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

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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."[5] 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

disturbed by creating apprehension that something awful was *likely* to happen to characters we cared about. Also, it was more effective, or so this argument went, because it required the audience to participate intellectually, to actively create the frightening thoughts in their individual minds. In the 1940s, producer Val Lewton became a master of such suggestive effects in finely crafted movies that lacked visible monsters or on-screen violence. The issue was not censorship, though Hollywood movies were heavily censored at that time, but taste. "Terror" became a conscious aesthetic approach.

Horror, then, is seemingly distinguished by the opposite of restraint. Horror is an emotionally overwhelming form that produces not mere anxiety but revulsion, a sensation that might be literally stomach-churning: explicit scenes of gory violence and the decay of the grave paraded into view. In the sadistic German film *Mark of the Devil* [*Hexen bis aufs Blut Gequaelt*] (1970), about eighteenth-century witch-hunting, we see a woman's tongue ripped out of her mouth by Inquisitors. Nothing is spared or left to the imagination. If terror makes us worry about what might happen to a potential victim, horror shows us; it realizes our worst fears of victimization. However, the claim that the impact of graphic horror is easily achieved and inevitably less effective than a more restrained approach is not upheld by the history of the genre since the mid-1960s, where complex works from *Night of the Living Dead* and *Last House on the Left* (1972) to *The Fly* (1986) or *The Ring* (2002) combine grisly effects and unsettling themes whose dark implications outlast their shock value. True, graphic horror with little else to recommend can be quite dull. *Mark of the Devil* is a less interesting or skillful work than an earlier one that inspired it, Michael Reeves's *Witchfinder General/The Conqueror Worm* (1968). Careful writing, direction, and performance usually carry the day in a horror movie, as in any other. As I suggest in Chapter 10, John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) became such a popular and influential movie owing to its balance of suspense and explicit violence. Nevertheless, in the 1980s, a horror sub-genre (often called "splatter movies") appeared (e.g., *Dead and Buried* [1981], *The Burning* [1981], *Scalps* [1983]), largely intended to showcase increasingly gory and spectacular illusions of dismemberment, impalement, and decomposing flesh that drew audiences largely for the craft of the makeup artist. If we simply want to see astonishing demonstrations of gross-out effects, these movies succeed, too. In any case, the genre is flexible enough to accommodate a range of possible styles.

The final distinguishing mark of the horror film I will describe pertains to its construction of a steadily growing mood of foreboding derived

from the story's setting. In fact, this was the principal form and appeal of its major literary predecessor. Arising in late eighteenth-century England, gothic fiction formed the basis for the modern horror story. So named because of their typical settings in medieval (gothic) castles, manors, or abbeys, novels such as *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), *The Monk*, (1796), and *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) built their plots around restless spirits, ageless monsters, and unresolved sins of the past that reappear to bedevil modern characters. The gothic novel conventionalized many of the plots, characters, and themes still found in surprisingly similar forms in horror movies. The ghost-plagued fortress in *The Castle of Otranto*, written a decade before the American Revolution, established a dark setting to contain guilty family secrets. Castle, ghost, secrets: these gothic tropes were widely familiar by the time Edgar Allan Poe evoked them in "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839); then knowingly manipulated in Henry James's eerie psychological tale "The Jolly Corner" (1908), where the association of the dwelling's architecture and the anatomy of a disturbed mind becomes explicit; parodied in Universal's *The Old Dark House* (1932); used to juxtapose a banal postwar motel with the sinister Victorian house behind it in *Psycho*; or disguised in the vicious thing stalking the dark passageways of a futuristic spaceship in *Alien* (1979). Though gothic elements grew to define Euro-American horror stories, we should not assume these settings and themes are essential or natural to all such tales, not in the way that supernatural monsters or fear of the bad death seem to be. Rather, gothic imagery is both historically and culturally particular to the Western world. Horror stories from Asia, Africa, or the Middle East draw on cultural traditions for which the decaying medieval castle or shadowy Victorian manor have no strict parallel. Western societies gradually developed the gothic setting as horror's most familiar realm.

It's All in Your Mind

Like other writers on horror, I assume that the underlying irrationality of its scenarios – the certainty that this *thing* is not real, this situation could not actually occur – provides an allegorical cushion allowing us to contemplate, both intellectually and emotionally, the implications of a variety of threatening, painful, and finally individually and socially important conflicts. Critics have recalled from Greek mythology the polished shield of Perseus that permitted him to look indirectly at an awful monster, the Gorgon, and thus slay it. Freud's theories that dreams

are a visually and narratively coded form of self-communication that address ongoing emotional traumas have proved perennially attractive for considering many aspects of cinema; for horror, we need only emphasize the symbols as if in a terrible nightmare, and seemingly we are off on a variety of analyses. Indeed, the nightmare analogy suggests itself because horror's realm is a profoundly nighttime world. Many horror films signal the passing of danger with the rising sun. In any case, these analogies offer explanatory possibility because while the monsters in horror stories are decidedly unreal, the implications of the stories told about them can offer insights into the material world. Here I am presenting only a few basic ideas about possible psychological ramifications of the horror film, a complicated topic further explored in other sections of this book and in the work of various critics cited in accompanying discussions.

The horror film represents a contemporary instance of an apparently universal phenomenon. As with comedy and pornography, frightful stories and images can be found in all human cultures. Moreover, these three seemingly distinct modes frequently intertwine.[6] At least since Freud's work became widely popularized around the time of World War I, audiences have taken for granted the ever more direct mixing of horror and sexuality: Count Dracula is at once seducer and murderous fiend. Yet it is hard to find a character (or characterization, especially Bela Lugosi's tuxedoed vampire) more frequently lampooned. This may suggest that humor often provides horror film viewers a psychological escape from on-screen terrors, an emotional defense that can be wielded as effectively as a crucifix against a vampire. Yet if horror stories existed solely to be subjected to condescending laughter, they would have disappeared long ago. Laughter in the face of something awful is likely an outward sign of other more troubled reactions. The desire to seek out terror or revulsion in the ultimately safe confines of the movies must serve certain psychological and ultimately social functions. Such questions have occupied a variety of thinkers since antiquity.

In the perennial debates about the social functions of art, Aristotle is frequently evoked in relation to his theory of catharsis, an idea that seems particularly germane to analysis of the horror film. Aristotle implied that art ought not be subject to censorship because by experiencing vicariously a range of events and emotions in an artwork – especially fear and pity – the reader/viewer was purged of the desire to act out any such natural but dangerous tendencies in the real world. For Aristotle, the proper work of tragedy produced a purification (catharsis) of all such emotions for the audience, whether the resolution was "happy" or not.

The individual experience of catharsis through art functioned as a social safety valve. This most traditional model generally applies to the experience and narrative trajectory of what we will call the classic horror film. Aristotle's ideas conflict with the social theory of his mentor, Plato, who so distrusted the emotionally seductive powers of drama he argued that in the ideal republic, one of the first actions of the rulers should be to drive all the actors from the city. Plato and many later theorists and censors feared that depictions of anti-social acts and immoral behavior in art were socially dangerous because it stimulated our baser emotions and instincts rather than appealing to our higher faculties of reason and analysis. The obviously more complex ideas expressed in this simple sketch have nonetheless formed the basis for much subsequent theory, debate, and conflict over the social impact of art.

Aristotle's theory of catharsis was memorably restated in relation to horror by Stephen King:

> I like to see the most aggressive [horror tales] as lifting a trapdoor in the civilized forebrain and throwing a basket of raw meat to the hungry alligators swimming around in that subterranean river beneath. Why bother? Because it keeps them from getting out, man. It keeps them down there and me up here.[7]

On the other hand, latter-day proponents of Plato's views might say the dangerous alligators ought to be killed, not fed. Such critics can be called "determinists;" that is, they argue that art can cause the acceptance, or even imitation of emotionally and socially dangerous behavior or attitudes reflected in artworks. (Behavior and attitudes – i.e., beliefs, values – are not the same, of course; and the debate often continues over these no less tricky distinctions.) Deterministic arguments have existed throughout the history of the film medium but became more acute as formal censorship waned and established social standards of all sorts underwent political challenge and change in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of horror movies of those decades was an increasing tendency to deny catharsis and/or to present monstrous evil as an unstoppable force. Critics and commentators since then have given divergent interpretations of such films, as we will see.

Freud, who considered caves, cellars, and other underground realms to be metaphors for the unconscious mind itself, would have quickly grasped King's image of the subterranean river. Indeed, one must think the doctor inspired it. The many schools of Freudian criticism, both scholarly and popularized, present an important avenue into the horror

film long accessible to artists, viewers, and critics. Chapter 5's discussion of *The Unknown* (1927) and Chapter 7's analysis of *Cat People* (1942) describe how filmmakers sometimes consciously introduced a Freudian framework into psychological horror. One of Freud's basic tenets was "the return of the repressed": psychosexual traumas and conflicts experienced both in childhood and as adults are never fully resolved; yet if left unrecognized or untreated, such problems are bound to fester and return as neurotic symptoms, behaviors, and phobias. The gothic form is ripe for Freudian critique, as many such stories involve a guilty secret that cannot be acknowledged or reconciled. The antique and evil house is the genre's physical representation of this theme. Inside are monsters frequently described as germinated from past events, however remote. Broadening this theme to a sociopolitical critique, recent horror critics have described the genre as resonating the return of any number of actions and desires repressed by the dominant social order. The monster itself is but the most obvious manifestation of the repressed, for which the divided psyche of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* might be the most explicit example. The analogy between the symbolically coded nightmare and the fearful world of horror fiction is highly suggestive, regardless of how fine the application of psychoanalytic theory. A horror film may conjure private fantasies and dreads; its reception and interpretation remain a public and social phenomenon.

The Horror Film as a Genre

Though horror films may seem exceptional in some ways, for the kinds of villains or violence they depict, as genre movies, they share much with other story types far removed from their gloomy moods and death-dealing monsters. A genre can be simply defined as a large category of stories united by their settings, characters, themes, and narrative conflicts. The word comes from the same root as the words general and generic, terms meant to describe a broad category of things. A supermarket often contains lower-priced generic or "plain-label" products, commonly used items like toothpaste, cat food, and beer. Typical of capitalist consumer society, there are also numerous brand-name products that, through a combination of differing ingredients, quality of materials and manufacture, or often just differences in packaging and advertising, seek to stand out as distinct individual examples of this primary category. This is roughly the relationship between a given genre and individual movies within that form. Genre study tries to balance

analysis and description of the larger, common attributes of the form with the smaller, unique aspects of individual movies.

Like the Western, the combat film, the "woman's picture," or television sitcom, the horror film seems to exist in a fictional world at once highly familiar and quite removed from the everyday experience of most people. One can easily describe typical characters and problems in these genres, even though such familiar forms are still capable of originality and broad variation. Indeed, one of the crucial features of any popular genre is its ability to balance the familiar and the novel. Although an individual genre movie must stand on its own, it draws much of its meaning, effects, and inferences from its relation to other stories of its type. Good or bad, complex or simplistic, a genre movie simultaneously participates in an ongoing tradition and creates precedents for the future. As we will see, the horror film is a particularly self-reflexive form, one that often tacitly or directly references its forebears and acknowledges its place in a larger tradition, if only to invert or undercut the assumptions and expectations of those earlier works. Genre movies communicate with each other as much as with their audiences.

The terms that have evolved to name genres often emphasize one aspect of the form over another: The Western is identified primarily by its setting in space, but the time is important, as well (the western American frontier sometime in the second half of the nineteenth century). A "hospital drama" names a specific setting but is really about the occupations and roles of its typical characters – doctors, nurses, and patients primarily. A "romantic comedy" is a hybrid of those stories that either offer dramatic takes on romantic love or those meant to be funny generally. Romantic comedy will look for laughs in the difficulties a couple has getting together. Similarly, the "private detective," "gangster," or "cop" drama tell stories about crime (the central conflict) which vary in their emphasis on a particular character within that larger situation. Genre designations may be incomplete: A "musical" describes what the movie's major attraction and experience will be, the performance of songs; yet these films usually feature intricately choreographed dance as well, a genre highlight which somehow did not make it into the genre name. Even so, it is important to pay attention to a genre name, however arbitrary it might seem. Though "gothic novel" emphasized a setting, "horror movie," stresses the emotion of fright experienced by both the characters and the audience, which remains this genre's primary distinguishing feature.

Genres usually depend upon a set of established conventions, familiar elements of these stories that filmmakers regularly include – and then try

to vary while remaining recognizable. Walter Kendrick calls this process "genrefication," the gradual but steady production of assorted literary and cinematic works that establish stock characters, plots, and conflicts that producers successfully repeat, and audiences soon expect to be found in a given story form.[8] Some people disdain certain genres (or all genres) because of their ritualized sameness and predictability; more often, audiences are drawn to individual genres precisely because of these features. Multiple aspects of a genre become conventionalized: the recurrently employed settings of such tales; a constellation of character types that populate many examples of the form; in plots, obligatory, and common scenes that usually appear; and fairly circumscribed dramatic and ideological conflicts that erupt in the narrative. Horror films, foremost, revolve around the monster and its threat to individual characters. The stakes are high because the struggle, as suggested above, is often not only a mortal but a metaphysical one. The horror story turns fear, whether personal or social, into a specific type of monster; and seeks to contain and destroy it.

Many examples of the vampire sub-genre, for example, are highly dependent on specific aspects of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897). These include the discovery of the seemingly human monster by an unsuspecting person; the creature's lair in an isolated, rotting castle; the vampire's gradual draining of the blood of a virgin; a wise elder who leads the hunt for the creature; and the monster's eventual destruction by wooden stake, silver bullet, or exposure to sunlight. Dracula's (blood) lust for Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker underscores the primarily sexual nature of the threat this monster represents. Other versions of the myth flaunt their deviations from Stoker's model. In the comic parody *Love at First Bite* (1979), a Jewish doctor (Richard Benjamin) amuses Dracula (George Hamilton) by pulling out an evidently harmless Star of David to defend himself. In *The Lost Boys* (1987), the vampire is not one but several contemporary American teenagers, friends who gradually join the ranks of the undead. A veritable horde of vampires must be destroyed in the involved combat scenes of *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996). These variations work by conscious reference to the "normal," i.e., conventionalized version of the story familiar to the audience.

Genres are also identified and vary in relation to their manipulation of iconography. The word literally means "picture writing" and refers to the visual shorthand that films (or paintings, theatrical productions, etc.) muster to quickly communicate a set of meanings that have gathered around this character, object, or setting over time. This may include typical costumes, props, and locations the stories employ (cemeteries, dark castles, shadowy cellars, lonely woods, etc.) and the events that often

transpire there (hesitant exploration, stalking, bloody murder). In one aspect of what Thomas Schatz calls "the feedback circuits" of genre popularity, iconography is also developed gradually through an indirect process – offerings by producers followed by acceptance or rejection by readers and viewers.[9] Gothic locales, along with their requisite shadows, cobwebs, and antique décor, constitute important horror iconography; as do the specific appearance or costuming of certain monsters, looks often derived from specific movies. The widely recognized image of the Frankenstein Monster, an icon in and of itself, comes from Universal's 1931 version; a child wearing a hockey mask on Halloween is dressed not as a goalie but as Jason from *Friday the 13th*. Iconography is a powerful determinant of how viewers both recognize and respond to a genre; so powerful, in fact, that filmmakers can also trick viewers by playing off such codes and conventions. Hitchcock intensified the impact of *Psycho* by spending nearly an hour convincing the audience they were watching a contemporary crime story before abruptly shifting into the iconography of gothic horror. Like genre itself, iconography is a culturally coded language system that is developed through many statements, repetitions, and variations that audiences have come to understand and accept through exposure to assorted works.

Growth and Development of Genres

Like language itself, two intersecting axes structure genres: those aspects that remain relatively stable over time (which linguists call synchronic) and those that change and evolve (called diachronic). Major aspects of popular genres have stayed much the same over the decades, but some have changed, responding to forces industrial, social, and historical. Adapting a model from art history to theorize the historical transformation of artistic styles to the analysis of movie genres, Schatz presents a taxonomy of genre evolution: the experimental, classical, refinement, and baroque phases.[10] These stages describe structural changes in both form and content within a genre. Schatz's model can be useful and suggestive for considering how genres change, though it should not be considered definitive or its phases inevitable. Early film adaptations from gothic or gothic-inspired literature such as Edison's *Frankenstein* (1910) or Thanhouser's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1912) mark experimental efforts toward a distinct horror genre (though the "experiment" is rarely conscious on the parts of producers at this phase) and offer some elements that will come to be conventionalized

and some that won't. (This is Kendrick's genrefication process at work.) The first uses of the term "horror movie" by critics and industry commentators appeared in 1931–2 upon release of Universal's *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* and similar productions by other studios, as observers noted the arrival of something new and groped for a commonly accepted name. Indeed, they often put the term in quotation marks or referred to "so-called horror movies" to indicate their uncertainty and suspicion of the entire enterprise. Yet we now consider the early 1930s to mark the start of the horror genre's classic phase, that in which "the conventions reach their 'equilibrium' and are mutually understood by artist and audience."[11] This phase was relatively stable; the classic period stretches into the 1960s and exerts a great influence still on films that came after.

The third stage is refinement, "during which certain formal and stylistic details embellish the form."[12] This phase involves conscious experimentation, filmmakers in search of novelty and original flourishes pushing and testing the limits of the classic conventions. In the late 1950s, Britain's Hammer Films released new color versions of *Frankenstein* (*Curse of Frankenstein* [1957]) and *Dracula* (*Horror of Dracula* [1958]) that enhanced the classic models established by Universal with greater gore, more open sexuality, and harsher tones. In Hollywood, an odd but interesting movie seemingly refined the classic conventions of two genres at once: Universal's *Curse of the Undead* (1959), despite a clear "horror-movie" title and plot involving a vampire is set in the Old West; the monster is a gunslinging enforcer in the employ of a greedy cattle baron. The movie is a riot of contradictory genre icons, with scenes including a midnight visit to the vampire's coffin in a mausoleum and shoot-outs where the "outlaw" laughs off bullets striking him in the chest. Is *Curse of the Undead* so outlandish and exceptional that it spilled over from mere refinement into what Schatz terms a genre's baroque stage?

The baroque is characterized by increasing stylistic adornment and self-consciousness in which the genre's classic conventions are sharply revised or inverted. This may extend so far as to make the genre itself, its history and conventions, the major subject of the work. A genre's baroque stage presents the classic conventions only to reject or ridicule them as inadequate, obvious, and outdated. (A more common term for what Schatz describes here is simply a "revisionist" genre movie.) *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* tortures the audience as well as its characters by refusing most of the classic elements, especially the cathartic destruction of the monster. *Re-Animator* (1985) evoked the Frankenstein

myth but only as a backdrop for a mix of outrageous gore and black comedy. *Scream* (1996) is mainly about the often-simplistic formula of the slasher cycle of the early 1980s, including a notable scene in which a character smugly lists the trite conventions of those earlier movies. By this point, the classic elements have become so familiar they can no longer be considered natural but rather inevitably noticed as artificial and played out.

Although this model of genre development permits a variety of explanatory insights, it also has some problems. Its structure can seem rigid, making it difficult to account for the many subtle differences created through formal aspects of individual movies. In Chapter 6, I argue that *Frankenstein* exemplifies the classic-style horror film. However, I also suggest that crucial elements of that classicism, the climactic destruction of the monster and formation of a couple, are compromised because Dr. Frankenstein seems a dubious combination of hero and monster. As such, classic should not be construed to mean either naïve or "pure." Moreover, though the model describes important genre changes, it is not historically specific. While I believe horror's classic phase started in 1931 and "ended" sometime in the 1960s, it is important to recognize that such phases – understood as differences in form and narrative structure rather than chronology, per se – can and do overlap. Dr. Van Helsing destroys his nemesis as usual at the end of *Horror of Dracula*; and the literally bloodthirsty gunman of *Curse of the Undead* also perishes. Such movies stretch the classic patterns without breaking them. The evolutionary process is not always so linear; nor is it a one-way street.

Assuming the horror genre entered its baroque phase around 1970, is it impossible now for audiences to accept a movie that largely fits the contours of the classic type? No. Such movies can be made and have been commercially successful: *The Sixth Sense* (1999) revamped an old-fashioned gothic tale and garnered Academy Award nominations. The remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003) still gave us lots of gore but steadily worked to produce a cathartic and relatively "happy" ending. Since the early 1980s, we have perhaps seen the start of a "neo-classical" phase of genre development. Yet we can concur with Schatz's larger idea that most genres do display "patterns of increasing self-consciousness" over time. The creation as well as comprehension of a genre is an indirect but ongoing process of communication between producers and consumers, influenced by a variety of cultural and historical factors.

From the mid-1970s until his death in 2009, Robin Wood was perhaps the single most influential and insightful critic of the horror film; and his influence continues. In his 1979 essay, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," Wood's nuanced distinction between what he terms "classical"- versus "contemporary"-style horror employs elements of formalist, Freudian, Marxist, and feminist analysis.[13] His idea of horror's classical form is roughly equivalent to Schatz's definition, emphasizing a stable set of conventions and ideological assumptions mutually understood by producers and audiences. Wood's contemporary films, however, which he dates from the appearance of *Psycho* in 1960, subvert the norms of the classic type. Although concerned with history, Wood considers these differences to be matters of internal structure and theme, of plot development rather than of strict chronology. More importantly, he argues that horror's classical model represents a strongly conservative tradition, which, like many other cultural and political traditions, was sharply contested in the 1960s and 1970s. For Wood, horror carries profoundly political ramifications.

As a radical social critic Wood contends that horror holds particular interest to critics of ideology because it opens a direct "pipeline to the unconscious," giving expression to that which is repressed in both individual and social circumstances. By this he means not only to probe horror's psychological functions but also to unite these ideas with a theory of the genre's political implications. Rather than seeing classic-style horror films as somehow socially destabilizing, the fear that had always fueled calls for censorship, Wood argues they worked to uphold the status quo. Just as important, however, he maintains that through analysis and critique, comprehension of the internal structures, and functions of the horror genre (and all popular forms) holds possibilities for aesthetic development and social change. Wood offers a fruitful beginning to analysis of horror by applying the simple formula "Normality is threatened by the Monster": "I use 'normality' here in a strictly nonevaluative sense to mean simply 'conformity to the dominant social norms': one must firmly resist the common tendency to treat the word as if were more or less synonymous with 'health'."[14] Applying this "basic formula" to the narrative and stylistic aspects of a given film leads to an assessment of how and what the film defines as the normal; the nature of the monster; and the specific threat it represents. However varied these terms may be, classic horror films end in a certain way: The monster is definitely destroyed in a manner that permits a sense of catharsis, and the restoration of

"normality" is usually signaled through the formation (or preservation) of a heterosexual couple or family group.

By the late 1960s, Wood indicates, the most intense and aggressive horror films reflected the radical momentum of the antiwar counterculture and social liberation movements for blacks, women, and gays. This conflict can first be seen in *Psycho*'s image of monstrosity gestating within the nuclear family itself; in the resilient African American hero of *Night of the Living Dead* assumed to be a zombie and shot down by the all-white posse at the end; with a bourgeois couple in *Last House on the Left* succumbing to the same savagery as the outcasts that killed their daughter; and as Wood and various feminists argued, in reactionary violence directed against sexually independent women in the slasher cycle of 1978–84. Notably, Wood contends that low-budget exploitation-style horror movies carry greater progressive potential than glossy, big studio productions, which are likely to be both formally and politically conservative if only because of the need to recoup far larger investments. (Both left and right condemned the low-budget slasher films, however.) The interest and energy were to be found at the cultural margins, not the staid mainstream. Bolstering Wood's point, horror's exploitation variant was the type traditionally most disdained by "respectable" arbiters of dominant taste. Lacking major stars and slick production values, with only sex and violence or a lurid premise as its chief selling points, exploitation horror is the dominant ideology's id exposed and unleashed. Though again stressing the importance of narrative structure and formal style (e.g., graphic versus "tasteful" effects) over historical period, Wood's "contemporary" horror primarily describes the exploitation movies of the 1960s and 1970s ignited by the social and political strains of the Vietnam era. Still, unlike the humanistic critics of those same years who began to take horror seriously, Wood presents a way to account for and understand the "subterranean river" of ideological conflict that has always fed the genre.

Family of the Fantastic Film

It has been my observation (and experience) that many people who become seriously interested in making or studying film and media often do so through fascination at an early age with one or more of the related genres of horror, science fiction, and fantasy. I think this is because while it soon becomes apparent that the vampires, aliens, and dragons of these stories are decidedly unreal, their fascination is supplemented by

increasing recognition of the art and artifice that went into their creation. Even while mundane crime stories and domestic dramas can still be thought "realistic," we plainly see the hand of writers, set designers, makeup artists, and visual effects technicians behind Darth Vader, Godzilla, or Freddy Krueger. And this may lead to increasing interest in film aesthetics and curiosity about the history of these genres. The common appeal of the three main branches of the fantastic film is their distance from everyday life and reality, and the possibilities they open for imagination, creativity, and speculation about other lives, times, and worlds.

Though all these genres usually feature monsters, the nature of their unnatural creatures varies substantially. Yet it behooves us not to create too strict a division between these forms that might work to inhibit analysis. Initially, the variance between horror, science fiction, and fantasy can be found in relation to the narrative, and ultimately, sociopolitical nature of *power* governing their respective universes. Power can be defined simply as the ability to affect and change the world around us. While in our everyday lives we are bound by the laws of Newtonian physics, these limitations are easily overcome in the fantastic film. Though qualifications can be represented by individual works, I will call the three motives of action, the power, in the three genres by the following terms: in horror, the source of power is the supernatural; in science fiction, science and technology; in fantasy, magic. For horror, I use supernatural in the sense of the malevolent powers of the occult, or the "black arts." Horror involves instances and figures of evil, however defined, and death. In fantasy, the irrational forces I call magic are not necessarily evil or dangerous.[15]

Fantasy has its roots in two other related narrative forms: mythology and fairy tales. The latter are usually teaching stories aimed at children and touch on issues of morality and conduct, yet they also evoke the psychosexual conflicts and fears that drive the horror genre. (People still commonly report that parts of the beloved Walt Disney "family classics" *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* [1937] and *Bambi* [1942] were utterly terrifying to them when first seen as small children.) Fairy tales are ultimately about children and parents. The strict definition of mythology is stories about the relations between men and gods. This would include such ancient epics as the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid*. Mythology invests incredible power in the gods, though they sometimes share a bit of their amazing abilities with humans. One of fantasy's major branches is often called "sword and sorcery," which reveals its origins in ancient myth. In general, if a story features magic and characters wielding swords, it falls into the fantasy category. Thus, the *Star Wars* saga is more closely related

to fantasy than science fiction despite the prevalence of robots and spaceships. Indeed, its central element of magic, The Force, is shown throughout to be superior to mere technology. As in the ancient epics, fantasy stories are often variations of the quest myth (e.g., *The Lord of the Rings*), or involve an incredible journey to exotic lands (*King Kong*, *The Wizard of Oz*) or even to the realm of the dead. Importantly, magic power is often neither intrinsically good nor evil; much depends in these stories on how such power is used and by whom and to what ends.

Science fiction is largely a product of the Industrial Revolution and modernity. Early literary examples appear in the second half of the nineteenth century in England, France, Germany, and the United States, the most advanced industrial nations. This genre's fictional wonders are assumed to be rational and understandable by people. The Martian invaders who attack the Earth in H.G. Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898) used highly advanced science, knowledge possibly accessible to humans, though not just yet. The hypothetical things of science fiction are often extrapolations from known scientific principles or emerging technologies. There is no guarantee, of course, that such things will ever come to pass. Based on what science thinks now, faster than light travel, a staple of many space-faring stories, is no more possible than werewolves. The key point is that science fiction postulates that such developments could occur, and if they did would come from dogged research and discovery, not divine intervention. This returns us to *Frankenstein*, long considered one of the major works of gothic fiction and central to the definition of the horror film in the early 1930s. Frankenstein's creature was born through scientific not supernatural means. The same is true of the titular scientist and his nasty alter ego in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. These stories and characters have become associated with horror rather than science fiction in part because of their treatment on stage and screen, but also in relation to other factors that distinguish the two genres.

As Vivian Sobchack argues, one of the most significant differences between the dreadful creatures or events in horror versus science fiction is the site and scale of the threat. In horror the danger is personal and individual; in science fiction, social and collective, the threat rapidly expanding from the local to the global. Horror stories usually take place in remote locations (in a mountain castle, on a secluded island, at a deserted summer camp). This parallels the view of the haunted house as a metaphor for an individual human mind. Science fiction often depicts public and social spaces under threat. Thus, "The horror film deals with moral chaos, the disruption of natural order (assumed to be God's order),

and the threat to the harmony of hearth and home; the SF film … is concerned with social chaos, the disruption of social order (man-made), and the threat to the harmony of civilized society."[16] Science fiction's origins in utopian literature and its common allegorical bent often make its social and political intentions apparent. Horror returns us to the basics of individual mortality and/or damnation. Yet the example of *Frankenstein* argues again for critical flexibility, despite the advantages of a fairly specific demarcation between these genres. Qualifications are made not for the sake of consistency but analytical open-mindedness that allows us to consider issues or experiences, whether or not a particular work fits easily into a predetermined category.