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Monsters in our Midst: An Examination of Human Monstrosity in Fiction and Film of the United States

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MONSTERS IN OUR MIDST: AN EXAMINATION OF HUMAN MONSTROSITY IN
FICTION AND FILM OF THE UNITED STATES

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

Monsters In Our Midst: An Examination of Human Monstrosity in Fiction and Film of the United States

By

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The chapters within this dissertation concentrate on textual analysis of literature and film in which monsters appear in various forms, and particularly how those monsters still coincide with Noel Carroll's definition of "art-horror" in his book *Philosophy of Horror*, while proving that Carroll's definition of monster – and any others who may attempt to limit the definition of monstrosity – is incomplete and much too restrictive. I will be concentrating on monstrosity as it appears in gothic and horror fiction, film, and other elements of popular culture in order to explore the concept of "the monstrous" on multiple levels.

The first chapter will examine the monster which lies at the foundation of the Gothic/Horror genre: the monstrous house, or the haunted house. The chapter "The House Askew" examines both fiction and film of the United States in order to show how the human – not the house – is actually the one who is haunted within these stories. This begins from early U.S. Gothic texts, including Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," and H.P. Lovecraft's "Pickman's Model." These texts all show that the haunting of the human stems from moral conventions set up through Puritan standards, and that the inhabitant must either face their "sins" and become expiated, or fall victim to their own

disgraces. Following these texts, an examination of the films *Signs*, *The Others*, and *1408* again show that when ghostly manifestations occur in haunted houses, it is almost always directly due to the haunting pasts of the people who inhabit the house, rather than the past of the house itself. Finally, this chapter examines Danielewski's postmodern masterpiece, *House of Leaves*. This text is the most compelling example of monstrosity because in this case, the book itself – and by association, academia – is what becomes the monster, which is even further proof that the definition of monster has been broadened.

Next, the chapter “Terrifying, Horrifying, Disgusting Zombies” examines George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and Max Brooks' novel *World War Z* among other legends of zombies found in history and popular culture. The chapter also examines some of the cultural fears and taboos brought about in zombie fiction and the popular culture zombie craze – the fear of the horde, the fear of mass infection, and the taboo of cannibalism.

The chapter “Don't Be Fooled by the Handsome Fellow in the Mansion” takes an interest in the way the definition of vampire, and the myths surrounding vampires, have expanded through popular culture, especially through TV and film. It begins with an examination of Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* which shows how the human, rather than the monsters, are really the antagonists within a post-apocalyptic society. It also discusses Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* as a metaphor for post-Vietnam America. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the vampire in popular culture. Because of texts like *Twilight* and television shows like HBO's *True Blood*, for example, vampires have been given a whole new life that is almost entirely human. The final chapter, “Anything Coming Back to Life Hurts” highlights the fact that in much African American literature, including Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the monstrous appears in the form of the human construct of slavery or

of one's relationship to the past. It reflects the particular connection between the Gothic tradition and the American past, beholding a darkly coded understanding of what lay beneath the American nation's usually optimistic surface. That darker note concerns, in part, the legacy of slavery and racial discrimination. Morrison's Gothicism and Horror expresses the atrocity of black experience in the South, in which the nightmare past is re-experienced through a "spiteful" haunted house and the revenant of a murdered child. Morrison utilizes three types of monsters in order to articulate these underlying cultural fears. Morrison and other African American authors prove that all hauntings are, in fact, due to one's relationship to one's own history, both personal and cultural. In the conclusion, I will be commenting on how I envision this project to proceed, the other monsters which were not included within this dissertation, and the general relevance of a study of the monstrous in scholarly circles.

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DEDICATION

For my nearly-born daughter, who has taught me the true definition of the uncanny, and with whom I am currently approaching the abject. Thank you for being my internal motivation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The oft-debated question in gothic and horror studies, “What makes a monster?” is a key question because the definition of monstrosity is what many scholars will base their definition of “gothic” and “horror” upon. The more restrictive the definition of monster, the more confined one’s definition of gothic and horror becomes. I was first exposed to this debate through Noel Carroll’s *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990). This work is a seminal, though contentious, work of criticism in the discipline of Horror Fiction and Film. Its book jacket blurb hails it as bringing together the philosophy of art (including fiction, film, and visual arts), the philosophy of mind, and questions of popular culture, and providing a “comprehensive knowledge” of the horror genre. Though there are certainly helpful and enlightening aspects of the study – for example, Carroll’s ability to distinguish subsets of genres such as fantasy and science fiction from that of horror, and his later discussion of art-horror’s relevance to postmodernism – the premise of his work itself, his definition of “horror” as pertaining to works which feature a particular kind of “monster,” is not only overly-simplified, but indeed unfounded. Carroll claims that horror *must* be defined by the appearance of monsters in the work, and specifically that monsters are “of either a supernatural or sci-fi origin” (15), and therefore cannot be human. He reemphasizes this later, saying “‘monster’ refers to any being not believed to exist now according to contemporary science” (27). If a human being is the antagonist, or the horror is more psychologically driven, the story or film falls into a different genre rather than that of horror, dubbed by Carroll as “tales of terror” (15) or “tales of dread” (42). In fact, Carroll attempts to separate the horror genre completely from the gothic, while I believe that these two terms – Gothic

and Horror – can and should be used interchangeably if a broader definition of monster is applied to the scholarship surrounding the literature and popular culture of the United States starting from its literary beginnings in the 17th century.

Carroll is not the only one to reduce the definition of monster to such a small group of creatures. David D. Gilmore, in his 2003 book *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*, seems to support Carroll’s reductive definition, confining monsters to “supernatural, mythical, or magical products of the imagination” (6). He continues:

I will not include heinous criminals or mass murderers like Hitler or Stalin (justifiably “monsters” in a metaphorical sense), nor will I include physical abnormalities, freaks and birth defects, or other real anomalies or deformities (referred to as “monsters” in the Middle Ages and Renaissance). Additionally, for purposes of cultural comparison, I will exclude witches and sorcerers, because, like our serial murderers, they are only human beings who have gone bad, rather than fantasies. For the same reason I exclude revenants like ghosts and zombies, which are, once again, only dead (or half-dead) people come back to haunt. (6)

Gilmore not only says humans cannot be monstrous, but takes it even further by excluding anything that may have been human in the first place.

The purpose of this dissertation and the chapters therein is to point out the glaring weaknesses in various arguments about the definition of monsters, what makes a monster, and the concept of monstrosity in general. My argument is positioning itself on the opposite side of scholars such as Carroll who restrict the definition of monster to beings of supernatural or mythical origin. The chapters will not only examine humans as monstrous,

but will contend that those monsters which are generally thought of as inhuman (zombies and vampires, for example) are actually fueled by human fears and social constructs. In many cases, the monster itself is not what is at the root of horror in these stories and films – the monster is only a metaphor for what human beings are attempting to deal with in their own lives, past and present. When viewed through a socio-historical and psychoanalytic lens, it becomes clear that the definition of monster is a much larger concept than what Carroll uses to define art-horror, and that “monsters” can actually encompass not only human beings, but more abstract concepts like institutions or academia. This changing definition is something that Carroll does not take into account, largely due to his dismissal of Julia Kristeva and other psychoanalytic critics who are commonly used to interpret horror and gothic fiction. Though Carroll does acknowledge the socio-historical influence on the appearance of monsters in art-horror, he fails to consider how these influences have also changed the very definition of what makes a monster.

Before examining my own definition of what makes a monster in the context of current conversations about monstrosity, it is important to fully develop Carroll’s own definition of what makes a monster. In a section titled “Fantastic Biologies and the Structures of Horrific Imagery,” also labeled by Carroll as “How to Make a Monster,” Carroll breaks monsters into various categories, offering multiple examples throughout. The first category is labeled “Fusion” monsters. These monsters blur the distinction between living and dead, or are made up of multiple categories of species which all defy biology in some way. Basically, this is a monster made up of more than one entity, such as a mummy, vampire, ghost, zombie, man/insect, etc. The next category is “Fission” monsters. Like Fusion monsters, these are also made up of contradictory elements, but they have multiple individual identities.

Doppelgangers, alter-egos, and werewolves fit into this fission category. Next, Carroll discusses “Magnification” of entities which are already considered disgusting (such as overgrown insects), and “Massification” of repelling creatures (such as enormous amounts of insects), of which both types also fit into his definition of monster. At the end of the “How to Make a Monster” section, Carroll brings up a strategy he calls “horrific metonymy.” In this strategy, the horrific beings are surrounded by things the audience already associates with disgust, making the monsters even more disgusting. It’s not just the monster that is horrifying, but the locale¹. This emphasizes the monster’s own impurity/disgust by association.

Though these categories can be considered useful in a preliminary discussion of monstrosity, Carroll fails to consider – or even mention – what many other scholars in studies of the monstrous use to *begin* their definition of monster; namely, the etymology of the word “monster” and some of the earliest cases of the “monstrous,” which inherently involve human beings. Popularly, the etymology of the word “monster” derives from the Latin *monstrare*, “to show” (with cognate forms *demonstrate* and *remonstrate*), as well as *monere*, “to warn.” As the etymological burden of these phrases suggest, the monster will always *signify* something. Usually it signifies difference, “whether lack or superfluity, whether too many or too much, hand, toe, finger, or other bodily member, for instance” (Ingebretsen 211). But this difference always demands interpretation, because it signifies the ominous – something from which a detriment is expected, and something which deviates from the norm. The use of the word “monster” is always a metaphor in Gothic and Horror fiction. The metaphor justifies a range of socially discounted, but nonetheless tolerated behaviors – “physical and rhetorical violence, social expressions of astonishment, scandal and insult,

¹ For example, cemeteries, underground caverns, swamps, or any other sort of beastly "lair."

displays of sex as moral currency and economic exchange” (Ingebretsen 2). In the ancient world, monstrosities, *monstra*, are named from admonition, *monitus*, because they point out something by signaling or symbolizing. Clearly, from the beginnings of recorded time, monsters have been part of a semiotic culture of divination, metaphors, messages, indications of deeper meaning, or inspiration. Gilmore points out:

Although words have changed, the basic import of the concept as an intellectual, aesthetic, and moral problem has remained fairly constant. Following classical usage, in the writings of St. Isidore of Seville, as seventh-century Spanish monk who wrote extensively about evil, monstrous likewise reveals a divine source, God’s will or design in the Christian sense. For such holy men as Isidore, monsters came under the headings of God’s creations and therefore must have some revealed meaning:

“monstrations” or warnings from God, directing attention to deviations from the true path in symbolic or allegorical form. (9-10)

He continues by stating that for most Western observers, the monster is a metaphor for all that must be repudiated by the human spirit. Monsters embody “the existential threat to social life, the chaos, atavism, and negativism that symbolize destructiveness and all other obstacles to order and progress, all that which defeats, destroys, draws back, undermines, subverts the human project – that is, the id” (12). On the one hand, the monster is burdened with behaviors that are deemed to threaten society. On the other hand, the monster makes such incivilities possible, even justifies them or others in the name of the common good. For most people, monsters are sources of identification and awe as well as of horror, and they serve also as vehicles for the expiation of guilt as well as aggression. There is a strong sense in which the monster is an incarnation of the urge for self-punishment and a unified metaphor

for both sadism and victimization (after all, the horrible monster is always killed off, usually in the most gruesome manner imaginable, by humans).

History suggests that monsters are born as often as they are “made” or “created.” Roman law, dating from as early as 450 B.C., stated “A father shall immediately put to death a son recently born, who is a monster, or has a form different from that of members of the human race” (Friedman 179). From ancient times, the monster – a child born with physical abnormalities – was an object of fear and wonder. The unnatural birth was an omen from the gods, a remonstrance or rebuke to human communities for faults known and unknown. The monstrous birth was often abandoned or put to death. In his *Moral Essays*, Seneca writes, “unnatural progeny we destroy; we drown even children who at birth are weakly abnormal. Yet it is not anger, but reason, that separates the harmful from the sound” (145). In his introduction to *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen lists seven theses about the monster that remain as valid now as they might have been in ancient Rome. Cohen can be condensed here: the monster’s body is a “cultural body” (4); the monster is a harbinger of “category crisis,” escaping categories of knowledge as well as form; monstrous fear displaces, relocates, and sometimes exploits desires that are equally monstrous (6). In sum, the monster watches and wards at the gates of the human, policing “the borders of the Possible” (7). Finally, in an apt theological allusion, Cohen says that the monster is “difference made flesh, come to dwell among us” (12). Cohen gives a framework with which to begin. By asking who, or what, is the monster, I also seek to answer who or what is the human.

Multiple studies have been done which effectively link the definition of monstrosity to human beings themselves. For example, Edward Ingebretsen’s work *At Stake: Monsters*

and the Rhetoric of Fear in Public Culture has its primary focus on “a handful of persons deemed so terrible that they have been cordoned off as monsters” (2). Ingebretsen explains:

Susan Smith, for example, killed her two children by drowning them. Another, Andrew Cunanan, was the presumptive killer of five persons, including a well-known fashion designer. Very little was known about either Smith or Cunanan, although as befits the monster, vast amounts were speculated as to both, their origins and consequences. (2)

Similarly, editors Caroline Picart and Cecil Greek have compiled a collaborative group of essays in their book *Monsters In and Among Us: Toward a Gothic Criminology* which examine contemporary monsters including:

...the pedophilic homosexual priest; the hypermasculinized rogue cop; the masculinized mother; the drug addict; the white-collar criminal; the serial killer; and the terrorist. Other instances of the Gothic in popular culture include police departments nurtured by monstrously corrupt practices, unbridled capitalism as vampiric, and even the proliferation of Gothic images and metaphors in popular culture spawning paranoid and useless public policy. (13)

Whether the studies on what makes a monster deals with the inhuman or the human, all definitions agree on similar premises. First, monstrous individuals symbolize some means of evading real implications of the uncertainties and discomforts which appear to be endemic to the constantly changing social, political, and economic conditions of our cultures. Also, the monster is inherently paradoxical. It is simultaneously a figure of horror and repulsion as well as of fascination and charisma. It can be both subhuman and superhuman. It can even be both natural and unnatural. Ingebretsen explains that “the word ‘monster’ slipped its

biological moorings very early, becoming a categorizing term for the unusual, abnormal, the exotic and alien” (6). He continues:

In its disparate manifestations – as wonder, freak, oddity – the monster represented deviations from a presumptive natural order. As often as not, this unnaturality was invested with negative weight, read as perversions, deviance, and transgression. An unexpected consequence followed: monstrosity gave human failure a legitimate place, at least marginally, on human maps. Monstrosity became a flexible tool of civil repudiation – sometimes literal, sometimes metaphorical. (6)

Mostly, monsters serve to warn. They redefine boundaries that have become frayed.

Monsters are outlaws. They live outside of the rules and laws of society. This is one of the aspects of monstrosity that makes it so attractive. Monsters have, or seem to have, freedoms we lack. Monsters transgress, cross over, do not stay put where – for the convenience of our categories of sex, race, class, or creed – we would like them to stay. This blurring of boundaries, or "deterritorialization," is one of the things that makes monstrosity so terrifying, because it places readers into the realm of the unknown. Humans inherently enjoy seeing well-defined boundaries. It is comforting to have things so simply defined and clear-cut, rather than fuzzy, gray areas. The lack of definition promotes tension, anxiety, and fear.

When these boundary lines are blurred and smeared, horror is created through the immediate sense of the unfamiliar and the unknown. In gothic/horror fiction and film, deterritorialization runs rampant, blurring the lines of fantasy and reality, the natural and the unnatural, and the threshold between childhood and adolescence. This fear of the unknown and blurring of boundaries makes readers uncomfortable and afraid. As Ingebreetsen writes, “Sometimes it is [the monster's] painful beauty, or untrammelled individuality; other times it

is simply the liberties they take (and *that* they take them in the first place) that so astonish us. They get away with murder and that fascinates us. Monsters are supposed to do just what they desire, and that frightens us” (4). Because of their ability to live both within and without society, monsters help a community reinterpret and reimagine itself. Whether human or non-human, monsters are always a way to hold up a mirror upon the “self” in hopes of self-examination with the ultimate goal of reform – either in the individual or within the constructs of society.

Before delving into the monstrous works themselves, it is first important to identify Carroll’s own definition of horror, or as he calls it, “art-horror,” and to showcase Carroll’s weaknesses within his definition due to his dismissal of Julia Kristeva. The four main aspects that should be promoted in horror, according to Carroll, are as follows: emotional fear, visceral revulsion, disgust, and loathing. Carroll also discusses the element of “shock” in art-horror, stating:

I would not want to deny that shock is often involved in tandem with art-horror, especially in theater and cinema. Just before the monster appears, the music shoots up, or there is a startling noise, or we see an unexpected, fast movement start out from “nowhere.” (36)²

Mystery and thrillers also utilize this type of shock, whereas fear, visceral revulsion, disgust, and loathing are much more essential to art-horror. So these four aspects are what encompass the thrust of his argument. With these as his premise, it seems impossible for Carroll to dismiss Julia Kristeva’s work as “not ultimately germane to [his] investigation,” and for Carroll to claim that “the topic of [Kristeva’s] book does not quite coincide with the topic of

² However, I will not be discussing this shock element in detail, because, as Carroll correctly asserts, “horror is not reducible to this sort of shock” (36).

[his own] book” (221 n.39). All of the preceding elements are articulated quite clearly in “Approaching Abjection,” Kristeva’s first chapter of *Powers of Horror* – in fact, in its first pages. The following few paragraphs align Carroll’s definition of horror with Kristeva’s discussion of abjection, in order to prove that Carroll – and any other scholar who would like to discuss the concept of monstrosity – should be giving much more thought and credit to Kristeva’s work on this subject. Simultaneously, scholars should also be willing to accept the concept of “human as monster” into the study of gothic and horror.

The first two aspects of Carroll’s definition of horror are inherently linked. Art-horror first creates emotional/psychological fear, which thus produces a visceral, physical reaction from the audience. Carroll claims, “The cross-art, cross-media genre of horror takes its title from the emotion it characteristically or rather ideally promotes; this emotion constitutes the identifying mark of horror” (14). Works of the horror genre, for Carroll, are predicated on raising a specific, emotional state – that of horror and fear. He clarifies that this emotion is “linked with a particular affect – specifically, that from which it takes its name” (15). This affect in the audience should parallel the emotional response of the non-monstrous characters in the narratives. Carroll attempts to list the responses that horror may evoke in his section titled “On the Structure of the Emotions”:

In respect to art-horror some of the regularly recurring sensations, or felt-physical agitations, or automatic responses, or feelings are muscular contractions, tension, cringing, shrinking, shuddering, recoiling, tingling, frozenness, momentary arrests, chilling (hence, “spine chilling”), paralysis, trembling, nausea, a reflex of apprehension or physically heightened alertness (a danger response), perhaps involuntary screaming, and so on. (24)

In using multiple examples from both fiction and film, Carroll contends that horror must elicit not only initial fear, but a visceral revulsion and a physical reaction to what is seen or read. The affect cannot merely encompass an emotional state; it must also require a “felt physical dimension” and “correlate with some physical agitation” (25).

Similar to Carroll, Kristeva makes it clear that it is emotional/psychological fear which creates the visceral reaction. She calls the emotional fear the “phobic” and writes, “The phobic has no other object than the abject” (6). This sentence could carry multiple meanings, based upon her definition of “object.” Here, it seems Kristeva is using “object” as a synonym for “purpose,” “objective,” or “aim.” With this definition, an alternate way to write her sentence would be: “The purpose of fear is only the abject.” Abject, for Kristeva, is also a word with multiple definitions, and perhaps a word that is utterly un-definable – after all, her chapter’s title is “Approaching Abjection,” lending to the interpretation that abjection is a concept constantly and actively approached but never reached. But even with its seemingly ambiguous meaning(s), Kristeva makes it clear that a visceral, physical reaction is fundamental to abjection. And since abjection is the object of fear, Kristeva is making the same points as Carroll.

Kristeva’s writing is absolutely full of examples of the visceral revulsion of abjection. Kristeva’s initial heading in the chapter, “NEITHER SUBJECT NOR OBJECT” (1, author’s capitalization), immediately reveals that abjection is an intensely affective experience. Abjection itself is something bodily. Kristeva writes, “the abject does not cease challenging its master. Without a sign (for him), it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out” (2). At every step, Kristeva illuminates her definition of abjection by using literally corporeal examples. Her first is “food loathing,” which she describes in an off-putting first person,

saying “I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire” (2-3). Her second example of the abject: a corpse, or more specifically, the affective difference between seeing an actual corpse as opposed to death as signified by “a flat encephalograph” (3). A corpse is “violently” upsetting, as opposed to the encephalograph, because “corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty on the part of death” (3, author’s emphasis). The difference between a flat encephalograph and a corpse is the body, which is Kristeva’s point throughout. Abjection is “a violent, clumsy breaking away...Repelling, rejecting; repelling itself. Ab-jecting” (13). Kristeva’s abjection is fear and visceral revulsion combined. In both cases, the physical reactions are direct manifestations of the psychological crisis of the moment.

Just as Carroll defines horror at once characterized by fear and revulsion, the aspects of disgust and loathing are also interrelated. Carroll uses these terms in direct correlation to the audience’s affect when confronted with the monsters of art-horror. “The monster in horror fiction,” Carroll writes, “is not only lethal but – and this is of the utmost significance – also disgusting” (22). The monster evokes disgust from the audience because it is a “violation of nature,” that which is “impure and unclean” (23). Carroll invokes anthropologist Mary Douglas’s theory of impurity, describing monsters as “un-natural,” claiming monsters violate a culture’s “conceptual scheme of nature” (34). The monsters’ impurity produces a “loathing on sight...connected to the ugliness which is said to cause one to sweat” (19). Similar to visceral revulsion, Carroll again emphasizes that in response to the audience’s loathing and disgust, the monster creates a physical reaction – in this case,

sweating.

Kristeva also defines disgust and loathing as major elements of abjection. In fact, she devotes an entire section of her chapter to “THE IMPROPER/UNCLEAN” (2, author’s capitalization). Like Carroll, Kristeva directly refers to disgust derived when viewing an entity as a violation of nature³. She writes:

Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and much. The shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery. The fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from them. (2)

Her understanding of the force of “loathing,” “repugnance,” and “shame” is exactly what Carroll is attempting to define. The “spasms,” “vomiting,” “retching,” and so on, are Kristeva’s definitions of the physical reactions Carroll also writes about. In a later section, Kristeva writes that the “discomfort, unease, dizziness” which “[stem] from an ambiguity” are further aspects of abjection specifically pointed out “through loathing” (10). The abject is quintessentially both disgust and loathing. Furthermore, in multiple places Kristeva addresses abjection as a response to a violation of nature, which is exactly Carroll’s point as he defines monsters. For example, invoking and differentiating Freudian “uncanniness” from the horror of abjection, Kristeva writes, “abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even a shadow of a memory” (5). If in abject horror, instead of mere uncanniness nothing is familiar, it is certainly “outside” of a culture’s conception of the

³ Carroll’s endnote acknowledges that “Kristeva also uses Douglas’s work to discuss horror,” but then he immediately states Kristeva’s book fails to coincide with his own. To ignore this section of Kristeva is a rather drastic oversight on the part of Carroll, and directly contradicts his statement. If he read and understood the very first paragraph of her Improper/Unclean section, or if he’d even read the first two pages of “Approaching Abjection,” Carroll would have seen that Kristeva is referencing both disgust and loathing at once.

natural. The un-natural is the un-familiar; never does Carroll suggest otherwise. Later, when Kristeva considers, following Douglas, religion's participation in abjection, Kristeva writes, "Abjection appears as a rite of defilement and pollution in the paganism that accompanies societies with a dominant or surviving matrilinear character. It takes on the form of the exclusion of a substance..." (17). Though she cites the logic of religious structures to illustrate her point, the concept applies to societal structures. Kristeva's abjection is something outside the bounds of society, defiling and polluting the structure it attempts to infiltrate. It is therefore excluded (even abjected) by the structure.

Kristeva describes abjection as "A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing" (2)⁴. When abjected, a person is unable to articulate his/her experience. Abjection is a "something" just as a monster is a "something." As stated previously, abjection is something which must always be actively "approached" rather than reached, making it rather difficult to comprehend, even inconceivable. Kristeva's very first sentence is another attempt to approach the inconceivability of abjection. She writes:

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. (1)

⁴ Carroll further fails to acknowledge the rather obvious relationship between his own characterization of monstrosity and Kristeva's definition of abjection. Had Carroll glanced at the second page of "Approaching Abjection," he could have quickly seen the comparison of inconceivability in a monster to Kristeva's abjection.

Words are inadequate in the face of both abjection and monsters. They are “beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable,” which is what makes them horrific in the first place.

Carroll’s criteria for monsters (unclean, impure, interstitial, categorically incomplete, disgusting, and threatening) heavily relate to one another. Once again relying on anthropologist Mary Douglas, Carroll identifies monsters as impure and unclean if they are “categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete or formless” (32). Both monsters and abjection are interstitial because they are concerned with boundaries. Abjected by the accepted social order as impure, monsters live outside the boundaries of that order. Carroll writes:

Monsters are native to places outside of and/or unknown to the human world. Or, the creatures come from marginal, hidden, or abandoned sites: graveyards, abandoned towers and castles, sewers, or old houses – that is, they belong to environs outside of and unknown to ordinary social intercourse. (35)

Kristeva notes the same about abjection, saying, “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). Monsters are perpetually “in-between,” both in their locale and in their own bodies. But even more so, they are “in-between” their world and the world as known by society. And because they are perpetually “in-between,” they are also in “perpetual danger.” Kristeva continues:

We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. But also because abjection itself

is a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives. (9)

Because of their impurity and their separateness, the monsters are regarded as abnormal and as violations of nature. The protagonists in horror fiction and film “not only fear such monsters; they find them repellent, loathsome, disgusting, repulsive and impure” (54).

Carroll points out:

[Monsters] are putrid or moldering things, or they hail from oozing places, or they are made of dead or rotting flesh, or chemical waste, or are associated with vermin, disease, or crawling things. They are not only quite dangerous but they also make one’s skin creep. Characters regard them not only with fear but with loathing, with a combination of terror and disgust. (23)

Certainly Carroll is correct that “horrific beings are often associated with contamination – sickness, disease, and plague – and often accompanied by infections vermin – rats, insects, and the like” (28). He also recognizes the importance of categorical incompleteness as “a standard feature of the monsters of horror: ghosts and zombies frequently come without eyes, arms, legs, or skin, or they are in some advanced state of disintegration” (33). But where Carroll’s definition disappoints is in its failure to connect any of these traits to Kristeva’s abjection. The “combination of terror and disgust” is one of the very definitions of abjection, and the reaction occurs because of everything listed in association with monsters. Carroll admits that the monsters are unnatural because they “do not fit the [culture’s conceptual scheme of nature]; they violate it. Thus, monsters are not only physically threatening; they are cognitively threatening. They are threats to common knowledge” (34). Yet even with these statements, Carroll never credits Kristeva’s abjection as an insightful addition to the

discussion of monstrosity, even when she is making similar claims. Kristeva says the abject “neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them” (15). The abject stands outside the culture’s conceptual scheme of nature just like Carroll’s monsters.

Kristeva’s claims about abjection as something opposed to the self would be useful for any study of horror and monsters. The very reasons monsters are repulsive and loathsome is because they stand separate from the self, and are inherently both Other and abject at once. Kristeva writes:

I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and instead of what will be “me.” Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be... If, on account of that Other, a space becomes demarcated, separating the abject from what will be a subject and its object, it is because a repression that one might call “primal” has been effected... (10)

Monsters clearly demarcate a “space” between themselves and their audience, and ultimately embody abjection. Monsters stand as both abject for the audience, and as abjected by the audience. They are abject for the audience because they are “so physically repulsive, they often provoke nausea in the characters who discover them” (Carroll 22), much like food loathing repels Kristeva. But they are also abjected by the audience because “they frequently produce in characters the conviction that mere physical contact with them can be lethal” (Carroll 22), and therefore the monsters are forced to be separated from any social interaction, and often destroyed. On the very first page of her chapter, Kristeva makes it clear that “The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I” (1, author’s

emphasis). Monsters threaten their witness by mere sight, if not also by physical contact, and show this same opposition to the self that Kristeva is commenting upon.

Since, for Kristeva, abjection is a bodily experience, and even the self is abject and separated at birth, Kristeva clearly denotes various ways human beings are both abject and monstrous. She writes:

The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is savior... Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. (4)

This excerpt makes a very good case against reducing the definition of monster to entities of supernatural origin only. One of the best cases made for “man as monster,” and which also follows Kristeva’s reasoning, is found in a story co-written by Steve Rasnic Tem and Melanie Tem called “The Man on the Ceiling” included in Peter Straub’s anthology, *Poe’s Children*. A large portion of the Tems’ story is dedicated to describing their philosophy of monstrosity, saying:

The world has in it: Children hurt or killed by their parents, who would say they do it out of love. Children whose beloved fathers, uncles, brothers, cousins, mothers love them, too, fall in love with them, say anything we do to each other’s bodies is okay because we love each other, but don’t tell anybody because then I’ll go to jail and then I won’t love you anymore.

Perverved love.

The world also has in it: Children whose only chance to grow up is in prison, because they’re afraid to trust love on the outside. Children who die, no matter how

much you love them.

Impotent love.

And the world also has in it: Werewolves, whose unclaimed rage transforms them into something not human but also not inhuman (modern psychiatry sometimes finds the bestial “alter” in the multiple personality). Vampires, whose unbridled need to experience leads them to suck other people dry and are still not satisfied. Zombies, the chronically insulated, people who will not feel anything because they will not feel pain. Ghosts.

I write in order to understand these things. I write dark fantasy because it helps me see how to live in a world with monsters. (93)

It is clear that any rejection of human as monster is incorrect. As Kristeva and the Tems have shown, man is monster in so many cases, and humans can certainly be as horrific, if not more, than other monsters in the genre. In fact, all monsters are human constructs which reflect that beings that made them. They are, in essence, psychologically not *separate* from humans, but *mirrors* for humans. The monstrous does not – and cannot – exist outside of humanity.

The chapters within this dissertation concentrate on textual analysis of literature and film in which monsters appear in various forms, and particularly how those monsters still coincide with Carroll’s definition of “art-horror” while proving that Carroll’s definition – and any others who may attempt to limit the definition of monstrosity – is incomplete and much too restrictive. My interpretations of the works herein heavily rely on how cultural and historical influence often changes the ways monster are viewed and defined, and also pay homage to the psychoanalytic concepts of Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva as part of the ways we

understand the monstrous. The first chapter will examine the monster which lies at the foundation of the Gothic/Horror genre: the monstrous house, or the haunted house. The chapter “The House Askew” examines both fiction and film of the United States in order to show how the human – not the house – is actually the one who is haunted within these stories. This begins from early U.S. Gothic texts, including Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland*, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*, Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher,” and H.P. Lovecraft’s “Pickman’s Model.” These texts all show that the haunting of the human stems from moral conventions set by Puritan standards, and that the inhabitant must either face their “sins” and become expiated or fall victim to their own disgraces. Following these texts, an examination of the films *Signs*, *The Others*, and *1408* again show that when ghostly manifestations occur in haunted houses/places, it is almost always directly due to the haunting pasts of the people who inhabit the house, rather than the past of the house itself. Finally, this chapter examines Danielewski’s postmodern masterpiece, *House of Leaves*. This text is the most compelling example of monstrosity because in this case, the book itself – and by association, academia – is what becomes the monster, which is even further proof that the definition of monster has been broadened.

Next, the chapter “Terrifying, Horrifying, Disgusting Zombies” examines George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* and Max Brooks’ novel *World War Z* among other legends of zombies found in history and popular culture. Stephen King in *Dance Macabre* says, “I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I cannot terrify him/her, I will try to horrify; and if I find I cannot horrify, I’ll go for the gross-out. I’m not proud” (25). With this quote in mind, the zombie becomes the perfect creature for horror/gothic fiction because it embodies all the elements King lays out. The zombie is terrifying because it was once human and this

connection to the Freudian self and the uncanny is terrifying. The zombie is horrifying because it is dangerous. The body, which is something that should be familiar/homely, is now fully unfamiliar and recognizable as monstrous, which plays into Freud's uncanny as well. The zombie is also a disgusting creature as cannibalistic, reanimated dead, and therefore always gets the “gross out.” This is one of the only creatures of horror fiction that carries each category equally. But what makes them even more intriguing is the ethical dilemma human beings are faced with when confronting zombies. Usually, when a protagonist is faced with a zombie, it is often someone they knew in life before the zombie virus takes hold. This creates monsters out of humans, as they must kill people they used to know, and even become cannibals themselves in the event of the zombie apocalypse. Additionally, one of the only ways to kill a zombie is to destroy its brain, leading to another ethical dilemma: if the brain must be destroyed in order for the zombie to be killed, does this mean zombies still have their brain capacity? Can they think, can they learn, and are they sentient? The chapter examines, in particular, some of the cultural fears and taboos brought about in zombie fiction and the popular culture zombie craze – the fear of the horde, the fear of mass infection, and the taboo of cannibalism, among others.

The chapter “Don’t Be Fooled by the Handsome Fellow in the Mansion” takes an interest in the way the definition of vampire, and the myths surrounding vampires, have expanded through popular culture, especially through TV and film. It begins with an examination of Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* which shows how the human, rather than the monsters, are really the antagonists within a post-apocalyptic society. It also discusses Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* as a metaphor for post-Vietnam America. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the vampire in popular culture. Because of books like *Twilight*

and television shows like “True Blood,” for example, vampires have been given a whole new life that is almost entirely human. This expansion of the myth also proves that history will continue to broaden the definition of monster through cultural views and needs. The final chapter, “Anything Dead Coming Back to Life Hurts” highlights the fact that in much African American literature, including Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, the monstrous appears in the form of the human construct of slavery or of one’s relationship to the haunted past. *Beloved* reflects the particular connection between the Gothic tradition and the American past, beholding a darkly coded understanding of what lay beneath the American nation’s usually optimistic surface. That darker note concerns, in part, the legacy of slavery and racial discrimination. Morrison’s Gothicism and Horror expresses the atrocity of black experience in the South, in which the nightmare past is re-experienced through a “spiteful” haunted house and the revenant of a murdered child. Morrison utilizes three types of monsters in order to articulate these underlying cultural fears. These monsters are comprised of the ghost, as seen in the character of Beloved; the monstrous protagonist, exemplified by Sethe; and the haunting past, which, in this case, is slavery in America.

In the conclusion of this dissertation, I will be commenting on how I envision this project to proceed, the other monsters which were not included within this dissertation, and the general relevance of a study of the monstrous in scholarly circles.

CHAPTER 2

THE HOUSE ASKEW: THE HAUNTED HOUSE AS PERSONAL EXTRAPOLATION

In her book *The House Next Door*, Anne River Siddons states, "...a house askew is one of the not-rightest things in the world" (305). In the United States, we are obsessed with the idea of the "house askew," or what we call the "haunted house." In fact, haunted houses have become a commodity – we go out of our ways and pay to be scared. Horror is agonizing, uncomfortable, and terrifying, but somehow oddly gratifying. H.P. Lovecraft states in his essay *Supernatural Horror in Fiction*:

Children will always be afraid of the dark, and men...will always tremble at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars, or press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and the moonstruck can glimpse. (14)

There is no mistake in his use of the word "always." Being scared is infused in our very nature as humans. One of the reasons the haunted house is a symbol of anxiety is because it is the very epitome of Freud's uncanny – the "homely" has become the "unhomely," the familiar is no longer familiar. The haunted house also serves as a threshold or a boundary that is dangerous when crossed. This border is not only a physical place, but an interiority. When a person enters the haunted house, they find themselves in the realm of Kristeva's abject, because abjection itself exists at a border: "As if the fundamental opposition were between I and Other or, in a more archaic fashion, between Inside and Outside" (Kristeva 7). Kristeva continues:

...there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier...we may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold,

it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. (9)

Abjection is the perpetual crisis when the I confronts the Other, *and* when the I recognizes the Other within the self. Haunted houses create this perpetual crisis of the self, as those who inhabit them are constantly on the verge of this terrifying frontier. The inhabitants recognize that they have placed themselves within this deterritorialized area simply because they are human, and their own fears are replicated in front of them within the haunted space.

In his literary “ars poetica” entitled *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King describes the haunted house as the archetypal “Bad Place,” a term “which encompasses much more than the fallen-down house at the end of Maple Street with the weedy lawn, the broken windows, and the moldering FOR SALE sign” (264). “Hauntings” are often explained as a house which absorbed the emotions of its former inhabitants, giving us the preconceived notion of an inherent evilness. But upon closer examination of the haunted house, it is not always the house that is evil, but those who reside within the house, even if just for a short time. The house becomes a medium for confronting one’s own problems and fears. Our homes are supposed to keep us safe and separate from the wilderness or from the “outside world.” When haunted, they offer no escape except into ourselves. We have to deal with our own fear, violence, and rage. As King states, “the past *is* a ghost which haunts our present lives constantly” (265, author's emphasis), and so the haunted house can easily be turned into a symbol of personal extrapolation. If we accept the Puritan idea of the body as a temple, human beings can also be considered haunted houses – things haunt us, sin haunts us, morality haunts us, memory of things past haunts us, etc. So the purpose of the haunted house story, rather than a cheap thrill, is to tell a moral tale. The haunted house shows that if

we are not actively confronting the ghosts within ourselves, the ghosts will actively confront us. When it comes to the haunted house, the true horror is the confrontation of self. There is always a search for some kind of redemption within these stories as there is a realization that the true "other" is actually one's self – one's "animal" body. With this in mind, this chapter examines some gothic/horror tales accepted as “classic” or “canonical” in U.S. fiction, as well as a few fairly recent horror films and the theories behind the manifestations within the houses. Most of the time, these texts are not dealing with haunted houses at all – they are about haunted people. Finally, it shows that in postmodern horror fiction, the haunted house has expanded even further, by encapsulating ideas rather than merely inhabiting people, with a discussion of Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*.

The Monstrosity of Sin: Brockden Brown, Hawthorne, Poe, and Lovecraft

Contrary to popular belief, there is more to Gothic and Horror than merely the ability to scare its reader. It began in England as a genre of literature with very specific tropes and styles. Early British Gothic novelists, such as Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe, established the genre and then stuck to its form almost exactly. In British Gothic fiction, there is usually a dark and stormy night, an old and frightening house, a woman who swoons entirely too often, and something supernatural that is later revealed to have a completely natural and logical explanation, (for example, in Charlotte Bronte’s novel *Jane Eyre*, the noises in the attic are revealed to be Rochester’s mad first wife). But as the Puritans moved from England to America, and early settlers sought to create a truly distinct American culture, American writers took the Gothic form and attempted to improve upon it, creating a Gothic literature reminiscent of Britain’s, but with its own distinctly American character. The U.S. has

constantly struggled to stand on its own as a powerful and independent force, which is one of the reasons early Puritans left England in the first place, so they took the British tropes and twisted and shaped them into their own genre of American Gothic – always remembering where they came from, but also attempting to make their own place in the world all at once. Some of the unique American pressures which shaped the literature of the early United States are discussed by Alan Lloyd-Smith in his book *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*, namely: the Frontier Experience, the Puritan Inheritance, fear of the European subversion and anxieties about popular democracy which was then a new experiment, the relative absence of a "developed society," and, very significantly, racial issues concerning both slavery and Native Americans. As Eric Savoy, author of the article "The Rise of American Gothic Fiction" states,

From the turn of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century and the beginnings of a distinctive American literature, the Gothic has stubbornly flourished in the United States. Its cultural role, though, has been entirely paradoxical: an optimistic country founded upon the Enlightenment principles of liberty and 'the pursuit of happiness,' a country that supposedly repudiated the burden of history and its irrational claims, has produced a strain of literature that is haunted by an insistent, undead past and fascinated by the strange beauty of sorrow. (167)

The strange tropes, figures, and rhetorical techniques which are central to American Gothic narratives "express a profound anxiety about historical crimes and perverse human desires that cast their shadow over what many would like to be the sunny American republic" (Savoy 168).

The fact is that American Gothic fiction is obsessed with the past. From haunted houses, to the sins of the fathers being put on the heads of the children, American horror writers have produced the fear in their works mainly from the Puritan fear of God. In Puritan and/or colonial times, it was this fear that drove people to choose what they believed to be “right” or “correct” on their path back to heaven while traversing the earth. Everything that was done was done in the name of God, and everything that happened was by God’s hand. Even some of the earliest American literature proves this to be true. William Bradford, in *Of Plymouth Plantation* tells the story of “God’s Providence” in action. A young man who was “lustful” and “haughty” and would always “curse and swear most bitterly” was consistently “condemning the poor people in their sickness and cursing them daily with grievous execrations” (166). Bradford continues:

But it pleased God, before they came half seas over, to smite this young man with a grievous disease, of which he died in a desperate manner, and so was himself the first that was thrown overboard. Thus his curses light on his own head, and it was the astonishment to all his fellows for they noted it to be the just hand of God upon him. (166-167)

To Bradford and to the others on the ship, there was no coincidence that this man died – it was clearly God’s just hand which killed him. Thus we are left with a morality tale – the beginnings of Gothic Fiction in America.

More Puritan morality tales were to quickly follow. The following is an excerpt from John Winthrop’s journal:

[July 5, 1632] At Watertown there was (in the view of divers [sic] witnesses) a great combat between a mouse and a snake, and after a long fight the mouse prevailed and

killed the snake. The pastor of Boston, Mr. Wilson, a very sincere, holy man, hearing of it gave this interpretation: that the snake was the devil, the mouse was a poor contemptible people which God had brought hither, which should overcome Satan here and dispossess him of his kingdom. Upon the same occasion he told the governor that before he was resolved to come into this country he dreamed he was here, and that he saw a church arise out of the earth, which grew up and became a marvelous goodly church. (217)

Fears were built upon this idea of morality. Whether it was God punishing for a particular transgression, or the devil coming to test the people of God, it was only the righteous and the followers of God and the Bible who would prevail, according to the Puritans.

Thus it followed that stories arose of what happened to those who transgressed from the path of God. These stories turned into legends, which often had supernatural qualities abounding within them. If a person was misbehaving, that was when the monsters would be brought to the forefront. This is even clear today in the growing popularity of Horror films or “urban legends” – popular horror stories, particularly among the youth. So often these stories can be considered forms of morality tales. It is the couple on “lover’s lane” about to lose their virginity, for instance, who are so often the ones taken by the mass murderer with a hook-hand on the loose that night. As Savoy states, American Gothic fiction has “acute interests in the marks of sin and transgression and its view of history as a dark necessity, the working-out of a retributive divine plan...its mission was a kind of political engagement rather than just escapist storytelling” (175). So although we are aware of the punishments that sins and transgressions can bring, the question then becomes one of the possibility of redemption. These tales may just be meant to terrorize the sinners or the children of those who sinned, but

more likely they are meant to instill fear in order to rectify the situation. In American Gothic and Horror fiction, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the terrifying things that happen to the characters or the houses in stories are clearly because of a prior sin, whether belonging to the characters themselves or to their predecessors. But at the same time, there is a glimmering hope of redemption which leads them from their terrifying situations.

In 1781, Charles Brockden Brown, a lawyer from Philadelphia, caught wind of a bizarre – but unfortunately true – story about an intensely religious farmer in upstate New York who ritually murdered his wife and four children after hearing the command of religious “voices.” Brown, who is often regarded as the first professional author in the United States, used this fragment of American history as the premise of *Wieland; or the Transformation*, the first major Gothic novel in America. Though it did adapt some conventions of the British Gothic novel to American circumstances, it also paved the way for the new American Gothic, and thus produced a retrospective narrative of Clara Wieland, who tells the tale of her brother’s murderous intentions from a first-person perspective. Even in the preface of the novel, before Clara begins her often terrifying account of her family’s descent into death and madness, Brown gives the reader a chance to understand that this tale deals with morality above all else. In an advertisement at the outset of the novel, Brown writes that the purpose of the novel

...aims at the illustration of some important branches of the moral constitution of man. Whether this tale will be classed with the ordinary or frivolous sources of amusement, or be ranked with the few productions whose usefulness secures to them a lasting reputation, the reader must be permitted to decide. (3)

The author leaves no doubt in the readers mind, even from the first paragraph, that the most

important thing readers can get out of the story is an understanding of morality. And not only that, but readers are to decide for ourselves what is moral and what is not. However, Brown is leaves the reader to decide morals based on a Puritan idea of what God would have us understand morality to be.

With this in mind, the reader embarks on the tale of the Wieland family, who is clearly a God-fearing family. Like so many Americans, the Wieland's father immigrated to America from Germany in the search of freedom of religious expression. However, he is painted in the novel as a fanatic who acknowledges no authority apart from his own inner light. From this portrayal, he is already set up to be punished by God for his belief in himself above God. The patriarch of the Wielands decided to build a fantastic temple where he practiced his strange rituals of worship. Increasingly morbid, he became convinced that God would punish him for failing to carry out a divine command, and he eventually died – of spontaneous combustion, no less – in his own temple. The temple thereby acquired a stark symbolic ghostliness for the next generation. But as good Americans, his children turned their backs on the excesses of their father and converted the temple into a pleasure-house dedicated to the pursuit of intellectual beauty. The story begins as a classic example of the sins of the father being placed upon the children. It is clear that something is going to happen to them because of their father's skewed piety. He did not carry out some sort of divine command, and therefore it must be carried out by his progeny.

In the Clara's narrative, the death of the father becomes the master narrative, and often the plot of Clara's life. She states:

I was at this time a child of six years of age. The impressions that were then made upon me, can never be effaced. I was ill qualified to judge respecting what was then

passing; but as I advanced in age, and became more fully acquainted with these facts, they oftener became the subject of my thoughts. Their resemblance to recent events revived them with new force in my memory, and made me more anxious to explain them. Was this the penalty of disobedience? this the stroke of a vindictive and invisible hand? (21)

Everything that happens in Clara's family stems from this memory of her father. Somehow what he did became a part of what was to happen throughout the story. Eventually, Clara's brother, Theodore, begins to hear voices that he assumes are from God. He tries to ignore them, but ultimately cannot, and so ends up killing himself – but not before killing his wife and children. There is no choice but to wonder whether or not he was also shaped by the remembrance of his father. His father clearly failed to follow the voices, and Theodore felt there was no other way but to follow the voices in order to save his own soul – and, by proxy, save his father's soul in the process. In these actions, the role of the Gothic “is figuratively to embody an intergenerational tendency when the son finds himself, to his horror, transformed into the very father whose fanaticism he had vehemently rejected” (Savoy 174). In other words, there is a punishment that would continue to be handed down until “God's will” was fulfilled.

But this leaves the reader, and Clara, in a state of confusion. It makes the reader question why God would want to kill Theodore's family. It doesn't seem fair that an innocent family's lives be at stake merely because the elder Wieland faltered and transgressed in the eyes of God. It wasn't Theodore's family's fault, after all. And soon, Clara also begins hearing voices, and wonders if the same fate lies in her hands. Eventually it is made known that an acquaintance, by the name of Carwin, has been using his ability of ventriloquism to

make Clara believe she is hearing voices. However, Carwin emphatically denies ventriloquizing the murderous directive to Wieland, absolving himself from responsibility of the family's deaths. So if the reader believes that Carwin had nothing to do with Theodore's grotesque transformation, the solution very possibly lies in "the historical deep psyche of the American subject" (Savoy 173). In other words, the underlying agent of *Wieland* might be the shadow of history itself, and would prove "that neither the personal nor the cultural past is dead and that both can uncannily return" (Savoy 175).

Clara states at the outset of the novel that there is no hope for herself or her family, saying:

The sentiment that dictates my feelings is not hope. Futurity has no power over my thoughts. To all that is to come I am perfectly indifferent. With regard to myself, I have nothing more than fear. Fate has done its worst. Henceforth, I am callous to misfortune. I address no supplication to Deity. The power that governs the course of human affairs has chosen his path. (5)

So before the reader has entered into the story of the downfall of the Wieland family, there appears to be no matter of redemption at hand. However, the later unveiling of Carwin the biloquist (the author's word for ventriloquist) does exiate some of the horrors of the family's fate. Clara speaks of her brother after finding out about the voices being possibly related to Carwin, describing him in the following manner:

Fallen from his lofty and heroic station; now finally restored to the perception of truth; weighed to earth by the recollection of his own deeds; consoled no longer by consciousness of rectitude, for the loss of offspring and wife – a loss for which he

was indebted to his own misguided hand; Wieland was transformed at once into the *man of sorrows!* (262-3, author's emphasis).

This description of Wieland is Clara's way of getting him off the hook, or in other words, redeeming him of his sins. The obvious emphasis on "man of sorrows" is an allusion to Isaiah 53:3 which describes Christ and his suffering during the crucifixion using the same words. Leading up to this allusion, the descriptions of what Wieland has gone through additionally lend to the parallel between Wieland and Christ. He can be described as having "descended below all things," another religious way to describe the sacrifice of Christ⁵. Clara is trying desperately to show that her brother can – and most likely will – be forgiven of the horrors that his father's sins have put upon him. So although there is punishment for sins, there will still be hope in the redemption of them. Even as she ends her story, she tells the reader, "I leave you to moralize on this tale" (278). The entire narrative has been one of morality and of the consequences of morality, and Brown makes this very clear from beginning to end.

In *Wieland*, the Puritan idea of the sins of the father being placed upon the heads of the children is very apparent. This aspect of the morality of American Gothic literature is often combined with the emergence of the haunted house. Haunted houses obtain the reputation of being Bad Places due to the past of the house, and the primitive emotions that often took place within the walls – those of rage and of fear. Often, "hauntings" are explained as the house absorbing emotions of its former inhabitants, those who have died or who have murdered others within the home. The house labeled as "haunted" therefore gives us a

⁵ Found in the Doctrine and Covenants 88:6 (one of the sets of scriptures used by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

preconceived notion of terror even before delving into the house's past and the underbelly of its inherent evilness. Stephen King writes:

It's always been difficult for me to understand why the dead would want to hang around old deserted houses, clanking chains and groaning spectrally to frighten the passersby...if they could go elsewhere. It sounds like a drag to me. The theory suggested that the inhabitants might indeed have gone on, leaving only a psychic residue behind. But even so...that did not rule out the possibility that the residue might be extremely harmful, as lead-based paint can be harmful to children who eat flakes of it for years after it has been applied. (*Danse Macabre* 265-6)

So haunted house stories try to tell a moral tale, explaining in their own way that if we are not careful of the ghosts of our past, they could potentially live on in our surroundings even after we have passed on.

Hawthorne's famous work, *The House of the Seven Gables*, is a quintessential example of using the archetype of the "Bad Place" as a symbol for unexpiated sins of the fathers being placed onto the heads of the children. In his preface, Hawthorne points out that this is a "moral" tale, and clearly states that it is about "the wrongdoing of one generation [living] into successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, [becoming] a pure and uncontrollable mischief" (viii). Throughout the novel, Hawthorne takes many opportunities to link the misdeeds of Colonel Pyncheon to the subsequent misfortunes of the Pyncheon family. H.P. Lovecraft describes Hawthorne's Gothic novel as one which is "exquisitely wrought...in which the relentless working out of an ancestral curse is developed with astonishing power against the sinister background of a very ancient Salem house" (*Supernatural...* 63). The house itself, initially cursed by a man who was hanged for

witchcraft, plays an integral part in the unfolding of Hawthorne's events, and lives on through the story "haunted by ghosts of its sinful dead, wracked by the fear of its frightened living" (279). *The House of the Seven Gables* is an obvious symbol of the declining Pyncheon fortunes, but it also stands as a more general warning against the dangers of becoming too embedded in the past. As Lovecraft states:

Such an edifice, with its spectral peaks, its clustered chimneys, its overhanging second story, its grotesque cornerbrackets, and its diamond-paned lattice windows, is indeed an object well calculated to evoke somber reflections; typifying as it does the dark Puritan age of concealed horror and witch-whispers which preceded the beauty, nationality, and spaciousness of the eighteenth century. (*Supernatural...* 64)

Within the story, readers are told that the house's builder – old Colonel Pyncheon – ruthlessly snatched the land from its original settler, Matthew Maule, whom he condemned to the gallows because of alleged witchcraft. Already, there is evidence that the people of the house are corrupt – whether it is Maule for actually being involved in witchcraft, or Pyncheon for unjustly accusing Maule, Hawthorne leaves up to the reader to decide. Either way, Hawthorne portrays the disastrous results of sin as inefaceable. Maule dies cursing old Pyncheon: "'God,' said the dying man, pointing his finger, with a ghastly look, at the undismayed countenance of his enemy, 'God will give him blood to drink!'" (14) and the furious deaths of three separate Pyncheons clearly fulfill Matthew Maule's curse on the Colonel. Old Jaffrey Pyncheon and his nephew, Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, are both found dead with blood coating their shirts and beards, linking their deaths to the curse.

The story begins by describing "the terror and ugliness of Maule's crime, and the wretchedness of his punishment, would darken the freshly plastered walls, and infect them

early with the scent of an old and melancholy house” (14) and the waters of the old well on the seized land turn bitter. Both man-made and natural surroundings of the house become affected by the corrupt inhabitants. The house becomes a symbol for the decay of the Pyncheon family, including “poor old Hepzibah, the eccentric reduced gentlewoman; childlike, unfortunate Clifford, just released from undeserved imprisonment; sly and treacherous Judge Pyncheon, who is the old Colonel all over again” (Lovecraft 65). The house is a symbol of evil and decay not only because it has unresolved sin amidst its walls, but because the characters do not find the redemption in their family line – especially the judge who seems to have learned nothing from past mistakes. Even centuries cannot make the stain of the Colonel’s sins go away. Though the primary action of the novel takes place almost 200 years later, the Pyncheons still feel the effects of their ancestor’s crime.

However, as seen in *Wieland*, the Puritan ideals live strong in Hawthorne, in that there must be a way to provide redemption for the sins of the past. Hawthorne provides a fairly happy ending, “with a union of sprightly Phoebe, cousin and last scion of the Pyncheons, to the prepossessing young man [named Holgrave] who turns out to be the last of the Maules. This union, presumably, ends the curse” (Lovecraft 65). Of course, Hawthorne chooses a “holy” and “sanctified” act such as marriage to counteract the hellish past of the Pyncheons and Maules. Not only that, but he unites them together to end the suffering and the hatred between the families. A new line will be born from the marriage, one which will hopefully be able to reconcile any past horrors and which will allow the house itself to rest from its curse and its hauntings. But the redemption began even before the marriage, as Phoebe and Holgrave tend the garden and fix the summerhouse, and even the chickens begin to return to health under their care. The motif of decay clearly demonstrates the pitfalls of

families that “plant” themselves in tainted soil, as Holgrave puts it, but this perspective is countered by the more hopeful notion that decay can be discontinued, and turned to growth.

It is apt that Hawthorne described the House of the Seven Gables as “an old and melancholy house” (14), for this is almost the exact description used by Edgar Allan Poe’s unnamed narrator in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” a short story which successfully uses the “Bad Place” archetype to teach a moral tale. The narrator describes the “melancholy House of Usher” as a place with “a sense of insufferable gloom” (244). The narrator sets the sense of place stating:

I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees – with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after dream of the reveler upon opium – the bitter lapse into everyday life – the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart – an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it – I paused to think – what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? (245)

Even the very image of the house shows the decay of the home, and of the family of Usher, from the inside out. The eye-like windows and the decaying trees serve as symbols of the rotting and the evilness taking place within its walls. It is described as “melancholy,” “vacant,” and “ghastly,” in many places throughout the story, because it is so void of anything good and moral in its inhabitants. The very house has absorbed the evil and diseased atmosphere that its residents have forced upon it.

The narrator is summoned to the home by Roderick Usher, who, along with his sister, Lady Madeline, represents the last surviving line of the Ushers. The narrator explains, “the stem of the Usher race, all time-honoured as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain” (246). Thus emerges the first moral problem with the house of Usher – incestuous relationships. If the line has never broken, as proclaimed by the narrator, incest is the only explanation. Not only does this biologically wreak havoc on the Usher family, as is evidenced by both Roderick’s and Madeline’s unexplainable illnesses, but from a Puritan moral perspective, this will place them in the realm of damnation from God. Roderick places blame for their illnesses, however, on the mansion itself. The narrator recounts:

He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, and whence, for many years, he had never ventured forth – in regard to an influence whose superstitious force was conveyed in terms too shadowy here to be re-stated – an influence which some peculiarities in the mere form and substance of his family mansion, had, by dint of long sufferance, he said, obtained over his spirit – an effect which the *physique* of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought upon the *morale* of his existence. (252)

Though Roderick declares that the house itself as evil, and the narrator tends to agree based on the earlier descriptions which the narrator gives of the dwelling place, it could be inferred that it is not the house but the line of incest that has been in the house for so long which is creating the foul mood of the mansion. If it is true that a house absorbs the temperament of

the inhabitants, as so many writers and paranormal researchers have suggested, then clearly this house is suffering from the sins of the entire Usher family. It is not evil because it was built that way, it is evil because those who live in it are projecting their transgressions upon it.

Unfortunately, the decaying morality of the Usher family – and by transference, the house as well – does not end with the history of incest. Roderick comes to the narrator and “abruptly” informs him that “the lady Madeline was no more” and needed to be buried in one of the tombs beneath the house (258). The reasoning for keeping her in the house is an aversion to doctors, who might dig up her body for scientific examination, since her disease was so strange to them. The narrator helps Roderick put the body in the tomb, and he notes “a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is now so terrible in death” (260). The narrator also realizes suddenly that Roderick and Madeline were twins. It is never made clear that these two were trying to breed as well, but from the beginning it is made known that Roderick has been distraught over the fact that the death of his sister would leave him the last in the line of Ushers. This makes the reader assume that perhaps he has indeed tried to continue his line through his sister, and finding out that she is his twin sister seems to make it all the more disturbing and taboo. In addition to the incestuous history, the twin imagery establishes and foreshadows that Roderick is actually inseparable from his sister. Although mind and body are separated, they remain dependent on each other for survival. This interdependence causes a disastrous chain reaction.

Since Madeline has now suffered a breakdown, and is assumed to be dead, Roderick begins to collapse as well, becoming even more uneasy over the next few days. On a night

when both Roderick and the narrator are unable to sleep, the narrator decides to read “Mad Trist” by Sir Launcelot Canning, in order to pass the night away. As he reads the medieval romance, noises in the house begin to correspond to the descriptions in the story. At first, he ignores these sounds:

It was, beyond doubt, the coincidence alone which had arrested my attention; for amid the rattling of the sashes of the casements, and the ordinary commingled noises of the still increasing storm, the sound, in itself, had nothing, surely, which would have interested or disturbed me. (264)

Clearly, it was only his imagination. He continues with the story, and soon the noises become more distinct and he can no longer ignore them. He also notices that Roderick has slumped over in his chair.

His head had dropped upon his breast – yet I knew that he was not asleep, from the wide and rigid opening of the eye as I caught a glance of it in profile. The motion of his body, too, was at variance with this idea – for he rocked from side to side with a gentle yet constant and uniform sway. (265)

The narrator realizes that Roderick is muttering to himself, and bends closely over him to listen to what he is saying. Roderick reveals that he has been hearing these sounds for days, and believes that they have buried Madeline alive and that she is trying to escape. With a sudden outburst, Roderick utters what are to be his final words: “‘Madman!’ and here he sprang furiously to his feet, and shrieked out his syllables, as if in the effort he were giving up his soul – ‘Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!’” (267). The wind blows the door open and confirms Roderick’s fears. Madeline stands in white robes, bloodied from her struggle to escape her early entombment:

For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold, then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated. (267)

Madeline's physical death coincides with the collapse of both Roderick's sanity and the Ushers' mansion. The act of Madeline falling upon her brother can be construed as disturbing sexual imagery. Their line *must* die because it does not deserve to be passed down. They will commit no more incest, and they will commit no more murders other than their own.

The narrator flees. As he escapes, he gazes back on the house as it cracks along the break in the frame and crumbles to the ground. "There was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters – and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the 'House of Usher'" (268). The house itself could not stand while the immorality was still taking place inside the walls. And even with Roderick still alive (assuming Madeline had died the first time), the sin is still alive as well. The house cannot fall without the family falling. It crumbles because the last surviving member of the line of incest falls, and so there is no longer sin. The house was clearly not the problem – the family was. The house was merely the physical manifestation of the family – after all, it is pointed out by the narrator that "House of Usher" is interchangeably used to describe both the dwelling place and the family. It did not fall because the house had "conquered" its inhabitants, but because the Usher family has finally been wiped off the earth due to their sins. The house no longer remains to stand as a symbol of their evilness, and is allowed to fall, to its own great relief, because it is liberated from its heavy burden. It no longer needs to carry the weight of sin upon it. In the act of the falling house, Poe makes room for

redemption. Now there is a clean land and an unobstructed property, upon which new life and a new line of people might be able to build their own family, and begin again. With the removal of the house, and consequently the removal of the Usher family, the sins are no longer upon the earth to haunt those who may come upon them again.

Influenced by Edgar Allan Poe, H.P. Lovecraft has an interesting spin on the morality and cautionary tale in his short story "Pickman's Model." Pickman's sin is different than what we have seen so far. It is not a sin of murder or of incest, but a sin of excess and of participation in forces that are unnatural and unearthly. It is not a sin of the flesh, but of the spirit. Puritans clearly did not support the acts of those who fooled around with what they considered to be evil forces, as is evidenced by the Salem Witch Trials. Pickman stands as a modern-day representative of these so-called witches, but with even more horrendous results. Pickman willingly allows himself to be pulled into a world of demons and ghouls in order to further his art, and this sin of excess and regression is his ultimate demise. To understand Pickman, and to understand that there can be hope for redemption even in the eyes of Lovecraft, we must begin with his story.

The narrator of "Pickman's Model," whose name is Thurber, is clearly uneasy and terrified of the events revolving around Pickman's disappearance. Pickman was, at first, a well-respected artist, though not necessarily in the classical sense. In fact Thurber even claims, "Boston never had a greater painter than Richard Upton Pickman" (34). However, it is not merely the reality of his paintings, but the subjects and quality of them which make him a genius. His paintings are not just pictures on a page. They hit people deeply, and have the ability to engage the viewer into a dialogue with the art. According to Thurber, when a person looks at a Pickman painting, you can't help but *feel*. He states:

You know, it takes profound art and profound insight into Nature to turn out stuff like Pickman's. Any magazine-cover hack can splash paint around wildly and call it a nightmare or a Witches' Sabbath or a portrait of the devil, but only a great painter can make such a thing really scare or ring true. That's because only a real artist knows the actual anatomy of the terrible or the physiology of fear – the exact sort of lines and proportions that connect up with latent instincts or hereditary memories of fright, and the proper colour contrasts and lighting effects to stir the dormant sense of strangeness. (34)

Pickman clearly paints from an understanding of a world unlike ours, and the narrator is well aware of this fact, calling Pickman a “really weird artist” (34). Here, weird becomes a category rather than a mere adjective, which implies a shifting of the normal or natural values in life and in art. And the art world recognized this shifting as will. In regards to one of his paintings, “Ghoul Feeding,” it is revealed that “the club wouldn't exhibit it, and the Museum of Fine Arts wouldn't accept it as a gift; and...nobody would buy it, so Pickman had it right in his house till he went” (35). Pickman admits to the fact that the world was not ready for his art. He says:

You know...there are things that won't do for Newbury Street – things that are out of place here, and that can't be conceived here, anyhow. It's my business to catch the overtones of the soul, and you won't find those in a parvenu set of artificial streets on made land. (35)

To Pickman, real life has become “artificial,” and art has become real life. His work is living, and he becomes engulfed in it. He explains his reasoning behind overwhelming himself in this type of “weird” art: “Yes, Thurber, I decided long ago that one must paint terror as well

as beauty from life, so I did some exploring in places where I had reason to know terror lives” (37). Herein lies the first moral downfall of Pickman – he essentially goes looking for trouble, and immerses himself in what he knows to be terrifying. He withdraws from the world knowing full well that he is endangering himself.

Pickman eventually invites Thurber into his home and workspace, where Thurber sees unimaginable monstrosities upon Pickman’s canvases. He relates what he saw to a friend:

These figures were seldom completely human, but often approached humanity in varying degree. Most of the bodies, while roughly bipedal, had a forward slumping, and a vaguely canine cast. The texture of the majority was a kind of unpleasant rubberiness. Ugh! I can see them now! Their occupations – well, don’t ask me to be too precise. They were usually feeding – I won’t say on what. They were sometimes shown in groups in cemeteries or underground passages, and often appeared to be in battle over their prey – or rather, their treasure-trove. And what damnable expressiveness Pickman sometimes gave the sightless faces of this charnel booty! Occasionally the things were shown leaping through open windows at night, or squatting on the chests of sleepers, worrying at their throats. One canvas showed a ring of them baying about a hanged witch on Gallows Hill, whose dead face held a close kinship to theirs. (38-9)

Thurber continues to view these horrifying scenes, marveling at their realism and cowering at the feelings they invoked within him. Pickman continues to lead him through his “gallery,” until they reach the cellar where his actual studio is placed. Thurber notices tunnels that Pickman said used to undermine the hill on which he lived – some of which appear not to be

bricked up. Thurber sees unfinished pictures on easels or propped against the walls which “were as ghastly as the finished ones upstairs, and showed the painstaking methods of the artist” (41). Pickman suddenly unveils a huge canvas, and Thurber cannot for the life of him “keep back a loud scream” followed by his attempt to “choke back a flood of reaction that threatened to burst out as hysterical laughter” (42). Once again, Pickman has found the ability, in his excess, to evoke true, vivid, and strong emotion from his audience. The painting is of “a colossal and nameless blasphemy with glaring red eyes” who is feasting on the head of a child. But Thurber states that it wasn’t the subject which scared him so – it was the technique, “the cursed, the impious, the unnatural technique!” (42). Thurber realizes that there is something very unnatural, and even immoral, about the ability to paint this realistically. He sees, pinned to the canvas, a photograph from which Thurber deduces that Pickman meant to paint a background. When he reaches to unfold the photo, “there came a subdued sort of clatter” which was “heavy like wood falling on stone or brick” (42). Pickman tenses, and draws a revolver, motioning to Thurber to leave the cellar as fast as he can, shutting Pickman inside behind him. Pickman, here, is literally ostracized and cast out or cast off from the world. He has become the abject, and has become a monster. From outside the cellar, the noise continues to get louder, followed by “a muffled squeal of squawk, and a thud. Then more wood and brick grating, a pause, and the opening of the door....Pickman reappeared with his smoking weapon, cursing the bloated rats that infested the ancient well” (43). But Thurber knows better than to believe it was the rats which had been stirred up by the noise of his scream. He has seen the paper which he believed to be a photograph for the background of Pickman’s new masterpiece. He explains:

Well – that paper wasn't a photograph of any background, after all. What it showed was simply the monstrous being he was painting on that awful canvas. It was the model he was using and its background was merely the wall of the cellar studio in minute detail. But by God...*it was a photograph from life.* (44)

It becomes clear that Pickman has withdrawn from the world and delved into the realm of the ghoulish and the monstrous. He has done so willingly, in order to become closer to his art. Pickman ultimately becomes so surrounded by the subject and the atmosphere which he paints, that there is nothing he can do but disappear into it. Pickman does reappear in one of Lovecraft's later stories entitled *The Dream Quest of the Unknown Kadath*, but in it, he has become a full-fledged ghoul – understanding some English, but communicating in grunts and moans. He has entirely become part of his art.

Lovecraft is using Pickman as a moral example, showing the reader the dangers of become too engulfed in one's art – or to become too engulfed in anything, for that matter. Lovecraft is commenting that there must be moderation in all things. Lovecraft seems to have a certain admiration for Pickman, as any artist would for someone who is so good at what he does that it becomes his very life. However, it is also a cautionary tale, showing what can become of those who may not choose their subjects and their obsessions wisely. Because Pickman ultimately disappears, Lovecraft is showing that there is no redemption for him, or for those who willingly obsess about those things that might be considered evil. However, this does not make for a lack of total redemption as shown in the story. First of all, there is redemption for the author himself. Though he admires Pickman for enveloping himself in his art, Lovecraft himself is not going to end up with the same fate. He will go as far as he needs to in order to also produce visceral reactions and true emotion from his readers, but he will

not willingly regress into his tales of horror as Pickman did into his paintings. Otherwise, there would be no escape. Pickman as a character becomes a martyr for the sins of the author.

There is also redemption for Lovecraft's narrator, Thurber. The occasion of the story is that Thurber is telling his friend, Eliot, why he began "to cut the Art Club and keep away from Pickman" (33). Thurber also admits that he "can't use the subway or (you may as well have your laugh at this, too) go down into cellars any more" (33). He admits to dropping all contact with Pickman, and has no regrets about his decision. This in itself is Thurber's redemptive quality. He knew when to walk away, and when to cut off all contact with Pickman. He knew that whatever Pickman had going on, it was something he wanted to take no part in. Thurber stands as an example to those readers who have been in precarious situations, and have used strength and integrity to walk away and leave their own lives unblemished from what could amount to certain evilness. Pickman either lacked the ability to walk away from evil, or he exercised free will in order to sacrifice himself for his art. But either way, Pickman and Thurber make it clear that it is a personal choice whether to live in hell or escape from it.

What *Wieland*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Pickman's Model," and countless other Gothic tales are able to show us, then, is that horror comes from human nature, and from one's self first and foremost. In each individual is the inherent ability to do good or to do evil, and it is one's own choice to decide what is moral and what is not. Contemporary readers may not adhere to the Puritan ideals of morality, but can generally understand the dualities of good vs. evil, right vs. wrong, light vs. dark and so on. So according to Gothic fiction, one must face the evils that lie within one's self in order to overcome the potential harm that can be caused on us or on future generations. But most of

all, Gothic fiction shows us that even if these evils must be faced, there will always be hope for redemption and expiation of sins.

The Monster in the House: Personal Confrontation in Haunted House Films

One of the most popular ways of confronting one's own fears is through the genre of horror films. Watching these films is often a way to save the viewers the trouble of going out and finding their own fears – instead, Hollywood brings fears to them. And often, these films depict a “house askew” as a way of exhibiting their central themes of the personal extrapolation of sin. First under consideration is the 2002 M. Night Shyamalan Film, *Signs*. Though it is a film about aliens rather than a specific “haunting,” it is certainly a film dealing with the “house askew.” It is a house being invaded – quite forcefully in this case – by something unknown and supernatural. And, more importantly, it isn't about aliens at all. It is about a man confronting his own struggles and fears. The aliens are just a medium to bring those personal emotions out into the open, to force the man to deal with them. Graham Hess, played by Mel Gibson, is a former Reverend who has lost his faith in God and left the church after his wife was killed in a freak car accident. The opening scene of the film is shot from inside the house, looking through a warped window at a children's swing set. This window symbolizes Graham's distorted view of the world since his faith has ended. As the movie approaches its climax, Graham, his brother, and Graham's two children have found their house invaded by aliens. They have sequestered themselves in the basement, as presumably it is the safest place in their home. They block the door, and the camera zooms in on Graham's face. “I'm not ready,” he says. This simple line is essential in understanding that this film is about more than aliens. The invasion has become a test of his faith – he hasn't dealt, yet, with

the death of his wife and his emotions surrounding it. He hasn't dealt with the idea that there may be no "higher being" looking out for him. Though he has stopped admitting to the existence of a God – even refusing to pray at the family's "last supper" before the invasion – the line, "I'm not ready" shows he is not yet willing to fully give himself over to atheism.

The family soon realizes the invaders are only making noises at the basement door, distracting the humans while they find another way in. They realize there is a coal chute in the basement which wasn't boarded up like the rest of the house. As the camera follows Graham and his brother, they pan the basement walls with flashlights, and the beams land on Graham's son, Morgan, in front of the coal chute grate. Suddenly, the arms of an alien reach out and grab hold of the young boy, and the lights go out. Though the men are able to get Morgan away from the alien, the son, who is extremely asthmatic, begins to have an attack. They've left his medicine upstairs. This is a crucial moment for Graham's character. As he is holding Morgan gasping against his chest, Graham says, "Don't be afraid, Morgan. We'll slow this down together...I know it hurts...be strong baby, it will pass..." The audience becomes aware that he is not just saying this to his son, because these words are reminiscent of his last words to his wife as she was pinned between a truck and a tree. He is confronting the moment his faith was shattered. He continues speaking, and is clearly no longer talking to Morgan at all. "Don't do this to me again," Graham says, "Not again. I hate you." At this point, Graham has done what he needed to do throughout the conflict of the movie – he has acknowledged the existence of God. It wasn't that God didn't exist, it was that Graham was angry at God for taking his wife. But his words of hatred are still an acknowledgement and acceptance of the presence of a higher being. With this recognition, Graham utters the following words: "Fear is fading. Don't be afraid of what's happening. Believe it's going to

pass...Believe.” His son, of course, is saved. His family finds out how to defeat the invaders. And the movie concludes with Graham wearing his Reverend’s collar, and the same image of the swing set through the warped window at the beginning of the film is now seen through a window with no glass – a testament that Graham has broken through his distorted view of the world, and is able to confront reality due to this test of his faith. A movie which is about aliens on the surface level, has transformed into a struggle that many people go through – the questioning of religion.

The 2001 film *The Others* starring Nicole Kidman is a true haunted house film, and the same theme of invasion as seen in *Signs* is present in this film as well. Grace, played by Kidman, is slowly convinced by her children that her family is not alone in their home. Grace is portrayed as a logical character, relying very much on strict rules and religion to run her home. She dismisses her children’s many claims of seeing invaders in their home as expressions of imagination, and punishes them when they speak of the so-called imaginary people. But early on in the film, Grace begins to question her own sanity when she hears footsteps running around in the rooms above her, and she is certain it is an unwanted intruder. She hears the footsteps and follows them into a storage room, where everything is covered in white sheets. The scene is shot in silence, with only her own footsteps as the soundtrack. Suddenly, Grace hears a child say, “Shh...she’s watching,” followed by a gasp in terror. Grace begins frantically pulling the sheets off of coat racks, statues, chairs, and other artifacts filling the room. At the key moment of horror in this particular scene, she uncovers a mirror, and is frightened by her own image looking back at her. This scene should be a clue to the audience as to what is actually happening in the film. By confronting her own image during this scene’s climax of terror, it is clear that Grace must actually confront herself. The

fear in this house is about *her*, not the ghosts the children claim to have encountered dozens of times. Throughout the movie, she must confront her failing marriage, her crumbling relationships with her children, and her own deteriorating mental state. Each of these aspects are brought to the forefront only as she faces the ghosts in her house head-on.

Early in the film, Grace reveals that her children are allergic to the sun. She carefully keeps them concealed in the house, and windows are always covered by thick, heavy drapes. But as the film comes to a close, and during a climactic moment, Grace finds that someone has removed all of the curtains, putting her children's lives in danger. This scene is highly metaphorical as this idea of "letting the light in" is a way to describe an increase in awareness. Not long after, she remembers what has happened. She and her children are dead by her own hand. In fact, there are no ghosts in the house besides themselves. They are the ones who have been haunting the house, not the ones who have been victims of a haunting. But it is not until she acknowledges this horror she has caused that the film is able to resolve. She verbally utters that she has killed her children and then herself. Once she confronts this horrible thing she has done, she knows why these terrors have been happening. She accepts the punishment of her situation, which is to remain in the house and continuously keep out any invaders.

A more recent film than *The Others* is the 2007 film *1408* starring John Cusack⁶. *1408* can easily be considered simply a "ghostly room at the inn" film, which might be a viewer's first conclusion, but it is actually about a writer struggling with his craft. Cusack's character Mike Enslin is a washed-up writer. He writes books which list the "Top 10" Most Haunted Houses, Haunted Graveyards, Haunted Castles, etc. His current project in the film is

⁶ This film is based on a short story by Stephen King, and was recently included in his new collection entitled *Everything's Eventual*. For the purposes of this discussion, the film rather than the short story will be the focus of concentration, as adaptations often vary from the intent of the original piece.

Haunted Hotels. One day, he checks his mail and receives a mysterious postcard from the Dolphin Hotel in New York City which states, “Do Not Enter room 1408.” Of course, he makes it his mission to check in.

So, it could be asked how this premise is really just about a man struggling with his writing. It is more than this, of course. It is also a man dealing with the death of his daughter and with his alcoholism. In fact, the three films in question so far have main characters who have delayed in confronting their personal trauma. Perhaps this is another theme to be found – that it is healthier and safer to confront trauma head-on rather than repress. But there are a few things in *1408* which prove this basic theme of creative frustration and even creative impotence (which is actually a theme in most of Stephen King’s horror fiction). One of the first scenes of the film, for example, shows Enslin at a pitiful book signing – a fear of most struggling authors is a book signing where barely anyone shows up, as it is a direct attack on the ego. Enslin’s audience consists of a measly three people. A young woman approaches him with one of his early novels, entitled *The Long Road Home*. It is clear he loved this book. Novel writing is his passion, not writing Top 10 Lists. He has strayed from his writing path in his current occupation. He truly believed in this previous book (now out of print), which currently sells on eBay (and as his fan states, there are “not many bidders”). So the reason he checks into room 1408 is not to satisfy his readership. Frankly, as his book signing proves, he doesn’t have a real readership. Instead, he checks in to satisfy his own curiosity, and perhaps to see a ghost (since he makes it clear he has yet to actually experience the supernatural). But really, he wants to get a story for his novel. And this is exactly what occurs.

The room, of course, has a history. Over 200 deaths have occurred in the room since the hotel opened. As the hotel manager explains, no one lasts more than an hour in the room without some horrifying occurrence. When in the room, and the first signs of real terror occur, the camera zooms in on Enslin's face. Frantically, he yells to himself, "You're losing the plot...you're losing the whole structure!" This is even further evidence that this film is about writing. He's not concerned that he's losing his sanity, but that he's losing the plot of his next novel. The room is doing these things to him so he can confront his own writing and overcome his creative impotence. Often writing – especially good writing – is about confrontation in the first place, even if it's not scary. But, of course, in order to get Enslin back on track after so many years of lost creativity, the room must shock and scare him. And sure enough, in the last scene, he is finishing his novel. As he types the final lines, his wife remarks that she's never seen him write so quickly. "It's easy," Enslin says, "I already wrote this book." He has confronted his personal struggle with creativity, and has returned to the kind of writing he loved and lost. Once this occurs, the movie is able to resolve.

Themes of invasion, morality, and the confrontation of personal weaknesses are found in more films than can be adequately discussed here. Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, for example, is not just about a man going insane, but it is about the passing from innocence to experience, as a young child is introduced into the corrupt adult world. The 1982 hit *Poltergeist* was largely about the corruption and greed found in real estate, since construction was occurring on ancient burial grounds. It also confronts the horrors found in suburban America. The 2008 Guillermo del Toro production, *The Orphanage*, is about a mother who is confronting guilt in her past while trying to understand her own relationship to her adopted

son. Another M. Night Shyamalan film, *The Sixth Sense*, is a movie about communication and denial. And so on.

It is obvious that our culture is increasingly entranced by horror movies. These films are largely box office hits, and with the rise in special effects technology, the frightening images become even more real and more terrifying. When we finish watching the films, we are satisfied to call them “scary.” But there is a more profound reason than simply being scared that we continue to see these movies. We are living vicariously through these characters. They are confronting their own ghosts on the screen in front of us, and so we feel we can delay in confronting the ghosts in our lives. The audience is able to reach a catharsis. As we persist in watching these films, and seeking out that which scares us, we can remember that the haunted house often stands in, metaphorically, for human beings. The houses take on the larger role of the extrapolation of the true nature of humanity.

The Book Askew: Danielewski's *House of Leaves*

Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* envisions the house askew through a postmodern interpretation. The house itself is not the monster, nor are the people inside the house. Instead, the book itself – and by proxy, the audience reading the book and even the “academics” who try to interpret the book – becomes the monster. This work shows that the monster does not actually have to appear in supernatural origins. The monster can be a physical representation that is held in the hands of a reader. *House of Leaves* is seven hundred pages long and riddled with thousands of footnotes. It is a bewildering collection of documents and becomes, in itself, a textual labyrinth. Like the haunted house described within the pages, the book's very dimensions seem to constantly shift and change as the

narrative shifts from one textual level to another. The house, and the book, is like Lacan's "Real." In his concept of the Borromean Knot, Lacan outlines three distinct realms, or orders, of the psyche: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. The Imaginary is the realm of the senses or sensory knowledge of the world surrounding us. The Symbolic realm holds the language which we use to organize the knowledge received from the realm of senses. The Symbolic contains the signifiers, the laws, and the structures we use to understand our society and our thoughts. Finally, the Real is what can never be fully captured by language or signifiers. The Real is unknowable and unnamable. Like Lacan's "Real," the Navidson house – and *House of Leaves* itself – cannot be methodically documented, and it resists definition and understanding. Something of it will always remain imperceptible and unsymbolized.

House of Leaves is the quintessential example of contemporary fiction in the Gothic mode because it takes all the clichés of Gothic narratives and reorders them in spectacular fashion⁷. At the center of the narrative is a film called *The Navidson Record* which is a documentary shot by a photojournalist, Will Navidson. The narrative of the film leads to the audience's feeling of watching it, but the audience is paradoxically and fully aware that this is not the case. *The Navidson Record* traces his family's strange experiences in their new home in rural Virginia. Returning from a trip away, the Navidson's discover a mysterious extra room in their house. Upon painstakingly measuring the house, it seems that it is, impossibly, a quarter-inch bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. The dimensions of the house continue to shift, eventually opening up an apparently infinite labyrinthine space

⁷ It is interesting to note that contemporary technology was instrumental in the production of *House of Leaves*. The book was first serialized on the Internet, and the convoluted textual arrangements of the novel would have been near impossible to construct without a high-powered computer. Danielewski used a 300 Mhz G3 processor. (Spooner 41)

within its walls. In a textbook illustration of the Freudian uncanny, the “homely” is shown to be unhomely, and that which should be familiar is made unfamiliar. (Spooner 41-2)

The book as a whole is made up of multiple narratives and metanarratives, throughout which Danielewski seems to be pointing out that all of these narratives are flawed because language itself is flawed in the postmodern world. The film is the subject of the “core” narrative which is a critical commentary by an old man named Zampano. Zampano’s copious notes on the film are discovered after his death by the “editor” of the book, Johnny Truant, a trainee tattoo artist. Both of these narrators are eminently unreliable: Zampano because he is blind (and therefore cannot have seen the film he describes), and Truant because he is apparently a pathological liar (his name ironically comprises phonetic connotations of “true” or “truth” and its literal meaning of “shirking” or “idle,” a person missing from school or work). Truant’s narrative of his discovery of the manuscript in Zampano’s apartment, the editing process, and his ensuing madness all frame Zampano’s narrative and periodically interrupts it, in the form of scholarly footnotes (and footnotes to footnotes), which spiral off into stories about his own life. Some of these stories are self-consciously fictitious while others seem to be “true” within the world of the text. Finally, anonymous “editors” annotate both Zampano’s and Truant’s narratives, and add appendices, including a further narrative told in epistolary form by Truant’s mother. The relative fictionality or truth of what is being read is constantly placed under interrogation, with different authorities contradicting and undermining one another. None of these narrators can be identified with Danielewski, whose name does not even appear on the title page, as if to preserve the integrity of his fictional narrators. Further, the titling of the book as Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, rather than *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski, creates a shift in the conventional relationship

between the author and his work. Danielewski does not seem to be the author of the book; rather, he has produced or orchestrated it in a manner more reminiscent of a film director. His responsibilities are diminished – he claims ownership of the work, but not necessarily authorship. (Spooner 42)

The form of the book itself also contributes to its monstrous labyrinthine nature. Some of the footnotes could be read as paradoxically conveying the main story, if Truant is considered as the central character. The text begins to disintegrate as the book progresses, some pages telling two or even three stories at the same time in different columns and boxes, some pages carrying only a single word or phrase. Some parts of the text are written backwards, so they can be read only in a mirror, while others are crossed out. A letter is written in French, another in code that must be painstakingly deciphered by the reader. Tangled footnotes cause the reader to flip backwards and forwards between pages, mirroring the spatial confusion of the house itself, while in the most suspenseful parts of the story only a single word or phrase appears on each page, causing the reader to physically speed through these sections. In one part of the story, Will Navidson, lost in the lightless passages beneath his home, reads a book. That book is titled *House of Leaves*. Because his matches will not last long enough to enable him to read the whole book, he begins burning the pages he has already read to produce more light. When he reaches the final page, there are no other pages left, so he sets fire to the top of the page and reads it as it burns. Reading is figured as consumption – the pages is literally consumed as Navidson metaphorically consumes it. Moreover, since the word “leaf” can also mean “page,” by burning *House of Leaves* Navidson is also in effect burning down his own house. The book/house is a self-consuming artifact. (Spooner 43)

As if to convolute the textual labyrinth still further, Danielewski's sister, a musician named (with obvious Gothic resonance) Poe, concurrently released an album entitled *Haunted*, which provided an intertextual counterpoint to her brother's novel. The songs on *Haunted* were inspired by reading drafts of *House of Leaves*, though they often seem rather obliquely connected to the story, and the sleeve notes contain page references linking them (sometimes bafflingly) to the text. In addition, the album contains samples of a tape recording of the siblings' father that Poe found after his death. In Catherine Spooner's *Contemporary Gothic*, she writes, "Although Poe's album mines a seam somewhere between that of the female singer-songwriter and polished adult pop, nothing like the 'Goth' music of the 1980s and 90s underground, nevertheless it is able to make a claim for being 'contemporary Gothic' in its concept and method of production" (44). Poe's album is "haunted" not only by her own family secrets hinted at through her father's ghostly utterances, but also by traces of its companion text, without which it is incomplete. The power of the text to cross the invisible boundary between page and reader – another example of deterritorialization in horror fiction – is a constant theme of *House of Leaves*, from the obsession that Truant develops with Zampano's story to the textual tricks that emphasize the physical experience of reading. At one crucial point in the book, the possibility of the minotaur – or whatever terrible monster Truant or the text is trying to repress – escaping the labyrinth and emerging in the reader's own reality becomes breathtakingly close, as Truant instructs the reader of a fearful presence on the periphery of their vision. Similarly, it becomes difficult, after reading *House of Leaves*, to listen to Poe's album without straining for ineffable words or sounds that might signal the presence of the novel. Furthermore, *House of Leaves* is reciprocally haunted: Poe's music makes a ghostly appearance towards

the end of the book. Johnny Truant enters a bar where the band are playing a song with the lyric “I live at the end of a five and a half minute hallway,” a line from *Haunted*, that itself refers to the title of a short film discussed by Zampano (512). The hooking of choruses to textual references ensures that, when reading the book after listening to the album, Poe’s tantalizing melodies echo through the reader’s experience of the text. (Spooner 43-4)

The notion of reciprocal haunting does not end there: when Johnny meets the band after the show and asks them about the song, they tell him it was inspired by a book, and to his surprise hand him a copy of *House of Leaves*, with the warning “It’ll change your life” (513). Johnny recounts:

Already, they had spent many hours with complete strangers shooting the shit about Zampano’s work. They had discussed the footnotes, the names and even the encoded appearance of Thamyris on page 387, something I’d transcribed without ever detecting...During their second set, I thumbed through the pages, virtually every one marked, stained and red-lined with inquiring and I thought frequently inspired comments. In a few of the margins, there were even some pretty stunning personal riffs about the lives of the musicians themselves. (514)

In this scene, Johnny meets the readers of *House of Leaves* – readers who are not passive but whose questions and stories fill the margins of the pages. The book’s marginalia becomes just as important as the book itself. In the process of interpreting Zampano’s manuscript they become doubles of Johnny Truant. If the process of reading, and responding, to the text has changed their lives, so does their version of the manuscript change Johnny’s. He reports, after reading it, that “finally I fell into a sleep no longer disturbed by the past” (514). This is exegesis as exorcism. Only the process of annotation, and of being annotated in turn, appears

to bring Johnny peace (at least temporarily) from the multiple specters that haunt him.

(Spooner 45)

Speculation about the mysterious presence at the center of the labyrinth, as well as the origins of Johnny's haunting, is encouraged by the text. Early editions had the word "minotaur" in red, as if offering a rag to a bull. Zampano's account always offers the word in strike-through, possibly suggesting a further repression of what lies at the heart of the house/book, or possibly that the "solution" to the mystery can only ever be under erasure and can never be accessed. This could easily represent the return of the repressed in terms of childhood abuse, as Johnny Truant hints at awful events in his past, the key to which appears to be his insane mother, incarcerated in a lunatic asylum when he was seven years old. The horror in Navidson's psyche, on the other hand, is linked to Delial (the phonetic similarity to "denial" is surely not coincidental), a starving African child attended by vultures, of whom Navidson took a Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph. There is also a sense, however, in which Danielewski deliberately allows the source of horror to remain nameless and shapeless, so that it can be shaped to the individual fears brought to the text by the reader. In his Introduction, Johnny Truant predicts the effect that the text will have on the reader:

You'll stand aside as a great complexity intrudes, tearing apart, piece by piece, all of your carefully conceived denials, whether deliberate or unconscious. And then for better or for worse you'll turn, unable to resist, though try to resist you still will, fighting with everything you've got not to face the thing you most dread, what is now, what will be, what has always come before, the creature you truly are, the creature we all are, buried in the nameless black of a name. (xxiii)

As J.G. Ballard has remarked in a discussion of the films of David Cronenberg, “the disturbing event we witnessed in the past is the experience of being alive” (Spooner 46). At the same time, the reader is suggestively expelled from the text, forbidden to enter: the dedication (written in Truant’s “Courier” typeface) simply states: “This is not for you.” This anti-dedication automatically places the reader in exile, invoking both the uncanniness of Otherness and the thrill of the forbidden book. Readers break a taboo simply by turning the page. (Spooner 45-6)

The book has a tendency to make those who encounter it active readers but passive critics. Readers may have to turn the book upside down to read parts of the story or project their own fears into the labyrinth, but it is difficult to analyze the book without merely repeating what is already within it. The length and density of Danielewski’s novel produce a sensation in the reader analogous to that of the sublime: like the awe and sensory confusion produced in the Romantics by the sight of the Alps – or in Navidson and his companions by the scale and ineffability of the labyrinth – the book’s dizzying contortions defy verbal or textual communication. The parodies of critical discourse (one particularly funny section has Karen Navidson interviewing Jacques Derrida, Harold Bloom, Camille Paglia, Anne Rice, and Hunter S. Thompson for their critical response to the film) pre-empt critical response, presenting comically reductive versions of each critic’s or author’s point of view and thus mocking a sound-bite culture that would reduce the text to vulgar versions of one theory or another. Only the horror writer Stephen King “gets” the short film that Karen shows him, surmising that the house is a real place and not merely an artistic construction. While this maneuver adds further levels to the fictionality of the text (a fictionalized version of the real King grasps the “reality” of Danielewski’s fictional film), it also perhaps indicates a degree

of respect and acknowledgement of genre-belonging further indicated elsewhere. It is impossible not to place *House of Leaves* in the tradition of Charles Maturin, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe: all the generic features are present and correct, from the revenant histories of the characters' childhood traumas to the dizzying enclosure of the house itself, and the increasing disintegration of both the text itself and the individual subjects within it. This is a debt the text acknowledges even as it denies (in a footnote, of course). In its self-reflexivity, *House of Leaves* is an exemplary postmodern text. It is also an exemplary Gothic one. (Spooner 46-7)

CHAPTER 3

TERRIFYING, HORRIFYING, DISGUSTING ZOMBIES: WHAT WE FEAR IS OUR OWN MORTALITY

Death is humankind's ultimate fear. All cultures understand death because everyone and everything eventually dies. However, there is no clear consensus on what happens after death, which is why it becomes a terrifying thought. Our fear of death is not only metaphysical, but also practical. Corpses are, simply, bad for our health. Bodies exposed to the environment can pollute the water system and can spread diseases. Whatever the body consists of in life is broken down into over 400 different kinds of chemicals which are very "aromatic," to say the least. But there is something even more terrifying than death – when the dead come back to life and become our worst nightmares: zombies. The zombie forces us to not only confront our own anxieties, but to confront the abject body itself. As Kristeva writes:

The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, or decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for instance – I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live... There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. (3)

The zombie is a living corpse, and therefore does more than just "signify" death. It results in that visceral, abject feeling which forces those confronted with zombies to face their own

mortality. As the living dead, it contains the "blood and pus" and the "sickly acrid smell" of decay that Kristeva mentions. It is the "border" of condition because it is both dead and living. It crosses boundaries and reminds us that we are constantly approaching our own death. The zombie is the very embodiment of senescence – the concept that as soon as an organism is brought to life, it immediately begins to age and therefore is constantly dying. The zombie shows that we are always surrounded by the fears of our own mortality.

Zombies also present us with a horrifying reality about the possibility not just of our own death, but of the death of our entire civilization. W. Scott Poole writes, "In an America anxious over the fate of the social order, the zombie offers a talisman, a laughably horrific symbol about a fake apocalypse that keeps at bay real fears about social degeneration and collapse" (203). Through an examination of humankind's history of zombie anxiety, as well as a discussion of George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, Max Brooks' *World War Z*, and other popular reincarnations of the zombie, this chapter posits that human-created paranoia and social anxieties are really at the core of the overwhelming human fear of zombies. Fear is, in some ways, a social contagion. It doesn't matter if the zombies actually exist. If enough people think that zombies could exist, their fears become reassured. As anthropologist Kate B. Harding states, "Zombies are not the thing to fear. The thing to fear is what humans are capable of doing when they're afraid" (*Zombies...*). The confrontation of zombies shows that human nature is often our own worst enemy.

To understand the social and human anxiety surrounding zombies, it is first important to understand the rich history of zombie mythology. Though George Romero is credited with inventing the slow-moving, flesh-eating zombie as it is known in contemporary culture with his film *Night of the Living Dead*, some type of zombie mythology has been around

seemingly as long as human beings have walked the earth. Zombies first appeared in what is perhaps the oldest story on earth, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, which reads, "I will raise up the dead and they will eat the living. And the dead will outnumber the living" (*Epic of...*).

Historically, a Zombie is rooted in Voodoo and the term itself originated as "Zombi" in Haiti. Voodoo is a syncretistic religion, and is completely and inextricably tied to the Haitian culture and tradition, which, even after becoming the first free black republic by winning its independence from France in 1804, absorbed many of its surrounding cultures and traditions, including African, Taino, and European. Voodoo consists of a belief in and worship of spirits, with practitioners believing that these spirits have the ability to control everything, including health. The spirits act as intermediaries for a god figure. The Haitian word "Zombi" has two distinct meanings: 1) a person who dies without ever having possessed a spirit, and 2) the living dead. In her book *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*, Zora Neale Hurston relates her experience and understanding of the Haitian zombie, saying, "This is the way Zombies are spoken of: They are bodies without souls. The living dead. Once they were dead, and after that they were called back to life again" (179). Hurston explains that, for the most part, zombification occurs in lower-class citizens – peasants and laborers. They were usually slaves to a successful farmer. According to folklore, an evil "papaloo" (shaman able to channel spirits) has the power to transform corpses into mindless, undead servants (Poole 194). The papaloo would make these reanimated corpses devoid of emotion or of any past life in an attempt to create mindless laborers. Hurston writes, "No one can stay in Haiti long without hearing Zombies mentioned in one way or another, and the fear of this thing and all that it means seeps over the country like a ground current of cold air. This fear is real and deep. It is more like a group of fears" (179). She continues, "Zombies are wanted for

more uses besides field work. They are reputedly used as sneak thieves. The market women cry out continually that little Zombies are stealing their change and goods. Their invisible hands are believed to provide will for their owners" (197). This Haitian idea does not have much to do with the viral, ravenous, carnivorous horde that we now refer to as Zombies, but it certainly contributes to our understanding of their origins and we can see where the evolution begins.

In fact, some type of zombie occurs in almost every culture in the world. In China, the living dead are called Jiang Shi. This is a hungry ghost from Chinese folklore that returns to devour the living. It wants to attack its own family as retribution for not being properly buried. Like many cultures, the Chinese perform burial rituals to make sure the dead pass safely to the afterworld, and don't come back to threaten the living. In an improper burial, the dead does not get a chance to move on. It lives in torment, and in turn torments those who caused their suffering in the first place. In 7th Century Arabia, the living dead were known as Ghouls. The Ghoul was most often a female demon who had fallen from grace, usually because she lived a sinful life. In the oldest legends, the demon was a prostitute. She would hide in the desert, and call out much like a siren to passersby. When they approached, the Ghoul would transform into her natural state, which was a horrific, devouring monster. The Ghoul was so compelling a figure, the word "ghoul" became the name of Romero's zombie in *Night of the Living Dead*. In Norse mythology, the Draugr was a well-known, undead Viking who had an insatiable appetite for human flesh. Draugrs were people who had come back from the dead as unstoppable machines. The only way to stop them was to somehow lure them back into the ground. They retained some of their intelligence, which made them even more frightening because the Draugr knows and delights in what it is. Generally, even

Norse heroes were not strong enough to stop the Draugr. In 12th century England, the cleric William of Newburgh wrote about spirits called Revenants who became the hungry dead and needed to feed on the living. Newburgh is popularly considered history's first "zombie hunter." He was the first to try to understand why the undead might exist. He believed Revenants were real, and that they were on a mission to destroy humanity. He wrote, "One would not easily believe that corpses come out of their graves unless there were many cases supported by ample testimony." His writings became very important to the church at the time, because they were trying to understand, identify, and exterminate these monsters that were returning to plague the earth. Newburgh wanted to find out if there was some way to understand this horrible need, because if there was some way to understand it, perhaps it could be stopped. (*Zombies...*)

In many cultures, the living dead are viewed with being unhappy that they are dead. They want to prey on the living for what they don't have – life. Generally, it is accepted that those who die either experience a "good death" or a "bad death." A good death opens the doors to the next world, whatever that may be. A bad death – one of humanity's biggest fears – closes those doors and locks the spirits (or bodies) where they are. This is the basis for many of our monster beliefs. A bad death – which could be caused by a gruesome end, a sinful life, or the wrong kind of burial – causes a spirit to remain on earth as angry and vengeful. Because of this paranoia and fear of the return of the dead, human beings learn to dispose of death very quickly. Burial was traditionally a way to ensure that bodies were to remain dead. In a lot of beliefs, prevention from using the mouth was crucial in burials, by using rocks or bricks to cover the corpse mouths. The ancient Greek word, "maschalismos," means "to mutilate the body" so it doesn't come back from the dead. Maschalismos occurred

through removing internal organs (such as the heart, liver, or brain) in order to prevent the vital function of the body if it were reanimated. Historically, the Chinese physically restrained every corpse in preparation for burial, binding and pinning them in the coffin. If done with even the slightest error, the monster would come back and would have to be stopped with rituals and magic. The Norse had a "corpse door" in their homes. After a person died, the body would be moved out of the house feet first to confuse the dead, so they would not look back at the house and recognize where it came from. They would then seal up the corpse door so the dead couldn't find their way back. Throughout the 19th and into the 20th century, it was still common in Europe and even part of the Americas to carry the corpses out of the home feet first so they could not look back and beckon the living to come with them. Even today, many of our burial traditions come from these rituals. Coffins are nailed shut. There's a part of humankind that is afraid of something getting out, even if buried under the ground – and even if that fear seems irrational. The proper handling of the dead has always been a widely held human belief. When the dead is not treated with respect, they may come back for revenge. (*Zombies...*)

One of the inherent fears when it comes to a zombie attack plays on the idea of neighbor against neighbor, loved one against loved one. One's daughter could turn into a zombie, or the child could turn on the parent to save herself in the event of a major zombie outbreak. The psychological aspects of the zombie plague are more damaging than the direct effects of the contagion. In the event of a zombie attack, people would be fighting something that would look like loved ones, but are no longer the same people. This facing of one's self or loved ones as a zombie is reflected in Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay "The Uncanny" ("Das Unheimliche"). In this essay, Freud explores the spooky literary conventions of fiction

writers, but also derives a larger psychological category of feeling strange, not at home, not secure, and not quite right. The "heimlich," usually translated as "homely" or "familiar," becomes the "unheimlich," the "unhomely" or "unfamiliar." But more importantly, what is now uncanny was once something familiar which has become foreign. It is a form of emotional and cognitive dissonance: "It is undoubtedly related to what is frightening - to what arouses dread and horror" (Freud 217). In his essay, Freud discusses some dominant elements of horror: severed limbs, disembodied spirits, evil doppelgangers, and the fear of being buried alive. These fears are explained by his psychoanalytic theory, which proposes that one's early psychological life (the psyche) is dominated by the narcissistic pursuit of pleasure (the pleasure principle), whereas one's later psyche is more accommodated to a world indifferent to one's particular ego satisfaction (the reality principle). One comes into the world wanting everything, but a person is dealt the repeated blows of the reality check that they are not the center of the universe. Repression, an internal punishment, is the mechanism by which the early narcissism is reeducated, overcome, and subsumed into the later psyche. Such repression begins externally, in the form of parents disciplining the child's cravings and behaviors, but soon the disciplinary authority takes up residence inside the child's mind, becoming the conscience. The original desires and cravings of Id and Ego do not, according to Freud, evaporate and disappear, but instead submerge below the conscious surface into the deep fathoms of the unconscious(Asma 189-90).

We are disturbed by horror stories of cloning, doppelgangers, and "evil twin" scenarios for the same reason we are frightened of a zombie takeover: the idea of another version of the self, Freud argues, is a thinly veiled expression of the desire to extend one's life. The desire to live on and not perish, to never terminate, is made manifest in the form of a

fantasy about another self. Reality reminds us on a daily basis that we will die and everyone we love will die. So the universal urge to live forever must be repressed as we grow up. In order to grow up, one must negate one's urge to live forever. As mature adults we have, practically speaking, overcome our infantile desire for immortality, but, like everything that's repressed, the craving has only gone deep underground into the unconscious. The doppelganger as another self was loved in our original psychological phase, but during repression it came to be regarded with suspicion, fear, and loathing. Evil twins, clones, and supernatural doppelgangers are experienced as uncanny rather than just fearsome because they simultaneously stimulate the older unconscious familiar feelings and the newer negative feelings of terror. It seems clear that this Freudian explanation applies equally well to our ongoing fascination with zombies. Severed arms that crawl, jump, and choke their victims regularly inhabit our nightmares and our horror novels and films. Freud writes, "Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist...feet which dance by themselves... – all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when, as in the last instance, they prove capable of independent activity in addition" (220). Ultimately Freud has touched on the idea that the fear of the zombie is from the fear of death and dismemberment. Nothing can be quite as "unheimlich" as turning around to see your loved one, once familiar, approaching you with dead, hungry eyes, ready to eat your flesh. (Asma 190)

In addition to the uncanny, the zombie stands as a symbol of other widespread social anxieties – the fear of the horde and of technology, the fear of the destruction of the environment, the taboo of cannibalism, and the fear of the collapse of civilization as we know it. These fears can be seen in the following sections which address Romero's *Night of*

the Living Dead, Brooks' *World War Z*, and popular incarnations of the zombie in the mass culture of the United States.

Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*: Horde Mentality and the Fear of Technology

George Romero is credited with both creating the modern zombie and turning zombies into apocalyptic creatures. His vision of the end of civilization as a zombie apocalypse captured the primal fears of Americans in 1968. What started as a low-budget horror movie, shot for a little over one hundred thousand dollars in rural Pennsylvania, became an international sensation. Romero's film was filled with local actors and friends from his native Pittsburgh. Filmed in black and white⁸, *Night of the Living Dead* became a staple of drive-in theaters around the country, and created, to date, five sequels and numerous remakes, tributes, and reimaginings.

The film begins with a car driving away from a city, and into a cemetery in western Pennsylvania. Already, a typical gothic situation is introduced as the characters are transgressing a boundary from what is "normal" and transporting themselves into the realm of the dead. The cemetery is well-marked with flags honoring the recently buried Vietnam dead. A brother and sister, Johnny and Barbara, are visiting their father's grave. Both siblings are uneasy. Johnny did not want to come, and Barbara is clearly still grieving their father's passing. Johnny continuously complains about having to visit the gravesite, saying "church was this morning." Remembering that the gothic genre often deals with morality and the "punishment of sins" (as explained in the previous chapter), it is possible that this lack of respect for religion – as well as for the dead – is what brings about the ensuing

⁸ The film's color was for financial as well as aesthetic reasons – Romero hoped the lack of color would give the film a "documentary" type of feel.

circumstances. Johnny is bringing horror upon himself without knowing it due to his disrespect and disregard for sacred things. While Barbara kneels beside her father's grave to pray, Johnny, clearly uncomfortable, jokes about a man, perhaps an indigent, lurching toward them. "They're coming to get you, Barbara," he says, doing his best Boris Karloff impression. As it turns out, they were, in fact, coming to get Barbara – and everyone else. The shambling figure turns out to be a zombie who kills Johnny as Barbara escapes to a nearby farmhouse and becomes catatonic with terror. A young African American man named Ben also occupies the farmhouse, as does, viewers learn soon, a family that has been hiding in the basement. The group, fighting amongst themselves, also must fight a horde of hungry zombies who surround the small house. Ben learns from a radio he has discovered that "those things" are a global phenomenon: a zombie apocalypse. Humanity has been besieged by hordes of cannibalistic, animated corpses. (Poole 193-4)

Romero's hordes of zombies were the first to break from the folkloric tradition which originated with Voodoo. He imagined undead humans in various states of decay, driven by their hunger rather than by a necromancer's will. The rising dead, in this new version, could create more zombies, passing on their infection through a bite. The whole human race could be transformed into monsters. These zombies move slowly, but they never stop advancing. Even worse, they multiply. Killing them is useless, since they're already dead. What they lack in speed, they make up for in perseverance. Romero's zombies touch on the primary fear of the horde which occurs throughout human history. History is littered with the corpses of dead civilizations that fell when a horde invaded their city. One of the most famous examples is the invasion of Rome by the Visigoths in the 5th century. 800 years later in central Asia, the Mongols brought a new brutality to warfare with their horde. They were particularly

brutal in their tactics, catapulting the heads of their enemies onto the battlefield. The fear of the horde is that it inundates a society so quickly, there is no way to resist. Everything society has ever built can be destroyed by a horde. Many zombie movies, like Romero's, depict a city under siege by a relentless army bent on total destruction. A similar scenario played out in more recent times during WWII – this time, the horde was the Nazis. The siege of Leningrad in 1941 was one of the longest and deadliest sieges in history. It is rumored to have even forced the civilians to turn to cannibalism in order to survive. (*Zombies...*)

Hordes like the Visigoths, the Mongols, and the Nazis, remind humankind that the apocalypse is not an abstraction, and this is the same reminder that arises from movies like *Night of the Living Dead*. The horde – whether human or zombie – represents a force that will not surrender until it has achieved total destruction. Today, our enemy is more terrifying because they don't look like a horde. We know them as terrorists. The Bush administration played on the notion of zombies very succinctly when they described terrorists. There was absolutely no way to negotiate – they would follow us home, literally, like zombies, and there was nothing we could do to stop them except destroy them. In reference to the war on terrorism, Stephen T. Asma points out in his book *On Monsters*:

These new monsters [terrorists] are hard to pinpoint and isolate. Such a creature has no corporeal body to fight or dismember; it has no lair to infiltrate, no specific skin color, no national boundary. It is everywhere and nowhere. Global terrorism has given us all fresh opportunities to be afraid, both reasonably and unreasonably. We are in a new culture war now, one that nourishes its hostile imagination every day with the real blood of the East/West conflict. (241)

The war on terror has put us against a relentless army without a face, beyond reason, and with no fear of death. We are not battling a particular state or government – it is an ideology that could be anywhere.

Night of the Living Dead also reminds viewers that the zombie siege can start from anywhere, including our own home. In fact, it could be a monster that our own civilization unleashes. The most terrifying thing is that *we* always create the zombies. Humans are the cause of zombie outbreak. It's biological warfare, even if it's unintentional. In many stories, humans try to harness the power of nature for our own purposes, but we unleash a destructive force that consumes us as a zombie apocalypse. When Romero's film was released in 1968, the United States was at the height of the cold war and was also in the midst of the Vietnam War. There was a very real sense that the human race was pushing itself to the edge of nuclear destruction. In the film, the origins of the zombie plague are vague, but the movie suggests it is related to a NASA satellite leaking radiation. Romero's zombies evoke an ancient fear that the technologies developed to control our world are really in control of us. There is a fear that by tweaking with science, we are also tweaking with our own destiny. We are causing our own demise by "playing god."

The fear of the destructive power of our technology is ancient. In Greek mythology, for example, Prometheus steals fire from Zeus and gives it to humankind. As punishment, Zeus sends Pandora who opens a box and releases the sum of all evils into the world. The story of Prometheus is similar to zombies – our fear of creating something that destroys us. He has gone too far, and is punished for it. In later versions of the same myth, Prometheus first forms the human race out of clay and then gives them fire. As punishment, Prometheus is chained to a rock and an eagle feasts on his flesh (Hamilton 76). Jewish folklore has a

similar cautionary tale involving the Golem, which is an animated anthropomorphic being, created entirely from inanimate matter. The most famous Golem legend is the narrative by the rabbi of Prague in the late 16th century. In the tale, after being created by its master, the Golem grows increasingly violent, kills everyone, and then turns on its creator. The rabbi is eventually forced to kill the Golem (Moreman 90). In another tale about human beings "playing god," Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (aptly subtitled "The Modern Prometheus") challenges the way people related to god and knowledge by questioning what is and what is not possible when it comes to technology. Dr. Frankenstein brings life to the dead and builds his monster by stitching together segments of corpses. He jolts the monster to life through galvanization, a late 1700s theory about reanimating corpses through electricity⁹, and the novel has disastrous results. The stories of Prometheus, the Golem, and Frankenstein are all cautionary tales about humankind's attempt to play god. What is dead should be allowed to stay dead, because when a human plays god, he is usually devoured. Additionally, these stories show that people should fear technology, because once meddled with, it can ultimately lead to destruction. As human beings, we simply don't know everything about the universe, and it is our hubris about technology that will come back to "bite" us in the end. Today, biological weapons have become our Frankenstein, and have led to a fear of a zombie-esque apocalypse. Like zombies, a pathogen doesn't need to have tanks. It is the type of weapon a terrorist would choose because it can create unlimited damage with very little ability to be detected. Biological warfare has an old history. The first evidence of biological warfare occurred in 1346, when a Mongol army in Caffa attacked their enemies with corpses struck by the plague. They launched their armies into Caffa specifically to spread the disease

⁹ In early 19th C, Giovanni Aldini used this as an attempt to reanimate corpses, and achieved fame through erroneous reports about being able to bring a man named George Forrester back from the dead.

(*Zombies...*). In 2001, the chemical Anthrax sent to a string of targets, killing 5 and infecting 17 people. This attack was eerily similar to the horrors of a zombie apocalypse. Anthrax, for example, kills by eating away at human flesh. Investigators traced the source to a U.S. biological weapons lab. Once again, those who played with fire got burned. This fear, along with *Night of the Living Dead*, shows that a zombie virus could definitely be weaponized through technology.

Although George Romero has frequently insisted that *Night of the Living Dead* offers no political satire, audiences of the film have read it as a statement about the Vietnam War. Romero's zombies shambled on-screen as Americans became increasingly used to real-life images of graphic death, gore, and body parts blown to pieces. In January of 1968 the Tet Offensive inaugurated a new period in the Vietnam conflict and initiated house-to-house and hand-to-hand fighting. American casualties soared throughout the year with "one week in February of 1968 bringing news of five hundred thirty-four American deaths" (Poole 199). Romero's images of rotting corpses on a violent landscape covered with entrails and viscera, and a band of survivors battling it out with faceless hordes and deeply divided among themselves, perfectly suited the American mood. Zombie narratives have often proven the perfect vehicle for social satire. This is not because of any inherent quality of the zombie as a character, but rather because zombies always bring an apocalypse with them. Poole states, "Any apocalyptic narrative represents a deconstruction of the social contract, either as a complete revolution, a fairly severe redefinition, or in the case of evangelical eschatology, a reactionary insistence that breaks with a traditional past have triggered God's judgment" (216). Imagining the world as we know it collapsing around us gives us the opportunity to take a long look at what the dead world valued and call it into question.

Moreover, zombies are, more than any other monster, truly human. The zombie is one of us. They are recognizably human even as their bodies are always shown in varying degrees of decay. *Night of the Living Dead* emphasizes this by making zombies representative of specific occupations and pastimes, ranging from cheerleader zombies to zombie brides and zombie doctors. Zombie films often force our identification with the walking dead by revealing human beings as the real monsters. In *Night of the Living Dead*, the besieged humans cannot put aside their own desire for power and control in order to help one another. Frequently, humans murdering zombies with abandon and relish are some of the more frightening scenes in the best zombie films. Almost every zombie feature ends in the death of the major characters because of their own pride, self-absorption, or tyrannical impulses. These apocalyptic narratives in which everyday people are transformed into monsters allow for significant social critique.

World War Z, the Environment, and the Taboo of Cannibalism

Zombie literature mainly deals with the mechanisms of a post-apocalyptic world. These include the functioning of religion, social relationships, and morality in a world in which law, order, and government no longer exist¹⁰. In *World War Z* (2006) Max Brooks imagines the emergence, climax, and containment of a global zombie menace. The zombies' speculated origins are uncannily familiar – perhaps spawned by reckless biotech engineers or the black market trade in human organs, allowed to grow by governments more likely to deny than solve their problems – as is the world that takes shape in their wake. The strangest thing, for the reader and the survivors, is the reactions to the zombies by the generation born

¹⁰ Zombie literature also deals with issues of alienation and the construction of identity. The genre lends itself to ideas of alienation/isolation, sexism, identity, Otherness, and racism.

after the war. Brooks writes, "The pups born after the crisis came out of the womb literally smelling like the dead. It was in the air, not enough for us to detect, but just a few molecules, an introduction on a subconscious level" (283). As a result, these litters don't react to zombies with paralyzing terror, but with practical threat avoidance. Children learn to stay away from zombie-prone places in the same way that earlier generations learned not to take candy from strangers. Post-zombie generations of all species are able to experience and communicate about zombies in a way not possible for those who saw "the living dead contradict[ing] every other law of nature" (239). In his essay "Undead Is the New Green," Greg Pollock points out, "After the trauma of the undead event has been absorbed into the texture of the everyday, a difference still exists, recorded in those 'few molecules' in ecological circulation and from there translated into the psychology and sensoria of future generations" (169). Pollock continues by noting that the issue at hand is "not necessarily the apocalyptic 'either/or' of extinction/survival but, as in *World War Z*, the interdependence between the form of human life and the context in which it takes form" (169). The conclusion of *World War Z* can be turned on its head to help us understand the environmental politics of today. Whereas atmospheric circulation of zombie particles reshapes the dogs and people of *World War Z*, today we face the possibility of catastrophic reshaping of the ecological circulatory systems on which human life depends.

World War Z takes up the challenge of imagining humanity surviving a zombie apocalypse. Part of *World War Z*'s accomplishment is to give due measure to how the specific character of zombies informs this trauma in a way that other disasters would not. The emergence of zombies represents a violent rupture in the understanding of how the universe works, but it does not bring time to an end. The zombie war collapses nations and global

class structures, and all humans find themselves in peril and must defend themselves or die trying. But the book is not just about the way in which the human race is different after zombies, it is also a book that pays attention to the environmental disaster that could occur should such a disaster happen, and how much the environment would be missed. The world is damaged, and this is made most apparent in the comparison between human and nonhuman populations:

You know who lost World War Z? Whales...Amazing creatures, the California grays, and now they're all gone...So the next time someone tries to tell you about how the true losses of this war are "our innocence" or "part of our humanity..." [He spits into the water.] Whatever, bro. Tell it to the whales. (Brooks 341)

The appeal to think more carefully and caringly about the ecological blowback of our actions is strong in *World War Z*. Nature as we know it dies when the first zombie crawls from its grave. The result is not so much an "elevated consciousness" of the value of nature or other natural things. Rather, it pushes for a different way to view nature altogether. In the final chapter, the interviewer speaks with the former U.S. president "whose quasi-Marxism has redistributed the concept of 'labor' away from the human subject and onto the beingness of beings" (Poole 181). In this political ecology, any being has social standing in the work of the world:

'We're still at war, and until every trace is sponged, and purged, and, if need be, blasted from the surface of the Earth, everybody's gotta pitch in and do their job...

[We stop by an old oak tree. My companion looks it up and down, taps it lightly with his cane. Then, to the tree...]

"You're doin' a good job." (Brooks 329)

The "we" first refers to the U.S. and its military, then to humanity, and finally, after his address to the tree, it refers to all life on earth. This seems to show that *World War Z* is a novel of political ecology, not just a reminder that whales are aesthetically or even ethically interesting for us. The struggle to preserve humanity becomes the struggle to preserve the environment in which humanity thrives. (Pollock 179-180)

Another subject Brooks confronts head-on in *World War Z* is one that must be discussed in any analysis of zombies: the taboo of cannibalism, and our primal fear of being made into food. One of the things that disgusts human beings when it comes to the thought of zombies coming after them is the fact that zombies eat human flesh to survive. There has always been a predominate belief that no matter what you do, in what situation you find yourself, you absolutely should not eat people. Cannibalism is the ultimate taboo. Stories of cannibalism can be found throughout history. In ancient Greek mythology, Cronus ate his first born son to prevent him from seizing the throne. He eventually ate his first five children. When the sixth, Zeus, was born, he was hidden away by his mother to be saved from the same fate of his siblings. When Zeus grew up, he came back and killed his father (Hamilton 25). The moral of the story is clear: Cannibalism cannot be tolerated – especially when it comes to members of your own family. However, eating humans isn't always seen as taboo. Some cultures believe there is no finer way to honor their enemies than to eat their hearts. Other cultures believe there is no finer way to curse their enemies than to allow their hearts to pass through their digestive tracts. In Papua New Guinea, ritual cannibalism still occurs in isolated areas. One tradition involves eating the brains of deceased relatives. But in the 1950s, that practice led to the outbreak of a mysterious contagion – Kuru – which caused spongy pockets of air to form in the brain. These pockets caused people to become confused,

disoriented, delirious, and ultimately led to the people losing touch with reality (which is, actually, quite consistent with zombie behavior). The disease was called "The Shivers" and it came from eating brains infected with prions, which are infections transferred through the consuming of meat – for example, Mad Cow disease is a type of prion (*Zombies...*). This historical instance of cannibalism only reemphasizes the fear of zombification. Human beings can clearly be infected by prions, which produce zombie-like victims, so it makes it all the more possible that a zombie-like plague could actually occur.

The overwhelming message of cannibalism throughout history is never a positive one. When people eat people, especially people they know, it violates a deep human instinct. One of the darkest episodes in American History – the gory fate of the Donner party – proved that extreme circumstances can turn anyone into a cannibal. In 1846, a wagon train of 85 settlers began crossing the Sierra Nevada mountain range. They found themselves trapped during winter, and half of the party died. The other half made the decision to eat the dead in order to survive. Forty-eight travelers escaped, but the stigma of cannibalism followed them wherever they went, and they became outcasts. There was an idea that if they ate human flesh once, they could and would do it again. History has shown that once this taboo is broken, you will become ostracized from any group you may want to be part of. This is because in times of hunger, society does not want to turn on itself, no matter the circumstances. There must always be some sort of order in place in order for society to properly function.

Another historical instance of cannibalism occurred in 1879 in Alberta, Canada. Workers at a catholic mission were startled by a native trapper named Swift Runner. He claimed that his family had starved to death, but police discovered that he had killed and then eaten his entire family. When caught, he claimed he was possessed by the spirit of the

Windigo. The Windigo (also transliterated as Wendigo, Witiko, Wiitko, Wetikoo, etc., all stemming from roots meaning "the one who lives alone, hermit" [Gilmore 73]) is a fixture of Native American folklore since aboriginal days, and lurks in the forested backlands throughout central Canada. When this lonesome creature gets hungry for human flesh, which is often, it "crashes through the forests, uprooting trees, stampeding game, and setting off whirlwinds" (Gilmore 73). The Windigo is a particularly weird and abhorrent creature. Within its hideous, malformed body, there beats not a flesh-and-blood heart, but a pitiless block of ice. Within its gigantic head is a cavernous mouth made more awful by the lack of lips. Most informants say that "the monster is so hungry for flesh...he has eaten off his own lips! From this gruesome maw there protrude rows of jagged teeth through which the monster issues his fiery breath, making a sinister hissing that rivals windstorms in volume and is audible for miles around" (Gilmore 78). Swift Runner claimed that he had "turned Windigo" and had become a cannibal himself – a miniature replica of the giant ogre, with a yearning to feed on human flesh. He was struck by irresistible cannibalistic urges, upon which he must act or die. After Swift Runner was hung for his crimes, several cases of cannibalistic possession happened throughout the region, giving rise to the psychiatric concept of a culture-bound disorder known as "Windigo psychosis," whose symptoms are:

...anorexia, vomiting, insomnia, and melancholic withdrawal into oneself. The Indians feel that the sufferer can be cured during the initial stages; but the more advanced stages, which are characterized by perceptual distortions causing the victim to see other personas as edible animals and by outbursts of violent antisocial behavior, are considered beyond native therapy. When the violent stage is reached, the afflicted person has to be killed by the community in self defense. The corpse is usually

chopped to pieces and burned to melt the icy heart and forestall resurrection.

(Gilmore 85)

Just as the Windigo Psychosis craze brought the horror of zombies to life, more recently, in 1991, Jeffery Dahmer once again showed the dangers of the taboo of cannibalism. He told investigators that he killed and ate his victims because he didn't want them to leave. He wanted complete and utter control and power over the person, whether alive or dead, and cannibalizing body parts is a sign of this total power. Dahmer not only ate his victims, he tried to turn them into real life zombies. He would seduce men, bring them to his house, drill holes into their skulls, and pour acid into the holes. He wanted to create a zombie – still alive and functioning, but no longer with any choice or concept of free will. (*Zombies...*)

In all of these historical and mythological cases, it is cannibalism which leads to an eventual lack of humanity. *World War Z* confronts the issue of cannibalism differently – it is through one's humanity, and one's need to survive and to nurture others, that cannibalism becomes a necessity. In one particular section of the novel, a girl named Jesika Hendricks is being interviewed. She describes that she went from a heavy child to looking like a skeleton. Her parents were in similar dire straits, causing them to fight about everything and anything. She recalls:

One time, around Thanksgiving...I couldn't get out of my sleeping bag. My belly was swollen and I had these sores on my mouth and nose. There was this smell coming from the neighbor's RV. They were cooking something, meat, it smelled really good. Mom and Dad were outside arguing. Mom said "it" was the only way. I didn't know what "it" was. She said "it" wasn't "that bad" because the neighbors, not us, had been

the ones to actually "do it." Dad said that we weren't going to stoop to that level and that Mom should be ashamed of herself. (128)

Clearly, Jesika's parents are struggling with the thought of cannibalism. They cannot even bring themselves to name the ominous "it" of which they might take part. "It" is too horrific for these "schoolteachers, 'progressives'" (128), as Jesika calls them, to even think about. A fight eventually ensues between Jesika's parents, which ends, presumably, with her dad hitting her mother in the face and reentering the trailer looking "like he was a different person" (129). Already, starvation has turned two otherwise loving parents, who had "never raised their voices at home" (128) against each other at this point. Finally, her dad comes back from the neighbor's R.V. with "a big bucket of this steaming hot stew" (129). Jesika reports:

It was so good! Mom told me not to eat too fast. She fed me in little spoonfuls. She looked relieved. She was crying a little. Dad still had that look. The look I had myself in a few months, when Mom and Dad both got sick and I had to feed them. (129)

Jesika realizes that the meat is human flesh. She and her parents have become the cannibals they most feared when the zombies attacked. Now that they have eaten human flesh, they are permanently corrupted. As Stephen T. Asma points out, "An environment lacking in basic needs (employment, food, shelter, etc.) can produce a dehumanized populace" (241), and this type of environment is just what Brooks is providing in *World War Z*. The novel shows that zombies can kill through starvation, dehydration, disease – in so many ways that aren't actually by killing – because a zombie attack would break down society and societal taboos as we know them to be.

Zombies in U.S. Popular Culture: Fear of the Plague and Other Disasters

Zombies surround us. They can be found in comic books, TV, movies, and video games. Zombies have reached a popularity of epic proportions. The HBO series *The Walking Dead*, which premiered in October of 2011 (and is based on the graphic novel series of the same name), was so popular in its first year, that it was nominated for a Writer's Guild of America Award, a Golden Globe, six separate Saturn Awards, a Critics' Choice Television Award, and an Emmy. There is also a "Zombie Locator App" for the iPhone which fixes the user's location and gives off an alert when a zombie or zombie mob is around. The application will let the user know if the zombie mob is trading appendages, feeding on unsuspecting humans who can't run fast, updating their Twitter accounts, etc. Three years prior to his publication of *World War Z*, Max Brooks made the *New York Times* bestsellers list with *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead*. The book presents itself as a civil defense manual for the zombie apocalypse, complete with strategies to kill zombies in every conceivable environment (even underwater) and descriptions of armor (including "tight clothes and short hair"). Meanwhile, zombie walks or zombie pub crawls, in which fans use simple makeup to turn themselves into zombies, are becoming increasingly popular in urban areas.

There are a number of reasons that this 21st century zombie-revival, which could even be referred to as the zombie "craze," is occurring in popular culture, especially in the United States. One of the fears is that of the plague. A zombie is raised by a disease, and has a single biological imperative – to spread the disease by biting and infecting human beings. They exist to infect others. Zombies spread like a disease or a plague. Disease hunts without choice. It's going to take you down regardless of who you are. It can attack anyone and it's

not something we can do much about. Plagues break down the bonds of society and destroy our humanity. They don't just kill us; we are powerless against them. Plagues lead to panic, people turn on one another, and the fabric of society falls apart. In the 14th century, for example, the black death/bubonic plague spread from Asia to Europe, killing 1/3 of the population in less than two years. It is estimated that 45-50 percent of the population died (*Zombies...*). To the people living through this disaster, it must have felt like an apocalypse. If "apocalypse" is defined as a horrible event – something that takes down society and ruins the basic elements of social infrastructure (law, order, government) – those who lived through the plague essentially lived through an apocalypse. It crossed borders, it moved from country to country, and was near impossible to stop. People had all sorts of theories as to what caused it, and it usually revolved around the supernatural and the wrath of god. By 1400, the world's population fell by 100 million. The plague's destruction was absolute and it was incomprehensible. The terrifying thing about plagues is not just that they can kill you, but that they unhinge everything that we know. They completely disintegrate the cultural atmosphere. In 1918, the Spanish Flu (also known as the "Avian Flu," and the first known appearance of the H1N1 virus) killed nearly 50 million people in less than three years (*Zombies...*). This epidemic was particularly terrifying because it didn't just prey on the weak. Normally, the flu affects the very young and the elderly, but in this case, young people were affected in huge numbers. It devoured people and society in a mass scale, and an increasingly global world helped it spread rapidly and totally. The notion that it was "only the flu" also made it more terrifying, because it was something common and usually it could be overcome. The response to the Spanish Flu could very likely mirror how people might respond to a zombie plague. In their first response, governments will likely reassure the

public because they don't want a widespread panic which often occurs in times of pandemics. When plagues have hit society (SARS, Mad Cow, West Nile virus, for example), there is first almost always a sense of uncertainty because people don't know what the cause of these plagues are. And until the cause is known, paranoia will spread and wild ideas and conspiracy theories will emerge. A group of mathematicians in 2009 recognized the link between zombie outbreaks and epidemics, and decided to model a zombie infection and attempt to illustrate the outcome of such an attack using numerical solutions in their article "When Zombies Attack!: Mathematical Modelling of an Outbreak of Zombie Infection." Unfortunately, their results show that "only quick, aggressive attacks can stave off the doomsday scenario: the collapse of society as zombies overtake us all" (Munz 133).

Many U.S. citizens currently believe that civilization is as close as it has ever been to collapsing, and so the zombie craze is a response to the question of what might happen to us as a society when faced with total annihilation. Currently, there is a global war on terror, global warming, global financial meltdowns, natural disasters, political strife – basically everything on TV could potentially be disastrous. Historically, when societies face a threat unknown to them, the idea of the dead rising to attack the living becomes very popular. In fact, over half of the U.S.-made zombie films have been produced after September 11, 2001¹¹. Former vice president Dick Cheney once spoke of the 1% problem, saying if there was even a 1% chance that al-Qaeda launches a terrorist attack against the U.S., the consequences would be so grave that it would be worth doing any kind of counter measure

¹¹ Box office zombie films since Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968): *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Zombie* (1979), *Re-animator* (1985), *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Night of the Creeps* (1986), *Bride of Re-Animator* (1990), *28 Days Later* (2002), *House of the Dead* (2002), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (2004), *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Fido* (2006), *[REC]* (2007), *Resident Evil: Extinction* (2007), *28 Weeks Later* (2007), *Resident Evil: Degeneration* (2008), *Quarantine* (2008), *Diary of the Dead* (2008), *[REC 2]* (2009), *Survival of the Dead* (2009), *Zombieland* (2009), *Resident Evil: Afterlife* (2010), *Quarantine 2* (2011).

possible to prevent that from happening (Parry). Even if we conceive that the likelihood of a Zombie attack would be much lower, the consequences would be so grave that many citizens believe policy planning could/should be put into effect now. If disaster strikes, we want to believe we have what it takes to survive. In May 2011, the Center for Disease Control released a memo on how to survive a zombie apocalypse¹². The CDC stated that preparing for a zombie apocalypse is exactly like preparing for other disasters we have been hearing about (Khan). The belief is that a zombie is an ill-defined threat, just like pandemics, climate change, terrorist attacks, etc., and can be prepared for in the same manner. This belief also led to the creation of the "Zombie Squad" which began as an online community, and is now a worldwide movement with 28 separate chapters. Members of the "Zombie Squad" band together as communities and train for the apocalypse by studying survival methods and practicing necessary survival skills. The belief is that everyone should have the skills to survive any kind of disaster, including one that may involve zombies (*Zombie Squad*).

Whether in film, text, or popular culture, zombies will always either hint at or overtly present an apocalypse, an end to humanity through zombification. The most compelling aspect of the zombie genre is that it is, itself, viral, somehow cannibalistic, that its ability to generate narrative and its growing propensity for a celebration of human engagement and effort allows it to colonize multiple other kinds of stories. Rushton and Moreman point out:

As a genre built fundamentally on disruption of a status quo, in a generic sense the zombie apocalypse can be worked into any other genre: romantic comedy (*Shaun of the Dead*), cops and robber drama (*La Horde*), 1950s sitcom (*Fido*), air disaster narratives (*Flight of the Living Dead*), ad infinitum. Since the shock of the unbelievable can work to disrupt any narrative setting, and since that disruption is an

¹² Though this is touted as a P.R. stunt, its practical purposes are also essential in this context.

essential component of the zombie genre, the zombie genre is perversely capable of being linked to all genres – it is infinitely adaptable. Once this became apparent, the production of zombie texts proliferated exponentially. It was literally a case of "just add zombies." (6)

As a whole, zombie texts – no matter their format – challenge the reader/viewer to read the zombie in its relationship to the human, and vice versa. Humans have an innate drive to reach for meaning in life. They not only strive for meaning, but they long to communicate both what they find and how they get there. Zombies, as an abject reflection of our individual mortality, and harbingers of societal decay, force us to consider the dark possibilities of meaningless existence. Zombies can "paradoxically offer us a glimpse of worlds that might be better if we were forced to fight for our survival, for our joys, and for the right to define ourselves as we want to be" (Moreman 7). Or, at least, they force us to reconsider the nature of the meanings we currently attach to self and society. By examining the darker side that is the living dead, we might come to recognize something of ourselves as dying alive. We might even consider what it would mean to drop the adjectives altogether, and simply live in the world. As someone says in Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, as a few survivors watch hordes of zombies trying to claw their way into a shopping mall, "They're us, that's all."

CHAPTER 4

DON'T BE FOOLED BY THE HANDSOME FELLOW IN THE MANSION: VAMPIRES AND HUMAN MONSTROSITY

The vampire is one of the most fascinating and simultaneously fearsome of all the creatures of folklore. In many ways, vampires inspire the same fears as the zombies: as the living dead, they force humankind to confront their own fears of mortality; when they join in groups or "covens," vampires can inspire the fear of the horde; and through their infectious bites and their ability to turn humans into the undead, vampires can call attention to the fear of infectious disease. But the biggest difference between vampires and zombies is that for all the horror they inspire, vampires are ultimately sources of admiration, amazement, and even attraction. Of course, they are awful and even perverse, but vampires are equally seen as desirable and sexy, in literal ways – that is, the vampire is always and ultimately a symbol of sexuality and sensuality, however much this fact is disguised from view. Even as early as 1930, when Bela Lugosi starred in *Dracula*, U.S. audiences welcomed the idea of the vampire as "a new and exciting sex symbol" rather than being repelled by the bloodsucking, foreign monster, according to Scott Poole. He continues, "Today, the vampire and its related mythology serve as one of America's primary erotic systems" (15). Kristeva's abjection helps to explain this exciting combination of fear and desire. The abject both creates a sense of disgust as something to be cast out, while at the same time evoking a desire to know and even possess the object that creates this deep disturbance. While producing this strange combination of what she calls "phobia, obsession and perversion" (1), the abject creates a devoted following (Poole 15). Though vampire mythology has certainly changed throughout the decades, this paradox of being both attracted to and repelled from the vampire continues

through all incarnations of the monster, and ultimately reflects upon the audience's own desires and fears rather than on the vampire as symbolic on its own.

For example, in 19th century vampire fiction, the vampire is a figure of ultimate evil. He is an outcast, living on the margins of society, pretending to be human in order to feed among them. To satisfy his appetites, the vampire feeds on young women and, in the process, unleashes their sexual potential. The bite itself has been referred to as "veiled intercourse" (Lehtinen 2). In Victorian literature, sexual scenes could not be overtly portrayed, and so the vampire bite stood in for a sexual encounter. Lehtinen points out in his essay "Twentieth-Century Vampire Literature," that this interpretation is emphasized because "the bitten woman herself turns into a sexual predator. The vampire woman becomes the antithesis of decent womanhood: aggressive, demanding, powerful, and sexually uninhibited" (2). Lehtinen uses Bram Stoker's depiction of Lucy in *Dracula*, who is the first English woman transformed into a vampire by Dracula himself. Lucy was known as a beautiful, decent woman in life, but becomes a "hellish mockery of womanhood" in undeath (Lehtinen 2). Stoker writes, "The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness...[her] eyes seemed to throw out sparks of hell-fire, the brows were wrinkled as though the folds of the flesh were the coils of Medusa's snakes" (217-218). Not only does Lucy become animal-like and alien after her transformation into a vampire, but she goes on to take the initiative in sexual interaction, telling her fiancé, Arthur, how "hungry" she is for him (218). Lucy's seduction of Arthur is made even more horrific by the fact that just before she advances on him, she is seen with blood dripping from her mouth, carrying a small child. Here is a child on which Lucy has obviously fed and which she drops "callously as a devil" to the ground when she sees her fiancé (217). Lehtinen incredulously asks, "What

could depict a female character's perverse nature better than feeding on children and abandoning them to make sexual advances on a man?" (3). In 1897 when Stoker published *Dracula*, women were not considered to have sexual impulses, finding their deepest satisfaction in marriage and motherhood, making Lucy a rather unnatural female character and emphasizing the evil nature of sexuality which was a prevalent ideology in Victorian literature.

In his book *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King credits the sexual nature of the vampire for its continual appearance and popularity in texts and in films. "When all else is said and done," King writes of why films have conducted such a long "love-affair" with the vampire, "it's a chance to show women in scanty nightclothes, and guys giving the sleeping ladies some of the worst hickeys you ever saw, and to enact, over and over, a situation of which movie audiences never seem to tire: the primal rape scene" (66). For King, the vampire represents the "primal, perverse rapist...stealing not only sexual favors but life itself" (69), but more than this, the vampire allows audiences to vicariously exercise antisocial emotions and feelings which society demands to be repressed. This is may be one reason why the vampire myth has always been so popular with adolescents still trying to come to grips with their own sexuality. King notes, "Sex makes young adolescent boys feel many things, but one of them, quite frankly, is scared. The horror film in general and the Vampire film in particular confirms the feeling. Yes, it says; sex *is* scary; sex *is* dangerous"(69). Even as a symbol of sexuality, the vampire is still abject to the audience as both attractive and terrifying simultaneously.

In the mid 20th century, though the vampire still symbolized sexuality, its character began to change. This is largely due to secularization, but more importantly, a shift in the

balance of social power. Vampires, like all monsters, are shaped by their historical context. Forces such as the Civil Rights movement, feminism, and gay and lesbian movements in the 1960s changed society radically. In addition to winning their own battles, these movements forced the white heterosexual male and the culture built around him to acknowledge a sense of "Otherness" as well as the power of the oppressed. Historical events of the last third of the twentieth century helped prepare the way for the resurrection of the undead in movies and television. Whereas in the 19th century, a vampire's nature was not really questioned, but rather accepted as evil because "to them evil was an absolute and vampires were absolutely evil" (Lehtinen 5), in the 20th century vampires with a conscience began to come out of the coffin. In the 21st century, vampires began to even "domesticate" or assimilate into human culture, and began to fight for their own rights to be treated as equals. Now, anything can be interpreted as vampiric, and vampirism can symbolize almost anything, including the vampiric and monstrous nature of humankind.

I Am Legend and the Monstrous Protagonist

Richard Matheson's 1954 novel *I Am Legend* imagines what might become of the world after a vampire apocalypse. Human society was destroyed before the novel began, and vampires are now the norm. Protagonist Robert Neville, a suburban, middle-class citizen, has watched the world succumb to a plague that has transformed them into vampiric creatures, eager to drink blood and unable to go out in sunlight. Neville, who assumes he is the last human left, lives in a boarded-up suburban home in Los Angeles. During the day, he ventures out to kill vampires, gather supplies, and prepare his domestic fortress for the coming nighttime assault, "a Van Helsing without hope" (Pharr 95). Eventually, he modifies this

dreary schedule to include a study of the plague, which he traces to a bacillus. In writing this novel, Matheson goes against the grain of most Stokeresque fiction, and was a “significant if obliquely acknowledged inspiration for the revised vampires of the 1970s” (Auerbach 138). Matheson is a prolific horror writer – though, as Stephen King points out, the smug pretense of the 1950s that horror had been safely domesticated led to his misclassification as a science fiction writer (*Danse Macabre* 317) – but his novel *I Am Legend* has been a particular breeder of vampires. *I Am Legend* utilized the convention of deterritorialization because it “blurred the demarcation between its vampires and its singular, nasty hero too ruthlessly to be widely popular in the 50s, but later horror fed on its unsparing reversals” (Auerbach 138). Some years after its publication, it inspired three heroic movies – *The Last Man on Earth*, with Vincent Price (1964), *The Omega Man*, with Charlton Heston (1971), and *I Am Legend*, with Will Smith (2007) – but none of these interpretations capture the dry, hate-filled pragmatism of Matheson’s Robert Neville. At first, the reader believes this book is addressing both mass vampiric appetite and a no-nonsense account of one man’s search for the answer to the apocalypse. However, as the novel continues, it becomes clear that this story is about man as monster, or what has been labeled “the monstrous protagonist,” which is a common characterization in Gothic and Horror fiction. The monstrous protagonist is the protagonist who ends up becoming the very monster he/she is afraid of or trying to defeat. Robert Neville’s lone, murderous forays against his neighbors make him “the vampires’ vampire” (Auerbach 138).

Because of his ability to not only evade vampire hunger, but to fight against them in the daylight, to the undead, Neville represents a wasted bounty, “a banquet they can never join” (Pharr 95). Losing much of their sentience when they become vampires, these beings

are left with a single, dominant urge: to sustain the germ that keeps them moving by feeding it blood. But the germ is impossible to satisfy. The undead vampires lack the mental capacity to deal with the scarcity of available blood in the apocalyptic world. Early in the novel, Neville notices how disorganized the plagued vampires are when they're on the offensive: "There was no union among them. Their need was their only motivation" (19). With such motivation but virtually no prey left, the mob sometimes attacks one of its own – this constant threat of cannibalism becomes a sign of feral desperation: "They walked and walked about on restless feet, circling each other like wolves..." (64). Even the *vampiris* bacterium discovered by Neville cannot be trusted. It is symbiotic when fed and protected, and it becomes violently parasitic when exposed to the air: "It eats the host" (145) and the vampire turns into dust. Thus, in Neville's world, the food chain has devolved into a diminishing and mindless circle.

Too late, Neville learns that he has been killing not just monsters but also those who have mutated into a new human species, a species able to live with the bacteria by taking oral medication in lieu of warm blood. Tragically, these new vampire-humans show every evidence of replacing their previous society with a violent, greedy power structure of their own. Like Neville, the new humans are determined to eradicate the undead, and they want him eradicated as well. To these new humans, Neville is the true monster. As Stephen Poole points out:

Matheson does not portray his character as a heroic monster-hunter keeping the flame of humanity alive. Instead, Neville's hatred of the vampires makes him into more of a monster than they are... [H]e meets a woman who turns out to be a new breed of plague victim... [and] from her, Neville learns that he is seen by this emerging new

society not as a hero, but as a maniac killer who spends his days slaughtering and killing. The title of *I Am Legend* refers to Neville's realization that he has become a nightmare story to be told by the people of the new world, the legend of a mythic monster that had to be slain. (202)

Neville looks out at the post-plague people, hears their voices "like the buzzing of a million insects," sees their "awe, fear, shrinking horror" (173), and swallows a packet of suicide pills given to him by the only new human who understands his plight. In an ironic juxtaposition to the medication that keeps the new race alive, the suicide pills serve as Neville's last meal. Neville dies tragically aware of the irony in his own legend.

In *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King states that Matheson's novel "tells us that politics themselves are not immutable, that times change, and that Neville's very success as a vampire-hunter (his peculiarly practical success) has turned him into the monster, the outlaw, the Gestapo agent who strikes at the helpless as they sleep" (152) King continues by calling *I Am Legend* "perhaps an example of the ultimate political horror [novel] because it offers us the Walt Kelly thesis: We have met the enemy and he is us." (152) *I Am Legend* was also an inspiration for Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* (1975), a quite different brand of '70s revisionism. *Salem's Lot* is less concerned with Matheson's solitary survivor, whom King fragments into four or five not very effective vampire hunters, than with the hordes of engulfing vampire-citizens who in their mindless uniformity form the new community. The two disturbing innovations of *I Am Legend* – the lone monster/hero who embodies humanity's last days, and the collective, now-normal vampirism of the new species – become the norm of 1970s horror.

Salem's Lot, Vietnam, and Watergate

The legacy of the Vietnam War became a silent partner in the birth of modern horror. Many conservatives saw the war as creating what Ronald Reagan later called the “Vietnam Syndrome,” a profound loss of national confidence (Poole 197). Returning veterans came home to a world where the ground had fundamentally shifted. For Americans who had watched the war from their living rooms and mourned the deaths of their children, parents, and spouses at tens of thousands of funerals, the war itself became a kind of undead monster, one that overcame every attempt to keep it in the ground. This legacy was also part of the inspiration for Stephen King’s modern American retelling of *Dracula* in his novel *Salem’s Lot* (1975). Like slavery or the Civil War, the United States has never fully come to terms with its own trauma brought about by the Vietnam War. We do not forget, even as we try to forget.

Salem’s Lot considers what might happen if a vampire created a mini-apocalypse and turned an entire community into its undead servants. The novel tells the story of a small New England town visited by a “Master Vampire” named Barlow. Riven by small-town conflict, a dark place full of secrets even before the coming of the undead, the vampire transforms most of the townspeople into monsters. Auerbach describes the vampires as “so horrible that they may look retrograde. They are surely unsympathetic. No one would call them chosen spirits or leaders manqué” (155). In his introduction to the novel, King writes, “...in the post-Vietnam America I inhabited and still loved (often against my better instincts), I saw a metaphor for everything that was wrong with society around me, where the rich got richer and the poor got welfare...if they were lucky” (xviii). The Vietnam War was not the sole

historical event which made way for the vampire, of course. However, Vietnam produced “a very graphic iconography of death and bodily dissolution that has remained a permanent part of American culture. Horror images for the next forty years, in a very literal sense, owed their blood and gore to the conflict. Unlike WWII, in which images of veterans seldom included evidence of wounds, the corpses and the physically traumatized human body became a focus of America’s memory of Vietnam” (Poole 199). American journalism made Vietnam the first truly televised war, and magazines such as *Time* and *Life* create a massive photographic record of wounded, dead, and dying Americans. Vietnam came to be known as “the Living Room War” with images of troops returning in body bags becoming an indelible image of the failure of American policy in Southeast Asia. Dismemberment entered the public record and became part of popular culture. (Taylor 160-88) The vampire feasted off these images, and Americans turned to these monsters that resonated with the national horror. (Poole 199)

The entrance of the United States into a postcolonial conflict in Southeast Asia became a multidecade commitment that killed 58,000 Americans and wounded 153,303 more. An incalculable number of Vietnamese died in the conflict as well, victims of carpet bombing and chemical warfare (Appy 7-15). This massive loss of life was born of the frustrated efforts of an imperial power trying to squelch an armed peasant revolution. General William Westmoreland, commander of American forces in Vietnam between 1964 and 1968, implemented a strategy of “attrition,” or the killing of as many Vietnamese as possible in order to break the peasant revolution’s will to fight. The idea of attrition made the creation of a Vietnamese “body count” central to war-winning strategy. This attitude filtered down through the ranks to exert pressure on every officer that commanded a platoon. Former

Marine Lieutenant Phillip Caputo remembered that “the pressure on unit commanders to produce enemy corpses was intense” (Neal 93). Platoon members took souvenirs of ears, noses, and even scalps to impress their commanders and substantiate claims of a high body count. Some platoons actually padded their kill ratio (“box scores” some called it) by counting small blood traces and at least some unit commanders demanded severed body parts as clear testimony that their troops had performed their duty (Appy 156-57). Bureaucratic pressure to produce Westmoreland’s desired rate of attrition degenerated into careless brutality. The infamous My Lai massacre represents the most egregious case of the everyday horrors American forces visited on their hidden enemy, the incident with the highest box score. On May 16, 1968, a company of U.S. soldiers entered the small village of My Lai, rounded up the inhabitants (mostly women and children), placed them in a ditch, and turned murderous gunfire on them. Army investigators later placed the death toll at between four hundred and fifty and five hundred people, some of them infants in their mother’s arms (Zinn 469).¹³

Like attrition, which did not care to discriminate in regards to the victims it chooses, there are no elect spirits in *‘Salem’s Lot*. Anyone can become a vampire, and almost everyone does. It scarcely matters whether the citizens of the Lot have turned or not; even at their most human, the embittered Father Callahan smells in his flock "a mindless, moronic evil from which there was no mercy or reprieve" (149). Victimization is random, and anyone exposed in the night can become a vampire. The vampires begin to multiply so quickly that it scarcely matters who begins the chain. King's vampires thrive without authority or rules. It is interesting to note that though anyone – young or old – can become a vampire, only the young anticipate the vampires' arrival. Mark Petrie, one of those charmed Stephen King children

¹³ Vietnam information in this chapter is quoted from Poole, p197-200.

born with apprehension of evil, understands the invasion because he has learned life from the pages of horror comics. He is polite enough to love the parents who discuss him in temperate cliches, but he is scarcely surprised when Barlow knocks their heads together "with a grinding, sickening crack" (351), for in comic books death is neither logical nor sacramental. Mark muses: "Understand death? Sure. That was when the monsters got you" (139). Of this quote, King has explained:

...if I had to restrict everything I have ever said or written about the horror genre to one statement (and many critics will say I should have done, ha-ha), it would be that one. It is not the way adults look at death; it is a crude metaphor which leaves little room for the possibility of heaven, hell, Nirvana, or that old wheeze about how the great wheel of Karma turns and we'll get 'em next life, gang. It is a view which – like most horror movies – addresses not only itself not to any philosophical speculation about 'the afterlife' but which speaks only of the moment when we finally have to shuffle off this mortal coil. That instant of death is the only truly universal rite of passage, the only one for which we have no psychological or sociological input to explain what changes we may expect as a result of having passed through. All we know is that we go; and while we have some rules of – etiquette, would it be called? - which bear on the subject, that actual moment has a way of catching folks unprepared. People pass away while making love, while standing in elevators, while putting dimes in parking meters. Some go in midsneeze. Some die in restaurants, some in cheap one-night hotels, and a few while sitting on the john. We cannot count on dying in our bed or with our boots on. So it would be remarkable indeed if we did not fear death a little. It's just sort of there, isn't it, the great irreducible x-factor of our

lives, faceless father of a hundred religions, so seamless and ungraspable that it usually isn't even discussed at cocktail parties. (*Danse Macabre* 194)

Mark is not “cute” in his insight about death; he is right. King has often claimed that Stoker's Dracula is the source of *'Salem's Lot*, (*Danse Macabre* 38-9) but his is a Dracula without pattern or rationale or rule-giving elders. Not only is there no viable Van Helsing; vampires are so abundant that there is virtually no Dracula. Somehow, though, the young have access to terror their rationalist parents are denied. They are not guides or seers; they are seismographs. Auerbach writes, “The generation gap becomes an almost invisible abyss in *'Salem's Lot*, one from which Hiroshima, the violent lives of the Kennedys, and Vietnam peep out to divide the growing generation from its conventional parents” (158).

Though Mark was the lucky child to escape the initial onslaught of vampirism, other children were not so lucky. Mark's friend Danny Glick is the Lot's most memorable vampire. Danny's attack on a sick man inspires the novel's most quoted line:

And in the awful heavy silence of the house, as [Matt] sat impotently on his bed with his face in his hands, he heard the high, sweet, evil laugh of a child –
– and then the sucking sounds. (165)

Danny is one of the more ravenous demon children who proliferate in popular horror of the 1970s. The “high, sweet, evil laugh of a child,” the ensuing “sucking sounds,” might, in any other context, be naturalistic descriptions. The adjective “evil” could simply characterize a cranky observer. The horror is that there is little distinction between child and vampire here. Even when Danny first peers out of his coffin, there is nothing unnatural about him: “There was no death pallor in that face; the cheeks seemed rosy, almost juicy with vitality” (135). More pathetic still is the McDougall infant, an abused baby so used to pain that he does not

even struggle when a child vampire attacks him in his crib and then discards him like a candy wrapper. After his mother (who has been beating him for months) wakes to find her baby “flung into the corner like a piece of garbage” (224), she tries hysterically to wake him by forcing custard down his throat. It will not go. Soon enough, the baby will find his own nourishment and a bloody new bond with his nursing mother, who will then batten off her trailer-trash husband.

Whether they are vampires like Danny and the McDougall baby, or vampire-knowers like Mark – whose toy cross is a more effective vampire repellent than Father Callahan’s “real” one – children seem to be at the heart of the vampire epidemic in the Lot. For King, childhood is the essence of experience, “one so haunted and frightening that adulthood is evasion” (Auerbach 158). At the end of *Salem’s Lot*, a forgotten doll is a mute truth-teller:

And perched in one corner of the sandbox, a floppy arm trailing on the grass, was some child’s forgotten Raggedy Andy doll. Its shoe-button eyes seemed to reflect a black, vapid horror, as if it had seen all the secrets of darkness during its long stay in the sandbox. Perhaps it had. (425)

For King, vampirism becomes inextricably attached to childhood. In the case of this novel and its connection to Vietnam’s brutal imagery, King could be commenting on the victimization of children through the war itself. Wanton cruelty became an everyday result of American policy in Vietnam. One marine described the “fun game” of tossing candy out of the back of a transport truck, leading Vietnamese children to run for it and possibly be mangled by the next truck in line. A Vietnamese peasant woman remembered how passing soldiers in a truck grabbed her son’s hat and pulled him (it was held to his head with a string) under the vehicle’s tire, killing him. These random acts by some individual soldiers are

dwarfed by the death and destruction wrought on the Vietnamese people by the indiscriminate use of artillery and airpower. (Neale 96-7) Perhaps bred on these types of buried horrors in their post-Vietnam world, the young people in *'Salem's Lot* seem always to have known that life was inhuman.

Vietnam created a sense of malaise in American society as the population struggled to figure out their position in relation to the war. The feeling that the dynamism of post World War II years had fully dissipated. The trauma of the war remained with veterans and the American public after a decade of body bags and what can only be described as the military defeat of the United States in 1973. Events of the 1970s only deepened the growing sense of gloom and prepared the way for an apocalyptic sensibility in American cultural life. (Poole 200) Like other vampires born in the American 1970s, the Vietnam conflict left the vampires in the Lot leaderless and lethal, uncertain what to do. Vampires in the Lot “inhabit a lush but senseless world. In the 1970s, humans and vampires seem to cry together for a leader, a master-vampire who will guide them beyond the corrupt morass of muttering voices that supposedly constitutes authority” (Auerbach 162). This disillusionment with authority and a loss of leadership also stems from King’s inspiration gained while his writing the novel just as the full story of Watergate unfolded on television in 1973-1974. King commented that his story of vampires remaking the social order of a small town came directly from the ongoing horror of Watergate. King states:

I know that, for instance, in my novel *'Salem's Lot*, the thing that really scared me was not the vampires, but the town in the daytime, the town that was empty, knowing that there were things in closets, that there were people tucked under beds. Under the concrete pilings of all those trailers. And all the time I was writing that, the Watergate

hearings were pouring out of the TV. There were people saying "at that point in time." They were saying, "I can't recall." There was money showing up in bags. Howard Baker kept asking, "What I want to know is, what did you know and when did you know it?" That line haunts me, it stays in my mind. It may be *the* classic line of the twentieth century: what did he know and when did he know it. During that time I was thinking about secrets, things that have been hidden and were being dragged out into the light. (Underwood 5)

The secrets hiding under beds and the thing in America's closet became, for King, the sum of all fears. King has elsewhere compared *'Salem's Lot* to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* with its conceit that the social order could collapse as one's neighbors, one by one, become victims of a corrupting evil with which they seem willing to collaborate. *'Salem's Lot* produces no Van Helsing. No authentic leaders emerge because there are no clear vampire rules. Auerbach notes, "The townsfolk dredge up memories of Stoker's novel and Hammer movies, then hunt frantically for crucifixes none of them owns, but the rules that were once so reliable splutter and sometimes stop working altogether in *'Salem's Lot*" (159). Mark's toy cross repels Danny Glick because Mark believes; so does the good doctor Jimmy Cody, who makes a functional cross out of two tongue depressors (though it saves neither Jimmy's neck nor his life). But when Father Callahan, the only character whose crucifix is authentic, tries to repel Barlow's invasion of the Petrie kitchen, the cross fails embarrassingly. Barlow's diagnosis seems to make smooth sense: "Without faith, the cross is only wood...The boy makes ten of you, false priest" (355).

Nothing works in *'Salem's Lot* because its vampires, like its mortals, have no palpable design and no identifiable leaders. "Their invasion seems to follow the old xenophobic

Dracula pattern: two evilly suave Europeans, Barlow and Straker, come to the Lot to open an antique store” (Auerbach 160). Like the after-effects of Watergate, all chains of command are left undefined – even those among the vampires. there are no rules and no clear vampire origin. This vacuum of vampire leadership “is the diffused authority of American democracy” (Auerbach 160). Father Callahan muses on its Kafkaesque amorphousness: "It was all out of control, like a kid's soapbox racer going downhill with no brakes: *I was following my orders*. Yes, that was true, patently true. We were all soldiers, simply following what was written on our walking papers. But where were the orders coming from, ultimately? *Take me to your leader*. But where is his office? *I was just following orders*. *The people elected me*. But who elected the people?" (305) These floundering, directionless killers devour, for no reason they know, “the squabbling citizens of a city that has no authorities beyond woozy television and radio chatterers" (Auerbach 161).

Eventually, the master vampire Barlow is killed by the character Ben Mears, a writer who has returned to the Lot that was his childhood home, and the town’s only true “vampire-expert,” Mark Petrie. The Lot’s vampires survive their master and, without leadership, are a swarm of common predators, seeking sustenance rather than a kingdom. That they spread their state through feeding is no more significant to them than the spread of disease is to a rodent. Like Matheson’s plague-vampires, King’s vampires lack dimension. Godforsaken and stripped of their demonic master, the vampires of *‘Salem’s Lot* never do devour the world. They are incapable of replicating the plague of *I Am Legend* in any form. Hungry but inept, Barlow’s spawn “hide like rats in the abandoned town, coming out only when some unlucky passerby wanders through at night” (Pharr 98). With no one to tell them where to go, they stay at home and they stay together – thus sparing the rest of Maine (which has enough

to worry about, what with King's other novels), the Eastern seaboard, the U.S. mainland, and the planet Earth. Despite their need, they don't cannibalize one another, being in that respect more like Romero's zombies than Matheson's hordes. Like Romero as well, "King does not deal with the question of how the unfed vampires continue their twilight existence; his *nosferatu* seem trapped in a hell of potentially perpetual hunger" (Pharr 98). Only in the prologue and epilogue to the novel do a series of newspaper clippings suggest that the Lot's vampires may finally be inching away from their nest toward the living bounty in the surrounding areas. Roused by these scattered reports, the vampire-fighters return to the Lot at the novel's conclusion in a crusade to burn out the nest and then eradicate the remaining vampires. It's a noble cause – but one that apparently (we never know how) fails. In King's "One for the Road," a brief, partial sequel initially published in 1977, the burnt-out Lot is again "full of vampires" (317). Perhaps they will always be there.

Twilight and Body Image Anxiety

Vampire fiction has changed radically in the 21st century, but continues to raise unanswered questions about the bodies we inhabit. The vampire threatens to puncture, rend, and ultimately destroy our bodies, but also offers a way to remain young and beautiful forever by passing on their vampirism to their victims. Part of the fascination and fear of vampires comes from their human shape. As Poole points out, "You would never know the vampire did not share our humanity until she showed her fangs" (122). These creatures, blood-drinking and forever young, proliferated as a popular culture phenomena at a historical moment when the body had become a central concern in American culture as "the vehicle of pleasure, of theological meaning, or of personal happiness (or all three at once)" (Poole 196).

Anxiety over threats to the body became a paramount concern as evidenced by the popularity of dieting and exercise regimens, public health campaigns, and the growing acceptance of plastic surgery as an aesthetic renovation of the aging or unsightly physical self¹⁴. Americans proved remarkably uncomfortable in their own skins at the dawn of the 21st century, and have even become increasingly concerned over the possibility of a personal apocalypse taking place within their own bodies. An emphasis on the body's aesthetics and the need to save the body from death "betrays a profound anxiety about physical experience. The obsession of physical aesthetics...have absorbed enormous amounts of media attention" (Poole 205). In 2001, according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, 8,470,363 Americans had some form of aesthetic surgery. Fear that the effects of aging represented bodily decomposition drove this desire to reconstruct the self, along with the hope that the body could be transformed into a symbol of erotic appeal. Popular procedures used to achieve these goals included chemical peels using a powerful acid to remove a surface layer of skin, injections of the low-grade poison Botox that paralyzes facial muscles to give the appearance of smooth skin, liposuction that liquefies fat before removing it, and reconstructive surgeries, such as breast augmentation, rhinoplasty, and face-lifts. All of these procedures, invasive and destructive, have grown in popularity over the last thirty years, with notable spikes in the early 21st century. The number of chemical peels in 2001, for example, represented a 2,356 percent increase over the number administered in 1997. Breast augmentation surgery grew from 20,000 procedures a year in 1992 to 200,000 in 2002 and climbing. This mass desire to transform the body did not emerge organically from the availability of new aesthetic surgery techniques. Instead, it represents a carefully orchestrated effort to create a new aesthetic by an industry that views divergence from a universal template of attractiveness as an

¹⁴ Information which follows is quoted from Poole, p204-206.

abnormality and seeks to fully medicalize divergences from this template. Concerned over failing profits, The American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery began defining small breast size as a medical abnormality in 1983. An extensive advertising campaign, and the transformation of plastic surgeons into public figures who, as authors and talk-show guests, spread the gospel of bodily transformation, and convinced many American women that face-lifts, tummy tucks, and breast implants could further their career goals, improve their mental health, and even save their marriages. (Covino 38-54)

Vampires became the ultimate meaning machines in this era of the body wars. The immortal, and often eerily beautiful, bodies of vampires sucked the blood that Americans imagined as the carrier of infection and death, creating an iconography of fatal, diseased, erotic pleasure. This can clearly be seen in Stephanie Meyer's popular series *The Twilight Saga*. *Twilight* tells the story of a romance between teenager Isabella (Bella) Swan and Edward Cullen, a century-old vampire who masquerades as a teenager in a Forks, Washington, high school. Edward and Bella are typical star-crossed lovers, kept apart less by circumstance than by the fact that Edward's attachment to Bella includes a strange mixture of lust and predatory hunger. Readers are asked to empathize (indeed idealize) Edward for his effort to keep himself from ripping Bella apart and eating her. Over the course of four books, readers watch Edward become Bella's protector and eventually her husband, introducing her into a secret world of supernatural creatures. Maintaining sexual purity until their marriage, the rather flat characters managed to hold reader interest with the titillating conceit of whether or not they would ever consummate their love. It also gave the opportunity for Meyer to endanger Bella repeatedly, allowing Edward in turn to save her.

Notably, Edward and his fellow vampires are an odd set of monsters, missing almost all the trappings of either traditional folklore or Hollywood legend. Edward is part of a nuclear, loving, highly traditional family that seems representative of 1950s dreams of domestic bliss. Unaffected by crosses or holy water, these rather bourgeois vampires can even walk in the sun (sunlight makes them "sparkle" rather than burst into flame). Moreover, many of them are termed "vegetarian vampires," a particularly silly misnomer given that they use their speed and strength to hunt, kill, and feed on various woodland creatures instead of humans. Perhaps most notably, Meyer's creatures are shorn even of fangs, the most basic accoutrement of vampire mythology (Poole 212). But one attribute that Meyer makes sure to emphasize in her description of these 21st century vampires is their classical and overwhelming beauty seen in their physical appearance. Emmet Cullen, one of Edwards "brothers," is described as "muscled like a serious weight lifter" (18). Rosalie Cullen, who is married to Emmet, is not only "statuesque" with a "beautiful figure" worthy of "the cover of the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue," but her physical appearance is actually described as so breathtaking that she hurts the self-esteem of any girl around her "just by being in the same room" with them (18). Though the Cullens are noticeably paler than the rest of the students and appear to have "dark shadows" under their eyes, Bella sees in their faces something "devastatingly, inhumanly beautiful," so much so that she is unable to look away from them (18). She makes it a point to comment on their noses and all of their features as "straight, perfect, angular" – a Eurocentric idea of beauty – and continues:

They were faces you never expected to see except perhaps on the airbrushed pages of a fashion magazine. Or painted by an old master as the face of an angel. It was hard to

decide who was the most beautiful – maybe the perfect blond girl, or the bronze-haired boy. (19)

The “parents” of these vampires, Dr. Carlisle Cullen and his wife Esme, are no less striking in their perfection. When Bella officially meets Edward’s “parents” later in the text, she recalls:

I’d seen Dr. Cullen before, of course, yet I couldn’t help but be struck again by his youth, his outrageous perfection. At his side was Esme, I assumed, the only one of the family I’d never seen before. She had the same pale, beautiful features as the rest of them. Something about her heart-shaped face, her billows of soft, caramel colored hair, reminded me of the ingénues of the silent-movie era. She was small, slender, yet less angular, more rounded than the others. (322)

Meyer’s descriptions of the vampires feed into the unrealistic ideals of beauty pushed onto U.S. audiences via the media, and that Meyer has chosen *Sports Illustrated* and airbrushed fashion magazines as similes for the Cullens’ beauty is evidence of this fact. Because of this, the text could be viewed as setting a detrimental standard of beauty for those adolescents who are the main demographic of the *Twilight* series. Meyer is upholding the value in classical ideals of beauty with her description of their “perfect” features and by comparing them to portraits by the old masters. Her juxtaposition of Carlisle’s “youth” and “outrageous perfection” seem to emphasize that beauty is only truly contained if the body is considered eternally youthful, which is the very reason many people are led to plastic surgery and other procedures described above. Meyer’s emphasis on the importance of classical features in beauty is brought up again when Bella sees Edward in the sun for the first time. She describes him as “shocking,” saying:

I couldn't get used to it, though I'd been staring at him all afternoon. His skin, white despite the faint flush from yesterday's hunting trip, literally sparkled, like thousands of tiny diamonds were embedded in the surface. He lay perfectly still in the grass, his shirt open over his sculpted, incandescent chest, his scintillating arms bare. His glistening, pale lavender lids were shut, though of course he didn't sleep. A perfect statue, carved in some unknown stone, smooth like marble, glittering like crystal.

(260)

When Bella conjures up the courage to stroke the back of Edward's hand, she finds it to be the "perfect texture, satin smooth, cool as stone" (261). There is no doubt that by utilizing this imagery, Edward is meant to be seen as a modern-day Greek statue. Like Michelangelo's David, Edward will forever be frozen in time as the epitome of beauty and perfection. As the anxiety over the body continues to exist, Meyer's vampires will continue to serve as a symbolic reaction to the body wars facing the popular culture of the United States.

HBO's *True Blood*: Vampires are People Too?

Because Meyer's vampires are literally defanged, their immemorial associations with sex and excess become fully domesticated. Meyer's reworking of the vampire mythos, to the point that Edward and friends are best thought of as another fantasy creature entirely different from the vampire, also reflects a culture of conservatism from which the book came and to which it appeals. Stephanie Meyer's deeply conservative religious faith worked its way into her dream of vampires. In a time when conservative religious organizations waged "abstinence only" campaigns, Edward fought to control his appetite for Bella's blood while simultaneously refusing to have sex, since the act itself would likely overwhelm his

self-control and lead to her brutal death. Many horror scholars have serious issues with the way these vampires are portrayed. Scott Poole says “Meyer contains the imagery of alternative sexuality almost always associated with vampires, first by completely ignoring the homoerotic dimensions of the vampire present since Stoker's novel and, second, by only allowing Edward and Bella to consummate within the confines of a highly traditional, hyper-heterosexual marriage” (214). The refusal to allow the monster to be the monster, more than its obviously reactionary politics, is, in Poole’s opinion, “the chief reason that *Twilight* will likely make no enduring mark on the American monster tradition” (214).

HBO's *True Blood*, on the other hand, “promises to become a major milestone in the development of vampire mythology,” according to Poole (214). Often knowingly kitschy, and certainly over-the-top in its portrayal of extreme violence and eroticism, *True Blood* has also managed to create a truly American vampire. *True Blood* envelops its viewers in a sometimes uncomfortably alternative sensuality that encourages an equally uncomfortable social critique. *Twilight* represents a supernatural escape from the historic demands of feminism and the results of the sexual revolution. In some ways, as Poole points out, “the popularity of these two franchises highlights the American cultural divide, the two Americas of culture wars” (215). Set primarily in the fictional Louisiana town of Bon Temps, *True Blood* intertwines its living dead in a rich regional mythology, “a dirty Southern world of pickup trucks, juke joints, and evangelical religion as a patina for a seamy and steamy world of sex and violence” (Poole 214). The series follows Sookie Stackhouse and her beau, the century-old vampire and Confederate veteran Bill Compton. Bill and Sookie attempt to find vampire-human love in a modern America in which vampires have “come out of the coffin” after the discovery and marketing of a blood substitute known as “Tru Blood.” The modern

American setting, and the willingness to explore sexuality with humor and frankness, has made the show, in its fifth season now, both a controversial and critically acclaimed hit. Series creator Alan Ball sees himself as not so much revising the vampire myth as returning it to its roots and giving it an American – even a Southern – accent. This has allowed for all manner of satire and comment, especially in relation to America's struggle to come to terms with sexual identity and the rights of sexual minorities. In this, *True Blood* is the antithesis of *Twilight*, a point that series creator Alan Ball made when he told *Rolling Stone*, "Vampires are sex. I don't get a vampire story about abstinence" ("The Joy of...").

In Episode 101, Sookie's best friend Tara says, "You know they can hypnotize you." Tara is trying to alert Sookie to one of the dangers of associating with vampires – their ability to "glamour" human beings. In a sarcastic response, Sookie retorts, "Yeah, and black people are lazy and Jews have horns." Sookie rejects intolerance against vampires, comparing vampire prejudice with other detestable forms of discrimination, such as racism and anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, not all of the residents of Bon Temps have such an open-minded attitude. It's no coincidence that the show is set in the Deep South, where only a few short decades ago the civil rights movement put an end to racial segregation and the disenfranchisement of African American voters, or that the first actual vampire seen on Season One of *True Blood* is Nan Flanagan, spokesperson for the American Vampire League (AVL). *True Blood* is not subtle about the fact that it wants to press the issue of equal rights, as even in the show's opening credits a marquee-type sign reads the words "God Hates Fangs." This is a prejudice that echoes in many other current forms of intolerance and discrimination which are all too familiar in the United States (Blayde 33-4). In fact, on the AVL website, there is a letter from Nan Flanagan addressed to supporters of vampire

equality, in which “she signs off by explicitly evoking the memory of the civil rights movement with a quote from the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.: ‘The arc of the universe is long. But it bends toward justice’” (Blayde 34).

Throughout most of the long arc of human history, however, justice has been considered something we owe only to other *human* beings. From suffragettes to the civil rights movements of the 1960s, to the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment and the movement for gay rights, the oppressed have always used available public forums (such as television, radio, and print media) in addition to the legal system and the legislature to fight for their rights (Brace 104). The vampires on *True Blood* have a national agenda, including Washington lobbyists pushing the Vampire Rights Amendment (VRA), clever commercials showing everyday Americans coming out as vampires, and spokesperson Nan Flanagan appearing on *Real Time with Bill Maher* and debating the Reverend Theodore Newlin – the Fellowship of the Sun’s original leader, a group which is outspoken in its hatred for the vampire race. Echoing the intolerance of hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan toward African Americans, Jews, and homosexuals, the reverend refuses even to dialogue with Nan (Brace 104-5). The AVL has ads stressing how “vampires are people too,” featuring attractive vampires who are in every respect indistinguishable from ordinary human beings. These ads seem to be based on the gambit that if the rest of us can be persuaded that vampires are really just an exotic variety of human being – or at least close enough to be granted honorary human status – then we’ll be more inclined to extend to them *human* rights. Although a vampire like Bill Compton’s neighbor Diane would surely sneer at this approach as a case of vampires wanting “to dress up and play human,” it’s not hard to understand why the AVL would adopt this strategy of representing vampires as human, more or less (Blayde 34). After

all, vampires have been around for a long time, certainly long enough to have noticed that throughout history one of the chief justifications offered for depriving some groups – like women, racial minorities, and homosexuals – of their rights is that they are supposedly somehow *less* than human. Given this history of prejudice, it is no surprise that the AVL would want to persuade the world that vampires really are (or were, at least) just as human as anyone else.

In the wake of the “Great Revelation,” when vampires were able to begin to assimilate with human beings because of the introduction of synthetic blood as sustenance, vampires have had to work hard for the limited civil rights they’ve gained. In the ninth book of the series upon which *True Blood* is based (titled *Dead and Gone*), author Charlaine Harris reveals that even seven years later:

[Vampires] hadn’t yet obtained full rights and privileges under the law. Legal marriage and inheritance of property were still forbidden in a few states, and vampires were barred from owning certain businesses. The human casino lobby had been successful in banning the vamps from direct ownership of gambling establishments...and though vampires could be police officers and firefighters, vampire doctors were not accepted in any field that included treating patients with open wounds. Vampires weren’t allowed in competition sports, either. (73)

There are obvious parallels here to the limits placed on groups such as homosexuals who have been deemed unworthy of the same rights and privileges as other Americans. Vampires have acquired some personal protection from harm, however (Brace 105). Staking a vampire is “equivalent to murdering a human being, and deliberately victimizing someone because he or she is a vampire carries additional penalties accorded to hate crimes” (Brace 105).

Even with some rights in being treated as humans, Vampires still face special dangers after coming out of the coffin. For example, Bill is lured from the local bar on his first visit by the Rattrays, a criminal couple who intend to drain his blood and kill him in the process. Vampire blood, or V, is what the character Lafayette calls “pure, undiluted, 24-karat *life*” (Episode 105) – which is more than a little ironic given that it comes from the bodies of creatures who are ostensibly dead. But regardless of its source, V has immense power as an aphrodisiac for human beings, “stimulating the senses and connecting the user with a deeper, richer, more beautiful reality” (Blayde 37). Held down by silver at his neck and wrists, arms outstretched, his blood draining into collection bags, Bill is in effect being objectified and crucified, made to shed his blood simply for the Rattrays’ own profit and addictions. To them, Bill isn’t human, so his death won’t matter. Since blood is their objective, it is tempting to see them as merely turning the tables, making the vampire a victim of human bloodsuckers for a change. The difference is that until the invention of the Japanese synthetic “TruBlood,” human blood was necessary for a vampire’s survival. It was what they ate, and all they *could* eat to maintain their existence. Collecting, selling, and ingesting vampire blood, by contrast, are not necessary for human survival. They are in fact dangerous practices, and punishable by law (Brace 106).

When vampires “came out of the coffin,” they brought with them the seeds of a whole new era of prejudice, and this prejudice – which is human-created – is the real monster of the *True Blood* series. Coming out of the coffin – and, for that matter, standing up for one’s self regardless of sexual orientation, religion, or race – is something which clearly requires courage. *True Blood* presses the issue of justice throughout the series, with the hope that

acceptance and basic human and civil rights should be afforded to all citizens in Bon Temps and even in the viewer's own hometown.

CHAPTER 5

"ANYTHING DEAD COMING BACK TO LIFE HURTS": THE MONSTROUS PAST IN AFRICAN AMERICAN GOTHIC FICTION

In one of the earliest examples of the autobiographical slave narrative, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, the author repeats the word "horror" over fifteen times, particularly when describing his experiences with slavery. Early on, when Equiano arrives at the coast and is forced to board a slave ship as human cargo, he writes:

When I looked round the ship too, and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted.

(467)

Equiano recalls instances where fellow slaves who preferred "death to such a life of misery" (469), flung themselves from the ship, and drowned. Even Equiano himself "called on death to relieve [him] from the horrors [he] felt and dreaded" (477). The use of the word "horror" to describe what Equiano encountered after being kidnapped at age eleven and sold into slavery for the majority of his life is more than appropriate. The difference between terror and horror has long been established. Terror is the feeling of anxiety or dread a person might feel when approaching a possibly scary situation. Horror, on the other hand, is the visceral reaction – the abjection – a person feels when actually confronted with something horrific. Equiano was, indeed, confronted with the horrors of slavery. He witnessed cruelty beyond belief, including "violent depredations on the chastity of female slaves" (481), slaves being "flogged...unmercifully, for thus attempting to prefer death to slavery" (469), and throughout

the narrative he undergoes "more hardships than I can now relate, hardships which are inseparable from this accursed trade" (470). Later slave narratives, like that of Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, reveal similar horror stories connected to slavery. Jacobs writes, "I was struggling alone with the powerful grasp of the demon Slavery; and the monster proved too strong for me" (511). Jacobs capitalizes and personifies Slavery, rightly deeming it the monster that it is. For all those who were sold into slavery, the horrors they experienced were sometimes literally indescribable, and death was frequently preferred to living such a life. And the end of her narrative, though Jacobs appears to veil the horrors she has spent her narrative revealing, she still remains haunted by her history:

...it has been painful to me, in many ways, to recall the dreary years I passed in bondage. I would gladly forget them if I could. Yet the retrospection is not altogether without solace; for with those gloomy recollections come tender memories of my good old grandmother, like light, fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea. (520)

The passage registers Jacobs' desire to alleviate the pain of her horrific history with the healing power of forgetfulness, but it also insists on the futility of this desire. Haunted by the shadows of her past and the continued oppression of her present, Jacobs can never completely exorcise the demons of slavery, and even in bearing witness to them, she brings them back to haunt both herself and her audience. Unfortunately, unlike the other gothic and horror stories accounted for so far, these haunted stories of Equiano, Jacobs, and countless others are not fiction, making them all the more terrifying *and* horrifying.

As seen so far in this dissertation, Gothic and Horror Fiction of the United States is nearly impossible to define without a discussion of underlying cultural fears and quandaries

distinctive to American Life. For this reason, it is also impossible to separate the Gothic from the monstrosities of slavery which are part of the foundation of the United States. As Teresa Goddu points out in her book *Gothic America*, "the American gothic is haunted by race" (7), and is more specifically haunted by slavery itself. Even African American authors who may not fall under the generic label of "Gothic" or "Horror" cannot help but appropriate and revise gothic conventions. Richard Wright, for example, in his essay "How 'Bigger' was Born" (his ending to the introduction of *Native Son*), makes a powerful connection between the African-American experience and the gothic:

Early American writers, Henry James and Nathaniel Hawthorne, complained bitterly about the bleakness and flatness of the American scene. But I think that if they were alive, they'd feel at home in modern America. True, we have no great church in America; our national traditions are still of such a sort that we are not wont to brag of them...we have no rich symbols, no colorful rituals. But we do have in the Negro the embodiment of a past tragic enough to appease the spiritual hunger of even a James; and we do have in the oppression of the Negro a shadow athwart our national life dense and heavy enough to satisfy even the gloomy broodings of a Hawthorne. And if Poe were alive, he would not have to invent horror; horror would invent him. (461-462)

The horror that Poe or Hawthorne had to invent, Wright argues, is already embodied in African American history – in the haunting legacy of slavery and in the heavy shadow of oppression. For Wright, African American history is not only material for the gothic writer, but is also itself coded in gothic terms. Arguing that the gothic, as exemplified by an author like Poe, does not invent horror but is invented by it, "Wright unveils the gothic as a complex

historical mode: history invents the gothic, and in turn the gothic reinvents history" (Goddu 131-2). Similarly, Ralph Ellison makes this inextricable connection between the African American experience and the gothic in the first paragraph of his novel *Invisible Man*:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. (3)

The invisible man who haunts Ellison's text is not a Halloween trick or a special effect, but a person of flesh and blood. By arguing for the material sources and effects of the gothic, "Ellison resists dematerializing the ghosts of America's racial history" (Goddu 154). At the same time, Ellison uses invisibility to insist on the pervasiveness of racism's effect. His novel shows how this hidden history can be made visible through a redeployment of gothic tropes (Goddu 153-4).

Remembering this gothic history is not without its costs. Since the African American gothic's horrors are actual – written in the flesh as well as the text – any attempt to resurrect them can be painful and difficult. Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, one of the richest articulations of the gothic's role in rematerializing African American history, acknowledges this problem. Morrison locates slavery's horrors and subsequent hauntings in the body – not only in the baby ghost's materialization in Beloved's body, but also in the physical reminders of slavery as exemplified by Beloved's scar and Sethe's chokecherry tree. The epilogue chorus, "This is not a story to pass on" (274) reveals how difficult it is to achieve a balance between the

desire to forget the horrors of slavery with the need to remember. For Morrison, the haunting past will never be completely purged, and the novel offers no easy relief from the horrors of history (Goddu 154).

Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

On its surface, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is an American haunted house story, and therefore it can be placed within the American Gothic and Horror tradition of literature. However, the resonance within this story is deeper than merely dealing with a haunted house. *Beloved* reflects the particular connection between the Gothic tradition and the American past, beholding a darkly coded understanding of what lay beneath the United State's usually optimistic surface. That darker note concerns, in part, the legacy of slavery and racial discrimination. Morrison's horror expresses the atrocity of black experience in the South, in which the nightmare past is re-experienced through a "spiteful" haunted house and the revenant of a murdered child. Morrison utilizes three types of monsters in order to articulate these underlying cultural fears. These monsters are comprised of the ghost, as seen in the character of Beloved; the monstrous protagonist, exemplified by Sethe; and the haunting past, which, in this case, is slavery in the United States. Each monster builds upon the previous monster, respectively. In other words, the ghost could not have occurred without the monstrous protagonist, and the monstrous protagonist was similarly created by the haunting past. In this manner, Morrison proves that all hauntings are, in fact, due to one's relationship to one's own history, both personal and cultural.

The first monster encountered in *Beloved* is the baby ghost which inhabits 124 Bluestone Road. The haunted house is a common trope in Gothic and Horror novels, but as

stated in Chapter 2, haunted houses are not implemented by authors as mere scare tactics. They often symbolize something much larger than simply a place where ghosts reside. The reader's first clue to what this particular house represents is found in the house's street address. As with all names in Morrison's works, the name of this haunted house, 124 Bluestone Road, has a special significance. The number of the address, 124, could be the complete number sequence: 1234. But the "3" is notably missing, just as Sethe is missing her third child – the child who haunts the house. "1" stands for Howard, "2" for Buglar, and "4" for Denver, who are Sethe's still-living children. "3" would stand for Beloved, but has been removed from the sequence just as Beloved has been removed from the family. Also, the street address, "Bluestone Road" can be split into three separate phrases. First, it can be read as "Blues Tone," a tone of sadness, and also a type of music intimately integrated into the African American community. Morrison is showing the reader that this house is sad, and that it is haunted by something directly linked to the African American community. The name could also be read as "Bluest One," which could refer to either Sethe or the baby ghost who haunts the house. Finally, it can be read as "Blue Stone" which would be a clue to the reader that colors in this novel are going to be important symbols. Blue in *Beloved* is mostly associated with pain and sadness throughout the book, though sometimes it can have positive associations – such as the description of Sixo's skin as "indigo." This mixed positive/negative symbolism of the color blue also corresponds to the emotions surrounding the house. Morrison wants the reader to be aware that the house is associated with both happiness and beauty as much as it is associated with sadness and pain.

As previously discussed, "hauntings" are often explained by a house which has absorbed the emotions of its former inhabitants, giving the preconceived notion of an

inherent evilness. But upon closer examination of the haunted house, it is not always the house that is evil, but those who reside within the house, even if just for a short time. The house becomes a medium for confronting one's own problems and fears. From the beginning of *Beloved* it becomes clear that the ghost haunting 124 Bluestone Road is in direct connection with something Sethe has done. Because Sethe refuses to confront the ghost (or her own past), the ghost lingers – often becoming dangerous. The very first sentences of the novel read, “124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom” (3). Like a venomous predator, the intentions of the ghost are not only to defend its territory, but to harm the inhabitants of the house. Even before the action of the novel itself, the ghost has scared away two of Sethe's children:

...the sons, Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time they were thirteen years old – as soon as merely looking in a mirror shattered it (that was the signal for Buglar); as soon as two tiny hand prints appeared in the cake (that was it for Howard). Neither boy waited to see more; another kettleful of chickpeas smoking in a heap on the floor; soda cracker crumbled and strewn in a line next to the doorsill. (3)

But these violent occurrences fail to convince Sethe that the ghost harbors any vengeance towards the home's inhabitants. In refusing to confront her past, Sethe has become disillusioned with the nature of the ghost itself. Sethe tells Paul D that the ghost is “not evil, just sad” (8). At first, Paul D agrees with Sethe, thinking, “She was right. It was sad. Walking through it, a wave of grief soaked him so thoroughly he wanted to cry. It seemed a long way to the normal light surrounding the table, but he made it – dry-eyed and lucky” (9). But neither Sethe nor Paul D are perfectly correct in their assumptions that the ghost is merely sad. The ghost is dealing with its abrupt and brutal death, which is revealed later in the story.

As an infant, the ghost could surely not be considered “evil” in the moral sense of the word, as Paul D first surmises. However, the ghost is certainly vengeful and angry because of what has happened to it. Denver is more aware of the emotions surrounding the ghost than her mother. She is very honest with Paul D when he arrives to the home:

“We have a ghost in here,” she said...

“So I hear,” he said. “But sad, your mama said. Not evil.”

“No sir,” said Denver, “not evil. But not sad either.”

“What then?”

“Rebuked. Lonely and rebuked.” (13)

The infant ghost left the world alone, and is still feeling the loneliness surrounding her. The ghost is certainly rebuked, because Sethe is not willing to confront the ghost’s existence, or give the ghost the attention it feels it deserves. Sethe turns a blind eye to the damage the ghost is causing to her family and to those around her, refusing to “look away” when “the baby’s spirit picked up Here Boy and slammed him into the wall hard enough to break two of his legs and dislocate his eye, so hard he went into convulsions and chewed up his tongue” (12). The ghost is dangerously rebuked, but Sethe refuses to confront the reasons behind the ghost’s behavior, just as she is unable to confront herself. Denver realizes that her mother is the cause of the ghost’s actions, and attempts to force her mother to understand the same in the following conversation. Denver says:

‘I can’t live here. I don’t know where to go or what to do, but I can’t live here.

Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don’t like me. Girls don’t either.’

‘Honey, honey.’

‘What she talking ‘bout nobody speaks to you?’ asked Paul D.

‘It’s the house. People don’t – ’

‘It’s not! It’s not the house. It’s us! And it’s you!’ (14)

Sethe is a quintessential example of the haunted house as personal extrapolation, as she is haunted not just by the ghost, but by her actions and her memory of things past. Morrison does not use this haunted house trope for a cheap thrill, but to tell a moral tale. Because Sethe is not actively confronting the ghost within her own life, the ghost actively confronts her and her family. When it comes to 124 Bluestone Road, the true horror is Sethe’s confrontation of herself. Just as many Horror and Gothic stories, Morrison is using the haunted house to stand in metaphorically for the human being.

Soon, the infant ghost becomes incarnate by the teenage girl, Beloved. But even in bodily form, Beloved still shows that her existence is in direct connection with Sethe. When Beloved crawls out of the water, she makes her way to 124 Bluestone Road. As soon as Sethe lays eyes on Beloved for the first time:

Sethe’s bladder filled to capacity...and [she] ran around the back of 124...She never made the outhouse. Right in front of its door she had to lift her skirts, and the water she voided was endless. Like a horse, she thought, but as it went on and on she thought, No, more like flooding the boat when Denver was born. (51)

Without even realizing her connection to Beloved, Sethe has a physical reaction to this girl, which mirrors that of water breaking during birth. This should be the first clue to both Sethe and the reader that this girl is an intimate part of Sethe’s history. Denver knows there is a connection between Beloved and her mother before Sethe ever truly understands it. For Denver, this connection began before Beloved came into her flesh and bones form. Denver sees a “white dress holding its arm around her mother’s waist” and realizes it must mean “the

baby ghost had plans” (35). Sethe is unsure where Beloved came from, but Denver knows immediately. Morrison writes:

Denver neither believed nor commented on Sethe’s speculations, and she lowered her eyes and never said a word about the cold house. She was certain that Beloved was the white dress that had knelt with her mother in the keeping room, the true-to-life presence of the baby that had kept her company most of her life. (119)

Slowly, Sethe realizes Beloved must be her baby, who has grown up and come to live in 124 Bluestone Road with family she never had. Beloved is the only one who could remember Sethe’s “diamonds” (58) and the song Sethe invented to sing to her children (176). And though Sethe is happy that her child has returned to her – because her sons never will – she knows that Beloved’s reincarnation is not just to be with her, but to bring up haunting memories of the past. Sethe ruminates:

I can forget it all now because as soon as I got the gravestone in place you made your presence known in the house and worried us all to distraction. I didn’t understand it then. I thought you were mad with me. And now I know that if you was, you ain’t now because you came back here to me and I was right all along: there is no world outside my door. I only need to know one thing. How bad is the scar? (184)

Even with her elation that, finally, one of her children has returned to her – no matter that her child is dead – Sethe is haunted by what she has done in the past. She knows it is her fault that Beloved was a ghost, and has now been reborn. Sethe fears that not only the actual scar on Beloved’s neck will come to haunt her, but the emotional scars from her life as a slave will also be brought to the surface. She even equates this ghost with scars on her own back before Beloved is physically reborn, telling Paul D:

I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house, and nothing in between but the daughter I am holding in my arms. No more running – from nothing. I will never run from another thing on this earth. I took one journey and I paid for the ticket, but let me tell you something, Paul D Garner: it cost too much! Do you hear me? It cost too much. Now sit down and eat with us or leave us be. (15)

Sethe is confronting this same haunting past daily, both in her home and in her own body. She realizes that *Beloved* is the physical manifestation of her need to confront her past.

Because it is Sethe who is the cause of not only the ghost's appearance, but the ghost's actions, Sethe becomes the second monster which haunts *Beloved*. Sethe embodies the role of the "monstrous protagonist," by becoming the very monster she is trying to defeat. In *Beloved*, Sethe is the monstrous protagonist because, as the reader learns, she is the agent of *Beloved*'s murder. The full import of the primal crime in *Beloved* must not be ignored. The crime, visible in the scars on *Beloved*'s neck in 1873, is Sethe's 1855 killing of her "crawling already" third child. It is this child who becomes the ghost of 124 Bluestone Road. The murder itself is revealed in a series of flashbacks. After running away from Sweet Home, the plantation where Sethe was enslaved, Schoolteacher, the Sweet Home overseer who has ruthlessly reduced slaves to ciphers in a notebook, invades Bluestone Road to claim all his escapees under the Fugitive Slave Law. Morrison is fictionally expanding on an 1856 abolitionist article in *American Baptist* that told of an escaped slave, Margaret Garner, who slashed her children, one of them to death, because (in her words) she would "rather kill them at once [than] have them taken back to slavery, and be murdered piece-meal" (Hogle 220). Sethe's crime is revealed both through her own perspective, as well as Stamp Paid's perspective, who witnessed the action. The reader is given a glimpse of what was going

through Sethe's mind when Schoolteacher and his slave catchers appear in the following passage:

Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth and into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe. And the hummingbird wings beat on. (163)

Like the non-fictional woman whom the novel is based upon, Sethe believes that even death is a better alternative to slavery. She actually attempts to kill all her children in the shed outside the back of the house, so to save them from a fate worse than death. Stamp Paid recalls:

Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time, when out of nowhere – in the ticking time the men spent staring at what there was to stare at – the old niggerboy, still mewling, ran though the door behind them and snatched the baby from the arch of its mother's swing.

Right off it was clear, to schoolteacher especially, that there was nothing there to claim. The three (now four – because she'd had the one coming when she cut)

pickaninnies they had hoped were alive and well enough to take back to Kentucky, take back and raise properly to do the work Sweet Home desperately needed, were not. Two were lying open-eyed in the sawdust; a third pumped blood down the dress of the main one – the woman schoolteacher bragged about, the one he said made fine ink, damn good soup, pressed his collars the way he liked besides having at least ten breeding years left. But now she'd gone wild, due to the mishandling of the nephew who'd overbeat her and made her cut and run. (149)

As stated before, the characterization of a monstrous protagonist is that it *becomes* the monster it is attempting to confront. Simply killing her children does make her monstrous, but it is toward the end of the novel where the reader realizes Sethe is the actual monstrous protagonist. Beloved leeches off of her mother's strength, and the parent-child dichotomy is turned around as the book reaches its climax. Denver recalls:

Beloved bending over Sethe looked the mother, Sethe the teething child, for other than those times when Beloved needed her, Sethe confined herself to a corner chair. The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became; the brighter Beloved's eyes, the more those eyes that used never to look away became slits of sleeplessness. Sethe no longer combed her hair or splashed her face with water. She sat in the chair licking her lips like a chastised child while Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it. And the older woman yielded it up without a murmur. (250)

Just as an umbilical cord drains energy and food from the mother into the infant, so does Beloved drain the life out of her mother, Sethe. And Sethe becomes the very monster she has been trying to confront – her own daughter, whom she also drained the life from by slitting Beloved's throat as a baby.

Even with Sethe's violent and horrific act, there are some scholars, like those mentioned in the introduction, who would not believe she is the monster of the novel. Noel Carroll, for example, believes horror must be defined by the appearance of monsters in the work, but specifically states that a human cannot be the monster in a horror story. Carroll states, "The monsters of horror...breach the norms of ontological propriety presumed by the positive human characters in the story" (16). He continues:

Monsters are native to places outside of and/or unknown to the human world. Or, the creatures come from marginal, hidden, or abandoned sites: graveyards, abandoned towers and castles, sewers, or old houses – that is, they belong to environs outside of and unknown to ordinary social intercourse. My definition of horror involves essential reference to an entity, a monster, which then serves as the particular emotion of art horror. (35)

Carroll's monsters are supernatural, and specifically not human. Therefore, Beloved as ghost fits into Carroll's categorization. If a human being is the antagonist, or the horror is more psychologically driven, the story or film falls into a different genre rather than that of horror, dubbed by Carroll as "tales of terror" or "tales of dread." There is much to disagree with in Carroll's assessment, and certainly Morrison's characterization of Sethe in *Beloved* also contradicts Carroll's definition of monster. Paul D's discussion with Sethe after his discovery of Sethe's horrific act also makes a case against Carroll's claims:

'Your love is too thick,' he said, thinking, that bitch is looking at me; she is right over my head looking down through the floor at me.

'Too thick?' she said, thinking of the Clearing where Baby Suggs' commands knocked the pods off horse chestnuts. 'Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all.'

‘Yeah. It didn’t work, did it? Did it work?’ he asked.

‘It worked,’ she said.

‘How? Your boys gone you don’t know where. One girl dead, the other won’t leave the yard. How did it work?’

‘They ain’t at Sweet Home. Schoolteacher ain’t got em.’

‘Maybe there’s worse.’

‘It ain’t my job to know what’s worse. It’s my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that.’

‘What you did was wrong, Sethe.’

‘I should have gone back there? Taken my babies back there?’

‘There could have been a way. Some other way.’

‘What way?’

‘You got two feet, Sethe, not four,’ he said, and right then a forest spring up between them; trackless and quiet.” (165)

Paul D sees Sethe’s love as “too thick” and believes too much love can be a dangerous thing, stating, “For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love” (45). This dangerous kind of love turns a human into an animal, which is why he makes it a point to say she has “two feet...not four.” But Sethe realizes there was no way she would let her children go back to living as slaves. There are worse things than death. In the ghost of the haunted house and Sethe as monstrous protagonist, Morrison clearly mixes both “man as monster” and conventional monsters in the *Beloved*, and supplies a breakthrough in the horror genre by doing so. It is not that Carroll’s

definition is entirely incorrect; it is that Morrison is attempting to stretch the boundaries of what makes a monster.

But Carroll is wrong in more than just his rejection of Sethe as a monstrous character. The real monster of *Beloved*, the driving force behind Sethe's actions and the ghost of Beloved's appearance, is slavery – a man-made institution, and therefore, another example of “man as monster.” In this case, the monster is the haunting past. Even in dedicating *Beloved* to “Sixty Million and more,” it becomes clear that this book is not just about a family struggling to let go of the past, but it is about the suffering of slaves in America. Morrison's epigraph is another clue about the motivation behind the novel:

I will call them my people,
which were not my people;
and her beloved,
which was not beloved. (Romans 9:25)

Romans is a collection of letters by Paul who was instrumental for the bringing about of Christianity. In the passage, Paul is speaking of God and pointing out God's love for everyone. Not only does the “beloved” in this passage refer to the child, Beloved, but to the African American slaves who were also “not beloved” but certainly part of the children of the living God, and therefore beloved by God – even if the United States has attempted to forget the role the slaves in their own horrific history. Morrison wants her readers to approach this book as a horror story about what the United States has done to its people. African American Gothic is not only already established and deeply rooted, but is deliberately articulating profound social horrors. These horrors persist in both white and black America, to the point where all attempts to leave slavery and racism behind only re-

confront the unresolved and visceral haunting by an abjected past, already linked to race, that Gothic specters incarnate. Sethe makes it very clear that she is haunted by the past, and by her “rememory” of it. In a conversation with Denver, she says:

I was talking about time. It’s so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it’s not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don’t think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. (35-36)

There is significance in the mis-speaking of the word “remember” or “memory.” In the above passage, and in multiple places throughout the novel, Sethe calls her memory her “rememory.” In her confrontation with Beloved and the community at large, Sethe must remember, or put back together her past in order to face it. The complex memory of southern slavery is found within this book – which the characters involuntarily recall even as they strive to forget it – haunts the black suburban community of southern Ohio in a series of intrusive flashbacks that gather together the histories and enslavements of the residents. This kind of haunting extends a gothic element which is indebted to the Anglo tradition of Gothic retrospection. Baby Suggs, Sethe’s mother-in-law and former inhabitant of 124 Bluestone Road, is the first to point out these complexities of the haunted past, claiming:

Not a house in the country ain’t packed to the rafters with some dead Negro’s grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby. My husband’s spirit was to come back in here? Or yours? You luck. You got three left...I had eight. Every one of them gone away from

me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody's house into evil.

(5)

Baby Suggs fully realizes that her local community, just as the African American community at large, is haunted by slavery.

There are more clues to the haunting past as monster of this novel, as seen in the chapter where the reader learns about Sethe's murderous act. This chapter begins, "When the four horsemen came – schoolteacher, one nephew, one slave catcher and a sheriff – the house on Bluestone Road was so quiet they thought they were too late" (148). By calling them "the four horsemen," Morrison wants her reader to think of the Four Horsemen of the apocalypse, as outlined by the book of Revelation. According to the Bible, the four horsemen of the apocalypse include a False Christ, War, Famine, and Death. And certainly each of the horsemen approaching Sethe's house can metaphorically be considered as each of these symbols. Schoolteacher is the False Christ, forcing his slaves to follow and obey him, and teaching his followers (nephews) dangerous and incorrect instructions which will lead them to follow a sinful path. The nephew represents War, because of his violent act against Sethe when she lived at Sweet Home – taking her breast milk from her, while her husband watched in the loft of the barn (70). The slave catcher is Famine, taking people from their homes, leaving the land empty of life and growth. And the sheriff is death, ready to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law by sending home the runaway slaves, and ensuring them death in the hands of their white owners, or by killing them if they refuse to obey the law. The reason Sethe kills her child is directly because of these four men. These monsters have come to take her children, and she simply reacts the only way she knows how. In attempting to explain her act, she says to Paul D, "I don't have to tell you about Sweet Home – what it was – but

maybe you don't know what it was like for me to get away from there" (161). Slavery is the real monster of this novel, and Sethe realizes it quickly and sticks to her conclusion, saying "Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks" (Morrison 89). Though murdering her child is monstrous, it never would have occurred without the institution of slavery.

Beloved, in part as the "crawling already" child risen from the dead, symbolizes far more than the incident in which she was murdered. She haunts the whole community both with multiple memories of slavery, and with suppressions of a past that include the community turning against Sethe before and after the killing – for example, its failure to warn her as Schoolteacher and his party approached Bluestone Road. The echoes of Beloved's haunting past are also seen in the efforts of a class-climbing community, even one composed of former black slaves, to avoid their memories and the many abasements forced onto them. The community has avoided Sethe's family partly by isolating them shortly after Sethe escapes from Sweet Home plantation in 1855 and joins her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, on Bluestone Road. The character Beloved haunts a whole community as well as Sethe with layer upon layer of what its members strive to repress in their history. This is seen in many of the secondary characters of the community, including Ella:

Whatever Sethe had done, Ella didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present. Sethe's crime was staggering and her pride outstripped even that; but she could not countenance the possibility of sin moving on in the house, unleashed and sassy. Daily life took as much as she had. The future was sunset; the past something to leave behind. And if it didn't stay behind, well, you might have to stomp it out. Slave life; freed life – every day was a test and a trial. (256)

Just as Ella realizes the past should not control the present, the community must face its own past and confront the specter haunting Bluestone Road. In the climax of the novel, the women of the community gather together in the yard of the home they had avoided for so many years. They pray and sing, and as “the voices grew louder” (261) Beloved and Sethe appear on the doorstep. The women continue to do what they can to expel this ghost and the memories haunting 124 Bluestone Road, “Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash” (261). It is only when the community comes together that Beloved can finally disappear. Beloved’s abjection and embodiment of an extensive collective memory among African Americans is deliberately articulated. After acknowledging how a Gothic specter can encapsulate a primal crime that is really the whole history of slavery, the haunting power of Morrison’s book becomes clear. The novel is confronting the black community and all Morrison’s readers with an unavoidable choice: to continue the repression of the past and the destruction of the human community pursued in the isolation of Sethe and Beloved, or to embrace that past with the determination to draw the community back together in a forgiveness and reaching out that reaccepts Sethe and Denver while at least partially facing up to all the losses and desires that Beloved has embodied by the time she vanishes from sight.

The driving fear in *Beloved* is the combined guilt and terror among whites that half admits a dependence on, even an attraction to, a vaguely known black culture while at the same time feeling repugnance toward any prospect of racial mixture or black proliferation that might bring down mythical constructs of white purity, priority, or supremacy. Gothic specters and monsters readily combine the attractive and the repulsive, the deeply familiar

and the unfamiliar, in one symbol. The African American reshaping of the Anglo Gothic, a tradition of reshaping that has its own history of over two centuries, has wrought a profound change in the genre. African American Gothic works powerfully to recover the fullness of the black body, especially the body of the African American woman taken from her primal Mother Africa and alienated into Western slavery. It calls attention to that body – and brings it forth into greater awareness – in the very specters and monsters of the Anglo-American Gothic tradition that once suppressed it. The novel conveys, most of all, that this mixed genre at its best is not a distortion of African American life by white symbols. It is rather a resurgence of the African American body in an originally Anglo-American discourse that once refused to face that body and has now been reshaped to recover it from repression.

There are two lovely passages from *Beloved* which incorporate perfectly what Morrison accomplishes by including these three separate monsters in her novel. The first is when the white girl, Amy Denver, is rubbing Sethe's feet before Sethe gives birth to Denver on her way to Bluestone Road. Amy massages Sethe's feet until Sethe "cried salt tears," and then tells Sethe, "It's gonna hurt now...Anything dead coming back to life hurts" (35). The second passage is when Sethe is cooking in her kitchen, and she is, "Working dough. Working, working dough. Nothing better than that to start the day's serious work of beating back the past" (73). The past, specifically America's history with Slavery, is not dead. And it will never die, because it is part of a collective memory. Each time the past comes back to life – whether through novels like *Beloved*, or current examples of racism and hatred seen in America even today – it is extremely painful. *Beloved* encompasses these fundamental concerns and unsettling suggestions, and shows such in its many Gothic elements and the

complexities of African American history itself. Morrison's *Beloved* is both a Gothic or Horror novel, and an African American masterpiece.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

On a trip to a recent conference, I had the opportunity to visit the Experience Music Project (EMP) museum in Seattle, WA, where I ran into an unlikely exhibition for a museum I thought would be entirely devoted to the grunge movement of the Pacific Northwest. Down a dark, claustrophobic stairwell decorated with hundreds of portraits depicting screaming faces, I walked through a door which read, *Can't Look Away: The Lure of Horror Film*. Underneath the title on the door read the following warning: “BEWARE! Due to the subject matter explored herein, this exhibition has a suggested rating of PG-13.” The exhibition examined the pivotal role that horror plays in the human experience. Three iconic horror directors – Roger Corman, John Landis, and Eli Roth – worked with the EMP to curate a selection of their favorite films, providing a solid foundation on which audiences could safely explore the spectrum of cinematic horror, from its inception at the turn of the 20th century to the present day. Viewing booths were created where visitors could see clips of the aforementioned directors talking about various horror films and why these films were considered essential to the genre. Those visiting were also able to view iconic artifacts, including the script from *Night of the Living Dead*, the alien creature suit from *Alien*, and Jack Torrance’s axe from *The Shining*, among others. The exhibit featured interactive highlights as well, including a scream booth, where patrons could scream on cue as they watch horror film footage in a soundproof booth; “horror soundscapes,” where fundamental music elements and scoring techniques used in horror to enhance a cinematic sense of suspense, dread, and terror were explained in depth; and an interactive installation called “Shadow Puppets” by Philip Worthington, where one’s own shadow projected onto a wall

would spontaneously morph into monstrous forms.

As a fan and scholar of horror fiction and film, I found this exhibit more than merely intriguing, but educational and useful in my own answer to the question, "What makes a monster?" In particular, I was drawn to a wall which was covered in a "Monster Timeline." The timeline examined the specifics of monster archetypes, and attempted to educate the public as to why these monsters continue to inhabit the collective conscious of popular culture. The monsters included on the timeline were the Frankenstein, the Mutant, the Demon, the Alien, the Cryptid, the Shapeshifter, the Witch, the Psycho, the Ghost, and the Animal. I snapped a picture of this wall as a confirmation of what I have known all along – human beings can be, and most certainly are in some cases, monstrous.

This project has gone through a variety of stages, beginning with my understanding of Noel Carroll's definition of monster while I was simultaneously studying Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection. I began approaching monsters from a purely psychoanalytical approach in order to refute Carroll's definition of monstrosity due to his dismissal of Kristeva. In fact, the project was going to be solely about the monstrous protagonist (a concept touched upon in the sections discussing Matheson and Morrison within this dissertation). As I researched monstrosity further, I came across a number of things which altered my approach. First, the debate about monstrosity as human vs. supernatural has long been established, as discussed in the introduction of this project. I was new to the party, so to speak, but the party had been going on for a long time. Because of this, I decided to simply take a stance on the side of humans as monstrous rather than devote my time to refuting Carroll alone. Second, on either side of this debate, the main focus of understanding monsters is done through a socio-historical or cultural reading lens. To be part of this conversation, I shifted my approach

away from the psychoanalytic in order to more fully explore the historical anxieties associated with the presence of monsters while still exploring the importance of Kristeva's abjection within the concept of monstrosity. Finally, I approached this project from a pedagogical position. I teach literature through a socio-historic lens and utilize popular culture throughout my lessons in order for my students to relate to and understand texts through their contemporary world. This draft is not only a project which I intend to build upon, but it is something I would hope to use in my own teaching of literature to undergraduate students. After multiple revisions and additions, I plan to have a usable and relatable companion guide to my undergraduate gothic fiction class. This project sets up the texts I would teach and the scholarship I would use in a class on Gothic and Horror fiction, which is why the approach is broad and the texts begin with early American literature and end in the present day representations of the monstrous.

Though this dissertation has only concentrated on a select number of monsters, there are others which are also ripe for discussion, and will be added to later drafts of this project. A chapter on the witch, the werewolf, and the alien, for example, could certainly be viewed through the historical and cultural anxieties through which they emerge. It would also be relevant to add a discussion of hemispheric monsters into this project. Though the Native American Wendigo was touched upon in the discussion of zombies, an entire chapter will eventually be included in relation to Native American legends and how their particular monsters are representative of tribal anxieties. Similarly, monsters from Latin and South America, like La Llorona, the Chupacabra, and others, would be relevant to a discussion of anxieties throughout the Americas. Examining these hemispheric monsters allows the understanding of horror and gothic fiction to be addressed from a Transnational point of

view. Transnationalism addresses the misconception that each culture has developed independently from one another. The basic misunderstanding is that each country is independent, and each country has its own culture, and therefore each culture is independent. In reality, this is not the case. Along with the physical migration of people back and forth across political borders, there has also been the movement and sharing of cultures. By recognizing this, Transnationalism is the attempt to reassess the development of cultures with the understanding that they are not independent of one another, but in actuality have a constant and influential role in each other's development. Literature as a whole has been subjected to attempts to separate and categorize. The United States, for example, has appropriated the term "American Literature" and U.S. authors are often preoccupied with what it means to be an "American." In order to promote diversity in the studying of literature, U.S. students must look beyond the border of the U.S. and view their current home in relation to all of the hemispheric nations which make up our culture. Given the much broader understanding of culture that Transnationalism and Hemispheric studies suggests, gothic and horror literature, and the monsters that appear therein, can be approached with a much broader and more accurate perspective and can be understood in a much larger global context.

The most important thing I hope readers will attain from this project is to understand, first and foremost, that all monsters can be better understood through Kristeva's abjection. They are repellent, yet attractive. They are separate from ourselves, yet they are also mirrors for ourselves. And our true understanding of them, like abjection itself, can only ever be approached, rather than reached. All monsters are metaphors for human fears and human

anxieties, and for this reason, all monsters are mirrors for humanity. The monster is always in our midst.

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Degrees: Ph.D. (2012), M.A. (2009)

Field: English (U.S. Literature Emphasis), Rhetoric & Composition Minor

Dissertation: "Monsters in our Midst: An Examination of Human Monstrosity in Fiction and Film of the United States."

Brigham Young University

Degree: B.A. (2004)

Field: Humanities (English Emphasis), Human Development Minor

Publications

"Picturing Poe: Contemporary Cultural Implications of *Nevermore: A Graphic Adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories*." *Adapting Poe: Re-Imaginings in International and Popular Culture*. Ed. Carl Sederholm and Dennis Perry. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012. Print.

Awards

UNLV Graduate and Professional Student Association Grant Recipient (2009, 2010)

UNLV English Department Travel Grant Recipient (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011)

Professional Experience

Service and Activity

Fiction Reader, Word River Literary Review, 2011-present

Member, Graduate Program Review Committee, 2011

Guest Lecturer, Eng 454B (Gender and Modern American Lit), presentation on *Spoon River Anthology*, 2008

Guest Lecturer, Eng 231 (World Literature I), presentation on Arabian Nights, 2007

Teaching

Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2007-present
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List of Courses Taught

English 101 – Composition I

Semesters Taught: Fall 2007, Fall 2011

Course Description: English 101 is a writing intensive course designed to improve critical thinking, reading, and writing skills by providing students practical guidance in writing the short, 3 – 5 page, focused, thesis-driven, college paper. Students develop strategies for turning their experience, observations, and analyses into evidence suitable for writing in a variety of academic disciplines.

English 101 E/F – Extended Composition I

Semesters Taught: Spring 2008, Fall 2008, Summer 2009, Fall 2009, Spring 2010, Summer 2010, Summer 2011

Course Description: English 101E/F covers the same material as a regular English 101 course, but is designed to be taken over two semesters for those students whose tests indicated they needed additional practice in their writing.

English 102 – Composition II

Semesters Taught: Spring 2009

Course Description: English 102 builds upon the critical thinking, reading, and writing capabilities that students developed in English 101. Students learn the processes necessary for conducting research and for incorporating research material in writing.

English 232 – World Literature II

Semesters Taught: Fall 2010, Spring 2011, Fall 2011, Spring 2012

Course Description: English 232 is an introductory survey of various world cultures and literatures from the mid-17th century to present day. Students read works in English as well as many translated from other languages. They look at how these works can be understood and appreciated in relation to their historical, cultural, and literary contexts.

English 241 – Survey of Early American Literature

Semesters Taught: Spring 2011

Course Description: English 241 introduces students to major figures and movements in American Literature from the Colonial Period to the Civil War. The class examines major movements, religions, and philosophies seen through early American Lit.

Professional Presentations

Panelist for Roundtable Discussion of Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*. PCA/ACA National Conference. San Antonio: 2011.

"Picturing Poe: Contemporary Cultural Implications of *Nevermore: A Graphic Adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories*." PCA/ACA National Conference. San Antonio: 2011.

Panelist for Roundtable Discussion of Noel Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror*. PCA/ACA National Conference. St. Louis: 2010.

"That book isn't for people like *you*': The New Literary Horror in *Poe's Children*." PCA/ACA National Conference. St. Louis: 2010.

"The Morphology of Action Movies." Far West PCA/ACA. Las Vegas: 2010.

"It's a Postmodern World After All': Disneyland's Relevancy as a Postmodern Construction." Far West PCA/ACA. Las Vegas: 2010.

"The House Askew: An Examination of the Haunted House in Film." Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities. Honolulu: 2010.

"Things That Go Bump in the Night: An Examination of the Haunted House as Personal Extrapolation." Far West PCA/ACA. Las Vegas: 2009.

"Saving Grace: The Glimmer of Redemption in the American Gothic." PCA/ACA National Conference. New Orleans: 2009.

"Deterritorialization in Stephen King's 'Here There Be Tygers.'" Far West PCA/ACA. Las Vegas: 2008.