, 1933-1945: Germany, Japan, and the United States", *Osiris* 20 (2005), p.221.

[23] Jonathan D. Moreno, *Undue Risk* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 2000), p.251.

of the study that it was quickly ended in the 1970s.[24] A lingering side effect of this study is a distrust of the medical establishment by a segment of the African-American community, including a persistent urban legend that AIDS was created by the U.S. government specifically to infect African-Americans.[25] In 2010, medical historian and Tuskegee experiment expert Susan Reverby of Wellesley College uncovered an eerily similar experiment in Guatemala funded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health. Between 1946 and 1948 nearly 700 Guatemalan prisoners and mental hospital patients were infected with syphilis in order to test the effects of penicillin on disease prevention.[26]

Psychologists have studied these instances of institutionalised abuse and have found that perpetrators often justify the abuse by visualising and referring to the victims as something other than human, or as humans of somehow less intrinsic value than him or herself. For example, Japanese researchers in Unit 731 not only viewed the Chinese prisoners as intrinsically inferior to Japanese citizens, but in documents referred to the Chinese prisoners as "research material", "monkeys", or even "logs".[27] Similarly Nazi scientists viewed the concentration camp victims (Jews, Roma, homosexuals, and other marginalised and oppressed groups) as less than human, for example referring to the female inmates at the Ravensbrück concentration camp as "rabbit girls".[28]

As previously noted, in a number of zombie films, scientists are depicted as accentuating the differences between humans and zombies (in a clearly hierarchical schemata), labelling them as "other" and inhuman. This opens the door to all manner of gruesome scientific experimentation on zombies (and other humans) in the name of science. For example, in *Dawn of the Dead*, the scientist character known in popular culture circles as "Patchy" explains without emotion that zombies are not cannibals because cannibalism occurs within a species. "These creatures cannot be considered human", he explains. "They prey on humans. They do not prey on each other."[29] As previously noted, in the *Resident Evil* series, Alice is clearly viewed as a commodity,

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[24] James H. Jones, *Bad Blood*, rev. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1993), p.7.
[25] Jones, *Bad Blood*, pp.220-21.
[26] Donald G. NcNeil, Jr., "U.S. Apologizes for Syphilis Tests in Guatemala", *New York Times* (1 October 2010), http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/02/health/research/02infect.html, accessed January 3, 2011.
[27] Baader et al., "Pathways to Human Experimentation", p.223.
[28] Baader et al., "Pathways to Human Experimentation", p.230.
[29] Romero, *Dawn of the Dead.*

Umbrella Corporation property, and an experiment. Not only does she lack control over what is done to her own body, but over her very genetic code as well. In *Resident Evil: Extinction* (2007), Dr. Isaacs creates dozens (if not hundreds) of Alice clones, who one by one die during the course of experiments he runs upon them. When one particular clone fails to survive the test (a series of battles against mutants and machines), Isaacs instructs his assistants to "get rid of that," and the clone is unceremoniously dumped into a cement ravine along with innumerable other clones.[30] The visual similarity to photographs of the disposal of concentration camp victims is certainly intentional. The Alice clones are perceived to be expendable laboratory materials, akin to bacteria being studied in a petri dish, and can therefore be discarded like ordinary trash.

Similarly, much of *Day of the Dead* centres around Dr. "Frankenstein" Logan's experiments on the zombies. Although Logan explains that "they are us", his treatment of his "specimens" (referred to as "dumb-fucks" by the military in this subterranean research facility) is less than humane.[31] In one experiment he has severed all the vital organs in a zombie's torso, leaving it basically just limbs and a brain. In another he has removed the head with the exception of the brain. A fellow scientist, Sarah Bowman, criticises Logan for what she considers pointless experiments, and is further horrified to learn that the zombie whose skull and face were removed is not a "wild" zombie but in fact the former military commander of the facility, who had recently died from a zombie attack.

While the experiments conducted on zombies reflect the general inhumanity of human experimentation in the twentieth century,[32] a number of these experiments have a particular goal – to domesticate and control the zombies as one might an animal or a slave. The potential for zombies to serve as a slave underclass harkens back to the original Haitian zombie, who had lost his will and personality and was under the complete control of the voodoo master. Early zombie films relied heavily on this archetype, for example *White Zombie* (1932), generally considered the first film of the genre. *Day of the Dead*'s Dr. Logan justifies his experiments as searching

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[30] Paul W.S. Anderson, *Resident Evil: Extinction*, directed by Russell Mulcahy (2007; Culver City, CA: Sony Home Entertainment, 2008), DVD.
[31] George A. Romero, *Day of the Dead*, directed by George A. Romero (1985; Troy, MI: Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2003), DVD.
[32] Animal experimentation and animal rights is, of course, an important related topic which is not considered here except in passing simply due to considerations of the essay's length.

for a way that a zombie could be "domesticated. It can be conditioned to behave, the way we want it to behave."[33] Indeed, he succeeds in getting the zombie he nicknames Bub to mimic shaving and telephone usage, and Bub even remembers how to use a gun (much to the chagrin of the vicious Captain Rhodes). Logan's experiments mirror B.F. Skinner-type conditioning experiments done on rats and pigeons, with an added twist – to reinforce Bub's good behaviour he rewards the zombie with his favourite food, pieces of human flesh.

The domestication of zombies is also the stated goal of some of Dr. Isaacs' experiments in *Resident Evil: Extinction*. Isaacs injects zombie subjects with a special serum which is meant to return some intelligence and memories to the zombies and suppress their desire for human flesh. He explains to the Umbrella Corporation Board that the zombies are "animals, essentially. We can train them, if we can take away their baser instincts. They'll never be human"; however they would provide the "basis for a docile workforce."[34] He successfully tests the intelligence and problem-solving skills of zombie subjects, such as using a camera and cell phone; however, one becomes frustrated by the task of trying to fit a square peg into a round hole and attacks the lab technicians.

Zombies are used as mindless (literally) menial labourers in two other recent films, *Fido* and *Shaun of the Dead* (2004). In the former, the ubiquitous ZomCon corporation uses science and technology to solve the zombie problem through the domestication collar, which contains the zombies' desire for human flesh, "making the zombie as gentle as a household pet."[35] Zombies are used as gardeners and household servants, to entertain children, and to deliver newspapers. Some are treated like pets (for example, being kept on a leash), and the title character (named by Timmy Robinson, his owner's son) is actually chained outside and taunted like a neglected dog. At the end of *Shaun of the Dead*, fictional television reports and programming demonstrate how the subdued zombie population is being used to collect shopping carts in parking lots and other simple tasks, and for entertainment (for example, as easily-ridiculed targets on reality shows). Shaun keeps his best friend Ed (now a zombie) chained in the backyard shed to have someone to play video games against. The objectification of zombies (and the accompanying loss of basic

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[33] Romero, *Day of the Dead.*
[34] Anderson, *Resident Evil: Extinction.*
[35] Chomiak, Currie, and Heaton, *Fido.*

human rights) is a central theme in S.G. Browne's 2009 novel *Breathers: A Zombie's Lament*, in which zombies not only lose their social security numbers, but the rights to surf the internet, ride public transportation, and be seen alone in public. The main zombie character, Andy Warner, spends much of the novel being picked up and caged by Animal Control for his civil disobedience, and is frequently threatened by his mortified parents with being given to zoos, medical schools, "plastic surgery chop shops," or crash test dummy facilities.[36] Once again, the comparison between zombies and lab animals is intentional. A connection can also be drawn to the 2002 British film *28 Days Later*. Here the source of the zombie (or at least zombie-like behaviour) outbreak is the so-called Rage virus, which is accidently unleashed when animal rights activists try to liberate animals from a laboratory in which the virus is being tested.

Animals have been front and centre in another of the twentieth century's controversial scientific achievements, genetic engineering. From the cloning of Dolly the sheep to the production of strains of mice genetically engineered to exhibit such human traits as baldness, obesity, and propensities for various cancers, and even the creation of a glow-in-the-dark rabbit, scientists have been able to modify the genetic code of myriad plants and animals for the perceived benefit of society. Disease-resistant wheat and vitamin-enriched rice may reduce starvation and malnutrition in Third World countries, but in many industrialised nations such genetically modified foods are viewed with suspicion at best, and through conspiracy theory lenses at worst. One of the most vocal opponents has been Britain's Prince Charles, who accused genetic engineering of taking us into "realms that belong to God and God alone."[37] A 2010 poll of 3000 Americans found that 93% felt that genetically modified food should be labelled as such and only 38% expressed a willingness to eat genetically modified meat products.[38] Such uncertainties are reflected in the 2005 film

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[36] S.G. Browne, *Breathers: A Zombie's Lament* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009), p.81; p.181.

[37] Jeff Randall, "Prince Charles warns GM crops risk causing the biggest-ever environmental disaster", *The Telegraph* (August 12 2008), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/earthnews/3349308/Prince-Charles-warns-GM-crops-risk-causing-the-biggest-ever-environmental-disaster.html, accessed 3 January 2011.

[38] "National Survey of Healthcare Consumers: Genetically Engineered Food", *Thomas Reuters* (October 2010), http://www.factsforhealthcare.com/pressroom/NPR_report_GeneticEngineeredFood.pdf, accessed 3 January 2011.

Severed: Forest of the Dead, in which the sap from genetically-engineered lumber trees creates zombies.

The public's concerns regarding another specific application of genetic engineering – cloning – has also been measured by pollsters. For example, in a 2004 Opinion Research Corporation poll 84% of those surveyed opposed the commercial cloning of pets.[39] Two years later, the Genetic Savings and Clone company stopped taking orders for cloning cats after only six years in operation. The National Science Foundation's *2010 Science and Engineering Indicators* surveys found that 78% of Americans oppose genetically engineering or cloning humans.[40] In addition to the charge that such experiments are tantamount to "playing God," opposition to human modifications centres around such ethical and theological issues as whether clones have souls, whether they deserve the same basic rights as other humans, whether clones could be used as organ banks for the wealthy, and if such technologies could be used to develop a race of perfect soldiers. A number of countries, including the United States and United Kingdom, have banned the cloning of adult humans,[41] and bioethicist Arlene Judith Klotzko notes that "any scientist who actively engages in cloning humans in order to create a new human being risks being branded a 'mad scientist'."[42]

Such a label certainly fits Dr. Isaacs and the other scientists of the *Resident Evil* series. In the first film, the holographic Red Queen explains that the Umbrella Corporation's bio-engineered T-virus has both "medical and military applications."[43] Renegade security officer Spence is killed by the mutant creature known as the Licker, called one of the Hive's "early and unstable experiments". Once the Licker feeds on Spence, it incorporates his DNA and mutates once again into a "better, faster hunter". When Matt, an activist who is also trying to bring down the Umbrella Corporation, is scratched by the Licker, he too begins to mutate, and the Umbrella Corporation Clean Team takes him away to become part of the "Nemesis program".[44]

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[39] "Animal and Pet Cloning Opinion Polls", *Center for Genetics and Society* (4 April 2005), http://www.geneticsandsociety.org/article.php?id=470, accessed 3 January 2011.
[40] National Science Board, *Science and Engineering Indicators,* pp.7-41.
[41] Cloning of embryonic stem cells is also regulated to varying degrees, and is a controversial subject in its own right.
[42] Arlene Judith Klotzko, *A Clone of Your Own? The Science and Ethics of Cloning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.xxi.
[43] Anderson, *Resident Evil.*
[44] Ibid.

In the second film, *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (2004) Matt has completely transformed into a grotesque monster, and is made to fight Alice, whose own exposure to the T-virus has mutated her in a different manner, but one which the Umbrella scientists realise might be militarily as valuable. When Alice successfully appeals to the last shred of humanity left in Matt/Nemesis, he is killed by the Umbrella forces.[45]

As described above, Isaacs continues to experiment on the T-virus and the zombies it creates, under the guise of domesticating them for the Umbrella Corporation. His true motivations are to recapture Alice at any cost after she is allowed to escape, and to use his serum and her DNA to create a species of super-zombies under his control. As he explains to an Umbrella bureaucrat who questions the aggression of his zombies, "some aggression has its uses". His new tests focus on clones of Alice, which he treats like lab rats, forcing them to negotiate a maze of mortal dangers. When clone number 87 momentarily appears successfully to reach the final stage of the test, Isaacs gloats that his research "will change the face of everything",[46] only to be faced with yet another failure. When Isaacs is bitten by one of his super-zombies, he injects himself with an overdose of the anti-virus, and mutates into a grotesque physical form worthy of his inner monstrosity. He taunts Alice with the fact that even though he used to think she was the future, he has come to understand that his new form is the true realisation of that goal. In the next film in the series (2010's *Resident Evil: Afterlife*), the nefarious Andrew Wesker has become a mutant through exposure to the T-virus, and seeks to "ingest" Alice in order to regain control over the virus within his body. In keeping with the Umbrella Corporation's patent disregard for human dignity, the tanker ship Arcadia sails the Pacific coastline kidnapping uninfected survivors in order to have fresh specimens for their scientific experiments.[47]

Biochemical agents and genetic engineering are used to create an army of zombie soldiers in a number of other films. For example, in *Shock Waves* (1977), the legendary Peter Cushing plays a Nazi officer who was responsible for a band of indestructible undead storm troopers called the Death Corps. Dr. Hill's ultimate plan

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[45] Paul W.S. Anderson, *Resident Evil: Apocalypse*, directed by Alexander Will (2004, Culver City, CA: Sony Home Entertainment, 2008), DVD.
[46] Anderson, *Resident Evil: Extinction.*
[47] Anderson, *Resident Evil: Afterlife*.

in *Re-animator* is to use West's reagent and his own laser lobotomy procedure to create an army of zombies who will give him "undreamed of power".[48] A group of teenagers attempt to rescue a friend from Hybra Tech's experiments with Trioxin 5 in *Return of the Living Dead: Necropolis* (2005), and discover the corporation's plot to create an army of zombie soldiers. The creation of zombie soldiers by the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War is central to the plotline of *Automaton Transfusion* (2006), and *Flight of the Living Dead: Outbreak on a Plane* (2007) featured a genetically engineered mutation of malaria (incorrectly referred to as a virus) which was intended to produce soldiers who could continue to fight even after dying.

While one can argue whether or not the general public's fear of possible military misuses of genetic engineering are well-founded or not, there is no doubt that the possibility of biochemical agents being used either against soldiers or civilians is a very real threat in the twenty-first century. From the use of mustard gas in World War I to napalm in the Vietnam War and Sarin in the war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s, chemicals have been used to kill, disfigure, and incapacitate both on the battlefield and beyond. But biological warfare is older still, dating back to the Tartars' catapulting of plague-ridden corpses over the city walls into the city of Kaffa in 1346. The plague was also used in biological warfare in World War II, when Japan's Unit 731 dropped canisters containing plague-infected fleas on the Chinese countryside.[49] In the years since the end of the Cold War, information has slowly come to light concerning the United States and Soviet biological warfare programs, including the possible genetic engineering of bacterial strains which are antibiotic resistant and target specific ethnic groups.[50] In addition to these artificial biological weapons, the Centre for Disease Control has identified approximately sixty pathogens which have the potential for use in biological warfare, including anthrax, typhoid fever, plague, Ebola, and smallpox.

Any thoughts that biological warfare or bio-terrorism could be prevented in the United States were quashed in the fall of 2001, when anthrax-laden letters killed five people and sickened seventeen others. After a lengthy investigation, the attacks

[48] Paoli, Norris, and Gordon, *Re-animator.*
[49] Committee on Homeland Security, *Engineering Bio-Terror Agents: Lessons From the Offensive U.S. and Russian Biological Weapons Programs* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005), p.18.
[50] Committee on Homeland Security, *Engineering Bio-Terror Agents*, p. 22.

were traced back to a scientist, Dr. Bruce Ivins, who committed suicide before he could be indicted for the crime. According to the FBI investigation final report, Ivins had access to the specific strain of anthrax used in his job at the Fort Detrick, Maryland bio-defence laboratories, and his motivation was the possible cancellation of his anthrax vaccine program (due to criticism of the vaccines after the Gulf War), exacerbated by reported long-term mental health issues.[51]

If a real-life scientist and government employee could "crack" and use biochemical weapons on innocent citizens, it is certainly no surprise that similar scenarios have been dramatised in a number of zombie films. In *The Earth Dies Screaming* (1964), alien robots (rather than human scientists) use chemical warfare to kill the majority of the human race, and reanimate some human corpses in order to terrorise the survivors. The fictional experimental World War II gas Gamma 693 is the cause of a zombie outbreak in *Gamma 693* (1981), and an experimental AIDS vaccine creates a zombie outbreak in *Zombie '90: Extreme Pestilence* (1990). In the Japanese films *Biozombie* (1998) and *Junk* (2000), biochemical warfare agents cause corpses to reanimate, and Umbrella Corporation's bio-engineered T-virus was the source of the infection in the *Resident Evil* series.

The *Return of the Living Dead* series adds an interesting twist to references of military biochemicals in zombie films. The first movie in the series begins with a written disclaimer that the "events portrayed in this film are all true."[52] According to the story recounted by Frank, one of the employees at the Uneeda Medical Supply warehouse, Trioxin was developed by the Darrow Chemical Company for the military, in order to "spray on marijuana or something."[53] The chemical was accidentally spilled at a VA Hospital in Pittsburgh and reanimated corpses in the morgue. According to Frank, *Night of the Living Dead* was a fictionalisation of this actual event, and in order to convince Freddy, his new assistant, of the veracity of the tale, shows him the barrels of Trioxin (and zombies) accidentally shipped to their warehouse, resulting in the accidental release of Trioxin and the start of a new zombie outbreak. *Planet Terror* (2007) plays on widespread stories of Gulf War syndrome

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[51] "Amerithrax Investigative Summary," *United States Department of Justice* (19 February 2010), http://www.justice.gov/amerithrax/docs/amx-investigative-summary.pdf, accessed 3 January 2011.
[52] Dan O'Bannon, *The Return of the Living Dead*, directed by Dan O'Bannon (1984; Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Home Entertainment, 2007), DVD.
[53] Ibid.

(possibly caused by exposure to chemical warfare). A platoon of soldiers stationed in Afghanistan stumbles upon Bin Laden's hiding place and for some reason is sprayed with the chemical DC-2 (known as "Project Terror"). The chemical turns humans into zombies, and the platoon has only managed to remain human by procuring a supply of the chemical from an unscrupulous biochemist who claims that "science comes first, but business comes a close fucking second."[54] When the chemical is released, it turns a small town into a zombie hoard, and a doctor examining one of the early victims compares the horrible lesions and other symptoms to those he has previously seen in returning Iraqi veterans. "The shit they spread around there you just wouldn't believe", he explains to the concerned patient.[55] The DuPont Chemical Company may have once promised "Better Things for Better Living ... Through Chemistry",[56] but the lesson of numerous zombie films is that chemical discoveries are not always used for the betterment of society.

In the end, zombie media deliver a fresh vision of the classic Frankenstein trope, providing another venue for the creation of cautionary tales against historical and, more importantly, potential future abuses of scientific discoveries. For example, in *Brains: A Zombie Memoir*, zombie and former college professor Jack Barnes explains the ultimate genius of George A. Romero:

> His initial trilogy […] was prescient in the grand tradition of science fiction becoming fact. First you have to imagine a man on the moon, then you can put one there. Imagine an atom-splitting bomb, and then build one. Imagine a virus that turns corpses into the walking dead, and someone, somewhere, will develop the virus.[57]

This is the ultimate lesson of modern science – if something can be imagined by the human mind, some scientist will seek to discover how to make it a reality. Conversely, whatever science can create, some human mind (either fictional or all-too-real) will conceive how to misuse it for personal, financial, or political gain.

The scientific advances of the twentieth century have brought about increased economic prosperity, medical miracles, and forms of leisure and entertainment

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[54] Robert Rodriguez, *Planet Terror,* directed by Robert Rodriguez (2007; New York: The Weinstein Company, 2007), DVD.
[55] Ibid.
[56] "Better Things…: 1939," *Dupont*,
http://www2.dupont.com/Heritage/en_US/1939_dupont/1939_indepth.html, accessed 3 January 2011.
[57] Becker, *Brains*, p.4.

previously only considered in works of fiction. But with new discoveries come new ethical challenges, and questions as to whether all possibilities in the laboratory must be realised. Zombie films offer us a chance to ponder difficult questions at the intersections of science, technology, and ethics. Kenneth Bainbridge, director of the Trinity atom bomb test, called the test a "foul and awesome display" and later remarked to fellow scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer "Now we are all sons of bitches."[58] Other scientists and engineers may have certainly thought the same after seeing the results of their work. For example, Alfred Nobel is widely said to have bequeathed his fortune to set up what became the Nobel Prizes out of a sense of regret over the uses of dynamite and the other explosives he had developed. These geniuses of science ultimately concluded that they had given birth to something truly monstrous. And as in the case of Shelley's classic tale, one must ask, who is the real monster – the scientist or what he or she creates? Therefore *Day of the Dead*'s Dr. Logan appears to have been correct when he said of zombies, "they are us", for when we look into the heartless, decaying face of the undead, driven by the unreflecting need to consume (albeit human flesh rather than scientific knowledge), one can ask whether that face is being held up as a mirror into which all of us – especially scientists – must gaze.

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[58] "The Manhattan Project: An Interactive History – The Trinity Test", *U.S. Department of Energy Office of History and Heritage Resources*, http://www/cfp/doe.gov/me70/manhattan/trinity.htm, accessed 3 January 2011.

On 5 October 2020, the editors were made aware that the article 'Ghosted Dramaturgy: Mapping the Haunted Space in Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More*' from Issue #12 (2013), by Dr Deidre O'Leary (Manhattan College), took liberally, and in an uncredited fashion, from Dr Alice Dailey's published article 'Last Night I Dreamt I Went to *Sleep No More*: Intertextualitymand Indeterminacy at Punchdrunk's McKittrick Hotel' (*Borrowers and Lenders: A Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* (Winter 2012)). Dr O'Leary's article has been retracted due to plagiarism.

Pages 64 to 86 are therefore missing from this issue.

Plushies, My Little Cthulhu and Chibithulhu: The Transformation of Cthulhu from Horrific Body to Cute Body

Rachel Mizsei Ward

Introduction

This article will examine the depiction of Cthulhu in merchandising as a cute monster and how this affects our relationship to the character. The idea of a cute Cthulhu has gained the status of a meme, and this image has become commonplace in merchandising and comics, as well as fan-produced art. A meme is defined as a unit of culture that is passed on by imitation.[1] The cute Cthulhu meme has developed over the last decade and has become widespread, particularly as the internet has supported the development and communication of ideas, including cute culture. Most of the theoretical work on cute derives from scholars working on manifestations of cute in Japanese culture. In Japanese cute objects are described as *kawaii* and I will use this term and the related scholarship to inform my arguments about the cute Cthulhu meme. I will consider a selection of different cute Cthulhu merchandising centred on Steve Jackson Games' Munchkin Cthulhu (2007) card game. Steve Jackson Games is a games manufacturer based in Austin, Texas which has had a long pedigree in creating humorous games for adults based around geek subcultures, including Munchkin (2001) and Chez Geek (1999). Munchkin Cthulhu, along with its expansions and additional merchandising, is part of a larger series of games called Munchkin which all use the same rules, but each set emphasises different themes through the artwork and card names. The central premise of Munchkin is that it satirises different genres of role-playing games and some of the negative social behaviours in which some role-players engage.

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[1] Susan Blackmore, "Imitation and the definition of a meme", *Journal of Memetics – Evolutionary Models of Information Transmission*, 2 (1998),
http://borkowski.iss.uw.edu.pl/edukacja/Memetyka/Memetyczne/1998,Blackmore-Imitation%20and%20the%20definition%20of%20a%20meme.pdf, accessed 11 September 2011.

Many of Steve Jackson Games' products, including Munchkin, Munchkin Cthulhu and Chez Geek are illustrated by John Kovalic. Kovalic is the writer/illustrator of *Dork Tower* (1997-present), a comic about four male adult "dorks" and their interest in computer games, role-playing games, fantasy and science fiction films and merchandising. This link to geek culture made Kovalic suitably placed to work on the card illustrations for Munchkin Cthulhu. In addition to illustrating these games Kovalic designed both the Chibithulhu and the My Little Cthulhu toys. The Chibithulhu is produced by Steve Jackson Games and My Little Cthulhu is produced by Dreamland Toyworks. Both of these products were based on card art that Kovalic created for the Munchkin Cthulhu game. The artwork had proved popular with fans of the game and additional merchandising was arranged using the imagery including T-shirts and soft toys. With this background in mind the article will consider My Little Cthulhu by Dreamland Toyworks, and the Chibithulhu from Steve Jackson Games' Munchkin Cthulhu. The article will also consider Toy Vault's plush toys to act as a comparator to John Kovalic's designs. All of these products are intended for consumption by adults, not children.

Cthulhu first appeared in the 1926 short story "The Call of Cthulhu", by H.P. Lovecraft. The character is just one small element of Lovecraft's "mosaics of interlocking metatexts".[2] Despite this, Cthulhu has often been referenced visually in popular culture and is one of the more recognisable elements of Lovecraft's work. Lovecraft (1890-1937) worked predominately in the 1920s and 1930s as an author of short stories for pulp magazines such as *Weird Tales*. His stories were influenced by earlier writers of the Gothic and macabre, in particular Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Arthur Machen (1863-1947) and Lord Dunsany (1878-1957). An important part of his output was an extensive quantity of letters, which he used to correspond with many of his contemporaries, including other writers such as Robert E. Howard, August Derleth and Robert Bloch.

The success of Cthulhu and other elements of Lovecraft's work were aided by the fact that Lovecraft encouraged these other writers to use his creations in their stories. In return Lovecraft referenced his followers' work in his own writings.[3] As a

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[2] Robert M. Price, "With Strange Aeons: H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos as One Vast Narrative" in Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (eds.), *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives* (London: The MIT Press, 2009), p.225.
[3] Price, p.232.

result, there emerged a rich and densely populated setting termed the "Cthulhu Mythos". Petley argues that "Lovecraft's influence on modern culture has been, and continues to be, immense, even though in his own lifetime his work was barely known outside the readership of the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*".[4] After Lovecraft's death, his generosity to other writers encouraged the creation of a genre of fiction that is still used by modern authors including Brian Lumley, Ramsey Campbell and Stephen King. The "Cthulhu Mythos" is, as Miller suggests "an invention big enough for other writers and artists to crawl into, inhabit and expand upon".[5] The collaborative nature that Lovecraft himself encouraged makes the "Cthulhu Mythos" open to others to use and reinterpret at will. Lovecraft's written work is now out of copyright and his ideas are still being used, not only by writers, but also visual creative professionals such as artists and merchandising designers. As a result the depiction of this character has changed into a range of forms in different media, and Cthulhu's body has morphed from Lovecraft's horrific description into comical and, most importantly for this article, cute forms.

In "The Call of Cthulhu", the chief source of fear, the character Cthulhu, is only ever seen second hand, in dreams and depicted in artwork. However even this second-hand image is horrific. The narrator is shown "a morbid statue whose contours almost made me shake with the potency of its black suggestion".[6] Lovecraft describes Cthulhu as "a monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long, narrow wings behind".[7] This describes an unnatural body that is intended to create fear and loathing in the reader. In the short story Cthulhu sleeps beneath the Pacific Ocean, but can send humans dreams which invoke madness. When the stars are right he will awaken and destroy the human world.[8] However, Cthulhu has gone on to develop a separate life from his principal text,[9] and

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[4] Julian Petley, "The Unfilmable? H.P. Lovecraft and the Cinema" in Richard J. Hand and Jay McRoy (eds.), *Monstrous Adaptations: Generic and Thematic Mutations in Horror Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p.2.

[5] Laura Miller, "Master of Disgust": *Salon.com*, http://dir.salon.com/books/feature/2005/02/12/lovecraft/index.html, accessed 24 April 2010.

[6] H.P. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu", http://manybooks.net/titles/lovecrafthother06cthulhu.html, accessed 27 January 2010.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Lovecraft does not specify Cthulhu's gender but does describe him as a "priest" in "The Call of Cthulhu", which is a gendered title. In most of the sources and artworks since, Cthulhu has been

some have suggested that "hardly any reader finds Cthulhu frightening. In fact, by all indications, the public is very fond of the creature".[10] This is especially evident in the examples of cute Cthulhus discussed throughout this article.

These cute Cthulhu products are quite complex theoretically and can simultaneously appear to be both character merchandising and designer toys. Character merchandising is any product based around characters. These characters can be from existing media forms such as films or can be specifically created to sell branded products. Designer toys are collectables aimed at an adult market and have strong links with artists and frequently have limited production runs. Steinberg defines character merchandising as:

> A form of cultural production and marketing that uses a character (or multiple characters) to generate the consumption of media forms such as television programs and video games, objects such as plush dolls and plastic toys, and products like car insurance and financial services.[11]

Although Cthulhu is a recognisable iconic character to some people, "The Call of Cthulhu" story itself is out of copyright and Lovecraft encouraged other people to use his creations for their own endeavours, royalty-free. As a result these Lovecraftian-inspired toys are unlicensed products. They don't exist to generate further consumption of the original short story. In addition unlike other iconic characters such as Mickey Mouse there is no single iconic form for Cthulhu.[12] Instead the character is made recognisable by its combination of strange animal parts such as tentacles and wings. Therefore it could also be argued that some of the products discussed, in particular My Little Cthulhu, fall into what is variously described as "urban vinyl", "designer vinyl" or the designer toy movement.[13]

Steinberg describes the designer toy as: "a three-dimensional figure based on the design and pattern of a particular artist or graphic designer collective, usually

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gendered male. For example August Derleth states that Cthulhu is male in his Mythos stories. However "he" has traditionally been used in English as a gender neutral pronoun, and certainly was at the time Lovecraft and Derleth were writing.

[10] Miller, n.p.

[11] Marc Steinberg, "A Vinyl Platform for Dissent: Designer Toys and Character Merchandising", *Journal of Visual Culture* 9, no. 2 (2010), p.210.

[12] Steinberg, p.212.

[13] These terms are used by Steinberg in his essay, and by Woodrow Phoenix in *Plastic Culture: How Japanese Toys Conquered the World* (London: Kodansha International, 2006).

made from rotocast vinyl, but includes resin, plush and wood objects as well".[14] These toys are made in limited quantities, reflecting the small-scale nature of the companies involved in their production but also the idea that they are limited edition artworks to be collected by connoisseurs. A key aspect of these designer toys is that they are made without narratives or backgrounds, and exist solely as desirable objects. This means that they are designed by the artists to be desirable pieces of limited edition art for adult collectors, and are usually not intended to be connected to a specific story. This subverts traditional character merchandising which relies on its connection to other media forms for its desirability.[15] Apart from its name, the Cthulhu merchandising under discussion has little or no connection to "The Call of Cthulhu" story, and is therefore more of a designer toy than an example of character merchandising. The Japanese term *moe* is a useful term to describe these Cthulhu products. Galbraith defines *moe* as "a neologism used to describe a euphoric response to fantasy characters or representations of them".[16] A character that expresses *moe* is "removed from context, emptied of depth and positioned outside reality".[17] The character expresses *moe* through appealing characteristics which then encourage the consumer or viewer to feel *moe* towards the object. This expresses the way these Cthulhu products work very well. The other aspect of *moe* characters is that they exist to encourage consumption and are carefully designed to meet that purpose. Azuma argues that:

> Those who feel *moe* toward a particular character tend to buy its related goods excessively, [and] the success of a project for the producers of such goods is directly determined not by the quality of the work itself but by its ability to evoke the *moe* desire through character design and illustrations.[18]

The cute Cthulhus are marketed to encourage excessive consumption, with multiple versions for consumers to collect. The continued availability over more than ten years

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[14] Steinberg, p.210.
[15] Steinberg, p.213.
[16] Patrick W. Galbraith, "Moe: Exploring Virtual Potential in Post-Millennial Japan" in *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies* 9, no. 3 (2009), http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2009/Galbraith.html, accessed 10 July 2013.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals,* trans. Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono (London: University Of Minnesota Press, 2009), p.48.

of the plush Cthulhus and the creation of the more recent Chibithulhu suggests a level of commercial success and a high degree of *moe*.

Kawaii as soft and mouthless

This analysis of cute Cthulhus will also draw on another Japanese term and concept: *kawaii*, which is the Japanese manifestation of cute. Much of the theoretical work on Japanese cute has focussed on *kawaii*, examining items such as Hello Kitty, Pikachu and Loli-goth fashions.[19] There has been comparatively little examination of Western cute, and Western characters that have evolved into cute forms such as Cthulhu have been even less comprehensively studied. This article will therefore draw on recent work on *kawaii*, while acknowledging that there are important societal differences between Japan and the West because of their different languages, art styles, histories, culture and youth subcultures. Sharon Kinsella defined *kawaii* as meaning "childlike; it celebrates sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, weak, and inexperienced social behaviour and physical appearances".[20] *Kawaii* is a relatively new word, appearing in Japan during the 1970s. It has quickly become commonly used in daily language with "Japanese teen magazine *CREA* call[ing] *kawaii* 'the most widely used, widely loved, habitual word in modern living Japanese'".[21] The English word "cute", with its meaning of "attractive, pretty, charming" is similarly a relatively new word.[22]

In Japan *kawaii* is used to describe a huge range of things, from Hello Kitty merchandising, to young animals and children. Kinsella argues that "the essential anatomy of a cute cartoon character is small, soft, infantile, mammalian, round, without bodily appendages (arms), without bodily orifices (mouths), non-sexual,

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[19] This article will use the main English language theorists on *kawaii* – specifically Sharon Kinsella, Brian McVeigh and Christine Yano. It will therefore not refer to Yuko Hasegawa's minor essay on *kawaii* art, 'Post-identity Kawaii: Commerce, Gender and Contemporary Japanese Art' in Fran Lloyd (ed.), *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), as it is not directly relevant to the current discussion.

[20] Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan", in Brian Moeran and Lise Scov (eds.), *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan* (Curzon and Hawaii University Press, 1995), p.220, http://www.kinsellaresearch.com/new/Cuties%20in%20Japan.pdf, accessed 10 September 2011.

[21] Mary Roach, "Cute Inc.", *Wired* 7, no.12 (1999), http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/7.12/cute.html, accessed 27 January 2010.

[22] Oxford English Dictionary, "cute", *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edn.) online version, September 2011, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/46355, accessed 08 October 2011.

mute, insecure, helpless or bewildered".[23] This description is supplemented by Christine Yano who suggests that "many characters are animals or quasi-animals who must be cared for or trained".[24] This is particularly important because "as living, breathing, active things, they exist somewhere in between being human but not quite human, controllable but not too controllable, allowing us to project our own selves onto them".[25] The ability to project ourselves onto them is a suggested part of the reason for these cute characters' success. This feeling is created by not just a human/animal hybrid character but by giving the characters a blank expression. This is part of the *kawaii* aesthetic and can be seen in characters such as Hello Kitty, who has small expressionless eyes and no visible mouth. In his work on Hello Kitty, McVeigh argues that:

> Her plainness characterizes her as a cryptic symbol waiting to be interpreted and filled with meanings. Thus, she functions as a mirror that reflects whatever image, desire or fantasy an individual brings to it. Her mood is ambiguous; neither happy, sad nor agitated, thus ready to absorb and reflect back to her admirers whatever they are feeling on a certain day.[26]

In other words, the blank expression of *kawaii* characters allows viewers to project their own feelings and ideas onto it. This means that, however a viewer feels, the character can "respond" by being a blank slate. This is in part aided by some of Sanrio's most popular characters (including Hello Kitty) not being tied to an existing story or film.[27]

However it is not just cute characters which exploit this "blank slate" aesthetic. For example, Erica Rand discusses the way in which the creator of Barbie, Ruth Handler, "avoid[ed] giving Barbie any physical or biographical details that would limit the owner's imagination", quoting Handler's statement that "'the face was deliberately designed to be blank, without a personality, so that the projection of

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[23] Kinsella, p.226.

[24] Christine R. Yano, "Kitty Litter: Japanese Cute at Home and Abroad", in Jeffrey H. Goldstein, David Buckingham, and Gilles Brougere (eds.), *Toys, Games and Media* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), p.57.

[25] Brian McVeigh, "Commodifying Affection, Authority and Gender in the Everyday Objects of Japan", *Journal of Material Culture* 1, no. 3 (1996), p.295.

[26] Brian McVeigh, "How Hello Kitty Commodifies the Cute, Cool and Camp: 'Consumutopia' verses 'Control' in Japan", *Journal of Material Culture* 5, no. 2 (2000), p.234.

[27] McVeigh (2000), p.234.

the child's dream could be on Barbie's face'".[28] Similarly to Sanrio, Mattel "has deliberately refrained from circulating certain Barbie biographical details or narratives – such as an age, a geographical location, or a wedding – that might foreclose fantasy options".[29] Admittedly, the character of Cthulhu already has a narrative associated with it – that of H.P. Lovecraft's short story, "The Call of Cthulhu". Nevertheless the cute Cthulhu merchandising discussed throughout this article has for the most part stripped away this narrative, leaving the character of Cthulhu floating free, unrestrained by specific or limiting assigned meaning. In other words Cthulhu starts with a narrative which is removed in the process of creating merchandise, while Barbie never had a fixed narrative to begin with. Mattel provides a selection of Barbie narratives which are not considered canon but open up different possibilities for play as well as giving Mattel options for different new products. For example the *Barbie Mermaidia* (2006) straight-to-DVD film gives Mattel the option to create and sell a Barbie doll dressed like a mermaid. This film does not close down options for Barbie or her consumers, and she can still be a fairy next year, or a ballerina the year after.

The removal of the narrative is essential to drive sales of these products. In each case the intention is to provide a blank slate to enable the consumer to create their own worlds. This therefore allows consumers to interpret the cute Cthulhu merchandising in any way they wish and project their own meanings and desires onto the character. Not all purchasers of Cthulhu merchandise are fans of Cthulhu, or have read the story. Some do not even know what character the merchandising is supposed to represent. For these people it is a purchase based upon the desire for an appealing product.

Take, for example, the Chibithulhu, a soft toy designed by Kovalic for Steve Jackson Games. The design has its origins in art for a card titled "Chibithulhu" that appears in the game Munchkin Cthulhu. The term "chibi" is frequently used in *anime* circles to describe a style of character design which is hyper-cute. These characters have big eyes, small mouths, tiny stubby limbs and over-the-top poses. The Chibithulhu soft toy is made from plush and available in a range of colours and sizes from "deceptively tiny" and "insanely medium" to a 20-inch high "mind-crushingly huge" toy (Steve Jackson Games 2012). It has stubby arms and legs and a red

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[28] Erica Rand, *Barbie's Queer Accessories* (London: Duke University Press, 1995), p.40.
[29] Rand, p.8.

embroidered heart on its chest. The embroidered eyes are excessively large for the face, with clearly defined pupils and irises, and long eyelashes. This makes them look like the exaggerated and highly detailed eyes used for *manga* and *anime* characters. Unusually for a cute character it has a mouth, but it is stuck in a big forced smile. The wings are white and rounded, and look more like those of an angel, rather than a monster. The features of the Chibithulhu soft toy outlined here indicate that it is definitely not intended to be monstrous or scary. As a soft toy it is worth comparing with the similar plush Cthulhu toys made by Toy Vault. This Cthulhu is made out of plush fabric and is smooth, soft, and rounded. It is designed with gangly arms and legs and oversized hands and feet. This version of the character is the closest to having claws, with the fingers coming to a rounded point. The eyes are glass studs, similar to many soft toys. They clearly appear to fall into the same category that the Chibithulhus inhabit. However the Chibithulhu and the Toy Vault Cthulhu soft toys are not necessarily cute, as Kinsella defines the term. They are not sweet, vulnerable or weak and although their faces are blank and their bodies soft, they don't appear insecure, helpless or bewildered. This suggests that they might not necessarily be cute, as fits Kinsella's definition, despite being a soft toy. We can say that being soft is not the same as being cute as it is clearly possible to create soft toys that are superficially cute, but which, on closer examination, may retain some of the vestigial horror elements such as claws.

John Kovalic, the designer of the Chibithulhu, also designed My Little Cthulhu, a vinyl toy which is produced by Dreamland Toyworks. This design is also based on card art for Munchkin Cthulhu. My Little Cthulhu is perfectly smooth-skinned, with tiny, placid eyes, no mouth and a huge, monstrously out-of-proportion head, which is far larger than the rest of its body. Tiny wings that could never fly have been affixed to its back. The limited-edition versions produced in the alternative colours of red and black have a different facial expression. The eyes could be interpreted as displaying an emotion like anger through the use of a downward curving eyebrow. The My Little Cthulhu toy is designed to interact with a set of cute human victim figures (sold as "Little Victims") which can be placed in his hands. This allows the owner to pose the My Little Cthulhu in a way that looks like he is eating the figures and apparently care for the cute Cthulhu by feeding him human victims that are almost as cute as the monster to which they are fed.

However this is a perverse simulation of feeding, even as a child's game – rather than feeding carrots to a cute rabbit, the owner is feeding people to a cute monster. The blank expression of Cthulhu makes it easier for the owner to project their feelings onto this Cthulhu toy. Given that the owner is projecting feeding people to a blank-eyed monster, it seems appropriate to suggest that his/her feelings may include negative ones such as anger and rebellion. Conveniently for the social acceptance of the toy's owner these feelings are concealed from onlookers by the cute and blank-faced nature of this toy.

Although it is difficult to map directly from child behaviours to adult behaviours, it is not impossible that this kind of merchandising may reflect certain kinds of fantasy for a consumer. Phoenix argues that:

> Toys are symbols that have a figurative power to embody thoughts and emotions that may have their origins in childhood, but are not childish. We recognise parts of ourselves – our secret, wishing selves – in toys. The part of us a toy touches is our unexpressed, dream(ing) self.[30]

In the case of licensed character merchandising, their appeal "is based on the image networks to which they belong, rather than the material qualities of the toys themselves".[31] This appears to be a deliberate strategy on the part of those responsible for merchandising. For example, David Imhoff, the senior executive president of worldwide licensing and merchandising at New Line Cinema is quoted by Pomphrey on the subject of *The Lord of the Rings* film merchandising; "we want movie merchandise to transport consumers into the unique fantasy world they've experienced in the film".[32]

It is the drive to recreate the pleasure of reliving or imagining a fantasy that is the basis for many toys and merchandising. The objects provide the physical elements to support the mental images. The fantasies associated with toys from childhood on take many forms, and it has been argued that negative emotions are not unusual among children who play with dolls. Formanek-Brunell's research on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century doll play revealed a whole range of behaviours, but "not all

[30] Phoenix, p.9.
[31] Steinberg, p.213.
[32] Graham Pomphrey, "Franchise Players", *License! Global* (16 May 2007), p.60.

the feelings and issues which doll play accommodated were superficial and sweet".[33] She uncovers different types of play that explored children's darker feelings: "One eight-year-old doll dentist used toothpicks as dental tools. Another boy shot his doll full of holes with a bow and arrow so that he could dress its wounds. Boys' play also included doll crucifixion and executions". She also notes "a four-year-old girl [who] disciplined her doll by forcing it to eat dirt, stones and coal."[34] Although these kinds of play may not have been sanctioned by adults, other activities such as the doll funeral were; "these practises were encouraged by adults and mourning clothes were made for dolls. It was not uncommon for fathers to make doll-sized coffins for their daughters' toys".[35] In a period when infant mortality was high, the rituals of death would have not been unusual to nineteenth-century children. However it seems that these doll funerals may have been cathartic, acting as "an expression of aggressive feelings and hostile fantasies".[36] It is conceivable that similarly hostile fantasies may be given an outlet in the adult consumption of the range of Cthulhu-inspired products under discussion here. Of course, they are also connected with another kind of fantasy too – that of the consumption of multiple desirable objects.

Many of these items of cute Cthulhu merchandising are produced in multiple versions. Each version is almost identical apart from colour, size or elements of costume. This is similar to Mattel's creation of multiple versions of Barbie. It acts as a way to sell what is essentially the same product many times, often to the same consumer. Rand quotes a 1992 article in which "Jill Barad, president of Mattel USA, stated, 'The ultimate goal of making each Barbie special is to create the rationale for why little girls need to own more than one Barbie doll,' adding that Mattel is trying to get girls to think that they need more than the reigning average of seven".[37] Each Barbie, which is essentially the same doll (created from the same factory mould), is made special by the addition of different outfits, accessories and sometimes different hair styles and skin tones. It is these additions that make the dolls different from each other and therefore desirable to both child and adult consumers because they appear to be individuals, when they are not. When undressed, "Barbie Birthday Princess" is

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[33] Miriam Formanek-Brunell, "The Politics of Dollhood in Nineteenth-Century America", in Henry Jenkins (ed.), *The Children's Culture Reader* (London: New York University Press, 1998), p.370.
[34] Formanek-Brunell, p.374.
[35] Formanek-Brunell, p.370.
[36] Formanek-Brunell, pp.374-75.
[37] Rand, p.24.

indistinguishable from "Barbie Blonde Beach Doll". The clothes and accessories that come with these blank-faced dolls are what makes them different from each other. However for a collector (whether child or adult), it is the different accessories that make the two dolls worth owning. For the Barbie doll, counter-intuitively it is the accessories that are the important part, and help fuel consumers' fantasies and play. For example the "Barbie Birthday Princess" may enable fantasies about special birthday parties, while "Barbie Blonde Beach Doll" may facilitate dreams about fun days out at the seaside. "Barbie Birthday Princess" could theoretically go to the beach but she doesn't come with a bikini like "Barbie Blonde Beach Doll", so it is harder to envision the fantasy. For Mattel a doll with accessories can be sold at a higher price-point than a set of accessories alone. It also helps to prevent the Barbie brand from being diluted by consumers who might buy just the accessories and dress another eleven-inch fashion doll in Barbie's clothes. In addition a large boxed doll has a better presence on a shop shelf than a small packet of accessories, and will attract greater sales.

The examples of Cthulhu merchandising this article discusses fall into this pattern of producing multiple versions. The most interesting is the Chibithulhu, which is not only a soft toy, but also acts as a supplement to the Munchkin Cthulhu game. In order to encourage the players of Munchkin Cthulhu to purchase this piece of game merchandising, the Chibithulhus have additional rules for the game printed on the labels of the toys. This is not unusual for Steve Jackson Games, who frequently produce expansions for their games, as well as merchandising such as toys, figures and T-shirts. The rules published on the Chibithulhu label encourage multiple purchases of the toy because it gives players an advantage when playing the Munchkin Cthulhu game for each unique Chibithulhu that they own. These rules make the Chibithulhu desirable, not just as a toy or collectable, but also because of the benefits it confers when playing Munchkin Cthulhu. The other examples of cute Cthulhu merchandising also have multiple versions, but these work more like the different versions of Barbie. My Little Cthulhu has a number of special limited editions, including a red figure called "Angry", a black figure called "Goth", a glow-in-the-dark figure and a plain figure that purchasers can paint themselves. The availability of multiple versions is a common strategy in the designer toy industry,

and companies such as Play Imaginative, Toy2R and Kidrobot all produce do-it-yourself models for consumers to decorate.[38]

Toy Vault produces a wide variety of plushes inspired by the "Cthulhu Mythos". Central to the range is Cthulhu, which is produced in different colours and sizes, as well as a variety of different outfits, including Elvis; a graduate of Miskatonic University; and a superhero. These are highly detailed soft toys, especially those dressed in outfits, potentially making them more of an adult collectable than a toy. However some of Toy Vault's plushes such as My First Cthulhu are specifically made to be suitable for children, with embroidered facial details, instead of plastic eyes, and made using "baby-friendly fabrics". These toys are supplemented by other collectable Cthulhu items such as Cthulhu slippers, a Cthulhu mobile phone pouch and a Cthulhu backpack. The range also includes other plush Mythos toys, including plush Shoggoths, Necronomicons, and Deep Ones. These different variations are made in limited quantities and go out of production, making them collectable because of the limited supply.

All of these cute Cthulhus are blank-faced, allowing consumers to project their fantasies onto them. However companies need consumers to buy multiple products. By creating cute Cthulhus with different accessories or colouring they can encourage consumers to buy more than one product, even though the products are essentially the same. All these differences encourage people to be collectors, so each soft toy or urban vinyl becomes a desirable purchase.

Kawaii as pitiable and grotesque

These cute bodies effectively castrate Cthulhu by deliberately reducing the image's power to scare us by making Cthulhu pitiable. Harris argues that cuteness is "an unconscious attempt to maim, hobble, and embarrass the thing [the creator] seeks to idolize".[39] This maiming is physical with characters having "stubbly arms, no fingers, no mouths, huge heads, massive eyes – which can hide no private thoughts from the viewer – nothing between their legs, pot bellies, swollen legs and pigeon feet – if they have feet at all. Cute things can't walk, can't talk, can't in fact do anything at all for

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[38] Steinberg, pp.225-26.
[39] Daniel Harris, "The Cute and the Anti-cute", *Harper's Magazine* 287, no. 1718 (1993), p.26, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=afh&AN=9309300697&site=ehost-live, accessed 27 January 2010.

themselves because they are physically handicapped".[40] This acts as a way of disempowering the cute characters. Harris argues that it "forc[es] them into ridiculous situations and mak[es] them appear more vulnerable than they really are".[41] A key part of this is that the character becomes pitiable and in need of care. Yano suggests that the attraction of a cute object is that the viewer is left "simultaneously wanting to care for it, own it, and become it".[42] This is confirmed by Cross in his work on the cute child, which suggested the child "evoked in adults a longing to care for, protect, and possess, as well as to sacrifice".[43]

Although they are not completely incapacitated, the cute merchandising forms of Cthulhu are still presented as sexless, often mouthless creatures with no means of communicating; those that *are* given a mouth seem incapable of feeding themselves, even when provided with substitute food, because their arms cannot reach their own mouths. Although Chibithulhu is provided with a mouth, it is forced into a permanent smile, which still suggests a degree of submissiveness to its owner, and its stumpy limbs imply it can do nothing for itself. There is of course an argument to be made that mouths are irrelevant to toys as toys are inanimate objects and cannot eat or speak. However in cute the lack of a mouth relates to submission; because the cute has no visible mouth, they are rendered silent, and this makes them submissive to their owners, which is a strong part of the aesthetic. As Roach suggests; "if submissiveness is part of the appeal of cute, what better than to have no mouth at all?"[44]

Cute appears at first to be incompatible with the horrific but Harris suggests that cute "must not be mistaken for the physically appealing, the attractive".[45] Instead he links it to the grotesque, his reasoning being that "the grotesque is cute because the grotesque is pitiable, and pity is the primary emotion of this seductive and manipulative aesthetic."[46] By comparison Steig, quoting Jennings, describes the grotesque object as displaying "a *combination of fearsome and ludicrous qualities –*

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[40] Kinsella, p.236.

[41] Harris, n.p.

[42] Yano, 2004, p.59.

[43] Gary Cross, *The Cute and the Cool – Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children's Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.80-81, http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195156669.001.0001, accessed 19 September 2011.

[44] Roach, n.p.

[45] Harris, n.p.

[46] Harris, n.p.

or, to be more precise, it simultaneously arouses reactions of fear and amusement in the observer" [Jennings' italics].[47] Steig suggests that the grotesque is paradoxical in that "it at once allays and intensifies the effect of the uncanny".[48] It is used to deal with feelings of anxiety by expressing fears and then distorting them so that they become harmless. The fearsome is made safe by the ridicule of the grotesque aesthetic, while that with which it is uncomfortable to identify, is made strange.

Lovecraft's description of Cthulhu does evoke the grotesque with its mismatch of animal parts from different species; however it does not evoke pity, which is required for Harris' definition. The nihilistic nature of Cthulhu in Lovecraft's story is more frightening than his appearance. Although powerful, Cthulhu has no interest in humankind, wanting neither worship nor fear because according to "The Call of Cthulhu" he is sleeping unaware of humanity, beneath the Pacific Ocean.[49] On this basis, according to Steig's work on the grotesque, the grotesque appearance of Cthulhu in the story helps to distance us from the frightening nature of the character. By contrast, the cute merchandising does retain the grotesque mismatch of Lovecraft's story, with additional deformities in the creatures' out-of-proportion eyes and heads, and stumpy limbs. The out-of-proportion elements of these Cthulhus bring to mind children and infantile animals, whose proportions are different to those of adults. They evoke pity because they cannot care for themselves. Their grotesqueries in this cute form help to distance us from them, not because we are frightened, but because we may not want to identify fully with a nihilistic monster.

What is the *kawaii* aesthetic used for?

As an aesthetic *kawaii* has a number of functions. In Japan it is not only fancy goods such as stationary, stickers and key chains that are decorated with cute characters, but also credit cards and passenger jets. Allison argues that "play characters have become a popular strategy used by groups, products, and companies of various sorts to stake their own identity and differentiate it from that of others".[50] Products such as credit cards are difficult to differentiate from each other in the Japanese marketplace

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[47] Michael Steig, "Defining the Grotesque: An Attempt at Synthesis", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 29, no. 2 (1970), p.255.
[48] Steig, p.258.
[49] Lovecraft, n.p.
[50] Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters* (London: University of California Press, 2006), p.17.

because of universally low interest rates, so the *kawaii* character branding can provide an important point of difference for consumers. For example "twenty three banks, including Mitsui, Sumitomo, Sanwa, and Mitsubishi; fourteen stock companies, including Yamaichi, Daiwa and Nomura; and seven insurance companies, including Nihon Seimei, Sumitomo Seimei and Yasuda Kasai" have licensed cute characters.[51] These branded accounts appear to be popular in East Asia with "Aeon Credit Service in Hong Kong issu[ing] 100,000 Hello Kitty MasterCards in nine months"[52] and long lines for new accounts when Makoto Bank in Taiwan adopted Hello Kitty.[53] Brands in the West do not operate in this way, with cute characters mostly confined to discretionary or trivial products, and those aimed at children. Rather than being used in the promotion of unrelated products, the majority of cute Cthulhus observed are instead collectable products in their own right.

Kawaii in Japan is also used to conceal the ugly, whether this is an ugly message or an ugly but essential activity or object. Roach describes this cute layer as "a form of window dressing for the uncute".[54] For example cute characters are used on Japanese warning signs and government material meant to "warn or admonish" to "soften and [make] more acceptable" the message.[55] Kinsella argues that:

> In some cases a mismatch between the good's function and its design had simply gone unnoticed; at other times it was a deliberate attempt to camouflage and mask the dirty image of the good or service in question.[56]

In comparison Western cute child images from the turn of the twentieth century through to the 1930s "were popular because they appealed to adults trying to get 'back' to childhood through their children".[57] In this case it was a way for adults to connect with their children and a particular state in their lives. The example of cute Cthulhu is very much a case where the function of the original character has been overwritten and camouflaged to mask its central, horrifying premise. Instead it allows

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[51] Kinsella, p.226.
[52] Barbara Koh, "Cute Power", *Newsweek* (8 November 1999), http://www.newsweek.com/id/90086, accessed 3 February 2010.
[53] Roach, n.p.
[54] Roach, n.p.
[55] McVeigh (1996), p.300.
[56] Kinsella, p.228.
[57] Cross, p.125.

adults to return to their childhood and grants them opportunities to engage in playful behaviours.

Consumption of *kawaii* objects by adults can offer a way of escaping from the normal activities of daily life. The focus is on escape because of the pressures of daily life in crowded cities and the social expectations of others. The escape needs to be consumption-based as there is very little spare time for it to be time consuming.

For adults there are two aspects to this escape, an escape from the physical world and an escape from the social world. Allison suggests that something as simple as carrying a cute key chain or phone charm can act as "a reminder [...] of something beyond the reality of [the] office, cramped housing, and daily commutes".[58] Even something as quick as a glance can be enough to act as a psychological boost.[59] Part of the experience of escape is the feeling of nostalgia that consuming cute artefacts creates. The key aspect of this nostalgia is a remembrance of childhood and the feeling of being carefree.[60] This nostalgia for childhood is expressing a "yearning to be comforted and soothed".[61] With cute being used to conceal the ugly, this nostalgic consumption is concealing the ugliness of the present: "alienation is increasing […] [P]eople want to return to their childhood where there is no ugliness".[62] The cute characters act as emotional backup that can always be relied upon, like a family member. Allison concludes that "whether a Kitty-chan key chain, Doraemon cell phone strap, or Pikachu backpack, these commodity spirits are 'shadow families': constant and reliable companions that are soothing in these post-industrial times".[63] For character merchandising based on established worlds "the character provides a means of accessing the world – this being one of the reasons for its consumption".[64] The toy acts as a focus for remembering the film, television programme or computer game, even when you cannot access the source media.

In Japan the escape can also be from what is socially expected and the demands of other people. Yano describes an article in *Kitty Goods Collection* that suggests ideas for "spending one's leisure time in 'doing Kitty'". Here the cute icon inspires

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[58] Anne Allison, "Cuteness as Japan's Millennial Product", in Joseph Tobin (ed.), *Pikachu's Global Adventure* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), p.43.
[59] Yano (2004), p.63.
[60] Yano (2004), pp.62-63.
[61] Allison (2004), p.40.
[62] Koh, n.p.
[63] Allison (2006), p.91.
[64] Steinberg, p.213.

fans' leisure time, "provid[ing] the opportunity to focus on oneself, by oneself, luxuriating within *honne* (one's true feelings) to a schedule packed tightly with *tatemae* (public face)".[65] McVeigh describes cute as "a form of escape from the real world, or at least from the high pressure social world of Japan. 'Fantasy' stated one young woman; 'it's a way of forgetting about the unpleasant things we all have to put up with everyday'".[66] In the West these feelings are not as clearly defined as in Japan, and the social pressures are less intense; however there is still a split between one's desires and what is socially expected. To display a cute Cthulhu is a way of expressing one's personality and desires in a way that is non-confrontational. The toy can be a form of rebellion, resisting the expectations of society and labelling the owner as such, while remaining non-confrontational in approach – a cute Cthulhu is more visually appealing to the uninitiated onlooker than, for example, the surrealist horror art of H.R. Geiger. Seiter argues that:

> All members of modern developed societies depend heavily on commodity consumption, not just for survival but for participation – inclusion – in social networks. Clothing, furniture, records, toys – all the things we buy involve decisions and the exercise of our own judgement and "taste". Obviously we do not control what is available for us to choose from in the first place. But consuming offers a certain scope for creativity. The deliberate, chosen meanings in most people's lives come more often from what they consume than what they produce.[67]

The non-essential discretionary purchases that we choose to consume and display are a way of participating in different social groups and showing our allegiances to other people. Cross elaborates on the example of the Kewpie doll, a cute child figure based on the drawings of Rose O'Neill (1874-1944). These dolls were created as character merchandising, and as such were heavily mass produced along with other items bearing the Kewpie image.

> Men bought Kewpie dolls for their office desks and women for their dressing tables. They succeeded as "charms," however, not because they had supernatural power but because they were fads and a fantasy, playfully embraced. As such, they represented the wonder of childhood, a

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[65] Yano (2004), p.62.
[66] McVeigh (1996), p.294.
[67] Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately: Parents and Children in Consumer Culture* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995), pp.3-4.

dreamworld that adults, if not children, knew to be mere dream, but that was nevertheless enchanted because it enchanted children.[68]

The Kewpie dolls, although toys, helped adults connect to a desirable fantasy through their consumption. It is important to note that the consumers knew that the ideas that the dolls represented were a fantasy. However it makes the desires the Kewpie dolls represented no less real. Cross argued that these kinds of cute child images take "both the child and the adult to the edge of the acceptable, even across the line of self-control, to a playful, unserious anarchic moment".[69] In other words it gives them a chance to step outside of their ordinary lives and society's prescribed behaviours to explore the boundaries and to return to the experience of play.

Choosing cute Cthulhu character merchandising is a way of consumers creating meaning in their lives. It is useful here to consider Yano's description of the "wink on pink", a phenomenon where businesswomen display their femininity though small accessories such as a pink notebook or Hello Kitty rubber stamp. She suggests that "the wink on pink [...] represents a small act of defiance in recuperating and asserting both the playful and the feminine using the kitsch of a Japanese icon in a masculinist world".[70] If we consider the consumption and display of cute Cthulhus, they could be seen as a "wink on geek", in other words a way of expressing affiliation to geekdom. However, unlike the more obvious sign of pink, a cute Cthulhu is less obvious, and is instead a sign to those in the know, a kind of secret handshake for geeks.

Conclusion

The movement from horrific object to cute object has shifted the balance of power in consumers' relationship with Cthulhu. As a horror icon, Cthulhu has power over his observers because he creates feelings of fear and loathing in them. However, as a cute monster, the power shifts to the observer because the blank expression allows the observer to imbue the toy with their own feelings and emotions. If we consider the cute Cthulhu merchandising under discussion, we see that many of the elements that

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[68] Cross, pp.125-26.
[69] Cross, p.44.
[70] Christine R. Yano, "Monstering the Japanese Cute: Pink Globalization and Its Critics Abroad", in William M. Tsutsui and Michiko Ito (eds.), *In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on the Global Stage* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.157.

Kinsella, Yano and McVeigh list have been incorporated into the depictions of the character to make Cthulhu appear cute. All of the forms under discussion have transformed and simplified Cthulhu's body into a smooth-skinned, rounded, clawless form. The face has been reduced to two main types – either a featureless form with tiny eyes, like Hello Kitty, or a "chibi" form with large eyes, inspired by manga and anime. Cthulhu's wings become like those of dragons or angels.

These cute artefacts have a valuable function in people's lives. The creation of Cthulhu as a range of consumable objects gives people "a mechanism for interacting with the world through the imagination".[71] This cutification of Cthulhu weakens the original characterisation of Cthulhu; in doing so it offers the consumer a cute imaginary escape from their ordinary lives, in much the same way that Hello Kitty does. This is a significant change in the intended audience reception of Cthulhu from Lovecraft's original vision and represents a strengthening of the consumer's vision over that of the original author. Even when presented in the rounded, large-headed, cute form, Cthulhu still occupies a grotesque form, as it is quite possible to be grotesque-pitiable and cute at the same time. Cute Cthulhu therefore occupies a point somewhere between horror and traditional cuteness, which gives adults the chance to escape from their mundane lives.

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[71] Allison, 2004, p.43.

BOOK REVIEWS
Literary and Cultural Criticism

Roger Luckhurst, *The Mummy's Curse: The True History of a Dark Fantasy*
(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

A staple of popular culture, "the mummy's curse" immediately evokes images of messily bandaged, murderous ancient Egyptians chasing flabbergasted Western Egyptologists around country houses. It is a trope that has been deployed in film after film, from the Universal mummy pictures of the 1930s and 1940s, to the Hammer versions of the late 1950s and 1960s, to Universal's successful resurrection of the franchise in the 1999-2008 series (with another planned remake on the cards for 2014). And, as is perhaps less well known, this cinematic treatment was preceded by scores of popular novels and periodical stories which established the conventions of this Gothic subgenre. But how did the cultural association of the sweeping, violent curse with the mortal remains of ancient Egyptians arise? As Roger Luckhurst explains, citing present-day, curse-weary academic Egyptologists, the concept of the curse played only the slightest role in ancient Egyptian culture; hence his study, *The Mummy's Curse: The True History of a Dark Fantasy*, sets out to trace the origins of this dark fantasy to their late-nineteenth century roots.

By way of explanation, Luckhurst turns first to the historical practice of Egyptology and the world-famous opening of Tutankhamun's tomb by Howard Carter and the Earl of Carnarvon in the winter of 1922-23. He deconstructs the assumption that the idea of the mummy's curse stemmed from the equally famous series of misfortunes that were attributed to this event, instead tracing its origins to two less well-known preceding accounts of cursed Egyptian artefacts that circulated in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Luckhurst is not the first to observe the connection between the Western archaeological exploitation of Egypt's ancient civilisation and the idea of supernatural retribution – Jasmine Day, for example, has produced an excellent anthropological account of this conjunction in *The Mummy's Curse: Mummymania in the English-Speaking World* (Routledge, 2006), which neatly complements Luckhurst's cultural history. However Luckhurst's study is ground breaking for a number of reasons; firstly, it pursues the curse in the elusive, sub-discursive form of rumour, following the instigation and re-circulation of

unsubstantiated tales concerning the ominous careers of two purportedly lethal mummy-cases from their late-Victorian origins through to the early twentieth century. And, even more importantly, it places these rumours in the crucial and largely overlooked political context of the intensification of British colonial activity in Africa in the late nineteenth century. Reading the curse as a "displaced account" of some of Britain's shocking setbacks in its African campaigns, especially in Sudan, Luckhurst plausibly suggests that "the vengeance of the mummy might have had less to do with powers imputed to the Ancient Egyptians and much more with the contemporary geopolitics of North African resistance to British imperialism" (pp.80-81).

The study does not stop at pursuing the curse in the form of rumour; instead, it widens its scope considerably to explore an impressive array of manifestations of the shadowy presence of Egypt in England, these investigations combining to provide an exceptionally well-rounded account of the cultural phenomenon. For analytical purposes the Egyptianate manifestations are divided into two broad categories: those that had some nominal educative intent, such as the Egyptian displays in the cycle of "empire" exhibitions that proliferated in the late-Victorian period, and in the burgeoning museums; and those that existed explicitly for entertainment or consumer purposes, such as Egyptian-themed panorama and diorama displays and theatrical extravaganzas, and orientalised department stores. Luckhurst argues that the latter category presented no sense of Egypt as a locus of threat, functioning purely as "commercial immersive-exotic spaces" and contributing to the explosion of commodity culture in Britain (pp.118-19). However, in the former, despite the implication of control and power that these official narratives of empire provided, something of the Gothic leaked through in the persistent rumours of mummy curses that stubbornly attached to the displays and defied the denials of official Egyptology.

As no account of the mummy's curse in its earliest guises would be complete without a consideration of its virulent propagation through the medium of popular fiction, Luckhurst necessarily allots this topic considerable space. This is the form that has received most critical attention previously, typically in article-length treatments such as those by Nicholas Daly and Bradley Deane, but here Luckhurst's extended engagement allows a fuller picture of the cultural work performed by the literary curse to emerge. Luckhurst tours the archives of Gothic fiction about Egypt, from those works that employed the mummy as a satirical device to berate

contemporary society, to erotically charged, French-influenced accounts of mummy romance, honing in on the question that thematically ties this textual analysis to the study's wider inquiry into the curse – what caused the fictional mummy to turn vengeful after the 1860s. He demonstrates the impact of the significance of Egypt to the British colonial endeavour after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the consequent British occupation of Egypt in 1882 on the fiction of Gothic Egypt, using four well-chosen, novel-length engagements: Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897), Guy Boothby's *Pharos the Egyptian* (1899), Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903) and Sax Rohmer's *Tales of Secret Egypt* (1918). What unites these texts is their portrayals of some of the most unequivocally bleak outcomes in this strain of writing, a tendency which Luckhurst aptly links with Stephen Arata's influential critical paradigm of reverse colonisation.

Luckhurst proceeds to contrast these less nuanced depictions of Egyptian menace usefully with the more sustained and complex literary renderings of Egypt to be found in the works of Algernon Blackwood, and more particularly H. Rider Haggard, the latter deservedly receiving a chapter-length treatment. Haggard's engagement with Egypt could be said in ways to epitomise the intensity of the late-Victorian fascination with that country: he was the brief recipient of a restless mummy appropriated from Egypt, two of his brothers fought in the British colonial army there, and he toured Egypt himself several times, obtaining many souvenirs, not least a pharaonic ring which he wore constantly. This formative experience manifested itself in a predilection for Egyptian artefacts which Haggard obsessively collected and displayed in his home, and from which, Luckhurst argues, he produced a plethora of works dealing with Egypt ancient and modern. In these Luckhurst discerns a melancholia concerning the perceived squalid state of modern, occupied Egypt that dallies with curse tropes but more properly reflects a conservative yearning for an unattainable continuity or permanence evoked by the romance of immortality or reincarnation.

To confirm his central argument that the curse of the mummy takes shape in the late-Victorian period through multiple vectors, Luckhurst turns in conclusion to a final crucial outlet for the dissemination of curse rumours: the growing contemporary fascination with magic and the occult. By engaging with a field that may at first glance seem tangential, Luckhurst is able to postulate that the media-hyped attempts

of some hermetic societies to rediscover the supposed magical powers of the ancient Egyptians doubtless fed popular superstitions that pharaonic wrath could remain effective across the centuries, even that such powers might be actively wielded by the hermetic adepts of London's disreputable bohemian underworld. Ultimately Luckhurst convincingly ties the paranoid structure of belief in the specific occult concept of the "evil eye" (that it is inherently reversible and may be turned back on the practitioner) to the practice of imperialism. Hence what is looking back at those who ascribe curses and malevolent gazes to Egyptian artefacts is "the malignancy of [their] own desire and the violence [they] are prepared to commit to satisfy that desire", a "colonial gaze" that relentlessly appropriates the objects of its desire (p.236).

The drawing in of the disparate field of the occult is one of the best elements of Luckhurst's study, reinforcing the strength of his interdisciplinary, cultural-historical approach; it could have been improved only, perhaps, by a more extended account of the late-Victorian anthropological interest in the persistence of belief in the evil eye in modern North Africa, which may have contributed to the conflation of modern Egyptian hostility to colonialism with ancient curses. Overall, however, the study is written in an engaging, entertaining style and is likely to become the key text in its field for some time to come. While highly accessible, it is obviously the erudite product of years of ground-breaking archival research, often into alternative and out-of-the-way primary sources – including uncatalogued letters to the British Museum, handwritten minutes of occult societies, and oral family histories. As such, it clearly demonstrates the value of taking a diverse approach to the source material employed in this kind of cultural historical project.

Ailise Bulfin

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Lorna Jowett and Stacey Abbott, *TV Horror: Investigating the Dark Side of the Small Screen* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013)

On 31 October 1992, 20,000 people rang into the BBC to complain that they had been tricked into watching what they thought was a live broadcast of an investigation into paranormal activity, hosted by Michael Parkinson. The programme turned out to be

the horror mockumentary *Ghostwatch*, directed by Lesley Manning. In the days that followed, the British audience aired their grievances on TV, in letters, and over the phone. As one disgruntled viewer claimed live on the BBC public affairs programme *Bite Back*, which aired on 15 November 1992, the people involved in the mockumentary had "betrayed the trust of its viewers" ("*Bite Back* on *Ghost Watch*", http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgrI5ZRuKdc, accessed 1 July 2013). In transgressing the fragile margin between fact and fiction, the genre of horror had gone too far.

As a collective public, we enjoy being scared, but only within established and therefore comfortable parameters. There is apparently an appropriate place and time for such flirtations with terror. Seeing a horror film on a first date greatly enhances the "thrill experience", and of course fear typically has the effect of narrowing the spatial proximity between a nervous couple, as one party spooks, while the other, just as terrified, nonchalantly provides a hand, shoulder or a hopeful thigh to squeeze. Even within our own home, when we choose to watch a horror film on DVD, Netflix or on any of the vast range of media devices available in 2013, we still are active participants in its selection.

So what happens when television "betrays the trust of its viewers"? Turning over or turning off offensive programming is always a viable option, regardless of genre. However, in many homes, the television takes on a much more powerful role than simply that of a media device. It becomes a babysitter, a mood setter, a companion, a "distractor" and of course an entertainer, a mundane yet omnipresent apparatus that can often render the viewer comparatively passive. Thus it could be argued that DVDs, downloads and so on happen *through us*, whereas television happens *to us.*

The question remains, then, as to whether it is possible to reconcile the marginal genre of horror with the mass medium. In *TV Horror: Investigating the Dark Side of the Small Screen*, Lorna Jowett and Stacey Abbot argue that it can and more importantly has been, basing their assertions on the impressive backlog of Gothic and horror programmes which have already been assimilated into mainstream television schedules. Very often there seems to be a predilection towards the notion that horror programming is a relatively contemporary phenomenon. In the 1990s, horror stalked our screens in the guise of *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991), *The X-Files* (1993-

2002), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *American Gothic* (1995-1996). The years post-9/11 saw an explosion of horror-related programming with shows such as *Dexter* (2006-present), *The Walking Dead* (2010-present), *American Horror Story* (2011-present), *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-present), and most recently *Hannibal* (2013-present) and *Bates Motel* (2013-present). However, Abbot and Jowett wish to dispel such narrow notions, and interpret the genre as a long-standing and popular branch of television programming stretching back over sixty years.

Abbot and Jowett's book is posited, not as an introduction to TV horror, but rather as an investigation into the *relationship* between TV and the horror genre. However, in illustrating this relationship, which is often "fraught with tension and potential" (p.xiii), the text provides an excellent and often amusing historical guide to horror shows. Covering a range of series with impressive authority, *TV Horror* organises each television era into one of three distinct categories; "TVI" (1950-1975) which highlights programmes such as *The Quatermass Experiment* (1953), *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964), *The Addams Family* (1964-1966) and *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971); "TVII" (1975-1990s) featuring *Twin Peaks*, *The X-Files*, *Buffy* and *Angel* (1999-2004); and finally "TVIII" (1990s-present) which includes series such as *Dexter*, *The Walking Dead*, *Torchwood* (2006-2012) and *Pushing Daisies* (2007-2009). While the book isn't chronological, it still retains a definite historical focus throughout, as the authors choose instead to discuss a broad range of thematic, sociological and philosophical issues in each chapter, such as adaption of horror texts to TV in Chapter Four; modernising or "Revising the Gothic" in Chapter Six; the "Excess of Horror" in Chapter Seven; and in Chapter Nine, they explore the notion of "TV as Horror".

Although much of the early part of the book is concerned with the process of translating horror onto the small screen, the authors put great emphasis on the sociological ramifications of this process in the 1950s, particularly in relation to programmes such as *The Addams Family* and *The Munsters* (1964-1966). These sitcoms sought to "subvert suburban conformity" (p.23) while other domestic sitcoms such as *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960) served only to promulgate the idealised American family life. Though each of these ghoulish families appeared to others within the fictional worlds they inhabited as strange and "altogether ooky", the point was that they still maintained a strong familial bond which was based on traditional

morals, however fantastic the setting. The authors claim that, during this era, this unusual juxtaposition provided the public with a means literally to *air* certain social issues such as drug abuse and juvenile delinquency. Presented with this juxtaposition between the idealised fiction of *Father Knows Best* which rarely portrayed transgressions of any kind, and fantastic fiction which seemed to revel in these transgressions, the viewing public began to accept horror within mainstream entertainment as harmless fun.

TV Horror develops this theme further, referencing the "seriality" of TV as an aid and not an impediment to the integration of the horror genre into mainstream entertainment. Jowett and Abbott assert that TV horror programmes mimic the typical domestic rudiments of a soap opera, thus providing a recognisable space for viewers to watch horrific images that they may not have had the (dis)pleasure of seeing before. However, due to the fact that "the televisual structure of horror relies more on repetition and cycles than linear narrative" (p.52), the horror text becomes more accessible to non-horror fans, as these conventions (combined with the usual trappings of soap operas such as shorter segments and advertisement breaks) reinforce the "fictionality" of the programme, making for an all-round more customary and therefore unproblematically enjoyable experience.

With this in mind, the necessity for locating programmes such as *Dark Shadows* and *The Addams Family* within the world of the domestic sitcom becomes clear. In Chapter Three, "Shaping Horror: From Single Play to Serial Drama", the authors discuss how, fifty years after these domestic Gothic dramas, the zombie series *The Walking Dead* also seeks, for the same reasons, to replicate the trials and tribulations of a soap opera, with its reliance on sexual tension, affairs and bed-hopping, thus providing a familiar setting to an unfamiliar theme.

A second and equally important attribute of TV seriality, discussed in the same chapter, is that it can "privilege the open ending and dystopian horrors of humanity" (p.40). Thus, unresolved endings, which the horror-film fan would usually expect, such as the hand reaching out of the grave in *Carrie* (Dir. Brian de Palma 1976), lend themselves perfectly to the serial TV format, where the viewers are left guessing for only another week, and not a year, as they would be when waiting for a film sequel.

Taking great pains to examine what is put on the screen, the authors place equal weight upon what is *not* shown on our screens. As witnessed by the mocumentary *Ghostwatch* mentioned earlier, there are limits to what the television-viewing audience will stomach. Though these limits often appear indefinable, and are liable to shift with each new decade, there is a point at which the viewing public will say "Enough!" In Chapter Seven, the authors take on board the complaint that, in trying to please all tastes, TV horror is often bland, a claim championed by Stephen King when he declared that "Television has really asked the impossible of its handful of horror programmes – to terrify without really terrifying, to horrify without really horrifying, to sell audiences a lot of sizzle and no steak" (p.131). In spite of this, *TV Horror* wishes to challenge the assumption "that graphic depictions of gore are intrinsic to horror by asserting instead that the aesthetics of horror are characterized by the spectacle, with visual and aural excess encompassing both terror and horror" (p.132). Moreover, due in part to the ever-changing landscape of television, discussed at length in Chapter Two, they also draw attention to the way in which many horror conventions such as graphic sex and violence are now typical features of non-horror programmes. Therefore, "for TV horror to be provocative, it must do more than simply be gory." TV horror now must offer "fresh perspectives on the genre" and showcase "distinct forms of spectacle through stylistic excess" (p.136), an aesthetic which seems to fit more and more comfortably onto the small screen, as demonstrated by the popularity of "body horrors", such as *Dexter* and *Pushing Daisies* which are continuously "making death palatable" (p.142).

Returning to the initial question as to whether the horror genre is reconcilable with television programming, *TV Horror* certainly succeeds in demonstrating that it is, and offers an excellent account of the affiliations between the horror genre and the television medium. In the process of exploring this relationship, they dispel any "assumptions that TV is the nadir of banality" (p.181) with a widely researched and well-informed account of TV shows from the past six decades.

Additionally, in defending the genre as a credible and worthwhile subject matter for academics and non-academics alike, *TV Horror* displays a wonderful grasp of some of the most complex theories surrounding horror, which the authors weave into the main body of the text in a relaxed and effortless style, in a way that is both enjoyable and insightful. For Jowett and Abbot, TV horror is anything but bland. Its

narratives are continuous, progressive and unrelenting. The only thing that can apparently stop TV horror is bad ratings – or the paranormal musings of one Michael Parkinson.

Sarah Cleary

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Andrew Cusack and Barry Murnane (eds.), *Popular Revenants: The German Gothic and Its International Reception, 1800-2000*
(Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2012)

2009 was a busy year for Irish Germanists Andrew Cusack and Barry Murnane. They convened not one but two international conferences on the German Gothic. The first event, held in the suitably historic German university town of Halle, was *Populäre Erscheinungen* (loosely translated as *Popular Appearances*). It focused on the German *Schauerroman* ("Shudder Novel") in its heyday around 1800. The second was *Popular Revenants*, a two-day symposium in Trinity College, Dublin, convened in September 2009. Billed as a consolidating and amplifying "sequel" to Halle, it sought to explore nothing less than the international "afterlife" of the German Gothic from 1800 to 2000. The fruits of this second conference are to be found within the covers of the present volume.

Fully nine of the twelve contributors to *Popular Revenants* are veterans from the *Populäre Erscheinungen* campaign. In all but two cases – these being well-placed English translations of key expository essays by Jürgen Barkhoff and Silke Arnold-de Simine – they have brought brand-new papers to the table. The lack of widespread duplication is most impressive. It also mercifully spares the reviewer from having to riff away on the "Gothic" relationship of "spectral" source text to its "uncanny" "doppelgänger" target text – a scenario about as thrilling as hearing a Freudian close reader cry "Close, and two cigars!"

The present book, as Cusack rather startlingly notes in his short but informative Introduction, is the first in English to be dedicated solely to the German Gothic since Michael Hadley's 1978 *The Undiscovered Genre*. The avowed aim of this new volume is to "introduce new research for students and researchers in German studies and English studies alike" (p.1). It succeeds for the former group triumphantly well. For the latter group, however, the success is perhaps more qualified.

The qualification is just this. Where *Populäre Erscheinungen* gave us Germanists talking to each other in German about German-language texts, *Popular Revenants* gives us, for the most part at least, Germanists talking to each other in English about – German-language texts. One cannot help but be a little disappointed at the relative incuriosity on the parts of the bulk of contributors in point of non-German – and more specifically English-language – Gothic literature.

Not that you would see the problem coming if you started with Cusack's Introduction, where memorable instances of the confusions and cross-pollinations attendant upon the distinctively transgressive operations of Gothic fiction are cited. One particularly amusing example is the zigzag track from Germany via France to England of Heinrich Zschokke's novel, *Abaellino, der große Bandit* (*The Bravo of Venice*, 1794). Matthew Lewis, explains Cusack with evident relish, "wanted to bring his translation to the London stage but was beaten to it by two other versions of *Abaellino*, one of which, masquerading as an original work, was in fact an adaptation of a French stage-adaptation of Zschokke's novel" (p.1). Such convolutions, suggests Cusack, are quite typical of the dissemination of German-language Gothic around this time.

The comparativist game is still very much afoot in the terrific extended introduction to German Gothic by Cusack's co-editor which inaugurates the volume proper. "Haunting (Literary) History" is a veritable masterclass in synoptic cultural history, with Murnane taking in a copious amount of research literature and drawing some vigorously synchronic lines of contour between the *Schauerroman*, the realist novel, twentieth-century modernist fiction and the neo-Gothic productions of post-Wall German writing. Murnane's analysis is especially compelling when he tracks the ways in which classic Gothic tropes managed to insinuate themselves into later realist and naturalist texts. But he also displays keen attentiveness along the way to English-language Gothic literature, with Charles Maturin, Matthew Lewis and Jane Austen getting a more than perfunctory look-in.

What follows must therefore be accounted, in this one respect alone, a bit of a let-down for the non-Germanist reader. The English Studies gauntlet thrown down in the editors' introductory offerings will really only be taken up with gusto by four contributors: Arnold-de Simine, in her meticulous account of English translations of Benedikte Naubert's *Hermann von Unna* (1788/94); Victor Sage, in his splendidly

lively essay on "Scott, Hoffmann, and the Persistence of the Gothic"; Cusack himself, in his nuanced study of Irishman James "Clarence" Mangan's complex relationship to German gothicism and the *Nachtseite* ("night side") of life; and Peter Arnds, in his insistent referencing of Robert Browning's famous poem "The Pied Piper of Hamelin". As a Long Nineteenth-Century man, I would have loved to have seen a detailed Germanist take on striking moments of intercultural transfer in writers like (to take just the obvious examples) Coleridge, Austen (the "Horrid Novels"), the Shelleys, Dickens, Wilde and Jameses M. R. and Henry. And speaking of Henry James, what of the virulent afterlife of the German Gothic in the works of American writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? With the honourable exception of Mario Grizelj's illuminating section on Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym*, you'll find barely a peep here. Was it for this that Leslie A. Fiedler wrote his classic 1960 study *Love and Death in the American Novel*?

Thus the sizeable nit, picked. If the English-speaking student of Gothic literature can get past this problem – and I would urge her or him to do so – then this volume will repay repeat visits. The trick, I suspect, is simply to delve into individual essays without looking immediately for sharp straight lines pointing due west. The adventurous reader will come away with an urge to seek out serviceable English translations of intriguing texts like Immanuel Kant's magnetically nervous *Träume eines Geistersehers* (*Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, 1766), Friedrich Schiller's unfinished paranoid thriller *Der Geisterseher* (*The Spirit-Seer*, 1787-9), Wilhelm Raabe's novella *Die Hämelschen Kinder* (*The Children of Hamelin*, 1868), Theodor Fontane's historical novel *Vor dem Sturm* (*Before the Storm*, 1878) and Paul Leppin's supernatural Prague story *Severins Gang in die Finsternis* (*The Road to Darkness*, 1914).

It would be criminal to close without singling out for express praise Andrew Webber's revisiting of the penultimate scene of E.T.A. Hoffmann's still-unsettling tale "Der Sandmann" ("The Sandman", 1817). These seven-odd pages of close semiotic reading, informed as they are by Webber's convincing linkage of Hoffmann's weird optics and Lavaterian physiognomics, are worth the volume's price of admission alone. And if *Popular Revenants* as a whole is anything to go by, it is Hoffmann more than any other single figure who haunts the psyche of today's student of German Gothic. This is very good news indeed, not least as it leaves the English-

speaking reader with the wholly edifying impression that the richest German resource for today's Gothic devotee is quite simply: Anything By Hoffmann.

Cusack and Murnane have done us all some service.

Daragh Downes

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Tabish Khair, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness: Ghosts from Elsewhere*
(Basingstoke: Palgrave 2009)

When Jane Eyre encounters the mysterious ghostly figure that haunts Thornfield Hall in the novel which bears her name, she struggles to find a way of describing something that seems so alien, and so fundamentally different, to herself, claiming eventually that it reminded her of "the foul German spectre – the Vampyre" (Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Norton 2001), p.242). Of course, the true identity of this mysterious figure is ultimately revealed to be the first Mrs Rochester, a Creole woman who has made her way from the Caribbean to take up her position as the archetypal madwoman in the attic, and is something infinitely more troubling than Jane's initial impression implies. As colonial/racial other, Bertha is perceived by her husband as the inverse of Jane herself, as he makes clear when he places his two brides directly alongside one another: "look at the difference! Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder – this face with that mask – this form with that bulk" (*Jane Eyre*, p.251). Yet for all her "differences", Bertha Rochester is not entirely "other" to her English counterpart at all; she is a disturbingly familiar monster, an uncivilised and barbaric version of femininity that colonial ideologies insisted could be controlled and improved (but never promoted to a position of equality with the coloniser – or the patriarch, for that matter).

But Jane's first impulse on initially encountering Bertha is a compelling one. In that initial moment of contact between the two characters, Bertha exists as an image of what Tabish Khair might term "an alterity which cannot be subsumed simply into negativity or similarity" (pp.145-46). It is an "otherness" for which Jane cannot account. Only by coding the unknown figure in Gothic terms, as vampire, can she find a way in which to narrate the "otherness" that she has registered. In this, she is faced with the same task as so many of the colonial and postcolonial writers

discussed throughout *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness*, in which Khair undertakes "an examination of the ways colonial and post-colonial literatures within or influenced by the Gothic genre negotiate with and narrate (or fail to narrate) Otherness" (p.3).

The book proposes "a re-examination of central (and pertinent) aspects of both [the Gothic and postcolonialism] through a discussion of the problematics of narrating the Other" (p.3) over the course of its two main sections – "The Gothic and Otherness" (which focuses on nineteenth-century manifestations of colonial Gothic) and "Postcolonialism and Otherness" (where the attention turns instead to Gothic-inflected work by postcolonial writers). These sections are bookended by useful introductory and concluding chapters which establish the methodological and philosophical frameworks on which Khair draws throughout his discussion of alterity and subjectivity (in particular, the work of Emmanuel Levinas). His focus, he insists throughout, is on the British Empire and its post-colonies, and in particular (in the section on colonial Gothic), on "how colonial Otherness is encountered in […] Gothicised narrative[s] that [take] place in Britain" (p.72) – though these parameters are not always rigidly maintained. The first main textual analysis in Chapter 1, for example, comes from *The Phantom of the Opera* (1909-1910), while *Moby Dick* (1851) provides a focal point in the conclusion; similarly some of the texts discussed (such as *Heart of Darkness* [1899]) may be narrated *from* the centre of the Empire but the main action largely takes place outside of it (even if Marlow, the novel's main narrator, makes it clear that London itself is a Gothic place, haunted by different kinds of colonial legacies and knowledge). Discussions of the likes of *Dracula* and (somewhat cursorily) *The Moonstone* fit Khair's parameters more directly, as does *Wuthering Heights* (1847), which is prioritised here over *Jane Eyre* (1847) (despite the detailed discussion of Jean Rhys' prequel/rewrite *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) in Section 2). In the process, admittedly, Khair does make some well-intentioned but ultimately somewhat tenuous observations about how Heathcliff's "otherness" might resonate in a contemporary context.

> Imagine an intelligent dark-skinned person, slipping into the country-side of a peaceful European country from somewhere disturbingly "post-colonial", lying dormant for many years and then snaring the families that harboured him in a net of violence, revenge and terror. It

> might sound like an account of the so-called "sleeper agents" that organisations like *Al Qaeda* are said to send into the heart of Europe, but actually it would be one way of describing Heathcliff. (p.64)

There are more persuasive textual readings on display elsewhere, however, and in Section 2 Khair turns to a discussion of a similarly broad-ranging and diverse collection of postcolonial writing. These include Erna Brodber's *Myal* (1988), Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997), Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996), Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) and *Midnight's Children* (1980), and particularly thought-provoking discussions about textual representations of *vodou*, and what he sees as the limits of magic realism. This breadth of reference is simultaneously a strength and limitation of the book as a whole, on the one hand providing ample – and often fertile – ground in which to explore the central thesis, but also making for a slightly disparate discussion at times.

Throughout the book, Khair emphasises the ways in which the Gothic and the postcolonial are concerned with the narration of "Otherness". By identifying the Gothic as a "'writing of Otherness'" he "allude[s] most simplistically to the fact that it revolves around various versions of the Other, as the Devil or as ghosts, as women, vampires, Jews, lunatics, murderers, non-European presences etc." (p.6). In the colonial Gothic, these figures often carried with them connotations of racial otherness too, contributing to the popular establishment of a colonial/racial binary, in which the racial Other was coded as less-than-human. The postcolonial writer, then, is faced with the task of renegotiating this binary, in order to achieve agency, and is enjoined to "write a different story", as Chinua Achebe once put it (cited in Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction* (Heinemann 1991), p.16). Khair's interest, then, lies in examining the ways in which colonial and postcolonial writers employ the Gothic mode as a way of narrating and acknowledging the agency of the Other *as* Other, and not simply as what he terms the "Self-same".

"For the Other to be Other," Khair writes "there has to be difference – and space for its acceptance, interplay and recognition" (p.158), and in considering the space that the Gothic provides for the textual representation of this difference, Khair raises some interesting possibilities. Of particular note is his assertion that colonial Gothic texts "dealt with the racial/colonial Other, lacking the language to narrate its alterity but sometimes managing to register its presence, if negatively, as 'terror',

'fear' and other states of strong emotion" (p.101). For both colonial and postcolonial writers of the Gothic, it seems, language remains key, and often seems incapable of accounting for moments of "irreducible alterity" (p.101). For Khair, however, it seems that the textual failure to speak on behalf of the "Other" in these instances does not amount to an outright failure to perceive "Otherness" itself – in fact, he insists, "we can still leave space open for the alterity of the Other to be registered – but not explained away or, as literature, narrated 'fully'" (p.172). It is in these moments that "the Other is registered in its full alterity; its agency is recognised as independent from that of the Self and, hence, at least, potentially terrifying" (p.173). He ends by opening up the discussion once more to consider broadly how our encounters with "Otherness" function in terms of contemporary global discourses about "terror" – in theoretical terms, this is an intriguing question, certainly, but ultimately it is one that cannot be contained or resolved within the book itself.

In the end, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism and Otherness* is ambitious in scope and raises compelling and potentially provocative questions about the ethics of narrating – and acknowledging – "Otherness". If the book ultimately raises more questions than answers in its meditation on this topic, these nevertheless remain questions that bear further investigation, and may provide foundations on which future scholars will continue to build.

Jenny McDonnell

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Gary William Crawford, Jim Rockhill and Brian J. Showers (eds.), *Reflections in a Glass Darkly: Essays on J. Sheridan Le Fanu* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2011)
and
Elizabeth Miller and Dacre Stoker (eds.), *The Lost Journal of Bram Stoker: The Dublin Years* (London: The Robson Press, 2012)

When you first behold the superb portrait of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu by the modern Irish artist Robert Ballagh which hangs in Le Fanu's former home at 70 Merrion Square, what you initially see is the writer, lost in thought and bearing a candle, staring out at you from a shadowed window. A closer look reveals another, more bewildering image. Ballagh's Le Fanu is not, as he at first seems, looking directly at

you but is being reflected onto the windowpanes. In fact, through a narrow opening in the casement a country house can be seen, dwarfed by a vast and lowering sky. Ballagh's visual trick is one that Le Fanu, whose Gothic fiction so often deals with the shifting relationship between appearances and reality, would surely have appreciated. The painting is a brilliant illustration of Le Fanu's peculiar predicament as a writer who, for all the enduring popularity of some of his stories, has for a long time only been perceived in the darkest of glasses.

In the realm of Gothic and horror studies, Le Fanu remains that rarest of entities; a pivotal figure in the development of these genres whose life and writings have remained largely untouched by scholars. In this regard, he is the exact opposite of the other great Irish master of Gothic horror and mystery, Bram Stoker, whose life and work have been ceaselessly discussed. And yet, in almost every other respect, Le Fanu and Stoker seem uncannily similar. Each was a well-connected Dublin Protestant, a Trinity student and a newspaper man. Both wore masks of gregarious joviality which belied their inner melancholy. Each was an outward-looking, versatile writer and if, on balance, their fiction is as flawed as many critics have made out, it is no more so than that of the vast majority of Victorian storytellers. Finally, both wrote works which obscured the rest of their output, but while Stoker had the bad luck of penning *Dracula* quite early on in his career, a masterpiece he could never match, Le Fanu was equally unfortunate to die before *In a Glass Darkly* brought him the fame for which he had long waited.

Two recent additions to the field of Irish Gothic studies, *Reflections in a Glass Darkly*, edited by Gary William Crawford, Jim Rockhill and Brian J. Showers, and *The Lost Journal of Bram Stoker*, edited by Elizabeth Miller and Dacre Stoker, offer important new perspectives on these writers. Other than W.J. McCormack's excellent 1980 biography, *Sheridan Le Fanu and Victorian Ireland*, Le Fanu has been the subject of surprisingly few book-length studies. However, what has been published over the years is an intermittent but impressive series of essays covering many aspects of his life and nearly all of his major works. A diverse and distinguished collection of novelists, short-story writers, critics and historians have put their respect for Le Fanu's unique fictions on record. Since the mid-1990s, Gothic literature scholars Gary William Crawford, Jim Rockhill and Brian J. Showers have been working to renew critical attention in Le Fanu. Together they have edited the first critical edition of his

complete works, compiled a new Le Fanu bibliography and launched an online journal of Le Fanu studies. In their most recent project, *Reflections in a Glass Darkly*, they have brought together all the seminal moments in Le Fanu criticism as well as commissioning new essays from some of the foremost names in the study of Gothic literature. It is a volume bursting with good things, a cavern of wonders for anyone who revels in the strange, the mysterious and the weird.

Reflections in a Glass Darkly is divided into five sections. The first of these is given over to biographical sketches of the man himself, penned by those who actually knew him, including Alfred Percival Graves (father of the poet Robert) and the author's brother, W.R. Le Fanu. Here we encounter a witty, genial man, a great conversationalist with an interest in everything and everyone. Le Fanu emerges from these accounts as a man whose passion for hard work was matched only by the strength of his devotion to his chronically ill wife Susanna. And yet Le Fanu's charming, radiant personality concealed a strain of morbidity, a fixation with the odd and unearthly which gave his writing its extraordinary uncanny power, but which took the upper hand in his mind following Susanna's untimely death in 1858. This led to Le Fanu's withdrawal from Irish society and his peculiar transformation into Dublin's legendary "Invisible Prince," a man never seen in daylight, who worked alone at night and who had little human contact for the last fifteen years of his life.

General discussions of Le Fanu's work make up the second selection of essays. These date mostly from the 1920s to the early 1960s and represent the original critical rediscovery of Le Fanu. This section contains some fine pieces by Edna Kenton, V.S. Pritchett and E.F. Benson, although its real pleasure is to be found in the two marvellously droll contributions from the man who launched the Le Fanu revival, M.R. James. Curiosity in Le Fanu seems to have been at an all-time low in the early 1920s until James, then at the height of his own fame as master of the ghost story, edited a collection of Le Fanu's stories in which he made the famous claim that Le Fanu "succeeds in inspiring a mysterious terror better than any other writer" (p.138). Unlike the other authors in this section, who praise the originality of particular qualities in Le Fanu's art, James' case for Le Fanu's supremacy seems to have rested simply on the fact that he thought he was quite good, an argument he took to be sufficient in itself. Who are we to disagree?

The third section of *Reflections in a Glass Darkly* is a mixed bag of intriguing

topics, and includes discussions of the connection between recurrent motifs in Le Fanu's descriptions of city and landscapes, and the work of the later Romantic painters; Le Fanu's lengthy involvement with the *Dublin University Magazine* and his attempts to get published in Charles Dickens' *All the Year Round*; the use of the 1798 Rebellion as the theme of his verse narrative S*hamus O'Brien*; and a short essay which succeeds in explaining why H.P. Lovecraft held such a low opinion of Le Fanu. Of particular interest in this section are two new essays dealing with Danish film director Carl Theodor Dreyer's use of Le Fanu's *Carmilla* as the basis for his 1932 masterpiece *Vampyr*.

Period reviews of Le Fanu's works, taken from *The Athenaeum*, *The Spectator* and the *Saturday Review*, comprise the fourth section of this collection, but it is the fifth, containing essays concentrating on specific novels and story collections, which will be of lasting value to students. Again the timespan here is wide, moving from Elizabeth Bowen's eloquent introductions, to reprints of Le Fanu from the 1960s, to a number of new pieces appearing for the first time. What makes these essays the most satisfying part of the book is that they look beyond *Uncle Silas* and *In a Glass Darkly* to take in the whole corpus of Le Fanu's fiction, including some of his most obscure texts. Sally C. Harris and Stephen Carver examine the late novels *The Wyvern Mystery* and *All in the Dark*; Victor Sage considers the charmingly entitled *Willing to Die*; while Jarlath Killeen provides the most substantial and enlightening of the newly commissioned essays with his spirited rereading of Le Fanu's famous tale of the *nosferatu*, *Carmilla*. Overall, *Reflections in a Glass Darkly* gives back to Le Fanu some of the standing he possessed in his own time, showing him to be no mere writer of occasional ghost stories but a Victorian novelist equipped with a formidable array of fictional techniques who was both more ambitious and more daring than most critics have hitherto understood.

By contrast, never an author who has wanted for critical attention, Bram Stoker has received biographical treatment at least four times in the last four decades and each of these books (particularly Paul Murray's tremendous *From the Shadow of Dracula: A Life of Bram Stoker* from 2004) has provided a more complete portrait of the man, his life and his working methods. However, the announcement of the publication of a "lost" journal of Stoker's cannot help but have led scholars to think that it might contain information that might allow them to answer conclusively the

question that has defied all of Stoker's biographers: how a fifty-year-old theatre manager and former civil servant with little previous success in the art of fiction could create what is arguably the most powerful and enduring of all modern myths, *Dracula*?

Sadly, the first thing that must be stated about *The Lost Journal of Bram Stoker* is that it offers no eureka moment, no discovery that definitively explains where Stoker got the inspiration for his one and only masterpiece. To be fair, there was no way that it ever could, given that the journal was composed between 1871 and 1882, and ends nearly ten years prior to the publication of Stoker's first mature fiction and long before he began work on *Dracula*. So if not the genesis of *Dracula*, what does *The Lost Journal of Bram Stoker* give us? The accusation which some rather cruel critics have levelled at biographies of Stoker is that, for all the lurid extravagance and wild imagination of his fiction, it is almost impossible to make the man himself a figure of fascination or even sympathy. If anything, as with Le Fanu's public visage, what we do know about Stoker often makes him appear too normal, too dull to sustain interest. Like Le Fanu, the record seems to show that Stoker found his place in the world too easily, enjoyed too comfortable an existence, and this makes it impossible for him be a compelling character in his own right.

The Lost Journal of Bram Stoker does much to illustrate what a misconception this view of Stoker is. Its pages put us inside the head of a man who, for all the ease of his daily routine, was constantly, obsessively watchful for anything he might metamorphose into fiction, *anything* that would allow him to leave behind the dreariness of his position as a Clerk of Petty Sessions. Stoker was twenty-four when he began writing entries in his journal in August 1871, three months before he began penning the unsigned theatre notices which marked his first appearance in print. The sprawling mass of ideas for stories, characters, quotes, anecdotes and observations that he recorded in his journal really do give us the writer-in-the-making, a literary talent searching for something to fasten upon and make its own. It offers a potent and strangely poignant image of someone determined to use literature to set himself free.

Stoker expert Elizabeth Miller and Bram's descendant Dacre Stoker have done a highly competent job of putting this literary grab-bag into an orderly format. Rather than simply printing the entries in chronological order, they have wisely chosen to divide the book into nine sections, each devoted to Stoker's jottings on particular

subjects. These range from books he thought he might write and meetings with friends and relatives, to his travel experiences and the scenes he encountered while walking the streets of Dublin. While unobtrusive notes elucidate many of the references in the journal, there remains, perhaps inevitably after 140 years, a considerable number which leave the reader baffled. Despite this, in sections such as those containing the awkward maxims the young Bram wrote to himself ("Take care always that in acting as you think unselfishly you are not simply trying to rid yourself of responsibility"(p.277) and "Difficulties are like ghosts or wild animals. Look them steadily in the face and advance and they will recede" (p.270)) and his humorous sketches (for which he had no small talent), we are brought into more intimate contact with Stoker than, in many ways, we have ever been before.

Although they belonged to different generations and it is uncertain whether they ever even met, it's impossible to read these two books without considering Le Fanu and Stoker's similarities as men and as authors. What was it about their shared background and its effect on their personalities that led them to create such strange, mesmerising fiction? While these two books are fine commemorations of their talent, one cannot help but wonder what more can be done to mark Le Fanu and Stoker's contribution not only to Gothic literature but to the universe of popular culture which has benefitted richly from their dark imaginations? Surely Dublin, a city that already boasts monuments to so many literary figures, should delay no longer in erecting statues commemorating two men whose masterpieces of Gothic horror have had, and continue to have, a worldwide influence on the literature of the fantastic.

James Moriarty

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Isabella van Elferen, *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny*
(Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012)

Sound can be disturbing. Unlike a visual image, a sound has no boundaries; it can be impossible to locate, to control or conceptualise. A sound can evoke a presence that is invisible and thus ghostly. It is this quality of sound that interests Isabella van Elferen: its "ambiguous relation with embodiment" (p.4). Sound is uncanny on various levels. A sound without a definite body can evoke the presence of the ghostly, while it can

also bring back half-forgotten memories – haunting the hearer – by keying into long-standing conventions (for example the eerie sounds of children singing in film). Gothic sound/music, argues Elferen, disrupts linear time, or "enables listeners to experience a time that is off its hinges, and with that a being that might be haunted, infinite, or simply unknowable" (p.10).

Elferen traces how sound and music operate across different Gothic media, ranging impressively from literature to film, and through television, game and Goth music. The virtual sounds of literature become actual in cinema, and invade the home through television and video games, while Goth music immerses its hearers in a culture. In framing the question of what makes music Gothic, Elferen emphasises the "functional" quality of music, rather than its "stylistic essence". She brilliantly interrogates how sound and music function across a range of Gothic texts, including how they produce certain effects such as contributing to a novel's ability to haunt its readers.

The first chapter is well grounded in Gothic literature, with a focus on ghost stories. Elferen considers how a novel's soundscapes contribute to its eerie mood, and how commonalities can be identified across such literary soundscapes. In particular, she considers sounds and music that typically lack a source, such as a rustling, a breathing, a creaking floorboard, sounds which in Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* seem for a moment to have "no physical origin," to "be made by bodiless beings" (p.21).

In its attention to soundscapes, *Gothic Music* is in some ways reminiscent of John Picker's *Victorian Soundscapes* (OUP, 2003), one of the many books published in the past decade or so in the flourishing field of sound studies. Picker considers how sound operates in Victorian fiction, but where he engages throughout with how sounds are situated in their historical context (especially the scientific and technological developments of the time), Elferen's attention to sounds is primarily focused on the texts themselves. What this allows her to do is not only to reach beyond the single medium of literature but also to make connections between texts from different periods. Elferen moves in one paragraph from Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) to Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), for example, novels which allow her to consider how silences as well as sounds can contribute to the eerie atmosphere

of haunted houses. In her attention to the phenomenology of sound, Elferen considers, among other things, Don Ihde's argument that "silence is the basis of sound" (*Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (State University of New York Press, 2007)). Sound emerges out of silence and returns to it, a phenomenon that is amplified in the suspenseful silences of Gothic literature: "Rusty hinges, growling corridors and nocturnal singing represent invisible entities waiting in silence, a silence that may hide invisible, bodiless beings" (p.25).

Sound's relation to the visible is an ongoing concern in *Gothic Music*. Film actualises both sounds and sights which literature can only describe and make imaginable. In its ability to make feared objects visible, to display the violence of mutilated limbs, or the cold corpse, film can create "horror" in a way that literary texts cannot, but Elferen is interested in "terror". Where horror generally involves a direct and visible encounter with the feared object, terror involves a degree of invisibility, of darkness or shadows, what Edmund Burke called "obscurity" (in his 1757 *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*). "To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary," wrote Burke: "When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread [...]". Elferen doesn't mention Burke, but his account resonates with her use of "terror" to refer to that which isn't visible. Gothic produces terror by "leaving the object of fear implicit, just outside perception," and it does so through sound (p.36). What is terrifying is an audible but unseen presence, located beyond the screen.

Elferen frames these discussions of the gothicised version of sound severed from its origins with deconstructionist ideas about the non-referentiality of language, and the foregrounding of mediation. She considers how the medium of literature itself contributes to its eerie effects, as by its very nature, it embodies the absence of the signified. The virtuality of sounds in literature adds to their ghostliness, much as the sound technologies used in film, by separating sound from its physical origin, transmitting voices without bodies, contribute to their capacity to haunt. Other media similarly enhance the Gothic effects they depict. Television and games add to the sense of the uncanny by "multiplying the spectres seen in the cinema and bringing them into viewers' own homes via the little box in the living room"; the homely thus

becomes unhomely (p.73). This effect is enhanced by the "extra-diegetic level" of television and game music: "the musically created space *outside* the television set in the viewer's living room," whereby the sound of the television overlaps with the domestic soundscape (p.77). Computer games invade the home in a more terrifying way as the player – or her/his projected doppelgänger – can not only see and hear but can interact with the spectres. Further, these spectres are digital in origin, which in contrast to analogue recordings of sounds originally existing in the world, need not refer to anything beyond themselves: "video game spectres are phantoms born from the algorithms of a lifeless machine" (p.100).

Elferen not only provides thorough and convincing theoretical frameworks for understanding the workings of sound and music in Gothic texts, but also illustrates her points through a series of rich, detailed examples, including the soundtracks of film and TV adaptations of Gothic novels, Hammer Horror films, the TV series *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991) and *Lost* (2004-2010), and the game *Ju-On: The Grudge* (2009) (based on the Japanese horror film and its Hollywood remake). The latter, for example, makes sparse use of sound, mainly consisting of the avatar's own sounds (her echoing footsteps, heartbeat, and breathing) and the surrounding soundscape (such as howling wind), while "the almost-silence" is periodically interrupted by "disembodied noises", including a death rattle indicating that the ghost is approaching. These sounds help to immerse the player through a kind of "Gothic Positioning System," suddenly breaking through the silence to "provide 3-D indications for gaming navigation" (p.120).

The final chapter on Goth music considers how the body itself becomes a medium: the Goth "becomes the *lived and embodied* destabilised Self that other Gothic media can only produce as a result of reading, viewing or gaming" (p.131). Elferen argues that through clothing, drinking, and dance in particular, the Goth performs and partakes in an alternative and ritualistic space that is Goth nightlife. Through music, participants are immersed in club life more completely than readers, viewers or gamers are immersed in novels, films or games, in part because music is a key part of sub-cultural identity (requiring knowledge and specific dance styles), and because "club music can be felt as well as heard." Drums and bass sounds contribute to the tactility of music, helping to "ensure a deep corporeal immersion in the

temporary reality of a club night", along with clothing (wearing a tightly laced corset), drinking (absinthe) and other sensory experiences (smelling incense) (p.135).

Gothic music crosses various boundaries, but most importantly, it seems, those between pasts, presents and futures, through a mixture of haunting nostalgia (for example with intertextual references to earlier sounds and music, from liturgical chants to classic horror-film samples), effects such as echoes, reverb, delay, drones, sustained chords, and repetition (also often deployed to excess), and futuristic noise (crossing the boundary between human and machine, intensifying the disembodied quality of sound). As previously indicated, Gothic music manipulates time. Elferen argues, then, that the immersion in this music enables listeners to become engulfed in its temporality and to encounter "the existential uncanniness of Being beyond time" (p.186).

This is an extraordinarily rich book. Elferen systematically demonstrates the crucial and complex role played by sound and music across a wide range of Gothic media, engaging with theoretical, metaphysical, social and political questions, uniquely and brilliantly making links from Gothic literature through to contemporary Goth scenes. Gothic and Goth are often separated in academic discourse, while *Gothic Music* shows how music in all cases enables listeners to enter uncanny borderlands.

Shelley Trower

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BOOKS
Fiction

Neil Gaiman, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*
(London: Headline, 2013)

A man remembers something he is rarely permitted to remember. When he was seven, his family's lodger, deep in debt, committed suicide; this caught the attention of an entity that, manifesting first as an amorphous canvas tent, then as a worm, and then as the boy's nanny Ursula Monkton, sought to establish a life in this world by way of the boy's family. And the boy was only believed by Lettie Hempstock, the girl from the

farm at the end of the lane who had been eleven years old for a very long time, and by her mother and grandmother, who liked to make the moon shine full and could snip and stitch the course of human lives when the details required correction.

Such is the story told in Neil Gaiman's new novel *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, a book concerned with the reliability of memory, and with the conflict between the innocent loves of childhood and the more cynical desires of adulthood. While frequently compelling, it is not without weak points where instructive complexity is lost to narrative closure, causing the fantastic to seem commonplace, the terrifying merely bothersome.

Gaiman is mostly good – better than good – at avoiding broad brushstrokes, instead working his prose into the corners of his characters' emotional experience. This is seen in the relationship between *Ocean*'s narrator and his father, described thus in the bleak seventh chapter:

> I was terrified of him when he was angry. His face (angular and usually affable) would grow red, and he would shout, shout so loudly and furiously that it would, literally, paralyse me. [...] In the school stories I read, misbehaviour often resulted in a caning, or the slipper, and then was forgiven and done, and I would sometimes envy those fictional children the cleanness of their lives. (pp.89-90)

This is written from a naïve perspective: there is in reality nothing clean about hitting children. Yet Gaiman understands that a little boy comforted by books might find even the clichés of suffering consoling; and he ensures that the protagonist's suffering is not clichéd. That the father is not physically abusive makes all the more shocking his attempt to drown his son in the bath. Yes, the father is by this stage under the seductive influence of Ursula Monkton – "a cardboard mask for the thing that had travelled inside me as a worm, that had flapped and gusted in the open country under that orange sky" (p.81) – and, yes, it is unclear to what extent the drowning is a mere threat. But the effort is real enough, and the boy fights back:

> Now he pushed me down again, but fear of death gives us strength: my hands and my teeth were clamped to his tie, and he could not break my grip on them without hitting me.
>   My father did not hit me. (p.98)

Hypocrisy, unsettlingly, saves the day, and the boy: there is no change of heart, only a

man's commitment to a hollow principle. When the father complains "'You ruined my tie'" (ibid.) and sends the son to bed, Gaiman invokes the state of mind that George Orwell, remembering the corporal punishment of his school years, calls "a sense of desolate loneliness and helplessness, of being locked up not only in a hostile world but in a world of good and evil where the rules were such that it was not actually possible for me to keep them" ("Such, Such Were the Joys", in *Essays* (Knopf, 2002), p.1294). The impression of callous illogic and disproportion serves the chapter well. And the uncertainty of the father's intentions recalls, as does his implied self-justification, the recent attempts to undermine the classification of waterboarding as torture. In the words of Christopher Hitchens, "You feel that you are drowning because you are drowning – or, rather, being drowned, albeit slowly and under controlled conditions and at the mercy (or otherwise) of those who are applying the pressure" ("Believe Me, It's Torture", in *Arguably* (Atlantic, 2011), p.450). Gaiman similarly shows how little a word like "albeit" means when applied to matters of basic human survival.

Further commentary on contemporary political matters arises through occasional references to economic concerns. The tent/worm/nanny will achieve her ambition – "'I will take all I want from this world, like a child stuffing its fat little face with blackberries from a bush'" (p.71) – by giving people what they want. And what people want is money. As the narrator suggests, this is what "'all the fighting and the dreams'" are about (p.41). The creature confirms this:

> "Something came to me, and pleaded for love and help. It told me how I could make all the things like it happy. That they are simple creatures, and all any of them want is money, just money, and nothing more. Little tokens of work. If it had asked, I would have given them wisdom, or peace, perfect peace..." (p.57)

Here is some dark thinking, which might have been sustained for longer, about the aspirations of both the haves and the have-nots: a life lived on the basis of the acquisition of wealth is lived under the thumb of whoever, or whatever, can help to acquire it. Ursula Monkton is not evil *per se*, but does catalyse the petty anger, lust and greed of humankind; to view her as the novel's only villain is to ignore her as she laughs, or screams (possibly only within the protagonist's mind), "I NEVER MADE ANY OF THEM DO ANYTHING" (p.174).

Given that the novel is so thematically rich and disturbing, it is surprising that the tension of the main narrative is quite poorly controlled. There is an oddly clumsy approach to the question of naming. Early on, as they travel beyond the borders of the ordinary world, Lettie and the narrator are forced to hide from a presumed threat:

> Something came through the woods, above our heads. I glanced up, saw something brown and furry, but flat, like a huge rug, flapping and curling at the edges, and at the front of the rug, a mouth, filled with dozens of tiny sharp teeth, facing down. (p.52)

The creepy description is somewhat spoiled when Lettie casually tells the narrator that the animal is a "'manta wolf.'" The name is too reassuring, defines too tidily; were this an isolated incident it would not matter much, but it foreshadows the point at which Ursula Monkton's true name, long withheld, is revealed by Lettie, who "'went looking for it'" (p.162), apparently at no great inconvenience. On such occasions Gaiman's novel is neat and complacent where it should, like its antagonist, be ragged and ambitious.

Ocean is not explicitly marketed as a horror novel, let alone a Gothic one, and one cannot legitimately condemn it for not adhering or contributing to a tradition to which it claims no connection. Yet there are enough explicit acknowledgements of fear to suggest that it should be considered a driving force. And insofar as this is a short novel with a child protagonist, if not necessarily a "children's book", comparisons with other recent Gaiman books such as *Coraline* seem permissible. While similarly not works of horror *per se*, the uncanny doubling involved in the button-eyed Other Mother (*Coraline*, 2002) or the black-suited ghouls with names like the Duke of Westminster or the Emperor of China (*The Graveyard Book*, 2008) demonstrate Gaiman's eye for the skull gradually revealed beneath the skin, for the skewed reflection of human anxiety and weakness in inhuman eyes. Expectations, however unfair, make the uncomplicatedly *heimlich* portions of *Ocean* a touch disappointing.

The Hempstocks, with their maternal warmth, are part of this problem. The book's hero might be a weak boy, but if his friends are immortal beings whose power is apparently limited only by their preferences or by the page-by-page demands of the story, there is little sense of threat: when an encounter with Ursula Monkton, "every

monster, every witch, every nightmare made flesh" (p.116), can be followed under ten pages later by "I was not at all afraid of Ursula Monkton, whatever she was" (p.125), the novel seems overprotective of both its hero and its readers. Towards the end, when a meaningful sacrifice is replaced by a sacrifice that lacks significant negative consequences, one might even wonder why the tale is being told at all. A novel about memories and fears, and the difficulty of negotiating these phenomena, should not be happy to let such experiences come and go as if, well, by magic. Gaiman's fantasies tend to resonate, but this one, while making some admirable claims, ultimately seems willing to stay in its own world.

Adam Crothers

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John Freeman (ed.), *Granta 117: Horror*, ill. Kanitta Meechubot and Jake and Dinos Chapman (Autumn, 2011)

It is not easy to define what purpose horror serves in the twenty-first century. Living in a digital landscape where never-ending newsfeeds are constantly taking us straight into the bloody heart of warzones, massacres and natural disasters, where we can be looking into the haunted face of someone slowly dying of a terrible disease one minute and then find ourselves unable to escape the expressionless eyes of a serial killer the next, the notion that we need *more* horror – fantasy horror –to supplement the glut of real horror overflowing everyday life, can often seem irredeemably perverse. In fact, it is more than a mystery why the horror genre survives at all. How did it not become redundant in the wake of the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, atrocities whose inhumanity exceeded even the most nightmarish imagination's capacity to conceive? After these revelations, surely horror was something we didn't need to invent anymore.

The fact of the matter is, however, that fictional horror has survived, thrived and diversified in ways that its earliest practitioners could never have imagined. Of all popular genres it is easily the most robust, mutating with the ease and rapidity of a super-virus to suit each new climate of fear. From pandemics to terrorism, from anti-social behaviour to the seemingly unstoppable rise of new technologies, horror writers have developed new breeds of narrative that capitalise on our freshest nightmares.

Arguably, unlike other genres, which often have their own distinct audiences, the market for horror is boundless and it now infests our global culture. We simply cannot get enough.

One clear acknowledgement of the genre's sheer omnipresence is that the prestigious literary magazine *Granta* has dedicated an entire issue, its 117th, to the theme of horror. Characteristically of this renowned publication, editor John Freeman has drawn together a stunning list of international contributors, from bestselling novelists and award-winning journalists to superb short-story writers and beguiling poets whose reputations are no more than a few years old. This volume's panoply of household names includes Paul Auster, Stephen King, Don DeLillo and Will Self, while the fledgling, but no less impressive, talents include Sarah Hall, Rajesh Parameswaran, Mark Doty and Julie Otsuka. Read side by side, these pieces amount to a startling mosaic of the grotesque, the uncanny, the monstrous and the liminal, and make *Granta 117: Horror* a panoramic and engrossing survey of the countless shapes of fear.

Granta has only ever had one editorial policy; to publish new writing of the highest quality and the broadest range of categorisation, from fiction and poetry to essays and reportage. All of these are represented here, and the reader is encouraged to contemplate the meaning of the word "horror" from a multitude of perspectives, and to speculate on what fears may be common to all human experience. The nine pieces of fiction are certainly varied, but they are united by their oblique approach to the unnatural, the fact that they disturb by implication and suggestion and manage almost entirely to resist looking horror in the face. For example, while the succession of Bible-thick novels he has published over the last twenty years might indicate otherwise, "The Dune" proves that Stephen King has not lost his knack for writing superbly eerie short-stories which leave the reader in a constant state of unease but unable ever to determine why. The tale of an aging judge's fateful encounter with his past, as he returns to a beloved landmark, "The Dune" displays enough of King's mastery of style and tension to explain why he is one of the most popular storytellers alive.

Magic realism is a species of literature not often spliced together with horror but *Granta 117: Horror* contains not one but two examples. "The Infamous Bengal Ming", by rising talent Rajesh Parameswaran, is a successful, exotic mixture

reminiscent of Saki or even Roald Dahl. Focusing on a tiger's confession of its love for its captor and the grisly chaos that results when it finally tries to express this affection, this is a sly piece of narration with a plot that creeps along and gradually builds to a witty, jet-black denouement. Every bit as flamboyant, Sarah Hall's "She Murdered Mortal He" is an even more memorable literary hybrid of this kind. Brimming with strange characters and enigmatic images, it weaves its spell with great elegance and accomplishes one of the hardest tasks a writer can set themselves – to conjure up a convincing dreamscape.

A hypnotic, disorientating piece, Julie Otsuka's "Diem Perdidi" darts back and forth in time as its narrator's splintered memory moves in and out of focus, leaving the reader to fill in the tantalising blanks in her father's stories and her own. It also asks the intriguing question of whether unimaginable horror is something that human beings might be capable of forgetting. "Brass", by Joy Williams, has a similarly light touch and is also open to all kinds of interpretations but overall works less well, remaining too vague and impressionistic to capture one's interest fully. Nevertheless, it is a fine example of the suburban Gothic and a queasy glimpse beneath the bland surface of everyday life.

"The Colonel's Son", a wickedly effective little story by the late Roberto Bolaño, follows the twisting plot of an imaginary Mexican zombie movie and it is a tale with more than a whiff of Quentin Tarantino about it. Hinging upon our collective pleasure at seeing zombies butchered on the cinema screen, it then interchanges these metaphorical representatives of Otherness with real social and political outcasts. Bolaño's message, that mindless violence is always unacceptable and the entertainment industry should never encourage unthinking hate, is a valid one which he delivers with much linguistic liveliness.

Don DeLillo, the foremost chronicler of Post-War American alienation and paranoia, might seem an odd name to appear in a book of horror writing and yet his story, "The Starveling", is the most quietly horrific and unsettling one in this volume. The tale of a lonely man's obsessive quest to learn the identity of a strange woman he sees in the cinema, the piece uses anorexia as a powerful metaphor for a contemporary culture in which people are literally starving themselves of human contact. Every bit as grim and troubling as it sounds, "The Starveling" overflows with DeLillo's trademark morbid humour. The beauty and precision of his prose are as

breath-taking as ever and almost every paragraph reinforces his status as one of America's greatest living writers.

Moving from fiction to non-fiction, *Granta 117: Horror* features two pieces of war reportage. "The Mission" is Tom Bamforth's account of working with those displaced by the conflict in Darfur, and at times reads like some ghastly piece of surrealism. Finding himself in "a landscape of unparalleled bleakness" (p.96), Bamforth tries, and admittedly fails, to make sense of such sights as a child soldier brandishing a rocket launcher while an ancient donkey caravan begins a daily twelve-hour round trip simply to procure water. "Deng's Dogs" is Santiago Roncagliolo's brief and bloody history of the Shining Path, a league of Peruvian Maoists and one of the most brutal guerrilla forces in Latin America. What makes both of these pieces so shocking is not just the fact that they take us into societies where violence and murder have become perfectly common, but also their depiction of the international community as utterly disinterested in the plight of the unfathomable number of innocent people caught up in the bloodshed.

The first of three autobiographical essays included in *Granta 117: Horror*, Mark Doty's "Insatiable" is an intriguing discussion of the self-destructive urge whose point of departure is the famous exchange of letters between Walt Whitman and Bram Stoker. Having been a drug addict and a keen participant in some of the more dangerous varieties of sex for many years, Doty is led to ponder whether his own overpowering desire to keep putting himself in these situations, to test the limits of his physical and mental being continually, is akin to the kind of desire which Stoker imagined as the driving force and the allure of the vampire Count. Could it be, Doty asks, that in actuality vampirism is but "a matter of the overly self-conscious being awakened into life by the vitality of those who are barely self-conscious at all?" (p.204)

Doty believes that what both Whitman and Stoker really wrote about was "the intersection of the chosen and the compulsive, of consuming and being consumed" (p.205). The difference, as he sees it, is that, whereas Whitman celebrated this view of human nature, Stoker became so repulsed by his own secret longing to give way to it that he projected it "onto a horrifying sub-human or post-human creature, who has no firm foundation in biology, but must feed off the juices of others, without choice or sunlight" (p.204). It is an interesting argument and a brave essay, but one cannot but

feel that it is undermined by Doty's leaping to some massive conclusions based on what was an extremely brief correspondence.

Granta 117: Horror's two standout contributions, however, are Paul Auster's "Your Birthday Has Come and Gone" and Will Self's "False Blood." A reminiscence of his charming but unbalanced mother, Auster's piece begins with her sudden death. This leads him to confront an aspect of his own personality that has never worried him before – the fact that every time a significant member of Auster's family died, he never felt the need to cry. Numb from shock and exhausted by the task of putting his mother's estate in order, Auster suffers a panic attack. He is then forced to re-examine the years he shared with her, asking some painful questions about her precarious mental health and the degree to which he may have inherited some of her less desirable traits. An extremely moving treatment of loss and the imminence of our mortality, Auster's essay also manages to be unexpectedly and consistently hilarious.

Another powerful contemplation of the fragility of life, Will Self's essay "False Blood" is the most genuinely horrifying contribution to *Granta 117: Horror*. This is because its subject is the ultimate nightmare; what happens when our bodies turn against us. Self is the first to admit that he has not treated his own body with much kindness and relates, in stomach-churning detail, how more than thirty years of drug, alcohol and tobacco addiction have managed to deplete his health. What Self was not prepared for was the sudden transformation of his hands into bright red, lobster-like claws. A blood test leads to a diagnosis of *Polycythaemia vera*, a rare form of blood cancer. What can be done, he asks, when one's very life blood turns renegade?

The short-term answer, and a more Gothic one can scarcely be imagined, is that Self must be bled, and he begins having two pints extracted every week. A long-term solution proves more elusive and Self is plunged into a seemingly endless cycle of hospital visits, consultations and referrals, all of which he records in his own inimitably dry, laser-beam-precise style. The hours spent in drab waiting rooms and grubby corridors, the whole loathsome business of sickness, agonised uncertainty and gradual recovery is described with such alarming, detached wit and cruel honesty that you can hardly believe Self is writing about his own condition. Indeed, it's ironic that these pieces, by far the most clearly written and harrowing in this collection, should be by Auster and Self, two novelists constantly attacked for being pretentious and

tricky, show-offs whose books play clever games to hide their emotional emptiness.

While it is fantastic to see the genre treated so well, *Granta 117: Horror* nonetheless provokes some troubling questions about its future. Does this distinguished collection suggest that horror has become too fashionable and, even more worrying, too respectable? If the genre is so common and its conventions so overfamiliar to readers, is it possible that it has lost its radical spirit, the subversive streak that gives the great works of horror their ultimate power? Fortunately, by the time you've finished this collection, such worries fade away, for if *Granta 117: Horror* confirms anything, it is that we need a vastly expanded set of critical equipment if we are going to keep pace with horror's own expansion as an art form. Horror is something as unique to each author, and each reader, as their own dreams and nightmares, and now that publishers seem to be positively encouraging writers to venture into the darkest regions of their imaginations, we can look forward to having countless new worlds of horror to explore.

Edward O'Hare

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Graham Tugwell, ***Everything is Always Wrong***
(Dublin: Independent Publishing Network, 2013)

Seduction by a sluttish crab ("Pleon, telson rubbing" (p.18))… Friendless schoolboys plotting to get rid of the least befriendable of them all… Desecration of Catholic monuments, egged on by Daniel O'Connell, ideological founder of modern Ireland… Further seduction, this time by a woman who has chosen to have her neck turned into knives… A man who paints house doors red to warn his town of the "wrong" that has been unleashed behind them.

The five stories collected in Graham Tugwell's debut collection of horrific tales are introduced by three rules:

1) There is no God.
2) Love is Impossible.
3) The Universe is Malign. (p.3)

Tugwell's characters, however, are either unaware of these rules or refuse to believe in them: those who do dare to hope for happiness or peace or goodness are ruthlessly undeceived. Be this as it may, it is their futile attempts at defiance that give these tales their animating tension. The typical Tugwell protagonist is characterised by a terrible naïve sincerity that makes us, as readers, care about what happens to them, but which is also, ultimately, more ruinous than any of the terrible things they encounter. It is Darren, the pathetic lover in "Romancing the Crab", and not his crustacean paramour, who is unable to come out of his shell. Within the world of the story, what is wrong with him is less that he desires a crab than that he actually believes himself to be in love, and is therefore utterly exploitable. He is unprepared, for example, for the possibility that he might have a rival in his affections. The narrator of "High Five, Danny O'C", meanwhile, is self-evidently deluded – his account is even punctuated by Wikipedia-style insertions stating "[*citation needed*]" (p.39) – but, because *he* believes so wholeheartedly in the truth of the story he tells, he is pitiful, and the punishment that awaits him seems disproportionate. And the ersatz-twee beginning to "They've Come To Paint The Doors Again", in which a kettle rumbles and bubbles "happily to itself" (p.56), serves only to exacerbate the despair that follows, that kettle becoming, in retrospect, a portent of the fate of the story's victims, who are destroyed by the "wrong" that is bursting to get out of them.

Tugwell's parochial Gothic owes debts to Edgar Allan Poe, H.P. Lovecraft, and Terry Pratchett, while the wordplay and the satire of small-town Ireland are unmistakably both Joycean and Beckettian. Each piece can be read, in one respect, as a study in closed-mindedness – or rather of the cost of trying to escape closed-mindedness. It is imagination – the ability to fall in love with someone or something that one shouldn't fall in love with, to make imaginary friends, or to question the established order – that is punished above all else. The bullying, disappointed love, exploitation, and fear of sex that mark the stories are all symptoms of the failure to defy an entrenched set of very local expectations. Read allegorically, the collection can be seen as a critique of a stifling and impoverished contemporary Irish moment.

Tugwell is well versed in standard tropes of psychological horror: the crab and the knife-necked woman, for instance, represent strains of *vagina dentata* that have taken over the entire female body, to the extent that any contact at all brings with it the threat of castration. "We Left Him With The Dragging Man", meanwhile – the

most frightening of the stories gathered here – relies for its effects upon suggestion and suspense. The Dragging Man himself, and the things that he has done, are hinted at rather than described, but the story's real queasiness lies in its twist: the recognition that the Dragging Man – who, living without hands or feet in a ruined house, is so *manifestly* "wrong" – is less horrific and damaged than the "brown-haired and blue-eyed" (p.27) boy who is left with him. This story and "High Five, Danny O'C" are Tugwell's most developed in terms of plot and characterisation. You think that they are winding back to an original starting point, only for them to take a further unexpected – and invariably unhappy – twist. "Romancing the Crab" and "Unskin Me With Your Neck of Knives", are less narrative-driven. The latter especially is a set piece without plot and, though still discomfiting, consequently forgoes some of the tension that impels the others.

Everything is Always Wrong is both macabre and funny in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable about laughing: Danny O'C's attempt to put a bra on a Jesus monument is a typically blasphemous bit of slapstick, the eventual outcome of which is fatal. But the collection's most remarkable quality is how adeptly Tugwell juggles conflicting tones and how economically he sketches his scenes of ruin. His paragraphs are typically a single sentence long, rarely more than three. This can be frustrating: justifiably parodic though it may be of bad porn scenes, the panting dialogue of "Unskin Me With Your Neck of Knives" refuses to let us encounter anything of the characters' interiority. This may well be the point, but it gives the reader too little to care about, as the disjointed dialogue makes clear:

> "*I've always…*"
> "*Wanted…*"
> "*This…*" (p.51)

and

> "And it hurts you?"
> "*Agony.*"
> "*Like I'm breathing fire.*"
> "*In.*"
> "*And out.*" (p.52)

Elsewhere, however, a single sentence or even word is enough for Tugwell to define a character or destroy their dreams. Of Alby Gorman, the terrifying bully of "We Left Him With the Dragging Man", we learn: "He lived with his grandmother and little sister until, one day he lived with just his grandmother" (p.27). And reticence bears the emotional weight at the climax of "They've Come To Paint The Doors Again". "'Go *home*, Tom'" (p.63), the door painter's superior tells him – but at a point at which "home" has lost all association with comfort, solace, or rest.

The pared-down style often blooms into a lyricism that seems incongruous for such gruesome subject matter. At the climax of "We Left Him With The Dragging Man", for example, the assonantal and alliterative inflections of "Blood gushes and Kevin collapses and Tommy is softly sick through threaded fingers" (p.34) belie a tenderness that only makes the despair (despite the hilarity) worse. Form and content thus prove inextricable, while perhaps Tugwell's greatest strength is his refusal to give us the get-out clause of reading his stories as mere fantasy. The horror always seems to come from within his characters. In "They've Come To Paint The Doors Again", without ever stating it, Tugwell insinuates that Tom, the door-painter, might himself be unwittingly responsible for his daughter's affliction. And in trying to deal with the problem of Alby Gorman, the four boys in "We Left Him With The Dragging Man" succeed only in unleashing their own murderous impulses. Their grief is real and there is no redemption.

The stories collected here are only a sample from an output of over a hundred. A stage adaptation of "High Five, Danny O'C", performed with Tugwell's own "Risky Proximity Players", was well received in March. More recently, three further versions of other Tugwell stories have been unsettling audiences as part of the *10 Days in Dublin* festival. Presumably Tugwell hopes, in due course, to gather all of these pieces into a single *magnum opus*. For the time being, however, *Everything Is Always Wrong* should convince readers as to whether or not they dare venture any further into the unhappy world he has created – and I would (cautiously) recommend that they do.

Alexander Runchman

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Books Received

David Aldrich, *Framing the Dark: Dread by Design in Motion Pictures* (Dal LaMagna Publishing, 2009)

Jennifer Brown, *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012)

Erik Butler, *Metamorphoses of the Vampire in Literature and Film: Cultural Transformations in Europe, 1732-1933* (Camden House, 2010)

Alan Corbett, *Ghost of Shandon* (Cork: Onstream Publishing, 2012)

Matthew J.A. Green, *Alan Moore and the Gothic Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013)

Steve Jones, *Torture Porn: Popular Horror after Saw* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013)

S. T. Joshi and Steven J. Mariconda, *Dreams of Fear: Poetry of Terror and the Supernatural* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2013)

Jim Kelly, *Charles Maturin: Authorship, Authenticity and the Nation* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2011)

Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben (eds), *Neo-Victorian Gothic: Horror Violence and Degeneration in the Re-imagined Nineteenth Century* (New York; Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2012)

Muireann Maguire (trans.), *Red Spectres: Russian 20th Century Tales of the Supernatural* (London: Angel Books, 2012)

David Neal, *Chosen* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012)
Kim Paffenroth and John W. Morehead (eds), *The Undead and Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012)

David Sandner, *Critical Discourses of the Fantastic 1712-1831* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011)

Bram Stoker, *The Lady of the Shroud*, Sarah E. Maier (ed.) (Richmond, VA: Valancourt Books, 2012)

Dara Waldron, *Cinema and Evil: Moral Complexities and the "Dangerous" Film* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013)

Mark Valentine, *Selected Stories* (Dublin: The Swan River Press, 2012)

The Green Book: Writings on Irish Gothic, Supernatural and Fantastic Literature, Issue 1, Bealtaine 2013 (Dublin: The Swan River Press, 2013)

Zombies Hi, Issues 1-7 (Derry: Uproar Comics, 2011-2012)

FILM REVIEWS

Melancholia **(Dir. Lars von Trier)** Denmark/Sweden/France/Germany 2011
Zentropa Entertainments

To describe *Melancholia* as a film about the relationship between two sisters, at a wedding where things go disastrously but hilariously wrong, is to make it sound like a chick flick. To describe it as a film about the end of the world is to make it sound like a disaster movie. To describe it as a film about depression might just make it sound like a film nobody would want to watch. Happily, it is none of these films: it is a bizarre, glorious combination of all three.

The film is divided into two parts. The first focuses on a young bride, Justine (Kirsten Dunst), who is suffering a relapse of depression on her wedding day. Her inability to enter fully into the rituals of the day (guessing how many beans are in the jar, cutting the cake, the first dance) highlights the unreal nature of the wedding, while jarring discrepancies remind viewers that we are watching a film (Justine, her sister and both her parents all have different accents – the actors' own). The outrage expressed by the wedding planner (cult horror actor Udo Kier, in a star turn) at Justine's refusal to stay put and stick to the schedule provides some of the funniest moments in a film full of deliciously black humour: "She ruin my wedding – I will not look at her!" Von Trier has suggested that the wedding is a ritual into which Justine forces herself, only to find it to be empty; certainly, the confusion of the wedding planner and the guests at this wedding-without-a-bride, and the incongruity of Justine's exploits as the bride-without-a-wedding (urinating on the golf course, taking a bath while still wearing her veil) do point to a degree of artificiality around the event. The dissonance and futility of this most human of ceremonies is played out against the backdrop of an impending event which threatens to make everything meaningless: a giant planet named Melancholia is on a collision course with Earth.

The second half of the film takes place some time later, on the same estate, which is owned by Justine's sister Claire (Charlotte Gainsbourg, also seen in von Trier's 2009 film, *Antichrist*) and her husband John (Kiefer Sutherland). Justine arrives by taxi from elsewhere, and John and the butler travel in and out of town, but it gradually becomes clear that the women are, for some reason, trapped on this estate. Justine's horse refuses to cross a bridge, and later, when Claire tries to drive away,

her car will not start and her golf cart stalls. They are effectively imprisoned in the large, gloomy house, with its gardens full of eerie topiary. So, rather than showing us a city full of people reacting to the threat of the approaching planet, as in some of the big-budget disaster movies of the last few years, von Trier limits the action to an isolated country estate, and the relationship between the two sisters becomes the emotional focus of the film. For them, the estate is the world, and as Melancholia approaches, there is no escape.

At this point, Justine's perfect husband (played by Alexander Skarsgård, notable as one of the sexy vampires in HBO's *True Blood* [2008-present]) and perfect job are both gone, and all the fight has gone out of her. Claire's attempts to make Justine feel better fall flat: she runs a bath into which Justine is physically unable to lift herself; a favourite home-cooked meal turns to ashes in her mouth. The viewer simultaneously feels Justine's despair and Claire's enormous frustration. At one point, Claire tells Justine that she sometimes really hates her: a moment which speaks volumes about the limits to which the disease of depression can push those fated to observe but not experience it.

Various motives are suggested for Justine's outrageous behaviour (the most excessive instance of which is perhaps her sexual intercourse with another man on her wedding day): is she behaving this way because of her depression? Does her depression stem from her relationship with her parents (darkly comic monsters played by John Hurt and Charlotte Rampling)? Or is she more sensitive than others to the influence of the approaching Melancholia? The film has touches of realism which anyone with a loved one who suffers from depression will recognise: the smile that fails to reach Justine's dead eyes; her exhaustion. Both von Trier and Dunst have suffered from depression, and have spoken about bringing their real-life experiences to the film. For all that, however, depression, or melancholia, remains a mystical condition in this film: the dialogue between Justine and her mother on their shared gift of premonition suggests well-worn clichés of madness as a form of insight, of the mad being somehow saner than the sane. As the planet gets closer, it is Claire and John who crumble, and Justine who takes charge. Allusions to artistic works throughout the film remind us of the creativity possible at the juncture of desire, madness, and death: the striking image of Justine in her wedding dress floating in water is reminiscent both of Millais's *Ophelia* and of the work behind that, *Hamlet*.

Soaring above it all are the longing strains of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*: here too are layers of meaning. Wagner's work remains controversial – is it acceptable art or Nazi art? – while von Trier was declared *persona non grata* at the 2011 Cannes film festival after an apparently pro-Nazi outburst. The infamous Tristan chord, which appears at the beginning of Wagner's opera, sets up a desire for a consummation which will only be satisfied at its end. *Melancholia*'s opening montage shows the meeting of Earth and Melancholia, and the recurrence of the Tristan chord at various points throughout the film ratchets up the tension as we wait for this consummation. The other long-awaited meeting is the one between Justine and oblivion: like Melancholia, hurled toward Earth by the death of its star, Justine has lost an anchor of meaning and worth in this world, and for her its end can only be a good thing.

Whether you are drawn in by the story and the sisters, or irritated beyond measure by them, the film leads you to its only possible conclusion: to the desire for it to be over. The ending, when it comes, is something of an anticlimax. We have been worked up to wish for the end of the world, and all that happens is the end of a film. We stumble out of the cinema into the sunshine, take a deep breath, and try to decide whether or not to be glad that we are still here.

Ruth Doherty

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The Raven (Dir. James McTeigue) USA 2012,
FilmNation Entertainment/Intrepid Pictures

Edgar Allan Poe's life and legacy have inspired a myriad of works, including Louis Bayard's novel *The Pale Blue Eye* (2006) and DC Comics' *Batman: Nevermore* (2003). As early as 1915, filmmakers were integrating Poe as a character into their projects. These and other fictionalised accounts of Poe's life often mix reality with characters from his stories and the author's presumed detective skills. The 2012 film *The Raven* follows this tradition neatly. The famous "lost days" just before Poe's death are shrouded in mystery, thereby providing the perfect backdrop for this type of story. There are many gaps in the history of Poe's demise, which allows *The Raven* to

delve into a modern Gothic version of what could have happened, although many details do deviate from known reality.

The movie tells how Poe, played by John Cusack, is roped into helping a local police officer, Detective Fields (Luke Evans), unravel the mystery of a series of murders that appear to be inspired by the writer's grisliest stories. Soon he becomes personally involved, when the murderer kidnaps Poe's young love, Emily Hamilton (Alice Eve), with the promise that she will die if they do not find the perpetrator in time. The killer leaves behind clues related to the girl and to Poe's writing that should eventually lead them to him.

Naturally, it helps to be familiar with Poe's stories in order to appreciate this film fully. Having read most of his stories already, I recognised the scene from "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" before anybody in the movie made a connection: two women brutally killed inside a room with a locked door and a sealed window, one body stuffed up the chimney with amazing force. Only gradually does Fields perceive the parallels between this first crime and Poe's writing. The viewer's ability to pinpoint references gives a little thrill each time another detail is spotted. "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Masque of the Red Death" also make appearances; conversely, Poe's raving in the pub about his recently published poem "The Raven" seems a little forced, not to mention irrelevant to the rest of the film. Its only merit is that it may work to establish character for those unfamiliar with Poe's purported reputation as a troublemaker. Overall, the title's relationship to the plot is unclear, but perhaps the intention was simply to entice the audience with a reference to Poe's most famous piece.

In this film, we find many Gothic tropes, but often with a modern twist. There is a clear focus on death with an underlying question of what is and is not real, all immersed in a thoroughly constructed dramatic atmosphere. However, in this filmic adaptation, the traditional "virginal maid" is less of an "innocent", as the character Emily is clearly involved in a sexual liaison with the writer. On the other hand, she does not seem to stray too far from Gothic norms. She is in many ways the "damsel in distress" who needs her hero (Poe) to rescue her in the end. She is also the daughter of Captain Hamilton (Brendan Gleeson), a member of the upper classes – a familial relationship which holds true to the Gothic mode. That being said, the Gothic often incorporates elements of secrecy with regards to parentage, but here there are no

lingering secrets about Emily's family. Instead, scriptwriters Ben Livingston and Hannah Shakespeare use secrecy in a different way, having Emily and Poe hide their relationship from her parents. As a whole, the film lacks the supernatural element which would be expected of Poe's tales, and instead, the creators decided to implement a more restricted imagined universe, abundant in mysteries which are ultimately resolved at the end, detective-style.

Clearly, Emily's character represents the real-life Sarah Elmira Royster, a young woman who was taken away from Poe by her father to marry another man. Years later, following the death of her father, their renewed relationship led Poe to ask for her hand in marriage on several occasions. She refused every time. In the movie, though, it is Emily who pushes a grudging Poe to propose to her, a twist used to enhance the effect of his loss and guilt when she is kidnapped by the criminal.

As the story unfolds, Poe willingly takes on the role of hero, even though it seems contrary to his troublemaking nature. Scott Peeples, English professor at Charleston College, has discussed Poe's heightened sense of self-importance, as well as his propensity for consuming too much alcohol ("Edgar Allan Poe Expert Comments on *The Raven*", http://news.cofc.edu/2012/04/27/edgar-allan-poe-expert-comments-on-the-raven). However, the film portrays Poe as more confident than he allegedly was, according to Peeples. Toward the end, the writer puts himself at risk and goes as far as to drink poison to ensure Emily's safety, knowingly causing his own death to save his love.

The story deviates most obviously from reality toward the end. There is a lack of legitimate information as to what Poe did in the last few days of his life, but some of the circumstances under which he was at last found and his behaviour before dying have been documented, albeit unreliably. Given the right to do so, the movie takes some liberties with this information in the name of dramatic effect and viewers get the full benefit of this deft combination of realistic possibility and absolute invention.

On 3 October 1849, Poe was found in Baltimore in a state of "great distress", according to Joseph W. Walker, the man who found him. Poe allegedly repeated the name "Reynolds" during his last night alive, a notion taken up to great effect in the final moments of the movie (here lies another point of contention for those familiar with the true story, for it actually took him four days to expire after he was picked up). Speculation has trampled all over any possible truth-finding efforts in regard to

the cause of Poe's death or who Reynolds really was, which once again enables the filmmakers to use their own imaginations to wrap up their tale. In *The Raven*'s version of Poe's demise, the hero raises his face to the sky and murmurs, "Lord help my poor soul". Although real-life accounts vary on this point, Dr. John Joseph Moran did initially report this sentence as Poe's last words. Whether true or not, Cusack brings a dark emotionality to the scene and the words offer a sense of redemption for a troubled, unsettled life. By giving up his life for Emily, Poe gives viewers a chance to forgive his history of drinking and fighting, as shown early on in the movie.

With its Gothic subversion of widely accepted fact, *The Raven* is compelling, as it fires the imagination for those familiar with Poe's mysterious death. Cinematographic choices like dark lighting portray the gritty underbelly of Baltimore, sweeping us along from the newspaper office where Poe's work was published, to the tunnels under the city and back again. It is a worthwhile thriller in its own right, whether or not the viewer is a fan of Poe's work or historical fiction. What the movie lacks in accuracy, it makes up for in emotionality. It is a "What if?" exploration of Poe's lost days that upholds and also plays with standard Gothic tropes and the tradition of incorporating Poe's written material into his own life.

Marek Lewandowski

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The World's End (**Dir. Edgar Wright**) UK 2013
Universal Pictures

Several issues ago, I started putting together the idea for a review (never finished) of the Gothic and horror-inflected collaborations of Edgar Wright (as director and co-writer) and Simon Pegg (as co-writer and star), to mark the release of *Hot Fuzz*, the second instalment of what's variously termed the "Three Flavours Cornetto" or the "Blood and Ice Cream" Trilogy. That trilogy has now been completed with the release of *The World's End*, in which Wright, Pegg and many of their usual cohorts (in particular, Nick Frost) pay homage this time to the science-fiction genre. Yet it's another hybrid tale, which draws on a classic Gothic/horror sci-fi trope – body-snatching and mind control. In *The World's End* a group of friends reunite and try to complete the pub crawl they first attempted as teenagers twenty years before, the

culmination of which is the apocalyptic-sounding "World's End" pub, only to discover that their home town has been overtaken by alien-controlled robots. Like the teenage versions of the protagonists who never made it all the way to the "World's End", then, I may never have completed the original review, but like the grown-up versions of those protagonists, it's time – at last – to finish what I started.

From their first collaborations for television on *Asylum* (1997) and *Spaced* (1999-2001) to their now-complete cinematic trilogy (*Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *Hot Fuzz* (2007) and this year's *The World's End*), Wright and Penn – along with a stable of regular co-stars – have gleefully pastiched and paid affectionate homage to a range of genres (also appearing in cameo roles in George A. Romero's *Land of the Dead* in 2005). The rom-zom-com of *Shaun of the Dead* may have been their most direct foray into the horror world, but across their body of work as a whole, Gothic/horror themes and tropes abound, beginning with the surreal Gothic setting of the show on which they first worked together. Directed and written by Wright but co-written by David Walliams, and first screened on Paramount Comedy Channel in 1997, *Asylum* was loosely centred on the false imprisonment of a hapless pizza delivery boy (Pegg) in the titular institution, which is run by authorities whose own sanity is constantly in question; his fellow inhabitants included future *Mighty Boosh* player Julien Barrett and Jessica Hynes *née* Stevenson. Next up was the stand-up/sketch show *Is it Bill Bailey* (1998), with Wright again on directorial duties and Pegg as one of the featured actors, but things really took off with *Spaced*, with Pegg and Hynes as co-writers and co-stars. Over the course of its two series, *Spaced* openly referenced Gothic/horror texts throughout – most obviously in the sequence in which a strung-out and hallucinating Tim (Pegg) envisions himself fighting zombie hordes while playing *Resident Evil* (a sequence which famously provided the impetus for *Shaun* in the first place).

But there were other nods – in the establishing shot of the house in which much of the show takes place (which clearly recalled the Bates Motel in Hitchcock's *Psycho* [1960]); in the repressed memories and flashbacks that haunt several of the main characters; and in sight gags and parodies galore, which included references to *The Shining* (1980), *The Omen* (1976), *The Sixth Sense* (1999), and both *Evil Dead* (1981) and *Evil Dead II* (1987). And *Hot Fuzz*, in which uptight policeman Nicholas Angel (Pegg) is sent to the sleepy rural location of Sandford where he uncovers the

dark secrets that lurk beneath the idyllic "Village of the Year", may have presented itself as a paean to action cinema, but it owed as much to *The Wicker Man* (1973) as it did to *Bad Boys II* (2003). It also boasted a slasher-subplot that at times referenced famous horror-movie deaths (in particular in one churchyard death that clearly recalled *The Omen*). These links seemed to be further underlined by the fact that horror icons such as Edward Woodward and Billie Whitelaw were cast in supporting roles. Unsurprisingly, then, *The World's End* turns its comedic eye to another hybrid form with Gothic/horror undertones – a dystopian science-fiction tale about conformity and apocalypse on both a personal and global scale.

As *The World's End* opens, Gary King (Pegg) sits in a group therapy session, reminiscing about the failed attempt to complete the pub-crawl known as the "Golden Mile" that he and his teenage friends made on the night that they finished school. Soon, he sets about getting the gang back together – Oliver (Martin Freeman), Peter (Eddie Marsden), Steven (Paddy Considine) and Andrew (Nick Frost). All have now grown up and grown apart from Gary's man-child, having tired of his ways and irresponsibility years before (in particular Frost's character), but reluctantly make their way back to Newton Haven for the ill-fated reunion. Along the way, they also bump into Oliver's sister Sam (Rosamund Pike), the object of both Gary's and Steven's teenage (and continued) lust. The early scenes of this awkward reunion establish the radically altered nature of the friendships involved, and the various attitudes that each man has developed in the process of growing older – Gary seeing his friends settling into mundane middle-aged, middle-England lives, them seeing him as deluded in his refusal to do so. The town, too, has changed, its collection of generic pubs and public spaces anticipating the broader and more overtly sinister type of conformity to which its inhabitants have succumbed, at the hands of the alien force that now controls the town – and which Gary King and co must attempt to evade.

In depicting Newton Haven as a homogenised space, *The World's End* echoes themes that recur also within *Shaun of the Dead* and *Hot Fuzz*. In the former, a zombie outbreak initially goes unnoticed because the zombies don't actually look or act all that differently from a "normal" population so subdued and deadened by the routines of modern life that they fail to notice what's going on around them (and by the end of the film, the survivors will have settled back down into a modified version of this pre-zombie "normal" life). *Hot Fuzz* boasts a (both literal and figurative)

Model Village, and a Neighbourhood Watch Alliance that goes to murderous lengths to maintain Sandford's "Village of the Year" status – cleansing the streets of jugglers, living statues, hoodies and anyone else who fails to conform (or who stumbles upon their plot) "for the greater good". In different ways, too, the earlier films engage with ideas about growing up, and settling down, most clearly in the case in *Shaun of the Dead*. Whereas Shaun starts the film faced with choosing between a life with his slacker best friend Ed (Frost) or his girlfriend Liz (Kate Ashfield), who wants him to wise up and commit to her, in the end he's allowed both (keeping the now-zombie Ed chained up in the garden shed, permanently on-call to play computer games). In *The World's End*, we seem to encounter older, more extreme versions of these characters, but with the situations apparently reversed – Frost as the "sensible" one who has accepted responsibility and Pegg as the ne'er-do-well, a man so hell-bent on getting his old friends to go along with his plans that he dupes them into believing that he's just lost his mother to cancer, and thus merits their sympathy and support.

Gary's insistence on completing the "Golden Mile" drives the narrative – but it turns out that it is a different kind of failed attempt entirely that has compelled him to do so (remember the film opens with Gary in therapy). By reassembling his old friends and attempting to complete what he sees as unfinished business, he is not just attempting to recapture past glories – he is also attempting to establish some kind of purpose in his life. The scene in which this becomes apparent – and in which Andrew and Gary both realise the secrets that each has been concealing from the other – gives rise to one of those genuinely affecting moments that this collection of films (and *Spaced* too) have always done so well, amidst all the pastiche, homage and frenetic camera-work. It still brings a tear to my eye when Mike (Frost) sacrifices himself in a game of 'Nam-inspired paintball and "dies" in *Spaced*; or when Shaun and his step-dad Philip (Bill Nighy) share a brief moment of connection before the latter succumbs to a zombie bite. And don't get me started on what happens with Shaun's mum Barbara, played by Penelope Wilton, or Shaun's plaintive "I don't know if I have it in me to shoot my mum, my flat-mate and my girlfriend all in the same evening".

Inevitably, the latest film will send fans back to the earlier texts, just as I've done here, to find the kinds of self-referential links and echoes across all three that might be expected – the running gag (amended on each occasion) in which Pegg jumps a backyard fence; the cameos from familiar faces; the reverence paid to the

local pub as a site of security and camaraderie. There's always the danger that this might turn into self-indulgence, but here it seems to serve a thematic purpose, and is in keeping with Gary's own insistence throughout on looking back. To some extent, the main character himself embodies the very idea of self-indulgence, because of his apparently relentless insistence on clinging to past glories and perceived refusal to grow up. But despite Gary's initial abrasiveness and bull-headed insistence on pursuing his quest, the film doesn't damn him, not least because it's his actions that manage to expose the extent of the conformity-horror that has taken hold. Nor, I think, does it join him in wallowing too much in an attempt to recapture past glories at the expense of moving on.

SPOILER BEGINS Crucially, when Gary is faced with the option of succumbing to the aliens' plans, and is actually given the chance to be remodelled as a robotic version of the youth that he has glorified all along, he ultimately declines. In doing so, he refuses to conform, but is also allowed to accept that he has grown older without having to follow the various routes his school-friends have taken. The film ultimately resolves itself (in a well-observed and brilliantly realised coda) by allowing each of its characters to revert to the paths they had chosen in life (albeit modified for a post-apocalyptic world), suggesting that each lifestyle choice is, in the end, valid, and each brings with it its own rewards and challenges. Admittedly, a couple of them have been turned into robots by the end, but they're still in a position to resume (and rebuild) the lives they had been living previously, reintegrating into a post-apocalyptic society in which the lines between the "blanks" (as they're called) and the norms is not actually all that clear-cut. Rather than seeing this as a scathing indictment of dull, conformist middle-aged life and an all-out endorsement of Gary King's ideals, though, it seems to me that it suggests something more balanced, and potentially more bittersweet. In their own ways, each – Gary included – has chosen to conform to a particular set of ideals on their way to adulthood and middle age; and each of them is tasked now with at least recognising (and possibly accepting) the ways in which old friends may choose a different way of going about their lives, whether that is as (relatively) contented father and family man; corporate high-roller; or aging Goth. Gary is allowed retain this identity, then, still defining himself in terms of his past, teenage self in the closing scenes, and reasserting his role as the leader of a new gang – the robot versions of his old school-friends that have survived the

climactic apocalypse. But there are also indications that he's learned a thing or two. Early in the film, for example, he had scorned Andrew's sobriety (telling him that King Arthur didn't order waters at Camelot after winning the Battle of Hastings), but by the end, Gary King can walk into a pub and order five glasses of water. ***SPOILER ENDS***

In clinging to the past, Gary has actually been struggling to maintain a sense of identity, and the film ultimately rewards him with one. In the end, it seems, there *is* only one Gary King, but he does prove capable of change. By sticking with him to the bitter (or lager) end, *The World's End* brings about a resolution that is both satisfying and cathartic. What's more, it even grants him a memorable and strangely appropriate romantic sign-off to Sam, with whom he once shared a passionate teenage clinch in a disabled toilet in one of the pubs on the "Golden Mile" – as he wistfully tells her, "We'll always have the disableds".

There *is* something of an elegiac tone to all of this at times – the sense of an ending – and whereas *Spaced*, *Shaun* and *Hot Fuzz* all ended with reunions, this one starts with a reunion and (without giving too much away) ends with the characters apart again. In this, it parallels the filmmakers' own recent career trajectories. *The World's End* reunites them at a point at which each has already completed several separate projects – Wright with *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010) and the forthcoming *Ant-Man* (currently scheduled for release in 2015), Pegg as key player in two movie franchises (*Mission Impossible* and *Star Trek*), and as co-writer and co-star (with Frost) of *Paul* (2011). Gary's backward glance, then, is also the film's, and it seems significant that it begins in the same location as the first onscreen collaboration between Wright and Pegg (in an "asylum"), and ends with the characters poised to move on to new things.

But ultimately, *The World's End* is as much about beginnings as endings. The film may close, to some extent, at a new beginning, but it remains to be seen if it will give way to new collaborations between Wright, Penn and company. For now, though, happily, it's enough that they've brought this trilogy to a satisfying conclusion. And while it may be giving away too much to say that this is a film that briefly envisions a world without Cornettos – a horrifying prospect indeed – at least we'll always have the Cornetto trilogy.

Jenny McDonnell

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Snow White and the Huntsman (**Dir. Rupert Sanders**) USA 2012
Universal Pictures

We are, undoubtedly, in the midst of a fairy tale renaissance. We have been increasingly exposed to an array of texts that retell, reimagine, and revamp the fairy tale as we know it – with varying degrees of success. Within the last couple of years the likes of *Red Riding Hood* (2011), *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* (2013) and *Jack the Giant Slayer* (2013) have appeared in cinemas, while television shows such as *Grimm* (2011-present) and *Once Upon a Time* (2011-present) are both still running. Last year alone saw two blockbuster retellings of "Snow White", with Tarsem Singh's *Mirror Mirror* and Rupert Sanders' *Snow White and the Huntsman*. The former was met with generally scathing reviews, and so a second attempt at reviving this played-out tale seemed, to some, superfluous. But this, I argue, is far from the case.

Snow White and the Huntsman offers a rather loose interpretation of the "original" story. In Grimm, Snow White is only seven years old, though she is strangely (and not to mention disturbingly) deemed fit to wed her prince come the end of the tale. By contrast, in Sanders' retelling, Snow White is already an adult for the majority of the action. Such a change is accompanied, too, by more explicitly adult themes, resulting in a piece that is largely Gothic in tone. If several changes have been made to this tale, its core parts nonetheless remain the same. Again we find the magic mirror, the poisoned apple, the largely ineffectual men of the story, and at its centre what is, in essence, a bitter and highly sexualised rivalry between age and youth: between wicked stepmother and persecuted heroine.

This should have been a horror movie. At times, indeed, it comes tantalisingly close to being one, but is ultimately held back and confused by its more saccharine requisites. Firstly, Kristen Stewart is, perhaps unsurprisingly, a little lacklustre. With very few lines, she seems more of an *objet d'art* than anything else. Meanwhile, Chris Hemsworth (who some may know from 2012's *The Cabin in the Woods*) makes for a bearable, if not entirely convincingly Scottish, huntsman. Here the huntsman is the love interest, along with William, Snow White's childhood friend who seems to have been added solely for the purpose of recreating "that" love triangle (for which Stewart

was famed in *Twilight* and its sequels [2008-2012]). The customary dwarves undoubtedly add a little charm to the film, though the casting of non-dwarf actors (who had to be digitally reduced in size) caused considerable controversy among the Little People of America, with Warwick Davis weighing in with his opinion that the decision was "inexcusable". The lead dwarf (interestingly named after forest theorist John Muir) is unfortunately plagued by lines that are almost physically painful – he is the blind dwarf who can "see" with his heart once Snow White arrives, because she is so pure, so beautiful, and she "will heal the land" because she "*is life itself*".

It is in its Gothic aspects that the film finds its redemption. Visually, it is utterly stunning and its dark and fantastical imagery is hauntingly provocative. Indeed for me the highlight of this film lies in its depiction of the Dark Forest. Masterfully portrayed as a landscape of nightmares, the threatening environment of the fairy tale forest is not only recalled, but is quite literally brought to life. In a montage reminiscent of von Trier's *Antichrist* (2009), the forest becomes hideously animated. The suggestive shadows give way to a plethora of monstrous possibilities as the trees themselves writhe, scratch, grab, and seem to bleed.

No less unnerving are the villains of the piece, who seem themselves almost extensions of this hellish landscape. Sanders presents us with a more intricate picture of the infamous and cruel stepmother – here named Ravenna – who in this story is accompanied by her eerie and lascivious brother Finn. Incestuous undertones are rife in this dark coupling, but his desires have strayed too, it seems, to the young Snow White. We learn that he has spent years watching her in the cell to which she was banished as a child, forbidden to enter by his jealous sister. Snow White escapes upon his first ingress, after fearfully whispering "you've never come in before". As he sits threateningly at her side, the scene is uncomfortably suggestive of a perverted uncle visiting a child's bed. Sam Spruell gives a truly creepy performance as this loathsome monster that pursues the girl through the woods. His death is a particularly satisfying moment as he is brutally impaled upon an uprooted tree, leaving his sister alone to complete her bloody task.

Ravenna, of course, must kill Snow White. Charlize Theron makes for a genuinely frightening villain. In place of the simple, unquestioned evil of the fairy tale, this wicked stepmother is one who has also suffered at the hands of wickedness. In an intriguing twist, her immortal and cursed fate is of her mother's making: as a

child she was force-fed blood for beauty, and so surely had little chance of benevolence. We learn first of her evil in a scene that parallels the opening of *Basic Instinct* (1992). In bed with the king, she thrusts a sword through his chest, murdering him as she spits the words "men *use* women [...] when a woman stays young and beautiful forever, the world is hers". And so her curse is that she must forever eat the hearts of women and drain their youth in order to preserve her own. The patriarchal mirror defines her self-worth as "the fairest of them all" – a position unthreatened until her stepdaughter comes of age. (One childish observation is that it is a *little* hard to swallow Stewart's beauty as any real threat to Theron's...) Interestingly, it is hinted that the man from the mirror may be a mere figment of her imagination – a literal reflection of her own misandric madness. This woman has issues indeed and seems near-crippled by them for much of the narrative. When she finally confronts Snow White in the forest (a delayed move that is hard to justify – why, we must ask, did she not do so before?), she appears as a man, as the young William, and kisses Snow White before offering her the poisoned apple. This, in turn, has its desired effect. Snow White is killed and Ravenna promises portentously to "give this world the queen that it deserves". But we already know this story – and so we know that Snow White will reawaken and good will, of course, win out. Ravenna is killed and in death returns to her actual age: a shrivelled and pathetic old woman who spurs our involuntary sympathy. We are left desperately wanting to know more of her, but instead the focus predictably shifts to the "happily ever after".

The ending is unsatisfying, but a seeming requisite. Indeed the film's predominant fault is that is constrained by its form as a retelling. Nonetheless, it is a brave and thought-provoking adaptation that begins to explore the nasty underbelly of our folklore; I can only hope that it provokes more dark and disturbing fairy stories to come.

Elizabeth Parker

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Stoker (Dir. Park Chan-wook) UK/USA 2013
20th Century Fox

The opening shot of Stoker is a preview of its ending. The protagonist, India, strides into a patch of tall grass and wildflowers growing by the side of a road and pauses to reflect on her heritage: "Just as a flower does not choose its colour, we are not

responsible for what we have come to be. Only once you realise this do you become free. And to become adult, is to become free". It is only when the scene is revisited at the film's close that we attain a full understanding of the monologue's significance: the red and white mottled flower she pauses to contemplate is dyed with arterial spray, and just off-screen a county sheriff stumbles away from her, spluttering, with a pair of pruning shears planted deep in his neck. This is a very different kind of coming-of-age story: not a young woman's entrance into the wider world through the navigation of its complex social codes, but an embracing of her outsider status and murderous capabilities.

The story follows the eponymous Stoker family in the aftermath of the mysterious death of their patriarch, Richard (Dermot Mulroney), a tragedy which mars the eighteenth birthday celebrations of his devoted daughter, India (Mia Wasikowska). India's icy relationship with her queenly, socialite mother, Evelyn (Nicole Kidman), is further strained by the sudden arrival of Richard's estranged brother, Charlie (Matthew Goode), who takes up residence in the family home and begins to exert a demonic and seductive influence over the two women of the house.

As a tense and noirish thriller, the film pays homage to the work of Alfred Hitchcock. This is especially apparent in its employment of ironic, loaded dialogue: "I want to know my brother's wife", says Charlie in an off-handed way that almost plays as innocent; "too tannic", he says of a young wine, giving sour-faced India a sidelong, speculative glance. "Not ready to be opened." The plot directly echoes Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) in its premise of an inter-generational struggle between a homicidal monster and a plucky ingénue, yet that which serves as a grand finale for Hitchcock is, as the scriptwriter Wentworth Miller states in an interview for Collider.com, merely "a jumping off point" for Stoker. India suspects Charlie from the start, yet her dogged avoidance of her uncle in the early part of the film becomes an erotically charged fascination, and her repulsion is revealed to be rooted in recognition rather than fear. "Have you ever seen a photograph of yourself, taken when you didn't know you were being photographed?" she asks her soon-to-be first victim, reflecting on her newfound transgressive daring. "From an angle you don't get to see when you look in the mirror – and you think, 'that's me; that's also me'".

In fact, both are monsters, and Charlie and India intuit in one another the same inherited characteristics that mark them out as different. Neither can bear to be

touched (except, it seems, by one another); they both suffer from a synaesthetic hypersensitivity which makes the exterior world's colours and sounds brash and unbearable; they exhibit a predator's capacity for patience, watchfulness, and sudden violence. They are also ingénues, both at times betraying their lack of worldly experience: India, with her pale, floating dresses and flat, tomboyish shoes (later to be exchanged for vampish Christian Louboutins), still wanders around the house and grounds as if it is a private childhood kingdom. Charlie, we come to understand, has not been travelling in Europe for the past eighteen year as he initially claims, but residing in a mental institution (for burying his baby brother alive in a sandpit). He has mastered culture by correspondence course rather than by experience, and thus his urbane persona is as false as his slightly-too-dark tan, his travel stories pat and implausible.

The Stoker name is an obvious hat-tip to the godfather of the vampire genre, and hints of the Victorian Gothic persist throughout. Charlie exhibits vestigial vampiric qualities: he cooks lavish meals which he does not himself eat and he enters the film as a pillar of shadow atop a grave. In a playfully metatextual scene, India taunts her merry widow mother with her stated intention to follow to the letter her encyclopaedia's entry on nineteenth-century mourning practices: "What are you going to do today?" "I thought I'd... draw the curtains... stop the clocks... cover the mirrors... and then retire to my room". As in popular readings of Victorian Gothic, sex and death are twinned. Yet here the conventions of text and subtext have been switched: where in a Gothic narrative (such as a vampire story), the act of killing is covertly sensualised, and seen as at least partly representative of sublimated sexual desire, for India Stoker it is the solicitation of sex that is the cover act; her shameful, true desire that of wreaking death. This revelation plays out in a scene where uncle and niece enact a homicidal *ménage-à-trois* with a would-be date rapist, in which India lies beneath their struggling victim in the missionary position, and the snap of his neck stands in for climax.

In the grand tradition of the genre's earliest works, such as Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), the central looming and sinister presence in the narrative is a building. The architecture of the Stoker house is not "Gothic" in architectural terms, but a hybrid of Victorian institutional tiling and sweeping art-deco curves, with a smattering of tastefully crafted tchotchkes from the later twentieth century. These

disparate elements of interior design are united by the use of hyper-saturated colour –
entire rooms of regency green, soft-hued oriental bamboo or deep, blood red.
Although the house is not closed-off or remote, its timelessness (or, perhaps, out-of-
timeness) gives it a labyrinthine quality, implying that the central characters are
somehow confined within it until the inevitable, bloody resolution which breaks its
hold (at least on India). The Stoker house therefore fits John Clute's definition of a
Gothic "edifice" in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (John Clute and John Grant (eds.),
Orbit, 1997): "more than a house and less than a city […]; it is coextensive with the
mind of its builder or ruler [...]; it is alive; it occupies simultaneously the past, the
present and the future".

Trapping the characters in such a claustrophobic environment allows for
greater tension and increased audience focus on the performances of the three central
cast members. Kidman (*Moulin Rouge*; *The Others* [both 2001]) is a perfect choice
for the poised, beautiful-yet-brittle Evelyn. The preppy, clean-cut looks of Goode
(*Watchmen* [2009]) are somehow sinister, evocative of a boy playing at adult charm
and sexuality. Wasikowska (*Alice in Wonderland* [2010]; *Jane Eyre* [2011]) has a
quirky, odd-angled beauty and impassive facial expressions which make her both
captivating and believable in the role of nascent psychopath.

For horror aficionados, the biggest pull of Stoker is not its cast, but its
distinction of being the English-language debut of South Korean director Park Chan-
wook. Less shockingly gory than his self-written offerings such as the masterful
revenge tragedy *Oldboy* (2003) and offbeat take on the vampire myth, *Thirst* (2009),
Stoker nonetheless displays Park's highly stylised aesthetic, layered visual symbolism
and dark, absurdist humour, as well as his preoccupation with the themes of
sensuality, incest and revenge. Fans of Park's work will agree that none of his charm
has been lost in translation.

Kate Roddy

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Excision (Dir. Richard Bates Jr.) USA 2012
BXR Productions

Excision, based on the 2008 short film of the same name, is a contemporary twist on
the stereotypical teenage misfit movie, documenting the tumultuous life of the
protagonist Pauline (Annalyne McCord). *Excision* primarily scrutinises the twisted

realms of macabre fantasy occurring in Pauline's fragile teenage mind. The film addresses many of the darker aspects of confused adolescence in an unforgivingly direct fashion and openly examines issues that are often considered taboo such as disturbed youth, sexual desire, disease and even menstruation. *Excision* further accentuates many of these issues through a fetishised depiction of the macabre, most pointedly within a series of dream sequences. In structural terms, the film uses distinctive fantasy and reality segments, which are thematically interconnected. We are provided with contextual elements stemming from Pauline's "real-world" living situation with her parents and her critically ill sister Grace (Ariel Winter), who suffers from cystic fibrosis. This is paralleled with the horrific fantasy segments, into which Pauline retreats in response to the events occurring in her woeful everyday life, and in which she encounters and confronts the same themes and difficulties that she faces on a day-to-day basis. The intricate balancing act between the various degrees of strife in Pauline's immediate existence and the horrific fantasies occurring in her mind, positions *Excision* as one of the most memorable horror films in recent times.

The film's overall effectiveness lies in this division into two distinct but related sections. It employs an idiosyncratic visual style to provide an immediate contrast between these fantasy and reality segments. We are initially introduced to Pauline's fantasy-ridden dream sequences, which punctuate the film and include its clearest forays into horror (although this line is gradually blurred towards the end of the film, as fantasy inevitably transitions into the real world). In these sequences, there is an undeniable cinematographic flair evident from the start, as the film visually evokes the strong use of colouration in the work of directors such as Oliver Stone (*Natural Born Killers* [1994]) and Dario Argento (*Suspiria* [1977]). The immediate use of a surreal blue background in the film's opening segment, against which a bloody Pauline convulses, proves instantly striking. This soon gives way to a scene which offers a stark contrast, in the film's depiction of a typically suburban "reality". With it comes an introduction to the fraught relationship between Pauline and her mother (Traci Lords). This dynamic is subtly developed within this confined and conservative suburban setting. The often deadpan and black humour used in these scenes mocks the contradictions of the suburban world in which Pauline lives and knowingly subverts convention and societal norms. Lords, previously known for her work in the adult-film industry, is cast as an overtly religious and etiquette-conscious

mother, while John Waters (director of such notorieties as *Pink Flamingos* (1972) and *Cry Baby*, the 1990 film which saw Lords transition from adult film to mainstream cinema) plays the role of the local priest and Pauline's makeshift psychiatrist. The tongue-in-cheek mocking of religion in this fashion also serves as a device to bridge the gap between Pauline's horror-laden fantasies and the scenes of her domestic reality. Atheistic Pauline is also depicted in somewhat ironic real-world prayer sequences, which act as an open dialogue with, what is to her, a seemingly non-existent God. This in turn serves a dual purpose, providing insight into Pauline's future intentions (such as losing her virginity), as well as acting as a bridge between subsequent dream sequences, which visually narrate Pauline's aforesaid fantasies, of sex, and even abortion, after her pre-planned (real-world) intimate encounter with a classmate.

Excision's interweaving of macabre fantasy and harsh reality is especially commendable. It expertly weaves Cronenbergian surrealist horror with cutting black humour, yet doesn't allow this to distract from its central focus on the protagonist's compulsive behaviour and fixation. Fixation is indeed a highly prevalent theme within the movie. Pauline's bloodied imaginings are paralleled with her obsession with medicine, prompted by her sister Grace's fatal diagnosis with cystic fibrosis. The title of the film itself references the medical process which is literally defined as "the surgical removal of a foreign body or of tissue". The act of "excision" is also a recurring feature of the film, in both the fantasy and "real-life" sequences. It helps form a thematic connection between Pauline's surreal fantasies and her everyday life, as she tries to increase her prowess at medicine in a vain attempt to find a cure for her sister's condition.

Despite *Excision*'s tendency to focus on the use of exaggeration, we are also left with welcome lulls in between the often grotesque events which occur onscreen. Pauline's understated interactions with her sister serve as a means of humanising her abrasive personality, illustrating that her deluded attempts to cure Grace's condition have their origins in her love for her sister. Several small scenes portray Grace's cystic fibrosis treatment, and the effects that the disease has upon her psyche, presenting her as a sympathetic character and leading the viewer to hope that she may avoid a fate which is cleverly implied throughout the course of the film. As Pauline's situation gradually worsens, *Excision* constantly provides us with subtle clues in

reference to this inevitable fate. The film's horrific finale functions to elicit an emotional response from the audience – employing shock tactics through the use of an extremely graphic and sudden resolution of Pauline's internal conflict about her sister's illness.

Overall, creating a successful piece of cinema that deals with the broad range of issues which may be attributed to the stereotype of the traumatised adolescent is a huge ask. However, writer and director Richard Bates Jr. has effectively realised and amalgamated these themes on all fronts, and moreover, has interweaved them with a stylistically modernised interpretation of its aforementioned predecessors of the same genre. *Excision* sometimes shocks, sometimes incites laughter, and most importantly, draws a powerful connection between the genre of horror and a convincing character study, resulting in a highly credible piece of cinema. In order to appreciate fully the film's shockingly abrupt ending, though, it may be necessary to experience the film for a second time – thankfully, it bears, and rewards, repeated viewings.

Oisin Vink

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Maniac (**Dir. Franck Khalfoun**) USA/France 2012
La Petite Reine/Studio 37

Maniac (2012) is both a remake of the 1980 feature directed by William Lustig and co-written by/starring Joe Spinell, and a reimagining of the contemporary POV horror genre. Ultimately, it is an utterly different cinematic experience to each. The grindhouse spirit of the original is updated in a disconcerting grunge aesthetic, and fused with a simple yet effective cinematic device: all of the onscreen events are presented through the eyes of the serial killer, Frank (Elijah Wood). We witness him scalp his victims before attaching their scalps to the mannequins in the store formerly owned by his dead mother (a drug-addicted prostitute). The audience is presented with no cheap camera tricks or cliché horror tropes, in comparison to other attempts at the Point of View genre in recent offerings such as *Paranormal Activity* (2007) and the anthology film *V/H/S* (2012). We are, however, subjected to a visceral series of unembellished murders, scalpings and assorted knife crimes, depicted through a stylishly realised first-person narrative which does not allow the viewer any respite

from the events onscreen. *Maniac* is most certainly a prime example of a successful remake, which stays true to its grindhouse roots, while redefining them; at the same time, it manages to inject modern artistic flare into the tired POV genre. These intelligent cinematographic devices, along with excellent casting, help make *Maniac* one of the most striking examples of horror cinema in recent years.

In writing about the film, though, it is difficult to convey the ways in which its visual inventiveness helps distinguish it from typical slasher affairs. The film conveys atmospheric nuances through its fantastically implemented visuals and a hauntingly effective electronic soundtrack. In the opening sequence, the audio immediately sets the late 1970s/1980s horror vibe, with the use of what sounds like a vintage and electronic MIDI-esque tone. The visuals remain focused on the stalking and inevitable death of the film's first victim, before the gratifyingly retro title font appears. This opening kill sequence distinguishes *Maniac* from the traditional Hollywood slasher and does not merely glorify senseless gore, as happens in the original film (and in more recent examples of "torture porn" that American horror cinema has produced). Instead its visual inventiveness is more reminiscent of French new-wave extremist horror such as *Frontière(s)* (2007) and *Martyrs* (2008), in which scenes of torture and violence are not designed purely to shock or entertain gore-loving horror fans, but rather serve a larger philosophical purpose.

Following the conclusion of the opening sequence, the film maintains a brisk pace, as Frank quickly stalks and kills his victims. It employs a well-implemented online dating scene to play upon the audience's internalised paranoia, evoking the sensationalised concept of the omniscient online stalker. Through the first-person perspective of Frank, the viewer is forced to watch the Instant Messaging conversation between a murderer and an unsuspecting woman on a typical dating website. These visuals draw on a prevalent fear in the "real" world – that of the potentially murderous online stalker – as well as challenging the audience's preconceptions about classic horror. The typical suspense created by a purposefully concealed killer, who may pop out at any moment, is removed. Instead, we are fully aware of the killer's motives, and are forced to witness the realisation of these motives first-hand. We are present from the initial stalking of his victim, through Frank's first interaction with them, and ultimately witness their inevitable death. This

makes for a visceral viewing experience, in which the horror is almost tangible and immediate for the audience.

The implementation of Frank's brutal murders aside, the plot employs two devices to offer further insight into his character. As he goes about attaching his victims' scalps to the various mannequins in his store, we gain glimpses into the reasons behind his psychosis; each mannequin takes on the character of the deceased victim, demonstrating Frank's (clearly schizophrenic) hallucinations. His delusions that his prior victims live on through the inanimate dummies, who now converse with, as well as goad, him, help account for Frank's transformation into a deranged murderer. These sequences of delusion often reference occurrences with his abusive and sexually promiscuous mother (America Olivo). It is clearly implied that this traumatised parental relationship is the root cause behind Frank's uncontrollable urges to exact revenge upon women, in response to his deceased mother's crimes against him.

The mannequin restoration store also acts as a hub for our protagonist and his battle with his own psychosis. Within this setting, we are introduced to Anna (Nora Arnezeder), an artist who coincidentally specialises in photographing mannequins. When she asks to use the mannequins in her gallery exhibition, she begins to develop an unlikely friendship with Frank. Within this newfound relationship, Anna is positioned within the film as the polar opposite to the antagonistic mother figure. The viewer may hope that Frank's relationship with her will break the murderous cycle in which the other female victims have thus far been caught. The friendship between the two is well integrated into the film, and tortures the viewer with the possibility that Frank will be redeemed through her character's influence. It raises hopes that her immediately likeable character might be spared a ruthless death (although the grim vibe of the film suggests otherwise, deliberately provoking the viewer's emotions).

It is exceedingly rare to find a piece of cinema that positions the viewer so effectively within the mind of a serial killer. *Maniac*, however, is even more merciless in that it attempts to humanise a character who has committed some of the most graphic onscreen killings in recent cinema, by introducing a memorable and convincing female lead. Overall, the film succeeds because of Anna's presence, as the polar opposite to the ruthless mother figure. Ultimately, *Maniac* is a highly efficient cinematic work, which expertly blends grindhouse gore with art-house aesthetics, and

it deserves to take its place alongside the films that it has successfully sought to revive and reinvigorate.

Oisin Vink

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TELEVISION REVIEWS

Hemlock Grove: Season One (Netflix 2013)

A young man bearing a pronounced resemblance to *True Blood*'s (2008-present) Eric Nordstrom sits in a small-town gift-shop-come-ice-cream-parlour, an excessively large cone of vanilla melting, untouched, in his hand. A raven-haired beauty arrives outside, peering through the shop's glass door in a manner that is both sinister and decidedly erotic. Their eyes meet but she does not come in. Nathan Barr's score (here a repeated violin refrain, echoing Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* with female voice accompaniment) builds in intensity. Within seconds the two are coupling furiously in the cramped confines of a blood-red Austin Healey 3000. He pulls out a cut-throat razor, only to slice his own thumb and rub his blood on her arm. "You're so weird, Roman. But I like it", says she. "Ssshhh", he replies. "You don't know my name".

Hemlock Grove (2013), the Eli Roth-produced Netflix Original series that follows is every bit as weird as Roman's haemo-erotic proclivities portend. And not everyone has liked it – Netflix viewers, who revel in its witty bricolage of Gothic tropes and devices, giving it a hefty Four Star approval rating while critics, apparently happier with the anodyne Gothic-lite of the *Twilight* franchise, have damned it as overblown, disjointed and derivative. Echoing critical condemnations of the eighteenth-century Gothic novel, such critics not only betray a complete misunderstanding of the Gothic mode but do this splendid series a grave disservice. And yes, the pun is entirely intended.

Based on the 2012 novel by Brian McGreevy, *Hemlock Grove* retains its opening's air of arch good humour across its thirteen episodes which are, by turns, suspenseful, erotic, visceral, emotive, clever and camp. Here are buried secrets and resurrected children, vampires, werewolves and witches. Here is decay and rebirth,

transformation, mutation and return. There are enough moments of body horror to please the blood-and-guts brigade and a collection of extremely strong performances – particularly from Famke Janssen (as vampiric mother Olivia Godfrey), Dougray Scott (her hapless lover Norman Godfrey), Landon Liboiron (teen wolf Peter Rumancek), Lili Taylor (his hippy mother Lynda) and Bill Skarsgård (Roman Godfrey, the richest boy in the town and heir to a darker legacy). Bill is, of course, Alexander's baby brother.

Into the eponymous former steel town, still reeling from the death of heavy industry and seething with its own resentments, jealousies and secrets, come Peter Rumancek and his mother Lynda. As Romani-Americans they evoke that gypsy-lycanthrope association commonplace since Curt Siodmak's *The Wolf Man* of 1941. Taking up residence in a late uncle's trailer in the woods, moreover, they also embody all the liminality of the American poor white. Fittingly, as Peter observes upon arrival, Hemlock Grove is itself a strangely Gothic town. Above it looms the giant tower of the Godfrey Institute for Biomedical Technology, home of white-coated necromancer Dr Pryce (whose name echoes that of horror icon Vincent, self-referentiality being a constant source of pleasure in this show). It is Pryce (Joel de la Fuenta) who has brought Roman's baby sister Shelley (Nicole Boivin) back from the dead, Shelley having now grown into the series' giant teenage narrator, with a huge luminous eye and the capacity to glow eerily when touched. Within days of Peter's arrival, the body of the first victim is discovered – mutilated "lady-parts first" by what seems like a giant dog. Other murders follow and Peter is hunted, both by a lynch-mob of townspeople and by an alcoholic Gulf War veteran, now hit-woman for the mysterious Order of the Dragon. Meanwhile Olivia, Roman's sexually inappropriate Jocasta of a mother and the town's "most beautiful and most hated woman," hints at her vampiric origins while continuing a longstanding affair with Roman's uncle Norman, who runs the town's psychiatric hospital. His daughter Letha (Penelope Mitchell) finds herself immaculately with child, having been impregnated, she believes, by an angel. Later she falls in love with Peter. Christina (Freya Tingley), a fellow student, finds a hideously mutilated body in the woods, goes grey overnight and finds herself committed to uncle Norman's asylum. A grave is opened. And Peter's cousin Destiny (Kaniehtiio Horn), a grifter and part-time hooker, consumes a

corpse-fed worm to better commune with the dead. Across the whole caboodle falls the shadow of father-daughter and mother-son incest.

From all of this it is, perhaps, apparent why the critics responded so poorly to *Hemlock Grove.* This is not a series targeted, as some seemed to think, at a mass fantasy audience such as might tune into *Game of Thrones* (2011-present). It is not, for all its teen-love sub-plot, a Gothic romance in the vein of *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-present). Neither does it opt for a predictable linearity in the telling of its tale or a restrained realism in its realisation of character. Nonetheless, for viewers attuned to the stylistic excesses of the Gothic who know their horror history and take pleasure in texts that are playful and inventive in their self-referentiality, this is a fantastically enjoyable series. Its pacing is swift and its plotting effective, its characters well-drawn and its utter delight in the excesses of the Gothic mode is apparent at every turn. There's all the burgeoning adolescent sexuality one would hope for in a wolf-story, a hefty dose of mad science, some old-country vampire lore and some significant attention to the evolution of American society over the course of the last thirty years or so – as heavy industry has been replaced by transnational corporations and communities have struggled to adjust. The series culminates with several juddering climaxes that are impressively grand in their guignol and yet leave us both overwhelmed and crying out for more.

It is no coincidence that the image of the ouroborous (the snake that eats its own tail) peppers this series, as does a quotation from Confucius – "the end is only the beginning". In classic Gothic mode and to the irritation of its critics, the first series of *Hemlock Grove* refuses closure – leaving questions unanswered, characters unanchored and plotlines unresolved. It will be an anxious wait until the second season, commissioned by Netflix in response to fan-appreciation and in the face of misguided critical opprobrium, launches next year. I, for one, can't wait.

Linnie Blake

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Mockingbird Lane (NBC October 2012)

The Munsters returned to television screens – for one night, at least – in a contemporary reimagining written and co-executive produced by Bryan Fuller, known for his macabre-themed series *Dead Like Me* (2003-2004), *Wonderfalls* (2004),

Pushing Daisies (2007-2009) and most recently *Hannibal* (2013); Bryan Singer, probably best known for his work on the *X-Men* movie franchise, took on directorial and co-executive producer duties. When news hit that a modern remake of the cult favourite, playfully retitled *Mockingbird Lane*, had been given the green light by NBC executive Bob Greenblatt, it was met with much disparagement and reservation. With an ever-growing plethora of supernatural programming in today's media – from friendly vampires on *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-present), werewolves on *Teen Wolf* (2011-present), demons and witches on *Supernatural* (2005-present) – *The Munsters'* resurrection was perhaps inevitable. In October 2012, the pilot for *Mockingbird Lane* was screened as a Halloween special, with the possibility of producing a full series if the ratings were adequate.

The 1960s CBS sitcom *The Munsters* (1964-1966) was one of the most popular dark comedy sitcom families of the era, along with their ABC rivals *The Addams Family* (1964-1966). Both shows juxtaposed zany elements and slapstick humour with classic horror tropes, but it was *The Munsters* that captivated audiences by giving them a glimpse into the uncanny world of monsters trying to assimilate into society with, of course, a laugh or two along the way. Their syndication popularity even resulted in a spin-off series *The Munsters Today* (1988-1991) and several made-for-TV films. The family of *Mockingbird Lane* is less goofy, however, and more sinister, a concoction of *True Blood* (2008-present) mixed with *Modern Family* (2009-present).

The pilot opens with a group of cub scouts gathered around a campfire under a full moon. They are soon terrorised by a "baby bear" that turns out to be Eddie Munster (Mason Cook) in full werewolf state. By morning, a naked Eddie walks out of the bushes to find his fellow scouts unscathed but traumatised by the night's events. This incident is the catalyst of the pilot; the Munster family embarks for their new residence on 1313 Mockingbird Lane, in order to protect Eddie from the dire news of his transformation into "monster-hood". This sets up the characters' storylines, in which Eddie grows hair "everywhere", his lycanthropy clearly functioning as a metaphor for puberty; Marilyn (Charity Wakefield) searches for her position in the family; Herman (Jerry O'Connell) consistently loves so much to the verge of expiration; Lily (Portia de Rossi) reassesses her parenting; and Grandpa (Eddie Izzard) struggles to assimilate with the living by not devouring them.

Fuller's characters deviate from the pancake makeup and apparel of the original show and opt instead for a modern twenty-first century appearance, thus concealing their monstrous identities – they are wolves in sheep's clothing. Fred Gwynne's earlier incarnation of Herman, with his green makeup, stiff physique, bolted square head, and unkempt clothing, was famously inspired by Boris Karloff's look in *Frankenstein* (1931), *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), and *Son of Frankenstein* (1939). In *Mockingbird Lane*, we are presented with a thirty-something-year-old man with visible sutures on his neck, a body composed of borrowed human parts, and the wardrobe of a *GQ* model. Likewise, Eddie's popular widow's peak and Victorian attire have been replaced, and Eddie has been reimagined as a moody prepubescent boy in scout gear; Lily has ditched the Bride of Frankenstein makeup and flowing garbs in favour of a more natural appearance and curve-accentuating apparel; and kooky Grandpa has swapped Dracula's classical style for a red robe, sunglasses, and now boasts the ability to shape-shift into a blood-lusting creature. While the 1960s versions of the characters referenced the Universal Monsters of the 1930s (such as Karloff's Frankenstein and Bela Lugosi's Dracula), *Mockingbird Lane* draws on more recent renditions of these creatures, typified by Grandpa's new attire, which clearly recalls Gary Oldman's appearance in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992). Stylistically, the character that remains the most recognisable is Marilyn, the oddball. She retains Pat Priest's 1960s style and mannerisms, in a nostalgic nod to the earlier version of the show, which is also in line with contemporary TV's pastiche of the 1960s, since Marilyn is styled similarly to Betty Draper from *Mad Men* (2007-present). In the 1960s version of *The Munsters*, it was the fact that she looked human that made Marilyn the oddball of the bunch, but the rest of her family were monstrous in appearance only. *Mockingbird Lane* veers away from what made the Munsters "monsters" by making them look more human – yet they are ultimately more frightening than they were in the original show.

In the 1960s version, the characters were unaware of their monstrous identities and saw themselves as friendly, attractive and outstanding American citizens who met life with comical silliness. In contrast, Fuller's Munsters are aware that they are monsters; they are confronted with the struggle to conform and resist the urge to devour mankind, in order to integrate into a society that would otherwise banish or destroy them. This realisation deviates from the Munsters' innocent appeal. For

instance, Grandpa is seen drinking from the heart of Eddie's scoutmaster and his magic spells are no longer madcap but evil – a dark transition from the original. The other members of the family battle existential questions in their struggle to get to grips with their identities in a judgmental society and are flawed in their own way. Fuller's monsters undeniably have a contemporary and darker edge, perhaps as a way of developing a common thread with the audience; for example, an iPad is used to reboot Herman's heart, while Eddie is a vegetarian werewolf. By humanising the Munsters figuratively and physically, Fuller seems to have lost the original Munsters' playful and comical charm.

In stylistic terms, Fuller aims to please the twenty-first century audience. For example, the dark, Gothic house is up to par with the architecture found in today's TV horror shows like *American Horror Story: Murder House* (2011). Unlike the original, where effects were limited to animatronics and light shows, *Mockingbird Lane* utilises impressive CGI effects to create elaborate entrances and creatures. This technology may appeal to today's generation, but may be too slick for fans of the 1960s version. For those familiar with the original series, there *are* some homage scenes: Marilyn whistles the 1960s theme song to a black crow; a square-shaped silhouette of Herman appears but turns out to be a lantern; the entrance to Grandpa's lair underneath the staircase is shown; and their fire-breathing pet dragon, Spot, makes an appearance. Ultimately, *Mockingbird Lane* successfully manages to update the Munsters for the twenty-first century, but loses its classic appeal along the way.

It is understandable that a modern remake will alter certain elements from its original source, but in the end, it seems that too much was altered in this project. *Mockingbird Lane* is a far cry from its predecessor and deviates from what makes the Munsters, *The Munsters* – their physical characteristics, inane dialogue, and endearing innocence. The show may have had potential as a sitcom about a monster family, but ultimately, not as *The Munsters*. When screened in October 2012, the pilot of this attempted reimagining was seen by 5.4 million viewers and delivered a 1.6 rating in the adult demographic scale; as respectable as those numbers are, they were not enough to resurrect Herman and his family on our television sets again in the long term.

Silvia E. Herrera

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Hannibal: Season One (NBC 2013)

When first announced by NBC in 2011, the television series *Hannibal* seemed to be set on mining the twice-adapted Thomas Harris novel *Red Dragon* for inspiration, drawing on the margins of the story in order to explore the earlier years of Hannibal Lecter's relationship with the brilliant but damaged profiler Will Graham. For those who continue their devotion to Lecter's escapades, from the chilling (*Red Dragon* [1981/2002]; *The Silence of the Lambs* [1988/1991]) to the Gothic (*Hannibal* [1999/2001]) through to the ridiculous (*Hannibal Rising* [2006/2007]), much of the anticipation for this new series rested upon the willingness of producers Bryan Fuller (*Pushing Daisies* [2007-2009]; *Dead Like Me* [2003-2004]) and David Slade (Dir. *Hard Candy* [2005]; *30 Days of Night* [2007]) to explore Lecter's own psychopathy while simultaneously bringing this character to life beyond the more familiar confines of the asylum. As a character, Lecter brings with him a particular form of expectation for the audience; no other fictional serial killer has made such a generational and cultural impact through his multiple adaptations from the page to the screen (both cinema and television). He must be a suitable and recognisable version of Anthony Hopkins' popular and culturally celebrated incarnation (from *The Silence of the Lambs* onwards) with the menace of Brian Cox's more frightening but less urbane Lecktor (as portrayed in 1986's *Manhunter*). All of this may provoke the question: what need or desire is there for another narrative in the Lecter saga? After all, Hannibal Lecter has been with us for more than thirty years. Thankfully, though, *Hannibal* has more than delivered a promising appetiser which has garnered critical acclaim, and producers have confirmed its second season will air in early 2014.

Hannibal's first season successfully adapts the world of Thomas Harris and his damaged characters with aplomb and celebrates the Gothic in thirteen visually arresting episodes, each of which seems strikingly fresh and original (especially worthy of note considering its source material was published in 1981). The show also remains genuinely uncanny and abject throughout, and key to its success is its sustained sense of menace and tension as it dramatises unsettling scenes of Gothic mutilation, violence, and cannibalism. Special Investigator Will Graham (Hugh

Dancy) is brought into the field by Jack Crawford (Laurence Fishburne) to work on a case concerning eight missing girls. When Graham is found to be unstable and psychologically damaged because of his unique ability to glean an empathic insight into the killer's motives and reasoning, he is referred to psychiatrist Dr. Hannibal Lecter (Mads Mikkelsen) whose psychological expertise provides Graham with the mental anchor he needs to continue investigating the case under Crawford's direction. As the season develops and the central case unfolds, the show handles familiar characters in a manner which is carefully considered and balanced, and rewards fans with sublime and detailed visual and intertextual references to earlier film versions of Harris's texts directed by Michael Mann, Jonathan Demme, Brett Ratner and Ridley Scott. (Thus far, there seems to be a deliberate dismissal of *Hannibal Rising* in the series plan – both the novel and film version.) To appreciate the series as a whole, re-watching the film adaptations will reveal the level of significant and exhaustive detail to be found throughout *Hannibal*, and helps demonstrate that this show is lovingly made by and for those who know and wish to re-enter Harris' dark world.

Furthermore, specific rewards can be found in knowing and recognising the visual and aural cues (and clues) in each episode which allude to the earlier films. For example, we hear Bach's *Goldberg Variations* as Lecter is introduced in the first episode and see his sketches (in reference to *The Silence of the Lambs*), while later references are made to *Red Dragon*, *Manhunter* and (in particular) Ridley Scott's 2001 *Hannibal*. According to producer Bryan Fuller, this first season is – in theory – designed eventually to lead to the events of the novel *Red Dragon*, with later seasons ambitiously sketched to adapt each of the Lecter novels in turn (while hopefully discarding the disappointing *Hannibal Rising* in favour of larger segments of the novel *Hannibal*). Given the Gothic and visual riches on display in this first season, the prospect that it may lead to further, closer adaptations of the novels is thrilling; in fact, if realised, such ambitions for this series might accommodate the more grotesque aspects of Harris' novels and Lecter's terrible appetites.

If the show does go on to explore this grotesquery even further in later seasons, it remains to be seen if it would find an audience beyond die-hards, as even Season One might be too hard for the uninitiated to take. Some of the crimes featured in the series leave strong imprints, as the show frequently and vividly delights in the Gothic twisting of the human body and mind, gorgeous in its grotesqueness. But there

is much to savour in Season One. Hugh Dancy is excellent as the brilliant but damaged Will Graham, seemingly unhinged and chaotic at times; his tense performance is exhausting to watch, and the visions that haunt him provide a beautiful and terrifying landscape (a "mind palace" of his own perhaps?) onto which all the horrors of serial killing are projected, and deciphered. Mads Mikkelsen's Lecter, the central anti-hero/villain-in-waiting, is clearly channelling Hopkins' Lecter with added nastiness and unrestrained culinary experimentation, but unfortunately lacks his crisp and deliberate diction – this Lecter frequently mumbles, which simply "won't do" as we proceed to later seasons. Laurence Fishburne, Caroline Dhavernas and Lara Jean Chorostecki (as Jack Crawford, Dr. Alana Bloom, and reporter Freddie Lounds respectively) are exceptionally strong in their supporting roles (convincingly modified from their literary counterparts), and offer occasional but necessary relief from the ongoing psychological dance between Graham and Lecter. In part, the show succeeds because of its effectiveness as a police procedural with a Gothic/horror aesthetic – an example of the increasingly graphic and gruesome detective fiction genre – but also because of the level of genuine anticipation that is afforded by adapting these familiar texts for the television screen. Collectively, this is a powerful recipe for future seasons, which are destined to relate stories we know and want to reimagine and re-experience again, particularly in the prolonged experience of viewing a television series. We all know where this story will eventually lead but the precise devil in the details relies on the delicate consistency of these narrative elements for future series. Macabre, gripping and beautiful, this first season of *Hannibal* is simply delectable.

Sorcha Ní Fhlainn

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Bates Motel: Season One (A&E 2013)

By all accounts, *Bates Motel* (a prequel to Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 feature film *Psycho*) seemed to have all of the odds stacked against it. In essence, creating a backstory to a cult classic, by one of the world's most lauded directors, is an almost impossible ask, especially in light of a negative fan reception upon its announcement. In spite of this, however, *Bates Motel* concluded a ten-episode run of its first season to wide critical acclaim, as well as a generally satisfied viewer base. This televised

prequel explores the relationship between a teenage Norman Bates (Freddie Highmore) and his erratic and deranged mother Norma (Vera Farmiga), in order to illustrate the factors behind Norman's transformation into the killer from the original *Psycho*. After the death of his father, Norman (now portrayed as a sensitive and intellectual youth) is swept away to the iconic and dilapidated motel that featured in the film incarnation of *Psycho*. This forced move is initiated by Norma, and causes friction between her and her son, which is exacerbated by Norman's attempts to negotiate the various external factors and pressures he faces as a modern young man. This makes for a generally intriguing portrait of the Bates family's origins, albeit a portrait set in contemporary times, as opposed to the era of the original film. In particular, the show's impressive casting, with an exceptional and convincing performance from Vera Farmiga, helps create a fascinating vision of an iconic fictional family, and establish the show as one of the best newcomers of the season.

Within the opening episodes, however, a few elements of the show fail to impress. The indicators that this is a contemporary update/reimagining of a concept initially created in 1960 are a little jarring at first – for example, the styling of Norman's peers and overtly rebellious brother (Max Thieriot) as contemporary teenage types, and the inclusion of modern technology. These flourishes, including iPhones and other new technologies, contrast starkly with the dilapidated architecture of the motel, which matches that of the original film. This sense of modernity is initially distracting, but becomes less so over the course of the series. As the show develops, any lingering desire the viewer might have had for more temporal ambiguity in its setting seems to disperse, as s/he is gradually introduced to the surrounding, delightfully twisted community, which is highly reminiscent of the television show *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991). The introduction of a miscellany of quirky characterisations also lends to this vibe, creating constant catharsis for protagonists Norma and Norman. This is mainly implemented through a dispute which revolves around ownership rights to the motel, initiated by an attack on Norma by the original owner of the premises (which was since sold to Norma by the bank). The consequences of this attack subsequently entangles Norma in a dispute with local law enforcement, also providing us with insight into the locality, due to Norma's concealed murder of her aggressor and subsequent rumours about this.

In terms of plot, *Bates Motel* features multiple whodunit arcs throughout the series. The motel is used as a hub, while the show branches out into the surrounding town, in order to depict Norma's conflict with the peculiar residents of the crime-ridden area over her purchase of the property. The viewer's prior knowledge of Hitchcock's film means that s/he knows the notoriously grim resolution to this relationship, and the makers of *Bates Motel* are interested throughout in exploring the events that will eventually bring about this conclusion. In particular, the focus on Norma Bates' blatant possessiveness of her son, linked with her personality disorder, is well-conceived. Farmiga's high-octane performance in this role is especially memorable, and does much to help negate the aforementioned annoyances. Her goading of Norman in the guise of an overprotective mother figure plays out exceptionally well, and suggests that Norma may be a contributor in creating the "psycho" that we see in the original film. It is also implied that Norma's own psychological problems provide a trigger for Norman's emerging psychosis, and that this may, in fact, be a hereditary condition. This is borne out in a therapy session as the show progresses, which provides an interesting context for Norman Bates' origins. His unwavering dependency upon his mother, due to her psychological indoctrination, also plays a large role in revealing him as the emerging "psycho" as the season progresses.

The show's exploration of the relationship between Norman and his mother is clearly its main interest, but the effects of this relationship on Norman's interactions with other persons of his own age are also highlighted – in particular his relationships with young women. Norman's Oedipus complex begins to emerge during his relationship with his classmate Bradley (Nicola Peltz), further reinforcing Norma's detrimental influence upon his psyche. This series of exchanges between the young couple is one of the more insightful aspects of the show, which subtly refers to the original film, triggering suspicions in the audience that this may indeed become the first "shower scene" of the series (teasing us with the possibility that Bradley may become the first victim). This level of ambiguity and tension in *Bates Motel* is where the screenwriting truly shines, leaving space to play with Norman's ever-increasing psychosis, which will inevitably manifest itself by the end of the season. The contrasting sensitive dynamic created around Norman's character is a commendable

inclusion, placing him as an anti-hero towards whom we are invited to become sympathetic, despite his increasingly unstable mental condition.

Overall, *Bates Motel* is a welcome addition to the catalogue of new television series that have been released this year. It has also ended its initial ten-episode run on an exceptionally engrossing cliff-hanger, which leaves the viewer wondering how both Norman and his mother will deal with the deterioration of their respective mental conditions. *Bates Motel* has achieved the seemingly impossible task of creating a compelling backstory to a cult classic, which many may feel should not be meddled with, and should indeed be highly commended on this front. The series is most certainly one to watch for the coming season.

Oisin Vink

Notes on Contributors

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Mark Jancovich is Professor of Film and Television Studies at the University of East Anglia, UK. He is the author of several books: *Horror* (Batsford, 1992); *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism* (CUP, 1993); *Rational Fears: American Horror in the 1950s* (MUP, 1996); and *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (with Lucy Faire and Sarah Stubbings, BFI, 2003). He is also the editor of several collections: *Approaches to Popular Film* (with Joanne Hollows, MUP, 1995); *The Film Studies Reader* (with Joanne Hollows and Peter Hutchings, Arnold/OUP, 2000); *Horror, The Film Reader* (Routledge, 2001); *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fans* (with James Lyons, BFI, 2003); *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (with Antonio Lazaro-Reboll, Julian Stringer and Andrew Willis, MUP, 2003); *Film Histories: An Introduction and Reader* (with Paul Grainge and Sharon Monteith, EUP, 2006); and *Film and Comic Books* (with Ian Gordon and Matt McAllister, University Press of Mississippi 2007). He was also the founder of *Scope: An Online Journal of Film Studies*; and is series editor (with Eric Schaefer) of the MUP book series, *Inside Popular Film*; and series editor (with Charles Acland) of the Continuum book series, *Film Genres*. He is currently writing a history of horror in the 1940s.

Kristine Larsen is Professor of Astronomy at Central Connecticut State University. Her teaching and research focus on the intersections between science and society, such as science and gender, the history of science, science pedagogy, and science and popular culture. She is the author of *Stephen Hawking: A Biography* and *Cosmology 101*, and co-editor of *The Mythological Dimensions of Doctor Who* and *The Mythological Dimensions of Neil Gaiman*.

Rachel Mizsei Ward received her PhD from the University of East Anglia in 2013. Her research looks at cross-platform franchises, transmedia and licensing between film, television and games. Other research interests include Asian cinema, particularly Hong Kong popular film, horror, blaxploitation, cult cinema and game adaptations. Rachel has contributed an essay on the film *Underworld* and the role-playing setting The World of Darkness to the edited collection *21ˢᵗ Century Gothic* and has an article on Barack Obama as the Joker in *Comparative American Studies*. She is currently working on Islamic superheroes and an edited collection about superheroes outside of America.