



SECOND EDITION

THE HORROR FILM

AN INTRODUCTION

RICK WORLAND

WILEY Blackwell

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WILEY Blackwell

This edition first published 2025
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Edition History

John Wiley & Sons Ltd (1e, 2007)

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for:

Paperback ISBN: 9781119715269

Cover Design: Wiley

Cover Image: © jpa1999/Getty Images

Set in 11/13pt Bembo by Straive, Pondicherry, India

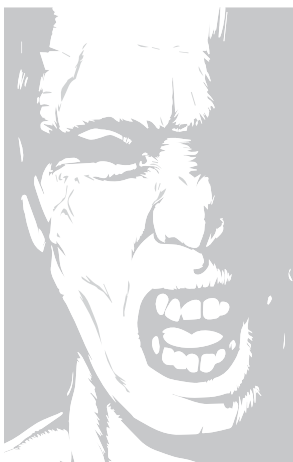
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Acknowledgments for the Second Edition

Revisiting and updating this project on the history, criticism, and reception of the horror genre has been a rewarding and frustrating process. The rewards came in viewing, teaching, and diving deeper into many horror movies made since the first edition of this book went to press near the end of 2005. The quality and inventiveness of filmmaking in the genre, especially in the 2010s was rich and extraordinary, honoring some of the finest works of the past while creating new movies that seem likely to endure. Notably, many of the most original and exciting filmmakers working since about 2000 were students and fans of the genre before they made their first films; their attention to tropes and traditions has invigorated their often formally sophisticated and unnerving films. This has been an excellent time to revisit and update the genre's development.

The frustration I felt is one that affects every author of a broad topical survey. I have a good friend who teaches and researches Renaissance and Baroque art in Italy and Western Europe. I always

joke that scholars in his field have it easy: No one's making Renaissance and Baroque art anymore. Meanwhile, the film/media historian is faced with a gigantic and expanding global machine that turns out texts of every kind every day. Horror has always been an international genre, though one that Hollywood arguably dominated, as it did much international filmmaking, through the end of World War II. However, from that point on, and increasingly since 2000, horror has become a genuinely global form. Filmmakers and fans everywhere can now easily access and be frightened and inspired by artists in industries and cultural traditions around the world. Influential movies from Hollywood, the UK and British commonwealth, and Western Europe that dominated the second half of the twentieth century, now compete with movies from Eastern Europe and East Asia, especially Japan and South Korea, as well as from Hong Kong and Australia. Latin American filmmakers in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico produced vivid horror-fantasy films in the post-World War II era and down to the present. Authors of survey texts more than ever must offer humble admission that it is virtually impossible to present an all-inclusive history of even just this one genre. Does the Bollywood industry of India or the Nollywood filmmakers of Nigeria produce horror movies? Evidently, yes. But it will be up to those with much greater cultural and historical knowledge of those regions than me to discuss their history. (And cue me for what to look at and why.) Some may decry any attempt to present a book that implies an all-encompassing outline of the horror genre, or any subject. But after more than 30 years of teaching assorted surveys of film, television, and media history I feel safe in saying in the most practical terms: You've got to start somewhere. Consider this book a start.

The revisions and updates of the original edition consist of the following: corrections of any factual errors, such as release dates of movies or spellings of names; or clarifying some descriptions of scenes discussed. The new material includes embellishing sections of the historical chapters with additional information or context; and with all-new discussion of films from about 2005 to the present added to Chapter 3. I have made only minor revisions to Chapters 5 through 12, because those essays should stand on their own as written originally and because my opinions about the selected movies have not greatly changed. At various points throughout, however, I have also cited some of the most relevant and outstanding scholarship on individual horror films or periods that has

been produced since 2005. I also added Chapter 13, a close analysis of *Get Out* (2017), a popular and powerful movie that has generated a great deal of discussion and analysis since its release, and that represents several important genre trends of the 2010s.

I must extend thanks for help in completing the new edition. At Southern Methodist University, I thank my friends and colleagues Kevin Heffernan, Derek Kompare, and David Sedman for their advice, support, information, and encouragement. Jolene deVerges, Director of the Hamon Arts Library, and her highly professional and friendly staff, including Chris Rincon, gave prompt attention to my many requests for research materials. Sam Holland, Dean of the Meadows School of the Arts, has fostered and maintained an atmosphere and institution of strong support for scholarship in the humanities that is essential and highly welcome.

I also thank my students at SMU who enlivened my courses on the horror genre, especially those of the past several years, just before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when we concentrated on movies made in the twenty-first century. Their enthusiasm and humor, valuable insights, and occasional expressions of genuine shock made for what I think were many moments of mutual learning.

At Wiley Blackwell Press, thanks to managing editor Pascal Raj Francois for his persistent and prompt information and help in completing this edition.

My close friends John O’Leary, Joe Ansolabehere, and Giles Knox (from the field that has it easy) teach me things every time we talk. But nothing about horror films since none of them like the genre. My internet bud Rob Spadoni, at Case Western Reserve University, however, knows a lot about it but mainly wants to talk about *Star Trek*. Rob was always helpful in graciously reading drafts and offering important feedback. I hope all these good friends live long and prosper.

My family has been a constant source of love and support. Thanks, and deepest gratitude to my wife, Kathy, our children Emily, Julia, and Ethan, now all vital and creative young adults; and to our fine son-in-law Arturo Morin. My earlier books marked the passing of my parents. For this new edition, I want to acknowledge our family’s new addition. I dedicate this book to the life and happiness of our grandson, Montgomery Eloy “Mo” Morin. May he and his generation live in a world of less horror than the one they inherited.

– RW, 2023

Acknowledgments for the First Edition

Over the past decade, several academic writers on the horror film have begun their books with more or less ironic declarations of whether their interest began in childhood or fairly recently, implicitly arguing that one's credibility to speak about the genre was somehow either enhanced or hurt by just when the writer's interest began. Such statements indicate that horror may be the original "guilty pleasure;" and underscore again the genre's roots in the psychological jungles of childhood. I am among those whose fascination started early. In October 1967, I asked my grandfather for a "loan" of seventy-five cents to buy a strange magazine I had spotted at the drug store, one with silly puns accompanying photos of Godzilla, the Phantom of the Opera, and a still shocking image of a woman with a hatchet buried in her forehead. Realizing this last item might hurt my case, I told Grandpa the money was for a "Halloween magazine." The description was true enough and it skipped over extraneous details. The pitch worked; and though my interest in the genre has changed and deepened, its multi-faceted appeal endures.

Scholars and critics of varied backgrounds whose passionate work on the horror film have both inspired me and informed this study include the late Carlos Clarens, R. H.W. Dillard, David J. Skal, Linda Williams, Tony Williams, and Robin Wood.

Special thanks to Barry Keith Grant who initiated an earlier version of this project and provided much valuable editorial commentary and support throughout.

Harry Benshoff, Sean Griffin, and Brian Taves gave their support and encouragement and freely shared their knowledge and insights on horror films and other aspects of film scholarship at important points in the book's development. Thomas Graham graciously lent his insight and research on Aurora model kits that enhanced Chapter 4.

My friend and colleague Kevin Heffernan was a constant source of information, insight, and invaluable critique that strengthened this study. His work on the economic and formal history of post-World War II horror kept me aware of the importance of industrial context to the development of the genre overall.

At Southern Methodist University, I must thank Carole Brandt, Dean of the Meadows School of the Arts; Tinsley Silcox, Director of the Hamon Arts Library, and David Sedman for their personal and professional help in the research and writing of this book.

At Blackwell Publishing, Ken Provencher and Jayne Fagnoli provided steady professional advice and encouragement in finally bringing this project to fruition.

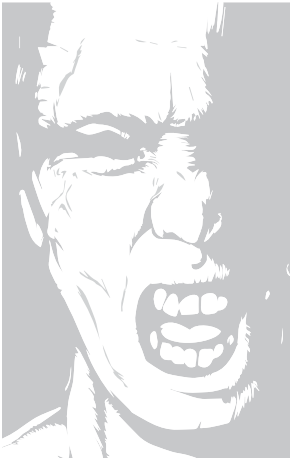
Two extraordinary teachers and friends fired my passion for the study of movies and American culture, Dr. James M. Curtis at the University of Missouri, Columbia; and Dr. Howard Suber at UCLA. Thank you for your examples.

Many thanks to my wife Kathy, and our wonderful children Emily, Julia, and Ethan for their love, support, and patience. I could not have done this without you.

Finally, I dedicate this book to the memory of my father, C.I. "Ike" Worland, Jr. The last farmer.

RW

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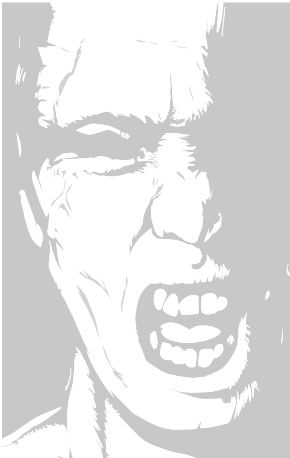
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: UNDYING MONSTERS



A stranded group approaches the ancient house where a dim light burns in an upper window. As the full moon rises, a pain-wracked man gasps at the fur growing on his palms. Thunder crashes and lighting illuminates the operating table lifted into the night sky. Eager for furtive sex on a dark night, a young couple hears twigs snap as an apparition raises a hooked blade above them. Seated in a movie theater, these sights and sounds can only mean you are watching a horror film – paradoxically prepared, even eager to see things that may make you want to avert your eyes.

Ominous places, grotesque semi-humans, or outright monsters await, ready to make you confront your own fragile mortality. Who would go here willingly? Millions have, for decades; centuries if we recognize the basic shape and themes of horror narratives in media long preceding motion pictures. Many explanations for the perennial appeal of horror have been advanced, yet most probe similar points: the psychological and emotional reactions of the individual viewer/consumer, most importantly the evocation of mortal fear, one of our most

The Horror Film: An Introduction, Second Edition. Rick Worland.

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primordial instincts; the dread of a radically non-human monster; events that challenge traditional conceptions of morality and/or the social good. The horror tale compels us to contend with a particularly violent and uncanny disruption of our unremarkable, everyday experiences, one that carries both individual and social implications.

Say that you seriously enjoy horror movies, and you are likely to elicit reactions that seldom occur should you express affection for love stories or even science fiction. Unless you are with other like-minded people – and horror is a broadly popular, not elite form – those reactions may range from amused condescension (“kids’ stuff,” “camp”); to quiet opprobrium (“Aren’t there enough real horrors in the world?”); or even suspicions about your emotional health (“You’re drawn to images of women being murdered? Let’s explore that ...”). Still others may respond that they avoid horror movies either because they find them too upsetting to be “entertainment” or reject the entire form on moral or political grounds. Those wary of horror films surely understand part of the story: the psychology of the horror film viewer, or at least the emotional reactions such works can provoke are central to the genre’s construction and reception. The monsters in horror stories are powerful and truly immortal beings because no matter how many times they are killed or destroyed, our fear and desire for their company compel their return.

This book surveys the history, stylistic development, and social reception of the American horror film from the earliest period of the genre’s importance to the present. While we will touch on antecedents of the horror film in art, literature, and theater for the themes and motifs they share, cinematic horror will remain the major focus. We examine ways in which horror movies have been produced, received, and interpreted by filmmakers, audiences, and critics throughout the medium’s history. Though horror has proven popular in many media (witness the phenomenal success of the novels of Stephen King and Anne Rice), the mass audiences long attracted to cinematic horror have made it the most prominent cultural source for frightful tales of monsters, madmen, and supernatural evil. Characters and scenes from horror movies permeate our cultural consciousness: the flat-topped Frankenstein Monster; the Phantom of the Opera unmasked; Bela Lugosi’s black-caped Dracula; Janet Leigh’s fatal shower in *Psycho*; Linda Blair’s demonically rotating head in *The Exorcist*; or an unholy trio of implacable stalkers with preppy names – Michael, Jason, and Freddy – in the slasher series of the 1980s and beyond. The horror film draws together and transforms mythic and literary traditions, forming a pool of images and

themes that filmmakers can reference, vary, or revise. Probing such a vibrant yet often controversial genre brings us closer to understanding the functions, meanings, and pleasures of that form as it circulates in changing historical circumstances.

The later twentieth century saw increasingly specialized writing about the horror genre. From the mid-1970s onward, individual films, auteurs, and stylistic sub-groups were critiqued from various critical perspectives (by feminist writers especially), submitted to the rigor and variety of analysis previously devoted to the Western, Film Noir, or the cinema of Alfred Hitchcock. Over this same period, however, discernable shifts occurred in intellectual conceptions brought to bear on horror. Critics moved from suggesting that this modern form continues the traditional concerns of ancient mythology and canonical literature for confronting fundamental, even universal philosophical and moral questions about human mortality and the nature of evil; to emphasizing the psychological processes either reflected in or stimulated by horror's frightening narratives; and to probing the genre for allegories of contemporary social and political ideology. Some would argue this is clear evidence that comprehension of the horror film, indeed of all popular forms, has grown steadily more sophisticated, but in any case, recent approaches have tended to become more historically and culturally specific. Still, the production of historical or critical knowledge is as much related to the intellectual framework one builds, the assumptions or omissions made, as it is to the establishment of empirical facts. Critics tend to combine and borrow pragmatically from various approaches because different insights can result from different interpretive methods.

Horror often achieves its greatest impact when it exposes or flaunts cultural taboos. Yet over time movies proven to have scared audiences in their day and beyond did so because they succeeded first as movies – through cinematic renderings of characters and stories that skillfully manipulated the range of film technique. In this regard, although the very concept of artistic canons has been the subject of intense intellectual and political debate for decades, canon formation remains both inevitable and essential to provide any framework for analysis, regardless of the conclusions or interpretations at which one finally arrives. Simply to describe works of interest does not automatically legitimate these and only these texts as important, valuable, or worthy of consideration. One of the most salient facts about fictional horror is the generally low regard in which it is held – at least publicly – by proponents of “good taste” and higher intellectual and esthetic aspirations. Such disdain invites closer

investigation, as it likely obscures a wealth of ideological assumptions. Moreover, when dealing with the popular arts, canons may be formed from both the enduring commercial appeal of certain texts (e.g., the many incarnations of Frankenstein's Monster) and from the received wisdom of critical tradition, wisdom that can be more readily challenged if one has a broader grasp of the genre as well as the conventional terms of valuation and debate. Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer's brooding and difficult *Vampyr* (1932), for example, though often championed as a genre landmark, is really a high brow "cult movie," one we might now categorize as an example of the international art cinema style; though a distinguished film filled with uncanny imagery, not remotely a popular work like contemporaneous Hollywood efforts such as *The Mummy* (1932) or *Dr. X* (1932). Self-conscious attention to canon formation that seeks rapprochement between audiences and critics, which acknowledges that each side has something important to tell us about a given movie or period, seems likely to produce a more complete account of a genre and its most significant works.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, a rich period of formal innovation throughout the film medium (e.g., the French New Wave, Direct Cinema documentary, the avant-garde "New American cinema," and directors of the New Hollywood grappling with these forms) stimulated increasingly sophisticated popular criticism that enhanced cinema's cultural prestige. This artistic and intellectual activity meshed with the political and social tumult of the period, from the Civil Rights movement to increasing opposition to the Vietnam War, a subsidiary effect of which was to shift attention to the social dynamics of cultural, especially popular cultural forms. Significant work on film also began to emerge from established academic departments of language and literature, art history, and theater. Partly owing to the need to justify such work to culturally conservative administrators and traditionalist colleagues, these writers analyzed popular movies with steady reference to the canons and concerns of High Culture. For them, film versions of *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* were ripe for analysis because of their roots in nineteenth-century novels that had some (though not wholehearted) literary cachet. These initial efforts sought to prove that such sensational fare might not only be redeemed but also incorporated into the canons of the humanistic tradition. The effort was as sincere as the task was formidable since it often failed to satisfy neither traditional cultural elites nor the unabashed fans of movie monsters; or after the early 1960s, account for the lurid exploitation movies that increasingly made up the genre's most dynamic works.

The fine 1972 anthology *Focus on the Horror Film* typifies the humanistic criticism I am describing. At what the editors evidently recognized as a significant transitional moment in the genre's history after the end of censorship in 1968, the writers collected in this volume sought to present a critical and historical overview of horror's development. The essays are grouped into categories including "The Horror Domain," "Gothic Horror," "Monster Terror," and "Psychological Thriller," indicating major genre patterns. Titles of two essays in the initial category reference Shakespeare and Yeats. An essay by literary critic R.H.W. Dillard begins,

I suppose that all significant Western art, at least since the medieval period, has been directly concerned with the original fall of man and the consequent introduction of sin and death into the world ... The horror film is, at its best, as thoroughly and richly involved with the dark truths of sin and death as any art form has ever been, but its approach is that of parable and metaphor – an approach which enables it ... to achieve a metaphysical grandeur, but which also may explain why its failures are so very awful and indefensible.¹

Dillard walks a fine line, beginning an analysis of the genre's particular mediation of the confrontation with mortality and asserting its importance as a cultural voice, while dismissing the likes of *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein* (1957) or *Billy the Kid vs. Dracula* (1966), movies "obviously" more suited to the drive-in than the classroom. Yet how, then, to reconcile serious considerations with the positively thrilling sense of partaking of something that is low, vulgar, and offensive to paternalistic authority, the things that often give the horror film its charge and appeal? This work would have to come a bit later.

Overall, perhaps the greatest contribution of humanistic critics was to take horror films seriously, a simple act that opened many doors. They did so in part by riding the high tide of auteurism, the controversial but suggestive critical notion that certain outstanding directors ought to be considered the principal creators (authors) of their films. In discussing James Whale or Tod Browning as auteurs, critics were insisting on the analysis of these directors' work as cinematic art, as opposed to earlier rejection of *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Dracula* (1931) as shallow mass cultural travesties of their literary predecessors; or, closely related, dismissal on the grounds that monster movies were simply and obviously juvenile entertainment that ought not to impress or engage any "serious" person above age 12. Considered in terms of typical settings, characters, and themes (key components of any genre), horror movies could indeed

suggest parallels with ancient myth, gothic literature, and other artistic forms. But to the extent that auteurist critics began to focus attention on the formal properties of the films, they brought a new aesthetic vocabulary to bear on visually rich works produced from at least the 1920s German Expressionist period onward. One might argue that analyses that proceeded from High Culture models or appeals to film-as-art were superfluous or even distracting from the subject at hand, but at certain points, such appeals were entirely necessary.

About two decades later, however, freed of the need to rationalize the object of study, James Twitchell's *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror* (1985) still considers the horror film a continuation of themes in art dating from prehistoric times. But for Twitchell, this is merely the starting point for other analyses, including his argument that horror stories "carry the prescriptive codes of modern Western sexual behavior."² A similar notion that the horror film both assimilates and secularizes persistently important cultural and philosophical motifs appears in Walter Kendrick's *The Thrill of Fear: 250 Years of Scary Entertainment* (1991). The broad, inclusive approaches of English literature professors such as Twitchell and Kendrick remain important to contextualize prevalent issues in horror criticism. Scholars had noted even earlier that the flowering of gothic literature, if dated from the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), roughly coincides with the Age of Enlightenment, marked in this case by secularization that increasingly rivals or replaces traditional religious explanations and earlier or co-existent folk superstitions and practices with skeptical philosophical and scientific inquiry.³ In a period largely stripped of literal belief in the supernatural, a new form of literary expression arose based on confrontations real or presumed with the occult, a form that endures to the present. Why? And what are the implications of this cultural response and its persistent popularity? As I will suggest, these and other analyses of the horror film often seek to map and understand the genre in relation to four major questions, large issues that can be subdivided into more specific areas.

First, just what is a "horror film;" or what are the typical settings, characters, and narrative problems that structure and define this genre? Second, what are the psychological functions of horror? Writing about gothic literature in the twentieth century took it as axiomatic that its "true" meanings were to be found in psychological (particularly Freudian psychoanalytic) conceptions. Because the horror genre is defined by the emotional response it provokes – apprehension, fear, and terror – critics have pursued questions about the individual

reader/viewer's psychological reactions. Third, how has this form evolved over time, or what does the history of the horror film tell us about both its relatively stable and constant aspects and of those that change historically? Finally, what are the social functions of horror? Recent commentators would agree that the psychological and social implications of the genre are closely related, even inseparable, reasoning that the individual is a subject of social formation and conditioning whose personal responses must be mapped onto larger social questions raised by horror as entertainment. Most public discussions of fictional horror center around issues of censorship, the violation of social standards of morality and conduct, and the potential deleterious results from exposure of some members of society, especially children and the socially disadvantaged, to violent, disturbing, and destabilizing horror narratives. But there are other issues to consider in regard to horror's social meanings, and historical conditions shape reception as much as the genre's formal features. I will defer discussion of the genre's social impact to Chapter 4. Yet throughout this book, we will suggest ways in which all these basic questions or areas of analysis overlap.

Tracking the Thing

What do we mean when we use the term “horror film”? An important part of the definition is self-evident: it is a movie that aims foremost to scare us. But the fear it evokes and how it goes about it is distinct. While we are likely to experience anxiety and fright in other violent genres – a war story, disaster movie, or crime drama, for instance – a horror film evokes deeper, more personal psychological fears in the starkest terms. The most basic fear in the horror story is the fear of death. But this is only the beginning of its impact and appeal. The fate of horror's most unfortunate characters usually comes down to two possibilities, which a given story may or may not consider synonymous – death, the physical fact of the end of life; and damnation, a metaphysical conception that describes a state in which the immortal “soul” is condemned to eternal suffering and punishment. Creatures in horror stories, as well as their victims, often straddle these two domains in a horrible state that is neither death nor life – the threat of becoming one of the “living dead” or “undead.” The monster can be seen as the personification of death itself which, like the traditional figure of The Grim Reaper, is an ultimately unstoppable opponent relentlessly committed to the destruction of

healthy and vibrant human beings. As the perfect title of a sporadically effective horror movie of 2000 had it, seemingly, *The Dead Hate the Living*. Such stories depict death as the possible start of an even more terrible fate.

As regards the omnipresence of death in horror tales, however, these stories threaten or present us with images not merely of death but of an especially grotesque and painful end, what Stephen King sardonically dubbed “the bad death,” which he considers a fundamental aspect of horror tales.⁴ Marion Crane was not simply stabbed, she was sliced to pieces; the zombies in *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) disembowel and eat their victims; opponents of the shadowy corporation in *Scanners* (1981) do not just suffer strokes, their heads explode; *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) – well, the title says it all. Horror in all periods has thrived on depictions of “bad deaths,” the kind that makes us dwell on physical agony. To learn that someone “died instantly” can provide a certain comfort. But suffering occurs over time, its dread that the pain will be drawn out indefinitely. (Hell is often depicted as endless physical torment, lavish “bad deaths” extended through eternity.) Despite widely varying tones, the deathtraps in *Peeping Tom* (1960), *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* (1971), and *Saw* (2004), frighten not just with the mortal punishment the victims endure but from the soul-killing depression of knowing that the perpetrator is all-too human and drawing a sadistic thrill from the victim’s agony. These examples and others wring additional intensity from allowing the victims to contemplate their impending deaths. Moreover, to depict atrocious acts on screen may be decried as gratuitous or tasteless; but when violence is intermingled with sexual sadism, it is likely to raise charges of potential harm in the real world.

As such, another significant dimension of the horror tale is its affinity for the lesson, often metaphysical, implicitly social. Though we will never encounter such unnaturally powerful monsters in the material world, such stories serve as parables or convey a sharp message of warning. As the American horror genre took shape in the early 1930s, censors inside and beyond Hollywood vigilantly insisted that its monsters and transgressing scientists must either perish or live long enough to recant. Regardless, horror stories seem to form a secular, parallel narrative to the essentially religious traditions of the cultures that generate them. Their plots describe situations that carry ultimate consequences for certain characters, which by analogy offer similar alternatives for the reader/viewer regardless of narrative plausibility. Avoid the vampire and we will walk in the sun tomorrow; but should we fall victim to its bite, we may be damned forever. Accordingly, the undead creature can often be

checked or wounded by the most familiar Judeo-Christian religious symbols, the cross, holy water, or a prayer that invokes the Almighty. Even though gothic novels were originally formulated in a skeptical age whose most vibrant minds aimed to question and reject traditional religious dogma, these tales still affirmed the power and persistence of the uncanny, the inexplicable, and the irrational in most aspects of individual and social life.

Besides intending to scare the viewer by presenting images that most people would certainly not wish to see in real life, a major component of the horror film is its star, the monster. Most genres contain a collection of stock characters that appear in assorted variants and combinations, and the horror film is no exception: the mad scientist and his deformed servant, the scoffing authority figure, a wise elder who recognizes the evil, the screaming (usually female) victim, among others. Still, no one goes to a horror movie to enjoy another pair of typical characters, the sturdy hero and wilting heroine often pursued by the monster, the earnest heterosexual couple hoping to put all this behind them the morning after. No, the audience comes to see the creature, the thing, the supernatural menace in whatever near-human or non-human form it assumes. Most sub-genres of horror are built around specific monsters: the zombie, werewolf, vengeful ghost, or psychotic slasher, to name a few. As I suggest later, certain monsters can be thought of as embodying specific threats or fears. The monster is often a liminal figure, an uncertain amalgam or transitional form between living and dead; human and animal; male and female. The most potent character in the genre, the paradox of the monster is that it incites our fear, compels our attention, and quite often courts our empathy and fascination, even though it remains the most remote from any possible reality.

As such, perhaps the most important aspect of the horror story is that its situations and sources of fear are largely irrational. (We will talk more below about the varied possibilities of irrational powers in the related forms of horror, science fiction, and fantasy.) Horror tales can evoke genuine fears; frequently these consist of scenarios common in nightmares of being pursued, trapped, and slaughtered by an overwhelmingly powerful figure. In fact, one of the most complimentary things to say about a gripping horror story is to call it “nightmarish.” Yet in most horror tales, the agents of destruction are purely imaginary creatures, essentially the products of lingering pagan superstition. Put it this way: Though we might check into an out-of-the-way motel and be murdered by a maniac while showering – and for this reason, *Psycho*, by the way, was generally not considered a “horror movie” upon its 1960 release – it

is not possible that we will ever be bitten by a vampire, chewed by a decaying zombie, or torn up by a werewolf. Still, movies featuring these creatures are among the best-known and most lasting works in the genre. It is this central irrationality that allows the mass-mediated horror story of the modern technological age to seem a logical extension of monster and hero stories from mythology, folklore, and fairy tales, the last usually intended for young children at a developmental stage at which distinctions between wish and reality, or make-believe and material, are not so clear.

A supernatural basis is only apparently absent in the slasher films that appeared in the late 1970s where the monster at least begins as a human psychopath; yet the most enduring of these series, such as *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* quickly developed their invulnerable killers as virtual immortals. Still, stressing the irrationality of the threat in the horror genre, many movies may gather under its umbrella even if the monster remains fully human from start to finish. Some of the best of these, however, use so much time and atmosphere to convince us that the weird occurrences are the work of ghosts or a curse that even, when finally told, they are not (e.g., in *Rebecca* [1940], *The Pit and the Pendulum* [1961], or *Dead Ringers* [1988]), our sense that this was all fundamentally uncanny remains. The cultivation of fear and a sense of the psychologically bizarre they evoke is what most aligns these stories with the horror genre.

For more than half a century now, the term “horror movie” has likely evoked acts of graphic violence rather than subtle constructions of ominous atmosphere. Yet over time, horror stories have often differed by how much or how little their atrocities were hinted at or shown directly. In this regard, some have sought to distinguish between “terror” and “horror,” arguing that the former is more artful and unsettling than the latter, which is condemned as esthetically cheap, perhaps even ethically suspect. Author Ann Radcliffe, one of the central figures in the formation of gothic literature, believed the distinction between terror and horror to be an important one, as did actor Boris Karloff, who preferred the term “terror pictures” to describe the work he did for nearly 40 years after he played the Monster in *Frankenstein*. Radcliffe insisted that “Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them.”⁷⁵ Nearly two centuries apart, Radcliffe and Karloff agreed that terror was a more refined and difficult performance to achieve than the quick shocks of mere horror – effects that simply disgusted the audience rather than engaged it in the more psychologically complex anxiety of terror. Terror evolved from careful construction of suspense; it