Fears in Concrete Forms: Modernity and Horror in the United States; 1880-1939.

Kevin C. Valliant
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-3swn-c213

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
Fears in Concrete Forms: Modernity and Horror in the United States; 1880-1939

Kevin C. Valliant

Hampton, Virginia

Bachelor of Arts, The College of William and Mary, 1988
Master of Arts, Old Dominion University, 1995

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

American Studies Program

The College of William and Mary
May, 2015
This Dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Kevin C. Valliant

Approved by the Committee, April 2015

Committee Chair
Associate Professor Charles McGovern, American Studies and History
The College of William and Mary

Associate Professor Alexander Prokhorov, Russian and MDLL
The College of William and Mary

Professor Francesca Sawaya, American Studies and English
The College of William and Mary

Associate Professor M. Lynn Weiss, English and American Studies
The College of William and Mary
ANABSTRACT

Scary entertainment is an oft maligned genre of popular culture. It is, however, ubiquitous in modern society with television shows, movies, and countless books all dealing with monsters and other horrors. Modern scary entertainment began to take shape during the late nineteenth century and proliferated in the earlier twentieth with the rise of pulp magazines, radio shows, and motion pictures. Through a study of short stories, films and other primary sources, this dissertation explores how scary entertainment was shaped by political and social discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This dissertation argues that far from dealing with timeless fears of death and the unknown, scary entertainment reveals how white, middle class Americans viewed their society. Horror supplied the perfect forms for discussions of the changing understandings of what it meant to be human in the modern world. This study will explore how white Americans sought to reconcile older ideas of self as mind and soul with newer ideas of self as brain and psychological constructs, struggled with Darwinian Theory that placed humans closer to animals, tried to maintain a societal moral order in the face of cold science, and sought to maintain racial superiority in a world they saw increasingly contaminated with other races. Horror narratives allowed white Americans to vindicate their world view by either restoring the proper balance to society or damning it to the very forces they feared.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ii
Dedications iii
Introduction 1
Chapter 1. Personal Identity and Horror 24
Chapter 2. The Horrors of the Evolution and De-Evolution 55
Chapter 3. Mad Science and Society 77
Chapter 4. Horror and the Other 103
Conclusion 130
Bibliography 134
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This writer wishes to express his appreciation to Professor Charles McGovern, under whose guidance this investigation was conducted, for his patience, guidance and criticism throughout the investigation. The author is also indebted to Professor Arthur Knight who provided invaluable support.
This Ph.D. is dedicated to my loving wife Susan, who still believes…
Introduction

During the first full week of July, 2011 two separate programs on National Public Radio touched on the topic of horror entertainment. On the first, *Fresh Air*, author Jason Zinoman discussed modern horror films. On the second, *On Point*, host Tom Ashbrook noted the trend of supernatural elements and themes appearing more often in literary fiction, written by well-regarded authors whose previous writing had no hints of monsters. Invariably the question arose as to why these types of entertainments are popular. These were not questions of general interest, that is, why do people enjoy being scared, but rather specific questions concerning why now? Why are zombies, vampires, and werewolves popular in this particular moment in time? Do they represent a current worldview? Hegel might ask, do these monsters embody the “zeitgeist,” the “spirit of the age” of early twenty-first century America?1

This is certainly not the first time monsters and horror have been popular. The 1980s put teenagers in peril in countless “slasher” films and the 1950s saw America besieged by giant radioactive bugs. In the 1930s Universal Studios unearthed Dracula, the Frankenstein Monster, and the Mummy. These iconic creatures did not suddenly emerge fully formed in darkened theaters. The monsters of the so-called Golden Age of horror movies emerged following

---

American forays in imperialism, a cataclysmic world war, and a worldwide economic depression. Victor Hugo wrote that "monsters are mysteries in a concrete form," but I would argue that modern monsters are fears in concrete forms.² The monsters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were embodiments of the fears born from a rapidly changing world. These monsters represented the fears of white, largely middle class, Protestant Americans who believed their personal identities and their special position in society, and indeed, in the universe was being attacked.

In today's horror landscape monsters are often not monstrous at all. The vampires and werewolves of the Twilight series are incredibly photogenic and eternally youthful. Future Bible Heroes sum this up in their song "I'm a Vampire" when Claudia Gonson declares "I have ever so much money, I'm gorgeous and I can fly."³ In Glen Duncan's The Last Werewolf, the hero is a tragic figure who may be cursed, but leads an incredibly interesting life. And even when things are not glamorous as in AMC's The Walking Dead, the monsters, in this case zombies, are more of a force of nature. The real monsters after the zombie apocalypse are the human survivors. This point cannot be missed in George Romero's Land of the Dead (2005) in which the villains are the rich who have isolated themselves in a zombie-proof gated community and the hero tells a companion not to shoot a zombie because "they're just looking for a place to go, like us."⁴ This horror of the late twentieth and early twenty first century is a distorted image of the horror of

³ Future Bible Heroes, I'm a Vampire, protected ACC audio file, 2002.
one hundred years before. In modern horror, human depravity is a given but in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the fear was human depravity. The forces of modernity undermined the idea of humans (or again white, American humans) as a divinely created group whose destiny was to lead the world to the pinnacle of civilization. In the modern world some monsters could look human, but some vital aspect of humanity was missing. Perhaps they denied the human immortal soul and divine purpose or they embraced cold science and personal ambition over the warmth of human emotion and the needs of society. Monsters could also be from less civilized locales, with strange features, unnatural desires, and arcane knowledge that would threaten white civilization. Horror entertainment, as a unique genre, came of age at the moment when modern forces assaulted the privileged position of white, middle class Americans. The creators of horror stories at this time were mostly white men and the horrors they described were part of a world that left them increasingly fearful of their place in society, the world, and the very cosmos.

The Emergence of Horror as Entertainment

Tales with frightening monsters and horrible deaths have been told throughout time. Myths, fairy tales, folk stories, and dramas have long had supernatural elements as part of their structure, but characters such as Medusa and the ghost of Hamlet's father are part of larger stories, they are not the focus. The modern horror story has its foundations in the gothic novels of the late eighteenth century and most scholars give Horace Walpole's 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto* the honor of being the first of this new type of literature. It is
there that many of the familiar elements of the genre, castle ruins, secret
passageways, and ghostly apparitions, are first on display. Walpole's novel
appeared at the historical moment of the Enlightenment, when many educated
people no longer took witches and ghosts seriously. This novel and its genre
progeny were not meant to offer moral guidelines or lessons, they were for
enjoyment not elucidation.\(^5\) They elevated mood and feeling over cold logic. The
novels of Anne Radcliffe introduced another element that is often found in later
horror tales, the non-supernatural resolution of an apparent ghostly encounter.
Tzvetan Todorov placed these stories into the genre of the fantastic which he
described as the feeling of hesitation the reader (and sometimes the characters)
experiences as he or she tries to decide if the events are supernatural or can be
explained by rational means.\(^6\) This distinction would continue with slight
modifications in the twentieth century as exemplified by the distinction between
tales of the supernatural and horror and those of terror and "weird menace."\(^7\) In
the United States Charles Brockden Brown placed Radcliffe styled stories in
American settings such as the Pennsylvania backcountry. American authors such
as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Washington Irving also wrote scary stories but it was
Edgar Allan Poe who became the premier writer of the terror tale in the nineteenth
century. Poe's stories could have supernatural resolutions as in "The Masque of

1975, 12.

(Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), 25. For Todorov tales which are supernatural fall into
the genre of the marvelous, while those which provide rational explanations fall into the genre of the
uncanny.

\(^7\) Terror and weird menace tales often were resolved with rational explanations whereas horror and
supernatural stories were not. Robert Kenneth Jones, "Popular's Weird Menace Pulps" in *Selected Tales of
Grim and Grue*, 1.
the Red Death” (1842), but often stories such as “The Black Cat” (1843) and “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843) centered on madness and human depravity. George Lippard’s *The Quaker City* (1844) used Gothic elements to critique Philadelphia society. Most horror stories were not so overt as Lippard’s but they can generally be seen as a reaction to rationalism in that they point out man’s capacity for evil or they describe events which cannot be described by rational means.

When Poe died (1849) few lamented and his work was not heralded. His place in the canon of American writers was long debated, but his impact on popular culture was never in doubt. Scary entertainment in general has not had its Poe moment, it is still often marginalized critically, but its popularity has not diminished. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many writers did not write horror exclusively, and so we find among the authors writing scary tales Ambrose Bierce, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Stephen Crane, Kate Chopin, Ralph Adams Cram, Frank Norris, Henry James, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, and Ellen Glasgow. Many of their stories were published in mainstream magazines such as *Collier’s* and *Harper’s*, but beginning in the 1890s a new outlet for such stories emerged. In 1891 Frank Munsey issued the first issue of *Munsey’s*, a magazine printed on cheap, pulp paper that featured no illustrations but plenty of stories. Soon it was selling half a million copies a month and Munsey revamped his other publication *The Argosy* into the same format and would add *The All-Story* and *The*

---

Cavalier early in the twentieth century.⁹ These magazines published all genres of fiction in the same pages and provided platforms for writers such as Edgar Rice Burroughs. In 1923 a new pulp title was published which catered more specifically to the scarier tale and although *Weird Tales* was not exclusively horror its name came to be associated with stories that would frighten the populace. Although *Weird Tales* was never a huge financial success it demonstrated that there was a market for horror and so other titles began to appear such as *Ghost Stories*, *Strange Tales*, *Horror Stories*, and *Terror Tales*.

Horror stories, with their grotesque description of monsters and evil deeds, were quickly adapted to visual mediums such as stage plays and later motion pictures. Throughout the nineteenth century there were numerous unauthorized retellings of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and by the end of the century stage versions of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* were also appearing. Those two iconic horror stories were modernized for the stage in the 1920s by Peggy Webling (*Frankenstein*) and Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston (*Dracula*) and the theatrical versions served as the models for the 1931 Universal films. Various other ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and zombies would begin to appear in films, often worrying parents and other concerned citizens. The height of horror spectacle appeared on the stage at the Grand Guignol Theater in Paris which used buckets of fake blood and staged torture to shock its audiences. When the

theater attempted to create a similar venue in New York City it was a failure.\textsuperscript{10}
Perhaps American audiences needed more distance from horror. The theater's staged atrocities would continue to have an influence in horror films and especially in the pulp horror magazines which had more leeway in depicting terror and violence.\textsuperscript{11}

By the 1930s horror was an established genre, even if a not terribly respected one, of American entertainment. \textit{Frankenstein} was the highest grossing film of 1931, and \textit{King Kong} repeated the feat in 1933. Horror stories sold well in the pulp market even as individual horror magazines often folded after a few years. There were also radio horror shows such as \textit{Lights Out} and stage magicians incorporated horror elements in live "ghost shows." Increasingly scholars and critics examined the forms and functions of horror entertainment.

\textbf{Historical Approaches to the Genre}

Dorothy Scarborough, a young American scholar, confessed that she loved ghosts and her 1917 book \textit{The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction} was one of the first to explore the genre.\textsuperscript{12} She believed that people enjoyed reading supernatural stories because it let them touch something infinite, if only in their imagination. Scarborough cataloged the types of ghosts and manifestations of the devil that could be found in gothic stories in an attempt to understand the plot devices of the field. Her work is therefore limited in trying to explain horror in a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Jones, "Popular's Weird Menace Pulps", 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Dorothy Scarborough, \textit{The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction} (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1917) Amazon Digital Services, 4.
\end{itemize}
historical context beyond that of literary history. In 1925 Howard Philip, (H. P.) Lovecraft was asked to write an article detailing the use of “terror and weirdness” in literature by his friend W. Paul Cook, who wanted to use the article to launch his new journal, The Recluse.  

The long essay which resulted was published in 1927 in the only issue of The Recluse ever printed. In “Supernatural Horror in Literature” Lovecraft offered a refrain that would be echoed by many critics discussing scary entertainments, that horror’s appeal is timeless. Indeed, Lovecraft made the claim that horror is a kind of race memory, although so submerged in the modern psyche that only a minority of people would respond to it. 

The thrill experienced in a scary story is inherently human and cannot be conquered by “rationalism, reform, or Freudian analysis.” Despite this built-in attraction to terror, Lovecraft admitted that the terror tale was popular with only a select few, those who have a vivid imagination and can leave behind the cares of the world. But leaving behind daily concerns did not mean adopting a naïve or idealistic view. For Lovecraft most mainstream literature was too concerned with base emotions such as happiness and sorrow. This was a too idealistic view of the world for Lovecraft who claimed that the oldest and strongest emotion is fear. Since fear is the preeminent emotion, Lovecraft argued that the weird tale is a dignified literary form.

---

14 Ibid, 21.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid. An interesting inversion of what would usually be considered “lowbrow” entertainment.
17 Ibid.
Lovecraft's review of weird stories focuses on what should be called weird and how well the authors he discusses handle the task. For Lovecraft the important element was the feeling of terror on the part of the reader and he critiqued the works of particular authors in terms of how innovative and truly terrifying they rendered their work. Todorov would later dismiss Lovecraft's definition of the fantastic as being inadequate because it concentrated on producing a feeling of terror in the reader. But for Lovecraft this is precisely the point, and he is interested in how well that effect is achieved. So although he surveys a great many European and American authors through the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, he is not interested in what these stories might tell us about the real world when they were written. It does, however, provide a quite useful list of writers largely forgotten today.

Dashiell Hammett provided a simpler explanation for horror. In the introduction to Creeps by Night, an anthology of horror stories he selected, Hammett claimed that the effectiveness of the stories depended "on the reader's believing that certain things cannot happen and on the writer's making him feel – if not actually believe – that they can but should not happen." This is a brilliant statement about horror entertainment. Readers are drawn in by the suspension of disbelief, they know that these events cannot happen, but they are willing to allow them within the story even if they produce feelings of dread and horror.

---

18 Lovecraft somewhat famously rejected Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" as a weird tale pointing out, somewhat macabrely, that it told a tale that could actually happen.
19 Todorov, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, 35. For Todorov the fantastic centered on the uncertainty of events being real or unreal and not on feelings of terror.
Since the Golden Age of Universal monsters began during the Great Depression, many critics assume a direct correlation between the two. One of the first to do so was Edmund Wilson. Believing the idea of a Gothic ghost story was a quant relic of a bygone era, Wilson tried to explain the modern interest in scary entertainment. Responding to several recently published anthologies of scary stories, Wilson questioned how in the age of electric lights, telephones, and radios, such “antiquated stories” could still be popular.\(^1\) Wilson then supplied two possible answers. The first is that in times of strife, when everything seems to be falling apart, people tend to seek out other realms that may provide mystic or spiritual experiences that impart some order or meaning on events. Secondly, when faced with real horror, such as the Gestapo, people are drawn to stories in which the horrible things are defeated. These tales then become a diversionary entertainment.\(^2\) Wilson doubted the anthologies would scare anyone but the youngest children but admitted that some of the stories had potential but usually “fail(ed) to lay hold on the terrors that lie deep in the human soul and that cause man to fear himself.”\(^3\) Interestingly this seems to contradict Wilson’s own prior statement that horror is diversionary.

Wilson does bring a valuable contribution to the discussion of horror. In order for stories to be truly frightening, Wilson argued they must contain elements of modern culture, particularly psychology. He lamented the tried and true and applauded those stories which probe the “psychological caverns” where the

---

\(^{1}\) Edmund Wilson, “A Treatise on Tales of Horror,” *New Yorker* (May 27, 1944), 72.

\(^{2}\) Ibid.

\(^{3}\) Ibid, 75.
repressive nature of modern society has given rise to "disquieting obsessions."\textsuperscript{24} The idea that we can be our own monsters or that our minds could be leading us astray is an unsettling notion. For Wilson the psychological terrors of Henry James are much more terrifying than some of the weird tales of an author such as Arthur Machen, whose stories often centered on ancient cults operating in modern times to prey on innocent victims.\textsuperscript{25} For Wilson, tales such as Machen's are almost laughable. He preferred a writer like Algernon Blackwood who focused not on outside evils, but rather inner terrors that "take possession of our minds."\textsuperscript{26} Likewise Wilson enjoyed Kafka who dispensed with the silly ghosts and devils of earlier writers and instead probed the horrors waiting in the psyche.\textsuperscript{27} Wilson's ideas demonstrate the impact of Freudian psychoanalysis on American culture. The stories of Poe and others had certainly dealt with madness, but the clinical study of psychology introduced a whole new language of psychosis and repression that seemed to indicate that anyone could potentially be a fiendish killer.

Although he discussed some horror films in passing, Wilson, like Lovecraft, is more concerned with the written tale of terror. Curtis Harrington writing some ten years after Wilson shifted the focus of the discussion to the scary movie. For Harrington the advent of sound had a lasting impact on the reception of the horror film. Like Wilson, he also argued that the stock market crash drove people to see horrific images on film. Stress led people to horror during the Depression but by

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 78.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, 81.
1939, Harrington argued the Depression was fading in the face of the Second World War and horror films had almost ceased to be produced.\textsuperscript{28} This is true but it ignores the fact that Hollywood had an unofficial ban on horror films due to concerns from British distributors, and that this had a larger impact on production than the easing of the Depression.\textsuperscript{29} Universal returned to horror in 1939 with the release of \textit{Son of Frankenstein}, following the success of a \textit{Frankenstein}/Dracula double feature in many cities. To say that horror films lost their popularity because the economy recovered is too simplistic an explanation. Harrington ignored Universal’s last Golden Age monster, \textit{The Wolfman} released in 1941. He credited producer Val Lewton with reviving the horror film in the 1940s and claimed these more atmospheric films appealed to the more sophisticated taste of the modern audiences who had seemingly move beyond the “penny-dreadful formulas” of Universal.\textsuperscript{30} Classic monster movies were reliably successful in the 1940s but their profits were shrinking.

Following the war the horror film did suffer somewhat and the iconic monsters eventually served as foils for the comedy team of Abbott and Costello’s 1948 farce \textit{Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein}. New monsters such as the Creature from the Black Lagoon emerged in the 1950s and 1960s and critics again tried to account for the appeal of these films. Writing in 1967 Richard Dillard claimed that horror films revolved around “the dark truths of sin and death.”\textsuperscript{31}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{29} Skal, \textit{The Monster Show}, 195.
\item\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 18.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Dillard, horror films serve as updates of medieval morality plays and as such play out the struggle of good and evil over the soul of man. Dillard here follows the trend of writing that separates horror from the context of its time. Unlike Lovecraft, however, Harrington attempted to move beyond horror's primitive appeal to our emotions. The real horror of vampires, mummies, and werewolves, according to Harrington, is not their fearsome guise, but rather their state of being. Quite simply monsters are the undead and this state and its accompanying failure to find eternal peace are what make monsters scary. Dillard introduced a purpose much different than just evoking shivers or allowing the audience a brief victory over evil. For Dillard the task of the horror film is to make the audience accept death as natural and preferable to the possibility of being undead. Horror films somehow frighten us out of our fear of death. How this works is not specifically laid out, but Harrington argued that the best horror films are those with a sympathetic monster. Audiences cheer when the monster is dispatched not only because the world (or village) is saved but also because the monster is finally at peace. Horror films then reveal great truths about the world, primarily the presence of darkness and the power of redeeming love. This interpretation may be helpful for philosophers, but it ignores variations of themes at different times.

Theoretical Approaches to Horror

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid, 37.
34 Ibid.
36 Ibid, 39. The Christian underpinnings of this interpretation are clear to Dillard.
Dillard and Harrington, writing about horror in the latter half of the twentieth century moved away from descriptions of types of scary stories, to explanations centered on what horror means. To understand why terrible images are fascinating to people Noël Carroll developed a philosophy of horror in *The Philosophy of Horror, Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990). Using Aristotle’s discussion of tragedy as a frame of reference, Carroll seeks to create a description for horror the way Aristotle did for tragedy.\(^{37}\) To that end Carroll coins the term “art-horror” as the name for the emotion produced in the audience when witnessing horror entertainment. Carroll then sets out to identify the “characteristic structures, imagery, and figures” and how they are arranged to produce “art-horror.”\(^{38}\) Carroll’s philosophy explores the basic paradoxes of horror: how can people be frightened by what they know is not real and why do people seek to be frightened in the first place. Carroll concludes that horror is simply interesting to people and that the presence of monsters, which people know cannot be real, “command[s]” our attention.\(^{39}\) Our fascination with monsters overrides our own emotional response to flee or simply stop watching or reading.\(^{40}\) For Carroll it is all about the monsters, although not all monsters are alike. They are all otherworldly and he claims that a central feature of monsters is their impurity.\(^{41}\) Monsters are categorical malformations; they are dead and alive, human and nonhuman. There

---


\(^{38}\) Ibid.

\(^{39}\) Ibid, 206.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) Ibid, 31.
are fusion monsters like the Frankenstein monster and there are fission monsters like werewolves and Mr. Hyde. Regardless of type, monsters hold our fascination.

The decade of the 1980s saw a new wave of horror movies as well as new ideas about their true meanings. Whereas previous writers focused on death and fear a new group of critics focused on sex in horror stories. James Twitchell sums up horror this way: "... modern horror myths prepare the teenager for the anxieties of reproduction."42 The fumbling of monsters trying to capture young women, and the possibility of creating (birthing) monstrous creatures are at the heart of horror, showing teenagers what social norms are not to be violated.43 Judith Halberstam argues that modern monsters have come to be focused on sexual elements, whereas monsters in the past also dealt with race and class.44 In this there is the acknowledgement that monsters may change over time. Film historian David Skal also sees sex at the root of all horror and goes to great lengths to link what seems plausible (the asexual production of the Frankenstein monster and the unnatural sexual reproduction of vampires) to the absurd (Lon Chaney's makeup in *Phantom of the Opera* denoting a ruined penis and 1960s Aurora wolfman models appealing to teenage boys because of their hairy palms) to his underlying theory. What emerges in many of these writings is the idea that horror is a conservative reaction to the liberation of the Enlightenment. The message of horror, according to these writers, is that sex often means death. The idea of horror as a reaction to

---

43 Ibid.
the Enlightenment is not new; we have seen that Walpole's proto-gothic novel was also thought to be a response to rationalism. The difference in the two responses is that one fears that the Enlightenment produces chaotic freedom while the other implies that rationalism cannot be relied on to explain everything.

E. Michael Jones has a different perspective. For him monsters are not produced in reaction to the Enlightenment; the Enlightenment is the true monster. For Jones, if we follow the Enlightenment to its logical conclusion we will find despair and destruction. Horror is about sex for Jones as it represents the conflict between complete sexual freedom and strict religious values. For liberal critics of horror fiction the solution is to abandon the old values, but Jones argues this completely misreads horror and simply leads to more terrible situations. He inverts the idea that monsters occur when you repress sexual desire and states instead that real horror occurs when sexual morality is abandoned. This is the essential problem for those who write about horror and make horror films. They cannot see how sexual morality can be a good thing, and so they misunderstand the central conflict of horror. This position has some weight in discussing horror in the United States between 1890 and 1939 when there existed a fear that science might create new horrors rather than alleviate them.

For Jones the culprit is not just sexual license, but also an over reliance on scientific reasoning. Science leads not to enlightenment but to despair because

---

46 Ibid, x.
47 Ibid, 271. Perhaps the classic examples of sexual repression leading to monsters are psychological interpretations of James’ *The Turn of the Screw* and Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.
48 Ibid, 265.
"science has violated sexual norms which protect the matrix of human life."\(^{49}\)

Other writers echo that horror is driven by concerns with science. Suzanne Navarette argues that writers in Europe were indeed concerned about the implications of modern science, particularly the idea that decline and decay was inevitable.\(^{50}\) Scientific ideas of the nineteenth century often brought attention to the seeming fact that the outside shape of something, for instance the skull, revealed something about the inner nature of things and people. Horror writers then demonstrated that fear of what might be lurking on the inside.\(^{51}\) Jason Colavito also argues that horror is primarily a reaction to scientific theory.\(^{52}\)

There are still those who argue that all of this discussion about meaning is worthless. Walter Kendrick dismisses the idea that horror might have some use in deciphering culture and society. For Kendrick, horror is simply about the feelings it evokes.\(^{53}\) Of course the primary feeling is fear, and Kendrick, like Lovecraft, argues that fear is a timeless and universal emotion that primarily revolves around a fear of death and dead things. As modern hygiene practices have evolved people have become less fearful of spirits (as their ancestors were) and more fearful of the dead thing itself.\(^{54}\) This relates to Freud's idea of "the uncanny" or the feeling that some inanimate object may be alive and vice versa. For Kendrick modern plagues such as AIDS do not reshape horror, they merely bring to the

\(^{49}\) Ibid, 272.
\(^{51}\) Ibid, 5.
\(^{54}\) Ibid, xv.
surface the old fears of decay that the West continually tries to suppress through various funerary rights.\textsuperscript{55} So why do people seek out horror as entertainment if they fear dead things? Kendrick's answer is the opposite of Harrington's. Horror films reassure audiences not that death is natural and preferable to being undead, but rather that their bodies are impregnable to decay.\textsuperscript{56} They see the evidence on the screen. Although they know that filmmakers are employing various tricks the audience members shriek and grab each other but not in fear. The screams of the crowd are celebrations of being alive, "permanently alive, and forever immune to decay."\textsuperscript{57} There may be some contemporary political or social commentary in a horror film, but its real purpose is to reassure the audience that they will never rot.\textsuperscript{58} Oddly enough through this analysis of the purpose of horror films, Kendrick still maintains that scary entertainment is not something that conveys meaning, but is rather simply an entertainment, a way to make money, and should therefore not be over analyzed.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{Horror and American History}

It seems clear that the study of horror falls into a few main categories. There are studies of the chronological development of horror, there are studies of the meanings of horror, and there are studies which are more generally appreciations of the genre, with emphasis on particular monsters, authors, actors or directors. Over the past thirty years much of this writing has centered on the

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. xvi.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, xviii.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. xix.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, xxiv.
sexual elements of horror. But all of these efforts tend to look at horror as a continuum from Mary Shelly until the present time. By trying to write all-encompassing theories I believe many writers ignore critical aspects of scary entertainment relevant to the time it is produced.

I intend to use these scary entertainments as cultural artifacts in order to gain some insight to American culture. In doing so I hope to show that Robert Bloch, best known for writing Psycho, which Alfred Hitchcock filmed in 1961, was wrong when, in a brief piece written in 1973, he claimed that readers could learn nothing about 1920s America from the writings of Lovecraft.60 A quick survey of topics in Lovecraft will reveal that his fiction responds to many areas of interest in Jazz Age America: evolution, immigration, and the origin of the cosmos. Approaching the stories of Lovecraft and others, as well as films and radio plays, from a cultural historian's viewpoint yields interesting results. If we take the idea, espoused by Peter Burke, that ultimately cultural history is concerned with symbols and what those symbols mean, then we can look at scary entertainments not merely as less than reputable art forms but as texts that can be used to better understand this period of American history.61 In his 1969 introduction to a collection of stories written by Robert W. Chambers some seventy-five years earlier, Everett F. Bleiler posited a thought provoking statement: "During the last decade or so of the nineteenth century, some forgotten impulse drove several

---

unexpected persons into brief association with supernatural fiction." Bleiler noted that Chambers, a contemporary and collaborator of Charles Dana Gibson, creator of the "Gibson Girl," was one of a group of writers including Charlotte Perkins Gilman, F. Marion Crawford, and the architect Ralph Adams Cram, who all dabbled in horror stories in the 1890s. The idea of the "forgotten impulse" echoes the question of why those monsters and why at that time? A popular writer of historical romances largely forgotten by 1969 and still little remembered today, Chambers' 1895 collection of short stories *The King in Yellow* constitutes what many still consider the template for what would later be known as weird fiction. The stories in the book are loosely interwoven by the existence of a mysterious play, "The King in Yellow," which drives its readers mad. The stories involve madness, animated corpses, exotic landscapes which may exist only in parallel worlds, and a host of other features, which would routinely appear in later works by authors such as H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, and Clark Ashton Smith in publications such as *Weird Tales, Strange Tales of Mystery and Terror, Strange Stories, Horror Stories*, and *Unknown Worlds*. The elements in these stories often remained the same but context and settings would change over time.

If we think about Bleiler's "impulse" as an inspiration for creators of horror entertainment then perhaps we better understand the fears that helped produce monsters and to see how those monsters changed during the first years of the twentieth century. This dissertation will trace what I will call scary entertainment in the United States from the early 1880s until the late 1930s. I will examine how

---

scary stories exposed the tensions of white Americans in a changing world. This period of scary entertainment came to an end around 1936 when the objections of British censors helped bring about a short, self-imposed 'ban' on horror in Hollywood. Monsters would return but the real horrors of World War Two and the coming of the Atomic Age would usher in a whole new era of scary entertainment.

This study is a work of cultural history. As such it is not merely the study of cultural institutions but rather what Johan Huizinga referred to as patterns of culture, that is, what the people of a particular time and place were thinking and feeling and how those thoughts and feelings appear in literature, art, and other cultural forms. To find these patterns historians must study “themes, symbols, sentiments and forms.” ‘Forms' refers to cultural rules and interestingly enough Huizinga thought American writing lacked a sense of form. This may be particularly true with regards to scary entertainment that was often viewed as lowbrow entertainment. In Sensational Designs Jane Tompkins set out to redefine the term literature, removing it from the realm of the timeless, and making it more immediate to the time period in which it was produced. One only has to look at a classic monster, the vampire, to see how things change over time. Today's cinematic and literary vampires are beautiful creatures, forever young and vibrant. In contrast, Orlock (Max Schreck) in Nosferatu (1922), is pale, emaciated, and generally reminiscent of a giant rat. There is not much teenage appeal. Even Bela Lugosi's Dracula, with all of his Old World charm was a monster to be destroyed.

---

63 Burke, 9.
Certainly there is something happening in society to shape monsters and how they are presented indicates their meanings are fluid not timeless.

There is much that can yet be done with the study of horror entertainment in the United States. Scary entertainment is often relegated to the realms of popular culture and so until recent years may have been ignored altogether as an academic pursuit. Recently S. T. Joshi and others have attempted to establish H. P. Lovecraft as a great American writer. Lovecraft now has volumes in the Library of America series so perhaps he has arrived. But debate over literary merit misses the point of popular culture, namely what was being discussed in this often critically maligned forms of entertainment.

Lawrence Levine has defended the study of popular culture as a legitimate pursuit for historians. For Levine popular culture is just as legitimate as an area of study as is folk culture. An idea that Levine objects to is that these entertainments are often described as escapism. Using the idea that monsters represent fears in concrete forms, scary entertainment provides a unique insight into American history. The monsters that appear in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are the manifested fears of a rapidly changing world, a world where humanity's place in the cosmos was in flux. Americans did not go to monster movies to escape the world, they were engaging in a conversation that helped explain their world. Their vision of humanity was distinctly white, middle class, and Protestant. That understanding of humanity was experiencing strains from multiple sources. Chapter one centers on the tension between continued belief in an

---

eternal soul and the more scientific view that humans are simple biological units
controlled by psychological forces they may not understand. The second chapter
focuses on the role of evolution in scary entertainment and focuses on fears of the
taint of the primitive on the pure white race and the fear of de-evolution into a
more base form. The third chapter focuses on the fear of science unfettered by
human emotion and morality. The mad scientist became a staple of scary
entertainment and in many of these stories, the inhumanity of these men of
science and their abandonment of human society is emphasized. The final
chapter explores fears of the other as depicted in stories where other races and
cultures pose a threat to white, American civilization. Horror stories also tended to
characterize those with physical deformities as things to be feared, an idea that fit
in well with the eugenics movement. What emerges is a society that appropriated
different strands of thought for their own particular needs. Many of the themes that
emerge in scary entertainment are irrational and they represent an emotional
response to a world which seemed terrifying.

The sixty years between 1880 and 1940 were ones of monumental
changes in the United States. Not only were there technological and scientific
advancements, but the role of the country in the world was also changing, bringing
the United States into the arena of international relations as a major player. The
mores and morals of the Victorian Age were also falling away. And as these
chaotic changes were taking place, scary entertainments gave forms, in the
shapes of monsters, to the fears of the American people trying to make sense of
things. It can be argued that people have always been afraid of death and the
unknown, and many writers have tried to place horror into a continuum to explore those fears or they have created more modern theories dealing with reproduction or sexual repression. There may be some merit to these ideas, but they tend to ignore the particulars of time and place. Horror provides the perfect place to give form to people’s fears, not just timeless fears; but those they encountered and worried about every day.
On Thursday September 9, 1909 the American philosopher and psychologist William James met Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud at the home of G. Stanley Hall, president of Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts. Freud and Jung had been invited by Hall to give a series of lectures to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the opening of Clark. Freud delivered his lectures in German, but they were transcribed and newspapers supplied summations of his talks. Nathan Hale noted that Freud’s lectures exaggerated elements of his work and that reporters further simplified key elements for American audiences, but they found a particularly receptive audience in the United States.¹ For Freud argued what many American psychologists had come to believe, that neurosis was grounded in psychological issues, not physical ones such as brain lesions. Freud’s methodology for curing mental disorders was quickly accepted by many laymen as well. But those who considered themselves men of science were not as easily swayed. Neurologists in particular were dismissive of such unscientific practices as dream interpretation and at the 1910 annual banquet of the American Neurological Association member Dr. Joseph Collins placed “Freudism” alongside supernatural explanations as ideas to be strenuously opposed.² William James, who died that same year, might also have provoked the ire of Dr. Collins, for he might have fit into the second category of

² Ibid, 275.
condemnation. James was an investigator of supernatural claims, and he did not set out to merely discredit them.

Forty years before Freud came to America James was a pioneer in applying scientific method to the study of psychology. In Germany he studied the emerging field of physiological psychology which postulated that human consciousness was predicated by some physical process in the brain. He established laboratory conditions to study human reactions. But James also wrestled with feelings of ennui in the face of "positivistic science (which) had blown like a frigid wind across the intellectual landscape – dispelling the comforting warmth of inherited faith, reducing reality to the precisely observable and measurable, challenging familiar ideas of morality and freedom." Perhaps to try and reestablish some comfort James was open to the possibility of some realm beyond the physical world. Instead of dismissing supernatural claims outright, he sought to test supernatural claims using the same empirical methods he used in his laboratory. In a letter from the American Society for Psychical Research James invited others to aid in this endeavor:

We therefore invite cooperation from those disposed to aid us in our purpose. That purpose is neither the gathering of testimony from others, nor the mere gaining of a personal conviction satisfactory to ourselves; but rather the ascertainment of facts under such thorough conditions of observation as may make it seem impossible to those who credit us with honesty and normal intelligence to reject our conclusions. We seek, in other words, evidence, that is facts so ascertained and recorded as to be open to but one interpretation.5

---

James attended séances and collected information in an attempt to amass evidence of the continuation of human consciousness beyond death.

Sigmund Freud sought no such evidence. Freud thought religion was a mass delusion brought about by people seeking to avoid suffering and the belief in eternal life was wish fulfillment. His primary focus was inward, and he sought to discover the connection between past psychological events and present behaviors. Present neurosis often had their roots in repressed memories of earlier, traumatic events. Troubles emerged with the return of those repressed memories.

The human mind was something that both James and Freud sought to understand. But James tried to reconcile the supernatural with the natural while Freud sought to understand why humans harbored fears of things which clearly were not real. Many scientists ridiculed James's forays into psychical research, but he and other respected men and women were not willing to completely close off these avenues into the unknown. Oddly this dimension did not represent terror but comfort. The idea of immortality, that loved ones were not really dead was reassuring to many. Freud's ideas represented a break from older modes of thought, such as ideas of sexual morality. But they also emphasized intense self-examination to uncover latent issues which might lead to psychosis. This chapter will explore how the ideas of James's and Freud's ideas emerge in the scary stories of this era. The first set of stories deals with ghosts and while sometimes

---

scary, these stories also presented the reassurance of immortality as well as ideas of social justice as spirits often avenged wrongs. The second involved people who were victims of their own minds. The horror in these stories centered on the depravity and potential deceitfulness of mind. Scary entertainment provided a way to shape the discussion of whether or not there was something beyond human understanding, some realm of the supernatural. The horror stories that emerged to explore this realm centered on ghosts and madness. Previously scary stories tasked both protagonists and audiences with determining if seemingly supernatural events were actually occurring or were instead elaborate human hoaxes. Horror stories that appeared in the late nineteenth century continued that tradition, but often stressed the reality of the unknown or the possibility of a rational, previously unknown explanation. Stories that centered on modern ideas of madness also emerged. These stories posited a world in which the human mind could produce its own unique horrors.

The Comfort of Ghosts

On March 3, 1912 William Dean Howells attended a party given by his publisher Colonel George Harvey in honor of the author's seventy fifth birthday. The speeches offered tended to focus on three cornerstones of nineteenth century civilization: certain and universal moral values, the inevitability of progress, and 'traditional' literary culture.7 This assessment overlooked the fact that the nineteenth century was also a time of considerable turmoil. During the 1800s the United States experienced rapid industrialization, mounting political

---

conflicts that ultimately erupted in Civil War, severe economic depressions, violent clashes between labor and capital and the assassination of three presidents. The values upheld at Howells’s party were no longer certain or universal and progress seemed to be working only for a small portion of the country. The pressures of modern, industrial society could be overwhelming and in 1880 George Miller Beard identified neurasthenia, which resulted in a paralysis of the will, as the disease of the age.8

Industrialization disrupted patterns of family and societal relations in the United States. As more men began working in factories and away from home, older familial relationships began to break down. Young men who previously might have stayed home to learn the family business now found themselves travelling to find work.9 As the male centered family farms and businesses faded, the resulting uncertainties led to a series of revivals in upstate New York.10 The Second Great Awakening burned out in the 1830s but the area still seemed to attract those seeking spiritual answers such as John Humphrey Noyes who began his Oneida Community in 1848. In the same year two young girls living in New York ushered in a new type of religious fervor. Kate and Margaret Fox claimed they could communicate with the spirits of the dead by means of coded knocks or rapping. The girls moved to Rochester and were soon conducting séances that attracted hundreds of people. Not all were convinced and Margaret

10 Ibid, 65.
eventually confessed that it was all a hoax. But her confession came forty years after their first claims of clairvoyance, and by that time there were hundreds of Spiritualists claiming they too could conduct séances to communicate with the spirits of deceased loved ones. For many Spiritualism reaffirmed the idea that there were realms beyond human understanding. Science and Spiritualism seemed to be diametrically opposed, but there were those who believed that science should study the phenomenon empirically. The bulk of the scientific community argued that this was not only a ridiculous idea but also a dangerous one as it gave Spiritualism a hint of legitimacy that it did not deserve. One man who was willing to approach Spiritualism with an open mind was William James.

In 1882 several learned Englishmen including Henry Sidgwick, an economist and philosopher, and Edmund Gurney, a dabbler in almost everything from medicine to law, founded the Society for Psychical Research in London. Their stated purpose was to use the latest scientific methods to study psychic phenomena including telepathy, ghost sightings and mediumistic communication with departed souls. Later that same year James met Gurney and became intrigued by the Society’s work. In 1884 James was given the task of overseeing the startup of the American branch of the Society for Psychical Research. Along with Henry Bowditch, James was to outline the Society’s research plan.11 James fervently believed that the claims of the Spiritualists could and should be studied empirically. He argued that by simply approaching Spiritualism with the aim of disproving its claims, scientists might be arrogantly disregarding real evidence.

James was willing to believe in the possibility that the Spiritualists’ claims could be an aspect of nature as yet unknown. He was also well aware that a kind of war might be brewing between the scientists and the spiritualists and warned scientists that they were in danger of alienating those with supernatural experiences and creating a larger divide by being “callously indifferent” to such experiences. James also faced spiritualists who were skeptical of his intentions, believing he was a debunker out to make them look foolish. James, in turn, was considered foolish by those in the science circle because he gave serious consideration to such matters to begin with. For his part James was not fond of the obvious frauds he encountered: “once a cheat, always a cheat,” he wrote in 1909. But he was also dismayed by science’s refusal to investigate phenomenon that he found intriguing and compelling enough to thoroughly explore. He saw no reason why science and spiritualism could not coexist.

Perhaps psychical research just did not have the right supporters:

Orthodoxy is almost as much a matter of authority in science as it is in the Church. We believe in all sorts of laws of nature which we cannot ourselves understand, merely because men whom we admire and trust vouch for them. If Messrs. Helmholtz, Huxley, Pasteur, and Edison were simultaneously to announce themselves as converts to clairvoyance, thought-transference, and ghosts, who can doubt that there would be a prompt popular stampede in that direction? We should have as great a slush of “telepathy” in the scientific press as we know have of “suggestion” in the medical press. We should hasten to invoke mystical explanations.

---

13 Ibid.
14 Richardson, William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism, 263.
16 Richardson, William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism, 264.
17 Ibid, 258.
without winking, and fear to be identified with a by-gone régime if we held back.\(^{18}\)

James's interests in psychical research were however, not entirely removed from the realm of the personal. In 1885 his infant son Herman died and a few months after this tragedy James made his first visit to Leonora Piper, a well-known medium. Initially skeptical, James became increasingly convinced that Piper did in fact possess "supernormal powers."\(^{19}\) James attended many séances and had written various investigative reports, sometimes exposing frauds. In general he did not favor so called materializing mediums who made letters fall from the ceiling or caused objects to crash or bang around the room.\(^{20}\) Leonora Piper, however, was a trance medium, that is, she entered a trance state and claimed to be a conduit through which spirits could speak to their friends and relatives. Her sessions seemed to be more serious and reverent than spectacles of musical instruments being played by "spirits."

Richard Hodgson, a member of the London SPR, came to the United States in 1887 to investigate Mrs. Piper. Hodgson had previously investigated famed spiritualist Madam Blavatsky and discovered much of her mediumistic insight was gathered by opening people's mail and gleaning any information which she could then claim to have come from the spirit world.\(^{21}\) Hodgson was initially skeptical of Piper because her trance involved the use of a so-called spirit

---


\(^{19}\) Richardson, William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism, 263.

\(^{20}\) Ibid, 259.

\(^{21}\) Blum, Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death, 91.
guide, a go-between for the spirits in the world beyond and Mrs. Piper in ours. Piper's guide was a male, French physician named Dr. Phinuit who had died in 1860. No record could be found of his existence and when he spoke through Piper, whose voice dropped in pitch, he apparently struggled with his native tongue. For this reasons Hodgson was convinced that Piper too was simply another fraud. On a subsequent visit Dr. Phinuit provided personal details about Hodgson's life that convinced the Englishman she must have agents spying on him. After his own spies followed Piper and turned up nothing unusual Hodgson concluded there simply was no evidence of fraud in the séances she conducted.23

Perhaps his grieving desire for some communication from his son clouded his empiricist gaze, but James, even more so than Hodgson, came away convinced that Leonora Piper was genuine. "I now begin to believe that that type of mind takes hold of a range of truths to which the other kind is stone blind," he wrote to J. J. Garth Wilkinson.24 Leonora Piper became his "white crow," the rare exception that disproved the scientific community's claim that there was no such thing as communication with spirits from beyond.25

For James even if the supernatural could not be proven empirically, human belief in such things produced physical effects. In "The Reality of the Unseen" James argued that all of our beliefs, our attitudes, morals, and emotions

---

22 Ibid, 134. When James attempted to speak to Dr. Phinuit in French, the doctor often fell silent.
23 Ibid, 141, Richardson, William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism, 261.
24 Richardson, William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism, 263. Wilkinson was a friend of James's father, whom James's younger brothers had been named for.
25 Ibid.
were due to objects that we believe exist. He called these things "objects of our consciousness," which may be detected by our senses or may be wholly in our thoughts.\textsuperscript{26} These objects elicit certain reactions from us. James suggested that "things of thought" may even provoke stronger responses, that our memories of events often produce stronger feelings of, say, anger or shame, then those produced at the time of the actual occurrence.\textsuperscript{27} As an example of this James offered morals. Our morals, based on ideas of right and wrong, can bring about stronger reactions than the physical stimulus at the time. So our morals may override our current desire for gratification.\textsuperscript{28} James, of course, was discussing religious ideas, but he used several examples from SPR research to emphasize his point. James recounted that Immanuel Kant claimed that words such as soul and God technically have no significance since our conceptions require "sense-content" to be true "objects of knowledge."\textsuperscript{29} That is for the pure empiricist if you cannot see or hear or touch the soul then it cannot be known. If the soul cannot be known in the living then it seems even more unlikely that it could be known from beyond. This, of course, is where empirical scientists might object for how could one postulate a 'beyond'? What proof was there? But, James continued, Kant went on to say that such words have "meaning for our practice," that is, we act as if there were a God or as if we had an immortal soul, and so these words do have an impact on our lives.\textsuperscript{30} These "objects of belief" underlie all the things

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Freud's argument would claim that the base desires of the id would be held in check by the ego.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 59.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
we can conceive of and are in fact central to our humanity as they are the things we love, hate, and fight over as if they were concrete things.\textsuperscript{31} James argues that these are "...as real in the realm which they inhabit as the changing things of sense are in the realm of space."\textsuperscript{32}

From this Platonic realm of absolutes James then turns to science. Science, he claims, is taking the place of religion and the Laws of Nature are becoming "objective facts to be revered."\textsuperscript{33} For James these laws seem to be little different than religious ideas. They may be abstract but they explain certain phenomena. Human consciousness gives rise to a "sense of reality" and "a feeling of objective presence" that allow religious "conceptions" or even scientific laws to be believed even if difficult to describe or explain.\textsuperscript{34} Sometimes we just know. This sense of reality can be seen when someone feels a presence in a room, a hand on the arm, or even a distant friend. James relates the story of a woman who was an involuntary or automatic writer and claimed that she felt a foreign presence.\textsuperscript{35} But while others may dismiss these things as unconscious acts, James does not. Just as he argued for the possibility of spiritualism, he argues that these examples prove that our brains are open to a broader reality than our senses can provide.\textsuperscript{36} As for religious beliefs, James argues that "belief objects are not simply ideas believed to be true" but are "realities directly

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 60.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 61.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 63-64.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 65.
Rationalism will not be able to unseat these ideas. So for all the attempts to study spiritualism scientifically, James comes back to the realization that it may not be possible to empirically prove the unseen, but this does not mean that it does not exist.

Proving the unseen was precisely what the Society for Psychical Research set out to do. In 1886, after only four years of existence, the London Society published its magnum opus, *Phantasms of the Living*. The two volumes contained the reports of hundreds of individuals who claimed to have had supernatural encounters. These were not ghostly encounters per se, but what we might term telepathy. The Society sought particular instances where the mind of one person affected the mind of another. These might be cases of physical phenomena, such as the woman whose nose began to bleed mysteriously and who later discovered her husband had injured himself fishing, causing a nosebleed. These could also be instances of what might be called astral projection, in which the image (phantasm) of a living person appears to another. It was believed that these connections were made in times of stress. What the Society sought was statistical evidence to show that there were enough of these cases that they could not be labeled chance. In his review of the book James professed that he found some of the accounts plausible and praised the researchers for their scientific methods. Although the authors did use statistical

---

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid, 72.
analysis, they still had to rely on the veracity of the individuals telling their stories. Skeptics would easily dismiss any experiences as delusions.

In an effort to increase the scope of data the Society asked for similar information from other countries and James was tasked to guide this "Census of Hallucinations" in the United States. James sought volunteers to collect data using a questionnaire concerning extraordinary experiences. The first question was the most obvious, had the person ever seen, heard, or been touched by anything that was not due to any external physical cause? This was the essence of the ghost story, a phenomenon that seemingly defied rational explanation. Although ghost stories predominantly concerned apparitions, others also included situations more closely aligned with what James termed hallucinations, i.e. an ethereal presence rather than a vision caused by a psychological problem. So hallucination was a rather confusing term chosen to suggest a supernatural phenomenon. This in turn begged the question, how exactly could such other worldly phenomena be seen? Seemingly to confound Kant a returned soul is often visible and therefore should be subject to empirical confirmation. If one sees something not entirely in the mind, then it must reflect light in order to be perceived. If this presence were to be felt, heard, or seen it must interact with the physical world in some manner.

---

Spiritualists claimed that the physical matter of the spirit was ectoplasm. Spirits covered in ectoplasm, usually generated by a medium, could then touch, or speak to, or be seen by others. Perhaps this why ghosts always appeared clothed, a phenomenon that Ambrose Bierce thought was somewhat odd and even commented that it was difficult to believe in ghosts because they never appear naked.\textsuperscript{42} Hundreds of pictures were taken of mediums excreting ectoplasm for spirits to shape and all are obviously faked. This did not stop the term from becoming part of the ghost story lexicon. Stephen Vincent Benet wrote of "a malicious Ectoplasm de-materializing on the wrong cosmic plane," in his story "The King of the Cats" (1929) and some fifty years after its publication the paranormal investigators of Ivan Reitman's 1984 film \textit{Ghostbusters} collected samples of the slimy substance after ghostly encounters.\textsuperscript{43} Ectoplasm demonstrates that even ghosts of the modern era could not escape the laws of physics. Although sight and sound were the most common ways characters experienced ghosts some, like Francis Marion Ward's narrator in "The Upper Berth" (1886) actually grapple with spirits. The title character in Crawford's "The Screaming Skull" (1908) not only wails but bites.

The questionnaire serves as an interesting guide to ghost stories of the day. If the respondent checked yes to having a supernatural encounter, then they were to answer further questions. These follow up questions added specifics to each occurrence. The first question asked if the respondent was "out of health or

\textsuperscript{42} Ambrose Bierce, "Devil's Dictionary", \textit{The Wasp} (February 28, 1885).
\textsuperscript{43} Steven Vincent Benet, "The King of the Cats" in \textit{American Fantastic Tales: Terror and the Uncanny from Poe to the Pulps}, ed. Peter Straub (New York: The Library of America, 2009), 581.
in grief or anxiety." The mental and physical state of the person claiming an encounter was important as obviously skeptics could argue the impressions were illusions or imaginings of a fevered brain. In stories the health of the protagonist can lead to doubts about reality of the experience. Bierce's narrator in "An Inhabitant of Carcosa" (1886) has been ill, Mathias in James Young's film The Bells (1926) suffers from anxiety brought on by guilt, and the narrator of Crawford's "The Screaming Skull" suffers from guilt and paranoia. The narrator of John Kendrick Bangs's "Thurlow's Christmas Story" (1894) begins by acknowledging people who have supernatural experiences often cannot relate them for fear they be seen as insane. He then goes on to relate just such an experience. He knows that to tell his story is a risk, "but until Mr. Edison or some other modern wizard has invented a search light strong enough to lay bare the secrets of the mind and the conscience of man I cannot prove to others that they are not pure fabrications, or at least the conjurings of a diseased fancy." The narrator, like James, holds out the possibility that science may indeed one day solve the mysteries of these occurrences. The brain apprehends these realities before science can explain them.

James's second question asked if "the impression (was) that of someone whom you were in the habit of seeing, and do you know what he or she was doing at the time?" For ghosts were not only the dead; many believed that 'phantasms' of living people could appear to warn of danger or at the moment of their death. It was not unusual for characters to be haunted by versions of

themselves. Henry James's narrator in "The Jolly Corner" (1908) is haunted by visions of his alternate self and the writer in Bangs's "Thurlow's Christmas Story" is visited by what appears to be an older version of himself and an evil version.\textsuperscript{45} Thurlow encounters the evil specter on the stairs, but it is a version that displays all of his bad qualities and he fears someone may mistake the bad version for himself.\textsuperscript{46} The older double is more kindly. Other encounters feature vengeful spirits such as the murdered man in \textit{The Bells} or the murdered woman in "The Screaming Skull (1908)."

The final question asked if others were present and if they shared the experience. Here James believed that more than one witness made a stronger case. In most ghost stories the protagonist experiences events that others do not witness. The traveler in "The Upper Berth" (1886) is the only one who encounters the ghost, but is told others have had similar experiences. The younger man in "The Screaming Skull" sees the bite marks on the old man and other evidence that suggests the skull is moving, but he never actually witnesses it. \textit{The Bells} offers a ghost, but it only appears to the main character Mathias played by Lionel Barrymore. The film echoed the ghost of Hamlet's father who is kind enough to appear to many, so even though we may later question Hamlet's sanity, we, the audience, know he saw a ghost because all those guards did as well. Mathias murders a wealthy merchant travelling alone who conveniently arrives at his inn

\textsuperscript{45} Henry James, "The Jolly Corner" in \textit{American Fantastic Tales: Terror and the Uncanny from Poe to the Pulps}, ed. Peter Straub (New York: The Library of America, 2009), 351.
\textsuperscript{46} Bangs, 163.
on Christmas night.47 Mathias takes his gold laden money belt to pay his debts and spare his daughter from marrying his creditor. As the merchant is dying he grabs some sleigh bells. When the murder is discovered Mathias hears sleigh bells but it is clear that only he hears them. Similarly no one sees the older double who gives Thurlow a manuscript that he has been working on for ten years and says that Thurlow may publish it as his own. When Thurlow decides to send it to his publisher along with an explanation of how he obtained it his evil self appears and convinces Thurlow to put his own name on it. Thurlow asks his double if he has read the story, and the double replies, “Haven’t you?” implying that the helpful stranger may in fact be a future version of Thurlow. Thurlow copies the story and burns the original, but when the publisher receives the story all the pages are blank. Any empirical evidence of his encounter is gone. Thurlow cannot remember the details of the story, but the publisher accepts his explanation of how he came to have the story as Thurlow’s Christmas tale.48

These protagonists demonstrate what James himself might have termed the will to believe. They are aware of the dangers of admitting such encounters and understand the importance of corroboration and empirical evidence to avoid accusations of insanity. “The Screaming Skull” even suggests that non-supernatural explanations would be insufficient. The titular skull leaves its hatbox container, is thrown out a window but returns, and apparently bites its victim to death. The old man’s continued declaration “Oh, I don’t mean as to anything

48 Bangs, 175.
supernatural," seems ridiculous in the context of the story. Whereas many might hold up the believers in the supernatural to ridicule, in this instance the rationalizer seems to be the fool. But the narrator does not dismiss the supernatural entirely. He claims there may be ghosts but that if they exist he does not think that they could harm people “except by frightening them.” James welcomed the possibility of supernatural explanation. The possibility of a life after death or of an immortal soul as promised by Christianity. In the face of empirical science many still clung to these comforting ideas.

For Ambrose Bierce ghosts had a very definite, if more psychological, purpose as they served as the “outward and visible sign of an inward fear and they served as no evidence of life after death or of an immortal soul.” Well aware of spiritualism and mediums, Bierce was not an admirer. He warned readers that mediums were often only fronts for prostitution and cautioned men to be wary if their daughter was told she would meet a handsome stranger. The ultimate cost could be her virtue and her soul. “An Inhabitant of Carcosa” was written in the 1880’s but was reworked for publication in the collection Civilians and Soldiers in 1892. The narrator himself is the ghost who wanders through an unrecognizable landscape. The narrator cannot be seen or heard. He is either from or in another physical realm. He then notices a headstone that bears his name and his date of birth and death. The story ends with a note stating that

---

50 Ibid.
51 Donald T. Blume, Ambrose Bierce’s Civilians and Soldiers in Context: A Critical Study (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2004), 38.

42
these are facts given to the medium Bayrolles by the spirit Hoseih Alar Robardin.52

It is easy to see that for some readers this endnote would almost serve as a punch line. The joke is that all this is nonsense relayed by a huckster medium. The spirit depicted in the story is not a happy one. It is disoriented and confused, with no great truths to impart, and with difficulty in communicating. Perhaps Bierce was cautioning readers not to be too enamored of the afterlife or to waste time in trying to communicate with it. In The Bells the audience is also given an alternate explanation for what is happening. When Mathias hears the bells and sees the ghost a title card tells the audience, “His tormentor – his conscience.”53 Although there is no attempt in the film to rationalize the bells or the ghost, the audience is given an alternate view as to what is happening, that Mathias’s guilt is driving him insane. This explanation aligns with the more modern worldview of human nature, a view that did not discount horror, but rooted it in the human psyche.

Psychological Horror

In 1909 when G. Stanley Hall, the founding president of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), extended an invitation to Sigmund Freud to come and lecture at Clark University Freud was not unknown to Americans, but he was far from a household name. Hall ensured that there was full press coverage of the event and Freud’s name appeared for the first time in the American popular

press.\textsuperscript{54} Complicating the coverage and impact of the visit Freud delivered his lectures in German. Hall urged Freud to write out his lectures, which Hall then had translated and published in the \textit{American Journal of Psychology}.\textsuperscript{55} Pamela Schirmeister argues that Americans identified with the Freudian notations that there is sense in everything, even if we cannot immediately see it, and that knowledge of this order is derived from experience.\textsuperscript{56} American readers of popular press articles of Freud's ideas were quick to distill them into one simplified misreading, namely that suppression of desires led to insanity and therefore people should act on impulses. What people failed to understand was that Freud was focusing on unconscious repression, and it was the power of the unconscious mind that found its way into horror fiction.

Madness as a theme had been a device in many works and not all associated with horror, but the madness of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was different. Nineteenth-century neurologists held the somatic view which argued that insanity was brought on by brain lesions in those with hereditary predispositions. By the end of the century this view was increasingly challenged by psychologists like Hall, who argued that madness resulted from psychological rather than physiological causes.\textsuperscript{57} Horror stories such as Charlotte Perkins Gillman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) presented new psychological horrors. Not only was the audience not sure if they were

\textsuperscript{54} Raymond E. Fancher, "Snapshots of Freud in America, 1899-1999", \textit{American Psychologist} 55, no. 9 (October 2000), 1026.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Pamela Schirmeister, "Freud in America", \textit{Psychoanalytic Dialogues} 14, no. 2 (2004), 267.
\textsuperscript{57} Hale, \textit{Freud and the Americans: The Beginnings of Psychoanalysis in the United States, 1876-1917}, 17
experiencing real supernatural horror or the delusions of an unbalanced mind, but the characters were not murderous madmen, but rather innocent victims.

In his essay “The Uncanny,” (1919) Freud explains that the uncanny is something frightening, which is connected to something that was once familiar and well known.\(^8\) This seems to contradict the well-known idea that what frightens us is the unknown. The uncanny might not have even been frightening at first, but once the memory has been repressed, its return leads to terror. The emotional impulse according to Freud, “is converted into fear by being repressed.”\(^9\) Moderns repressed their old fears of death and ghosts but it was always there, underneath the surface.\(^6\)

An example of what might produce feelings of fear would be the doubt that an inanimate object might in fact be alive. Freud listed fears of dolls and marionettes, but also of dead bodies.\(^1\) Freud also noted the reverse dynamic, where an epileptic seizure, for example might cause some to wonder if a living person is actually not some sort of mechanical construction that has malfunctioned.\(^2\) One of the most familiar elements of the uncanny is, of course, the double – something that is you and yet not you. Often an evil omen or a “harbinger of death.” Freud claimed that doubles come from a primitive stage of development and that when they return they produce feelings of terror. In religion Freud states that familiar old gods return as demons in the new religious

\(^9\) Ibid, 147.
\(^1\) Ibid, 135.
\(^2\) Ibid.
hierarchy. In the same way modern minds mirror “savage” thoughts about spirits. These repressed ideas produce the fear of death but also proved interesting to those seeking contact with the spirit world. The educated supposedly no longer feared ghosts but Freud argued that the primitive fear is merely repressed. Somewhere in our psyche is the fear of the dead, the fears that the dead are the enemy of the living who wish to carry off the living to share the afterlife. Spiritualists wrestled with this fear in order to minimize it. Since they believed in spirits they set out to show that the spirits were generally benevolent and helpful or sought justice. Even the scientific spiritualists were looking for reassurances that spirits were basically the same as their living counterparts had been and had not become evil ghouls. In that sense each attempted to put a benevolent face on death.

In stories of psychological horror the protagonists often suffer from some form of neurasthenia. In “The Yellow Wallpaper” the wife and young mother is brought to a new house in order to cure her of her “slight hysterical tendency” and her inability to care for her new baby due to nervousness. In George Sylvester Viereck’s The House of the Vampire (1907) the psychic vampire tells his young victim that he is overworked physically and emotionally and would not be surprised if neurasthenia resulted. Even young Miles in Henry James’s “The Turn of the Screw” (1898) seems at times to be overtaken by a certain malaise. The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” feels remorse at not being able to

---

63 Ibid, 143.
64 Ibid, 149.
65 Ibid.
perform her "duties" as wife and mother, but she also resents the fact that her physician husband does not take her illness more seriously. She tells her husband she thinks she has seen people walking in the gardens, and he cautions her that her nervous condition and her imagination could lead to dangerous delusions. His words are born out as she becomes increasingly agitated by the wallpaper, imagining that the pattern has eyes that stare at her. In a passage that looks forward to Freud she recalls being frightened by similar things as a child, and retreating to a favorite chair.\textsuperscript{67}

As her stay in the room continues the young woman becomes convinced that there is a woman trapped in the wallpaper trying to escape, and that others have tried but get caught, and only their eyes can be seen. As her time in the room draws to an end the narrator tries to remove the top pattern to help the woman escape and locks herself in to finish the job. The narrator now believes that \textit{she} is the woman behind the pattern and that even though she has escaped during the day, she will have to return at night. When her husband finds the key and enters the room, he finds her creeping along the floor. She tells him that she has ripped the wallpaper so that they cannot put her back. Her husband promptly faints.\textsuperscript{68}

The best known story that involves the reality of ghosts was "The Turn of the Screw," which first appeared in installments in \textit{Colliers Magazine} in 1898. The author, Henry James, was the brother of William James. The narrator,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{67} Charlotte Perkins Gillman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” in \textit{American Gothic: Tales from the Heart of the Country} eds Elizabeth Terry and Terri Hardin (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1997), 323.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Ibid, 334.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Douglas, tells the story to a gathering of friends. He claims that no other story can match it "[f]or general uncanny ugliness and horror and pain." Although written before Freud’s essay, James’s story used the term uncanny in much the same way. At the heart of the story are familiar themes from childhood, a home that possibly houses dark secrets, and a governess who may have repressed emotions of her own.

The main mystery of the story is whether or not the ghosts of Miss Jessel and Peter Quint are in fact real. The only person who seems to actually see them is the governess. She assumes that the children do as well but believes that they will not tell her that they do. The girl, Flora, explicitly states that she has never seen anything and simply thinks the governess does not like her. Mrs. Grose begins to think that Flora is indeed under the influence of evil ghosts, even though she reiterates that she has never actually seen one. The reader is never given a clear demonstration of the ghost’s presence. All of our knowledge comes through the governess. In a section that again hints at Freud’s primal fear of the lonely dead, the governess relates to Mrs. Grose that Miss Jessel wants Flora to share the torments of the damned. But the reader is not privy to a ghostly conversation between Miss Jessel and the governess, we learn about it as Mrs. Grose is hearing it.

For the governess commonplace childish mischievousness becomes evidence of ghostly influence. Miles’s attempts to assert himself are seen as

---

70 German word translated as uncanny more literally means “ unhomely.”
influenced by Quint. Flora's outburst and declaration that she does not like the
governess is evidence that the girl is lost to Miss Jessel. When the governess
writes to the children's uncle to find out why Miles was expelled from school, it
does not seem shocking that Miles took the letter to avoid getting into any more
trouble. For the governess this is another sign of the evil influence of the ghosts.
During their final confrontation the governess asks Miles if he took the letter
meant for his uncle. As she stands before Miles, the ghost of Peter Quint
appears in the window behind him, so again the governess is the only one that
sees it. When Miles confesses, the ghost disappears, and the governess sees
this as a victory. But when she presses Miles to tell her what he did at school, no
doubt to free his soul through confession, the ghost reappears. Miles asks, "Is
she here?" and the governess replies it was not Miss Jessel but another. Miles
cries out, "Peter Quint, you devil," collapses in the governess's arms and dies.71

James provides no clear-cut answer to the existence of ghosts. Unlike
other gothic tales the question is not whether the ghosts were actual spirits or a
hoax, but rather whether the ghosts are real or the governess is insane. James
himself never gave a definitive answer. The origin of the story is also somewhat
of a mystery. James claimed that he heard the story from Edward White Benson,
but Benson's sons dispute this, claiming never to have heard such a story.72 It is
possible that James heard of a similar story through his brother's association with
the Society for Psychical Research. In his preface to "The Turn of the Screw"

---

71 James, *Turn of the Screw*, 85.
72 Francis X. Roellinger, Jr. "Psychical Research and 'The Turn of the Screw'”, *American Literature* 20, no. 3 (November 1948), 405
James talks of “recorded and attested ‘ghosts’,” and says that he felt they were somewhat boring, so he made his ghosts more dramatic, saying it was better to have a good story than ‘correct’ apparitions.\textsuperscript{73} In other ways James’s ghosts are characteristic of the modern ‘real’ ghosts. They are not floating shrouds moaning and clanking chains. They are silent, they have regular clothing, and they can even appear during the day. These are all attributes of spirits found in the Society’s research.\textsuperscript{74} The ghosts in “The Turn of the Screw” can be seen as representations of what might be called the scientific ghosts of the late nineteenth century. The Governess fears the ghosts are trying to harm the children, but if they are real we see no direct evidence of that. They seem to be more along the lines of what Myers described as residual “personal energy” somehow connected to someone known before death.\textsuperscript{75} Of course, there are those who take a more direct Freudian view and claim that the ghosts stem from the governess’s repressed sexual feelings.\textsuperscript{76}

One of the clearest examples of a Freudian, psychoanalytical approach to horror is W.B. Seabrook’s “The Witch’s Vengeance” (1930). The narrator of the story is an American visiting France who overhears a sorciere (witch) place a curse on his friend Philippe Ardet. The reason for the curse is that the old woman does not want Ardet to see her granddaughter. The old woman tells Ardet, “Down, down, down you go, but not up, my pretty boy; not up, not up, not up!”\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{74} Roellinger, “Psychical Research and ‘The Turn of the Screw’”\textsuperscript{405}.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 411.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, 406.
When Ardet fails to return from a hike a search party is sent out. They bring Ardet back but he is unable to walk. The American narrator suspects witchcraft, but of a psychological rather than supernatural nature. The narrator gets the granddaughter to take him to her grandmother’s secret room where he finds a doll dressed like Ardet in a web of string. He takes the doll to Ardet hoping to snap him out of his delusion, but it does not work. The American then hints that the girl, Maguelonne, may be in danger. That does the trick and Ardet springs from the bed and takes Maguelonne from her grandmother’s house. The narrator then explains that Ardet’s subconscious mind was susceptible to the autosuggestion of magic. The narrator concludes that sorcery is a “real and dangerous force, but that its ultimate explanation lies not in any supernatural realm but rather in the field of pathological psychology.”

Edmund Wilson thought that stories which touched on psychological issues would be more realistic than ghost stories and would have a better chance of frightening people. Scary entertainment allowed the psychological to be transformed into the horrific. The radio drama “Cat Wife” (1938) starring Boris Karloff provides an example and is one of the more overt Freudian horror stories of the 1930s. When husband John confronts wife Linda with her unfaithfulness, she laughs at him and declares she only married him for his money. John angrily calls her a cat which prompts a physical transformation in Linda. Now a cat, Linda claws John’s eyes out. Freud would argue, and in the context of the drama it is hard to disagree, that this act represented the castration of John.

78 Ibid, 230.
Lambert Hillyer's Dracula's *Daughter* (1936) features a psychiatrist confronted with vampires. Otto Kruger plays Dr. Jeffrey Garth who is contacted by Dr. Van Helsing (Edward van Sloan) who has been arrested for the murder of Count Dracula. Garth believes Van Helsing is suffering from an obsession, but Van Helsing tries to convince him that vampires exist. Van Helsing asks who can determine the line between the superstition of today and the science of tomorrow. Garth then claims that he can accept the underlying scientific facts of Tibetan magic, voodoo, and thought transference but that vampires are simply not real.\(^8\) When Garth meets the Countess Zelaska (Gloria Holden) he thinks she too is obsessed by the idea of vampires. The Countess hopes that Garth is correct and that psychiatry will cure her. The relationship between Garth and Zelaska is undermined by her servant Sandor (Irving Pichel) who encourages the countess to embrace vampirism and grant him eternal life. When it becomes clear that Zelaska prefers Garth, Sandor shoots her in the heart with a wooden arrow, thus killing her. Garth is never fully convinced that Zelaska is not insane, but he will never be sure. Psychiatry is shown as a valuable science, but one which may have to expand its understanding of the world.

The contending ideas of the possibility of the supernatural versus an empirical world of rationality represented an aspect of the fluctuating definition of humanity. Were humans part of a divine creation, imbued with immortal souls that could somehow communicate with the living? Or were humans simply part of the natural world, whose own psychological foibles could turn them into monsters

---

\(^8\) Lambert Hillyer, *Dracula's Daughter*, Universal, 1936.
or lead them into insanity? Horror stories continued to bring the two together in much the same way as stories of the fantastic, leaving the audiences guessing. These horror tales represent a solution in that they provide the possibility of a duality of humanity that is both temporal and eternal. The possibility is replayed constantly in scary stories where one explanation does not seem to suffice.

In the 1920s and 1930s pulp magazines began publishing horror and fantasy stories in increasing numbers. A sub-genre of these stories was the "weird menace" story. These stories had traditional gothic trappings such as secret passages and dungeons, but they usually had no unresolved supernatural elements.81 The publisher Henry Steeger claimed the idea for these gruesome tales came from the extreme simulated carnage of the Grand Guignol Theater. Popular Publications featured bizarre murders and what appeared to be a non-human nemeses, but all would be rationally explained by the end of the story.82 A typical story is "The Buyer of Souls" (1936) in which the hero, Colin Avery, seeks the help of a witch to help fend off a rival who is a spiritualist of the old school, complete with table rapping. Avery has scientific explanations for the witch's actions but these do not prevent him from fearing for his immortal soul. He fears his girlfriend has been drugged and hypnotized into being a Satanist. At the same time he is terrified to discover that he unknowingly signed a document selling his soul to the devil. Although he has read that drugs cause people to hallucinate and think they are flying to witches' Sabbaths, he has also "read too

82 Ibid.
often about the helplessness of civilized science in the face of witch-curses and voodoo." 83 In the end Avery has a chemist analyze the "witch" drugs and discovers that most of them are the common "sinister drugs of witchcraft." However, one drug that causes paralysis could not be identified. 84 The message seems clear, for all of our science there will always be those things that are unexplained. The world cannot be explained using only one method.

Writing to the New York Times in 1915, the psychologist and psychical researcher James Hyslop asked for a merging of the two realms. Hyslop stressed that psychical researchers were real scientists involved in the study of certain phenomenon. 85 Like all good scientists they were trying to establish the facts and not fit evidence to some preconceived idea. The Society of Psychical Research sought facts in categories of research such as telepathy, alleged clairvoyance, alleged premonition, mediumistic phenomena of communication with the dead, hypnotism, and dowsing. 86 Psychical researchers were still seeking the cause of telepathy according to Hyslop, but he wrote of telepathy as an established fact and claimed that it "has perhaps been proved as certainly as any other fact known to science." 87 Hyslop admits that clairvoyance, prevision, or the foretelling of future events do not have as many facts and that the problem with mediumistic displays is always determination of authenticity and determination of authenticity requires expensive equipment to carry out rigid

84 Ibid, 114.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
scientific evaluation. Hyslop again emphasized that psychical research was not spiritualism but rather research based on empirical data. Tying psychical research to psychiatry Hyslop argued that the subconscious mind is largely a mystery and its connection to the body and other minds needs to be studied. He reminded his readers that science was always discovering new things, which in turn required new ways of observation. His case in point was atomic theory. Hyslop desperately wanted people to see that just as there is an atomic world that we cannot perceive unaided, so there might be a whole new mental world waiting to be discovered.

Americans too wrestled with the ideas of the nature of humanity. Were humans simply psychological impulses and repressed desires? If all mental things can be explained by psychiatry, should that make us feel any safer? Or was there some other element of humanity that might survive our physical existence? Scary entertainment provided some answers by presenting stories with both elements. Although Freudian ideas were incorporated into horror tales, the ideas of William James permeated. There were things that were presently unknown by science, but this did not mean they would remain that way. But scientific knowledge did not necessarily provide comfort. The science of evolution indicated not only that humans had evolved from more primitive forms, but that the evolutionary path was far from divinely inspired. This created new fears for white Americans.

Ibid. By clairvoyance, Hyslop meant perception of physical objects beyond the range of normal vision. Ibid.
Chapter 2

Charles Dawson was a Sussex solicitor and amateur archaeologist who, with no formal training, was able to gain admittance to the Geological Society and the Society of Antiquaries of London. By the age of thirty-one he was already credited with the discovery of three new dinosaur species, one ancient mammal, and a prehistoric plant. He achieved international fame in December 1912 when Smith Woodward, of London's Natural History Museum, presented to the Geological Society of London Dawson's latest find, evidence of a missing link between man and ape. The fossils Woodward presented included an apelike jaw with two human like teeth and a more human cranium. Woodward claimed the pieces were from the same specimen and named the newly discovered hominid Eoanthropus or the Dawn Man.1 The fossils became more commonly identified by the name of the quarry where they were found, Piltdown. Although some objected to Woodward's conclusions, his explanations were supported by the scientific evidence at hand and further strengthened by similar fossils found in 1915.2 The Piltdown Man became a sensation. The New York Times boldly stated, "Darwin Theory is Proved True."3 But declarations such as this did not

---

2 Ibid
bring everyone into Darwin's camp, and one hundred years later some still debate the issue of the proper lineage of humankind.

Many Americans became aware of Darwin's theory of evolution in 1860, a few months after *On The Origin of Species* (1859) was first published. Initial responses in the American press dealt mainly with the theory as one of science, with little meaning for philosophy or religion. Within a short period of time, however, many Protestant theologians, who long used natural science as evidence of the work of a divine creator, began to attack the theory as atheistic. By the time of Darwin's death many scientists began to accept his theory and Christian apologists worked out ways to reconcile Darwin and theology. Protestant intellectuals adopted the theory of evolution as a tool of God and did not see it as a threat to religious insight. But not all were able to embrace Darwin and continued to see his theory as a threat to their religious doctrines. The special nature of humanity in the world was a central issue in the debates concerning Darwin. Were humans inspired by the divine or were they a random event with lineages traced to primitive animals? This chapter will explore how horror dealt with the issues surrounding evolution. After an overview of cultural awareness of the issue it will focus on two main themes played out in horror stories dealing with evolution. The first being the fear of de-evolution into a more

---

6 Ibid, 117.
7 Ibid, 231.
primitive state and the second being the fear of the tainting of the white race by “inferior” species.

**Americans and Evolution**

One author enmeshed in Darwinian debates was H.P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft was an odd mix of New England gentility, often using archaic or Anglicized spellings of words, and twentieth century modernity. From an early age he began writing what has been termed, weird fiction. He was an avid reader of pulp anthologies such as *Argosy* and *The All Story*. His particular style of writing, however, was much more suited to a pulp title that made its debut in 1923 and bore the appropriate moniker: *Weird Tales*. In 1924 *Weird Tales* published a Lovecraft story entitled “The Rats in the Walls,” which demonstrated Lovecraft’s talent for the macabre, but also his awareness of evolutionary science. “The Rats in the Walls” is a contemporary tale, set in 1923 and traces the history of the de la Poer family from the viewpoint of one member who has just moved into the renovated family estate Exham Priory. The priory displays several architectural styles including Gothic towers, a Saxon substructure, and an even older foundation from either the Romans or the Druids.\(^8\) The estate, whose history has been forgotten by the American branch of the family, is still feared and hated by the locals.

The current head of the family, now residing in Virginia and renamed Delapore, becomes intrigued by the family past through his son who discovers

---

family legends while serving in the American Expeditionary Force in England. Intrigued by the stories the narrator decides to buy and restore the property, but plans are put on hold for two years as he has to care for his veteran son who returned a "maimed invalid." 9

After his son's death the narrator sets to work on the restoration. The locals refuse to work for the narrator, and he suspects they hate him for being a de la Poer and for restoring the place they considered a "haunt of fiends and werewolves." 10 During the work the narrator discovers that the house is built on the site of a prehistoric temple as old as Stonehenge and that from ancient times "indescribable rites" were practiced on the site. These rites were then adopted by Romans in the area and then by the Saxons. Even during the Christian era strange rites were still carried on by a "strange and powerful monastic order." 11

When the site was granted to Gilbert de la Poer in 1261 stories about the family being cursed began to spread. Local disappearances were blamed on the family, and it was rumored that relatively normal members were killed off by a demonic inner circle cult of the family. These stories cause the narrator to think of his own cousin who "went among the negroes and became a voodoo priest." 12 As he settles in he discovers that Walter de la Poer did indeed kill his father, three brothers, two sisters, and several servants after making a horrible discovery. Soon after this revelation the narrator notices that his cats are acting strangely, and he begins to have terrible dreams and hears the scurrying of rats behind the

10 Ibid, 30.
12 Ibid, 33.
walls. Following the sound he arrives at the door to the sub-cellar where all the cats have congregated. De la Poer discovers that Romans built the sub-cellar but within it are older altars and symbols that predate the Romans. One of the cats begins to claw at the bottom of the central altar from which a draft is coming up.

De la Poer assembles a team to explore the area underneath the altar. The steps are covered with human and semi-human bones that have been gnawed upon. The skull shapes reveal "idiocy, cretinism, and semi-apedom." The chisel marks on the stairs indicate that they were carved upwards. When the team travels down the steps they discover an immense underground grotto with buildings and ruins from several time periods. The whole floor of the grotto is covered in bones with some intact skeletons "clutching other forms with cannibal intent." One member of the team examines the skulls and declares that although most of them are further down the evolutionary scale than the Piltdown man, they are all human. A psychic in the group faints when the anthropologist suggests that some of the humanoids were quadrupeds. It becomes clear to the team that the quadrupeds were kept in stone pens, fed a diet of "coarse" vegetables, and then eaten. Writing on the walls reveals that the cannibalistic diet of the ancient cult was adopted by the Romans. That the practice was continued is evidenced by a seventeenth century wooden structure that was a butcher shop and kitchen. The narrator enters a low, Saxon building and finds a skeleton in a cage bearing a family ring. In a prehistoric burial ground skulls are discovered that are only "slightly more human than a gorilla's." De la Poer is

---

13 Ibid, 49.
14 Ibid, 51.
overcome with thoughts of eating forbidden things and lapses into the thoughts of other de la Poers, including his voodoo priest cousin. He begins babbling in other languages, moving backwards from English to Latin to Gaelic, and finally elemental grunting.\(^\text{15}\) He does not recall saying any of this; it was what he was told he was saying when he is discovered hours later over the “half-eaten” body of one of the team. The narrator is placed in an asylum where he can still hear the rats, and his restored ancestral home is blown up.

The “Rats in the Walls” highlights concerns with pre-historic cults and human evolution of man. Although it is not revealed until late in the story, the various skulls are used to point out the depravity of the ancient abattoir, but also its longevity. As a reference point Lovecraft uses the Piltdown Man, which had been a focal point for discussion since its discovery in 1912. For many it was further evidence of human evolution.\(^\text{16}\) Lovecraft’s reference evokes less an obscure bit of history than a contemporary issue many Americans would be aware of.

By the time Lovecraft wrote his story evolution had been controversial in America for some seventy years. Darwin’s theory seemed to undermine man’s unique place in the world. Humans, for many, had acquired that unique place because they were made in the image of God. But now evolutionary theory said that man did not emerge as is but evolved over time from lower forms. This threatened the notion of a divinely created man. For many Darwin was rejected


\(^{16}\) Piltdown was not discovered to be a hoax until 1952.
outright, but liberal Christians were able to adapt evolution into their theology. This meant an abandonment of the literal truth of the Bible, especially the Creation story. Many were willing to concede that the days mentioned in Genesis did not correspond to actual 24-hour days, but to longer periods of time. This would allow God to use the device of evolution in the creation process.\textsuperscript{17}

If this "gap theory" reconciled evolution and the creation story of the Bible, there was, however, one piece of Darwin's theory that did not fit: natural selection. In a world created by God, even if he employed evolutionary mechanisms, there was no room for random variations that produced traits that would then be passed on to offspring. The idea that mere chance would lead to one species thriving over another undermined the idea of divine planning. Even those Christians who accepted evolution were troubled by the evidence of adaptability. A divine, omniscient creator would seemingly not need to adjust his creation. Some liberal Christian thinkers abandoned the process of trying to reconcile science and the Bible. The Bible was not meant to be a science book, but rather a guide for Christian living.\textsuperscript{18}

The evolution debate did not wholly turn on Christian accommodation. Many were concerned that religion was hampering science.\textsuperscript{19} John William Draper's \textit{A History of the Conflict between Religion and Science}, published in 1874, argued that religion, as embodied by the Catholic Church, tried to repress

\textsuperscript{17} Roberts, 26, 117.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 151.
\textsuperscript{19} Caudill, 946.
scientific ideas such as evolution in order to maintain its own power.\textsuperscript{20} Andrew Dickson White's \textit{Warfare of Science} (1898) highlighted events such as the Catholic Church's persecution of Galileo and was seen as a call to arms for science to resist any religious anti-evolution crusade.\textsuperscript{21}

By the 1920s the conflict between science and religion was seen as a fact of American life. When new genetic research began to show that Darwin's ideas of random mutations were correct and that more advantageous adaptations could indeed be passed on to offspring from only one parent, the final victory of science over religion seemed apparent to many.\textsuperscript{22} Natural selection and its lack of a divinely stamped blueprint had returned. By the time "The Rats in the Walls" appeared, "the warfare model of science and religion had become ingrained into the received wisdom of many secular Americans."\textsuperscript{23} The year after Lovecraft's story appeared a major battle of the war was fought in a small town in Tennessee.

If Americans believed there was a war between science and religion, then the object of the war was to win the minds (and perhaps the hearts) of American children. As the twentieth century progressed more children were in school and their education now routinely extended into high school - from about 200,000 high school students in 1890 to over 2,000,000 in 1920.\textsuperscript{24} The biology textbooks, including Hunter's \textit{Civic Biology}, used by these students often contained

\textsuperscript{21} Larson, 21.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 22.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 24.
Darwin's theory of evolution. The leading group opposed to the teaching of evolution was the World's Christian Fundamentals Association, more commonly referred to, along with like-minded others, as Fundamentalists. The Fundamentalists were concerned with various theological issues including the truth of the Virgin birth of Christ, the authenticity of Biblical miracles, and other questions concerning the accuracy of scripture. The debate over evolution was only part of their larger concern with issues facing the church. They were particularly concerned with "modernism" in the Protestant church that allowed that the Bible may not be literally true and that ideas such as evolution could coexist with faith.

In the summer of 1925 the clash over evolution became centered in the small town of Dayton, Tennessee. The "Trial of the Century" was supposed to be a test of academic freedom. The recently formed American Civil Liberties Union offered to support any teacher in Tennessee who violated the state's anti-evolution statute by teaching Darwin's theory. Town leaders found a volunteer in John Scopes and the media circus was on. To help argue that in a democracy the people had the right to decide what could be taught in public schools, the prosecution recruited William Jennings Bryan, thrice defeated candidate for President and nationally famous orator known as the Great Commoner. An equally well-known defender of liberal causes and the most famous trial lawyer in the nation, Clarence Darrow, volunteered his services to the defense and the

\footnote{Ibid, 35.}
\footnote{Ibid 31.}

64
ACLU's interest in defending the right of teachers to teach accepted scientific facts.27 Dayton's civic leaders were primarily interested in publicity.

Once Bryan and Darrow became the main attraction all talk of academic freedom was gone. Instead the trial became one of science versus religion. Darrow mercilessly questioned Bryan on the witness stand about the Bible. Darrow's aim was to discredit both Bryan and Christianity. Although a spectacle, it had little to do with the case. Ultimately, Scopes was found guilty of violating the statute and fined one hundred dollars. Although later viewed as a pivotal moment in U.S. history and a ringing victory for rationalism, the case changed very little at the time. More states enacted anti-evolution statutes after the case and the Fundamentalist movement continued to be a political force into the 1930s.

What the trial did do was bring attention to evolution and apes. Whatever people might think about evolution, there did seem to be some passing resemblances between humans and primates. In fact much of the confusion over evolution centered on the mistaken belief that Darwin proposed that humans actually evolved from apes.28 Lovecraft refers to skulls "slightly more human than a gorilla's" and to pithecanthropoid bones. The term pithecanthropoid was coined by Ernst Haeckel to refer to the missing link between apes (pithekos) and men (anthropos).29 The "missing link" was, an intriguing piece of the evolution puzzle. Bryan often asked science to produce this missing link. The Piltdown skull was

---

27 The ACLU was particularly happy with Darrow's presence.
28 Ibid.
heralded as just such a discovery. Clearly there was much confusion and it is understandable that in the public mind evolution meant people came from apes.

**The Horror of De-Evolution**

The idea of the interconnectedness of apes and men was often played out in horror stories. This was often explored in one of two ways, either the fear of de-evolution (reversion to barbarity) or the bizarre spectacle of cross species breeding. Lovecraft’s story cleverly centers on the first fear. The narrator in Lovecraft’s tale undergoes an extreme form of de-evolution and in the process taps into some race memories that allow him to speak different languages culminating in primitive grunts. Not only does he speak the language, he engages in the customs and devours a man.

De-evolution is taken to an even further extreme in Clark Ashton Smith’s “Ubbo-Sathla” (1933). In this story Paul Tregardis discovers a crystal in a curio shop that enables him, with help from “The Book of Eibon,” to travel backwards in existence to become the sorcerer Zo-Mezzamalech. After some trepidation Tregardis returns to his crystal gazing and continues his regression. “And the thing that had been Paul Tregardis, that had been Zo-Mezzamalech, was a part of all the monstrous devolution.” The process enables Tregardis to experience the world with the eyes of creatures far from Darwin’s evolutionary tract, including a serpent-man. Eventually Tregardis becomes part of Ubbo-Sathlo, a “formless

---

31 Ibid, 299.
mass" that sheds the "archetypes of earthly life."\(^3\)\(^2\) The story concludes by saying that Tregardis has vanished from the present time without a trace.

Smith and Lovecraft, who corresponded and shared ideas, struck a chord that others were worried about. On screen this reversion to barbarity is most clearly seen in the 1931 movie version of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." The story, based on Robert Louis Stevenson's novel, deals with kindly Dr. Jekyll, played by Frederick March, who is shown early on ministering to the needs in the free ward of London. Jekyll's beliefs about the soul of man are laid out in a lecture in which he posits that man's bad self "binds him to some dim animal relation with the earth."\(^3\)\(^3\) If the evil self can be separated from the good, then man could go on to do wonderful things. In Jekyll's case his evil self is focused on sex. He is engaged to be married to Muriel (Rose Hobart), but her father refuses to move up the wedding day, which clearly frustrates Jekyll, who is trying to stick to Victorian mores and wait until marriage. On the way home from the dinner party at which his request for an earlier marriage was denied, Jekyll encounters a young woman being assaulted. Being the kindly doctor he intervenes and escorts her to her room to see if she is injured. The girl's name is Ivy (Miriam Hopkins), and she is very appreciative of Jekyll's attention and lets it be known that she could repay his kindness in a particularly earthy way. Jekyll laughs off her kiss, but the image of Ivy's bare leg swinging provocatively from her bed will haunt him. His brush with Ivy convinces Jekyll that he must pursue his plan to separate his evil self. He tells his friend Lanyon that he wants to be clean, "not only in my

\(^{32}\) Ibid.

\(^{33}\) Rouben Mamoulian, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Paramount, 1931).
conduct but in my innermost thoughts and desires." Jekyll locks himself in his lab and gets to work. After a few days he has completed his formula, which he tests on himself. Jekyll is transformed into his pure evil self, Mr. Hyde.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde had been made as silent films several times before. The most famous of these adaptations was the 1920 version which starred John Barrymore. What is somewhat legendary about Barrymore's version is that he made his transformation into Mr. Hyde without stopping the camera. Barrymore managed to don a skullcap and finger extensions all without a camera stoppage. He was decidedly grotesque, but did not look like March's version of Hyde, which has excess facial hair, a flattened nose, protruding teeth, and hairy hands. In short, Hyde is an ape.

March's Mr. Hyde appeared in a post-Scopes world and the base instincts of men were reflected in his simian face. Hyde brutally forces Ivy to become his mistress and establishes her in an apartment where he can visit to satisfy his carnal needs. When Muriel returns, Jekyll feels guilty (so much for the liberating aspect of Hyde) and swears off using his potion ever again. Muriel's father finally agrees to move up the wedding date, and everything appears to be fine. But fate intervenes. Jekyll had sent fifty pounds to Ivy, but she shows up at his door saying she does not need money but protection from Mr. Hyde ("he's a beast.").

Talking about Hyde, director Rouben Molmoulian said, "(he) is the exact replica

34 Ibid.
36 It is also this Barrymore version which introduces the dance hall girl character that would bring out the beast in Dr. Jekyll. Skal, 140.
of the Neanderthal man, so he's our ancestor. We were that once." Dr. Jekyll represents the good, civilized man whereas Mr. Hyde is the animal, debased man.

**Apes and White Women**

William Jennings Bryan was certainly not concerned about returning to the ooze, but he did seem worried about the type of debasement experienced by Dr. Jekyll. Bryan did not fear physical transformations but rather the effect that teaching evolution might have on America's children. He believed that if children were taught they came from apes, then they might act like apes. That civilization might slip backwards was an unpleasant thought. Some had long worried about this notion, particularly when the discussion centered on African Americans. Historian Philip Alexander Bruce, writing in 1889, feared that blacks, having lost their proximity to the civilizing white race, would retrogress to a primitive state that would result in a race war. Perhaps this is the underlying fear of Bryan and others, that devolution would lower the white, civilized race to the level of the darker, uncivilized races. There certainly seems to be a connection between fear of black men raping white women and apes carrying off white women in horror stories. Bruce wrote that there was something "strangely alluring and seductive" in the appearance of white women to black men and this idea appears to hold true with apes and monsters. In RKO's 1933 version of *King Kong* the native witch doctor offers six native women in exchange for the white Ann Darrow.

---

38 Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 104.
39 Ibid, 106.
Although it is not made clear what is supposed to happen to the sacrificial “Bride of Kong,” it can be surmised that she is simply eaten by the monster. Ann, however, is not only not eaten, she is rescued on three different occasions, tickled and undressed and generally fawned over by Kong.40 Although a physical relationship seems quite impossible in *King Kong*, it seems less so in Universal’s *Murder’s in the Rue Morgue* (1932). Bela Lugosi stars as Dr. Mirakle, who is bent on proving his theory of evolution by mixing the blood of his ape Erik and a human woman. How this blood mixing is to occur is not made clear, perhaps only in a petri dish, but it also seems likely that Mirakle sees a viable offspring born of a human woman to be proof of the relationship between man and ape.41 *The Last Moment, The Unholy Three, Unknown Treasures, The Gorilla, The Leopard Lady, Stark Mad, The Monster Walks,* and *The House of Mystery,* films released between 1923 and 1934, all feature some form of murderous ape or ape like monster. The proximity of men and apes in biology held both fascination and horror for Americans. And the idea that humans might slip backwards along the evolutionary scale held not only a fear of depravity but also of equality with less civilized races and the corruption of white womanhood.

In horror the scientists who champion evolutionary theories also contemplate bizarre or murderous actions. In the 1934 ultra B movie, *The Beast of Borneo,* Dr. Borodoff is intent on proving his evolutionary theory at almost any cost. Although his theory is never made clear in the film it apparently concerns

40 Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Shedsack, *King Kong* (RKO, 1933).
the proximity of orangutan's and humans on the evolutionary scale. Lugosi's Dr. Mirakle touts the scientific facts of evolution in Paris in 1845 and even has a canvas backdrop to show the stages from mollusk to fish to lizard to ape to man. Mirakle asks the audience if they can understand Erik's language or if they have forgotten. He then "speaks" to Erik in some gibberish that sounds nothing like the sounds Erik makes and translates for the audience Erik's story of being captured in Africa by "white hairless apes." In a dramatic crescendo Mirakle speaks of the ascent from the "slime of chaos" to the first beast which walked upright. With a flourish Mirakle cries, "Behold the first man" and indicates Erik. There is much murmuring in the audience and Mirakle is accused of heresy. He asks if they still burn men for heresy and boldly asks, "Do you think your little candle will outshine the flame of truth?" His methodology to prove his theory, however, is suspect. Director Robert Florey stated that Mirakle's goal was to produce, like Frankenstein, a human being, but through the mating of an ape with a woman. The idea of mating a woman and an ape is beyond taboo, but was certainly something that could be arrived at by traveling down wild roads of evolutionary theory.

Evolution scandal rested for many on the fear of reversion to an animal state. But for some writers like Robert E. Howard this reversion was attractive as

---

42 Harry Garson, *The Beast of Borneo* (Far East Productions, 1934). The movie's posters give some clue as to Borodoff's scheme with the tagline "Can Gorilla Glands Bring Back Passionate Youth?"

43 Florey, *Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

44 Bryan Senn claims that the screenplay was rewritten to change the word mating to blood mixing. Senn, *Golden Horrors: An Illustrated Critical Filmography of Terror Cinema, 1931-1939*, 44. If this was Mirakle's aim then why couldn't he just show Camille and Erik's blood coexisting happily in a petri dish? In his final scene Mirakle had something else in mind.
a source of energy and sexuality. *King Kong* centers on a narrative of beauty (women) leading to the destruction of the beast (men). Even before the film crew reaches its destination Denham warns Jack Driscoll about falling in love with Darrow. Beauty will make Driscoll soft Denham warns. Denham and Driscoll represent the sort of characters that Leslie Fiedler writes about in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). They are adventuring boys/men who are terrified of mature sexual relations with women because they will turn them into sissies. Denham in particular represents an all-American image of a man. He is an adventurer, a self-made man, a showman, and an example of what men can be. And it is this heroic, adventuring he-man that warns Driscoll about falling in love. To retain your manhood, one should stay away from women, or at least avoid long-term commitments.

This warning is also applicable to Kong. When we first see him he is terrifying. He towers over Ann and takes her into the jungle. One of the questions not asked in the movie is what exactly is Kong going to do with Ann? It seems clear that the natives assume Kong will simply devour her. It seems reasonable to assume that Kong is offered a sacrifice to keep him from eating the rest of the villagers. Ann, of course, is different from the previous sacrifices in that she is white. Perhaps this is why Kong does not eat her right away. Any sort of sexual relationship is clearly impossible and even a scene showing Kong tearing Ann's

---


clothes seems to be more for audience titillation than Kong’s. Additionally Kong does not act as a rapist but rather as a hero. As he takes Ann further into the jungle he saves her from an attack by a Tyrannosaurus Rex, a snake-like lake creature, and a pterodactyl. He is domesticated in his concern for Ann. If there is anything sexual Carroll suggests that it is a child’s vision of sexual relationships that involve displays of manly strength and the rescue of the damsel in distress.47 Whatever Kong’s interest in Ann, it proves to be his undoing. After Driscoll rescues Ann, Kong’s pursuit of her leads him to Denham’s smoke bombs and Kong is rendered unconscious. He is then crated up and brought to New York. As Denham warned, a woman has reduced the once mighty man.

Kong is a sympathetic monster. He is shown in his glory, but like so many Americans in the 1930s he is laid low by the laws of the jungle. Kong, once king, is destroyed by forces he cannot understand, and in that, his fate parallels that of thousands of Americans. Director and producer Merian C. Cooper knew what he could get from a giant ape monster – emotion. He wanted to make Kong sympathetic and indeed he is.48 Kong’s face does show emotion and his death is tragic. Noel Carroll sees King Kong not as a biological tale of evolution, but rather as a display of Social Darwinism.49

On his island Kong was king. He demonstrated quite clearly the law of the jungle, he was the fittest, and therefore he survived. But at the end of the film he is in a different jungle. Kong suffers because he transgresses worlds.

49 Carroll, “King Kong: Ape and Essence”, 216.
Interestingly enough Kong seems somewhat resigned to his fate until two things happen at his exhibition. The first is the appearance of Ann, who on her return to New York has indeed conquered the Depression. She is a star and dresses like one. But her appearance agitates Kong. Cedric Robinson suggests that this is due to Kong's unnatural sexual attraction to Ann. This attraction marks Kong as "the bad nigger" and a threat to white society. The second occurrence is the flash photography of the dozens of reporters on hand. The flash bulbs emphasize that Kong is on display and that he is emasculated in front of the crowd. The reporters ignore Denham's advice and continue to take pictures of Kong. Their refusal to heed warnings leads to chaos as Kong breaks free and rampages through New York in search of Ann. He finds her in a hotel room, grabs her, and proceeds to the highest point on the island, the Empire State Building. Along the way he battles an elevated train that mirrors his fight with the snake creature. The message is clear; New York is a jungle with different monsters. Climbing to the top of the Empire State Building, Kong battles airplanes as he had the pterodactyl. This time however, the New York monsters triumph and Kong plummets to his demise.

The dynamic of King Kong is that he is the gargantuan king of his primitive island home but that he is quickly destroyed in the big city. The economic pressure that the Depression has on Americans is a theme introduced early in the film. Carl Denham, a movie maker, needs a leading lady for his film which will

---

51 The movie runs 100 minutes, but only the last 20 are in New York.
be shot in a secret location only he knows. During his last minute search he
stops at a women's shelter but finds no starlet material. He then intervenes when
a young woman attempts to steal an apple from a storefront. The young woman
is Ann Darrow, who like many others is down on her luck. It is her situation that
compels her to accept Denham's offer. The Great Depression, the breakdown
of the capitalist system, introduced Social Darwinism in a more profound way in
America. For many, survival really was at stake. For Ann the need to survive will
place her in a terrifying situation. For the audience the message is a movie can
chase the depression away.

Another example of the fear of Darwin's ideas unleashed is found in a very
different place. Edith Wharton's story "Afterward," (1910) is ostensibly a ghost
story. It concerns an American couple who move to England and seek a house
with a ghostly presence. They find a suitable place but are told they will not
realize they have encountered a ghost until long afterward. We learn that Mr.
Boyne gained his wealth through a mine in the United States and some sort of
legal action concerning the property is preoccupying him. During this time Mrs.
Boyne notices a stranger coming up the path, but as time passes, she does not
think about the incident.

One day a stranger approaches her looking for her husband. She directs
the stranger to the house and goes about her business. Later her husband goes
missing for months with no trace. Once she becomes somewhat resigned that

52 Ann has an unspoken hesitation that implies she believes Denham may want her to be a prostitute. Once
she is assured this is not the case she agrees, even though Denham has not revealed all the details. Carroll,
"King Kong: Ape and Essence", 224.
53 Ibid.
she will never see her husband again, his lawyer comes to the house. The lawyer, Mr. Parvis, gives Mary the background story of her husband's involvement in the mine and the legal matter that had briefly preoccupied him. Parvis tells Mary that her husband made his fortune from the Blue Star mine at the expense of one Robert Elwell. Having lost out on the riches, Elwell was driven to suicide, although his method caused him to live for an additional two months beyond his attempt. Parvis does not blame Boyne for Elwell's death. "It's the kind of thing that happens every day in business. I guess it's what the scientists call the survival of the fittest..."54 In this case, however, Social Darwinism resulted in vengeance from beyond the grave for Mary realized that the stranger she had first seen appeared when Elwell attempted suicide and that the stranger who came two months later to take her husband away was the specter of that same Bob Elwell.55 For Wharton, survival of the fittest did not excuse men from decent actions and following its dictums could destroy even those who initially seemed to benefit.

For many Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the ideas of Charles Darwin provided terrifying thoughts. Indeed the foundations of Christian faith itself were assaulted. Underneath these fears was the nightmare that Darwinism could lead to the loss of humanity and lead to individual destruction. Some scary entertainment took the idea of evolution and turned it into a fear of unholy physical relationships between women and beasts.

55 Ibid.
Others explored the idea of devolving to some primitive state in which all trappings of humanity and civilization would be abandoned. Herbert Spencer's ideas of evolution applied to society held the possibilities of further evil, the destruction of even the mightiest beast by the economic vagaries of the market.

Even those who rose to the top did so at the risk of their very soul. These evolutionary fears are caught up in the idea that rationality will lead to destruction. The next chapter will explore this relationship in the form of mad science and a redefined cosmology.
Chapter 3

In October 2010 President Obama made an official apology to the government and people of Guatemala for what Guatemalan president Alvaro Colom called a "crime against humanity."\(^1\) The crime in question was the deliberate attempt from 1946 to 1948 to infect Guatemalan prisoners with syphilis, either through sexual contact with infected prostitutes or by exposure to bacteria through cuts or spinal punctures.\(^2\) The intent was to study the efficacy of penicillin in combatting the disease. The physician overseeing the experiments was John C. Cutler who also took part in the Tuskegee experiments in which African American men were deliberately denied treatment for syphilis. This type of human experimentation was exactly what concerned the American Humane Association when it published its pamphlet *Human Vivisection: A Statement and an Inquiry* in 1900. Their aim was to draw attention to a Senate inquiry of the previous year which focused on human experimentation. The Association acknowledged that experimental uses of new treatments for the benefit of informed patients was acceptable, but that "the practice of subjecting human beings, men, women and children, who are patients in hospitals or asylums, to experiments involving pain mutilation, disease or death, for no object connected with their individual benefit, but entirely for scientific purposes," was


reprehensible. Their view summed up American attitudes towards science and
technology; that it improved the lives of millions was beyond question, but the
specter of perverted science was ever-present as well.

In the creation scene from James Whale’s 1931 film version of
*Frankenstein*, complete with sparks, crackling electricity, the hands of dials and
meters twitching and pulsing, and kites flying to catch the lightning, science is as
mysterious as black magic. The individual functions of the giant machines are
never explained beyond instructions to pull levers and throw switches, but the
audience knows these machines are vitally important to Frankenstein’s quest to
create life. The United States of 1931 had already experienced the wonders of
modern technology but also the horror of mustard gas and the mechanized death
machines of the Great War. A recurring analysis of mad scientists is that they are
ultimately punished for seeking forbidden knowledge. In this chapter I will argue
that horror stories focus less on forbidden knowledge but rather the loss of
human compassion and empathy on the part of the mad doctors. To many, the
untethering of scientists from their better nature put them at odds with society.
Mad scientists seek only their individual aggrandizement, not the good of
humanity. This in turns poses a threat to the established moral norms of society.
At the same time the individual society of white, America found its relationship to
the cosmos altered by scientific knowledge. Once confident of a privileged place
in creation, Americans found their place in the cosmos was truly insignificant in a

---

Association, 1900, [http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mnc2.ark:/13960/t7xk92d8f;view=1up;seq=7](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mnc2.ark:/13960/t7xk92d8f;view=1up;seq=7). (accessed March 6, 2014).
universe that astronomers were proving was unimaginably vast. Horror provided a unique way to grapple with meanings of humanity in a world that was increasingly more difficult to comprehend.

The last decade of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth fundamentally altered the United States. The numbers are quite impressive as American productive capacity increased at an unparalleled rate. Machines had been part of the United States economy since the days of Eli Whitney and Samuel Slater, but they took on a new, highly visible position in the 1890s. The Columbian Exposition of 1893 highlighted the epic proportions of the modern machine. The cotton gin and the spinning jenny were dwarfed several times over by the Westinghouse engine and the Edison dynamo. Aside from size these machines also promised progress. These wonders would make life easier and provide marvelous goods that would be available at reasonable prices. The fairgrounds themselves, only a few miles from Chicago, displayed the promise of technology with its thousands of electric lights. The Ferris Wheel demonstrated that even amusement would be changed by machine. The theme of the fair, in fact all of the similar world’s fairs, was progress, and the pathways to that progress was technology. For technology brought forth the machines, but also improved medicines, healthier and convenient foods, and improved sanitation.

By 1900 the idea of abandoning technology and regressing to an earlier, more pastoral time was abhorrent. Edward W. Byrn, a historian of invention, writing in 1900 claimed that technology was bringing a high point to civilization,

---

delivering fewer labor hours and more leisure hours, better health, and even brotherhood and peace.\textsuperscript{5} Ignorance and barbarism were being left behind. The thriving economy of the United States seemed to prove his point. Between 1899 and 1929 American manufacturing output increased by over two hundred fifty percent.\textsuperscript{6} Hallmarks of the modern age such as telephones were appearing in more and more homes. Factories were producing items unthought-of of before the turn of the century such as wristwatches, cigarette lighters, Pyrex glass used for cooking, and film for the emerging motion picture industry.\textsuperscript{7} Families were able to eat a well-rounded dinner of meat, vegetables, and fruits, all of which came from cans. More of these families were living in cities where new concrete and steel buildings seemed to stretch higher and higher into the sky The Empire State Building, which opened in 1931 was the tallest building in the world at one hundred and two stories. Workers were travelling to their offices and factories on trolley cars, elevated trains, and subways. At work they were spending fewer hours as the eight-hour day became more common, and Henry Ford introduced the five-day workweek.\textsuperscript{8}

Factory owners did not fear reduced days and hours because they did not decrease productivity. Modern science and technology were making processes more efficient. At the center of this efficiency was the work of Frederick W. Taylor and his theory of scientific management. During the final years of the Great War

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid, 178.
wages were high. As the nation returned to a non-war economy, manufacturers worried about cutting costs without cutting wages and sparking labor unrest. The answer was lowering production costs through Taylor's ideas and more efficient machinery. The hours worked by laborers decreased slightly but output per factory man-hour increased nearly seventy five percent.\(^9\) Progressive politicians applied efficiency methods to government in the hopes of making it work better for the people.\(^{10}\) Applied science seemingly could make anything better.

The idea that the power of technology would invariably mean progress, however, was not universally adopted. Henry Adams believed that progress was merely an illusion and that chaos and decay were the reality in the United States and indeed the entire world.\(^{11}\) Henry Demarest Lloyd feared that technology would lead to further debasement of the laboring classes and noted that the labor-saving machines were tended by children.\(^{12}\) Scary entertainment, likewise, showed how science and technology could be twisted for horrible purposes. In one tale the inhuman monster turns out to be an escaped lunatic with extraordinary strength whose physical deformities are explained as exposure to heavy mineral content in the water of his lair.\(^{13}\) In another story walking corpses are animated by exposure to a radium x-ray that causes its victims to rot and

---


\(^{11}\) Kason, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900*, 188.

\(^{12}\) Ibid, 187.

then die.\textsuperscript{14} Another explains its monsters through vivisection, plastic surgery, and a process of injecting acid into bone to render it pliable and possible to reshape. In the same story the hero does not use crosses to defeat monsters but rather his scientific knowledge.\textsuperscript{15} He mixes radiator glycerin and potassium permanganate to start a fire to burn through his rope bonds. Another monster wears a steel vest to stop bullets, has knives attached to gloves (the better to cut out tongues!) and uses tetra-ethyl lead poison to kill victims through a slow paralysis.\textsuperscript{16} The problem posed by these stories was one of control. Certainly in the right hands technology could be a marvelous help to society. But in the hands of the industrial aristocracy, technology would not serve everyone, but rather a select few and the divide between rich and poor would continue to widen.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Every Gift Twisted – Science Against Society}

In horror, science is not the weapon of industrialists, but rather of men whose passionate pursuit of their particular interest has isolated them from the rest of society. It is this distance, this lack of empathy that often leads to terror. Susan Sontag argues that science fiction and horror films such as \textit{Frankenstein}, \textit{The Island of Lost Souls}, and \textit{Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde} revolve around the proper use of science. The proper use of science would be to benefit mankind. This is what the Humane Association argued. But the archetypal character of the horror

\textsuperscript{16} Wyatt Blassingame, “The Tongueless Horror” in \textit{Tales of Grim and Grue}, ed. Sheldon Jaffrey (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 1987), 132. Tetraethyl lead was used beginning in the 1920s as a fuel additive to prevent knock and increase fuel efficiency in automobiles. Its toxicity and harmful effects were debated at the time and it was finally phased out during the 1970s.
\textsuperscript{17} Kason, 193.
scientist is one whose “mad, obsessional use of science often leads to chaos and destruction.” Mad and obsessional did not translate to beneficial. Typically the mad scientist is wealthy (how else could they afford their basement laboratories?) and an intellectual, and thus prone to be inherently mistrusted. But if their elitist attitude makes them suspicious characters, what makes them truly frightening is their lack of humanity.

The underlying moral of many mad scientist horror stories seems simply to be those who trespass in God’s domain would suffer. Jason Colavito centers his study of the horror genre on the development of science and scientific knowledge. He posits that forbidden knowledge leads to the destruction of not only the villains but also the heroes who might encounter such knowledge. For Colavito, in what he refers to as the biological horror cycle of the genre’s development, those who search for such knowledge find only “terror and pain” and the message is clearly “Do not trespass on those realms of knowledge forbidden to you.” This type of trespass is not limited to scientific pursuits and the trope of things better left unknown is quite common. But this does not fully explain the horror associated with science. What American horror stories in the early twentieth century deal with are not simply the hubris of scientists, but rather the failure of science to deliver on its promises. For all of the advances of science there was still much that belied progress including war, poverty, and disease.

19 Ibid, 217.
The scientists in American horror are not evil for reaching too far, but rather for forgetting their own humanity, for exploring science with a single mindedness that is no longer concerned with improving the world, but only serving their own purposes.

Many of these scientists fail to display proper human characteristics such as love or compassion. The most iconic of the mad scientists was Frankenstein. In the earliest film version of the story, the Edison Company's 1910 treatment, Victor Frankenstein a youthful student, having somehow discovered the secret of life, creates a monster. In this abbreviated version of the story there is no assembling of parts; instead the creature is created from some chemical reaction in a crucible contained within a large wooden box. In the exhibitors description of the film, which showed up almost verbatim in the local newspapers of cities showing the film, the Edison company assured theater owners that the original material had been altered and "repulsive situations" had been removed so that there would be "no possibility of its shocking any portion of the audience..." Edison's version is a very brief morality play. The monster does not really do anything, but its presence and creation imply evil. While working, Frankenstein is isolated from others, particularly his fiancée. What

---

21 Although his surname remains intact, Frankenstein's given name was changed from Victor to Henry when Peggy Webling adapted the novel for the stage in 1927. This was perhaps a tribute to Henry Hallatt who played the scientist in the production alongside Hamilton Deane's monster. When James Whale made his film version for Universal the name change remained. Susan Tyler Hitchcock, *Frankenstein: A Cultural History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 140.

22 The effect of creation is actually the destruction of the monstrous effigy run backwards. Actor Charles Ogle played the monster and is more of a golem in appearance; shaped from some chemical protoplasm rather than stitched together. J. Searle Dawley, *Frankenstein*, Edison Manufacturing Company, 1910.

saves him is literally the love of a good woman as a title card indicates by
proclaiming “The creation of an evil mind is overcome by love and disappears.”24
Frankenstein tried to transcend his humanity and in doing so becomes evil and
creates a monster. Science itself is not the problem; it is Frankenstein’s
“consuming ambition – to create the most powerful human being the world has
ever known,” that leads to the problem.25 When his fiancée returns to him his
humanity is restored and evil disappears.

In James Whales’ 1931 film version of *Frankenstein*, the eponymous
scientist is ostensibly still a student, but Colin Clive’s portrayal of Henry is that of
a man possessed by a vision. This obsession has led to Frankenstein’s removal
from the world. He lurks about in graveyards digging up corpses, inspects
hanged criminals for suitable brains, and does his work in an abandoned
watchtower with a maniacal, deformed assistant. This obsession has also led him
to leave behind his beautiful fiancée, Elizabeth (Mae Clark). In a letter to
Elizabeth Henry explains that “work must come first, even before you...”26 The
price of Henry’s obsession is immediately clear as it is evident that his friend
Victor (John Boles) would be happy if Henry pursued his work and abandoned
Elizabeth. But Victor is no cad and as a true friend and real human he puts
Elizabeth’s happiness before his own and offers to visit Henry’s mentor Dr.
Waldman (Edward van Sloan).

25 Hitchcock, 129.
Dr. Waldman provides clues as to Henry's mania. He tells Elizabeth and Victor that Henry was brilliant but erratic, that his fields of study, chemical galvanism and electro biology, were far in advance of the university, and that his demand for bodies so that he could fulfill his "insane ambition to create life" made him increasingly unreasonable and dangerous. Victor is unconcerned with the lives of a few rabbits and dogs, but Waldman corrects him and emphasizes that Henry was only interested in human life, "First to destroy it, then recreate it." 27 The concerned trio arrives at the watchtower to confront Henry only to be told that they must go away or they will ruin everything. When Henry again insists that she leave, Victor steps in. "Henry," he says, "you're inhuman. You're crazy." It is here where Frankenstein's crime lies, in his lack of humanity. Victor may well have said you are crazy for leaving Elizabeth all alone, for sending her away, perhaps, into the arms of another man. At this point they have only the slightest inkling about Frankenstein's experiment, but his "inhuman" desire for seclusion to work is the real problem. For his part, Frankenstein focuses on Victor's second charge of insanity. "Crazy am I? We'll see whether I'm crazy or not." He then takes them up to the laboratory.

After being subjected to lightning, the stitched together body is lowered and the movement of its hand prompts Frankenstein to maniacally shout, "It's alive, it's alive!" When Waldman and Victor try to restrain him one of them says, "Henry in the name of God," to which Frankenstein replies with the film's most

27 Ibid.
infamous line, "In the name of God! Now I know what it feels like to be God!"^{28}

Here, boldly stated, is Frankenstein's presumption, but for the characters this is a secondary problem. The real problem with Henry is emphasized in the very next scene. Victor and Elizabeth are trying to tell Henry's father, the Baron, that Henry is fine and will contact him soon. The Baron is not convinced. He knows something is wrong, why else would his son be skulking around in the ruins when he had a good home and a pretty girl waiting for him? The Baron actually thinks Henry has another woman, which would be shameful, but would make sense to him. While Henry remains in the tower the monster is a frightening but sympathetic creature. It is only when Henry returns home to Elizabeth that the monster becomes a threat.

With Frankenstein separated from his creation, his humanity is restored. Reunited with Elizabeth he speaks of being in Heaven and refers to his time experimenting as "horrible." In the watchtower, the monster kills Waldman, who was about to dissect him. The monster escapes the tower and begins a fateful trek through the woods. To this point the monster has been a somewhat sympathetic character. After he accidently drowns the child Maria the monster behaves more like a monster. Why this happens is not entirely clear in the film, but in analyzing the movie we can see that the monster becomes a monster when he trespasses in Frankenstein's idyllic home. The creature arrives on the couple's wedding day and violates the sanctity of Elizabeth's bedroom and

^{28} This line was cut by several state movie review boards. Even in the 1999 Universal Studios DVD release the full line is not given in the closed caption; it simply reads, "In the name of God, now I know what it feels like."
perhaps Elizabeth herself. The monster, the result of science untethered from human emotion, is now a threat to the natural order of propagation and society at large. Henry hears Elizabeth scream and races to her bedroom to find her unconscious on the bed. Although there is nothing obviously wrong, it could certainly be inferred that the monster has raped Elizabeth. This trespass brings Frankenstein fully back to his manly, human identity. When the search for the monster is organized there are no accusatory fingers pointed at Frankenstein, there is no acrimony over his experiment, he is recognized for his position in the village hierarchy and automatically assumes a leadership role in the search party that no one disputes. In the climactic scene the villagers set fire to the windmill where the monster has taken Henry. The monster hurls Frankenstein from the top and is then seemingly destroyed, but Frankenstein miraculous survives.

Henry Frankenstein is somewhat unique in the mad scientist horror films because he does not pay for his scientific crimes. I believe this is largely due to the fact that he is able to restore his humanity, that is, his feelings for Elizabeth. Other mad scientists never undergo this process or discover their error when it is far too late. In Werewolf of London (1935) Henry Hull plays Dr. Wilfred Glendon, a biologist in search of the rare moonflower, which blossoms only by lunar light. When he finally finds the flower in Tibet he is attacked by a creature and bitten. He returns to London with the hope of new blooms brought about by the effects

---

29 In the novel the monster tells Frankenstein that he will visit him on his wedding day. Without dialogue and with the condensed nature of the film, it seems pure happenstance that the monster appears. It is also not clear why he now appears as a growling, lurching, threatening monster, when in his last frames he was terrified by his accidental drowning of Maria.

30 Nick Dear’s stage directions for his 2011 stage version of the story remove all innuendo as the monster rapes Elizabeth and then breaks her neck. Nick Dear, Frankenstein, Based on the Novel by Mary Shelley (London: Faber and Faber Plays, 2011), 74 Kindle e-book.
of his artificial moon ray. At his home Glendon is approached by the mysterious Dr. Yogami (Warner Oland), who tells him of the werewolf legend and the antidotal properties of the moonflower.\(^{31}\)

*Werewolf of London* is not usually placed with mad scientist movies, but I would argue that Glendon is very much like Frankenstein in that he loses sight of his human nature. Both scientists have ties to humanity in the form of the women in their lives. The audience sees that both men are in danger of losing those women; Frankenstein's fiancée Elizabeth to his friend Victor, and Glendon's wife Lisa (Valerie Hobson) to her childhood sweetheart, Paul Ames (Lester Matthews). Although Glendon has a laboratory in his house, it is clear he is obsessive about his work and increasingly isolates himself, even making use of a closed circuit television so that he can see who is at his door. After returning from Tibet he acknowledges his behavior to Lisa and promises that as soon as he completes his experiment he will "try to be more human."\(^{32}\) The divide that his work has created is also apparent at the party being thrown for Glendon. Here the audience is introduced to Paul Ames and it becomes quickly apparent that Ames still has feelings for Lisa, that Glendon is jealous of Ames, and that Lisa is not happy in her marriage. Again science has cut a man off from human qualities and turned him into something not quite a man. In this case Glendon's inhumanity becomes fully realized as he transforms into a werewolf and becomes a threat to his loved ones.

\(^{31}\) The flower will not cure the werewolf but it will relieve symptoms for a short period of time, and so perhaps spare a victim. Stuart Walker, *Werewolf of London*, Universal, 1935.

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
Unlike Lon Chaney Junior's later version of the werewolf, Hill's Glendon is not a sympathetic character. His condition was the indirect result of his scientific pursuits. Even before his affliction presents itself, he is portrayed as cold to his wife and as the film progresses he drives his wife into the arms of another man.\textsuperscript{33} Sympathy is only generated for Glendon, ironically enough, when he becomes a werewolf. It is when he realizes that he has killed that he yearns to be human again, and not just metaphorically. Glendon's dualism, his human/non-human affliction, underscores his isolation from the human race. Whereas before his single-minded pursuit of science kept him from humanity, his werewolf nature compounds that isolation in a way that Glendon can recognize. When he rents a room in an attempt to isolate himself from Lisa, he tells the landlady that he is "singularly single. More single than I ever realized it possible for a human being to be."\textsuperscript{34} In his room Glendon prays that he not be transformed again. His plea to God is not granted and he turns into a wolf and kills again.

The police then go to Glendon's house where he has returned to stalk his wife. She pleads with him to no avail and a policeman shoots him. As Glendon is dying he says that he will soon know why all this had to be, and he apologizes to Lisa for not making her happier. When he dies he reverts to his human form. In the end, the answer that Glendon seeks will not be answered by science, but by God. Boris Karloff's Dr. Savaard in \textit{The Man They Couldn't Hang} (1939) also suggests the possibility of finding a "great truth" after his death. That death is only temporary, however, as he is revived by his own methods and seeks

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
revenge on those who thwarted his efforts to serve humanity. After his murderous revenge is carried out, his daughter's horror at his deeds restores his humanity. Realizing that "[e]very gift science has given has been twisted by hate and greed," including his own, he destroys his life restoring machine and dies.\(^3\)\(^5\)

John Dewey believed that if a man was stripped of his human qualities he would necessarily cease to be a part of society. The pieces (individuals) cannot operate independently of the whole (society).\(^3\)\(^6\) Scientists were to use their individual endeavors to benefit the whole of humanity. If they operated somehow outside of this dynamic, scientists became dangerous. Antivivisectionists viewed the practice of experimentation on live animals as outside the social dynamic, as a betrayal by science of its moral duty to benefit humanity.\(^3\)\(^7\) Surely moral progress demanded that science come up with a better way to do things than inflict pain on poor animals. "By coldly inflicting pain in pursuit of mere phenomenal knowledge, science revealed its abandonment of spiritual values, its unconcern for moral progress, its immersion in materialism, its refusal to admit religious truths into the temple of science."\(^3\)\(^8\) Many antivivisectionists did indeed feel that scientists were setting themselves apart from society as a sort of modern priesthood.\(^3\)\(^9\) If scientists felt themselves above everyone else then their connection to ordinary people might be severed. Joseph Krutch was no Luddite, he did not rail against scientific advancement, but he too was concerned about

---

\(^3\)\(^5\) Nick Grinde, *They Man They Couldn't Hang*, Columbia, 1939.
\(^3\)\(^6\) Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 304-305.
\(^3\)\(^8\) Ibid, 103.
\(^3\)\(^9\) Ibid, 106.
the effect of science on humanity. His fear was not just that scientists would lose
their humanity, but that science itself would lead to a new, frightening world. If
human qualities such as romantic love are mere myths in the scientific world or
quaint notions that can be rationally explained the world of science is a
“dehumanized” world. The concern here is not the quest for forbidden
knowledge, but rather the effects of science. Krutch feared a destabilization of
human norms. This can be represented by the rationalism of science dismissing
the “awe of emotional experience.” More importantly, with science having
disposed of God, Krutch is concerned with the foundations of morality, with God
gone what authority will tell humanity what is right and wrong?

Perhaps the mad scientist most removed from humanity is Charles
Laughton’s Dr. Moreau in Paramount’s Island of Lost Souls (1932). The movie is
an adaptation of H.G. Wells’ anti-vivisection novel The Island of Dr. Moreau
(1896). At the heart of the story is Moreau, who has retreated to a remote island
in order to conduct his experiments. He is attempting to create humans from
animals. This leads to a horrid menagerie of “beast men” with traces of human
grafted onto their animal bodies. Into this setting stumbles a shipwrecked sailor,
Parker (Richard Arlen), who discovers Moreau’s work.

By the 1930s vivisection had largely been accepted as a tool of science.
Its usefulness in aiding advances in surgery and the discovery of antitoxins such
as the one to combat diphtheria derailed legal efforts to end the practice. But

40 Joseph Wood Krutch, The Modern Temper: A Study and a Confession (New York: Harcourt, Brace and
Company, 1929), 23.
41 Ibid, 12.
42 Turner, Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind, 117.
this did not mean antivivisection was abandoned. The Anti-Vivisection League of New York met just days before *The Island of Lost Souls* premiered in 1932.\(^4^3\) The New England Anti-Vivisection Society, founded in 1895, is still in existence today. Perhaps due to its very nature, the practice also appears in horror stories. Vivisection seemed like mad science come true. James L. Ravenscroft’s “The Bloodstained Parasol” (1923) tells the story of a young scientist whose fiancée leaves him after she accidentally intrudes on his vivisection of a dog. The young man then goes mad, haunted by visions of bloody pieces of the animal. The narrator remarks “[v]ivisection may, possibly, be of service to medical and surgical science, but it has nothing to do with love.”\(^4^4\) This is a very human response and implies that those who conduct such experiments and do not go insane would have to have a certain, perhaps even a dangerous amount of emotional detachment. For this reason vivisectionists might seem particularly inhuman and Laughton’s Moreau is a perfect example of the dangers of dehumanizing science.

David Skal suggests that the film is more of a social commentary with the beast men standing in for the working class. In his study *The Monster Show* Skal suggests that the beast men, like the proletariat, have been promised “progress and social elevation” but have in fact been degraded and exploited.\(^4^5\) In a later work, *Screams of Reason*, Skal argues that the beast men are the “animalized”

---


working class, symbols of degradation, who have pulled the world into economic chaos. In both works Skal mentions Paramount's publicity stunt of a national search for an unknown to play the role of "The Panther Woman." This stunt was to provide an identification of the working class with the monsters, in one instance a more positive link than the other. The real reason simply seemed to be to generate interest in the film, and as publicist Arthur Mayer pointed out, the winner, Kathleen Burke, just happened to come from Chicago, home to the largest number of Paramount operated theaters in the country. I believe a better reading of the film centers on Moreau's crimes as a man of science.

At Moreau's house the audience learns of Moreau's plan. He introduces Parker to Lota, whom Parker thinks is simply an attractive Polynesian girl. Moreau's assistant, Montgomery (Arthur Hohl), is wary, fearing Parker has "seen too much" already, but Moreau wants to see if Lota is attracted to Parker. As Moreau watches Parker and Lota interact, his voyeurism does not seem sexual but rather clinical. Parker and Lota's talk is interrupted when they hear screams. Parker goes to investigate and finds Montgomery and Moreau in a laboratory operating on one of the beast men and realizes that the men on the island are all experiments. Parker believes that Moreau was vivisecting a man but Moreau tells him he is mistaken and then proceeds to tell Parker of his experiments. Moreau explains that he began trying to accelerate the evolution of plants and having succeeded turned to more complex organisms. Like many in the nineteenth and

46 David J. Skal, Screams of Reason: Mad Science and Modern Culture (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 143-144.
47 Ibid, 144.
twentieth centuries, Moreau sees man as the most advanced life form and claims "all animal life is tending to the human form." Parker then realizes that what is on the table is not a man, but rather an animal being turned into a man. Moreau then proceeds to explain how giving the beast men speech was his first great achievement. Then echoing Frankenstein's claim, Moreau asks Parker if he knows what it "means to feel like God?" Moreau has separated himself from humanity. Parker is disgusted and wishes to leave the island but Moreau needs him for his great experiment with Lota and so sinks the only boat so that Parker cannot escape.

The following day Lota finds Parker reading a book about building a radio so that he can get off the island. Lota throws the book in the water fearing that it will take Parker away from her. They kiss but Parker tries to explain that he loves someone else. When he walks away she follows and throws her arms around him. As she does this, her nails claw Parker and he grabs her hands and sees the animal nature of her fingers. Parker then angrily confronts Moreau. Moreau explains to Parker that Lota is his greatest success and that he wished to display her when he returned to London. He would show his doubters that she was completely a woman who could love, mate, and have children. Moreau explains that Lota was afraid of him and Montgomery, and Parker's appearance presented possibilities. Parker then hits him. This key scene reveals Moreau's monstrosity. Not only has he conducted these horrible experiments; he has equated humanity with simple biological reproduction. The true test of Lota's humanity for Moreau

48 Erle C. Kenton, Island of Lost Souls Paramount, 1932.
was her ability to bear Parker's child. Ironically this underscores Moreau's lack of humanity, as he has no offspring. Parker represents true man, devoted to his fiancée and outraged by Moreau.

Sexuality and procreation as an aspect of humanity was present in several horror tales. In the case of Dr. Jekyll, he foolishly tries to eradicate base but natural desires and inadvertently creates a monster. Perhaps if Jekyll had been able to sublimate his desires for premarital sex into more useful avenues he would have been spared his horrible transformation. If Moreau's planned copulation between man and Panther woman was unnatural, Dr. Frankenstein's perversity reigned in *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). In this sequel to the 1931 film Frankenstein is persuaded (seduced) by Dr. Pretorius (Ernest Thesiger) to create a mate for the monster. Pretorius is keenly interested in creating life, but in a decidedly unnatural way. His creations are bizarre miniature version of humans he keeps in jars and claims to have grown them. Frankenstein is horrified and yet agrees to begin constructing a female monster. Pretorius again implies the godly aspirations of science when he snidely refers to the Bible “stories” of the creation of Adam and Eve. Whatever offspring the monsters may have produced is never known as the bride rejects the monster and they are both destroyed in an explosion. Moreau's experiment of breeding between man and beast is also echoed in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* but not as explicitly. This fear of mixing was also evident in American society through the interest in eugenics. ‘Good’ science preserved the white race while mad science corrupted it. All of the white

49 Freud believed that a person could sublimate their sexual desires, that is, divert them into more socially useful, non-sexual aims. Hale, Jr., *Freud and the Americans*, 340.
women (and occasionally white men) chased by monsters must be spared the horrors of half breeding. Humanity would be subsumed to the monster just as many feared that whites breeding with any other group would reduce the white race to the ‘lower order.’ The irony here is that eugenics came to be seen as unscientific and would be forever linked with Nazi Germany. After the Second World War mad scientists were just as likely to try to breed master races as to mix man and beast.

"Long Before Any Human Race"

This fear of the misuse of science, unfettered by human emotion and moral restraint, was accompanied by another fear, the increasing awareness of humanity’s insignificance in a vast universe. Just as natural selection eliminated man’s central place in an ordered menagerie, so too astronomy eliminated humanity’s central place in the universe. Throughout the late nineteenth century scientists were developing more powerful telescopes to study the heavens. Not only were there new objects discovered such as Pluto in 1930, but also new estimates of the size of the universe were being calculated. In 1921 Harlow Shapley presented a paper in which he outlined the evolving ideas of the physical universe. He stated that for primitive man the universe was anthropocentric, then Ptolemy and other astronomers considered the universe to be geocentric, then Copernicus established a heliocentric universe. Shapley argued that each of these changes came with a new understanding of the vastness of the universe and that man’s place became increasingly less

---

significant. Shapley stated that our cosmic position had to be reformed once
again and that the enormous size of the galaxy meant that we could no longer
consider our solar system to be in any way central. Shapley’s estimate of the
diameter of the galaxy was a staggering three hundred thousand light years. Shapley’s paper was actually the follow up to what was known as the Great
Debate with Heber D. Curtis. The debate involved the size of the Milky Way and
our position in the galaxy. Although later observations and calculations proved
our galaxy was not as vast as Shapley calculated, it was proven that there were
galaxies far beyond our own and that the universe was in fact expanding.
Shapley’s formulation of the relative position of our solar system was correct. Not
only was man not the center of his own solar system, but that solar system was
thousands of light years from the center of the galaxy, and that galaxy was only
one of many.

In addition to fears about individuals’ psychic well-being and the eternal
condition of soul, the base biological animal nature overtaking our better selves,
and science leading us from the moral groundings that make us human, the
horror genre was shaped by the fear that ultimately all of humanity is simply
insignificant. H.P. Lovecraft wrote, “If the cosmos be a momentary illusion, then
mankind is a still briefer one.” For Krutch this was a sobering thought. In the

May 1921, Number 11, Pg. 171.
52 Ibid.
vastness of the universe humans had no more meaning or purpose in their lives than an insect.54

Perhaps for technical reasons films of the period did not often dwell on this aspect of horror. “Cosmic” horror developed in short stories and pulp fiction. Lovecraft was perhaps the master of these stories. In “The Colour Out of Space,” (1927) a strange meteorite lands in a Massachusetts field west of the fictitious city of Arkham.55 “Men of science” come to investigate and discover all sorts of strange properties including a color not quite in our normal spectrum. This is reminiscent of Ambrose Bierce’s “The Damned Thing” (1893) which cannot be seen because its color is outside the spectrum visible to the human eye.56 What is terrifying are those scientific unknowns which wreak havoc on Earth. In Lovecraft’s story the color leaches into the earth and slowly poisons everything causing animal and plant life to grow grotesquely and glow with the odd color. Eventually the farm family is killed, apparently by something of the unknown color that lives in the well and eventually escapes into the sky in a flash of light. The narrator writes of the phenomenon, “It was just a colour out of space – a frightful messenger from unformed realms of infinity beyond all Nature as we know it; from realms whose mere existence stuns the brain…”57 The horror of the story is not only the gruesome demise of the farm family but the arbitrary manner in

55 Although American, Lovecraft often used English or archaic spellings of words such as colour and shewed (showed).
which it happens. They have done nothing wrong; there is no retribution, rather an infinite cosmos that happens to occasionally bring destruction. Krutch wrote that modern man could no longer fool himself about his significance in the universe, that if he disappeared nothing would change. Lovecraft’s "Colour" certainly was not bothered by its wanton destruction.

Lovecraft’s most famous creation, Cthulhu, also pointed out the relative insignificance of man. Cthulhu was a member of an ancient race, the "...Great Old Ones who lived ages before there were any men, and who came to the young world out of the sky." Their non-Euclidean cities vanished "long before any human race we know had shambled out of apedom." Primitive men worshipped them as gods, and in Lovecraft’s tales mere glimpses of them can drive men mad. With these stories Lovecraft seemed to enjoy undermining the arrogance of man, showing his characters glimpse of a universe so far beyond their understanding that it drives them insane. This was the despair that Krutch believed science created: "With increasing completeness science maps out the pattern of nature, but the latter has no relation to the pattern of human needs and feelings."

A universe which pays little attention to humanity is found in Donald Wandrei’s story "The Red Brain." Published in 1927, just a few years after Shapley and Curtis’s debate, the story is a tour of the universe as it is.

---

58 Krutch, 20.
61 Krutch, 12.
systematically destroyed by a cosmic dust. Wandrei emphasizes the immensity in age and size of the universe; it is "millions and billions and trillions of years" old and was filled with "hundreds of millions of stars, planets, and suns; but they were ephemeral as life or dreams, and they faded and vanished one by one."62 The earth literally disappears from the story on the first page. The plot involves a race of highly evolved beings in the Antares system. Although once a warring race they are now giant brains that exist to think. Wandrei notes that these brains have evolved beyond sex and spend all of their time in the advancement of science. Now, of course, their goal is to try to survive the onslaught of Cosmic Dust. To do so they have created Super Brains and one of these, known as the Red Brain for all the others are black, claims to have conquered the dust. The Red Brain is red because in his creation certain chemical impurities found their way into the process. These impurities also made the Red Brain different with thoughts his fellow brains could not understand. When it comes time to reveal his plan the Red Brain instead kills all the other brains and the Cosmic Dust destroys everything.63 Not only is the Earth erased with barely a trace, the most advanced science in the universe is ultimately helpless.

The horror genre developed during a time of incredible technological and scientific advancements. Machines promised to make life easier but maimed hundreds in factories and annihilated thousands in war. Scientists working within the established norms of society provided beneficial technology and yet there were fears of men of science losing their connection with humanity. Untethered

63 Ibid, 438.
from the morals of society scientists might unleash terror on the world. And the world itself was increasingly dwarfed by the immensity of space. Having long adapted to a non-earth centered solar system, Americans now dealt with a non-solar system centered universe. Their lives seemed increasingly cosmically insignificant. Horror is unique in that it can turn metaphysical questions into an immediate understandable form. Questions such “as why are we here?” are answered in horror in the worst possible way, there is no reason, or worse as suggested by Lovecraft, humanity is a cosmic joke. What small security white Americans might feel in their own society also seemed to be under assault from various groups of outsiders.
Chapter 4

In the spring of 1910 American audiences were re-introduced to the Frankenstein monster. In darkened theaters viewers witnessed a wild-haired, squat monster emerge from a fiery kiln. The monster of this Edison kinescope production represented the evil impulses of his creator and threatened young Victor's relationship with his fiancée. That same year another monster threatened to keep young white women from their intended young men. In the eyes of many white Americans, Jack Johnson, the African American heavyweight boxing champion, was that monster. When Johnson soundly defeated James Jeffries, the former champion turned farmer, a San Francisco newspaper referred to Johnson as a "black Frankenstein."1 Literary purists may have fretted about the confusion of creature with creator, but the meaning was clear; Johnson was an inhuman monster. In the ring his ability to take punishing blows and return them was astounding. Outside of the ring Johnson resembled the monster in another way; he was a threat to women, specifically white women. Johnson did not hide his preference for white women and married two. The combination of his sexual prowess with white women and his physical dominance of white men suggested to white men that their position in American society was not as secure as they believed.2

---

1 *The San Francisco Call*, July 5, 1910.
In the chaos of changing ideas of soul and mind, of man’s place in the biological hierarchy of the earth, and of his significance in the universe, many white Americans clung to the stabilizing idea that the white race was at the pinnacle of civilization. Anthropologists and social scientists wrote at length about the backwardness of other races and cultures. But at that supposed peak of civilization, many white Americans also feared the other, those peoples not like them. Ironically many feared that civilization was feminizing white, American men. Teddy Roosevelt voiced his concern that America might lose its “barbarian virtues” and become soft. Following Johnson’s victory, however, Roosevelt was moved to denounce prize-fighting and in particular motion picture recording of those events. He argued that boxing itself was a healthy, manly activity but that money had sullied the sport. It is not hard to imagine that he and other white men simply did not relish seeing Johnson’s victory again and again.

If American white men felt physically threatened by black men, they also feared the machinations of foreigners. Determining who was or was not a white American or deciding which immigrants were “desirable” was difficult. As white Americans began to embrace an idealized Anglo-Saxon heritage in the late nineteenth century, those outside that broad category were often met with suspicion. Not only did many immigrant groups from southern Europe or Asia look different, but their ways and habits were considered bizarre and unwholesome. Matthew Frye Jacobson notes that established white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants found these “non-American” races and ethnicities unsettling.

---

4 Bederman, Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race, 5.
because their “barbarian virtues,” including a certain physical vigor might undermine an over civilized America.\(^5\) In horror this often meant that these races also retained knowledge of a spiritual world and supernatural insights that the “civilized” races had forgotten. This forgotten, primal knowledge such as magic spells and poisonous potions could undo a civilization no longer prepared to deal with such matters.

The presence of so many non-white threats also fed fears of the tainting of the pure white race. Miscegenation, a term coined for the mixing of black and white, remained a preoccupation for white Americans. In the early twentieth century the eugenics movement sought to strengthen the white stock through selective breeding. Eugenics promised to eliminate physical deformities which were viewed as signs of evil and monstrosity.\(^6\) In the nineteenth century physical characteristics were seen by some as outward indicators of moral temperament and rational capabilities. Some anthropologists even posited that humans should be separated into different species, which would be unequal in their moral and intellectual capabilities.\(^7\) The shape of the skull and other traits became signs of potential moral depravity and mental limitations.

Difference was troubling for white Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This chapter will examine how the white American fear of the other was shaped into the monsters of horror stories. Encounters with the

---


other in horror were constructed by a mixture of assurance of white supremacy, a fear that that supremacy was being attacked by non-white races, and a more base fear of those with physical abnormalities, who did not look “normal.” Race in horror usually followed the same dynamics seen elsewhere in society; aggressive black men were evil, docile black men were good, and black women were sexualized temptresses. At the same time many stories assumed that black Americans had some knowledge of the supernatural and often had an advantage over more modern white people. Immigrants were also seen as a threat to white American dominance and also possessed arcane knowledge which might undermine American society.

A final facet of the other involved physical deformity. Fascination with medical oddities did not emerge with modern horror, but these stories often had evil characters with physical deformities. At the same time horror acknowledged that being relegated to inferior status because of such deformities might drive people to commit horrible crimes or ally themselves with evil doctors who promise to restore them.

The idea of civilization, or of what civilization was supposed to be, was a key pillar of American thought. For many in the early twentieth century white America was the crowning achievement of the march of progress. Josiah Strong was convinced that the Anglo Saxon race (in its American form) would take over the world unless they were undone by alcohol and tobacco. The imperialism of the late 1890s and early 1900s was buoyed by thoughts of a civilizing force

---

moving across the globe to create markets and bring democracy to backwards peoples. But just as white people laughed off voodoo with a slight unease, Matthew Frye Jacobson has shown that American attitudes of superiority towards other races and cultures were troubled by a sense that less civilized people were more in touch with certain “barbarian virtues.” 9 These barbarous elements led to American views that people living in Africa or other far off locales were not just backward, they were somehow misplaced in time. 10 Johannes Fabian argues that terms such as “primitive” place other cultures along a frame of reference that privileges the observer. 11 This seems to be exactly what white Americans did with contemporaneous pastoral societies. This idea of being out of the proper time coincides with one of Carroll’s types of monster, a thing that should not exist but does. For Carroll a living dinosaur would be a monster because it should not exist. 12 In a similar manner natives from other lands, existing out of time, could be monsters posing a threat to American civilization. At the same time, links with the past also gave minorities insights into ancient magic and rites that modern man had forgotten. White Americans certainly seemed to be fascinated by subjects such as voodoo and its adherents. This fascination rested on a disdain for superstition along with the recognition that practitioners were still skilled at

9 Jacobson, 137.

10 Ibid, 115.


108
practices such as poisoning. The apprehension of the other was inseparable from unease.

The Horror of Race

In white America it seemed to be a given that African Americans were uniformly superstitious. One reporter claimed that all of his "colored acquaintances" in the southern states believed the story of a bewitched boat that sank on the Ohio River and simply stated "[w]herever there are colored people there is superstition..." To reinforce this idea whites could chuckle at news stories of African Americans killing cats they believed to be witches or of "witch doctors" being arrested for petty larceny. Often this belief was played for comic effect and superstitious black characters appear in countless films, stammering and staring with wide eyes, while the white characters seek rational explanations. In Stephen Crane's story "The Black Dog" (1892), four travelers seek shelter from a storm in the home of a "slate-colored man" and his dying uncle. The man tells the travelers that his uncle will not die until he hears the howl of the black dog, a spirit creature that haunts the region. The travelers scoff at such tales but become increasingly nervous as the night passes. When they hear a scream they rush upstairs to find the uncle staring out the window at an enormous dog.

14 Drysdale, "West Indian Witchcraft: Some Remarkable Superstitions of the Negroes".
In a panic one of the travelers throws various objects at the "phantom" dog, including a bowl of soup. Once the soup hits the ground, the dog stops howling. The men laugh at the exposed ghost dog and their own nervousness, but they find that the uncle is dead. While the white men were nervous, the black man's belief led to his death. Superstition is part of the African American character in these stories. In Irvin Cobb's "Fishhead" (1911) it is noted that all of the "Negroes" but only some of the whites believe in the tales told about the title character. Even when represented as a given, African American belief in the supernatural was not always held in derision. In Ellen Glasgow's "The Shadowy Third" (1916), a black servant is presented in a more sympathetic light. In the story Margaret Randolph, a young, white governess is haunted by visions of a ghost child. The only other person to see the child is Gabriel, a "coloured butler . . . from South Carolina." A housekeeper tells Margaret: "I've heard that negroes often have a kind of second sight – though I don't know that that is just what you would call it. But they seem to believe in the supernatural by instinct..." Gabriel later assures Margaret that the ghost child is real. Gabriel and by implication most African Americans, are in tune with the supernatural world in a way most whites are not.

---

17 Ibid, 152.
18 Irvin Cobb, "Fishhead" in Cobb's Cavalcade, a Selection from the Writings of Irvin S. Cobb (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1945), 128.
This connection with the supernatural offers fascination but also concern. Perhaps white Americans protested too loudly. Did their mockery of African American superstition underlie their own unease and mask fears that their belief could be exploited? As we have seen there were those who advocated for belief in things currently unexplained by science. Perhaps the unexplained of the white man was more comforting than the unexplained of a different culture and belief system. Modern man confronted with powers they could not comprehend was a common theme in horror. The explorers in Edward Lucas White’s “Lukundoo” (1907) are confronted with witchcraft while in Africa searching for a tribe of pygmies. Stone, the leader of the expedition, has been cursed and out of his body grow small African heads which he cuts off with a razor. The others in the party initially believe the heads to be those of pygmies until they witness one emerge. The only explanation, although the white men are hesitant to believe it, is that Stone is the victim of some ancient magic.

Stone was a victim of the over reliance of reason over mystical knowledge. Indeed it is the hubris of the white man that causes his supernatural affliction. Two white men ignore the supernatural at their own peril in Cobb’s story as well. The character Fishhead has a supernatural connection with the giant catfish that inhabit the lake near his home. Fishhead, described as the monstrous offspring of a black father and a Native American mother, even looks like one of the fish. The local black community believes that Fishhead can call

---

21 Drysdale’s source claimed that many whites did believe in voodoo but did not want the blacks to know.
the catfish to him and even swims with them. When Fishhead is murdered by two
poor white brothers who believe he insulted them, it is the catfish who exact
deadly revenge.\textsuperscript{23}

In Cobb and White’s stories the supernatural enacts revenge for the
criimes of white men. More often the black connection to the supernatural
threatens whites. Perhaps this explains why reports of supposed voodoo so often
relate the various poisons available to its practitioners. The oppressor is at least
subconsciously aware that the oppressed might attempt to violently strike back.
This threat is the lingering unease in John H. Knox’s pulp story “The Buyer of
Souls” (1936). The story involves an elaborate plot by a faux spiritualist to
ensnare a young woman and her fortune. The hero, Colin Avery, enlists the aid
of Ursula Fludd, a grotesque woman who “practiced witchcraft among the
Negroes,” to save the girl from the evil clutches of the spiritualist.\textsuperscript{24} Although
most of the witchcraft is revealed to be a hoax, there is one drug which defies
scientific explanation.\textsuperscript{25} The title character of Seabury Quinn’s “The Curse of
Everard Maundy” (1927) also finds himself helpless in the face of witchcraft.
Maundy, a self-proclaimed atheist, attended a séance to mock the participants
and encounters a medium described as old, black, and “unbelievably ignorant”.\textsuperscript{26}
The medium curses the civilized and arrogant Maundy who then seeks the aid of
Quinn’s occult adventurer Jules de Grandin. De Grandin chastises his Watson-

\textsuperscript{23} Irvin Cobb, “Fishhead, 132.
\textsuperscript{24} John H. Knox, “Buyer of Souls”, 100.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 103.
like friend Trowbridge who dismisses Maundy's story by telling him he has not been to Martinique or Haiti or the Belgian Congo where de Grandin has seen many strange things. Many white Americans might have nodded their head in agreement with de Grandin. There were strange things in the world. New York Times reporter Leone Baker cautioned readers that they did not know "[h]ow closely the ancient magic comes to the white man's cities..." De Grandin's strange things and Baker's ancient magic manifested a threat to white society. In Quinn's story several people who hear Maundy speak are driven to suicide by an evil spirit which follows him. In this story, unlike "The Witch's Vengeance", the curse is real and can only be defeated by knowledge of the occult. Of course the heroes of these stories are white men who learn to wield the power of the occult. In August Derleth's story "Lagoda's Heads" (1939), the white adventurer Henley triumphs over black magic because he has adopted its use. This is imperialism along supernatural lines. The white man comes to plunder the resources of the native and appropriates them for his own needs.

Robert E. Howard's Puritan hero Solomon Kane is another white man who learns native magic to overcome evil. Howard's typical hero, however, tends to use his fists to solve problems. In "Black Canaan" (1936) Howard presents perhaps the most straight-forward story involving the threat of African Americans to white society. The threat is a black uprising led by Saul Stark who aspires to

---

27 Ibid, 552.
28 Leone Baker, "Witch Doctors Still Prey on Superstitious", *The New York Times*, December 23, 1928. Baker also noted the adeptness of voodoo priests at poisoning and seemed shocked that even in places where there were white people and Christian schools, many natives still believed in the witch doctor.
29 August Derleth, "Lagoda's Heads" in *Rivals of Weird Tales: 30 Great Fantasy and Horror Stories from the Weird Fiction Pulps* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1990), 139.
create a black empire in the United States. Kirby Buckner sets out to stop the uprising and encounters a mysterious and beautiful “quadroon” girl. He is bewitched by her and finds his resistance weakened. Buckner’s friend Jim Braxton shoots the girl but she vanishes. Later Buckner learns that the girl is the power behind Stark. While she dances the “Skull Dance” Braxton’s bullet finally kills her. With the witch dead Buckner is able to defeat Stark.\textsuperscript{30} The black temptress uses her sexual and magical powers to lead the black uprising against white society. Buckner is able to overcome this threat not with science or rationality, but with more traditional manly strength and a gun. Teddy Roosevelt would have been pleased.\textsuperscript{31}

Howard also taps into Anglo-Saxon masculinity in the vampire story “The Horror from the Mound” (1932). Against the advice of his neighbor Juan Lopez, Steve Brill breaks open a Native American burial mound hoping to find treasure. As night approaches Brill goes to get a lantern and returns to find the open mound empty. Believing Lopez has stolen the contents Brill sets off to confront “the dirty coyote.”\textsuperscript{32} Approaching Lopez’s dwelling Brill hears a scream and races to discover Lopez’s lifeless body, with bite marks on the throat. Brill finds some papers that Lopez had been writing and takes them back to his house. There he reads Lopez’s tale of a conquistador and his men who were the victims of vampire nobleman Don Santiago. The conquistador sealed the vampire in an


Indian burial mound and Brill unknowingly freed it. As Brill finishes the story the vampire bursts through the door. As they fight an oil lamp is broken and fire spreads. Brill defeats the vampire not by beheading or a stake through the heart, but by breaking its spine on a table and leaving it to burn.33 Howard's heroes were not too civilized, their raw strength and courage saw them through, and they maintained the dominant position of the white race.

Horror from Foreign Shores

There were many in the early twentieth century who were not so sure the white man could survive so easily. If monsters are fears in concrete forms, then many monsters were born of fears of the habits of immigrants. John Higham's work demonstrated that in the late nineteenth century apprehensions about immigration tended to move in waves that ebbed and rose during cycles of economic prosperity and depression. Immigrants welcomed during good times might fall under suspicion after violent episodes such as the 1886 Haymarket Riot. Manufacturing interests were seldom concerned with immigration restriction because of their desire for cheap labor. By the 1920s, however, many no longer viewed the United States as a vast frontier with endless opportunities and the need for cheap labor came into doubt. Robert Ward questioned whether an American industry that could not prosper without a steady supply of cheap labor was even worth having.34 Americans, Ward went on to say, did not want a permanent class of "low-grade labor of the coolie type," and new machinery would alleviate any need for cheap labor. This reduction in cheap labor would

33 Ibid, 198.
34 Robert Ward, "Our New Immigration Policy" Foreign Affairs, September, 1924, 104.

115
also prevent any "undue domination by labor." Additionally labor was hostile to immigration during the economic downturn following the end of the First World War. The Red Scare also revived old fears of political radicals and anarchists in the mass of immigrants.

Higham argued that anti-immigration forces coalesced around a racial element. For many years Americans assumed that immigrants would be assimilated and become part of the fabric of the country. But imperialistic endeavors, particularly in the Philippines, showed that foreign peoples could be particularly resistant to American ways. If foreign peoples could resist American ways abroad then perhaps "inferior" immigrants could weaken traditional American institutions at home. The idea of the "Melting Pot", which would help immigrants become real Americans by learning the English language and American history and by sending their children to school to do the same was no longer a reliable model for Ward and others. Ward believed that immigrants brought sub-par mental and physical characteristics, which would taint the native stock and produce a less than ideal American. Although some Americans looked to the example of African Americans to show that contact with civilized America could lift minorities out of their degraded state, many feared this would not happen with the "unredeemed savages" who were immigrants. Ward feared that education and environment could not overcome inherited "racial" values.

---

35 Ibid.
38 Ward, 103.
40 Ward, 103.
Ironically, Ward argued that the new immigration restriction act which would preserve the racial status of the United States did not imply the racial superiority of northwestern Europe over southeastern, but merely that some races were better ‘fits’ in American society. But not all were as forgiving as Ward to some groups and began to see almost all foreign peoples as unequal, and therefore undeserving of equal treatment.

During the nineteenth century Louis Agassiz and others posited the idea of polygenesis, the theory that humans sprung from more than one common source. Ironically this was counter to both Christian ideas of creation and Darwinian Theory. This theory was discredited but the idea that other races were from some different branch of humanity resurfaced in scary entertainment. As the narrator in Francis Stevens’ “Unseen – Unfeared” (1919) walks through an immigrant neighborhood, he is revolted by all of the Italians, Jews, and blacks that he observes. “They were all humans, and I, too was human. Some way I did not like the idea.” Differences among human beings had tended to be viewed through the lens of environmentalism. Different skin color, facial features, and other physical distinctions were seen as the result of climate and other geographic features on the development of particular groups. Franz Boas, a leading American anthropologist, explicitly argued against inherent, genetic traits that differentiated races. But this idea that all humans were essentially the same was clearly unsettling for Stevens’ narrator. And it was for whites on both sides of

41 Ibid, 107.
42 Jacobson, 50.
the Atlantic during the late nineteenth century who increasingly wanted to put more genetic space between themselves and other races. In the mid-nineteenth century environmental explanations were challenged and some began to advocate for the division of humanity into different species which were unequal in physical, intellectual, and moral capacities. If science did not ultimately support this idea, there were still new categories to invent for separation. American economist and amateur anthropologist William Z. Ripley provided such categories for whites whose anti-immigrant views were taking an increasingly racist turn. Ripley divided Europeans into three groups: Teutonic (northern, tall, blond, long-headed), Alpine (central, stocky round-headed) and Mediterranean (slender, dark, long heads). Although he tended to regard racial variances as dependent on environmental factors, Ripley did ponder how genetics might play a role in those variances. Ripley, and others who sought scientific explanations for how race mixing might weaken a 'stronger' race, turned to the ideas of Gregor Mendel. He noted, in a 1908 speech, that hybridization sometimes led to the return of latent characteristics. So if the Teutonic race mixed with the Mediterranean race, the less desirable traits of the latter might repress the traits of the former. In 1916 Madison Grant, a New York elite and amateur zoologist, expanded on these ideas in his book *The Passing of the Great Race.* Grant argued that environment could not alter heredity and that the Teutonic race

---

45 Higham, 154.
46 Ibid, 155
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid, 156
(which he renamed Nordic) could be tainted by the mixing with the Alpine, the Mediterranean, or the Jews. In an idea that merged with American notions of 'one drop of blood', that is that any trace of black blood made one black, Grant argued that any mixing of Nordic with Jew always resulted in a Jew.\textsuperscript{49}

Popular culture did not always keep pace with science and Robert E. Howard and others would use these ideas in stories that demonstrated the horrible threats to the white race. "The Children of the Night" (1931) begins with an anthropological discussion of whether the Alpine were a distinct race or merely the result of the mixing of the Mediterranean and the Nordic.\textsuperscript{50} There is also a non-explicit reference to the environmental versus genetic debate. The focal point of the story, however, is Ketrick, an Anglo-Saxon with unusual facial features. The narrator, O'Donnel, remarks that from certain angles Ketrick's eyes "slant like a Chinaman's and that another colleague referred to Ketrick as "a reversion of type to some dim and distant ancestor of Mongolian blood..."\textsuperscript{51} The story then shifts to a discussion of the nameless cults of ancient races, the genetic composition of the 'wild Picts' and whether descendants of these Picts might still carry on ancient dark rituals. Ketrick then accidently strikes O'Donnel with a bizarre artifact, a kind of war hammer, which the companions note is unusually small. O'Donnel then experiences a race memory in which he has been attacked by small, savage people: "Humans they were, of a sort, though I did not consider them so. They were short and stocky, with broad heads too

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 157
\textsuperscript{50} Robert E. Howard, "The Children of the Night", in \textit{The Horror Stories of Robert E. Howard} (New York: Del Rey, 2008), 143.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 144.
His ancient self then pursues and slays countless of these before succumbing to his wounds. When he awakens in the present O'Donnel immediately attacks Ketrick, who he recognizes as a descendent of that earlier inhuman race. O'Donnel then reveals that the Picts were not the first inhabitants of the British Isles. An earlier race called the Children of the Night had come from the Far East. It was this group that tainted Britain with evil. The story ends with O'Donnel thinking of Ketrick and sums up the fears of white men:

But let me speak of Ketrick... A reversion to type – but not the type of some cleanly Chinaman or Mongol of recent times. The Danes drove his ancestors into the hills of Wales; and there, in what medieval century, and in what foul way did that cursed aboriginal taint creep into the clean Saxon blood of the Celtic line, there to lie dormant so long? The Celtic Welsh never mated with the Children any more than the Picts did. But there must have been survivals – vermin lurking in those grim hills, that had outlasted their time and age. In Aryara’s day they were scarcely human. What must a thousand years of retrogression have done to the breed? What foul shape stole into the Ketrick castle on some forgotten night, or rose out of the dusk to grip some woman of the line, straying in the hills?53

O'Donnel finishes by lamenting that his race has become degraded by mixing with “conquered races” and swears that he will find Ketrick, who “pollutes the clean air and leaves the slime of the snake on the green earth” and kill him. The vitriol in this story is unnerving. Howard, through O'Donnel, clearly agreed with Grant’s argument that the Alpine, Mediterranean and Jewish hybrids were weakening the Nordic race. The Nordic stock needed purification and restoration.

52 Ibid, 148.
53 Ibid, 156.
Mixed with this racial fear is also the fear that these races retain ties to a cultish past which will undermine white domination in some nefarious way.

Several horror stories use the device of a link to the past which translates into some sort of doom for the present. In “The Children of the Night” and “The Black Stone” (1931) Howard makes references books which contain the arcane knowledge of lost cults. Much of this idea of black arts secretly passed down through the ages seems to come from Margaret Murray’s new theory of witch cults in Europe first articulated in her 1921 book *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*. Although discredited by historians and anthropologists, she argued that the people persecuted during the witchcraft hysteria of the Middle Ages were actually practicing witches. This idea held a peculiar fascination for horror writers, especially H.P. Lovecraft and his circle of acquaintances. Lovecraft mentions Murray in letters and he corresponded with a range of authors including Howard. One of Lovecraft’s protégés, Zealia Bishop, in “The Curse of Yig” (1928) told of a group of frontier settlers who planned for an annual witch Sabbath “of the primal pre-Aryans, kept alive through the ages in the midnight blackness of secret woods…”54 This does not suggest that these writers believed in magic, but it does suggest a distrust of immigrants and their customs. Lovecraft’s own “The Horror at Red Hook” (1927) showcased his fear and loathing of foreigners. The hero of the story is university educated police detective Thomas F. Malone. Perhaps this reflected Lovecraft’s opinion that certain groups could be assimilated one at a time into the dominant Nordic group but Lovecraft also

---

called the Irish "the pest of Boston." Malone is involved in the case of Robert Suydam, an elderly recluse and expert on the occult, whose family fears is going insane. The law takes interest because Suydam's new associates were known criminals who, among other things, "smuggled ashore certain nameless and unclassified Asian dregs wisely turned back by Ellis Island." Suydam and his horde of illegal immigrants, whom Lovecraft describes as "slant-eyed," "mongoloid," "squat," "squinting," etc., are involved in a plot to unleash an ancient evil in New York. Other elements of the story include classic tropes of 'evil foreigner' tales, such as the kidnapping of young children and the possible deflowering and certain murder of a "young woman of excellent position." Suydam himself has been corrupted by contact with evil forces and his reanimated corpse is to be used in a rite to bring the evil goddess Lilith to corporeal form. Some kind of race memory survives in the corpse however, and it thwarts the plans of the immigrant hordes even as it melts away into tissue and bone. The corpse bears out Lovecraft's idea that the Nordic races feel a hatred of "squat, squint-eyed jabberers with coarse ways and alien emotions" in their "deepest cell tissues", an idea clearly seen in Howard's later story. Lovecraft's own experiences living in Red Hook were the inspiration for history and Suydam's house stands in for the brownstone that Lovecraft imagined had some horrible secret far beneath its foundations.

55 Lovecraft, Lord of a Visible World, 181.
57 Ibid, 141.
58 Ibid, 153.
59 Lovecraft, Lord of Visible World, 181.
60 Ibid, 167.
he obviously loathed, could not help but see himself as some kind of explorer in a
distant land and wrote, “I... came to know that squalid world as few white men
have ever known it.”61 His time in New York reinforced his idea that the East and
the West could not co-exist and he wrote that the Jews would either disappear or
be killed off “in some sudden outburst of mad physical loathing on our part” and
that whites would either murder other immigrants, emigrate themselves, or be
taken to the asylum.62 In his horror story the unthinkable almost happens, the
immigrants are nearly successful in unleashing an ancient evil which would have
destroyed the white race. In the caves underneath Suydam’s house the
authorities find kidnapped women and their demon offspring, and again
Lovecraft’s fear of race mixing is evident. At the end of the story, Malone asks,
“who are we to combat poisons older than history and mankind.”63 Here Lovecraft
blends his fanciful elder gods with his very real beliefs that different races simply
cannot coexist since it is in their very nature to hate each other.

Racial differences also frame the story of the most famous horror
immigrant from southeastern Europe, Dracula. As created by the Irish author
Bram Stoker, Dracula is not an effete aristocrat as earlier vampires were
portrayed, but rather a fierce warrior, a holdover from an earlier savage time. In
Stoker’s time Dracula’s homeland, Transylvania, was a land of many barbarous
races and a source of unease for the English.64 The vampire story has long been

61 Ibid, 166.
64 Arata, Stephen D. “The Occidental Tourist: Dracula and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization” in
W., Norton, 1997), 464.
scrutinized for sexual themes and whatever view one may take, it is clear in the novel, play, and film that Dracula does attack society through its women. In language that echoes the sentiments of American concerned with immigration, Stephen Arata argues that Dracula’s peculiar miscegenation does not result in a mixing of the blood, but rather the conquest of the tainted, foreign blood over the pure blood of England’s women. Dracula brings death and corruption; he weakens men and turns virginal young women into dangerous women who only come out at night. In the 1931 Universal film version, audiences see one young victim, Lucy, become a vampire herself, one who feeds upon small children. As if the threat against women was not strong enough, the added terror of the corruption of children by the dreaded foreign influence is introduced. It also worth noting that many vampires of fiction are titled, perhaps indicating that the vampire will bring not only genetic subjugation, but political as well. Count Dracula threatens society as a corrupter of pure, Anglo-Saxon blood as well as democratic ideals.

Bela Lugosi was not the only vampire menacing the United States. In Seabury Quinn’s “The Man Who Cast No Shadow” (1927) occult investigator Jules de Grandin encounters another vampire from Transylvania who also carries a title, Baron Lajos Czuczoron. De Grandin also finds the Baron’s victim in a state no play or film could show, naked on the floor of a root cellar with her blood about to be spilled. The Baron’s female accomplice had already been

---

65 Ibid, 466


124
dispatched after preying on a young man.\textsuperscript{67} Clearly the foreigner here is a menace to red-blooded young Americans. Vampires cannot be assimilated, they cannot be taught to be Americans, they come to feed on Americans and weaken the country.

A variation of the vampire story was presented in Universal’s “The Mummy” (1932) starring Boris Karloff. The undead stalker of women is the living mummy Imhotep who plans to turn his love interest, Helen (Zita Johann), into a living mummy as well. Helen is half Egyptian and so is apparently susceptible to Imhotep’s hypnotic call. Once she realizes Imhotep’s plan she resists because she is one of the living while Imhotep belongs with the dead. Again there is a parallel with Carrol’s idea of monsters being out of their proper time and Jacobson’s claim that Americans viewed foreigners as from point further back in time. Imhotep also possesses powers that civilized men do not wield. The Van Helsing-like Doctor Muller (Edward van Sloan) says that Imhotep has “dragged her back to ancient Egypt.”\textsuperscript{68} The spell is broken when Helen’s young love calls her name. Imhotep’s death also releases his hold on the black servant, “The Nubian” (Noble Johnson). When Dr. Muller realizes that the Nubian is under Imhotep’s control he remarks that it must be the “ancient blood.”\textsuperscript{69} Here again is racist semi-science in the idea that black blood is somehow inferior and

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid. In the story de Grandin believes it is unlikely that a man is the victim of the suspected male vampire. There are two vampires discovered, each attacking members of the opposite sex. The idea of a homosexual vampire was apparently too unnatural to comprehend.

\textsuperscript{68} Karl Freund, \textit{The Mummy}, Universal, 1933.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
conditioned to be in a state of servitude. It also reinforces the idea of the other's connection to the primitive.

While much of the concern over immigration in the early twentieth century centered around southern and Eastern Europe there was still concern over immigrants from the Far East as well. Although the Chinese Exclusion Act had been in place since 1882, they were still a people that attracted and repelled white Americans. The sheer number of Chinese attracted American economic interest in Chinese markets. Those same numbers also worried white Americans concerned with the "yellow horde." As Jacobson notes, the Chinese were seen as resistant to change and were considered somewhat backward to the West, despite their ancient history and superior numbers. China was an enigma, holding on to customs such as ancestor worship, which many saw as an impediment to their progress.\(^7\) In Robert Chambers' story "The Maker of Moons" (1896) China is portrayed as a mystic land, a dreamlike place in which millions had never heard the name of Christ. In a convergence of American concerns of the 1890s, an evil Chinese sorcerer is behind a scheme to create artificial gold. One character remarks that it would certainly settle the silver question, but the government fears the potential economic chaos and sends an agent to stop the sorcerer.\(^7\) The most infamous fictional Chinese villain was Fu Manchu. Created by British author Sax Rohmer, Fu Manchu was the subject of the 1932 MGM film "The Mask of Fu Manchu." Boris Karloff portrayed Fu and Myrna Loy played his

---

\(^7\) Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 37.
sadistic daughter Fah Lo See. The plot involves Fu's quest to steal the sword and mask of Genghis Khan in order to place himself at the head of a new conquering army. "Should Fu Manchu put that mask across his wicked eyes and take that scimitar into his bony cruel hands, all Asia rises!" Fu's arch rival, Nayland Smith (Lewis Stone) declares.\footnote{Charles Brabin, \textit{The Mask of Fu Manchu}, MGM, 1932.} The horror elements of the film include elaborate torcher devices, slithering snakes and spiders, and a death ray. The terror at the heart of the film, however, is the cunning Fu's plan of domination. Not content with simply ruling the world, Fu commands his army to "Conquer and breed! Kill the white man and take his women!"\footnote{Ibid.} This cry is reminiscent of the San Francisco Chronicle's hysterical headline, "Japanese a Menace to American Women."\footnote{Jacobson, 83.} Japanese immigration was limited by the so-called Gentleman's Agreement of 1907, and codified by law in the 1920s. The fear of a threat to white humanity, which many white Americans saw as the pinnacle of all of humanity, was given chilling life in the film persona of Fu Manchu.

\textbf{Deformity and Horror}

Not all threats to white American homogeneity came from other races. The most infamous of all horror films of the 1930s involved not caricatures or broadly drawn stereotypes to represent fear but real human beings. The film was Tod Browning's "Freaks" released in 1932 by MGM. The film is an odd mix of exploitation and sympathy. At the very beginning a carnival Barker describes the performers as "living, breathing monstrosities" and yet the villains are two

\footnote{Charles Brabin, \textit{The Mask of Fu Manchu}, MGM, 1932.} \footnote{Ibid.} \footnote{Jacobson, 83.}
"normal" people. The trapeze artist Cleopatra (Olga Baclanova) takes advantage of the feelings of the dwarf Hans (Harry Earles) in order to get gifts and money. She schemes with the strong man Hercules (Henry Victor) to marry Hans and then kill him. At the wedding feast the freaks welcome Cleopatra into their group by passing a loving cup and chanting, "We accept her, we accept her, one of us, one of us." The irony is that the group of outsiders is now the dominant group to which she must assimilate. Cleopatra is appalled and throws the cup and orders the freaks out of the tent. She later apologizes to Hans but also continues to poison him. Hans becomes aware of her plan and on a stormy night he and the others exact their revenge, Hercules is killed and Cleopatra, through unexplained methods, is turned into a freak.

Upon its release, audiences and critics did not know what to make of *Freaks*, and it was a commercial failure. Some reviewers found it loathsome while others worried how its shocks would affect audience members. *Freaks* has been the subject of much analysis since its revival in 1962, but it is important to understand how audiences reacted upon its release. Director Tod Browning worked in carnivals and was well acquainted with sideshow freaks and he does show the performers with some sympathy. The film reveals daily lives that in many ways are like anyone else's, and one could argue that he is showing how people overcome handicaps. But scenes of the armless girl eating and the human torso lighting a cigarette also pander to the voyeuristic gaze. The climax

---

75 Tod Browning, *Freaks*, MGM, 1932.
76 Senn, *Golden Horrors*, 55.
77 Rachel Adams note for instance that in Hans's wagon Cleopatra is the one who seems out of place. *Sideshow U.S.A*, 68.
is clearly meant to frighten the audience as Cleopatra is pursued by the freaks through the rain and the mud. In a 1962 review, John Thomas refers to the film as a masterpiece and applauds Browning for the reversal that makes the audience reject the normal and sympathize with the “freaks.”78 But this is precisely what 1932 film audiences did not want to do. The performers themselves were not allowed to eat in the MGM cafeteria because of the effect they had on the other actors.79

In horror stories deformities often equated to evil and while *Freaks* attempts to show the humanity of the performers, the ending seems to revert to form. Susan Sontag wrote that audiences derive pleasure from looking at freaks who are “beings excluded from the category of the human,” and therefore lesser beings. The feelings of superiority along with feelings of fear allow the audience to set aside “moral scruples” and enjoy cruelty.80 This would undermine any attempt on Browning’s part to humanize the freaks of his film.

Even deformities which are not congenital often indicated that a character is evil. In *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933) the villain has been hideously scarred by fire. The villain in *Doctor X* (1932) is missing an arm. Fritz, the sadistic assistant in *Frankenstein* is the first of many hunchbacked helpers. The monster in the pulp story “Death Tolls the Bell” (1935) is an escapee from an insane asylum who has been mutated into a monstrosity by chemicals in the waters of the cave he inhabits. Although he is only the “moron slave” of the true villain, this

---

does not prevent the hero from burning him to death with acid. The idea of
deformity and evil is perhaps most evident in Universal's 1935 film *The Raven*.
Bela Lugosi stars as the demented Dr. Vollin, who claims death as his talisman
and has recreated Poe’s pendulum torture device in his basement. One evening
career criminal Bateman (Boris Karloff) comes to Vollin’s house seeking help.
Bateman wants Vollin to “change his face” because people have always called
him ugly and that makes him angry. Bateman theorizes that, “maybe if a man
looks ugly he does ugly things.” Intrigued by Bateman’s words, Vollin agrees to
perform the surgery. As an experiment to see if Bateman’s words are true, Vollin
makes Bateman hideously ugly, with a “dead” eye always staring from the right
side of his face. Knowing he has been betrayed, Bateman growls at Vollin, the
same growl Karloff used as Frankenstein’s monster. Vollin tells Bateman he will
fix his face but only if he will do something for him, namely help him kill the father
and boyfriend of Jean Thatcher (Irene Ware), a young woman whose life he
saved after a car accident. Although initially terrified of Bateman, Jean is kind to
him, and this proves to be Vollin’s undoing when Bateman kills him rather than let
Jean come to harm. *The Raven* then turns out to be somewhat of an indictment
of society and seems to caution to look past physical appearance.

Lessons of acceptance were rare in horror stories of the period, especially
acceptance of the other. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were
times of hostility towards people who were different from white, Anglo-Saxon
Americans. Jim Crow was entrenched in the South and immigrants were looked

---

81 Hugh Cave, “Death Tolls the Bell”, 95.
on with increasing fear and loathing. Those with physical deformities were also marginalized and in the case of circus freak show performers, regarded as macabre entertainment. Horror stories were the perfect medium to turn these groups into inhuman monsters. The threats to a perceived way of life were crystalized in stories which demonstrated that strange, foreign customs were undermining white civilization and humanity itself.
Conclusion

In January 1939 Boris Karloff donned the makeup one last time as Frankenstein's monster returned. He literally represents the sins of the fathers as his presence is a threat to the Son of Frankenstein, Wolf von Frankenstein played by Basil Rathbone. This time the monster is little more than the muscle behind the revenge schemes of Bela Lugosi's Ygor. The monster, played by different actors, would lurch through four more sequels before Universal essentially retired the character. Movie audiences did not respond to the monster in the 1940s as they had in the previous decade. Perhaps they were just tired of him, or perhaps the horrors of the Second World War lessened their appetite for such diversions. Horror did not disappear but no horror film would duplicate the successes of Frankenstein and King Kong as the top grossing for the year until The Exorcist in 1973.1

Popular historic narratives of this time period indicate that the United States was moving out of the shadow of Victorian morality and non-rational thought and into the bright light of empiricism. The Scopes Trial is held up as an example of this transition. But an examination of the monsters in scary entertainment from 1880 until 1939 reveals an unease with the contemporary world. They are monsters born of modernity. The number of ape-centric horror movies after the Scopes Trial should indicate that all was not well in the imaginations of white, middle class Americans. At the heart of their fears were questions of identity.

---

Horror is reactionary and the scary entertainment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reacted to modern problems by retreating. Rational men like Sigmund Freud viewed religion as a delusion. Rational men like Franz Boas demonstrated there was nothing inherent in the race of individuals. Rational men such as Harlow Shapley revealed the vastness of the universe and humanity’s very small place in it. In horror these ideas were dangerous. Religion was an essential tether to morality. Humans unencumbered by morality would run wild. Horror showed that there were such things as ghosts, that something did live on after death and could communicate either benevolently or malevolently. Scary stories had vengeful ghosts, but these ghost reinforced a world view. Psychology was not abandoned entirely, but psychology revealed the depths of depravity people were capable of. Horror stories indicated people needed rationalism and spiritualism. Horror showed that people would be foolish to ignore the unexplained.

Horror reacted to Darwinian Theory by highlighting the threats to the purity of white women. If evolution were true then what might prevent an intermingling of the pure with the slightly less pure. In horror apes filled the role of the undesirable and it was no stretch to see them stand in for African American men. King Kong was only the most extreme example. There would be no mixing of blood, no matter how natural science may claim it would be. Scientists were not to be trusted if they abandoned their human nature and acted against the best interest of society. As is shown in numerous mad scientist movies and stories it is better not to have technology than allow it to be misused.
Those who were different must also be guarded against. The white race must be kept pure against the threat of degradation. Property and women must be protected. The other comes to take those very things and strength and intelligence must be relied on to protect the weak from the insidious plans of foreigners and other races. If necessary whites would learn the ways of spells and magic in order to combat the evil. Once whites had appropriated that power, they would naturally be able to wield it better than the native practitioners. The ideas of race superiority in horror stories such as those written by Robert E. Howard and H. P. Lovecraft appealed to racial ideas that many anthropologists had already left behind.

Scary entertainment in this time period concerned maintaining positions against attack. Horror movies of later years would focus on what humans had done to the world and how the world was reacting. This is the basis of all the giant bug movies of the 1950s. Even the classic monster of that decade, the Creature from the Black Lagoon, has his world intruded on, and as a result, he intrudes on ours. Perhaps the most striking difference in outlook comes from the science fiction film The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951). Klaatu (Michael Rennie) has come to Earth, not to invade us, but to warn us. Our violent wars have brought us to the attention of a group of intergalactic peacekeepers and their robot policemen. Klaatu offers these final words:

I am leaving soon, and you will forgive me if I speak bluntly. The universe grows smaller every day, and the threat of aggression by any group, anywhere, can no longer be tolerated. There must be security for all, or no one is secure... It is no concern of ours how you run your own planet, but if you threaten to extend your violence, this Earth of yours will be reduced
to a burned-out cinder. Your choice is simple: join us and live in peace, or pursue your present course and face obliteration. We shall be waiting for your answer. The decision rests with you.\(^2\)

The worst fears of that earlier time had come true. Humans were now the monsters.

---

**Bibliography**

**Short Stories, Novels and Radio Plays**


电源信物


Films


____. *Freaks*. Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1932
Cooper, Merian C. and Ernest B. Shoedsack, *King Kong*. DVD. RKO, 1933.


Freund, Karl. *The Mummy*. DVD. Universal, 1933


Mamoulian, Rouben. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Paramount, 1931.


____. *Bride of Frankenstein*. DVD. Universal, 1935.


**Secondary Works**


http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nnc2.ark:/13960/t7xk92d8f;view=1up;seq=21 (accessed March 5, 2014).


Roellinger, Jr., Francis X. “Psychical Research and The Turn of the Screw.” *American Literature* 20 (November 1948), 401-412.


Wilson, Edmund "A Treatise on Tales of Horror." *New Yorker* (May 27, 1944), 72-82.