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The Fall of the House of Meaning: Between Static and Slime in *Poltergeist*

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A good portion of the writing on *Poltergeist* (1982) has been devoted to trying to untangle the issues of its authorship. Though the film bears a directorial credit from Tobe Hooper, there has been a persistent claim that Steven Spielberg (credited as writer and producer) informally dismissed Hooper early in the process and directed the film himself. Dennis Giles says plainly, "Tobe Hooper is the director of record, but *Poltergeist* is clearly controlled by Steven Spielberg," (1) though his only evidence is the motif of white light. The most concerted analysis of the film's authorship has been by Warren Buckland, who does a staggeringly precise formal analysis of the film against two other Spielberg films and two other Hooper films, ultimately concluding that the official story bears out: Hooper directed the film, and Spielberg took over in post-production. (2) Andrew M. Gordon, however, argues that *Poltergeist* deserves a place within Spielberg's canon because so many of his trademarks are present, and because Spielberg himself has talked about it as a complementary piece for *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982). (3)

A similar argument can be made on behalf of Hooper, however, with respect to certain narrative devices and even visual motifs like the perverse clown from *The Funhouse* (1981). Other scholars have envisioned the film as more of a contested space, caught between different authorial impulses. Tony Williams, for examples, speaks of Spielberg "oppressing any of the differences Tobe Hooper intended," (4) which is pure speculation, though perhaps one could be forgiven to expect a different view of family life from the director of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) than that of *E.T.* Robert Latham envisions a slightly more complex relationship, considering *Poltergeist* to be "an uneasy alliance between Spielberg's confidence in the suburban project and Hooper's corrosive contempt for bourgeois institutions." (5) As we are not party to the exact nature of Spielberg and Hooper's relationship and their individual contributions to *Poltergeist*, it seems to me ultimately unproductive to speculate about it except to note that the film has an obvious divided, inconsistent quality, which we may or may not attribute to contested authorship.

Many people have found *Poltergeist* confusing, such as the *Los Angeles Times* critic who complained that "You are never sure what the ground rules are." (6) In 1934, the surrealist journal *Minotaure* carried an article by Jean Ferry on *King Kong* (1933) noting many absurdities and inconsistencies in that film. Ferry, however, argues that these are reconcilable with a surrealist mindset:

Through the absurdity of its treatment (an inept script with numerous incoherent details), its violent, oneiric power (the horribly realistic representation of a common dream, its monstrous eroticism) [. . .] the unreality of certain sets [. . .] or better still, in combining all these values the film seems to correspond to all that we mean by adjective "poetic" and in which we had the temerity to hope the cinema would be its most fertile native soil. (7)

I would suggest that something similar can be said of *Poltergeist*, that its own inconsistencies and points of incoherence may be recuperated by a certain kind of reading strategy. First off, let us observe that *Poltergeist* is heavily prone towards bifurcation. The film, for example, has two different climaxes, one with lots of flashing white lights and optical effects and the second with much muck and skeletons clambering out of the earth (it is almost irresistible to label them Spielberg and Hooper climaxes, respectively). The ghosts themselves transfer without much narrative justification from playful to vicious, very abstract to very embodied, and even have two completely separate and not obviously reconcilable

sets of motivations, that 1: they are attracted to Carol-Anne Freeling's (Heather O'Rourke) life force, which has distracted them from the light of Heaven and caused them to linger on earth, or 2: they are angry about the desecration of the cemetery in which they are buried by Mr. Teague (James Karen) and are taking out their rage on the Freelings. These differences are puzzling, though partially resolvable by examining that very scheme of dividedness, embodied by the twin threats present in the film, that of static and slime. Ultimately, these opposites prove paradoxically similar threats to meaning, which this essay argues to be the central issue in *Poltergeist*.

Poltergeist is the story of the Freeling family, Diane (JoBeth Williams) and Steve (Craig T. Nelson) and their very nuclear family, three children and a dog. They live in a California suburb development called the Cuesta Verde Estates, for which Steve works as a real estate agent. Their five-year-old daughter Carol-Anne has an unnerving fixation on the television set, especially when it shows static, and as supernatural events suddenly erupt through the house, she vanishes, sucked into her bedroom closet and ending up in a place normally called "the Other Side," though her voice can be heard through the television static. Steve enlists the aid of a team of parapsychologists under Dr. Lesh (Beatrice Straight), and learns from his boss, Teague, that Cuesta Verde was built on a cemetery that the company quietly moved to another location. Dr. Lesh brings in a psychic and professional exorcist named Tangina Barrons (Zelda Rubinstein) to help retrieve Carol-Anne from the Other Side, a portal to which exists in the closet of Carol-Anne's room. Ultimately Diane passes through the portal to retrieve Carol-Anne and Tangina declares the house to be "clean," but the family decides to move away nevertheless. But as they prepare to leave, the house reawakens with spectral happenings as ghosts arrive to reclaim Carol-Anne. It is discovered that the land developers under Teague moved only the headstones from the cemetery but left the bodies. Desperately fleeing as the house collapses on itself, the Freelings spend the night at a motel outside of town – but only after wheeling the TV set out of the room.

Poltergeist is a richly polysemic text and may be approached in a variety of ways: as a commentary on suburban life, a polemic against television's pernicious influence on youth, a fable of the maternal unconscious, a revenge narrative for suppressed indigenous peoples, (8) a quasi-Marxist exposé of capitalism's excesses and the follies of unbridled consumerism, (9) a conservative text trumpeting the nuclear family's capacity to withstand even the harshest adversity, or even a deeply-buried divorce narrative. (10) And this list is by no means exhaustive. Without necessarily nullifying any of these readings, I wish to approach *Poltergeist* as a narrative of the threats to meaning and its ultimate collapse, signified by the fall of the Freeling house. I wish to challenge, particularly, Douglas Kellner's take on the film as a deeply conservative Reaganite text; on analysis, the film reveals surprisingly radical potential as a narrative celebrating the triumph of meaninglessness.

The Face of Static

Superficially, *Poltergeist* is strung on the antinomies of static and slime, evanescence and abjection, though like a Derridean binary, the distinction between the two proves untenable on observation. I will proceed by outlining these two halves of the equation separately, and showing how both prove to be resident in the film's central symbol, the haunting television set. Gillian Beer writes that the ghost story is "a narrative of the usurpation of space by the immaterial," (11) and in *Poltergeist* this dynamic is heavily evident. Linda Badley provides a useful description:

As [Helene] Cixous suggests, the ghost's uncanny "presence" asserts to a "gap where one would like to be assured of unity," a black hole in the text of the symbolic order, swallowing it up. They are like Derridean

words: they kill meaning. Ghosts pretend to assert transcendence, but actually they speak to the nothingness, the death, of the things that they name. (12)

But if such a fear of nothingness is part of the fear of ghosts, it is surely also part of their perennial appeal – their subversive power to disrupt the symbolic order by challenging meaning itself.

In the famous opening sequence of *Poltergeist*, we begin by looking closely at the television screen – too closely, so that the image is fragmented by its pixilation. As "The Star-Spangled Banner" plays, we see a montage of images of patriotic Americana, like the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima and the Lincoln Memorial. A television station is going off the air for the night, and it screens these images packed with meaning, good or ill. Douglas Kellner writes that these images "[evoke] America's heroic past. But the present is troubled." (13) It seems more likely, though, that the cracks in the images indicate that there is something intrinsically faulty about these images, about representation itself. The images are soon replaced by a screen of roiling static, white noise that bathes the living room in its flickering light. We witness here the collapse of meaning, as we see the medium of television shorn of the necessity of representing anything. The film forces us to look deeply into the inchoate face of the static: like the mists of creation, it could become anything, but is presently blank, absent, yet terrifyingly present at the same time. As Garrett Stewart notes, (14) the static has a stroboscopic effect on the house around it, threatening to expand its meaninglessness into the world that surrounds it, while simultaneously laying cinema bare as an infinite set of moments of stillness.

The linkage of the ghost world to television functions on a number of levels. Jeffrey Sconce notes that television seems to have the capacity to "generate [its] own autonomous spirit world," (rather than being a simple conduit to an existing spirit world, like earlier media) "an 'electric nowhere' [. . .] a zone of suspended animation, a form of oblivion from which viewers might not ever escape." (15) As the sequence continues, Carol-Anne rises from her bed and walks down to the television, staring squarely into this field of static. She speaks to it: "Hello, talk louder, I can't hear you." Then, after a moment, she says, "Five. Yes. Yes. I don't know. I don't know." And she reaches her hands out to touch the screen. Various moments throughout the film will find Carol-Anne staring into static-covered TV sets the same way, and this is always a moment of tension, for it seems so unnatural. We like to feel that we watch television to watch *something*; Carol-Anne is deliberately looking at the fascinating, awesome spectacle of nothingness fluttering behind those images. The film dares to flirts with concepts familiar from Georges Bataille: the pleasures of immolation, of nothingness, of self-destruction. In Bataille's sense, Carol-Anne is exercising the pineal eye, the organ of not-knowing. As Martin Jay writes, normal sight "was a vestige of humanity's originally horizontal, animal status. But it was a burden rather than a blessing [. . .] the pineal eye yearns to burst out from its confinement and blind itself by staring at the sun, that destroying sun ignored by rational heliocentrism." (16) The static-faced TV is a compelling equivalent to Bataille's solar anus, the sun that we look on only in order to extinguish our sight and our intelligence.

But what is static? Ron Kaufman gives an explanation going back to nothing less than the Big Bang. (17) In short, static on a television set is a trace of cosmic microwave background radiation, composed of high energy photons that have been cooling since the universe's beginning: "When you are watching TV, you are watching static. The TV signal is not perfect, there are always small random electrons that go astray when the images are shot onto the screen [. . .] You may not see it, but the background radiation is always there. So the static is always there." (18) To watch television is to watch static; to watch cinema is to watch the moments of blackness between the frames, in Steven Shaviro's apt term, "the wound at the heart of vision." (19) They represent a gap or interval in Deleuze's sense, a moment of non-perception

that nevertheless makes perception possible, again pointing to the fundamentally troubled and fragile qualities of meaning. In a later scene, Carol-Anne stares into the static of the kitchen TV. Diane notes that it's bad for her eyes and absently changes the channel to a violent war film. Carol-Anne does not at all react to the change; it as if her eyes are not fixed on content at all. She looks at the image and all she sees is static and the absence it represents underneath it. Appropriately, then, the Other Side becomes an *unsignifiable* location. The film cannot visualize it or even meaningfully characterize it, since it is precisely that which escapes or perhaps exceeds powers of depiction.

Soon enough, Carol-Anne vanishes wholeheartedly into the world beyond the television, losing her embodiment altogether and becoming wholly pure. At first she is able to speak with her parents through the television but she becomes harder and harder to contact as she disappears more and more into the regressive environment of the Other Side. If the opening sequence carries a heavy dose of Lacan's mirror phase, her fate is the mirror phase being undone as she is torn increasingly away from the symbolic order. The Other Side, a location of pure spirit and abstract disembodiment, has its affinities with Lacan's imaginary, but we also ultimately find that it constitutes a bath in the real, as it proves a slimy, abject environment linked with the mother's womb. In the film's first, optical effects-driven climax, Diane, coached by the midwife-like medium Tangina, must duplicate the labour process by jumping into the Other Side and reissuing her daughter into the world.

It is Tangina who gives us the clearest motivation for the spirits and the best characterization of their static spirit world:

Carol-Anne is not like those she's with. She is a living presence in their spiritual, earthbound plane. They're attracted to the one thing about her that's different from themselves: her life force. It is very strong. It gives off its own illumination. It is a light that implies life and the memory of love and home and earthly pleasures, (20) something they desperately desire but cannot have any more. Right now, she's the closest thing to that, and that is a terrible distraction from the real light that has finally come for them [. . .] Inside this spectral light is salvation.

So it seems that Carol-Anne now resides in a kind of limbo between earth and heaven. And she is there not because of her evanescence (with her blond hair, frequently dressed in white, she looks angelic and otherworldly from her first appearance) but for her materiality and the material world that it implies. Carol-Anne's captors are "earthbound spirits," and we will ultimately learn that their fault is in not being evanescent enough, in retaining too much of a link to their remains, the disturbed bodies that lie underneath Cuesta Verde. This is not information available to Tangina, however, and her famous line "This house is clean" becomes ironic, and certainly casts some doubt on Tangina's famed mediumistic capacities, in light of the fact that the house is resolutely not clean. Or if it is, it is shortly to become very dirty again, as the haunting comes to take on a much more abject character.

Ectoplasm and Abjection

A curious weakness of Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, probably the definitive psychoanalytic treatment of the horror film, is its lack of treatment of ghost films, even though it covers nearly every other horror archetype. This is perhaps because, compared to the vampire, witch, werewolf and other the classic monster-types, the ghost does not so much invite treatment in terms of the abject, since ghosts are often so pure and clean and traceless. Katherine A. Fowkes' points about the lack of abjection in the comic ghost carry over its more horrific variants to a considerable

degree. (21) If the ghost narrative thrives on the uncertainty and hesitation of Todorov's fantastic mode, the abject tends to overthrow this tendency by providing absolute certainty. In the years leading up to *Poltergeist*, however, the genre grew increasingly abject in its character. The major transitional film in this regard is probably *The Amityville Horror* (1979), with its bleeding walls and swarms of flies, and the trend would be firmly entrenched by *Ghostbusters* (1984), which revived the arcane spiritualist term "ectoplasm" to refer to the sticky slime left by the passing of the abject spectre (it also is responsible for turning "slime" into a verb). Chronologically between these films is *Poltergeist*, which may be the best representation of all, as it narrativizes the transfer from the evanescent spectre to the abject one.

Diane returns from the Other Side physically marked by her experience by a shock of white hair. Only once she tries to dye it do the ghosts reemerge. The cleanly optical quality of the previous vortex is replaced by something fleshy and corporeal, a yawning hole of a distinctly anal character, threatening to drag the characters into the back end of creation. It is an abject scene and if the film suddenly becomes dominated by the abject, corpses and all, it is not because the abject is absent in early scenes of *Poltergeist*. Actually, it is everywhere, and all the more striking for being played against the clean and sterile qualities of suburban life (which adds additional irony to Tangina's rhetoric of cleanliness).

Abjection, despite some injustice done to the word over time, does not simply refer to sticky and unpleasant substances. As outlined by Julia Kristeva, the abject is "the place where 'I' am not, the place where meaning collapses" (22), a definition broad enough to encompass the static-realm into which Carol-Anne vanishes (better still, Kristeva even referred to the abject as a 'land of oblivion'). (23) More usually, abjection is associated with the body and is often embodied by bodily wastes like hair, urine, feces, tears and blood, and ultimately with corpses, those things which test the boundaries between self and other and the status of the symbolic order. As Kristeva writes, "These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly, and with difficulty on the part of death [. . .] Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere* (to fall), cadaver." (24)

The first corpse we see in *Poltergeist* is that of Carol-Anne's canary. On this discovery, mother Diane says, "Shit, Tweety, couldn't you have waited for a school day?" (25) Diane wishes to shield her daughter from the facts of death, and the fecal motif continues as she tries to flush it down the toilet, but is interrupted by a shocked Carol-Anne. (26) What follows is a parody of the burial rite, as they bury the bird in a cigar case in the back yard. What the characters do not realize yet is that they live in a graveyard, one violated by Teague's duplicitous capitalism, (27) and that there are already corpses beneath their very feet. "Why do the dead return?" asks Slavoj Žižek. "The answer offered by Lacan is the same as that found in popular culture: *because they were not properly buried* [. . .] The return of the dead is a sign of a disturbance in the symbolic rite [. . .] This is the basic lesson drawn by Lacan from *Antigone* and *Hamlet*." (28) At the faux-funeral, Robbie asks "When it rots, can we dig it up and see the bones?" and soon enough a backhoe will indeed disinter the cigar box, foreshadowing the revelation that a disturbed burials were a cause for the haunting of Cuesta Verde. The ghosts' major activity is to contest and battle the structures of the symbolic that the funeral itself represents – a struggle in which, I might add, they are nearly totally successful.

Kristeva also links the abject to food, writing that "food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection." (29) *Poltergeist* is astonishingly fixated on food and consumption, from the brand-name chips that the dog steals in the opening sequence to the pickle that the older daughter Dana (Dominique Dunne) suggestively munches and the waffle that Robbie (Oliver Robbins) feeds the dog

under the breakfast table, to the beer, coffee and liquor that adults consume elsewhere in the narrative. Carol-Anne buries Tweety with three strips of licorice "for when he's hungry," suggesting that the dead experience hunger – this will turn dark as the animated tree tries to eat Robbie and a lashing tongue appears from the anus-vortex, trying to drag the characters into it.

The most memorable episode involving food has an extremely Lacanian character, linking food to ultimately the disintegration of the flesh in a way that reflects Kristeva clearly. Marty, one of the trio of parapsychologists who enter the narrative midway through, goes to the kitchen in search of food. As he holds a chicken drumstick in his mouth, he watches a pork chop make its own way across the countertop. He trains his flashlight onto it, and just as that light hits it, it bursts with maggots, rotting into slime before his eyes. The drumstick drops from Marty's mouth and he races into the bathroom to vomit. Staring into the mirror above the sink, he watches a horrifying parallel disintegration of his own face, hands ripping flesh from his face till bones peek through beneath, foreshadowing the revelation of the skeletons beneath Cuesta Verde's veneer of normalcy. In a neat articulation of the dual character of Lacan's mirror, he finally must look into the mirror to confirm the illusion of his bodily cohesion, the same mirror that has just demolished the very same illusion.

Barbara Creed writes that "Most horror films construct a border between what Kristeva refers to as 'the clean and proper body' and the abject body, the body which has lost its form and integrity." (30) In *Poltergeist*, the Freelings are clean and white and well-scrubbed suburbanites contrasted against the violated corpses beneath their feet, but, in parallel to Marty's vision in the mirror, undergo a less dramatic but more lasting degradation of their bodies through the stress of their daughter's disappearance. "You look like shit," the ever-diplomatic Mr. Teague tells Steve at one point. Everywhere in the diegetic world, the abject threatens to swell up and overwhelm the symbolic, dragging it down in the muck, as it were.

Even the television possesses a considerable abject potential. Though it contains the evanescent purity of static, it is itself an object, a clunky material one (more material that cinema, the invisible point of comparison throughout the film, as in the pixilation seen in the film's opening moments). As mentioned before, Diane tells Carol-Anne not to look at the static, stating that it is bad for the eyes. At *Poltergeist*'s cultural moment, there was a considerable vogue for idea that television was *bad for you*, even physically, though this idea is as old as television. Lynn Spigel reproduces a cartoon from a 1950 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal* featuring a twisted creature called a "telebugeye" with an alarmist text:

This pale, weak, stupid-looking creature is a Telebugeye and, as you can see, it grew bugeyed by looking at television too long. Telebugeyes just sit and sit watching, watching. This one doesn't wear shoes because it never goes out in the fresh air any more, and it's skinny because it doesn't get any exercise. The hair on this Telebugeye is straggly and long because it won't get a haircut for fear of missing a program. What idiots Telebugeyes are. WERE YOU A TELEBUGEYE THIS MONTH? (31)

1978 saw the release of Jerry Mander's influential *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, an apocalypse-flavoured tome that paints television not as a neutral technology that needs to be reformed and recuperated, but an irredeemable menace that worms its way into human minds and society at large, reaping a huge destructive influence beneath the notice of anyone. The third of Mander's four broad arguments is called "Effects of Television on the Human Being," where he investigates various angles, from eyestrain to hypnosis to sleep teaching, assembling a body of evidence that television watching has a very real and deleterious effect on the human body. One passage reads as follows:

When you are watching television, you are experiencing something like lines of energy passing from cathode gun to phosphor through your eyes into your body. You are as connected to the television set as your arm would be to the electric current in the wall [. . .] if you had stuck a knife in the socket.

These are not metaphors. There is a concentrated passage of energy from machine to you, and none in the reverse. In this sense, the machine is literally dominant, and you are passive. (32)

Mander speaks of the television set as a source of x-rays, an argument explicitly figured in terms of abject bodily distortion: "In one celebrated series of studies, the roots of bean plants [. . .] placed in front of a colour television set grew *up*ward out of the soil. Another set of plants became monstrously large and distorted. Mice which were similarly placed developed cancerous lesions." (33)

It becomes evident that the neat distinction between evanescence and abjection cannot stand, and that the television constitutes a locus of their collapse, an object simultaneously physical with abject potential and opening a door onto a world of the evanescent, which is itself abject. On the evidence of other films like *Videodrome* (1983) and *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (1982), one could make a strong prima facie case for *Poltergeist*'s cultural moment as a pinnacle of mass anxiety over cinema's *bodily* effects on its viewers: the three films, from art horror to blockbuster to lame slasher sequel, have remarkably consistent themes of corporate exploitation, abjection and television's degrading *physical* effect on the viewer. The idea of television as a doorway to a ghost world would, of course, get perhaps its most famous enunciation in *Ringu* (1998), a film which owes much to *Poltergeist* and *Videodrome*.

The re-eruption of Diane and Carol-Anne out of the "Other Side" coated in a viscous red substance that equally looks much like red currant jelly (34) and equally suggests afterbirth and ectoplasm. In its old usage, ectoplasm referred to a viscous substance said to ooze from spiritualist mediums' orifices, usually nipples, mouths, genitals and noses. It was usually said to be luminous yet paradoxically destroyed by light, which generally prevented it from remaining for close scientific analysis. Be this as it may, it was the most physical product of mediumship, part spiritualism's late, corporeal turn, and was thus the cause for scientific analysis from scientists like Gustav Geley, Wilhelm von Schrenck-Notzing and Charles Richet, who, in 1894, coined the term from the Greek for "exteriorized substance." As Linda Badley writes, "the very concept of ectoplasm, like the concept of anti-matter, was mind-boggling. It was the tangible, visible representation of 'spirit,' the word made if not flesh then something close to it. Ectoplasm destroyed the most basic distinctions between mind and body, medium and message." (35) As previously noted, the term gets rejuvenated and modified around *Poltergeist*'s moment, and this seems entirely appropriate, since that same troubling of the distinction between flesh and spirit is at work in *Poltergeist*, and in the abject itself.

Furthermore, ectoplasm was historically a means of depiction. Very often ectoplasmic mediums would shape the substance into images, especially the faces of the dead. Ectoplasm works to transform the medium's body into an "uncanny photomat, dispensing images from its orifices." (36) Karen Beckman also reports that *The American Heritage Dictionary* also offers as a definition for "ectoplasm": "*Informal*: An image projected onto a movie screen." (37) So when one looks at ectoplasm that fails or refuses to form into an image (as it no longer does in the word's contemporary incarnation), what is one looking at? Something very much like television static, a medium of representation minus the representation. Mind-boggling, indeed.

It should be clear that the binary of evanescence and abjection cannot stand. Static and slime (both in their own way abject) finally reflect the same fear of meaninglessness, the same trouble to the symbolic order. The haunted TV, whatever it might symbolize in any other kind of interpretation of *Poltergeist*, stands as a potent symbol of that collapse: a physical, potentially abject object which contains the meaninglessness of infinite static.

Switching Off: Collapse and After

It is with collapses, on a number of registers, that *Poltergeist*'s ending is concerned. The final destruction of the Freeling house is in the form of a spectacular implosion. Compare the last lines of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" to this fall of the House of Freeling:

While I gazed, this fissure rapidly widened—there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind—the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight—my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder—there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the '*House of Usher*.'

Poltergeist shares the sense of erasure, that the house has been not only contested but wiped from existence. But one detail tantalizes – as the house is pulled apart by a swirling vortex, the last image we see is a big white dot that pulses in midair, glowing and lingering after the house is gone. It resembles the image that would sometimes be left on an older picture tube when the television was turned off, a last luminous trace of the images that were once present, now stripped of all meaning. In this it echoes the image with which the film began, that of a television channel going off the air.

In Poe, the story cannot outlast the destruction of the house. The symbiotic relationship between Roderick Usher and his house (both as a location and in terms of lineage) mirrors a relationship between the house and the story itself. In his *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928), Jean Epstein boldly underlines this with the outgrowth of stars behind the model of the house that shapes into the Usher family tree, as if the universe itself collapses alongside the House of Usher. Can the same be said of *Poltergeist*? The film does not end with the destruction of the Freeling residence, but everything that follows is a narrativization of the process of a film ending; rather than the promise of meaning being reinstated, it just keeps on unspooling. The closing sequence is worth close analysis.

The Freelings drive from Cuesta Verde in the rain, and their headlights illuminate a sign that reads "You are now leaving Cuesta Verde. We'll miss you!" Suddenly, there is a cut to a pulsing neon star, a reminder of the film's outer space motif, which we soon find is on the outlandish sign of a Holiday Inn. The marquee reads "Welcome Dr. Fantasy & Friends." The first sign is similar to one that Carol Clover discusses in another Tobe Hooper film, *Texas Chain Saw Massacre II* (1986) (might it be Hooper's contribution?), where the protagonist is running through the killer family's labyrinth and suddenly encounters a glowing EXIT sign, of exactly the sort one sees in movie theatres. Clover writes that it draws an audience reaction "partly because of the analogy it admits (labyrinth = moviehouse, chain saw-wielding sons = camera-wielding filmmakers, terrified victim = audience) but partly because [it is] such a breach of third-person protocol – such a naked disclosure of the cinematic signifier." (38) The sign in *Poltergeist* works similarly to herald our forthcoming exit from the cinematic environment, which will indeed "miss us."

But the departure is simultaneously a welcome to another location. The magician-sounding name "Dr. Fantasy" on the marquee reaches way back into cinema's origins as a magician's novelty act, with the

audience as his friends, being welcomed into a new environment (movies have marquees too, after all). But between these two written signs that promise to reinstate the symbolic order, we have the star. While it has an iconic function of sorts, representing actual stars and perhaps abstractly signifying Hollywood, its foremost impact is one of pure spectatorship. It is a gaudy grabber of attention, cinema (or television, for that matter) stripped of the veneer of its representational function and exposed as pure flash and dazzle.

The remainder of the film is one long unbroken cut. It is a lengthy, difficult shot, a *cinematic* shot, smoothly accomplished through the technical acumen of a skillful filmmaker. The crane shot requires a material apparatus, but this "body" of the shot is forever out of view. The family trudges along a balcony to their motel room and Steve unlocks the door. White lights flash subtly atop the railing alongside them. Through the window we can see a very small portion of the room, including a television set directly next to the door. Seconds later, Steve draws the curtains, and our view into the motel room vanishes, and appropriately so – it exists outside the realm of the film, as surely as the Other Side does, so it is equally unsignifiable. With everyone else inside, Steve lingers in the doorway and waits a moment before entering himself, closing the door. Five or six seconds later, the door reopens and Steve wheels the television onto the balcony, pushing it hard against the railing. It is a clunky and physical object. Taking a last uncertain look at it, he vanishes into the room again. The Freeling family has well and truly "looked away." Now all that remains on the balcony is the sinister TV set . . . and us. Oddly enough, the television is unplugged yet the screen seems to be rippling with static; this is a very subtle effect from the flashing lights atop the rails.

But no sooner has the door closed than the camera begins pulling back, as if in revulsion. Numerous indeed are the films that end with a pullback, a gesture of departure that simultaneously remains fixed on the image. The credits begin to roll, still over the image. The film is ending, but it is ending slowly. As we pull away, the tracking shot becomes a crane shot, pulling off the balcony and over the parking lot. The Holiday Inn sign creeps into view in the distance, its pulsing star visible. The television set eventually leaves our line of sight, lost under the railing. Finally, the utilitarian-looking two-floor motel, another potentially haunted location, is centered in the frame, and the screen slowly fades to black. The star, a crude and flashy grabber of attention, remains in the back of the shot, perhaps signaling that what it represents finally wins the day.

What does Steve's final act mean? If the film constitutes itself as a statement against television, and by extension media culture, it has much to answer for; as Linda Badley notes, "the film epitomizes the consumerist culture it indicts." (39) One strong register of the ending is open-endedness. William Paul perceptively argues that *Poltergeis*t, with its serial endings, marks a move away from the absolute closure that was previously expected in horror films. (40) If the ending is an occasion for laughter, it must be uneasy laughter. All in all, there is nothing openly anodyne about the film's last scenes. The Freelings flee Cuesta Verde bludgeoned, defeated, and more scared than ever; the symbolic order now lies in pieces, and the fear goes on.

The bulk of the film is about the destruction of meaning for the characters; the ending is about the destruction of meaning for the viewers. Steven Shaviro writes that "All cinema tends away from the coagulation of meaning and towards the shattering dispossession of meaning, the moment of the razor slicing the eyeball in *Un Chien Andalou*." (41) Pauline Kael's review of *Poltergeist* seems to recognize something of the same dynamic: "You've become the director's target: you're subjected to thrills, bombarded by them [. . .] the director puts you into the position of being a connoisseur of special effects [.

. .]" (42) For Kael this is a cause for criticism, and indeed there are effects sequences in *Poltergeist* (Marty's sequence before the mirror, for one, and the parade of ghosts down the stairway in the living room) that exist with only a smidgen of narrative justification or explanation. The ending of the film discloses that these were part of *Poltergeist*'s thematic strategy from the beginning, an element in its vociferous assault on meaning.

Family Matters

The critic who has probably written the most on *Poltergeist* is Douglas Kellner, so I feel a special need to address his work specifically. His writings on the subject go as far back as 1983 (43) but seem to get a definite treatment in his 1996 article "Poltergeists, Gender, and Class in the Age of Reagan and Bush." One immediate point to make is that his interpretation of *Poltergeist* is fairly auteurist in nature, and he frequently ropes in examples from other Spielberg films to support his points. (44) He writes, for example, "Unlike more critical Hollywood filmmakers who dissect dominant myths and question dominant values (Altman, Scorcese, Allen, and so on), Spielberg is a storyteller and mythmaker who affirms both the opposing poles of middle-class values and lifestyles and a transcendent occultism." (45) But surely any close analysis of *Poltegeist* will find it to be more ambivalent than simply affirmative – does Kellner detect no cynicism, for example, in the sequence where Diane rolls a joint while Steve reads a biography of Ronald Reagan? And even if one accepts that *Poltergeist* is best considered as part of Spielberg's canon, might not the various shades of cynicism detectable in *Minority Report* (2002), *Catch Me If You Can* (2002), *Munich* (2005) and *War of the Worlds* (2005) require us to revisit his earlier work a new eye?

In Kellner's view, *Poltergeist* simultaneously provides an uncynical, laudatory view of middle class life and allegorizes the perceived dangers to it (downward mobility, loss of home and job, the invasion of the suburban life by "others" – ghosts, or the working class represented by the uncouth construction workers). Elements of his analysis seem indisputable, but what about Kellner's claim that "The film has a traditional happy ending as the family leaves the home, pulls together, survives the disaster, and checks into a friendly Holiday Inn"? (46) It would never occur to me to call the ending of *Poltergeist* happy, or indeed traditional. The Freeling family has lost everything they own, Steve has lost his job. The family home and all of its possessions have vanished into another dimension, and furthermore, it is clear that their happy home was always a tainted location, built on lies and corpses. In what way is this a happy ending? Kellner's final assessment of *Poltergeist* as a conservative horror film rests on our accepting it as such, but how can we possibly do so? It seems more likely that the ending is the culmination of the motion that has been at work throughout the film towards the dissolution of meaning (which admittedly may be thought of by some among us as a happy ending, though certainly not in the traditional sense Kellner means).

The point that Kellner emphasizes is the unity of the family unit. *Poltergeist* is in the select group of horror films that contain no deaths, and while the Freeling family is threatened with dissolution throughout the narrative (supernaturally through Carol-Anne's disappearance, more realistically through Dana disengaging from her family to spend all her time with friends), their unity remains till the end. If you like, the house of Freeling (the location) falls but the house of Freeling (the family) survives. Kellner writes that, "Films like *Poltergeist* show good families being attacked by monsters, and thus serve as ideological defenses of middle-class family, which transcode cinematically the conservative profamily discourses of the 1980s." (47) Kellner locates this against narratives from the 70s like, ironically, Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, that depict families as evil forces themselves, rather than the

victims of evil forces. The Freelings, finally, are good people, and their beleaguered family dynamic survives where all else perishes. It is as Andrew Gordon writes: "The Freeling family is too nice." (48)

But Gordon's statement contains a double meaning he may not have been aware of. They are *too* nice . . . nice to a superficial, unreal extreme. Their façade of the perfect suburban nuclear family, 2.5 children and dog in tow, is just that . . . a façade. Gordon sees this as a weakness in the film, though it actually contributes to his reading of the film as a coded divorce narrative. Dealing with a subject too painful to be confronted directly (if not divorce, then the dissolution of the symbolic structure of the family unit), it flaunts its unreality its subtle ways. For instance, Dana is absent from the narrative to an even greater extent than Carol-Anne, disengaged physically and psychically from the family unit. Where the vanishing of Carol-Anne is a major crisis, Dana's parallel disappearance is all but ignored by both the film and its characters. However, Dana conveniently pops up during the final crisis exactly at the right moment to be ushered out of Cuesta Verde with the rest of the family. If the final unification of the family feels forced, that is because it *is* forced.

There other curious moments where the façade of the perfect family cracks, including one which to my knowledge no critic has ever mentioned. When Steve is giving the names and ages of his family members to Dr. Lesh, he says "There's my wife, Diane, she's 31 . . . 32, I'm sorry. My oldest daughter Dana, she's 16 . . ." For these dates to work, either Dana is not Diane's child (she is never specifically referred identified to as such) or Dana is the product of an underage pregnancy. Either way, this subtly undermines the image of the Freelings as the perfect nuclear family. Never mind the fact that Diane's parenting seems decidedly questionable in the early scenes of the film, especially in her ecstatic (rather stoned-seeming) reaction to the ghosts' early, playful incarnation, including putting a football helmet on Carol-Anne and letting the ghosts drag her across the kitchen floor. Indifferent to the paranormal displays that so excite Diane, Carol-Anne complains that her mother forgot to cook dinner, and Diane says "We'll go to Pizza Hut, okay?" All of this combines to code her as a mildly negligent mother, not to mention profoundly naïve in the face of the real threat that the ghosts prove to represent.

Kellner also refuses to engage the metaphorical meaning of Mr. Teague and his offenses deeper than the superficial. Kellner describes him as "a greedy capitalist who puts private property above all" and notes that his name may play on Frank Norris's McTeague, familiar to filmgoers from *Greed* (1924). (49) The film's revelation about Teague does away with the understanding of suburbia as a bastion of middle-class goodness under siege from evil forces; it is *inherently* a faulty place, cursed from its inception and built on lies. Teague, the symbolic father to all the extended family that is Cuesta Verde, is ultimately responsible for everything that happens in the narrative – he is finally punished by being forced to watch Freeling House vanish into the Other Side alongside many other Cuesta Verde residents. His dream suburb fall to tatters as his horrible secret can no longer be kept. Steve Freeling, his best sales rep, responsible for 42% of sales in Cuesta Verde, has even misspent his professional life working to perpetuate this monstrosity – perhaps this is the reason the ghosts single out the Freeling family for torment – and ends up with nothing to show for it. Everywhere in *Poltergeist* structures of the symbolic are failing and institutions fall to ruin.

Even if the family survives, *Poltergeist* can hardly be described as an unqualified endorsement of middle class ideologies or suburban ideals. At the very least, the shocking, unsettling qualities of the film, its depiction of a world on the verge of collapse into meaninglessness, outlives whatever anodyne tendencies one might locate in it. It seems appropriate that, in a study of the effect of horror films on children, *Poltergeist* was the single-most mentioned film in terms of triggering long-term phobias. Doubtless this is

because it starts out with sweetness and light before unleashing horror and destruction. One respondent said: "After seeing *Poltergeist*, I couldn't sleep knowing the TV was here. I stayed up *the entire night* watching the television to make sure it wouldn't come to life [. . .] The next day, I immediately told my parents and asked them to remove the television set." (50) This seems a powerful testament to the film's lasting ability not to soothe but to disturb.

Will-o'-the-Wisp

Finally, we return to the question of authorship. It seems very likely that the limitations I perceive in the existing scholarship on *Poltergeist* are rooted in the problem of authorship; scholars are unable to look beyond the question of its divided status, or to consider it outside of Spielberg's canon. The film's status as a space of contested authorship actually adds to the qualities I have outlined thus far. It refutes the defining, meaning-making power of authorship. For Michel Foucault, the author function exists as a strategy in the limiting "the great peril, the great danger with which fiction threatens our world." (51) It is designed to ensure safe limits and boundaries, everything which the abject exists to destabilize. Far from a self-evident and natural conception, authorship works as part of a larger system that shapes and constraints meaning. It is a testament to the continuing power of what Foucault deems the "author function" that when an anonymous or contested work like *Poltergeist* appears, the grand critical project must be to decide "who is the real author?" before anything else can be said about the text definitively – even to the extremes that Warren Buckland pursues. Let us instead embrace *Poltergeist*'s contested status, as a work outside of the author-function, and deem this authorlessness to be consistent with the assault on meaning that is the film's internal project. Salman Rushdie describes *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) as "as near as you will get to that will-o'-the-wisp of modern critical thought: the authorless text"; (52) *Poltergeist* is surely a strong contender for the same prize. *Poltergeist* is just what it depicts; it is a wraith.

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1. Giles, Dennis, "Conditions of Pleasure in Horror Cinema," *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett, eds., (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2004), 48.
2. Buckland, Warren, *Directed by Steven Spielberg: Poetics of the Contemporary Hollywood Blockbuster*, (New York: Continuum, 2006), 154-173.
3. Gordon, Andrew M, *Empire of Dreams: The Science Fiction and Fantasy Films of Steven Spielberg*, (Lanham, N.C.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 94.
4. Williams, Tony, *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film*, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 1996), 225.
5. Lathan, Rob, "Subterranean Suburbia: Underneath Smalltown Myth in the Two Versions of *Invaders from Mars*," *Science-Fiction Studies*, Vol. 22 (1994), 203.
6. Qtd. in Gordon, 97.
7. Ferry, Jean, "Concerning King Kong," in *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema*, Paul Hammond, ed., (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2000), 162.
8. It is an *astonishingly* common mistake, even in academic sources, to say that Cuesta Verde was built over an old Indian burial ground. It was actually a conventional cemetery. This reading may still have a certain amount of validity, though; consider that Cuesta Verde has a Spanish name but no non-Caucasian inhabitants that we see.
9. "Cuesta Verde," the film's setting, is Spanish for "It costs green."
10. Andrew M. Gordon's take is perhaps the most auteurist of all, completely dependent on details of Spielberg's biography.
11. Beer, Gillian, "Ghosts," *Essays in Criticism*, No. 28 (1978), 260.
12. Badley, Linda, *Film, Horror and the Body Fantastic*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 42.
13. Kellner, Douglas, "Poltergeists, Gender, and Class. Horror Film in the Age of Reagan," *Cinema and the Question of Class*, David E. James and Rick Berg, eds., (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1996), 222.
14. Stewart, Garrett, "The 'Videology' of Science Fiction" in *Shadows of the Magic Lamp: Fantasy and Science Fiction in Film*, George Slusser and Erik S. Rabkin, eds., (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 168.
15. Sconce, Jeffrey, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 127, 131.
16. Jay, Martin, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought*, (Berkeley: University of Californa Press, 1993), 226-7.
17. The "cosmic" quality of static does much to justify the strong outer space motif in *Poltergeist*. This is made most literal when Dr. Lesh and her assistants discuss where Carol-Anne's voice might be coming from as they hear it through the white noise. Ryan says: "The absence of a channel that is not receiving a broadcast means that it can receive a lot of noise from all sorts of thing things, like short waves [. . .] outer space. Or inner space." Indeed, television signals often literally come from outer space, bounced off satellites. Likewise, Dr. Lesh speaks of herself feeling "like the proto-human coming out of the forest primeval and seeing the moon for the first time and throwing rocks at it." The children's bedroom is also associated with outer space, through the posters for interstellar narratives *Alien* (1979) and *Star Wars* (1977), as well as a preponderance of *Star Wars* iconography in the form of toys, blankets and the like.
18. "Television Static: Bringing Radiation into Your Home or Why TV Will Give You a Headache," http://www.turnoffyourtv.com/commentary/static.html (accessed August 4, 2008).
19. Shaviro, Steven, *The Cinematic Body*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press), 51.
20. This line does much to justify the buried sex and food motifs in the film as establishing the physical nature of the world which the ghosts envy.

21. Fowkes, Katherine, *Giving Up the Ghost: Spirits, Ghosts and Angels in Mainstream Comedy Films*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 58-9.
22. Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.
23. Ibid, 8.
24. Ibid, 3.
25. This sequence suggests Wordsworth's poem "We Are Seven": "A simple child . . . what should it know of death." Significantly, both texts ultimately deal with a child spending excessive amounts of time in a cemetery.
26. Carol-Anne's consistent role is preventing the dead from going where they are supposed to – the bird from going down and the ghosts from going up, to the Real Light.
27. Compare Stuart M. Kaminsky's observation that "The fact that the money in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* is buried in a graveyard can have immense Marxist and Freudian overtones – with money, associated with feces and death, accumulated through the old work ethic or death ethic." "Italian Westerns and Kung Fu Films: Genres of Violence," in *Graphic Violence on the Screen*, Thomas R. Atkins, ed., (New York: Monarch Press, 1977), 55.
28. Žižek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 23.
29. Kristeva, 3.
30. Creed, 11.
31. Spigel, Lynn, *Make Room For TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 51.
32. Mander, Jerry, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, (New York: Quill, 1978), 171.
33. Ibid, 172.
34. Linda Badley's phrase again evokes food. 46.
35. Badley, 44.
36. Gunning, Tom. "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations," in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, Patrice Pietro, ed., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 58.
37. Beckman, Karen. *Vanishing Women: Film, Feminism, and Magic*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 78.
38. Clover, Carol J., *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 201.
39. Badley, 46.
40. Paul, William, *Laughing Screaming: Modern Hollywood Horror and Comedy*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 413-6.
41. Shaviro, Steven, *The Cinematic Body*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 54.
42. Kael, Pauline, *Taking It All In*, (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1984), 351-2.
43. "Fear and Trembling in the Age of Reagan: Notes on Poltergeist," *Socialist Review*, No. 54 (1983), 121-134, and "Spielberg's Ideology Machines: "Poltergeist and the Suburban Middle Class," *Jump Cut*, No. 28 (1983), 5-6.
44. Kellner briefly addresses this question in "Poltergeists, Gender and Class," describing the film as an amalgam of Spielberg's and Hooper's styles and concerns: "This film exhibits Hooper's flair for the suspenseful, odd and horrific, and Spielberg's affection for the middle class, fuzzy-minded occultism, technical skill, and nose for the market." 237-8. One gets the general impression that we are supposed to think of Spielberg as providing the film with its ideology and Hooper as a craftsman executing it.
45. Ibid, 229.
46. Ibid, 228.

47. Ibid, 220.
48. Gordon, 100.
49. Kellner 1996, 227.
50. Canton, Joanne. "'I'll never have a clown in my house again': Why Horror Movies Live On," *Poetics Today*, V. 25 No. 2 (2004), 291.
51. Foucault, Michel, "What is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Donald Bouchard, ed., (Ithaca: Cornel University Press, 1977), 118.
52. Rushdie, Salman, *The Wizard of Oz*, (London: BFI, 1992), 95.

'The strange heart beating': Bird Imagery, Masculinities and the Northern Irish Postcolonial Gothic in the novels of Sean O'Reilly and Peter Hollywood

Maeve Davey

The umbrella-like Gothic genre remains a popular form of social and political critique today. It can be seen, as Catherine Spooner suggests through George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* portrayal of "brain-dead zombies staggering vacantly through a shopping-mall to the sound of piped Muzak, the link between one form of mindless consumption and another comically underlined" (1) , and, as I will argue , through the Gothic imagery and themes in the novels of Sean O'Reilly and Peter Hollywood which interrogate postmodern masculinity and how Northern Ireland's relationship with the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland has been coloured by colonialism. The supernatural, however, has fallen somewhat out of vogue in contemporary Irish writing and criticism, which Bruce Stewart attributes to fact that "in some quarters […] the occurrence of supernatural themes in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Irish writers is seen as the product of colonialism itself, whether in its characters as a weapon or a wound."(2) Thus, in order to eradicate the undesirable conception of Ireland as what Killeen describes as "weird and bizarre[…]a place where the past had never in fact disappeared, a place where the past was the present" (3), although it may still be acceptable to use Gothic themes and motifs, Irish ghost stories, vampire novels and writing about Celtic mythology that includes leprechauns, faeries, the *bean sídhe* or giants are arguably no longer palatable to the modern reader, if such a person can be imagined.

It is not just within the threat of the supernatural or the haunted recesses of the mind that one may be pursued, tortured and held captive in today's Gothic. Botting explains: "Terror and horror are diversely located in alienating bureaucratic and technological reality, in psychiatric hospitals and criminal subcultures" (4). However, more and more frequently, the contemporary Gothic does not simply focus on exaggerated parodies of bureaucracy and monstrous technology, or the subcultures of mental patients and disturbed criminals. One of the functions of the Gothic in recent times is to locate and expose horror in places familiar to the reader, from the workplace, to the home, to the archetypes of modern society. Thus, today's Gothic derives much of its strength from its ability to create a sense of uneasiness about the home, and the urban sprawls so many of us inhabit; in effect, to use Freudian terminology, transforming what should be *heimlich* into the *unheimlich*.

The urban environment is tediously familiar to many twentieth and twenty-first century readers – streetlights, neon signs, pollution, towering buildings, a homeless population who are usually pitied or feared, harmless spaces like parks and lanes that are transformed by night into places of terror and the feeling of claustrophobia at lives involuntarily lived so much on top of each other. Although this scenario is superficially very different from the castles, vast moors and dark forests of older Gothic novels, the settings are connected nonetheless in Botting's analysis: "Gothic landscapes are desolate, alienating and full of menace. In the eighteenth century they were wild and mountainous locations. Later the modern city combined the natural and architectural components of Gothic grandeur and wildness, its dark, labyrinthine streets suggesting the violence and menace of Gothic castle and forests" (5). In a society in which people work all day, employed by large, bureaucratic, faceless corporations; living beside people they might often see or hear but never speak to, and sharing daily transport around the city with others they also never communicate with, the probability of alienation is high. Furthermore, cultural anxieties (a by-product of different cultures existing side by side in many Western cities) provide fertile grounds for the Gothic, particularly since the 'War on Terror' which has meant that these cultures have become increasingly more, rather than less, segregated over time. The fears fuelled by media and right wing

politicians of corruption of the spirit of the American or European nations by Islam or of the legal system by Sharia law run rife and create a rich imaginative territory in which to situate the Gothic. And all of this is further complicated by class, with many Western cities also home to sink estates, ghettoes and the euphemistically named 'projects'.

It is various parts of urban, postmodern Ireland with its complicated mixture of class, politics and alienation that Sean O'Reilly and Peter Hollywood use as the setting of their Gothic-influenced novels. In O'Reilly's collection of short stories *Curfew* (2000) and his first novel *Love and Sleep* (2002) it is the city of Derry that figures prominently. As Fionnuala O'Connor argues, place, especially within a Northern Irish context, can be of pivotal importance to the formation and attitudes of the individual: "In Belfast, Derry, Newry and other towns where a very short geographical distance – sometimes less than a mile – can mean an entirely different daily experience of The Troubles, it is far from fanciful to suppose that attitudes can be affected by where people live."(6) Despite people's experiences of The Troubles having differed so widely, there are also many parallels between the experiences of post-conflict society across Northern Ireland. *Love and Sleep* is narrated from the perspective of Niall, a dissolute native of Derry who originally left the city several years before the novel begins to go to university in London and since dropping out has travelled all around Europe, most recently to Italy where he was living before his return to his hometown. The novel opens at a macabre party at the house of man who committed suicide and has just been buried in the cemetery on the hill overlooking the city. This opening has the effect of immediately delineating this uncertain, post-conflict time from the 'dead' past, metaphorically represented through a literal death. Malachi O'Doherty argues that "although the Troubles went on too long, there is a prevailing idea that they ended too easily."(7) The seemingly covert, hushed up end to this long and bloody conflict has parallels with this suicide in the novel, as the man chooses to end his life quietly and without explanation, crawling under his own bed to die.

The first, somewhat gruesome, impression of Derry created in the novel as a place of 'queasy, humble streets' (p.7) and 'sordid lair[s]' (p.ix), hidden away between 'new shopping centres and new pubs and new car parks and scaffolding everywhere' is heightened rather than abated, as the narrative continues, chronicling the 'frantic months' Niall spends there, half-heartedly trying to return to his hometown before ultimately admitting defeat, acknowledging his failure to belong and leaving once more. The aspect of the city that creates most unease in Niall is its encroaching modernity, making a place that was familiar to him increasingly unfamiliar, and to Niall's mind hostile: "I was living in a bedsit in the centre of town… The buildings on either side were concealed behind scaffolding and rows and sheets of white plastic that buckled and slapped like gunfire in the relentless wind. During the months I lived there, I never saw a sign of anyone at work on these vivisected houses; it was the same all over the city, gutted shops and sliced-up streets left to wait under swathes of plastic and wire netting, like the traces of some disease were being kept out of view." (p.37). Despite its unfamiliarity, the transformation of post-Troubles Derry is in many respects positive, as is apparent even to Niall: "I was up on the old walls of the city, looking out over the newly scrubbed Bogside with its painted verandas, satellite dishes and hidden alleyways. The main streets were tidy and empty." (p.8)

This parallels Hollywood's description of twenty-first century Newry in *Luggage* (2008) which, like *Love and Sleep*, introduces the reader to the place through a funeral. This parallel is interesting and it goes further than just this textual coincidence; like Derry, Newry too is a traditionally contested urban area situated near the border with the south, the kind of in-between or liminal space in which the Gothic has traditionally been situated. The funeral in *Luggage* is for a well-known local republican and Thomas, the novel's central character, is amazed at being able to look around him and see "no binoculars, observers,

check-points, concealed convoys of waiting land-rovers, police cars; no cauterwaul of rotor blades drowning out orations and prayers, no downdraughts scattering hats and headscarves – handkerchiefs; no unmarked cars, spies-in-the-sky; ranks of riot shields leaning Trojan-like in side streets ready to be snatched up; no rubber bullets, batons nor tear-gas; no 'PIGS' nor water cannons, nor dragon teeth; no Saracens; no metallic, megaphone voice booming from on high. No riot." (p.34) Like Niall's ambivalent reaction to the changes in Derry which he perceives to be hostile, Thomas too has a perhaps surprising reaction to these trappings of modernity and normality in Newry; in the absence of all the signs of conflict Thomas expected to see the narrator remarks that 'the hairs stood up on the back of his neck.' (p.34)

In Derry, the renewed economic prosperity is bringing nightlife and hotels to the city; and along with them jobs for the city's inhabitants, including Niall's old school friend Danny who ironically 'has a job behind the bar of a new pub, the biggest so far with four floors, in the post-past city, as he jokingly describes it. He sells the socialist papers every Saturday outside one of the new shopping centres.' (p.xvi) The core political concern for the central characters in *Love and Sleep*, somewhat surprisingly for a city so associated with The Troubles, but directly linking to Botting's explanation for why the city provides such rich material for Gothic, is that of class and whether the new economic climate will bring as dramatic a change for the city's inhabitants as it has brought to the city's appearance and also whether this change will be an entirely positive one.

Despite the increase in jobs and amenities available in Derry in the post-conflict period, and Danny's description of the city as being 'post-past', the people who live there, in O'Reilly's portrayal of them, still seem very preoccupied with the horrific aspects of the city's history. Niall's erstwhile girlfriend Lorna comments: "The doctors keep this city going, you know. The men all die young and the women go to the doctor. The whole city's on a wave of Prozac, everybody I know's on it. We're all drugged to the eyeballs. An acceptable level of intoxification. Direct rule by chemists." (p.93) This 'acceptable level of intoxification' spills over into the nightmarish carnivalesque every weekend night, where people drink to the point of oblivion to forget the past or the boredom of their lives: "The streets were teaming with people, drunk and raucous. They gathered in groups, unwilling to go home, with all sorts of glasses in their hands – it could have been a chaotic night-time procession through the city, with glasses instead of candles or flowers, to a vigil in the main square. Bursts of song or fighting started at the slightest provocation[…]There were signs of disorder everywhere I looked: a rampant couple on the roof of a chip van, people gathering in doorways or on their knees, staring furiously at the ground; men pissed freely, writing their names on the walls, taxis revved their engines to get through the crowds." (p.58) Of all the people Niall encounters in his months in Derry, very few have a positive attitude towards themselves or their lives; even his sister-in-law, Maureen, who initially seems relatively content with her situation complains, "I'm a woman with a husband and a child…a depressed husband and a child who won't eat and I'm guaranteed to spend the rest of my life in this place." (p.45) The bad times of paramilitary violence, bombs and curfews may appear to be gone in O'Reilly's Derry but so has the sense of community that once existed, to be replaced with the attitude epitomised by Danny: ''Why should I do anything about it? They can blow up the whole town for all I care. What's it ever done for me?' (p.61)

This obsession with the past and the relationship between past and present is typical of the Gothic, and the Gothic is further invoked through the figure of Niall's father. The last time Niall saw his father was when he boarded the bus which would take him on the first step of his journey to London. His father will not even get out of the car to say goodbye to him, so when he dies a few years later Niall refuses to come back for his funeral, much to the chagrin of the rest of his family. Maureen attempts to explain and to some extent excuse her father-in-law's behaviour to Niall on his return: 'He was a cold man, we all know

that. He couldn't help it. The men of his time were all like that. Think what they lived through – the forties and fifties in Northern Ireland; they were treated worse than animals. And then you going off to university. How can they make sense of changes like that?' (p.5) Niall initially reacts by scorning the idea that his failure to return for the funeral or visit home subsequently has anything to do with the past, and says that it has more to do with the fact that nothing in Derry holds any attraction for him.

Nevertheless, later in the novel, to escape a riot between the police and some teenagers, Niall jumps over a gate in the dark and finds himself in the cemetery. Having hurt his foot, he cannot climb back over and so, "With nowhere else to go I started up the slope between the split-open crypts and debauched supplicating angels, dragging my foot. Without acknowledging it to myself, I must have known where I was going." (p.138) The location of course is his father's grave, which, despite the fact that it is dark, Niall has been drinking and he has never visited it before, he manages to find without difficulty. Upon finding it, he promptly lies down upon it and curses his father as a 'wank-stain' and a 'coward' for spending his whole life being 'mute and obedient to the end' (p.139). This act of cursing is not enough to bring catharsis to Niall's damaged psyche: when he wakes the following morning still lying on the grave he discovers "to my horror that the gravel was scattered and there were obvious traces of digging[…]I gaped at the dirt on my hands, under my fingernails, on my clothes. Even the skin on my face felt like it was heavy with dirt. There was grit under my tongue, in my gums – falling to my knees, I puked." (p.140) Niall, while apparently both angry with and dismissive of his father, is also somewhat obsessed with the idea of his return. Whether Niall believes that this return he is so fixated with lies in himself, in the potential to become the man he claims to detest so strongly buried within him, or whether he believes that the attitudes and beliefs of his father are somehow a product of the city and can be unearthed and possibly understood by digging them up is unclear.

Whatever the reason for his fixation and frantic digging, the night Niall spends at the cemetery affects him so deeply he is stricken with a typically Gothic, metaphysical fever, in which he is tormented by nightmares of "digging with the last of my strength at my father's grave[…]children gathered in a vast crowd all around me, naked, seized by diabolical fits, holding burning torches, their faces painted white; I knew that if I didn't obey them they would tear me to pieces." (p.143) In desperation, he sends Danny up to the cemetery to the grave, to "check[…]it's the way it should be", where Danny encounters Michael, Niall's older brother and heir to their father's pragmatic, stiff-jawed, responsible disposition. Perhaps this is the return that is intended by O'Reilly: the legacy of repression inherited by Michael and by the rest of the people of Derry which keep them locked in the destructive cycle of drugs, alcohol, depression and denial as chronicled by Niall, who has managed in some ways to escape from it.

In O'Reilly's second novel, *The Swing of Things* (2004), the focus has shifted to Dublin but the northern gothic undertones remain through the central character, Noel Boyle. Boyle, who is from Derry, is a former republican prisoner who has turned his back on the IRA and is trying to begin a new life as a Philosophy student in Dublin; reflecting the description of Derry as 'post past' in *Love and Sleep*, Boyle describes Dublin as 'the non-unionised, postcolonial city.' Once again politics of class and colony are centralised, although the status of exiles and refugees is also explored in *The Swing of Things*. Boyle is regarded with a mixture of fear, pity, wariness and frustration by the other characters in the novel and his greatest flaw is his seeming failure to make a decision and stick to it. He joins the IRA and then changes his mind about the organisation just as he is driving a bomb towards a security checkpoint. After his release from jail he moves in with his friend Dainty, who lives in a new waterfront apartment. The first thing Boyle notices about his new home is not its luxury or stylish design but, perhaps unsurprisingly given his own recent experiences, its 'clear view down into the lighted car park of the Strand Road police station, an inhuman

gloom of inscrutable and fastidious experiments.' (p.27) He soon realises that he cannot shake the post-jail paranoia, understanding that 'when [he] stepped through the gate into the cheering crowds[…]his sentence had only begun" (p.27) and he eventually decides he has to move elsewhere in order to rebuild his life. He moves to Dublin and enrols as a student, only to find that after eight months he is still having difficulties settling in and making friends, and he begins to think about dropping out of university: "Boyle had lost his way and he knew it." (p.10)

Noel is often referred to by his surname and in fact often refers to himself in this way. The name Boyle has obvious connotations with the idea of things boiling over, which matches his edgy temperament and his struggle to keep the violence and rage, which despite his best efforts seem to be constantly simmering within him, under control. Boyle's unlikely friend Fada, a street poet, describes Boyle as having "tension around him, a consternation in the air. He was serious, slow to banter, maybe humourless[…]He reminded Fada of a bar after closing time, stools knocked over. The words came out of him sparsely, reluctantly like he didn't trust them or he knew they'd be back to haunt him. But there was also naivety, a fear of all before his eyes, and it could turn quickly into violence. He was uncomfortable in the world, ashamed, sullen." (p.77) Boyle seems to recognise his own capacity for reckless destruction, telling himself: "He couldn't lose control of himself in public. One thoughtless reaction and he would be back inside. He had to keep a grip, a focus, submerge himself in the books, and wait. That's what he had come down here for. To take his life into his own hands and make something." (p.73) The use of the word 'submerge' is ominous here: the notion of submersion applies to three important bodies in the novel: that of the unidentified woman found in the Liffey; that of the murdered artist thrown into the river by Boyle, and finally that of Boyle himself, who does not submerse himself in his books but winds up submerged in a ditch, betrayed by the organisation he himself betrayed eight years before.

Boyle has been brought up in a culture where the state is mistrusted by all those he knows and which in turn routinely discriminates against these people, a striking example being when his friend Dainty's older brother is shot dead by soldiers. Dainty's parents react to the murder by sending their other son to live with relatives in America, thus preventing him from becoming involved with the IRA, while Boyle is left behind. Although stopping short of allowing the past and his circumstances to completely excuse his behaviour, O'Reilly's portrait of Boyle's upbringing in a republican stronghold by affectionate but unconcerned parents who would rather be out drinking and dancing than worrying too much about what their son is up to paints a complex and sympathetic picture of why and how young men could become involved with the republican cause in the north.

O'Reilly's empathy as such is at odds with the vehement anti-revisionism of historians such as Desmond Fennell, who embodies "a sense of piety towards our nationalist past, with allegiance to the essential tenets of Irish nationalism, and with critical respect for contemporary Irish nationalism" (8) or the condescending attitude of academics such as Butler Cullingford, who argues that militant republicanism is 'the Irish version of [a] fascist discourse: a discourse which still holds sway in the Maze prison and the Catholic ghettoes of Belfast' (9). Of this tendency to either completely ignore or totally disassociate oneself from The Troubles, O'Doherty scathingly comments: 'It's not hard to see why the Troubles are an embarrassment. For one thing, they went on far too long. They seemed to represent a society which was incapable of learning from the sensible and mannered intellectuals. The sensible and mannered intellectuals quickly ran out of things to say and concluded, therefore, that the violence was just an embarrassing lapse into barbarism' (10).

He may not exactly believe the Troubles to have been an embarrassment, but Dainty's absence from Derry at the crucial juncture after his brother's murder, seems to have prevented him (as well as Northern Ireland's 'absent' middle classes and their Southern counterparts, who were also able to avoid the worst of the violence) from being able to understand why Boyle would have followed this path of becoming involved with paramilitaries. He reprimands Boyle for not being able to enjoy the party to celebrate his release from prison: "Jesus…just try and get into the fucken swing of it will you for fuck's sake? Just for me. Just this once. There's enough big faces in this town without you joining the ranks. And get rid of that beard for a start… Do you expect them all to get down on their knees in fucken thanks? Do you think they feel beholden to you or something? Catch yourself on Boylo." (p.29) For whatever reasons, right or wrong, Boyle has spent eight years of his life in jail and when he is released, having shunned all association with the IRA he is left with no support network. All Boyle has is Dainty who blithely encourages him to move on, take night classes and forget the whole thing ever happened or a former prisoner called Doe Hoe who hosts a 'pow-wow' for ex-prisoners every month in a caravan in Donegal, where they all drink excessively and take any and all drugs they can get their hands on as their lives and marriages fall apart.

Having spent eight years in prison, it is hardly surprising that Boyle is still finding it difficult to adjust after just eight months in Dublin but while Dainty cuts through to the core of the matter, he still fails to show any empathy for what Boyle is going through: "You think you're different but you're not. You're panicking now at being part of the state. They let you into the libraries and classrooms and give you a wee identity card. You've never had to face that before. You can't cope with it. You're just the same as everybody else now. Biting your lip, waiting for payday." (pp.112-113) O'Connor comments in 1993 that 'The South has been a sore place in the Northern nationalist soul for a long time'(11). Dainty, however, is an unusual example of a northern nationalist who sees the Republic of Ireland as being 'the state', and being as much the country of men from Derry as men from Dublin. He cannot understand why, after spending eight years in jail for being involved with an organisation that sought to bring about a reunification of the two separate political entities on the island, by whatever means necessary, that living in and belonging to this other state may be a strange experience for Boyle.

Dainty has wholeheartedly embraced post-conflict Derry, with his waterfront apartment and his new girlfriend. O'Doherty draws attention to the "prevailing idea that [The Troubles] ended too easily" (12) and that as a result people are afraid to "scrutinise how they ended or to test the compromises by which they ended, in case we bring them back." (13). This is reflected in Dainty's resolute refusal to give credence to the idea that The Troubles and the country's paramilitary organisations could still exist, even residually, vehemently trying to convince the mistrustful Boyle that: "Nobody gives a fuck any more. It's just gangland stuff now. Drugs and protection rackets. Everybody knows that. They can't even remember what they fucken did last week never mind eight years ago. You're fucken paranoid. The only person after you is yourself for being such a stupid wanker in the first place." (p.106) Interestingly, this is the exact opposite of the reaction Hollywood's character Thomas gets when he remarks on all visible signs of The Troubles and all security service surveillance having disappeared and seemingly gone in Newry: ''They're still here… They're in the air… Mobile phones? Emails? Computers? The internet… I guarantee you someone was watching, they had both assured him.' (p.34) Dainty and Thomas both assume that this period in the north's history can now be considered closed and they base their assumptions on the veneer of modernity and normality which glosses over lingering problems in contemporary northern life. However, better informed characters such as long-time Newry inhabitants or Boyle who has spent eight years in prison disrupt and unsettle this assumption with their insights and experiences. In this way the Gothic theme of the dreaded return and the Gothic image of corruption beneath a desirable façade are

present in the narrative and create feelings of uneasiness in the reader. Society may have progressed and with this progression has come the appearance of further progress but, despite the forceful optimism of characters like Dainty, things in Northern Ireland have not really changed all that much in essence. Given the end that Boyle meets, Dainty is forced to revise his opinions somewhat, although he still concludes that the problem must be Boyle, that "stupid fucker… stupid arsehole", rather than accepting that there might be any genuine problem in the postcolonial society he is so eager to be part of.

Fada's invocation of the Leda and the Swan myth is another clear example of postcolonial anxiety in the novel. *The Swing of Things* begins with an epigraph from Breton and Eluard's 'The Immaculate Conception': 'My whirling wings are the doors through which she enters the swan's neck, on the great deserted square that is the heart of the bird of night.' The 'she' that enters the swan's neck in 'The Immaculate Conception' or the Leda who is overcome and raped by the swan in Yeats' poem is not a frightened young girl in O'Reilly's novel but, rather, the Irish male psyche. Fada is the modern day epitome of 'the land of saints and scholars', a dissolute, mentally unstable Irish poet who peddles his poetry on the street and promises: "Poetry on tap, the great classics of Irish literature. Joyce and his chamber pots. Wilde and his twilight balconies. Yeats and his randy ghosts. I'll take you turf cutting with Heaney or onion eating with Jonathan Swift, lamenting the earls with O'Leary, into the monasteries and out on the misty hills, I've got ballads of the Easter Rising and odes to autumnal hussies… poets from the North and the South, Bobby Sands and Lady Gregory, bohemians and rednecks, dreamers and believers, wasters and wantnoters, scavengers and squanderers, a poem for everybody alive and dead, for the yawning refugees and pale-faced gunmen, the new Spanish armada and the Russian gangsters." (p.17) Half-crazed with the idea that he has been cursed, Fada spends his nights drinking and taking drugs with anyone that will pay for them and regaling anyone that will listen with the story of the night during which he, in a perverse caricature of a Gothic heroine, believes he was sexually assaulted, allegedly by a swan on the beach: "I looked around and there it was standing over us, wings outspread, the beak open wide, right over us. So Jess got out from under me and she grabs her clothes and runs along the beach. I keep slipping on the sand and falling over. We'd had a few drinks as well. And it's coming after me. I can hear Jess screaming. And the big white neck straightens up and bends and it snaps at me and I roll out of the way and I'm trying to get up off me knees again and then it gets me by the back of the neck and pushes me face down in the sand[…]It got me by the back of the neck in its jaws. I was pinned down. Blinded, couldn't breathe. Have you ever smelled a swan's breath? It's like burned skin. Scorched flesh. Like you're being branded. I couldn't do anything. It was stronger than me." (p.76)

In Yeats' poem, the poet asks if 'the staggering girl..put on his knowledge with his power'. This has been a troubling concept at the heart of Yeats' poem for many critics. Butler Cullingford argues that "Yeats never abandoned those essentialising myths that, in using woman as a symbolic object, deprive her of her own voice" (14), yet here it is suggested that the raped girl was somehow complicit in and benefited from her rape, gaining knowledge and power from the experience. This has been one of the key arguments for reading 'Leda and the Swan' as an allegory about the colonisation of Ireland. The violence of the poem's imagery, given that it was published in 1928 may have been influenced by the 1916 rebellion, the ensuing War of Independence, followed by the bitter and bloody civil war. The poem also challenges the dominant nationalist metanarrative of resistance in asserting that many Irish were indeed complicit in being colonized and the nation gained in certain educational and some economic respects from its colonisation.

Complicit or not, as a result of colonisation the Irish male psyche arguably was or at least was seen as being emasculated and feminised, a point which Butler Cullingford illustrates by referring to the writings of nineteenth- century ethnographers such as Ernest Renan: 'If it be permitted to us to assign sex to

nations as to individuals, we should have to say without hesitance that the Celtic race…is an essentially feminine race' (15). The effect of this feminisation is explored by Stewart in relation to Matthew Arnold who shared similar sentiments to Renan in relation to the Irish: 'In our own day Irish critics have strenuously repudiated this formulation, however well-intentioned it may have been on Arnold's part: the conception of Ireland as an emotional rather than a thinking being is clearly the prologue to its feminisation and hence an adjunct of colonial domination.'(16)

Controversially, in *The Swing of Things*, women are excluded from this particular process of colonisation. In the novel women are actually identified with the birds which symbolise colonial domination: Fada describes a woman on the street as 'lady with the swanlike body' and Boyle nicknames Emer, a girl he meets at university, as 'The Dove'. It is difficult to see what meaning is being inferred here. Fidelma Ashe comments that in contemporary Western society, "The qualities of 'manliness' have also been framed as under threat, attacked and undermined by feminism, gay culture and commercialism" (17). On the one hand, neither Boyle nor Fada nor many of the other men in the novel are particularly at ease around women and so it could be argued that O'Reilly is attempting to paint women into the picture of being responsible for some of the many threats to Irish masculinity. On the other hand, the woman who Fada describes as having a 'swanlike body' screams when he approaches her, in what could be described as the kind of sound a wild bird might make but is just as likely to be associated with Leda, a woman under attack, issuing "a loud shriek of warning down the centuries of women." (p.17) Nor is Emer, with her enthusiasm and innocence, a very threatening character. Perhaps, then, what O'Reilly is suggesting is that these women are not actually threatening or in any way malevolent but a damaged male psyche could perceive them as being such.

Una Brankin's novel, *Half Moon Lake* (2003), set in rural Country Antrim in 1976 also has a strange 'swan' episode in which local girl Grace goes on a walk by the lake with a man staying with her family who the other characters in the novel at this stage know little about and suspect of being an on-the-run paramilitary: "The swans had drawn closer and when the mother spotted us, she butted out her neck with a shrill heckle. Saul threw a pebble at her and she bolted, the cygnets flapping in her wake. "Swans give me the creeps. Vicious things, you know." " (p.61) Grace agrees and mentions that her brother too is afraid of the birds, but she proclaims herself to be much more frightened by the unmistakeably Freudian 'eels'. If swans and gulls can be read as metaphorical signifiers for colonialism, then one subtext of these narratives is that while Irish men are obsessed with, afraid of, and bitterly hate the reality of their subjugated colonial status; Irish women feel just as, or even more, threatened by the violent version of masculinity created by colonialism.

As terrified as Fada is of the swans and as much as he identifies himself as Leda, he is also fixated with the birds. While institutionalised in a mental hospital, it is revealed that Fada "liked to draw many headed swan-like shapes on the walls in excrement not necessarily his own." (p.194) He also seems, at points, to identify with the swan rather than Leda, savagely flapping 'his arms like a starving carrion bird.' (p.18) Fada's attitude to the swans varies between fear, obsession and an all-consuming hatred, sneering to himself "at the swans patrolling the canal beyond the weir. Guarding against what? Always the suggestion of their aloof waiting, always circling and gliding and stretching their wings in preparation for the wondrous moment. How could people control their rage at the sight of them, the revolting dignity, the decadent grace? Why didn't people attack them with hammers? Pour petrol in and set the waters aflame[…]See them the tumultuous fiery wings outspread." (p.64) He incites others to attack them too, although the prevailing attitude seems to be: "We've lost our way as a people when we start harming animals." (p.262)

The postmodern aspect to Fada's fractured psyche is underlined when Boyle claims to disbelieve his story about being raped by a swan: "It was more likely you jumped the poor animal." "When I have a child, people will believe me and rejoice. Her face will launch a thousand peace-keeping land-to-sea mobile units." (p.234). The Irish may have won to an extent their freedom from Britain but the legacy of colonialism remains in the emasculation of the male psyche and the nation's lack of military power as an officially neutral country with a small army reserved only for peace-keeping missions, as a result of De Valera's tactical manoeuvring during WWII. There is no suggestion in the novel that O'Reilly in any way supports the idea of a more aggressive, militarised Irish nation but the continuation of the legacy of colonialism and the constant presence of the swans suggests the exposure of a subconscious fear that the nation may still be vulnerable to domination even today, again the great Gothic fear of the return, whether that domination is colonialism, capitalism or globalisation.

A telling detail in whether it is the old colonisers or the new state the citizen should fear is well captured in another image involving hostile birds: "He turned his face away and saw a camera moving on a lamppost towards the door of a sex shop where a man was throwing bread to the swooping screaming gulls." (p.149). Compared to the Irish nation under De Valera, this new, relatively secular, postmodern state may allow the citizen more personal freedoms as symbolised by the sex shop, but this liberty is carefully monitored in a Foucauldian gesture symbolised by the camera whereby the subject is taught to watch and discipline itself. Moreover, the subject now feeds the birds which are the harbingers of colonialism, this curiously benevolent act being perhaps indicative of Celtic Tiger Ireland's attitude towards courting the dominating forces of global investment or of the anxiety created by modern Ireland's position within the EU. Fada's final comments on the swans in the novel references both 'Leda and the Swan' and a later Yeats' poem, 'Wild Swans at Coole': "They flew up from the lake… I saw them gathering last night. Forty, fifty of them. A shudder in the loins. Their hearts don't grow old" (p.300). In 'Wild Swans at Coole', the poet sombrely reflects on the passing of time and the loss of the passion and exuberance he had in his youth, while the swans remain 'unwearied'. After Boyle's killing of the artist, and Boyle's being killed in turn by the IRA, Fada's final mention of the swans is a poignant elegy to the difficulty and exhaustion of living in such a rapidly changing, undefined society.

Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, the nationalist male remains an uneasy part of an old colony, so the fear of return conjured up by the swans in Dublin is replaced by the paranoia induced by army helicopters. The birds have not completely disappeared, the colonial eye is watching from the ceiling at a pub in Derry through "a badly painted *trompe l'oeil* of swans with the faces of children drifting across a gloomy lake." (p.51) In Hollywood's Luggage, Newry man Thomas is very aware of the presence of birds even on holiday in France, warily watching "eight griffin buzzards from the bridge at Les Millandes" (p.18). The first thing Thomas notices on arriving in a coastal French town later in his holiday is that the beach is named after seagulls, La Plage des Mouettes. Upon noticing this, Thomas instinctively remembers that he has neither seen nor heard these birds in the previous three weeks and points out to his children that "the Dordogne is the farthest in-land you've ever been" (p.57), a fact which implies his children have never been too far away from these sentinel birds, growing up as they are in a supposedly new and peaceful society.

Helicopters too are representative of colonial power and domination, if somewhat more obviously than the birds are. Like the swans, helicopters are airborne and like Fada's fear of being assaulted by the swans, the helicopters create fear of being followed, tracked like prey, arrested and hauled off for brutal interrogation or worse. At the very outset of *Love and Sleep* as the crowd gather in the dead man's house

after his funeral, outside "above the city a helicopter was taunting a silent street" (p.xi), reminding the reader from the outset of the colonised status of the city the novel is set in and the feelings this provokes in the city's inhabitants. Boyle in *The Swing of Things* fixates on the symbol of the helicopter in his post-jail paranoia: "You're walking down the street and suddenly you are convinced somebody is following you. Or a car. A helicopter, new silent ones they haven't announced yet." (p.16) The silent, unannounced assault is the most feared one. Moreover, in Boyle's nightmarish recollections of the day he is arrested he recalls running panicked across the fields while "there was a helicopter coming down over his head and they were knocking out the window to him, waving, blowing kisses, the camouflaged faces[…]there was no fucken mercy." (pp.91-92) Just as the swan conjures up fears of sexual assault, the sight of a helicopter full of men with their faces painted blowing kisses at Boyle while they bear down upon him creates a similarly sexual, predatory image.

The sexual theme continues after Niall is rebuked by Danny for trying to seduce the quiet young girl, Niall realises he pities Danny and his repressed, narrow minded attitude towards life: "Inexplicably I felt sorry for him. He snorted mockingly to himself as I gave him my excuses for why I had to go. A helicopter was out. Danny struck me as sickly and depressed; I found it painful to even look at him. After the gloom of the house, I was relieved to get back out into the air and the night streets." (p.84) At this juncture the helicopter serves again to remind us of the north's colonised status and how this goes some way to explaining attitudes towards sexuality and towards women in the city, a point which is well articulated by Gerardine Meaney: "The psychodynamic of colonial and postcolonial identity often produces in the formerly colonized a desire to assert a rigid and confined masculine identity, against the colonizers stereotype of the subjects as feminine, wild, ungovernable. This masculine identity then emerges at state level as a regulation of 'our' women, an imposition of a very definite feminine identity as guarantor to the precarious masculinity of the new state" (18). In *Love and Sleep*, Dainty and his friends, who want to give Niall a beating for his attempted seduction of the girl, are arguably clear examples of this mindset.

After Lorna is shot dead by an army foot patrol, the first indication that something is amiss in the city is the sound of helicopters circling overhead. It is never made clear why Lorna is shot, and in a book published in 2002 this seems slightly out of place, as the last killing officially attributed to the British Army or security forces in Northern Ireland took place some time before this, several years before the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 (19). Realistic or not, however, Lorna's murder seems to confirm the worst fears of men who are unable to recognise women as being autonomous agents; men like Danny, whose first remark to Niall when he breaks the news to him that Lorna has been shot is that she was alone when it happened: "She was walking along the street by herself, he roared into my face." (p.194) The worst-case scenario of the native woman, left alone and vulnerable to harm by the colonising forces, has been realised. However, somewhat anachronistic as the shooting of Lorna appears, O'Reilly is careful to show how the mindset caused by colonialism does not seem to affect the younger generation: "It was a Saturday morning and a group of teenagers were sitting on a garden wall across the street… None of them bothered to glance up at the sound of a helicopter." (p.190) The implication is that the helicopter, the symbol of domination, has nothing to do with them. It is not clear whether this implication increases or detracts from realism in the novel, which is set in a society where children are obviously influenced greatly by their parents' prejudice and many still live in segregated housing estates and attend segregated schools. Nor is it clear whether it is intended to be a positive thing from O'Reilly's perspective that the younger generation are so blithely able to ignore what is going on around them, when it of course still affects them.

O'Doherty criticises the wilful ignorance of the existence of hardened sectarian mindsets and the deliberate refusal to acknowledge the realities of discrimination that existed in Northern Ireland before the Troubles, which allowed the country to "[walk] into the Troubles looking the other way." (20) A key theme in the Gothic that I have explored in this article is that of the feared, half-anticipated and much hated return. Forty years after The Troubles began, the question that remains to be answered is if O'Reilly's postmodern portrayal of disinterested youth in *Love and Sleep* and characters like Dainty in *The Swing of Things* are indicative of this same mindset criticised by O'Doherty; a mindset of averting your eyes and refusing to admit the reality of your own involvement whether it is something you have chosen or not. Moreover, if this is the case, how is this long and bloody conflict meant to be finally and lastingly resolved if everyone, from the public to politicians, journalists, playwrights and novelists, is too busy looking the other way to address the disturbing legacy it has left behind?

The potent Gothic fear of the return holds much currency in a region still scarred and fragmented by thirty years of bitter conflict. The question of whether the reasons behind this conflict have been explored and resolved is left hanging in literature and journalism produced within or about the region, and increasingly it is a question that demands an answer. However, for as long as it remains unanswered Northern Ireland encapsulates the Gothic image of desirability and prosperity, corroded and corrupted beneath with the potential for poison and horror to seep through the cracks and crevices of the public consciousness. It is for this main reason that the Gothic is experiencing the beginnings of a resurgence in the reason, and it is also for this reason that this genre is already proving effective and unsettling in the accuracy of its social critiques.

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Ghostly and Monstrous Manifestations of Women: Edo to Contemporary

Ada Lovelace

> What controls a bird is the human will; what controls a wife is her husband's manliness.
> Akinari Ueda (1) *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*

Aiming to contextualise the emerging field of Japanese Gothic, Henry J. Hughes' 'Familiarity of the Strange: Japan's Gothic Tradition' directly focuses upon drawing transcultural parallels with the Western Gothic tradition while emphasising the unique cultural aspects of Japanese Gothic fictions. Hughes reminds us that 'Gothic literature is characterized by its use of a barbarous past to dramatize uncontrolled violence and passion.'(2).The anxieties that plague and anguish human society, such as religious corruption, civil unrest and familial discord, render a distinct notion of familiarity that defies the limitations of cultural boundaries. However, these cultural boundaries are integral in the overarching social structure that produces and aims to contain the monstrous woman.

Japanese societal and familial constructs are also essential in establishing its Gothic tradition – especially when pertaining to women. Numerous early Western Gothic fictions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries showcase how, as Punter and Byron argue, 'women characters tend to be objectified victims, their bodies, like the Gothic structures, representations of the barriers between inside and outside that are to be broached by the transgressive male.'(3) Female Gothic novels, however, function on a rather problematic level. While such fictions often aim to subvert the archaic and outmoded domestic ideologies administered by the reign of tyrannical patriarchs, the completely successful execution of this theme seldom occurs. Ironically, the subversion entails the reinstatement of the protagonist's position within society. However, the subservient role delegated to women, and its allegorical representations within the West's Gothic past, in many ways, is strikingly different to that of Japan.

First published in 1776, Akinari Ueda's *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*, with its vividly grotesque spectral and monstrous manifestations of women and female sexuality, marks the textual inception of Japan's Gothic tradition. Although Ueda's tales are heavily influenced by Chinese lore and *The Tale of Genji* (4), they also showcase the wide range of folkloric anomalies unique to Japanese culture – such as tengu and shape-shifting serpents. Moreover, the figure of *onryō*; or the vengeful spirit, is perhaps Japan's more persistent and enduring image of the strange. Ghostly manifestations most often appear when obligations go unfulfilled, which consequently binds the person to this world, and prevents them from transcending to the next. However, *onryō* is most often represented in literature and theatre as a wronged woman who has been murdered, or subjected to a traumatising event during life that has instigated her demise. The powerful and overwhelming emotions that have originated in such an instance function as the catalyst for administering vengeance upon the living. According to Iwasaka and Toelken, 'ghosts are thought to express certain dilemmas which require culturally acceptable solutions. It is the values represented by these problems and reflected in their resolutions that the legends dramatize.'(5) Iwasaka and Toelken proceed to elaborate on the concept of *on*, which is an essential construct in the overarching framework of Japanese society, defining it as 'the kind of obligation one assumes […] when one has been the recipient of love, nurturance, kindness, favour, help or advice – especially from a superior in the social system.'(6) Monstrosity functions as a cultural metaphor, and serves to represent the anxieties plaguing a particular society at a particular point in time. In dramatizing the *onryō*'s intimate interconnectedness with equating and realigning the distortion created by unpaid debts and unfulfilled obligations or executing retribution, ghosts embody and preserve the cultural value of *on*.

While Ueda's writings in the feudal period of the Tokugawa shogunate epitomise the cultural importance of on through ghostly representations of women and female sexuality, the early modern era, dominated by the works of Izumi Kyōka and Junichirō Tanizaki, shifts from physical monstrosity to abnormal psychology in women. As Western ideology seeps into Japanese tradition, the monstrous woman manifests in textual hauntings that afflict the narrative to represent masculine anxieties. The beautiful and alluringly dangerous women present in the texts of Kyōka and Tanizaki conceptualise the modernisation of woman's role in society under Western influence as her restricted feudal predecessor is left behind. Likewise, Japanese cultural values are also under threat of being cast aside or overshadowed.

Contemporary encounters with monstrous women are no longer confined to rural villages, but rather dwell in the vast metropolis of Tokyo in contemporary Gothic fictions. At the centre of Ryū Murakami's fiction *Piercing* is globalization; this overarching theme governs the actions of the objective self in polite society. Consequently, subjectivity becomes the site of monstrosity as trauma lingers beneath the surface and threatens to arise in both women and men. Gendered discourse itself is deconstructed in the work of Kōji Suzuki through his use of a hermaphroditic figure. Perhaps the most notable figure of modern Japanese horror is the vengeful and hermaphroditic ghost of Sadako from Suzuki's *Ring*. The re-emergence of the *onryō* in recent years suggests the rejection of the intercultural depictions of monstrosity that manifest as a result of globalization and a return to the folkloric origins of the monstrous woman.

These progressive representations of women and monstrosity are undoubtedly the focal points that link this diverse array of authors from the Edo period to Heisei rule today. Drawing upon the wealth of uncanny Japanese mythology and folklore, each writer appropriates women, and the themes of female sexuality and sexual trauma, to reflect the cultural anxieties prominent at the respective period of time. This, therefore, allows the pattern of female monstrosity's evolutions and devolutions in Japanese Gothic literature to be mapped to convey and define a culturally specific and unique representation of the monstrous woman in Japan.

The Edo Period: Akinari Ueda's Tales of Moonlight and Rain

First published circa 1716 in the midst of the Edo period, with its authorship attributed to the moralist Ekken Kaibara, *The Greater Learning for Women*; or the *Onna Daigaku* is a cultural and familial dogma with a vague resemblance to the women's conduct books circulating in the West in the eighteenth century. (7) According to Kaibara, '[t]he five worst infirmities that afflict the female are indocility, discontent, slander, jealousy, and silliness.' (8) In order to govern these seemingly inherent flaws, and consequently uphold a successful marriage, the teachings of 'self-inspection and self-reproach' (9) within *The Greater Learning for Women* aim to endow women with the desirable qualities of 'gentle obedience, chastity, mercy, and quietness.' (10) As Shingoro Takaishi also notes, (11) it is rather unclear what Kaibara explicitly meant by feminine 'silliness.' (12) Takaishi does not argue that the guidance of *The Greater Learning for Women* rose out of a belief that women 'were mentally imperfect or lacking in intellect' (13) but rather that 'a woman was too apt to give way to her passion' (14), which certainly correlates with the morals at the heart of many stories in Ueda's *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*. Moreover, while it may seem that Kaibara's moral precepts are a portrayal of overwhelming Japanese patriarchy, it can also be suggested that the doctrine functions to equate the balance between the duties of men and women in the feudal system of the Tokugawa era. Kaibara states that '[a] woman has no particular lord' (15) unlike her husband who would follow the code of the Bushido, which encompasses virtues such as 'submission to

authority, utter devotion to one's overlord, and self-sacrifice of all private interest, whether of self or family, to the common weal.'(16) Seemingly gender performativity and conforming to socially prescribed roles was central to the Edo period for both men and women as demonstrated by the prominence of the later *Shingaku* (Heart Learning) movement (17). Jennifer Robertson argues that '[u]nmarried women were considered anomalous and dangerous mavericks, since they were not locked into a sociopsychological framework of overlapping obediences.' (18) Thus, it proceeds that a similar belief would be upheld for married women that stray from the confines of the tenets dictated to them. The ghostly and monstrous incarnations of women in Ueda's *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* ultimately serve to represent male anxieties about unfettered female sexuality.

With marital piety, and the idealised wife functioning as the overarching theme of 'The Kibitsu Cauldron', Ueda vividly and grotesquely portrays how the follies of the idle husband can corrupt the dutiful wife; jealousy is manifested both upon the body and psychologically to condemn husband Shōtarō doubly for his wayward lifestyle. With his habitual 'indulging in sake and sensual pleasure' (19), and his blatant disinterestedness in his father's flourishing farm, Ueda sets up Shōtarō, not only as a young man with little sense of filial duty to his family, but also as an idler who is wavering from his obligations as part of the peasant class. However, the arranged marriage between Shōtarō and Isora is intended to remedy his wilful behaviour; with her conduct modelled from *The Greater Learning for Women*, Isora 'served them all with her heart, rising early, retiring late, always ready to help her parents-in-law, and accommodating to her husband's nature.' (20) Rather than changing Shōtarō through the positive influence of utmost duty, Isora's accommodating nature only exposes the gulf between their very different dispositions.

While Isora's unwavering devotion to Shōtarō is undoubtedly the crux of the story, the silence of the Kibitsu cauldron, which signifies ill omen according to Shinto belief, certainly foreshadows the impending ruin of both Isora and Shōtarō; ironically, it is her steadfast devotion that incites their ruin. By sympathising with her husband's concubine, and consequently being 'cruelly deceived', Isora is 'overwhelmed by resentment and distress and took to her bed, seriously ill.' (21) Seemingly, the polarising traits of Isora and Shōtarō cannot coexist, and as a result, 'she weakened day by day, until finally there was no hope.' (22) Isora's death functions as a direct subversion of an aesthetic manifestation of sexual excess, which is practised by her husband, upon her own body. This, in turn, results in physical deterioration and untimely death. As if afflicted by rampant contagion, which is a theme adapted by contemporary writer Koji Suzuki in his 1991 novel *Ring*, concubine Sode 'seemed to come down with a cold; she began to be vaguely unwell and then appeared to have lost her mind, as though possessed by some malign spirit.' (23) With her symptoms bearing similarities to Isora's, Sode's bodily and psychological decay serves as penance for her contribution in both sexual transgression and the betrayal of Isora by none other than the jealous *onryō* of Isora herself. Shōtarō and his immoral conduct are certainly the catalyst for this plethora of affliction, and it is only when he encounters the ghost of Isora does there rise an inclination to change. Accompanied by the ominous words '"Let me show how I repay your cruelty"', Isora's face is revealed to be 'ghastly pale, the bleary, tired eyes appalling, and a pale, wasted hand pointed horribly this way' (24); Ueda's focus upon the wasted, cadaverous visage of Isora serves to enforce a striking contrast with the sensual pleasure associated with carnality in which Shōtarō so lavishly indulgences.

After being squarely confronted with the materiality and decay of the physical body through this ghostly incarnation of his wife, Shōtarō '"must shut [himself] inside for forty-two more days and exercise the greatest restraint on [his] behavior during that period"' (25) as instructed by the yin-yang master. The nights of Shōtarō's confinement are often defined by the 'wind in the pines [that] sounded fierce enough

to topple things over, and then the rain began to fall' as 'the spirit circled the house or screamed from the ridgepole' emitting the horrid cry, '"Oh! I loathe him!"', which is accompanied by 'a crimson light [that] pierced the window-paper of Shōtarō's house.' (26) Ueda's purging of Shōtarō's mind is rich in allegory; as with all the stories in *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*, the strange encounters with spirits predominately occur during rainy, moonlit nights as implied by the title. As Inouye comments, '[t]he playwright [Monzaemon Chikamatsu] […] saw water as a space where man meets woman, life crosses into death, and the known world merges with the world beyond.' (27) Like Chikamatsu, Ueda's tales utilise the numerous metaphorical interpretations of water that are so deeply rooted in the oral tradition. In 'The Kibitsu Cauldron', water symbolises the process of purifying Shōtarō's mind, which is tainted by sin; it also symbolises the fluidity of the continuum between the living and dead – how the spirit of Isora can survive in order to act vengeance upon her husband. Moreover, the connotation of the storm also suggests the precarious nature of the situation. Due to its association with sexual promiscuity and violence, the 'crimson light [that] pierced the window-paper of Shōtarō's house' (28) is a metaphorical reversal of penetration executed by unrestrained ghost of Isora. Shōtarō is ultimately at the mercy of his wife.

Shōtarō's impulsive behaviour is epitomised when he leaves confinement moments too early to reveal that he has learned nothing; after a piercing scream, all that remains of Shōtarō is the 'fresh blood dribbling from the wall onto the ground. And yet neither corpse or bones were to be seen.' (29) With Shōtarō, we witness his passion for carnality, only to watch the corporeal withering and decaying as sexual excess culminates upon the body of both Isora and Sode, but he is, in turn, completely obliterated by his vengeful wife. Unable to realign the balance through the overwhelming influence of devotion as depicted by Isora, or purge the mind into a state of nothingness, Shōtarō's body is effaced; consequently, Isora has her revenge, and also disappears. Yet the red blood remains as a reminder of how a husband 'will incite [a wife's] perverse nature and bring grief upon himself.' (30) Even in this patriarchal hierarchal society, women as *onryō* transcend into the dominant position as a terrifying and monstrous punisher. However, the underlying theme of Ueda's tale is to reinforce on. Shōtarō's parents arrange this marriage to Isora as a positive influence. Isora fails to rectify the situation because she too becomes infected by an undesirable disposition; specifically, jealousy. Isora, however, is a wronged woman; the haunting and revenge evokes a somewhat subversive devotion to on, but still conveys its reverence and importance in Japanese culture. The subsistence of on after death, and consequently its entailing association with the *onryō*, stresses both the endurance and importance of this convention in Japanese culture.

The Early Twentieth Century: Kyōka & Tanizaki

The establishment of the Meiji government in 1868 ultimately incited great political and social changes within Japan; beginning with the dissolution of the feudal rule imposed by the Tokugawa Shogunate, the Meiji period is recognised as 'a time of questioning old customs and practises and of experimenting with new forms, frequently under Western influence.' (31) With the state's publication of *The Meiji Greater Learning for Women* (*Meiji Onna Daigaku*) and its accompanying slogan "Good Wife, Wise Mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*), the model of the idealised Japanese woman was certainly under revision from her Edo predecessor. Confounding the boundary between the domestic sphere and the public domain, the Meiji period's reinstatement of the home as '"an essential building block of the national structure"' (32) is certainly another denotation of woman's position in Japanese society. Ideally, woman's service to the empire was in household management, and in raising children, consequently rendering women's suffrage or even any involvement in political activity inappropriate, and thus, prohibited. However, the establishment of the Taishō period in 1912, with its eager willingness to embrace Western culture and practises, created the "modern woman": a hybrid of Japanese tradition and Western influences that

spanned all classes and infiltrated Japan's male-dominated urban workforce. This drastic redefinition of female sexuality was in constant conflict with the conservative familial role associated with previous Meiji ideologies, which survived until the end of the Second World War. Writing during these periods of political and social reformation were Izumi Kyōka and Junichirō Tanizaki. Women characters often occupy a position of centrality in both Kyōka's and Tanizaki's fictions. While embodying the polarising elements comprising of the Edo period's feudal past, and Japan's burgeoning state of modernity, both Kyōka's and Tanizaki's depictions of feminine monstrosity in such a transitional period of Japan's history challenge and confound androcentric psychology, and are deeply rooted in danger, deception and dominance.

'Again and again, there she was, resembling her Western counterparts, foregrounding in remote and liminal territories, enticing and destroying, entrapping and amorphous, polluting, terrifyingly maternal, alternately deadly and breathtakingly erotic' (33) wrote Nina Cornyetz of the numerous enchantresses in Izumi Kyōka's tales. Kyōka's female characters are a polarising amalgamation of a seemingly transcultural model of feminine monstrosity in conjunction with Japanese traditions, but despite this, the cultural origins of Kyōka's creations are not obscure or overshadowed, but are rather rendered fantastically unique by their Japanese context. Deviating from Ueda's use of the female body as a source of visual abhorrence, Kyōka's women use their beauty and their paradoxically maternal and lustful dispositions to seduce, manipulate and torment their submissive male counterparts.

The power of the vampiric seductress of Kyōka's 'The Holy Man of Mount Koya' lies in her ability to confound Meiji gendered discourse, to distort what is complementary: to cause meaning to collapse. While she is typical of Kyōka's construction of female characters with the colours red and white encoded into the text as exemplified by her 'snow-white' (34) skin, and the 'flowing perspiration' that 'could only be light crimson in color, the shade of mountain flowers' (35), she is distinguished from Kyōka's archetypical woman by her strange powers, and parasitical disposition. As Charles Shirō Inouye argues, the '[r]ed marks on pale skin are an emblem both of taboo and of transcendence, expressing the bipolarity inherent in Kyōka's depictions of women.' (36) Even though the parasitical mistress certainly embodies taboo, she is perhaps better conceptualised as a transgressive force as a result of her vampiric traits.

Heavily influenced by the folkloric allegorical interpretations of water as demonstrated by Chikamatsu and Ueda, Kyōka extensively employs this metaphorical device as the momentum for many of his stories. The focal point of 'The Holy Man of Mount Koya' is the river. With the village's contaminated stream at the beginning of the novel placed in juxtaposition with the purifying river in the isolated mountains, Kyōka establishes a distinct binary, only to distort and confound it through the use of the vampiric enchantress. Susan Napier suggests that 'the water is contaminated by modernity itself, the vulgar real world of the medicine peddler and the maid at the inn, a world from which the "old road" is both literally and psychologically a form of escape.' (37) The monk's anxiety and rejection of this water establishes his rejection of the infectious influence of the West; he desires the untainted source of the river that embodies old Japan. The beautiful vampiric woman's powers are entwined with this 'strange and mysterious stream that both seduces men and restores her beauty.' (38) The stream adopts different symbolism for the woman, and her male victims. For the woman, the stream encompasses her 'lustful nature' (39), and her deteriorating beauty – both of which are satiated by preying on men, and extracting their semen. On the other side of this dialectic relationship, the stream is the epitome of danger; undeterred by the watery barrier represented by the road that has been 'turned into a river' (40), the 'secluded mountain cottage' (41), situated far from civilisation, is reminiscent of Japan's medieval Gothic past when strange encounters could arise. The monk's entrance into the 'secluded mountain cottage' (42) itself is doubly

symbolic; while it represents the prohibited act of sexual penetration, it also conceptualises the rejection of the symbolic order by returning to a semiotic state – the ultimate transgression.

The lure of the woman lies in the conglomeration of female sexuality and maternity; this effacing of definitive boundaries causes 'mothering [to] become a teleology that fused femaleness and the abject; modernity was posed as the other to an archaism rendered female/maternal.' (43) With the seductress's 'idiot husband' (44) seated on the veranda fingering his navel that 'stuck out like the stem of a pumpkin' (45) with one hand 'while waving the other in the air as if he were a ghost' (46), man's presence within the text is allegorically comprised of two progressive elements through this strange figure: with the repeated, masturbatory stroking of his protruding navel, the woman is represented as the idealised Oedipal fantasy of the abject maternal, which in turn reduces men to their 'base desires.' (47) Upon fulfilment of this fantasy, the enchantress is empowered as the man transgresses from the symbolic order into the semiotic, which ultimately entails the effacement of the self as conceptualised by the idiot husband's presence within the text as a nonentity. Embodying both temptation and penance for sexual transgression, the husband conceptualises a paradoxical continuum of the karmic wheel; this Buddhist theme is extended as the enchantress' magic transforms the degenerate male 'into an animal, just like that. No one escapes' (48), constituting a figurative rebirth in the lower Realm. However, the monk's faith nullifies the woman's powers. Instead, he is assimilated with animals in a figurative sense when 'feeling like a snail without a shell' (49) and 'as helpless as a monkey fallen from its tree.' (50) Each of these similes is representative of the effects the woman has on the monk; this is conveyed when he is bathing in the river with her, and feels 'as if the woman's body … had enveloped [him] in the petals of its blossom.' (51) Her beauty erodes his staunch religious vows of chastity to leave him exposed to temptation. At the same time, her domineering maternal disposition dissolves his notion of selfhood and threatens to render him as part of the continuum of the maternal body by accentuating his helplessness.

However, differing drastically from the Countess Kifune from 'The Surgery Room', and Mio Tamawaki of 'One Day in Spring', the parasitical woman of 'The Holy Man of Mount Koya' is not 'subjected to violence and death in order to qualify for the honor of providing salvation for Kyōka's [hero.]' (52) Instead, the monk must attain salvation himself by 'curb[ing] [his] wayward thoughts.' (53) At the Husband and Wife Falls, the monk imagines the woman 'inside the falling water […] her skin disintegrating and scattering like flower petals amid a thousand unruly streams of water […] and immediately she was whole again.' (54) Kyōka extends the metaphor of the flower blossom as the maternal body, but the water is doubly metaphoric. The monk regresses to the semiotic, and the water epitomises danger as he drowns himself. However, the water becomes purgatory and 'expecting to see a messenger from Hell' (55) after pulling himself out of the river, he learns of the woman's true nature from the old man. Unlike the enchantress's other victims who are transformed into animals for their sexual transgression, the monk is figuratively reborn with his mind purified of deviant thoughts. The balance between good and evil has been realigned.

Vampiric figures of the West – particularly those of the nineteenth century – portray how, as Wisker observes, 'boundaries, tested and strained, are reinforced. The evil is without, order reigns again.' (56) While Kyōka's enchantress does both invite and punish men for sexual transgression, her ability to lure men from the symbolic order and into the semiotic with her beauty and maternal care, confounds boundaries, and then proceeds to erase them. It must also be noted that this Japanese vampire need not be vanquished, but rather the monk victim must purge the evil from his mind to restore the balance between good and evil. The vampiric nature of the seductress is commenting on Meiji gendered discourse: both promiscuous and maternal, this enchantress cannot be confined to the role of "Good Wife, Wise Mother"

that patriarchy has prescribed her. She is also a depraved, sexual parasite; she manipulates and uses men for her own ends. This behaviour portrays her as an idle woman, and this is certainly contrary to the constructive nature of managing household affairs, which is her duty to both her husband and the state. Kyōka's vampiric enchantress is representative of the disappearing view of old Japan; as a tremendously powerful figure, she administers revenge upon patriarchy and its doctrines through her transformative powers and deconstructive lure of the semiotic.

As Japan progresses into the Taishō period in 1912, modernisation is no longer an infectious contaminant as depicted in Kyōka's 'The Holy Man of Mount Koya', but has rather evolved into an overbearing and dominant presence. The vampiric mistress figure now inhabits the urbanised areas of Tokyo and Yokohama in Junichirō Tanizaki's 'Aguri' – as opposed to the isolated mountains of 'The Holy Man of Mount Koya'. Bearing many similarities to Tanizaki's 1924 novella *Naomi*, 'Aguri' also focuses on a paradoxical view of the West. Ken K. Ito asserts that while *Naomi* 'is the fable of a Japanese dominated by his obsession with the West, it is also the story of a "West" that can be manipulated, objectified, and even consumed.' (57) These conflicting yet complementary notions of the West originate in 'Aguri', and are the essential elements that merge to spawn the monstrous and vampiric woman.

Aguri herself often likened to a 'marble statue' (58) that Okada has sculptured and manipulated to resemble his fetishist fantasy of the Western woman. Once adorned in Western clothes, and consequently crafted to perfection, Aguri is reduced to an object that is to be cherished and adored. However, Okada's obsession with obtaining the Western woman of his dreams has its negative side; exhausted and emaciated due to his overindulgence in sexual pleasures with Aguri, Okada's physical appearance is characterised by its active process of decay. While 'his fine rich flesh slowly melted away' (59), Aguri's 'mysterious hands looked younger every year'; at the age of fourteen, her hands 'seemed yellow and dry, with tiny wrinkles' and 'at seventeen the skin was white and smooth.' (60) Sharing a similarity with vampiric qualities of Kyōka's seductress, the extraction of semen also functions as the restorative for Aguri's beauty and vitality, which consequently drains and weakens Okada in the process.

For Okada, their sexual relationship is, at first, 'the enchanting game that he was always dreaming of, that gave him his only reason for living.' (61) According to the master/slave dialogue, this seemingly places Okada in the position of dominance. However, Okada envisions Aguri as

A leopard brought up as a house pet, knowing exactly how to please its master, but one whose occasional flashes of ferocity made its master cringe. Frisking, scratching, striking, pouncing on him – finally ripping and tearing him to shreds, and trying to suck the marrow from his bones'.

The 'enchanting game' swiftly progresses into '[a] deadly game!' (62) The exclamation mark certainly emphasises Okada's delight in Aguri's occupation of the dominant role as the cunning predator that lies beneath her guise of subservience. It is also an image of violent carnal passion taken to an extreme: Okada's weakness for his idealised Western woman physically and mentally incapacitates him, and allows parasitical Aguri to feed off this product of vulnerability. Consequently, this secures her position of empowerment. Underlying the masochistic addiction of Okada and Aguri's sexual schema is the onset of cultural and social dissolution; the roles imposed by patriarchal gendered discourse have also collapsed under the weight of the West's colossal influence. With Okada and Aguri respectively representing modern Japan and the Taishō period's "modern woman", their master/slave relationship is the overarching allegory of the story: Japan is rendered impotent by the overpowering West as its traditions and societal values begin to morph into a careful constructed Western duplicate.

But what exactly is it that threatens to disappear? According to Ito, Japanese critics often analyse *Naomi* as a '*fūzoku shōsetsu*, or a novel of manners' (63), and similarly, this can be applied to its prototype 'Aguri'. The narrative itself is fragmented with rambling instances of Okada's exhaustion induced delirium. He imagines himself collapsing and dying on the busy street with Aguri's thoughts, which consist of the following: '[t]he poor fool was so crazy about me he couldn't possibly resent it if I take the money and buy anything I please, or flirt with any man I please.' (64) Okada's imaginings depict Aguri as a true parasite; as soon as her first host has been drained of his usefulness, she will simply move onto her next victim. She is utterly selfish, and does not conform to the social impositions such as on. Gender roles have also been subverted as we are reminded of the "wronged woman" from the folkloric past. As the grotesque daydream continues, this notion becomes more poignant: '[i]f he tries to haunt me I won't be afraid of *him* – he'll listen to me whether he's alive or dead. I'll have my way…' (65) Even when the typical gender roles of *onryō* and victim are reversed, and woman transcends from the prevalent ghostly archetype from the Gothic past, she retains the position of power and can dictate to men by embodying their sexual fantasy. This male *onryō* is completely devoid of vengeance, and the concept itself is belittled by Aguri's patronising comment of '"Well, Mr. Ghost, my poor love-struck Mr. Ghost who can't rest in peace – how about a smile?"' (66) Aguri's condescending language signifies the *onryō*'s position in the Taishō period; it is an element of mythology from a now decadent feudal past. The adoptions of Western social practises have simply rendered this cultural metaphor redundant.

In the works of Kyōka and Tanizaki, the metamorphic vampiric women evidently serve as the mirror for cultural anxiety as opposed to ghostly manifestations. As numerous critics have observed, Kyōka's seductress resembles the shamaness, which is a prevalent figure in the oral tradition. This, in conjunction with her vampiric state and her ability to lure men into the semiotic, binds her to premodern Japan. The vampiric mistress in Kyōka's story functions to preserve feudal Japan as the West seeps in like a contaminant, whereas Tanizaki subverts the function of the vampire. Aguri embodies both a Japanese woman infected by the West, and the West itself. The story itself is reliant upon conveying and reinforcing the binaries between Japan and the West. (67) The West is rendered vampiric as it drains Japan's societal and cultural beliefs, which are reduced to an archaic, outmoded ghostly image of the past. Like the metamorphic vampire, the shapes of both sides of gendered discourses begin to shift.

Tokyo Renderings: Cross-Cultural Monstrosity

The vampiric mistresses of Kyōka's and Tanizaki's stories function to emphasise the framework of the ever-changing dialectic relationships between East and West in the modern period. Often set in the vast metropolis of Tokyo, numerous Gothic fictions of the latter 20th century are propelled by the cataclysmic momentum of globalization. The definitive boundaries supporting the dialectic relationships between Japan and the rest of the world have been completely effaced as Japanese culture and mass culture merge. Glennis Byron observes that:

[J]ust as attempts to locate more nationally specific forms of gothic have begun to proliferate, the effects of globalization upon cultural production have also led to the literature and film of different countries feeding off each other to produce new cross-cultural monstrosities.' (68)

Enveloped in mass culture, modern day Tokyo renders a unique and deconstructive effect upon female monstrosity. Monstrosity is now stripped of the cultural identity that is established through the oral tradition; *on* has become obsolete. Women are no longer limited to the strict confines of behavioural

doctrines; the anxiety of female sexuality has seemingly been cast aside. Whether it is focused upon the self and subjectivity, gendered discourse, or Japanese culture, monstrosity now coincides with the dissolution caused by globalization. The fictions of Ryū Murakami and Koji Suzuki convey this dissolution in their respective depictions of monstrosity in many different societal and cultural aspects of Japan. Consequently, the site of monstrosity can no longer be designated a singular position, and is constantly shifting.

For Ryū Murakami, modern day Tokyo is an impassive dictator of objectivity and suppressor of the subjective self that does not coincide with the "norm". Many of the inhabitants of his numerous works do not comply with the societal constraints of Tokyo and mass culture, and are imbued with difference. Stephen Snyder conveys a correlating view of Murakami's fictions thusly:

If contemporary Japan is a place of escalating order and transparency, of unlimited and utterly promiscuous image exchange […] then Murakami's fiction constitutes a prophylaxis of chaos and anomaly. Murakami's fiction insists on aberration, on difference, on the irreconcilable. It is replete with the very things erased by contemporary culture: desire, sexuality, terror, and art (as opposed to their ubiquitous simulated versions). (69)

This process of othering 'desire, sexuality, [and] terror' (70), which is constantly being executed by Japan's contemporary culture, consequently produces the site of monstrosity in Murakami's *Piercing* – namely, through suppressed trauma from the past. However, this trauma spans both parts of the gender binary, and seemingly realigns the great misbalance created by feminine-centred monstrosity of the past. The illusory notion of self-identity, which has been manipulated and held together by mass culture, becomes unstable as the dissipated, but genuine, self becomes the prevalent image. This is conceptualised by how, as Snyder observes, 'the "real" world (the world of narrative realism) fragments under the stabbing ice pick wielded by the protagonist' (71) Masayuki Kawashima. Whenever Kawashima holds the ice pick, or even contemplates upon stabbing his baby or a woman with this phallic and deadly object, Kawashima's objective and subjective selves split. This is evident when Kawashima is sweating and standing over his baby's crib with the ice pick:

'That's sickening, he thought […] didn't even know I was sweating. Couldn't even feel it. Like it isn't me the sweat's pouring down but a wax figure of me, or some stranger who looks like me. (72)

Through the absence of personal pronouns, and the brief, fragmented sentences, Murakami successfully conveys how the ice pick sends Kawashima into an almost catatonic-like state as he feels his consciousness separating from his body, which creates a fluctuating and unstable notion of selfhood. The 'wax figure' (73) is Kawashima the family man; Kawashima the successful salaryman; it is the Kawashima that has been moulded into the confines of "ideals" perpetuated by mass culture, and trauma is excluded from such boundaries.

Kawashima's tendency to 'break out in a cold sweat at just a glimpse of that shiny, pointed tip' (74) of the ice pick rouses the dormant trauma that lies beneath the surface:

As he opened his eyes he found that his senses of sight and sound and smell were getting entangled with one another, and now came a snapping, crackling sensation and a pungent whiff of something organic burning. Yarn or fingernails, something like that. (75)

Breaking out in a sweat triggers synaesthesia in Kawashima; he is forced to relive the physical abuse administered upon him as a child by his mother through an uncontrollable, mental recollection. Murakami's language is aloof, non-specific and detached; this conceptualises the spatial distance of the segregation of the undesirable, but still integral, component of society that is violence. Suffering sexual abuse during childhood, S&M sex worker Chiaki Sanada is dubbed a 'kindred spirit' (76) by Kawashima in his thoughts; they relate to each other through their difference on an unconscious level. Chiaki's 'eyes didn't seem to stay focused on anything. As if they were disconnected from her consciousness' (77); unlike Kawashima, Chiaki does not have a socially constructed role to conform to. Instead, her objective self is impassive and almost a non-entity. Chiaki does, however, have another self; she refers to her as 'What's-her-name.' (78) With 'What's-her-name lurking up there at the corner of the ceiling' (79) during sex, Chiaki loses her libido; this starts 'the cycle of terror' (80), which also reduces her to a catatonic-like state. Chiaki's fading consciousness is assimilated with 'lights going out one by one, words were whirling away, receding out of reach. AROUSE, MASTURBATE, SEX … HUMILIATED … it was as if neon signs in the shapes of these words were slipping off into darkness and memories were rising to take their place.' (81) Murakami's language captures Chiaki's catatonic state perfectly; the use of alliteration creates a fluid dynamic to the language, which mimics the smooth movement of her selves fragmenting. Moreover, the sharp contrast of the block capital letters captures her violent transition into unconscious self-mutilation. However, the metaphor also resonates with the Shinjuku ward of Tokyo. With the neon lights, which suggest the red light district of Kabuchikō, inextricably linked with Chiaki's memories, both the sex industry and sexual trauma have played a significant part in shaping Chiaki's identity. By working in the sex industry, Chiaki is both literally and figuratively segregated from society as a contaminant of difference.

After Kawashima's silent and gentle rejection of Chiaki's body, her romanticised memories of 'walking along arm in arm with this man, and sitting next to him in the taxi with the lights of the skyscrapers all around' (82) are now tainted. This is the pivotal moment for Chiaki, and she bears a resemblance – albeit a modernised one – to Kyōka's seductress. By overdosing Kawashima on Halcion, Chiaki has her revenge on men. While drugged, Kawashima 'was horrified to find himself being sucked inside something dark and enormous. It was as if a huge, diaphragm-shaped iron shutter were closing before his eyes.' (83) Devoid of the phallic ice pick and the ability to penetrate Chiaki's body, Kawashima has been castrated and thrust back into the semiotic. With the metallic qualities of this womb-like structure, it also represents the effacing capabilities of mass industrialization and popular culture Tokyo. As a continuum of his mother's body, he hears her 'sharp, high-pitched voice saying, *Don't bother coming back!* The sound of a latch being locked. A blurry silhouette on frosted glass. It's Mother, he thought. She's inside me.' (84) Kawashima has ultimately been rejected from his mother and the maternal body, and instead, the semiotic has been subverted and reversed. When Chiaki picks up 'the ice pick […] and [places] it along with the wallet, the knife, and the notebook on top of his overnight bag' (85), she is reconstructing the many components of Kawashima's fragmented identity. Mother has been effaced, and Kawashima is whole again.

At the centre of the dramatic yet climatic foray between Chiaki and Kawashima is Chiaki's German coffee machine; when bound to the cable by her wrists, 'her skin turned a colourless, ghostly white where the cord bit into it.' (86) With the coffee machine functioning as a metaphor for globalization, we can see the vampiric effect it unleashes upon Chiaki as it drains her damaged, but nonetheless, subjective identity. Both Kawashima's and Chiaki's respective psychological disorders and violent actions do not render them monstrous, but rather as flawed, and decidedly human. The monstrous of *Piercing* are the ghostly cameos that are manacled to globalization and mass culture, and seamlessly blend into 'the buildings [that] look

like they're alive.' (87) Monstrosity and ghostliness have finally been stripped of gender; ghostly manifestations are no longer associated with on, and are now devoid of cultural meaning and value. As the boundaries of Japan and the rest of the world are confounded almost beyond recognition, it becomes increasingly difficult to locate *Piercing* as a Japanese Gothic text as opposed to a Gothic text. However, upon cutting the cords of globalization, Chiaki resumes the role as the 'broken android' (88) in Tokyo, which paradoxically renders her human as she is alienated as a result of her individuality. The rejection and suppression of universal difference, such as sexuality, violence, and abuse, is central to Piercing, but this is not what makes it a uniquely Japanese Gothic fiction. However, Murakami's overwhelming bombardment of imported products and nondescript Tokyo ghosts within the text subversively draw attention to the suppression of Japanese cultural values that propagate difference in mass culture.

With Western influence altering and reconstructing Japanese cultural values from the Meiji period onwards, the *onryō* is thus displaced and devoid of meaning in this transitional period. However, the *onryō* figure finally rises from obscurity and reclaims its role in Japanese culture in Koji Suzuki's *Ring* (1991) – in the form of a hermaphrodite. Despite *Ring*'s contemporary setting, Suzuki evokes many elements from Japan's Gothic past; he concentrates his focus upon primordial fear, such as a child's fear of 'a fist-sized mask, of a *hannya* – a female demon' (89), and protagonist Asakawa's claustrophobia. Suzuki strips away the complex anxieties that have been plaguing modern and contemporary Japan, and utilizes fear and the fear of impending death. The archaic masculine fear of female sexuality is subverted through Sadako Yamamura. Sadako Yamamura, a beautiful woman with testicular feminization syndrome, and XY chromosomes, causes the patriarchal constructions of gendered discourse to dissolve beyond recognition. Dr. Nagao's decision is to murder Sadako after raping her; at first, it is rationalized by his thought that it would have 'been a necessary trial if she were to go on living as a woman.' (90) Dr. Nagao's initial reaction to kill Sadako out of pity is instigated by the fear that she is not only excluded from the confines of androcentric gender politics, but that she is also a threat to such constructions.

Shamed and wronged by the outmoded convictions executed by a representative of patriarchal constitution, Sadako's revenge as *onryō* is widespread and relentless. Sadako diverts significantly from her folkloric predecessors in the sense that she does not manifest in this world in a visible ghostly form, but is immortalised in the constant circulation of her viral videotapes. The theme of the virus is pivotal to *Ring*: '*[a] virus's instinct is to reproduce. A virus usurps living structures in order to reproduce itself.*' (91) Unable to reproduce, Sakado's viral revenge is not only subversive of societal constructs of gender, but is anomalous itself by defying biological possibilities. Sadako's virus gains sustenance, and proceeds to flourish from the fear of death in its host. However, by failing to duplicate the videotape in seven days, Ryuji is confronted with brunt of Sadako's revenge. Looking into the mirror, Ryuji sees '[s]omebody else reflected there. The cheeks were yellowish, dried and cracked, and hair was falling out in clumps to reveal brown scabs.' (92) This display of bodily decay is alien to Ryuji, yet '[t]he face in the mirror was none other than his own, a hundred years in the future' (93), and it is actually an integral part of himself. With the fear of death plaguing its host, the power of Sadako's virus lies in its ability to project an external manifestation of this internal anxiety; consequently, the virus projects an image of the self in an almost cadaverous state of decay. Sadako's more unfortunate victims are literally abhorred and terrified to death in witnessing oneself 'transformed into someone else.' (94) The constant fluctuation in the boundary between self and other, in conjunction with the emphasis on the familiar and the foreign, evokes a sense of the Kristevan abjection of the corpse in a very extreme form. It epitomises Kristeva's notion of how '[i]t is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled.' (95) After being driven by the fear of impending death, the terror of seeing oneself stripped of personal identity and reduced to unrecognisable deteriorating matter, causes boundary and order to dissolve.

Through his portrayal of Sadako, Suzuki creates a paradoxical figure of female monstrosity; Suzuki returns to the origins of the monstrous woman as depicted in the oral tradition, but Sadako's videotapes are imprinted upon the text. This connects the *onryō* to a globalized world; the dramatization of this enduring figure emphasises Japan's unique cultural aspects in a homogenised world. The vast metropolis Tokyo is no longer haunted by dehumanised followers of mass culture, but the *onryō*, which has always been synonymous with disrupting the order of Tokugawa regime and its predecessors. Like Isora from Ueda's 'The Kibitsu Cauldron', Sadako is a contaminant and spreads contagion; her contagion is rooted in the fear of death and bodily decay. However, her hermaphroditic state is also a contaminant of gendered discourse; the subversion of gendered discourse is derived from Asakawa and Ryuji's journey to her burial spot in the well. This conceptualises the retrogressive Freudian return to womb before the Oedipal Crisis into the state of bisexuality before societal and cultural influences shape gender. Gendered restrictions of monstrosity have been effaced.

Conclusion

In relation to the significance of *on*, Iwasaka writes that the ghostly manifestations present in Japanese folklore 'ensure the kind of behaviour which preserves the culture and its values, along with the proper relationships without which – in the Japanese view – culture would be meaningless.' (96) The *onryō*, and the emphasis placed upon motifs and elements from the oral tradition in Akinari Ueda's *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*, in conjunction with the corruption of Tokugawa era's uneducated, but fully wife modelled from the *Onna Daigaku*, showcases the overarching presence of Japanese culture within the text. Ueda manages to encapsulate a decadent, but uniquely Japanese form of Gothic fiction. The upholding, preservation and execution of cultural values is both tantamount and integral to Japan's Gothic tradition; when it is pertaining to gender discourse, it is the momentum. Social deviance and anomaly in women is the product of diverging from the idealistic patriarchal schema of what constitutes as femaleness. With the founding binary depictions of patriarchal denotations of womanliness, and unconstrained female sexuality established, the masculine anxieties of the effects of societal and cultural transitions upon women can be analysed through the monsters they create.

The transitional Meiji era, with its slogan "Good Wife, Wise Mother" conceptualising the *Meiji Onna Daigaku*, is under threat from the growing influence of the West, which creates Japan's "modern woman." The monstrosity of this period is vampirism, which is doubly allegorical. For Izumi Kyōka, the vampiric woman in 'The Holy Man of Mount Koya' represents an image of the alluring, but dangerous maternal from the archaic, fading old Japan. She offers deadly escapism from the modern world; she is untouched and free of the West. However, in Tanizaki's 'Aguri', the utilisation of vampirism renders the opposite effect that Kyōka achieves. The West's influence upon Japan is draining its cultural identity, and constructing the "modern woman." Both awed and revered, Aguri embodies the fetishistic fantasy of the Western woman; as an anomalous woman, Aguri evokes the repressed masochistic desire for submission in men. Ghostliness is no longer the figure of anxiety; whether it is the self-destructive longing for the abject maternal, or masochistic fetishes for a Westernized woman, women who are not confined to gendered discourse, who are thus monstrous, become the figure of desire. Their allure is their exoticism.

Through Murakami's dehumanised depiction of mass culture Tokyo, and Suzuki's reconstructed, hermaphroditic *onryō*, the evolution and devolution of female monstrosity is ultimately dislocated from both cultural and gendered discourse in contemporary Japan. Japanese Gothic transcends into a detached and misaligned space where it is defined by what it lacks. Barren and transparent, modern day Japan is

now confined to the framework of globalization, yet the mundanity of mass culture is broken by the nightmarish undesirables like Chiaki and Sadako. Monstrosity is ingrained into the very essence of Japanese cultural identity; segregation and suppression is not possible.

1. All Japanese names will be written in the Western format with the given name followed by the family name.
2. Henry J. Hughes 2000. 'Familiarity of the Strange: Japan's Gothic Tradition', http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2220/is_1_42/ai_63819091/ (accessed 30th June 2008)
3. Punter, David and Glennis Byron 2005. *The Gothic*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 278.
4. This eleventh century work of Japanese literature is usually attributed to Murasaki Shikibu, and is sometimes described as the world's first novel.
5. Iwasaka, Michiko and Barre Toelken 1994. *Ghosts and the Japanese: Cultural Experience in Japanese Death Legends*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 16.
6. Ibid, 18-19.
7. For an example of the Western conduct books intended for women see Abbé d'Ancourt 1768. *The lady's preceptor, or, a letter to a young lady of distinction upon politeness*. Taken from the French of the Abbé d'Ancourt, and adapted to the religion, customs, and manners of the English nation. By a gentleman of Cambridge. The sixth edition: Birmingham, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO (accessed 30th June 2008)
8. Kaibara, Ekken 1905. *Women and Wisdom of Japan*, ed. L. Cranmer-Byng & S. A. Kapadia. London: The Orient Press, 44.
9. Ibid, 44.
10. Ibid, 34.
11. Ibid, 18.
12. Ibid, 44.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid, 38.
16. Ibid, 21.
17. For a detailed examination of the Shingaku (Heart Learning) movement incited by Baigan Ishida, Toan Tejima and other Shingaku theorists, see Robertson, Jennifer 1991, 'The Shingaku Women: Straight From the Heart' in *Recreating Japanese Women*, 1600-1945, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein. Oxford: University of California Press.
18. Robertson, Jennifer 1991. *Recreating Japanese Women*, 1600-1945, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein. Oxford: University of California Press, 94.
19. Ueda, Akinari 2007, 'The Kibitsu Cauldron' in *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* trans. Anthony H. Chambers. New York: University of Columbia Press, 142.
20. Ibid, 144.
21. Ibid, 145.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid, 146.
24. Ibid, 149.
25. Ibid, 150.
26. Ibid, 151.
27. Charles Shirō Inouye 1991, 'Water Imagery in the Works of Izumi Kyoka' Monumenta Nipponica 46, 1, 43-68
28. Ueda 'The Kibitsu Cauldron', 151.
29. Ibid, 152.
30. Ibid, 142.
31. Bernstein, Gail Lee 1991. *Recreating Japanese Women*, 1600-1945, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein. Oxford: University of California Press, 7.

32. Ibid.
33. Cornyetz, Nina 1999. *Dangerous Women, Deadly Words: Phallic Fantasy and Modernity in Three Japanese Writers*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2.
34. Kyōka, Izumi 1996. 'The Holy Man of Mount Koya' in *Japanese Gothic Tales* trans. Charles Shirō Inouye. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 45.
35. Ibid, 49.
36. Ibid, 165.
37. Napier, Susan J. 1996. *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity*. London: Routledge, 35.
38. Kyōka 'The Holy Man of Mount Koya' 71.
39. Ibid
40. Ibid, 29.
41. Ibid, 39.
42. Ibid, 39.
43. Cornyetz, *Dangerous Women, Deadly Words*, 26.
44. Kyōka, 'The Holy Man of Mount Koya' 65.
45. Ibid, 39.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid, 65.
48. Ibid, 71.
49. Ibid, 47.
50. Ibid, 50.
51. Ibid, 48.
52. Ibid, 165.
53. Ibid, 71.
54. Ibid, 64.
55. Ibid, 65.
56. Wisker, Gina 2006. *A Companion to the Gothic Novel*, ed. David Punter. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 168.
57. Ito, Ken K. 1991. *Visions of Desire: Tanizaki's Fictional Worlds*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 100.
58. Tanizaki, Junichirō 1981. 'Aguri' in *Seven Japanese Tales* trans. Howard Hibbet. New York: Perigee Books, 198.
59. Ibid, 187.
60. Ibid, 190.
61. Ibid, 192.
62. Ibid.
63. Ito, *Visions of Desire*, 77.
64. Tanizaki, 'Aguri' in *Seven Japanese Tales*, 193.
65. Ibid, 193.
66. Ibid, 194.
67. Also writing in the transitional Meiji era, the distinctly transcultural texts of Edogawa Rampo and Lafcadio Hearn offer a diverging representation of feminine monstrosity in the early modern period from that of Kyōka and Tanizaki. Rampo's short stories take the dialectic binary relationships of Western/Japanese and feudal/modern, and causes them to merge as opposed to using the West as figure of dominance. This is exemplified in the short story 'The Caterpillar'; the role of the doting wife in the familial sphere and the concept of *on* are imbued with depravity, and monstrosity arises from conformity

to the social impositions these aforementioned roles entail. On the contrary, Lafcadio Hearn diverges from his contemporaries by resurrecting the ghost in his sensational retellings of the oral tradition. Although Hearn's revamped tales are coloured with his own Western literary aesthetic to appeal to his British and American readership, they encapsulate a somewhat romanticised depiction of the submerging Japanese cultural values.

68. Byron, Glennis 2008. *Asian Gothic* ed. Andrew Hock Soon Ng. Jefferson: McFarland & Co Inc, 33.
69. Snyder, Stephen 1999. *Ōe and Beyond* ed. Stephen Snyder & Philip Gabriel. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 202.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid, 206.
72. Murakami, Ryū 2008. *Piercing* trans. Ralph McCarthy. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 3-4.
73. Ibid, 4.
74. Ibid, 5
75. Ibid, 4.
76. Ibid, 127.
77. Ibid, 85.
78. Ibid, 66.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid, 70.
81. Ibid, 89.
82. Ibid, 157.
83. Ibid, 163.
84. Ibid, 178.
85. Ibid, 182-183.
86. Ibid, 172.
87. Ibid, 150.
88. Ibid, 172.
89. Suzuki, Koji 2005. *Ring* trans. Robert B. Rohmer & Glynne Walley. London: HarperCollins Publishers, 65.
90. Ibid, 289.
91. Ibid, 361.
92. Ibid, 344.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid.
95. Kristeva, Julia 1982. *Powers of Horror* trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 4.
96. Iwasaka, *Ghosts and the Japanese*, 20.

Delightful Cannibal Feasts: Literary Consumption in *Melmoth the Wanderer*

Christina Morin

Often recognised as the last gasp of a dying Gothic form, Charles Robert Maturin's fifth and most famous novel, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), is a complicated maze of interwoven tales. It opens with a frame narrative centring on the eponymous Wanderer's nineteenth-century descendant, John Melmoth. A student at Trinity College Dublin, John travels to his wealthy uncle's Wicklow home to find him dying literally "of a fright".(1) Haunted by his immortal ancestor, the elder Melmoth charges his nephew with the destruction of the sole remaining reminders of the Wanderer – a seventeenth-century portrait and an aged manuscript documenting the Wanderer's temptation of an Englishman named Stanton. The first of many interpolated tales in the novel, the 'Tale of Stanton' follows its hero as he encounters Melmoth first in Spain, then again in Restoration England, and finally in the mental asylum where Stanton's friends have committed him due to his strange fascination with the mysterious Wanderer. Appearing to him amongst the ravings of lunatics with his unspeakable offer, Melmoth promises Stanton deliverance from his inevitable descent into insanity: "Is not your situation very miserable? […] I have the power to deliver you from it". Met with Stanton's continued resistance, Melmoth taunts him with the future that awaits him:

[W]here be your companions, your peaked men of countries, as your favourite Shakespeare has it? You must be content with the spider and the rat, to crawl and scratch round your flock-bed! I have known prisoners in the Bastile [sic] to feed them for companions, – why don't you begin your task? I have known a spider to descend at the tap of a finger, and a rat to come forth when the daily meal was brought, to share it with his fellow-prisoner! – How delightful to have vermin for your guests! Aye, and when the feast fails them, they make a meal of their entertainer! – You shudder – Are you, then, the first prisoner who has been devoured alive by the vermin that infested his cell? – Delightful banquet, not 'where you eat, but where you are eaten!'(2)

Ultimately, Stanton denounces Melmoth's temptations, secures his own liberation, and avoids the gruesome fate Melmoth has predicted for him. The imagery of perverted gastronomic consumption, however, continues to emerge throughout the novel. In particular, depictions of cannibalism, both literal and metaphoric, prove pervasive. While such imagery is hardly surprising in a Gothic text, in *Melmoth* it arguably takes on an added dimension associated with Maturin's understanding of authorship as an essentially cannibalistic undertaking. Writing within a market economy and ostensibly driven by financial need, Maturin clearly saw himself as producing commodities to be consumed by readers and critics. Objects of consumption, Maturin's novels bow to the demands of the audience, whether or not these sit well with the author's aesthetic tastes and literary aspirations. As Maturin wrote in his preface to *The Wild Irish Boy* (1808), for instance, the "hope of being read" compelled him to cater to the public demand for illustrations of fashionable high society even if that meant "sacrific[ing] his inclination and habits".(3) Maturin's continuingly disastrous attempts at literary success, however, demonstrate that such sacrifice was very rarely rewarded. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Maturin often evinces an ambivalence about authorship largely proceeding from his bitterness towards the thankless demands and constraints of literary consumption. While Maturin ultimately succumbs to the exigencies of the literary marketplace in many of his texts, his discomfort with the commodification of his literature is clear.

In *Melmoth*, this unease manifests itself most obviously in the frequent depiction of cannibalistic activity. Like Maturin's texts themselves, the characters in *Melmoth* are uniformly transformed into commodities

to be consumed by others. Melmoth himself, with his desire for a replacement, a sacrificial victim to assume the onus of his long-ago crime, essentially seeks to cannibalise those he tempts. For him, these helpless individuals are simply commodities to be bought, sold, and traded for his benefit. That he finally fails in his satanic mission suggests Maturin's underlying anxiety about his works as cultural commodities.(4) Similarly, the text's dominant imagery of hunger, starvation, and cannibalism attests to Maturin's concerns as a clergyman-author torn between his apparently irreconcilable professions. Further, it emphasises Maturin's central authorial conflict between his fundamental desire to achieve literary fame as well as financial security and his resentment towards an audience that scorned him even as he pandered to its debased taste for literature.

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Born in Dublin in 1780, Maturin cherished literary, or at least dramatic, ambitions from an early age. A voracious reader and amateur actor throughout his childhood, the young Maturin intended to continue his dramatic career into adulthood. His family's increasingly impoverished condition, however, forced him to give up his dreams of acting to undertake a more financially secure career in the Church of Ireland. Ordained in 1803, shortly after his marriage to the celebrated singer and socialite, Henrietta Kingsbury, Maturin first served in Loughrea, County Galway, but, finding himself unsuited to small town life, very soon returned to Dublin, where he served as curate of St. Peter's parish in Aungier St. This was a position he would maintain, without further preferment, until his death in 1824. Although Maturin was apparently "universally loved" by his parishioners, it seems he was ill-suited to clerical life, or at least, "the necessary restrictions" it placed on activities such as authorship.(5) Subjected to elevated standards of decorum and morality, clerical authors in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries were expected to set an example and demonstrate "the refinements of a correct taste".(6) As the case of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) had proven, the creation of literature containing levity, not to mention lewdness and suggestiveness, offended propriety and transgressed the demands of a clergyman's religious profession.

Already viewed with suspicion by his religious superiors for, in Maturin's terms, his "high Calvinist" beliefs,(7) but also, one suspects, his noted "affectation" and "eccentricity",(8) Maturin wisely chose to publish his first three novels under a pseudonym – the "vulgar and *merely* Irish sounding" Dennis Jasper Murphy.(9) With the successful production of his Gothic melodrama, *Bertram; or the Castle of St. Aldobrand* (1816), however, Maturin was forced to reveal his authorship and accordingly suffered the consequences. Although he did not actually lose his position at St. Peter's as one reviewer erroneously believed,(10) he did receive the censure of his religious superiors and literary critics, both of whom agreed on the impropriety and indecency of Maturin's works. In response to the repeated accusations of clerical misconduct directed at him, Maturin vehemently, if somewhat insincerely, maintained that financial need was his only motivation. In a letter to his friend and mentor, Sir Walter Scott, for example, Maturin declared that he would be happy to publish a book of sermons "if it was only to prove I can do something beside write Romances, and *never did that voluntarily*".(11) By the time of *Melmoth*'s publication, this claim of authorship by necessity had become a kind of mantra, despite Maturin's evident desire for fame as well as profit. Tellingly, *Melmoth*'s preface contains an apology of sorts for Maturin's repeated literary endeavours:

I cannot again appear before the public in so unseemly a character as that of a writer of romances, without regretting the necessity that compels me to it. Did my profession furnish me with the means of

subsistence, I should hold myself culpable indeed in having recourse to any other, but – am I allowed the choice?(12)

Obliged by a profession that failed to provide adequately for his family and his needs, Maturin tells us, he simply had to write. Yet, while Maturin presented himself as the victim of an unjust system and 'jealous' religious superiors,(13) he undoubtedly caused much of his own distress precisely through his continued authorship of 'distasteful' and 'indecorous' novels and plays. As J.W. Croker wrote in his vitriolic attack on *Melmoth*:

We, and all the world except Mr. Maturin, can see very good reasons why his profession will not afford him the *means of subsistence* – he designates himself as the *author of Bertram*, a play; we hear of his sermons only as the foundation of an *unseemly* novel, and then, forsooth, this labourer for the stage and the circulating library, wonders that the Church does not provide subsistence for him!(14)

Emphasising the role Maturin's continued authorship played in his failure to progress in the Church, Croker argued that Maturin himself was to blame for his financial insolvency. Despite seeing himself as leading "an unoffending life",(15) Maturin clearly placed himself at odds with the Church with his continued authorship. As a result, instead of "assiduous[ly] cultivat[ing] […] some other profession" in addition to authorship, as Scott had advised, Maturin came to rely almost exclusively on the returns of his novels and plays. Unfortunately, true to Scott's predictions, literature ultimately proved "a wretched crutch".(16) In fact, with the notable exceptions of *Bertram*, which was performed at Drury Lane in May 1816 with overwhelming success, and *Melmoth*, Maturin's works were generally considered failures, critically and financially. Of this, Maturin was all too aware. As he lamented in the preface to his fourth novel, *Women; or Pour et Contre* (1818), "none of [… my previous works] arrived at a second edition; nor could I dispose of the copyright of any but of the 'Milesian', which was sold to Colburn for 80£ in the year 1811".(17)

Faced with such failure, Maturin must have wondered if the professional sacrifices he had made were worth it. Clearly, he resented a reading public that refused to award him the accolades and attending monetary returns he felt he deserved. Yet, he also realised how dependent he was on these readers who held so much power over him. Seeking to 'dispose' of his failed novels – distasteful objects that had proven ineffective as commodities – Maturin signaled his keen awareness of this dependence. The most important readers, of course, were the critics, a majority of whom evidently sided with the religious hierarchy and generally dismissed Maturin as a poor author. Unsurprisingly, Maturin's ire was very often directed towards critics such as Croker. In the 'Dedication' to his third novel, *The Milesian Chief* (1812), for instance, Maturin first bitterly lamented the negative reviews his previous two novels had received, and then disparaged the critics who had so roundly castigated him. They informed him, Maturin wrote, that he was "a bad writer" but refused to say "why, or how, or in what manner [he] was to become better". In so doing, they "graciously" left to Maturin the matter of his improvement as a novelist.(18) The sarcasm evident in Maturin's comments poignantly reveals his resentment towards his critics, an animosity that would feed into an intense desire to resist his subordination to critics and the demands of the literary marketplace. Even if he was "a disappointed Author", as he wrote shortly after the publication of *The Milesian Chief*, this was due less to his own authorial skills and more to the debased tastes of readers and critics: "as to my talents (if I possess any) there is no excitement, no literary impulse in this Country", Maturin explained to Scott, "my most intimate acquaintances scarcely know that I have written, and they care as little as they know".(19)

The fact is, however, Maturin continued to write. That he did so, despite his evident disdain for his readers and critics as well as his persistent lack of returns, suggests his firm belief in the literary talents he so self-effacingly refers to in his letter to Scott. It further emphasises what Regina B. Oost has identified as the "simultaneous need to perform and urge to resist" characterising Maturin's literary career. As Oost persuasively argues, Maturin's predominant feeling towards authorship proves to be an "ambivalence born of his desire for both money and social respectability, and of his knowledge that audiences of his day were not likely to bestow both upon clergymen who wrote Gothic romance".(20) In *Melmoth*, Oost contends, Maturin's central ambivalence about authorship emerges in authorial characters such as Biddy Brannigan – the "withered Sybil" who tells John Melmoth the story of his ancestor – and the "stranger" who narrates the 'Tale of Guzman's Family',(21) who "simultaneously perform for and resist their audience". Like Maturin himself, these characters are driven by a consciousness of their economic dependence on their audiences, but are nevertheless determined to defy the consumers who hold so much power over them.(22) What's more, Oost maintains, *Melmoth*'s intricate structure itself attests to Maturin's underlying desire to perform and resist. The seemingly endless multiplication of narratives and insistent ambiguity about *Melmoth* evince an authorial "strategy of resistance" involving the simultaneous engagement with and frustration of readers' expectations. As familiar with the typical conventions of the Gothic novel as his readers were, Maturin knew what they would have expected with *Melmoth*. But, rather than fulfill these expectations, Maturin deliberately frustrates them. Oost therefore proposes that a probable reason for the text's complex and oftentimes bemusing narrative is Maturin's "determination to resist as much as possible the expectations of an audience from whom he needs money, yet whom he knows will stigmatize [sic] him".(23)

While Oost's arguments about the authorial figures in *Melmoth* are persuasive, her conclusions about the deliberate nature of the text's structure require some caution. By insisting that *Melmoth*'s peculiarly disrupted and disruptive narrative is intentional, Oost ignores the circumstances in which the novel was written, just as many critics before and after her have done. In fact, as Sharon Ragaz has recently demonstrated, Maturin's intentions for the final structure of his novel were vague and unclear at the best of times. First proposed in April 1818, *Melmoth* was originally envisaged as a four-volume series of tales to be published serially in the *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* before being issued in volume form. This serialisation, however, was eventually aborted in the course of what proved to be a "precarious, protracted and difficult" composition and publication process.(24) Plagued with compositional difficulties, Maturin's conceptualisation of his work remained hazy from beginning to end. Tellingly, as late as September 1819, Maturin had yet to provide a title for his novel, attesting to his continued confusion and lack of clarity about his own text.

In the end, Maturin's publisher, Archibald Constable, supplied his own title – 'Melmoth' – for what he understood as the first tale of the series, but Maturin's copy increasingly failed to organise itself according to ordered tales of a similar length. Faced with short pieces of copy sent to him irregularly and haphazardly, Constable necessarily pieced everything together as best he could. As a result, while he may not have "intervened directly with suggestions about the conduct of the narrative", as Ragaz suggests, Constable certainly had a considerable hand in the final published version of *Melmoth*.(25) In fact, the structure of the finished novel might be seen to derive from the work Constable and his printer, John Pillan, undertook to amalgamate the fragments of manuscript sent by a geographically distant author without a clear understanding of his intention for the work. Maturin himself would only have proofed small sections at a time, meaning that he never actually saw a final version of his novel before it was published. As a result, any effort he could make "to regain control" of his text or "to identify an overall design according to Constable's wishes" would have been necessarily abortive.(26) While this

publication history does not necessarily preclude critical analysis and interpretation of *Melmoth*'s structure, it does recommend a certain hesitation.

If, however, we might doubt that the novel's entire structure is devoted to Maturin's 'strategy of resistance' as Oost claims, *Melmoth*'s strange conclusion certainly deserves attention. Returning to Ireland after his various unsuccessful attempts to secure a replacement, Melmoth promises John a full disclosure of his mysterious existence. Before he can do so, however, he disappears, apparently, but never unequivocally, condemned to final damnation. Left only with "the last trace of the Wanderer"(27) – a handkerchief he had worn around his neck – the reader remains fundamentally confused and bewildered. For over five hundred pages, the novel's dauntingly elaborate narrative structure has undermined any sense of clear comprehension. In the last two pages, with an explanation both desired and expected, it finally denies that satisfaction, insisting instead on continued ambivalence. Unlike the typical Radcliffean Gothic, to which Maturin directly refers in his preface, or even Lewisean Gothic, also alluded to throughout the text, *Melmoth* refuses explanations, denying closure. Although the reason behind *Melmoth*'s unsatisfactory inconclusiveness may well owe something to Maturin's disdain for and resistance to his reader, as Oost claims, a more probable, if mundane, answer lies in Maturin's understanding of the potential financial gains to be made from a never-ending series of tales. From the very beginning, indeed, it seems that Maturin was planning *Melmoth*'s sequel. Even as he struggled to complete the smallest portions of script requested by Constable, in fact, Maturin continued to propose extensions and continuations of his as yet unfinished, and indeed, barely begun, novel. By early 1820, when Maturin was still struggling to complete his novel and Constable's patience was wearing dangerously thin, the publisher was forced to send an angry reply to Maturin's request for five volumes rather than the agreed-upon four: "[T]he book *will not do in any way in five Volumes* – we have more than once declined to bring out *five volumes* by the Author of Wavereley! even with two Tales – the fact is – it is too much and will not sell".(28) Thoroughly disappointed with this rejection as with Constable's later refusal to take on a second *Melmoth* ostensibly because of "his Engagements with the Author of 'Waverley'", Maturin complained bitterly and pointedly to Scott: "Who is this author who was born for the enrichment of booksellers, and the ruin of his humble contemporaries? […] I wish this great writer could [be] prevailed on to say to me […] there is room enough in the world for us both". Possibly already aware of Scott's secret authorship, Maturin implores Scott (as if he had the power), to allow him to earn his bread. Even fools and knaves, he writes, "must eat, and truly my wishes are not ambitious of more".(29)

However disingenuous, Maturin's comments to Scott are intriguing, if only because of their illustration of a starving author desperate to earn his living. Throughout his correspondence with Scott, Maturin rather melodramatically relies on such imagery to describe his impoverished situation. In a letter written in February 1813, for instance, Maturin asserts his desire to avoid "eat[ing] the Bread of idleness" and his willingness to undertake any "humble and laborious" situation necessary in order to survive.(30) Later, specifically constructing his literary works as commodities, Maturin claims not to feel "the vanity of authorship" because

the possible profit of any thing I undertake is the only object in my calculations, and I have been so long a stranger to commendation or notice, that I begin to be indifferent about them – like the Character in one of Lillo's plays who after trying to feed his mind with the lofty morality of some heathen author, gives the Book to his wife with the emphatic words 'take it and buy us Bread'.(31)

Despite this apparent indifference towards critical opinion, however, Maturin clearly felt the effect of his unpopularity: "[W]ill it not shock *you* to hear, what none of my *countrymen* care about, that the only real evil of life is coming fast upon me – horrid actual want is staring me in the Face […] is it not a shame to my Country that I should be left to starve[?]"(32) Written at a time during which Maturin's literary activity was slow, this letter evinces its author's increasing desperation with his financial situation, as well as his bitter disdain for a society that so little regarded him. 'Left to starve' by his countrymen, Maturin comes to fear "the Hour in which the Heart of Man is tried above any other, the Hour in which your children ask you for Food, and you have no answer".(33) Shortly after *Melmoth*'s publication, Maturin would again turn to an image of starvation to describe his situation: "My circumstances are these – I am to receive £500 for my next romance which will be published in spring, but in the interval I and my family are – almost starving –". Requesting money to save his family "from actual want of food", Maturin explains, "hope will not feed me".(34)

The plaintive tone of Maturin's letters to Scott, although sometimes grating in its histrionic excess, poignantly emerges in *Melmoth* in the words of another storyteller – the stranger narrating the 'Tale of Guzman's Family'. Interrupting his story of the almost starvation of a musician and his family, the stranger asks,

Is all the energy of intellect, and all the enthusiasm of feeling, to be expended in contrivances how to meet or shift off the petty but torturing pangs of hourly necessity? Is the fire caught from heaven to be employed in lighting a faggot to keep the cold from the numbed and wasted fingers of poverty[?] Pardon this digression, Senhor […] but *I had a painful feeling, that forced me to make it*.(35)

An author "preparing for the press a collection of facts relative to that person [Melmoth]", the stranger laments the fact that his talents have gone to waste in the pursuit of mere subsistence. Much like Maturin himself, the stranger understands himself unappreciated and scorned by an audience ignorant of and indifferent towards his skills. The story he narrates is apparently taken directly from the book he has written but which has been rejected for publication because "the government, in its wisdom, thinks [it] not fit to be perused by the eyes of Catholics, or circulated among a Christian community".(36) Condemned by the ruling religious system – Catholicism not Protestantism in this case – the stranger is understood as equally immoral and indecorous as Maturin was.

These similarities between Maturin and his text's internal narrator are striking, as are those between the tales they tell. As Oost has observed, just as Maturin's frame narrative centres on a young man dependent on an extremely wealthy but also greedy uncle for his future subsistence, so too do the Walberg family rely on their Uncle Guzman for financial security and eventual financial independence. Given this narrative mirroring, Oost concludes that "the interior Walberg story appears to be a miniature version of the novel as a whole". This is because the 'Tale of Guzman's Family' "thematically duplicate[s]" *Melmoth*'s frame narrative, but also because it "recreates the circumstances under which the novel is produced: both the novel and the embedded Walberg tale are texts created by men facing financial difficulty".(37) Such parallelism, however, extends further than the facts of each text's composition to their actual content. Indeed, the situation in which the patriarch of the Walberg family finds himself mirrors that of both the stranger narrating his tale and Maturin himself. Married quite young to his Catholic wife, Ines, the Protestant Walberg takes her to Germany from her native Spain after her wealthy brother, Guzman, disinherits her over her ill-advised marriage. A gifted musician, with apparently "highly appreciated" talents, Walberg nevertheless lives "with the utmost frugality" as he labours daily to provide his family with mere "subsistence".(38) Suddenly, however, the Walbergs are recalled to Spain by an

ailing and conscience-stricken Guzman, who establishes them in considerable wealth and luxury. He even revises his will so that his considerable wealth will go to his sister and her children, rather than to the Catholic Church, upon his death. But, when he dies, the new will is hidden by Church authorities, and the Walberg family is left destitute. All too aware of the hardship that awaits his family, Walberg is inconsolable, tortured by "the thought that the hands that clasp ours so fondly cannot earn for us or themselves the means of another meal, – that the lips that are pressed to ours so warmly, may the next ask us for bread, and – ask in vain!"(39)

Mirroring Maturin's image of his children begging him for food, Walberg's depiction of his family demanding bread which he cannot provide emphasises the similarities between Maturin and his fictional character. What's more, this parallel is continued throughout the Walberg story. As his situation becomes increasingly desperate, for instance, Walberg decides to "offer his talents as a musical teacher"(40), much as Maturin established himself as a tutor for young students attending Trinity College Dublin. Walberg's lack of Spanish, however, results in his inability to find work as a tutor, an occupation that was, as Maturin knew too well, inconsistent at best.(41) In these circumstances, Walberg laments the "subservience of [his] talent to necessity, [when] all its generous enthusiasm [is] lost, and only its possible utility remembered or valued".(42) Again echoing Maturin's own sentiments as expressed to Scott – 'the possible profit of anything I undertake is the only object in my calculations' – Walberg ably voices Maturin's representation of his authorship as both a scorned talent degraded by its pandering to the corrupt tastes of its audience and simply a tool for financial gain. Understanding their talents and, in Maturin's case, his novels, as mere commodities, both Walberg and his author see themselves as selling themselves for bread.

The pieces of himself that Maturin sells are his books, but for Walberg they are literally his body and, at least indirectly, those of his children. Desperate for food, Walberg's children contribute to the daily effort to secure their next meal. For Walberg's daughter, this involves near-prostitution, but, where she is finally unable to stomach marketing herself, Walberg's eldest son, Everhard, is more successful. Soon after he and his family begin to face the very real possibility of starvation, Everhard returns home "with an unexpected supply of provisions". Refusing to explain how he has obtained these provisions, Everhard exhorts his family to partake in the "manna-meal" he has provided, while he stands by "look[ing] exhausted and dreadfully pale". Soon after, Walberg and his wife find an unconscious Everhard bleeding profusely from the "opened veins" of both his arms. Described by Ines as resembling "[a] St. Bartholomew flayed […] a St Laurence, broiled on a gridiron", Everhard is imaged as a human sacrifice but also, more poignantly, as a martyr killed in a most cannibalistic manner. As he was being 'broiled' to death, St. Laurence reportedly enraged his persecutors by directing them to turn him over for even roasting. Allegedly refusing to relinquish the Church's material wealth to his tormentors, Laurence surrenders himself instead, and, in the process, transforms himself into a commercial product, a mere slab of meat. Similarly, in the 'Tale of Guzman's Family', Everhard voluntarily offers himself as an expendable commodity to provide for his family. Selling his blood to the local "barber-surgeon",(43) Everhard literally barters his body for food.

Although not quite as spectacularly or as successfully as his son, Walberg too contemplates selling himself for food to feed his family. Visited frequently by Melmoth, the "enemy of man", Walberg finds himself sorely tempted by the offer placed before him. As he explains to Ines, "Want and misery are not naturally fertile in the product of imagination, – they grasp at realities too closely. No man, who wants a meal, conceives that a banquet is spread before him, and that the tempter invites him to sit down and eat at his ease". Desperate for the 'banquet' presented by Melmoth, Walberg seriously considers selling his

eternal soul. Ultimately, of course, Walberg refuses Melmoth's offer, but not before he has overheard Everhard's "horrible secret" and kept quiet, or before he has viciously attacked his elderly father for eating but not earning. Eventually restored to wealth and plenty when Guzman's real will is discovered, Walberg nevertheless continues to remember with horror "the hour of his adversity". Although he and his family rest secure in their newfound "wealth" and "importance", the memory of starvation and the extremes it drove him to continue to haunt Walberg.(44)

In this preoccupation with hunger, need, and starvation, Walberg is not alone. Instead, a concern with food and the ability to obtain it runs throughout *Melmoth*, thematically replicating itself in many of the novel's other embedded tales. Even where characters appear unworried about the provenance of their next meal, as with Stanton, there is a striking reliance on the imagery of food, starvation, and, in extreme instances, cannibalism. Alonzo Monçada, for instance, the Spanish man who narrates to John Melmoth most of the novel's many embedded tales, describes mealtimes in the monastery in which he was unjustly confined as hours in which the monks "banquet on the little scandal of the convent" as they "swallow their meal". Whilst they feed on the miseries of others – "Who was late at prayers? Who is to undergo penance?" – Monçada receives his punishment for desiring escape: "food, which famine itself would have shrunk from".(45) Later, having entrusted himself into the care of a parricide promising to help him escape, Monçada listens to him as he narrates a story of almost inconceivable horror: a young man forced to enter the monastery under extreme duress soon developed an oddly intense relationship with a novice who had arrived at the monastery shortly after he had. When the two are discovered embracing and the novice's identity is revealed as the young man's disguised female lover, the Superior decided to punish the pair by allowing them to believe they can escape. Assisting with the Superior's evil plans, the parricide guided the lovers through the monastery's subterranean passages, but, instead of securing their release, trapped them in a small underground chamber. As he sat outside the barred door, the parricide waited and listened until he finally heard "the shriek of the wretched female, – her lover, in the agony of hunger, had fastened his teeth in her shoulder; – that bosom on which he had so often luxuriated, became a meal to him now". Laughing at their fate, the parricide explains his contempt:

One hour of hunger undeceived them. A trivial and ordinary want, whose claims at another time they would have regarded as a vulgar interruption of their spiritualised intercourse, not only, by its natural operation, sundered it for ever, but, before it ceased, converted that intercourse into a source of torment and hostility inconceivable, except among cannibals.

Driven by "the rabid despair of famine", the young lovers become nothing more than brutish cannibals.(46)

Such imagery is clearly linked to Maturin's fear of Catholicism and its apparently cannabilistic beliefs and practices. Although accused of the basest savagery, the young lovers are actually victims of a religion in which their love is seen as deviant, akin to "the horrible loves of the baboons and the Hottentot women, at the Cape of Good Hope" or the "unnatural and ineffable union[s]" between South American snakes and their human victims. Much to the parricide's chagrin, however, the two never actually commit the crime of which they are accused. In fact, the only visible sign of the pair's apparent savagery is "a slight scar" on the young woman's shoulder – hardly evidence of cannibalism at all.(47) Accused of a cannibalism they have not committed, the young lovers essentially reverse the accusation. The literal cannibalism they supposedly engage in becomes the metaphoric cannibalism of the Catholic Church.(48) Through these young lovers, *Melmoth* suggests that the savagery lies not with the couple but with a Church that had become a monstrous and unnatural entity. Something similar might be said about the 'Tale of Guzman's

Family'. Through its depiction of cannibalism, Walberg's story offers a searing commentary on the exploitative social and commercial relations by which the Catholic Church maintains its social dominance at the expense of the impoverished Walberg family. Such is the Church's power that the Walbergs are immediately aware that "a change of their heretical opinions" would be the only way to succeed in Spain. Guzman's death bears this truth out; despite "the ablest advocates" and proof of "undue influence, of imposition, and of terror being exercised on the mind of the testator", Walberg and his family are left with nothing.(49) This failure has everything to do with religious politics: "The chance of a heretic stranger, against the interests of churchmen in Spain, may be calculated by the most shallow capacity".(50) In the wake of this decision, the Walbergs become nothing more than heretical social climbers; those they appeal to refuse assistance out of jealousy for the "former splendour" in which Guzman had established them before his death. Even with their wealth restored upon the discovery of Guzman's true will, the Walbergs must return to Germany before they can enjoy "prosperous felicity".(51)

Such scenes are evidence of the anti-Catholicism both characteristic of the Gothic as a form and apparent in Maturin's life and works. Yet, as Robert Miles has recently argued, understanding *Melmoth* as "the high-water mark of Gothic anti-Catholicism and Europhobia" may do injustice to Maturin's imagery and its many layers of meaning.(52) The figure of "[t]he good and friendly priest", for instance, who assists the Walbergs despite their heretical tendencies, negates a simplistic equation of Catholicism and terrible depravation.(53) Nevertheless, Maturin's severity towards the Catholic faith should not be ignored. In his construction, it is a system of belief founded upon the idea of displaced penance: one person's sins are forgiven because of another person's sacrifice. It is a religion, as Monçada says, "which makes our aggravating the sufferings of others our mediator with […] God".(54) Monçada's own mother falls victim to these beliefs, sacrificing her son to the Church in exchange for her perceived sin – pregnancy out of wedlock. Similarly, the parricide who leads Monçada out of the monastery only to betray him firmly believes in his ability to excuse himself in the eyes of God through the deeds of others: "Every offender may purchase his immunity, by consenting to become the executioner of the offender whom he betrays and denounces".(55) In this way, *Melmoth* presents Catholicism as schooling its believers in essentially cannibalistic behaviour.

While the Church may attempt to displace such behaviour onto its sinful adherents, as suggested by the parricide's tale, it is seen to partake equally in these monstrous cannibalistic activities. In keeping with an implicit Protestant understanding of transubstantiation as fundamentally cannibalistic(56), Maturin frequently describes the Church and its authorities engaged in metaphoric, if not literal, flesh-eating. The Inquisition, for example, emerges in *Melmoth* as a program directly aimed at the maintenance of the Church's power through the sacrifice and consumption of its believers. Imprisoned for his questioning of Church authority, Monçada only barely escapes becoming a sacrificial victim and martyr to the Church's demand for obedience and mute compliance. Elsewhere in the novel, the terrors of the Inquisition become an effective check on apparent questioning of Church authority. In the 'Tale of the Indians', for instance, Don Fernan is frightened out of resistance to his family's confessor, Father Jose, by the suggestion of the Inquisition, "Mark me, I will use but one unanswerable argument […] The Inquisition at Goa knows the truth of what I have asserted, and who will dare deny it now?" Terrified by this prospect, Don Fernan's mother urges her son, "believe what the reverend Father has told you". Don Fernan, in turn, proclaims, "I am believing as fast as I can".(57)

Forcing compliance at the threat of torture and death, the Catholic Church in *Melmoth* is never content simply to feed off the souls of believers. Instead, Maturin suggests, it demands literal flesh and blood sacrifice. Such anti-Catholicism is striking and may be linked to the "ontological insecurity" Maturin

arguably felt as an Irish Anglican clergyman towards Ireland's Catholic population.(58) What interests me here, however, is the text's juxtaposition of the Catholic Church's cannibalistic behaviour with society's inhumanity in general. The greedy consumption and literal power-hungriness of the Catholic Church and its authorities is conspicuously compared to Maturin's understanding of a wider social callousness. When Immalee, a young and innocent castaway discovered on an isolated island off the coast of India, expresses horror "at the mention of animal food" just as "the most delicate European would at the mention of a cannibal feast", Melmoth offers a prolonged invective against the society from which Immalee has been such a stranger. Sympathising with her distaste for eating meat, Melmoth explains that "Some […] have a taste by no means so sophisticated". Yet, while these disparaged people happily eat the animals around them, in so doing, they actually aggravate the suffering of poorer, less fortunate members of society. Far better, Melmoth suggests, that the fortunate few, rather than eat pork and beef, actually eat the impoverished multitudes, "as human life is always miserable, and animal life never so, (except from elementary causes)". Melmoth therefore recommends cannibalism as "the most humane and salutary way of at once gratifying the appetite, and diminishing the mass of human suffering". He further observes, however, that notwithstanding the irrefutable logic and humanity of such a course of action, the wealthy "pique" themselves on being cruel, insisting on eating animal flesh and thereby "leav[ing] thousands of human beings yearly to perish by hunger and grief".(59)

Melmoth's description of cannibalism as an acceptable and welcome means of dealing with poverty and surplus population undoubtedly owes much to Jonathan Swift's similar recommendation in *A Modest Proposa*l (1729). Famously advocating the use of poor Irish children as food for "*Persons of Quality and Fortune*, through the Kingdom",(60) Swift's satire transformed the human body into "an object that, purified through the process of commodification, may be consumed acceptably as food".(61) It did so arguably in an attempt to suggest, as Jarlath Killeen has maintained, that the destitute poor offered for consumption "ha[d] [themselves] *surrendered* to starvation".(62) In this way, they had become victims of their own vices. In contrast, Maturin's imagery depicts the poor as willing participants in an activity presented as both necessitated and ultimately prevented by the rich.(63) Dwelling on the idea of victimisation, Maturin's illustration of society's "unequal division of the means of existence" contrasts the "industrious" poor with the idle wealthy. Immersed in "the wild and wanton excess of superfluous and extravagant splendour"(64), the fortunate disdain, scorn, and most importantly, ignore the poor and their plight. As a result, society's unfortunates are left 'to perish by hunger and grief' because of the selfishness and greed of the rich. Maturin's poor, therefore, are the casualties of an unjust society – condemned to a terrible life of want, despite their best efforts, with no possible egress simply because of the disregard of those around them.

That Maturin understood himself as one of these injured poor is clear both from his correspondence and his representation of himself in his texts. Given his understanding of himself and his place in society, it seems very likely Maturin was thinking of himself when he wrote of "the industrious, the ingenious, and the imaginative" being condemned to starve "while bloated mediocrity pants from excess".(65) At the very least, his depiction of authorial figures in *Melmoth* certainly finds inspiration in his own situation. In particular, the stranger who narrates the 'Tale of Guzman's Family' aptly encapsulates Maturin's understanding of his social standing. Shortly after finishing his tale, the stranger mysteriously dies, despite having promised a continuation of his tales. Although circumstances are suspicious, murder is immediately dismissed by the authorities because the stranger is counted only as "a writer, and a man of no importance in public or private life". The stranger's ignominious death highlights the derision and contempt encountered by authors and artists such as the stranger, Walberg, and Maturin himself. Combined with Melmoth's angry criticism of society, such representations of authorship satirically

suggest that it would have been better for society literally to eat authors rather than simply let them die from starvation and want. More practically, however, *Melmoth* proposes that readers and critics treat leniently and liberally with texts written by diligent authors driven by need. Rather than condemn their works "to moulder in the libraries of the curious […] scorned even by those who exhaust sums on their collection", readers could literally save authors such as Maturin from starvation through the consumption of their texts.(66) In a sense, then, despite his evident disdain for his readers and his fundamental ambivalence about authorship, Maturin continued to invite, and indeed, plead for his readers' cannibalistic consumption of his texts.

In this light, Melmoth's prediction for his eventual fate is especially telling. Likening his destiny to that of "Don Juan […] as he is represented in the real horrors of his destiny by the Spanish writer", Melmoth pictures himself as the guest of honour at "a feast". Here, Melmoth is to be confronted by "the spirits of those whom he has wronged and murdered, uprisen from their charnel, and swathed in shrouds […] call[ing] on him in hollow sounds to pledge them in goblets of blood".(67) Condemned to literal starvation due to the derision and contempt of his audience, Maturin suggests that his demanding but unrewarding readers face a similar fate to Melmoth: to be haunted by the authors they have 'wronged and murdered' by unjust condescension and ridicule. Maturin thus subtly registers his defiance of readers, who, when presented with the delightful feasts that were his works, refused to dine, thereby condemning him 'to perish by hunger and grief'.

1. Charles Robert Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, ed. Douglas Grant, introd. Chris Baldick (1820; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 18.
2. Ibid. 54, 55.
3. Charles Robert Maturin, *The Wild Irish Boy*, introd. Robert Lee Wolff, 3 vols. (1808; New York: Garland, 1979) 1:xi, x.
4. Ostensibly, Melmoth's failure is meant to prove that, as Maturin had argued in one of his sermons, no human being would ever "resign the hope of his salvation […] were the enemy of mankind to traverse it with the offer". Of course, Melmoth himself is a glaring contradiction to these terms, forcing us to look elsewhere for meaning; Maturin, *Melmoth* 5. For the sermon from which this argument is plainly taken, see Charles Robert Maturin, Sermons (London: Archibald Constable, 1819) 35-36.
5. 'Memoranda of Maturin', *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine* 3 (1846): 130, 127.
6. 'Obituary of Charles Robert Maturin', *The Gentleman's Magazine* 95 (1825): 84.
7. Letter from Maturin to Scott, 11 January 1813, in Fannie E. Ratchford and Wm. H. McCarthy, Jr., (eds.), *The Correspondence of Sir Walter Scott and Charles Robert Maturin, With a Few Other Allied Letters* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1937)10.
8. 'Obituary' 84.
9. 'Maturin', *Dublin and London Magazine* 2 (1826): 248.
10. 'Review of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, by Charles Robert Maturin', *Monthly Review*, 2nd ser. 94 (1821): 81-90, *British Fiction, 1800-1829 Database* 15 June 2006 <http://www.british-fiction.cf.ac.uk/reviews/melm20-51.html>: 83.
11. Letter dated 17 July 1813, Ratchford and McCarthy 20; my emphasis.
12. Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer* 6.
13. According to Maturin, his advancement in the Church was prevented because his "high Calvinist […] Religious Opinions [… were] viewed with jealousy by Unitarian Brethren and Arminian Masters"; letter dated 11 January 1813, Ratchford and McCarthy 10.
14. J.W. Croker, 'Review of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, by Charles Robert Maturin', *The Quarterly Review* 24.48 (1821): 311.
15. Charles Robert Maturin, *The Albigenses; a Romance*, 4 vols. (London: Hurst and Robinson, 1824) viii.
16. Letter dated [?23 December 1812], Ratchford and McCarthy 8.
17. Charles Robert Maturin, *Women; or Pour et Contre*, introd. Robert Lee Wolff, 3 vols. (1818; New York: Garland, 1979) 1:iii.
18. Charles Robert Maturin, *The Milesian Chief*, introd. Robert Lee Wolff, 4 vols. (1812; New York: Garland, 1979) 1:iii.
19. Letter dated 11 January 1813, Ratchford and McCarthy 10.
20.Regina B. Oost, '"Servility and Command": Authorship in *Melmoth the Wanderer*', *Papers on Language and Literature* 31.3 (1995): 292.
21. Maturin, *Melmoth* 10, 399.
22. Oost 292.
23. Ibid. 306.
24. Sharon Ragaz, 'Maturin, Archibald Constable, and the Publication of *Melmoth the Wanderer*', *Review of English Studies* 57 (2006): 373.
25. Ibid. 372.
26. Ibid. 369.
27. Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer* 542.

28. Letter from Constable to Maturin, dated 11 February 1820; quoted in Ragaz 369. This is after Constable had already rejected, in late November 1819, Maturin's proposal to extend his text to eight volumes rather than four.
29. Letter dated 3 May 1820, Rathcford and McCarthy 98.
30. Letter dated 15 February 1813, Ratchford and McCarthy 14.
31. Letter dated 15 October 1814, Ratchford and McCarthy 34.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid. 35.
34. Letter dated 1 October 1821, Ratchford and McCarthy 99, 100.
35. Maturin, *Melmoth* 418.
36. Ibid. 396.
37. Oost 301.
38. Maturin, *Melmoth* 400, 402.
39. Ibid. 415.
40. Ibid.
41. As Maturin informed Scott, "I found the greatest difficulty in procuring the few [students] I have, and almost equal difficulty in keeping them – it is impossible to describe the 'Variety of wretchedness' attendant on this line of life – the Caprices of parents, the dullness of Children, the Expectation that I am to make a Genius of him whom his Maker has made a dunce, [… etc.]"; letter dated 11 January 1813, Ratchford and McCarthy 9-10.
42. Maturin, *Melmoth* 419.
43. Ibid. 419, 422.
44. Ibid. 426, 423, 434.
45. Ibid. 151.
46. Ibid. 212-3, 213.
47. Ibid. 207, 213.
48. The parricide is also implicated in this reversed accusation. As Julia M. Wright has cogently argued, the parricide attends the starvation of these two lovers with a "noncorpreal appetite" that is only "one remove from literal cannibalism – it feeds on the famine that feeds on the lovers"; Julia M.Wright, 'Devouring the Disinherited: Familial Cannibalism in Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*', *Eating their Words: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Cultural Identity*, ed. Kristen Guest (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001) 87-88.
49. Maturin, *Melmoth* 402, 412.
50. Ibid. 413-4.
51. Ibid. 417, 434.
52. Robert Miles, 'Europhobia: The Catholic Other in Horace Walpole and Charles Maturin', *European Gothic: A Spirited Exchange 1760-1960*, ed. Avril Horner (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002) 89.
53. Maturin, *Melmoth* 407.
54. Ibid. 147.
55. Ibid. 224.
56. For a discussion of the Catholic Church's historical belief in transubstantiation – the theological understanding that the Eucharistic bread and wine literally becomes the body and blood of Christ – see Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990) 79-85. Maturin's belief in the cannibalistic horrors of transubstantiation is clear from a passage in his *Five Sermons on the Errors of the Roman Catholic Church* (1824). In the second of these sermons, Maturin argued that, if people were to believe in transubstantiation, they had to also believe that at the Last Supper "Christ held his own body in his hand, and ate and drank his own

body […] and his disciples also ate and drank that body which was then alive […] Let insanity, in its wildest ravings, exceed or equal this, if it can"; Charles Robert Maturin, *Five Sermons on the Errors of the Roman Catholic Church* (Dublin: William Folds and Son, 1824) 42.

57. Maturin, *Melmoth* 337, 337-8.

58. Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta Books, 2000) 72. Kiberd here is speaking of Jonathan Swift, but the ongoing conflict Swift felt as both a clergyman and an Irish Anglican seems equally applicable to Maturin.

59. Maturin, *Melmoth* 301.

60. Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal, Irish Tracts 1728-1733*, ed. Herbert Davis (1729; Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) 111.

61. Margot Gayle Backus, *The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999) 87.

62. Jarlath Killeen, *Gothic Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005) 110.

63. Wright suggests that Maturin "rounds out" rather than diverges from Swift's premise: "that is, while Swift figures the rich as cannibals, feeding on the bodies of the poor indirectly through economic inequity, Maturin suggests that the economic inequity leads to bodies so starved that they duplicate, with even more directness, that violence". This is, as Wright contends, "the locus of the gothic horror" of *Melmoth the Wanderer* – the very real fear that someone who is starving will be driven to cannibalism knowing that it is produced by social institutions over which the individual has no control; Wright 90. As persuasive as these arguments are, they do not account for the ways in which Maturin, like the 'impoverished multitudes' Melmoth discusses, demands to be consumed. In terms of Maturin's perspective on his literary production at least, he seems less concerned with the extremes of consumption he may be driven to, i.e. cannibalistic behaviour, than he is with his audience's refusal to cannibalistically consume him and his literary works.

64. Maturin, *Melmoth* 302.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid. 439, 397.

67. Ibid. 537.

Traces of Gothic Spectrality in New Media Art

Wendy Haslem

Gothic simulations

Traces of Gothic spectrality emerge from a dynamic interaction between literature, cinema and new media, creating art that is both new, but also indebted to tradition. Contemporary Gothic projections inspired by 18th century literary convention, reveal their lineage from experiments in the limits of vision explored in pre-cinema and silent film. In 1781 Immanuel Kant identified a split in perception between the seen and the unseen.(1) Kant classified 'phenomena' as the nature of objects as they are perceived, distinguishing this from 'noumena', invisible, spectral, unreal 'things-in-themselves'. Gothic culture has a particular interest in interrogating noumena, exploring the limitations of vision, valuing irrational visions and sensation beyond the visual. In new media art, digital technologies create and animate spectral visions, capturing attention and beguiling audiences, extending the ways that pre-cinematic technologies created images of wonder and fear for early film audiences. Tom Gunning describes how pre-cinematic attractions conjured illusions of wondrous worlds, inspiring curiosity, shock and fascination, producing an 'aesthetics of astonishment'.(2) Pre-cinematic optical technologies included magic lantern, phantasmagoria and spirit photography which projected spectral impressions onto smoke or clouds. These devices and illusions became popular in the nineteenth century for testing the limitations of apprehension. Further developments in optical devices included the thaumatrope, zoetrope and praxinoscope which used the 'flicker fusion threshold' of sixteen images per second to generate the illusion of motion. The aesthetics of astonishment encompasses the technological construction as well as the apprehension of the illusion. With the development of early cinema, George Méliès created 'trick cinema' by exploiting the potential for deception within film's editing process. This incredulity at the spectacle and the apparatus is extended into unimaginable realms as technologies are used to create dimensions that challenge the limits of vision and comprehension from early optical technologies to digital art. Writing on the lineage between pre-cinematic devices and new media, Marina Warner argues, "[t]he coming of the camcorder has transformed the relationship between reality and image. By installing the spectral enigmas of appearance as familiar features of existence today, it has further destabilised those ancient boundaries between illusion and its opposite".(3) The art under examination here represents various approaches to the haunting of time, space, bodies and objects. Drawing from the history of cinema, particularly from experiments in pre-cinema, Gothic simulations produced by digital media create impressions of Kant's noumena.

Misha Kavka argues "the Gothic does not "belong" to film, and the film medium must content itself with a home for the catch-all category of terror and spookiness, the horror genre."(4) Whilst the origins of the Gothic do not belong to the moving image, it has certainly created a presence on the screen. With the ability to reanimate history, infusing figures of the past with a spectral presence, the Gothic seems specifically suited to the possibilities presented by projection. The experimentation with image and sound in new media extends the Gothic beyond the limitations imposed by formulas of narrative or genre. Digital media provides a range of tools for exploiting the possibilities of haunting. Moving image projections inspired by the Gothic become simulations haunting the gallery space. Gothic simulations are hyperconscious projections, aware of the rich lineage, but focused on innovation and revision. Aware of their lineage, they reconfigure and transcend traditional conventions, themes and imagery, creating new ways of apprehending and experiencing the Gothic. As simulations, however, they lose nothing of their resonance. Recent screen based art and installations create and project impressions of the Gothic anew, creating unstable, haunted spaces, layered temporalities and surprisingly spectral effects.

Fred Botting argues that the 'paraphernalia' of Gothic modernity, particularly the uncanny, is not where it used to be, "[s]pectrality instead describes ordinary operations of new technologies and their hallucinatory, virtual effects."(5) It is from installations in the gallery space that these hallucinatory, virtual effects are reconfigured as Gothic, creating striking apparitions for contemporary audiences. Inspired by the work of Jean Baudrillard, who perceives culture as full of the haunting of the separated double, Botting argues that Gothic simulations work "differentially and retrospectively in the play of imaginary and real."(6) Gothic imagery, Botting suggests, works to "preserve the illusion of darkness, death and sexuality in a world given over to the omnipresence of virtual light and life on screens."(7)

Spectrality

The Gothic reincarnation in the moving image emphasises and extends its spectrality. In Derrida's work, spectrality is neither alive nor dead but somewhere in between. It is outside classification, representing the "possibility and the limit of all idealization and hence all conceptualization."(8) In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida explores the specter of a Marxist revolution haunting Europe.(9) The Gothic shares a similar interest in the influence of the specter, a notion central to Derrida's counter-philosophy of 'hauntology'. Hauntology implies disjointed time, an unstable definition of past and present, with the present existing in the shadow of the past. For Derrida, hauntology is "repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time."(10) Time and histories are blurred and interrelated in this paradigm with the past casting a shadow over the present. The figure of the specter is ubiquitous, materialising in the form of otherness externalised, incorporated and internalised. This 'in-between' state is characteristic of Gothic simulations. In creating illusion and perceptual dislocation, screen media effectively incarnates a spectral in-between. From the 18th century, the Gothic literary form displays an interest in the persistence of historical and personal memory. Authors like Ann Radcliffe in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Matthew Lewis in *The Monk* (1796) and later Charlotte Perkins Gilman with *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) produced work in which the past asserts itself with the revelation of secrets, the appearance of ghosts, uncanny apparitions and animated portraiture. Within the walls of the Gothic space, in early literature and later new media, chronological temporality is undermined by a past that ruptures the present. Kavka argues that the Gothic "represents the incursions and invasions of a semi-imaginary past into the present".(11) By maintaining this continuum, the Gothic confirms the impossibility of the end of history.

Traces of spectrality are visible in the impressions and aural effects created by reanimating the past and creating new apprehensions in installations and digital projections. Spectral images appear as an incarnation of the restlessness of the past. As uncanny presences, they test boundaries between life and death, the inanimate and the animate. The ephemeral figures arising within seem to emerge from the past, representing an inability to forget the past. Traces of spectrality also affect spectatorship. Spectral images often create a curiosity to see images, or feel impressions of a time beyond the present. Impressions of spectrality intensify in screen media. Screen art creates and projects image based spectral effects. The artworks investigated here are impressionistic and spectacular. They emerge from imagery, effects and montages created for impact, unlimited by the formality of narrative or linearity. This is similar to the way subplots are interwoven in Gothic novels. Isolated images without a specific narrative context, introduction or resolution, intensify the effect of haunting. These traces can be understood in Julian Wolfrey's terms as the "spectralization of the Gothic".(12) The images are indebted to the conventions of the Gothic, but also appear as revisions, hauntings of the original form. Images on exhibition in the gallery condense spectrality. Wolfreys writes that, "[w]herever narratives cannot speak, there we may respond to the gothic fragment as one aspect of the enormity of haunting, or what might provisionally be described as the spectral sublime."(13)

Wolfreys, following Derrida, suggests that the experience of haunting is accentuated and accelerated by modern technologies inhabiting a phantom structure.(14) Haunting is the effect of modernity. Spectrality emerges from the reproduction and repetition of images, something that has never been more possible than with digital technologies; new technologies in the form digital cameras, software for image manipulation and projectors allowing increased screen ratios. Digital reproduction produces a specific type of aesthetic spectrality, one that is animated by the glow of light isolated by darkness, or by shadows projecting surprising and dangerous forms. Nature takes on new dimensions when represented through the tools for digital imaging, allowing manipulation and the creation of spaces that are layered as a palimpsest, impacting to defamiliarise the familiar. Created by digital technologies, the Gothic apparition doesn't require a referent in reality. Gothic inflected screen art prioritises the past and the imaginary, projecting images of memories, dreams and nightmares. In installation art, screens take on unexpected forms and ratios extend from the small and distant to the elongated and immersive.

Versifier

The ghostly apparitions that inhabit the screens in Gina Czarnecki's installation *Versifier* (2003) are an overt and confronting example of the impact of Gothic spectrality. These apparitions are created by traces of light exhibited within the darkness of an enclosed installation. In this installation a shrouded doorway leads to a dimly lit passageway lined with floor to ceiling screens. Inside the installation, the participant is confronted by spectral impressions of naked black and white humans who appear to be lit from within. These glowering human forms constitute the only light sources within the installation. Rear projection highlights their spectrality as the bodies appear to be suspended within the darkness. Impressions of human forms begin at a distance, appearing to approach the spectator. Effectively, the viewer becomes the participant as their presence generates the ghost – thus a profound connection is created between the participant and the specter in *Versifier*.

The monochromatic skin tones and the exposure of these bodies both reveals and depersonalises them. On one hand they appear as ghostly apparitions, biological specimens preserved in the past. With reference to the spectral bodies, Emma Crimmings asks: "[a]re they human, specimens or visual remnants of a neglected experiment to extract and preserve souls in the hope that such an endeavour would achieve immortality?"(15) The lack of any colour beyond the spectrum from grey to black combined with the vulnerability of the flesh, reflects the coldness and precision of a scientific autopsy. The bodies appear to be suspended somewhere in the past. Crimmings describes them as "the revelation of a physiological memory."(16) But these bodies bear traces of memory and apprehensions about the future. In their exposure, they reveal both natural imperfections and evidence of slight visual manipulation. Some bodies have eerily spindly legs and elongated arms; others appear outlined by a strange aura. Some reveal gender indeterminacy, appearing androgynous and beyond binary classification. In these figures in particular, the flesh is decidedly post-human.

The impact of *Versifier* arises from the dynamic alignment it creates with the viewer. Looks, movement and gestures, like reaching out to touch the screen from within destabilise the boundaries between screen and spectator. The (over) proximity of the specter on the large screen, its human scale and gesture accentuates the visual connection with the ghost. The dimensions of the screen are beyond the scope of vision, intensifying the effect of encapsulation in the spectral world. Physical and virtual bodies are trapped inside the installation on either side of the screen mirroring one another in their restless movements of advance and retreat. This spatial alignment, however, is complicated by the silence of the spectral bodies as attempts at verbal communication are drowned out by what sounds like the deep and

elongated electronic tones of an underwater sonar on the soundtrack. Writing about how aspects of the Gothic confront the limits of apprehension, Wolfreys suggests, "[s]uch fragments and the silences which they generate, speak of the unspeakable, bearing witness to an absence or the unrepresentability at the heart, and as the very limit of meaning."(17) The absolute exposure of these spectral bodies, their desire to connect, and the frustration of their silence creates a connection based on empathy rather than voyeurism.

Such a beguiling installation prioritises a visual proximity, encouraging an engagement that is embodied and experiential. *Versifier* offers a Gothic spectacle, images that are immediate and beautiful in their cold tones and strange textures. In relation to avant-garde cinema, Laura U. Marks describes 'haptic optics' as an ability to touch with the eyes, and a similar type of engagement could also be extended to describe the affect of *Versifier*. Haptic optics rejects visual paradigms defined by distance, mastering and domination, preferring instead a connection that is immediate and personified, "a bodily relationship between the viewer and image".(18) Marks focuses on a mimetic connection arguing that: "[i]n a haptic relationship our self rushes up to the surface to interact with another surface".(19) With connection and affect dependent on black and white impressions, textures and surfaces, these ghostly impressions create a dynamic engagement between the viewer and apparition. Spectators approaching this installation become participants involved in an interrelationship between presence, movement and proximity.

Gina Czarnecki perceives *Versifier* as an extension of the cinema. She extends the spectator/specter dyad to include others within the installation, revealing that: "I have always loved the cinematic experience and came to realize that I wanted this in an installation environment. There is something about being in the dark in a public space that focuses your eyes and attention onto small details, sounds, people in the space with you or your inner thoughts and solitude."(20) The influence of the cinema on the installation creates a concentration of seen and the unseen in Gothic spectrality. *Versifier* is a striking example of the historical traces of the cinema in new media installations, drawing on the ability of the moving image to animate the spectral. With reference to Gothic literature, Emma McEvoy notes "[o]ne of the specialities of the Gothic novel is its power of rendering the material phantasmal and the phantasmal material".(21) Such a slippage between the phantasm and the material is also evident in *Versifier*. The apparitions exhibited in this installation attract and confront audiences, encouraging a sensory, embodied, and haptic engagement with specters of the Gothic.

Tool's Life, *Cage for Kage*, *Shadow Monsters*

Whilst *Versifier* uses a monochromatic lighting palette and the darkness of the enclosed installation space to explore the ways that Gothic spectrality tests the limits of vision, exhibits like *Tool's Life* (2001) and *Cage for Kage* (2003) created by the Minim++ partnership and *Shadow Monsters* (2005) developed by Philip Worthington, use shadow play to project dimensions beyond the visible, projecting new impressions of Gothic spectrality which emerge from familiar surfaces. Bodies, movement and touch figure prominently as the viewer is required to generate the spectral shadows produced by these interactive installations. Each of these installations creates projections of unfamiliar images emanating from familiar objects and forms.

Japanese artists Kyoko Kunoh and Motoshi Chikamori (under the name Minim++) illuminate everyday objects with customised software to create an interactive installation that asks the participant to question the logic linking objects with the shadows they cast. In *Tool's Life* touching an ashtray creates a shadow of a lizard that scampers around its rim, touching a trowel transforms its shadow into a bird as it sprouts wings and flies off. A small watering can responds to the touch by generating an elaborate shadow of

sprinkling water that causes a flower to grow and burst into bloom. The object and the projected shadow are surprisingly disconnected in *Tool's Life*. Conventionally representative and static, shadows take on a form that transforms the meaning of the original object. Shadowy presences reflect the magical possibilities of the object and extend its function into the realm of Gothic illusion. In *Cage For Kage* viewers take the place of the objects in *Tool's Life* casting the shadows of birds, snakes, lizards, fish and even school children as they walk past a series of large, magical columns. In *Cage for Kage*, animated shadows generated from the proximity of humans appear as reincarnations of the spectral. Minim++ investigate the boundaries of perception and apprehension as impressions of the noumena are projected as fleeting shadows.

Philip Worthington's interactive installation, *Shadow Monsters* (2005) extends the shadow into pre-history. Without human interaction, *Shadow Monsters* appears as a simple light box and white screen but when the human steps into the space in between, technologies cast shadows creating dynamic impressions that reveal traces of a monstrous past. This interactive exhibit encourages participants to see themselves as an imaginary monster as the outlines cast from their bodies sprouts teeth, hair, eyes, beaks and claws. Stylized shadows take on menacing proportions, some resembling wolves or crocodiles with razor sharp teeth, others appearing as birds or prehistoric dinosaurs. Vision recognition technology is used to read an impression of the outline, which then transforms the human into the prehistoric monster. The soundtrack layered with the deep drones of animal noises and guttural howls amplifies this impression. Here the traditional shadow play is recast within the fantasy of the digital realm, collapsing spectral impressions of prehistoric histories with the body in motion. Such an expression of the monstrous offers a subversive fantasy, blurring boundaries between the monster and the human. Participants are offered temporary license to become monstrous in their shadow play, allowing an expression of primitive rage during this rebellious ritual. *Shadow Monsters* creates the space for an interactive experience of Gothic carnivalesque. But these interactive links to prehistory are ephemeral and the monstrous shadow is confined to the subversive space between the light box and the screen, dematerialising as the participant steps away from the installation

House II: The Great Artesian Basin, Pennsylvania, Haynes/Hinterding, 2003
The first impression of David Haynes and Joyce Hinterding's *House II*, suggests a neo Gothic house in danger of being swept away by a torrent of water. Quickly, however, it is revealed that the water is gushing from inside the home. The torrential force of the water threatens to splinter the house from within, perhaps even to wash it away. A neighbouring house, visible at the edge of the frame also appears under threat. The water surges out of the neo Gothic house with the ferocity of an oil gusher. The spectacle emerges from the intersection between the beautiful swirling pristine blue of the water and its potentially devastating effect on the material world. Writing about the haunted house as a tenet of the Gothic, Wolfreys argues that "[h]aunting cannot take place without the possibility of its internal eruption and interruption within, and as a condition of a familiar everyday place and space."(22) The swirling water surrounding the home sets the landscape against the image of American Gothic. The awe of the watery landscape depicting the extreme forces of nature suggests the inability of the architecture to withstand such an uncontrollable force. The spectral sublime is incarnated here in the water that threatens chaos. The house in *House II* is suspended at a temporal imminence representing the moment between existence and obliteration.

Manmade architecture is the vessel for this disturbance. Haunted by natural forces, the home is depicted as giving rise to environmental disorder. The home becomes the site of catastrophe, water spewing out through doors and windows. This neo Gothic house internalises disaster. Coral Ann Howells describes the

Gothic diegesis as, "a shadowy world of ruins and twilight scenery lit up from time to time by lurid flashes of passion and violence".(23) In the Gothic, storms herald danger, a change in the weather signifies a climactic confrontation. Iconic signifiers of the Gothic are reinvented by new media art such as David Haynes and Joyce Hinterding's *House II*. The space of the home as a site of shelter and comfort is questioned as its boundaries are made permeable, becoming redefined as a site of haunting and disturbance. Wolfreys describes the effect of haunting as the destabilisation of the domestic, powerful in that it displaces us in the space that we feel most secure, "that place where we apparently confirm our identity, our sense of being, where we feel most at home with ourselves."(24)

Haynes and Hinterding modeled their imaginary house on an actual dwelling in Pennsylvania. This house was located on Petroleum Street, Oil City, the site of the discovery of oil in the US. Its collapse of distances and spaces is evident in the compositing of visual impressions of Central Australia's Great Artesian Basin erupting within the Pennsylvanian landscape. *House II* contains a clear and alarming warning about the potential for humans to unleash environmental chaos. This version of the iconic haunted house, the home resonant with malignancy, uses Gothic signifiers to create a warning about the environment.

Enola

This tension between the hypervisible and the invisible creates an unnerving effect in Susan Norrie's *Enola* (2004). In this eight-minute digital video two anonymous hooded people are glimpsed at the periphery of the frame looking onto an illusory cityscape. The film is set in Tobu World Square, Fuji-wara-cho, Tochigi Prefecture. This Japanese theme park is built from 102 models of famous edifices at a fraction of their actual size. This constellation of iconic buildings creates an imaginary urban space rendered at one 25th of its original size. This miniature city is further defamiliarised by the similarity of it surfaces. Buildings are primarily identified by shape, surface and texture. Hooded people who offer a sense of scale and astonishment as they look onto the scene with wonder mediate this unsettling Disneyesque landscape.

Whilst the imagery suggests a futuristic miniature cityscape, an imaginary impression of the proximity promised by new communications technologies, the soundtrack implies imminent chaos. The incessant sound of an airplane flying above, the Enola Gay, creates an unnerving reminder of the devastation of Japanese people and cultures in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945. Furthermore, the soundtrack featuring elevator 'muzak', including a kitsch version of 'It's a Small World After All', creates an ironic clash. The dislocation of image from sound, the haunting of the miniature city by traces of tragedy and memories of destruction introduce a spectral temporality. Gayatri Spivak refers to 'trace' in the preface to Derrida's *On Grammatology* as an impression of absence in presence.(25) Traces of sound reveal the impact of the past on the present, referring to something beyond itself. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida questions whether this sensation of absence, the "*spectrality effect*" is involved in undoing dialectical oppositions of time.(26) *Enola* is an audio-visual example of history haunting the present and threatening destruction in the future.

Going Places Sitting Down and *Dwelling*

Gothic screens create new imaginings of spatial and temporal dynamics, fusing public histories with private memories and extending the Gothic into unexpected realms. Space is reconfigured throughout the videos created by Hiraki Sawa when nature invades the home, providing evidence of the instability and the permeability of spatial and temporal boundaries.(27) Kavka notes the plasticity of Gothic space as it is transformed from the page to the screen where paradoxically, "the effect of fear is produced through the

transformations, extensions and misalignments of size and distance."(28) Exhibiting the influence of hoax photography of the Victorian era, Sawa's art revises Gothic spatiality and temporality, producing new impressions of domestic spaces that transform when miniature worlds spring to life.

The most elaborate reinvention of the Gothic in Sawa's oeuvre is evident in *Going Places Sitting Down* (2004). Here Sawa produces spectral effects of microworlds emerging within an empty home. The middle screen of this triptych opens the video by featuring a keyhole image of a blue sky dissected by electrical power lines spied from a low angle. An antique rocking horse appears in this landscape, seemingly gliding on the wind. The still images that establish the background of an English-style home create a sense of entrapment. This comfortable, light home appears distant from the archetypal Gothic haunted house. In his analysis of the literary Gothic, David Punter writes of the unspoken and unrepresentable in Gothic architecture: "The castle represents a world which is terrifying because its limits cannot be known, but the rituals which govern its occupants' everyday life are even more terrifying in that they represent a kind of knowledge, but a neurotic knowledge which is condemned to circularity."(29) The neurotic, paranoid knowledge that Punter refers to is firmly embedded within Sawa's homes. But it is in the stillness and spatial enclosure that the home can be interpreted as a site of daylight Gothic. It is in the magical animation of tiny worlds that the effect of Gothic spectrality manifests. Sawa's installation shows the home animated by small spectral presences. In the stillness of the interior, exotic miniature worlds manifest and shift the home into a spectral dimension.

Inanimate objects give rise to tiny landscapes as nature invades the house. A close up of a bathroom sink reveals miniature trees magically sprouting from its inhospitable porcelain surface. An extremely low angled shot reveals a train of camels making a journey across the textured surface of a rug covering a series of leather bound books, the surfaces doubling as an arid red desert. A convergence of spatial and temporal oppositions is created in the same shot as miniature ships which crest waves on their nautical journey in the foreground.

Miniature worlds introduce specific ecosystems to the interior spaces in *Going Places Sitting Down*. Scenes on the left screen are distinguished by their wintry aesthetic. In this screen tiny rocking horses travel across the textured pile of a sheepskin rug. Snow falls over trees that appear to sprout magically from the pile. Miniature landscapes create their own temporal zones; forests germinate rapidly, coming to life in the interstices of time between human presences. The water in the sink becomes an ocean with rippling waves and rhythmic tides. Sinks support bodies of water with tidal rhythms. By accentuating snow, rain, wind, tides and floods, this screen's miniature ecosystems transfer the rhythms and traces of nature to the interior.

Sawa uses digital compositing, layering microworlds over the domestic background, drawing the eye towards the detail of miniature environments sprouting from inhospitable surfaces, creating new spatio-temporal alignments. This layering results in a matrix of journeys written across the domestic space. In *Going Places Sitting Down* specifically, the wonder of animation as the miniature is written over the stillness of the home reveals connections between the immediacy of the abandoned home and imaginary projections of ancient histories, mythologies and journeys. Miniature animations act as an incursion into separation of the domestic and the exotic, distance and proximity, old and new technologies. The inscription of the dynamic microcosm representing past journeys within the home defamiliarises rational time and space. The focus on in-between times and fantastic spaces, illuminated by the miniature in *Going Places Sitting Down*, represents an elaboration of Sawa's earlier interest in exploring apparitions beyond conventional vision in the experience of wonder in ordinary spaces.

Throughout his video art, Sawa exhibits a fascination with disruption, movement, ritual, migration and travel by situating transient spaces within the home. Literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov identifies the apprehension that movement in Sawa's videos seems to generate. Writing about the fantastic in literature he argues that the "fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty […] The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event"(30) It is also the initial and overwhelming response to the uncanny. The uncanny vision hesitates in the inability to comprehend the defamiliarisation of what was once familiar. The uncanny rejects linear time and cohesive space, it manifests as an intrusion of an imagined past into the present. This hesitation is a response to an abundance of almost incoherent, but eerily familiar signifiers.

Sawa's first Flash animation, *Dwelling* (2002) signals an early fascination with imaginary impressions of travel from home. An apartment created by black and white photographs transforms into an airport as small planes take off from horizontal surfaces like the kitchen table or the carpet, shrinking the magnitude of giant airplanes into a scale that allows graceful flight throughout the apartment. Planes glide through the bathroom, kitchen and hallway, filling the (air)space and avoiding collision by seemingly following predetermined flight paths. This animation establishes a sense of impeding chaos, perhaps even the threat of terror as black and white images of an apartment are animated by small airplanes that bring the exterior and movement into the stillness of the interior. In this video the 'non place', the site of transience and anonymity, as defined by Mark Augé is reimagined as part of the home.(31) The apartment becomes a hybrid of personalised and depersonalised spaces. *Dwelling* ends with vapor trails across the ceiling and tiny planes that fly off into the sky, uninhibited by windows. It is only in the final image that the perspective matches human vision. Airplanes in the home appear on a similar scale as those sighted from the ground. *Dwelling* questions scale and perspective and it also represents Sawa's experimentation with the penetration of interior surfaces, introducing spectrality to the home.

The impact of the Gothic on new media installations is evident in the fluidity of blurred boundaries between disparate spaces, past and present, memory and reality in Sawa's videos. Sawa draws from Gothic tradition to reimagine the home alive with apparitions of animated microworlds and miniature objects. Homes in Sawa's videos seem to function according to laws, rhythms and possibilities influenced by the miniature worlds. Inspired by Eadweard Mybridge's experiments in the use of photography to capture movement, Sawa's videos revise the illusionistic style of pre-cinema, depicting imagined journeys from home, some barely registered in black and white, or as shadows or traces.

Every Shot, Every Episode, *Every Anvil*, *How We Met*, *Double Fantasy* and *Soft Rains*

Brooklyn-based artists Jennifer and Kevin McCoy use new technologies to undermine the primacy of a single vantage point, splitting and fracturing spectatorship, creating new ways to imagine and see space, projections and narrative form. Their installations reveal a Gothic inflected revision of time, space, narrative form, scale and memory. The early work produced by the McCoy's focused on television and serial narrative, questioning the influence of the database and the potential offered by new media to intervene and organise narrative form differently. These works pivot on the revision of two popular television shows. In *Every Shot, Every Episode* (2001), the McCoy's reorganised the *Starsky and Hutch* serial, creating two hundred and seventy-eight new categories. Ten thousand shots are reconfigured into new aesthetic, textual and thematic categories including: 'Every Plaid', 'Every Yellow Volkswagen', 'Every Sexy Outfit' and 'Every Blue'. The rejection of a diachronic, linear narrative in favor of synchronic organisation is also a feature of *Every Anvil* (2001). This exhibit reconfigures *Looney Tunes* animations, presenting a deconstruction and reconstruction of narrative form, prioritising theme, shot

scale, angle, colour, props and *mise-en-scène*. These early works display an interest in narrative incursions, exhibiting interventions in the influence of the database on linear form. Rather than evoking fear or trepidation, this defamiliarises popular imagery and narrative form.

In 2004 the McCoy's focus shifted from public to personal memory. The artworks that emerged investigated the differences and similarities of the memories of both artists. Doubling became a feature of the artwork, explorations of individual and shared memories, dreams and projections. Wolfreys understands doubling as a figure of haunting beyond all else. He writes, "[i]t is itself not only itself but already other than itself, every instance of doubling being the singular instance of the 'ghostlike manifestation'".(32) *How We Met* (2004) is a personalised narrative of Jennifer and Kevin's first encounter reaching for the same suitcase at an airport in France. The centrality of this gesture within the diorama suggests a convergence of identities. The miniature dioramas are conceived and developed as exploded, fragmented spatial impressions of their memories. The dioramas that form the base of *How We Met* is a constellation of small gestures of figures and actions suspended in time. The tiny figure of Jennifer waits for her bag to emerge. A disembodied hand reaches for a suitcase circling a carousel. A cab waits outside the airport. When projected on the screen, these tiny gestures create narrative events as the story is built from the juxtaposition of traces of memory.

The recreation of real and imaginary spaces plays an important role in the projection of the fantasy in these installations. The 'non-place' that Sawa introduces to the home becomes the location of *How We Met*. Marc Augé argues that non-place is created "through the excessive logic of 'supermodernity'."(33) The 'superabundant' sources of new media, for Augé, contribute to excess in time, space and ego. The 'non-place' arises as urban spaces of little or no distinct identity or particular history. These spaces, epitomised by the airport, are temporary, provisional spaces of solitude, even when populated. These are spaces of transit without community or connection. Manifestations of non-place are petrol stations, supermarkets, freeways, but particularly airports and transit lounges. In *How We Met* the McCoy's situate personal memories within the non-place of the airport creating a dislocation between the public and the private.

The revelation of technology also creates new ways of perceiving and appreciating the construction of illusion, a dynamic that is made clear in *Double Fantasy* (2005). *Double Fantasy* is an installation featuring two miniature dioramas positioned back to back and placed on top of a pedestal. The dioramas are surrounded by a matrix of flexible metal arms, each containing tiny cameras and pinpoint lights. One scene depicts a bloodthirsty medieval battle with castles and horses, spears, bodies and shields strewn across the ground. The other side features a tranquil, romantic, ordered kingdom of brides and grooms. Colours are vibrant with the green of the grass and the red of the blood both a shade beyond the natural. Images filmed by the micro-cameras are sent to a central computer where they are juxtaposed, forming part of a montage which is projected on the screen. The computer is driven by various formulas that create multiple versions of cause and effect, resulting in an inability to predict the order and the images that will appear on the screen. Chance is a fundamental structural element of the McCoys' installations. These miniature worlds are an intricate recreation of the childhood dreams of each artist suspended in time and projected onto a screen. New media art introduces its own form of hypertextuality to the Gothic.

In *Soft Rains* (2004), the imagery becomes decidedly Gothic. A diorama reveals a suburban setting where a woman in a kitchen stares longingly out of the window, suggesting entrapment and the desire for escape. A car traveling down a road indicates her travel to a remote cabin where a couple is murdered with an axe. The installation references the suburban Gothic by incorporating imagery signifying isolation,

alienation and the projection of murderous fantasies. The films of David Lynch and slasher films like the *Friday the 13th* series inspired the creation of *Soft Rains*. Exposing sets, lights and cameras, as well as the fantasy projected deconstructs the illusion. Neoformalist film theorist Kristin Thompson writes about 'baring the device' as a strategy that defamiliarises form.(34) Exposed and hidden technologies create the illusion of movement and construct a narrative that defamiliarises and reinvents Gothic narrative. The artworks incorporate the technology and the McCoy's recognise it as part of the spectacle. This is reminiscent of Gunning's description of the incredulous spectator fascinated by both the image and its projection.

Conclusion:

Gothic simulations in new media art forms reveal allegiances with, but also radical interrogations of, traditional Gothic. New composite spaces, depth cues, layers, objects, creatures, shadows and visual attractions result in images of multiple dimensions and seemingly disparate temporalities. Gothic simulations also create embodied connections to the spectator/participant. The film theorist Linda Williams has linked horror, melodrama and pornography beneath the heading of 'body genres', genres that she argues offer pleasures that are visceral, producing changes to the body that can be seen, felt and measured. (35) Much of the attraction of the Gothic emerges from the imagination of danger. Pleasure in watching is provoked from an attraction to images of dislocation and the indeterminancy of boundaries, emphasising the potential for transformation, instability and, importantly, offering a spectacle of danger. Gothic simulations offer a form of visceral pleasure, but one that manifests as a different set of symptoms. Whilst Gothic simulations in the gallery prioritise the visual, they often also offer attractions for senses beyond the visual. The Gothic draws from a tension between the seen and the unseen to create spine-chilling effects. Simulations of spectrality produces surprise when shadows create unexpected connections, images of sublime natural forces create wide-eyed anticipation of apocalyptic destruction, glowering ghosts cause pupils to dilate and illuminated projections of dioramas produce a beguiling split vision. With the use of new media technologies, Gothic simulations emphasise traces spectrality, using new digital technologies to illuminate the noumena - invisible, spectral, unreal 'things-in-themselves'.

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BOOK REVIEWS

David J. Skal and Jessica Rains, *Claude Rains: An Actor's Voice*
Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008

Claude Rains was one of the greatest actors ever to work in Hollywood, a supporting player so brilliant that he'd steal any film from under anybody. He was nominated four times for a Best Supporting Oscar, from 1940-47, should probably have won them all, but ended up with none. Although he did have a small role in one post-World War I British melodrama, the now-lost *Build Thy House* (1920), his screen career didn't really get started until he was well into his forties, when he made his Hollywood debut in James Whale's *The Invisible Man* (1932), an incredibly demanding role that required an actor who could command the screen by virtue of his voice alone. I doubt whether there are more than half a dozen actors in Hollywood history who could have pulled this off, but fortunately Rains was blessed with one of the greatest voices ever.

He was, alas, too short, too old, and probably much too good for leading man material, and so he spent the rest of his career essaying an astonishing series of indelible character roles. In *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), he's the distinguished senior senator tempting greenhorn James Stewart with Mephistophelean *realpolitik*. In *The Wolf Man* (1941), he's Sir John Talbot, who has a son, Larry (Lon Chaney Jr) who is mysteriously twice his size and about the same age, and whom in a riotous Freudian crescendo he beats to death with a silver-tipped cane. He's easily the best thing in *Now, Voyager* (1942) (as a sympathetic shrink, Dr Jaquith), in *Notorious* (1946) (as a mother-loving Nazi), and in *Deception* (1946) (as an obnoxious composer). While he isn't the best thing about *Casablanca* (1942), that's only because the peculiar nature of that film's perfection means that no one element stands out over anything else. Nevertheless, his ironic cynicism precisely counterpoints Humphrey Bogart's romantic cynicism, and in a film on whose ending nobody seemed able to agree, it seems to me now that *the only possible way* it could have closed was with Rick and Louis walking off together at the 'beginning of [their] beautiful friendship' (to hell with Ilsa and Victor, those virtuous bores, let them go off on the plane together – Rick and Louis are meant for one another).

In his *New Biographical Dictionary of Film*, David Thomson writes of Claude Rains: 'is there anyone more watchable, more delicate or acidic? … It is amazing that this mix of decorum and wildness has not yet inspired a biography.' Well, it has now, at last. David J. Skal will be familiar to many readers as the world's foremost authority on the classic Hollywood horror movie, and while Rains tried very hard not to be typecast in horror roles, he's still Griffin the Invisible Man, Sir John Talbot, and Erique Claudin, the deranged and disfigured virtuoso violinist, playing opposite that dullard Nelson Eddy in Arthur Lubin's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1943) (and yup, he's the best thing in it *by a mile*). Over a hundred of the book's 290 pages are by way of notes, filmographies and indices, which leaves a rather brisk, sleek, and functional narrative of Rains's life – which is, of course, in many ways entirely appropriate for its subject. Skal whisks the reader along at a terrific pace, pausing occasionally for an engaging anecdote, a wry aside, or a brief, judicious critical assessment. If Captain Louis Renault himself had written a biography of Claude Rains, it might have come across a bit like this.

Claude Rains was born in 1889 in Camberwell, South London – which is not quite Brixton, where Alfred Hitchcock thought he was born; nor quite Clapham, where Skal has him born, though it's very close to both. Nor is it quite East Dulwich, a mile or two down the road, where Boris Karloff was born a couple of

years earlier; nor quite Walworth, a couple of miles up the road, where Charlie Chaplin was born six months earlier. (I wonder if they ever crossed each other on the street? Somebody should write a novel about this.) Though hampered by both a speech impediment and a cockney accent (we're talking the 1900s here, not the 1960s), Rains still managed to find himself attached to Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's theatre company, as variously a gopher, a prompter, and eventually a bit-part player (after elocution lessons, for which Tree paid). As an officer in the First World War, Rains was wounded in a mustard gas attack, which left him permanently blind in one eye, but which also changed the timbre of his voice forever (hard to believe that something so rich and beautiful owes its existence to such brutality). After the War, Rains became a distinguished feature on the London stage, specializing in Shaw, and in 1923 began to teach at RADA, where his pupils included John Gielgud, who thought he was brilliant, and Charles Laughton, with whom he had a more troubled history.

In some ways, Laughton and Rains are analogous figures – enormously talented British stage actors who went on to forge careers of unlikely and unconventional success in Hollywood, punctuated by occasional, memorable forays into horror. Laughton supported Boris Karloff in *The Old Dark House* (1932), which James Whale directed the year before *The Invisible Man*; he played Dr Moreau in *The Island of Lost Souls* (1932) and Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939); his one project as a director was of course that classic work of American Gothic, *The Night of the Hunter* (1955). In other ways, they are diametrically opposed. Laughton was a grotesque of monstrous appetites (he was an Oscar-winning Henry VIII in 1933), a hyperbolic barnstormer of an actor, and a man tormented by his homosexuality; while Rains was small and dapper, brought a meticulous precision and formality to everything he did, and was voraciously heterosexual (he had six wives, though Skal somehow makes it seem like rather more!). The notoriously insecure and defensive Laughton, fresh from his Oscar, was condescending about Rains's performance in *The Invisible Man*, exclaiming, 'Good God almighty, what did you do that for? A challenge? An extraordinary thing to do. I suppose *you* would accept a challenge like that.' When, later in the 30s, they met on the Universal lot, Laughton greeted Rains with a sneering 'Hello, you little shit.' They never spoke again.

Not that Rains wasn't himself insecure and tormented – he was an actor, after all. Standing 5'6", he was very conscious of his lack of stature, which he attempted to overcome by adopting an extremely formal bearing, and by brushing his hair backward in such a way as to add an extra inch or two to his height. When Rains made *Notorious* opposite the considerably taller Ingrid Bergman, Alfred Hitchcock suggested that he wear lifts for certain scenes, which he seems then to have done for the rest of his career. Perhaps stereotypically, he played a brilliant Napoleon on numerous occasions, on stage and screen. His womanizing, which seems compulsive, may have stemmed from insecurity, too. His drinking certainly did: by the 1950s, Rains was drinking very heavily, though it seems not to have affected his performances in any way, right up to very near the end of his life. He died in 1967, of complications brought on by cirrhosis of the liver. In 1971, his old friend and co-star Bette Davis (who was, Skal hints, in love with Rains from the start, though this was never consummated), was interviewed on American TV by Dick Cavett. Asked whether Claude Rains had been 'a happy person', Davis, not without demons of her own, said:

> 'As happy as …[*Pause*] … As a group, I don't think actors are what I'd call happy people. I think we're very moody people. I think we have great ups and great downs … If something turns out badly you're depressed for days. I think we're terribly peculiar that way, and rather lonely people, actually. So Claude I could not say was a happy person. He was witty, amusing, and beautiful, really beautiful. And thoroughly enchanting to be with. And brilliant.'

Like all great actors, Claude Rains gave his own happiness over to his audience. Like all worthwhile subjects, Claude Rains ultimately eludes his biographer. But the best compliment I can pay David J. Skal's book is probably the best compliment I can pay to any film biography: it made me want to spend the next couple of months of my life watching the complete films of Claude Rains. I think I will.

DARRYL JONES

Lynn Forest-Hill (Ed.), *The Mirror Crack'd: Fear and Horror in J.R.R. Tolkien's Major Works*
Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008

As the subtitle, if not the titular allusion to the *Idylls of the King*, indicates, Lynn Forrest-Hill's edited volume, *The Mirror Crack'd*, gathers chapters sharing an interest in investigating Tolkien's use of fear and horror, an important and potentially useful avenue of approach that has so far been under-utilised. The essays are also unified in their concentration upon the medieval sources of Tolkien's fiction. It is this fact, it seems, that accounts for the collection's rather confusing title. According to the introduction, 'it acknowledges the well-known medievalism of Tolkien's works' (1). However, the precise relevance of Tennyson and 'The Lady of Shallot' is never explained, and, never emerges, to this reviewer's eye at least.

The collection grew out of a session at the 2006 Leeds Medieval conference, and brings together the work of an eclectic array of scholars: Ph.D. students, independent Tolkien scholars, and a Professor of Physics and Astronomy. The content is almost equally diverse, encompassing discussions of *Beowulf*, spiders, light and darkness, and philology. Such a diversity is, in general, to be welcomed, and, if nothing else, this volume is testament both to the copiousness (in the medieval sense of rich abundance) of Tolkien's fiction and the continuing popularity of Tolkien studies both within and beyond the compass of academia.

The inevitable downside of such a range of subjects is a loss of coherence. In one respect, Forest-Hill has managed to ameliorate this: the texts cohere clearly in their investigation of Tolkien's medieval sources. However, as the editor herself acknowledges, there is an 'overabundant body of criticism that focuses on myth, legend, sagas, and medieval texts' (229). In this saturated marketplace, it is the volume's focus on horror and fear that promises to be its most valuable feature. Few readers can have read Tolkien without experiencing at least some *frisson* of fear and there are a number of points where this deepens to genuine horror. In the context of Tolkien studies, investigations that focus on his use of fear and horror have a good deal to offer and, in potential if not in the volume under review, offer a useful way of moving Tolkien scholarship on from the pervasive focus on the medieval, and of reading his work with a keener eye to his immediate literary context. It is a pity, therefore, that the chapters it contains are not marked by a consistent focus on these issues. It is an even greater pity that some of those chapters that pay the most attention to fear and horror are far from the most successful in the collection. And, unfortunately, there are more unsuccessful essays than there ought to be: the diversity of the contributors and the eclecticism of their approaches have resulted in a volume that is notably patchy in terms of its quality, and that declares a certain inadequacy in the editing process.

This problem is compounded by a chapter plan that, while not precisely saving the best till last, does push the worst into a rather prominent position. So, one first encounters a brief essay by Maria Raffaelle Benvenuto on 'the roots of fantastic horror in *The Lord of the Rings*.' This brief chapter provides a survey of the 'horrific' elements of Tolkien's great work, but fails to be very illuminating about any of them. This is followed by Jessica Burke's contribution – 'Fear and Horror: Monsters in Tolkien and *Beowulf*.' Burke is to be commended as one of the few contributors in this book to interrogate seriously the concept of fear. However, she merits censure for her misleading discussion of Augustine's views on evil and a discussion of the Biblical account of Cain that combines New Age whack-jobbery with a total lack of any account of its relevance to Tolkien. These are real problems, and are exacerbated by a rather lumpen and unclear writing style. Similar stylistic concerns beset Michael Cunningham's discussion of 'Liminality and the Construct of Horror in *Lord of the Rings*.' A chapter that opens with a sentence like 'J.R.R. Tolkien's

Middle-Earth is a Secondary World thriving with fauna and features that are at once familiar to the reader who soon finds a rich topography unfolding within the pages' (119) can scarcely be said to have put its best foot forward. Again, this reflects on an editing process that may have been too light of touch for the good of the volume – and of the author.

On the other hand, this volume also contains some genuinely useful and interesting material. Shandi Stevenson's essay 'The Shadow beyond the Firelight: Pre-Christian Archetypes and Imagery Meet Christian Theology in Tolkien's Treatment of Evil and Horror' is a valuable and stimulating discussion of a subject whose centrality to Tolkien's work has not always been recognised. Similarly, Reno Lauro's chapter 'Of Spiders and (the Medieval Aesthetics of) Light: Hope and Action in the Horrors of Shelob's Lair' contains some useful material on Tolkien's utilisation of light, darkness, and colour. Lauro draws a particularly interesting contrast between Tolkien's appreciation of the importance of vivid colour and 'the rather conservative palate adopted by Peter Jackson's art team' (56). A treatment of the philology and Tolkien's views on artistic endeavour rounds out a stimulating chapter. Julie Pridmore's contribution, on 'Images of Wolves in Tolkien's Fiction' also deserves mention for its exhaustive and encyclopaedic treatment of its theme, and, in particular, for her handling of Tolkien's revisions of his material.

The remaining essays in the volume are interesting in a more minor key. Rainer Nagel's discussion of Tolkien's spiders and Amy Amendt-Raduage's treatment of 'Barrows, Wights, and Ordinary People' both reflect on the important of philology to Tolkien's work, and the richness imparted by his careful selection of archaic words. In a similar way, Romauld Ian Lakowski's treatment of 'The Slaying of Glaurung and Medieval Dragon Lore' highlights Tolkien's use of pre-existing mythic material. Like a number of other chapters, Lakowski's is also notable for its extension of the scope of the collection beyond *The Hobbit*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*.

A very different and rather interesting approach is taken by Kristine Larsen. Her contribution – 'Shadow and Flame: Myth, Monsters and Mother Nature in Middle-earth' – concentrates on the development of Tolkien's *legendarium* by arguing for the relevance of the concepts of geomythology and astromythology for his approach. Larsen's thesis is appealing, on the whole, though one cannot but feel that true Tolkien fans may be dismayed (rather like the conservative Christians who are the usual target of these demythologising discourses) at having the supernatural elements of the story simply explained away as representing geological and astronomic phenomena.

This volume, then, is not without value, and some of the material it contains is useful. It is, however, hamstringed by a number of issues. In particular its failure to live up to the considerable promise of its subtitle is disappointing. With a more clearly conceived focus, and, perhaps, a rather more ruthless and interventionist editor this could have been an interesting and important book. In the event it has to settle for interesting.

MARK SWEETNAM

Margaret Oliphant, *The Library Window*
Tampa Florida: University of Tampa Press, 2006

Margaret Oliphant belongs to that class of writers of the Victorian era who have the dubious accolade of being referred to as prolific. Literary legend has it that, when invited to her home for tea, Anthony Trollope and Oliphant compared their literary output and much to the former's amazement, Oliphant's proved to be substantially greater. While Trollope wrote some 47 novels, Oliphant wrote 98. She also published 26 books of non-fiction, more than 50 short stories, over 300 articles and reviews in addition to 25 volumes of personal correspondence, 4 volumes of diaries and a posthumously published autobiography. There is also evidence that she burnt some novels and that her ne'er-do-well brother, Willie, published some of her earlier novels in his own name.

As far as critical commentary on Oliphant's life and writing is concerned, there are two recurrent themes – one is her immense literary production and the other her personal hardships and these two themes are often linked. Widowed by her husband of only seven years (who died bankrupt) and with three children to raise, Oliphant supported herself and her children as well as her brother Willie and her brother Frank and his family through her writing. Not surprisingly, many critics and commentators have viewed Oliphant's literary production and financial necessity as unhappy bedfellows and have, at best, lamented and, at worst, condemned her work as a fatal comprise of her creative integrity. Virginia Woolf's comments are typical in this regard; she writes of Oliphant "[She] sold her brain, her very admirable brain, prostituted her culture and enslaved her intellectual liberty in order that she might earn a living and educate her children." In her autobiography, posthumously published in 1899, Oliphant's comments on this aspect of her literary career give voice to a far more pluralistic attitude to literary productivity:

> I always avoid considering formally what my own mind is worth. I have never had any theory on the subject. I have written because it gave me pleasure, because it came natural to me, because it was like talking or breathing, besides the big fact it was necessary for me to work for my children. That, however, was not the first motive, so that when I laugh iniquities off and say that it is my trade, I do it only by way of eluding the question which I have neither time nor wish to enter into. (*Autobiography*, 14)

It seems that one of the few exceptions to the ease with which Oliphant wrote comes in the form of her tales of the supernatural. Writing to John Blackwood on the subject of producing more of these tales, Oliphant explained, "They are not like any others. I can produce them only when they come to me." Indeed, when compared to her prolific literary output in other areas, Oliphant's supernatural tales (which she did not begin writing until the age fifty) are few and number less than a dozen. The majority of these tales were collected in the volume *Tales of the Seen and the Unseen* and despite their generic titles – 'The Open Door', 'The Secret Chamber', 'The Portrait' – they are distinctive and diverse in their representation of the supernatural; emphasising the themes of familial love, loss, mourning, guilt and the less than wholly successful role of religious faith in comforting the bereaved. 'The Library Window', one of Oliphant's finest ghost stories, is perhaps a little untypical in this regard. Not only is it is her only supernatural story with a definite female narrator but it is also a tale whose theme of loss is most vividly represented not through death but through missed opportunity and possibilities unrealised. The story concerns a young woman who, on a prolonged visit to her Aunt Mary's home and at her aunt's indulgence, spends most of her day ensconced in a window recess reading or employed at her

needlework. While engaged in these occupations she overhears her aunt's elderly female friends discuss a window in the building opposite:

"It's no window […] It has been filled in, in the days of the window duties."
"It's just a delusion: and that is my opinion of the window, if you ask me."
"One thing is clear […] it cannot be a window to see through. It may be filled in or it may be built up, but it is not a window to give light."
"And who ever hear of a window that was no to see through?" (7)

The young woman soon becomes obsessed by the window and begins to see beyond its apparently opaque panes to a room inside. The window in question belongs to a library and the room that is slowly revealed to the narrator is that of a scholar who can be seen seated at his desk immersed in writing. Through the course of the narrative, a number of stories connected with the scholar are revealed by different characters, none of them satisfactory to the young girl, not only because all of them are based on the assumption that he is now dead but also because they emphasise rather trite romantic scenarios of doomed or unreciprocated love. One of these stories, told by the narrator's aunt, involves the exchange of a ring as a token of love. This is significant because one of Aunt Mary's elderly friends, Lady Carnbee, wears a diamond ring which fascinates and repels the young woman. The ring is too big for Lady Carnbee's finger and twists around into her palm: "the big diamonds blazed underneath in the hollow of her hand, like some dangerous thing hiding and sending out darts of light." (8) Whatever the ring may signify for the narrator or the reader, it "seemed to mean far more than was said" and when the young girl is bequeathed it on Lady Carnbee's death she never wears it but instead keeps it in a house she does not visit and secretly hopes that it might eventually be stolen.

Yet, these stories of romantic intrigue hold little interest for the young narrator; what fascinates her above all else is the scholar's utter absorption in his work: "He moved just so much as a man will do when he is very busily writing, thinking of nothing else." Her feeling on coming to her window to look at him is always the same: "Is he still there? is he writing, writing always? I wonder what he is writing!" (21) Curiously, what never occurs to the young woman is how her own actions mirror the scholar's. She too sits virtually motionless for long hours at her window immersed in solitary occupation but significantly her time is not spent writing but reading, sewing and then spying on the scholar. At one point the scholar moves from his desk to his window and appears to wave his hand at the young woman. He will do this once more at the story's close, years later when the narrator returns from India a widow with her young children. Bereft of companionship and with no one to welcome her on her sad homecoming, she is certain she sees him in the crowd waving at her: "I landed almost cheerfully, thinking here was someone who would help me. But he had disappeared, as he did from the window, with that one wave of his hand." (48) What was the promise that this figure offered the narrator all those years ago as a young woman and now as a widowed mother? Romance? A kindred love of solitude? The life of a writer? Whatever the significance of his influence on her it is fleeting and ultimately lost but still, as the narrator explains earlier, "it is always interesting to have a glimpse like this of an unknown life." (21)

Some critics have suggested that Oliphant's scholar is a shadowy representation of her fellow countryman Walter Scott whose prolific writing was legendary. Indeed Scott is mentioned in 'The Library Window' but in part this is to differentiate him from the scholar, for unlike Scott whose was once seen through a window incessantly writing and throwing each finished sheet of paper down on the floor, the scholar's movement is limited to writing alone: "[I]t appeared to be a long long page which never wanted turning." (21) Of course Oliphant herself wrote ceaselessly and, like Scott, her writing output was closely bound up

with financial necessity. Could it be that Oliphant's scholar is some impossible dream whose intense commitment to writing is, unlike Scott's or Oliphant's, unhampered by worldly concerns, even to the extent of not having to turn a page to continue writing? Even if this is so, what of the female narrator who is fascinated with, and drawn to, the scholar's activities but it seems never succeeds in emulating them let alone understanding their significance? Could she be Oliphant's shadowy double just as the scholar is her impossible ideal? Widowed, with her young children, the narrator is not unlike Oliphant but fortunately, not least of all for us as readers, Oliphant herself succeeded in far more than an outsider's brief glimpse at a life immersed in the art of writing.

One of the greatest pleasures in reading the University of Tampa Press' publication of 'The Library Window' is its conscious decision to place Oliphant and her work within a literary and cultural context. With both an introduction and an engaging afterword by Elizabeth Winston it affords this most intriguing of Oliphant's ghostly tales and Oliphant herself the focused consideration they so richly deserve. *The Library Window* is the first volume in a series from the University of Tampa Press entitled *Insistent Visions* whose objective is to return to print "lost or under-appreciated supernatural fiction, mysteries, science fiction, and adventure stories from the 19th century"; a worthwhile objective indeed. What's more, the second volume in the series is a critical new edition of the fictional work of the Irish occult figure Cheiro, *A Study of Destiny*. We look forward to volume three soon; it's been too long already! Oliphant's 'The Library Window' is certainly an excellent place to start rediscovering and reassessing under-appreciated 19th century fiction. While many of her ghost stories are suspenseful and decidedly unnerving her supernatural writing does not sit comfortably with contemporary assumptions about the role of Victorian ghost stories as diverting entertainment. Rather, her supernatural narratives directly confront the pain of loss and the incomprehensible void between what is, what was and what can never be – themes as relevant today as they were in Oliphant's time.

ELIZABETH McCARTHY

"A Creak and a Crack and the Scent of Sandalwood": Joanne Owen, *Puppet Master*
London: Orion Children's Books, 2008

Puppets and puppetry are the central motifs of Joanne Owen's debut novel *Puppet Master*. A dark fantasy for young readers, *Puppet Master* is, according to the blurb, "rich with the traditions of circus and theatre"; the contents page is, intriguingly, laid out like a playbill and the text is divided not into chapters, but into acts and scenes. This unusual opening has the effect of defamiliarising the reader and drawing new awareness to the experience of reading, an experience which is enhanced by the textured binding, rich illustrations and an exotic, Czech vocabulary. This appeal, however, belies the darker aspects of the text, which has undertones of murder, fascism and necrophilia.

On the surface, there is the story of Milena, a young Czech girl who lives with her grandmother, Baba, who is an accomplished cook and storyteller. But this cosy world of stew and stories masks the darker side of family life, the death of Milena's father and the mysterious disappearance of her mother, Ludmila. It emerges that Ludmila's fate is bound up with the machinations of the eponymous Master Puppeteer and his fanatical apprentices, twins Zdenko and Zdenka. The Master's devious plan to take over Prague centres on using people as puppets – some he controls through hypnotism, others, including Ludmila, he transforms into actual puppets which perform in his shows. When Milena discovers that her mother has been kidnapped by the Master, she must fight to rescue her.

The story has obvious parallels with *The Adventures of Pinocchio* – the villainous Puppet Master, for example, is a clear descendent of Swallowfire – but it soon becomes clear that *Puppet Master* is aimed at an older readership than its predecessor. From the gruesome account of the blinding of the master craftsman, to the uncanny dualism of Zdenko and Zdenka, and the image of Ludmila as puppet, many of the images Owen draws upon are obviously upsetting, though there are some images which are more subtly disturbing. While the living puppets have strong connotations of slavery and the undead, they also hint at the de-individuation brought about by fascist regimes. The Puppet Master's obsession with race and national heritage, and his desire to rewrite and refocus national legends, has stark parallels with events in twentieth century Europe.

Puppet Master is exquisitely presented. Almost every page is graced with a dark and beautiful illustrations; an editorial note describes the illustrations as collages made of "layer upon layer of artwork and subtle colour [each with] its own unique richness". There are playbills, photographs, snippets from newspapers, ancient stories, letters, pressed flowers and glossaries and notes. The various threads of the narrative are distinguished, not only through the style of the writing, but through the very appearance of the pages which alternate between white paper for the main narrative and weathered, aged paper for the mythological narratives – some of which look like they could have been torn from ancient and perhaps even magical books. The ambiguity and the beauty of these images are, without doubt, one of the book's main selling points.

The layered technique used in the illustrations is echoed by the intertextuality of the narrative itself. Owen draws the reader through tiers of stories, myths, legends, layer upon layer of intertext and suggestion. But while the obscurity of the images is attractive, the lack of clarity in the narrative is more frustrating than eerie and, at times, the multiple layers threaten to obfuscate and destabilise the main plot. While we are in no doubt that Milena is the central protagonist, many different points of view are followed in different chapters, leading to a lack of consistency in the narration. The bewildered reader is

left to decipher much of the plot alone. There is a lack of consistency in the mechanics of the story too – the text is riddled with mistakes which will bother any but the laziest of readers. Katerina and Tereza are referred to as Baba's sisters-in-law but on the next page they are established as her daughters-in-law (pp.38-39). In one scene the Puppet Master and his twin accomplices appear at Milena's bedroom window to give her a birthday present – a doll in her own image. They subsequently plot to kidnap Milena: why not simply snatch her from her bed? Elsewhere Owen notes that Ludmila is held in a tiny cage in a room that is too small and cramped to stand upright in (p.77) but later, when Milena has joined her mother in the cage, Ludmila is able to pace around the cage with her "gown rippl[ing] behind her like a scarlet river" (pp. 156-157). More generally, there are points where the narrative expands too quickly and becomes confusing; at other points, the dialogue is clumpy and convoluted. When Katerina turns to her sister and says, "We've become embroiled in what can only be described as a highly dangerous political and personal conspiracy" (p.154), she not only states the obvious, but states it in a very unnatural manner. Details like this are small, but not insignificant, and it is disappointing that the same care was not taken in editing the text as was taken in designing the fabulous illustrations.

Ideally, *Puppet Master* belongs on the shelf and in the hands of a young teenage reader with a keen interest in stories of the supernatural and the occult, a reader who will enjoy the unique qualities of the book, delight in the illustrations and intertexts and who will spend many happy days afterwards chasing up stories of Czech mythology. But such readers are hard to come by and harder still to satisfy, and it is by no means easy to produce such an interesting and unusual book for such a notoriously demanding readership group. As a first novel, *Puppet Master* shows great promise; Owen has fabulous imagination and scope in her writing and the hugely ambitious nature of the project ought to be acknowledged properly. It is a delight to see an author who is not afraid to try something new. *Puppet Master* challenges the expected format and content of children's books and Owen will be rewarded with a following of readers who want to be challenged, who are not afraid of a complicated text, and who will eagerly await Owen's next publication.

JANE CARROLL

Kim Paffenroth, *Gospel of the Living Dead: George Romero's Visions of Hell on Earth*
Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007

Long championed by scholars and historians from humanist and Marxists traditions, George A. Romero's central film creations are given a justly ecumenical analysis in Kim Paffenroth's *Gospel of the Living Dead*. Though Paffenroth is mainly interested in uncovering the strongly Christian themes in this remarkable series of very bleak and outwardly atheistic films, he is also concerned with showing Romero's general willingness to breach very difficult human subjects on a massive scale. In clear, readable prose, Paffenroth presents a series of detailed essays on the films of the Romero zombie series – *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985), and *Land of the Dead* (2005) – even straying slightly outside of this canon to investigate the *Dawn of the Dead* remake (2004, directed by Zack Snyder and written by James Gunn, without any direct supervision by Romero). Though published in 2007, the book obviously went to press before the release of Romero's *Diary of the Dead* (2008) and the remake of *Day of the Dead* (2008, directed by Steve Miner), and for that matter does not consider (perhaps wisely) the supposedly-official sequel to *Day of the Dead*, the direct-to-video *Day of the Dead 2: Contagium* (directed by Ana Clavell and James Glenn Dudelson).

Paffenroth's introduction serves as a general primer on zombie cinema, providing a brief outline of its general thematic issues, and explaining his own interpretive direction on the subject. Romero is widely understood by horror fans, scholars, and Western culture at large as central to the development of the zombie movie tradition, though *28 Days Later* (2002) and the Romero-inspired *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) are often used as points of comparison or for reinforcement of themes commonly found in the zombie film. Paffenroth identifies racism, sexism, and an indictment of modern American individualism as central to Romero's social concerns (18-21). These issues amount to a broad critique of contemporary society, characteristically widely sweeping but constantly augmented, re-invented, or shifted with each successive film. Paffenroth identifies these themes as "a critique that could be characterized as broadly Christian, but which many modern American Christians may now find uncomfortable or unfamiliar" (22). *Gospel of the Living Dead* therefore approaches Romero's movies from the position of a rather pluralistic and humanistic Christianity, noting how these films can be seen as "a most welcome corrective" to corrupt, amoral, selfish, pointlessly exclusionary and ignorant behaviours (22). Further, Paffenroth considers the historical and spiritual antecedent of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* against each of Romero's films, showing that the different movies play to themes that are present in the most famous of literary hells.

The *Dead* films are read as a kind of *auteurist* progression for Romero, though even the *Dawn* remake is understood as expanding the thematic ground of the previous movies in the series. *Night of the Living Dead* is duly contextualised as an important turning point in the history of the horror genre, but also as "one of the great success stories of film history" (27). Low budget, starkly filmed with gritty immediacy, and uncompromisingly violent, *Night* is a touchstone of modern horror. Paffenroth points out that it is "clearly and overwhelmingly the most hopeless and depressing of all the Romero zombie movies," mainly due to the death of Ben (Duane Jones) at the hands of a human hunting posse (43). While there are no overtly Christian references in the film – indeed, the world seems bleakly drained of any meaningful spirituality – Paffenroth asserts that a Christian viewer will understand how the film exposes human fallacies, especially "human arrogance, supposed self-sufficiency, and resulting complacency" as sites of continued sinfulness (44). Refreshingly, Paffenroth is not necessarily concerned with affirming or

defending Romero's every move, but rather with articulating the latent meanings of these sometimes taken-for-granted films.

Dawn of the Dead is examined for its broadened scope of critique, including how it advances anti-consumerist, anti-sexist, and anti-racist messages. Paffenroth adds an extra-textual element to his analysis, pointing out that "exactly like Dante's *Inferno*, the film is ghastly, funny, shocking, but also humane and humanizing," and that both book and film "unmask human beings for the selfish, greedy, self-destructive creatures that they are," and similarly try to reach out to audiences and "shock us out of our sins" (70). *Gospel of the Living Dead* examines *Day of the Dead* with less esteem (and overt enthusiasm) in terms of technical accomplishment or wholeness of approach, though finds it valuable for the depth of its examination of a claustrophobic situation. Human nature is here on trial, played out through the shouting, bickering, shallowness, greed, and hostility of the central characters. For Paffenroth, *Day* is best approached as a thought-experiment, as "although it is less satisfying as a movie than any of the others, conceptually or intellectually it is much deeper and more complex than the last two [*Dawn* remake, *Land*] films" (72).

The *Dawn of the Dead* remake – endlessly debated by fans for its absence of Romero and for its controversial inclusion of "running zombies" – garners the same attention as the other *Dead* films. [An aside: As far as I am concerned, running zombies are fine so long as they run for a reason. In the case of the *Dawn* remake, I think it suggests an exponential increase in the appetites and desperation of the living dead, which is perhaps entirely appropriate to the post-9/11 West]. Though different in its roots (a direct re-interpretation of an existing property), budget (modest, though huge in comparison to the other films in the series), marketing (name actors as opposed to relative unknowns, a trend continued in *Land of the Dead*), and style (in a general sense, faster and more furious than Romero's films), *Dawn* treads much familiar thematic ground. Paffenroth summarises by saying that "criticism of modern American society is prominent in the remake, especially in its criticism of materialism, racism, sexism, and homophobia, but this criticism is more balanced and less stark" (112). The general sense by the end is of a slightly more optimistic view of people, their world, and its institutions. Finally, *Land of the Dead* caps the series with a tentative message of possibility. Despite its very blatant dichotomisation of barbarous, vile human beings on the one hand and community-building, sympathetic zombies on the other, some kind of compromise can insure the continued (perhaps not deserved) existence of the human race. *Land* provides "the only unambiguously hopeful ending in any of the films" in which human and zombie might "live—or, more properly, coexist— in peace with one another" (116). In this sense, Paffenroth sees Romero's zombie films as returning to the terrain of hope, though it is unclear if this is for extra-textual reasons – *Land* was a mainstream film and therefore might have demanded a more mainstream ending – or as a progression toward humanistic possibility on the director's part.

Kim Paffenroth writes in a very accessible, reader-friendly way. While Robin Wood's analysis of the *Dead* films (mainly in *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*) is more rigorously theoretical and Tony Williams's views (from his book *The Cinema of George A. Romero: Knight of the Living Dead*) more literary and traditionally scholarly, Paffenroth's book is a great place to find an alternative voice. The main problem with *Gospel of the Living Dead* is not in its ideas, but rather in its over-inclusion of non-essential information. Paffenroth writes detailed synopses of each of the main films he analyses, thereby filling nearly half of each chapter with descriptive, non-analytical text. The *Dead* films are so commonly available throughout the English-speaking world that having access to a second-hand account of plot and narrative is not necessary: viewers can do this type of fact-gathering themselves! Rather, Paffenroth should have expanded his interpretive passages, especially his central – though ultimately

underdeveloped – connection between the Hell of Dante's *Inferno* and Romero's Hells on Earth, which he uses as a point of comparison and as a legitimising link between Romero and the respectable, "high" cultural past. The connections, however, seem too tenuous to be teased out too far. As it stands, though, Paffenroth's *Gospel of the Living Dead* is a curious, rewarding book for the religious and secular alike. It helps illustrate how films even as outwardly Godless as Romero's zombie works can benefit from divine interpretation.

KEVIN M. FLANAGAN

Hazel Court, *Hazel Court - Horror Queen*: *An Autobiography*
Tomahawk Press , 2008

Hazel Court, co-star of such films as *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), *The Raven* (1963) and *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964), died in April of this year, a week before the publication of her autobiography. That regrettable occurrence, combined with her iconic status among horror aficionados, has led certain reviewers to offer opinions of *Hazel Court – Horror Queen* which, it must be said, reflect better on their sense of delicacy than their sense of judgement. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, and all that sort of thing...

The fact remains, however, that reading *Hazel Court – Horror Queen* is an experience akin to being stuck in a lift with Madeline Bassett, that most terrifyingly empty-headed and sentimental of Bertram Wooster's matrimonial near-misses. Whether Miss Court would have shared Miss Bassett's view that rabbits are gnomes in attendance on the Fairy Queen and that the stars are God's daisy chain, is now impossible to ascertain, but on the evidence of this book, it seems more than likely. How else to explain her girlishly gushing recollections of an idyllic, chocolate-box childhood complete with Bob the milkman, Dobbin the horse, and Cinderella's glass slippers, to say nothing of her prescription for world peace: "With the world in great turmoil, one wonders sometimes if maybe coffee isn't the answer. The way of simplicity can be powerful." So there we are. "With milk or without, Mr. Bin Laden?"

Even by the deplorably low standards of luvvie-lit, this book is an embarrassment. At times, Miss Court appears to be addressing a particularly backward group of children: recalling Paul Robeson, she writes, "Some of you may not know who he is but there's never been anyone like him before or since. He was a magical human being." Having mentioned that Richard Greene was once known as "the Brylcreem Boy", she then adds, helpfully, that "Brylcreem was a product used to slick down men's hair and make it shine, and it did just that. In fact, it made men's hair look like the shine my mother would get on her grate after using black lead polish." Write that down in your jotters, boys and girls. And when, for reasons not worth going into, she happens to refer to the death of Mary, Queen of Scots, one can almost see her stamping her foot, her brow furrowed like Shirley Temple's, as she delivers the following admonition, "To die by the sword of an executioner was very wrong." Very, very wrong! Bold, bad executioner!

Platitudes flow from Miss Court's pen more freely than blood in a Hammer film. Particularly cherishable is her recollection of discovering a young Bill Clinton, a friend of her step-children, cooking hamburgers in her kitchen: "He still loves hamburgers, his favourite food. Born a Leo in August, it's no surprise. They love meat. My son is a Leo, so I know." Best of all, however, is a brief encounter, at MGM Studios in 1965, with Elvis Presley. Rushing from her dressing room to the set of *Dr. Kildare*, Miss Court found herself unable to stop for an audience with the King: "Fleeing down the corridor, I turned around. He was laughing as he waved one of those famous hands. I will never forget the energy that surrounded him, even as he waved. Mesmerising. I should have gone back and talked, but I was very young." The eternally girlish Miss Court, it seems worth mentioning (as she coyly fails to do herself), was born in 1926, and so was 39 at the time of this "youthful" missed opportunity.

Buttock-clenchingly awful though *Hazel Court – Horror Queen* is in almost every respect, none of that would have mattered had Miss Court had anything even remotely interesting or novel to relate concerning her work for Hammer and AIP. Predictably, of course, she does not. The section (one can hardly dignify it with the description of "chapter") on *The Curse of Frankenstein* contains the following pearls of

perspicacity: Peter Cushing was "a wonderful human being", Christopher Lee was "very funny, and really not scary at all", Robert Urquhart was "a very nice human being ... and quite attractive", while director Terence Fisher "knew his craft and gently steered the production." Her recollections of working for Roger Corman are equally vapid ("He was a fast director, and we worked very quickly ... Roger was very, very clever") and include the priceless (or should that be "Price-less"?) revelation, regarding *The Masque of the Red Death*, that, "The scenes in the film where I sacrifice myself to the devil gave me a very strange feeling. It was almost like I was really doing it, and I thought, 'Oh my God, I am giving myself to the devil!'" Clearly, there was Method in Miss Court's madness.

Given that her horror films are the entire *raison d'être* – and sole selling point – of these memoirs, one can imagine a rictus-grin of disappointment freezing the face of publisher Bruce Sachs as he waded through this mindless waffle. "When I had asked Hazel Court some years ago to write her autobiography, I never expected the one she finally delivered," Mr Sachs has recalled (see www.hammerfilms.com), and there can be little reason to doubt the veracity of that statement. Mr Sachs, however, is nothing if not loyal: "She spent the last days of her life studying every page [of the proofs]. She loved it. 'The most important thing I've done in my life', she told me. Hazel's opinion on the finished book was the only one that mattered to me." Which, one imagines, is just as well, as there will be no shortage of disappointed horror fans willing to share a rather different opinion of this "important" work. It would be gratifying to report that Mr Kenneth Bishton, credited as proof-reader of the book, had also studied "every page", but the constant misspelling of "Edgar Allan Poe" in the memoirs of an actress remembered for adaptations of that author's work rather suggests he did not, as do Miss Court's uncorrected assertions that Stuart Whitman won an Oscar for *The Mark* (he was nominated but didn't win), and that she and second husband, the director Don Taylor, "were filming in Rome right after Liz Taylor and Richard Burton made *Cleopatra* there" (Don Taylor's *The Five Man Army* was made six years after the release of *Cleopatra*). Picture captions are not usually the preserve of the proof-reader, but someone at Tomahawk should have known that John Gregson did not look remotely like Michael Craig.

Tomahawk Press have published some excellent books (Tony Earnshaw's *Beating the Devil – The Making of Night of the Demon*, Wayne Kinsey's *Hammer Films – The Elstree Studio Years*, and Sheldon Hall's book on *Zulu* come readily to mind), but *Hazel Court – Horror Queen* is not one of them. Even the plethora of photographs, seized on by some reviewers as an excuse to pass over the accompanying prose, are largely banal, an endless succession of magazine covers and studio portraits which only serve to reinforce the impression that Miss Court's most abiding memories of her film career were the opportunities it afforded her to dress up prettily in pretty dresses. Unless, like Madeline Bassett, one believes that "every time a fairy hiccoughs a wee baby is born" or one has a particularly well-developed taste for masochism, there is no good reason for wasting either money or time on a book which, to borrow the title of Miss Court's first film for AIP, would have been best served by a "premature burial".

JOHN EXSHAW

Carole Zucker, *The Cinema of Neil Jordan: Dark Carnival*
Wallflower Press, 2008

For those interested in the manifestation of the Gothic within contemporary cinema, a book-length study of the work of Neil Jordan is a welcome publication. Since his successful collaboration with Angela Carter in adapting her series of short stories from *The Bloody Chamber* (filmed as *The Company of Wolves* [1984]), Jordan has steadily built a small body of Gothic works within a much larger literary and cinematic oeuvre, often choosing to adapt novels (*Interview with a Vampire* [1994], *The Butcher Boy* [1997] and *In Dreams* [1999]) as well as occasionally writing original works (*High Spirits* [1988]). With such works, Jordan has proven himself to be one of the few directors whose autueristic sensibilities lends themselves naturally to the Gothic, for his interest, as author Carole Zucker states, resides "in the mysterious shadow side of humankind."

The Cinema of Neil Jordan: Dark Carnival is an extensive critical overview of virtually all of Jordan's work to date. Throughout, Zucker's approach to analysis is interdisciplinary, using, amongst others, art history, psychology, philosophy, literary criticism, myths and fairy tales as a means by which to illuminate Jordan's work. Through such modes, Zucker identifies the "artistic hybridity" of Jordan's cinema and suggests that such an oeuvre is deeply informed by Celtic myth and folklore, Romanticism and the Gothic. The critiques themselves are not in chronological order, with Zucker instead choosing to group the films together thematically in an effort to expose the commonality between differing works. This approach allows intriguing juxtapositions to be made, such as the chapter in which *The Company of Wolves* is positioned alongside *Mona Lisa* (1986); films unified by their relationship to the fairy tale and the manner in which "identity, gender and cruelty form the basis of a reality in which characters may find or loose themselves." With such comparisons taking place and ably supported by eloquent critique, one is encouraged to revisit some of Jordan's films and view them again with a totally new perspective on both the narrative and its potential meanings.

The analysis of *The Company of Wolves* is clear and insightful, exploring the use of the fairy tale within the film before identifying its symbolic values: the labyrinthine nature of the narrative and the associations of sexual awakening and the menstrual cycle as an exploration of the protagonist's psyche. The reading then broadens to encompass the concerns of its director, most notably his "predilection for the dark carnival" that concludes in the confirmation that Jordan is indeed "one of the most mordant modern re-tellers of fairy tales."

In Dreams, Jordan's adaptation (with Bruce Robinson) of Bari Wood's novel *Doll's Eyes*, is a further fairy-tale narrative loaded with potent symbolic imagery. Zucker dedicates a full chapter to a critique of this film and then builds upon these readings throughout other chapters: she analyses protagonist Claire's (Annette Bennning) status as a re-born heroine and her quest for understanding and wholeness. Throughout this reading there is an appropriate application of the concepts and content of myths and the fairy tale to add further critical depth to the discussion, suggesting that Claire is ultimately "Jordan's Postmodern conception of Snow White", an active heroine who has no prince to rescue her. Here the interdisciplinary approach is actively at work, constructing coherent readings that not only evidence Jordan's "artistic hybridity" but also the value of Zucker's critical hybridity.

An equally diverse approach is taken with *Interview with a Vampire*: the film is analysed from the perspective of acting, with Zucker suggesting that it is a narrative that is "in great measure about

performance as spectacle, funded, as it is for much of the film, by copious amounts of theatrical rhetoric," leading to a close analysis of the brothel scene and then through the *Le Théâtre des Vampires* sequence. Here dialogue, style, gesture and actor/viewer relationship is explored in order to produce an assessment of the protagonist vampires: Tom Cruise's depiction of Lestat as a sadistic dandy is clearly amplified by Zucker's approach whilst Brad Pitt's performance as Louis elicits a greater sense of pity. Zucker's convincing readings amplifies the very humanity of the inhuman vampires through their gestures, their movement and their very theatricality. Like she does with *In Dreams*, Zucker returns to *Interview with a Vampire* later in the book, positioning it this time as a Romantic text in which Louis is an archetypal Romantic hero "consumed with guilt and the knowledge that he can never in all eternity attain redemption." In this reading Louis becomes a "creature suspended between extremes", one who desired death when in life and now desires death even in the afterlife.

What is disappointing, particularly given the depth that Zucker goes to in her analysis of the films, is the lack of critique of *High Spirits*: the film is discussed in a brief paragraph that explains the plot and the problematic experience Jordan had with the studio, Tri-Star. As she indicates, the film was taken out of Jordan's hands, scenes re-shot and the narrative distilled, in Jordan's words, to a "silly, frenetic teenage comedy." Whilst there may not be much to wring critically from the director's experience, it may have been possible to explore the vision that Jordan had for this film. This possibility is compounded by the fact that Zucker had access to Jordan's personal archives, a space in which one imagines there to be a wealth of the unseen in relation to this film. This omission becomes all the more frustrating given that part of Zucker's approach to this oeuvre is through Celtic folklore and the Gothic, the two central tropes upon which the narrative of *High Spirits* hangs. Although one could argue that the released film bears only Jordan's name, the presence of a crumbling Gothic mansion, the spectres that haunt its dark corridors and the almost necrophilic relationships between the living and the dead suggest that strands of Jordan's preoccupations, no matter how fine, still remain within the narrative.

A further minor concern is that some aspects of the text feel as if Zucker wants to say more and that the length of a chapter is not, in some cases, enough to explore fully her understanding of the individual films. This can be frustrating: at times the text feels like it is merely broaching the surface and at other times leaves a tantalising suggestion, particularly when Zucker ends a paragraph with "The film also challenges the paradisal notion of childhood as it focuses on children's lives cut short by violence." So much is suggested in terms of further critical readings by this sentence only for it to simply end at a full stop.

Regardless of this, Zucker's book is an articulate and high-quality critique that covers a diverse range of film in an equally diverse range of critical modes. Herein lies the success of the work, for that very diversity brings about new readings and new interpretations of now well-established Gothic adaptations.

JAMES ROSE

FILM REVIEWS

Bat out of hell: The Dark Knight and Hellboy II: The Golden Army

***The Dark Knight* (Dir. Christopher Nolan)** USA, 2008
Warner Bros

***Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (Dir. Guillermo del Toro)** USA/Germany, 2008
Universal Pictures

Even a cursory glance over the films reviewed in the last issue of the *IJGHS* alone reveals the extent of the checklist of contemporary anxieties that recent horror films have voiced, ranging from terrorist attacks on US and European metropolises; the war on terror; religious extremism (at home and abroad); Hurricane Katrina, the Asian Tsunami and related natural disasters; SARS and contagion; and the erasure of human contact and individual identity in an age of user-generated websites and shaky-cam news footage. The times they are a-becoming quite anxious indeed, all of which is contributing to the generation of an increasingly dark strain of studio output, in which any franchise worth its salt seems compelled to adhere to one cardinal rule: each successive release must be marketable as "the darkest instalment yet" (see, for example, *Harry Potter*, *Spider-Man*, and *Star Wars* in recent years, as well as Daniel Craig's reboot of James Bond). What's more, there is no room for a straightforward hero these days (significantly, the second instalment of Bryan Singer's *Superman* franchise seems stuck in development hell), and this summer in particular gave the anti-hero his day in the sun, from Will Smith's *Hancock* (Dir. Peter Berg), (a hard-drinking superhero who has lost his sheen and is badly in need of a PR tune-up) to Edward Norton's *Incredible Hulk* (Dir. Louis Leterrier), via an older, grumpier Indy in *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (Dir. Steven Spielberg). Top of the list, though, were the figures of Batman and Hellboy, both of whom were granted darker sequels to quite-dark-to-begin-with first instalments this summer in *The Dark Knight* (Dir. Christopher Nolan) and *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (Dir. Guillermo del Toro) respectively. Of course, the origins of both go some way back in comic book terms; but the rise to prominence of their cinematic interpretations at this juncture seems particularly timely, making them a pair of likely candidates that just might suit an anxiety-ridden contemporary world's increasingly complex superhero needs.

First up was Christian Bale's return to the Batsuit in *The Dark Knight*, which appeared in July to universal hype and hyberbolic acclaim. With *Batman Begins* (2005), Nolan and co. seemed intent on making this fantasy world seem real; the film sought to exorcise the ghost of Joel Schumacher's Day-Glo vision by virtue of a relentlessly grim origins tale, and banished all vestiges of campy theatrics in its gritty underworld of bad cops, organised crime, and übervillains in the shape of Cillian Murphy's Scarecrow and Liam Neeson's Ra's al Ghul. Culminating in the latter's dastardly plot to use Gotham's monorail to infect the city's water supply with a 'fear toxin' and bring about its destruction, a direct attack on the heart of the city's infrastructure and a literalisation of paranoia-as-contagion that served as a clear indication of the film's post-9/11 mindset. The first film ended with an inevitable sequel-baiting coda in which the only good cop left in Gotham, Gary Oldman's Lieutenant Gordon (as he was then known), handed Batman the calling-card of a new criminal figure with "a taste for the theatrical" who has begun to make his presence felt. Enter The Joker (Heath Ledger).

The Joker was always going to be the main focus of attention even before Ledger's untimely death in January this year, so when the film finally arrived, all eyes were on his last completed performance, widely tipped as an early Oscar contender. It remains to be seen if the Academy will opt for a rare double-whammy of awarding a posthumous Oscar *and* recognising fantasy filmmaking, but make no mistake: this is Ledger's film. From his first appearance in the film's opening bank robbery, through his warped and ever-changing accounts of how he acquired his signature scars, to his final confrontation with the Bat himself, he carries the film with a twitching and twisted repertoire of tics and unconventional magic tricks involving disappearing pencils. The most successful trick of all, though, is the sleight of hand he achieves whenever he's onscreen – of distracting from the film's flaws and making *The Dark Knight* seem like a better film than it actually is.

The Dark Knight's Gotham is still a city under the influence of a far-reaching mob presence, though the streets seem to have become a little safer under the vigilant gaze of Batman and his ally Gordon. Into the mix has now been added District Attorney Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart), also intent on clearing the streets of Gotham of its criminal elements. Clean-cut and filled with all-American derring-do, Dent seems like a stand-up guy, just the kind of law-enforcing 'white Knight' that Gotham needs to ease it through its times of crisis and a more comforting figure than the titular Dark Knight, Batman himself – though he *has* stolen Rachel, Batman's girl (Maggie Gyllenhaal, taking over from Katie Holmes). An elaborate set-up later, the Joker, intent on bringing chaos to Gotham City, has begun to wage all-out war, demanding that Batman reveal his true identity, or the people of Gotham will be forced to pay the price. Another elaborate set-up later, there's an initial showdown between Batman and the Joker, which leads to yet another elaborate set-up, and so on, until the Joker's scheme – and the film – has run its course.

The film really amounts to a series of show-stopping set-pieces, then – the bravado of the opening bank robbery sequence; a frenetic chase through the city; the dark humour of a dragged-up Joker in a nurse's uniform ministering to Harvey Dent (well on his way to becoming the infamous Two-Face into whom he must inevitably evolve). These are linked together primarily by a series of moral quandaries orchestrated by the Joker, which make the point – again and again – that in times of crisis, the lines between 'good' and 'evil' become increasingly blurred. So Batman must choose to maintain the very anonymity which allows him to protect the city of Gotham or give up both to save lives in the short term; he must choose between saving the woman he loves or rescuing the greater good (in the form of Harvey Dent); and a boatload of commuters and a boatload of criminals must each choose to save their own boat (at the cost of the lives on the other) or damn the occupants of both boats. In the end, the film begins to resemble a choose-your-own-adventure book of impossible choices, in which all roads lead right back to the Joker and his chaotic worldview. Like *Fight Club*'s Tyler Durden before him, it seems, he's introducing his own version of Project Mayhem – but apparently with no goal in mind other than to plunge the world into chaos and test the concepts of ethics and morality to their limits. Within the world of the film *everyone* is compromised in trying to fight the Joker's own brand of nihilistic amorality on its own terms – even last good cop standing Commissioner Gordon (as he's become by the end of the film), who should be the still moral anchor of the film, succumbs, puts his family through a fair few traumatic situations in order to play the Joker at his own game. Indeed, the film's focus on this theme has led to some critics (among them, the *Wall Street Journal*'s Andrew Klavan) suggesting that it amounts to little more than "a paean of praise to the fortitude and moral courage that has been shown by George W. Bush in this time of terror and war"... Whether or not such a reading holds true is likely to be long-debated, but nonetheless, the film's fundamental point – that in times of travail, it's sometimes necessary to make sacrifices and do the wrong thing for the right reason – is inescapable, bludgeoned home over and over again, with a relentless lack of subtlety.

None of this is to say that *The Dark Knight* is a *bad* film, but the frenzied, gushing accolades with which it has been met really do seem to be overcooked. In truth, it suffers from a fairly severe case of over-plotting (ironic, in a film that is so intent on ideas of chaos), padding the film out to a running time that more than outstays its welcome. Moreover, Ledger aside, many of the lead performances struggle to compete. Although Eckhart and the ever-reliable Gary Oldman are fine, the usually dependable Maggie Gyllenhaal fails to succeed in what should be an easy task of taking over from a rather bland Katie Holmes; her Rachel is even more insipid, which has crucial ramifications for any feelings of empathy we might have in a number of key set-pieces on which the emotional heart of the film rests. And then there's Bale himself, who's much more reliable as Bruce Wayne, since it gives him another chance to polish his Patrick Bateman characterisation, than he is as Batman, saddled as he is with the most ludicrously guttural and gravelly voice this side of Harvey Fierstein, making it very difficult to take things seriously. And this is a film that demands that we take it seriously. Its overly-contrived plotting; its layers upon layers of bad guys and 'gritty' realism; its efforts at probing society's moral principles; and its numerous casualties of 'the darkest instalment yet' syndrome all demand such gravity. But in the end, these are all presented with such a heavy-handed touch that the entire enterprise falls short of greatness, and it's possible that it might have benefited from taking one of the Joker's sound-bites a bit more literally: *why ... so ... serious*?

After all, what's wrong with a bit of fantasy in these troubled times? This is why *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*, following hot on the heels of *The Dark Knight* in August, seemed like such a breath of fresh air by comparison. Del Toro is a dab hand at investing the real world with fantasy landscapes and storytelling techniques, and the film makes both of these credentials clear from the very beginning with a flashback to Christmas Eve 1955, in which young Hellboy (Montese Ribé) listens to a bedtime story told by his adoptive father Professor Bruttenholm (John Hurt), as we watch a projection of the story in the form of a stop-motion animation sequence with wooden puppets. The story tells of the war between humankind and the magical realm, which led to the creation of the titular Golden Army, a brutal, mechanical and seemingly unbeatable force. The army now lies hidden and dormant, in the wake of an uneasy truce between humanity and elf-kind, which confirmed the split between the two realms, granting sovereignty of the cities to humans and the forests to elves. To symbolise this truce, king of the elves Balor divided a crown which controls the army into three pieces, giving one to the human world and keeping the others for the elves. However, legend has it that his son, Prince Nuada, was dissatisfied with this turn of events, and remains firm in his belief that the magical realm is in decline and in danger of being wiped out by the human world. When he surfaces at an auction in the present day, intent on acquiring the human world's portion of his father's crown in an effort to reunite the shards and reawaken the Golden Army, the stage is set for the adult Hellboy's (Ron Perlman) latest outing.

Hellboy and the other survivors from the first film – pyrokinetic Liz Sherman (Selma Blair) and amphibian Abe Sapien (now voiced by Doug Jones, who's also the man in the suit) – are still working to protect the world from all kinds of supernatural beasties, under the watchful eye of Agent Tom Manning (Jeffrey Tambor) at the Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defence. Joined by new recruit Johann Krauss (voiced by Seth Macfarlane) – a being comprised of ectoplasmic energy housed within a containment suit – their investigations lead them to the mythical Troll Market (located under the Brooklyn Bridge) and the discovery that Nuada has made some headway in his efforts to reawaken the Golden Army, having killed his father and acquired one more portion of the crown. The third piece (as well as the location of the army's hiding place) remains in the possession of his twin sister Princess Nuala (Anna Walton), pronounced Noo-alla (to the slight consternation of Irish audiences). When Nuada kidnaps her

from the BPRD headquarters where she has been hiding, the crew must pursue him to the Giant's Causeway for the final smackdown.

As we've come to expect from del Toro, *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* is beautifully made, populated with nightmarish beasties that are strikingly realised – a flock of scavenging, cannibalistic tooth fairies; Mr Wink (Brian Steele), Prince Nuada's troll companion; the haunting figure of the Angel of Death (Doug Jones again) – and shot through with visual flair in its realisations of elaborate set-pieces like the Troll Market and the realm of the elves (which should prove good practice for his next project, *The Hobbit*). But at heart it's also driven by the questions of morality and accountability that haunt *The Dark Knight*, and is underpinned by another source of contemporary unease that is ecological in focus. After all, Nuada's actions are prompted by the erasure of his people and their forest realm, which implies that his cause is arguably a sympathetic one, and that the categories of 'good' and 'evil' are once again not so easily differentiated. The film brings all of these strands together in what is probably its most memorable sequence in which Hellboy battles a gigantic forest elemental – the last of its kind, as much of a one-off as he is – and must choose which world deserves to survive – a scene that lingers longer in the mind than all of the moral quandaries of *The Dark Knight* put together.

Like Batman's well-meaning vigilante, Hellboy is a complex figure, a demon who devotes himself to protecting his adoptive world from supernatural figures that he actually has far more in common with than he does with the humans that shun him. Both seem to be appropriate poster-boys for these mixed-up times, then, and both films present us with two misunderstood outsiders who do their best to protect their respective worlds by thanklessly working within potentially corrupt systems of governance and authority; who are faced with difficult choices in morally questionable times and situations; and who struggle with the prospect of having to make personal sacrifices for the so-called greater good. But in the end, Big Red edges it – because for all its gleeful excess and revelry in its fantasy landscapes, *Hellboy II* actually handles itself with a tad more subtlety than *The Dark Knight*, and proves the more satisfying, the more accomplished, and possibly even the more thought-provoking of the two.

Jenny McDonnell

***Martyrs* (Dir. Pascale Laugier)** France/Canada, 2008
Canal Horizons

Martyrs may well turn out to be one of the most important horror films of the past decade. Then again, it may not. Having sat through the film, read about it, and talked it over with the few people I know who have also seen it, I still don't quite know what to make of it. Neither did they. Simply put, it's either deeply profound or incredibly pretentious. Perhaps it's both. Like I said, I still don't know myself. Maybe that's the point.

If you haven't had a chance to see the film yet, I suggest that you stop reading this review now and come back to it later, for *Martyrs* is best approached with as little prior knowledge as possible, and a frank discussion of the movie demands that I discuss the plot in some detail. The film opens with a horribly abused girl in her early teens running screaming down a gritty side-street. She is Lucie (Jesse Pham), who has been kept chained to a chair in a warehouse and tortured by mysterious assailants for an unknown length of time. Rendered almost catatonic by her ordeal, Lucie is sent to a children's home, where she forms a close bond with fellow inmate Anna (Erika Scott) narrative then moves forward about a decade. A happy, bourgeois family – mother, father, two kids – living in a luxurious, modernist house in the middle of the countryside sit around the breakfast table in a perfectly normal-seeming fashion when there is a knock at the door. It's Lucie (now played by Mylène Jamponaï), all grown up and seeking revenge for the abuse she endured as a child. She has seen a picture in the newspaper and decided that these are the people responsible for her captivity. Paying little heed to Anna's pleas that she reconsider her actions lest she has chosen the wrong targets, Lucie brutally executes the entire family with a shotgun in a scene which evokes the climax of Claude Chabrol's *La Ceremonie* [1995]).

While we get the sense that Anna (Morjana Alaoui) is appalled at Lucie's actions, it's significant that she does little in a practical sense to intervene, and after the killings she sets about cleaning the crime scene and tidying away the bodies. Anna is deeply in love with her friend – feelings which the terribly damaged Lucie will never be able to reciprocate – and she will do anything for her. It's a dynamic which at first seems like it will evoke the final act twist of another, rather more conservative French horror hit, *Haute Tension* (aka *Switchblade Romance*, 2003), and it is this poignantly rendered relationship which will help furnish the film with its ambitiously transcendent finale. The fact that Martyrs, at least initially, features two mixed-race women from the margins of French society engaging in violent and transgressive acts also brings to mind Virginie Despente's cult classic *Baise-Moi* (2000). Ultimately, though, Laugier's film proves to be a very different viewing experience to either.

Following the murders, Lucie endures disturbing hallucinations featuring a horribly-deformed woman which wouldn't be out of place in a Japanese horror film and, as seen at the beginning of the film, resorts once more to terrible, and ultimately fatal, acts of self-harm. With Lucie dead before the film has even reached its halfway point, Anna makes a discovery that takes the narrative in an entirely different direction and towards its brutal and provocative final act. She finds a secret compartment which takes her to a nightmarishly modern, neon-lit underground dungeon which proves that her friend was right all along. The walls are decorated with photographs depicting scenes of immense human suffering and torture. What's more, there are a series of cells, and some of them are occupied… Inevitably, Anna herself soon becomes a prisoner of the mysterious group in charge of the dungeon, and suffers an appalling and debasing series of ordeals over the remainder of the film.

Needless to say, if described merely in outline, the scenario which furnishes the rest of the narrative would sound dispiritingly similar to that of at least five or six other so-called examples of "Torture Porn". Indeed, *Variety*'s critic has reductively described *Martyrs* as "*Hostel* minus the laughs", a summary which is kind of right in the technical sense, but misses the spirit of the film entirely. The crucial difference lies in the sheer breadth of Laugier's intellectual ambition here, and in the fact that unlike the eminently dislikeable frat boys and sorority girls carved up by Eli Roth and his ilk, Anna is a genuinely sympathetic character. Furthermore, the ramifications of her graphically depicted ordeal are presented in a truly humane fashion, a facet of the film which underlies they way in which it deviates from more conventional "Torture Porn" treatments of similar scenes, tend to be about audience titillation and shock effect In fact, *Martyrs* has a lot more in common with a film like Steve McQueen's Hunger strike drama *Hunger* (2008) than the likes of *Captivity* (2007) or *The Strangers* (2008), both of which it superficially resembles, in that it attempts to delve into the effects that confinement and dehumanising treatment can have upon an individual, and interrogates the philosophical implications of the term "self sacrifice" at considerable length.

Those responsible for the incredibly brutal ill-treatment meted out first to Lucie and then Anna do not carry out their actions in order to satisfy twisted sexual or sadistic urges, but for reasons which are even more disturbing. They have a plan, a twisted agenda with distinctly religious overtones, and her suffering is a distasteful but necessary step towards achieving that goal. Confined to a concrete cell, chained to a chair with her hair shaved off, Anna becomes a kind of analogue to unjustly treated prisoners anywhere in the world, at any time in history, regularly beaten senseless by a physically imposing man clad in black, force-fed just enough to keep her alive for the next day's abuse, her very sense of self submerged in a tidal wave of suffering. It is at this point that some viewers may start to find the film either too difficult to endure, or alternatively, downright tedious, as scene after scene in which the main character is used as a punch bag passes with hardly a line of dialogue. And yet I think this sequence may be one of the bravest things about the film. The meaning of Anna's ordeal – and crucially, there is a perverse logic to her suffering – lies in the ramifications of the film's title, and in the meaning of the word "Martyr".

A martyr, in the general sense of the term, is one who undergoes death or great suffering for faith, a belief or a cause. This is precisely what Anna is enduring, except that the cause is that of the group that has imprisoned her, not her own. She is, like Lucie before her, merely the unwilling means to the most dramatic end of all, nothing less than a conduit to supreme enlightenment. Her fate in the film's final moments leads to a scene of bodily mutilation so extreme that it will surely become one of the films's most talked about aspects. Yet it is the scenes leading up to this one, in which friendship and love come to the fore again, which will, I think, linger in the viewer's mind even longer than the undeniably gory special effects set-piece which has lent the film so much notoriety (indeed, it was briefly banned in France). Whatever you may ultimately make of the film, it's hard to deny the ambitiousness of what is being attempted here, nor the fact that the true meaning of the last few minutes will be debated by viewers for some time yet. As I said at the beginning of this review, I still don't know myself whether Laugier fully succeeds in everything he attempts here, or whether the film is ultimately meant as a kind of existentialist deconstruction of the modern horror movie or functions as a secular (yet still defiantly spiritual) riposte to the propagandistic horrors of *The Passion of the Christ*. Similarly, I can understand why some viewers may find the unabashedly "profound" finale unforgivably pretentious. The fact remains that for better or worse, *Martyrs* is a horror movie with unabashedly philosophical aspirations, and anyone with a genuine interest in the genre should see it, if only to decide for themselves.

Bernice M. Murphy

***Les Yeux sans visage* (*Eyes Without A Face*) (Dir. Georges Franju)** France/Italy, 1960
Second Sight

E.T. summed up the whole ball of wax when he said "Ouch". The plain fact of the matter is that pain and hurt are universal, but it takes a low-life like Spielberg to make that particular truth digestible for large portions of the cinema-going public. Indeed, the history of popular cinema demonstrates that truth is a peculiar thing, and is seemingly most palatable in sugary morsels divulged from the foam lips of a Christ-like alien puppet. A case in point is the popular and critical response offered *Les Yeux sans visage* (1960) upon its initial release. Georges Franju's second fictional film served up a rather fecund mix of pain and hurt, truth and lies that proved unappetizing and disagreeable for the majority of its viewers. Famously, the film's unflinching scenes of facial surgery gained it instant notoriety when several audience members were stretchered out from the theatre during the film's first screening at the Edinburgh Film Festival.

Of course, Georges Franju was no stranger to upsetting his audience's physical or moral sensibilities. Prior to *Les Yeux sans visage*, Franju's most notorious film was *Le Sang des bêtes* (1949);a twenty-two minute documentary shot in and around a Parisian abattoir that evokes a lyrical surrealism by counterpointing scenes of graphic animal slaughter with scenes of quiet suburban landscapes. Tellingly, this extraordinary film's notoriety is probably less founded on its audience's response to animal slaughter per se, and has more to do with the transgression of filming such scenes at all. In this instance, scenes of real death reaffirm the mechanics of cinema, specifically, the camera's ability to reveal or falsify reality. *Le Sang des bête*s, like all of Franju's work, including *Les Yeux sans visage*, can be seen to engage with the form and mechanisms of film as a means of displacing a confirmed reality and exposing the uncanny within a realistic setting.

Based upon a novel by Jean Redon, with a script by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narjecac, *Les Yeux sans visage* is a routine, if somewhat perverse, story told in an extraordinary manner. The plot revolves around celebrated surgeon, Dr. Génessier (Pierre Brasseur), who is aided in his abduction of young women by his devoted assistant Louise (Alida Valli), so he might attempt a series of experimental heterograft surgeries to restore his daughter Christiane's (Edith Scob) disfigured face. The plot outline is distinctly gothic, containing as it does, a crazily obsessive doctor, a disfigured and imprisoned daughter, an obedient and devoted assistant, murder, experimental science, and an unrequited love from beyond the grave (kinda). Yet for all this, *Les Yeux sans visage* is strangely devoid of melodramatic thrills. In fact, one of the most remarkable aspects of *Les Yeux sans visage* is the way the excesses of its gothic narrative are frequently foiled by Franju's sedate cinematic style.

At the time of its release, Franju stated his intention was to create an "anxiety" film as opposed to a "horror" film. It might be worth noting here the significant contribution that incidentals like ambient sound effects, silences, and Maurice Jarre's musical score make to the film's anxious mood. More significant to this end, Franju adopts a clinical and intellectual approach that is exemplified by extended shots, mute exchanges and a rather static photographic style. The combined effect conjures a kind of off-kilter realism. Additionally, Franju decides against using film techniques like rapid editing or jolting jump-cuts as a means of "guiding" his viewer's emotional responses or provoking more traditional horror-audience screams. Certainly, the infamous surgery scene is photographed with an appropriately steady, unflinching detachment worthy of a medical documentary. Needless to say, this is not an

educational documentary, but Franju utilises the long take to suggest a documentary *reality*. Accordingly, the scene plays on an audience's assumption that seeing is believing. Franju displaces the physical "horror" by the very act of showing it, but unlike a Herschell Gordon Lewis blood fest/feast which displaces its horror with comedy via an unrealistic slapstick of gore and body parts, Franju sidesteps any comic displacement by making the scene appear realistic and believable and thereby reconfiguring the emotional content of the scene towards a kind of helpless voyeurism.

Les Yeux sans visage was photographed by the celebrated Eugen Schüfftan and the film's beautifully still compositions undeniably contribute to its clinical mood. The camera photographs the macabre goings-on with a detached contemplation that becomes increasingly unsettling. There is a terrific series of shots early in the film that show Dr. Génessier walking quietly through the rooms and halls of his sterile mansion, ascending two separate flights of stairs, then continuing on to a small room in the attic of the house where his daughter Christiane resides. Arguably, the very length of the scene is unnecessary, but the slow deliberate pace and quiet ominous mood it establishes superbly conveys the shame, secrecy, and even the methodical aspects of Dr. Génessier's personality, while simultaneously suggesting the physical and psychological isolation suffered by Christiane. Franju's static framing helps undermine the panorama of his exterior locations while, conversely, they dispel a sense of intimacy within his interior sets, so that characters seem physically subdued and resigned to their fates as they forlornly enter and exit the frame. This feeling of resignation permeates the entire mood of the film and is only ever disrupted during short-lived moments of physical violence, assault, or terror, when abducted women struggle against an imposed fate. The scene in which Dr. Génessier chloroforms a young woman lured to his house to view a room (supposedly for rent) is all the more unsettling because of its brevity. The suddenness of the assault and the pitifully short struggle that ensues are contained ruptures in the pervasive deathly still mood of the film.

A character's scream of terror is frequently the first and last means of protest in traditional horror movies. In *Les Yeux sans visage*, screams are infrequent and short-lived. However, while it can be safely said that the film does not boast any Fay Wray moments, it still manages to evoke the cinema of the early thirties, and its transition from silent pictures to talkies. In this respect, *Les Yeux sans visage* is peculiarly like a silent film with sound. Certainly, the film's small but superb cast defer from the type of emotive acting commonly attributed to silent movies, but the film is full of extended silences and wordless exchanges between characters. Particularly memorable is the mute shake of the head Christiane gives a moment before she stabs Louise in the throat, which marks Christine's silent rejection of the fate imposed on her and triggers the events that end the film. Significantly, *Les Yeux sans visage*'s plot resolution hinges less on a series of authoritative actions and more on a prevailing mood of French fatalism and a healthy dose of arbitrary justice. Ouch indeed.

This latest edition of *Les Yeux sans visage*, released by Second Sight, has one extra; an extract from the 1987 French documentary 'Cinema of Our Time – Georges Franju: Visionary.' Rather disappointingly, this ten-minute "extract" is only about *Les Yeux sans visage*. It would have been far more interesting to include the documentary in its entirety. For my money, the Criterion edition of the film (Region 1) released in late 2004 is a much better buy with plenty of worthwhile extras, most notably Franju's gruesome documentary *Le Sang des bêtes*.

Paul Cronly

***Saw V* (Dir. David Hackl)** USA, 2008
Lionsgate

Since the rise of the so-called "torture porn" sub-genre of modern horror, the *Saw* franchise has become the staple Lionsgate release for the Halloween weekend since its gory genesis in 2004. With each annual outing, the franchise has become increasingly susceptible to the "demise-by-sequel" rules of horror cinema, in which victims are usually subjected to increasingly ludicrous deaths and situations, recalling other multi-sequel horror releases of the 1980s, in particular the *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Friday The 13th* series. However, *Saw*'s demise is not due to the ridiculous quips of masked killers nor the assurance of a jaded villain's immortality in order to facilitate further sequels which ultimately ruined these slasher films.

Saw differs from these predecessors in two distinctive ways. First, its "traps" and elaborate contraptions alone are precisely what continue to draw in its target audience, forcing the audience to posit themselves within the film's structure of blood and flesh self-sacrifice to atone for previous sins. Second, at the core of the narrative, the mastermind villain Jigsaw is revealed as increasingly frail and human, unlike the seemingly immortal slashers Jason and Freddy. Indeed, it is the death of the villain Jigsaw in *Saw III* (Dir. Darren Lynn Bousman, 2006) that should have marked the finite conclusion to this cerebral franchise.

This postmodern horror series can be read on many intellectual levels. Its philosophical influences range from Schopenhauer's "will to survive" to Nietzsche's "will to power", Freud's "death drive" and Gilles Delueze's theories on "lines of flight" and potential (discussed in depth by Jake Huntley in our third issue, November 2007), and *Saw* is acutely aware of its need to satisfy these criteria if it is to distinguish itself from its equally gore-laden competitors. Yet with each instalment, the series dilutes this clever approach with misdirection, McGuffins, red-herrings and the introduction of numerous accomplices to substitute for the original Jigsaw John Kramer's (Tobin Bell) absence. Now on its fifth instalment and with rumours that a sixth is in pre-production, the Saw series runs perilously close to self-destruction.

The series is structured on a two-tiered narrative – the first narrative tier running from *Saw* to *Saw III* and concluding with *Saw IV* to *Saw V* (and potentially *Saw VI*). Beginning in a dank bathroom in *Saw* (Dir. James Wan, 2004), Dr. Lawrence Gordon (Cary Elwes) and Adam (Leigh Whannell) wake to discover that they are bound in chains and must cut through their feet to escape Jigsaw's prison. Jigsaw (who is eventually revealed in a fantastically gothic and macabre fashion) forces his victims to "cherish life" by testing their will to live at all costs. In *Saw II* (Dir. Darren Lynn Bousman, 2005) Jigsaw, now in the final stages of brain cancer, entraps a collective of criminals and a young boy in a house filled with poisonous gas to test police officer Eric Matthews (Donnie Wahlberg). He is aided by Jigsaw-survivor Amanda (Shawnee Smith) who, it is revealed, will continue Jigsaw's legacy after his death. In *Saw III* (Dir. Darren Lynn Bousman, 2006), a dying Jigsaw initiates a final test whereby he ensures his successor's worthiness to continue his legacy and concludes with a devastating and clever twist. The series should have concluded on this note as it would have provided the audience with a complete sense of the narrative by returning to the first film's crucial premise of will, grief and survival. While each of the first three films is dependent on the continuing narrative, each film can also be considered to be of a high quality on individual merit, which is rarely seen in modern trilogies. However, in *Saw IV* (Dir. Darren Lynn Bousman, 2007), the mood and tone of the *Saw* series drastically changes, and this is the pinpoint of the second tier of plot which unfortunately becomes its downfall. The common thread of traps and grisly

contraptions are still evident and creative but the centre of Jigsaw's perverted moralism is corrupted and lost by providing an unlikely personal history – a device which has undone so many of horror's celebrated villains – and by introducing a new successor to the Jigsaw legacy.

While *Saw IV* concludes with this revelation, *Saw V* (Dir. David Hackl, 2008) is concerned primarily with the notion of corruption and revenge disguised as Jigsaw moralism, and focuses on how the last cop remaining on the case, Agent Strahm (Scott Patterson), intends finally to reveal and capture Jigsaw's second accomplice. Revisiting the same situation as seen in *Saw II* where a collection of corrupt criminals are subjected to a series of torments, both stories run concurrently and cause confusion as they collapse the timelines of the sequels by re-entering the previous films and revert back to the second narrative tier begun in *Saw III* as Jigsaw/John Kramer lies dying. The confusion of re-entering the earlier films is wholly unnecessary and it creates a false sense of time, lending to a reading that these events are happening simultaneously (in one scene, it reads that the "bone twisting crucifixion" scene in *Saw III* occurs just moments before an elaborate group trap in *Saw V*). This effectively collapses the fourth instalment largely into both a flashback sequence and recruitment exercise which borrows the concept of a "real-time" countdown, familiar to viewers of the television series *24* (2001 –). This unnecessary overlay of plot hinders the flow of the film and intends to shock the audience by playing a double-bluff by unveiling the motives of Jigsaw's second accomplice (who is revealed at the conclusion of *Saw IV* anyway, effectively removing any surprise element from *Saw V*), and showing how his legacy as the new Jigsaw continues.

The overwhelming flaw of the film lies with the evident lack of John Kramer/Jigsaw (Tobin Bell) onscreen, which highlights exactly why the series should not have continued beyond *Saw III*. The central performances of Agent Strahm (Scott Patterson) and Jigsaw's accomplice are poor and provoke questions on how this accomplice, who does not exude any of John Kramer's intellectualism, is even capable of creating such contraptions for the victims. However, we are provided with some interesting performances by television stars Julie Benz (Darla from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) and Carlo Rota (Morris O'Brien from *24*) which keeps the collective's "game" watchable and suitably hostile.

Overall, the sense of horror and revelation so familiar and expected in the *Saw* franchise is utterly lost at the conclusion of this film. Not only is there genuinely no huge surprise awaiting but, with the clear clear set-up for what will hopefully be the final instalment, one would not be completely surprised if there is an additional accomplice introduced to dilute it further and continue the franchise far beyond its original concept and brilliantly brutal beginnings. Unfortunately, the tag-line irks most of all: 'You won't believe how it ends!' it claims – and sadly, I didn't.

Sorcha Ní Fhlainn

***Blacula* (Dir. William Crain)** USA, 1972

***Scream Blacula Scream* (Dir. Bob Kelljan)** USA, 1973
Optimum Home Entertainment

One of the great joys of genre cinema is that occasionally an actor will give a performance so brilliant that not only does it threaten to overwhelm the film in which it appears, but it can define their careers and even, I like to think, justify their lives. Ernest Thesiger managed the unique trick of pulling it off twice, both times for his protégée James Whale, in *The Old Dark House* (1932) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) – and on both occasions succeeded in stealing the film from performers as iconic as Boris Karloff, Charles Laughton, Elsa Lanchester, and Colin Clive. Such a list would also include Michael Redgrave in *Dead of Night* (1945), Niall MacGinnis in *Night of the Demon* (1957), Margaret Johnston in Night of the Eagle (1962), Charles Gray in *The Devil Rides Out* (1966), Linda Blair in *The Exorcist* (1973), and Jim Siedow in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974). It would also include, with a vengeance, William Marshall's performance as the African vampire Mamuwalde in *Blacula*. The difference is that while most of the films I just listed are great, and those that aren't are not bad, *Blacula* is frankly rubbish. Thing is, nobody told William Marshall this, and so he thinks he's acting in an altogether better film, and possibly the greatest film ever made. While everyone else involved knows damn well that they're making a Blaxploitation quickie, as far as Marshall's concerned, he's Othello with fangs.

Blacula opens in 1780, with African Prince Mamuwalde and his wife visiting Castle Dracula, to seek the Count's assistance in ending the slave trade. (Told you it was rubbish, though in the film's sole moment of wit, Mamuwalde notes that he has been particularly impressed to meet a 'Dr Duvalier' at the Count's dining table.) In Charles Macauley, the film has possibly the worst-ever screen Dracula – worse than David Niven in *Vampira*, worse than John Forbes-Robertson in *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires*, perhaps even as bad as Marc Warren in the BBC's calamitous 2006 adaptation of Bram Stoker's novel. I wondered whether this wasn't deliberate, as a kind of inverse counterpoint to Marshall's magnificence.

Mamuwalde is vampirized by the Count and imprisoned forever in a locked coffin. The film then shifts to 1972, when Castle Dracula has been bought by a pair of gay antiques dealers, seeking 'the very *crème de la crème* of camp'; and so Mamuwalde's coffin is shipped Stateside. Honestly, what is it with vampires and gay antiques dealers? Stephen King must have been taking notes here, I think, as readers will already have spotted that this is the exact same premise which animates the vampire attack in *'Salem's Lot*, published not long after, in 1975. King's Barlow and Straker may be gay purveyors of 'old things, fine things', but they are nothing like the camp pairing in *Blacula* – it was as though Larry Grayson and Dick Emery had somehow wandered off the stage of *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* and into a Blaxploitation movie. I think one of them actually does say something like, 'Shut that door, you honky mofo! Ooh! You are awful! *But I like you*!', though I may be misremembering slightly. In fact, such is the stereotyping of this film that I did find myself wondering whether I wasn't watching some kind of rather subtle satire: at one point, one white cop actually turns to another and says, 'How can you tell? They all look alike.' After all, the film does have a kind of wacky anti-slavery message, and does refer in passing to Black Panther violence, as well as to the black middle class moving out of the inner city and into the suburbs. Perhaps, like Richard Matheson in *I Am Legend*, Crain, Marshall and company are actually using the vampire narrative as a comment on American race relations. After all, *The Omega Man*, the adaptation of Matheson's novel released the year before *Blacula*, had famously featured an inter-racial romance between Charlton Heston and Blaxploitation regular Rosalind Cash. Perhaps William Marshall knew something the rest of us didn't, and *Blacula* is rather a good film after all.

Well, perhaps not, but it does have all the usual reasons for watching Blaxploitation movies – huge Afros, great threads, a brilliant soundtrack (featuring disco legends the Hues Corporation), and a vivid feel for 70s urban cool. These are in themselves substantial reasons for wanting to watch any movie, though *Blacula* also has a number of incidental pleasures for us genre-hounds. Elisha Cook Jr's in it, of course, as a sleazy, one-handed mortuary attendant; as is Ji-Tu Cumbuka, less terrifying than usual, but still a badass dude. Perhaps best of all is former *chanteuse* Ketty Lester, easily the scariest thing in the film as vampire cabbie Juanita Jones. Lester's probably best-known for her 1962 transatlantic Top 5 hit, 'Love Letters'. You know the one: 'Love letters stake through your heart / Keep us so near while apart…' (At least, that's what I think she sang, though again I may be wrong.)

The pleasures of *Scream Blacula Scream* are, as a result of the Law of Diminishing Returns, all incidental, but still quite gratifying. Firstly, there's the unimproveable title, which justifies the whole endeavour by itself. William Marshall's back, as imperious as ever, and he's joined this time by an actual screen legend, Pam Grier (playing a voodoo priestess!). There are a couple of notable TV cops in supporting roles: Bernie Hamilton, Captain Dobey in *Starsky and Hutch*, pops up as a kind of voodoo hobo; and here's Michael Conrad as a police lieutenant, practicing the kind of ostentatiously formal diction that was to become his trademark as Sgt Esterhaus in *Hill Street Blues*. My favourite bit of the film has future Dynasty star Richard Lawson as Willis, Mamuwalde's superfly apprentice vampire, genuinely aggrieved that he can no longer see his spectacular pimp outfits in the mirror: 'This really ain't hip!'

The two *Blacula* films may not be aesthetic monuments to the human condition, not exactly, but I was very pleased to see them again. Well done to Optimum for releasing them in a double bill like this.

Darryl Jones

***THE MUMMY* (Dir. Karl Freund)** USA, 1932
Universal Pictures UK

When *The Mummy* was first released, in December 1932, it was poorly received and made only a modest profit, a fact that seems as surprising today, given its long-standing reputation as the third great horror film of the sound era, as it must have been to Universal Studios at the time. Seeking to capitalise on their success with both *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* of the previous year, the company had put together what today would be called the perfect "package": Karl Freund, cinematographer of *Dracula*, as director, John L. Balderston, who had adapted the stage versions of both *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* for the screen, as scriptwriter, and a cast drawn from both films, headed by none other than the Frankenstein monster himself, Boris Karloff – or "Karloff the Uncanny", as Universal's publicity department decided to dub him. And throughout the preceding decade, the world had been gripped by Egyptomania, in consequence of the discovery, by Howard Carter in 1922, of the unopened tomb of the Pharaoh Tutankhamun, an event itself followed by a press-generated conspiracy theory which insisted on greeting the death (however natural and explicable) of any member of Carter's expedition as a direct manifestation of the 'Curse of the Mummy'.

So why did *The Mummy* not do what was known as "boffo business" at the box-office? One reason may have been that it lacked the literary and theatrical pedigrees of its predecessors, allowing critics to treat it with the customary dismissiveness reserved for horror films. *The New York Times*, while praising the scenes of Imhotep's resurrection and burial, concluded, "But most of *The Mummy* is costume melodrama for the children." As Christopher Frayling has pointed out, many people's memories of the film extend no further than the first ten minutes, from which it can be deduced that even children may have found a film in which the main menace appears to do little more than look sinister and spout mumbo-jumbo rather a let-down compared to, say, Dracula's transformative abilities or the Monster's talent for mayhem. Furthermore, according to Leslie Halliwell, women "generally hated" mummy films, which seems rather odd in the case of the 1932 version, given that it is, as much as anything else, a love story, albeit of a decidedly "uncanny" bent. Considering these factors, then, it can perhaps be seen how a horror film with no claims to literary respectability, one which shot its bolt, in terms of shock value, in the opening sequence, and whose 3,700-year-old leading character was unlikely to pose a serious threat to Ronald Colman (or even Bela Lugosi) in the heart-throb stakes was always going to prove something of a hard sell to the film-going public of the day.

Whatever the causes of its initial reception, it can certainly be said that Universal have done their very best to extract every last cent from the film in the DVD era. Single-disc and *Legacy Collection* editions, a double-bill with *Creature From the Black Lagoon*, and now the inevitable 2-Disc Special Edition have all been peddled with a persistence that would make even an Egyptian street-seller pause for breath. So, what's so "special" about this Special Edition? Well, not much, actually. Disc One is exactly the same, even down to the *Classic Monster Collection* label, as the original single-disc edition, while Disc Two comprises three supplemental programmes of wildly varying quality. The first of these is a 25-minute profile of Universal's make-up genius, Jack P. Pierce, entitled *He Who Made Monsters: The Life and Art of Jack Pierce*. Perfectly acceptable, if unremarkable, it includes soundbites from the likes of Christopher Frayling, Kim Newman, and Stephen Jones, along with contributions from make-up artists such as Rick Baker and Tom Savini. All in all, it's rather short on biographical material (the fact that Pierce was born Janus Piccoulas, in Greece, goes unmentioned) and rather long on technical terms such as "collodion" – none of which adequately explains why his heirs, despite all the myriad technical advances available to

them, have failed to produce anything even remotely as memorable as, say Pierce's make-up for Karloff as Ardath Bey, as seen in what remains one of the most terrifying close-ups in cinema history.

Frayling also pops up, looking distinctly out-of-place, in *Unravelling the Legacy of The Mummy*, a remarkably trite, eight-minute waste-of-time principally cobbled together from publicity puffery for the preposterous *The Mummy Returns* (2001). Much more satisfactory, and perhaps the sole reason for investing in the 2-Disc Special Edition if one already owns the single-disc version, is the 1998 documentary, baldly titled *Universal Horror*, made by Kevin Brownlow for Turner Classic Movies in 1998. As one would expect from Brownlow, this is a proper documentary film, not to be confused with the moronic PR exercises all too often palmed off on the paying public as DVD extras, and one can easily imagine it coming as something of a shock to his TCM paymasters, who were probably expecting something rather more bland, to judge by their usual programming efforts. Informed by Brownlow's unsurpassed knowledge of silent film, *Universal Horror* not only paints a fascinating portrait of this most European (and eccentric) of studios, but also illustrates the often direct influence that earlier films, including Paul Wegener's *Der Golem* (1920) and Rex Ingram's *The Magician* (1926), had on directors such as James Whale. Equally absorbing are the first-hand accounts (from author Ray Bradbury, actor James Karen, and the late Forrest J. Ackerman, founder of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine) of the impact the Universal films had on their original release. In addition to the deft narration spoken by Kenneth Branagh, the comments of film historian David J. Skal provide an historical and cultural context too often absent from the (frequently puerile) writings of many of his contemporaries and compatriots in this field. *Universal Horror* has been included as an extra on at least three previous releases, as part of the *Universal Monsters Legacy Collection*, and on the Region 1 75th Anniversary editions of both *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* (the latter still shamefully unreleased on Region 2, thereby depriving a significant portion of the English-speaking world from enjoying the insights of *IJGHS* stalwart Darryl Jones on the subject of Messrs. Lugosi and Karloff), and, if nothing else, one hopes that its inclusion on this Special Edition will spur the DVD release of Brownlow's earlier films, such as *Hollywood* (1980), *Unknown Chaplin* (1983), and *D.W. Griffith: The Father of Film* (1993), to say nothing of his and the late David Gill's restoration of Rex Ingram's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.*

As can be seen, these extras, of whatever standard, are only peripherally connected to *The Mummy* itself, leaving those requiring further information to turn to Paul M. Jensen's commentary. Delivered in a rather dry and schoolmasterly manner not inappropriate to its deliberately-paced subject, it proves most interesting when examining the influence of Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) on the development of the reincarnation and "love across the centuries" themes in *The Mummy*, an influence explained by the fact that John L. Balderston was simultaneously working on an adaptation of the Haggard novel while writing the screenplay of the latter. (Mr. Jensen, however, seems to be unaware of Leslie Halliwell's contention that most of the elements found in *The Mummy* had originally appeared in two short stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle – 'The Ring of Thoth', 1890, and 'Lot No. 249', 1892.) The proposal by Mr. Jensen suggesting the uncredited participation of director Karl Freund in the writing of the script appears, on the evidence presented, to be entirely valid.

Despite certain faults – its leisurely pace, its staginess, and Freund's sometimes clumsy camerawork and editing – *The Mummy* remains the best film of its kind for three reasons: Karloff's subtle and mesmerising performance, Jack Pierce's remarkable make-up, and Balderston's decision to present Imhotep in the modern-day guise of Ardath Bey, thereby making the character both real and even sympathetic, as opposed to a lumbering brute in bandages (the later Universal Mummy films, and Hammer's 1959 version) or a mere prop for increasingly overblown CGI effects (Universal's "franchise" films of recent

vintage). So settle back, and let Karloff the Uncanny “awaken memories of love and crime and death” as only Karloff the Uncanny can . . .

John Exshaw

MULTI-MEDIA REVIEWS

Simon Dark: What Simon Does
(DC Comics, 2008)
Written by Steve Niles and Drawn by Scott Hampton

A word to the wise: If your satanic cult of choice is going to conduct a sacrifice in public it might be an idea to check for anti-heroes with identity issues. At least that's the lesson to be gleaned form the opening pages of *Simon Dark*, the new on-going series from *30 Days of Night* creator Steve Niles and artist Scott Hampton. The title's trade paperback, *What Simon Does*, collects the first six issues and does a reasonable, if somewhat muddled, job at setting up the protagonists and the desolate urban landscape they are forced to call home.

The first thing that jumps out at the reader of *Simon Dark* has nothing to do with the make-up of the story, however, but the choice of imprint. Convention dictating that stories with a darker bent go under their Vertigo umbrella, to see a DC badge on the front cover is an important statement of intent. Unlike Niles' aforementioned gorefest (published by the independent IDW) this book comes with a stamp of reliability, implying the contents will amuse, entertain, occasionally shock and, if things don't work out, some special friends might just make a cameo to keep your interest.

This brings us to a second point of interest, the familiar setting for Simon's story. Not only do we get a world pre-packaged with a reserve cast, we also have another mainstay of the DC universe to play with: Gotham City.

Proof that there is room in town for more than one masked crusader, Simon's neighbourhood is physically and metaphorically miles from the high-rises and low-lifes Bruce Wayne would be used to. If Batman's turf could be described as Manhattan then Simon's is definitely Fort Apache – full of low buildings, blue collar Joes and shoegazing commuters.

From the first pages we are introduced to a murderous, nameless secret society whose rites are interrupted by Simon. When a grateful survivor asks the befuddled hero what he wants in return he tellingly asks for some spare change for food. Bruce Wayne he is not.

The action then cuts to the first of a series of peripheral characters through which we learn more of Simon and his place in the community. Medical examiner Beth Granger is a tired singleton who thinks she has seen it all until coming across some of Simon's handiwork. Working alongside her is detective Tom Kirk, himself damaged goods (albeit in a very different sense) and resigned to Granger's insistence on her dating policy regarding work colleagues – i.e. she doesn't. Also along for the ride is Rachel Dodds, a new girl in town with a yen for Poe and second hand clothes stores.

This brings us to Simon himself, or rather his construction as hero and object of pity. Unlike the morally upright bastions of the DC universe, Simon Dark is a character in a state of moral flux. Aged 17, he is a pastiche of badly-sutured body parts and borrowed memories, with a set of shifting facial features under a poorly stitched mask. Despite his vagrancy he is afforded something approaching affection by the locals, which he, in turn, treats with a nervous gratitude. Simon's existence is a part of urban folklore. One of the refrains throughout the book is a skipping song sung by girl playing in the streets – a repetitive chant

designed to quicken the heart but keep the feet in check. Like a bogeyman Simon is scary enough to make the hardest men turn on their heels and run – but only if they deserve it.

Like any good adolescent, Simon's demons come both from within and without. Constantly struggling to establish his identity he is a mix of the scientific and the magical. His powers appear limited to enhanced strength and agility but it is his state of being between life and death that neatly sums up his predicament. Eventually it becomes obvious that his savagery is not a product of bile but ignorance and a debilitating lack of empathy. Simon's story thus is not about saving the world but dealing with his freakishness without the aid of a benevolent parental influence: a Frankenstein's monster for the emo generation, if you will.

So how does the story 'hang' together? About as well as Simon's stitching. As a writer Niles has a proven record of coming up with good concepts but his follow-through remains weak. By throwing his major players together in the very first scene he creates a seal on the story that makes the other characters have to work that much harder to gain a foothold in. His plotting also relies on a series of mini-twists that reach for subtlety but come off as insubstantial. As for the arch-villain, Vincent, he comes across as little more than comedic relief. The depiction of the police as fundamentally ignorant of Simon's existence rings hollow and the only outliers to the conspiracy arc, Beth and Rachel, seem little more than emotional crutches providing maternal and romantic support respectively. Most annoyingly, Simon comes through his first real test relatively unscathed. Ending on a note of enlightenment, he has little difficulty achieving his goals and making new friends. There's barely a tense moment in the 140+ pages.

As for Hampton's artwork, his reliance on Photoshop to layer images creates some startling effects, even if some pages come across as over-worked. His panel work is exemplary and the uniform guttering makes for a finely compressed read. His weakness, however, lies in character detail, where a painterly style does not lend itself well to illustrating a large cast in confined spaces. Caught in any dark alley Kirk, Vincent or any of the cultists could easily be mistaken for each other while Rachel and Beth could pass for sisters, a disservice to both characters.

Cold, lonely and hungry, *Simon Dark* makes for an intriguing character, but this first shot at an ongoing series displays too much impatient plotting and an array of barely distinguishable characters united by a costumed freak wearing Freddie Krueger's spare jumper. What does Simon do? Well he's not altogether sure. In all likelihood, neither are his creators.

Niall Kitson

Silent Hill: Origins
(Developer: Konami)
Platform: PSP (review copy), Playstation 2

A small town lies swaddled in mist, the only sound the steady clip clop of your footsteps as you walk down the street. A slow hiss begins to emanate from your pocket radio and you hear the shuffled steps of one of the towns twisted inhabitants as it slowly makes its way towards you. Your heart leaps, adrenaline kicks in and you start wildly swinging the iron bar in your hands, hoping to connect with the monsters head. No, it's not Limerick on a Friday night, it's Silent Hill.

Silent Hill has been one of horror gaming's mainstays since the 1990's. Originally released on PlayStation, it was a direct competitor of Capcom's *Resident Evil*, taking on the giant of the Survival Horror Genre with its all consuming mist and haunting sound track. Focusing more on psychological horror and eerie atmospherics rather than *Resident's Evil* concern with taking on traditional horror conventions (zombies, Lovecraftian monsters known as the hunters and an evil corporation), *Silent Hill* did it's best to upset the player, using off kilter camera angles, strange sounds and hideous monsters dredged up from your character's subconscious.

The original *Silent Hill* game centred on a protagonist named Harry Mason who was trying to find his daughter Cheryl after a car accident on the outskirts of the town. Harry quickly found himself embroiled in a tale of demons, drugs and insane local townspeople. At the time, *Silent Hill* was a significant step forward in horror gaming. Unlike *Resident Evil*, which relied on limited ammunition and zombies jumping out of wardrobes to scare you, *Silent Hill* made use of more obviously filmic conventions. The town was covered in a mist that reduced your field of vision (a necessity for the game in that the Playstation did not have the processing power to fully render the towns buildings) and added to the sense of isolation within the game. The gamer was given a pocket radio that hissed with static when the monsters that swarmed the town were nearby and even a torch used to light your way added a fear factor, with the light guiding monsters towards you. Full of scares, *Silent Hill* was a massive success for Konami, resulting in four sequels and one prequel.

That prequel game is *Silent Hill: Origins*, launched a few months before the next generation version *Silent Hill: Homecoming* is due out in the shops. In *Origin*'s you take on the role of trucker Travis Grady as he narrowly misses running over a young girl standing on the middle of the road. Running after her to see if she's ok, Travis finds a house on fire and the screams of the girl coming from within. Entering the house, Travis rescues the girl but collapses as he leaves the flame engulfed home. He wakes up in Silent Hill and goes in search of the mysterious girl, at which point the player takes over, guiding Travis around Silent Hill in his quest to find the girl.

Origins follows many of the conventions developed in the previous games, with the player having a radio that hisses with static when a monster is nearby, a torch that draws enemy's to you and a focus on melee weapons. The game develops many of the existing ideas within the Silent Hill Universe. Melee weapons now break after a certain number of uses, the relative strength of the weapon dependent on what it is made of, For instance a wooden fence post is only good for one or two strikes against a monster whereas a crowbar lasts much longer and kills enemies more quickly. In
previous games when your character ran he or she would gasp for breath, but this wouldn't affect your gameplay. Now, as Travis runs he slows down, eventually stopping to gasp for breath, leaving you

exposed to attacks. You can replenish his stamina with energy drinks, but as in all survival horror games, such resources are limited.

The game also returns the player to the concept of the real world and the other world, with the latter being a twisted and decayed version of the former. In previous games, an air raid siren would sound and you find yourself transported to the other world, watching rust and rot settle in and strange sculptures appear, made up of bodies and barb wire. In *Origins*, rather than have to wait with trepidation for the siren to sound, Travis can purposely jump between the real world and the other world. This happens when he touches mirrors scattered throughout the game. The transition from one world into the other is used as a plot device in which Travis can move past obstacles in one world which are not present in the other, or solve puzzles to the same effect. Whilst this expands game play it does remove some of the suspense and unease present in earlier incarnations of the game. Previously, when the siren sounded you knew something bad was about to happen and there was nothing you could do about it. In *Origins* you can just touch a mirror and reappear in the relative safety of the real world. The player has more control over the game, and as a result the sense of genuine trepidation present before is lessened considerably.

One of the more interesting factors within *Silent Hill* games has been its recognition of the fact that in the real world, most people are not particularly weapons savvy. Consequently, they will not be expert shots when they pick up guns and go chasing after monsters. The series followed this by having the game character miss his or her shots and a reliance on melee weapons. *Origins* is no different, although in this incarnation, melee weapons break after a certain number of uses, adding an extra level of stress when your fighting a demonic nurse and the drip stand your hitting her with shatters. Weapons control is simple to use, although selecting a weapon during a fight can be awkward resulting in the player just punching their attacker.

Of particular note is the music used throughout the game. *Silent Hill* games have always had an eerie and effective soundtrack and *Origins* is no different in the regard either. The soundtrack is based on the original music for *Silent Hill* by Akira Yamaoka who added such a level of creepiness to the series that the soundtrack was released on a CD and much of it was used in Christophe Gan's 2006 film adaptation. Visually the game looks excellent on the PSP, with the environments and character models fitting in excellently with the games pervious versions. As with most *Silent Hill* games, the monsters are nasty masses of twisted flesh and meat.

Origin follows many of the conventions established by the original series, but fails to deliver on the scares. The fifteens rating allocated to the game can be seen in the toned down violence and limited scares, with the abundance of weapons meaning you rarely go into a fight without being fully prepared. In addition, and more seriously, the games writers appear to have assumed that the players are fully aware of what a *Silent Hill* game involves. Travis expresses no surprise when attacked by one of the town's warped denizens for the first time. Also, the reasoning behind why he tries to track down the girl he nearly runs over (who is later revealed as Alessa, the girl sacrificed to a demon in the original game) is never really explained. A further level of confusion can be added by the lack of explanation regarding why Travis's radio starts to make noise when an enemy approaches. Travis just seems to accept all these things, leading to a high level of disconnection from the game. You just don't care if Travis survives or solves the mystery of the town. Later in the game [plot spoiler] it's discovered that Travis's mother spent much of her time in the town's sanatorium, with Travis never acknowledging that he has been there before. This tendency to 'jump' the plot has been a problem in previous *Silent Hill* games, with the main story never quite making sense, even after multiple play throughs. During play, this is not much of an

issue, as you become too involved in trying to ensure Travis survives whatever is happening on screen. However, the ending of the games can be less than satisfying, with issues raised throughout the game never quite being resolved and large leaps in logic being made which can be quite hard to follow. For example, Travis's mother was once a patient in the towns Sanatorium with many of the monsters reflect this (such as twisted figures who vaguely resemble people in strait jackets and an animated cage that casts the shadow of a screaming woman). However, the only way to know this is to read online guides as the information provided in the game is vague at best. The film version suffered from many of the same problems, particularly an over convoluted plot and an ending that just didn't quite make sense.

Silent Hill: Origins does not add much to the mythology of the Silent Hill Universe, playing more like a reminder to gamers that the franchise still exists and is holding on for dear life to its existence. Whilst the game does have some interesting innovations, and the occasional scare, this is not sufficient to hold the players interest, with poor storytelling throughout leaving gaps in logic that are hard to follow at times. The emotionless nature of Travis also serves to distance the player from the gameplay, making it hard to sympathise with his circumstances or encourage you to play on and solve the latest mystery at the heart of Silent Hill.

Eoin Murphy

Silent Hill: Origins
Graphics: 8
Gameplay: 6
Sound: 8
Replay Value: 3
Overall Score: 6

The Mystery Play
(Vertigo, 2008)
Written by Grant Morrison and Drawn by John J. Muth

Grant Morrison's *The Mystery Play* opens with one of the more interesting starts to a graphic novel I've read in quite a while, beginning with the creation of Adam and Eve, the arrival of Lucifer to tempt them, and the somewhat untimely death of God himself.

Morrison's graphic novel takes its inspiration from the early Medieval Mystery Plays, re-enactments of passages from the Bible rewritten into verse and performed by local amateurs. Mystery Plays were soon taken over by the Guilds, with each guild taking control of one story or scene within the play as a whole and guarding its verse with extreme suspicion of anyone wanting to view it. Mystery Plays were, in fact, the precursor to the wandering troupes of actors that are the forebears of modern theatre.

The story opens with a re-enactment of a Mystery Play by Townely town council, a small mining community in Yorkshire which has seen tough times as a result of Margaret Thatcher's New Right policies and an horrific crime which occurred years earlier. During the play, the actor who plays God is murdered with the body shown in a beautiful, but slightly blasphemous manner: the almighty himself is pictured lying face down on the ground with his robes pulled up to show his stripped boxer shorts.

Following the death of 'God', the police arrive, with the investigation taken over by the bearded Detective Sergeant Carpenter, who quickly becomes obsessed with the case and haunted by Townley itself, continuously and almost obsessively talking, about how every act that occurs around a murder scene – from a flock of birds flying overhead, to finding a spent Catherine Wheel firework – has some significance to the case. Throughout the course of his investigation Carpenter is followed by Annie Woolf, a report for the local paper desperate to make it into the National Press and who feels that this story is the one to take her there. Of course, what she finds out is all the more startling than she could have imagined.

As Carpenter moves throughout the town interviewing its inhabitants, he is occasionally overtaken by hallucinations. One particularly well scripted scene involves him interviewing the actor who played Lucifer, with the art work slowly transforming him into a devilish visage as they discuss the nature of truth.

Running in parallel to the investigation is the mystery of Carpenter himself. Christ allegories run through the writing, and Carpenter (not just a coincidental name, of course) even undergoes his own apparent 40 days in the desert of being tempted by Satan. At one point, after visiting a child's bedroom in an abandoned house, Carpenter cuts himself on broken glass, a panel revealing the stigmata like bleeding which results. The allegory is even carried through to the inevitable conclusion in which the townsfolk crucify Carpenter before he miraculously manages to escape, an event captured in the image of a jacket nailed to a cross and blowing in the wind.

The art work throughout is excellent, with Muth providing realistic and occasionally disturbing images, particularly the autopsy of 'God' and one unpleasant scene involving a brothel madam eating what first looks like a giant spider, one leg at a time. Some of the scenes depicted are stunning, encouraging the

reader to just sit and look at a panel without any dialogue for minutes at a time to take in all the detail. Muth has excelled himself throughout the novel.

Morrison's writing is, as always, highly effective and full of symbolism, encouraging repeated readings so that one can embrace the full meaning of the text. *The Mystery Play* is a gothic graphic novel at its best, forcing the reader to face uncomfortable truths throughout, both through its writing and through its art. For those interested in graphic novels filled with twists and turns and the dawning realisation of unpleasant truths, this is well worth reading.

Rico Ramirez,
Buenos Aires Correspondent

New Media Retrospectives #1: Clive Barker's Undying
(Developer: DreamWorks Interactive)
Platform: PC-CD ROM

As in all preceding eras, the technology of the twenty-first century has been intrinsic to both the spreading and shaping of the Gothic. The Gothic has disseminated its conventions between new media and traditional literature, evolving in the process. This critical concern is nowhere more apparent than in the release of Clive Barker's *Undying* in 2001, written by the popular horror author of the same name. Clearly, the game's title makes a serious statement about its authentic heavyweight horror credentials, claiming to be both a legitimate extension of Barker's existing literary and filmic fiction, and an alternative text that is equally worthy of critical respect. Without even delving into the game's contents, then, *Clive Barker's Undying* is steeped in Gothic identity. However, does the game itself stand up to the author's texts represented by other mediums, and is it capable of engaging with the theoretical aspects of the Gothic in a similarly effective way?

This is a tall order. However, Clive Barker rises to the role of author admirably, investing a large portion of his own effort into the game. Not only did he write the game's story, but he also provided his voice for one of the characters. It clearly shows. In the introductory cutscene it is explained that the main character, Patrick Galloway, an Irish paranormal investigator, has returned from the Great War after receiving a letter from his old friend, Jeremiah Covenant. This letter informs him of an outbreak of supernatural activity on a small island off the coast of Ireland, at Covenant's manor home. This sequence upholds the game's equality with its brethren texts, having the cinematic quality of film, and the well-written dialogue of a Gothic novel. In fact, Clive Barker's other material, particularly his films and comic books, with their emphasis on creating complimentary combinations of images and writing, make particularly suitable bedfellows to the videogame medium. *Clive Barker's Undying*, unlike many other horror games, through its focus on equalizing storytelling to visuals, re-enforces this symbiosis. Compared to his more recent efforts of videogame design with *Jericho*, released in 2007, Clive Barker's efforts in creating complex characters and situations in *Undying*, pays off. The problem with *Jericho* was its substitution of traditional horror through narrative and environmental atmosphere with an overuse of visually thrilling, but ultimately shallow combat. This is a charge which is often laid at the feet of videogames, with plot and characterisation eschewed for explosions and big guns. The videogame *Black* is a perfect example of this with the game's developers deliberately ignoring any depth to the game,instead focusing on set pieces and graphics. *Clive Barker's Undying*, however, focuses on authentic storytelling through visuals and writing, which is to expected from a writer of Barker's calibre.

The technology that represents this period environment renders it suitably atmospheric. The game utilizes the Unreal graphics engine, which, despite being seven years old, still looks impressive. Although newer graphics engines have made it appear obsolete, *Clive Barker's Undying* doesn't merely rely on the Unreal engine to deliver quality visuals. Rather than focussing on graphics in isolation, it uses the technology as a stepping-stone for a higher cause: to arrange such power artistically and atmospherically in order to accurately represent the game's period history environment. These environment surroundings are clear and sharp, yet they appear realistically decayed, perfectly constructing the antiquated world through modern technological means. Stone slabs flicker menacingly against torchlight, cobwebs wispily sway from ceilings and the sound of the wind conveys a sense of foreboding that permeates the entire island. Indeed, the design of the landscape and its buildings present a Gothic environment which is varied, never

repetitive, yet consistent in its period design. Excluding the continuity-breaking tropical rainforest and 'hovering hell' segments, the island environment appears as a single believable world tied together by the game's early-twentieth-century period perspective, rather than appear as a series of disparate, disembodied levels. It contains many interconnected locales, many of which echo the historical and literary Gothic past that it replicates so well. There's the Victorian-influenced Covenant Manor, a crumbling Catholic Cathedral, and a series of mysterious standing stone circles positioned out on the island's headland. Not only does *Clive Barker's Undying* re-envision the Gothic sites of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century, but it also holds connections to early-twentieth-century Gothic; the period in which the game is set. The twisted, tentacle-based enemies which appear in Barker's game are clearly inspired by the imagination of an earlier horror author: H.P. Lovecraft. Also, the turn-of-the-century weaponry, which consists of revolvers, shotguns and dynamite, is borrowed from literature contemporary to the game's depicted period, such as Bram Stoker's *The Lair of the White Worm*, or Lovecraft's own tales. Here, *Clive Barker's Undying*, in including stock elements of subject matter from the Gothic novel, positions itself and the medium it represents as an equally viable alternative to written storytelling.

The character's journals in *Clive Barker's Undying* also allows the conventions of Gothic writing itself to be transplanted into the new technological medium through which the game is created. Throughout the game, the player encounters readable journals and diaries of each of the characters, such as Patrick Galloway and the Covenant family members, which give insights into their psychologies. These characters are largely two-dimensional when met and then fought face to face, their complex inner lives revoked when they transform into visually horrific creatures to do battle. However, the writing, in its intentionally rambling and stuttering style, does contribute to the sense of Lovecraftian uneasiness and paranoia.

This disparity between surface and psychological horror, however, is one of the primary drawbacks of *Clive Barker's Undying*. The game primarily uses its graphics and sound to create tension, often eschewing its more complex psychological and historical elements for quick and violent thrills. One memorable example is when exploring the ruined medieval abbey on the far side of the island, the player is attacked by mad monks. This unquestioning violence, while initially shocking, does not develop any of the history that the monks and their religious surroundings would otherwise reveal; subject matter which most Gothic novels would not miss the chance to explore. Thus, in delivering its brand of shock horror, the game is in constant danger of isolating itself from the rich heritage it recreates virtually, undermining the effort it puts into being an authentic alternative to the novels that it takes for its inspiration.

One of the most important critical concerns that the game deals with, with varying degrees of success, is the search for a true Irish national identity, free from religious conflict. *Clive Barker's Undying* consistently demonises the symbolism of religion upon a visual surface level, whether it be the aforementioned monks and the hidden secrets scattered around their ruined monastery, or the equally demonic, pseudo-Protestant Covenant family and its supernatural experimentation. Here, both sides of Ireland's historical conflict are re-imagined, imbued with Gothic negativity. They are both set of land-grabbers who use prescribed ritualism to suppress their true intent to colonise the island and abuse its secret powers. Where the Catholic inhabitants are intent on proving the supernatural happenings are a divine testing and ultimate affirmation of their own religion's legitimacy, the Covenant family attempt to study and harness these powers in furthering their attempts to transform the island into a scientifically enlightened, rational home for the British subject. Both are equally paranoid and in the end, come to be dominated by the demons that enflame their obsession. The game, played through the eyes of Patrick

Galloway, an individual who has served in the Great War, presents nationalism as a lost cause, a concept that is inseparable from the chaos it rallies its people against.

Much like the Lovecraft novels which it references, the game uses the literal presence of physical demons as manifestations, stand-ins even, for psychological ones; a tangible representation of the underlying universal despair that such a conflict as the Great War might cause. Playing as the combat-hardened veteran Galloway, the player has the unique supernatural talent of 'scrying', an ability to read into the scenery to reveal the underlying horror that the everyday world hides. While this is an innovative and effective gameplay feature that leads to some genuinely horrific moments, it captures such horror in its mere surface visuality, denying it a deeper, psychological meaning. In one of the game's key moments, the player approaches a family painting which depicts all five members of the Covenant family. Using the scry ability, these subjects are momentarily transformed into the demonic versions of themselves. Thus, what lies beneath, the inner identity of these people, is just as much a surface as that which existed before investigation. Much like the mad monks, these enemies have no true narrative origins, and Clive Barker's game fails to fully deliver on its promise of plot and characterisation, key ingredients which would otherwise make it an equal alternative to his literary horror.

Although *Clive Barker's Undying* doesn't fully use its virtual powers to achieve its aim of raising the Gothic videogame to a standard comparable with the novel or film variant, these technical elements are impressive in themselves, and are combined to make a game that is, if nothing else, fun to play. Its innovative gameplay features such as the scrying ability are put to great use in producing their horrific visual effects, ensuring that the resulting shocks will stick long in the mind after the game has been completed. Even though it fails to live up to the name it bears, *Clive Barker's Undying* valiantly does what a good horror videogame should do. It expertly creates and sustains tension before releasing it at effectively timed moments.

Stuart Lindsay

Clive Barker's Undying
Graphics: 7
Gameplay: 8
Sound: 9
Replay Value: 7

TELEVISION REVIEWS

"We're Coming to Get You": Charlie Brooker's *Dead Set*

(e4, 27th October – 1st November 2008)

"Whose house do you think you're standing in, you stupid speck of shit." So states (without inflection, and hence without a question or exclamation mark) obnoxious boss Patrick, a producer who effectively elects himself *Big Brother* in Charlie Brooker's recent "zombies-in-the-*Big*-*Brother*-house" mini-series, *Dead Set*. Even without the fascinating commentary on power and the individual which the inclusion of the character of Patrick brings to the programme, this would be pretty fine stuff. With it, the entire production becomes something that I certainly hope will endure as one of the more memorable and thought-provoking televisual horror offerings of recent years. Brooker, the show's creator, is a *Guardian* journalist and television critic famous for diatribes against the cult of celebrity, mass culture and pretty much everything else, and whose recent collection of TV writing, *Dawn of the Dumb* (2007) carries the Romero reference in the title through to a cover featuring a gun-toting Brooker poised to take on legions of the undead. It is unsurprising therefore that *Dead Set*, despite participating in this culture, equally functions as a trenchant, even damning critique of the vapid self-promotion and desperation for fame with which modern society appears to be consumed. Nevertheless, e4 itself, despite being the sister channel of Channel 4, which (at least occasionally) offers viewers innovative and challenging material, both fictional and non-fictional, is dominated by the twin institutions of the *Big Brother* behemoth and *Hollyoaks*, a sensationalist, over-produced paean to the reality-TV generation. As such, then, Brooker's blood-spattered, allusion-heavy production, in which Davina McCall herself goes from groomed über-host to growling flesh-eater in the space of a single episode, sits rather strangely in the middle of the very cultural vehicle which it so unrelentingly derides.

The series (which ran to five episodes of varying length on either side of Halloween 2008 – a reminder that the Halloween season runs right through until Guy Fawkes Day in the UK) is based on an elegantly simple premise. While the population of Britain (it is somewhat unclear if the rest of the world, or indeed Ireland, has been affected – perhaps this is seen as immaterial) is systematically transformed into a vast and unstoppable horde of seemingly mindless, flesh-guzzling zombie, the usual miss-matched collection of self-promoting wannabes, and a few members of the staff who film and control their lives, find themselves occupying a smaller and smaller enclave of safety within the *Big Brother* house and its environs. Our Final Girl, significantly, is not in fact a "housemate," but a lowly runner on the production team. Kelly (played convincingly by Jamie Winstone), rather than being the one who doesn't have sex (the usual characteristic which distinguishes the Final Girl and which somehow keeps her safe from the ravaging monsters), is therefore set apart from almost all of the other female characters by dint of the fact that she is behind, rather than in front of the cameras (and somewhat more modest sartorially). In an interesting take on the usual device (employed in *I Am Legend* in particular) of having the main character physiologically immune from whatever virus has caused the zombie epidemic, Kelly's job quite literally places her outside of the attention-grabbing hysteria which, initially at least, is the thing which unites the housemates, and indeed some of the other characters.

This marked tendency both to work within and subtly to alter the concerns and motifs of the genre is carried through to other elements of the film. The overwhelmingly claustrophobic mood is intensified rather than broken by the subplot, in which Kelly's boyfriend Riq (they had a fight immediately before disaster struck) tries to reach her, teaming up with another survivor named Alex. After holing up in a

country house, where he can access the live *Big Brother* online feed, which allows him to see that Kelly is still alive, he convinces Alex to go and try to find her, and they leave by boat. Cue some lovely atmospheric and deeply creepy scenes as they drift along a calm river surrounded by dense fog, which could (and, as it transpires, does) hide some pretty nasty things. When Riq finally does get to the film studios, we are treated to an almost compulsory Romero reference; Marky, a housemate who has been picking zombies off from the roof with a very large gun, very nearly kills Kelly's beau by mistake, creating a moment of audience trepidation which is allayed in the next episode.

However, this temporary relief (which leads us to think that, unlike Romero's Ben from *Night of the Living Dead*, Riq might just save the day) serves only to lull us into a false sense of security, by exploiting the intertextual knowledge of a genre-savvy audience. Thus, while the opening of Episode 5 seems to imply that *Dead Set* is alluding to but not engaging in the bleak, post-apocalyptic despair of that most seminal of zombie movies, the ending, which finally convinced me that I was watching something really very good, is about as bleak as they come. In the final few minutes, it is revealed that every character has been zombified, including the resourceful Kelly, in spite of her desperate last stand against the heaving, shambling masses which ultimately break into the compound. Moreover, the final frames of the programme radically undermine the positioning of Kelly as a Final Girl, a survivor who never succumbs to the temptations which doom those around her – in this case, celebrity culture and the cult of the image-simulacrum. Instead, we are left with a shot of her staring vacantly into a camera which continues to roll as the human world collapses around it, and beaming her image to countless television sets all over Britain which were never switched off – a spectacle watched, it would seem, by millions of other zombies. More chilling still, not only has she joined them in their remorseless desire to consume human flesh, but neither she nor Riq are even filmed as leaving the *Big-Brother* house. The world of superficial stardom and "ten seconds of fame" has won out; she too has been seduced, and there will be no escape.

E4's website for the show (http://www.e4.com/deadset/) cleverly extends the critique of celebrity culture and mass media representational strategies at the same time as utilising, feeding into and perpetuating it. The site includes mocked-up tabloid articles on each housemate, Kelly's emails from the morning of the outbreak, Riq's Facebook page and a David-Brent-gone-evil interview with the vile Patrick. There's also a picture gallery, of which the set of "teaser" pictures released before the series began is a personal favourite, focusing mainly on blood-stained light switches and prostrate female legs clad in high heels. The close-up of dead flies on a white, industrial surface is a particularly nice touch, extending the programmes' highly effectively conjuring up of the sense of realism and of a situation vaster than could ever fully be portrayed.

Even more interesting is the discussion of power which comes into play when Patrick first makes contact with the beleaguered housemates. When he utters the line with which I began this review, he is standing in the control room of the house, setting the industrial shutters to plunge the house's interior into darkness and turning on a blaring siren until Kelly begs him to desist. This initial play of authority – and his self-positioning as Big Brother, the owner and ruler of the house in which the others have become trapped – is far from short-lived, but becomes even more vital in Episode 4. Convinced that escape is the only option, he hatches a reasonably well thought-out plan to distract the zombies with body parts from a dead housemate, Grayson, the by-now obligatory housemate of ambivalent gender (a rather perfunctory engagement with issues of sexuality and indeed race is perhaps the one major failing here). What follows is surprisingly gory, even in a mini-series about flesh-eating zombies – Patrick doesn't just dismember Grayson; he seems to find it necessary to disembowel him as well, yanking out bloody entrails and becoming himself more blood-spattered than Johnny Depp in *Sleepy Hollow* (only much less prettily).

The tyrant who descends to appalling atrocities in order to push home his point that his way is the best way, like Macbeth (only much less nobly), his own terrible deeds are revisited upon him, as the zombies inevitably fall on him in the final episode, in their turn dragging out and devouring his livid intestines.

While his character seems to be a pretty straightforward *homage* to Captain Rhodes in Romero's *Day of the Dead*, who is also a reprehensible authority figure who receives his just deserts at the hands (and teeth) of the undead, he also serves to add yet another dimension to the show's central critique. Trapped in the labyrinthine corridors around the house proper, Patrick and vacuous evictee Pippa must be rescued by Kelly and the surviving housemates (not least because this is the only way to stop him from persecuting them with the apparatus of the house itself). In an effort to stop his whining, Kelly yells "We're coming to get you!" ominously echoing the words uttered by Davina when Pippa is evicted, a mass-media event which almost seems to trigger the zombie outbreak – and, of course, the famous "They're coming to get you, Barbara!" from Romero's original. The alteration in pronouns here seems significant, blurring the boundaries even before the final scenes (this occurs in Episode 4) between housemates and zombies; and between Davina's eviction-night extravaganza and the liberation of trapped human beings from a space infested with the dead. In a world where everyone and anyone can be gripped by the bug of celebrity, as it were, it's hard to tell who's in charge and who's at their mercy; who's benign and who's malevolent; who's living, and who's dead.

There is a new world order, even in the house, were are being told; piffling rules and men barking orders have no place in a zombified Britain, and neither do those who seek to opt out and live independent, private lives. Now, it would seem the sole and supreme ruler is the television screen itself – or perhaps the camera, which keeps running, long after its human operators have ceased to be able to use it in any kind of creative way. Instead, they (or what is left of them) can only stare blankly at one another – and, by extension, at us staring blankly back at them – probably forever.

DARA DOWNEY

The Simpsons: Treehouse of Horror
(20th Century 1990-present)

The Simpsons may have made their full-length television debut with a Christmas episode ('Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire'), but in the nineteen years since they've made Halloween their signature holiday with the annual "Treehouse of Horror" episode. First introduced in October 1990 in the show's second season, the "Treehouse of Horror" series now amounts to fifty-seven individual segments over nineteen episodes to date (plus extras, in the form of opening and closing credits sequences and their associated trappings, such as the alternate scary names for cast and crew that get more elaborate by the year – Dan Blackulaneta, for example). Over the years, *The Simpsons* has parodied and paid homage to all kinds of supernatural and extra-terrestrial beasties culled from popular culture, and taken pot-shots at television censors, politicians, and the television programmers that now regularly schedule the show to appear in November. At its best, the Halloween special has re-enacted classic horror movies ('King Homer'; 'The Shinning'; 'Nightmare on Evergreen Terrace') and television shows (*The Twilight Zone*-inspired 'Clown Without Pity'; 'Terror at 5½ Feet' and 'Homer3', among others, proving especially memorable) and squeezed many a gem into the introductory segments that anticipate the main attractions (Marge's warnings; Bart and Homer's *Outer Limits*-styled takeover of the airwaves; Homer's stint as Alfred Hitchcock). In recent years, though, it has faltered somewhat, displaying the same kind of patchiness that has been evident in latter-day *Simpsons* as a whole, and showing signs of the law of diminishing returns to which horror franchises are so fatally prone.

It started on a real high with the trio of 'Bad Dream House' (a spin on *The Amityville Horror*); 'Hungry are the Damned' (based on a *Twilight Zone* episode 'To Serve Man', itself based on a short story of the same name) and the real highlight, 'The Raven'. The latter, read by James Earl Jones, is plainly conceived and brilliantly executed, casting Homer as the poem's main character, Marge as the lost Lenore and Bart as the raven (just one of a series of appearances by Edgar Allan Poe which reached its zenith in Season 9's episode 'Lisa the Simpson', which featured Bart and Homer whooping to the fall of the House of Usher on a fictional Fox special, *When Buildings Collapse*). Indeed, the first nine instalments of the "Treehouse of Horror" produced moment after moment of perfectly-honed horror pastiche, from 'The Devil and Homer Simpson' (in which Homer sells his soul for a donut and faces a trial by the jury of the damned, including Benedict Arnold, Lizzie Borden and the then-still-very-much-alive Richard Nixon) to 'The Thing and I', where Bart's discovery that he was born with a conjoined brother (Hugo) who now lives in the attic leads to the revelation that it is Bart himself who is the evil twin. As the show really hit its stride, its experiments became more elaborate (most obviously in the Tron-inflected 3-D animation of 'Homer3') – but also with more and more playful narratives in which advertisements come to life and terrorise Springfield ('Attack of the 50-Foot Eyesores') or Itchy and Scratchy break down the fourth wall of the Simpsons' world ('The Terror of Tiny Toon'). Throughout its run as a whole, the show has also maintained a healthy propensity towards punning in their tradition of scary names, and for segment titles – the best from the show's heyday probably being 'The HΩmega Man' and 'Clown Without Pity'. In recent years in particular, these titles have veered more and more towards the tortured (and I must confess I'm very fond of a tortured pun, as is probably evident from the film section…), giving us such classics as 'You Gotta Know When to Golem' and (my favourite) 'I've Grown a Costume on Your Face'…

Equally, though it has sometimes seemed that more attention has been paid to lexical histrionics than the subject matter itself in some of the more recent episodes. Overall, the quality has certainly dipped, and

has gone hand in hand with the downturn in quality in a lot of contemporary horror cinema – parodies of the likes of I Know What You Did Last Summer ('I Know What You Diddily-Iddily-Did') just don't quite cut it (although, in Homer's advice as to where each member of the family should take shelter from their pursuer, it does provide one of the show's funniest Halloween gags: "Marge, you hide in the abandoned amusement park. Lisa, the pet cemetery. Bart, spooky roller disco. And I'll go skinny dipping in that lake where the sexy teens were killed one hundred years ago tonight"). Too often of late, the show has tended to feature at least one segment per episode that merely retreads a recent release in a manner that is just a bit too straightforward – 'The Island of Dr Hibbert' (The Island of Dr Moreau), for example, or this year's 'Untitled Robot Parody' (Transformers). Indeed, 2008's offering proved notoriously weak, not even fulfilling the Halloween brief. One of the segments – 'Mr and Mrs Simpson' – is an uninspired take on Mr & Mrs Smith, while 'E.T., Go Home' recasts recurring favourite Kodos as a less-than-cuddly extra-terrestrial in a tiresome alien invasion story that had been done better in earlier, superior Halloween specials. This was particularly true in the 1996 election special 'Citizen Kang', a personal favourite, in which Homer uncovers an alien plot to replace then presidential candidates Bill Clinton and Bob Dole with Kang and Kodos, which leads to some quite blunt (but equally funny) satire along the lines of:

Kent Brockman: Senator Dole, why should people vote for you instead of President Clinton?
Kang: It makes no difference which one of us you vote for. Either way, your planet is doomed. DOOMED!
Kent: Well, a refreshingly frank response there from Senator Bob Dole.

And, when they are unmasked as the "hideous space reptiles" that they really are:

Kodos: It's true, we are aliens. But what are you going to do about it? It's a two-party system; you have to vote for one of us.
Man 1: He's right, this is a two-party system.
Man 2: Well, I believe I'll vote for a third-party candidate.
Kang: Go ahead, throw your vote away.

This impulse for political subversion still endures in the Halloween specials, though, and election time still seems to bring out the best in the *Simpsons* writers. The most recent "Treehouse of Horror" was first broadcast in the US a few days before Election Day, and boasted an introductory segment in which Homer's efforts at voting for Barack Obama are thwarted at every turn by a "haunted" voting machine that registers each vote for Obama as a vote for John McCain, before turning violent…

The rest of the episode that followed (tired *Transformers* parody aside) marked something of a return to form, certainly improving on the previous year's effort. This was particularly true of the final segment ('It's the Grand Pumpkin, Milhouse), which paid good-natured homage to another festive animated favourite, the *Peanuts* specials. This was a literal reanimation, then, which recreated *Peanuts*' signature animation style for Springfield and recast Springfield's inhabitants as characters from Charles Schultz's cartoons. This kind of playfulness is also evident in what is probably the best gothic sequence to have made a *Simpsons* appearance in recent years. This was not included in a Halloween special at all, but in a Season 18 episode ('Yokel Chords') in which Bart's story of the so-called "Dark Stanley murders" at school is animated in the style of macabre artist Edward Gorey (whose work has influenced the likes of Tim Burton, for one). This inventive and beautifully animated sequence managed to inject new life into the show's long-standing tradition of paying tribute to the gothic where that year's Halloween special had fallen flat, an upward spiral that continued into the most recent "Treehouse of Horror" itself. It looks like

things might be on the up for *The Simpsons* horror oeuvre, then, and it may well continue on the trajectory envisioned by Kodos in 'Citizen Kang', moving "forward, not backward; upward, not forward; and always twirling, twirling, twirling towards freedom!"

JENNY McDONNELL

Weird Science: *Fringe*
(Sky, October 2008 - Present)

Coming as it does from the creative team responsible for the hugely successful (and famously convoluted) Lost, Fringe arrived freighted with more expectations than most paranormal themed television shows, although in fairness, given that the likes of *Medium*, *Supernatural* and *Ghost Whisperer* had been the most prominent representatives of the sub genre in recent years, the bar hasn't been set all that high of late. The basic premise – a team working for the FBI investigates "unusual" cases which defy conventional law enforcement methods – is of course almost identical to that of *The X-Files*, and indeed, many of the mysteries dealt with here would also have suited the deductive talents of Mulder and Scully. The main difference plot wise is that whilst it was the mysterious abduction of Mulder's sister and the alien-conspiracy takeover plot which resulted which provided the all important (and tedious) arc for that series, here, it is the so called "Pattern" – a series of mysterious and generally gory incidents said to result from the actions of rogue scientists operating on the "Fringes" of ethically responsible science – which drives the narrative (and provides the title).

Whilst fans of *Lost* are no doubt scouring the series for interconnections with that series, and there are undoubted similarities (such as the predilection for last minute twists and the fact that the soundtrack pays frequent homage to the famous *Lost* "wooshing" sound which closes scenes), it is another, earlier J.J. Abrams show which has most in common with *Fringe: Alias*. Though initially marketed as an action adventure/espionage show, the most compelling, and ultimately maddening thing about *Alias* was the ever present "Rambaldi" subplot, which concerned the inventions of a Leonardo Da Vinci-style Sixteenth Century inventor named Milo Rambaldi whose mysteriously advanced inventions, the McGuffin at the heart of many of the shows finest episodes, frequently edged *Alias* into the realm of Science Fiction. Similarly, *Fringe* also hinges upon the consequences of unchecked Scientific ambition, and the race to decide who controls the discoveries which result. The series also shares with *Lost* and *Alias* another of Abrams favourite conceits: a troubled heroine with major Daddy issues surrounded by men and by organisations which may not be entirely trustworthy.

Olivia Dunham (Olivia Torv) is an FBI field agent reluctantly drawn into the world of weird science when the passengers and crew of an airliner all die within moments of each other in the gory scene with which pilot episode opens. Together with her partner/secret boyfriend, John Scott, Dunham probes the reasons behind the crash and soon discovers evidence that the loss of lives was the result of a sinister conspiracy (is there any other kind?) instigated by rogue scientists conducting seemingly random experiments on the population at large as part of what is known as the "Pattern". When Scott is infected by a deliberately engineered virus during the course of their investigations, Dunham must spring mad scientist Walter Bishop (John Noble) from the nuthouse and enlist the aid of his cynical son Peter (Joshua Jackson) to help find a cure. The pilot also introduces us to the Machiavellian high-ranking executive Nina Sharp, an employee of the vast multinational conglomerate "Massive Dynamic", which was founded by Bishops former business partner. The most interesting thing about Nina Sharp so far – apart from the fact that her company seems to have a mysterious connection almost every case investigated by the Fringe trio – is that she has a metal arm. It's something which cannot help but evoke *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, whose second season, showing at the moment, also features a sinister, red-headed female executive with metallic body parts and a secret agenda. It must be noted however that Blair Brown's performance in *Fringe* is much better than that of the remarkably stilted Shirley Manson in *T: TSCC*, who seems to have studied Arnold Schwarzenegger's turn in the original films and decided that the secret to

playing an effective Terminator is to speak with as little expression as possible whilst trying not to blink too much.

Fringe is also notable for being yet another recent American SF/Horror show in which the lead characters work for the increasingly ubiquitous department of Homeland Security, seen also in the likes of *Threshold* and *The 4400*. It is perhaps no coincidence then the plane load of dead passengers with which the show opens ends up landing at Boston's Logan airport, point of departure for many of the 9/11 hijackers, nor that as the series progresses we are told of the existence rogue "cells" of scientists determined to further technological and scientific inquiry at the cost of human life. Here, at least so far, unseen scientists have become the ruthless fanatics, secular jihadists determined to further human knowledge at all. What's more, as in any good conspiracy, the secrets go right to the top, and it is strongly suggested that both the Federal Government and Massive Dynamic are playing an important part in such secret machinations. In a familiar scenario therefore, Olivia, Peter and Walter (like Sydney Bristow in *Alias*) may just be pawns unwittingly aiding the very powers they're trying to bring down.

This is clearly a show that has had a great deal of money spent on it from the outset: there's a glossy, movie-of-the week look to it which suggests that the studio have a lot riding on its success. One of the most visually striking elements is the fact that both the opening titles and the location and key scenes are dramatised as giant 3-D letters floating over the landscape (this innovation surely be cribbed from the opening titles of David Fincher's *The Panic Room*): a great deal more attention grabbing than *The X-File*'s relatively discrete use of courier font.

Yet the success (or failure) of any show lies not in the opening titles, but in the attractiveness of the dynamic between its leads, and in this crucial respect *Fringe* gets it only two-thirds right. The best thing about the programme so far is Australian actor John Noble's performance as Walter Bishop, an insightful but unstable genius whose seventeen-year sojourn in an asylum has sorely depleted his already rudimentary social skills. Noble's small but unforgettable turn in *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* as the insane Denothor (who decided to cremate his son even though he wasn't quite dead yet) was the basis for some of the most disturbing scenes in the entire trilogy. Similarly, he seems to be in his element here, providing a much needed strain of comedy to a sometimes rather po-faced show, yet at the same time managing to evoke poignancy in his portrayal of a man whose immense intellect has probably done more harm than good. His performance in episode eight, "The Equation" – in which Walter must return to the asylum in order to interrogate a fellow inmate – is particularly moving. More surprising perhaps is the fact that *Dawson's Creek* alumni Joshua Jackson manages to achieve actual likability as Peter Bishop, the gifted but rootless cynic who serves as his father's assistant. The tentative father son relationship at the heart of the show is one of its most compelling elements, and crucially, helps differentiate the show from the many other similarly themed programmes out there.

Unfortunately, the part played by Torv fails to be half as interesting. Olivia Dunham has been assembled from the same tediously predictable template as practically every other female law enforcement office on US television. Impractically long and shiny hair? Check. A dedication to the job which comes at the expense of a personal life? Check. Penchant for starting into the middle distance? Check. Troubled childhood? Check. Irritating tendency to state the obvious so that the slower members of the audience can keep up? Check. A boss who initially doubts her abilities but later doles out grudging respect? Check. Yup, it's all there, including a propensity for saying unintentionally hilarious things like "I know I'm emotional, but that's what makes me so damn good at my job" (she's a woman in a man's world, see). Torv herself isn't all that bad, despite her often flat delivery of lines and rather limited palate of facial

expressions (expression one: squint to denote deep thought, expression two; nod significantly to signal understanding of technobabble heavy explanation of the week). It's the script which really hobbles the character, and the fault may well lie with Abrams himself. Dunham has much in common with his similarly humourless and predictably troubled heroines on *Lost* (particularly Kate Austen, who like Dunham has also violently dispatched an abusive stepfather) or even Sydney Bristow on *Alias*, who grew increasingly dull as that series progressed. One can only hope that *Fringe*'s writers have noted the characters sheer blandness and have resolved to make her rather more interesting than she is as present, before viewer irritation hardens to downright dislike.

So what of the episodes themselves? Well, the pilot was fairly intriguing and established the premise in a crisp, efficient manner. It's still early days yet, but, the episodes seem to be proceeding in a fairly predictable fashion: something strange happens in the pre-credits sequence (a lift plummets to the ground, a woman makes people's heads explode in a diner, etc) whilst our trio of investigators attempt to figure out what went wrong. So far, the level of coincidence here seems worryingly high: most of the cases seem to have some sort of connection with Massive Dynamics and/or Walter Bishop's earlier research interests, and the "Freak of the Week" structure may well, as in *Smallville*, soon prove tiresome. And yet, for all that, *Fringe* remains an entertaining, if as yet unexceptional hour, particularly for those nostalgic for the days when Mulder and Scully roamed the gravel pits and forests of Vancouver looking for weird cases to solve. If already somewhat formulaic, the show is well produced, features excellent special effects and some mildly intriguing mysteries. Perhaps the stand out episode so far is "The Arrival", which we are introduced to a character known as "The Observer" who may well prove as crucial to *Fringe* mythology as the Cigarette Smoking Man was to *The X-Files*. Crucially, the episode's initial weird-happening of the week here provides an opportunity for the writers to set up and even more intriguing mystery regarding the Bishop family connection to "The Pattern". It may well be that as more and more clues regarding the overall arc are provided the show will truly come into its own. Or, as in *Lost*, the establishment of a detailed mythology will result in a convoluted and essentially unsatisfying confection which can never satisfactorily resolved (see also *The X-Files* and *Alias*). At the moment therefore, the show remains promising but flawed: as with the "Pattern" itself, its true nature has still to fully emerge but is still worth keeping an eye on, just in case.

BERNICE M. MURPHY

Death Traffickers: The Rise of the Irish Road-Safety Advert

Who would have thought it? Ireland has finally produced a successful horror movie, a terrifying piece of film in which an air of portentous doom is shockingly realised in a scene of appalling carnage. This film is a Gothic tale in the strictest sense, revolving around (in Richard Davenport-Hines' terms) "a tyrant who ruins the lives of the young but whose dominion is broken by the uncontrolled excesses of his own passions," and a heroine who sees too much and is emotionally and physically mutilated by her experiences. This film has gained recognition and praise from international audiences, and yet is deemed so disturbing and graphic that it is only shown on television after 9pm, and, in the cinema, before films with certificates of 15s or higher.

The film in question, "Mess" (or, to give it its ungrammatically awkward full title, "The Faster the Speed, the Bigger the Mess,"), created by Lyle Bailie International Limited, is not strictly a horror movie as such. At any rate, this was not the intention behind its production as part of an impressively well funded cross-border campaign to reduce road deaths in Ireland. Nevertheless, it works within the genre's conventions, and it is as a horror film (albeit a brief one, at a mere – yet unbearably interminable – sixty seconds long) that it has effectively been received by unsuspecting viewers who find themselves watching it during the ad break for something innocuous like *The Late Late Show*.

Precisely because of the significant overlap with exploitative slasher flicks, but also because of the expectations created in previous road-safety commercials, the message which "Mess" is seeking to convey becomes somewhat garbled. A considerable proportion of such advertisements are aimed at those who are most likely to be hurt or killed on the roads. For example, a pair of ads in which Fats Domino's "I Wanna Walk you Home" plays loudly over the action portrays inattention while crossing the road as having terrible consequences for a young Lothario, and for a mother and young son. Somewhat more ambiguous, however, is the "No Seatbelt, No Excuse" campaign, in which a single unbelted passenger causes the death of three of his friends, including his girlfriend, and is left severely brain-damaged himself.

This second ad is far closer to the "innocent victim dies, evil perpetrator is unhurt" variety of road-safety commercials which are most prevalent on our television screens at present. These ads explicitly play up the underlying gender dynamic of the "No Seatbelt, No Excuse," message, invariably coding victims as female (or, less often, as young children) and murderously irresponsible drivers, who invariably walk away physically unscathed, as young, sexually predatory males. Thus, "Slow Down Boys" (slick young buck survives, pretty girl in skimpy white dress is crushed against a tree) targets boy racers who attempt to use cars as indicators and extensions of their sexual prowess; while the even less subtle "He Drives, She Dies" (based, it is insisted, on sound and overwhelming statistical evidence and shown primarily in cinemas, for some reason) spells the message out in no uncertain terms.

Whatever the figures might say, however, in this latter campaign (which Noel Brett, Chief Executive of the Road Safety Authority referred to as encouraging "girl power") matters become somewhat confused. By placing the onus on young women to refuse lifts with joy-riding studs, advertisements of this nature (presumably inadvertently) imply that victims are in fact responsible for the injuries or loss of life that comes about as the result of someone else's bad driving, a somewhat skewed perspective which aligns them even more closely with the slasher films, those modern-day manifestations of Gothic unease.

Famously, slasher movies are now often seen as modern-day versions of Perrault's fairy stories – morality tales intended primarily to curb the sexual impulses of an impetuous youth. As we are told explicitly in Wes Craven's *Scream* (1996) – which draws upon such classics as John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) and its sequels, as well as *the Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street* franchises – having sex is a sure-fire way of winding up dead in just about every horror-film scenario (a motif turned humorously on its head in *Cherry Falls* (2000)). However evil or depraved the villain might be, on a fundamental level we are being told that the victim (most usually a teenage girl) has no-one to blame but herself.

The "sex is dangerous" angle is also present in "Mess" – if not quite to the same degree as in some other road-safety commercials. One of the most intriguing things about the ad is the fact that it has become a massive hit on YouTube: one particular posting – and there are several – has clocked up 388,153 hits and counting, a figure which, considering the content of the commercial, more than suggests a prurient fascination with, almost a fetishisation of traffic accidents which strongly recalls David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996), a text which seems to lurk queasily behind the advertisement's rather garbled moral message. Beyond this, both within and outside of YouTube, the ad has sparked off a surprising number of threads on online discussion forums. As one contributor has commented, what he's learnt from the ad is that kissing your girlfriend at the side of the road is a *really* bad idea, and he won't be doing that again. This may be somewhat glib, but the way in which the narrative is organised, and its implicit association of sexual encounters with the horrific consequences of the accident, certainly makes this a legitimate reading. It begins with a couple kissing; she is sitting on the wall of a bridge, with her legs wrapped around him. The events leading up to the crash, for which the driver of the car is evidently to blame, are interspersed with shots of the young lovers, and later with a courtroom scene, a scene in an ambulance, a morgue and finally a funeral, but are given rather less weight, and considerably less attention than the harrowing scenes of the boy being pinned against the girl, while her legs are crushed against the wall. Brief as they may be, her screams and the shots of both young people writhing in agony are the things which stay most firmly in the mind of the (often unwary) viewer. However dark and apocalyptically doom-laden the court-case scene might be, it is not fear of the law, fear of the consequences of our actions as drivers, or even fear of the idiotic man who swerves to avoid a dog which runs into the middle of the road that this ad evokes.

Instead, because at least some of the images contained within it are almost too distressing to watch, causing (as many people have pointed out, on the internet, in the newspapers and on radio and television) a significant proportion of viewers to change channels the moment they hear the accompanying music, it is the pain and mutilation undergone by these young people, the site of their blood and terror, that frightens us. Moreover, for those who have lost loved ones or themselves been involved in a traffic accident, every ad break is potentially an emotional minefield (a serious problem with the campaign overall which various government websites callously dismiss). It is no wonder, then, that so many of us choose, in the face of something that is more upsetting than instructive, to look away.

Indeed, this very fact is embedded in the song (written specially for the ad) entitled "I Can't Take My Eyes Off You," as well as through the way in which ads like this (and indeed horror more generally) function, inviting a sick, Cronenbergain fascination coupled with a desire – but often an inability – to avert our gaze. Indeed, this conflicted reaction is cleverly referenced in "Mess" itself, when we see a mother hastily, but far too belatedly, put her hands across the eyes of a small child who has inadvertently ended up watching the carnage. In a sense, we, as the viewers, are that little girl, visually assaulted not once but (potentially) several times in one evening, and only turning over when we've already seen more than we would like. One its most simple level, however, the song also blurs the boundaries between

perpetrator and victim – the couple's infatuation with each other being intimately associated with the driver's fatal moment of inattention.

What I would *not* like to suggest here is that road safety ads are ill-conceived, a futile exercise or a waste of money. Consciousness-raising is always a vital first step in any campaign, and if the plethora of online activity and media controversy which these advertising campaigns have spawned are anything to go by, they are undeniably making young people across the English-speaking world and beyond think more carefully about what exactly is involved when they get behind the wheel of a car. The problem is that cause and effect become somewhat slippery things in the realm of horrific images, however carefully a narrative economy may

strive to distinguish them and to direct our dread accordingly. On the one hand, we ought to identify with the perpetrator, and adjust our behaviour accordingly for fear of what might happen if we fail to do so. However, it would seem that this identification can slide all too easily into a Gothic villain's gloating delight at the pain inflicted, drawing some viewers to return again and again to this spectacle which should repel rather than attract. On the other hand, when, along with the heroine, our eyes widen in horror as we comprehend exactly what is bearing down inexorably upon us, fumbling – too late – for the remote control, it seems that instead, we have become the victim.

DARA DOWNEY

True Blood
(HBO, September 2008 – Present)

Given the rise of vampire romance novels in the last few years, and the number of vampire-related detective television series such as the CBS show *Moonlight* and the Canadian *Blood Ties* (both cancelled early by their networks to the disappointment of many fans), the popularity of HBO's *True Blood* is hardly surprising. Part romance, part mystery, *True Blood* stands out from its counterparts because of its network's allowance of explicit sex, gory violence and bad language, but also by its quirky humour and the steamy atmosphere which pervades the show.

In Alan Ball's adaptation of Charlaine Harris's Southern Vampire Mystery novels, the world has become aware of the existence of vampires due to the fabrication of 'Tru Blood' – a Japanese-made synthetic blood which fulfils all of a vampire's nutritional needs without requiring them to kill anyone. The small town of Bon Temps, Louisiana, hasn't seen a real-life (or rather a real-undead) vampire since their race 'came out of the coffin' two years beforehand, until Bill Compton (Stephen Moyer) walks into Merlotte's Bar and Grill one night and orders a bottle. Bill, and others like him, can come out at night and go about his business as a regular American citizen. There are many, of course, who oppose the idea of vampire rights, and Bill is met with suspicion and hostility by all but pretty blonde telepathic waitress Sookie Stackhouse (Anna Paquin), whose name, pronounced in the characters' Louisiana accent becomes the hilariously appropriate 'Sucky.'

Sookie, often branded as freakish or crazy by the other inhabitants of Bon Temps because of her telepathic abilities, is inexorably drawn to Bill as another outsider, and as the only person whose thoughts she can not hear (which offers blessed silence from the sex, violence and unhappy marriages on the mind of the sadly oftentimes stereotyped Southerners). The love story between Bill and Sookie is full of slow-motion walking, lingering shots and soft music, and the scene in which they first kiss is like something taken directly from a bodice-ripper romance novel, with a white-frilly-dress-clad virginal Sookie running in slow motion through a graveyard to Bill's plantation house where he takes her in his arms and smells her hair. The series seems to gently poke fun at the romance genre while still appreciating it. A lot of the appeal of Sookie's otherwise slightly whiny character is her ability to put tall, dead, brooding Bill back in his place. As he glowers at her when they first meet, she laughs at his name – 'Vampire *Bill*?! I thought it might be Antoine, or Basil, or like Langford, maybe.' – and when he attempts to 'glamour' her (a sort of vampiric hypnosis) she pretends it's working before once again laughing in his face ('You don't like not being able to control people, do you? That's not a very attractive trait, Bill.').

Sookie spends half her time being awesome (beginning the series by saving Bill's life rather than the other way around, warning the vampire to speak to her 'like the lady that I am,' cursing at the entire town at her grandmother's funeral, and being the one to stop the Bon Temps killer in the season finale) and the other half moping or snapping at her friends for no discernable reason. Luckily, for the whinging half we have a plethora of quirky characters to concentrate on instead, like Sookie's best friend Tara (Rutina Wesley), whose feistiness and smart mouth are a welcome balance to Sookie's mixture of childlike innocence and supernatural world-weariness; shapshifter Sam (Sam Trammell), Sookie's boss and one-third of her love triangle; black, camp, foulmouthed short order cook slash drug dealer Lafayette; and Sookie's older brother Jason (Ryan Kwanten), who at first threatened to remain simply a gag character whose only function initially seemed to be getting into trouble and getting naked, but who became far more

interesting after meeting psychopath hippie chick Amy (Lizzy Caplan). If Sookie's character occasionally gets lost among the other characters' subplots it only helps to enliven the supporting cast. Bill also seems to exist only for brooding, but then again this is a staple of the vampire romance genre (think Angel in *Buffy* – before *Angel* the series fleshed out his character – and Edward Cullen in *Twilight*).

Nods to the romance genre aside, Ball, creator of deliciously dark drama series *Six Feet Under*, takes on Charlaine Harris's good-natured psychic detective/ vampire romances and turns them into *True Blood*, a gothic explosion of sex and gore which still somehow manages to retain a lot of Harris' quirky humour. The beautifully realised opening sequence, set to Jace Everett's *Bad Things*, lets the viewer know in no uncertain terms what the show is all about. Images of road kill, the Ku Klux Klan, Southern baptisms, Venus fly traps, gospel choirs, strippers and pole dancers come together with the bars, bayous and houses of Louisiana in flickering sepia, reminding us at the beginning of every episode that this series is about death, sex, race and religion and we would do well to remember it.

Ball's generous use of allegory is hardly subtle. While the show successfully portrays a lot of the preoccupations of modern American consciousness – underlying the campy vampire story, the romance and the sex is the reality of post-Katrina Louisiana and the US in general after the Iraq war – he is often heavy-handed. With its repeated epithet of 'God Hates Fangs' and the political backstory involving vampire rights legislation, the show tries to make parallels between homosexuality and vampires, and race and vampires, without quite knowing which metaphor to stick to. These metaphors become quite problematic when one considers the discrepancies between human minority groups and vampires, who all – 'mainstreamers' and rebels alike – practice a rather laissez-faire attitude towards their own anti-killing laws.

Some of the specifics of the vampire world Harris created aren't too clear in the series, and the mystery of the Bon Temps killer, which supposedly leads the plot of the first season, tends gets lost in the romance and the rest of the action. This aside, the world of *True Blood* is interesting if not entirely original, and is imbued with a heady, steamy atmosphere that is right at home in the Louisiana bayous. The characters are offbeat and engaging, if sometimes annoying, and the main cast are generally satisfyingly good-looking. If this is, as Alan Ball himself has claimed, 'popcorn television for smart people,' smart or not, please pass the popcorn.

MOIRA FOWLEY

EVENTS REVIEW

The *Dark Glamour* of Neo-Victorian Gothic

Gothic: Dark Glamour Exhibit, curated by Valerie Steele
New York Fashion Institute of Technology, 5 September 2008 - 21 February 2009

"Your mind is in disturbia" sang the reigning princess of R&B music, Rihanna, as she opened the 2008 MTV Video Music Awards on September 7th. Clothed in high-fashion black leather and feather bondage gear, she and an entourage of back-up dancers miming zombies gyrated around the stage as she asked seductively, "Am I scaring you tonight?" If the performance, which resurrected Michael Jacksons's *Thriller* with a touch of S&M, frightened the audience it was with no more than a pleasantly titillating thrill as Rihanna's macabre Gothic-inspired musical opening effectively upstaged the return of Britney Spears and kept more than 8.4 million viewers riveted to the screen.

MTV, perennial source of all things trendy, used its opening entertainment as a clever marketing tool, for Rihanna's performance responded to the Gothic vampire craze present in contemporary youth culture, particularly the culture of adolescent girls. The popularity of Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series of fantasy novels has positioned the author as the J.K. Rowling of "tweens" and teens. *Twilight*, first book in the series, sold over 1.5 million copies, and the final installment, *Breaking Dawn*, sold 1.3 million within 24 hours of its release. Not coincidentally, a movie adaptation of *Twilight* opens in November. Even HBO, a network with programming geared more toward adults, has staked (pun intended) its claim to vampire narratives, premiering this Fall its drama *True Blood*, based on a series of Southern vampire mysteries by Charlaine Harris. Alan Ball, writer of *American Beauty* and creator of the critically-acclaimed series *Six Feet Under* (also for HBO), has said in interviews that he sees *True Blood* as an opportunity to continue the popularity of vampire shows like *Dark Shadows*, while simultaneously providing viewers with smart, witty pop satire of American culture and politics.

A phenomenon like the *Twilight* series has its roots in the earlier success of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the all-black Goth fashion popular amongst teenagers in the late 1990s, developments that both proved of interest to academic scholarship. Milly Williamson's essays in *Reframing the Body* (2001) and *Dressed to Impress: Looking the Part* (2001) address women's complex relationship to the image of the vampire and Gothic fashion as a means of self-expression. Williamson speculates that fascination with vampires and with Gothic clothing originates in a desire to produce "nonconformist identities through oppositional dress." This gesture of rebellion is, however, contradictory, as vampire narratives and their corresponding fashions simultaneously reject and retain conventional ideals of femininity.

Although the rise of the Gothic has been a prominent topic in academic publishing for several years, it has, until recently, bypassed the museum world. Certainly, no show had looked at pop culture versions of Gothic through the lens of fashion history and theory. On September 5th, the Museum of the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City mounted the first exhibition devoted to Gothic style: *Gothic: Dark Glamour*, curated by the museum's director, Valerie F. Steele.

The intersection of the Gothic with clothing style has long been a staple of both the gothic as a literary genre and the Goth cultural movement. The wall text for FIT Museum's exhibition includes a telling quotation from Catherine Spooner's *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* (2004): "Within gothic discourse, the clothes are the life" — a play on Bela Lugosi's famous pronouncement, as Dracula, that "The blood is the life."

Spooner continues, "Surely, therefore, within the world of fashion, it is this enduring potency of gothic images for imaginative self-identification that leads to their perennial revival." Like a vampire rising from its coffin, our fascination with the Gothic continues to come back to (after)life as we use Gothic trappings to imagine new selves and recycle alternative identities.

The new lifeblood of Gothic fashion also comes from another source. Throughout the exhibition, Valerie F. Steele emphasizes the morbid allure attached to the Victorian period as a significant factor in the Gothic's ongoing afterlife. Scholarly studies, such as Cora Kaplan's *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (2007) and John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff's essay collection, *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* (2000), have already established the connection between the popularity of recent Victorian revivals and the Gothic. In fact, the cover of the paperback edition of *Victorian Afterlife* serves as an excellent example of the intersection between Gothic and fashion: the features of the female model are obscured by a funereal black coatdress with a cascade of hyperbolically feminine white ruffles exploding from the neckline. The image echoes almost precisely the Fall 1997 creation "Camaïeu de Roses" (Cameo of Roses) by *haute couture* designer Thierry Mugler on display in *Gothic: Dark Glamour*. Mugler's black silk faille and silk taffeta dress re-envisions a Victorian-style mourning gown, with dark fuchsia fabric blossoms bursting from both neck and wrists.

At the beginning of the exhibition, which is fittingly housed in the FIT Museum's basement, Steele juxtaposes the Victorian cult of death with the figure of the vampire. Gowns from Kambriel's 2007 collection stand next to authentic Victorian mourning clothes, circa 1880. Kambriel and other designers suggest that contemporary Goths respond to the "morbid allure and claustrophobic corsetry" of Victorian fancy. Thus, visitors to *Gothic: Dark Glamour* see the Victorian period constructed for modern (fashion) audiences as a distinctly Gothic setting. The Gothic, and simultaneously the Victorian age, becomes synonymous not only with fear and terror, but with anxieties over contested femininity. Both the clothes on display and the layout and structure of the exhibit pay homage to contemporary fashion's Victorian antecedents and to Victorian debates over women's social roles.

Instances of hyperbolic femininity recur throughout Steele's show, especially in the voluminous gowns of Alexander McQueen and of Kate and Laura Mulleavy. But one of the most interesting intersections of Victoriania, Gothic, and hyper-feminine attire is represented in the "Elegant Lolita" fashion movement from Japan. Designers such as Hirooka Naota have combined fanciful babydoll dresses with parasols and petticoats. Naota's models clutch angry dolls, with skull-like faces reminiscent of figures from Tim Burton's film *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) or from the graphic novel *Johnny the Homicidal Maniac* (Jhonen Vasquez 1995). With fashion-forward American pop singers like Gwen Stefani—who now has her own line of clothes—embracing the Elegant Lolita (also called "Gothic Lolita") look, the trend has even begun to turn up on campuses in the U.S.

The corset, that most iconic of Victorian symbols of restrictive femininity, also appears numerous times throughout the exhibit, perhaps never more memorably than in the "Strange Beauty" collection, where Yohji Yamamoto's 2006 black silk crepe ensemble with cage corset resurrects, according to Steele, the "twenty-first century equivalent of whale-boning" while "simultaneously evoking the human rib cage." Not coincidentally, Steele made a name for herself in scholarly circles as a historian and apologist for the corset with her book *The Corset: A Cultural History* (2001).

In the display area called "Ruined Castle," an outfit by Hussein Chalayan plays with past trends in fashion by deconstructing a garment made from blue silk, gauze, netting, cotton, and lace. Inspired by the idea of ruination, the dress is meant to imply that it was "ripped apart by a voodoo curse." Interestingly, what is left behind in the deconstructed garment is a look reminiscent of a Dickensian street urchin, complete with artful tatters and uneven handkerchief hem. Apparently, stripping away layers of Gothic fashion leaves us with the aesthetic stylings of one of the Victorians' most successful novelists—a creation that is half the fashion sister of Oliver Twist and half the stepchild of Miss Havisham.

Miss Havisham's contradictory world of preservation and decay is also evoked in the section of the show called "Cabinet of Curiosities," which Steele uses both for Victorian memorabilia and modern Goth fetish accessories. The examples of *memento mori* collected in this cabinet include the death mask of the nineteenth-century American poet Celia Thaxter and Victorian mourning jewelry and hair-wreaths encased in shadowboxes placed alongside contemporary bracelets, chokers, and rings featuring skulls and bats. Once again, Victorian and the twenty-first-century styles mirror each other, brought together in the same Gothic discourse.

Gothic: Dark Glamour ends by making the idea of reflection literal. In the "Bat Cave," Goth and cyberpunk clothing of the kind favored by black-clad Goth teenagers shares space with a two-way mirror. As the lights are dimmed and raised, the viewer sees either the high-fashion equivalents of contemporary Goth street clothes or only herself in the Gothic mirror. Thus, the exhibition functions as its own cabinet of curiosities, blending a Victorian past and a postmodern present, defying categorical and historical boundaries, and revealing what the current cultural obsession with Gothic narratives and styles already suggests: that we now see ourselves through a glass very darkly.

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Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis*
Adapted and directed by David Farr and Gisli Orn Gardarsson
A Versturport Theatre and Lyric Hammersmith production for the Dublin Theatre Festival, Olympia Theatre, Dublin, 29 September-4 October 2008

In Mel Brooks's *The Producers*, Max Bialystock and Leo Bloom, in search of the worst play of all time, a flop guaranteed to close on the first night and thus make their fortunes, find themselves reading through a mountain of treatments and proposals. 'Here's one!' says Max: '"Gregor Samsa awoke one morning to find he'd been transformed into a giant cockroach." Nah, it's too good!' As everyone will know, they light on *Springtime for Hitler*, 'a gay romp with Adolf and Eva at the Berchesgarten', and the rest is history….

In September 2008, the Los Angeles Opera staged a stellar production of *The Fly*, a newly-commissioned opera with music by Howard Shore (of *Lord of the Rings* fame), directed by David Cronenberg, and conducted by Placido Domingo. The production received, it is fair to say, mixed reviews.

Knowing all this, it did not exactly come as a surprise to me that this year's Dublin Theatre Festival would feature a staging of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* with music by Nick Cave and Warren Ellis of the Bad Seeds. And while this one doesn't quite go as far as Brooks's Busby Berkeley Nazis, formation high-kicking their way through a series of musical extravaganzas, there were times when I began to wonder whether Brooks's film was not consciously in the minds of Farr, Gardarsson and their cast as they staged Kafka's masterpiece. This is not to say that the production is bad or even misguided, and nor is it anything like as camp as I may have made it sound. After all, Nick Cave was involved, and I probably wouldn't have gone otherwise. It's often powerful, occasionally moving, and always strikingly ingenious.

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If I say that the best thing about the production is the set, this is not to damn the whole endeavour with faint praise. It's just that the set is brilliant. It divides into the two storeys of the Samsas' house, one above the other, connected by a staircase. Downstairs is the living room, where the family attempt to go about their normal, respectable, bourgeois life, while upstairs, Gregor's bedroom has been turned through ninety degrees, so that his bed and furniture are now on the wall. Yes, OK, what this means is that their lives have been turned upside down by his transformation into a giant insect, but this makes for more than just the literalizing of a metaphor. It also allows Gisli Orn Gardarsson himself, who plays Gregor, to give a breathtakingly acrobatic performance, climbing the walls, hanging from the ceiling. In 1980, David Bowie famously performed without makeup in a stage production of The Elephant Man, thus accentuating his character's fundamental humanity and the monstrosity of those who respond to him with cruelty and revulsion. Gardarsson's Gregor works along similar lines, further highlighted by the fact that, where Kafka's original found his attempts at speech thwarted by his new form, coming out as guttural noises, here we understand him perfectly, while his family greet his pleas for understanding and communication with incomprehension.

Franz Kafka, whose work was very influential for Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt School of Marxist cultural theory, wrote *Metamorphosis* in 1915 as a generalized Modernist fable of the dehumanization of alienated labour: Gregor is a salesman for an unspecified company, a classic Modernist functionary, a 'little man'. Farr and Gardarsson's interpretation is far more specific, and their play is shot through with Nazi rhetoric and imagery. This makes perfect sense as an interpretation of the text, and is hardly new. Benjamin's collaborator in the Frankfurt School, Theodor W Adorno, who fled Germany for Los Angeles in the 1930s, famously read Kafka's work as a prefiguring allegory of Nazism. Another *Mitteleuropean* Jewish Marxist exile from the Nazis, the controversial Hungarian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, spent decades excoriating and hectoring just such respectable bourgeois as the Samsas for their repressed complicity, in books such as *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933) and *Listen, Little Man* (1948). We

grow around us, Reich argued in the former work, an armour, a shell, a carapace, in our attempt to protect us from the iniquities of the world, and in doing so become less than human.

Here, Gregor's father, whose business has collapsed, finds a job as a security guard in a bank, and takes great pride in his new uniform, which he insists on wearing at all times: 'Work will set you free!' he says. *Arbeit macht frei*, and the Samsas' new lodger also spouts final-solution rhetoric about cleaning the vermin off the streets, while upstairs, locked in his room, Gregor is starved to death. As Gregor's life fades, his sister Grete, who begins the play as a sympathetic, violin-playing schoolgirl, grows her own shell, transforming into a business-suited harpy.

The play's closing tableau is really devastating. As Gregor dies, hanging from a length of silk, his room is destroyed to show, behind it, the Emperor's Gardens in full bloom, impossibly lovely. As the Samsas go for their gay romp in the garden, Nick Cave sings a heartbreaking ballad, and the flowers seem to be growing directly out of the discarded abjection of Gregor's corpse. It's springtime for Hitler.

Darryl Jones

Horrorthon Film Festival 2008
23rd - 27th October 2008 at the IFI cinema, Dublin

The IFI's eleventh annual *Horrorthon* took place from 23-27 October. This year marked another expansion on the programme to include 27 features and, for the first time, a script to screen workshop, with *2001 Maniacs* director, Tim Sullivan. Despite a varied schedule of material from schlock to extreme horror, criticism had been made that the festival was lacking in the kind of audience involvement that had characterised previous events. EA Games may have donated two kiosks to provide an alternative form of entertainment, but a lack of spot prizes and freebies goes a long way towards dampening what is usually a carnival atmosphere.

Call it cynicism but a predominance of 'classics' such as Tobe Hooper's *The Funhouse*, *Evil Dead II*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and, inexplicably, *Jaws* 2 indicated a sad lack of originality either on the part of filmmakers the world over, or the organisers themselves. A selection of *Grindhouse* trailers provided some cheap laughs and the Irish contingent was represented by the unremarkable *Ghostwood* and *Seer* – the latter playing to a full house.

Thankfully, amidst the dross lurked a few new films of interest by turns effecient, quirky and downright shocking. The following covers some unexpected highlights:

Quarantine

A remake of the claustrophobic Spanish shocker *[REC]*, director John Erick Dowdle transfers the action from Barcelona to Los Angeles, where an outbreak of a mysterious contagion puts a residential building in lockdown. Told from the perspective of a TV news crew recording a colour piece about the local fire service the action goes from playful boredom to mania. As with its originator, the found footage model of storytellng works well as a conceit to enliven what is little more than an indoors version of *28 Days Later*. The main departure is the depiction of the centra character who goes from being a cynical reporter looking for 'real news' to a peppy roving reporter. When the inevitable collapse into hysteria comes it feels less like a reversal and more like an inevitability. Popcorn by numbers.

Time Crimes
One of those films that left everyone with a smile on their face. Intentionally silly, Spanish director Nacho Vigalondo's debut is a low-budget mystery combining elements of whodunnit thrillers and old school house on the hill gothic. Hopefully it will get a release on DVD soon.

The Disappeared
Guilermo Del Toro's *Devil's Backbone* comes to Staines in Johnny Kevorkian's urban gothic. Just released from a mental hospital, Matthew (Harry Treadaway) is an emotionally crippled adolescent trying to deal with the fallout from his younger brother's abduction. With a fractured home life and a hostile, impoverished neighbourhood to deal with, Matthew has his problems compounded when he starts hallucinating his lost sibling. Compelled to find some kind of closure he enlists the help of a fragile young girl with issues of her own. Carefully constructed and with some excellent dialogue *The Disappeared*is a subtle ghost story given greater impact by an honest depiction of council estate life. Drugs, drink and violence are prevalent but are never overplayed for effect. The characters all come across as real people without lapsing into 'rude boy' posturing. The only let-down is the denouement where the villain is revealed to be considerably more malevolent than the plot actually required.

Martyrs

The shocking centrepiece to the weekend, Pascal Laugier's exercise in extreme terror also represents its biggest missed opportunity. Coming across as the bastard child of Michael Heneke's *Funny Games* and Eli Roth's *Hostel*, this abrasive revenge drama works as an assault not just on the senses but on the intellect as well. Having tracked down her captors of 15 years previous, a young lady and her closest friend wreak bloody havok, only to stumble across a form of deprivation more terrifying than they had ever imagined. Relentlessly linear, *Martyrs* keeps the attention by shifting the point of empathy from one character to the next using either smashcut editing or smashing blows to the face. The initial protagonist becomes an irredeemable savage, a happy family are in fact monsters